Five Parts of an Inclusive & Learning-Centered Syllabus

Whitney Scott, PhD[1] & Ashley Samson, PhD[2]

[1]Director, Office of Faculty Development, California State University Northridge

[2]Associate Director, Office of Faculty Development, California State University Northridge

Syllabus & Course Checklist

1. Learning Goals & Objectives – Measurable & Assures *Significant* Learning

- ❑ Does it have long-range learning goals (i.e., what you want students to learn 1-5 years) that span **Dee Fink's (2004) taxonomy of significant learning** (do you have objectives focusing on learning how to learn; or cultivating caring/passion about the content; or developing the human dimension)?
- ❑ Are course-level learning objectives, also derived from Fink's taxonomy, **clearly articulated using specific measurable action verbs** (avoiding the words *know, understand, or demonstrate*) regarding what students will be able to do, value, or explain at the end of the course?
- ❑ Is the **course description engaging and question-driven** sparking student curiosity and motivation?

2. Assessment/Assignment Activities – Transparent & Aligned to Objectives

- ❑ Are the assessments/assignments **aligned or connected to each learning objective**?
- ❑ Are assessments/ assignments **especially summative ones, authentic when possible** (e.g., real-life applications, observations, field experiences, portfolios, case studies, presentations)**?**
- ❑ Are all assignments ***transparently designed*** with a description that includes: the larger ***purpose*** of the assignment (e.g., what skills & knowledge used), the ***specific steps*** to be taken, and ***evaluation criteria*** including annotated examples?
- ❑ Does it appear there will be opportunities for low-stakes **formative assessments** with immediate feedback from a variety of sources (e.g., self reflection, peer feedback, and instructor)?
- ❑ Does it appear the instructor will use **classroom assessment techniques** (e.g., muddiest point exit ticket; to gauge how students are mastering the material and will adjust accordingly?
- ❑ Are the assessments adequately **paced and scaffold** throughout the course with **at least one scheduled early in the semester**?
- ❑ Is grading information transparently **included** so that students can easily understand & calculate their current grade throughout the course?
- ❑ Does the grading scheme appear **aligned with the learning objectives & assessments**?

3. Schedule – Motivational & Logical

- ❑ Does it embed motivational hooks such as **beautiful questions** inviting students to use inquiry to navigate the course?
- ❑ Is the schedule **transparent, easy for students to navigate (e.g., chronological), and logically sequenced** highlighting assignment due dates and weekly tasks (e.g., topics, readings, questions, homework)?
- ❑ Does it appear there will be time dedicated to getting to know each other (student-student and instructor-student) and co-constructing ground rules?
- ❑ Are procedures for making up assignments or missed work due to religious holidays included?

The Inclusive & Learning-Centered Syllabus

Whitney Scott, PhD[1] & Ashley Samson, PhD[2]

[1]Director, Office of Faculty Development, California State University Northridge

[2]Associate Director, Office of Faculty Development, California State University Northridge

Syllabus & Course Checklist

4. Inclusive & Promising Learning Environment – Inviting, Supportive with High Expectations & Acceptance of Difference

- ❑ Is the language and tone respectful, **inviting**, and address the student as a competent & engaged learner?
- ❑ Is there evidence the instructor will enthusiastically **support & incorporate all learners' backgrounds, identities, & viewpoints** including when those differ from the instructor?
- ❑ Does the content include alternative perspectives (e.g., readings, speakers, assignments) or present the content through non-dominant perspectives?
- ❑ Does the syllabus communicate **high expectations for learning and project growth mindset confidence** that students can meet them through persistence?
- ❑ Are there indicators that the instructor uses **inclusive pedagogical approaches** (see CSUN's Faculty Development *Teaching Toolkit-Inclusive Teaching Ideas* for specific examples)?
- ❑ Is there encouragement to connect with the instructor about course content and to anonymously reveal classroom climate dynamics?
- ❑ Does it signpost a learning environment that fosters **positive intrinsic motivation,** one that promotes a learning orientation instead of a performance one (i.e., avoids focusing on consequences, punishments & grade points)?
- ❑ Overall, is the syllabus well-organized & easy to navigate allowing students to **continually interact with the document**?

5. Dynamic Activities- Evidence Based & Active Learning

- ❑ Do the class **activities appear to align with learning objectives**; in other words, will the course activities aid students' ability to be successful on course assessments/assignments leading to achievement of the learning objectives?
- ❑ Do class activities show promise to **actively engage students** in a variety of ways verses expecting students to passively listen (e.g., collaborative peer learning; group work; think-pair-share; jigsaw; 4-corners; Pogil; team-based learning; problem-based learning; fishbowl; send-the-problem)?
- ❑ Will course activities foster a **dynamic exchange of knowledge,** including student-as-expert/contributor/teacher, using evidence-based teaching practices?

Does my syllabus align with the CSUN Syllabus Policy?

There are 13 basic requirements that all CSUN syllabi must include such as: contact info, course description, objectives/outcomes, main topics, evaluation methods (e.g., grading criteria, plus/minus system), due dates, revision date if modified, GE or IC outcomes (if applicable), available first class meeting, AND students can print from a single document.

Visit FacDev's *Teaching Toolkit-Syllabus Ideas* to see the full policy & more learning-centered ideas.