TOPkitDIGEST

This months TOPkit Digest is brought to you by **Susan Jardenah**, MA, MFA (Susan.Jardaneh@ucf.edu) and **Carla M. Nevarez**, MBA, MSET (Carla.Nevarez@ucf.edu). Both Susan and Carla are Assistant Instructional Designers at the Center for Distributed Learning in the Division of Digital Learning, University of Central Florida. They discuss the topic of **Inclusive Syllabus for Faculty Development**.

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Video Tip

Liquid Syllabus

Providing Support on Design and Accessibilty

In this video, Michelle Pacansky-Brock discusses the benefits of a liquid syllabus. When assisting faculty in the creation of an inclusive syllabus, it is important to provide support on design and accessibility. Creating a liquid syllabus is one approach that faculty can adopt to share information with students outside of the learning management system. The liquid syllabus offers a unique format that is accessible across a variety of different devices and encourages more student interactions than a standard document-based syllabus.

Watch Video

Register to Attend TOPkit Workshop 2023

The TOPkit Workshop 2023 to be held in a live, virtual format with three half days of informative sessions about planning, developing, or evaluating faculty development programs as well as networking and fun. Join us as we bask in the **excellence of online teaching and learning to build on the past to empower our future.** We'll be celebrating with the theme: **Vintage Florida!**

REGISTER NOW

Call for Proposals Extended

We have extended the call for proposals for **TOPkit Workshop 2023** due to Hurricane Nicole. Proposal deadline is **November 28**.

Learn more →

Top Tips

Inclusive Syllabus for Faculty Development

Looking at the Traditional Syllabus through a Different Lens

As faculty developers we often look at ways to support faculty who are working to be more inclusive. While faculty may have heard about the value of an inclusive syllabus, they may not have any idea of how to begin creating one. However, as faculty begin to understand the importance of an inclusive syllabus to ensure all students in the course are afforded the opportunity to succeed, the necessity of it becomes evident. The inclusive syllabus emphasizes the importance of engaging with and valuing difference, and incorporates equity and inclusion into key course information, such as course policies, reading, assignments, and resources (University of British Columbia, CTLT, 2019). With an inclusive syllabus, faculty can set the foundation for a supportive class environment, while at the same time framing the course with a commitment to equity.

Faculty developers and instructional designers can help faculty take small steps toward creating an inclusive syllabus. According to the University of Massachusetts Amhersts Center for Teaching and Learning, there are six principles for inclusive syllabus designs.

Tip #1: Learning Focused. The learner-centered syllabus approach focuses on what students will learn to do in the course, rather than what the course or instructor will teach them. One step of this design is establishing course objectives outlining what students will be able to do at the end of the course. Those objectives should also be directly connected to assignments and assessments in the course, so students understand the alignment between these components. A principle of inclusive syllabus design is to shift focus to how students will be learning and interacting with the course rather than what students should not do in the course. Some design questions for a learner-focused syllabus are:

- Does the course provide resources and information for student success?
- Where does the course provide higher level course goals and measurable learning objectives?
- Where is the syllabus transparent about how students succeed in the course and how they are

evaluated?

- How does the syllabus develop a pathway of learning throughout the course?

Tip #2: Essential Questions. When working with faculty who are designing an inclusive syllabus, faculty developers can rely on design strategies to help support the process. Backwards Design is a method for creating a syllabus that starts with a focus on the major ideas and goals first, then moves into the creation of learning activities and assessments. One way to apply backwards design to inclusive syllabi creation is to allow the learners to explore those same ideas and goals as they review the syllabus. To encourage this spirit of inquiry, consider using questions, rather than headers to identify different sections of the syllabus. For example, instead of a syllabus with the heading Instructor Introduction, the heading could be Who is your instructor? The use of questions develops a sense of curiosity and an invitation to students to explore how the course is meaningful for them.

Tip #3: UDL Connections. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) builds inclusion into the online learning environment so that all aspects of the course are accessible to the greatest extent possible. The syllabus can model the UDL considerations by presenting information in text, video, and images. Faculty developers can help faculty with this process by ensuring that the syllabus indicates how students can access content in different formats, such as textbooks, web resources, and videos. The syllabus should also outline the major assignments of the course and illustrate UDL by having different options for assignments. Lastly, faculty may include UDL considerations by showing on the syllabus the variety of ways students will be able to demonstrate what they have learned. When working with UDL, having a designated UDL rubric can help with ensuring the principles have been applied.

Tip #4: Inclusive Motivating Language. In any online situation, language is the key to developing a strong relationship. Syllabus language should convey respect, support, and commitment, while also valuing the diversity of students. However, since the syllabus conveys information about policies and procedures, the language often reads as punitive and alienating. To develop more motivating syllabus language, make sure that language is positive, gives rationale for policies, and uses compassion and enthusiasm. The use of collective pronouns is one way to create an environment of community. Switching from you, as in You will submit to we, as in We will submit focuses on class expectations rather than behavioral ones. A syllabus should create a partnership with students, but places where the use of italics, bold, and underscore are used may result in a negative reaction from students, especially those not used to the college culture.

Tip #5: Supportive Course Policies. A syllabus contains a lot of policies and guidelines, and at times, the language may appear more punitive than positive. Language that emphasizes flexibility and possibility rather than performance and punishment establishes a more collaborative environment that focuses on student success. Faculty developers can guide faculty by making recommendations for the adoption of more inclusive rhetoric, as it is important to have and emphasize positive over punishing language. Along with the course policies, consider including a rationale that details the values and norms behind the policies to help students understand how they are designed to support their success. Supportive course policies may also include statements that provide resources for students to succeed. A diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) statement in the course sets expectations and establishes instructor and course values. Statements about personal pronouns, preferred names, and pronunciation acknowledge the diversity of students. Also consider working with faculty to examine

course policies to see where flexibility is possible, especially regarding attendance, assignment deadlines, participation, and grading. Other considerations for supportive course policies:

- Include links to student support resources (library, technical support, academic advising, student accessibility services).
- Provide technology information on what kind of device or software students will need.
- Have details about how students can reach out and how they can utilize office hours.
- Design the syllabus so that students can work collaboratively to craft some of the course policies.

Tip #6: Accessible Design. An accessible syllabus illustrates commitment to having an inclusive course. A syllabus can be dense with information, making it difficult for students with learning disabilities, dyslexia, or non-native speakers. Make the syllabus accessible by developing it in a learning management system and make sure to format the syllabus for the web and mobile devices. A liquid syllabus, for example, is an open, web-based syllabus that is accessible, interactive, and responsive. An accessible syllabus is also one formatted with styles (Title, Heading1, Heading 2) for organization. Make sure content is chunked by breaking up large paragraphs and using headings, and icons and that images include alternative text to describe the image. To convey information quicky, faculty developers may work alongside faculty to ensure that images are accessible images and that icons represent essential course information, such as course materials, meeting times, and office hours.

From the Community

Humanizing the Remote Learning Experience

A Special Focus on Faculty Development

One of the ways that we can support teaching faculty who are building courses, especially in online environments, is to offer them ideas and suggestions for humanizing the remote learning experience.

- Humanizing the Remote Learning Space
- Importance of Social Presence in Online Courses

Upcoming Event

Innovation Summit

Register now for the 2023 Florida Online Innovation Summit.

Learn more →

Top Community Topics

- TOPkit Workshop 2023
- Evaluating - Checklists & Rubrics
- Developing - Best Practices for Using Video in Online Learning
- Evaluating - Data on Your Campus
- Developing - Provide Incentives for Faculty Participation
- Planning - Faculty Development Models

Works Referenced or Cited

SEE REFERENCES

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