



## Westmont College Guidelines for Course Syllabi

**Every course needs a syllabus.** The college grants you considerable freedom to construct syllabi that reflect your own goals, pedagogies, and vision for your courses. There are, however, several requirements that must be included in all syllabi. The following guidelines define those requirements and offer some recommendations about how you might construct the syllabi for your courses.

### **Purpose and Philosophy of the Syllabus**

While the syllabus exists primarily for your students, it is helpful to remember that it also serves other purposes and is viewed by multiple audiences. Your syllabus should tell prospective and current students what the course is about, what they can expect to learn, and how they can complete it successfully. Your syllabus also provides your department and the college with easily accessible information such as course objectives and outcomes that serve both assessment and planning.

In recent years the syllabus has been at the center of some weighty debates. Some faculty view it as a legal document that spells out obligations of all parties. Others look to the syllabus as a place to articulate their aspirations for the course, and use it to inspire enthusiasm in their students. Still others treat it simply as a record of course requirements and schedules. Whether you think of the syllabus as a contract or more as a roadmap, know that the goal of **these** guidelines is to help faculty envision what a “thorough” syllabus looks like. A thorough syllabus is one that

- Creates some structure for students and the course, but allows for flexibility over the course of a semester;
- Outlines official rules of conduct, but resists overly prescriptive policies and punitive measures; and
- Provides a rationale for the course, the texts, and the topics, without teaching the entire class in the pages of the syllabus!

Another debate in the syllabus discussion has focused on questions about goals, aspirations, and outcomes. Just as a syllabus cannot capture all that you want students to know about your course, lists of outcomes and descriptions of your hopes for the students in your course will be limited in their ability to convey the full range of your aspirations for the impact of your course on your students. Still, such lists and descriptions have a place in every syllabus. More suggestions about that element of the syllabus will come in the section on Further Guidance, below.

**Required Elements of Your Syllabus** As an instructor, you will bring your own style and the expectations of your particular discipline to the format and content of your syllabus. But every syllabus must answer some particular questions for your students. Those questions appear below. In the case of a few of them, noted with an asterisk, further guidance and recommendations follow.

- ◆ What is the course title, number, section, term, and year?
- ◆ Where and when does the class meet?
- ◆ Who is teaching the course, where is your office, how can you be contacted, and when are your office hours?
- ◆ What books, materials, and other resources are required for this course?
- ◆ **What is this course about? What will I learn? What are your aspirations for me in this course?\***
- ◆ **What are the specific learning outcomes of the course and how are they connected to the department's Program Learning Outcomes, the Institutional Learning Outcomes? \***
- ◆ What GE requirements does this course meet and why?
- ◆ What are the main assignments and exams, and when are they due?
- ◆ What are your policies about attendance, participation, make-up work, and due dates?
- ◆ **I have been diagnosed with a disability. What should I do?\***
- ◆ **What are your expectations regarding academic integrity?\***
- ◆ **What is the proposed course schedule of topics?\***

You may choose to answer additional questions in your syllabus. Here are few to consider:

- ◆ How should I study for this class?
- ◆ What is the homework like?
- ◆ What are the exams like?
- ◆ What additional resources might help me succeed in this course?
- ◆ **Are there library resources for this course?\***

### **Further Guidance**

#### **What is this course about? What will I learn? What are your aspirations for me in this course?**

Some professors provide a short narrative in their syllabus (1-2 paragraphs) about the content and direction of the course. It might include the college catalogue description, but often goes beyond the terse language of the catalogue. This narrative can define the purpose of the course, might set the topic of the course in the context of particular goals and trends of your discipline, and can help students perceive why this topic is intriguing, relevant and worthy of their exploration.

This section could also convey your aspirations for students in the course. Students will, of course, be evaluated on their performance on certain assignments and measured against certain “learning outcomes” (more on outcomes below). But you have many other aspirations about the hopes, abilities, curiosity, affections, and virtues that will be enriched by the course. You may want to convey something about the experience that you hope students will have working and learning together. At its best, a syllabus can reinforce the values of pursuing the topic in the context of a liberal arts community of learners, so you may want to make connections between your goals and aspirations and students’ broader education, helping them see how your course connects to the planks of Westmont’s mission.

Other colleges may look at this part of your syllabus to determine whether a student’s credits for the course will transfer to another institution, so some specifics about the topics covered can be helpful.

## What are the specific learning outcomes of the course and how are they connected to the department's Program Learning Outcomes, the Institutional Learning Outcomes?

As part of an ongoing effort to assess how well our students are learning and how we might make adjustments in our courses and programs, every syllabus should identify some specific **course learning outcomes** (CLOs). The outcomes identify some of the specific knowledge, skills, or abilities students should be able to demonstrate following the successful completion of the course. You can consider attitudinal outcomes, such as civic engagement, diversity, professionalism, and respect for civility in interpersonal relations.

The number and kinds of outcomes per course will vary. Some experts recommend as few as three, and some as many as ten. It is important that you keep the number of learning outcomes manageable for you. ***Since these are the outcomes that you will actually assess with specific tests, assignments, or other forms of evaluation, you should keep the number limited. Remember that outcomes need not capture all your goals and aspirations for your students. You can include broader, less measurable objectives when you answer the question above about aspirations.***

To help students see how your course fits into the mission of your department and the college, include information in this section about the links between your course learning outcomes, the **Program Learning Outcomes** (PLOs) for your department/program, and the **Institutional Learning Outcomes**.

Also indicate what activities in the course will enable you to determine whether students have achieved the course learning outcomes.

Below is brief checklist to guide your development of this section of the syllabus.

- The syllabus has a section titled "Course Learning Outcomes" (for the sake of consistency and clarity, it is important to use the word **outcome** here, rather than such words as *goals* or *objectives* or *standards*);
- All the outcomes use active verbs to state what students can demonstrate, represent, produce or do (words such as *improve*, *understand*, *know*, *appreciate*, or *learn* belong in the section on goals and aspirations, but **not** here);
- When appropriate, at least some of the outcomes connect with your department's Program Learning Outcomes and the college's Institutional Learning Outcomes;
- The syllabus tells the reader how you will determine whether students are able to do what you want them to do by the end of the course (in other words, how the outcomes will be assessed);

You can find your department's **program learning outcomes** on your department's web page at [http://www.westmont.edu/\\_academics/departments/\[your discipline\]/program-review.html](http://www.westmont.edu/_academics/departments/[your discipline]/program-review.html)

For example:

[http://www.westmont.edu/\\_academics/departments/chemistry/program-review.html](http://www.westmont.edu/_academics/departments/chemistry/program-review.html)

A link to a document with the Institutional Learning Outcomes can be found here:

[http://www.westmont.edu/\\_offices/institutional\\_portfolio/program\\_review/index.html](http://www.westmont.edu/_offices/institutional_portfolio/program_review/index.html)

Note: some years ago, Westmont had a document called the Institutional Learning Standards. We have replaced these with the Institutional Learning Outcomes.

At the end of this guide are a few sample syllabus excerpts for this section.

## **I have been diagnosed with a disability. What should I do?**

Please include the following statement in your syllabus:

Students who have been diagnosed with a disability are strongly encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services as early as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations for this course. Formal accommodations will only be granted for students whose disabilities have been verified by the Office of Disability Services. These accommodations may be necessary to ensure your equal access to this course.

Please contact Sheri Noble, Director of Disability Services. (310A Voskuyl Library, 565-6186, [snoble@westmont.edu](mailto:snoble@westmont.edu)) or visit the website for more information: <http://www.westmont.edu/offices/disability>

## **What are your expectations regarding academic integrity?**

Remind students of the college's policy on academic integrity and plagiarism, and spell out your own policy. You may also want to list resources that would help students avoid plagiarism. At a minimum, include a statement such as the following:

Dishonesty of any kind may result in loss of credit for the work involved and the filing of a report with the Provost's Office. Major or repeated infractions may result in dismissal from the course with a grade of F. Be familiar with the College's plagiarism policy, found at: [http://www.westmont.edu/offices/provost/plagiarism/plagiarism\\_policy.html](http://www.westmont.edu/offices/provost/plagiarism/plagiarism_policy.html)

## **What is the proposed course schedule of topics?**

- Include important and required dates (exams, major assignment due dates, and required attendance for visiting speakers, performances, etc.).
- If appropriate for your course, provide a daily or weekly schedule of topics and associated readings, activities, and assignments.
- Identify what may change as the semester progresses.

## **Are there library resources for this course?**

Voskuyl Library has provided this language you may choose to include in your syllabus.

Westmont librarians are available to help you. You can go to the Research Help Desk in the library for help with research for your assignments. You can also set up an appointment with the librarian who serves your academic department. To identify a specific librarian and to find subject-specific resources, consult the library's research guides at [libguides.westmont.edu](http://libguides.westmont.edu).

**Final Thought: Consider the Tone You've Set in Your Syllabus.** Once you have a draft of your syllabus, think about the tone you will set when your new students read your syllabus. Is the syllabus more punitive, or more inspiring? Have you set the tone for obedience or intellectual excitement? Are your expectations clear without being pedantic? Think about whether you prefer the first person plural (inclusive "we" language) or second person singular (familiar "you"). Consider your audience and how your syllabus will be read by prospective students, parents, colleagues, and accrediting agencies.

*These guidelines were compiled from previous Westmont documents, AAC&U guidelines, and policies of other colleges, including University of Utah, Baruch College, LeMoyne College, Cornell Center for Teaching Excellence, and Oberlin College.*

See also: [http://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/le-fa07/documents/le\\_fa07\\_DeathSyllabus.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/le-fa07/documents/le_fa07_DeathSyllabus.pdf)

## Sample Syllabus Excerpts: Course Learning Outcomes Sections

### From MA-010 Calculus II

**COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES** In addition to the goals and aspirations described above, I have specific skills and knowledge (or “outcomes”) that I want you to be able to demonstrate by the end of the course. Because this course is one part of your broader Westmont education, those outcomes have connections to that broader education. This course is part of the mathematics major, so it will contribute to your achieving some of the outcomes of that program as well. You can see the connections between the course and the mathematics program in the lists below.

#### **Mathematics Program Learning Outcomes**

1. **Core Knowledge.** Students will demonstrate knowledge of the main concepts, skills, and facts of the discipline of mathematics.
2. **Communication.** Students will be able to communicate mathematical ideas following the standard conventions of writing or speaking in the discipline.
3. **Creativity.** Students will demonstrate the ability to formulate and make progress toward solving nonroutine problems.
4. **Christian Connection.** Students will incorporate their mathematical skills and knowledge into their thinking about their vocations as followers of Christ.

**MA-010 Learning Outcomes** Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of and skills related to particular concepts and tools of integral calculus (PLO #1);
- Explain mathematical ideas according to the conventions of professional, formal mathematical writing (PLO #2);

**General Education:** This course fulfills the **Common Skills: Quantitative and Analytical Reasoning (QAR)** requirement because it emphasizes understanding and communication of numeric data including the computation and interpretation of summative statistics and the presentation and interpretation of graphical representations of data. A core focus of the course is the explicit study of quantitative and analytic methods. This course also fulfills **Abstract Reasoning (AR)** because it focuses on critical and analytical reasoning about non-empirical, abstract concepts, objects and structures. You will learn to understand and evaluate abstract arguments and explanations, analyze abstract concepts and solve abstract problems.

The expected learning outcomes for this course will be assessed through problem sets, WeBWork assignments, and exams.

### From COM 110 Interpersonal Communication

#### Course Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should be able to...

- Articulate “best practices” in conflict management (& hopefully implement some of them!)
- Articulate how communication concepts/theories can improve their relationships (& hopefully implement some of them)
- Meaningfully read, analyze, and communicate about interpersonal scholarship
- Articulate how their faith intersects with/informs their interpersonal communication practices

These course outcomes align with four Program Learning Outcomes in Communication Studies:

Course Objectives	Disciplinary Knowledge	Biblical & Ethical Principles	Oral Communication Skills	Written Communication Skills
Articulate best practices in Conflict Mgmt	Lectures Readings/Read Qs	Lectures Readings	Lectures Readings	Conflict Paper
Articulate how COM can improve relationships	Lectures Readings/Read Qs	Lectures Readings	Lectures	Relationships Paper
Read, analyze and communicate IP scholarship	Readings Wildcard Project	Wildcard project	Wildcard Presentation	Wildcard Paper/Documentation
Articulate how faith informs interpersonal practices	Readings/ Read Qs Lectures	Readings/Read Qs Lectures	Discussion	Reading Qs