

SMC ETHICS

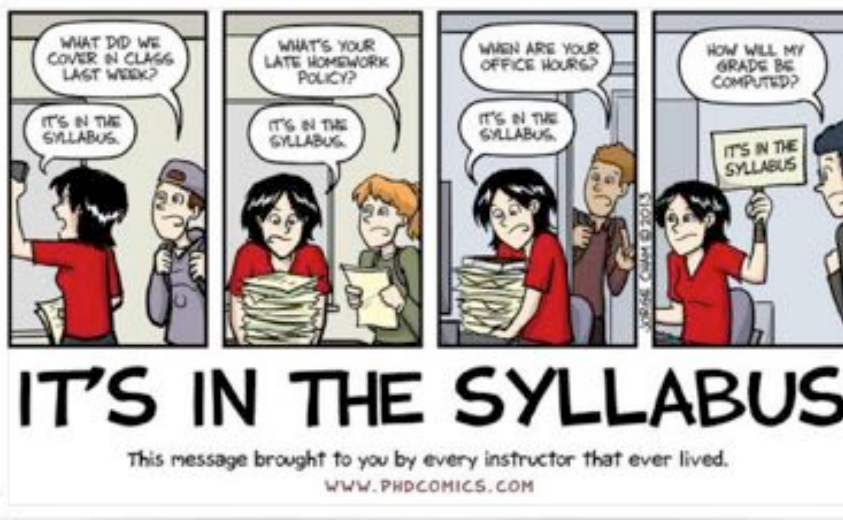
Continuing a Dialogue on What We Do and How We Do It

What We Do Day One

The first day sets the tone for the semester. By being prepared and prompt, we show we're serious about teaching and set a good example for our students regarding punctuality. Distributing a well-organized and thorough syllabus also shows we're professional, but covering it on the first day may not be optimal.

Learning student names and pronouns is a simple activity that makes students feel valued, included, and more willing to seek our help. It may take some time, but students will appreciate the effort we put into this task. Student information index cards are a great way to learn names while not forcing transgender students to disclose information they may not want to.

Modeling the level of participation expected throughout the semester is also a good idea. If your class is discussion based, try discussing a controversial topic right off the bat, and let students know they are expected to engage. If your class is student centered with



Cartoon by Jorge Cham

What is a Syllabus?

If you ask three different faculty what is most important in a syllabus, you will likely get three different answers. Some view a syllabus as a contractual document, others may see its primary purpose as a learning tool for students, while others may see it as the foundation of the classroom community. Most faculty would agree, however, that at its heart, a syllabus is tool for communication.

For a faculty member that views a syllabus as a contract, each passing semester can add new clarifications and policies to account for past student disagreements. With the eyes of a legal expert, the instructor has expanded and fortified the syllabus content to defensively cover every possible scenario that might arise. A syllabus as a permanent record lives beyond the class when students are transferring to institutions where SMC may not have articulation agreements. It provides evidence on the level

tons of activities, try starting with one so they know what level of activity to expect. One might, for example, have students model Sherlock Holmes by pairing them up and silently observing each other for a few minutes. When time expires, they can report all they learned about their partner to one another and later the class. It might be super awkward, but students will learn that they'll be the ones working in class.

Enthusiasm for the class material is also crucial to convey and transmit. We all want to feel excited about learning, so try giving an interactive mini lesson on something you find absolutely fascinating about your field. Students will feel your genuine passion for the class and it may inspire respect for you as a scholar, and more importantly, interest in the topic.

Finally, use the whole class. Gathering everyone into one room for an hour or more is an event. It's precious time, and we want to show that by using every moment.

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If you have any ideas or issues you would like to submit to the Professional Ethics and Responsibilities Committee for future consideration, get in touch with us through the links below.

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and depth of instruction on a particular course. However, covering every student grievance or learning objective in writing at a certain point can make the syllabus impersonal and even unreadable for students, its actual audience.

When a syllabus is used as a learning tool for students, it can be a way to provide equity to disparate student populations. With many of our students being first time college attendees, the syllabus might help to identify campus resources and point out mistakes to avoid and tips on how to do well in the class. It can be used to foreground some of academia's many implicit assumptions and unspoken codes that form barriers to student achievement. Also referring students to tutoring centers, counseling services, or public safety resources, this kind of syllabus sometimes can seem to be aiming to be a comprehensive guide to campus life and college success. Despite good intentions, some of this information might be better placed in a more accessible location such as Canvas.

Perhaps we can also look at a syllabus as an opportunity, a letter of welcome into our classroom and the college community. In addition to conveying expectations, procedures and course policies, the syllabus can creatively be a way of inviting students into a course. As the first document students will encounter in the class, it models the kind of friendly relationships and language to be adopted by all members of the classroom community. Office hours may be renamed "drop-in" hours, strict policies on things like cell phones may take a humorous form, and the instructor may do everything possible to lessen any feelings of hierarchy and authority. As such, the syllabus aims to capture student motivation and investment from day one by enhancing their sense of belonging to the class and institution. Needless to say, the syllabus as an invitation may find itself the antithesis of the syllabus as a contract.

Although one of the most basic documents of any classroom, the syllabus is by no measure a simple thing, either for students reading them or the instructors writing them. Before locking themselves into one sense of the function of a syllabus, perhaps all instructors might benefit from stepping back from their assumptions and freshly asking what they want their syllabi to do for them and their students.