12

THE BLENDED COURSE SYLLABUS

What Do We Know About the Blended Course Syllabus?

For a course being developed using backward design principles, the creation of the syllabus usually occurs toward the end of the design process. This is done to ensure the prioritization of fundamental design elements such as the intended outcomes, the assessments, and the learning activities for the course. Many of the activities you have completed thus far throughout the workbook will be useful to you as you begin to draft the syllabus for your blended course. As you will read in this chapter, there are several ways that a syllabus can be modified to acculturate students to a blended modality and to ensure their success. There are also two examples of blended course syllabi included in the appendices so that you can see how all of the syllabus elements work together.

Syllabi are seen by many as the cornerstone of a course, perhaps because a syllabus can serve many purposes (Fink, 2012). Research on syllabi design and the influence of syllabi design on student learning is broad. Scholars have studied the range of syllabi components (Eberly, Newton & Wiggins, 2001), how syllabi differ across disciplines (Albers, 2003), how students perceive syllabi (Calhoon & Becker, 2008; Harnish & Bridges, 2011; Saville, Zinn, Brown, & Marchuk, 2010), and how students use syllabi throughout a term (Becker & Calhoon, 1999), among other areas. There is even a scholarly journal called *Syllabus* that is devoted to explorations on the topic.

In the following section, I describe the purposes of syllabi that are included in the literature: (a) as contract or legal document, (b) as a permanent record, (c) as a resource for student learning, (d) as a motivational tool, (e) as an interaction tool, (f) as a collaboration tool, (g) as a socialization tool, (h) as a communication tool, (i) as an interpersonal tool, (j) as an administrative tool, (k) as a course or curriculum development tool, (l) as a professional development tool, and (m) as a marketing tool. Scholarly references regarding each of these syllabi purposes can be found in Appendix A.

Syllabus Purposes

As a Contract or Legal Document
Bers, Davis, and Taylor (1996) point to the administrative purposes of syllabi as public descriptions of courses, evidence in grievance debates, and documents used to provide evidence of course equivalency for credit transfer; several scholars argue that these purposes constitute the syllabus as a contract.

As a Permanent Record
Syllabi are permanent records for an individual's teaching career as well as for departmental or institutional curricular records.

As a Resource For Student Learning
The syllabus helps students to see what the instructor has prioritized for the course content and may also include information about instructional techniques and assessment that assist a student in succeeding in the course.

As a Motivational Tool
Estes (2007) argues that the syllabus should be seen "as a crucial document for conveying an approach and a mindset" (p. 184) for a particular course. The syllabus can help students to be excited about a course and to feel personal ownership over their learning.

As an Interaction Tool
For syllabi that have multimedia components, instructors can use the document to help students interact with one another and course materials from the beginning of a course.

As a Collaboration Tool
Some instructors ask students to collaboratively generate course rules, assignments, or readings that are then included in the syllabus.

As a Socialization Tool
Scholars have discussed how the syllabus is a tool to acculturate students into a higher education environment, a particular discipline, or a standard of behavior.

As a Communication Tool
Altman and Cashin (1992) argue that "the primary purpose of a syllabus is to communicate to one's students what the course is about, why the course is taught, and what will be required of the students for them to complete the course with a passing grade" (p. 1). Eberly, Newton, and Wiggins (2001) agree that "the syllabus is often the initial communication tool that students receive as well as being the most formal mechanism for sharing information with students regarding any course" (p. 56).

As an Interpersonal Tool
Several scholars have pointed to the ways in which tone and choice of language can impact students' perceptions of a course and a teacher.

As an Administrative Tool
Syllabi are used for the purposes of accreditation, evaluation of teacher effectiveness, and development of benchmarks for pedagogical initiatives such as learner-centeredness.

As a Course or Curriculum Development Tool
When looking to change or norm a department curriculum, syllabus analysis can be an important factor. The syllabus creates a record of how a course may change over time, acts as an artifact to pass along to colleagues new to teaching a course, and can help with multisection norming in larger courses.

As a Professional Development Tool
The literature shows disciplinary differences in syllabus components, so a discussion with department colleagues, or across disciplines, can result in interesting pedagogical conversation. Syllabi are also frequently used as job market materials. Lastly, syllabi can be used for publications in the *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*.

As a Marketing Tool
The syllabus can be used as a tool to advertise a course, particularly in institutional settings where students are "shopping" for certain learning experiences.

Collins (1997) states that "the syllabus lets us help students think of themselves as insiders in the strange world built by academics, and the process of its construction and revision affords us periodically recurring opportunities to be self-critical about our course, its content, and our approach to it" (pp. 80–81). Indeed, the syllabus is a tool for reflection on our course design, pedagogical choices, and our goals for student learning. In the step-by-step guide that follows, you will be able to choose the various components to include in your syllabus and see a range of examples of statements that have been designed for blended course syllabi. As you explore the steps outlined in the remainder of the chapter for creating your course syllabus, I encourage you to reflect on the purposes your syllabus has served for your traditional courses and how a blended course syllabus may serve additional or different purposes.

A Step-by-Step Guide to the Blended Course Syllabus

Choosing Components of Your Blended Syllabus

Scholars who have studied syllabus components typically agree on the kinds of information that should be included. Scholarly references for each content area described in this section can be found in Appendix B.

Instructor Information
Includes instructor name, phone number, office location, office hours, and other pertinent contact information.

Course Information
Includes course title, location, time and days of meetings, and other logistical information about the course.

Course Description
Includes the course description offered in a curricular catalogue in addition to a description written by the instructor.

Course Rationale
Includes information about where the course fits within a curriculum, major, or minor field of study and why the course adds value to a student's education.

Pedagogical Methods or Instructional Techniques
Includes information about the instructor's choices regarding the structure of the course; the assignments, activities, or assessments used; and/or the classroom techniques (lecture, team-based learning) that the students will experience.

Readings/Materials and Textbooks
Includes information about the textbook, readings, course tools (calculators, etc.), and other materials and where these items can be found by the student (see Box 12.1).

Goals and Objectives
Includes information about what students will know, understand, and be able to do upon successfully completing a course (see Chapter 2 for additional information).

Calendar/Course Schedule
Includes information about when the course will meet, when readings and assignments are due, and when the course will not meet due to holidays.

Course Policies
Includes information about policies on attendance and participation, academic dishonesty, class behavior expectations, and other policies that apply to students taking the course.

Assignments
Includes information about the tasks, including tests and exams, that students will complete to earn their grade in the course.

Grading Procedures
Includes information about the course grading scale, the weights of different assignments and activities, and may also include rubrics or other assessment tools.

Support Services or Student Resources
Includes information about campus resources on disability services, student tutoring or writing center services, the campus wellness center, and other areas of support designed to help students succeed in their learning.

When considering the components for a blended course syllabus, I recommend the following:

Instructor Information

Make sure to differentiate between face-to-face and online office hours if you plan to offer one or both for your blended course. Checking in with students to make sure they know how to access online office hours is also a good idea.

Course Information

If the course is being taught in a blended modality for the first time, this may be something to include in the course information to encourage student feedback about the structure as well as to ask for their patience as you work out any issues that may arise with technology. (See Box 12.2 for an example syllabus statement.)

Course Description

Consider including a description or definition of the *blended learning model* along with the regular course description. This can be especially helpful for students who are experiencing blended learning for the first time.

Course Rationale

This is a space where you can offer a brief explanation of why the course was transitioned to a blended model. If you choose not to include this in your syllabus, you may want to discuss the rationale with students in the first class.

Pedagogical Methods or Instructional Techniques

If there are particular technologies or tools that will be integral to successful learning, you may want to include brief descriptions here along with your methods and techniques. This is another area of the syllabus where a definition of *blended learning* could also be included if not appended to the course description.

BOX 12.1
Example of Readings and Materials List

Required Textbook: *Business Statistics—Communicating with Numbers*, by Sanjiv Jaggia and Alison Kelly, 2013, McGraw-Hill Publishers, **WITH** McGraw-Hill's CONNECT (online assignment and assessment system). Choose one of the following options:

a. eBook with CONNECT: Purchase CONNECT Plus from [LINK]
b. New textbook packaged with CONNECT. Available at bookstore. After purchase, go to [LINK] and enter access code for CONNECT found on textbook.
c. Used textbook and CONNECT purchased separately. Purchase CONNECT from [LINK]

Unless you are given a used text, the eBook with CONNECT is the most economical way to purchase the class materials. No matter which option you choose, after a one-time log in for CONNECT, you will be able to access all online components for the class directly from Blackboard.

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BOX 12.2

Example of Statement Regarding Timeline for Blended Course Assignments

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This course follows a ***blended format*** where the majority of the lectures are covered outside of class time. Class time is used to review the more difficult concepts and solve homework exercises and case studies. In-class and out-of-class requirements are as follows:

- In-class requirements: A weekly, 1.5-hour in-class meeting where we review the weekly assigned material and solve homework exercises and case studies. Students also take quizzes and exams during this time period (1.5 hours a week).
- Out-of-class requirements: Outside of class, students are required to complete assigned readings, watch video lectures, [and] complete conceptual exercises (referred to as LearnSmart) and online homework assignments. (10.5 hours a week).

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BOX 12.3

Example of Blended Format Syllabus Statement

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Prior to each in-class meeting, you are expected to:

- Complete all relevant readings,
- View online lectures (see Blackboard > Course Documents > Video folder), and
- Complete LearnSmart assignments (see Blackboard > Course Documents > CONNECT: LearnSmart folder).

Within 48 hours of each in-class meeting, you are expected to:

- Complete on-line homework assignment (see Blackboard > Course Documents > CONNECT: Homework Assignments folder).

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Readings/Materials and Textbooks

If the course requires the use of a technology-enhanced textbook or other web-based tools, this is the place to explain where and how to access those tools. (See Box 12.2 for an example.)

Goals and Objectives

Make sure to include goals and objectives that are related to the use of technology or the blended environment if appropriate to your course. (You can read more about this in Chapter 2.)

Calendar/Course Schedule

I want to highlight the increased importance of the course schedule within a blended course syllabus. Students may initially be confused about the course structure, including

BOX 12.4
Example of Grade Book Statement

All grades will be available via the Grade Center on Blackboard. Please consider the online grade book as a courtesy to you, subject to errors given various upgrades and shifts in the software. I reserve the right to make grade book corrections to keep it consistent with the syllabus so that your grade reflects true performance, not software or user error. If you see something that doesn't make sense, please alert me! Thanks much for your help.

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when they are supposed to attend face-to-face meetings or synchronous online sessions. Discussing the structure in person on the first day of class is highly recommended. (Examples of course schedules are provided in Chapter 6 on course mapping; see also Box 12.3)

Course Policies
If there are course policies that are specific to the blended learning experience (e.g., an online etiquette policy), make sure to include these as well.

Assignments
Because students may be experiencing blended learning for the first time, it is important to take special care to note whether assignments are due in class or online. Indicating how tests or exams will be administered will also be a crucial component of student success and comfort for the course (see Chapter 4 for more information about online assessment tools).

Grading Procedures
If you plan to share grades via your LMS, consider including a statement for students to share that information (e.g., see Box 12.4).

Support Services or Student Resources
If your institution has special support resources for blended courses, include them here.
    Two additional components are also helpful for blended courses: technology requirements and technology support services.

Technology Requirements
This area will include the kinds of technology tools (software and hardware) that a student will need to be successful in the course. Additionally, this may include a statement regarding required Internet speed.

Technology Support Services
This area will include contact information about campus support services for technology assistance for things such as set-up of technology, troubleshooting of technology, and support for a campus LMS. You may also choose to include embedded links

to tutorials or instructions for common technology issues or training associated with the course.

Lastly, when possible, it is recommended that you include hyperlinks within your syllabus to course resources, assignments, or other components that are available online. Students are more likely to actually review the materials you are pointing them toward if they have the direct means to access it.

Sharing Your Syllabus

Traditional, blended, and online courses frequently rely on an LMS to share information with students (for more information on LMSs, see Chapter 7). I recommend not only posting your blended course syllabus online for students to review before the course begins but also going over the syllabus during the first face-to-face class so that students can ask questions. Posting a discussion board thread (discussed more in Chapter 8) for student questions about the syllabus can also be a helpful method of sharing information with the whole group when one student asks a question that may be pertinent to everyone.

Although many instructors are used to discussing their syllabus within the first week of class only, Becker and Calhoon (1999) argue that "given the general trend for students, particularly continuing students, to pay less attention to syllabus items as the semester wears on, it would be wise to revisit portions of the syllabus in class with the students throughout the semester" (p. 10). I also recommend using the syllabus as a classroom resource that is referred to and reviewed frequently. By having the syllabus available online, students will be able to reference the document to find information about office hours and instructor contact information as well as to review course policies when needed.

Key Ideas From Chapter 12

- In the backward design process, the syllabus is typically drafted after more fundamental course design activities are completed.
- A syllabus can serve many purposes for students, faculty members, and administrators.
- A syllabus document can provide important information for students who are taking a blended course for the first time.
- The blended course syllabus has additional components (e.g., technology requirements and technology support services) that may not have appeared previously on an instructor's traditional course syllabus.

Questions for Faculty

- Does your institution or department have a syllabus template for traditional, blended, or online courses?

- Is there a model that you can use when designing your blended course syllabus from another faculty member who has successfully taught a blended course?
- What purposes has your syllabi served for your traditional courses? How might those purposes change for your blended course?

Questions for Administrators

- Does your institution have a syllabus template for traditional, blended, or online courses?
- Have you established mandatory, suggested, and optional syllabus components for blended courses?
- Does your institution have a repository (online or otherwise) for syllabi to be shared between faculty members?

Documenting Your Course Design Progress

TABLE 12.1.
Documenting Your Course Design Progress

Course Design Steps	In Your LMS Sandbox
- Choose the components that you will include in your blended course syllabus and make a note of any modifications that might need to be made because of the blended modality. - Check to see if your campus has a syllabus template that is recommended for traditional, blended, or online courses. - Ask around to see if there are other instructors of blended courses who might be willing to share an example of their syllabus with you. - Begin drafting your blended course syllabus, adding in components that you have already designed from previous workbook activities. - Gather campus-specific resources and support structures to include in your syllabus (e.g., the help desk number for LMS-related questions).	- Create a space for your course syllabus in your LMS sandbox navigation menu. - Upload your completed syllabus to your LMS site. - If you plan to have students complete a syllabus quiz, design the quiz in your LMS and place a link to the quiz in the same content area that you post the syllabus.

NOTES