



**Online syllabi as living  
documents:  
Developing and extending  
syllabi into online course  
design**

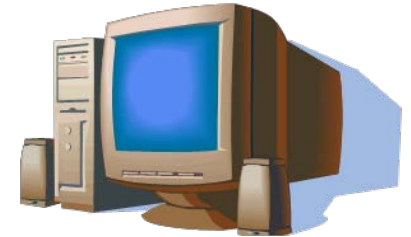
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# What is the purpose of a syllabus?

- ▶ Forges understanding between the instructor and students
  - what the class will be like
  - expectations
    - learning objectives
    - policies relating to the course (schedule, grading, communication)
    - community norms
    - what the student will need to do
  - roadmap of course organization and direction relaying the instructor's teaching philosophy
  - “Is this class for me?”

- ▶ The syllabus is a small place to start bringing students and faculty members back together... If students could be persuaded that we are really interested in their understanding the materials we offer, that we support their efforts to master it, and that we take their intellectual struggles seriously, they might respond by becoming involved in our courses, by trying to live up to our expectations, and by appreciating our concern.
- ▶ – Rubin, “Professors, Students, and the Syllabus,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*

# Syllabi for Online Courses



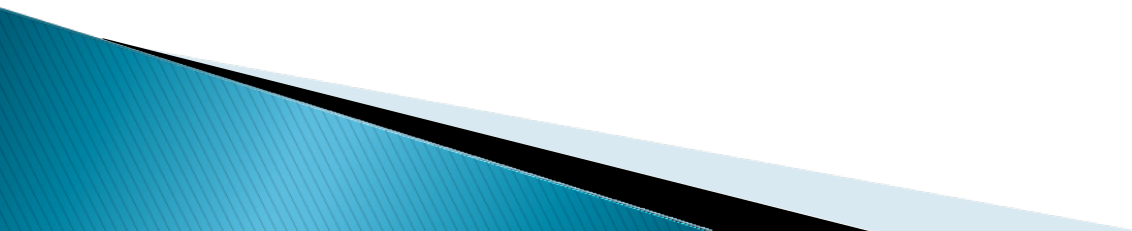
- ▶ First impression of the course
- ▶ They often view it alone
- ▶ No immediate clarification or feedback from you or each other
  
- ▶ Clearly organized and worded syllabus vital
  - Explain the landscape of the online course
    - Sequence: Where to start and end each week
    - Where to find things and do things
    - How to turn in assignments
  - Explain the culture of the online course
    - Content
    - The philosophy, the approach

# My Online Class



- ▶ University of Cincinnati
- ▶ Summer 2010
- ▶ Graduate-level
- ▶ “Role of Teachers in a Democratic Society”
- ▶ Completely online
- ▶ 5-week accelerated
- ▶ My philosophy: student-centered, active
  - Multiple ways to express what they know
  - Student choices to promote engagement
  - Community

# On My Syllabus...The Usuals...

- ▶ Contact information
  - ▶ Course description and overview
  - ▶ Objectives
  - ▶ Standards
  - ▶ Required Policies
  - ▶ Grading Scale
  - ▶ Readings
- 

# Landscape

- ▶ Explain the typical sequence of events they can expect
  - Each week, we will engage in at least one online discussion.
  - For three of the weeks (Week 1 and Week 5, and the third is *your choice*), you will post a journal entry.
  - Depending on the context of this course (*your interests, topics that come up*), we may have small activities in addition to the discussion and journal entries.
- ▶ Embed philosophy (use of ‘we’)

# Landscape

- ▶ **Introductions (50 points):** The first week, we will be focusing on getting to know each other, which is very important in an online course. To accomplish this, post an introduction in the discussion board and reply to someone else.

# Details: Discussion



- ▶ **Why?** “We surprise ourselves by what we write. Writing is thinking, not thought recorded” (Murray, 1990, as cited in Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995).
- ▶ **What?** Some discussions will ask you to react to the assigned readings, others will ask you to debate current issues, while others will be more reflective in nature.
- ▶ **With who?** Sometimes you will be discussing them with the whole class, sometimes you will be discussing in a small group of 3 or 4.
- ▶ **Where?** We will usually use the discussion board in Blackboard, but we will also use other ways to have discussion using alternative technology tools like Voice Thread and Wall Wisher (*note: directions will be provided, so don't worry if you're not familiar with them*).

# More Details: Discussion



- ▶ **When?** For each weekly discussion, you are expected to post at least one original contribution by Thursday at midnight (earlier is preferred) and reply to at least one peer's post by Sunday at midnight.
- ▶ **How often should I check in?** You are expected to reply to any question or comment directed to you as well, which means you need to check in with the discussion on a daily basis.
- ▶ **How will I be assessed?** A rubric will be provided to show how you will be assessed in the discussions. This rubric is *open to suggestions* and can be modified if necessary.
- ▶ **How much is this worth?** 5 at 40 Points each = 200 Points

# Details: Journal



- ▶ **Why?** This is a place for you to *personally think* about the material.
- ▶ **What?** The entry can be on *anything you like* that is content-related.
  - perhaps you want to expand on something from the class discussion or readings
  - perhaps you want to further reflect on your personal or professional life
  - perhaps you have found a related topic of interest
  - perhaps you don't understand something so you would like to talk it out
  - *I will provide a prompt for each week which you can use to get started if you like.*

# More Details: Journals



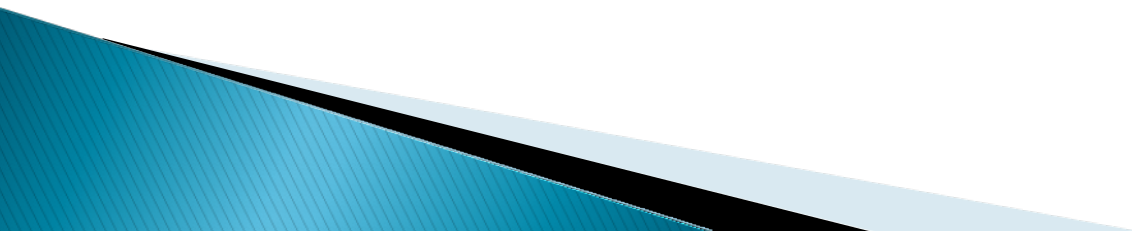
- ▶ What will it look like? I'm envisioning 300–500 words, but I also encourage you to *get creative* – add photos/videos, audio comments or web links *if you like*.
- ▶ How will I be assessed? It does not have to be tremendously long, but it should be thoughtful and complete.
- ▶ How much is this worth? 3 at 20 Points each = 60 Points

# More Details: Journals



- ▶ **With who?** As opposed to the discussions which are public, the journal entries will be private and only *you and I* will be able to see them.
- ▶ **When?** Three of the weeks; Week 1 and Week 5, and the third is *your choice*
- ▶ **Where?**
- ▶ **Why private?**

# Other Activities (estimated 20–40 Points)

- ▶ Depending on the context of this course (your interests, topics that come up), we may have small activities in addition to the big discussion and journal entries. These will be *small and not time consuming*, with the general intention of making the class more interactive.
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# Final Project

- ▶ **What?** Your task is to interview one person in your personal or professional life. The main point of the interview is to assess his/her views on education and teaching.
  - What does he/she think education is for?
  - What are teachers supposed to do?
  - What are students supposed to do?
  - What does 'democratic society' mean to him/her?
  - Has his/her views changed over time?
  - What was his/her past experiences as students?
  - What teachers did he/she favor and why?
- ▶ *You will generate* additional questions to ask as well.

# Final Project

- ▶ **What?** Summarize your findings, and then relate these to the readings and discussions we held in class. For instance, does your interviewee hold a progressive view of schooling? How does nationality, age, race, class or gender influence answers? Finally, reflecting on these findings and the readings, *what do you believe the role of the teacher is in a democratic society?*

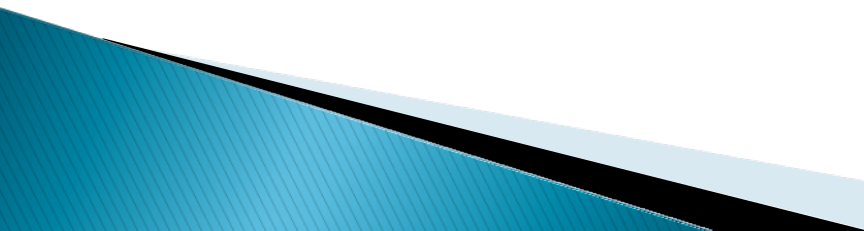
# Final Project

- ▶ **What?** Your end product is *up to you* – a Word document, a PowerPoint presentation, a podcast, a movie, etc. I'm not concerned with length so much, as long as you address the questions. The more creative, the better. *If you really want a minimum length*, I'm thinking a Word document, double-spaced, size 12 font paper would be between 10–20 pages.
- ▶ Anticipate questions
- ▶ Conversational tone, dialogue

# Final Project

- ▶ **With who?** You will share this with the class.
- ▶ **Where?** Please post your end product in the main Discussion Board for others to view and critique.
- ▶ **When?** Post your Final Presentation by Wednesday at midnight; critique another presentation by Friday at midnight
- ▶ **How will I be assessed?** I will provide rubrics for this project; again, they are *open to your suggestions* and your answers will be completely confidential.

# Conclusion

- ▶ Relay landscape of the online course
  - ▶ What to expect in a typical unit of study
    - Why
    - What
    - With who
    - Where
    - When
    - How assessed
    - How many points
  - ▶ Embed your philosophy and personality
  - ▶ Anticipate questions
- 

# Next Time

- ▶ Give a clear rationale for pacing the course
  - ▶ Talk about community guidelines for how to discuss (this was in rubric, but a little should be in syllabus too)
  - ▶ Give a clear rationale for discussing with others (how is it different from private journaling?)
  - ▶ Clarify where, when, how journals will be assessed
  - ▶ Explain my role in the discussions and journals
  - ▶ Give a clear rationale for the final project
  - ▶ Incorporate multimedia in syllabus
  - ▶ Editable to keep it living?
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