A syllabus is the most important document an instructor shares in a college class. It is a valuable resource for both you and your students and should be developed thoughtfully to ensure the information it contains is communicated effectively.

Take some time to compare today’s college textbooks with those used a decade ago. You are likely to identify a significant increase in the use of visual elements that are used to create hierarchical levels between content and foster interconnections between chapters. All in all, content today continues to become more visual and, in turn, engages learners in multiple ways.

Has your syllabus adapted to contemporary shifts in communication styles? Would it communicate your course’s crucial information more effectively if it did?

1 Text-Based Syllabus

This is an excerpt of a syllabus from one of my own classes many years ago. The syllabus was a total of ten pages and relied solely upon text-based elements to establish hierarchy throughout the content (font size, bold face and underlined type, indentations, etc.). A student referencing this document throughout the course would need to rely solely upon textual cues to locate information.
When I began teaching online, I started to think about the content within my class as a hub connected within my students' informal social learning experiences. I envisioned my students fluidly shifting from Facebook and YouTube into my online class rather than "disconnecting," "powering down," or needing to draw upon a different communication vocabulary.

So, one thing I did was transform my syllabus into a rich, visual message. From the excerpts below, you will see that color and font variety have been introduced; but there’s also an infusion of text-boxes, which allow me to stress certain ideas and make recommendations. These visual nuances allow me to weave in multiple layers of hierarchies within a page, more parallel to the way I would present the syllabus synchronously to a class of learners.

Also, the introduction of art historical images into the syllabus weaves in a subtle scaffolding of curricular content (this is an art appreciation class). Upon first reading, students see art historical images that are meaningless to them. Each time they revisit the syllabus, they realize the new meaning that has formed around each image we have learned about in class. Finally, visual diagrams (like a pie chart to illustrate a breakdown of course points by assignment type) empower me to communicate essential information in more than one way, enforcing principles of Universal Design for Learning.
An Educator's Guide to a 21st Century Syllabus

Grading

There is a total of 500 possible points in this course. The total number of points you earn throughout the semester will determine your grade. It's that simple, really! At the end of the semester, the following point scale will be used:

- 90-100 points = A
- 80-89 points = B
- 70-79 points = C
- 60-69 points = D
- 59 and below = F

How to Earn Points

3 Tests: Total of 275 Points

There will be three tests (or major assessments) in this class and they will be taken color by test. These are the only tests that will be given. Tests one and two are worth (00) points and test three is worth (00) points. The tests will be a combination of fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, short answer, and long essay questions. Exams must be submitted before the date/times listed below.

Important Note about Timed Exams!!

The exams in this class are timed. I establish a time limit to maintain integrity with on

Test Dates - put these on your calendar TODAY!!

Make-up tests are offered only in cases of legitimate emergencies and when I am no-

Test 1 – 1st: Tuesday, Feb 1st from 6am to Thrus, Feb 1st at 1pm
- Test 2 – 2nd: Tuesday, March 18th from 6am to March 22nd at 1pm
- Test 3 – 3rd: Tuesday, April 26th at 6am - Thrus, April 26th at 1pm

Homework:

75 points

You will have homework assignments in this class that will be discussed in your Learning Unit content (remember, this will be posted each week on Tuesday morning). When you receive a homework assignment, it will be due the following Monday by 1pm (unless otherwise noted). Assignments will vary in format but will usually take the form of VoiceThread discussion participation. VoiceThread assignments may not be submitted late, as they are mandatory that all students participate during a learning unit and all students learning from them must complete the homework.

Your Ning Blog:

100 points

Each week, after you complete the required learning content in Blackboard, you will es-

Tip:

Track your points in the MyGrades area. You should always know how

Pick up more great teaching ideas on my blog, Teaching Without Walls, at http://www.teachingwithoutwalls.com.

-Michelle Pacansky-Brock

http://www.teachingwithoutwalls.com updated 08/12 Page 3 of 3