

Of Syllabi and SLOs

The value and attributes of a good syllabus and ways to think about articulating and accomplishing student learning outcomes

What Do We See? What Should We See in a Syllabus?

- Structure and a logical flow –(see [template](#))
 - Content description and information –(see [template](#))
 - CYA → Syllabus as Contract
 - WIIFM → Learner-Centered
 - SLO → Goal/Outcome Oriented
- } Community & Purpose
- So, let's build a learner-centered, goal-oriented syllabus that both sides would sign onto.

(*CYA = Cover Your @\$\$; WIIFM = What's In It For Me; SLO = Student Learning Outcomes)

CYA: Syllabus as Contract

- A good contract protects both sides.
- Think about something you would be perfectly happy being held accountable to.
- Think about the rules of the game as well as university rules and policies.
- Academic Integrity
- Civility
- Accommodations
- Attendance
- Assignment & Grading Policies

*Where and how do we fit these in?
(see the [template](#))*

WIIFM: Learning Centeredness

Take a look
at your
syllabus.

Would your colleagues nod approvingly?
How about your students?
How do they/did they react to it?
Does it engage and inspire them?

Now put
yourself in
the student's
seat and
take a *WIIFM*
approach.

Does it look like a set of rules and expectations?
Is it dry or engaging?
Does it connect with them and inspire them?
Does it sell itself and relate to the rest of the curriculum?
What do students look for and have more than just a "right" to know?
If you want to engage your students with the content, with the curriculum, with the learning goals, with one another, with you, how do we do that?

The Syllabus, Community, and Purpose

The syllabus is the initial point of contact between the **instructor and the students**.

It is often the initial point of contact between **the student and the course**, and even **the curriculum and the discipline**.

It is the first chance we have to establish **shared value** – to engage in a collective and purposeful effort to accomplish learning goals.

What does this mean to *us* and to our students?

How do we enhance that contact and sense of value?

Community and Shared Purpose Requires...

...using the written word carefully to reveal our commitment to their learning.

...discussing the syllabus with the students on the first day of class and refer back to it as a guidepost throughout the semester.

Take the time to write, and talk about...

How the course **relates** to the curriculum,

How the readings and videos **relate** to the course and learning goals,

How the assignments and assessments **relate** to SLOs,

Student **roles and responsibilities,**

Faculty **roles and responsibilities.**

Let's assume you backwards
designed your class around your
learning goals...or want to

...because you should...

SLOs: Accomplishing Goals



As a roadmap to student success, the syllabus should clearly facilitate the accomplishment of learning outcomes.



What are your learning goals/outcomes?

Are they clearly articulated? How so? Examples?



How do you empower your students to accomplish them?

What are your methods and instruments (assessments and assignments)? Examples? How and why did you choose these?



Do the students see –*in the syllabus and throughout the semester*– that this document is a carefully and thoughtfully crafted instrument intended to steer them towards those goals? That the readings, assignments, and activities were intentionally selected to do just that?

Goals, Actions, and Evidence of Learning

Think about a class you teach. Why does it exist? Does it get at the learning? Use this sheet to explore this by filling in the blanks.

Learning Goals	Instructional Actions	Learning Actions	Connecting Teaching to Learning	Connecting Content to Learning	Connecting Interaction to Learning	Options
<i>What do you want your students to know or be able to do?</i>	<i>How do you teach? What do you do to help them learn/perform?</i>	<i>What are your students doing?</i>	<i>How do you know if they are learning from your instruction?</i>	<i>How do you know if they are learning from the course content/reading/video materials?</i>	<i>How do you know if they are learning from interaction with you and one another?</i>	<i>What else might work?</i>

Need Help Thinking About This?

Go here: <https://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/cetl/learning-assessments.asp>! You'll see this (below) and so much more!

Learning Assessments

Evidence of Learning

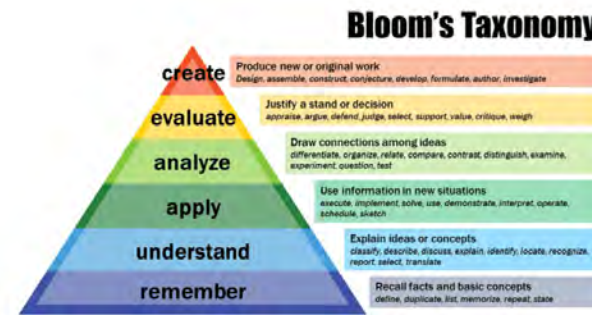
Request a Learning Assessment Eval



Too often, the word "assessment" sends chills down the spine of faculty. Frequently, it conjures up images of overly complicated reporting procedures which reduce instructional efforts to data points that fail to reveal what really occurs in our learning environments. Further, faculty often feel like they are being judged. While it is true that good assessment yields useful information on the impact of our teaching, the real emphasis is—and ought to be—on *learning*: on seeing what works and what doesn't in a climate of trust. In order to do this, we need to shift our paradigm to one that values curiosity, experimentation, and innovation, and seeks to answer basic questions about cause and effect: *If I try this, what happens? What is the impact of teaching on learning? How do we measure it?*

To make assessment less daunting, let's think about what it is that we really want and need our students to be able to do in our classes in order for them to demonstrate that learning has occurred. Let's think about how we can set the stage for good assessment at critical intervals and in key documents such as in the syllabus, assignments and rubrics, and class discussions. Let's stay curious and learning-centered and think about how we can link teaching and learning. Then think about how to measure the impact of instructional innovations on learning gains.

To help us out, we can look with confidence to Bloom's taxonomy pyramid which signifies the importance of the "lower level" thinking and learning skills and their relationship to and through what is often considered to be the epitome of learning—creating new knowledge. As a cautionary tale, don't rush up the pyramid. A lot of significant learning experiences occur along the way. Indeed, some of the best new research focuses on the pyramid's base, and how the brain must be made to work hard (reality check: teaching should be a fun challenge, and learnings should be hard) in order to recall, remember, apply, and develop knowledge. If you want to learn more about this, come on by the CETL office (Education Building, Suite 220) to talk, and while you're at it, pick up a copy of *Make it Stick, The New Science of Learning, Learning Assessment Techniques*, and a host of other books we can share with you.



Most of us have seen Bloom's Taxonomy Pyramid displayed above before, and many use it as a foundation for organizing and coding the kind of learning and work we want our students to do in our classes. That's all fine and good, but it can be a little "teacher-centered". If we shift our emphasis just a bit—if we put on a pair of learning-centered lenses—we begin to think more creatively about how we accomplish learning at each level. More importantly, this moves us away from simply stating (hypothetically) "I give students a multiple-choice test for them to show me they remembered these key principles" and moves us towards a greater integration of what we do in-class and outside of class to help our students develop and demonstrate a command of material. Assessment helps us think about this as a process, and therefore tends to rely appropriately on verbs.

Cover the right-hand side of the Bloom's Taxonomy Pyramid shown above and ask yourself:

Where do the following terms fit in Bloom's Taxonomy Pyramid?

Assemble	Calculate	Cite	Classify	Contrast	Criticize
Critique	Defend	Define	Demonstrate	Design	Devise
Diagram	Distinguish	Explain	Identify	Illustrate	Integrate
Locate	Measure	Persuade	Prioritize	Produce	Recite
Report	Reproduce	Select	Simulate	Solve	Summarize

You will notice that certain verbs fall logically into certain tiers which helps us think about exercises and assignments we can use to gather evidence of significant learning experiences at all levels.

Bloom's Taxonomy Pyramid (from lowest to highest)

- Remembering:** Think about the basic features of a thing or phenomenon. define, identify, label, locate, list, match, quote, recall, recognize, recite
- Understanding:** Think about how or why something works. describe, explain, restate
- Applying:** Think about applying a rule to a different situation, or in a different context. apply, complete, illustrate, simulate
- Analyzing:** Think about analyzing quantitative data. compare, contrast, differentiate, interpret
- Evaluating:** Think about measurement. estimate, judge, prioritize, rate, score
- Creating:** Think: inventive. compose, construct, design, develop, formulate, hypothesize, invent, produce

So, how does this all come together in a class?

Great question. It is tempting—and in the right context entirely appropriate—to reference Angelo and Cross' *Classroom Assessment Techniques* and Barkley and Major's *Learning Assessment Techniques*. But often we need to fundamentally reassess—and potentially redesign—our courses. For that, please see CETL's *Course (Re)Design* and *Student Learning Outcomes*. Each, in different, but related ways, helps us develop significant learning experiences for our students.

Assessing Student Learning Outcomes

Tips for Effective Measurement

SLO Worksheet: Using verbs to make 'em actionable, attainable, and measurable

	What is the goal of this outcome?	What are you already doing in your class to accomplish this goal?	What else might work?	How can you express this and explain why in your syllabus?
SLO1				
SLO2				
SLO3				

An Example of Backwards Design

Objective	Expected Change	Instrument/Innovation	How to Assess	When to Assess
Objective 1a. Student Engagement In Class: PRSs	Greater participation/engagement	Personal response systems	Measure frequency of responses	Each time device is used
Objective 1b. Student Engagement In Class: Groupwork	Greater participation/engagement	Groupwork, think-pair-share, etc.	Students submit a written individual and group report. Observe/record amount and type of participation	Each time exercise is conducted, then cumulatively to determine changes as semester progresses
Objective 2. Student Engagement In-Between Class Sessions	Greater cognitive engagement in-between class sessions & enhanced preparation for class sessions	Forum, with rules/rubrics	Frequency of participation, fidelity to rules & rubrics	When Topic closes, but monitored in-between opening and closing periods.
Objective 3. Content Mastery	Increased command of key principles of the discipline	General knowledge survey. Not teaching to the test but providing conceptual clarity in class	Administer general knowledge survey in all sections at end of semester	End of semester
Objective 4. Essential Skills: Locating & Gathering Information	Increased ability of students to know how and where to locate relevant scholarly sources	Assignments with clear expectations. Mandatory library/info literacy session	Have students submit a project based on info. lit. session. Have students complete assignments; measure them against rubrics	Per assignment.
Objective 5. Essential Skills: Critical Thinking	Increased ability of students to make sense of complex information; to exhibit critical thinking skills	Assignments with clear expectations. Emphasis not on content and conclusions as much as reasoning skills. Can include Forum	Design, implement, share rubrics that indicate and measures critical thinking	Per assignment