Syllabus Recommendations – FPD – FINAL DRAFT

Approved by FPD 11/16/22

A. Class Syllabus

The class syllabus serves as an overall introduction to the class and the instructor, a resource for students to refer back to throughout the semester, and a document that sets the tone and expectations for the entire class. The class syllabus is not a binding legal document, but rather a valuable tool for demystifying course expectations and the college experience for students of a variety of backgrounds and needs. This document is often the first one provided to students in a class and is one students can refer back to when challenges arise.

The intention of a syllabus should be to invite students into an inclusive and welcoming learning environment. Punitive and/or deficit-minded language and tone in a syllabus can interfere with trust and create additional barriers for students. This type of language can communicate to students that the instructor does not trust them and does not believe they are capable of being successful in the class. Trust between students and instructors is essential for students to be able to undertake the risk of learning and reaching out when help is needed.

Ultimately, the purpose of a syllabus is:

1. To set expectations of the class in terms of assignments, grading, outcomes, and what students need to do.
2. To set expectations of the class in terms of the role of the instructor and their availability to students.
3. To provide resources and support for students to refer back to as challenges arise.
4. To demystify the process of being in a college course and being a college student.
5. To serve as a document for other educational institutions to be able to assess the transferability of the class.

Although the requirements of each instructor and each class are different, and all instructors' syllabi are subject to change as necessary during the course of a semester, there are some basic components which are required through ACCJCC Accreditation standards and/or the Sierra College Faculty Contract. Other basic components are highly recommended as part of best practices. Both will be outlined below.

Required Elements

The following three elements are required by ACCJCC Accreditation standards and/or SCFA contract:

- For online classes: Faculty Response Time.
  - "Faculty/Student Interaction for Online Instruction
    Online faculty should be online for a minimum of four out of seven days per week and at least three hours per week. Online instruction shall include regular and

substantive interactions between students and faculty. In most instances, students should be able to get a response from faculty within a reasonable amount of time which must also be defined in the syllabus for the course."[1]

- CLSOs – Course Student Learning Outcomes (CSLOs) can be essential tools for assessing student achievement and improving teaching and learning. To meet ACCJCC Accreditation standards, the syllabus must include the official CSLOs of the course as outlined in current curriculum and accessible through the class schedule CRNs. These CSLOs cannot be altered by individual instructors in the syllabus, but must only be revised and approved through the formal curriculum process.[2]
- By the end of the first week of class, copies (preferably electronic) of all syllabi must be submitted to your division office and must contain the official course student learning outcomes (CSLOs). This is an accreditation requirement. Check with your division for specific policies and procedures. Documents may be submitted as .pdf, .doc or .docx, .html, .rtf, or .xps files.

Basic Information to be included (Highly recommended):

While not dictated by law, contract, or accreditation standards, there are other elements highly recommended to be included in a syllabus to best meet the purpose and intention of this type of document. Below, these recommended elements to be included in the syllabus are broken down into 3 key categories: Class Information, Class Policies, and Student Resources.

Class Information

The class syllabus should provide students with an overall understanding of the structure of the course. Information to be included:

1. Basic Course Information - Course name and number, location/day(s)/time(s), CRN, catalog description, CSLOs, and add/drop deadlines for the specific class
2. Faculty information – name, office location, student hours, ways to contact you (phone number, email address, etc)
   a. Best practices: Consider including a communication plan, making it clear to students how to reach you and how soon they should expect to hear back from you (required for online classes).[3] Clearly explain what support they can expect from you as their instructor.
   b. Demystifying: Explain to your students what student hours are, what their intended purpose is, how they are to be utilized, and what benefits they provide to their success as students.

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[1] SCFA Contract Article 21.1 22-26

[2] For more on CSLOs please see the SLO Page: https://www.sierracollege.edu/about-sierra-college/planning-and-governance/student-learning-outcomes-slos/

[3] SCFA Contract 22.1.25-26

  c. Humanizing: rather than just listing your name, consider including a photograph, a brief introduction to yourself, and/or including a statement about your teaching philosophy

  d. Accessibility Statement: The syllabus can be a place for instructors to communicate to their students their dedication to making their course as accessible as possible. Consider using the following language to guide both your own approach and to communicate welcome to your students:

    i. *I welcome and support students of all abilities. I aim to make my course as accessible as possible for all students. If you have additional accommodations, please contact me and we will work together towards a solution.*

3. Required class materials - texts, software, supplies, or other materials

  a. Best Practices: Whenever possible, instructors are encouraged to reduce costs for their students. Consider adopting Open Educational Resources (OER) or low-cost options. Please note the use of Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) or Low Textbook Costs (LTC) in the class schedule by emailing your division office.

  b. Please see Academic Senate resolution: Adoption of Course Materials (2021)[4]

4. Class Schedule, Assignments, and Due Dates

  a. Best practices: The syllabus can provide clear structure and lower student anxiety by outlining all expected topics, assigned readings, homework and other evaluative assignments, as well as tests, exams, and projects with all related due dates

Class Policies

A syllabus is a document explaining the expectations within a specific class. Letting a student know expectations and the purpose behind policies can help create better rapport and trust in the classroom. Therefore, the policies included in the syllabus should center on the expectations and practices internal to the class. External policies including Sierra College policies, Student Rights and Responsibilities, Program Code of Conducts, and/or Program Handbooks can be linked and referred to as is of use to the students, but do not need to be included in the document itself. These external college policies will be upheld whether they are listed in your syllabus or not. Consider how including external policies might create a punitive or deficit-minded tone that could communicate to students that you do not trust them and expect dishonest or untrustworthy behavior. How would a mindset like that affect your students or your ability to build trust and rapport?

Below is a list of internal class policies that are recommended to be included in your syllabus:

1. Grading policy. A grading policy should explain how final grades are assigned, what assignments will be given throughout the term, and how much those assignments are worth.

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[4] Sierra College Academic Senate Adoption of Course Materials (2021) https://www.sierracollege.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Adoption-of-Course-Materials-2021.pdf

a. Demystifying: Having a clear grading policy as well as a way for students to easily access their current grade throughout the semester can minimize confusion and anxiety.

b. Best Practices: Consider each of your grading policies and how they impact students. Make sure grading policies are aligned with assessing the achievement of the course outcomes and not measuring other unspoken criteria. Unspoken, non-competency-based criteria can create unnecessary barriers, anxiety, and equity gaps.

c. Online Testing and Proctoring Software. Please see Sierra College Distance Learning Recommendations for Using Proctorio and Considerations for using proctoring software when creating policies around online testing.[5]

d. Late Policies. Consider late policies that allow room for the holistic student and communicate the value you place on assignments as educational experiences. A flexible late work policy sends the cue to students that a personal conflict will not derail their success in the course. Stringent late policies can create an unwelcoming atmosphere for students where they do not feel trusted or seen as responsible individuals with pressures and stresses outside the classroom. Besides negatively impacting students with stresses and responsibilities outside the classroom and contributing to success gaps, not accepting late work for any credit can also send the message that the assignment has no value outside being turned in on time, or that student's advocating for their needs is not valuable. Additionally, please keep in mind that some students might feel more comfortable reaching out for extensions than others due to past educational experiences that could make trust difficult for them. This can be particularly true for students from historically-underrepresented and disparately-impacted groups and may contribute to success gaps. Consider proactive reaching out to students who struggle with due dates and offering more time.

2. Attendance policy. An attendance policy should explain why attendance is essential to student learning and success and how the instructor would like absences to be addressed.

a. Please remember that students cannot be graded on attendance.

b. Best Practices: please see Academic Senate resolution: Attendance Policy and Related Recommendations (2021).[6] Be aware that there are many important religious, cultural, and tribal dates that our current academic calendar does not accommodate. Consider how to create a policy and class environment that allows students to balance their education and their religious, cultural, tribal, and familial connections.

3. Campus and Course Policies

a. Best Practices: All students at Sierra College are held to the policies and procedures outlined in the Sierra College Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook found in

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[5] Need link for where this recommendation document lives

[6] Sierra College Academic Senate Resolution, Attendance Policy and Recommendations (2021), https://www.sierracollege.edu/about-sierra-college/planning-and-governance/governance/

the college catalog. Rather than reiterating all of these policies in the syllabus, a simple statement and reference to the handbook may be preferable.

   b. Sample Language: "Please familiarize yourself with the Sierra College Student Rights and Responsibilities (https://www.sierracollege.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/student-rights-responsibilities-handbook-1-2018.pdf) in the Sierra College Catalog, as well as the Sierra College policies and procedures that can guide your experiences here at Sierra College (https://catalog.sierracollege.edu/student-resources/academic-standards-policies-procedures/). This will help you understand both your rights as a student as well as what is expected of you. In this course you will be held to these policies and standards. If you have questions about any of them, please let me know!"

   c. Program Code of Conduct – If your program has an additional code of conduct or handbook that guides student expectations, consider linking to the code of conduct and reminding students that they will be held to those standards within the program.

      i. Demystifying: Consider explaining the purpose and need of this kind of code of conduct in the program and how it will serve them both as a student and a potential employee in the field.

4. Student Expectations

   a. Demystifying: As instructors, we might often have unspoken expectations of students (note-taking, participation, out of class work, etc). Clearly outlining and explaining the purpose of these expectations can lower anxiety and help students navigate college more successfully. This can in particular help first-generation students or historically-underrepresented and disparately-impacted students, or for those who the culture of the classroom is unfamiliar.

5. Instructor Expectations

   a. Demystifying: While the syllabus might often list all the things the student is expected to do, it is also a great place for the instructor to explain their role in the course. What can students expect from you? What standards are you to be held to? What kind of feedback and support are students allowed to expect? How can they contact you and for what reasons?

Student Resources

There are many reasons students may be struggling in our courses. Some of these challenges might arise outside of the classroom, even as we know they can still impact students' ability to succeed in their learning. Sierra College and the surrounding communities offer many resources that can help students face their challenges and persist in their learning. Providing these resources in your syllabus can be a great way to connect students with resources when challenges arise. It is recommended that you consider including the following resources:

1. Campus Academic Resources (Tutoring Center, Writing Center, Library, Student Success Workshops, Success Center, Student Accessibility Services (SAS) etc.)

      a. Demystifying: consider briefly explaining what each resource provides and when they might be useful to students.

2. Basic Needs Center Statement: "*We learn as whole people. It can be challenging to do your best in class if you don't have a safe place to sleep or enough food to eat. If you need support with housing, food, or other basic needs, please talk with me or visit Sierra's College's Basic Needs Resources page for more information: https://www.sierracollege.edu/student-services/health-and-wellbeing/basic-needs-resources/. Together, we can work to make sure those needs are met. We are here to help.*"

3. Student Health Center Statement: "*Your mental and physical health is essential! Please be aware of the supports available to you here at Sierra College. The Student Health Center offers many services free of charge (consultations, non-physical exams, mental health counseling, vision and hearing screenings, influenza vaccines), some by income eligibility (STI testing, birth control, pap smears), and some at low cost (immunizations, prescription medications, lab testing, and physical exams)! If you have any questions or would like to access these services, please reach out to the Heath Services Center in the Winstead Building or by visiting their website here: https://www.sierracollege.edu/student-services/health-and-wellbeing/health-services/*"

4. Title IX Statements
      a. Equity and Consent - Instructional faculty are encouraged to include the following language on their syllabi. Non-instructional staff are encouraged include similar language in their program materials. As responsible employees, you must report any information about gender-based discrimination, violence, and harassment to the Title IX office, therefore including a statement like this in your syllabus will not only inform students about their rights to support, but will also let students make informed decisions around what they share with you.
            i. Option 1: *Sierra College is committed to providing a safe learning environment, free of harassment and discrimination, as described by Title IX, Senate Bill 493, and District policies found on our website. It is my goal that you feel you can share information related to your life experiences in classroom discussions, in your written work, and in our one-on-one meetings, and I will seek to keep information you share private to the greatest extent possible. However, if you share information about incidents of gender-based discrimination, violence, and harassment, I must notify the Title IX Coordinator and connect you with a Title IX Campus Advocate, a trained counselor. Through a referral to the Campus Advocates, students receive the best information possible regarding appropriate on and off-campus support, services, resources, and options for filing a complaint.*
            ii. Option 2: *As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment for my students and the campus as a whole. So that the college can provide students with appropriate support, services, and assistance, I must notify the Title IX Coordinator when students share any instances of sexual harassment, sexual violence, and/or other forms of prohibited discrimination. I am also encouraged to connect students with the*

> *Title IX Campus Advocates, confidential employees available to provide counseling, crisis intervention, reporting options, and connection to campus and community resources. If you would rather share information about sexual harassment, sexual violence, or discrimination to a confidential employee directly, call a campus advocate at (916) 660-8400. Additionally, our local community organizations provide confidential support and resources to survivors of sexual assault and intimate partner violence and are available 24/7.*

    iii. Community Resources: [STAND UP PLACER](#) (Placer County) (800) 575-5352, [Community Beyond Violence](#) (Nevada County) (530) 272-3467, [Sierra Community House](#) (Tahoe/Truckee) (800) 736-1060, [WEAVE](#) (Sacramento County) (916) 920-2952

5. Pregnant/Parenting:
   a. *As a pregnant or parenting student, you have the right to an equal education. You have the right to participate and to have your pregnancy-related absences excused. Sierra College is committed to the success of our pregnant and parenting students. Please communicate with me if I can support you in any way. You can also contact our Title IX Coordinator/EEO Director, LaToya Jackson-Lainez at (916) 660-7006 or email EEOT9@sierracollege.edu. Students may also request classroom or other accommodations from our [Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS) Office](#) by calling (916) 660-7460. Visit our [Pregnancy and Parenting Rights page](#) to learn about our lactation spaces and other resources.*