

Preparing Effective Syllabi: Engagement, Accessibility, and Enthusiasm

Rebecca Gilkey, Doctoral Student and Special Educator

Hannah Bollin, Doctoral Student and Fellow of Educational
Studies, Site Coordinator at Project BIG

Jeffrey L. Bernstein, Professor of Political Science and Director
of the Bruce K. Nelson Faculty Development Center

Our Purpose

Jeff- I am a political science professor, director of the Faculty Development Center at EMU, husband, father, and Mets fan. To me, the syllabus is a document that conveys my joy and enthusiasm for teaching, and for working with my students.

I want to help my colleagues create syllabi that convey their own excitement for the courses and the students that they teach.

Thanks for Joining Us Today!

Let's talk about the first day of class

A meaningful first day can set the tone - first impressions matter to students

The syllabus is, in some ways, like the first day

It sets a tone for what the class will be

It tells students who you are, and who you want to be as a professor

Given all this, it's worth time to do it right

Our Plan for this Session

Meet my co-presenters

They know stuff - and they have a perspective we all should hear

Figuring out ways to make our syllabi effective

Making them accessible

Making them engaging for students

Making them convey our excitement for the class

Our Purpose

Hannah - I am an after school educator, a doctoral fellow, and an aspiring faculty member. I see the syllabus as a form of contractual communication between students and instructors.

I want to use the student perspective as a guide to effective syllabus design.

Rebecca - I am a full time special educator, doctoral student, and a mom to two young kiddos. The syllabus is my primary connection to campus and any course before it begins, and sometimes even after.

I want to support instructors in designing a document for all students.

The Intention of a Syllabus Should be Communication



What are you
communicating?

Statement of Diversity, Inclusivity, and Respect

It is my intention to teach this course with all learners in mind. We will cover many topics and I will do my best to be inclusive of your views and beliefs while delivering pertinent course content. Please disclose any disabilities or unique circumstances you may have that require my attention.

There is a lot of information in the syllabus for your review. Please read it all carefully and reach out with any questions or concerns. Additional supports and resources can be found hyperlinked in the syllabus.

Statement of Diversity, Inclusivity, and Respect.

Black.Lives.Matter

Every student in this course is a valued member regardless of ability, background, class, ethnicity, gender, political affiliation, race, religion, or any other identification. In this college, you have the right to determine your own identity. You have the right to be called by whatever name you wish and for that name to be pronounced correctly. You have the right to be referred to by whatever pronoun you identify. You have the right to adjust identifications at any point.

It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. If there are aspects to instruction that result in barriers to your inclusion, please contact me privately without fear of reprisal. We also use the course from time to time reflect on practices. If you feel uncomfortable contacting me, please contact the College of Education Diversity and Inclusivity Committee--current chair Audrey Farrugia afarrugi@emich.edu).

I acknowledge that regardless of one's own race or ethnicity, individuals are at various points in the academic process. I encourage every student to share their own experiences, but I also stress that no student is ever presumed to speak for anything or anyone more than their own experience or point of view, unless, in a course such as this one, you draw from and use evidence of social patterning and social theory.

Dr. Audrey Farrugia,
Associate Professor, Chair of
the COE RAIJE Committee

What EMU Students May Be Looking For



- Welcoming Language
 - Avoid jargon
 - Talk about yourself (e.g., include your pronouns, tell a fun fact about yourself)
 - Include your own diversity statement
- Organized Formatting
 - Use organized and bold headers
 - Put university-mandated information in the back of your syllabus
- Consistency
 - Set clear expectations
 - Update the syllabus as dates/assignments change

Course Calendar by Week
(Subject to change if needed)

	Topic	Reading	Assignment Due (in class unless noted)
Week 1 (8-11-23)	The Nature of Research Preparing Proposals and Reports	Chapter 1 Chapter 25	
Week 2 (9-7-23)	The Research Problem Locating & Reviewing Literature	Chapter 2 Chapter 3	UR 1 & AC 1
Week 3 (9-14-23)	Ethics and Research Variables & Hypotheses	Chapter 4 Chapter 5	UR 2 & AC 2
Week 4 (9-21-23)	Instrumentation Survey Research Data file construction	Chapter 7 Chapter 17	PS1 UR 3 & AC 3
Week 5 (9-28-23)	Sampling Validity and Reliability	Chapter 6 Chapter 8	PS2: Instrument UR 4 & AC 4
Week 6 (10-5-23)	Internal Validity Experimental Research	Chapter 9 Chapter 13	PS3: Methods (w/revised PS2) UR 5 & AC 5
Week 7 (10-12-23)	Single-Subject Research Causal-Comparative Research	Chapter 14 Chapter 16	PS4: <i>Start data collection window!</i> UR 6 & AC 6
Week 8 (10-19-23)	Correlational Research Action Research	Chapter 15 Chapter 24	UR 7 & AC 7
Week 9 (10-26-23)	Content Exam		Content Exam
Week 10 (11-2-23)	Complete data collection SPSS-Navigation, data entry, file construction for analyses	Use sample class datafile	UR 8 & AC 8
Week 11 (11-9-23)	Descriptive Statistics-SPSS	Chapter 10	PS5: Complete Data File PS6: Run Descriptive Data UR 9 & AC 9
Week 12 (11-16-23)	Inferential Statistics-SPSS Statistics in Perspective-SPSS	Chapter 11 Chapter 12	Ensure PS6 & 7 Complete!
Week 13 (11-23-23)	Thanksgiving-no class		
Week 13 (11-30-23)	Statistical Interpretation		PS7: Run Inferential Data
Week 14 (12-7-23)	Research Presentations		PS8: Data Analysis Plan PS9: Written Research Report Due 12-10-23 by midnight
Week 15 (12-14-23)	Stats Exam		Stats Exam

ASSIGNMENTS

- [9 Points] *Unpacking Research: Weekly literature analysis and critique (UR)*
Research is critically important to the work we do as scholars and deeply understanding the research in an area of interest is an important skill for any doctoral student. Each week you'll need to complete an "Unpacking Research (UR): The Literature Analysis and Critique Worksheet" and a research article matrix for a new/unique primary quantitative research article to class. It must be a primary **quantitative** research study article! Qualitative studies and systematic reviews **will not work** for this assignment. Mixed-methods reports should be avoided unless the quantitative content is presented in a distinct section with significant depth of content provided. Each week students will submit the APA reference for the article and the analysis/critique worksheet. Key elements of the worksheet should be transferred to the Quantitative Summary Table (analytic matrix) that will provide a cumulative summation of the articles. Across the term each student should accrue a minimum of nine research articles that will contribute to their literature review for the Pilot Study Project assignment.
- [9 Points] *Article critique (AC)*
Noted above, each week each student should bring a new/unique primary quantitative research article to class. Faculty will share a worksheet each week for students to complete. The worksheet will help identify key attributes of the research articles relevant to the lecture topic of the week. Each student will complete the worksheet for their own article in class and be prepared to discuss their article within the worksheet context.
- [57 Points] *Pilot Study Project (PS)* [52 of the 57 points are split into individually graded assignments that comprise the final paper and five points for the Pilot Study Presentation.]
The pilot study is designed to provide an authentic quantitative research experience. The intent is to model the research process, from problem identification through dissemination. The study will be developed and implemented throughout the course. Many researchers begin with a pilot study to examine the feasibility of research methods, the quality of their instruments/procedures, or the accuracy of their theory. A pilot study is required by IRB as part of a survey-based dissertation.

Dr. Robert Carpenter
Professor, Teacher Education

What the Research Says

- Students vs. Instructor beliefs
 - **“exam dates, assignment descriptions, and attendance policies” are the most important** while instructors place emphasis on the course, instructor, and required texts. (Garavalia et al., 1999; Keller et al, 2014)
- Learner-Centered Syllabi can produce a more engaged student with an increased perception of the instructor and course
 - Community, Power and Control, & Evaluation/Assessment (Cullen & Harris, 2009; Richmond, Slattery, et al., 2016; Richmond et al., 2019)

What a Learner-Centered Syllabi Looks Like In Action

Helpful:

- Weekly due date chart
- Clearly explained assignments
- Additional resources, e.g., texts, tutoring
- Clear grading scale
- Group pertinent information
- Review syllabus together

Unhelpful:

- Outdated rubrics
- Incorrect texts
- Unclear assignment descriptions
- Lack of important dates
- No time for embedded feedback

**What is a part of your
syllabus that you are proud
of?**

Accessible Practices

- Legibility and viewing (Passman & Green, 2009)
 - Include accessible supports and contact information
 - Verdana, Arial, Tahoma size 14 font
 - Allow Microsoft vs. PDF for screen readers
- Allow revisions (Richmond et al., 2019)
- Chunk large assignments into smaller manageable assignments
- Include contact information for
 - Discipline-specific tutors
 - Writing Centers/Math Lab
 - Mental Health Centers
 - On campus resource centers

**How do you make your
syllabus accessible?**

First Day of Class



- **PLAY!**
 - Eye Spy → highlight pertinent information
 - Jigsaw reading → share out highlights
 - Two truths and a lie with course expectations found in the syllabus
 - Bread Crumbs → leave 3-4 Qs or Comments
- Make the syllabus a living document to engage, annotate, and revise together as a class.

Welcome to SYL 111

Please access the course syllabus below using the QR code or link provided in the chat.

1. When are drop in office hours?
2. What page is the Late Work/Exam Policy on?
3. Is there a course calendar? When is the Content Exam?

[Syllabus 111](#)



Presenting the Syllabus on Day 1

Words matter, and what you write on the syllabus is important

But *how* you present it matters as well

When you share it with students

The way you convey its meaning in class

Want a student perspective on this?

[Reese McClelland blog](#)

**How do you make your
syllabus convey
excitement?**

Questions?

Moving Forward

For additional support and examples visit:

- Bruce K. Nelson Faculty Development Center: Syllabus Support
 - https://www.emich.edu/facdev/resources/syllabus_resources.php
- Carnegie Mellon University: Eberly Center
 - <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/syllabus/index.html>
- Accessible Syllabus
 - <https://www.accessiblesyllabus.com/>
- Project Syllabus
 - <https://teachpsych.org/otrp/syllabi/index.php/>

References

- Cullen, R., & Harris, M. (2009). Assessing learner-centredness through course syllabi. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 34, 115–125.
- Gambescia, S. (2006). Best practices: Syllabus construction with a commitment to shared governance. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 54(1), 20-27.
- Garavalia, L., Hummel, J., Wiley, L., Huitt, W. (1999). Constructing the course syllabus: Faculty and student perceptions of important syllabus components. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 10(1), 5–21.
- Keller, C., Marcis, J., Deck, A. (2014). A national survey on the perceived importance of syllabi components: Differences and agreements between students and instructors in the principles of accounting course. *The Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, 18(23).
- Passman, T. & Green, R. (2009). Start with the syllabus: Universal design from the top. *Journal of Access Services*, 6(1-2), 48-58.
DOI:10.1080/15367960802247916
- Richmond A., Slattery J., Morgan R., Mitchell N., Becknell J. (2016). Can a learner-centered syllabus change student's perceptions of student-professor rapport and master teacher behaviors? *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, 2, 159–168. doi:10.1037/stl0000066
- Richmond, A., Morgan, R., Slattery, J., Mitchell, N., Cooper, A. (2019). Project Syllabus: An exploratory study of learner-centered syllabi. *Teaching of Psychology*, 46(1), 6-15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0098628318816129>
- Wagner, J., Smith, K., Johnson, C., Hilaire, M., Medina, M. (2022). Best practices in syllabus design. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 87(3). <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe8995>