

Moving from a Content-Focused to a Learner-Centered Syllabus: The Type of Document Matters

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Learning Objectives

- After this interactive presentation, our goals are for you to:
 - **Identify** essential syllabus items such as UTRGV policies and procedures
 - **Compare** and **contrast** a content-focused and a learner-centered syllabus
 - **Identify** ways to create a learner-centered syllabus
 - **Apply** what you learn to develop a plan to create a learner-centered syllabus or learn more about this topic
 - **Complete** a Learning Assessment Technique

Focus Activity

- Turn to a neighbor and take 3-minutes to:
 - Identify the purpose of a syllabus
 - Identify differences between a content-focused and a learner-centered syllabus

What is the purpose of a syllabus?

- To outline a course
- To provide basic course information
- To provide a list of readings, class meeting times, and grading procedures
- To serve as a contract between instructor and students
- To become an interactive learning tool (Nilson, 2016)
- To encourage students to become co-learners (Slattery & Carlson, 2015)

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

- **The Texas Legislature House Bill 2504** requires public institutions of higher education, other than a medical and dental unit, as defined by Section 61.003, shall make available to the public on the institution's Internet website the following information for each undergraduate classroom course offered for credit by the institution to have a syllabus that:
 - Satisfies any standards adopted by the institution
 - Provides a **brief description** of each major course requirement, including each major assignment and examination
 - Lists any required or recommended readings
 - Provides a general description of the subject matter of each lecture or discussion

Content vs. Learning-Focused Syllabi

- Content-focused syllabi focus on dry course descriptions, use mechanical and robotic language, and have a calendar that only includes due dates and course readings
- Content-focused syllabi focuses on what the “**course will do**”
- Learning-focused syllabi are characterized by engaging course descriptions; clear and measureable learning objectives; alignment between objectives and assessment activities; transparent and meaningful assessment activities; positive and inviting tone; and a detailed and interactive course calendar.
- Instructors focus on what “**students will learn**” and how the course will be structured to support learning
- Instructors invite students to become co-learners

Benefits of a Learner-Centered Syllabus

- Students who read a learner-centered syllabus might be:
 - More motivated before they enter the classroom (Harnish & Bridges, 2011)
 - Have better perceptions of the syllabus, the course, and the instructor (Palmer, 2016)
 - Use the syllabus as an **interactive learning tool** throughout the course (Palmer, 2016)
- A student who read a learner-centered syllabus stated, “**I like how they emphasize the realistic aspects of learning and participating, rather than simply laying out the work to be done.**”

Criteria of a Learner-Centered Syllabus

- (1) Learning Goals and Objectives
- (2) Assessment Activities
- (3) Course Schedule
- (4) Overall Learning Environment

Learning Goals and Objectives

- In a learner-centered syllabus, learning objectives are a central element of the course and are:
 - Clearly articulated and use action verbs (e.g., analyze, connect, apply) to describe what students will know, value, or do
 - Aligned with Bloom's and/or Fink's taxonomy of learning dimensions
 - Included in a specific section
 - Aligned with assessment activities



STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES	FINK'S TAXONOMY OF SIGNIFICANT LEARNING	ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES
After participating in this course, you should be to explain and give examples of quantitative and qualitative research methods.	FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE	LEARNING ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES: EXIT REPORTS; MID-TERM EXAMINATION; FINAL EXAMINATION
After participating in this course, you should be to apply what you learned about quantitative and qualitative research methods to prepare a research proposal.	APPLICATION	RESEARCH PROPOSAL DRAFT; RESEARCH PROPOSAL REPORT; POSTER DEMONSTRATION
After participating in this course, you should be able to reflect and develop a learning plan to learn more about how to use research to influence the counseling profession.	LEARNING HOW TO LEARN	LEARNING ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUE: WHAT? SO WHAT? NOW WHAT? JOURNAL



UTRGV Syllabus Evaluation Rubric

Criterion	Component	Beginning (1)	Emerging (2)	Effective (3)
Student Learning Objectives	Comprehensive List	List is incomplete, overly detailed, inappropriate, or missing; list ignores relevant program or institution-wide learning objectives.	List is organized and some SLOs are reasonable and focus on key knowledge, skills, and values students will learn in the course; list does not include relevant program or institution-wide outcomes. SLOs are stated in only one part of syllabus.	List is well-organized; SLOs are reasonable and focus on key knowledge, skills, and values learned in the course; relevant institution-wide objectives (e.g. communication skills) included. SLOs are integrated in various parts of syllabus.
	Levels of Learning	Appropriate levels of learning are not reflected or unclear.	Adequate levels of learning are reflected.	Higher levels of learning are reflected such as evaluation, application, or learning how to learn.
	Measurable Verbs	Little or no information on student learning objectives are included or information is unclear.	Three to five learning objectives are included; some are clear, measurable, and use an action verb to describe expectations in students' knowledge, skills, or beliefs.	Three to five learning objectives are included; all are consistently clear, measurable, and use action verbs to describe expectations in students' knowledge, skills, or beliefs.

Assessment Activities

- In a learner-centered syllabus, all assessment activities should:
 - Connect with learning objectives
 - Include a description (e.g., purpose, task)
 - Include evaluation procedures (e.g., rubric, criteria for success)

Transparent Assessment Activity: Purpose

- **Purpose:** One of the [learning objectives](#) of this course is for you to demonstrate understanding and knowledge of quantitative and/or qualitative research designs. Another [learning objective](#) is to identify how to critique research to inform counseling practice. The purpose of this assignment is to prepare a research proposal on a counseling-related topic using a quantitative and/or qualitative research design. I want you to review counseling research and prepare a quantitative or qualitative proposal that can advance knowledge in the counseling profession. As [a future school or clinical mental health counselor](#), you might be asked to prepare evaluation reports, write a grant, or prepare a research-based presentation. This assignment will help you practice and develop skills necessary to produce a research or grant report.

Course Schedule or Calendar

- In a learner-centered syllabus, a course schedule:
 - Provides a list of readings, class meeting dates, or assessment due dates in chronological order.
 - Provides additional information to guide and help students prepare for each class session.
 - Requires students to interact with syllabus to stay updated with important readings as well as themes or focus questions for each specific class session.
 - For a student in a class where the instructor did not have a course calendar, she provided the following statement, “The professor’s course calendar was like his office hours: non-existent.”

Learner-Centered Course Calendar

Date	Daily Class Objectives	Readings and Guided Focus Questions	Teaching Strategies
August 28th	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Identify key concepts and ideas in quantitative and qualitative research2. Compare and contrast quantitative and qualitative research methods3. Prepare a research question using quantitative and qualitative research methods4. Demonstrate understanding of quantitative and qualitative research questions.	<p>Chapters 1 and 2</p> <p>What are differences between quantitative and qualitative research methods?</p> <p>List three characteristics of quantitative and qualitative research methods.</p> <p>What are characteristics of good research questions?</p> <p>How are quantitative and qualitative research questions different?</p>	<p>Quiz at beginning of class</p> <p>Interactive and mini-lecture on quantitative and qualitative research method</p> <p>Small group and application activities</p> <p>Learning Assessment Activity: Exit Ticket</p>

Overall Learning Environment

- Tone and Positive Expectations
 - Instructor uses personal pronouns, focuses on student learning, and communicates positive and high expectations.
 - Instructor describes students as responsible for their learning.
- Course Policies
 - All UTRGV policies and procedures are provided. **Instructor makes an attempt to connect policies and procedures with course content, teaching beliefs, and/or pedagogical practices.**
- Instructor Beliefs
 - Instructor's beliefs and attitudes toward teaching and learning is included throughout the syllabus. A rationale for how beliefs are related to teaching strategies, assessment activities, and/or learning environment is provided.

WELCOME TO 4343:)

ENGL 4343.02 (20471) . Fall 2017 . TTH 1:40 - 2:55 . Edinburg . ELABS 259

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INTRODUCTION

We designed ENGL 4343-Composition Theory & Pedagogy . . . to scare the hell out of people with that name:). Seriously, its only competition for unsexiest title is Academic Discourse Studies! While the title is heavy, it's a class about how writing works and how to teach it, and the class goals are pretty straightforward. One, I'm going to expose you to a variety of composition theories—explanations of why and how we write, learn to write, and teach other people to write. We'll be talking about these theories after you read them, but we'll also be experimenting with them as writing teachers-in-training.

Two, you're going to learn how to give and take feedback on teaching and writing. So you will be learning about composition pedagogy, practicing composition pedagogy, and getting/giving criticism on composition pedagogy to help us all improve on how we act as writing teachers *and* students.

Three, it's a class on teaching, so there are things we do to get better at teaching and learning (even if your immediate post-degree goal isn't to work in a classroom). You practice a lot and get better at handling new situations. You also have to work on articulating your own theory of teaching—what you do, how it works on other people, and how you know it's working. To that end, you'll be developing an online teaching portfolio that will have a number of pieces of writing that demonstrate what you know, do, and assess as a writing teacher.

All this work should help you synthesize and apply the teaching concepts and strategies you learn throughout Composition Theory & Pedagogy, and I'm looking forward to helping you improve your learning, writing, and teaching processes.



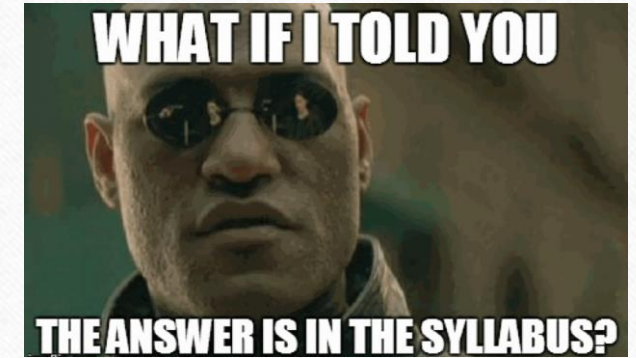
Interactive Pause and Reflection

- On a scale from 1-10 with 1 being content-focused and 10 being learner-centered, how would you rate one of your syllabi right now?

FOCUS Activity

- In a small team (no more than 3!), take 5-minutes to:
 - Identify at least two ways to make your syllabus more learner-centered
 - Identify a strategy to use active learning and interactive engagement to encourage students to interact with syllabus before or during the first day of class

Potential Activities



- *If your objective is for students to demonstrate understanding of essential syllabus items and/or build rapport with your class, consider using any of the following:*
 - *Syllabus quiz* to give students a reason to read and learn from the syllabus
 - *Active learning and syllabus speed dating* to give students a reason to read and learn from the syllabus
 - *Active learning and first day graffiti* to encourage students to reflect on their previous learning experiences, what they expect to learn in your course, and how they can apply what they learn in your course to their future educational or professional career

Evaluation and Learning Assessment Techniques

- **SACSCOS:** UTRGV non-academic units need to develop an assessment plan to measure services, programs, and learning experiences.
- **CTE's Objectives and Assessment:** Some of CTE's objectives are to help faculty reflect and apply what they learn to improve teaching and learning as well as demonstrate foundational knowledge in target teaching areas. The purpose of today's learning assessment techniques (Barkley & Major, 2016) are to:
 - Determine if you are able to **reflect** on what you learned
 - Determine if you are able to **demonstrate** a plan to **apply** what you learned to your teaching or learning, which are indicators of lifelong learning
 - Determine if you **demonstrate foundational knowledge** in key teaching area

Exit Ticket

- **Purpose:** The purpose of the initial three questions on the exit ticket are to determine if you are able to demonstrate important foundational knowledge in target teaching area.
- **Task:** Identify at least one benefit of a learner-centered syllabus (LCS), one strategy to create a LCS with learning environment, and LCS with course calendar.
- **Criteria for Success:**
 - Identification of one benefit of a LCS = 1 point
 - Identification of one strategy to create a LCS with learning environment = 1 point
 - Identification of one strategy to create a LCS with course calendar = 1 point

What? So What? Now What? Journal

- **Purpose:** The purpose of this learning assessment technique is to determine if you are able to reflect on what you learned and apply what you learned to develop a plan in target teaching area.
- **Task:** We want you to reflect and write your responses to the following questions. A total of 5 sentences will be sufficient if you address each question.
 - What? (1) What happened in today's session?
 - So What? (2) What did you learn today? (3) What connections can you make between what you learned today and previous learning experiences?
 - Now What? (4) How can you apply what you learned? (5) What would you like to learn more about and how will you learn more about this or a similar topic?

Criteria for Success

- Rubric:
 - What? = 1 point
 - So what? = 1 point + 1 point for a connection to a previous learning experience
 - Now what? = 1 point + 1 point for a concrete action plan to apply what you learned or learn more about topic
- There are a total of 5 points.

Sample Response

- I attended a keynote address at the SACCOS annual convention. *In this presentation, the speaker presented important findings from a transparency in higher learning project.* I observed a lot of people who were interested and engaged with this topic.
- *I learned that transparency in teaching and learning can produce important benefits such as academic confidence, self-confidence, and workplace skills.* I also learned that the following criteria are involved in transparent designs: purpose, task, and criteria for success. *I can connect what I learned today with Dr Julie Schell's keynote presentation on problem-based learning.* When students tackle real work problems and are given evidence that their assignment is connected to later work or life goals, they might be more likely to be motivated to engage in such assignments.
- I plan to do two things after this presentation. First, *I want to create transparency in my assignments,* particularly my research proposal in COUN 6301. Although I might explain assignments in class, I know that I can describe these assignments on the syllabus with better transparency. I also want to do a better job of describing the purpose of all my assignments. Second, *I want to lead a CTE conversation on transparency with UTRGV colleagues.* This conversation will not only lead to improved understanding and insight but also a plan to engage in meaningful dialogue about future applications.

Resources and Helpful Readings

- Guertin, L. (2014). Getting students to read the syllabus with a syllabus quiz [blog post]. Retrieved from <http://blogs.agu.org/geoedtrek/2014/08/27/syllabus-quiz/>
- Harnish, R. J., & Bridges, K. R. (2011). Effect of syllabus tone: Students' perceptions of instructor and course. *Social Psychology of Education, 14*, 319-330.
- Nilson, L. B. (2016). *Teaching at its best: A research-based resource for college instructors (4th ed.)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Palmer, M. S., Bach, D. J., & Streifer, A. C. (2014). Measuring the promise: A learning-focused syllabus rubric. *To Improve the Academy: A Journal of Educational Development, 33*, 14-36.
- Palmer, M. S., Wheeler, L. B., & Aneece, I. (2016). Does the document matter? The evolving role of syllabi in higher education. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 48*, 36-46.

Resources and Helpful Readings

- Wieman, C. (2014). First day of class-Recommendations for instructors.
Retrieved from
http://www.cwsei.ubc.ca/resources/files/First_Day_of_Class.pdf