Assessing Your Syllabus: Is it Learning Focused?

- Introduce a syllabus rubric and explain the basic course design constructs used in its development
- Examine criteria typical of learning-centered syllabi
- Determine what evidence of proficiency might look like and where it can be found
- Compare sample syllabi
- Use the rubric to assess the learning focus of your own syllabus

Workshop Objectives

Measuring the Promise: A Valid and Reliable Syllabus Rubric

- Michael Palmer, Dorothee Bach, Adria Streifer, University of Virginia, Teaching Resource Center
  - http://virginia.edu/resources/syllabus-rubric/
- Determine learning focus of a syllabus
  - Qualitative descriptions of components of learning-focused syllabi
  - Weighted quantitative scoring system that places syllabi on spectrum (learning-focused -> content-focused)
- Flexible and nuanced
  - Range of levels, disciplines, learning environments
  - Formative feedback for instructors

Resources Available Here
Syllabus Rubric

+ Instrument Overview
- Criteria
  - Learning Goals and Objectives
  - Assessment Activities
  - Schedule
  - Overall Learning Environment
- Criteria do not map onto specific sections—look for evidence across the syllabus

Learning goals/objectives and objectives
Summative + Formative
What are deadlines, etc
What type of learning environment does this syllabus support?

To use this rubric, prior knowledge of course design is applicable to instructors
Builds on Bloom's Taxonomy / Gagne
Cognitive, Skills +
Effective Learning (Interpersonal Skills)
Definitions of Course Goals and Learning Objectives

- Learning (or course) GOALS
  - High-level and long-term
  - Communicate what you want students to remember or do years or more after taking the course
  - Holistic often use aspirational/inspirational language

- Learning (or course) OBJECTIVES
  - Concrete and measurable
  - Communicate what course intends for students to achieve or master
  - Translate high-level goals into outcomes that can be measured through course assessments

Alignment

- Conceptual tool in course design process
  - Course assessment and learning activities are directly derived from course goals and objectives

- Backward Course Design
  - Articulate objectives
  - Design learning activities that support development of skills, values, knowledge, and attitudes embodied in course objectives
Learning Goals and Objectives

Explicitly stated learning goals encompass the full range of Taxonomy's quadrants.

Where to look and what to look for:

- Explicitly stated goals:
  - Course Description, especially affective goals
- Implicit goals:
  - Assessment
  - Schedule
  - Tips for Student Success
  - Other sections

Learning Goals and Objectives

Course-level learning objectives are clearly articulated and use specific action verbs.

Where to look and what to look for:

- Prominent and easily identifiable location (i.e., labeled section)
- Objectives are stated in clear, measurable language (i.e., active verbs with objects). Non-quantifiable terms, such as 'understand' and 'know' are avoided.
- Syllabus considers full range of Taxonomy's quadrants, including affective ones.
- E-8 course level objectives

Exercises

- Compare and contrast pre- and post-CDI versions of the syllabus PTS 100: Twice-Told Tales: Fairy Tales in Literary and Popular Culture.
- Where are the course goals? How are they articulated?
- Where are the learning objectives? Do they use measurable language? Do they map onto a range of learning domains (cognitive, affective, metacognitive)?
Assessment Activities

It is clear that the objectives and assessments are aligned. Major assessments map onto range of learning objectives and degree of mapping correlates with the weighting of the assignment.

Where to look and what to look for:

- Connections between objectives and major assessments should exist (i.e., each major assessment activity should map onto one or more learning objectives)

Assessment Activities

The basic features of the major summative assessments (e.g., exams, papers) are clearly defined.

Where to look and what to look for:

- Prominent and easily identifiable location (i.e., labeled section)
- Grading percentages may or may not be included with assessment descriptions, but there should be a distinct section on grading
- Major assignments are briefly described
- It is clear that rubrics or evaluative criteria will be made available, if not included in the syllabus.

Assessment Activities

Exercise

- Compare and contrast pre- and post-CIDI versions of the syllabus: FV 105: Twice-Told Tales: Fairy Tales in Literary and Popular Culture
- Do course assignments/exams/projects align with learning objectives? Where do assignments either not meet or exceed objectives?
- Are grading schemes presented in a distinct section?
- Are major summative assignments described clearly? Where can students go for information on evaluative criteria?
+ Assessment Activities

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+ Assessment Activities

Exercise

- Compare and contrast pre- and post-CDD versions of the syllabus PYE 10C, Twice-Told Tales: Fairy Tales in Literary and Popular Culture.
- Do course assignments/exams/projects align with learning objectives? Where do assignments either not meet or exceed objectives?
- Are grading schemes presented in a distinct section?
- Are major summative assignments described clearly? Where can students go for information on evaluative criteria?

Make sure assessments meet the objectives
meet more than less
i.e. 5 - 8 objectives =
at least 5 - 8 assessments
that meet these

Separate grading section must accompany this, indicates to students what they can expect.
+ Overall Learning Environment
The tone of the document is positive, respectful and inviting and addresses student as competent, engaged learner

Where to look and what to look for:
- Positive, respectful, inviting tone is conveyed throughout document
- Personal pronouns (e.g. you, we, us) used rather than "the students"/"the course"
- Focus is on learning and possibilities not on policies and punishments
- Contains a "promise" that will be fulfilled by mutual effort by instructor and students

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+ Overall Learning Environment
The syllabus envisions a learning environment that fosters positive motivation, describes the potential value of the course, and communicates that content is a vehicle for learning
Where to look and what to look for:
- Makes clear that there are opportunities to "wonder" and "discover"
- Course components frame content through compelling questions or big ideas
- Student is in control of his/her learning (e.g. use of mastery rather than performance based grading mechanisms)
- Instructor provides resources/instruction related to becoming a life-long learner
- Course policies framed in positive ways and connected to clear pedagogical purpose.

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+ Overall Learning Environment
Exercise

- Compare and contrast pre- and post-CDI versions of the syllabi
- What is the tone positive and inviting, or pushy and demotivating? Does it communicate high expectations for students?
- Are course policies de-emphasised in favor of language of possibility and achievement?
FIGURE 2.1. TAXONOMY OF SIGNIFICANT LEARNING.

Learning How to Learn
- Becoming a better student
- Inquiring about a subject
- Self-directing learners

Foundational Knowledge
Understanding and remembering:
- Information
- Ideas

Application
- Skills
- Thinking
  Critical, creative and practical thinking
- Managing projects

Caring
Developing new:
- Feelings
- Interests
- Values

Human Dimension
Learning about:
- Oneself
- Others

Integration
Connecting:
- Ideas
- People
- Realms of life
