Preparing a Course Syllabus
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What is a course syllabus? A recent Google search for syllabus produced 45,500,000 hits. Included in the list are definitions, examples, instructional manuals for preparation of syllabi, and even a journal! According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a syllabus is a “summary outline of a discourse, treatise, or course of study or of examination requirements”. At Adams State University (ASU), there are two different types of syllabi for each course – an institutional syllabus and a syllabus that is provided to students on the first day of class. The former is more general and is used by ASU for approval of new or modified courses by the Curriculum Review Committee, by the records office for evaluation of transfer credits, and by external accrediting agencies such as the Higher Learning Commission. You should be able to access institutional syllabi for all the courses you will teach here from the ASU website and/or from your department/program office.

The syllabus given to each student on the **first day** of class differs from the institutional syllabus by being much more explicit. At a minimum, this syllabus should contain:

- Title of Course
- Name, office location, and contact information for the instructor – office telephone, email address, website if appropriate.
- Office hours – ASU expects a minimum of five designated and five arranged office hours per week – check with your department chair or program coordinator for more information. These hours and your schedule should also be provided to your administrative assistant and posted by your office.
- Course description – Typically, this will be a bit more detailed than the description in the university catalog.
- Student Learning Outcomes – What will successful students learn in your course? This will probably be a numbered or bulleted list and will require you to think about your course in some depth.
- Texts and other resources
- Course Policies (e.g., attendance, use of handheld electronic devices). Your students may not know about excused absences. This information can be found at [http://www.adams.edu/pubs/index.php](http://www.adams.edu/pubs/index.php) and click on the student handbook, pages 30-31.
- Assignments and Examinations/Papers – I like to list specific dates for examinations so students will know from day one when the tests are scheduled. Other assignments may have more flexible dates, depending on the particular type of assignment.
- Grading Policy – One of the criteria on the end-of-semester student evaluations is “Clearly defined grading method”. The syllabus is your opportunity to tell students precisely how their semester grade will be earned. How many points of the semester total are the exams, the writing assignments, the homework, etc.? Students really appreciate knowing this information from the start of the course (and you’ll get a better rating on criterion 9 of the student evaluations!).
- Schedule – Some instructors provide a schedule that identifies what will be covered for each class period; others (like me) just provide a “bare-bones” schedule of the topics to be covered, without specific dates. I would encourage you to include the word “tentative” before the word “schedule” to give yourself and the students some wiggle room.
- Cheating – Include a statement that describes your (or your department’s) policy regarding cheating.
- Withdrawals and Incompletes – Give the date for the last day to withdraw from the course and a statement that describes the University’s policy regarding grades of W and IN. See [www.adams.edu/academics/course-disenrollment.pdf](http://www.adams.edu/academics/course-disenrollment.pdf) for appropriate language regarding
withdrawals (including late withdrawals) from courses. See www.adams.edu/academics/academic_policy_incompletes.pdf for appropriate language regarding incompletes and www.adams.edu/academics/assistant_provost/.../incomplete-agreement.pdf for an example incomplete agreement form.

- Accommodations – Include a statement that provides information regarding accommodations required because of the American Disabilities Act. Here’s an example: If you require ADA accommodations because of a documented disability as identified by the American Disabilities Act of 1990 or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1974, please contact ASU's Office of Disability Services/Diversity and visit with me as soon as possible. The Office of Disability Services/Diversity coordinates services, provides reasonable accommodations, and serves as a resource for students, faculty, and staff. If you have questions or concerns regarding disability support services, we encourage you to contact the Office of Disability Services/Diversity located at Nielsen Library Rm.136 or call (719) 587-8226. In addition, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need particular arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please discuss these with me before the end of the first week of the semester.

- Emergency Evacuation: Include a statement describing how the classroom will be evacuated in case of an emergency.

Your department/program may have specific policies that must be included in the syllabus. Please check with your department chair or program coordinator before you print it or post it on the Internet. Your colleagues will be happy to review your syllabus – don’t hesitate to ask them.

The course syllabus is essentially a contract between you and the student. Careful preparation of the syllabus will help ensure a successful semester!

One final thought: When I first started teaching more than 30 years ago, I had not even heard of the word “rubric”. Nowadays, though, your students have been familiar with this term since grade school days. If you will be using a rubric to evaluate student projects, writing assignments, etc., it is a good idea to provide that rubric to your students either the first day of class or when the assignment is given to them. Their work will be better, and your job of grading will be simpler.