CREATING A SYLLABUS FOR LIBERAL STUDIES

Prepared by the Office of Liberal Studies, Florida State University

I. Introduction
When creating a syllabus for Liberal Studies course review, there are specific technical requirements that must be met for a smooth faculty review process and so the course can be correctly entered into the university’s course catalog. Expectations for syllabi submitted for Liberal Studies course review are outlined here.

The syllabus you submit in the Curriculum Request Application will be a policy-heavy document that provides in-depth information about your course. It will also focus heavily on the assessments you have designed and how they connect to the course’s intended Liberal Studies student learning objectives.

II. Basic Elements

University-Required Elements
University policy requires that a course syllabus be distributed at the beginning of the semester including at a minimum the following information:

- Course number, title, and credit hours
- Course description
- Instructor contact information
- Student learning objectives
- An evaluation (grading) statement that indicates what procedures will be used to evaluate students and the weight of each grade component
- Required syllabus statements (the Americans with Disabilities Act statement, the University Attendance Policy, and the Academic Honor Policy statement)

It is also recommended that instructors include statement outlining class policy and/or expectations regarding classroom conduct and missed work.

For more information, please consult the University and Faculty Senate Teaching Policies document available at Faculty Senate’s Curriculum Resources page.

Additional Details for Liberal Studies Review and Approval
Because the course syllabus will provide the reviewers on the Liberal Studies Course Review Panel the information needed to certify a course as fulfilling Liberal Studies requirements for a particular designation, syllabi submitted for Liberal Studies review

---

1 For the generic curriculum file syllabus submitted as part of the course approval process, these are best left as blank fields that can be filled in by individual instructors on a semester-by-semester basis.
2 See https://facsenate.fsu.edu/Curriculum-Resources/syllabus-language.
3 See https://facsenate.fsu.edu/curriculum-resources.
must contain a greater level of detail than the minimum information required by University policy.

Please take time to review requirements for designations you are considering for the course and any required language or design requirements. A handout for each Liberal Studies designation area is available on our website. If there are any course design requirements (for example, writing or diversity courses), the assignments and activities that fulfill these requirements must be described in sufficient detail so that outside readers can see that and how these requirements are fulfilled.

If a particular assignment is identified as an assessment of one of the Liberal Studies learning objectives, provide enough information about that assignment for reviewers to tell that it will be an appropriate and valid assessment of that objective. It is helpful to identify any required texts and include a full reading list as well, with the understanding that this will be a sample reading list subject to change semester to semester.

Much of this detail can be included in the file syllabus you will upload into the CRA, but you may also consider an appendix following the syllabus body proper to provide additional information noted above. See “Liberal Studies Assessment Planning” below for more information.

III. Texts of Required Statements

In addition to the appropriate Liberal Studies area-specific language provided in section 4 “General Education Competencies and Requirements” below, University policy requires all syllabi to include the following statements.

University Attendance Policy
Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

Academic Honor Policy
The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University’s expectations for the integrity of students’ academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to “… be honest and truthful and … [to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University.” (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found at http://fda.fsu.edu/Academics/Academic-Honor-Policy.)

Americans with Disabilities Act
Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should:

1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and
2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type.

Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodation to a student until appropriate verification from the Student Disability Resource Center has been provided.

This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request.

For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the:

Student Disability Resource Center
874 Traditions Way
108 Student Services Building
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167
(850) 644-9566 (voice)
(850) 644-8504 (TDD)
sdrc@admin.fsu.edu
http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu/

IV. Texts of Recommended Language

Free Tutoring from FSU
On-campus tutoring and writing assistance is available for many courses at Florida State University. For more information, visit the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) Tutoring Services’ comprehensive list of on-campus tutoring options – see http://ace.fsu.edu/tutoring or contact tutor@fsu.edu. High-quality tutoring is available by appointment and on a walk-in basis. These services are offered by tutors trained to encourage the highest level of individual academic success while upholding personal academic integrity.

Syllabus Change Policy
Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

A Note on Sexual Misconduct
Florida State University does not discriminate on the basis of sex/gender in education programs and activities, and, as a recipient of Federal financial assistance for education activities, is required by Title IX to ensure that all of its education programs and activities do not discriminate in such a manner. As a University employee, it is my responsibility to ensure that anyone who has been impacted by alleged sex discrimination or sexual misconduct—including sexual violence, sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking, or sexual exploitation—is connected to appropriate University staff to provide information and resources following an incident. This is accomplished by submitting a report to the Title IX Director within two days of receiving a disclosure. Students are also encouraged to report incidents to the Title IX Director via report.fsu.edu or to FSUPD at (850) 644-1234.
V. Liberal Studies Assessment Planning

One of the essential requirements for approval as a Liberal Studies course is that the course must assess student achievement of the required Liberal Studies learning objectives. This is especially important for courses submitted for Liberal Studies General Education or E-Series areas, as they are included in the annual assessment of student learning. Information about student achievement on the Liberal Studies student learning objectives will be requested as part of the university’s focus on continual improvement of the general education program and student learning.

The syllabus (or an appendix) must address (1) how student achievement of each LS learning objective will be assessed and (2) how instructors will collect data on student achievement of these learning objectives. This will provide the Liberal Studies faculty reviewers with the information they need to verify that the course meets requirements for inclusion in the curriculum, and it can serve as a guide for future instructors of the course.

There is no required template for this material. Effective syllabi or appendices include (for each learning objective):

1. A brief discussion of how the course will enable students to master that learning objective; and
2. Identifying graded in-course assessment(s) that can be used as a quantitative measurement of students’ achievement of the learning objective.

Documents outlining instructional requirements and other considerations for each Liberal Studies area are available on our website as a resource when developing this material for the file syllabus.

Each objective should have its own measurement, though an assignment could measure more than one student learning objective depending on its design. Often faculty identify assignments such as quizzes/exams, lab reports, papers, oral presentations, graded discussions, or a final project as measurements. Specific components of any of these can also be used to focus the measurement, for example, specific questions on an exam, a particular component of a larger assignment, or an individual criterion from an analytic rubric for a paper.

Examples of possible assessment appendix formats and strategies can be found in the example syllabi available on the Liberal Studies website. Please feel free to reach out to the Liberal Studies office for assistance in identifying and/or embedding effective assessments in the course.

VI. A Learning-Focused “Promising” Syllabus

After your course is approved, you may want to edit the course syllabus to be learning-focused. Though much of what you submit for approval must be included, there is ample opportunity to take a learning-focused approach, using the syllabus to both set high standards for the students and convey a strong sense of trust in students’ abilities to

4 http://liberalstudies.fsu.edu/example-syllabi.html
meet them. Ken Bain (2004) describes this approach in *What the Best College Teachers Do* as a “promising syllabus.” A promising syllabus aims to accomplish three things.

1. It lays out the promises and opportunities the course *offers* to students. This is an invitation, not a command, and the students themselves have control over whether they accept the invitation.

2. It explains what students will do to realize these promises. It again gives students control over their own education and growth—these are framed not requirements *per se*, but rather as the things students would be invited to do so that they could succeed.

3. It explains how the learning progress will be tracked. This naturally includes grading policies and criteria, but it more than that—it is “the beginning of a dialogue in which both students and instructors explored how they would understand learning, so they could both make adjustments as they went and evaluate the nature of the learning by the end of the term.” (Bain, 2004, p. 74-75)

The tone of a syllabus can also influence student perceptions of both instructor and course. In the syllabus you provide to students, you might consider using friendly, approachable language rather than adopting an overly formal style. Subtle differences in how identical policies are expressed can have significant impacts on how students react to a syllabus and the instructor. For example, rather than writing, “Come prepared to actively participate in this course. This is the best way to engage in learning the material,” instead try, “I hope you actively participate in this course. I say this because I found it is the best way to engage you in learning the material.”

---

5 Harnish and Bridges, “Effect of syllabus tone: students’ perceptions of instructor and course.”