> About to teach a new course or plan to revise your syllabi?
> Where should you begin?

Developing a syllabus for a course that you have never taught can be as daunting as starting that first chapter of your dissertation! The conventional approach might be to "borrow" syllabi from your professors or experienced faculty or to list the content, divide it into 15 weeks, and add in tests and assignments. When you are new to the course or pressured for time, these conventional approaches are understandable, but may not lead to a meaningful learning and teaching experience.

Syllabi should be more than just a schedule of reading assignments, tests, and classroom policy statements. Syllabi (and how you teach your course) should be designed to create "significant learning experiences." L. Dee Fink promotes this approach in his monograph *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses* (2003, 2013). If you don't have time for his book, read "Integrated Course Design" (IDEA Paper No. 42) which summarizes the main ideas in his book.

Fink's approach to developing syllabi is more generically known as **backward design**: start at the end. To summarize the approach:

Step 1: Determine what students must be able to know, do , feel, value not only upon completion of the course but what we will be memorable two or more years later (a good sign that learning has occurred). In this context, Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe explain that knowing including the ability to explain, interpret, apply, have perspective, empathize, and have self-knowledge. State these goals in form of essential questions, big ideas and/or core tasks; they shape your syllabi, assignments, teaching methods, and student learning activities. Force yourself to prioritize between what is absolutely **essential**, what is **important** for students to know and do, and with what they should simply be **familiar**.

Step 2: Determine what will be acceptable evidence that students have reached the course goals. Ideally this evidence should include meaningful, authentic, cumulative activities. Evidence might include research projects, major essays, presentations (a.k.a. summative assessment), or it might include quizzes, exams, and other assignments that proves students are making progress (a.k.a. formative assessment). In addition, seek feedback from students about their perceptions of how they are learning (metacognition) and your teaching effectiveness.

Step 3: Now it's time to develop activities: learning and teaching. **Learning activities** are what you students will do inside and outside of class: reading, writing, viewing films, listening to lectures, working in groups or teams, making presentations, completing homework, etc. **Teaching activities** are what you will do to help students learn: lecture, demonstrate an experiment, facilitate discussion, etc.

Step 4: Make relevant, if any, instructional technology decisions. Select the technology most appropriate to your teaching and learning goals.

By the way, backward design is not strictly linear. As you contemplate acceptable evidence, you will undoubtedly ponder teaching and learning activities. Most important – your syllabus should pass the "Why?" test. You know that question, "Professor, why do we have to know (or do) this?"

Bloomsburg University's Master Syllabi
The master syllabus is a document created when any course is offered at the University. It should be consulted as you create your syllabus. Why? Student learning outcomes and content are defined in the master syllabi. Make note of language that provides individual instructors freedom to adapt and expand. In addition, the list of recommended texts can easily become outdated. So instructors should consult their colleagues about the master syllabi and tips on text selection.

Essential University Policies:
- Academic Examination (PRP 3516)
- Academic Integrity (PRP 3516)
- Class Attendance (PRP 3506)
- Grades (PRP 3522)
- Student Course Requirements (PRP 3264)
- Student Disruptive Behavior (PRP 3881)

Additional Useful Links:
- BU Policies and Procedures
  FYI: comprehensive University list
- BU Faculty and Staff Resource Page
- Academic Calendar
  FYI: No classes meet on reading days
- Final Exam Schedule
  FYI: Found through the Registrar's webpages; during finals week, exam times and days may differ from when you normally teach your course; verify that you are consulting the correct semester.
- Severe Weather Procedure
  FYI: useful to know if we have a compressed schedule or cancellations due to weather, etc.

Syllabus Checklist

Information about you
- [ ] Office location
- [ ] Office hours
- [ ] Faculty website URL (if you have one)
- [ ] Contact information
- [ ] Your response time to emails and email etiquette
- [ ] Your philosophy about teaching and learning

Information about the Course
- [ ] Course goals (e.g. student learning objectives, outcomes, competencies)
- [ ] Course description
- [ ] How the course will fulfill general education and/or program goals
- [ ] Explain relevancy of course goals to life-long learning
- [ ] Required prerequisites
- [ ] Required laboratories

Information about the Course Materials
- [ ] Required text(s)
- [ ] Additional required materials
- [ ] Explanation of how the course material will be used
- [ ] Titles and location of any online materials

Grading Expectations and Assignment Guidelines
- [ ] Grading expectations
- [ ] Grading scale
- [ ] Grading criteria
- [ ] Point values for assignments
- [ ] List of all graded assignments
- [ ] Explanation of assignments, exams, quizzes
- [ ] Guidelines for assignments
- [ ] Rubrics for assignments

FYI: tension is created between instructors and students because students want to know what is expected of them. It is wise to provide a list of assignments including guidelines for successful completion. When creating new assignments for a course, try completing the assignment yourself to anticipate challenges, pitfalls, and how to improve the guidelines. Semester-long assignments should be "scaffolded" (clearly defined steps that lead to successful completion) into the syllabus for best results.

Information on the Schedule of In- and Out-of-Class Activities
- [ ] Weekly or class-by-class course schedule (i.e. calendar of the semester)
- [ ] Explanation of how changes in the syllabus will be announced

Guiding Students to Support Services on Campus
- [ ] Counselling Services
- [ ] Department of Equity and Accommodations
- [ ] LGBTQA Resource Center
- [ ] Library Research Help Information
- [ ] Military Students
- [ ] Multicultural Center
- [ ] TRIO Student Support Services
- [ ] Tutoring Services
- [ ] Women's Resource Center
- [ ] Writing and Literacy Engagement Studio (WALES)

Relevant Policies and Procedures to list, reference, highlight
- [ ] Academic integrity
- [ ] Instructional technology requirements
- [ ] Policies on mobile devices (including smart watches while take exams)
- [ ] Attendance requirements

FYI: academic support and coaches ask for updates on students enrolled in classes including attendance
- [ ] Tardiness policies
- [ ] Policies on late or missed assignments and exams
- [ ] Conduct expectations
- [ ] Campus safety statement
- [ ] Laboratory safety procedures
- [ ] "Safe Zone" statement
- [ ] Syllabus copyright statement
- [ ] Legal caveat or disclaimer indicating the syllabus is subject to change

FYI: Your syllabus is a "contract" with your students, son include language that indicates that it is subject to change.
- [ ] Privacy rights (FERPA)

In a *Chronicle of Higher Education Blog*, James M. Lang offers advice to faculty about the syllabus in "The 3 Essential Functions of Your Syllabus" (Part 1; Part 2)