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Set the Tone With an Inclusive Syllabus

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Set the Tone With an Inclusive Syllabus

Dr. Alison Sloat, College of Sciences

Teaching Practice & Need it Addresses

Inclusive and equity-minded syllabi help welcome students, set positive and encouraging tones on the first day of class (Fisher & Keenan, 2020), and improve the chances of success for all (Keenan et al., 2020). The course syllabi for three courses (SCI 101, SCI 201, and GEOL 340X) were redesigned for Summer and Fall 2021 semesters to provide better support for First Generation students. Rather than reading like a legal contract, the redesigned syllabi welcome students, explain jargon, and normalize struggle. The new syllabi serve our diverse students by demystifying success, especially in remote learning environments.

How Others Can Adopt This Practice

Three small changes can make your syllabus more inclusive:

Step 1: Include a Welcome message (Figure 1),

Step 2: Explain jargon (e.g., Office Hours, Learning Outcomes, cumulative exam) (Figure 2), and

Step 3: Normalize struggle (Figure 3).

SCI 101 Syllabus Fall 2021

Welcome!

Welcome to SCI 101! Congratulations for taking on the challenge of pursuing a difficult major and attending college. This is an exciting time in your life, and I am looking forward to working with you as you succeed in college and discover your path as a scientist. In this class, you will be asking questions to which no one knows the answers, designing experiments to answer those questions, collecting and analyzing the results, and drawing conclusions. You will get to do REAL science! If you have never conducted a science experiment before, do not worry—I will help you along the way, step by step.

Figure 2: Explain jargon (e.g., Office Hours, credits, MW, cumulative exam).

Faculty Information and How to Contact Me:

Faculty: Dr. Alison Sloat (pronouns: she/her/hers)

Office (Student) Hours: If you have questions, I invite you to visit me in my office in MPE-A 133 during **office hours, a time I set aside specifically for your questions and concerns:** Mondays (M), Tuesdays (Tu), Wednesdays (W), and Thursdays (Th) from 11:30 am – 12:30 pm. You are also welcome to contact me outside of class and office hours. I teach every day until 11:15 am, and I am usually in my office in the afternoons. When my office door is open, you are welcome to stop in.

Email: alison.sloat@unlv.edu

Office: MPE-A 133 (down the hall from the College of Sciences Advising Center)

Phone: 702-895-1535

How to Succeed in SCI 201:

Everyone can succeed in SCI 201 if you do the following:

1. Recognize that this course will take a large amount of time. You will need to do readings, write essays, attend class, and prepare presentations. It is expected that you will be spending 2-3 hours outside of class for every hour (or credit/unit) in class. This class is 3 credits, so you should expect to spend a minimum of 6 hours per week on class work. College truly is a full-time job.
2. Come to class on time, every time. If you miss a class or get sick, please talk to me as soon as possible so that we can make a plan to help you catch up. It is easy to fall behind, so get in the habit of reading the assigned reading prior to class so that you are prepared to participate in each class session.
3. Listen, take notes, and participate in class so that you can incorporate the course material into your essays.
4. This is a reading and writing intensive course. The more you read and practice writing, the better writer you will become. Therefore, it is recommended that you complete your work at least 12 hours before it is due to give you time to think, process what you have read, and reflect on what you have learned.

Figure 3: Stating that the course will require a lot of work and effort lets students know that they are not alone when they struggle at some point..

Figure 1: Include a Welcome message.

Evidence it Benefits Students

Providing welcoming language in the syllabus that reflects you as an educator helps set the tone for the class for the rest of the semester. Overall student success improved because students were encouraged and excited from the very first day of class until the completion of the course—they were more engaged, more interested in their assignments, and reported more interest in conducting additional undergraduate scientific research in the future. First Generation students benefitted from the explanation of jargon that normalized struggle and demystified success, making the course material more equitable and accessible to all.

Resources & Where to Find Them

This information is based on research by Fisher and Keenan (2020) and Keenan et al. (2020) at the University of Northern Colorado. Additional examples of redesigned syllabi can be found [Here](#), with additional tips for creating a more inclusive syllabus [Here](#).

References

- Fisher, G.F., & Keenan, S.M. (2020). Tips for creating a more inclusive syllabus. *The Teaching Professor*. Retrieved from: <https://www.teachingprofessor.com/topics/preparing-to-teach/syllabus/tips-for-creating-a-more-inclusive-syllabus/>
- Keenan, S.M., Novak, J.D., Bergstrom, C., Reinsvold, L.A., Shellito, L., Romelo, C., & James, A. (2020). Materials for a culturally inclusive STEM classroom. *STEM Inclusive Excellence Collective, University of Northern Colorado*. Retrieved from: <https://www.unco.edu/nhs/stem-inclusive-excellence-collective/resources-equity.aspx>