

Constructing an effective syllabus: Getting the semester off to a good start

General Advice

There are 4 critical components to an effective syllabus:

1. Clearly articulate Learning Goals and Learning Objectives:
 - a. Goals are broad statements identifying general educational outcomes for your course. When designing your course start here. Your goals should answer this question: What do you want students to be able to do or know when they leave your class at the end of the semester?
 - b. Objectives are concrete measures of how goals will be attained. Be sure your objectives are measurable....it is really hard to measure "appreciation or understanding".
 - c. Word bank to help construct objectives: analyze, compare, demonstrate, discuss, identify, justify, outline, state, appreciate, compute, direct, display, infer, list report, synthesize, classify, contrast, derive, evaluate, integrate, name, respond, define, collaborate, designate, explain, interpret, organize, solicit.
2. Content and sequencing:
 - a. Establish direct relationships between the objectives and the course content
 - b. Think of your course like a flowchart and decide what information and skills students need to meet the aims and objectives by the end of the course. Let this be your guide for the semester.
 - c. You don't have to cover everything; a course is not a textbook.
3. Assessment and evaluation:
 - a. The purpose of assessment is to establish to what extent have students achieved course objectives.
 - b. Set firm deadlines, provide feedback in a timely manner, carefully consider class size when determining frequency and depth of assignments.
4. Administration and presentation:
 - a. See practical advice below
 - b. Try to keep syllabi to about one page in length.

Practical Advice

The University Curriculum committee of Faculty Senate has a set of guidelines for the minimum information that must be included in syllabi for courses taught at NDSU (<https://www.ndsu.edu/facultysenate/acadaffairs/syllabi/>). If your course is a General Education course there are additional requirements for the syllabus (and course content), which are detailed here (https://www.ndsu.edu/facultysenate/general_education/). Some additional practical information to keep in mind as you develop your syllabus:

- We have a 17-week semester (16 with classes and a final exam week). Many faculty schedule tests either every 4th week or every 5th week of the semester for either 4 or 3 tests plus a final exam. These are busy weeks in the semester for the students.
- If you have an attendance policy, you will need to include that in your syllabus, as well as a policy for missed assignments (also a policy for make-up tests; See [Policy 333](#)).
- We do have a dead week policy: only one exam can be scheduled in the last two weeks of the semester (including exam week). This means that if you schedule an exam finals week, you may not schedule a test for the last week of classes. All classes are required to meet during the exam week, regardless of what you have planned for your final assessment.

- Most classes start Tuesday, August 24 (the exception are evening classes that start on Monday August 23)
- NDSU Holidays (no classes scheduled) for the 2021-22 academic year include:
 - Labor Day, September 6
 - Veteran's Day, November 11
 - Thanksgiving, November 25, 26, and 27
 - Dead Week: December 6-10 (we do have a dead week policy: <http://www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/policy/336.pdf>)
 - Final Exams: December 13-17 (exam schedule: <https://www.ndsu.edu/registrar/dates/finals/>)
 - See this link for the academic calendar: (https://www.ndsu.edu/registrar/dates/2021_2022/)
- Talk with your colleagues about teaching and syllabus development.

References:

- M. J. V. Woolcock. Constructing a Syllabus: A handbook for faculty teaching assistants and teaching fellows. The Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning, Brown University: http://brown.edu/Administration/Sheridan_Center/. This handbook is helpful and includes workbook-style exercises to help you as you think about a syllabus. Much of the general advice presented here was gleaned from this handbook.
- Carnegie Mellon's site has practical advice: <http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/design/syllabus/index.html>
- Washington State University in St. Louis has:
 - Tips for Faculty Teaching for the First Time: <https://teachingcenter.wustl.edu/resources/course-design/tips-for-faculty-teaching-for-the-first-time/>
 - Tips for Teaching on the First Day of Class: <https://teachingcenter.wustl.edu/resources/course-design/using-class-time-effectively-on-day-one/>
- Ten Tips for Dealing with Nervousness on the First Day of Class from Faculty Focus: <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/ten-tips-for-dealing-with-nervousness-the-first-day-of-class/>
- First Day of Class Activities that Create a Climate for Learning from Faculty Focus: <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/first-day-of-class-activities-that-create-a-climate-for-learning/>