

Syllabus Guidelines for Best Practice



**Southern
Illinois
University**
CARBONDALE

Office of the Provost

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What is a Syllabus?

The course syllabus is a complex document. It first appeared in the 17th century as a table or index of contents in a book and was adopted into academia in the 18th century as a list of subjects or lectures in a course (Snyder, 2010, cited in Harrington & Thomas, 2018). Over the course of the 20th century, it expanded in length, content, and detail as it began to fulfill additional roles for a wide range of stakeholders: instructors, students, administrators, articulation specialists, and accreditors, among others.

Instructors often view the syllabus as a contract or set of rules, outlining expectations and policies for students taking their course. Although expectations and policies are important information for students, a better practice is to frame the syllabus more positively, as the roadmap for a course and a motivational tool for students (Harrington & Thomas, 2018).

A good syllabus should fulfill three purposes: communication, planning, and motivation and support. In terms of communication, a syllabus should describe the purpose of a course and the learning goals ([student learning outcomes, or SLOs](#)). As it is one of the first elements of a course that students encounter, the syllabus is invaluable for giving students a positive first impression, helping to get them excited about the content of the course, the value and relevance of the material, and the enthusiasm that the instructor has for the subject. Instructors may also use the syllabus to share their approach to the course and their teaching philosophy, which can help students understand the purpose of the planned learning activities and to avoid seeing course work as busywork (Palmer, 2017, cited in Harrington & Thomas, 2018).

The syllabus is also a planning document, both for instructors and for students. Information about what students will learn, what materials they will need, how they will be assessed, and what the expectations are for success in the course all help students see what they need to do, and when, to succeed. Instructors can also use the syllabus to help them apply backward design to structure their course. This involves beginning with the SLOs and working backwards from there to determine what evidence would best demonstrate student achievement of those learning outcomes, and then which teaching methods, learning activities, and course materials will best support students in that learning (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

Finally, the syllabus can be a great source of motivation and support for students. It provides a resource for students to get key information about course requirements and policies. A detailed plan will also help students to see how they can meet the goals of the course and what they need to do to succeed (Slattery & Carlson, 2005). Instructors can use their tone and language to demonstrate their belief in students' ability to master the course material, thus harnessing the power of teacher expectations for supporting student achievement (Rubie-Davis & Hattie, 2025). Research also shows that students view courses with more robust and transparent activity and assessment descriptions as more relevant and interesting (Palmer et al., 2016), and when students view their course and their instructor more positively, they are more motivated to learn and are more engaged in the course (Myers & Huebner, 2011; Pass & Neu, 2014).



Rather than focusing on behaviors to *avoid* and contractual language (e.g., “Students should avoid plagiarizing”), instructors are encouraged to communicate expectations using positively worded descriptions (e.g., “You are expected to engage in academically honest work, which means...” (Littlefield, 1999). Warm, personalized, and informal language can also increase student recall of syllabus information, positive perceptions of the instructor, and even their learning (Harnish & Bridges, 2011; Mayer, 2009; Saville et al., 2010). This may look like saying “you will learn...” instead of “students will learn...”, or “student hours are Mondays and Wednesdays 1-3; feel free to drop in or set up an appointment by emailing me” rather than “Office hours: MW 1-3”.

In terms of design, it can be helpful to minimize the number of pages as much as possible to avoid overwhelming students and instead provide links to various information and resources through D2L. Visual appeal, which can help instructors to be perceived as more encouraging, enthusiastic, and approachable (Ludy et al., 2016), can be enhanced with the use of white space, bold lettering and underlining, borders, and images, particularly those linked to course outcomes or how the course may link to students’ futures. Technical terms and jargon can be made more approachable by including definitions within the syllabus.

Finally, keep in mind that the syllabus is a document that wears multiple hats and is used by many different stakeholders for a range of purposes. Syllabi should be accessible and student-friendly but must contain enough information to be useful to others. For example, administrators may use syllabi to provide quick insights into the teaching practices at their institutions (Doolittle & Siudzinski, 2010). Syllabi are also used by faculty and staff at other institutions and by state-level education officials for articulation purposes and for determining course equivalency. Similarly, students may be asked to provide syllabi from their courses to demonstrate that they have met certain pre-requisites for graduate school, internship, or job applications or have obtained specific knowledge or skills. Syllabi are also used by various accrediting bodies, including our institutional accreditor the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), as a key piece of evidence for curricular alignment and program integrity, as well as a source of insight regarding common teaching practices at the institution, as it is not possible for accreditors to directly observe instructors teaching (Habanek, 2005).

This document has been developed to provide instructors with useful information on best practices for syllabi and to act as a resource for information about institutional policies and practices at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC). Additional information and support may be obtained from the [Office of the Associate Provost for Academic Programs](#) and the [Center for Teaching Excellence](#).

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Basic Course Information

Syllabi should begin with the basic information about a course. This includes the three- or four-letter course prefix (e.g., CHEM, MUS) and the course number. Faculty may also include the CRN (course reference number), a five-digit code that is unique to each section and semester a course is offered. The CRN may be located through the [searchable course schedule](#) or on a faculty member's personal class rosters (accessible via [SalukiNet](#)).

For accreditation reporting purposes, it is helpful to indicate the semester for the syllabus. Additional elements that are useful to include are the credit hours for the course and course modality (e.g., face-to-face, synchronous online, asynchronous online, hybrid, etc.).

For in-person courses, include the classroom location. For synchronous courses (online or face-to-face), indicate the days and times the class is scheduled to meet. These scheduled meeting times must be consistent with the official course schedule in Banner. Finally, give the official course dates (as listed in Banner) to clarify whether the course is full-term, 8-week, or a special session length.

Example from the SIU Syllabus Template:

Course Number: Course Title [Ex: CRS 101: Sample Syllabus]

Semester: (e.g., Fall 2026)

Credit Hours:

Course Modality: (In-person, Synchronous/Asynchronous Online, Hybrid)

Direct Link to Course in D2L (MyCourses):

Classroom location: *(Remove If Online)*

Times and days class meets: *(If Applicable)*

Course dates:

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Instructor and Contact Information

Instructors must provide contact information for any and all instructors responsible for a course. Most courses have a single faculty member, making contact information straightforward. However, if a course is taught by a graduate student, full contact information must be provided for both the graduate instructor and the supervising faculty member. If a course is co-taught between two or more individuals, full contact information must be provided for all of them.

Contact information must include the instructor's name, university email address, university telephone number, and office location. All faculty members should have a university-assigned telephone number through Microsoft Teams. This can be found by opening the desktop or mobile Teams app, going to the Calls tab, and looking immediately below the dial pad. If a faculty member does not yet have a university telephone number, the faculty member or their School Director should request one using the [New Teams VOIP Telecommunications Service Request form](#). Note that graduate assistants are not automatically assigned a telephone number, but units may choose to request a number for them. Details on service availability and fees can be found on the Office of Information Technology [Telephone Services](#) webpage.

You may also include information on how students should address the instructor(s), for example, "Please address me as [Dr./Professor Last Name]".

Example from the SIU Syllabus Template:

Instructor and Contact Information

Instructor name:

E-mail address:

Office location/**office hours access (If Online)**:

Office phone:

Student engagement opportunities:

TA/Co-Instructor name: **(If Applicable)**

E-mail address:

Office location:

Office phone:

Student engagement opportunities:

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Office Hours and Student Engagement

All instructors for a course must provide their office hours availability (also known as their student engagement opportunities). Faculty are free to specify their own policy, which should be reasonable, disciplinarily appropriate, and flexible. Syllabi must provide a set schedule of weekly openings for student meetings. These meetings may be held virtually or face-to-face, either in instructor offices or other spaces (e.g., labs, studios) that are convenient for instructors and students, but should be consistent with the scheduled modality of the class. Instructors must also be reasonably available via appointment, but office hours availability CANNOT be by appointment only.

All syllabi should include a policy for responding to student emails within a reasonable and clearly defined time frame, and faculty may also describe their expectations for student usage of email. For more information, see [\(Electronic\) Communication Policy](#).

In addition to email, instructors may also describe other means for student engagement that they consider appropriate. These may include other means of electronic communication (e.g., Slack, Discord); encouraging students to drop by their office at times outside of scheduled office hours; and/or encouraging interaction before and after class.

Example from the SIU Syllabus Template:

Instructor and Contact Information

Instructor name:

E-mail address:

Office location/**office hours access (If Online)**:

Office phone:

Student engagement opportunities:

TA/Co-Instructor name: **(If Applicable)**

E-mail address:

Office location:

Office phone:

Student engagement opportunities:

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Course Materials

Syllabi must list all texts, materials, and supplies or other equipment that students are required to purchase. List texts and similar materials in the citation style of your discipline (e.g., MLA/APA/AMA style); this gives students a good example of appropriate citation use. It can also be helpful to define an abbreviation for each item for use on your course schedule. If you are placing books [on reserve](#) in the library, provide information about the Reserve Desk and checkout policies. Please note if an eBook is available to students. Keeping in mind the high cost of textbooks, consider using [open educational resources \(OER\) or materials](#).

SIU has partnered with Follett to offer affordable course materials. All students are automatically enrolled in the program to provide the opportunity to receive their required course materials at the lowest price available and to ensure preparedness across campus on the first day of class. The program's cost will be added to the student's Bursar statement each semester for easy payment. Students can opt out of the program with no penalty but must do so by the course drop deadline. Note that if students opt out, they must do so for *all* courses they are enrolled in for a particular semester; the choice is made semester-by-semester, not class-by-class. More information can be found on the SIU [myTextbooks website](#). Recommended language regarding the SIU myTextbooks program is provided at the bottom of this section and on the SIU Syllabus Template.

In addition to required materials, it may also be useful to list any material that you believe will support student learning, but that is not required. You may want to include notice of the need for specific programs such as MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint, or more discipline-specific tools if applicable to the course.

Instructors should be aware that [federal law requires](#) institutions of higher education to provide required and recommended textbook information, including pricing, as part of the institution's course schedule. At SIUC, this means that textbook information should be entered *before enrollment begins* for the upcoming term(s). Instructors (or School Directors or their designees) should enter all textbook information for courses via D2L using the process described under the "FAQ for Faculty" section of the [myTextbooks website](#).

Language about the myTextbooks program from the SIU Syllabus Template:

All the required course materials for your classes are being delivered through myTextbooks, the campus-wide affordable course materials program. Your Bursar bill will be charged automatically, so you will not need to make a separate purchase.

(Choose the applicable message for the applicable course):

For this course you will be able to access your eBooks and courseware through the My Materials link in D2L.



OR;

For this course we will be using a physical (print) book. You will receive an email confirming your materials are ready for pickup. Upon receipt of the email, please bring your Student ID to the online order pickup area at the campus store to pick up your print course materials. **Note:** If you drop this course on, or before, the last day of the DROP/ADD period (check the academic calendar [here](#)), when you return your physical course material to the campus store, your account will be refunded.

(Include if faculty/department chooses)

If you wish to opt-out of this program, please follow the steps below by the last day of the add/drop period for the course, as indicated on the [Registrar's website](#):

Go to [Opt-Out Portal \(https://ACCESSPortal.follett.com:443/0625\)](https://ACCESSPortal.follett.com:443/0625)

Create an account using your student email account

Select Opt-Out to opt-out of the entire program. You will have an opportunity to opt back in if you choose to do so.

You can also Opt-Out from the student-specific link provided in the email from noreply@follett.com.

Important: If you Opt-Out, you will no longer have access to your required digital materials and will need to purchase required materials on your own. If you have required physical (print) materials that you have already picked up from the campus store, please return the physical material(s) before opting out.

If you have any questions about myTextbooks or the charge to your student account, please contact the campus store by phone at (618) 536-3321 or via [email](mailto:mytextbooks@siu.edu) at mytextbooks@siu.edu.

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Course Description, Goals, and/or Topics

All syllabi must include the goals and topics for the course. One recommended approach is to provide the formal course description as it appears in the official [Undergraduate](#) or [Graduate Catalog](#) for the current academic year.

Depending on the content of the catalog course description, additional information about the goals and topics of the course may need to be added. For example, special topics courses frequently have very limited descriptions in the catalog that should be elaborated on in the syllabus for a particular semester offering. Unlike [student learning outcomes \(SLOs\)](#), course goals may be broad statements, using general verbs such as “know”, “understand”, or “apply”, and they may be course-centered (i.e., describing what the course introduces) rather than student-centered (i.e., describing what students will be able to do by the end of successful course completion).

Alternatively, faculty may provide their own, customized description to give students a more personal perspective on the course and how being enrolled will benefit them in their studies and after they leave SIU. In this description, you may consider addressing your students directly, using second-person pronouns (for example, “In this class, you will...”). Tell students what they will learn by the end of the class, in terms that capture the excitement you have for the course. However, such customized descriptions must be consistent with the official course description as it appears in the official [Undergraduate](#) or [Graduate Catalog](#) for the current academic year. For example, a course that is described in the catalog as an introductory course should not describe “advanced topics” in its syllabus description.

If at any point instructors realize that their course description, goals, and/or topics do not align with the official description in the catalog, revision of the curriculum materials or the catalog description is needed. In such a case, an instructor should contact their School Director and/or College Dean for assistance in working through the School or College curriculum revision process.

Official catalog-based course description for LING 470:

“Provides a broad overview of the field of bilingual education, including related terminology; historical, political, social, theoretical, international, economic, cultural, and legal aspects of bilingual education; and educational program models for serving English language students. Satisfies the CoLA Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Requirement.”

Example faculty-customized course description for LING 470:

“This course provides an overview of the field of multilingual education, focusing especially on the United States but also touching on multilingual education in various contexts around the



world. Topics covered include (but are not limited to) how to define and describe bilingualism and multilingualism, common models of multilingual education, the history and socio-politics of language education (in the United States and internationally), legal rights, responsibilities, and requirements pertaining to multilingual learners, and best practices for teaching in a multilingual context, focusing specifically on sheltered/structured language instruction.”

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Prerequisites

If a course has any prerequisites or co-requisites, these are useful to note on the syllabus. Give the three- or four-letter course prefix (e.g., CHEM, MUS) and the course number, plus any minimum grade, for such requirements. Note that any prerequisites or co-requisites given on a syllabus must match the requirements in the official [Undergraduate](#) or [Graduate Catalog](#) for the current academic year.

Example from the SIU Syllabus Template:

Prerequisites:

- CRS #: Title, with a grade of C or better

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Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Student learning outcomes (SLOs) are concrete and measurable descriptions of the minimum knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or dispositions gained by students who have successfully completed (passed) a course. There are a variety of terms that may sometimes be used interchangeably with student learning outcomes, such as student learning objectives, course learning objectives, course goals. Often, different accrediting bodies and professional organizations use different labels, leading to inconsistency and confusion. At SIUC, the term used for the expected course-level learning by students is “student learning outcome (SLO)”; the term used for the expected educational outcomes at the level of academic programs is “[program learning outcomes \(PLOs\)](#)”.

Note that, as a criterion of our accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission, all syllabi must contain SLOs. Faculty are recommended to also include a brief statement or demonstration of how the SLOs will be covered and assessed in the course (e.g., noting which SLOs are associated with which assignments or activities on the course schedule).

Although there has been a history of instructors individually writing SLOs for their courses, as an institution SIUC is moving towards faculty working together to jointly agree upon SLOs for the courses in their programs. This aligns with the emphasis on faculty responsibility for developing and reviewing program curricula ([SIUC Faculty Association CBA §17.02](#); [SIUC Non-Tenure Track Faculty Association CBA §5.02](#)). It is also consistent with the [AAUP’s 2013 Policy Statement on The Freedom to Teach](#), which acknowledges the need for coordination among faculty to decide common course syllabi and to have a periodic process for making and reviewing curricular decisions via a consensus of the teaching faculty. Deciding jointly on SLOs for courses will help ensure that all students completing a program receive comparable instruction. Providing SLOs directly on syllabi increases the transparency of course and program outcomes and the benefits to students and aligns with the Higher Learning Commission’s guidelines of [Evidence for the Criteria for Accreditation](#).

It is best to give SLOs in a numbered list format. This format makes it easy for students (and others reviewing syllabi, such as accreditation officials) to quickly and easily locate and parse the course SLOs. A numbered list in particular facilitates the ability to reference specific SLOs in relation to course readings, activities, assignments, and other assessments through assignment descriptions and/or the course schedule. Such direct links between SLOs and specific learning activities and assignments also helps the syllabus serve as a course planning document (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) and facilitates annual program assessment.

Writing Good SLOs

Good SLOs have the following characteristics:

- Focus on **student** knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or dispositions (rather than descriptions of the course, the teaching or instructors, or the learning process)



- Are specific, concrete, and measurable (use action verbs)
- Describe the minimum level of competency for successful course completion
- Constrained in number – most courses should have 3-7 SLOs
- Provide a link between the specific elements of a class (e.g., activities, assessments) and the broader course and program goals
- Are appropriate for the student level and the place of the course within the broader curriculum (e.g., general education, introductory survey course, advanced skills course, etc.)

SLOs may describe a variety of different outcome types (Carriveau, 2016). They may address the cognitive domain, which includes students' knowledge, skills, and intellectual abilities, or they may address the psychomotor domain, which includes perceptual and motor skills (e.g., radiological detection ability, musical or artistic performances). SLOs may also describe specific behaviors, dispositions, and attitudes that students are expected to develop by the end of a course (e.g., time management, teamwork, self-awareness, open-mindedness), which can be grouped together as belonging to the affective domain.

It is often useful to reference [Bloom's Taxonomy](#) (Bloom et al., 1956; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) when developing or revising SLOs, particularly those related to the cognitive domains of learning. The various cognitive levels of the taxonomy are [frequently associated with a variety of specific, measurable verbs](#) that can be used to describe concrete expectations for student outcomes. For example, in an introductory course in which students are expected to develop general disciplinary knowledge, verbs such as “list”, “name”, and “relate” may be appropriate for SLOs. In contrast, for an upper-division major course focusing on developing students' analysis and synthesis skills, verbs such as “appraise”, “design”, “differentiate”, or “propose” may be more appropriate (Mackh, 2018).

Although less well-known the taxonomy for cognitive domains of learning, Bloom and his colleagues also developed a taxonomy for describing learning outcomes in the affective domain, dealing with attitudes and feelings (Krathwohl et al., 1964). This hierarchy begins with *attending* (including awareness and willingness to receive) then proceeds to *responding* (willingly participating and reacting), *valuing* (ascribing worth or personal value to something), *organizing* (balancing and prioritizing values), and finally *characterizing* (maintaining a consistent value system).

Similarly, other educational researchers have developed taxonomies for learning outcomes in the psychomotor domain, which describes things that students might learn to do physically. One representative taxonomy was developed by Simpson (1966). It proceeds from *perception* (e.g., “detect”, “isolate”) through *readiness to act* (“begin”, “volunteer”), then *guided response* (“copy”, “react”), *developing confidence and proficiency in complex overt responses* (“calibrate”, “manipulate”), *adaptation* (“alter”, “vary”), and finally *origination* (“design”, “construct”).



One approach for developing a detailed version of SLOs that can be helpful for guiding further course design and assessment decisions is the ABCD framework. The acronym ABCD stands for Audience, Behavior, Condition, Degree – the four elements in a maximally specific SLO. The Audience refers to *who* the SLO describes (i.e., students) and at what stage (e.g., students graduating from a program; students entering clinical rotations). The Behavior corresponds to the action verb describing that students know or can do by the end of a course. The Condition describes contextual information about *how* students are expected to perform the behavior (e.g., in a three-page essay, using a specific method or piece of software, in a simulated clinical setting). The final element, Degree, refers to the overall success rate or standard for acceptable performance required for a learning outcome to be considered ‘achieved’. For example, students may be expected to identify specific pieces of art with 90% accuracy, perform a specific laboratory task within 10 minutes, or produce writing of a certain genre and length adhering to a particular disciplinary standard. Degree may also refer to the overall level of performance expected for students in a program as a whole and so may be part of writing a whole-program assessment plan.

Example SLOs

Two examples of weaker and stronger SLOs, with brief explanations of why each is weaker or stronger, are given below. These are followed by two sets of corresponding SLOs for a 400-/500-level co-convening course that demonstrate how to differentiate the expectations for undergraduate versus graduation sections of a course. Finally, there is a checklist which instructors, curriculum committees, and program faculty can use to guide the writing and revision of SLOs for the courses in their program.

Stronger and Weaker SLOs with Explanations

Weaker: Students will learn about leadership principles

Stronger: Students will apply their analysis of leadership theories to describe case studies

Why:

- The first SLO uses an unmeasurable, vague verb (“learn”)
- The second SLO uses action verbs (“apply”, “describe”) that reflect higher-order cognitive domains from Bloom’s Taxonomy
- The first SLO does not specify what students will actually do, or in what contexts
- The second SLO clarifies how students will demonstrate their knowledge (analyze leadership theories) and under what conditions (“to describe case studies”)

Weaker: Students will complete a group project

Stronger: Students will produce evidence-based conclusions in a written team report

Why:



- The first SLO is not specific about what the group project accomplishes within the curriculum
- The second SLO clearly describes what ability will be demonstrated (“producing evidence-based conclusions”) through the assignment of a group project
- The first SLO does not specify the conditions under which students will demonstrate the ability
- The second SLO clarifies that the conditions will involve producing a written team report

Differentiated 400- and 500-level SLOs with Explanations

400-level SLO: Develop personal and administration values in sport settings.

500-level SLO: Understand and articulate the ethical responsibilities of sport administrators and professionals, with a focus on professional conduct and integrity.

Notes:

- The 400-level SLO emphasizes a relatively early and incomplete stage of self-reflection (“develop values”), though the emphasis on reflection aligns with a higher cognitive domain from Bloom’s Taxonomy (evaluation) that is appropriate for an upper-division course
- The 500-level SLO describes a more thorough knowledge and capacity for reflection (“understand and articulate ethical responsibilities”) than the 400-level version
- The 400-level SLO is general in its focus (“values”, “sport settings”), reflecting a level of expertise appropriate for an undergraduate course
- The 500-level SLO is precise in its focus (“ethical responsibilities” rather than just “values”, specifying “sport administrators and professionals” and “a focus on professional conduct and integrity”), aligning with the greater expertise developed in a graduate-level course

400-level SLO: Make improvements to existing reading and vocabulary teaching materials based on their strengths and weaknesses

500-level SLO: Create original reading and vocabulary teaching materials that follow best practices identified by research for teaching these skills

Notes:

- The 400-level SLO requires students to apply their new knowledge to evaluate existing materials; this emphasis on higher cognitive domains from Bloom’s Taxonomy (application, evaluation) is appropriate for an upper-division course
- The 500-level SLO requires a much greater degree of independent creation (“create original teaching materials”) than the 400-level version (“make improvements to existing teaching materials”)
- The 400-level SLO asks students to rely on knowledge gained from the course for their evaluation (“based on their strengths and weaknesses”)
- The 500-level SLO asks students to go beyond surface-level best practices and engage with the research literature to support creation of their materials



SLOs Checklist

Are the SLOs...

- ☐ Student-focused (describe what students know or can do by the end of a course)?
- ☐ Specific, concrete, and measurable (use action verbs)?
- ☐ Aligned with the minimum level of competency expected for a student who passes the course (earns at least a D grade)?
- ☐ Between 3 and 7 in a numbered list?
- ☐ Connected directly and clearly with the course activities and assignments?
- ☐ Connected logically with the program learning outcomes (PLOs)? (for required courses)
- ☐ Appropriate for the course level (e.g., lower-division vs. upper-division)?
- ☐ Differentiated between undergraduate and graduate courses (for co-convened sections)?

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Grading

All syllabi must describe how grades are determined (for example, the types of assignments and grade breakdown) and the grading scale or scheme that is used to calculate final grades. Instructors may choose the grading system (e.g., points-based, weighted) that best fits their course but should provide a list of all grade categories that will be considered in grade calculation (e.g., homework assignments, lab assignments, papers, quizzes, exams, portfolios, presentations, group projects, attendance, participation, etc.) and all of the points and percentages of items required to achieve each letter grade in the course (A, B, C, D, F). Instructors should explicitly describe how students will be evaluated and the way grades are determined so that students always know where they stand and do not feel that grading is done arbitrarily. Instructors must be sure to treat all students equally in matters of grading or else open themselves up to grievances. Examples of how this information may be communicated to students in the syllabus are given below and also on the SIU syllabus template.

[Best practice for grading](#) indicates that the assignment of letter grades should be based on the percentage or total count of points earned, as this most closely aligns grades with mastery of course content and achievement of student learning outcomes rather than non-cognitive factors (e.g., a behavior like attendance) that are not directly linked to the course-level SLOs (Marsh, 2023). Instructors should aim to strike a balance between providing early information to students about their performance in the class (e.g., it is best for at least one graded assignment be returned to students within the first three weeks of a 16-week semester) and more heavily weighting student performance toward the end of the semester, after they have had an opportunity to learn and improve their knowledge and skills. This helps address any grade penalty that students may receive from early performance issues that they are able to address through growth over the term. For example, if a class requires eight writing assignments, the first few may count relatively little toward the final grade (even as low as 2-5%), with the last few writing assignments counting much more (e.g., 10-15%).

The alignment between letter grades and percentage or total count of points earned should be given directly to students at the beginning of the semester, as in the example table below. This final grade should be structured such that it directly reflects the degree to which students have succeeded in achieving the course-level SLOs.

Note that all course requirements must be completed before a final grade is assigned. For information about the SIU Grading Scale, see the [Undergraduate Grading System Explanation](#) in the catalog or the [Grading System from the Graduate School](#) website.



Examples from the SIU Syllabus Template:

Grade Breakdown:

Assignment Category	Points
	nn
	nn
	nn
	nn
	nn
	nn
	nn
	nn

Grading Scale:

Letter Grade	Percentage of Points
A	nn-nn
B	nn-nn
C	nn-nn
D	nn-nn
E	nn-nn

Midterm Grades

Midterm grades are only required by institutional policy for full-semester UNIV 101 courses but are highly recommended for all classes to provide students with feedback and support, and may be required by specific program or college policies. Midterm grades can be submitted officially via Banner; guidelines for grading and navigating the grade entry system are available on the [Faculty and Staff section](#) of the Registrar's webpage. Instructors are also recommended to explain in writing to the student what the student's midterm grade implies for his/her overall success in the class and to include an invitation to consult with you or a TA (if appropriate) concerning the grade.

Final Exams

Although the demands of some disciplines may require specific scheduling for end-of-term projects, [by institutional policy](#), final examinations may only be administered during the sixteenth week of the semester (eighth week of the summer term). They may not be given earlier.



The Registrar sets a schedule, which can be found linked on the [Registrar's list of calendars](#). Final exams are recommended to count for no more than 30% of the final grade in a course to facilitate students knowing where they stand in a class before the start of finals week.

Final Grades

Final grades must be finalized and submitted via Banner no later than 8:00 am CST on the Wednesday after finals week. Final grade entry opens the Monday of finals week, or when the course concludes for short or late-ending courses (e.g., intersession). If grades are not submitted on time, an "NR" (Not Recorded) placeholder will be entered and a [grade change card](#), requiring a signature from the College Dean (and Graduate Dean if for a graduate student), must be submitted. Late or missing grades may delay degree awards and impact financial aid and should be avoided.

Incomplete grades (INC) may only be assigned in circumstances that follow the institutional policy (described in the [Undergraduate](#) and [Graduate Catalog](#)) regarding incompletes. This policy stipulates that an INC grade may only be assigned when students who are **already passing a class** cannot complete all assigned work for circumstances that arise unexpectedly and out of their control. An INC grade may NOT be assigned to allow students to catch up on missing work that would result in a failing grade if an INC were not given. See the [course policies section on incomplete grades](#) for more detail.

Additional Information for Instructors

SIUC employs two student tracking procedures: one to indicate any students who are no-shows in the first part of a course and one to provide feedback for students who are at risk for not succeeding in one or more of their courses. The following sections describe these procedures and are intended to serve as information for instructors; such sections are not intended to be included on a course syllabus.

No-Show Reporting

For in-person courses, federal financial aid regulations require SIUC to verify student attendance in courses. Students who do not attend or otherwise participate in the course during the initial attendance verification period (defined as the first two weeks of the semester for a 16-week course) should be reported as a no-show. For this purpose, participation may include attending class, submitting an assignment, completing a quiz or discussion activity, or other instructor-designated academic engagement.

No-shows must be reported through the Banner system using the Faculty Feedback task. A step-by-step guide is provided [on the Registrar's website](#).



Students reported as a no-show may be removed from the course and may experience changes to their enrollment status, financial aid eligibility, tuition charges, or other university records. It is the student's responsibility to participate in the course by the deadline communicated by the instructor and to monitor their SIU email account for any notifications regarding attendance verification. Students who register but do not intend to participate in the course must officially drop or withdraw from the course according to university deadlines and procedures.

For online and hybrid courses, attendance is established through academic engagement, not simply logging into D2L. Students must complete an academic activity (e.g., assignment, quiz, discussion post, exam, or other instructor-designated activity) during the attendance verification period (the first two weeks of the semester for a 16-week course). Students who fail to demonstrate academic engagement should be reported as a no-show in accordance with federal Department of Education requirements and University policy.

Progress Reporting

Student Progress Reporting comprises a suite of efforts to identify students at-risk in their coursework and provide timely intervention to support student success. This process formally occurs during Weeks 4-5, 8, and 12, when instructors will receive an email prompting them to submit their Student Progress Reports. Instructors are encouraged to submit a progress report for any undergraduate student who may be at risk of not being successful in the course. This involves accessing the Student Progress Reporting link provided in the email, indicating which students are at-risk by choosing “Yes” from a drop-down menu, and then choosing one or more pre-defined reasons for the concern. Additional space is provided for instructors to provide other details if applicable. Upon submission, students receive notification of the concern and are encouraged to connect with their instructor and/or academic advisor. Appropriate campus support offices also provide outreach and follow-up.

Proactive alerts and timely interventions increase the opportunity for students to seek assistance, address challenges early, and improve their standing. Because a variety of academic and personal factors can impact a student's engagement and success, early communication is an important part of supporting student achievement.

In addition to Progress Reports, faculty may also submit concerns through [Saluki Cares](#) and the [Academic Early Alerts webpage](#).

Faculty should never hesitate to report a concern. Submitting an alert allows the university to connect students with the appropriate resources and support.

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Assignments, Readings, and Activities

Syllabi must describe the types of assignments and activities that are required in a course. The list of assignments and activities should include all elements that contribute to a student's final grade and students should be provided details regarding an instructor's expectations for a homework assignment, laboratory activity, project, etc. If expectations vary over the semester depending on the nature of the assignment or activity, provide an outline specific to each. Research shows that students prefer to get assignment details in the syllabus itself and tend to view their instructor more positively when more detailed information about assignments is provided in the syllabus (Harrington & Gabert-Quillen, 2015; Jenkins et al., 2014; Saville et al., 2010). SIUC encourages this practice.

Examples:

Quizzes

Give details here.

Discussions

Give details here.

Papers

Give details here.

Video Assignments/Presentations

Give details here.

Case Studies

Give details here.

Exams

Example detail: "There will be four exams that will assess content learned from in- and out-of-class learning activities, including the reading assignments. Each of the four exams will consist of 50 multiple-choice questions and five short-answer questions. There will be a total of seven short-answer questions on each exam, and you will be able to choose which five questions you want to answer. For these short answer questions, you will need to apply content learned to various case scenarios. The final exam is cumulative, meaning that the test questions will address content covered throughout the entire semester. Study guides that direct your attention to the most important concepts will be provided." (*adapted from Harrington & Thomas, 2018, p. 54*)

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Course Schedule

A detailed schedule should be provided to students that shows required readings, class activities, assignment due dates, and exam dates. For online courses, the syllabus and/or course schedule must demonstrate [regular, substantive interaction \(RSI\)](#) between instructor(s) and students on at least a weekly basis. For eight-week or full-semester terms, the course schedule is recommended to be given on a weekly basis; for shorter-term courses, a daily schedule may be more appropriate.

Instructors are advised to note that final exams may only be scheduled during Finals Week. The final exam schedule is released a few weeks into the semester; the final exam schedule for a given term can be found on the Registrar's [Final Exam Calendars](#) webpage.

In addition to class readings, activities, assignments, and exams, instructors are encouraged to also include course withdrawal deadlines on their course schedule (the dates for when the class can be dropped without receiving a "W" and/or a "WF"; see the Registrar's [Registration Deadlines Calendars](#) for semester-specific dates).

Example from the SIU Syllabus Template:

Week	Topics	Readings and Activities	Assignments	SLO(s) Measured
Week 1 Start - End				
Week 2 Start – End				
Week 3 Start – End				
Week 4 Start – End				
Week 5 Start – End				
Week 6 Start – End				



Week	Topics	Readings and Activities	Assignments	SLO(s) Measured
Week 7 Start – End				
Week 8 Start – End				
Week 9 Start – End				
Week 10 Start – End				
Week 11 Start – End				
Week 12 Start – End				
Week 13 Start – End				
Week 14 Start – End				
Week 15 Start – End				

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Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)

Program learning outcomes (PLOs) are measurable statements of what graduates should know, do, and believe upon completion of an academic program (a certificate or degree). They describe what it means for a student to have that particular degree from SIUC. These statements typically include both field-specific outcomes (e.g., “Students will be able to apply knowledge of sustainability to aviation issues”; “Students will be able to analyze linguistic diversity in terms of cross-linguistic, sociolinguistic, and/or historical variation and change”) and broader academic outcomes (e.g., “Students will be able to work effectively on multi-disciplinary and diverse teams”; “Students will be able to communicate orally and in writing in formal and informal situations”). Most programs will have 3-7 PLOs.

Although not required, in many cases PLOs are useful to include on a syllabus because they can contextualize the content of a course as part of a larger degree sequence. This information can be useful to demonstrate to students how all the pieces of a degree program fit together and the overall relevance of the course to students and in their future careers. This is particularly true because most courses do not stand completely on their own but rather are part of a sequence or a set of options that fulfill specific goals in various educational programs, be they general education (University Core Curriculum, UCC), certificates, or associate, bachelors, masters, or doctoral degrees. Thus, even electives exist to build specific knowledge in skills and students, and including PLOs can help students see their relevance and value.

Including PLOs on a syllabus can also help instructors think more purposefully about the design of a course and ensure that the course fulfills the role it is intended to play within the broader degree program(s) of which it is a part (Harrington & Thomas, 2018). This includes considering whether a course is meant to introduce knowledge and skills (appropriate for lower-division and introductory courses), strengthen them further (e.g., in a course partway through a sequence), or develop deeper understanding and expertise (particularly in upper-division courses). Finally, the inclusion of PLOs on a syllabus can help program faculty and curriculum committees ensure that every PLO is addressed by at least one required course in an academic program. Course-level assessment of SLOs also feeds directly into program-level assessment, a key annual activity required by our accreditor (HLC).

If instructors are not familiar with the PLO(s) that their course connects to, they should reach out to their Program or School Director for this information.

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Course Policies

The policies section of the syllabus is a place to describe the rules and norms of the learning environment in a classroom. However, this does not mean that policies should be described in prohibition-focused legalese; rather, policies that focus on learning rather than a behavioral contract are more motivating and engaging for students and can better help them develop the soft skills, such as personal accountability, timeliness, and professionalism, that employers are concerned with (Kent, 2016). Policies exist to describe the expectations for both students and instructors and help outline what guidelines students need to abide by in order to succeed in the course. Finally, it can also be helpful for students if instructors explain the rationale behind their policies, as this minimizes the impression of arbitrary rules.

All instructors must include information about their office hours or their student engagement policy (addressed [above](#)). In addition, tenured or tenure-track faculty are required to include a policy for responding to student emails in a reasonable and defined time frame, and all instructors are strongly encouraged to include such information in their syllabi.

In addition to these required policies, instructors are strongly encouraged to include information on their course policies regarding attendance, missing or late work, electronic or other communication preferences, and the use of artificial intelligence (AI). Note that SIUC has institutional policies regarding religious holidays, incomplete grades, and academic integrity that all instructors must follow; details of each are given below.

Other policies may be included on syllabi, such as a policy that collaboration is or is not permitted on homework; a policy regarding calculator usage on exams; recommended dress for specific field assignments; rules for class discussion; etc. Guidelines for such policies are addressed in the following section on [Additional Elements to Consider](#).

Attendance Policy (Program- or Instructor-Specific)

There is no institution-wide attendance policy; however, SIUC explicitly acknowledges the importance of attendance for student success and encourages all students to attend classes regularly. Although attendance is not required by the institution, certain programs or colleges may have program- or college-specific policies regarding attendance that must be followed; instructors should consult their School Director and/or College Dean for further information.

To clarify their expectations for course attendance, instructors should specify their attendance policy in their syllabi. If applicable, include the number of unexcused absences allowed, acceptable excuses, tardiness policy, and the effect of absences and/or tardiness on a student's final grade. If there is a point at which missing a specific number of classes results in a failing grade, this should be explicitly noted on the syllabus. Note that absences for religious holidays are addressed via the institutional [Religious Holidays](#) policy.



In some cases, it may be important to clarify the difference between *preparation* for class, *attendance*, and *participation*. Preparation for class typically involves reading all assigned readings, viewing any assigned videos, listening to any assigned audio material (e.g., podcasts), and reviewing all information required for a specific class session, such as notes from the previous class session. For in-person classes, attendance typically refers to physical presence in the classroom for all or a majority of the scheduled class time. In contrast, participation involves not only physical presence, but also active engagement in the class activities. It may be demonstrated through, for example, asking or answering questions; responding to polling activities; interacting with classmates via collaborative work; brief written reflections or exit tickets; etc.

In the context of an online asynchronous course, attendance comprises logging into D2L regularly and participating in all required activities that are posted in the course for a defined time frame (weekly, twice weekly, etc.). Thus, attendance and participation are less easily separable in the online context.

Attendance can be taken via roll call, a seating chart, [You-Attend](#), a sign-in sheet, and name tent cards, among other options. However, instructors are encouraged to emphasize participation over simple attendance, as active engagement is more closely related to student success than simple physical presence in the classroom. This may be accomplished in a variety of ways, including bonus quizzes for extra credit points at the start of class, one-minute papers, clickers or electronic polling that tracks student responses, group work that is submitted to the instructor, entry or exit tickets, and self-reflections on participation.

Religious Holidays (Institutional Policy)

SIUC has an institutional Religious Holidays policy that meets the legal requirements of state law (the University Religious Observances Act, 110 ILCS 110/et seq.) and which all instructors must follow. It can be found in the Religious Observances section of the [Undergraduate Catalog](#) and [Graduate Catalog](#).

Broadly speaking, this policy requires students to notify their instructors of an absence due to a religious holiday at least three regular class periods in advance and to make up any work missed. The policy requires instructors to excuse such an absence. For exams, instructors are encouraged to avoid major religious holidays when scheduling their exams. If a conflict cannot be avoided, students must notify their instructors of their absence at least three regular class periods in advance or when the exam is announced, whichever is later. Instructors must provide absent students with a reasonable opportunity to make up the exam.

Instructors are encouraged to make the Religious Holidays policy clear on their own syllabi. This may be done by linking to the online catalog, copying the catalog language into their syllabus, or providing their own description of the policy that aligns with the institutional requirement.



One example of this that instructors may use or adopt is as follows:

Students who wish to observe their religious holidays must notify their instructor at least three class periods before the date when they will be absent unless the religious holiday is observed less than three class periods into the semester. In such cases, the student must notify their instructor during the first class period. Students are responsible for making up any work missed, but the instructor will not penalize the student for missing the class. If an examination or project is due during the absence, the instructor will make every reasonable effort to give the student an exam or assignment equivalent to the one completed by those students in attendance.

Missing or Late Work (Program- or Instructor-Specific)

There is no institutional policy at SIUC regarding missing or late work, though certain programs or colleges may have program- or college-specific policies regarding missing or late work that must be followed; instructors should consult their School Director and/or College Dean for further information.

Instructors should clearly communicate the consequences of late or missing assignments, as well as the policy for missed examinations. This policy should indicate whether instructors will accept late work; if so, under what circumstances and within what timeframe; and what penalty students will incur (if any) for late submission. In developing their policy, instructors are encouraged to balance their desire to encourage personal responsibility and professional behaviors (such as timeliness) in students (as well as to manage their own workload), with appropriate incentives for students to complete course work even if late (to support and demonstrate learning) and the importance of final grades closely reflecting student mastery of the course-level learning outcomes (SLOs).

Note that missed examinations for religious holidays are addressed via the institutional [Religious Holidays](#) policy.

Below is an example of a policy based on one from the [Eberly Center](#) at Carnegie Mellon University, which instructors may adapt or use as a model for their own policy:

Due dates for every assignment are provided on the course syllabus and course schedule (and posted in D2L). Unless otherwise stated, assignments are due on those days. However, I recognize that sometimes “life happens.” In these instances, you may use your allotted three flex days. These days allow you to submit an assignment up to two days late without penalty. You can use these days for any assignment and for any reason. You do not need to provide me with a reason: simply email me and tell me how many of your flex days you would like to use.



Once you've exhausted your flex days, then point deductions will occur for any assignment submitted after the deadline. An assignment submitted within 24 hours of the due date will only be eligible for 80% of the maximum number of points allotted. Assignments submitted more than 24 hours after the due date will not be accepted. If you experience extenuating circumstances (e.g., you are hospitalized) that prohibit you from submitting your assignments on time, please let me know. I will evaluate these instances on a case-by-case basis.

Incomplete (INC) Grades (Institutional)

SIUC has institution-wide policies that limit the circumstances under which an Incomplete (INC) grade may be assigned as the final grade for a student. This stipulates that an INC grade may only be assigned when students who are **already passing a class** cannot complete all assigned work for circumstances that arise unexpectedly and out of their control. An INC grade may NOT be assigned to allow students to catch up on missing work that would result in a failing grade if an INC were not given.

Specifically, for undergraduates, the [Grading System Explanation](#) section of the Undergraduate Catalog specifies that:

An INC is assigned when, for reasons beyond their control, students engaged in passing work are unable to complete all class assignments. An INC must be changed to a completed grade within one semester following the term in which the course was taken, or graduation, whichever occurs first. Should the student fail to complete the course within the time period designated, that is, by no later than the end of the semester following the term in which the course was taken, or graduation, whichever occurs first, the incomplete will be converted to a grade of F and the grade will be computed in the student's grade point average. Students should not re-register for courses in which an INC has been assigned with the intent of changing the INC grade. Re-registration will not prevent the INC from being changed to an F.

For graduate students, the [Grading System](#) section of the Graduate Catalog specifies that:

An INC grade should be assigned when, for reasons beyond their control, students engaged in passing work are unable to complete all class assignments. INC is not included in grade-point computation. An INC must be changed to a completed grade within one year from the close of the term in which the course was taken or graduation, whichever comes first. Should the student fail to complete the course within the time period designated, that is, one year from the close of the term in which the course was taken or graduation, whichever comes first, the Incomplete will be converted to a grade of F and the grade will be computed in the student's grade point average.



To complete the work from the original registration, a student should not register for the course again, but should complete the work for the original registration if the original registration is within the normal time limits established for the degree.

In courses for which INC and DEF grades have been given, assigned instructors have the responsibility of determining the final grade to be assigned and notifying the Office of Admissions and Records of the final grade by means of the grade change card.

Instructors are strongly recommended to reach an explicit agreement with students who receive an INC grade that outlines expectations for completing the missing work. This can be done by completing a [Notification of Undergraduate Incomplete Grade Agreement](#) or a [Notification of Graduate Incomplete Grade Agreement](#).

All missing work must be completed and a [grade change card](#) must be submitted to prevent the INC grade from being automatically changed to an F grade. For undergraduate students this must be done by the end of the semester following the term with the INC grade (or graduation, whichever comes first); for graduate students this must be done by one year from the end of the term with the INC grade (or graduation, whichever comes first). Instructors are strongly recommended to submit this grade change card by the end of business on the last day of classes. It *must* be submitted no later than noon on the last day of final exams to avoid an INC grade automatically being converted to an F grade.

(Electronic) Communication (Instructor-Specific)

Instructors are strongly encouraged to indicate if they have rules or preferences regarding e-mails or other forms of communication with students. For instance, instructors may promise to reply within a certain number of hours, not accept work that is e-mailed, or be available at certain times for online synchronous conferencing (e.g., via Microsoft Teams). Instructors who are tenured or tenure-track faculty are required to include a policy for responding to student emails within a reasonable and clearly defined time frame on their syllabi. Other instructors are not required to include such a policy but are strongly encouraged to do so.

In addition, instructors may also describe their expectations for student usage of email. Keep in mind that SIUC has an [official SIU Student Email Policy](#) that should be followed by students. In addition to email, instructors may also describe other means of electronic communication that they consider appropriate, such as Slack or Discord. Finally, instructors may wish to explain the communication methods available within D2L (e.g., the discussion board, email links, instant messages) and their preferences surrounding them.

The following language is an example that can be modified to fit your approach:



This course uses a “three before me” policy regarding student-to-faculty communications. When questions arise during this class, please remember to check these three sources for an answer before asking me to reply to your individual questions:

- 1. Course syllabus*
- 2. Announcements in D2L*
- 3. The “Water Cooler” discussion board*

This policy will help you in potentially identifying answers before I can get back to you and it also helps your instructor from answering similar questions or concerns multiple times.

If you cannot find an answer to your question, please first post your question to the “Water Cooler” discussion board. Here your question can be answered to the benefit of all students by either your fellow students who know the answer to your question or the instructor. You are encouraged to answer questions from other students in the discussion forum when you know the answer to a question to help provide timely assistance.

If you have questions of a personal nature such as relating to a personal emergency, questioning a grade on an assignment, or something else that needs to be communicated privately, you are welcome to contact me via email or phone. My preference is that you try to email me first. I will usually respond to email and phone messages from 8 am to 5 pm on weekdays, please allow 24 hours for me to respond.

If you have a question about the technology being used in the course, please contact the Help Desk for assistance (contact information is listed below).

Academic Integrity (Institutional)

Most students can recognize that directly copying text from outside sources or looking at another student’s exam responses are not acceptable behaviors. However, there are many other actions, such as working collaboratively on homework assignments, submitting the same (or a substantially similar) paper for multiple classes, or minimal paraphrasing, that they may not be aware can be problematic. Thus, the purpose of an academic integrity policy is to clarify and provide guidance to students on what behaviors are and are not permitted. To avoid such a policy becoming a catalogue of infractions, it is best to focus on describing the behaviors, habits, and practices that instructors expect students to demonstrate when engaging in academically honest work.



Detailed information on SIUC's Academic Misconduct Policy can be found in the [Writing Center's guide](#) on avoiding plagiarism and the [SIU Student Conduct Code](#). In brief, instructors have initial jurisdiction for resolving issues of academic misconduct related to their assigned course(s). Instructors must notify students in writing of their allegation of academic misconduct, specifying which standard(s) of conduct are alleged to have been violated. This notification should be sent to the student, the School Director or Department Chair, the Dean of the relevant college, and the [Director of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#). Students must respond to the written notification within five days, either accepting responsibility or contesting allegation. Guidelines for subsequent actions are outlined in the Student Conduct Code based on whether the student accepts responsibility (a meeting with the instructor to discuss any sanction) or contests the allegation (a meeting with the Dean of the relevant college, the student, and the instructor).

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) (Instructor-Specific)

There is currently no institution-wide policy on AI at SIUC, and therefore instructors can (and should) draft their own policies regarding. The following questions may be helpful when drafting such a policy (adapted from [Stanford's Teaching Commons](#)):

- What is the policy? Are there specific tools that it applies to or does not apply to? (Consider, for example, [ChatGPT](#) versus [Grammarly](#).)
- When does it apply? What conditions or contexts allow or preclude the use of AI?
- What processes and consequences result from non-compliance?
- What are the rationale and reasoning that guide this policy?
- How do you provide support to students in relation to this policy?
- How does the policy show support for student well-being?

As much as possible, use inclusive language. Stanford has created [a useful module and guide](#) for their faculty and other U.S. colleges and universities. CTE also provides useful guidance, including a checklist for developing an AI policy, on their [Artificial Intelligence and Teaching webpage](#).

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Additional Elements to Consider

In addition to the syllabus elements already discussed, some instructors may find other elements useful to incorporate into their syllabi. Consider the following options.

Office of Access and Accommodations

SIUC is committed to providing an inclusive and accessible experience for all students. The office on campus that is responsible for coordinating disability access and learning accommodations is the [Office for Access and Accommodations](#) (OAA) (formerly known as Disability Support Services). Instructors who have student(s) with accommodations enrolled in their course(s) will receive a letter from OAA that lists those student(s)' approved accommodations. Instructors are required to make these accommodations unless (a) they fundamentally alter the essential nature of the course, such as by clearly conflicting with the core learning outcomes; or (2) impose an undue administrative or financial burden on the institution. If an instructor feels that a student's approved accommodation may interfere with essential elements of a course, they should contact OAA.

Instructors are encouraged to refer students to OAA, as students must be registered with OAA before they can receive accommodations. Instructors should not request medical documentation or discuss any disability or health issues with students themselves, as OAA staff works directly with students to determine reasonable accommodations. Two sample statements that instructors can include on their syllabus are given below.

Example syllabus statement 1:

If you have a disability and need accommodations to fully participate in this course, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss your needs in a private setting. I'm happy to work with you and the Office for Access & Accommodations (OAA) to make appropriate arrangements. To request accommodations, contact OAA at 618-453-5738 or email access@siu.edu. You can also find more information at access.siu.edu. This is the first step in the process.

All information shared with OAA will be kept confidential. You may contact OAA without notifying me if you would prefer to keep your disability confidential.

Example syllabus statement 2:

If you need a disability accommodation, please let me know as soon as possible. Some parts of this course—like assignments, in-class activities, or how the class is taught—may be adjusted to support your learning. You may contact OAA without notifying me if you would prefer to keep your disability confidential.



To get accommodations, contact the Office for Access & Accommodations (OAA) at 618-453-5738, access@siu.edu, or visit access.siu.edu. This is the first step in the process.

Student Behavior, Classroom Conduct, or Respectful Dialogue

Here you can explain the kind of courteous behavior and professional conduct you expect in your classroom, including rules about talking in class, consuming food or drinks in the classroom, and whether you allow recording devices in the classroom.

Here is an example from one SIU instructor's syllabus that focuses on respectful behaviors:

The classroom is a shared space where consideration and compassion for others are not negotiable. These are a must! To learn the interpersonal and professional skills offered in the course requires that, as with a sport or any instrument, we practice them daily. These include a positive attitude, a willingness to listen and learn, and an embrace of differences as well as similarities.

Here is an example that addresses the importance of safety in a laboratory setting:

For your safety: Eating and drinking are not allowed in the lab. Please do not bring any food or beverages into the lab. We will be working with hazardous materials throughout the term. Eating or drinking during lab puts you and your classmates at increased risk of accident and injury from breakage or toxins. You will be asked to remove any food or beverage you bring into the lab.

Electronic Devices

Instructors may wish to include a statement indicating whether and how students may use laptops, iPads, netbooks, e-readers, smartphones, etc. during your class. It may be useful to note whether technology must be fully charged for class or if charging outlets are easily accessible. When crafting such policies, instructors are encouraged to consider, and share with students, the research that demonstrates that the use of cell phones and laptops during class negatively affects their performance and the performance of their classmates (e.g., End et al., 2009; Sana et al., 2013).

Here is an example from one SIUC instructor's syllabus:



Cellphones should be placed on silent and kept in your bag during class unless being actively used for an in-class activity. Students are also encouraged to put away tablets and laptops unless they are needed for a specific class activity. This is because research consistently demonstrates that you and your fellow classmates learn better without laptops in the classroom (see <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>). Exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis for reasons related to individual learning needs; please talk to me if you would like to discuss this possibility.

Resources for Students

To help the syllabus function as a useful and motivating resource for students, it can be beneficial for instructors to include information on the many valuable resources across campus that exist to support student success. The following information may be copied directly into syllabi and modified or supplemented as needed.

Counseling and Psychological Services

[Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) provides mental health-related services for students. CAPS provides confidential counseling services, crisis intervention, and referral services.

Clinical Center

The [Clinical Center](#) at SIUC offers psychological assessments (including for learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder), speech and language assessments, and counseling services.

Writing Center

The [Writing Center](#) provides one-on-one consultations for students in all majors and all degree programs to help improve their writing abilities and written work. Students can make appointments online or in-person, in Morris Library, the Student Services Building, and Grinnell Hall.

Tutoring Center

The [Tutoring Center](#) provides scheduled one-on-one tutoring, walk-in and drop-in tutoring, as well as academic coaching to help students succeed during their time at SIUC. The Tutoring



Center also hosts study jams near midterms and finals week and workshops to help students develop their time management, study skills, test preparation, and writing strategies.

Morris Library

[Morris Library](#) is the primary library on campus at SIUC. In addition to housing the university's library collection, it provides a range of services for students including laptop and equipment loans, printing and copying services, course reserves for physical textbooks, 3D printing, research consultations, interlibrary loan, and more. The library has both quiet study and group study spaces in various locations throughout the building.

Center for Teaching Excellence

The [Center for Teaching Excellence](#) (CTE) is the primary resource center on campus that supports teaching and learning experiences. They provide instructional support, graduate teaching assistant support, and manage [D2L](#), SIUC's learning management system. Their resources for [getting started in D2L for students](#) may be of particular interest.

Advising

[Academic Advisement](#) is the central office that coordinates student academic advising. Students are responsible for meeting with their academic advisor each semester and to enroll in classes for the upcoming term(s) soon after registration opens. Advisors are typically assigned within students' College to ensure familiarity with specific degree programs. Students should work with their advisor to create and update their degree plan, find resources, and work through any academic challenges they may face.

Saluki Cares

[Saluki Cares](#) is a campus program that helps connect students to the resources they need. If students are confronting issues such as adjustment challenges, homesickness, extended illnesses, death, financial stress, concerns about their academic performance, or even just general welfare concerns, they are encouraged to [reach out to the Saluki Cares](#) team for help.

Saluki Food Pantry

Located on the lower level of the Student Center, the [Saluki Food Pantry](#) is free for all students with a valid SIUC ID. It provides a variety of non-perishable items and students can visit once per month.



First Saluki Center

The [First Saluki Center](#) is an [award-winning](#) resource hub on campus that is dedicated to assisting first-generation students. They provide peer tutoring, life skills and academic workshops, and general support for accessing resources across campus.

Student Multicultural Resource Center

The [Student Multicultural Resource Center](#) (SMRC) provides a space on campus that is dedicated to equity, inclusion, and social justice for students with diverse identities. It includes the Asian American Pacific Islander Resource Center, the Black Resource Center, the Hispanic/Latino Resource Center, the Paulette Curkin Pride Resource Center, the Women's Resource Center, Undocumented Student Support, and Hope Chicago Scholars.

Veteran Services

The [Veteran Services](#) office is a single office dedicated to helping resolve any issues encountered by veterans enrolled at SIUC. Their services include assistance with the transition to college, connections with financial, health, and career services, helping veterans identify additional resources and services on- and off-campus, and providing information about SIUC to those in the armed services.

Safety on Campus

The [Department of Public Safety](#) is responsible for policing on and near campus, parking, and public safety communication for campus community members. They provide Safe Walk services between 8 pm and 6 am, information on emergency preparedness, and prevention and education programs (including on theft prevention and identity theft).

[SAFE at SIU](#) is provides information about campus resources for campus safety, crime prevention, and crime reporting, including the various [options for reporting](#) that students have.

Technical Support

If you are having D2L Issues, you can always access the help desk:

Phone: 618-453-5155

Email: salukitech@siu.edu

Alternatively, you can look for the **Self-Help** button at the bottom right of the D2L **My Home** menu.



Need D2L help? -- Click the "Get Help" bubble in the lower right corner of your screen.



Instructors can also list outside links to technical support for any outside programs used in a course.

Recruitment and Retention Coordinators

Most Colleges at SIUC employ one or more Recruitment and Retention Coordinators. These are staff members whose responsibility is to recruit students to SIUC and then help retain them and resolve issues that can interfere with academic persistence. Instructors are encouraged to identify who these individual(s) are (a list is provided under [Additional Resources on the Academic Advising webpage](#)) and to provide their name(s) and contact information to students.

Example from one SIUC instructor's syllabus:

If you find yourself unsure of where to go for help with any specific issue, you are encouraged to contact Rachel Wolters (rachelw@siu.edu), a staff member in the Dean's office for the College of Liberal Arts. Her job involves working to recruit and retain students at SIU and she is there to help you solve any problems you may have!

Community Engagement

For a course that provides or reports community engagement, service learning, or experiential learning, it can be beneficial to explain how the community engagement activities tie into the course content and to list the specific outcomes obtained from these activities.

Below is an example of a community engagement statement adapted from [West Virginia University](#):

Service learning is an integral part of the introductory pharmacy practice experiences, as students learn about the mutual relationship that exists between service and learning. by completing hands on service learning activities and various settings in the community, Students gain valuable skills that only can be reinforced outside of the classroom. Students will have the



opportunity to develop verbal and written communication skills as well as the opportunity to interact with diverse populations in the community.

Two examples of community engagement-focused SLOs, also from [West Virginia University](#), are given here:

Students will integrate knowledge from class material, the primary literature, and discussions to communicate immunology to the general public.

Students will identify key characteristics of rural populations and apply them through delivery of health services in rural communities.

Inclusive Excellence, Diversity, and/or Values Statements

An inclusive excellence, diversity, or values statement is a statement that is intended to explicitly acknowledge and welcome individuals from a wide range of backgrounds and previous experiences. Including such a statement can be useful to help set expectations for respectful communication and productive student engagement, particularly in courses or subject areas that may be diverse and/or controversial.

Example Inclusive Excellence statement:

SIU contains people from all walks of life. Learning from and working with people who differ from you is an important part of your education in this class, as well as essential preparation for any career. Diversity of backgrounds, experiences, identities, and perspectives enriches our learning by broadening our understanding and challenging us to think in new ways. This course values the contributions that each student brings to our learning community and seeks to foster an environment in which everyone has the opportunity to participate, learn, and succeed.

Example Values statement from one SIUC instructor's syllabus:

The field of linguistics is inherently interdisciplinary, as well as diverse in terms of student and researcher backgrounds, cultures, educational experiences, beliefs, expectations, religions, and ethnicities. We stand to benefit greatly from this diversity as it helps illuminate the similarities and differences in language – one of the defining features of humanity. As outlined above, students and guests in the classroom are expected to treat others with respect, even when disagreeing or speaking on controversial issues. The real world requires working with and collaborating productively with people who are very different from



yourself and acting as a professional even in challenging circumstances and environments. This course provides an opportunity to gain experience with this work and you are encouraged to engage with it seriously and productively, looking for the value in difference and diversity wherever possible.

Preferred Names/Pronouns

One step that instructors can take to proactively contribute to a more inclusive classroom environment is to invite students to indicate their preferred name and/or pronouns. It may also be useful to provide students with information about [how to change their preferred name](#) within the SIUC records system, where it will appear on class rosters, advising lists, unofficial transcripts, their SIUC student ID, and their SIUC email account.

An example statement regarding preferred names and pronouns, adapted from [Lake Forest College](#), is below:

Students may designate they pronouns they use to identify themselves, and I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate or preferred name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

Campus Network or D2L Outages

Instructors are encouraged to specify their policy for how students should handle deadlines in case of a campus network or D2L outage. An example policy is given below.

Example policy:

When access to D2L is not available for an extended period (greater than one entire evening – 6 pm until 11 pm) you can reasonably expect that the due date for assignments will be changed to the next day (with the assignment still due by midnight).

Administrative Closures

If SIUC officially closes or suspends normal operations due to severe weather, emergency conditions, or other administrative circumstances, students should monitor the [campus homepage](#) and their SIU email for official updates. When an administrative closure affects a scheduled class meeting, the instructor will provide guidance regarding course activities,



assignments, examinations, and revised deadlines through the University's approved communication systems (e.g., D2L and SIU email). Students remain responsible for checking these communications and completing any assigned coursework by the revised deadlines. If the University remains open, but a student cannot safely travel to campus due to local conditions, the student should notify the instructor as soon as possible to discuss available options, consistent with course requirements and institutional policy.

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Provost Syllabus Attachment

In addition to their course-specific syllabus, instructors must also provide all students with the official Provost Syllabus Attachment for the appropriate semester when they distribute their syllabus in class. This may be accomplished by including the Provost Syllabus Attachment as a hard copy attached to the course syllabus or by providing a URL link for students; links for the syllabus attachment for specific semesters can be found at the bottom of the [Provost Forms](#) webpage. The attachment is a standardized one-sheeter providing students with key academic calendar dates, resources, and university policies and is designed to complement the course-specific policies and information from instructors.

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Responsibilities for Syllabus Distribution

Instructors are required to provide their syllabus to students at the beginning of each course. For in-person classes, students should receive a copy during the first class meeting; instructors are encouraged to provide a physical copy to students as well as an html version through D2L ([to ensure accessibility](#)). For online classes, syllabi must be available to students as soon as the course is open.

Instructors are also required to provide a copy of their syllabi to their School Director/Chair (or their designee) by the end of the first week of class and must confirm in writing that they have provided their syllabus to students.

Instructors are strongly encouraged to spend part of their first class reviewing the syllabus with students. Engaging activities for ensuring students are familiar with the course syllabus are provided in the section “[Activities to Engage Your Students with Your Syllabus](#)”.

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Additional Considerations for Online Courses

Providing a Course Walk-Through

For online courses, instructors are required to make the syllabus available when the course opens. In addition to providing the syllabus, it can be very helpful to post an introductory or orientation video for an online course. Take this opportunity to introduce yourself as the instructor, talk a little bit about your background and your interest in the course topic, and what your life looks like outside of teaching. Walk students through the layout of your course D2L site, where they can find various types of information or specific items (e.g., assignment instructions, submission folders, quizzes, discussion boards), your use of the calendar, and how to access the gradebook to track their performance in the course.

An alternative is to develop an orientation video for the online course as a whole. This can be especially useful because students often underestimate the time and effort that it can take to succeed in an online course (Bawa, 2016). An orientation module may include elements such as general information and strategies for succeeding in an online class (e.g., creating a weekly plan that includes a schedule of where and when to work and the tools/technology they need); expectations regarding weekly communication (e.g., “Every Monday, watch the recorded lecture video and take the associated quiz. By the end of the day each Wednesday, participate in our online discussion board, and every other Friday, submit your short reflection paper”), a screencast video with a voice-over to demonstrate how to navigate the course site and where to find important information, a [syllabus activity](#), and a Q&A discussion forum.

Netiquette

Communication via asynchronous digital environments can be challenging because of the loss of contextual clues (e.g., tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, etc.) that help convey a speaker’s intent, and which also limit the degree to which a speaker (or writer) can gauge how their communication is perceived. In addition, the relative distance and anonymity of online communication can make it easier to lose sight of the fact that there is another person on the receiving end of each interaction. Thus, for online classes it can be helpful to set out clear expectations regarding netiquette (“internet etiquette” or “network etiquette”) (Mintu-Wimsatt et al., 2010).

An example netiquette policy, adapted from [Western Iowa Tech Community College](#) and the [University of Hawai’i Hilo](#):

Even though many of us are very accustomed to communicating via email, text, and discussion forum, there is still a lot that can get lost in translation when communicating online. Additionally, as you’ve likely seen on social media, news sites, etc., the standards of professionalism and kindness that many have for in-person conversations do not always show up in digital conversations.



Because the vast majority of communication for this class will occur via email and discussion forums, it's crucial that we remain aware of the challenges of talking online and make every effort to remain professional, courteous, and clear. For example, use classroom-appropriate language when writing in the discussion forums (this means avoiding profanity and avoiding slang, which may be easily misinterpreted). Use typical sentence capitalization (not ALL CAPS) when writing, as writing with all capital letters is considered "shouting" online and can appear impolite or aggressive. Be respectful of others' views and opinions; disagreement is fine, but should be expressed carefully and politely to avoid coming off as an attack (which happens more easily in online communication). Finally, use conventional grammar and spelling and use acronyms only sparingly to help with clarity.

Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)

As part of [Title IV of the Higher Education Act](#), the U.S. Department of Education requires regular and substantive interaction (RSI) between instructor(s) and students in distance education to maintain institutional and student eligibility for federal financial aid. In fact, the presence of RSI is the primary distinction made between distance education and correspondence courses, the latter of which may deliver instructional materials electronically but do not include consistent, meaningful interaction with instructors.

Although a formal definition of RSI has never been issued by the Department of Education, at SIUC RSI is interpreted as instructor-initiated, academic engagement that occurs on a regular and predictable basis and is substantive (i.e., beyond passive presence). RSI must be tied to course outcomes and include feedback, direction, or instruction. At minimum, RSI must meet the following criteria:

- It occurs at least once every week of a course;
- It is initiated by the instructor (i.e., replying to student messages alone does not constitute RSI)
- It advances student learning (e.g., by providing direct instruction, providing feedback, or proactive monitoring and outreach to students)
- It is documented via presence in the syllabus and/or course schedule as well as in the course site (e.g., via announcements, discussion replies, written feedback, messages, etc.)

A variety of activities can count towards meeting the expectations for RSI. These include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Direct instruction (such as weekly videos with follow-up questions or discussions)
- Hosting live class sessions with interaction between the instructor(s) and students
- Frequent announcements, used to review prior topics, clarify misunderstandings, overview common patterns in student work, or preview upcoming topics and questions for students to keep in mind



- Active facilitation of online discussions (such as multiple replies to student posts that provide probing questions and guided analysis, or which prompt deeper thinking on the part of students)
- Engaging with students via interactive activities created or provided by the instructor
- Individualized, timely (e.g., within three business days) feedback on assignments or quizzes
- Regular Q&A or help sessions (held either synchronously or asynchronously), ideally including a summary or recording for all students
- Office hours (with documented student attendance and engagement) or other one-on-one meetings (face-to-face or virtual) between students and the instructor
- Instructor-facilitated working or study groups
- Proactive monitoring of student progress and outreach to individual students or groups

Other activities do NOT satisfy the RSI requirement on their own. These include (but are not limited to):

- Pre-recorded lectures with no student engagement or instructor follow-up
- Sending a general welcome message to the class
- Automated announcements or messages focusing on logistics, not content, and without instructor presence or feedback
- Responding to student-initiated emails
- Listing office hours but lacking documentation of student attendance and engagement
- Automatically graded assessments (including AI-based comments and scoring)
- Posting grades without personalized feedback
- Providing an open discussion forum not moderated by the instructor
- Peer-to-peer discussion without instructor facilitation or feedback
- Contact between students and instructor(s) not related to the course subject matter

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Accessibility

Requirements

All instructors are responsible for ensuring that their syllabi (and all other course materials) are compliant with accessibility standards. This is best practice for supporting student success because it removes barriers that may limit students' access to information, increases inclusivity to ensure all students can participate fully in their courses, improves the usability of materials for everyone, and enhances digital experiences for those who primarily access resources through a smartphone or tablet. It is also [SIU policy](#) and [required by federal law](#) (Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, ADA). Individual instructors are responsible for ensuring the compliance of their own materials, with possible oversight and verification from School Directors and/or College Deans.

Instructors' focus on accessibility for syllabi will most likely center around screen reader compatibility, providing video captions for course overview videos, adding alternative text for images, using high-contrast colors, including descriptive links for websites, and ensuring keyboard navigation.

Resources

For an introduction to how some people with disabilities use web and mobile technology, watch this [video from the Office of Civil Rights](#).

Introductions to ensuring accessibility in D2L, Microsoft Office, and on websites and can be found on the [SIU Digital Accessibility webpage](#). More information on basic concepts for [creating accessible documents](#) is also available, including [checklists for various document types](#) (Word documents, PDFs, emails, video, etc.). Other resources, including links to training and workshops, can be found on the [CTE's Title II Resources](#) webpage.

Additional tutorials can also be accessed through SIUC's partnership with [LinkedIn Learning](#). Step 1 involves completing "[Designing for Digital Accessibility in Online Learning](#)" and Step 2 involves completing "[Designing with WCAG 2.2](#)". Other universities have also developed excellent resources for accessibility, including the [University of Washington](#) and the [University of Montana](#).

Microsoft publishes guidelines for [making Word documents accessible](#) and Adobe Acrobat similarly provides guidance on [creating accessible PDF documents](#). Instructors can use the SIUC Syllabus Template as a starting point to help ensure the accessibility of Word document-based syllabi, as many key accessibility features are already built in.

Instructors can use the checklist below to help them assess the accessibility of their syllabi.



Basic Accessibility Checklist

- ☐ **Clear and descriptive titles:** Does the document have a clear title that clearly labels it as a syllabus for a specific course, with course prefix, number, and title?
- ☐ **Consistent and clear layouts:** Is the content organized using headings and the built-in styles tool (rather than just font changes), lists, and consistent layouts for easy navigation?
- ☐ **Font size and style:** Are the fonts rounded and readable? (Use simple, sans-serif fonts like Arial or Verdana at a minimum of 12 pt for readability; avoid italics or all-caps.)
- ☐ **Color:** Is there a high contrast between fonts and backgrounds?
- ☐ **Spacing:** Is the spacing consistent and readable? (Line spacing of 1.15 or greater is recommended for readability; full-justified text is discouraged as it can create uneven spacing; the line spacing formatting tool should be used rather than paragraph returns to create the document layout.)
- ☐ **Tables:** Are tables captioned with their header rows designated and their scope (column or row) set?
- ☐ **Alt text:** Is descriptive alternative text provided for all images, charts, and graphics to ensure screen reader accessibility?
- ☐ **Descriptive links:** Is descriptive text used for hyperlinks? (For example, give “[SIU Website](#)” rather than “[click here](#)” or <https://siu.edu>.)
- ☐ **Accessibility checker:** Have the accessibility checkers for [Microsoft](#) and/or [Adobe Acrobat](#) been used to verify compliance? (When possible, avoid saving documents as PDFs. For syllabi, consider saving the document as “Read Only” to maintain accessibility features.)

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Activities to Engage Students with Your Syllabus

Although the syllabus is an essential resource for students and has the potential to motivate and engage them, students often view the syllabus as authoritative, dense, and overwhelming (e.g., Palmer et al., 2016; Pliego & Kaplan, 2025). Getting students to actively engage with the syllabus can help them learn how to navigate this important document and feel more confident in their understanding of course expectations. Instructors are encouraged to try one or more of the activities below.

Scavenger Hunt

Divide students into pairs or small groups and give each group a handout with a set of questions (focusing on the most important information they should know from the syllabus). For example, you may ask students, “What is the attendance policy for the course?” “What is the best way to get in touch with your instructor?” and “When is the first assignment due?”. To make the task more meaningful, consider asking students questions that requires them to consider their goals and motivations, such as “From the list of student learning outcomes, which one interests your group the most and why?”

Review the correct answers with the whole class and ask students to share any questions or concerns they have that were not answered during the activity. You can also give different sets of questions to different groups of students to avoid repetition when reviewing the answers.

Optionally, consider having groups race to finish the scavenger hunt and award a prize to the first team that answers all questions correctly, or the team that answers the most questions correctly in a limited amount of time.

Reconnaissance Mission

Hand out physical copies of the syllabus and tell students they will be doing a reconnaissance mission on it. (Ask students if and when they have heard the term *reconnaissance* before and be sure to give a definition.) Give students 10 minutes and tell them they should spend the first 2-3 minutes scanning the syllabus, highlighting or underlining key points. They should spend the remainder of the 10 minutes reading through the syllabus and placing a star next to five important facts or pieces of information.

Then, have students form small groups to share and compare their selected facts. Finally, generate a whole-class list of the most important pieces of information from the syllabus. Discuss them, answer questions, and identify any key information that was not already mentioned.



Syllabus Quiz

Using the quiz function on D2L, create a quiz for students based on the most important information on the syllabus. For example, questions could be asked about required materials, the course schedule, requirements for assignments, class policies and expectations, and so on. A mix of automatically-scored and open-ended questions can provide an early opportunity for [RSI](#) if instructors provide customized feedback in response to written student responses. Using a quiz can be particularly helpful given the extensive evidence demonstrating that students are more likely to remember information they have been quizzed about (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006). Instructors of online courses may find it useful to make access to the full course materials contingent on a passing grade on the syllabus quiz (and allowing unlimited attempts).

Syllabus Discussion Board

Create an open discussion board and require that all students post a comment (e.g., something that stood out to them from the syllabus, such as something interesting, exciting, surprising, or confusing) and a question about something on the syllabus. Optionally, you could ask students to try answering at least one question posted by their peers. For instructors, this information can provide early feedback regarding what is important and/or confusing to students. It is also a low-stakes way of getting students actively involved on the discussion board early in the term.

News Clip Course Introduction

Put students into small groups of 3-4 students and ask them to review the syllabus. They should work together to create a brief, 1-2 minute overview of the course, similar to what a brief news report would sound like on the radio or a morning news television show. Groups can then share their news reports with the class, either live (for in-person classes) or via a recording uploaded to the course site (for in-person, hybrid, or online classes). By asking students to stick to a strict time limit, students are encouraged to focus on what is most important. As a variation, you can also give different parts of the syllabus to different groups of students to avoid repetition across students' reporting.

Jigsaw Syllabus Activity

In a jigsaw activity, students work in groups to develop expertise about a specific topic, which they then teach to their fellow students (Aronson et al., 1978). To apply this to a syllabus activity, put students into groups of four members, constituting their “home base” groups. Each member of each group will be assigned to different pages or sections of the syllabus.

Then, ask students to move to different parts of the room to meet up with their classmates from other groups that were assigned to the same portion of the syllabus. These are the “expert” groups, and they should be given a set amount of time to review their assigned part of the syllabus and identify the most important information to share with their classmates. Their job is



to become experts on their part of the syllabus. To help ensure this is happening, it can be helpful to check in with each group and ask specific questions, such as “What are the key points you plan to emphasize, and why?” Make sure to clarify any misunderstandings in these expert groups.

Finally, students return to their home base group. Each student should have 1-2 minutes to “teach” his or her group members about the important content in their portion of the syllabus. Additional time at the end can be used to clarify information and ask questions to ensure understanding. Finish with a brief whole-class discussion to answer any remaining questions and add emphasis to any information from the syllabus that needs additional attention.

Policy Negotiation

In many cases, students are more engaged in a course when they have greater choice and agency over the details of their experience (Kaplan & Renard, 2015). Thus, some components of the syllabus may be worth actively negotiating with students. For example, students may work together to develop classroom dialogue or netiquette policies that are mutually agreed-upon; standards and expectations for using [artificial intelligence \(AI\)](#); due dates for assignments, or even the weight specific assignments contribute toward their final grade (usually within a pre-defined acceptable range). This is often done most effectively by putting students in teams of 4-6 students and having each team negotiate with the instructor to determine the final details for the syllabus.

Personalized Learning Outcomes

To encourage students to think more deeply about the learning outcomes for your course and their relevance to their own lives, interests, and future plans, ask students to choose one learning outcome from your syllabus that stands out to them for personal or professional reasons. Ask the students to post in a discussion board or write a two-minute paper to explain why they chose that outcome, how it connects to their goals or interests, and how they might customize the outcome to best align it with their own goals.

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References, Further Resources, and Recommended Reading

Accreditation

[Assumed Practices](#) required by the Higher Learning Commission (Policy Number CRRT.C.10.010).

Higher Learning Commission's [Criteria for Accreditation](#) (Policy Number CRRT.B.10.010).

[Providing Evidence for the Criteria for Accreditation](#) by the Higher Learning Commission (updated September 1, 2025).

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