Idea Board:
Building a Course Syllabus

A course syllabus identifies the parameters of a course in terms of structure, expectations, and content. Although a well-developed syllabus is targeted at the students taking the course, it should be written plainly enough that anyone who reads it can understand the scope of the course content, the expectations of students, and what students can expect to learn by taking the course. When programs offer multiple sections of the same course, some components of the syllabi might significantly overlap. If these sections have differing course structures or instructors, then some components such as the calendar or the assignments may be changed to address the needs of the students and that particular class.

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The specific structure of a syllabus can vary greatly depending on the instructor's preference, target audience, course content, course level, or course structure. However, the following 8 components of a syllabus can establish the levels of expectation and predictability necessary for a successful learning environment. These are:

1. **Course Structure:** Instructors often have little input on the course structure, as it is usually predetermined by the organization or institution sponsoring the course. The class structure includes:

   - The duration of the course (number of months, weeks, days, or hours).

   - The frequency of classes (number of meetings per week).

   - The duration of classes (number of hours or minutes per class).

2. **Objectives:** Helps to focus instruction and learning by including 3 to 5 objectives that are broad enough in scope to connect knowledge and skills across the content, but specific enough to identify expectations of learning or levels of mastery that students should gain by the end of the course.

3. **Texts and Resources:** The syllabus includes a list of the assigned texts and resources and, if necessary, directions and links to where they can be found.

4. **Course Abstract:** The course abstract is a brief statement (100 to 300 words) that introduces the course. The abstract allows the instructor to:

   - Identify the purpose of the course.

   - Address the scope of the course content.

   - Discuss the instructional approach of the course.

   - Prepare students for what they can expect in the course.

5. **Student Expectations:** For an adult learning environment, a section on student expectations may only require alerting students to the attendance policy and articulating the basic expectations for a safe and productive learning environment. Specific expectations may be added as needed.

6. **Assignments:** A description and rationale for the assignments (50 – 100 words per assignment) allows students to identify not only what work they are expected to complete, but how that work is relevant to the purpose and objectives of the course.

7. **Assessments:** A description and rationale for normed, formal, and informal assessments (50 – 100 words per assessment) ensures that both the teacher and students are aware of the standards and the format in which students are assessed.

8. **Course Calendar:** The course calendar ties the syllabus together because it:

   - Is organized based on the course structure.

   - Identifies the order and duration that content will be covered.

   - Is aligned with the corresponding chapters in the assigned text, content standards, and other relevant curricular materials.

   - Identifies due dates for assignments.

   - Identifies dates for assessment.

Note: The syllabus is part of the curriculum, but the syllabus is not the curriculum.