

# Communicating with Students: Syllabus Design at Georgetown

## What is included in syllabi at Georgetown?

As part of an effort to understand how Georgetown faculty write about goals and assignments, CNDLS began the *Syllabus Format Analysis Project* in the summer of 2006 with the intention of analyzing all syllabi across the university. After reviewing 225 syllabi, CNDLS identified different sorts of information included in many syllabi across the university.

No single syllabus includes all of these components, but one that did would provide a complete record of what was taught that semester, an indication how the course was organized according to course goals, and a window into the teaching and learning process designed by the professor.

## Syllabus Components at Georgetown

### **Logistical Information:**

- Class number/Section
- Class time/location
- Semester/Year
- Instructor Name
- Email address and/or Phone number
- Office location/ Office hours
- Names of Teaching Assistants (if any)

### **Course Policies/Rules of the classroom/Protocols:**

- Attendance requirements/Missing Class/Tardiness
  - **Example:** "You are expected to attend class. I will circulate an attendance sheet periodically simply as a record; attendance will not be graded (but may be considered in certain circumstances if you are appealing a borderline grade). If, for whatever reason, you are unable to attend class it is your responsibility to obtain material missed from other students. Powerpoint slides used in lecture will be posted online but only represent an outline of the covered material; if you miss class, get the notes, announcements, handouts, etc., from someone. Under no circumstances will I give out notes."
- Cell phone use in class
  - **Example:** "Please turn off cell phones, pagers, and other communication devices during class. Surfing the web or engaging in other non-class technological activity during class is unacceptable."
- Communication during office hours and via email
  - **Example:** "I will respond to email inquiries within a 24-hour time period, excluding 10pm-6am."
- Make-up exams
  - **Example:** If a student cannot take one of the quizzes, midterms, or tests when scheduled, no makeup will be given under any circumstances. Regardless of the reason for absence, the missed exam will count as a zero; however you may

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elect to have one test dropped from your final score. It is strongly recommended that students try to take all mini-quizzes and midterms as research shows incremental testing leads to better understanding of material. The only exception to this rule will be the final exam when I will allow a makeup on a certain date if the excuse is approved in writing by your Dean. No exceptions.

- Expectations: Variant of the policies written above, but in shorthand form.
  - **Example:**  
I expect you to . . .
    - Be on time to class
    - Attend every class session unless you have a legitimate excuse
    - Do all of the assigned readings
    - Participate actively in discussions
    - Refer to the syllabus and course web page continually
  
- Civility
  - **Example:** The success of the class will often depend on active participation in discussion. You have a responsibility not only to learn for yourself, but also to teach each others through conversation. I expect you to remain considerate and respectful of others' ideas, words, and efforts. I especially value contributions to our discussions that:
    - show clear understanding of the readings and subject at hand;
    - help to make connections among ideas or readings under consideration, or in some other way focus our analysis of the topic under discussion; or
    - help to get us unstuck.
    - In other words, don't just talk for the sake of talking. Think about what you and others in the class are saying.
  
- Appealing grades:
  - **Example:** "If a student believes that an answer on an exam deserves more credit than was awarded, the student may appeal to the instructor for reconsideration. All such appeals *must* be in writing, and reconsideration will be based on the quality of the appeal as well as the quality of the answer concerned. Reconsideration can be downward as well as upward when partial credit has been awarded."

### Reference to Georgetown's Honor System:

The basic honor pledge to include in a syllabus is the following:

*"As signatories to the Georgetown University Honor Pledge, and indeed simply as good scholars and citizens, you are required to uphold academic honesty in all aspects of this course. You are expected to be familiar with the letter and spirit of the Standards of Conduct outlined in the Georgetown Honor System and on the Honor Council website. As faculty, I too am obligated to uphold the Honor System, and will report all suspected cases of academic dishonesty."*

Other Honor System links that have been included in syllabi:

### Standards of Conduct

[http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/hc/standards\\_of\\_conduct.html](http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/hc/standards_of_conduct.html)

### What is Plagiarism?

<http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/hc/plagiarism.html>

**Course Format:** discussion, lecture, experiential, simulations, modular

**Course Description:**

- Rationale/Purpose for the course: where is this course in the department curriculum?
- Disciplinary questions or themes that connect the class components
- Problems/challenges that will be tackled throughout the course

**Course Goals:**

- What should students walk away with in terms of knowledge and skills?
- This is usually written in the form of “this course will improve students’ abilities to: . . . .”
- What would you like your students to remember as the crucial take-away from your course?
  - See **Chandra Manning**, History, HIST 287: *History of Baseball*

**Course Requirements (Assignments) and Grading Policy:**

- What will students do and what percentage of their grade is associated with it?
- How do you determine a student’s grade?
- What are the expectations associated with this grade?
  - See **Sandeep Dahiya**, MSB, FINC 212: *Advanced Financial Management*

**Course schedule:** Topic, readings, page numbers, due dates, exam dates, review sessions

**Description of technology used in the course** (Blackboard, web site, etc.).

**Course content:** textbooks, books, articles, web sites, guest lectures, and where to find them (Blackboard, web site, on reserve, online databases to locate through the library web site, etc.).

**Additional resources for students often found in GU syllabi:**

**Steps for successful learning in this course:**

- reading guidelines
- how to review daily material
- note-taking
- how to participate in class discussions
- previews of the course written through past students’ inquiries

**Sample Statement on Respect:**

“Everyone is entitled to her or his educated and informed opinions, but all interactions in this classroom will be rooted in respect for one another as individuals. Strongly voiced comments are highly encouraged, but since you are ultimately responsible for your words, all comments must be done in a manner that refrains from personally attacking your classmates or instructor.”

### **Statement on the Academic Resource Center/ADA:**

"If you have a disability, or believe you might, and would like to receive accommodations in my course, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center ([arc@georgetown.edu](mailto:arc@georgetown.edu)) to register as a student with a disability, or for an evaluation referral. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies. The Center is located on the third floor of the Leavey Center, Suite 335; you may access their website at <http://ldss.georgetown.edu/>."

### **Sample Writing Center Statement**

"Please consider taking advantage of the resources of the Writing Center. The Writing Center provides one-on-one peer tutoring focused on improving your writing skills. I encourage you to take your paper drafts to the Writing Center. Visit [www.georgetown.edu/departments/english/writing/wcenter.htm](http://www.georgetown.edu/departments/english/writing/wcenter.htm) for more information. You can also schedule an appointment with a Writing Center tutor online at <http://lumen.georgetown.edu/projects/writingCenter/>."

### **Sample Statement on Library Use**

"Electronic reserve items can be accessed by visiting [www.library.georgetown.edu/service/course.htm](http://www.library.georgetown.edu/service/course.htm), click on the "search for reserves" link at the top of the page and log in with your netid and password. You can then search for reserves by instructor's name or course name."

### **Scholarly Research and Academic Integrity Tutorial**

An online tutorial required of all first-years and transfer students. The tip sheet for scholarly research is helpful to all students:

<http://www.library.georgetown.edu/tutorial/tipsheet>

### **References:**

Eberly, M. B., et. al., The syllabus as a tool for student-centered learning. *The Journal of General Education* v. 50 no. 1 (2001) p. 56-74.

[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal\\_of\\_general\\_education/v050/50.1eberly.pdf](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_general_education/v050/50.1eberly.pdf)

Grunert, J. (1997). *The Course Syllabus: A Learning-Centered Approach*. Boston: Anker. [CNDLS Library]