



Syllabus Checklist

Prepared by Prof. Chrys Demetry,
Director, Morgan Teaching & Learning Center

Elements of this document are adapted from Linda B. Nilson (2007), *The Graphic Syllabus and the Outcomes Map: Communicating Your Course* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass) and from the Cornell University Center for Teaching Excellence *Course Materials Checklist* (<http://www.cte.cornell.edu/tap/TeachingMaterials.html>).

For a thought-provoking reflection lamenting the trend toward more detailed course syllabi, see Mano Singham's article "Death to the Syllabus!" in the Fall 2007 issue of *Liberal Education* (http://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/le-fa07/le_fa07_myview.cfm).

A well-constructed syllabus attempts to motivate learning of the subject matter and conveys the instructor's expectations along with basic course information. Use this listing as a guide for what *might* be included in a course syllabus at WPI; few (no?) syllabi include all of these items.

Basic Course Information

- Course number, title, and term
- Classroom location
- Days and hours of class meetings
- URL of any course website (or information about use of myWPI)
- Recommended background (assumed) and/or suggested background (helpful)
N.B.: WPI catalog course descriptions include any recommended and suggested background. Strictly speaking, WPI does not have enforceable "prerequisites" or course sequencing, but instructors are free to emphasize the importance of particular background. Examples: "I strongly recommend/ask that you DROP this course if you have not yet successfully completed course XYZ." "In my experience, students have difficulty succeeding in this course if they have not successfully completed courses A and B."

Information about Required or Optional Conference Sections or Labs

- Location of lab and lab hours
- Purposes of conference sections

Instructor Information

- Name and title (so students know how to address you)
- Office location, office phone, email address, mailbox location, office hours, AIM screen name if desired, personal website
- How often and at what hours you will respond to questions by email, and what turnaround time students can expect
- Relevant professional information
- Teaching philosophy

Information about Course Support Staff (Teaching Assistant, Peer Learning Assistant, Lab Manager)

- Office location, office phone, email address, mailbox location, office hours
- Responsibilities/ roles in the course

Course Goal and Learning Objectives (Student Learning Outcomes)

- Course description, purpose, value, an interesting quote, and/or other motivating information
- Student learning outcomes or learning objectives—what students will or should be able to do by the end of the course.
- For tips on articulating learning objectives and for samples from a variety of courses, see <http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/design/teach/design/learningobjectives.html>.

Information on Readings and Required Course Materials

- Required and recommended books, articles, course pack, etc. with complete citations
- Why you chose the required readings
- Whether readings are available on reserve at Gordon Library
- Any required materials such as software or safety equipment, where to find them, and when they will be needed
- Helpful on-line resources

Course Requirements and Grading Standards

Instructors are strongly recommended to include information about their grading practices in the syllabus, both due to teaching best practices and because of WPI students' expectations. In addition, WPI's academic honesty policy includes the statement that *"Faculty members should outline their policies concerning evaluation procedures ... at the beginning of each course."* Many experts recommend that you think of your syllabus as a contract and be prepared to stick with it, even if in hindsight you would make different choices. With that in mind, some instructors use disclaimer statements like "These grading practices may change if..."

- A description of graded course activities
 - How many of what types of assignments
 - Number and types of quizzes/tests/exams/papers
 - How assignments and exams are aligned with course objectives
(Note that you may decide to give a "final exam," but WPI does not have a final exam reading period, and faculty are generally discouraged from scheduling exams outside of the regular class period, except of course for take-home exams. WPI students often refer to taking "finals" in the last days of the term. It is the instructor's decision whether to make it a cumulative final or whether it addresses just the final segment of the course.)
 - Any group component of individuals' grades, including peer evaluation procedures
 - Graded electronic communication such as discussion boards, blogs, or wikis
 - Class participation
 - Lab assignments
- General standards/rubric by which you will grade papers, problem solutions, other written work, electronic communication, in-class participation, etc.
- Explanation of how students' final grades will be determined (e.g., percentages, points, curve), including percentage of the course grade (and/or number of points) for each course component.
The grades available to WPI undergraduate course instructors are A, B, C, NR (no record), and I (incomplete), but how these grades are defined and determined is the instructor's prerogative. (There ARE guidelines for project grading, however.) The grades available to graduate course instructors are A, B, C, D, F, and I.
- Course requirements aside from those you compute in the grade. Examples: "You will be expected to participate in discussion;" "I will give unannounced, ungraded quizzes to see how well you are comprehending the readings and lectures;" "In-class activities will include ungraded writing exercises and classroom assessment techniques."

- Any extra credit or “makeup” options or lack thereof (so that students know whether or not there will be any extra credit or “makeup” opportunities to raise their grade.)
- Whether or not you will give students a “NR” upon request, rather than a letter grade they are not happy with.

Course Policies / Student Responsibilities

- Policy on Americans with Disabilities Act accommodations

The federal Office of Civil Rights strongly suggests that faculty include a statement in their syllabus that states that accommodations are available for students with disabilities, the correct procedure for receiving the accommodations and that you are willing to provide the accommodations. WPI’s Office of Disability Services developed the following sample statement that you can use or adapt:

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you have medical information to share with me, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible. If you have not already done so, students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. This office is located in the West St. House (157 West St), (508) 831.4908.

- Expectations for academic integrity, including in collaborative work
WPI policy states that “Faculty members should outline ... their expectations pertaining to academic integrity at the beginning of each course.” The Faculty Guide to Academic Integrity at WPI (<http://www.wpi.edu/offices/policies/facultyguide.html>) provides suggestions for communicating expectations.
- Policies on missed and late exams and assignments
- Policies on attendance, tardiness, class participation, and classroom decorum or civility (e.g., use of cell phones and laptops)
- Policies and procedures on lab safety, if applicable
- How many minutes to wait for you if you are late for class

Teaching and Learning Methods

- In-class activities and formats (e.g., lecture, group meetings, class discussion, role-playing, simulation, film or video, debate, student presentations, visiting speaker, case studies, field trips, review session) and rationale or purposes of each
- Help sessions and/or campus support services available to assist students throughout the course (e.g., Math and Science Help (MASH) tutors, peer tutors in the Writing Center)
- Study and assignment aids to be posted or distributed, such as study guides, review questions, old exams, directions for writing papers.
- Recommended study strategies

Course Organization and Schedule

- Overall course organization/flow and your rationale for it
- Class-by-class or weekly schedule. Consider providing a grid format or alternative graphic representation. Consider including:
 - Substantive learning outcomes or topics
 - Readings, papers, or other homework assignments due for each class
- Caveat/disclaimer such as “The above schedule, policies, procedures, and assignments in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances, by mutual agreement, and/or to ensure better student learning.”