

Creating an Airtight Syllabus:

A dean's two cents

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General tips:

- Explain WHY you have particular policies so that students understand that your policies are not arbitrary, but are intended to help them be more successful. For example, if writing skills are weighed in your written assignments, consider language such as: "Although this is not an English class, it is a college class; therefore, I expect you to write clearly and use proper grammar."
- If you teach in an occupational area, you may consider: "Writing reports is a critical part of this occupation; employees who have good writing skills are more likely to succeed in the field. Therefore, the use of proper grammar, punctuation and spelling will be considered in the grading of all written assignments."
- Post your syllabus on Blackboard, and let students know that they get one printed copy. If they lose it, they can always reprint it from Blackboard.
- When it comes to syllabi, less is NOT more...MORE is more! The tighter your language (not your rules, but your precision and word choice), the less likely you are to have viable student complaints.
- Consider having your syllabi printed on a colored paper, so that it stands out a bit more in students' backpacks and folders.
- Always proofread your syllabus for errors, and have someone else proof it. Nothing undermines a teacher's academic authority more than grammatical and spelling errors!

Specific areas:

Academic Integrity: No matter how much we warn them, inevitably you'll have the occasional cheater. Include the Academic Integrity policy in its entirety (or close to it), as few students read it otherwise. You might also put a link on your Blackboard site, and even throw the page up on the projector in the first day, and show students how to use the links embedded there to see examples of what constitutes cheating in the various categories. You might even want to share real examples (with identifying information redacted, of course!) from previous semesters on the first day. The link to the policy is:

http://www.mcc.edu/18_policies/student_acad_integrity.shtml

Also include your penalty for cheating in the syllabus. Will students fail the assignment, the class, etc.? Reinforce that if a student is unclear whether their use of quotations and citations are correct, they should consult with you or seek help from the Writing Center in advance of the due date. Note that once a paper is turned in, the student is representing that the work as their own and if it is found to be plagiarized, the academic integrity process will be followed.

Assignment resubmission: One way to be flexible with grading is to allow students to resubmit work, with a solid deadline and perhaps with additional criteria, such as going to the Writing Center to get help with written assignments. One thing to note- you might want to set a minimum initial level of achievement, so that students don't simply turn in their name on a piece of paper to qualify with meeting a deadline! For example, letting students resubmit only passing work to earn an additional X number of points, or each student may only resubmit one assignment during the semester.

Attendance policy: Note that your attendance policy and the attendance reporting are two different things. Include the "Federal guidelines..." language (see the bottom of the Syllabus Template for this language).

Tying points to attendance opens up the door for students to argue if you recorded their attendance correctly. Instead, offer short in-class assignments that cannot be made up otherwise. Vary these assignments- some at the beginning of class, some in the middle, some at the end. You can even use these opportunities to assess student learning or come up with new delivery ideas! Ideas include:

Beginning of class:

- List three things you learned in the last class.
- In what way did this class tie into your real life in the last week?

Middle of class (especially for once a week classes, before going to break):

- What questions do you have about what we've covered so far today?
- What is the most interesting thing you've learned so far today?
- How could you apply today's topics to your real life?

End of class:

- What questions do you have about the topics we discussed today?
- List three things you learned in class today.
- Did today's group activity help you understand the material better? Why or why not?

Classroom distractions: Include your policy for laptops and cell phones. If you ban their use in the classroom, reinforce that with language that reminds students that the use of these electronics are distracting to others, and constitutes behavior that is disruptive to the learning environment. Again, remind them that your job is to protect the learning environment for all, and yes, that does trump "personal freedom"!

Communication/contact information: Make clear the methods which are most effective for students to communicate with you. Be realistic! If you prefer that they contact you by email, be sure that you check email daily.

Deadlines: Be very clear about due dates and deadlines. Is work due at the beginning or end of class? If you allow late work to be submitted, indicate calendar days, class days or business days, and be clear about the method of submission- should students email work to you, drop it off in the Division office, or hand it to you in the next class session?

Incomplete Policy: It's always good to include the College policy, and indicate your criteria that may be above and beyond the college policy. Handy extra tip: although students have a year to complete an incomplete, consider a much shorter deadline. The longer the deadline, the less likely a student is to complete the "I", and the less successful they may be as they forget the content of the course!

Late Work Policy: Be extremely clear about deadlines and penalties.

Rubrics: If you develop them in advance, include them in the syllabus. This gives students as much notice as possible about the grading criteria, therefore cutting down on the "I didn't know we were going to be graded on _____."

Snow Days: When developing your course outline, try to work in one class session that is a "throwaway" ...but don't tell the students that! This could be a non-essential lesson that can easily be eliminated if there is a snow day without impacting the course objectives. Examples include showing a DVD of a TV program or film that relates to the course, a review day, an open discussion day, etc. In Fall you'll

want to plan it for the second week in December, and in Winter you want to plan it for after Spring Break. If there is a snow day, you simply rearrange the schedule and eliminate that lesson. It's not always perfect, but may help!

Tardiness/Leaving Early: This is a big one! Be clear how you count tardiness- define how late “tardy” is, and the penalty. Are they marked absent for arriving late or leaving early? Again reinforce that it is distracting to others when students come in late, and your policy exists to create the best possible learning environment for all. Reminder: having short assignments at different times during the class period on different days may help eliminate people arriving late or leaving early.

Throwing Out Low Grades: With assessments that have a good amount of frequency (daily points exercises, quizzes, short papers, self-tests etc.), offer to drop the lowest one or two. This eliminates the “excused” versus “unexcused” absence issue; it can eliminate a certain amount of begging on the part of students; and shows that you understand people have off days or need to miss class once in a while.

Syllabus Template

From the “Faculty Resource Guide”

All information must be consistent with catalog description, CPCS approved objectives and divisional topical outlines for this course.

I. Course Information

- A. Course Name
- B. Prerequisites
- C. Meeting days, times and location
- D. Course prefix and number
- E. Credits
- F. Contact hours
- G. Book requirements – required and optional
 - i. Title
 - ii. Author
 - iii. Publisher
 - iv. Edition
 - v. ISBN number
- H. Equipment and supply requirements
- I. General description of course

II. Instructor Information

- A. Instructor's name
- B. Instructor's office location
- C. Instructor's contact information
 - i. Office phone number
 - ii. E-mail address
 - iii. Fax number
 - iv. Division phone number
- D. Instructor's office hours

III. Class Organization

- A. Outline of CPSC approved objectives in chronological order
- B. Key dates for the semester

- C. How the objectives will be assessed
- D. Estimated timeline for assessment(s)
- E. How the objectives will be graded
- F. How each assessment impacts the final grade

IV. Instructor policies

- A. Opportunities for extra credit
- B. Grading policy including grading scale
- C. Complete attendance policy
 - i. Absences
 - a. Planned
 - b. Emergency
 - ii. Tardiness
 - iii. Withdrawal
- D. Instructor's policy regarding makeup work:
 - i. Exams and quizzes
 - ii. Assignments
 - iii. Homework
 - iv. Incompletes
- E. College policy on accommodations for persons with disabilities
- F. College's policy regarding emergency closings
- G. Policy regarding instructor's absence(s)
- H. Instructor's classroom policies
 - i. Safety requirements
 - ii. Cell phones
 - iii. Classroom etiquette
 - iv. Tardiness – entering when presentations are being given
 - v. Food/drink
 - vi. Tape recording policies
 - vii. Hats/appropriate dress
 - viii. Plagiarism

Syllabus Language to Cut & Paste:

Academic Integrity Policy:

In an academic institution, every member of the community must demonstrate the highest standards of academic honesty; one must produce work that is wholly one's own, whether it is in the form of taking a test, writing an essay or report, conducting an experiment, or completing an assignment.

Taking another's work and presenting it as one's own, falsifying data or other information, helping others to cheat, depriving others of the resources they need to complete their work, or presenting work from a previous course to fulfill the requirements of another course, violate MCC's Academic Honesty Policy.

Individual faculty members may have different guidelines for their course, and it is the student's responsibility to clarify each instructor's expectations for the course. For example, some instructors may allow students to collaborate or to present previously submitted work to fulfill a course requirement. Students must read, understand, and follow the syllabi, test directions, and any other instructor policies pertaining to academic honesty.

1. Cheating: Cheating includes, but is not limited to, (1) use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests or examinations; (2) dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems or carrying out other assignments; or (3) the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a member of the college faculty or staff .
 - o [Examples of Cheating](#)
 - o Fabrication: Fabrication is the falsification or invention of any information, data, research materials, or citation in an academic exercise without authorization from the instructor.
 - o [Examples of Fabrication](#)
 - o Facilitating Academic Dishonesty: Students who intentionally, willingly, or negligently allow their work to be used, copied, or submitted for credit by other students or who assist or attempt to assist another person in any act of academic dishonesty are in violation of this policy.
 - o [Examples of Facilitating Academic Dishonesty](#)
 - o Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the representation of the words, ideas, or works of another person as one's own in an academic assignment. A college is like a factory for the production of words and ideas. Students earn grades and credits for the valuable words and ideas that they produce. Therefore, it is essential that the words and ideas of all members of the College are protected as their "intellectual property," and it is essential that no one pretends that other people's intellectual property is one's own.

Sometimes, people plagiarize intentionally, committing fraud by turning in someone else's work and passing it off as their own. Sometimes, people plagiarize unintentionally because they are confused about how to fairly and honestly represent someone else's words or ideas in their writing. It is the individual student's responsibility to seek instruction in this skill.

- Helpful student web resources
 - ♣ <http://www.plagiarism.org>
- Helpful faculty classroom resources
 - ♣ <http://turnitin.com>
 - ♣ http://turnitin.com/research_site/print.html/

Students should ask their instructors for explanations of the appropriate use of source materials for assignments and for models of proper citation and documentation within each academic discipline. If one is unsure of what type of help is allowed for an assignment, ask the instructor.

- o [Examples of Plagiarism](#)

- o Denying others access to information or material: Academic honesty holds that each student has the same opportunity to use class resources and /or materials. Any acts of sabotage are in violation of the college's Academic Honesty Policy.

- o [Examples of Denying others access to information or material](#)

- o Electronic media: Students who use cell phones, PDAs, iPods, computers, calculators, or any other electronic devices as classroom aides are in violation of the Academic Honesty Policy unless given specific permission by the instructor. Individual divisions and instructors may have exceptions to this policy, based on the specific learning needs of the class. See the instructor for any clarification.

Students who intentionally, willingly, or negligently take part in file sharing of licensed software, music or video files are in violation of the Academic Honesty Policy. Students will not circumvent anti-pirating software to copy electronic files. Copyright laws prohibit the copying of information from the Internet or other electronic source (DVDs or CDs) without proper permission, citation or paraphrasing.

Students taking part in file sharing or illegal copying of electronic media are not only violating the Academic Honesty Policy but are also violating federal copyright law and may face lawsuits, federal charges, and/or fines.

[For more information on acceptable file sharing for academic purposes visit the RIAA website](#)

- Multiple submissions: Submitting work that was completed for another course or section without the instructor's permission violates the Academic Honesty Policy.

- [Examples of Multiple Submissions](#)

- Misrepresentation of academic records: Students who misrepresent their academic records are in violation of the Academic Honesty Policy.

Incomplete Policy:

A student must initiate a request for an "I" (Incomplete Grade) from an instructor. The "I" will be given at the sole discretion of the instructor.

Typically an "I" will be given only when the student:

- Has completed at least 75% of the class (excluding the final exam) but is unable to complete the class work because of extraordinary, unusual or unforeseen circumstances or other compelling reasons,
- Has done passing work in the course and,
- In the instructor's judgment, can complete the required work without repeating the course.

Instructors electing to give an "I" will complete an Incomplete Grade Form by the time final course grades are due. This form will specify what the student must do to complete the course requirements. It will specify a date by which the required work must be completed. The Incomplete Grade Form will indicate the grade the student will receive if the assigned work is not completed. Both the student and the instructor will sign the form. Copies will be provided to the Registrar, the student, the instructor and the Division Office. Responsibility for monitoring and grading the "I" work may not be transferred to another instructor without agreement of the faculty involved and the approval of the Academic Dean.

The instructor will submit a Grade Change Form to the Registrar when the student has completed the assigned work. All incomplete course work will be finished by the date indicated on the Incomplete Grade Form, but not to exceed one

calendar year from the end of the semester for which the "I" grade was recorded. If a Grade Change Form is not submitted by the end of one calendar year, the "I" will default to the grade submitted on the Incomplete Grade Form. Each instructor shall include an "I" grade policy consistent with college policy in his/her syllabus.