For the past several years I have been fortunate to be involved in the Associate Program and New Faculty Orientation at College of the Canyons. In my capacity as a facilitator I became immersed in one specific mode of communication between faculty and students – that of the course syllabus. The course syllabus is many things: It is a communication tool, it is a list of requirements, and it is a first impression. According to Hammons and Shock (1994), "A wide gap exists between what students would like to see in a course syllabus and what faculty typically include in one" (p. 7). Often we become concerned with length, and thus sometimes sacrifice content. We strive to highlight important points in class, which students often forget.

After years of trial and error, as well as numerous revisions, I redesigned my own syllabus in content, as well as design, to see if my own classroom issues could be resolved. The approach I took was to design a syllabus which is formatted like a newsletter. The addition of simple tools, such as text boxes, use of different fonts, and clip art, transformed my syllabus into something unique. The feedback I have received from my students has been overwhelmingly positive.

This site will provide you with information about the course syllabus, templates you can use, sample syllabi, innovative ideas such as the syllabus quiz and contract, and even research instruments with which you can assess the effectiveness of your own syllabus. I hope you will find the information useful.

If you have any questions about the content of this website please contact Victoria Leonard.
Listed below are the most common elements of the course syllabus. You will find that each area contains a discussion of reasons to either include, or exclude, a particular element of the syllabus. Specific examples of syllabi can be found on the Communication Studies Department website.

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**Heading (name of college, name of course)**

Providing students with both the name of the college and the name of the course will assist them in a number of ways. First, many students attend more than one community college – they should be able to easily identify *where* a course is being held. In addition, students often need their syllabi to provide transfer institutions information about a course to articulate that course. **Course titles** are not the same on all campuses.

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**Course number, section, location**

The course number is important to include for the same reasons that the name of the course is important – it will assist students who need to identify what course they are in, both during the semester and afterward. Since course numbering systems vary according to college, the number is another method of identifying what requirements a course satisfies. The section number allows students to identify who the instructor of record is should they need to, and allow them to add or drop the course easily. Location may or may not be valuable to you. If you want students to easily locate where your classroom is, this would be a good detail to include. However, rooms can sometimes change and if that happens it can be disconcerting to have an incorrect room number printed on the syllabus.

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**Required text(s) – title(s), author(s), edition(s)**

Textbook information should always be provided for students. Frequently, students will go to the bookstore and find that there are a number of textbooks being used for one course. They don’t always remember the instructor’s name at the beginning, or end, of the semester, therefore the syllabus will insure that the
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student knows which textbook to purchase.

Recommended materials

Some faculty require that students purchase additional materials. For example, since one course I teach is public speaking, I list a retractable pointer as a recommended item. You might even include Scantron form numbers, or Blue Books, if they will be used in your course. Depending on your discipline, this list might be small or extensive. Though this can be handed out separately, providing the information on the syllabus guarantees that the student has all of the important information in one place.

Course description and/or objectives; prerequisites

Why am I taking this course? If this question sounds familiar, it probably is. Students do not always have a clear sense of a course based on the description in the Schedule of Classes. They may not read the more detailed description in the catalog. First, instructors should be publishing Student Learning Outcomes (SLO's) in their syllabi. A student learning outcome provides the global course objective(s). The SLO's can be found in the course outline of record. To access the course outline for your course, if it has not been provided by your department chair, you can visit the curriculum website and open the public access area in WebCMS. We also break our courses down into smaller parts; the areas we cover on a week to week basis. Overall, there are several course objectives students will have learned by the end of the semester. Course objectives are an important component of every official course outline as well. As faculty, it is imperative that we teach to the course outline so that students can progress to the next level course and meet the objectives as presented on the course outline. Students may also access official outlines via the public access link on our curriculum server. A clear description of the course, student learning outcomes, and course objectives will tell the student what to expect.

Is the student prepared for your class? Did they somehow slip through the system and add your class under-prepared? Prerequisites are designed to promote student success. If your class has an official prerequisite, it should be noted on the
sylabus. If you want to recommend that the student take another class at the same time, a co-requisite, you may do so.

Finally, any lab hours or other outside assignments, such as field trips, are important for students to be aware of from the beginning of the semester. Any information which will help the student succeed may be included in the syllabus. Please note that it is expected that we offer alternative assignments if a student cannot participate in an outside activity that is a course requirement (unless it is noted in the schedule of classes, such as the field studies program).

Name

Putting your name on the syllabus is imperative. Not only will you increase the chance that your students will remember your name, but you will give them the information necessary should they need to contact you either during or after the semester. Depending on your preference, you might include the title that you prefer students address you by.

Phone number(s)

Students must have a phone number where you can be reached. All instructors at COC, both full and part-time, are entitled to have a voice mail extension at the college. However, phone numbers have proved to be controversial when private or home phone numbers are given to students. A great number of faculty have experimented with this, with mixed results. Regardless of what you decide, remember that students will have your phone number long after they have completed your course.
E-mail address

In today’s technological world, e-mail provides students with an alternative method of reaching you. E-mail policies should be discussed with your students, particularly if you choose not to include them in your syllabus. For example, it might be important to let students know your "turnaround" time. With hectic teaching schedules, you may not get back to a student right away. Students may e-mail you numerous times because they think you did not receive the first e-mail.

Using home e-mail addresses brings up issues of privacy, since students will have your address once they've completed your course. Adjunct faculty can obtain an e-mail account by contacting the Technology Center.

Web Page

Most departments have web pages. You should contact the department chair to inquire about what information to include on a web page. It would be important to follow whatever format the department requests. Some departments have photos of their faculty on the web page. However, some faculty are not comfortable having their photograph on the web page. This is an area you can discuss within your department.

Office Hours/Times when you may be contacted

Whether your office hours are fixed, or available by appointment, you should provide specific hours on your syllabus. It is important to try and vary your hours during the week to accommodate student needs. For example, having an office hour from 10:00 to 11:00 Monday through Friday would make it difficult for a student who takes morning classes to see you. It would be important to include afternoon hours as well.
If you find that an office hour does not work out for you, notify students so that they can make the correction on their syllabus. If possible, have them make that change while in class. If meetings or other appointments conflict with your office hour, it is important to post a note on your door. Adjunct faculty should be aware that the Adjunct Office, I-312 is available for use and office hours may be held there (though little privacy is provided).

Biographical information about instructor

Biographical information is another controversial category. Some faculty like to put information about themselves on the syllabus. Others, like myself, prefer to discuss background information during class. There is no right or wrong; rather the choice must be made based on one’s comfort level.

Schedule/Calendar Information

Calendars provide students with very specific information regarding the course. Calendars may be written in a day by day format, or a weekly format. There are pluses and minuses to both. A complete calendar allows the students to plan their semester. They will be able to stay on top of their assignments. Students are less apt to use excuses like, "I didn't know it was due today." Instructors may feel that a calendar is restrictive. What if you don't complete a lecture on time? What if you need to change an exam date? An easy way to deal with this is to put in a disclaimer in the calendar section. For example, you may say, "this calendar is subject to change," or "tentative calendar." The responsibility of keeping aware of the class schedule still falls upon the students. You can always ask students to bring their syllabus to class daily, and notify them of changes should they occur.

If you provide a class schedule or calendar, there are some common areas to include:
Grading Information

Course requirements (exams, quizzes, projects, papers, homework, etc.) and the proportion each counts towards the final grade are important to include in the syllabus. If using a point system, it is important to specify how many points each assignment is worth, and how the grade would be calculated at the end of the semester. Discuss the content and format of each requirement, including exams. For example, students should be told whether exams are multiple-choice, true-false, and/or essay. It is helpful if they know what chapters will be included on each exam. Finally, an understanding of how much each exam is weighted in their final score helps the students understand their progress. Quizzes can be explained in much the same manner as exams. If you drop either an exam or quiz score, students should be told. Though many instructors provide separate handouts for projects, papers, and homework, a general description of each and their weights should be included.

Class participation, if factored in, should be explained. This is an area that many students find confusing, primarily because participation is not always easy to quantify. Is the student who participates one who answers questions often? What if a student is reticent? If you give participation points on an assignment done in class, this is easy to quantify. It is important that students understand how participation can be quantified, and that all students have the same opportunity to earn these points, regardless of personality. Since this area can often lead to grade complaints, a clear and substantive description is important.

Attendance is another important area to discuss in grading. There is a debate as to the legality of using attendance as a grading criterion (see attendance policies below).
is vague on this point, and to date, COC has not taken an "official" position as to attendance. However, we are strongly encouraged not to use attendance in grading. Title 5, section 55002 states:

Grading Policy. The course provides for measurement of student performance in terms of the stated course objectives and culminates in a formal, permanently recorded grade based upon uniform standards in accordance with section 55023. The grade is based on demonstrated proficiency in subject matter and the ability to demonstrate that proficiency, at least in part, by means of essays, or, in courses where the curriculum committee deems them to be appropriate, by problem solving exercises or skills demonstrations by students.

Grading scale and standards should be explained. A grading scale, such as 90 - 100% = A, 80-89%=B, etc. or 450-500 points = A, etc. is important for students to have. This enables them to track their progress throughout the semester. It is also quite useful for students if you provide them with a hypothetical example. This is particularly helpful when you have assignments that are worth the same points, but hold a different percentage value. Regardless of whether you use percentages, or points, an actual point distribution for final grades should be included. (See sample syllabi for Victoria Leonard for a specific example of grading). Finally, any inclusion of extra credit and its impact on the final grade is important to mention. Any other information of a subjective nature that relates to your grading standards should also be included. College of the Canyons does not use the plus/minus grading system.

Policies regarding assignments, late work, and make-up exams

Do you allow your students to turn their assignments in late, or make-up their missed exams? If so, under what conditions do you make these allowances? Students may be extremely ill, or have family emergencies. If you allow make-ups, or allow students to turn in work late, you must be very clear as to the circumstances under which you will allow late work. Many instructors indicate their policies in their syllabi to prevent problems. For example, my syllabus includes the following statement: "There are no make-ups for any speech or
exam. In the event of an EXTREME emergency, a make-up may be given at the discretion of the instructor. Should an emergency occur, official documentation by an outside authority (physician's letter, hospitalization or police report, etc) is mandatory. Notification must be given prior to the speech or exam hour via voice mail."

A statement regarding academic integrity

Issues of cheating and plagiarism are pervasive on today's college campuses. Though there are alarming statistics of students who know what plagiarism is, there are still a number of naive students who do not truly understand the concept. You can let students know what your policies are, and what the consequences of academic dishonesty entail. You can also refer to the college website for very specific information on conduct policies via the following addresses:

Dean of Student Services

Conduct Policy for Students

Subject Matter

Some courses have subject matter of a controversial nature. Though it might be obvious in some classes just by the title, such as Human Sexuality, other courses may have content that would not be apparent. In teaching public speaking, there are many ethical issues involved in the choice of topics, and speakers must take the audience into account. However, this does not mean that controversial topics will not be discussed. Typical persuasive speeches include such topics as abortion, female genital mutilation, and fetal tissue transplant, to name a few. I provide students with a statement that indicates that topics of an adult nature will be discussed in class. You might consider letting students know that they can leave the classroom if they feel uncomfortable with a specific lecture, or presentation.
Attendance/late policy

There are many different views on attendance. As many of the other concepts discussed, there is no right or wrong answer. This has been a matter of debate, as some would claim that Title 5 prohibits grading on attendance. Title 5 does provide guidelines (i.e. typical assignments) that can be used for grading, but does not clearly address attendance. Recently, many faculty have begun using daily participation points instead of an attendance policy.

The campus has a limited attendance policy as well. Any instructor may drop a student if he or she misses more than the number of hours the class meets per week. I noticed early in my career that students took advantage of the late drop deadline.

Since students don't always track their attendance, I provide them with periodic notification. I discretely hand them a slip of paper that lets them know how many absences they have to date. This might be important particularly if you need to document a lack of participation. I realize that this presents a lot of work for myself, but I consider it as part of a "performance review" that corporations conduct for their employees. I also relate to my students that missing class is like missing work. When their wages are affected, they go to work. Similarly, their "grades" are affected by missing "work." This analogy has helped tremendously, especially for students who complain that "they are in college now and shouldn't have to go to class."

Finally, what is your policy regarding late arrivals to class? At the minimum, it is disruptive to your class. I have heard that some instructors lock their doors to prevent late arrivals. Needless to say, that is distressing to students. Make sure you inform students what your policy is. One way to minimize late arrivals is to do an activity, or have a quiz, right at the beginning of class. If they are not there, they would not receive credit.

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Student Conduct

If you don't enjoy side conversations, students who speak without raising their hand, or pagers and cell phones disrupting your class, a statement on student
conduct would be important. My syllabus contains the following paragraph: "College level behavior is expected. You will be asked to leave, or referred to the Dean of Students, if you engage in any inappropriate behavior during class. Cell phones are to be on vibrate mode, or turned off. Text messaging during class is unacceptable. Please do not use computers during class unless they are for note taking purposes." Of course, my statements continue to evolve as new problems occur. Recently, I am experiencing a new situation which I had never really encountered before. A student has decided that my class is the perfect opportunity for him to read a novel in the back row. Is one situation worth changing an entire syllabus? You may or may not include these types of ideas. I have also found one way to address student conduct early in the semester is to have the class create its own conduct code. It's an opportunity to break students into groups, allow them to get to know each other, and accomplish something that they will feel more compelled to live by because they created their own list.

For more detailed information and assistance, you can access the campus website regarding Student Discipline FAQ's at Dean of Student Services.

Support Services/Resources

This area of the syllabus is clearly optional. If you want to provide students with information regarding services such as Counseling, DSP&S, Tutoring, etc., you might let students know what their resources are. You can also refer them to the schedule of classes, which has information on all campus services. Students with documented disabilities are entitled to additional support services and are responsible for providing you with that information.