

Frequent Asked Questions about Course Syllabi

Note: The following suggestions on developing a course syllabus are intended to guide faculty, particularly new instructors, through the process. The underlined word signal possible direct links to university web sites for faculty who put their course syllabus on the web.

What am I required to include in my course syllabi?

First, please be advised that no university policy requires instructors to distribute, either on paper or online, a course syllabus. (Most instructors do, of course. Stay tuned. A change to require a written course syllabus is under review.) That said, the Code of Teaching Responsibility <http://www.msu.edu/unit/facrecds/FacHand/code.html> and the Academic Freedom Report <http://www.vps.msu.edu/SpLife/acfree.htm> of MSU requires instructors to inform their students at the beginning of the semester of the following:

1. Content of the course, which should be consistent with the description of the course as it appears in the university Description of Courses <http://ntweb1.ais.msu.edu/j4100/scripts/CatalogSearch.asp> catalog;
2. Instructional objectives of the course;
3. Grading criteria and method used to determine final course grade;
(Paragraph from Sharon that must be in each syllabus)

In order to pass this section of TE401 (TE402), each subject matter section must be passed with a 2.0 or above. Also, a satisfactory report must be received from the teachers in the field experiences during TE 401 (TE402). The Teacher Education Criteria for Progression to the Internship Policy (<http://ed-web3.educ.msu.edu/TE/team3/forms/instructorhandbook/section3/bCriteriaForProgression.pdf>) requires that students pass each Teacher Education course with a 2.0 or above. Minimum levels of competence, as demonstrated through grades in each content area of this course must be met before a student will be allowed to progress to the internship. If you receive less than a 2.0 in either subject matter section of this course, the lower grade will be the final grade for the course. If you receive less than a 2.0 in the course, the entire course would need to be repeated in order to continue in the Teacher Preparation Program.

(Extra information)

Here you should also include information about how the grade will be calculated. How many points will be assigned to attendance, participation, and the various assignments? How will the points be converted to the four-point scale? Will assignments be accepted past the due date? Will points be deducted for late assignments? Are there any special criteria for written work? Will points be deducted for spelling and grammatical errors?

(I think this statement or one similar would be a good addition.) All assignments and requirements must be completed satisfactorily to receive a passing grade in

the course, including the technology requirement (if applicable) and those assignments related to your field placement.

Policy on Grades of Incomplete – <http://ed-web3.educ.msu.edu/TE/team3/forms/internhandbook/Section2/gPoliceCourses.pdf>

Participation in Team 3 Classes – same as above.

4. Attendance requirement and its relevance, if any, on final course grade and <http://ed-web3.educ.msu.edu/TE/team3/forms/internhandbook/Section2/fProconductpolicy.pdf>

(Instructors could use the entire statement from our handbook at the above site or parts of it. The following paragraphs are from other team handbooks.)

Students are required to attend every class. Any absence requires documentation of reason for absence in order to be excused. More than one absence will result in lowering the student's final grade by the equivalent of one full letter grade (e.g., from 3.5 to 2.5) for each additional absence beyond one. Bona fide emergencies should be discussed with the instructor to explore the possibility of special accommodation and/or arrangements.

The general practice is to allow 2 absences per semester. For TE401/402 the absences are divided between the subject rotations: e.g. one for math and one for science.

5. Schedule office hours, with a provision for arranged office hours to accommodate students whose schedules conflict with the regularly scheduled office hours.

What other information should be included in a course syllabus?

Consider including:

1. Course number and title, section number (if applicable) and scheduled class time;
2. Course Web site (if applicable);
3. Instructor's (and TA's, if applicable) name, office address, phone number and e-mail address;
4. Required and recommended textbooks and course materials;
5. deadlines for all reading, presentations, and written/special assignments;

Assignments Due Policy – <http://ed-web3.educ.msu.edu/TE/team3/forms/internhandbook/Section2/gPoliciceCourses.pdf>

Assignments for your Team 3 courses are expected to be completed in a timely manner. They are due on the date designated by your course instructor. If you have circumstances that prohibit you from turning in an assignment on time, you need to talk to your instructor about your situation and establish an alternative due date if necessary. Turning in an assignment late without prior approval from the course instructor will jeopardize your grade on the assignment.

(The official policy is above, but I think the following has more teeth in it. We would have to agree on the reduced grade part.)

All assignments are expected on time. Late assignments will receive a reduced grade, generally, the equivalent of one letter grade per class session late. Students with bona fine emergencies should contact the instructor as soon as possible to discuss special arrangements in order to avoid grade penalties. For the longer term projects, students having problems completing the assignments by the due date should contact the instructor well in advance. Last minute emergencies (e.g., containing the instructor 2-3 days before a 5-6 week long project is due) on long term projects are generally not considered excusable.

6. Schedule of course topics;
7. Required field trips or rehearsals scheduled outside of regularly scheduled class time;
8. Make-up policy (if applicable) for course work, quizzes, tests and exams;
9. Tardy policy and its relevance, if any, on grades;
10. Test dates and final exam date, scheduled according to the university final exam schedule <http://www.reg.msu.edu/ROInfo/Calendar/FinalExam.asp>
11. common test dates for all sections of a multi-section course, as approved by the unit; and
12. course prerequisites and restrictions.

Technology Requirement – this section should explain which components of the Technology Requirement are included in the course:

TE301	Level I E-mail, Level I World Processing
TE 401/402	Level I Software (Literacy class)
	Level I Spreadsheet (Math class)
	Level II World Wide Web (Science class)

What university policies or procedures should I consider adding to my syllabus?

Consider including any of these statements:

1. Academic Honesty: Article 2.3.3 of the Academic Freedom Report <http://www.vps.msu.edu/SpLife/acfree.htm> states that “The Student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship,

grades, and professional standards.” In addition, the (insert name of unit offering course) adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in General Student Regulations 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades; the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades; and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations. (See Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide <http://www.msu.edu/SpLife/index.htm> and/or the MSU Web site: <http://www.msu.edu>)

Therefore, unless authorized by your instructor, you are expected to complete all course assignments, including homework, lab work, quizzes, tests and exams, without assistance from any source. You are not authorized to use the <http://www.allmsu.com> web site to complete any course work in (insert course number here). Students who violate MSU rules may receive a penalty grade, including but not limited to a failing grade on the assignment or in the course.

2. Accommodations for Disabilities: Students with disabilities should contact the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities to establish reasonable accommodations. For an appointment with a counselor, call 353-9642 (voice) or 355-1293 (TTY).
3. Drops and Adds: The last day to add this course is the end of the first week of classes. The Last day to drop this course with a 100 percent refund and no grade reported is (insert date). The last day to drop this course with no refund and no grade report is (insert date). You should immediately make a copy of your amended schedule to verify you have added or dropped this course.
4. Observing a Major Religious Holiday: You may make up course work missed to observe a major religious holiday only if you make arrangements in advance with the instructor.
5. Participation in a Required Activity: To make up course work missed to participate in a required activity for another course or a university-sanctioned event, you must provide the instructor with adequate advanced notice and a written authorization from the faculty member of the other course or from a university administrator.
6. Commercialized Lecture Notes: Commercialization of lecture notes and university-provided course materials is permitted in this course.**
7. Attendance: Students whose names do not appear on the official class list for this course may not attend this class.
8. Internet: Some professional journals will not consider a submission for publication if the article has appeared on the Internet. Please notify your instructor in writing if you do not want your course papers posted to the

course web site.

9. Disruptive Behavior: Article 2.3.5 of the Academic Freedom Report (AFR) for students at Michigan State University states that “The student’s behavior in the classroom shall be conducive to the teaching and learning process for all concerned.” Article 2.3.10 of the AFR states that “The student has a right to scholarly relationships with faculty based on the mutual trust and civility.” General Student Regulation 5.02
<http://www.vps.msu.edu/SpLife/reg3.htm#5.00> states that “no student shall ... interfere with the functions and services of the University (for example, but not limited to, classes...) such that the function or service is obstructed or disrupted. Students whose conduct adversely affects the learning environment in this classroom may be subject to disciplinary action through the Student Faculty Judiciary process.

(A general statement <Matthew Mayer’s> that I like.)

Policies related to excused absences, cheating/plagiarism, withdrawal, in completes, deferred grades, and final exams can be found in the Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook <http://www.vps.msu.edu/SpLife/index.htm>). As students and faculty at Michigan State University, we are responsible for adhering to these policies. Incidents of plagiarism are taken very seriously and will be pursued. Students are strongly cautioned not to copy any text verbatim on class quizzes, tests, reports, projects, or other class assignments without using appropriate quotations and source citations. Clear evidence of plagiarism will result in a grade of 0.0 on the assignment and a grade of 0.0 in the entire course. For more information of plagiarism, please go to this web page:
<http://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/plagiarism.html>

Counseling Center – Even normal, capable, intelligent, and reasonable person like the members of this class sometimes face situations and problems that they find difficult to deal with by themselves. Team Three’s instructors and coordinators might be able to help. Also, MSU has an Office of Student Affairs and Services, with a Counseling Center, for which the phone number is 355-8270. The Center is at 207 Student Services Building.

Writing Center – Teachers are models and coaches of writing for their students, and must communicate effectively in writing with colleagues, parents and others. For those reasons, teacher candidates are expected to write effectively and conventionally. If you need more help in meeting those expectations than you can get from your instructors and other teacher candidates, try the Writing Center at 300 Bessey Hall, 432-3610. Grammar Hotline: 432-1370.

Can I distribute my course syllabus only online?

Yes and, again, it must be accessible to students at the beginning of the semester.

Once I distribute my course syllabus, can I change it?

Generally, no. The Code of Teaching Responsibility, Academic Freedom Report (AFR) and Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities (GSRR) documents require you to inform your students of specific course information, including grading methods and criteria, at the beginning of the semester. (See the response to Question 1 above.) It's fair to argue that this particular requirement was indented in part to allow students to determine early in the semester if they could comply with the announced course procedures, such as the attendance policy, and meet course deadlines during the semester. If they decide they could not, being informed at the beginning of the semester would allow students time to drop the course and add another. If change is absolutely necessary, however, you should discuss the matter with your unit head. If change is deemed essential, provide your students with adequate written notice and, in fairness, be willing to offer your students options.

The University Committee on Academic Policy is reviewing course syllabus issues during this academic year. Stay tuned.

Is the course syllabus considered a “contract” between my students and me?

No, the course syllabus is not technically a legal contract. That said, it remains your responsibility to meet the course expectations you announced at the beginning of the semester, per the Code of Teaching Responsibility, the AFR, the GSRR and the faculty handbook.

*Tuition covers the costs of course syllabi; therefore, instructors may not include syllabi in course packets that students are required to purchase.

** Note: The Code of Teaching Responsibility requires instructors who permit students to commercialize their class lecture notes to include a statement in their course syllabi that gives such permission. Absent such permission, students may not do so.

Question? Contact the Ombudsman (ombub@msu.edu).