

Teaching a Good First Day of Class: Exploring Learner-Centered and Inclusive Syllabi Design

Alyssa G. Cavazos, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Writing and Language Studies

Director, Center for Teaching Excellence



Our objectives

1

Reflect on teaching values and goals for the first day of class

2

Examine and revise a course syllabus component through equity-minded practices

3

Plan a first day of class activity(ies) by choosing one principle that aligns to equity-minded practices

Reflection Activity #1: Introductions



Name and department



Courses you will teach Fall 2022



What is one of your teaching and learning values?



What is one thing you hope to accomplish during a first day of class?



What is one thing you'd like students to walk away with that day?

Rethink "syllabus day"

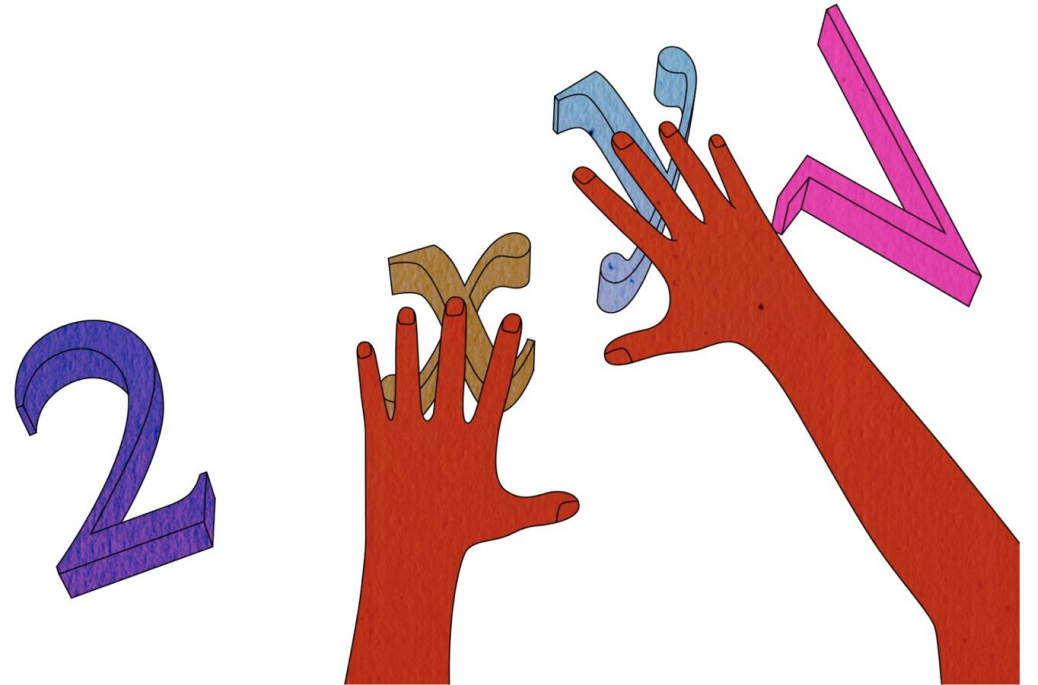
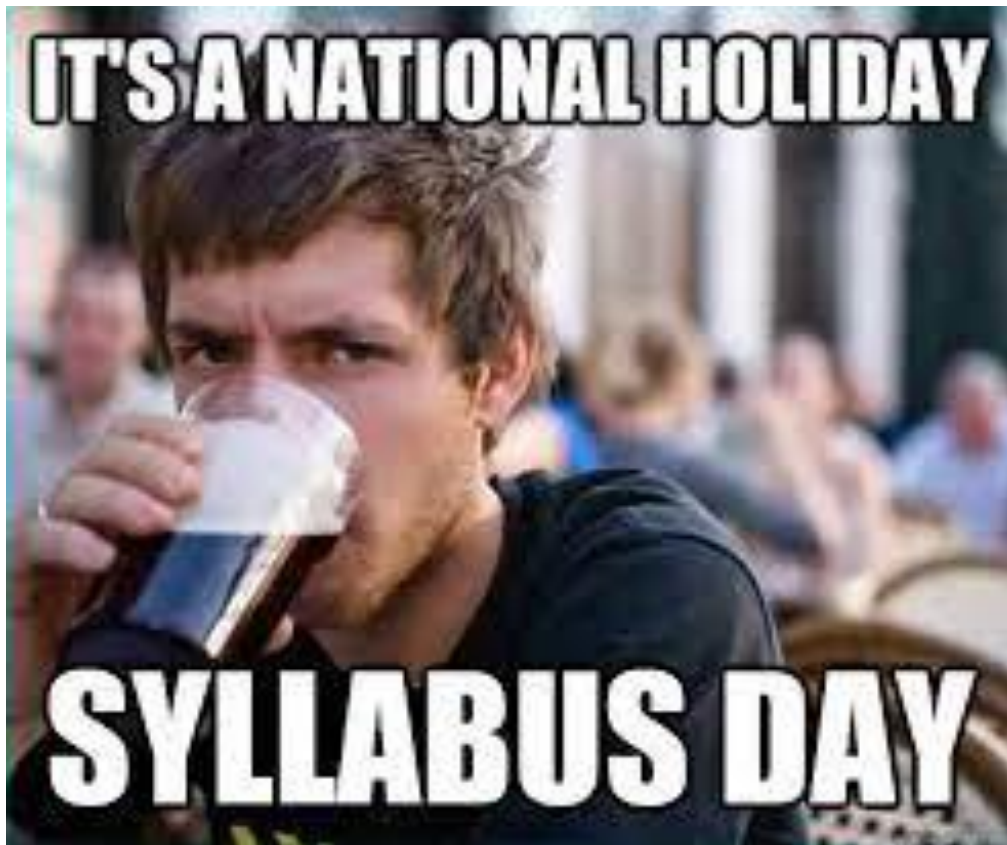


ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC PETERSEN

Don't mistake content delivery with teaching and learning. Find ways to engage students in activities that cause them to reflect and process.

What do our students value during a first day of class and in course syllabi?

- First Impression matters
- Making connections with topics of interest
- Sense of community
- Going over the syllabus and clarifying questions
- Positive language and diction



MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

How does language in syllabus affect student learning?

“Syllabus tone sets the mood for the class and can range from pleasant and welcoming to formal and disciplinary or even condescending and demeaning” (Slattery et al., 2014).

- Shapes students’ first impression of instructor and their attitudes toward teaching and learning (Harnish et al., 2011)
- Perceptions of friendly language result in viewing instructor as warm and approachable and highly motivated to teach (Harnish et al., 2011).
- Pleasant and welcoming can language encourages and motivates learners
 - readers are more likely to recall information more easily than when they believe the language is unfriendly or punitive (Littlefield, 1991 as cited in Slattery et al., 2005)
 - harsh language can be intimidating and discouraging for some students (Ishiyama & Hartlaub, 2002; Singham, 2005) and as such, hinders their success.

APPENDIX

THE SYLLABUS: A TOOL THAT SHAPES STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES

BY MAXINE T. ROBERTS, CENTER FOR URBAN EDUCATION

For some faculty members, the syllabus is a guide that outlines what learners should expect in a course and clarifies what is expected of them. For students, the syllabus helps them figure out what they need to do to ensure they will pass the course. However, in many ways the syllabus conveys so much more than rules and course expectations and as such, serves a larger purpose that can shape the students’ academic experiences and foster their success. In traditional syllabi that focus on rules and course expectations, instructors outline basic course requirements. However, with well-crafted syllabi, faculty design learning experiences that positively shape and alter how students perceive their instructors and seek assistance for academic challenges.

In this resource, we outline the traditional purpose of the syllabus, use findings from empirical and peer-reviewed articles to answer questions that are often asked about syllabi, and offer examples of language for syllabi that support or hinder learners’ experiences.

STANDARD PURPOSE OF THE SYLLABUS

Intends:

to present learners with the expectations and required components of a course (Harnish & Bridges, 2011).

to outline course expectations and goals along with the grading system and evaluate learners’ performance (Canada, 2013; Dowd & Slattery & Carlson, 2005).


to establish a tone and motivates learners to set goals that are achievable (Slattery et al., 2005).

[Link to resource](#)

Syllabus Review: Equity-Minded Approach

- Demystifying college policies and practices
- Welcoming students and creating classroom culture in which they feel cared for and supported
- Validating students' ability to be successful
- Creating a partnership in which faculty and students work together to ensure success
- Representing a range of racial/ethnic experiences and backgrounds in assignments, readings, and other materials
- Deconstructing the presentation of white students as the "norm"

Fall 2017



College Reading and Composition 1

English 101
Sec. 27280

Unit(s): 3 Lecture 3 Hours
Transferability: (UC:CSU)

**Table of Contents
Organized by page
numbers**

1: Greeting, Contact Info., Office Hours
2. Pre. Reqs., SLO's
3. What Materials do I need?
How do I log onto CANVAS?
How will my grade be determined?
4. Explanation of assignments,
How will I submit my essays?
5 and 6. What support is available to help me reach my goals?
7. Policy on Academic Honesty, Make Up Exams, Late Policy and Attendance
8 Few final words



"Dominant culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, reveling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community."
Bell Hooks

Prof. Jennifer Ortiz
Contact Information:
Email: ortizji@lattc.edu
213-763-5585 TE 5th Floor English Dept.

**Meets Monday/Wednesday
3:00-4:50 and 3hrs Online
TE 208**

Welcome to LATTC's English Department:

I am looking forward to working with each of you this semester. I've taught this course several times and I am always impressed by the quality work my students produce. I am confident that you will also create a strong collection of writings at the end of the semester. Remember, writing is a process and it takes work but being registered for this class is a good step towards becoming a better writer.

Mindset: research shows that students with a growth mindset are more likely to reach their academic goals. We will read more about this for our first essay of the semester, but essentially a person with a growth mindset believes they can learn (even when it's difficult) and that the key to learning is putting in effort. I will do my best to encourage a growth mindset in our class, and I hope you will do the same.

Student Hours:
Monday 9-10:10
Tuesday 8:30-10:10

DECONSTRUCTING

This quote from bell hooks points to the existence and problems of dominant norms

WELCOMING

This statement warmly brings students into the class

VALIDATING

This statement also affirms students' ability to become strong writers


CREATING A PARTNERSHIP


This statement explicitly notes what the instructor aims to do to foster students' learning


Syllabi Sample


- **Welcoming:**
Motivational, supportive, and caring
- **Partnership:** Student success and partners in learning
- **Demystifying policies:**
flexibility? Student needs?


Syllabus Snapshot


 My name _____ and I am **SUPER** excited to be your professor! Here is my info in case you need to contact me outside of class (try e-mailing me first):

 _____ (text/call)


 We will meet virtually online every **THURSDAY** from **11:00 am – 12:15 pm** on Blackboard (not Zoom) **Attendance is mandatory.** (attendance points affect your overall grade)

 **No late work accepted.** (sorry!) All assignments must be submitted in Blackboard every **Wednesday** by **11:59 pm** unless stated differently in the course schedule.

 What's our game plan for this course? To get you ready for your **career after graduation!** We will explore your **interests, values, major, and career goals.** Not sure what you want to do yet? No worries – **we will figure it out together.**

 **How can I be successful in this course?** Show up. Do the work. Try your best. **Communicate with me when you are struggling.** Celebrate the small wins along the way. **You can do this.** We're going to have a great semester!

Keep reading below for full details regarding our course and important UTRGV policies and resources...

UTRGV 

Handwritten notes in blue and green ink:
- "flexibility?" with an arrow pointing to the attendance policy.
- "Success" with an arrow pointing to the "No late work accepted" policy.
- "Partners" with an arrow pointing to the "game plan" section.
- "motivational" with an arrow pointing to the "How can I be successful" section.
- "caring" with an arrow pointing to the "How can I be successful" section.
- "student voice" with an arrow pointing to the "How can I be successful" section.
- "Supportive" with an arrow pointing to the "How can I be successful" section.

Reflection Activity #2: Equity-minded practices & syllabus components

Choose one equity-minded practice that enhances your values:

- Demystifying college policies and practices
- Welcoming students and creating classroom culture in which they feel cared for and supported
- Validating students' ability to be successful
- Creating a partnership in which faculty and students work together to ensure success
- Representing a range of racial/ethnic experiences and backgrounds in assignments, readings, and other materials
- Deconstructing the presentation of white students as the "norm"

Choose one Syllabus Component:

- Where in your syllabus do you hope to develop/expand upon, revise this equity-minded practice and why?
 - Course description or introduction to the course
 - Teaching philosophy statement
 - Description of assignments or projects,
 - Grading policies/assessments
 - Course/university policies
 - Tentative schedule layout
 - Readings and resources
 - Student support services
 - Others?

UTRGV SaLT HIS Equity-Minded Feedback Review

1. Share with your small group the equity-minded practice and the syllabus component you wish to develop
2. Each faculty member shares their syllabus (only that one component) on shared screen
3. Others comment and provide feedback informed by SaLT Framework questions (focus on only one lens/one set of questions rather than all of them at once)

UTRGV SaLT HIS Equity-Minded Feedback Review Lenses	
Note: Designed by Alyssa G. Cavazos and Lesley Chapa (2021) and modified by Alyssa G. Cavazos and Alonso Troncoso (2022) informed by research, reviews, and feedback from Student Teaching Consultants and Faculty Partnerships	
Inclusivity & Accessibility	<p>To what extent is the professor responsive to inclusivity and accessibility in the language they use?</p> <p>How is student voice, agency, and empowerment reflected in the language used to describe the course, assignments, expectations?</p> <p>How does (or can) the instructor seek feedback from students on their teaching practices and students' learning progress in the course?</p>
Engagement/Relevance of Curriculum	<p>To what extent are the assignments or activities engaging and relevant to a student's life and/or career/academic aspirations?</p> <p>How is the course responsive to students' interests, passions, goals? How effective are these in engaging students?</p> <p>How does the course build on students' self-efficacy (belief in ability to succeed) and aspirational capital (hopes and dreams despite inequities) through growth mindset?</p> <p>How can the instructor build relevance of curriculum and engagement through the language used?</p>
Grading policy and feedback/assessment practices	<p>To what extent is the course grading, feedback to learner, and assessment practices equity-minded and differentiated or guided to ensure all students' ability to demonstrate learning, engagement, and empowerment through a growth mindset?</p> <p>How are or can the assessment practices be balanced in the course (e.g., quizzes, exams, projects, essays, activities, presentations, group activities, homework, etc.)?</p> <p>How can the instructor challenge common assessment assumptions (e.g., demonstrate learning in one way, one assessment is better than others, one assessment for all students/all context)?</p> <p>How can the instructor invite students into the conversation through feedback on learning and negotiate assessment practices for student growth?</p>
Representation	<p>Who and what languages are overrepresented and underrepresented in readings, guest speakers, collaborations?</p> <p>How are different perspectives represented in the course, including student voices as well?</p> <p>How does the instructor create a sense of belonging (academic and social) among all the students in the course?</p>
Implicit Bias	<p>What does the language used in the teaching document assume about students' access to resources, prior knowledge, prior schooling experiences, literacy and language background, technology, books, car, travel, cultural background, etc.?</p> <p>If applicable, how can the instructor convey awareness of sociohistorical context of exclusionary practices and racism in higher education that contribute to student inequities in learning?</p> <p>How can the instructor seek students' and/or others' perspectives to help identify implicit biases in teaching?</p>

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Teaching a Good First Day of Class

How can we link our teaching values, equity-minded practice, and syllabus component we selected to our first day of class activities?

[How to Teach a Good First Day of Class](#)

[Advice Guide by James Lang](#)

A yellow dashed line in the bottom right corner, consisting of several short, curved segments.

First Day of Class: Four Principles

Principle No. 1: Curiosity

- Spark curiosity
- Center around deep questions/problems
- Find out their interests, passions, motivations

Principle No. 2: Community

- Humanize yourself
- Get students talkin' with one another
- Greet students & walk around (get to know them—class, hometown, major, etc.)

First Day of Class: Four Principles

Principle No. 3: Learning

- Actively engage students in the learning that will happen in the class
- "Ask students to try a cognitive task before they are ready"
- "Invite students to think about the course from a metacognitive perspective"

Principle No. 4: Expectations

- Review overall parameters of course: materials, assessments, policies, key dates and deadlines
- Dedicate time to answer questions

A student's perspective on a meaningful first day of class

What makes a meaningful first day?

What does the workload look like?

Is my professor receptive to student needs?

How is the course material relevant to my life experiences?

Do I feel a sense of belonging?

How are Lang's Four Principles enacted in my experiences?

Expectations

Learning

Community

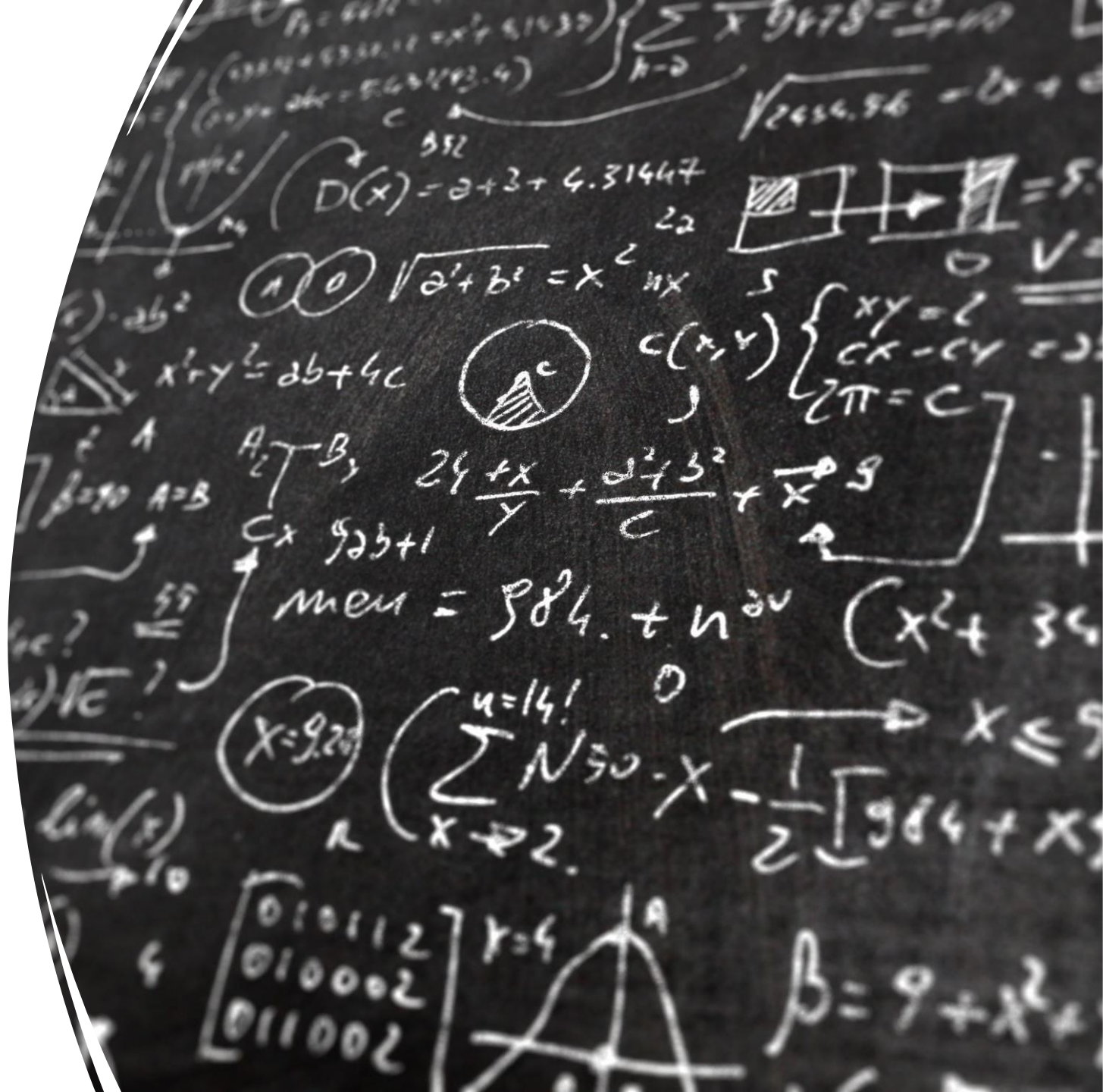
Curiosity

Examples of first day of class activities

- English Composition
- A History Survey Course
- An Upper-Level Psychology Course
- A Mathematics Course

[How to Teach a Good First Day of Class](#)

[Advice Guide by James Lang](#)



My reflections/examples

English 4342: Responding to and Assessing Student Writing

Syllabus Snapshot



My name is **Alyssa G. Cavazos**, and I am thrilled to teach this class and be your professor this semester!

alyssa.cavazos@utrgv.edu

Here's my e-mail. Please e-mail me with questions, comments, thoughts or schedule a time to talk about your writing & learning



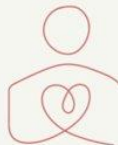
We will write and create new meanings as we draw on **our full literacy and language resources**.

We will **elicit and provide meaningful feedback** on our writing, learning, and teaching processes.



Please submit **drafts, revise, reflect, rethink, and reimagine** your writing to fulfill the "B" default grade and beyond as you wish.

I value **your voice, intentions, and goals as writers**, and I care about your success in the course. If you are experiencing challenges reach out to me and we will find solutions collaboratively.



Our journey together will expose us to different perspectives, challenge our thinking, and lead us to new and exciting paths in writing and learning



Writer Agency:

A Labor-Based Grading Approach

Dra. Alyssa G. Cavazos

My feedback will...



focus on growth and reflection on learning



pose questions and challenge



resist monolingual views to elevate la diversidad de lenguajes en la creación de nuevos conocimientos



build on your prior knowledge & experiences



encourage different perspectives



inspire conversations

Your agency as a writer will...



build on your reflective skills for growth and learning



elicit meaningful feedback



Negotiate and navigate language choices and feedback with intention & purpose by drawing on your full linguistic repertoire



create new meanings through revision



synthesize different perspectives



Reimagine writing ideas & creations

Reflection Activity #3: First Day of Class Principles and Activities

- What principle would you like to focus on (e.g., curiosity, community, learning, expectations) to actively engage and introduce students to your course?
 - How does this principle align to your teaching values/beliefs?
 - How does the principle link to the equity-minded practice and the syllabus component you selected?
- What activity would allow you to actively engage and introduce students to the essence of your course in a meaningful way?

CENTER FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE SALT HSI

UTRGV Instructors, did you know you can receive feedback on your teaching practices from trained Student Teaching Consultants?

What can you submit for feedback?



COURSE SYLLABUS

ASSIGNMENTS OR
PROJECT EXPECTATIONS



FEEDBACK AND/OR
ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES



TEACHING PHILOSOPHY
STATEMENTS



OTHER TEACHING
DOCUMENTS



UTRGV SaLT HSI also offers mid-semester reflection student focus groups, one-on-one conversations, and semester long student-faculty partnerships

- **Promote** authentic collaborations between faculty and students
- **Diversify** educational environments
- **Foster** inclusive and equitable pedagogies
- **Build** students' ownership in learning
- **Empower** students' voices in self-advocacy and agency



VISIT THE SALT HSI
WEBSITE FOR MORE
DETAILS

<https://rb.gy/kaibj1>

The University of Texas
Rio Grande Valley
Center for Teaching Excellence

[Learn more about SaLT HIS Here](#)

Student Consultant Feedback Request Form

If you are interested in receiving feedback on a teaching document or your course syllabi, please complete a Student Consultant Feedback Request Form.



[Student Consultant Feedback Request Form](#)

**student partners start their Fall work on September 1st.*

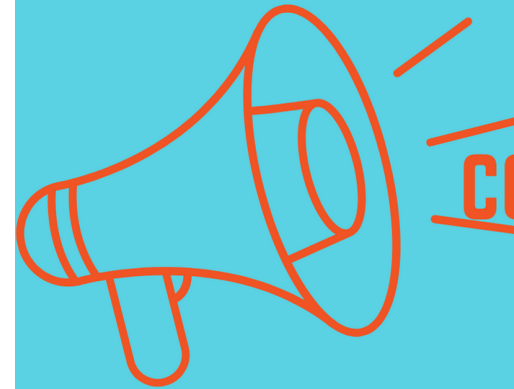
CTE Teaching Conversation Proposal



[Click here to submit your teaching conversation proposal](#)

BE A PART OF SOMETHING BIG!

**INTERESTED IN
FACILITATING A
TEACHING
CONVERSATION**



The Center for Teaching Excellence offers monthly teaching conversations on teaching and learning practices where participants reflect on diverse teaching and learning strategies and engage in conversations with fellow peers.

The University of Texas
Rio Grande Valley
Center for Teaching Excellence



Thank you!