

Basic Requirements for Syllabus Content
Department of Sociology
Appalachian State University

Justification for Syllabus Content Requirements:

As noted by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* ([Gannon 2019](#)), a syllabus is a document used to inform students of course content and requirements. However, more importantly, it can be seen as guidelines or a "contract" that speaks to how the business of education and learning will occur between instructors and their students, including the rules of formal (and informal) conduct and communication. Without this information, Gannon (2019) suggests that instructors and students can become confused about various requirements, leading to less learning and more complaints.

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) requires that syllabi are clear in their delivery of expectations, including but not limited to course objectives and learning outcomes that specify the knowledge, skills, and values students are expected to obtain in a course. They also suggest that syllabi include specific policies dealing with grading, assignment descriptions, and a schedule for students to follow throughout the semester or term to complete the instructor's required tasks. Syllabi may also include specific messages or policies dictated by the respective department, college, or university to assist students in understanding their responsibilities in terms of attendance, academic honesty/integrity, obtaining services, or meeting specific deadlines (i.e., drop/add periods).

However, this does not mean a syllabus should be a 25-page document all-inclusive document but can be something that has common or required elements that students can expect in every course they attend and other elements that enhancements that are specific to the teaching style and course content, which the individual instructors would guide. For example, the University of Louisville suggests that all course syllabi will have "core elements" (i.e., required content), as well as recommended and enhanced content (see [Content Guidelines](#), UL 2019).

At Appalachian State University, there are no specific guidelines for syllabi content or construction. While Appalachian does provide a list of required items concerning university policies and statements, little information is available for specific content. However, the Faculty Handbook (2018-19) states the following about what should be included in a course syllabus (Section 6.3.1.2).

The syllabus should include the following: an explanation of course goals and objectives, the name of the text and any other materials required of each student, the instructor's office hours, an explanation of how the grade is to be determined, and an explanation of any additional reading, papers, projects and examination which the instructor expects to give or assign.

Some departments or programs have created their syllabus content guidelines to ensure more uniformity across offered courses within their respective areas. For example, First-Year Seminar offers a [syllabus checklist](#) and a [template](#) for instructors to follow.

In the past, the Department of Sociology has not provided any specific guidelines but has informally asked professors to include the information noted by the Faculty Handbook. With that said, our external review noted that there was little to no uniformity in the information and content offered across our sampled syllabi. For example, based on our Faculty Handbook requirements, course titles, instructor names, contact information, and how grades will be determined were missing from several sociology course syllabi. Therefore, the external reviewer recommended that we correct this issue and come up with syllabus content requirements that meet our university's expectations (i.e., Faculty Handbook and University policy statements) to ensure that we meet SACS accreditation requirements in the near future. Below, we present our proposed requirements based on this research and the expertise of the Assessment and Policy Committee.

Department Syllabus Definition (Adapted from [UNC-CH – Syllabus Guidelines, 2019](#)):

A syllabus, or course outline, defines a course's goals and describes classroom activities, readings and other assignments, and course policies. Conventions for structuring a syllabus vary across disciplines, but what follows is intended to provide suggestions about what can be included. This page also contains a link to several exemplary syllabuses for additional ideas.

Syllabi are intended primarily as information for students, though sometimes colleagues and administrators also consult them for evidence of the instructor's expertise. A comprehensive syllabus can be a helpful teaching tool. At a minimum, it should tell students

- why learning this material might be important (course goals)
- what students will be learning (course content)
- when the material will be taught (schedule)
- how it will be taught (instructional procedures)
- when students will be required to demonstrate their learning (assignments and examination dates)
- how students' learning will be assessed (evaluation) and the final grade determined

Thus, a syllabus should have the following content:

- **Course Information**
- **Instructor Information**
- **Grading Expectations and Assignments**
- **Delivery Schedule of Course Content**
- **Course-Specific Policies**
- **Department/College/University-Specific Policies**

The next page lists the requirements necessary to meet the minimum of SACS accreditation and our university standards for syllabus content.

✓ **Course Information**

- Course Title (MUST match the published title listed in the [University Bulletin](#)).
- Course Prefix, Course Number, and Section Number (i.e., SOC 1000-101).
- Term/Year.
- Location and Times.
- Catalog Description Course (MUST match the published title listed in the [University Bulletin](#)).
- Required Text(s) and Materials (including relevant instructions for access).
- Course Goals and Objectives (Determined by the instructor but should relate to course description or should relate to any published goals and objectives created by the department – e.g., Gen Ed courses).
- Student Learning Goals and Outcomes (Determined by the instructor but should relate to course description or should relate to any published goals and objectives created by the department – e.g., Gen Ed courses).

✓ **Instructor Information**

- Full name, including credentials.
- Preferred Phone Contact and Campus Email Address.
- Office Location and Office Hours.
- *For Online Courses* - Hours Available by Phone, Chat, etc.

✓ **Grading Expectations and Assignments**

- Purpose and Description of Grading Scale.
- Purpose and Description of Assignments, including:
 - Evaluation Criteria/Rubric
 - Due Dates
 - Exam Dates
- Required Format(s) of Written Assignments.
- Requirements for Turning in Assignments.

✓ **Delivery Schedule of Course Content**

- Daily or Weekly Schedule of Class Topics and Assignments.
- *For Online Courses* - Getting Started and Organization of Online Classroom.

✓ **Course Procedures and Policies**

- Attendance/Absence Policy.
- Makeup Exams and Assignments/ Late or Missing Assignments.
- Detailed Instructions for Submitting Assignments.
- Instructions on How to Communicate with Instructor.
- Student Conduct Regulations in the Classroom (i.e., use of technology, group interactions requirements, maintenance of classroom space, ground rules for participation).

✓ **University Guidelines and Policies (Can be a separate document)**

<https://academicaffairs.appstate.edu/resources/syllabi-policy-and-statement-information>

- Statement of Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
- Academic Integrity Code
- Religious Holy Days and Observances

Optional but Should be Considered:

- Policy Regarding Notification of Course Modification
- Recommendations
- Responsible Employees Statement
- Title IX Statement
- Department or Personal Diversity Statement
- Important Dates from the University Calendar
- University Closure and Delay Statement/Policy
- Internet Outage or Technology Inaccessibility Statement

✓ **Optional Elements (Not Required but Should Consider)**

- Technology Expectations
- Course Organization
- Format of Written Assignments
- Email Communication from Instructor
- Teaching Methods
- List of important dates, including reading and assignment deadlines, instructor absences, etc.
- Needed technology for course materials and assignments.
- Statement on Student Privacy Rights
- Classroom Conduct
- Extra Credit
- Enhancements
- Statement Explaining Available Out of Class Assistance – Tutoring or Teaching Assistant Services.
- Disclaimer Statement (i.e., disclaimer that all items in the syllabus are subject to change based on various issues).