Creating a Learner-Centered Syllabus

The Preamble: This GEDI assignment provides you with the opportunity to write your own learner-centered syllabus, particularly the "front-end" of a syllabus. You may choose to revise a syllabus for a course you have already taught; or, for the adventurous, you may choose to create a syllabus for a course that you want to teach at some point in the future (either here at VT or elsewhere.) You do not need to create a complete syllabus with a full calendar, unless you would like to do so.

The objective of this exercise is to focus your attention on the segments of a syllabus you can make more learner-centered. A learner-centered syllabus serves multiple functions—it is a welcoming document and a guide and learning agreement; it clearly outlines the course requirements and expectations for the student, but it should also attempt to engage or motivate the student's intellectual interest as well. You should also be attentive to the "tone and tenor" of your syllabus. In other words, think about both the direct and indirect messages and information that your syllabus conveys. A syllabus comprised solely of assignments, policies and due dates says something about the pedagogical orientation of the instructor, but it might not be the message you want to send to your students.

Some suggestions for setting things up differently: Think about how you can best engage and "invite" your students into the learning community you build together in your class. You may do this via the structure and design of your course, as well as with the language you use to describe the course and the potential learning experience for all participants. What can you do to welcome, motivate and engage your learners? A syllabus can also convey your approach to the topic and introduce students to the significance of your course beyond the current semester in which they are taking it.

There are resources for your review on the website (week 7), and you should start with those items. There are also supplemental materials on the website and on Canvas. To inspire your (re)thinking about learning objectives, etc., I highly recommend Andrew Churches' update of Bloom's taxonomy and Gardner Campbell's "Curiosity as a Learning Outcome"

If you would like, you may practice "backward design" in creating your syllabus; in other words, determine the curricular focus of the course, your learning objectives, and the kinds of assessments that provide the best opportunities for your students to demonstrate understanding and application of course materials/learning objectives (i.e., PBL, written assignments, exams, lab reports, and so on). If you want to pursue this option, make sure and consult the selection on Backward Design by Wiggins and McTigue (posted on Canvas).

Directions: Write your own syllabus for a current or future course. Do not use a syllabus that is not yours. You only need to do a partial syllabus. You do not need to create a full calendar or list of readings; you do need to write an introduction to the course and invite your learners into an exploration of the course topic. Be sure to include how and why this course is a useful addition to their curriculum, and do so with attention to being welcoming and encouraging. This is an exercise in creating a learner-centered syllabus, so avoid the tendency to use authoritarian prose.

Your syllabus should include:

- the specific curriculum/topic and its relevance—its significance to the major, to various careers/professions, etc.
- how you approach teaching the course, and what you expect from the learners.
- articulate learning goals or learning objectives.
- include some course policies/guidelines—again, being attentive to how you discuss policies and their rationale.
- include the VT Honor Code, an ADA compliant dis/ability statement, and VT POC (Principles of Community); as with everything else be attentive to the language you use to discuss these items.

Again, you do not need to complete a calendar section of your syllabus (with specific readings, test dates, etc.), but you are welcome to do so.

Due date #1**: Bring a draft of your syllabus to seminar on Wednesday March 6**.

We will work with the syllabi.

You will complete a peer review of a colleague's syllabus during class and turn it (the peer review) in on Canvas after you have shared it with the student.

We will set up folders on our shared Drive for your syllabi before class. Please bring your laptops to class as well.

Due date #2: Submit on Canvas on or before **May 8** (the due date for the portfolio of all your GEDI assignments).