



Learner-Centered Syllabus

Research indicates that learner-centered syllabi positively impact students' perception of instructor effectiveness and rapport with instructors ([Harrington & Gaber-Quilen, 2015](#)). Moreover, learner-centered syllabi can lead to higher levels of motivation and engagement, achievement, and rapport between students ([Karanja & Grant, 2020](#)). This resource provides suggestions for constructing a learner-centered syllabus.

Definition: Learner-Centered Syllabus

Learner-centered syllabi are documents that outline clear learning goals, expectations, content, and structure of a course, with a specific focus on the learners' needs and experiences. Traditional syllabi tend to be more content-focused or teacher-centered, e.g., stating "what the course will do and what students will NOT do" ([Palmer et al., 2016](#), p. 37). Compared to traditional content-centered syllabi, learner-centered syllabi are accessible and more welcoming to students ([Richmond et al., 2016](#)). As syllabi are usually the first contact between student and instructor, it is crucial to take a more inclusive, and learner-centric approach.

Core Factors of a Learner-Centered Syllabus

[Cullen and Harris \(2009\)](#) suggest the following core factors of a learner-centered syllabus (1) community (2) power and control, and (3) assessment. The details below delve into ways to craft a learner-centered syllabus focused on these core factors ([Karanja & Grant, 2020](#); [Richmond et al., 2016](#)).

Community

Fostering a sense of community in courses can occur through learning activities (e.g., group work, peer feedback) and clear expectations and rationales for these activities. In addition, the perceived accessibility of the instructor impacts students' sense of community.

1. Provide multiple ways to connect with the instructor
 - a. State diverse ways to get in contact with the instructor (e.g., emails, office hours, phone number, etc.)
 - b. Expand ways to communicate with students such as Zoom/in-person meetings, phone calls and small group meetings

Power and Control

Power and control in the course are related to students' ownership of their learning. When creating a learner-centered syllabus, highlight students' choices to motivate learners' engagement. Consider the syllabus as a living document for students to interact with, continuously refamiliarizing themselves with course policies, learning outcomes, and contents, which can be updated throughout the course (Nilson, 2016).

1. Co-create classroom rules, policies, structures/procedures.
 - a. Share a draft of discussion guidelines with students and request their edits and



additions

- b. State students' flexibility in assignments (e.g., students facing challenges, or unexpected circumstances can communicate with the instructor for negotiations in due dates, or each student can miss one due date by 2 days without repercussions).
- 2. Use a positive and encouraging [tone in the syllabus](#)
 - a. Write the syllabus from an asset-based perspective to emphasize that students' diverse perspectives and experiences are valued in the course
 - b. Present a growth mindset with regard to student success (e.g., I am confident that by the end of the course, you will be able to...)
 - c. Focus more on the learning process and means of assessment than on what not to do in the course.
 - d. Limit the space consumed by policies and let students know that communication between students and the instructor is important.
- 3. Provide student/instructor expectations (Table retrieved from Richmond, 2016)

Expectations for Students & Instructors	
Student Expectations	Instructor Expectations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. PLEASE BE ACTIVE AND PARTICIPATE IN CLASS b. Discuss class concerns either after class or outside of class hours (office hours, emails, texts, etc.) c. Be prepared for class by reading materials prior to the lesson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. BE ACTIVE AND ENTHUSIASTIC TO FACILITATE STUDENT LEARNING b. Be prepared for class, grade objectively, consistently, and in a timely manner c. Accommodate differences in students' learning

Assessment

Articulate the distinction between summative determination of a learning outcome and formative feedback in the learner-centered syllabus. It is important that instructors clearly state the mechanism of the assessment.

- 1. Describe all forms of assessment in detail
 - a. Articulate the rationales for assignments, activities, and/or assessments
 - b. Illustrate how the activities, assignments and assessments may contribute to students' learning
- 2. Provide sufficient details about grading and feedback mechanisms
 - a. Describe ways you provide feedback explicitly. For instance, let students know where to look for instructors' feedback. (Canvas grading feedback comments, emails, etc.)
 - b. Discuss your approach to grading and determining the final grade for the course.



References

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