Teaching and Learning Initiative
Mount Holyoke College

Quick Syllabus Guide

I.   Content

Note: increased course structure is associated with better learning outcomes and greater equity. When we leave it to students to figure it out (e.g., what a "source analysis paper" is or what participation means) or base grades on a few high-stakes assignments, we tend to reinforce inequalities that have nothing to do with student potential or ability. Always go for more transparency when possible (hyperlinks below):

Task: What, *exactly,* do you want students to do?
Purpose: Why are you asking students to do it?
Criteria: How will you evaluate the work?

Core Elements:

1. Basic Course Information (title, where to meet, when, faculty contact information)
2. Course policies & values (e.g., make-up work, attendance, inclusion, accommodations, Honor Code and academic integrity, use of technology, intellectual property statement, Title IX)
3. Course Goals (an explanation of what students could learn by taking the course)
4. Course materials and requirements (how they are going to learn it)
5. Grading & Assessment (how they can gauge whether they are learning it)
6. Course schedule & calendar
   a. According to MHC Faculty Legislation:
      ● Classes shall be scheduled only during the hours set by the registrar. (That is, if you have field trips or screenings outside of your set course time, these should not be mandatory or should include self-scheduling options)
      ● In-course exams may **not** be given during the last week of classes (a quiz worth no more than 15% of the final grade, that is part of a regular sequence of testing, is NOT considered an in-course examination)
      ● No exams, readings, projects, or papers may be due on reading days
      ● A "substantial final paper" (in lieu of a final examination) cannot be due earlier than the start of the examination period
   b. Don't forget the potential for Mountain Day in the Fall!
   c. Keep religious holidays in mind when scheduling major assignments or events.

Tone matters

Studies show that students learn more in courses using a learner-focused syllabus with an invitational tone (vs. a content-focused syllabus with a contractual/scolding tone)

II. Design

Accessibility - Usability - Clarity

These best practices for universal design make written information as accessible and easy to use by as many people as possible, those with accessibility challenges and those without.

1. **Fonts: use san-serif font of at least 12pt size, in lowercase**
   Simple san serif fonts like Arial in 12pt size and larger are most legible. Limit use of uppercase blocks of text, which is hard to read.

2. **Colors: use high color contrast between text and background colors**
   Check contrast with tools like https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/

3. **Convey meaning in multiple ways, never only with color**
   Combine color with font type or size or weight, or text. Ex: ****Due date: Feb. 14****

4. **Include descriptions or captions with images**

5. **Assign style element tools in Word or Google Docs: Title, Header 1...**
   Screen readers can quickly jump from section to section.
   Readers can extract a table of contents.
   Authors can change formatting of all occurrences of an element with one edit.
   Word and Google Docs both include these tools, with customization options.

6. **Tables: define header rows, use for data (not formatting)**
   Present data clearly in tables by labeling the header rows and cells. For layout functionality, use columns and spacing.

7. **Use design principles to maximize scannability, legibility, and usability**
   Readers should be able to easily identify and locate different sections within your syllabus, WITHOUT reading all the text in order. To maximize this, apply:
   CONTRAST: Display strong visual differences between style elements
   REPETITION: Use repeated formatting and structure throughout the document, especially for similar content
   ALIGNMENT: Create visual blocks with clear, aligned edges. Limit use of centered spacing.
   PROXIMITY: Put similar content next to each other, use space meaningfully to separate things that are different.

III. Sample Policy Statements for Syllabus:

Accommodations:

AccessAbility Services is the office on campus that determines academic accommodations for students with disabilities. If you need official accommodations through AccessAbility Services, you have a right to have these met and kept confidential. Please contact AccessAbility Services, located in Mary Lyon Hall 3rd Floor, at 413-538-2634 or accessability-services@mtholyoke.edu. If you are eligible for academic accommodations, you will be provided with an accommodation letter. Once you receive your accommodation letter, I would like to meet with you and discuss these approved accommodations and our class. For more information on who might be eligible for accommodations and the application process please see the AccessAbility Services website (www.mtholyoke.edu/accessability).

Academic Integrity/Honor Code:

Mount Holyoke College is a community of students, faculty, staff, and administrators committed to free inquiry and the pursuit of knowledge in the tradition of the liberal arts. The decision to join this academic community requires acceptance of special rights and responsibilities that are essential for its effective functioning and the realization of its mission. All members of the community share the responsibility to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity.

I expect all your work to abide by the MHC Honor Code: "I will honor myself, my fellow students, and Mount Holyoke College by acting responsibly, honestly, and respectfully in both my words and deeds." Any work that does not will be reported to the Academic Honor Board. For more detail on what constitutes an academic violation of the Honor Code, please see the College Academic Rights and Responsibilities webpage.

Title IX/Responsible Reporter:

If you or someone you know has been a victim of discrimination, harassment or violence based on sex or gender and you would like to talk to someone about our resources, please contact the Title IX Coordinator, Shannon Da Silva at titleixofficer@mtholyoke.edu.

As a faculty member, I am a responsible reporter for any information I learn that may be a violation of our Gender-based and Sexual Misconduct Policy. This means that I will need to share this information with our Title IX Coordinator, Shannon Da Silva. This could be anything related to sexual assault, dating violence, stalking or sex or gender-based harassment. If you are experiencing any of these things and you want to talk with someone who is not a responsible reporter, I can help direct you to private and confidential resources on campus (Counseling Service, Health Services, and Alcohol and Drug Awareness Project. These offices have a legal mandate for confidentiality. These offices are not required to turn over identifying information to the Title IX coordinator but may provide anonymous data to the Title IX coordinator for reporting requirements of the Clery Act).

Audio/Visual Recording Policy:

To encourage active engagement and academic inquiry in the classroom, as well as to safeguard the privacy of students and faculty, no form of audio or visual recording in the classroom is permitted without explicit permission from the professor/instructor or without a letter from AccessAbility Services, signed by the faculty member, authorizing the recording as an accommodation. Authorized recordings may only be used by a student who has obtained permission and may not be shared or distributed for any reason. Violation of this policy is an infraction of the Mount Holyoke Honor Code and academic regulations and will result in disciplinary action.

IV. Other Useful Resources:

Academic Calendar
Registrar
Dean of Studies/Academic Class Deans
Academic Rights and Responsibilities
AccessAbility Services
Pathways (advising tool)
Moodle (online course management tool)

Inclusion and equity resources:
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiative
Inclusive syllabus design
Accessibility & Universal design
Inclusive teaching

Students in distress:
Title IX Office
Counseling Service

Ways to enrich your courses/events on campus:
McCulloch Center for Global Initiatives
Miller Worley Center for the Environment
Weissman Center for Leadership
Speaking, Arguing, and Writing (SAW) Center
MHC Art Museum
Library, Information, and Technology Services
Archives and Special Collections
Career Development Center