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A Guideline for Educators: Navigating the Course with a Productive Syllabus

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A Guideline for Educators: Navigating the Course with a Productive Syllabus
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This lesson plan was created after completing and attending the ACUE modules/workshops as an ACUE student, enrolled in, Effective Teaching Practices: Cohort B, Fall 2019 – Spring 2020

Purpose: To help students navigate a course, they need an effective and well-structured syllabus. Students rely heavily on syllabus for feedback and guidance. Imagine being stranded on an island, what would you do? Who would you call? Several people would begin searching for help and guidance. If a map to getting off the island became available, what should it look like? Would you be able to understand what the map was telling you? Visualize the perfect map that will successfully assist you with returning home. After completing several ACUE modules and workshops I have developed this lesson plan for which demonstrates my comprehensive understanding of what an effective syllabus should consists. Thus, the lesson plan would serve as a professional development workshop for enhancing an instructor's knowledge to developing a syllabus that is: student friendly, resourceful and engaging.

Topics of discussion:
1. The purpose of a course syllabus.
2. What to include in a syllabus.
3. How to construct a student-friendly syllabus.
4. When and where the syllabus should be distributed.
5. Verifying students understanding and application of the course syllabus.

Objectives: After completing this workshop, instructors should be able to:
- grasp the purpose of a syllabus.
- identify resources needed for student success.
- analyze course assignments and connect to student learning outcomes.
- Recommend and share with other educators what was learned in the workshop.
- Design a syllabus that establishes clarity and understanding for the instructor and student.

Audience: Higher Education (This includes, but is not limited to: Administration, Staff and Faculty)

Occupancy: 30+

Occasion: Includes but is not limited to: Professional Development, Workshops, Newly Educators, Refining Teaching Skills, Training, etc.

Time: 90 minutes

Materials:
- Syllabus: Attendees are encouraged to bring a copy of a syllabus used with a course.
- NOTE: An institution's approved syllabus template is recommended to be shared with audience, if available.

- In-class environment – Projector, PowerPoint (optional), Visual aid (hand-out required)
- Online modality – Video Conference Platform, PowerPoint (optional), Visual aid (hand-out required)

Topic of Discussion:	Feedback:	Time:
Welcome!	a)Welcome audience and introduce workshop. b)Provide an overview of the topics to be discussed during the workshop and objectives aligned.	15 minutes (0 – 15 minutes)
Topic 1: The purpose of a course syllabus.	a)Intro: A syllabus serves as a roadmap, guiding the student from the start of a course to the finish line. Syllabi, outline the overview of a course, requirements for successfully passing the course and expectations. When a clear and effective syllabus is provided, students feel less anxious for the course and demonstrate higher performance. *Activity: Have audience break into groups and discuss the purpose of a syllabus. They must then share with others.*	10 minutes (16 minutes – 25 minutes)
Topic 2: What to include in a syllabus.	*Activity: Have audience break into groups and develop a list of items that should be required and included in a syllabus. They must then share with others.* NOTE: An institution's approved syllabus template is recommended to be shared with audience, if available. a)Intro: Educators are welcome to be creative with their syllabus. When preparing for a new course, the question that follows always runs in the educators thought process, "what should I include in my syllabus?". To help answer this question, it is recommended that the educator looks back to their time in college and identifies things they found helpful from their syllabi. Consider asking the self these questions: 1) Was I able to find resources available to me as a student (i.e., textbook, school resources, scholarships, etc.)? 2) Were assignment guidelines and due dates clear? 3) Were classroom polices listed (make-ups, attendance, etc.) b)PAST – Syllabus were 2-4 pages minimum containing: Instructor info, course background, learning outcomes and objectives, institution and classroom policies, brief assignment descriptions, grading scale and course schedule.	14 minutes (26 minutes – 39 minutes)

d)Required: A syllabus should be ADA compliant, accessible to everyone, states the course background, course outcomes and objectives, instructor's info, institutions/classroom policies, assignment descriptions, grading scale, course schedule.

e) Now, syllabi range from 7+ pages long and include, but are not limited to:

- Personal message from instructor - Salutation message! My name is …. I earned my degree from……..I have been working in this discipline for…. Activities/scholarly research I have conducted include…. Closing message.

- Detailed assignment descriptions – Since day one, students are provided with detailed assignment guidelines and due dates other than "further details will be provided later".

- Color coding – Exams, assignments are color coded to represent importance in course schedule.

- Table by Table (ACUE) course schedules-

Week 5 Module
Due: Identity Collage Presentations

	Monday, Feb 10 – **Friday, Feb 14**	**Due:**
Topics for the Week	Name of topic	**Complete during week 5**
Learning Outcomes	Students will learn…	**Complete during week 5**
Textbook Readings	Ch. 3 Name to topic	**Complete during week 5**
Assignments/ Activities	Assignment #1: Record and Upload *Identity Collage Presentations* Video to Discussion Board #4	**Assignment #1- Fri. 2/14 @ 11:59pm via Canvas**
Online Discussion Board	Discussion Board #5	**Discussion #5 - Sun. 2/16 @ 11:59pm via Canvas**

- Peer tips/feedback for incoming students –
"Tips to help you be successful in this course is attend class meetings."
"Study the PowerPoint slides."

	"Pay attention to the instructors discussion questions as they will be on the exam."	

<u>Topic 3:</u>
How to construct a student-friendly syllabus.
	a)Organization is key with developing a syllabus. A syllabus should be organized in chronological order such as an outline. Ask yourself some questions before designing a student-friendly syllabus:
	  1) Who are my students (Traditional and non-traditional students, new, returning, etc.) ?
	  2) What do I want them to know about this course (assignments, course topics, deadlines, policies, etc.)?
	  3) What are the best practices for attaining student's comprehension of the course?
	Use practices listed below to help you with answering the following questions:
	  • Language – Avoid "you" language and incorporate inclusive language. Inclusive language involves the instructor(s) and students. For example: *"This assignment will help us understand…."*
	
	  • Resources - Share resources available to students for succeeding (i.e., writing center, labs associated with course, scholarships, student services, etc.)
	
	  • Assignment and Outcomes - Make a correlation between assigned assignments and the course outcomes/objectives. Students should be able to identify how an assignment meets the course objectives/course outcomes. This provides knowledge to students about course concepts and how to apply in real life situations.
	
	  • Assignment Descriptions - When creating and describing an assignment to a student, provide real life scenarios to enhance understanding. Student sample assignments from previous students (do not disclose student name) of what is expected should be provided.
	
	  • Tips for being successful in the course from the instructor to the student - Tips can consist of: encouraging student networking, inviting students to office hours, expressing any concerns
		14 minutes
		
		(40 minutes – 53 minutes)

	for the course and to feel comfortable sharing if any accommodations are required. • Calendar – Incorporating a calendar in the syllabus with color coded assignment deadlines, requesting school planners and using the calendar with online classes keeps students focused and avoids procrastination. • Color Coding - Using colors to identify assignments, reading material, exams, etc. is encouraged with course schedules. • Expectations List – A list expressing expectations to be seen from an instructor and student makes both parties feel accountable and aware that they are working together. • Closing – Praise students for taking the course and incorporate a motivational message.	
Topic 4: When and where the syllabus should be distributed.	a)In-Class – This should be determined by the instructor. However, providing students with the syllabus during week one is highly suggested. b)Online – Being that several instructors use online platforms for submitting grades, it is encouraged that instructors also upload the syllabus online for fast and easy access. *Activity: Have audience break into groups and discuss other locations a syllabus should be distributed/available. They must then share with others.*	10 minutes (54 minutes – 63 minutes)
Topic 5: Verifying students understanding and application of the course syllabus.	a)Below are techniques demonstrated by ACUE to assess student understanding and application. • Exit Ticket – ACUE demonstrated the Exit Ticket technique in which students list two detailed pieces of information that they learned for the day and lists concerns/questions they have. This technique can be used to acknowledge students concerns that can be addressed in the future and asses student engagement. • "Working in Pairs" Discussion - ACUE demonstrated the "Working in Pairs" Discussion	12 minutes (64 minutes – 75 minutes)

	technique in which students are asked to work with a classmate and analyze items that are most important to know from the course syllabus. Students are then asked to share with the class and the instructor further elaborates the purpose on the items selected by students. • Syllabus Quiz – Providing a syllabus quiz can push students to read the syllabus and will have a better understanding of what is expected.	
Questions and Answers	a)Answer any questions from audience.	10 minutes (76 minutes – 85 minutes)
Closing	a)Thank audience for attending. b)Leave audience with a motivational message. c)Provide any take-home resources.	5 minutes (86 minutes – 90 minutes)