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 Community & Purpose
• SLO → Goal/Outcome Oriented
• 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)
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

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?

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?
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.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Goals</th>
<th>Instructional Actions</th>
<th>Learning Actions</th>
<th>Connecting Teaching to Learning</th>
<th>Connecting Content to Learning</th>
<th>Connecting Interaction to Learning</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you want your students to know or be able to do?</td>
<td>How do you teach? What do you do to help them learn/perform?</td>
<td>What are your students doing?</td>
<td>How do you know if they are learning from your instruction?</td>
<td>How do you know if they are learning from the course content/reading/video materials?</td>
<td>How do you know if they are learning from interaction with you and one another?</td>
<td>What else might work?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 should 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 (quality teaching should be a fun challenge, and learning should be hard) in order to recall, remember, apply, and develop knowledge. If you want to learn more about this, come on by the CBF 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.

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, relate
- 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 Sally and Major’s Learning Assessment Techniques. But often we need to fundamentally reassess—and potentially rebase—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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SLO</th>
<th>What is the goal of this outcome?</th>
<th>What are you already doing in your class to accomplish this goal?</th>
<th>What else might work?</th>
<th>How can you express this and explain why in your syllabus?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SLO1</td>
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<td>SLO2</td>
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<td>SLO3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## An Example of Backwards Design

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