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## VILLANOVA INSTITUTE FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

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# Writing an Inclusive, Learning-Centered Syllabus

Adapted from Grunert O'Brien, J., Millis, B., & Cohen, M. (2008). (Second ed). *The course syllabus. A learning-centered approach*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass and [How to create a syllabus. Advice Guide](#), K. Gannon, The Chronicle of Higher Education, August 2023 (Accessed August 8, 2024) by Gabriele Bauer, Director, VITAL, 106 Vasey Hall, Villanova University.

*The more explicit and transparent information we can provide our students about the course goals, their responsibilities, and the criteria we will use to assess their performance, the more likely it is that they will be successful as students, and we will be successful as instructors. The syllabus serves as a central means to communicate such information.*

*Modified from Grunert O'Brian, Millis, & Cohen, 2008, The course syllabus.*

This syllabus outline has been designed to assist you in developing an inclusive, learning-centered syllabus. As you work with this outline, consider the core elements (some required) and questions it presents. Feel free to modify so that your course syllabus most appropriately reflects the program, the course, and your approach to learning, teaching, and assessment. The outline highlights aspects of teaching that support an inclusive learning environment. Please use **student-centered language** when writing your syllabus; that is, the syllabus is written in first-person and incorporates a text and tone that convey a welcoming, supportive, and encouraging climate for all students. The syllabus helps students understand the value of the course, how the course has been designed to contribute to their education as a whole person.

Access online at: [vital.villanova.edu](https://vital.villanova.edu) – Instructional Resources / Syllabus

**Note.** When posting a digital copy in Blackboard LMS, upload a PDF file to ensure accessibility across devices.

## 1. Course Logistics

This section provides information about 1) instructor(s), 2) course, and 3) instructor personal information.

### 1.1. Instructor Contact Information and Student Hours (Office Hours)

Enter instructor, and/or co-instructor name and contact information, including office phone#, email address, office address, office hours, virtual office hours via [web conferencing software](#), such as Zoom. Indicate whether instructor is available by appointment and the way appointments may be made. Note reasonable expectations for students regarding response time to e-mail or other messages. Explicitness and transparency are much appreciated. You may consider including some of the following sample communication regarding **student hours (office hours)**. The term “student hours” conveys to students that this time has been purposefully set aside to support them in their learning, personal growth, and well-being.

*I will respond to all emails and phone calls within 24 hours M-F and within 48 hours over the weekend/holidays. I tend to respond during regular working hours. I expect the same from you as a student. Requests for meetings/conversations outside regular working hours are possible with significant notice but cannot always be guaranteed. The night before exams or major assignment due dates I will schedule additional office hours online which will be announced in advance. There is no requirement to*

*meet with me for any assignment but I'm always willing to assist in improving your comprehension and application of the material.* (Shared by Randy Weinstein, PhD, VP for Teaching & Learning, Professor of Chemical & Biological Engineering, with permission, January 2023)

If multi-section course, list the name and contact information of the course coordinator that students may direct their questions to. You may also state your own pronouns when you introduce yourself in the syllabus to model an inclusive approach to gender.

For example: *Names and Pronouns: Pronouns can be a way to affirm someone's identity. They are a public way to refer to people in place of their name (e.g., "he" or "she" or "they"). In this class, you are invited to share what pronouns you go by, and we seek to refer to each other using the pronouns and names that we share. You can [update your pronouns and the name you go by](https://my.villanova.edu/my/villanova/myvillanova/myvillanova.do) through [myvillanova.villanova.edu](https://my.villanova.edu/my/villanova/myvillanova/myvillanova.do)*

## 1.2. Course Information

Course title, number, section, semester offered, days, times of course meetings (EST) and location. List any dates, times of special sessions, field trips, other activities that are scheduled in place of/in addition to regularly scheduled class meetings. Note any prerequisites for student enrollment, special skills or knowledge for effectively meeting course requirements.

Provide an accessibility statement that invites students to contact you, such as:

*Universal Learning: I am committed to the principle of universal learning. This means that our classroom, our virtual spaces, our practices, and our interactions be as inclusive as possible. Mutual respect, civility, and the ability to listen and observe others carefully are crucial to universal learning.*

*Any student with physical ability issues should contact the [Office for Access & Disability Services](#) at the start of the semester to coordinate appropriate accommodations. Then you and I will work together to ensure your academic success in this course as well as appropriate accommodations needed for this course.*

## 1.3. Instructor Personal Information

You may share your interest in the subject, your teaching philosophy. You may introduce co-instructors, outline their expertise, and share how they will contribute. You may record a brief video to introduce yourself and post in Blackboard LMS.

## 1.4. Land Acknowledgement Statement

We invite you to share a land acknowledgement statement to recognize those who first lived on the land where Villanova University resides. You may share the following statement prepared by the [Pennsylvania Youth Congress](#) in 2020.

*We recognize and acknowledge Pennsylvania as being the land of the Erielhonian (Erie), Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), Lenni-Lenape, Shawnee, Susquehannock, and Tuscarora nations, and the Honniasont, Saluda, Saponi, Tutelo, and Wenrohronon tribes. We pay respect to the Native peoples of Pennsylvania past, present, and future and their continuing presence in their homeland and throughout their diasporas.*

## 2. Academic Program and Course Student Learning Outcomes

### 2.1. 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.

## 2.2. Program Student Learning Outcomes

Indicate how the course learning outcomes align with the academic program outcomes, such as list which academic program goals are addressed in the course. You may outline this alignment by listing each program goal relevant to a particular course goal. You may also list accreditation or certification requirements, as appropriate.

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].*

## 2.3. 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.

Sample learning outcomes:

- *Create interactive 3-D models of products using VRML.*
- *Use energy principles to determine the stress states of structures comprised of one-dimensional elements (beams, columns, and rods).*
- *Solve geometric problems concerning planes using vectors.*

## 3. Assignments / Exams

Describe all academic requirements in the course, 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, such as percentage or points earned per assignment. List the dates when these requirements occur, or assignments are due.

Provide **opportunities for practice** and give students **frequent feedback** on their learning using low-stakes assessments (e.g., homework, reading quizzes, reflections). Require multiple high-stakes assessments (e.g., papers, performances, projects) with **opportunities to revise and resubmit** where students may demonstrate their mastery of learning outcomes. Link assignments to learning goals, explain to students what they will gain from completing assignments (besides the grade).

## 4. Grading / Course Policy

### 4.1. Grading Policy

State instructor grading policy, including the weight attached to all assignments/exams listed in the syllabus, including teamwork and class participation, as appropriate. Note how final grade is calculated and outline grade distribution. Set forth when/how students will receive feedback on their work and reasonable expectations about returning graded work. Set forth instructor policy regarding attendance, participation, missed assignments, late work, and extra credit. Please note the [attendance policy for first-year undergraduate students](#). Outline instructor policy regarding participation in webinars, field trips or other activities that are scheduled in addition to and/or in place of regularly scheduled class meetings.

### 4.2. Course Policies

Outline policy pertaining to **academic integrity**, **student safety** (lab), **civility** (e.g., use of cell phones, laptops), and **academic accommodations**. For example, *Eating and drinking are not permitted in the lab. Please do not bring any food or beverages into the lab. We will be working with hazardous materials throughout the semester. Eating or drinking during lab puts you and your classmates at increased risk of*

*accident and injury from breakage or toxins. You will be asked to remove any food or beverage you bring into the lab. Please turn off your cell phones so that you can focus on the lab work at hand.*

Provide a **statement about academic integrity**, such as *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](https://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/provost/resources/student/policies/integrity.html):*  
<<https://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/provost/resources/student/policies/integrity.html>>

*Students are encouraged to visit the [Academic Integrity Gateway](https://library.villanova.edu/research/subject-guides/academicintegrity), complete the interactive academic integrity quiz, and use this site as a resource: <https://library.villanova.edu/research/subject-guides/academicintegrity>*

For suggested statements regarding **A.I. and academic integrity**, consult the following resources: (1) [Guidance on A.I. generators, including sample syllabus statements](#); and (2) [Guidelines for students regarding responsible academic use of A.I. - generated material](#).

Provide a **statement about academic accommodations**, such as *It is the policy of Villanova to make reasonable academic accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. All students who need accommodations should go to [Clockwork for Students](#) via [myNOVA](#) to complete the Online Intake or to send accommodation letters to professors. Go to the Learning Support Services (LSS) website - <http://learningsupportservices.villanova.edu> or the Office for Access and Disability Services (ADS) website - [www1.villanova.edu/university/student-life/ods.html](http://www1.villanova.edu/university/student-life/ods.html) for registration guidelines and instructions. If you have any questions please contact LSS at [learning.support.services@villanova.edu](mailto:learning.support.services@villanova.edu) or 610-519-5176, or ADS at [ods@villanova.edu](mailto:ods@villanova.edu) or 610-519-3209.*

Include a **statement about Personal Day(s) in support of student wellness**. These [Personal Days](#) apply for undergraduate students under specific circumstances and do not excuse them from required work. Sample statement for 75-minute classes meeting twice a week, *In addition to the attendance policy outlined above, students are entitled to one Personal Day, excused absence, for any reason that may contribute to their personal wellness. Students must advise the instructor by email before class of their intent to utilize a Personal Day as the reason for their absence. A Personal Day will not be approved retroactively. Students may, but are not required, to provide additional information regarding their absence. Please note, a Personal Day may not: (1) be used immediately preceding or following a University holiday or break period; (2) be used on days when exams, presentations or other major assignments are scheduled. A Personal Day does not grant an automatic extension for items due. Students remain responsible for all assignments, exams, presentations, etc. due on that date. It is in the instructor's discretion to determine whether any extension is appropriate given individual circumstances. Please refer to [www1.villanova.edu/villanova/provost/resources/student/policies/attendance.html](http://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/provost/resources/student/policies/attendance.html)*

Include a **statement about absences on religious holidays**, such as *Villanova University makes every reasonable effort to allow members of the community to observe their religious holidays, consistent with the University's obligations, responsibilities, and policies. Students who expect to miss a class or assignment due to the observance of a religious holiday should discuss the matter with their professors as soon as possible, normally at least two weeks in advance. Absence from classes or examinations for religious reasons does not relieve students from responsibility for any part of the course work required during the absence. Please refer to [www1.villanova.edu/villanova/provost/resources/student/policies/religiousholidays.html](http://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/provost/resources/student/policies/religiousholidays.html)*

## 5. Teaching Methods and Materials

Convey to the students your commitment to create and foster an equitable and inclusive learning environment. You may include the link to [Villanova's Diversity Statement](#) and/or articulate your own. Describe the nature of instructional activities that will occur to help students accomplish set learning outcomes, such as teamwork, debates, interactive lecture, online discussions, use of Blackboard, polling. Outline the nature of interactions and students' responsibility in their learning: student-led discussions, presentations, peer feedback, self-assessment. Note whether you will collect student feedback for instructional enhancement purposes.

List all required readings, courseware, digital subscriptions, learning materials, instructional supplies, equipment that students are expected to use in the course and indicate where they may be obtained. Please familiarize yourself with the [Villanova Copyright Policy](#).

Note. According to the Higher Education Act (HEA), indicate the following information for required/recommended textbooks, course packs and 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: <<http://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/president/higheredact.html>>

**Classroom Lecture Capture (CLC):** If you are requesting that your course(s) be recorded in a [CLC capable classroom](#), you may consider informing students. [Link](#) to sample ULC syllabus statement.

## 6. Learning and Personal Resources

Describe how students can succeed in the course and offer study tips, resources, study guides, such as: *Guide to the readings - Keep an open mind. Listen to what the readings have to say. Think about what experiences you may have had and reading you have done that may corroborate the course readings. Give yourself time to reflect on the information offered in the readings. Take your time with the readings; allow yourself to enter into a kind of conversation with them.*

Outline how the faculty member and/or peer instructor will work with students; e.g., facilitate study groups, conduct review sessions prior to exams. Include tips from former students who have been successful in the course. You may also include links to Villanova Student Service offices that pertain directly to your course, such as [Learning Support Services](#), the [Math Center in the Learner's Studio](#), and [Villanova Writing Center](#).

You may also include information on how students can access resources that support their personal and physical well-being, such as the [Student Health Center](#), the [University Counseling Center](#), and the [Office of Health Promotion](#). Sample statement, *College can be quite stressful and challenging. Counseling Centers are there to support all students and they are a great resource. The Counseling Center sees more than 1400 students a year and the counselors can help you be more effective; the consultations are confidential.*

You may include a **basic needs statement** to convey to students that you are committed to supporting them in having their basic needs met (e.g., food, shelter, safety) so they can focus on their studies and utilize the multiple opportunities that the college experience offers. Refer to the following sample statement from the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice: *We learn as whole people. To learn effectively we must have basic security: safe shelter, sleep, and nutrition. If you're having difficulty with any of these essential things, please talk with me or the Dean of Students. Together we can work to ensure that your needs are met. We are here to support you.*

You may include a **course content note** to inform students that potentially sensitive content will be addressed in the course. These notes are designed to help the students prepare themselves to engage with the sensitive course material to the best of their ability and in support of their own well-being. The following sample course content note was shared by Rebecca Winer, PhD, and taken from her course on medieval history (with permission, January 2023).

***Course Content Note:*** “Our work as historians is to reveal, to the best of our abilities, the realities of the past, and as teachers to help our students to engage those realities through the lenses of the people who experienced them. I cannot imagine teaching history without engaging those events characterized variously as traumatic, charged, ugly, or painful. To do so would be to fail as historians and as teachers. At the same time, this teaching requires sensitivity and care.” --Nancy K. Bristow, professor of history at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington.

*A history course necessarily deals with issues that can be painful and disturbing for students; and in this course we will learn about violence against marginalized people during the crusades and the massive loss of life in the Black Death, among other tragedies. The Middle Ages have also been misused in the past, including by the Nazis, and in the present by alt-right groups to promote violence against others. It is a normal human reaction to feel uncomfortable, sad, anxious, and even guilty when learning about social injustice. I will do my best to build a community of trust, respect and support that allows us to discuss such feelings honestly and openly.*

***During our class a “meta-moment” or “time out” is offered to any student who feels uncomfortable or confused and wants to pause the conversation.*** *Students may need to briefly step away if they feel overwhelmed by a discussion or lecture. If you think you may have to leave during a certain class session, please let me know, you are, however, responsible for any material you miss. If you are aware of any kind of subject material that might be traumatic for you, please let me know in advance, if you are able. I am happy to discuss any concerns you have before this material comes up in class. Likewise, if you wish to discuss your personal reactions to such material with the class or with me afterwards, I welcome such discussion as an appropriate part of our coursework. I want us all to be able to engage as effectively as possible with the material. We come to this with our own experiences, points of view and opinions; all of these are important in our discussion; and we are striving together to respect and support each other as we learn.*

## 7. Course Calendar

List the sequencing of content areas, respective readings, schedule of course activities chronologically by class period for the entire semester. State dates, times when all academic requirements in the course need to be completed and submitted. Indicate dates for formative and summative student feedback, note drop-add dates, official holidays, breaks, and dates you will be away from campus. Refer to the [academic calendar](#) for observed holidays and breaks. From the course calendar students should have a clear understanding of their responsibilities for each week.

## 8. Disclaimer

You may wish to include a disclaimer about possible changes to the course calendar. For example, *This syllabus is intended to outline how the course will be conducted, how you will be engaged in learning the subject matter, and how your learning will be assessed and will be followed as closely as possible. However, the professor reserves the right to modify and supplement aspects of the course as needs arise. You will be informed about these modifications in a timely fashion.*