PennState | Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence

A course syllabus is a written document that summarizes the topical focus of a course, learning expectations for students, grading, materials, and a course outline. At Penn State, all course syllabi must adhere to Faculty Senate syllabus policy 43-00.

Format and timing

- The syllabus must be distributed to students in writing (paper or electronic form).
- It must be given to students in each course section on or before the first day of the class.
- The instructor can change the syllabus during the semester but must announce those changes in writing (paper or electronic form).

Required elements

1. A description of the course, including the academic unit offering the course section (e.g. department, division, school, college, campus), as appropriate to the class offering.
2. Information on course expectations, including course attendance and/or participation expectations, as appropriate.
3. Course assessment policy, including a list of any evening course examinations scheduled pursuant to the terms of University Faculty Senate Policy 44-30.
4. To enable students to reasonably keep track of their progress in the class, a grade breakdown, including where applicable the proportion or weighting of each grade component and minimum requirements for each grade symbol.
5. Required course materials, if any.
6. Course Goals and Course Objectives:
    a. Course Goals are broad educational benchmarks describing general understanding and knowledge domains in each course.
    b. Course Objectives are more specific, should map to broader course goals, and represent unique, focused skill sets with learning outcomes that are assessable.
    c. Course Goals and Course Objectives must reflect the most current course description on record. Each Penn State course should offer similar educational and knowledge domain experiences regardless of campus location and adhere to University Faculty Senate Policy 42-10 (sometimes called the 80/20 guideline). Refer also to University Faculty Senate Policy 100-10.

    For General Education courses, identify the course as a General Education course (see University Faculty Senate Policy 140-00) and specify which General Education Learning Objectives the course addresses based on the most recent course proposal (see University Faculty Senate Policy 141-00).
7. Academic integrity policy for the course.
8. Any course policies on student use of artificial intelligence.
   Resource: https://ai.psu.edu/guidelines/ and in particular FAQs specific to GenAI for instructional faculty.
9. Syllabus Statements (examples)
    a. Procedures related to academic accommodations identified by Student Disability Resources.
    b. Reporting educational equity concerns through the University's Report Bias website.
    c. Available counseling and psychological services.
    d. Contact information for all course instructors.

10. If appropriate given the course offering modality, course instructions relating to a campus closure (e.g., for a weather emergency) including a communication plan to students about any changes in assessment procedures, course deadlines, and/or submission procedures, along with any other appropriate information. See University Faculty Senate Policy 45-00.

Additional recommendations from the Schreyer Institute

- Consider adding a "subject to change" statement to your syllabus because students might view the document as a binding contract between instructor and student.
- Include basic course information:
    - Course name, ID and number, and section (e.g., ENGL 15, Section 12)
    - Office Hours (AKA Student Hours) and how to arrange a meeting at other times
    - Course Canvas site
    - Prerequisites (courses, skills, experience)
    - Course location(s) and meeting times; include lab or discussion section information
- Include the dates, times, and locations of all exams. The syllabus should also note if exams will be administered outside of class time, in the evening or in the Pollock Testing Center at University Park.
- In your course policies, provide clear details about:
    - Attendance, missed classes, lateness
    - Late projects/assignments
    - Make-up quizzes or exams
    - Method(s) of course delivery (e.g., face-to-face, synchronous/asynchronous online, hybrid)
    - Teaching methods (e.g., group work, online discussions, lecture)
    - Student responsibilities (e.g., student will need to use Canvas to post assignments)
    - Required activities (e.g., assignments, projects, class attendance, in-class participation)
    - Required technology (e.g., software)
    - Course calendar and schedule, with date/time requirements for topics, readings, assignments, exams, projects, special activities, etc.
    - Location and description of any additional or optional materials

This checklist was updated in October 2026.