

Syllabus Initiative Spring 2021

Background

The “syllabus initiative” was a response to concerns that there was insufficient guidance in the *Senate Rules (SRs)* regarding the expected content for course syllabi. At the time, both the Undergraduate Council (UC) and Ombud’s office felt their respective responsibilities could be more easily discharged if additional details were added to the *SRs*. The UC felt that the lack of syllabi-related information in the *SRs* made it difficult for them to effectively review courses. The Ombud’s office indicated that, for example, they could only make recommendations to instructors about what to include in a syllabus but could not refer to an official list of requirements. There was also a general sense that there could be other benefits if the issue of syllabi was reviewed more holistically.

About three years ago, a small group started meeting to discuss addressing concerns related to syllabi. Eventually, a workgroup put forward a list of the information that should be included in any syllabus, as well as inventoried the existing syllabi-related information in various sections of the *SRs* but not included in the section on syllabi (*SR 6.1.1* (“Information about Course Content”). To correct that, the workgroup added language to all the individual syllabi-related sections to refer to *SR 6.1.1* for more details about syllabi. The workgroup also proposed the development of new web pages, to be a single source of content for campuswide policies. These web pages make it easier for instructors to include up-to-date language about various campus offices and policies, as well as provide information (to instructors and students) in a concise and clickable manner.

The workgroup’s efforts resulted in two primary items: 1) proposed changes to the *SRs*, including an explicit list of required information for syllabi in *SR 6.1.1* and complementary references back to *SR 6.1.1* for all other syllabi-related sections throughout the *SRs*; and 2) a handful of new, Senate-maintained web pages. These items were presented to the Senate Council for discussion on [February 3, 2020](#) and to the University Senate on [February 10, 2020](#), both times for discussion only.

Recent Activity:

The Senate discussion raised four issues of concern and the proposal was revised in response to three of them. First, there was a concern that the use of the word “supersede” in describing the *SR* requirements could (erroneously) imply that instructors could opt out. The solution was to remove that term and instead clarify that there could be *additional* considerations for some courses and programs. Next was a concern about language that stated the SC on its own could approve certain changes to the *SRs* on syllabi. The solution was to remove that language entirely. Another issue was to revise the description of the date by which students must receive the course syllabus, which was subsequently clarified. The last concern was that the proposed new language in *6.1.1.5* was unnecessary, because optional things did not need to be documented. That language was left intact to reflect the workgroup’s original intent to inform readers/instructors of the possibility for optional items. However, the workgroup does not have a strong opinion about this.

One aspect of the syllabus initiative changed since the Senate’s review. In the interim, a formal statement for syllabi on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) was vetted by the Senate’s Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion and subsequently approved by the SC. The proposed *SR* language includes a requirement that syllabi include a faculty body-approved DEI statement, whether it be the [SC-approved statement](#) or some other faculty body-approved DEI statement.

Suggested effective date:

An effective date of Fall 2021 would allow time for instructors and others to respond to the changes.

Next steps:

The next step in the review process is for the Senate to review the proposed changes to the *SRs* as an action item, which is planned for February 8. At that time, if Senate votes to approve the proposed changes as presented, they will be made effective for Fall 2021.

Section 6. Student Academic Affairs

6.1. ACADEMIC RIGHTS OF STUDENTS

6.1.1 ~~INFORMATION ABOUT COURSE CONTENT~~ THE COURSE SYLLABUS

All students must be informed in writing of the course content and other matters listed in this rule at no cost to the student. Students have the right to ~~expect the course to correspond generally to the description in the official *Bulletin* of the University of Kentucky and the right to be informed in writing (in the course syllabus) at the first class meeting~~ about the nature of the course, ~~including~~ the content, the activities to be evaluated, and the grading practice to be followed. The course syllabus shall provide information to students regarding any factors used in determining grades (e.g. Whenever factors such as absences, required interactions, and or late papers assignments) will be weighed in determining grades, a student shall be informed. ~~All students must be informed in writing of the course content and other matters listed in this rule at no cost to the student.~~ Syllabi may be posted electronically; but must be shared with students this must be done by the third day of the fall and spring semesters, or, for compressed courses and courses in the summer session and winter intersession, by the first class meeting of the semester day of the course. Electronically posted and the syllabus syllabi must remain available there to students for the entire semester term. All students officially enrolled in a course shall, upon request, be provided a copy of the course syllabus free of charge. [US: 2/11/80; SREC: 11/20/87; US: DATE]

Course syllabi must address a series of required components (listed below) and include Academic Policy Statements (see SR 9.1.7). Syllabi for undergraduate and graduate courses must also include rules regarding academic offenses for undergraduate and graduate students. (There may be additional rules for professional courses and programs.) [US: DATE]

The following sections of the Senate Rules describe required components of a syllabus: SR 3.2.1.5 (expectations of graduate students and differentiation from undergraduate students); SR 5.2.5.1 (policy on return of assignments); SR 5.2.5.2.2 (making up graded work for excused absences); SR 5.2.5.2.1 (acceptable documentation for excused absences); SR 5.2.5.6 (Dead Week policies), and SR 6.1.3.1 (midterm grades for undergraduate students). [US: DATE]

6.1.1.1 Required syllabi components

[US: DATE]

Course syllabi must include the required syllabi components listed below.

1. Full and accurate title of course, corresponding to the title in the official Bulletin of the University.
2. Course prefix, course number, and course section number.
3. Instructor name, office location, office phone number including area code, and campus email address.

4. Office hours (days, times, location) or how to make appointment. For distance-learning courses, provide virtual office hours, preferred method of communications, and maximum timeframe for responding to student communications.
5. Course description corresponding generally to the description in the official Bulletin of the University.
6. Required materials for the course, e.g. textbooks, required readings/films, etc.
7. Associated expenses other than “required materials,” such as the cost of a field trip, proctoring fees, or polling software devices, if applicable.
8. Skill/Technology requirements, if applicable. If specific technical/digital literacy skills or software are required, the syllabus must describe these.
9. Student learning outcomes.
10. Descriptive list of activities, exams, and grading scheme. The syllabus must include language that describes to students how their grades will be calculated. As applicable, include the following: a list of activities with enough description for students to understand the course requirements; the factors used in determining grades (e.g., absences, required interactions, or late assignments); and due dates (if applicable, include a caveat that due dates can be changed and explain under what circumstances they can be changed).
11. Mechanics of submissions, if applicable. The syllabus must explain if assignments must be submitted via a certain method (e.g., via email or a specific software program or file type).
12. Policy on return of assignments, if applicable. See SR 5.2.4.1.
13. Grading scale (undergraduate, graduate, etc.). See SR 3.1.4.
14. For 400G- and 500-level courses, expectations of graduate students and differentiation from undergraduate students. See SR 3.1.4.
15. Midterm grades, if undergraduate students are enrolled in the course. See SR 6.1.3.1 and the University Calendar.
16. Submission of late assignments and late policies. The syllabus should explain if late assignments are accepted for unexcused absences and if there are penalties or time limits regarding work submitted after the due date. (Per SR 5.2.4.2.2, within some guidelines, late assignments must always be accepted for excused absences.) See SR 5.2.4.2.2.
17. Permissible assignments that are due during Dead Week. See SR 5.2.4.6.
18. Tentative course schedule. At a minimum include due dates of major assignments and exams. More detailed information must also be provided, either within the syllabus or located on another platform, such as a Learning Management System (e.g., Canvas).
19. Course activities outside of regularly scheduled class-required interactions, if applicable. These include special events, field trips, and required synchronous meetings for distance learning courses.
20. URL/hyperlink to, or copy and paste of, Academic Policy Statements. See SR 6.1.1.2.
21. Attendance policy for course, if applicable. (Per SR 5.2.4.2.3.2, unless an attendance policy is described in the syllabus, students cannot be penalized for lack of attendance.) See SR 5.2.4.2.3, SR 5.2.4.2.3.1, and SR 5.2.4.2.3.2.
22. Acceptable documentation for excused absences (e.g., a letter from an institution or medical provider, or published information). See SR 5.2.4.2.1.
23. Policy for absences due to major religious holidays, if applicable. See SR 5.2.4.2.1.

24. Resources. If applicable, the syllabus should describe special resources that may be useful to students, such as UK's distance learning library services, the Hub, proctoring information, etc.

25. Policy on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Instructors must include a URL to or text of a statement on diversity, equity, and inclusion approved by a relevant faculty body. The Senate Council-approved <URL statement> on diversity, equity, and inclusion or any other equivalent faculty body-approved statement will meet this requirement.

6.1.1.2 Academic Policy Statements

[US: DATE]

Academic Policy Statements are applicable to all courses, such as policies on excused absences, religious observances, accommodations due to disability, and non-discrimination and Title IX requirements. Instructors may either insert the full narrative of the Academic Policy Statements into a syllabus or include the URL/hyperlink to the Academic Policy Statements web page (<https://www.uky.edu/universitysenate/academic-policy-statements>).

[See SR 6.1.1 on documenting this information in a course syllabus.]

6.1.1.3 Rules Regarding Academic Offenses

[US: DATE]

Instructors for courses with undergraduate and graduate students must either insert the full language of the *Senate Rules* on academic offenses (SR 6.3.1, "Plagiarism," and 6.3.2, "Cheating," and 6.3.3, "Falsification or Misuse of Academic Records") in a syllabus or include the URL/hyperlink to the web page with this language. (<https://www.uky.edu/universitysenate/rules-regarding-academic-offenses-undergraduate-and-graduate-students>)

Instructors for professional courses and programs must describe applicable academic offense policies within their syllabi or include a URL/hyperlink to a web page with that information.

6.1.1.4 Resources Available to Students

[US: DATE]

Instructors are encouraged to provide students with a list of available resources, available at <https://www.uky.edu/universitysenate/resources-available-students>.

6.1.1.5 Optional Information for Syllabi

[US: DATE]

As non-required information that instructors may opt to include in a course, the following items may also be included: if required by an accrediting agency, course goals or objectives (in addition to student learning outcomes, or SLOs); classroom behavior policies; course material copyright statement; or classroom recording policy. This page has some sample language.

6.1.2 CONTRARY OPINION

A student has the right to take reasoned exception to the data or views offered in the classroom without being penalized.

6.1.3 ACADEMIC EVALUATION

[US: 12/5/83]

6.1.3.1 Midterm grade reports to undergraduate students

All teachers must inform the undergraduate students in their courses of their current progress based on the criteria in the syllabus before the following dates: [US: 2/14/94; 4/10/2000; 2/27/2008]

1. the end of the Monday following the end of the ninth week for the fall or spring semester; [US: 3/20/2017]
2. the third day of the fifth week for the eight-week summer term;
3. the second day of the third week for the four-week summer term.

[See SR 6.1.1 on documenting this information in a course syllabus.]

6.1.3.2 Right to receive fair and just grades

Students have the right to receive grades based only upon fair and just evaluation of their performance in a course as measured by the standards announced by their instructor(s) in the written course syllabus at the first class meeting.

* To “receive grades” means “to be graded.” [SREC: 2/17/2016]

6.1.3.3 Right to receive fair and just evaluation of performance in a program

Students have the right to receive a fair and just academic evaluation of their performance in a program. In addition to the student's overall academic record, evaluation may include the assessment of such activities as research and/or laboratory performance, qualifying examinations, professional board examinations, studio work or performance activities, behavior in professional situations, or interviews to determine continuation in a program. The program faculty and/or relevant administrative officer must inform the student as to which activities will be included in the academic assessment no later than the beginning of the activity to be evaluated.