

BOWDOIN COLLEGE

DEAN FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

PLANNING THE COURSE SYLLABUS

The form and content of syllabi vary widely by discipline, department, course, and instructor. In all cases, however, the syllabus provides the instructor and students with a common reference point that sets the stage for learning throughout the course. A syllabus is a basic contract between the instructor and students, laying out the responsibilities and expectations on both sides. Your colleagues are important sources for models and they stand ready with examples to review. In addition, the College's [Blackboard](#) site offers guest users access to syllabi and other course materials that might serve as useful models. Common elements of a good syllabus are outlined below:

Course information: The course name and number, meeting times and location, and semester.

Instructor information: Office location and hours, appointment scheduling, phone number, e-mail address, contact information for teaching or lab assistants.

Course description:

- **Required texts and materials:** List of all required textbooks, technology, and other materials (packets, programs, web access, etc) with information about editions, volumes, and other details; for difficult-to-find materials, hints on locating copies.
- **Course description:** Summary of what the course covers, with more details than the short catalog descriptions, to give the students a more complete picture of what you will (and will not) be covering.
- **Learning Objectives:** Explanation of why students should take this course, how it is relevant to them, and how it will help them now and in the future.

Characteristics of Class Meetings: Summary of the basic routines and learning activities for the course, how you'll assess students' knowledge and skills, what they can expect from you and what you expect from them. This should include an explanation of how you expect students to participate in your class, how they should prepare, how you will assess their participation, the use of review sessions, and class meetings outside the normal course schedule.

Topics and assignments:

- **Schedule of Topics and Readings, Assignments, Projects, and Exams:**
Layout a rough schedule for the course and note in advance when timing might vary. Final exams, as noted above, are scheduled before the start of the semester by the Registrar. Remember that students cannot be penalized for changes made during the course of the semester.

- Assignment descriptions: Descriptions and directions for each type of assignment, quiz, exam, and so on, or directions to more detailed directions; this is the information students need to understand the course assessments. Final exam dates are assigned by the Registrar's office and are available for inclusion in the syllabus before the start of classes.

Course Policies and Classroom Conduct:

- Respect for your peers and their views: Outline the format for class discussions and any peer-reviewed assignments. It is important to define your role as discussant and/or moderator.
- Academic Honesty: Make mention of the [Bowdoin Honor Code](#). Stress the importance of original work and the proper citation of sources.
- Class attendance: There is no College-wide policy about attendance though Bowdoin does stipulate that religious holidays should be respected when scheduling tests and assignments. In addition, you should be clear about your policy for missed classes due to athletic events or other extra-curricular activities.
- Grading procedures: A breakdown of each assignment and exam, what it's worth, how scores are weighted, and percentages for each grade level, the assessment of group work, late or missing assignments, and the scheduling of make-ups.

References and Resources:

Grunert O'Brien, Judith, Barbara Millis, and Margaret Cohen. *The Course Syllabus: A Learning-Centered Approach*. Bolton, MA: Anker, 1997.

Nunan, David. *Syllabus Design*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

[Citing Sources](#) on the Bowdoin Web site