***Creating a Learner-Centered Syllabus***

This unit covers syllabus design and explains how to develop learner-centered approaches to explaining course expectations for students.  At the end of this unit, faculty will be able to:

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| **Objectives** | 1. Compare and contrast instructor-centered and learner-centered communication styles. 2. Appraise the level of learner-centered information included on current course syllabi. 3. Redesign course syllabi to improve communication of instructor expectations and expected student learning outcomes and responsibilities. |
| **Assessments** | Proficient level- course relevant application |

**Resources**

***What is the difference between instructor and learner-centered communication?***

Learner-centered instruction refers to the idea that all instructional decisions should begin with knowing who the learners are (both individually and collectively). Knowing who are learners are will allow us to understand their needs and support their learning.

Therefore learner-centered practices *begin with identifying what we want learners to know and be able to do and then anticipates their needs and provides avenues for learning based on these needs*.

* Further reading on [learner-centered syllabi](https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-classroom-management/a-learner-centered-syllabus-helps-set-the-tone-for-learning/)
* How the [tone of our syllabus](https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/syllabus-design/) affects students
* Some thoughts [on course policies](https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-classroom-management/why-policies-fail-to-promote-better-learning-decisions/)

***How ‘learner-centered’ is my current syllabus?***

The syllabus is typically our first point of contact with students-so let’s start off on the right foot! To get started, review your current syllabus and see how well you address the following:

* Providing students with a rationale for course objectives and assignments-address the question students will have-*Why are we studying this particular topic? Why are we assigned these particular assignments?*
* Warning students of potential pitfalls- by giving students a heads up on the challenges ahead, or FAQs, or by simply sharing with students where past students have gotten themselves in a bind while taking the course. *In other words, what has previous teaching experience taught you about student needs?*
* Aligned with this warning should be recommendations for staying on track in the course, as well as clear details for what students should be doing if they were to feel themselves falling behind
* Shared decision making and flexibility when possible. Provide students with the avenue to have some say in course policies and procedures and allow them to set some teacher expectations as well, such as providing review sessions or resources, or additional office hours when larger project due dates are approaching
  + How to locate your WilmU [generic course syllabus](http://www.wilmu.edu/courses/index.aspx)
  + Some suggestions for your [learner centered syllabus](http://www.4faculty.org/Demo/read2_main.htm)

***How should I approach revamping my syllabus?***

Try to view your syllabus through the eyes of your students. Or perhaps ask them for input on the questions they have, or things they might have wanted to know in advance of your course. The more we can anticipate student needs, the more valuable our syllabus becomes.

If you would like to discuss this topic, or to forward your redesigned syllabus to the CTE for feedback please feel free to send us an email at [facultydevelopment@wilmu.edu](mailto:facultydevelopment@wilmu.edu).

***How do I earn credit for this learning unit on my Pathway to Instructional Excellence?***

Our creating a learner-centered syllabus module is designated as a CTE (Center for Teaching Excellence) Proficient Level Elective. At this level, the CTE is looking to see faculty application of learner-centered teaching to a future course syllabs.  Please upload a syllabus into your WilmU Learning Center profile that outlines your learner-centered inclusions and predicts how these efforts will impact student learning.  Please include the following in your submission:

* The info you have added to your syllabus
* How (if applicable) you have used past student feedback or class performance to anticipate future student needs
* The predicted impact these additions to your syllabus will have on student learning for this class meeting

Faculty submissions will be scored using the *Proficient Level Rubric.*  To earn completion of this exercise, faculty must score 4/5 or higher.  Faculty scoring 3 or lower will receive feedback from the CTE and will have the opportunity to resubmit their active learning techniques application.

**CTE-Pathways to Instructional Excellence-Proficient Level Rubric**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Scoring= 1**  **Unrelated** | **2**  **Beginner** | **3**  **Essential** | **4**  **Proficient** | **5**  **Mastery** |
| Submission appears unrelated to learning unit. Evidence of teaching skill not present in faculty submission. | Submission shows ability to recall correct terms but lacks ability to apply learning content to described teaching situation. | Submission shows understanding of how to apply learning content to teaching situation but lacks ability to anticipate the impact this decision will have on student learning. | Submission demonstrates correct application of teaching skill and correctly identifies potential impact this will have on student learning. | Submission demonstrates correct application of teaching skill, identifies potential impact on student learning and ability to tailor teaching to individual student needs. |