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Is the Syllabus Passé? Student and Faculty Perceptions

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Abstract: The syllabus is an essential learning resource for students. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of the syllabus but to date, no studies have addressed whether the syllabus needs to continue as a stand-alone document given the information contained within it can be, and often is, shared with students via the learning management system. At conference sessions focused on the syllabus, faculty have questioned the need for essential course information to be conveyed in a document format as technology has progressed. In this study, 396 students and 75 faculty members at a community college and a public university granting undergraduate and graduate degrees completed a survey. Results indicated that both students and faculty agreed that a separate syllabus document is still preferred, with faculty more strongly agreeing. No significant differences among students were found based on race or type of institution, but women as compared to men were more likely to indicate a preference for a separate syllabus. Graduate students, as compared to undergraduate students, were also more likely to prefer a separate syllabus document. No significant differences in terms of the type of institution, years teaching overall or online, or race or gender were found in the faculty sample. Suggestions for future research are provided.

Keywords: syllabus, syllabi, learning management system, student perceptions, faculty perceptions

The syllabus has long been an important document in academia. Initially, the syllabus was simply a list of topics that would be covered in a class (Synder, 2010) but today, the syllabus is a much more comprehensive resource. Based on a review of 15 college teaching resources, Doolittle and Siudzinski (2010) discovered 81 suggested components that professionals recommended be included in the syllabus, 24 of which were identified by at least 50% of the teaching resources. The researchers categorized these 24 components into the following four themes: course information, instructor information, grading information, and policy information. In addition to this core information, Harrington and Thomas (2018) have also suggested that the syllabus include additional components such as a welcome statement from the instructor, rationale for assignments, grading rubrics, resources, and tips for success. They argued that including these elements can serve to motivate and support students.

Despite numerous resources available to guide instructors on what to include in the syllabus and how to include it (Canada, 2013; Cullen & Harris, 2009; Doolittle & Siudzinski, 2010; Harrington & Thomas, 2018; Richmond et al., 2019; Stanny et al., 2015), there is a lack of consistency in what information is included in syllabi. In a descriptive study of 100 general education courses at a mid-sized, mid-western university, Eberly et al. (2001), for example, found that most but not all syllabi included basic core components such as the instructor's name (97%), office hours (89%) required readings (86%), and grading policy (82%). In a review of over 1,000 syllabi gathered from an Internet sample of lower-level undergraduate courses, upper-level undergraduate courses, and graduate-level courses, Doolittle and Siudzinski (2010) also found that most but not all faculty included core essential information such as the course name, instructor name, and required textbook. The syllabi reviewed represented a wide array of disciplines including art and architecture, business, engineering, liberal arts, life sciences, national sciences, physical sciences, and social sciences. However, they also discovered that most syllabi did not include policy information which was another essential component of syllabi.

For example, only 20% of the syllabi reviewed included a missed or late work policy (Doolittle & Siudzinski, 2010). In a more recent study that evaluated 75 syllabi for biology courses, Gin et al. (2021) found that syllabi for upper-level and lower-enrollment courses contained less information than first-year and larger-enrollment courses. In addition, they also found that many instructors did not include content that was required by their institution. The type of information included in the syllabus and how it is presented can vary from course to course.

Recent research has illustrated the benefits of a syllabus that is more visual in nature. For example, in a study conducted by Nusbaum et al. (2021), students recruited from the Psychology Department's research pool at a research university who viewed a visual syllabus were more likely to perceive the professor as kinder, more approachable, and more creative as compared to students who viewed a syllabus that was more text heavy. In another study, Yarosh (2021) found that students enrolled in a Social Problem class at a midsize four-year comprehensive university who viewed a visual syllabus were more likely to score higher on a syllabus quiz as compared to students who viewed a syllabus that was more traditionally formatted as primarily a text document. In this study, images, graphs, and headings of different sizes and colors were used in the visual version of the syllabus. In another interesting study conducted by Kim and Ekachai (2020), undergraduate communication students at a large university in the Midwest were more likely to engage with a course when the syllabus was posted as a website link, with different tabs, rather than being shared as a PDF document. Although faculty can convert text-heavy syllabi into more visual documents, learning management systems such as Blackboard or Canvas also make it possible to convey syllabus information in a visually appealing format.

Gin et al. (2021) noted that the syllabus can be viewed as an equity tool when norms and expectations for the course are explicitly shared on the syllabus. Transparency around expectations has been cited as an excellent way to support student success and reduce equity gaps (Harrington & Thomas, 2018; Winkelmes et al., 2019). Although all students benefit from transparency, students from historically marginalized populations often benefit the most (Winkelmes et al., 2019). When the syllabus contains information that communicates actions students need to take to meet with success, it serves as a roadmap for success (Gannon, 2016; Harrington & Thomas, 2018). These action steps can be especially important for first-year students who are learning to navigate a new academic environment and do not have the benefit of learning how to do so from their parents. Eberly et al. (2001) warned that only communicating syllabus content informally rather than in the syllabus can lead to miscommunications between faculty and students.

Transparent syllabi that contain detailed course information can often become long documents. Although some faculty may be concerned that a long syllabus may not be helpful to students, several studies have shown that students prefer a more detailed syllabus. Saville et al. (2010), for example, found that students enrolled in psychology courses at a large public research university who viewed a 6-page detailed syllabus described the instructor more positively than students who viewed a less detailed 2-page syllabus. Responses on a survey indicated that students thought the instructor of the longer 6-page syllabus was more approachable, creative, encouraging, enthusiastic, flexible, knowledgeable, and prepared. Findings also indicated that students reviewing the more detailed 6-page syllabus thought the instructor was a more effective communicator, promoted critical thinking, and was fairer. In an experimental study, Harrington and Gabert-Quillen (2015) randomly assigned community college students who were recruited from classes offered in the Department of History and Social Sciences to different syllabi conditions. In this study, the short syllabus was 6 pages, the medium-length syllabus was 9 pages, and the long syllabus was 15 pages. Students in the medium and long syllabus conditions, as compared to those in the short syllabus condition, thought the professor was more caring, more helpful, and more motivated. Sixty-six percent of the students preferred a longer syllabus with assignment details, and about a third preferred a shorter syllabus at

the start of the semester with additional information provided via the learning management system later in the semester (Harrington & Gabert-Quillen, 2015).

A common concern among faculty is whether students carefully read the syllabus, and this concern becomes more elevated with longer syllabi. Although students at a public research university have acknowledged that they may not read the syllabus in its entirety, they did report using the syllabus as a resource as needed throughout the course (Lightner & Benander, 2018). Other researchers have also found that students regularly access the syllabus, indicating its' perceived value among students. For example, in a study by Zhang (2016), students in four different classes, two introductory and two advanced, at a research university accessed the syllabus via the learning management system between nine and 14 times per semester on average. In one of the courses, there was a significant correlation between accessing the syllabus and the final course grade, with increases in access being associated with higher final course grades (Zhang, 2016). In a study conducted by Calhoon and Becker (2008), students, who were mostly first and second-year students studying at a small university, also reported regularly referring to their syllabus, with almost half of the students indicating that they reviewed the syllabus on the same day as their class. The students' perceived value of their syllabus was further indicated by the finding that all 112 students in the study reported still having their paper copy of the syllabus during the seventh week of the term, with most (93%) indicating that they kept the syllabus in a class-specific binder or notebook (Calhoon & Becker, 2008).

There is no doubt that the syllabus content is important, but does this content need to be communicated in a separate document or should faculty rely on conveying this critical information via modules within the learning management system instead? This is a question that is frequently asked by faculty attending teaching and learning conferences where discussions about how to use the syllabus as a learning tool take place. Learning management systems are being relied on more and more by both students and faculty (Rhode et al., 2021). Although the Quality Matters (n.d.) standards for higher education indicate the need for key course information such as objectives and assessment to be clearly communicated, the standards are silent on if there is a need for a separate syllabus document. Field (2022) offered that "it is possible to populate the LMS page for a class in such a way that it effectively supplants the syllabus as the thing students check to see what readings and assignments will be due soon" (para 8).

Learning management system platforms allow faculty to share syllabus information in smaller, more manageable chunks (Dean & Fornaciai, 2014). It might be helpful for students to have syllabus content conveyed in different modules such as an instructor welcome, assignment information, and policies rather than in one document. Consistency across courses, however, is important because students have expressed frustration with the varied ways in which faculty use the learning management system (Govender and Govender, n.d.; Steel, 2007). An online syllabus can also be interactive in nature, providing students with numerous opportunities to click on resource links (Zeytoon & Moosavian, 2017). In some cases, colleges or universities could even populate the content within the modules to ensure that essential information is communicated consistently across the college. For example, required institutional policy information could be automatically uploaded into every class learning management course shell.

There is currently no research on student and faculty perceptions on whether syllabi content should continue to be shared as a separate document given learning management system capabilities. The only study that was somewhat related to this question was the one conducted by Harrington and Gabert-Quillen (2015). In their study, approximately two-thirds of the 149 community college student participants indicated that they preferred a syllabus with assignment details rather than receiving the details later in the semester via other ways such as in the learning management system (Harrington & Gabert-Quillen, 2015).

There are several reasons why it is important to explore the continued perceived need for a separate syllabus document. First, faculty spend a significant amount of time developing or revising syllabi and then must spend even more time inputting this same information into the learning management system. Faculty time is limited, and time spent on these syllabus activities takes time away from other important planning tasks. Another concern is the errors that may occur when faculty transfer information from the syllabus to the learning management system. Many students and faculty members have discovered discrepancies with assignment descriptions or due dates on the syllabus and in the learning management system, for example. It is also time-consuming for faculty to update the essential course information in two places if adjustments are needed. When discrepancies occur, students may find this contradictory information confusing and frustrating.

Decisions about the use of important documents such as the syllabus are best made when based on data. Abbott et al. (2022) have argued for further research on the syllabus to determine best practices. One often underutilized data point is student preference. Understanding what students prefer through research studies can be helpful to faculty as they determine the best way to communicate key course information. The purpose of the current study was to investigate student and faculty perceptions about whether a separate syllabus is still needed given the tools available within learning management systems such as Blackboard and Canvas. The research questions were as follows:

- R1: Do students and faculty believe a separate syllabus is still necessary?
- R2: Do faculty and students differ in their perceptions about the need for a separate syllabus?
- R3: Do student preferences for a separate syllabus vary based on demographics?
- R4: Do faculty beliefs about the need to create a separate syllabus vary based on demographics?

Method

Students and faculty from two higher education institutions in the Northeast were invited to complete a survey about online learning tools and this survey included an item about preference for the syllabus to be a separate document. Details related to participants, the survey, and the procedure used in the current study are provided in the method section.

Settings

Two different Hispanic-Serving Institutions in the Northeast served as the setting for this study. IRB approval was granted at both institutions. Students and faculty from both institutions were invited to participate in this study. One institution was a community college located in a suburban area. This college offers over 70 associate degree academic programs and has over 10,000 students enrolled annually with most students (56%) attending part-time. The student population is diverse with 34% identifying as Hispanic, 27% as White, 16% as Asian, and 12% as Black. Over half of the student population identified as women (56%). There were approximately 140 full-time faculty and almost 500 part-time faculty employed at this college, with the majority of faculty identifying as White.

The second institution was an urban public university that grants bachelor's and graduate degrees. This institution offers over 50 undergraduate programs and 30 graduate programs and has enrolled approximately 5,000 students each year. In terms of race, 41% of the students identified as Hispanic, 20% as White, 8% as Black, and 2% as Asian. Sixty-two percent of the student population identified as women. There were over 200 full-time faculty and over 400 part-time faculty employed at this university, most of whom identified as White.

Participants

A total of 471 individuals accessed either the faculty survey (75) or the student survey (396). The first item on the student and faculty surveys was the informed consent and a total of 465 participants (74 faculty and 391 students) consented and answered survey questions.

Student Participants

A total of 396 students clicked on the survey link and 391 (98.74%) consented to participate. Of these participants, 284 answered a question about which school they attended. Most attended a community college (211 or 74.3%) while 73 or 25.7% indicated that they attended a public university. A total of 288 students responded to a question about the type of student they were, with 230 indicating they were undergraduate students and 58 indicating they were graduate students. See Table 1 for more specific year-in-school data. As indicated in Table 2, student participants represented a wide variety of academic majors.

In terms of race, 34% were White, 28% Hispanic or Latinx, 18% Asian, 12% Black or African-American, 7% two or more races, and 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native. Of those responding to a question on gender, 70% identified as women, 27% as men, 2% as non-binary, and 1% preferred to self-describe.

Table 1. Year in School: Student Survey.

Year in School	Number	Percent
First-year student	104	36.1%
Sophomore	77	26.7%
Junior	28	9.7%
Senior	21	7.3%
Graduate student	58	20.1%

Table 2. Academic Major.

Major	Number	Percent
Business	38	14.7 %
Health/Allied Health	36	13.9 %
Leadership	31	12.0 %
Science	29	11.2 %
Psychology	18	6.9 %
Computer Science	16	6.2 %
Education	14	5.4 %
Liberal Arts	12	4.6 %
Political Science	12	4.6 %
Criminal Justice	11	4.2 %
Engineering	9	3.5 %
Art	6	2.3 %
English	6	2.3 %
Paralegal	4	1.5 %
Social work	4	1.5 %

Communications	3	1.2 %
Fashion	2	0.8 %
Language	2	0.8 %
Sociology	2	0.8 %
Fire Science	1	0.4 %
History	1	0.4 %
Music	1	0.4 %
Women and Gender	1	0.4 %

Faculty Participants

A total of 75 faculty members started the survey and 74 (98.6%) consented to participate. Fifty-three (77.9%) of the faculty participants worked at a community college and 15 (22.1%) worked at a public university. Most faculty reported teaching undergraduate students (82%) while 7% reported teaching graduate students and 11% reported teaching both undergraduate and graduate students.

Sixty-one faculty respondents indicated their race while 10 preferred not to answer. Of those who responded to this question, most of the faculty members were White (79%), with 10% being Latinx, 7% Asian, 3% identifying as two or more races, and 1% Black. None of the faculty who completed the survey identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native or Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. Of the 64 faculty who responded to the question on gender, 63% identified as women, 36% as men, and 1% as non-binary.

The average number of years of teaching experience was 17.1 (SD = 10.7), with a range from 1-52 years. The average number of years of online teaching experience was 4.78 (SD = 4.52), with a range from zero to 20. Most faculty indicated a moderate (54%) or high (36%) level of proficiency with using Blackboard or Canvas tools. Faculty represented a variety of disciplines as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Faculty Discipline.

Discipline	Number	Percent
Science	8	11.3%
Computer Science	7	9.9%
English	7	9.9%
Criminal Justice/Law	6	8.5%
Education/Leadership	6	8.5%
Business	5	7.0%
Psychology	5	7.0%
ESL	4	5.6%
History	4	5.6%
Math	4	5.6%
Nursing	4	5.6%
Art/Dance/Theatre	3	4.2%
Health	3	4.2%
Language	2	2.8%
Engineering	1	1.4%
Public Speaking	1	1.4%
Sociology	1	1.4%

Procedure

After approval from the Institutional Research Board was obtained, students and faculty at two institutions were invited to participate. Email communication was used to recruit participants. At the community college, the Vice President of Academic Affairs emailed full and part-time faculty, inviting them to participate and encouraging faculty to also invite their students to participate. At the public university, the director of Online Learning emailed faculty who had recently engaged with their department and invited them to participate and encouraged them to invite their students to participate. The survey was open for over a month during the Fall 2022 semester and one reminder email was sent to faculty approximately a week after the initial email.

Survey

There were two versions of the survey, one for students and one for faculty. Qualtrics was the survey tool used. Students were asked to specify their level of agreement with the following statement using a 7-point Likert scale, with 7 indicating strongly agree: "I would prefer to have a separate syllabus document even if the content of the syllabus can be found in Blackboard or Canvas.". In addition, students were asked to respond to demographic questions on the type of college attended, year in school, race, gender, and major.

Faculty participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a similar question: "I believe it is important to create a syllabus document even if the components of the syllabus are infused into a Learning Management System such as Blackboard or Canvas." Similar to the student survey, a 7-point Likert scale was used, with 7 indicating strongly agree. Faculty participants were also asked to respond to several demographic questions on the type of college, race, gender, and teaching experience.

Data Analysis

Frequency data related to demographic data for both students and faculty was compiled. Descriptive data, including the means and standard deviations, for the student and faculty survey items were also calculated. To determine if students and faculty differed in terms of their perception of the syllabus as a separate document, a t-test was conducted. Additional t-tests and an ANOVA were conducted to determine if there were differences based on student and faculty demographic variables such as race, gender, and type of college. Jamovi, an open-access statistical tool, was used to conduct these analyses.

Results

The results section is organized by research questions. The findings from descriptive and inferential statistical analyses are shared. Where helpful, tables are used to summarize findings.

R1: Do students and faculty believe a separate syllabus is still necessary?

Based on survey data, most students still preferred to have a separate syllabus. The average score for students responding to the Likert question, I would prefer to have a separate syllabus document even if the content of the syllabus can be found in Blackboard or Canvas, was 6.02 (SD = 1.28) on a 7-point scale with seven indicating strongly agree. Sixty-two percent of students who responded to this question strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed with this statement. These results are based on a total of 352 student responses.

Survey data also indicated that most faculty still believed it was important to create the syllabus as a separate document. The average score for faculty responding to the Likert question, I believe it is important to create a syllabus document even if the components of the syllabus are infused into a learning management system such as Blackboard or Canvas., was 6.48 (SD = 1.16) on a 7-point scale with seven indicating strongly agree. Ninety-four percent of faculty who responded to this question strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed with this statement. These results are based on a total of 71 faculty responses. See Table 4 for student and faculty descriptive data on this survey item about preference for the syllabus to be a separate document.

Table 4. Descriptive Data on Survey Item about Preference for Syllabus as Separate Document

Participant	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	M	SD
Student[1]								6.02	1.28
n	106	82	30	58	18	39	19		
%	30%	23%	9%	16%	5%	11%	5%		
Faculty[2]								6.48	1.16
n	54	9	4	0	3	1	0		
%	76%	13%	6%	0%	4%	1%	0%		

[1] I would prefer to have a separate syllabus document even if the content of the syllabus can be found in Blackboard or Canvas.
[2] I believe it is important to create a syllabus document even if the components of the syllabus are infused into a Learning Management System such as Blackboard or Canvas.

R2: Do faculty and students differ in their perceptions about the need for a separate syllabus?

To determine if there was a significant difference between student and faculty perceptions of the syllabus as a separate syllabus, I conducted an independent samples t-test. There was a significant difference between student and faculty perceptions about their preference for a separate syllabus, t (421) = 2.81, p = .005, d= .37. The effect size was small to moderate. Faculty were more likely (M = 6.48; SD = 1.16) than students (M= 6.02; SD = 1.28) to indicate agreement with a statement about the importance of a separate syllabus, but as indicated previously, survey data showed that both students and faculty do believe it is important to have the syllabus as a separate document.

R3: Do student preferences for a separate syllabus vary based on demographics?

I conducted an independent samples t-test to determine if community college and university students differed in terms of their preference for a separate syllabus. There was no significant difference between community college students (M = 6.02; SD = 1.24) and university students (M =6.26; SD = 1.13) in terms of their preference for a separate syllabus document, t (282) = -1.463, p = .145, d = -.19. The effect size was small.

I then conducted another independent samples t-test to determine if there was a difference in preference for a separate syllabus between undergraduate and graduate students. There was a significant difference between undergraduate students and graduate students, t (285) = 2.35, p = .019, d = .35. The effect size was small to moderate. Graduate students (M =6.42; SD = .73) were more likely than undergraduate students (M = 6.00; SD = 1.32) to agree with a statement that they preferred a separate syllabus even though the content could be incorporated into learning management systems such as Blackboard or Canvas.

To determine if student preferences for a separate syllabus varied based on gender and race, I conducted an independent samples t-test and an ANOVA. Because too few of the survey respondents indicated binary or prefer to self-describe as responses for the gender question, I only included students identifying as women and men in the statistical analysis. Results of an independent samples t-test revealed there was a significant difference between students identifying as women and students identifying as men in terms of their preference for a separate syllabus, t (282) = 2.79, p = .006, d = .37. Women (M = 6.22; SD 1.14) were more likely than men (M = 5.77; SD = 1.43) to indicate a preference for the syllabus to be a separate document. This was a small to moderate effect.

I conducted an ANOVA to determine if there were differences between students of different racial backgrounds in terms of their preference for a separate syllabus document. The following racial categories were used: Asian (M = 6.33; SD = 1.11), Black (M = 6.06; SD= 1.30), Latinx (M = 5.95; SD = 1.36), White (M = 6.08; SD = 1.10), and two or more races (M = 5.89; SD = 1.70). There was only one student who identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native so it was not statistically appropriate to include this respondent in the analysis. Results indicated there were no significant differences based on student race, F (4, 262) = .79, p = .532, η^2 = .01. The effect size was small.

R4: Do faculty beliefs about the need to create a separate syllabus vary based on demographics?

To answer this research question, I conducted an independent samples t-test to determine if faculty perceptions about the need for a separate syllabus differed based on whether they were teaching at a community college or in a university setting. Results indicated that there was no significant difference between faculty teaching in a community college (M = 6.50; SD = 1.11) and faculty teaching in a university setting (M = 6.53; SD = 1.13) on their perceptions related to creating a separate syllabus, t (65) = -0.102, p = .919, d = -.030. The effect size was small.

Next, I explored whether faculty perceptions of the syllabus varied based on overall years of teaching and experience teaching online. I grouped years of teaching and years of online teaching into the following categories: less than 5 years, 6-15 years, and 16 years or more. I then conducted two ANOVAs to determine if there were significant differences in the perceptions related to creating a separate syllabus document in terms of years of overall teaching and in terms of years of online teaching experience. There was no significant difference in faculty's perceived need to create a separate syllabus based on overall teaching experience, F (2, 68) = 2.19, p = .12, η^2 = .06. The effect size was small. The average response was 6.67 (SD = .71) for faculty teaching 5 years or less, 6.81 (SD = .75) for faculty teaching between 6 and 15 years, and 6.32 (SD = 1.11) for faculty teaching 16 years or more. There was also no significant difference in faculty perceived need to create a separate syllabus document based on the number of years teaching online, F (2, 68) = .421, p =.658, η^2 = .01. This was a small effect size. The average responses were 6.58 (SD = .92) for faculty teaching online for 5 years or less, 6.65 (SD = 1.00) for faculty teaching online between 6 and 15 years, and 6.00 (SD = 1.41) for faculty teaching online for 16 years or more.

Finally, I conducted a series of analyses related to gender and race to determine if faculty perception of the syllabus varied based on these demographic characteristics. For the question on gender, there was only one binary response, so it was not appropriate to include this respondent in the statistical analyses. I conducted an independent samples t-test with those indicating women and men as their gender to determine if there were gender differences in terms of faculty perception about the importance of creating a separate syllabus. There was no significant difference between women (M= 6.54; SD = 1.00) and men (M = 6.17; SD = 1.53) in terms of their response to this survey item on the syllabus as a separate document, t (60) = 1.14, p = .259, d = .30. This was a small to moderate effect size. Due to the small number of faculty in all racial categories other than White, an ANOVA

was not appropriate. Instead, I re-coded faculty race as White or Faculty of Color. Faculty of color included faculty who identified as Black, Latinx, Asian, or with two or more races. None of the faculty who responded identified as Native American or Alaskan Native. I then conducted an independent samples t-test to determine if there was a difference between how White faculty (M = 6.38; SD = 1.25) and Faculty of Color (M= 6.85; SD =.56) responded to the question about if they believed it was important to create a separate syllabus. There was no significant difference found, t (59) = -1.32, p =.19, d = -.413. The effect size was small to moderate.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine student and faculty perceptions of the need for a separate syllabus given the content could be and often is incorporated into learning management systems. Overall, both faculty and students agreed that having a separate syllabus is still important, but faculty more strongly believed this was the case. Although this is the first study exploring student and faculty perceptions about the need for the syllabus as a separate document, it is consistent with a related finding reported by Harrington and Gabert-Quillen (2015). Based on their results, 66% of community college students reported preferring to have a longer syllabus with all essential details in one place rather than a shorter syllabus with additional information shared later via the learning management system (Harrington & Gabert-Quillen, 2015).

The current research study found no significant differences in student responses based on the type of college attended or race. There were, however, significant differences in preference for a separate syllabus based on gender and type of student. Women were more likely than men to indicate a preference for the syllabus as a separate document. Graduate students, as compared to undergraduate students, were also more likely to prefer a separate syllabus document. There were no significant differences in faculty responses based on which institution they taught at, years of overall teaching, years of teaching online, gender, or race.

The findings from this study indicated that the desire for a separate syllabus was consistent across most student and faculty demographics except that women and graduate students were more likely to prefer a separate syllabus. Although previous researchers have not identified gender differences in terms of their perceptions of the syllabus, some researchers have noted that traditional and nontraditional students have viewed the syllabus differently. For example, findings from a study conducted by Becker and Calhoon (1999) indicated that nontraditional students were more likely to attend to titles and authors of readings, the kinds of assignments, and course goals and objectives as compared to traditional students. Traditional students, on the other hand, were more likely to attend to policies about late assignments and academic dishonesty in addition to holidays.

From a generational perspective, undergraduate students may be more comfortable than graduate students with accessing course material electronically. Although Lai and Hong (2015) did not find many generational differences in technology overall, they did report that digital immigrants, defined as students over 30, were less likely than generation next, those under 20, and net generation students, those 20-30, to use technology tools such as their mobile phone for university work. Only 50% of digital immigrants reported using their mobile phones for university activities, while 77% of generation next students and 76.8% of net generation students reported doing so. Thus, one potential explanation for this finding could be that graduate students may not be as comfortable accessing syllabus information electronically through the learning management system.

Undergraduate students, however, may prefer mobile friendly access to important information. It is possible that undergraduate students may not be as likely to prefer a separate syllabus document because it is often not as easy to access via their phone. Chaw and Tang (2017) found that only 23.3% of undergraduate students reported using a computer as their main device for accessing

the learning management system. In a study conducted with mostly undergraduate students, with seven of the nine courses used to recruit participants being undergraduate courses, Ng et al. (2020) found that 91.1% of students surveyed indicated that they accessed the learning management system with their mobile devices. Ng et al. (2020) did not conduct an analysis exploring potential differences between undergraduate and graduate students, so it is not known if there were significant differences between undergraduate and graduate students. Faculty often upload a PDF version of a syllabus to the learning management system and a PDF is typically not mobile-friendly. Kim and Ekachai (2020) found that undergraduate students were more likely to engage with interactive tabs as compared to a PDF document of the syllabus.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations of this study that need to be considered when interpreting the findings. The main limitation relates to generalizability. A convenience sample was used. Although descriptive data illustrates there was diversity in terms of many demographic variables such as student major, faculty discipline, student race, and to some extent gender across student and faculty respondents, it is not possible to determine if the perceptions of the students and faculty in this study would be similar to students and faculty who did not participate in the study.

Another limitation of this study is the reliance on one survey question for students and one similar item for faculty. Having only limited quantitative data makes it difficult to fully understand the student and faculty perception. Future research could include a qualitative component, asking students and faculty to explain the reasons behind their preferences. Because students often receive content from the syllabus and the learning management system in different ways depending on how instructors opt to share this information, their perceptions are likely based on their prior experiences and how effectively their faculty have used these resources. Future researchers could design a study where students are shown an exemplar stand-alone syllabus and an exemplar learning management course shell where the syllabus was incorporated as modules and then asked about which they preferred and why.

Conclusion

Based on the findings from this study, the syllabus is not passé. Both student and faculty respondents indicated they preferred a separate syllabus even though the components of the syllabus could be, and often are, incorporated into modules within learning management systems. Faculty, however, had higher levels of agreement that the syllabus be a separate document than students. Women and graduate students also were more likely to prefer a separate syllabus. There were no significant differences found in terms of student perception based on the type of institution attended or race. There were also no significant differences found in terms of faculty perception based on the type of institution where they taught, race, gender, years of overall teaching, and years of teaching online.

As technology continues to advance and students access information in different ways, it will be important for this research question to be revisited. Today, these findings indicate students and faculty still prefer the syllabus to be a separate document, but this of course may change over time. The current finding that undergraduate students were less likely than graduate students to indicate a preference for the syllabus as a separate document may be evidence that perceptions are beginning to shift. Given the importance of the syllabus, further research exploring the best way to efficiently leverage this document as a teaching tool and learning resource is warranted.

Although it may not seem problematic to share essential course information with students via both a separate syllabus document and by incorporating the syllabus content into the learning

management system, this approach can be taxing on faculty time. Time spent on duplicative actions means there is less faculty time for other important teaching and learning activities. In addition, it is possible that the process of transferring information from the syllabus document to the various modules in the learning management system can lead to errors and discrepancies that students may find confusing and frustrating. Based on the findings of this current study, it seems these duplicative efforts continue to be warranted at this time, but perhaps with time and effective and consistent integration of the syllabus components into learning management systems, this may not be the case in the future.

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