SYLLABUS BASICS
CONCEPTUALIZING THE SYLLABUS

The syllabus is the backbone of a course in two important ways:

1. It is a legal contract between teacher and students. As such, it must contain information critical to students' success in the course, be subject to minimal substantive change, and be clear and concise;
2. It is a blueprint for the entire course --- it provides the teacher with a clear road map for course development as well as course management, and it provides the students with a road map for success in the course.

Steps in planning a syllabus

The following order of steps is essential for a successful course development process; it moves you from the conceptual to the practical:

1. Develop a solid rationale for your course --- why is this course important, how does it fit into a course sequence or other related courses.
2. Decide what you want students to be able to know or do as a result of taking this course.
3. Determine how you will assess student work --- evaluation standards and grading.
4. Define and set course content.
5. Structure students' active involvement in their own learning.
6. Identify learning and teaching resources.
7. Design a clear, concise and easy-to-follow format.

Note: If you plan on placing your syllabus online, consider the general look, length and ease of access.

Functions of a syllabus

- To establish and maintain contact between teacher and students;
- To help set the tone for the course;
- To provide students with a conceptual framework of the course;
- To acquaint students with the logistics of the course;
- To serve as a reference point for handouts and other learning resources;
- To define students' responsibilities for successful course work;
- To help students assess their readiness for the course (prerequisites, prior knowledge and skills);
- To provide an appropriate pacing for learning;
- To serve as a handy reference.