

Inclusive Syllabus Checklist

Why Conduct a Syllabus Review?

Research demonstrates that when students feel like their instructor believes that they are capable of learning new things and growing their academic abilities, students' classroom experiences and academic outcomes improve. When students feel as though they are valued and connected to others in their learning community, they are more likely to stay academically engaged and utilize the resources and support provided by their course and institution.

By ensuring that the messages, policies, and practices included in course syllabi are designed to communicate a growth mindset about student potential, and promote a sense of belonging, course instructors have a powerful opportunity to support student achievement, foster well-being, and contribute to equity in education.

Below is a checklist to help review your current syllabi and encourage reflection on issues to consider as your work to make more inclusive syllabi going forward.

If you have any questions or would like the Center for Inclusive Teaching and Learning to review your syllabi with you, please contact the director, Lindsey Hamilton, at lhamilto@bates.edu

Clarity and Transparency

Clear Language and Organization

- ☐ Is the syllabus written clearly, in plain language, with limited academic jargon?
- ☐ Is the syllabus formatted and ordered in a way that highlights what students need to know to maximize their learning and success?
- ☐ Does the syllabus list required and recommended texts and (a) state where they can be purchased, and (b) offer opportunities to order electronic equivalents?
- ☐ Does the syllabus offer a variety of ways to contact the professor?
- ☐ Does the syllabus contain general information about student-oriented campus resources and additional resources that may be specific to the course? For example:
 - Student Writing and Language Center
 - Student Academic Support Center
 - Library hours
 - Lab hours

Learning Outcomes:

- ☐ Does the syllabus make explicit what skills and knowledge students should have by the time they complete the course?
- ☐ Does the syllabus include learning outcomes that explicitly address skills and knowledge related to inclusivity?

Explain how student learning will be assessed:

- ☐ Does the syllabus make explicit what skills and knowledge you are assessing?
- ☐ Does the syllabus use a diverse range of assessment methods?
- ☐ Does the syllabus describe class meetings? For example, what types of activities should students be prepared to engage in: dialogue, lecture, teamwork, presentations, etc.?
- ☐ Does the syllabus explain policies for students to make up assignments that are missed?

Articulate the course schedule:

- ☐ Does the syllabus list topics/readings in chronological order with assignment due dates?
- ☐ Does the syllabus take into account religious holidays when scheduling major exams or deadlines?

Growth Mindset

Normalizing Challenges

- ☐ Does the syllabus convey sensitivity to students' entering skill level, notes that aspects of the course can be challenging, and suggests that it is acceptable and beneficial for students to seek help, whether they are struggling or not?
- ☐ Does the syllabus convey a willingness to work individually with students who need extra help?
- ☐ Do the messages in the syllabus communicate that it is normal to be challenged by course material, and that this is not a sign that a student is not capable of learning or does not belong in the course?
- ☐ Does the syllabus normalize challenges that students often face in college, and connect students with resources that can support their overall well-being?
- ☐ Does the syllabus communicate that utilizing academic resources is a standard part of succeeding?

Instructor Belief in Student Success

- ☐ Does the syllabus communicate that the instructor believes each student can succeed?
- ☐ Does the syllabus convey that the instructor believes that students are capable of growing their abilities if they put in the time and effort, use strategies for success, and reach out for help when they are struggling?
- ☐ Does the syllabus articulate that students—regardless of their stated intentions—are capable of obtaining their educational goals?
- ☐ Does the syllabus offer different types of assignments and forms of assessment that give students multiple ways to demonstrate their learning and strengths?

Creating a Partnership

Culture of Care

- ☐ Does the syllabus use language and tone that makes students feel cared for and valued?
- ☐ Does the syllabus communicate that the instructor cares about students' success?
- ☐ Does the syllabus use a tone that is positive, respectful, inviting and directly addresses students as competent and engaged learners?
- ☐ Does the syllabus focus more on possibilities, not on punishments?

Creating a Learning Relationship

- ☐ Does the syllabus state what faculty expects of students as learners, and what students can expect from faculty as an instructor?
- ☐ Does the syllabus articulate a willingness to receive feedback from students about instructor's teaching practices?
- ☐ Does the syllabus articulate a willingness to use a variety of teaching approaches to foster learning?
- ☐ Does the syllabus articulate respect for students as autonomous, critical, and reflective learners?
- ☐ Does the syllabus state how the class and course objectives will help students succeed in future academic work, and advance career and life goals?

Justice-Based Teaching

Expresses Value of Diversity in the Classroom (Welcoming to students from different backgrounds and identities.)

- ☐ Does the syllabus acknowledge accommodations for students with disabilities/medical issues, religious holidays, student athletes, etc?

- ❑ Does the syllabus share your gender pronouns and preferred name and request students' pronouns and preferred names?
- ❑ Does the syllabus include a class anti-discrimination policy?
- ❑ Does the syllabus include assignments that ask students to draw on their experiential knowledge and/or knowledge from their communities?

Commitment to Addressing Issues of Justice as They Arise

- ❑ Does the syllabus set ground rules for respectful class discussion?
- ❑ Does the syllabus communicate a commitment to talking through racist and discriminatory comments or behavior that arise in class or on campus?

Honoring Diversity Within Your Course Topic and Within Field

- ❑ Does the course reflect diverse backgrounds in your readings and in other course content materials, and/or allowing student choice in finding diverse sources of content?
- ❑ Does the course depict a diversity of people in leadership positions and other desirable roles?
- ❑ Does the course include readings, activities, and assignments that are culturally relevant and inclusive?
- ❑ Does the course include assignments that ask students to investigate real-world problems affecting the communities from which they come?
- ❑ Does the course include readings, activities, and assignments that ask students to critically examine their assumptions about different racial/ethnic groups, and the privileges or disadvantages they accrue by virtue of their race/ethnicity?
- ❑ Does the course include readings, activities, and assignments that ask students to question dominant, racialized norms, as well as inequalities in major social institutions (e.g., education, science, health, law)?

Tone

Imagine yourself as a first-semester college student receiving the syllabus on the first day of class, and ask yourself:

- How does this wording/policy/practice make me feel?
- Is there anything that makes me feel positive, understood, and supported?
- Is there anything that makes me feel negative, judged, or not supported?
- Are any parts of the syllabus confusing? Is anything missing that would be helpful to include?
- Does understanding the syllabus require knowledge that a new-to-Bates student or first-generation college student might not have?