Student Centered Syllabi

Viewing Our Syllabi with an Equity Lens

presented by CIC Chair Corinna Evett
How long has it been since we have taken a moment to consider

- Ourselves as educators?
- Our own prejudices?
- Our own preconceived notions about students?
- What messages we send through our syllabi?
What is syllabus review?

- Inquiry tool
- Teaching assessment
- Equity-minded practice

Harmony by Alima Newton
Why engage in a syllabus review?

▷ Key feature of each academic course
▷ Contract between students and the professor
▷ Record of what courses cover & how students outcomes and performance are evaluated
▷ Learning tools
▷ Communication devices
▷ Rich source
Syllabus Review Guide

➤ Please ponder the following:

➤ Do I know my syllabus?

➤ Please use a sticky note to respond to the five questions on the Google Jamboard.

➤ Whom does my syllabus serve?

➤ Please use the same color sticky note as the question being asked to respond to the three questions on the Google Jamboard.

➤ How does my syllabus demonstrate equity, especially for racially minoritized students?
Deconstruction Time

➢ Deconstruct: Let’s take a few moments to deconstruct your syllabus in terms of the different audiences it serves. Please read through your syllabus and

➢ Write INSTITUTION next to the sections required/expected by your institution.

➢ Write DEPARTMENT next to the sections required/expected by your department.

➢ Write ACADEMIC FIELD next to the sections that demonstrate what’s legitimate or valued by your academic field.

➢ Write Faculty next to the sections that share your classroom’s rules/policies, the relationship you expect to have with students, and what it takes to be a legitimate student.

➢ Observe: Note any ideas, ah-ha moments, or observations that come to mind as you deconstruct your syllabus.

➢ If you do not have a syllabus to use for this activity, please feel free to evaluate my syllabus that is still a work in progress: English 242 Syllabus
Reflection Time

- Reflect: Count the number of sections for each audience type (Institution, Department, Academic Field, & Faculty) and note the totals.

- Are you surprised by the result? Why or why not?

- What does the number of sections for each audience type suggest about for whom your syllabus is written?

- What did you learn from this part of the syllabus review?
Language Matters

- **Tone**
- **Welcoming**
- **Demystify**
- **Supportive**
- **Language**
- **Engage, validate, include, create, & respect**
- **Avoid deficit thinking & punitive language**

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Welcoming</th>
<th>Unwelcoming</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Office Hours</strong></td>
<td>Office Hours: 233 Jones Hall MWF 10:00-10:50 AM; TR 9:30-10:30 AM <a href="mailto:jsmith@hotmail.com">jsmith@hotmail.com</a> I welcome you to contact me outside of class and student hours. You may email me, call my office, or contact the department and leave a message.</td>
<td>Office Hours: 233 Jones Hall MWF 10:00-10:50 AM; TR 9:30-10:30 AM <a href="mailto:jsmith@hotmail.com">jsmith@hotmail.com</a> If you need to contact me outside of office hours, you may email me, call my office, or contact the department and leave a message.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Course Goals</strong></td>
<td>Some of the specific skills I hope you will obtain in this course are listed below. Being a critical consumer of information about mental processes and behavior is important; all of these activities will help you become one, and it is my hope that you will use the skills in your daily life.</td>
<td>Some of the specific skills you should obtain in this course are listed below. Because you are not yet a critical consumer of information about mental processes and behavior, all of these activities will help you become one, and if you are motivated enough, use the skills in your daily life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attendance</strong></td>
<td>You should attend every class but extenuating circumstances arise that can make this difficult. If you cannot attend a class, please let me know. If circumstances make you miss more than 3 classes during the semester, you may be overextended. I ask that you come see me to discuss your options.</td>
<td>I expect you to attend every class. If you cannot attend a class, please let me know. If circumstances make you miss more than 3 classes during the semester, I will drop you from the class roster in accordance with the college’s attendance policy.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Class Participation</strong></td>
<td>All of us in the class, you, me, your peers, have a responsibility to create an environment in which we can all learn from each other. I expect everyone to participate in class so that we can all benefit from the insights and experiences that each person brings.</td>
<td>Come prepared to actively participate in this course. This is the best way to engage you in learning the material (and it makes the lectures more interesting).</td>
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Adapted from Harnish et al. (2011)
How does my syllabus demonstrate equity, especially for racially minoritized students?

- Representing
  - Cultural relevancy & inclusivity
  - Experiential knowledge
  - Relatability & practicality

- Deconstructing
  - Critical examination of assumptions & privilege
  - Critical examination of history & experiences of minoritized people
  - Critical examination of dominant norms & social inequities
Additional Equity-minded Ideas to Consider

- Personalized Introduction
- Contact methods & availability
- Student input
- Resources/Student Services/Textbooks
Equity-minded Syllabi Practices Example

The following sample syllabus comes from the University of Southern California, Center for Urban Education, Rossier School of Education “Syllabus Review Guide for Equity-minded Practice”
Deconstruction Time 2.0

Deconstruct: Let’s take a few moments to deconstruct your syllabus in terms of equity-minded practices. For this exercise, please note where your syllabus does and does not exemplify equity-minded practices. To this end, please read through your syllabus and

- Write DEMYSTIFYING next to the sections that you believe exemplify this practice and DEMYSTIFYING—next to where you do not think you demonstrate this practice.

- Write WELCOMING next to the sections that you believe exemplify this practice and WELCOMING—next to where you do not think you demonstrate this practice.

- Write VALIDATING next to the sections that you believe exemplify this practice and VALIDATING—next to where you do not think you demonstrate this practice.

- Write CREATING A PARTNERSHIP next to the sections that you believe exemplify this practice and CREATING A PARTNERSHIP—next to where you do not think you demonstrate this practice.

- Write REPRESENTING next to the sections that you believe exemplify this practice and REPRESENTING—next to where you do not think you demonstrate this practice.

- Write DECONSTRUCTING next to the sections that you believe exemplify this practice and CREATING A DECONSTRUCTING—next to where you do not think you demonstrate this practice.

Observe: Note any ideas, ah-ha moments, or observations that come to mind as you deconstruct your syllabus.
Reflection Time 2.0

Reflect: Count the number of sections in your syllabus that demonstrate and do not demonstrate equity-minded practices of Demystifying, Welcoming, Validating, Creating a Partnership, Representing, & Deconstructing.

Are you surprised by the result? Why or why not?

Which of the practices for equity-minded syllabi are generally present? Which are generally absent?
Breakout Room Time

➤ Each member of your group should select an equity-minded practice and share one instance where it is demonstrated and one instance where it is not demonstrated with the group.

➤ As you and your group members share, please discuss how and why you believe the example is one that does or does not exemplify the stated equity-minded practice.

➤ Please also discuss the following: Imagine you are a student reading your syllabus on the first day of class.

➤ Share whether or not you feel that the professor is willing to provide opportunities and resources for you to do well in the course as well as to gain the knowledge and skills you need to success in subsequent courses. Why or why not?

➤ Next, share whether or not you, as a student, feel that the instructor assumes that you want to learn and cares for your development as scholars and human beings? Why or why not?

➤ Share your general reflections
What’s Next?

Based on the inquiry you have done here today, please post your ideas to the three questions on the “What will I do now?” Google Jamboard.
Please Ponder

- Syllabus review is not about copying the “good” syllabus.
  - Consider your own tone and comfort levels
  - Process of self-reflection
  - Continuous review
  - Identify and employ new and/or best practices
- Syllabus review is not about removing policies and rules from your syllabus.
  - Policies and rules are not automatically “bad”
  - More holistic view
  - Do classroom policies and rules overshadow other syllabi content, such as support services and resources?
  - What tone or beliefs are communicated to student in the way policies and rules are written?
  - If you were a student reading the polices and rules, what impression would have of the professor and the class in general?
Works Cited & Consulted

- ASCCC Fall Plenary Session 2020 Breakout: “Anti-racism Best Practices for Student Services Educators”
- *Association of American Colleges & Universities* “Five Principles for Enacting Equity by Design”
- DeAnza College “Student-centered Syllabus” Examples
- Harnish & Bridges “Effect of Syllabus Tone: Students’ Perceptions of Instructor and Course”
- Metropolitan Center for Urban Education “Culturally Responsive Classroom Management”
- USC Center for Urban Education Syllabus Review Guide for Equity-minded Practice

- Page 23 has a number of additional resources related to racial/ethnic equity in higher education and more about the purpose of the course syllabi.
That’s All Folks!

THANK YOU for listening
- ANY QUESTIONS?

Learn by David Cohoe