

The Science of Syllabi Construction

DR. ROBIN ROY AND DR. JOHN RUYS

FALL 2017 FLEX DAY

The science of syllabi construction

- The purposes of a syllabus
- Preparing an effective syllabus
 - Learner-centered syllabi
 - General tips for preparing effective syllabi
- Syllabus quizzes

The purposes of a syllabus

- The syllabus as a contract (Parkes & Harris, 2002)
- The syllabus as a permanent record of course requirements and content (Parkes & Harris, 2002)
- The syllabus as a learning tool for students (Parkes & Harris, 2002)
- The syllabus as a way to communicate your teaching philosophy and your personality (Richmond, 2017)

Preparing an effective syllabus: Learner-centered syllabi

- Learner-centered syllabi v. teacher-centered syllabi (Cullen & Harris, 2009; Richmond, 2016)
- Student perceptions (Richmond, Slattery, Mitchell, Morgan, & Becknell, 2016)
 - As compared to students who read a teacher-centered syllabus, students who read a learner-centered syllabus:
 - Rated the instructor as having better rapport with students
 - Rated the instructor as being more approachable/personable, creative/interesting, encouraging/caring, enthusiastic, flexible/open-minded, and happy/positive
 - Remembered more elements of the syllabus

Preparing an effective syllabus: Learner-centered syllabi

- Key elements that define a learner-centered approach to syllabi (Cullen & Harris, 2009)
 - An attempt to create community
 - A sharing of power and control of what is learned
 - A focus on assessment tied directly to learning outcomes
- Rubrics for learner-centered syllabi (Cullen & Harris, 2009; Richmond, 2016)
- Examples of teacher-centered v. learner-centered language in a syllabus (Richmond, 2016)

Preparing an effective syllabus: General tips

- Use warm and friendly language (Richmond, 2016)
- Rationale for assignments (Zinn, 2009)
- Share personal experiences (Collins & Miller, 1994), humor, and compassion
- Use of images made no difference in students' impressions of the course and the instructor (Harrington & Gabert-Quillen, 2015)
- Write a longer, more detailed syllabus
 - As compared to students who read a brief syllabus, students who read a more detailed syllabus rated the instructor higher on several characteristics of teacher effectiveness (Saville, Zinn, Brown, & Marchuk, 2010)
 - As compared to students who read short syllabi (6 pages), students who read medium (9 pages) or long (15 pages) syllabi had more positive impressions of the course and the instructor (Harrington & Gabert-Quillen, 2015)

Preparing an effective syllabus: General tips (Richmond, 2017)

- An effective syllabus should include the following:
 - A statement of your teaching philosophy
 - Information about campus resources
 - Assignment descriptions
 - How to succeed in the course
 - Common pitfalls that students encounter
- The syllabus should be made available to students before the first day of class

Syllabus quizzes

- Students who completed a take-home syllabus quiz did better on a subsequent in-class syllabus quiz than students who did not complete the take-home quiz (Raymark & Connor-Greene, 2002)
- Syllabus quizzes should be worded from the perspective of the instructor, such as, “A student comes to you and...” (Richmond, 2017)
- More than one syllabus quiz should be given (Richmond, 2017)

References

- Collins, N. L., & Miller, L. C. (1994). Self-disclosure and liking: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, *116*, 457-475. <http://doi:10.1037/0033-2909.116.3.457>
- Cullen, R., & Harris, M. (2009). Assessing learner-centredness through course syllabi. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *34*(1), 115–125. <http://doi:10.1080/02602930801956018>
- Harrington, C. M., & Gabert-Quillen, C. A. (2015). Syllabus length and use of images: An empirical investigation of student perceptions. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, *1*, 235–243. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/stl0000040>
- Parkes, J., & Harris, M. B. (2002). The purposes of a syllabus. *College Teaching*, *50*(2), 55–61. <http://doi:10.1080/87567550209595875>

References

- Raymark, P. H., & Connor-Greene, P. A. (2002). The syllabus quiz. *Teaching of Psychology, 29*(4), 286-288.
- Richmond, A. S. (2016). A primer for constructing a learner-centered syllabus: One professor's journey. *IDEA, #60*, 1-14. Retrieved from http://www.ideaedu.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/IDEA%20Papers/IDEA%20Papers/PaperIDEA_60.pdf
- Richmond, A. S. (2017, April). *Becoming America's next top model teacher*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Western Psychological Association, Sacramento, CA.
- Richmond, A. S., Slattery, J., Morgan, R., Mitchell, N., & Becknell, J. (2016). Can a learner-centered syllabus change students' perceptions of student-professor rapport and master teacher behaviors? *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology, 2*, 159-168. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/stl0000066>

References

- Saville, B. K., Zinn, T. E., Brown, A. R., & Marchuk, K. A. (2010). Syllabus detail and students' perceptions of teacher effectiveness. *Teaching of Psychology, 37*, 186–189. [http:// doi:10.1080/00986283.2010.488523](http://doi:10.1080/00986283.2010.488523)
- Zinn, T. E. (2009, October). But I really tried! Helping students link effort and performance. *Observer, 22*(8), 27-30.