Required Elements of a Course Syllabus
Elements of a Syllabus

An effective course syllabus is more than just an information sheet. A syllabus represents an informal “contract” between the instructor and the student — listing objectives, establishing expectations about projects, attendance, and participation. It must identify the method by which the student will be evaluated.

An effective syllabus includes basic introductory information as follows:

- Course name, number, section, and location
- Term or semester (and the year)
- Faculty name, phone numbers (typically both home and office)
- UR/personal e-mail address(es)
- Availability of instructor by phone or in-person
- Titles, authors, and editions of all texts – both required and recommended

In addition, the best syllabi also include all or most of the following:

- Course description and objectives
- Outline of assignments and activities (including time lines)
- Specific course requirements
- Grading and evaluation policies
- Attendance policy
- Academic Integrity
- Relevant sources, references or supplies
- Resources for students
- Disability Policy
- Religious Holidays

Course Description and Objectives

The course description should provide an overview of the course, including its content, value, and underlying assumptions. The relevance of the material and your values and attitudes can also be included.

Course objectives are the intended outcomes of successfully completing the course, and they need to be specified to provide a focus for learning.

Preparing a Course Syllabus for Your Class

The School of Professional and Continuing Studies, one of the five academic units that make up the University of Richmond, seeks to provide exemplary educational opportunities for non-traditional students through degree, certificate, and non-credit programs. Our goal is to offer a quality educational experience in a format convenient to adult learners. A clear, concise, and comprehensive course syllabus is an essential ingredient in creating an ideal educational experience, and it is critical in assisting adult learners in balancing their own multiple commitments. The information in this handout is an outline of the key elements that comprise an effective syllabus.

* Portions of this handout were adapted from the Syllabus Construction Handbook prepared by Barbara Mills, University College, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.
Your course syllabus should be forwarded as an attachment in Word (via e-mail) to your Program Chair prior to the beginning of the semester. Please copy the administrative specialist, Kay Robertson, krobert3@richmond.edu, in your e-mail. She will copy the document for inclusion in the Course Syllabi File Cabinets as well as the electronic net files.

Contacts

- Cathy Fisher, cfisher@richmond.edu, office phone: 287-6621
- Bo Harris, wharris3@richmond.edu, office phone: 287-1246
- Dan Roberts, droberts@richmond.edu, office phone: 287-6037
- Christine Contrada, econtrad@richmond.edu, office phone: 287-1260
- Erik Nielson, enielson@richmond.edu, office phone: 287-1245
- Patricia Strait, pstrait@richmond.edu, office phone: 484-1616
- Porcher Taylor, ptaylor@richmond.edu, office phone: 289-8404
- Ellen Walk, ewalk@richmond.edu, office phone: 289-8770

Attendance and Participation

School policy permits absence from no more than 25% of all scheduled class sessions. Students exceeding this standard receive a grade of "V" (failure due to excessive absences) and no credit for the course. It is up to you to determine if you will count attendance and participation toward your final grade. If counted, you need to specify how. For example:

- Is it the volume or quality of participation that matters?
- Will feedback on participation be provided during the term?
- Will the effect on the final grade be substantial or counted only in borderline cases?
- Does group participation count?

Below is the official Class Attendance Policy for the University of Richmond. It appears in all catalogs at the University.

Each student is expected to attend all meetings of all classes, including lectures, seminars, laboratories and drills, in which he or she is enrolled. The specific attendance policy in each course, however, is determined by the instructor of the course, subject to the section on University Holidays below. The specific attendance policy for each course will be announced to the students and distributed on the course syllabus at the beginning of the course.

Faculty members will honor an official notification from the appropriate dean that a student is to be excused for participation in a University-sponsored event, such as choral performances off campus, intercollegiate athletic events, or judicial hearings at which the student must be present.

A student generally will be held responsible for all work of a class or laboratory missed during an absence. Acceptance of any excuse for an absence, other than those excused by the appropriate dean in the previous paragraph, and any provision for make-up, will be at the discretion of the instructor provided it is consistent with the announced policy for the course and with the University Holiday Schedule below. Missed classes, work, tests and/or excessive absences with or without good cause may result in a poorer grade, or failure, in the course. (NOTE: Students enrolled in Business School or School of Professional and Continuing Studies courses must attend at least 75% of the class.
meetings regardless of the reasons for absence to be eligible to receive credit for the course.)

Generally, absences that may be excused by faculty members include accident or illness, death or serious illness of a family member, bona fide religious holiday observance, or participation in other University activities such as field trips. Students should make arrangements with their instructors as far in advance as possible for the making up of any missed work. Students experiencing difficulty in making reasonable arrangements for make-up work may see their dean.

Students with Disabilities
Students with disabilities must apply for accommodations through the Student Development Office as soon as possible. The following link provides information and required forms: disability.richmond.edu.

The main purpose of the University Disability Coordinator’s office is to make sure students with disabilities have the same chance for success (defined as average performance or better) as students who do not have disabilities. The designated disability advisors do this by making sure that students with disabilities are able to access learning material, buildings, services, and programs at the University of Richmond. Once reasonable access is provided, it is up to the student to do the necessary work—the disability advisors and accommodations help make sure that students have the chance to do it.

University Disability Coordinator:
Office of Associate Vice President for Student Development
Tina Cade, Associate Vice President
28 Westhampton Way
University of Richmond, 23173
(804) 289-8032
tcade@richmond.edu

University Holidays/Religious Observances
The holidays and schedules for academic calendars are available on the Registrar’s web site at registrar.richmond.edu/planning.

The University is a secular institution that values a diversity of religious expression. The University is also an active community with a wide range of personal commitments and academic and extracurricular activities.

Planning for academic and extracurricular activities should be done with sensitivity to the diverse religious commitments of the community and an awareness of religious holidays. Scheduling large-scale, one-time academic or extra-curricular events on a religious holiday should be avoided whenever possible.

Any student may be excused from class or other assignments because of religious observance. A student who will miss an academic obligation because of religious observance is responsible for contacting his or her professor within the first two weeks of the semester. Students who make such arrangements will not be required to attend classes or take examinations on the designated days; however, they are responsible for completing missed work. Faculty must provide reasonable opportunities for such students to make up missed work and examinations. To
facilitate this, faculty will announce and distribute all anticipated test and examination dates on the course syllabus, distributed at the beginning of each semester. Students should be aware that faculty may need to adjust these dates as necessary.

Faculty are expected to be mindful of potential conflicts with religious observances and should make reasonable accommodations when students’ religious practices conflict with their academic responsibilities.

The religious observance calendar is meant to serve as a scheduling guide. It lists significant holidays from the five largest global faith traditions. However, it is not comprehensive and students may choose to observe a holiday not included on the calendar.

University’s web site for information on religious observances at registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/religiousobsv.html.

**Academic Integrity**

Your syllabus should mention the University's Honor Code Statute and reiterate that cheating and plagiarism are unacceptable and could result in dismissal from the class and/or University.

The School of Professional and Continuing Studies of the University of Richmond embraces the purpose and intent of the Honor Code. The Honor Code policy of the University is spelled out online at spcs.richmond.edu/document/facstaff/handbook/faculty_handbook_spcs.pdf.

The issue of plagiarism should be covered in your first class session. In addition, your course syllabus should include information about our policy and the Honor Code creed. The UR Honor Code can be found at spcs.richmond.edu/about/honorcode.html.

In addition, some faculty members elect to have their students place and sign the following pledge to all of their work submissions:

> On my honor I hereby affirm that this work was created by me, the writings and conclusions are entirely my own, I actually completed the surveys and interviews (where appropriate), made all the observations noted, and all ideas from others are properly cited and referenced. In addition, this work is original for this class and none of it had already been written for another class nor have I received credit for this in any other class.

It is important that we do not assume that all students know the depth of plagiarism. Even though plagiarism is an ethically complex problem, your definition of plagiarism to students should be as simple and direct as possible. You should spend some class time at the beginning of the semester to define plagiarism and the proper processes of citing work. In addition you may choose to include a brief summary on acceptable “citing” practices within your course syllabus.

Review the University Library’s “Citing Sources Research Guide” for examples and resources to share with your students: libguides.richmond.edu/citingsources.
Grading Scale (from the SPCS Catalog)

Grade Points: Given for each semester hour’s grade according to the following scale:

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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
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<td>A-</td>
<td>3.7</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>3.3</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>B-</td>
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Final Comments

A syllabus is required for every class in the SPCS, and it should be available to students on or before the first class meeting. A copy of the syllabus must be sent electronically (only in WORD) to your program chair as well as Kay Robertson at krobert3@richmond.edu. The document will be maintained electronically as well as in hard copy.

Your syllabus should be as specific as possible. During the first class, you should review the syllabus with your students, using the time to share your philosophy about teaching and your commitment to learning.

If you are unsure about your syllabus, consult with your program chair. Please remember that if you are teaching a cross-listed course that has both an undergraduate and a graduate level designation, there must be two separate course syllabi on file.

Syllabus Checklist

Below is a handy checklist of important elements of an effective syllabus. They should be included in all School of Professional and Continuing Studies course syllabi. On occasion, some academic units require additional components. Please check with your program chair.

Information About Instructor

- Name
- University of Richmond e-mail address; optional – personal e-mail
- Contact phone number(s)
- Times when students may contact you

Course Information Required

- Heading (University of Richmond, School of Professional and Continuing Studies)
- Course name/title
- Course number including section number (SPCS courses are always followed by a “U.”)
- CRN of the course (can be found on BannerWeb or in the class schedule)
- Class meeting time(s)
- Location of class
- Required textbooks including title, author, edition
- Course description/prerequisite
- Course objectives

Schedule Information

- For the date of each class meeting, specify: the subject matter/topics to be covered (e.g., lecture, field trip, guest lecturer, etc.) and the pre-class readings and other non-graded assignments due.
Non-class meeting dates (holidays, breaks, etc.).
Graded assignment due dates, preferably highlighted in bold or capitalized (e.g., homework, quizzes, papers, projects).
Exam dates, preferably highlighted.

Grading Information
- Course requirements (exams, quizzes, projects, papers) AND the proportion each counts towards the final grade. Discuss the content and other instructions. If class participation is factored in, please explain how you will evaluate it.
- Grading and scale standards.
- Additional Components
- Policies regarding late work and make-up exams
- A statement regarding academic integrity/plagiarism

Attendance policies
- Disability Policy and students with disabilities information
- Holidays and religious observances
- Innovative class procedures, such as cooperative learning exercises, panel presentations, case study methods, class journals, etc.

Additional Information Concerning Student Resources
The information below is an overview of resources available to our students. We encourage you to include this information in your syllabus, on Blackboard, or perhaps as a separate handout.

Academic Skills Center ([http://asc.richmond.edu](http://asc.richmond.edu), 289-8626 or 289-8956): Helps students assess their academic strengths and weaknesses; hone their academic skills through teaching effective test preparation, critical reading and thinking, information processing, concentration, and related techniques; work on specific subject areas (e.g., calculus, chemistry, accounting, etc.); and encourage campus and community involvement.

Boatwright Library Research Librarians ([http://library.richmond.edu/help/index.html](http://library.richmond.edu/help/index.html) or 289-8876): Assist students with identifying and locating the best resources for class assignments, research papers and other course projects. Librarians also assist students with questions about citing sources correctly. Students can schedule a personal research appointment, meet with librarians in the first floor Research and Collaborative Study area, or ask questions by email, text or IM. SPCS Contact in the Library: Carrie Ludovico, [cludovic@richmond.edu](mailto:cludovic@richmond.edu), office phone number 287-6647.

Career Services ([http://careerservices.richmond.edu/](http://careerservices.richmond.edu/) or 289-8547): Can assist you in exploring your interests and abilities, choosing a major, connecting with internships and learning experiences, investigating graduate and professional school options, and landing your first job. We encourage you to schedule an appointment with a career advisor during your first year. In addition, faculty are encouraged to utilize the services of Tonya Osmond, Career Services for Alumni and SPCS Students, 289-8547, [tosmond@richmond.edu](mailto/tosmond@richmond.edu).

Counseling and Psychological Services ([http://caps.richmond.edu](http://caps.richmond.edu) or 289-8119): Assists students in meeting academic, personal, or emotional challenges. Services include assessment, short-term counseling and psychotherapy, crisis intervention, psychiatric consultation, and related services.
Libraries ([library.richmond.edu](http://library.richmond.edu), 298-8876): The University of Richmond Libraries provide services that suit the needs of all learners, whether on campus or hundreds of miles away. Visit the Library Services page for more information about services: library.richmond.edu/services.

SPCS Student Government Association ([spcs.richmond.edu/sga](http://spcs.richmond.edu/sga)): We encourage you to inform your students about the SPCS Student Government Association.

Speech Center ([http://speech.richmond.edu](http://speech.richmond.edu) or 289-6409): Assists with preparation and practice in the pursuit of excellence in public expression. Recording, playback, coaching and critique sessions offered by teams of student consultants trained to assist in developing ideas, arranging key points for more effective organization, improving style and delivery, and handling multimedia aids for individual and group presentations.

Writing Center and OWL ([http://writing.richmond.edu](http://writing.richmond.edu) or 289-8263): Assists writers at all levels of experience, across all majors. Students can schedule appointments with trained writing consultants who offer friendly critiques of written work. The Richmond OWL is available at owl@richmond.edu. Visit spcs.richmond.edu/degrees/current-students/owl.html for more information.