

### 1. Who created and approved the original syllabus policy and template?

Northern Arizona University first began requiring that faculty use a syllabus template in 1998. In Academic Year 2014-2015, the Faculty Senate's Advisory Council on Curriculum and Assessment (the "ACCA") conducted a two-year process to create the original syllabus policy and template. The ACCA is now a permanent Faculty Senate Committee known as the Curriculum and Assessment Coordinating Committee comprised of former chairs of the various Faculty Senate curriculum and assessment committees. Over that two-year process of policy creation, ACCA presented the "University Policy on Syllabi" (its original name) alongside the Implementation of the Degree Program Expectations Proposal to the following committees for review and feedback:

- Three sessions of presentation and feedback from the following Faculty Senate committees:
  - University Curriculum Committee
  - University Graduate Committee
  - Liberal Studies Committee
  - University Assessment Committee
- Two sessions of presentation and feedback from each of the following college-level curriculum committees:
  - College of Arts and Letters
  - College of Education
  - College of Engineering, Forestry and Natural Sciences
  - College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
  - College of Health and Human Services
  - Extended Campuses Curriculum Committee (now the Online, Branch and Community Campuses Curriculum Committee)
  - W.A. Franke College of Business
- Conducted the following meetings directly with the Faculty Senate:
  - Monthly updates about the process
  - Three presentations, with the final presentation in December for the January, 2016 vote

In addition, the proposals were presented at each college-level meeting or retreat in the fall of 2015 and again in the fall of 2016.

### 2. Why was the original syllabus policy and template created?

Now known as the [Syllabus Requirements](#) policy (which incorporates the current Syllabus Template and Syllabus Policy Statements), the original syllabus policy and template were created to help ensure that program faculty collectively agree upon a course's purpose and learning outcomes, students receive consistent communication about the course's purpose and learning outcomes (regardless of class section, instructor, instructional delivery mode, or when the course is taught), and Academic Units have access to syllabi for all classes taught each term as well as syllabi passed through the curriculum approval process.

### 3. Is there flexibility in developing syllabi from one class section to another?

The approved course purpose statement, course student learning outcomes and Academic Catalog information must remain the same each time the course is taught (regardless of class section, instructor, instructional delivery mode, or when the course is taught). If program faculty determine that additional aspects of the syllabus are to remain the same each time the course is taught (regardless of class section, instructor, instructional delivery mode, or when the course is taught), that information is documented in the Syllabus of Record, which is the syllabus passed through the curriculum process (see question #5 for additional information about Syllabus of Record).

However, the syllabus policy is designed to allow **departments to determine the range of flexibility they would like faculty to have** in the delivery of a course's class sections. Some colleges and academic departments, such as Nursing, Physical Therapy and Dental Hygiene, require strict compliance with Syllabus of Record, such that all aspects must always remain the same. Other departments, such as English, Anthropology, and Biology, allow for greater flexibility. **The level of flexibility is entirely up to faculty in each department.** To ensure that a great deal of flexibility is present for syllabi, the following approaches are used:

- Clarifying that faculty can ADD TO the agreed-upon course purpose and learning outcomes, but cannot SUBTRACT FROM these sections.
- Creating learning outcomes at the course level that have enough breadth for a range of assignments and readings to be used to address the course outcomes.
- Creating syllabi that use statements for the course purpose and learning outcomes that identify "ALL SECTIONS WILL" and "THIS SECTION WILL DO THIS BY..."
  - This approach is a favorite and it is very useful for topics courses. It can be used for both the course purpose and learning outcomes.
- Creating the Syllabus of Record together for multi-instructor courses, so that everyone feels they have a voice in the purpose and outcomes. If there are disagreements about what should or should not be included in the course, consider the following:
  - Revising the purpose or learning outcomes to provide greater breadth (be more general and less specific or prescriptive) as this provides greater flexibility for each faculty member to teach how they desire.
  - Considering whether the visions of the course are different enough to warrant creating another course. It could be that there really are two different courses being envisioned.
- It is recommended that if faculty in 300, 400, and graduate-level courses are the only instructors teaching those courses, those faculty may simply include all aspects of the template in their syllabus (they can order the syllabus as they wish) and send that syllabus in as the Syllabus of Record.

#### **4. How did the Syllabus Template change from 1998 to 2016?**

The only change that the policy made to the template was to enhance the course description to be a course purpose that describes the content and skills students would obtain in the course and why and how the content and skills are important to the degree program and/or university-wide curriculum.

#### **5. What is a Syllabus of Record? Do all sections of a syllabus need to be completed for a Syllabus of Record?**

A Syllabus of Record is the "official" syllabus for the course that is kept electronically by the Academic Unit for easy access by faculty who teach in the program. It is the syllabus that is submitted through the curriculum proposal process for review when large changes are made to a course, such as adding or subtracting units to the course, substantially changing the purpose and outcomes of the course in a manner that would change its title and description in the catalog, or adding a liberal studies and/or diversity designation.

#### **6. Who approves the course syllabus?**

When a *new course* or *substantial course change* occurs, the Syllabus of Record is reviewed through the curriculum proposal process. A complete syllabus will be reviewed during the curriculum approval process and as part of the Academic Program review or specialized accreditation process.

#### **7. Does the order of syllabus items have to match the Syllabus Template?**

While it is preferred that syllabi match the Syllabus Template as required for submitting courses for the curriculum proposal process, it is not mandatory, as long as all items are included. The rationale for wanting to keep a consistent order across all syllabi is for ease of reading by students, faculty, and staff. If all syllabi follow the same template, the different aspects can be quickly identified across syllabi.

## 8. Do all sections of a syllabus need to be completed for a Syllabus of Record?

A Syllabus of Record provides a fully designed syllabus for the course. This means a fully defined:

- Course purpose
- Course student learning outcomes
- Assignments or assessments of course student learning outcomes
- Grading system
- Readings and materials
- Class outline or tentative schedule
- Class policies (as applicable)
- Syllabus Policy Statements
- Additional sections or elements required by the department

Departments have created a variety of guidelines concerning what aspects of the Syllabus of Record must remain the same across all class sections, instructors, modalities, etc. Here are a few:

- Create a syllabus that identifies with Microsoft Word comments or notes the elements that must remain the same across syllabi.
- Identify the syllabus sections that must remain the same across all syllabi. Develop those sections, identifying clearly in the title that the elements must remain the same across all syllabi. Cut and paste another full syllabi at the end of the sections that are required by the department that contain everything else required in a syllabus.
- If only one instructor typically teaches the course in a single section, place the instructor's syllabus in the Syllabus Template and submit that as the Syllabus of Record. When the next instructor takes over for the course, the individual would review the current syllabus, make any changes, and submit their "new" syllabus as the Syllabus of Record for the course. If the changes are extensive enough that the course purpose and the majority of learning outcomes change, and the program would no longer accept the previously created course for the same requirements, then the course would need to be re-submitted for review through the catalog process.

## 9. What is the difference between a "course purpose" and a "course description?"

The course description is now located only in the Academic Catalog. It can be changed using the curriculum proposal paperwork for a *course change*. This is the description of the course that students read when they are selecting courses.

The course purpose can be used as the course description, if the department wishes to submit the course purpose as the course description. The length of the course purpose is not limited. The course description is limited to 250 words. The course description does not have to be included in the syllabus. Academic Units may include it at their discretion.

The course purpose is required in the syllabus. It identifies the overall goals or aims of the course, as collectively understood by the faculty members teaching in the degree program. The course purpose statement summarizes the following in a manner that differentiates it from other courses offered at NAU:

- The content studied, skills developed, and/or the learning experiences provided; and
- The role the course plays in the academic programs it serves.

Understanding and articulating a course's overall goals or aims helps achieve a number of important objectives. It clarifies for students who may know little about the discipline or program the boundaries of the course, as studied by the Academic Unit. Further, it provides a summary of what and how students will learn and expresses the future opportunities students will be prepared to achieve upon completing the course. It also requires program faculty to agree on the course's purpose of learning, the boundaries of learning, and the future opportunities students will be prepared to engage in upon completion of the course.

The clear identification of a course's overall goals and aims assists faculty in determining the learning outcomes that will lead to the achievement of the course's purpose. Finally, the course purpose is meant to guide and focus faculty instructional decisions as they design the course to achieve the course's learning goals.

## 10. Why are course learning outcomes created?

The primary purpose of course learning outcomes is to make teaching and learning purposeful. Learning outcomes provide a framework and a common language that both faculty and students can consistently apply to identify how the instruction, assignments, and work in the course contribute to the course's purpose. Course learning outcomes define the scope (breadth and depth) of what students will know, be able to do, etc. upon completion of the course. Course learning outcomes:

- Are explicit;
- Are learning-centered (focus on what students learn rather than on what faculty teach);
- Align with the course purpose;
- Are appropriate to the level of the degree offered (Master's degree outcomes would be more rigorous and comprehensive than Bachelor's degree outcomes, etc.).

Effective course learning outcomes facilitate student learning because they build the foundation for the course's design. When used in course design, course learning outcomes:

- Establish the learning priorities of the course;
- Communicate a unified vision of what faculty intend students will be able to achieve upon completion of the course;
- Tie together learning opportunities within and across courses; and
- Communicate how experiences contribute to and build learning throughout the students' degree program.

In Backward Design, learning outcomes create a foundation for designing a program by identifying faculty members' learning "goals" or "objectives," which we identify at NAU as "learning outcomes." By identifying learning outcomes, faculty can then work backwards to develop approaches to instruction and course design sequencing that will achieve their stated learning outcomes.

## 11. How can I quickly locate and access the Syllabus Requirements policy, the Syllabus Template, and the Syllabus Policy Statements?

The Syllabus Requirements policy is located within Northern Arizona University's Academic and Faculty Affairs Policy Manual, which itself is one of ten policy manuals that together comprise the University Policy Library. Along with the policy, the Syllabus Template and Syllabus Policy Statements may be accessed from the policy's landing page located at <https://nau.edu/university-policy-library/syllabus-requirements>.

## 12. Are syllabi regularly reviewed?

At least every four years and during the specialized accreditation or Academic Program review processes, the Academic Unit leader or designee(s) will review faculty members' class syllabi to ensure alignment with the syllabus approved through the curriculum process and to determine whether the course's purpose or learning outcomes have changed substantially enough to warrant re-submission and re-approval. It is also recommended that topics course syllabi be reviewed each term to ensure alignment between the course's design and the course's purpose and learning outcome statements.

## 13. Who maintains syllabi?

It is the department that compiles and maintains the syllabi. There is no central location where syllabi are kept on campus. Remember, the purpose of the policy is three-fold:

1. To ensure that faculty members at the university can peer-review the quality of a course's design both at its inception (as part of the catalog process) and during its periodic reviews.
2. To have the syllabus available in case the faculty member teaching the class can no longer teach the class during the semester. Unfortunately, sometimes people get sick or have family issues wherein they can no longer teach, and the policy ensures a smooth transition in learning for the student.
3. It provides evidence of the course's design for our accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission. The faculty on the Advisory Council for Curriculum and Assessment selected the syllabus as the easiest evidence to collect that aligned with the requirements already in place for faculty to create syllabi for all of their courses (that policy has been in place since 1998, or before, as well). ACCA did not want additional paperwork to have to be completed when the syllabus was already being created.

#### **14. Is there a separate template or additional syllabus requirements for a Liberal Studies or Diversity submission?**

Although there are additional aspects for a Liberal Studies course syllabus and the syllabus must align with these Liberal Studies or Diversity requirements, there is only one Northern Arizona University Syllabus Template. There are separate committees who request and review assignments/assessment and other elements of the syllabus. Yet, it is the department and faculty member's choice whether to make a course a Liberal Studies or Diversity designation. In addition, other programs, such as First Year Seminar, have stringent guidelines as to what is included in these syllabi. Again, the department and its faculty determine whether a course fulfills those designations or is in those programs.