The Course Syllabus

William Wresch, Ph.D.

Sources:


What is the Purpose of a Syllabus?

• Connect your course to the curriculum
• Explain student demands
• Specify learning activities
• Demonstrate your scholarship of teaching
Connecting your course

Courses have a hierarchy of learning goals

- **University level** – “all graduates of this university will be ethical.”
- **Program level** – “All graduates of this program will be competent in statistical analysis”
- **Course level** – “upon completion of this course students will be able to list major events in the history of Oman.”
Connecting your course

Where does your course fit in the larger goals of the university and of your program?

Can you list an overriding goal of this university and of your particular program?

(Answers to both are essential to university and program assessment)
Explaining Student Demands

“The Contract”

What work will be required?
When is it due?
How will it be graded?
What other demands will you make?
(attendance in class, at events, class participation)
Specifying Learning Activities

- Frequency of engagement
- Modes of engagement
- Depth of engagement
- Individual v team work
Specifying Learning Activities

• Frequency of engagement
  – First week probe (get their attention and find out what skills they bring to class. Formal pre-test is an option)
  – Weekly/Monthly tests
  – Daily/weekly/monthly assignments
Specifying Learning Activities

Modes of engagement

Tests (five minute quizzes v major exams)
Reports (single page v term paper)
Presentations (textbook v outside material)
Specifying Learning Activities

Depth of Engagement

Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning

- **Knowledge**  
  “Students will be able to name…

- **Comprehension**  
  “Students will be able to compare

- **Application**  
  “Students will be able to apply X to situation Y

- **Analysis**  
  “Students will be able to list the major reasons for the economic failure of …

- **Synthesis**  
  “Students will be able to propose a better set of responses governments might take when…

- **Evaluation**  
  “Students will be able to evaluate the quality of suggested responses to situation X
Specifying Learning Activities

Individual vs Team Work

- Develops project management skills
- Promotes Leadership
- Develops Time management skills
- And --- frequently leads to interpersonal conflicts
Your Scholarship of Teaching

• Your theory of pedagogy
• On-going research – what are you learning about student learning?
• What did you do about what you learned?
Your Scholarship of Teaching

• “...effective teaching requires the ability to pose problems, test hypotheses, measure outcomes, explain unexpected discoveries, and create knowledge.” (Albers, 2003, p67)
Your Scholarship of Teaching

Put another way – as you walked out of class today, what did you learn about student learning, what hypothesis are you developing, how will you measure the accuracy of that hypothesis, and how will you respond to what you are learning?
Your Scholarship of Teaching

How is that reflected in your syllabus?

– By the goals for the course
– By the relationship between important concepts, how they are sequenced and how they are grouped
– By the teaching strategies you selected
– By the role you chose for yourself – expert, facilitator, coach…
Main take-aways

- The scholarship on syllabus creation is extensive
- The syllabus connects your course to the broader goals of the university and program
- Students see it as a contract
- We see it as descriptor of the pedagogical choices we have made
- It can help define us as teaching scholars