Online Course Syllabus Development Guide

Online learning is catalyzing a pedagogical shift in how we teach and learn. Learning Management System (Blackboard) is the delivery platform that we use to design and deliver courses to online students. The instructor's role is changing from the "sage on the stage" to "the guide on the side". Students are also changing from "passive" learners to self-regulated learners in online learning environment. To lessen students' concerns about online learning, facilitate an effective online learning community, and fulfill our Villanova's commitment to individualized learning experience, online syllabus serves as a great tool to provide a clear vision of your online course and set explicit expectations for online students.

In addition to elements of the on-campus course syllabus, the online course syllabus needs to include the following information for students:

- Policies, procedures, and mechanics about how to communicate and learn in an online learning environment.

- Explicit instructions on delivery mode (i.e., asynchronous, combination of asynchronous and synchronous) and platform (i.e., Learning Management System), online etiquette, online participation and collaborative work requirements, accessible course materials, online testing, academic honesty, methods of submitting assignments, technology requirements, technical support, etc.

- Information pertaining to your teaching presence online; i.e., how you will work with the students, how you will engage them, how you will support them in their learning. As many students can feel isolated from the institution, their classmates, and the instructor in an online learning environment, instructors need to consider how to build an online community with their students.

This following syllabus outline has been designed to assist you in developing a learning-centered syllabus for your online course. Also, please consult your college for syllabus requirements. For example, the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences (CLAS) provides a syllabus guide for on-campus courses. Link to CLAS syllabus guide.

Online Course Logistics

This section provides information about 1) instructor contact information, 2) instructor personal information, 3) course information, and 4) course orientation.

1) **Instructor Contact Information**

   Enter instructor, and/or co-instructor name and contact information, including office phone#, email address, office address, office hours, and virtual office hours via web conferencing software such as Blackboard Collaborate Ultra and Zoom.

Indicate whether the instructor is available by appointment and the manner in which appointments may be made. Note reasonable expectations for students regarding response time to e-mail or other messages (e.g. respond within 24 hours). If multi-section course, list the name and contact information of the course coordinator that students may direct their questions to. List UNIT contact information for technical difficulties.

2) **Instructor Personal Information**

In an online course, students can feel isolated from the institution, their classmates, and the instructor; a personalized instructor narrative, via video, will help students get to know the instructor and begin to establish a connection to the course. For example, in the brief (3-4 minute) video you may share your interest in the subject, your background, and your teaching philosophy. You may introduce co-instructors, outline their expertise and share how they will contribute to the online course.

3) **Course Information**

Course title, number, section, semester offered, Learning Management System (LMS) used, course description, course structure, learning outcomes, and technical support are clearly indicated.

a. **Course Description:** Indicate how the course fits within the program, its value added for the students, its content. You may indicate the course format, e.g., seminar course, interdisciplinary, team-taught course.

b. **Program Student Learning Outcomes**: Indicate how the course learning outcomes align with the academic program outcomes: what academic program goals are addressed in the course? You may outline this alignment by listing each program goal relevant to a particular course goal. For example, in this course students articulate their data collection process by writing lab reports [course learning goal] - this goal contributes to students' ability to present written and oral reports of technical information clearly and concisely [academic program goal].

c. **Course Student Learning Outcomes:** State the course learning outcomes, including knowledge, skills, and competencies to be achieved. Inform the students how the course contributes to their learning. Use concrete verbs (e.g., identify, compare, appraise, estimate, predict) to articulate student learning outcomes and make them observable and measurable. The learning outcomes guide the design of assessments and in- and out-of-class activities.

d. **Course Structure:** As your course content will be chunked into several self-contained manageable sections/modules for online learning, it is important to introduce the overall structure of your course so that students will know how to navigate through your course progressively. As it is essential to break your course content into a number of manageable chunks/modules/sections, one suggested modular structure is listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Suggested Modular Structure

Within each module/section, state the learning goals, readings/materials, learning activities, and assignments within the module/section. Providing students with an overview of the course structure will help students navigate throughout the course.

1. **Module Introduction**: Provide a brief module overview information such as the

content to be introduced in the module. List the beginning and ending dates for each module/week, dates and times of synchronous course meetings (if necessary) and virtual conference tool used.

2. **Module Goals**: State learning goals for the module. Write [measurable learning goals/objectives](#) that describe what you want students to be able to do by the end of the module. Your modular learning goals will be aligned with learning activities and assessments within the module.

3. **Module Learning Materials**: Provide engaging and accessible online learning materials that facilitate communication and collaboration. Chunk video lectures into smaller manageable pieces no longer than 10 minutes.

4. **Module Activities**: Describe the nature of instructional activities that will occur to help students accomplish set learning goals. Provide online learning activities that promote sense of class community, open communication, student interaction, and constructive collaboration. State explicit expectations and indicate the synchronous and asynchronous online learning activities.

5. **Module Assignments**: Describe all assignment requirements in the module, such as types of assignments, tests, exams, papers, projects, homework, quizzes, exhibits, presentations that students will complete and indicate how they will help students achieve the intended learning outcomes. Indicate how each assignment contributes to the final course grade. List the dates when these requirements occur or assignments are due, as well as how to submit assignments online and how to access peer/instructor feedback.

4) **Course Orientation**

Provide clear and prominent instructions on how to get started, where to find various course components, syllabus information, course expectations, information about specific assignments covered in class, special software, course materials and other requirements for the course, and course structure for synchronous and asynchronous sessions. Note any prerequisites for student enrollment, special skills or knowledge for effectively meeting course requirements. Course orientation which features video walk-throughs may even better prepare students to move into the first module/week of the course.

Online Course Policy

As online students are mostly working independently by themselves in the online course, it is important to provide explicit course policies to students at the beginning of the course, such as participation guidelines, academic integrity, technical issues, online test, due dates and late work policies, etc.

1) **Online Etiquette/netiquette Guidelines**

Outline expectations pertaining to students' online communication behavior, especially as it pertains to being a productive member of the online community. For example, to build up an equivalent online learning community, we should communicate with each other using same common courtesy, politeness, and appropriate online behaviors as we should in a face-to-face environment: a) Respect the opinions of others and their right to disagree;

b) Do not send messages that are written all in uppercase as typing in caps is considered shouting or screaming online; c) Keep replies and comments focused on the relevant topic; d) Post discussions and assignments in a timely fashion so that others can have sufficient time to review and reply.

2) **Grading Policy**

   You need to describe your grading policy, performance standards, rubrics and/or examples of quality assignments much like your on-campus syllabus. In addition, explicitly state requirements regarding participation in online discussions and synchronous meetings, and online collaborations, as appropriate.

3) **Academic Integrity**

   Much like your on-campus syllabus, you need to provide a statement about academic integrity. For example, when students come to Villanova, they join an academic community founded on the search for knowledge in an atmosphere of cooperation and trust. Students must be honest and forthright in their academic studies. To falsify the results of one's research, to steal the words or ideas of another, to cheat on an assignment, or to allow or assist another to commit these acts corrupts the educational process. Students are expected to do their own work and neither give nor receive unauthorized assistance. Please familiarize yourself with the Code of Academic Integrity; students are encouraged to visit the Academic Integrity Gateway, complete the interactive quiz, and refer to this site as a resource.

Online Instructional Materials

Upload or hyperlink all required and optional readings, learning materials, technology tools that students are expected to use in the course. Please familiarize yourself with the Villanova Copyright Policy.

Course material costs may pose a financial hurdle for some students. Please make an effort to adopt **affordable course materials**. Please visit the following site for ways to provide affordable course materials:

Note. As required by the Higher Education Act (HEA), please indicate the following information for required and recommended textbooks, custom course packs and supplemental material such as software, website access, cases or simulations: the ISBN, the retail price. If the ISBN is not available, please provide the author/creator, the title, the publisher, and the copyright date.

Course Technology and Support

State requisite skills for using technology tools for class participation and information regarding technologies (hardware, software, subscriptions) that the students will need to work with, instruct students on how to test their computer's compatibility with LMS and software specifications and how to test the system prior to their first class session.

Provide links to respective resources: For example, Before you join the Zoom meeting, please review the following resources: "Zoom System Requirements for PC and Mac" , and "Joining a Test Meeting" to ensure the best possible synchronous experience.

We will start the Zoom meeting with the expectation that you have tested the technology in advance and will dive directly in the subject matter. If you experience technology issues during the meeting, you will need to leave the session and contact UNIT for support.

Describe how students can access technology tools used in the course, and include links to privacy policies and accessibility standards for technology tools. Provide information to technical support available to students. For example, for technical support and/or LMS support please contact UNIT directly by calling (610) 519- 7777 or sending email to: support@villanova.edu.

Online Learning Resources

Much like your on-campus syllabus, you are required to indicate how students with documented disabilities can access appropriate accommodations. Online students tend to work by themselves most of the time; thus, learning resources lend critical, timely, 24/7 accessible online support. Students appreciate having access to study tips, study guides, test review questions, guiding questions to online readings, videos. You may use web conferencing software to conduct online review sessions prior to exams.

You may also include links to Villanova Student Service offices that pertain directly to your course, such as Office of Disability Services, Learning Support Services, Mathematics Learning Resource Center, Writing Center, and Falvey Library.

Authored by Villanova Institute for Teaching and learning(VITAL), Villanova University, 2018.