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A COURSE SYLLABUS DESIGN: INITIAL STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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РАЗРАБОТКА ПРОГРАММЫ КУРСА: НАЧАЛЬНЫЕ ШАГИ И РЕКОМЕНДАЦИИ

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Abstract. The article attempts to highlight the importance of implementing a course syllabus design practices in Uzbek tertiary education. The syllabus is an introductory document that guides students throughout the entire course and functions as an asset to shape the initial impression on the course's nature and its content. The constituent parts of a course syllabus are a general description and course objectives, topics, preliminary schedule of assignments, materials, grading plan, pre-set rules, and policies of class conduct. Also, the author discusses the basic syllabus sections and presents the guidelines on the points to be considered while designing a syllabus for the course.

Аннотация. Целью данной статьи является попытка подчеркнуть важность внедрения практики проектирования учебных планов в узбекском высшем образовании. Программа курса является вводным документом, который направляет студентов на протяжении всего курса и служит активом для формирования первоначального впечатления о характере курса и его содержании. Составными частями учебной программы являются общее описание и цели курса, темы и предварительное расписание заданий, материалы, план оценки, заранее установленные положения и правила поведения в классе. Также, автор обсуждает вышеперечисленные основные разделы программы курса и представляет рекомендации по вопросам, которые следует учитывать при разработке данного плана для учебного курса.

Keywords: syllabus design, course policy, grading distribution, attendance.

Ключевые слова: разработка программы курса, курсовая политика, распределение оценок, посещаемость.

In the tertiary educational context, students are supposed to be more independent and self-conscious about their learning, therefore, the syllabus is part of the academic life for both instructors and students operating as a written agreement on course content and policy, attendance and assessment issues, class conduct and teaching philosophy of the instructor.

Even though a vast amount of literature has been published on the utility of syllabus implementation, in the Uzbek tertiary system of education, syllabus practices are only partially integrated. This conclusion rests on the survey of the first-year graduate students' testimonials at Uzbekistan State World Languages University. The initial cohort was 100 graduate students that were randomly selected. However, only 72 subjects eventually participated in the interview, consequently, the response rate was 72%. The results demonstrated that just a small number, only one-third of interviewed participants to the question, "Have you frequently received a course syllabus during the four years of study at the University?" had a more or less similar response



indicating, “All teachers introduced us to the syllabus and the ways of submission. Therefore, we studied easily and effectively”; of the 72 subjects who agreed to participate, over half replied that more than often they were not provided with a syllabus at all. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents were concerned about syllabus distribution and commented that: “Most of the students have already accustomed to the absence of syllabus or it can be right to say if students are given syllabus they are usually astonished. Why? Because there are only a few courses which provide it. In my bachelor's there were two or three courses which provided syllabus not more” or “We had some problems for understanding the ways of studying midterms and submission of tasks due to the absence of syllabus”.

For reasons of space, potential reasons for this tendency are not addressed in this paper. The present article aims to invite instructors to consider the syllabus as a practical and convenient way to introduce the course's goal encompassing all constituent components before the first class session.

It is known that in the tertiary educational environment, instructors and students possess and use separately designed set of resources and documents. While instructors work with registers, grading sheets, and reports to be able to perform their professional activity, students have textbooks, library borrowings, and software databases at their disposal to construct knowledge. The single official document is the syllabus that is considered as a contract shared by both instructors and students. The traditional syllabus consists of content-based information, such as themes, topics, names of structures, and task-based components, for example, assignments and methods to be processed. It is accessible first, for instructors, students, and their parents, secondly, to the university administration, and curriculum designers. According to Penny Ur, this is a clear indication of “the accountability principle” [1, p. 177]. She states, “The composers of the syllabus are answerable to their target audience for the quality of their document”. Overall, the central function of the syllabus could be defined as “describes what will be taught in a course” [2, p. 50]. In this respect, it is fundamental to distinguish between the notion of the syllabus and that of a curriculum. Even though, in some educational settings these two terms are used interchangeably, there is a considerable difference. Generally, the curriculum is an all-embracing concept that encompasses, firstly, the program level issues, secondly, it involves not only mere planning of the content but also the process of implementation as well as the final evaluative stage of the effectiveness of the given course [2, p. 50]. Conversely, the syllabus is developed and leveled on the course design scale.

Although syllabus “focuses more narrowly on the selection and grading of content” [3, p. 8], more often than not, instructors and teachers may find it challenging when they first start contemplating what components to include for their course syllabus, as there is an extensive range in syllabus types, designs, formats, and actual contents. Despite the excess in componential options, there are always core segments that are present in any syllabus. It is more advisable to commence designing a syllabus focusing first on essential parts, and only after that, to continue building upon the basic layout supplementary modules that are considered necessary dictated by the specifics of a certain course. Further, we explore central sections of a syllabus followed by the section-by-section explanation, which aid novice teachers to draft their preliminary version of an effective basic syllabus. The suggestions proposed in this article based on personal teaching experience; they are not cast in stone. The initial intention is that the guidelines could be applied flexibly and pragmatically; any part of a syllabus is subject to minor adjustments and modifications influenced by the course policy and standards. Instructors are welcomed to tailor the syllabus bearing in mind the needs of learners and the context of an educational institution where they teach.

Contact information section. This is an introductory part of a syllabus, which provides the name, number of hours, and the schedule of the actual course, the instructor's name, and the contact information. If the course continues several terms in line, then it is advisable to distinguish them by outlining the number and time of the term as it is illustrated in the sample excerpt. From the outset, students will be informed about the length of the course, when and where to appear for the class without rambling every time to the hall in search of the information desk for checking the classroom location before the class. The format of the course is important as well. In the sample, it is clearly outlined that half of the class hours are conducted online. Put it simply, it is a blended course, in which participants are required to work on the university platform. Not every student is familiar with the notion of blended learning in Uzbekistan. If it is the case instructors, therefore, need to define explicitly what exactly a blended course entails, in what ways an equal amount of workload is done through the platform and so on. It is a valuable asset for students to know basic contact details such as E-mail addresses and telephone numbers that provide easy ways of communication for sending in the assignments or any case of personal emergency. Since many instructors have to assign individual or mini-group sessions to students with some difficulties in learning, (for example, students who had absences due to some medical conditions or those who failed the examinations), to scaffold them and help to catch up with the tasks, it is recommended to outline upfront fixed and regulated office hours in the syllabus. This element displays the exact time and place when and where the instructor holds the office hours if there would be a need for students to clarify some issues within the course topics and assignments.

PRACTICAL ENGLISH (2nd TERM)	
COURSE SYLLABUS	
Spring, 2020	
INSTRUCTOR: Sultanova Malika	
E-MAIL ADDRESS:	_____ Sultanova Malika _____
CONTACT NUMBER:	_____ sultanovamalika@gmail.com _____
CLASS HOURS:	two pairs per week: 36 / 36
	1. Traditional: Monday, 13:20 p.m., room #212
	2. Online-based: Thursday, Moodle platform
	 http://moodle.uzswlu.uz/
OFFICE HOURS: (Consultations)	Friday from 12:00 p.m. to 14:00 p.m. or (by appointment)

Figure 1. Contact information section.

Description and course objectives section. In this part of the syllabus, a brief course description is presented followed by the breakdown of the specific objectives. General information about the course helps students shape a better understanding of what the course is, its specific features, while a well-tailored set of objectives may add detailed clarification on specific skills that

students master once engaged in this course. As Ken Bain claims, who is Vice President for Academic Affairs and the scholar specializing in teaching and learning, instructors should attempt to design the so-called “Promising Syllabus”, [4, p. 74-75]. As we know, traditional syllabus design is teacher-centered; instructors mostly concerned about the requirements of courses. However, from the perspective of learner-centered “Promising Syllabus” concept, assuring learners in potential benefits of the course and holding them accountable for their learning process may seed motivation and engagement that are key components of any successful course. Alternatively stated, whilst forming goals of the syllabus, the accent should be shifted from the requirements and assignments to specific skills that students would master if they take the responsibility to learn. In “Promising Syllabus” type, Ken Bain proposes to implement phrases such as “You will learn...”, “This program of study will help you to...,” or “You will master the following skills...” Consequently, “promises” will force students to pursue the defined outcomes through focused learning practices. In this respect, it is significant to mention the characteristics of well-crafted objectives. First, objectives should be definite, accurate, and concise. The major goal of the course reflects in a set of transparent objectives that foster students understanding of what they would achieve studying and practicing the provided input. Second, course objectives need to be easily measured. Ken Bain views grading policy differently and suggests including into the syllabus self-assessment checklists for preliminary independent evaluation that ingrains autonomous learning habits and aids to come to the best solutions about the nature of the course between an instructor and a student [4, p. 74-75].

A. DESCRIPTION

This course is allocated for Master Students whose major is Linguistics (the English Language). The module is skill-oriented, much focuses is on the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. In particular, attention is given to developing strategies that increase students' ability to comprehend, predict, summarize and review. Students are engaged in writing exercises as well as practice procedures essential to the production of research, such as selection and documentation of sources, paraphrasing, avoidance of plagiarism, review of literature, summarizing, and formatting of citations. Students practice negotiating in group discussions as well as give individual academic presentations.

B. COURSE OBJECTIVES

Within this module students will:

- study express their ideas clearly employing wide range of language units, provide strong and constructive argumentation;
- be familiar with the topic based vocabulary and employ it in speaking in a fluent manner;
- study to compose different types of argumentative essays based on the sources of a wide range;
- study to synthesize sources of different nature;
- be able to develop critique writing;
- study to write the review on the different genres;
- study to make public presentations employing both competent skills and language knowledge;
- obtain the critical thinking skill for evaluating material, its structure and content.

Figure 2. Description and course objectives section.

Materials section. It is proposed to place a general reading list in the third section. First, should come core textbooks that are essential for the course, and then, there is a need for some secondary literature and additional stationery. It is, therefore, essential to outline the necessity of e-mail accounts in line with the registration upfront on the platform as in the case of blended course to avoid any delays connected with registration and course enrollment (refer to the sample). If instructors intend to use any software applications that require registration or an account to create, it is always a good idea to lay it down and discuss the syllabus list, in the materials section.

C. MATERIALS

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS:

The textbooks are available at the university library.

1. Sanabria K. Academic Listening Encounters Life in Society. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004;
2. Blass L., Pike-Baky M. A Content-based Writing Book. -McGraw-Hill, 1996;
3. Jordan R.R. Academic Writing Course. Study skills in English. – Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited, 1999.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS:

- Notebook and hard-cover folder for distributional materials;
- E-mail account;
- E-mail account;
- Registration on Moodle platform.

Figure 3. Materials section.

Course topics and assignments schedule section. In some formats, “the policy and procedures” part comes right after the materials section. It is appropriate to place the first policy section in case it is extended and substantial describing explicitly rules and official statements in a detailed way. In contrast, if the policy section is concise and does not contain an extensive list of rules, then it can be left to come at the end. Instead, it is suggested to place topics that will be covered in the term coupled with deadlines for the assignments after the materials section (refer to the sample). The structured framework of topics in line with the monthly assignments in this section allows students to estimate the amount of work, the nature of topics to be covered and types of assignments to be written. It is always a good point to stipulate and discuss fixed deadline dates with students at this point.

D. COURSE TOPICS

The course will cover the following topics:

<i>Traditional lessons</i>		<i>Online-based lessons</i>
February		
1	Argumentative essay: problem-solution theory and practice	Argumentative essay: problem-solution additional material and samples
2	Scientific poster designing: theory and presentation	Rationale for scientific poster designing Deadline: 27th February, 2020
March		
1	Argumentative essay: discussion essay theory and practice	Tasks on Teacher-learner relationships
2	Scaffolding theory	Discussion. Scaffolding
3	Teacher-learner relationships	Practice. Teacher-learner relationships
4	Synthesis writing theory	Synthesis writing practice (500 words) Deadline: 27th March, 2020
April		
1	Teacher-learner development	Practice. Teacher-learner development
2	Research writing: abstract writing theory	Research writing: abstract writing practice (100 words) Deadline: 27th April, 2020
3	Article writing theory	Article writing practice (1000 words) Deadline: 27th April, 2020
May		
1	Proposal for a research project theory	Proposal for a research project practice (2000 words) Deadline: 27th May, 2020

Figure 4. Course topics and assignments schedule section.

Seeing that overwhelming majority of students who are willing to be informed about details concerning the format of the assignments, specific requirements, and systematic, easy-to-follow

guidelines, it is of utmost importance to equip students with as much available and supportive information as possible. Bearing in mind this factor, it is advocated to spread the load and support the course topics section with a separate sub-section. This involves designing and structuring the assignments list as a logical continuation of the course topics section in the syllabus. It is a good idea to organize the assignments list in the form of the Appendix and attach it to the existing syllabus since this design showcases twin advantage (refer to the sample). First, in the course topics section, instructors may invite students to familiarize themselves with basic and essential information concerning the monthly breakdown of topics and assignments types. That allows instructors to keep course topics section accurate and concise without overwhelmed tedious descriptions. Secondly, students will not feel insecure and uncertain due to the lack of details, since they will be offered supplementary information such as word limit in assignments, referencing format, all specific guidelines in the attached appendix that will be acting as an all-time reminder for students during the entire course's length. In fact, the more this section will be detailed and scrupulously structured, the fewer questions will be posted to instructors to deal with in the course of study. It is believed that the course topics section with the attached assignments list appendix should be thoughtfully designed because they operate as mediator tools for achieving the goal of the course. Thus, students reach the stated objectives through constant learning practices of topic-related tasks.

Grading plan section. The following section displays the general grading of the course. It holds that this portion of the syllabus is the most popular to which students give much of their attention while flicking through the document for the first time. That is the primary reason why this section should be properly structured promoting easy-to-follow and clear criteria for evaluation. It is advised to work out descriptive assessment rubrics for the grading system and attach it as an appendix. In view that different educational institutions apply various grading systems, all too often many course participants, in particular, international students are not familiar with the operating assessment. There is a potential risk that students will experience difficulties addressing evaluation and will not meet set expectations of instructors which in turn, will result in student failures, dissatisfaction, and dropouts.

<p>E. GRADING PLAN The scoring category: the marking system is used for the assessment. The marking range is from 5 to 2.</p> <p>Coursework will be weighted as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Attendance: traditional and online;2. Participation;3. Mid-term examination – written-format - Article writing (1000 words);4. Final examination – Proposal for a research project (2000 words); <p>P.S. A rubric for marking system is provided in Appendix II.</p> <p>PORTFOLIOS: In this term, students are required to submit two portfolios. Requirements of each portfolio are as following:</p> <p>PORTFOLIO 1 includes the following assignments: a critique and a synthesis essay. <u>Deadline for portfolio submission is March 27, 2019;</u></p> <p>PORTFOLIO 2 includes the following assignments: a literature review and a report. <u>The deadline for portfolio submission is April 27, 2019.</u></p> <p>MIDTERMS: Within one term, one mid-term examination will be held.</p> <p>FINAL EXAM: The final exam is organized to check students' language skills, grammar, and vocabulary in consistency with the materials covered during the 3rd term. PS. The final examination assignment will be checked and assessed by another teacher from the MA Department to reach objectivity and reliability.</p>

Figure 5. Grading plan section.

Thus, it makes sense to include a transparent and self-explanatory rubric to make learners aware of the expected objectives in tasks and the nature of assignment grading, for example, the cumulative final task options. In the sample below, a simple marking system is presented, the scale starts from 2 to 5, 5 is being top mark; the description of each mark-level is carefully outlined in the attached appendix. In addition to grade distribution, the brief information about formative assessment tasks in the format of portfolios is arranged, followed by the explanation on a midterm and final examination with summative assessment.

Course policy section. In traditional formats, after the materials section, there is a considerable property of a syllabus devoted to course policy. It is widely known as the policy and procedures section. At its most basic, instructors stipulate student expected behavior, all “should and shouldn’t” nuances, attendance issues, set of rules focused on resource use and avoidance of plagiarism, treatment of late or missed assignments. The policy and procedures section becomes markedly different when the educational institution’s administration requires including mandatory policy statements in this part to secure that any possible deviations in student behavior and actions are stated beforehand and negative consequences which students have to encounter afterward are displayed. However, it is feared that students are exposed to a long list of “shouldn’t and mustn’t”, may feel alienated from the course. Even though these precautionary measures have preventive nature and function to decrease potential dropout instances, the attention should be drawn to the fact that this type of syllabus design possesses a restrictive tone rather than welcoming. As the syllabus is the introductory document, the initial sign of contact between students and the course, it cannot be stressed enough how vital it is for the syllabus in students’ hand to have a welcoming and inspiring tone to shape the positive first impression and further favorable and beneficial impact on learners.

APPENDIX I. PORTFOLIO 1

<p>Task I. Critique</p> <p>Proper formatting includes the following:</p> <p>Times New Roman 14, 1.5 spaced, left-hand margin - 3, right-hand margin - 1.5, the top and the bottom margins - 2 inches; indentation 5 spaces from the left-hand margin.</p>	<p>Topic: Factors leading to juvenile delinquency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select 4-10 paged article; • Active reading technique: discuss the ideas and reflect with marginal remarks; • Design an outline of the ideas mentioned in the critique; • Critique (within 250-400 words); • Underline the thesis statement, topic sentences, the conclusion in the critique; • APA formatted Reference List; • Follow the accepted formatting; • Download the e-version of the lesson plan to the Moodle platform.
<p>Task II. Synthesis essay.</p> <p>Proper formatting includes the following:</p> <p>Times New Roman 14, 1.5 spaced, left-hand margin - 3, right-hand margin - 1.5, the top and the bottom margins - 2 inches; indentation 5 spaces from the left-hand margin.</p>	<p>Title: to be created</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select 5 resources for the synthesis essay; • Create an outline of the argumentative points; • Active reading technique: discuss the ideas and reflect with marginal remarks; • Write a synthesis essay (within 500-750 words); • APA formatted Reference List; • Follow the accepted formatting; • Download the e-version of the synthesis essay to the Moodle platform.
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Refer to the syllabus for the actual deadline</i></p>	

Figure 6. Appendix I, the assignments list.

The course policy section conventionally consists of three constituent subsections apart from the educational institution's official statements of conduct mentioned above. These are attendance issues, late work, and academic integrity.

A direct and clear explanation of attendance policy prevents students from neglecting the attendance. From the first day of the course, it is a wise decision to clarify whether the attendance is mandatory, how many class hours students can miss without penalties if applicable, the amount and the types of make-up work for the missed class hours, if any. Another salient point is the notion of the excused absence. Many instructors adopt the philosophy that “things happen in life” and distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. It is anticipated that students miss fewer class hours if they are conscious concerning unexcused absences and their consequences. Some instructors attach importance to the in-class presence and assign points for attendance as well as participation to foster student turnout (refer to the excerpt from the syllabus). However, it is not enough to require attendance, instructors should convince students and highlight advantages of being present in class, for example, extensive group discussions or joint presentation performances, peer feedback sessions, all that involves the active participation of group work justifies the need of students' presence and engagement.

In addition, the course policy section is responsible for the course rules of conduct. In this part, instructors might stipulate general rules of behavior during class time, for example, limitations to using mobile devices during lectures or rules concerning latecomers. We propose to pin down the transparent framework of dealing with late or missed assignments so that in any case course participants know ahead of time what they have to encounter when assignments they submit past the deadlines. The key issue is how instructors approach the notion of a deadline. In the sample illustrated below, it is, clearly outlined that late assignments are not acceptable. Moreover, one of the statements declares that it is not possible to upload assignments after the set due date as the submissions are automatically closed.

F. COURSE POLICY	
ATTENDANCE:	
Attendance will be graded as follows:	
No absences	5
One absence	4
Two absences	3
Three absences	2
Four or more absences	0
PARTICIPATION will be graded based on students' activeness during every traditional and online class.	
CLASSROOM & COURSE RULES OF CONDUCT	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Students who are late for a class for more than 10 minutes will get an absence.2. Assignments are not accepted unless students submit them on time.3. Submissions are automatically closed on the due time4. Students who are late to submit online assignments will not be graded.5. Assignments are annulled if students plagiarize.	
<i>PS. Excuses are accepted in the provision of a medical certificate.</i>	

Figure 7. Course policy section.

However, some instructors give value to the rolling deadline policy, without setting any fixed date for the submissions; they prefer to accept assignments when students are completely satisfied with the done work and ready to submit it. In one sense, self-set deadlines are more suitable for mature students who can work autonomously, while instructor-set cut-off points for task submissions seem to be a viable solution for those who suffer from procrastination as pressing time

limit to accelerate pacing rates. Overall, it is hugely dependent on the attitude of an instructor, whether to place a considerable role on the fixed date and time or let students have more flexibility concerning the deadline.

The last nuance to be considered in the course policy section is the stand regarding academic honesty. It is crucial to indicate straightforwardly the attitude towards plagiarism and cheating in written tasks. Instructors should briefly point out that plagiarism and cheating occurrences are not acceptable in an academic context. There is no actual need to put down a list of elaborate statements related to this issue, otherwise, the syllabus risk to bear judgmental and punitive tone.

In conclusion, this paper underlined the importance of syllabus implementation in an academic context and presented a number of suggestions on how to design the basic syllabus. This document offers an opportunity to obtain the key structured information about the course foundations and functions as an official agreement between the course instructor and students.

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