CETL Steering Committee
Recommendations on Course Syllabi
Report: Guiding Principles in Designing a Syllabus

CETL Syllabi Sub Committee:

Victoria Leonard

Julie Johnson

Robert Wonser

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Introduction

A well-designed syllabus is more than just an administrative document; it is also a foundational tool for student success. A *learner centered* syllabus prioritizes clarity, accessibility, and engagement, and can help students navigate course expectations effectively. A structured, yet flexible, approach to a syllabus enhances both student learning and instructor autonomy. This paper suggests specific elements that are strongly recommended to create an effective and equitable learning environment.

Throughout these recommendations, you will find:

➡️ Suggested syllabi elements

🖍️ Practical syllabi examples

📋 A quick Reference Recommendations Table

Learner Centered Syllabus Elements and Rationale

➡️ Basic Course Information (Campus, Title, Number, Section, Instructor details, Office hours and Meeting Times, Instructor Contact Information, Modality).

Rationale: Ensuring students have clear access to logistical details fosters organization and preparedness. Assists with any future need to find the syllabus for a transfer institution.

Student Benefit: Provides essential information upfront, reducing confusion.

Supporting Evidence: Williams (2018) describes the syllabus as a "road map for success," reinforcing the idea that basic course details are crucial for student navigation.

✏️ Examples

College of the Canyons
Course Title: COMM 246 – *Interpersonal Communication*
Section: XXXXX – Fall 2025 *In this course, we'll explore how people connect, build relationships, and navigate real-life communication challenges — skills that benefit both your personal and professional life.*
Instructor: Name, Title, Department, School of XXXX
Office Location: Hasley Hall XXX (and online via Zoom)
Office Hours: Tuesdays 11:00–12:00 p.m. (in person) and Wednesdays 10:00–11:00 a.m. (Zoom) — or by appointment.
Contact: Name@canyons.edu
Phone: (661) 362-XXXX (voicemail available)
Preferred Contact and Getting Your Questions Answered: *Office hours are your time —*

come by to ask questions, talk about class topics, or check in about your progress. I check email daily, Monday through Friday from 8:00 am through 7:00 pm.

➡️ Catalog Description, Course Description, and Student Learning Outcomes

Rationale: A course description and objectives with clearly defined student learning outcomes help students align their expectations with course goals. This information is also relied upon when transfer institutions are looking at a syllabus to determine whether the course will articulate with their university.

Student Benefit: Encourages self-directed learning by clarifying what skills and knowledge they will gain.

Supporting Evidence: Bart (2017) emphasizes that "a syllabus that is transparent about expectations helps students take ownership of their learning."

✏️ Examples

Catalog Description (from the COC Catalog): *Introduction to the principles and processes of interpersonal communication with emphasis on perception, self-concept, listening, verbal and nonverbal communication, and relational dynamics. Application of theory to enhance communication competence in personal and professional contexts.*

Course Description (in Syllabus): Welcome to *Interpersonal Communication!* In this course, you'll learn how communication shapes every relationship you have — from friendships and family to work teams and social interactions. Together, we'll explore how perception, emotions, language, and listening affect understanding and connection. You'll also gain strategies to handle conflict, build empathy, and strengthen your confidence as a communicator in any setting.

Student Learning Outcomes (What You'll Be Able to Do): By the end of the semester, you will be able to: Recognize how your own communication choices influence understanding and connection with others. Use foundational concepts and models of interpersonal communication to interpret real-life interactions. Apply active listening and conflict-resolution strategies to improve personal and professional relationships.

➡️ Grading Policy and Assessment Breakdown

Rationale: Transparency in grading prevents misunderstandings and grade disputes. Including percentages and weight of assignments, explanations of how grades will be calculated, and the inclusion of extra credit will help students track their grades.

Student Benefit: Reduces anxiety by offering a clear roadmap for academic performance.

Supporting Evidence: The American Psychological Association (2019) states that "grading

transparency is essential for fostering a sense of fairness in the classroom." Research indicates that transparent policies emphasizing *communication and shared responsibility* can enhance student motivation and self-regulation (Nilson & Goodson, 2018). When flexibility or grace periods are given, and the instructor communicates these expectations clearly, student anxiety will be reduced and instructors show that they understand that our students may have complex lives outside of the classroom. "When students perceive their instructor as fair and supportive, they are more likely to persist and engage meaningfully with coursework" (Felten et al., 2019).

✏️ Examples

Grading Philosophy: Grades in this course reflect your learning progress, effort, and engagement with the material. My goal is to give you multiple ways to demonstrate what you've learned through written, spoken, and creative work. *Communication is a skill, not a one-time performance, so you'll receive feedback designed to help you grow over time.*
Assessment Breakdown:
Learning Activities (35%) – Small assignments, discussions, and reflections that help you practice core skills before larger projects. All of these will be provided both in Canvas and in a handout form for you.
Major Projects (40%) – Includes your interpersonal observation report and applied communication analysis. Rubrics are provided so you know exactly what success looks like before you start.
Participation & Collaboration (15%) – Based on meaningful contributions to discussions, group work, and peer support. All points for participation will be based on activities completed when you attend class.
Final Reflection (10%) – A personal synthesis essay on what you've learned about yourself as a communicator.
Grading Scale: A = 90–100% B = 80–89% C = 70–79% D = 60–69% F = below 60%

➡️ Course Policies - COC Attendance Policy, Participation, Late Work, and Academic Integrity

COC Attendance Policy BP/AP 5070

Rationale: Standardized policies ensure consistency and fairness.

Student Benefit: Helps students make informed decisions regarding their coursework.

Supporting Evidence: The Northern Illinois University Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning (2020) argues that "explicit policies provide a safety net for students navigating college expectations."

Rationale: Participation fosters active learning, deeper comprehension, and accountability. By making it an observable, graded component, students are encouraged to engage meaningfully, develop communication skills, and contribute to an *inclusive learning environment*.

Student Benefit: Enhances Learning: Active participation improves retention and understanding (Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning, 2022). Builds Confidence: Encourages students to develop academic discourse skills (Bart, 2017). Promotes Equity: Ensures all students have structured opportunities to contribute (Eslami et al., 2024). Develops Professional Skills: Strengthens communication and collaboration abilities (APA, 2019).

Supporting Evidence: Participation creates an active learning environment where students feel connected (APA, 2019). Structured participation reduces inequities in STEM classrooms (Eslami et al., 2024). Clear participation policies increase engagement and course satisfaction (CITL, 2022). Outlining participation expectations sets the tone for meaningful interactions (Bart, 2017). Explanations of participation lead to fewer grade disputes (Leonard, 2002).

✏️ Examples

Attendance & Participation Policy: Because communication is learned through interaction, your consistent participation matters; not just for your grade, but for your learning and the community we create together. We all come from different backgrounds and experiences, and sharing your views helps contribute to the learning environment we create together.

What Counts as Attendance: Attending class regularly and not missing more than 10% of the length of the class. If you do not attend three class sessions, you will be dropped on the fourth absence per the college's policy unless there are compelling personal reasons that prevented you from being in class. *Only extreme circumstances may be considered since you need to fulfill the state requirements for student contact hours.*

What Counts as Participation: Being present in class, contributing to discussions, completing Face-to-Face or Canvas activities, and staying engaged in group work. Remember: All activities have a point value!

If You Need to Miss Class: Life happens — illness, family emergencies, and work conflicts can occur. Please communicate with me as soon as possible so we can discuss options for staying on track.

Non-Participation/Drop Policy: If you stop attending or submitting work for two consecutive weeks without contact, I will reach out to check in. If there's no response after reasonable attempts, I may have to drop you from the course in accordance with the college's policy. The

goal is not to penalize you but to prevent you from academic harm on your transcript. Staying in touch with me keeps your options open for success or withdrawal without penalty!

Late & Revision Policy: Communication about deadlines is encouraged. If you need more time, contact me *before the due date* so we can plan a solution. Some assignments allow revision after feedback; those opportunities will be clearly marked on Canvas. *Learning is a process, and flexibility helps everyone stay on track.*

➡️ Required Materials and Resources (Textbooks, ISBN Numbers, OER, Additional items that will be purchased).

Rationale: Ensures students have the tools they need for success.

Student Benefit: Helps with financial planning and preparation.

Supporting Evidence: Eslami et al. (2024) found that access to clear resource lists reduced equity gaps in STEM education.

✏️ Examples

Recommended Materials: A notebook or digital tool for reflective journaling and class notes. *If you prefer to take notes digitally, you may use a laptop or tablet during discussions — just stay engaged and present with your peers.*

☐ *Recommended* Humanized Syllabi Elements

➡️ Campus Support Services **(Tutoring, Academic Accommodations, Mental Health Resources, Veterans Services, Basic Needs Center, etc.)**

Rationale: Promotes student well-being and success.

Student Benefit: Increases awareness of support structures, especially for first-generation students.

Supporting Evidence: CSUN Teaching Toolkit (n.d.) states that "embedding student resources in the syllabus normalizes help-seeking behavior."

Detailed Weekly/Monthly Schedule (Calendar can be a separate document)

Rationale: Helpful and can be adjusted in real-time so there is flexibility for the instructor.

Student Benefit: Provides a roadmap for students so they can plan their schedules regarding both their school and work schedules.

> *Supporting Evidence:* As the University of Michigan's Center for Research on Learning and Teaching advises, "Make sure to bold, underline, or highlight significant due dates for papers, projects, or lab reports... and dates of exams, quizzes, or finals" (2025). Stanford Teaching Commons notes that by "clearly organizing your syllabus to communicate the course schedule, assignments, and policies, you can enable students to better manage their time and be successful in your course" (2025).

➡️ Optional Elements

Student Success Tips and Study Strategies

> *Rationale:* Encourages academic skills development.

> *Student Benefit:* Especially useful for students new to college-level learning.

Instructor's Biography, Teaching Philosophy and Course Approach

> *Rationale:* Builds rapport and sets a positive tone for learning.

> *Student Benefit:* Humanizes the instructor and fosters engagement.

Addressing Academic Freedom Concerns

The proposed suggestions do not impede academic freedom; rather, they ensure that all students receive a baseline level of clarity and support. As Sinor and Kaplan (n.d.) note, "the syllabus is a contract that ensures consistency while allowing for pedagogical creativity." Faculty maintain the ability to shape course content and teaching style while adhering to institutional standards that benefit students. Instructors retain full autonomy over **how** participation is structured and assessed, ensuring transparency while maintaining flexibility in andrological approaches.

Syllabus Accessibility and Storage

Access to the syllabus is a final consideration that CETL has explored. The value of having a syllabus in Canvas allows students to access it digitally and allows the instructor to make updates to due dates when necessary. *Once Canvas is no longer accessible to students, it is important for the College and specific department to have a digitized copy so that any future questions of articulation can be easily addressed and answered.*

Conclusion

Feel free to remix, reuse, and adapt any of this and make it your own. These guiding principles balance structure with flexibility, ensuring students have the necessary tools to succeed while allowing

instructors to maintain their teaching philosophy, while creating inclusive and transparent learning environments without compromising academic freedom.

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Syllabus Elements Quick Reference Table

Syllabus Element	Rationale	Example
Basic Course Information	Ensures students have clear access to logistical details; fosters organization and preparedness; assists with future transfer institution needs.	Course Title: Instructor: Name, Title, Department Office Hours: Contact: Name@canyons.edu
Catalog Description, Course Description & Learning Outcomes	Helps students align expectations with course goals; encourages self-directed learning by clarifying skills and knowledge they will gain; required for transfer articulation.	Course Description Learning Outcomes
Grading Policy & Assessment Breakdown	Transparency in grading prevents misunderstandings and grade disputes; reduces anxiety by offering a clear roadmap for academic performance.	Assessment Breakdown Grading Scale
Attendance Policy	Standardized policies ensure consistency and fairness; helps students make informed decisions regarding their coursework.	What Counts as Attendance
Participation & Engagement	Fosters active learning, deeper comprehension, and accountability; encourages meaningful engagement and inclusive learning environment.	What Counts as Participation
Late Work & Revision Policy	Clear communication about deadlines reduces student anxiety; flexibility demonstrates understanding that students have complex lives outside the classroom.	Deadlines
Academic Integrity	Ensures consistency and fairness; provides a safety net for students navigating college expectations.	*Follow COC policies on academic integrity*
Required Materials & Resources	Ensures students have the tools they need for success; helps with financial planning and preparation.	Texts Recommended Materials
Campus Support Services	Promotes student well-being and success; increases awareness of support structures, especially for first-generation students; normalizes help-seeking behavior.	*Include links to: Tutoring, Academic Accommodations, Mental Health Resources, Veterans Services, Basic Needs Center*
Detailed Schedule	Provides a roadmap for students to plan their schedules regarding both school and work; can be adjusted in real-time for instructor flexibility.	*Weekly/monthly calendar with highlighted due dates for major assignments, exams, and projects*

Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning