

**Ethical Professor 21: NEW ISSUES IN COURSE MANAGEMENT:
A note to accompany “Model Syllabus 2013”**

Many SMC faculty have been teaching for several years, over which the teaching and learning environment has changed in several ways. These changes include:

- Student preparation for college work
- Knowledge about human learning styles
- Requirements to evaluate student learning outcomes
- The demographics of domestic and international student populations
- Rapidly changing technology, resulting often in student familiarity with technology that exceeds that of the instructor
- Student reliance on social media and instant access to information
- Miscommunications arising from a changing understanding of intellectual property
- Student expectations of the College’s responsibilities toward students
- Student willingness to take administrative or legal action to obtain desired results

In this environment, there are many issues over which we have no control. One area where we can be influential, however, is the syllabus. This forms the “contract” between the student and the instructor. A syllabus that is clear and comprehensive, coupled with a commitment to apply the rules with consistency and fairness, can help avoid problems.

This new edition of the Model Syllabus provides a Template for both new instructors, and for instructors who want to revise their syllabus to deal with today’s student more effectively. The “Model Syllabus Template” is a Microsoft Word Document that can be used as a basis for any class. A few items are filled in—primarily to provide structure where there is some uniformity across campus.

The “Model Syllabus Menu 2013” is the more interesting document. Here we have gathered the suggestions sent in by faculty members who were willing to share their experience and their techniques. Some of the suggestions under a given heading are contradictory. This is because the suggestions were lifted without attribution from faculty who submitted their syllabi upon our request. The compiled suggestions are meant to be picked and chosen from: “Take what you like and leave the rest.”

Some additional issues arose in the feedback we received. Faculty mentioned:

- The need for a campus-wide “update” regarding changes in the laws or policies, and changes in the expectations that students and administrators have of faculty.
- The need for student education about social media in the classroom and in the workplace, as there is a gap in generational norms and expectations about the uses of cellphones, texting, tweeting and email.

A few other notes for those who are considering updating their approach to course management:

- Decide whether you want to communicate in your syllabus in the third person or the second person. Are you more comfortable using the more formal, “Students are expected to...” or would you rather use the more familiar, “I expect you to ...”?
- A shorter syllabus can be achieved without sacrificing completeness: link to files that provide detailed information, rather than including the information directly on the syllabus. Some of the items that can be easily “off-loaded” are: the Dates and Deadlines, the long-form Course Objectives, and the Suggestions for Success.
- Consider using eCompanion to provide notes, resources, grading feedback and a written record of communicated instructions.
- Strongly consider sending out your syllabus a week or two in advance of the first day of your course, welcoming your students in a cover-email. Textbook information, course structure and expectations can be communicated in advance, and can set the stage for a fresher start to the semester or intersession. This also provides an opportunity to tell students the importance of first-day attendance, and the consequences of not showing up.

Please let the Professional Ethics and Responsibilities Committee know if you have further improvements to these documents.