

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT ASHEVILLE
FACULTY SENATE

Senate Document Number 0214F
Date of Senate Approval 10/09/14

Statement of Faculty Senate Action:

FWDC 1: Revision of Course Syllabus Policy ([Section 5.2.5](#) of the Faculty Handbook)

Effective date: Spring 2015

Summary: This document updates the policies regarding the content for course syllabi in the Faculty Handbook and brings them in line with current system-wide policies, assumptions by SACS, and best practices for faculty and students.

Rationale: The current Faculty Handbook statement about course syllabus and class policies has not been edited since 1985 and states that syllabi are “strongly suggested” rather than required. All other campuses in the UNC system express the expectation or the requirement that faculty will provide syllabi to students at or near the beginning of class. SACS includes requirements that seem to assume that syllabi are given to students and held on file, even though there is no express instruction to do so. Several professional accrediting agencies, e.g. for Management & Accountancy, provide guidelines for syllabus content. Our handbook is simply out of date in this regard.

More significantly, the guidelines included in our current statement omit several important elements. The most important are 1) compliance with ADA requirements and accommodations for students with disabilities, including mention of Disabilities Services; and 2) student learning outcomes for course and degree program. Others, which can be found mentioned in “best practice” guides to syllabi creation, include:

- Professor office hours and contact information (email, phone, and preferred means of contact)
- Course assignments and how each is weighted; due dates
- University policies and professor policy on academic dishonesty
- Final exam date and description
- Course policies, including use of Moodle, how assignments are to be turned in, lateness, extra credit, makeups
- Campus resources for students who are struggling

And finally, syllabi are the best means of communicating course policy (and in some cases university and federal policy) to students. In a teaching university, they are the most effective means of serving the students, and of protecting the faculty in the case of an academic appeal.

The content of the current handbook statement on syllabi and course policy is not only deficient, but also unhelpful. Its question format does not provide templates or examples of language to assist faculty in constructing syllabi, and thus needs to be rewritten as well as expanded.

Current text of 5.2.5 to be deleted: Syllabus and Class Policies

Distribution of Information at the Beginning at Each Semester (VCAA, 8-12-85)

To assist students in deciding on the nature of the course in which they have enrolled, to help students understand what will be expected of them, and to help students plan their work in the course, it is strongly suggested each faculty member provide the following in writing to each student in every course at one of the first class sessions of each semester:

- a. A course syllabus describing the course as it will be presented by the individual faculty members;
- b. A statement of class policies which the faculty member will follow.

This request to inform students does not in any way impose on a faculty member any policies or any particular approaches to teaching that he or she does not now subscribe to. It is sound teaching practice to inform students in writing about the course (as he or she conceives it) and the policies that govern students in that class (whatever those policies might be).

Experience shows that students are interested in your responses to the following questions:

1. Course Syllabus
 - a. Is the course required for the major?
 - b. Does it have prerequisites?
 - c. What are the course objectives? What is it supposed to do? What in general are the students expected to get out of it?
 - d. What is the text? Any required readings? Any suggested readings?
 - e. What are the main topics that will be covered? Can you give a kind of timetable of when we might expect to be dealing with each of these?
 - f. How will we be evaluated? About how many exams or quizzes? Can we know the dates of these? How are grades in these exams and quizzes weighted to yield the final grade?
2. Class Policies
 - a. Must we attend each class session? Do you have a policy on "cuts"?
 - b. Can we make up missed quizzes or exams? If so, how? How does a missed class effect the final grade (if it does)?
 - c. What happens if snow or other severe weather makes it impossible to get to class, especially if an exam or a special assignment is scheduled?
 - d. Will you accept late homework or papers? Will lateness affect the grade?
 - e. Does "class participation" count toward the final grade? Can you tell us how much?
 - f. Can you tell us what must be done to pass, to get an "A", etc.? Is 60 a passing grade; is 90 an A, etc?
 - g. Do you have a specific format for papers? Must they be typed?
 - h. Any other policies that affect behavior or performance in this class?

Written statements need not touch on each of these items and may actually mention a few more. The lack of a written statement of an actual policy, however, gives the clear assumption that policy does not exist or is not important. Problems with student grievances are most easily resolved by getting policy in writing and making sure that each student has a copy.

Replace text of 5.2.5 with: Syllabus and Class Policies

The course syllabus is an essential tool in facilitating effective teaching and learning. It provides an instructor with the opportunity to describe the overall goals and structure of a course, while clearly communicating expectations and responsibilities of students. An effective syllabus helps students understand not only specific course requirements but also how classroom activities fit into a meaningful instructional framework. A complete syllabus should be distributed by the end of the first week of class.

All syllabi for UNC Asheville courses *must* contain the following elements:

- Basic course information: course name and number, room location, days and times of class meetings
- Instructor information: name, contact information, office location and office hours
- The place of the course in the overall curriculum: prerequisites (if any), whether the course fulfills any university requirements or requirements for the major/minor of the course's home department
- Course goals or objectives, including student learning outcomes
- Required and recommended readings or other course materials
- Course requirements: description and due dates (if known in advance) of tests, presentations, and assignments; date and time of final exam
- Grade determination: explanation of how assignments are weighted and how final grades are determined, whether instructor uses +/- grading
- Attendance policy
- Policy regarding academic integrity
- Tentative class schedule, including topics of course and associated dates of their coverage (if known in advance)
- Statement regarding accommodations for students with disabilities, e.g., "UNC Asheville is committed to making courses accessible to persons with documented disabilities. Students requiring reasonable accommodations must register with the Office of Academic Accessibility by providing supporting documentation. All information provided will remain confidential. For more information, please contact the Office of Academic Accessibility (insert contact information)."
- Other course policies which may include policy on late or missing assignments, use of technology in the classroom, etc.

In addition, *recommended* syllabi elements include:

- A statement that the syllabus is subject to change, and if changes are made, the form through which they will be clearly communicated to students
- Expectations regarding class participation and other classroom behaviors
- Information regarding use of a content management system (e.g., Moodle) and other required instructional technology programs
- Instructor's pedagogical approach
- Resources for students who are struggling (e.g., Writing Center, tutoring opportunities)
- Inclement weather policy