



Crafting Your Syllabi Transcript

Module One

Welcome to Crafting Your Syllabi. It is designed for faculty who are new to the academy and have not had the opportunity to design a syllabus independently and also for experienced college instructors who are new to Lehman.

My name is Niki Fayne. I am a colleague and fellow educator. I am drawing on my own experience in the classroom to share what I've learned about best teaching practices, and how to craft a clear, well-organized, and effective syllabus.

I hope to encourage all faculty, regardless of discipline and regardless of the size of your class, to think about instructional design and the messages that we send students on that first day of class when we distribute a syllabus. I recommend you download some of the resources I've made available and will reference throughout the webinar. And of course, pause at any time.

Let's review the intended learning outcomes for the Crafting Your Syllabus webinar. I will be referring back to the "big ideas" embedded in the three outcomes throughout the webinar.

Key elements of good instructional design should be reflected in a course syllabus. I hope that by the end of the webinar

- You will be able to draft a syllabus that Adheres to Lehman College policies
- You will be able to draft a syllabus that incorporates "promising syllabus" principles into your course design (and if the term "promising syllabus" is a new one for you...no worries. You will be conversant with this notion by the end of the webinar.
- You will be able to draft a syllabus that allows the reader to establish connections between content, learning outcomes, and how you as an instructor can and should demonstrate teaching effectiveness.

Here is a sample teaching cycle.

With student learning always as at the center, you begin with planning, move to teaching, and end with assessing your students. However, it is a cycle. So every time you teach the course, you look at student assessment data and think about ways to change the course the next time in order to make it even more successful.

Think back to your own student days or your own teaching.

I've always considered the most boring 20 minutes of the semester the time I spend reading the syllabus on the first day of class. Students come in, potentially excited about getting started, only to end up listening to me read aloud.

I imagine them paraphrasing in their heads one of my favorite Woody Allen lines:

Thanks, but I've been doing my own reading since about the first grade.

Still, the consensus among colleagues with whom I've shared this fear of boring my students -- dullaphobia? -- has been that reading the syllabus out loud remains a necessary act for reasons that seem vaguely legalistic.

When a student who has plagiarized a paper gets zero points for the assignment, for example, and questions the fairness of it, you can remind him that the policy was read to him on the first day of class.

And it does seem important not only to ensure that the students have heard the syllabus, but also that I've taken the opportunity of reading it to elaborate on various points, providing a more in-depth preview of the course.

Still, it has occurred to me lately that perhaps reading my syllabi aloud seems boring because my syllabi are boring.

This is excerpted from a 2006 Chronicle of Higher Education article written by James M. Lang, who was at that point an associate professor at Assumption College and author of Life on the Tenure Track: Lessons from the First Year published by Johns Hopkins University Press in 2005

Do Lang's words resonate with you?

Yes, your syllabus is a legal document, a contract of sorts. In that sense it does need to include elements defined by the institution.

If you haven't done so already, pause and download the official Lehman College Template, which I will be referring to throughout the rest of the webinar modules. It also serves as a preliminary checklist as you begin to draft your syllabi.

Yes, a syllabus gets hauled out by administrators when a student lodges a complaint about a grade or an instructor. Therefore, it is best that your syllabus includes those elements that Lehman requires (and those that are suggested as well).

However, you can go beyond compliance and create a "Promising Syllabus." There is a way to connect compliance with promise by asking three questions:



1. What learning outcomes does your course promise your students? Students should be able to answer this question by looking at the course description and objectives.
2. How do you plan to fulfill these promises? Students should be able to identify your fulfillment strategies by reviewing course requirements and assignments.
3. What ways have you devised for you and your students to know whether these promises have been realized? Students can check the grading policy and your assessments (brief descriptions and weights given to each) to figure out whether or not how successful they are and you, in turn, by looking over the class's performance will know how successful you have been.

We will address these three questions in Modules 2-4.

Module Two

In this module we will focus in on Element One: What does your course syllabus promise your students?

We'll focus on the Lehman College Syllabi guidelines and the professor, the course basics and beyond.

The basics include: Course Information- course title, course Number, credits, catalog course description, any pre or co-requisites, classroom location, meeting days and times.

I would add to the list instructional delivery mode (online, hybrid/blended, face-to-face)

Element Two is instructor Information- your name, contact information (phone, email), office location and office hours.

I just covered the basics. Now let's look at two instructors who have "gone beyond" in their course introductions:

Look at what Cindy (Dr. Lobel) has done, and what she says about her content and pedagogy.

Stefan Becker, GEO 228 describes how students will watch videos at home and use class time to revisit difficult concepts.

There are excerpts from the syllabi and other resources available to download.

Finally, let's take a look at required item number 3, learning objectives.



According to our Lehman Template, learning objectives (also called learning outcomes) are to be written in such a way that they are measurable.

How they are measured should be clear if a student takes the time to link them to assignments and grading criteria. As much as possible, course objectives should be a subset of program objectives or should link to some general College goals.

Let's go BTB or Back to Bloom. Bloom's Taxonomy is probably familiar to many of you. It has been a staple in elementary, secondary, and higher education for some time.

In our attached resources, you will find a link to this good overview (Thank you, Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching). Or just Google Bloom's Taxonomy, and you will be able to get more than you ever wanted on Bloom's Taxonomy and writing course objectives that align with the taxonomy.

In a nutshell: You ask yourself two questions:

1. What will the student know and be able to do by the end of the course? AND
2. Are my objectives (outcomes) written in a way that allows students to demonstrate them by the end of the course?

HINT: It is hard to demonstrate or measure "understand"

So again, let's consider What Promises Am I Making?

Here are examples. I have selected three course objectives from three different instructors. The objective is what the students should know and be able to do. The assessment linked to the objective is the way that students' demonstrate that the promise has or has not been realized for them.

Next on the checklist are your Materials and Technology

Here are the basics:

1. You need to include a complete citation on each textbook that you require (including the price of the book). This is not just a Lehman rule. We are mandated by the USDOE to provide students with cost information on textbooks.
2. You should provide basic information on Blackboard since it is likely that you will be using our learning management system even in face-to-face courses. The slide provides just the bare essentials.

But when you make these decisions, you need to know the Lehman context and recognize affordability and accessibility issues.



Textbooks are expensive. Many students cannot afford to buy them and either share with a classmate or just don't do the reading. And there are copyright laws about Xeroxing books and chapters and posting those for students.

So if you can, put at least one copy of required textbooks on closed reserve in the library and indicate that you are doing so in your syllabus. This is not a perfect solution, but at least it is an indication that you are trying to find a "work around."

Also, anticipate that technology (hardware and software) can be a barrier. Here are two instructors who give good advice in their syllabi.

[Two slides]

Finally, within the Lehman Context there are specific Policies and Services that need to be made clear to students.

The three paragraphs on this slide are available in the template attached, so you can use them in your syllabi. At the beginning of each semester, it is important to check that the URL and phone numbers are still accurate before you copy/paste. Office locations and URLs do change periodically.

Module Three

Welcome back to Crafting Your Syllabi. In module three we will be focusing in on making requirements and assignments clear and comprehensible as ways to fulfill your promise to students.

While the Lehman template lists a course calendar as a suggestion rather than a requirement, I would encourage you to include some type of calendar or schedule in your syllabi. Certainly, you should indicate that the time line, topics, assigned readings, test dates, due dates are subject to revision. However, giving students at the beginning of the course a sense of how it will unfold really gives them an important study/time management tool. Undergraduates are probably taking four or more courses per term; many are working full time and fulfilling family responsibilities. Graduate students are likely to be taking two courses or more per term, many are working; they also lead busy and complicated lives.

Here is a table that Dr. Sen included in his GEO 245 syllabi.

If your assignments require extended explanations, you can choose to include the detail in the syllabus or refer to other handouts or information posted on Blackboard.

Just let students know where they will find the answer to the question: What is expected of me in this course?



Let's turn to some Behavioral Expectations in your course.

Students need to know more than academic expectations. It will save you some wear and tear, if you spell out your own classroom "rules."

Here are some questions to answer as you determine how you want to establish your classroom climate:

Will you allow students to check their cell phones during class time?
How would you like to promote student engagement (face-to-face; online)?

Are you uncomfortable with students missing or coming late to class?

Are you willing to accept late assignments?

Will you give make-up examinations?

What is your expectation for partner work? Group work? Talk with your colleagues to get some other ideas. Notice the positive frame (professional, respect) in some of the following samples...

Here are some Snippets from Lehman Syllabi

An Attendance Policy written by Amber McGruder

A Lateness Policy written by Abby McNamee

A Description of Appropriate Discussion Etiquette by Deidre Pettipiece

The New Intruder: Cell Phones- A Policy and Warning by Gautam Sen

Module Four

Welcome back to the fourth and final module in *Crafting Your Syllabi* focuses on *Ways That Students and Instructors Know That Promises Have Been Kept*.

Here we will be thinking about assessment: How do we evaluate student learning?

How do we evaluate our impact on student learning?

The Lehman template indicates that you are to describe your grading procedures in your syllabus. This description is to include how you will arrive at a final grade with particular attention paid to the relative weights of components (classroom participation, homework, papers, exams). If you drop a low grade, curve test results, or give extra credit, say so.

Here are some standard student questions that could be answered in your syllabus:

- How do I earn an A in this course?
- How much does a particular assignment count?
- Do you take off points for late work?
- Do you take off points for absence?
- Do you give participation points?
- Do you curve test results?
- How is my final grade calculated?

Assessments can inform but they can also teach. I call these educative assessments.

If students are to actively engage in their own learning, they should be able to answer questions like these. Take a minute or two to think about ways that your syllabus could help your students to find answers to these questions (early in the course, at mid-semester, and after the final examination).

Not only will students learn from assessments. Instructors will as well. What worked? What didn't?

As I look over my course evaluations, can I triangulate them with assessment data and course design?

A final question: One goal of this webinar was to establish a connection between course content, intended learning outcomes, student assessment, and exploring the implication and evaluation of my teaching effectiveness.

So you must finally ask, how will I gauge my success?

Consider, "As I write my annual self-evaluation, will my syllabus provide what I need to assess my teaching effectiveness in this course during this semester?"



We've come to the end of the webinar, but this should not be the end of conversations about instructional design. I would advise you to talk to departmental colleagues and chairs. You might want to see versions of syllabi for courses that you have been assigned to teach.

I have also included a link to a CUNY network. We are Lehman, but we are also CUNY. You might use social media to collect other examples, to solicit advice, or to ask for feedback.

I wish you the best in crafting your syllabi.