THE SYLLABUS AS A TOOL FOR STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

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Colleges and universities need to be continually concerned with issues of curriculum assessment and reform. Curriculum reform, however, is often based solely on information regarding course content. We agree that course content is essential to redesigning curriculum, yet focusing on content alone overlooks the importance of issues related to communication and goal setting that occur at the course level. The syllabus is often the initial communication tool that students receive as well as being the most formal mechanism for sharing information with students regarding any course. Despite their importance, the structures and formats of written syllabi tend to be handed down from one generation to the next, rarely considered as part of curriculum redesign. This lack of consideration may be especially true for courses in general education curricula. Often, general education courses are given lower priority by individual departments, because such courses tend to be governed through shared ownership that crosses disciplines. Recently, as part of our university's assessment of the general education curriculum, syllabus analysis was recommended as an initial step (Ewell, 1997, personal communication). This paper describes the process and results of a descriptive study examining general education syllabi at one university. Specifically, the purpose of the present study is to examine the nature and content of general education syllabi in order to gain a better understanding of their attributes and characteristics; to identify the ways in which syllabi reflect and communicate university goals and objectives of general education; and to identify the ways in which the syllabi communicate an implicit contract.

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Rationale for Syllabus Analysis

The need to conduct syllabus analysis becomes evident when we recognize the multiple uses of syllabi in higher education and the changing perception of the role of syllabi in educating students. To date, these functional multiplicities of syllabi have not been examined simultaneously in the literature. What little literature does exist views syllabi from singular perspectives. Syllabi are educational tools that often have more important functions than what commonly is acknowledged by administration, faculty, or students. Taken together, the literature points to the simultaneous significance of syllabi in at least three domains of higher education: administrative, course development, and interpersonal.

Bers, Davis, and Taylor (1996) suggest that the integrity of syllabi is important for administrative purposes because (1) syllabi are explicit public descriptions of courses, (2) they can and often are used as evidence in grievance and judicial hearings, and (3) they are used routinely to determine course equivalency in transfer situations. Thus, the administrative function of syllabi occurs not only within any one particular university but also across colleges and universities. More specifically, universities can support instructors' decisions concerning grades and course policies when such issues are addressed specifically in course syllabi (Grunert, 1997). Because syllabi serve these functions, the syllabus forms a contract between the student and the university (Bers et al., 1996). Understanding the elements of syllabi is essential in order to facilitate administrative policies and procedures.

Course development is a second domain in which syllabi have significant influence. Ecker (1994) suggests that the periodic review and categorization of syllabi can be a means to evaluate curriculum and program development over time. One reason the syllabus has such an impact on curriculum revision is that the syllabus serves an organizational role in course development. At a global level, the syllabus, like a contract, makes explicit the responsibilities of the instructor and of the students (Grunert, 1997; McKeachie, 1999). "The syllabus as contract can serve as the document by which the classroom practices, expectations, and norms are discussed and codified. Any later ambiguities of meanings can

be resolved by examining the contract that exists between the parties" (Danielson, 1995, p. 8). For the instructor, developing the syllabus or course outline forces careful consideration of what topics will be covered, when assignments will be due, when exams will be administered, and what objectives will be reached (McKeachie, 1978). As suggested by Grunert (1997), instructors should undertake a "scholarly reflection about teaching" in designing a course, whereby plans and strategies are outlined in written form. For students, the syllabus provides security in knowing the direction and expectations for a particular course (McKeachie, 1978; 1999).

The changing perception of the syllabus as a contract can be witnessed in the evolution of McKeachie's long-standing work on teaching in higher education. In the Seventh Edition of *Teaching Tips* (1978), the syllabus is primarily conceived as a course outline that includes assignments, dates for exams, quizzes, and special rules. Like Bers et al. (1996), McKeachie (1978) suggests that the syllabus is a contract. It should provide students with some notion of what to expect from the course. McKeachie did not address students' obligations for learning other than meeting deadlines and attending classes. In the most recent edition of *Teaching Tips*, McKeachie (1999) continues to view the syllabus as organizational and centered around a schedule of assignments, tests, and topics. "The core of your syllabus will be that schedule" (McKeachie, 1999, p. 16). Similar to Hansen (1991), however, he adds the idea that the syllabus is not a one-sided contract. He recommends that ~~professors list~~en to student input and consider alternative ways in which students can achieve class goals. His assertion is that "[s]tudents who have options and a sense of personal control are likely to be more highly motivated for learning" (McKeachie, 1999, p. 17).

Although McKeachie (1978, 1999) indicates that syllabi are important, he allocates fewer than three pages to developing and presenting a syllabus. He stresses the importance of reflecting and revising nearly every aspect of the teaching process, yet does not mention that the syllabus might also be considered for appraisal and improvement. To date, Grunert (1997) provides the most comprehensive discussion of syllabus construction. Similarly, she views the syllabus as an initial and important point of interaction

between instructor and student; it clarifies mutual responsibilities, helps set the tone of the course, and describes the instructor's beliefs about the educational purpose of the course.

The syllabus becomes that much more critical because its content serves the dual role of providing specific information for the course, as well as establishing the foundation for the yet to be negotiated, unwritten rules for the ways in which the class will function. The unwritten rules and expectations for classroom conduct form the interpersonal domain. Students' first impressions of the interpersonal aspects of the classroom are derived from the syllabus and its presentation (Danielson, 1995). Hansen (1991) differentiates between the explicit contract in the form of a syllabus and the implicit contract created by the actions of the teacher and students. The syllabus as an explicit contract is still an administrative outline—"...they [syllabi] usually outline the protocols of the course: subject matter, number and times of class meetings, titles of texts and readings, grading policy, written and oral assignments, office hours, and the like" (Hansen, 1991, p. 128). In comparison, the implicit contract is negotiated through non-verbal behavior, such as the "nuances, overtones, implications, and inferences [that] create the unspoken agreements by which the class conducts itself"(p. 128).

Upon examining the extant literature on syllabus construction, three perspectives exist: syllabus as a legal document, syllabus as an organizational tool, and syllabus as a means of communication. Regardless of the perspective taken, as professors, we need to have an understanding of what we want in the explicit contract of the syllabus and what we allow to evolve as an implicit contract arising from "behavioral agreements that are understood rather than enunciated" (Hansen, 1991).

Despite the importance of the syllabus, little attention is given to the analysis of its characteristics (Bers, Davis & Taylor, 1996). As a result, faculty are forced to rely on assumptions instead of solid evidence to guide syllabus construction. A first step in developing such evidence is to have a clear picture of what information is typically included in course syllabi. What constitutes a quality syllabus has not been clearly identified or described, with Grunert (1997) being the notable exception. In Grunert's (1997) model the syllabus goes beyond the course objectives, course cal-

endar, and course grading to include information on the purpose of the course, additional resources and learning tools that students might use, and how to use the syllabus. In describing grading procedures, Grunert suggests that specific rubrics for the grading criteria be included as part of the syllabus. As the title of her book implies, "The Course Syllabus, A Learning Centered Approach," Grunert views the syllabus as a learning-centered document.

> Focusing on learning rather than teaching requires a shift from an overview of what you as the instructor will cover to consideration of what your students need to be successful learners . . . Your syllabus is your first opportunity to introduce the learning-centered paradigm to your students and to describe for them the role and responsibilities they will have in your class. (Diamond, 1997, p. *ix*)

The purpose of the present study is to describe and identify the content of syllabi in general education. Three faculty members, from three academic units within the university (the School of Nursing, The School of Education, and the College of Arts and Sciences—Department of Psychology), formed a committee to assess general education syllabi. The analysis of courses in the general education curriculum met a concomitant goal of shaping a better understanding of the nature of general education at our university. To fulfill these parallel purposes, we developed several aims for this study:

- Identify ways in which syllabi provide basic course information
- Identify ways in which syllabi reflect and communicate university goals and objectives for general education
- Identify ways in which syllabi reflects the implicit contract

Methods

Design

Several assumptions guided our thinking as we prepared to undertake this study. We began without a pre-conceived notion of

course syllabus components. However, we did assume that within each syllabus the goals of general education for any particular field category would be addressed. Otherwise, we took a non-evaluative stance. Our intention was not to compare any syllabus to an exemplar from either within the campus or from an outside source. Nor did we intend to identify flaws or deficiencies present in any particular syllabus. We chose to conduct a content analysis to determine the elements included in representative general education syllabi by categorizing constituent components. We recognized that the characteristics would emerge as our study unfolded. We anticipated drawing conclusions about what syllabi communicate to students. With these assumptions in mind, we employed a descriptive, qualitative design to examine the attributes and characteristics of course syllabi from the general education curriculum.

Setting

The study was conducted at Oakland University, a mid-sized, mid-western state university. Oakland is a comprehensive, Doctoral III institution with 74 undergraduate programs and 59 graduate programs, offered across the College of Arts and Sciences and five professional schools. While the university has strong graduate and post-graduate programs, most of the 14,664 students are undergraduates. Regardless of major or degree, all students are required to complete 32 credits of general education courses distributed over eight field categories: Arts; Literature; Language; Western Civilization; International Studies; Social Science; Mathematics, Logic and Computer Science; and Natural Science and Technology. The current view of general education is stated in the undergraduate catalog as:

> The general education program is designed to provide a common and coherent educational experience for all Oakland University undergraduates. It is based on the belief that educated persons should possess not only knowledge in a particular field of specialization but also an understanding of the world around them, an appreciation of the legacy of the

> past and some vision of the future. Exposure to a variety of disciplines will enable students to acquire a breadth of knowledge, develop analytical skills and examine fundamental questions of human experience. (Oakland University, 1999, p. 43)

Subject Matter for Analysis

Units of analysis were syllabi (n = 145) from the 1997–1998 academic year covering the 100 courses that fulfill the general education curricular requirements. General education courses often have more than one section, and some courses were represented by multiple syllabi from various instructors. For many courses, we had one representative syllabus, and in some instances, it was clear that a common departmental syllabus was used for all sections of a particular course (e.g. mathematics). Because of the descriptive nature of this study, there was no need to balance the number of syllabi reviewed for any single course, or general education content area. Ultimately, 90% of general education courses were represented in the analysis.

Procedure

General education syllabi were obtained from Department Chairs of disciplines offering general education courses. In order to establish a framework for content analysis, a small set of syllabi were used in a pilot analysis that would establish the basis for analyzing the remaining syllabi. All three researchers read the same syllabi and made note of the components and characteristics evident in some or all of the set. Through this process, categories were identified from common characteristics shared by the pilot syllabi in order to create a checklist. Additionally, some categories for the analyses originated from the university's general education guidelines. All general education courses at Oakland University must in some way address the generic guidelines developed by the General Education Committee and approved by the

University Senate. The generic guidelines consist of (a) Scope—Breadth of subject area, (b) Centrality—Central issues and approaches, (c) Methodology—Techniques and procedures used to answer essential questions in the area, and (d) Historicity—Historical perspective and cultural development over time. Within each field category, these generic guidelines are expressed using terminology appropriate to each discipline. These terms are listed in Table 4.

Following this pilot analysis, each researcher evaluated approximately one third of the sample using the checklist categories. In addition to the categories already identified, we remained open to new or unique characteristics. Weekly meetings were held to compare and discuss coding interpretations. When coding seemed ambiguous, all committee members read the syllabus in question and discussed interpretations until agreement was reached. This process served as a form of inter-rater reliability. Ratings were tallied and percentages calculated within and across field categories.

Findings

As a first step, we grouped the checklist characteristics into common themes that emerged as the result of our content analysis. The emergent themes included: Acknowledgment of General Education Guidelines, Basic Course Information, Required Reading, Course Format, Course Content, Performance Evaluation, Use of Technology, and Responsibility for Learning.

In our analysis, we first identified the basic information that instructors provided to students in course syllabi. Table 1 summarizes these findings. Most syllabi included information regarding the instructor, for example, office location, office hours, and phone number. Few syllabi contained faculty Email addresses or class section number. A corollary to this finding was the infrequent mention of student use of technology as part of the learning process. Table 2 provides information regarding the nature of the course experience. Data show that courses relied heavily on textbooks and lecture. Field experience, class demonstrations, or ex-

Table 1. Percentage of Syllabi Containing Basic Course Information

Type of Information	**Percentage**
Instructor Name	97.2%
Class Number	91.7%
Phone Number	91.0%
Office Location	91.0%
Office Hours	88.8%
Semester/Year	82.1%
Class Time	55.9%
Class Section #	29.0%
Email Address	24.8%
Academic Conduct	16.6%
Use of Technology	
Computer	4.1%
Internet	4.1%
CD/Rom	3.5%
Email	1.4%

Table 2. Percentages of Syllabi Containing Information on Course Readings, Content, and Format

Theme	Type of Information	Percentage
Required Reading	Text	86.2%
	Course Packet	29.6%
	None/Other	25.5%
Content	Topical Outline	89.0%
	Vocabulary of area	40.0%
Format	Lecture	64.1%
	Seminar	37.9%
	Interactive/Experiential	16.8%
	Medium Exposure[a]	13.1%
	Class Demonstrations	4.8%
	Field Experience	4.1%
	Not indicated	23.4%

Note: [a]Medium Exposure refers to the use of actual artifacts, documents, or primary sources (e.g. watching a play, going to a museum) in the Humanities.

periential learning were rarely part of the course format. Content information included in the syllabus was presented primarily in topical outline, whereas learning the vocabulary of the field was mentioned less often.

Grading practices are presented in Table 3. Most syllabi had a statement of grading policy. Traditional evaluation methods predominate; there was very little use of authentic assessment such as oral presentations, performances, products, or projects (Wiggins, 1998). Less than half of the syllabi included writing assignments or required attendance and/or participation as part of the grade. Because formal exams in the form of multiple choice and essay tests were the most common type of evaluation, we opted to examine test method by field category. Upon closer examination, both multiple choice (MC) and essay tests (ET) were used with some consistency in three field categories: International Studies (MC: 64%; ET: 64%), Literature (MC: 56%; ET: 89%), and Western Civilization (MC: 53%; ET: 65%). Not surprisingly, Literature employed more essay type examinations than other field categories. Natural Science (MC: 68%; ET: 18%) and Social Sci-

Table 3. Percentage of Syllabi Containing Information about Performance Evaluation

Type of Information	**Percentage**
Statement of Grading Policy	82.1%
Testing Procedure	
Multiple Choice/Objective Tests	53.8%
Essay	41.4%
Performance	4.8%
Not Indicated	18.6%
Written Assignments	46.9%
Attendance/Participation	42.8%
Individual Project	5.2%
Oral Presentations	4.1%
Group Project	3.5%
Not Stated	4.1%

Table 4. Percentage of Syllabi Referring to General Education Guidelines by Field Category

Field Category	Guidelines	Percent included
Arts (*n* = 10)	All Guidelines	72%
	History of the Arts	90%
	Critical Thought/Application	80%
	Theory of the Arts	70%
	Art Criticism	60%
	Value as Knowledge	60%
Literature (n=18)	All Guidelines	32%
	Literary Analysis	56%
	Recognition of Historical Context	44%
	Human Experience	33%
	Recognition of Cultural Context	28%
	Recognition of Biographical Context	0%
Language (n=13)	All Guidelines	88%
	Understand Language as Communication	92%
	Relationship Between Language and Culture	85%
Western Civilization (n=17)	All Guidelines	78%
	Historical Knowledge	100%
	Development of Western thought	94%
	Methods of Historical Inquiry	41%
International Studies (n=14)	All Guidelines	71%
	Examination of Unfamiliar Cultures	93%
	Appreciation of Other Cultures	86%
	Methods of Inquiry	36%
Social Science (n= 36)	All Guidelines	57%
	Major themes/Concepts	81%
	Impact of Work in the Field	58%
	Origin and Breadth	50%
	Methods of Inquiry	39%
Mathematics, Logic &	All Guidelines	0%
Computer Science (n=9)	Understanding of Concepts	0%
	Abstraction of Formal Theory	0%
	Power/Impact of Computers	0%
Natural Science (n= 28)	All Guidelines	27%
	Major Concepts	64%
	Impact of the Field on the World	21%
	Relationship Among Experiments and Theories	11%
	Methods of Inquiry	11%

Note: n refers to the number of syllabi analyzed in each field category.

ence (MC: 61%; ET: 36%) used multiple-choice tests most often. The syllabi from Mathematics, Logic, and Computer Science (MC: 22%; ET: 0%), as well as Arts (MC: 20%; ET: 10%) and Language (MC: 38%; ET: 38%), seldom indicated they type of test administered. These findings did not necessarily indicate a lack of testing in those fields. Rather, those syllabi did not disclose the type of testing employed. Arts and Language also indicated some use of alternative evaluation strategies. Overall, the Arts used pencil-paper tests the least, and relied more on non-traditional evaluation methods.

A primary goal of the present investigation was to ascertain the degree to which the syllabi mentioned the general education guidelines. The Oakland University Senate General Education Committee developed a set of guidelines for general education courses for each field category. Theoretically, all courses approved for the general education curriculum must adhere to those guidelines. There are three guidelines for each field category, some of which have several concepts. Therefore, we further divided the guidelines such that we had one statement in our checklist for each concept. Table 4 provides summative information regarding the occurrence of the general education guidelines. Results showed that within each field category, the guideline most often mentioned was content knowledge of the field. The guideline least often mentioned, in general, was methods of inquiry. This is not to say that students in any one class or field area are not informed about the general education guidelines, only that this information does not appear in the syllabus.

A final issue that became apparent as we examined the syllabi was student responsibility for learning. Surprisingly, only a small number of syllabi had any statements pertaining to student academic conduct, despite the importance of this issue on most college campuses. Further, 33% of the syllabi indicated that students would be given only one opportunity to complete assignments based on a pre-determined schedule. Only 7% of syllabi indicated that students would have an opportunity to revise their work and fewer than 9% provided opportunities for students to earn extra credit.

Discussion

The multiple roles that syllabi serve are evident in the literature on student-centered learning. Themes that emerged from our analysis supported this view in that they highlighted traditional conceptions of the syllabi as course outlines, but also addressed what was uniformly missing from the current general education syllabi. Our analysis revealed that 50% of the emergent themes related to administrative issues (Acknowledgement of General Education Guidelines, Course Format, Course Content, and Use of Technology). Seventy-five percent focused on course development (Basic Course Information, Required Reading, Course Format, Course Content, Performance Evaluation, and Use of Technology). Only one theme emerged relating to the interpersonal domain (Responsibility for Learning). According to McKeachie (1999), the course schedule and assignments are the core of the syllabus. While this clerical information is essential to any good syllabus, it is insufficient. Grunert (1997) and Hansen (1991) both emphasize the importance of establishing a framework for learning. Yet, we found very little evidence that the syllabi developed the implicit contract that guides teacher/student interactions. If we think of the syllabus as the springboard for the course experience, it needs to make more explicit the responsibilities of the instructor and student that form the basis for instructional interaction. Even McKeachie (1999) states, "the syllabus helps students discover at the outset what is expected of them and where they are going" (p. 17).

Clerical information is, perhaps, the most fundamental component to any well-written syllabus, yet the inclusion of all key elements should not be assumed. Not all syllabi examined in the present study included basic information, such as instructor name and course section number. More disturbing, perhaps, was uncovering that technology was rarely indicated either as a means to interact with the instructor or as an information resource. Only 25% of the syllabi included the instructor's email address. Perhaps this finding is evidence that syllabi are duplicated more often than constructed. Because multiple instructors use syllabi across sections and class section numbers change from year to

year, duplication is easier than substantive revision. Yet, revision of syllabi is necessary in order to adapt to changes in the teaching-learning process.

The literature pertaining to syllabus construction emphasizes the importance of a course outline. The majority of the syllabi under review (89%) included such an outline. In most instances, the outline was limited to broad topics often in the form of textbook chapter headings. In some cases, only the chapter number or page numbers were indicated. The presentation of chapter headings alone supports the assumption that the "topic of the day" will be delivered in lecture format. The implication is that the syllabus is viewed not as a learning tool but as a calendar of events. If more effort was put into constructing the syllabus initially, faculty would find that the stage is better set for the implicit teaching-learning contract on the first day of class, as well as directing course expectations for the remainder of the semester.

The data in Table 2 indicates that success in most general education courses results from reading texts and attending lectures with the goal of passing tests. Given that only 43% of the syllabi require attendance and participation as part of the grade, even the lectures are optional in most cases. There appears to be very little opportunity for interactive or experiential learning. Textbooks, lecture models, or topical outlines limited to broad headings imply a passive learning environment. "A major problem with the lecture is that students assume a passive, non-thinking, information receiving role" (McKeachie, 1999, p. 82). This is indicative of a traditional view of college teaching. The instructor's job is to "profess" and the students' role is to absorb passively (Audi, 1994). In contrast, an alternative view of teaching and learning (Dewey, 1910) suggests that students should be actively involved (Rogoff, 1990; Gardner, 1985), that they need to construct their own understanding (Vygotsky, 1978), and that they be required to show proficiency through performance and the creation of products (Stiggins, 1999; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998).

It is what students do, not what teachers do, that determines learning outcomes. Teachers cannot learn for students—students have to do it for themselves and usually by themselves. There has been a paradigm shift, in both cognitive research and educational

advice away from seeing students as passive recipients of teaching toward seeing them as actively processing knowledge and constructing their own understanding (McKeachie, 1999, p. 21).

Accompanying the lecture model we found to be so predominate, data in Table 3 reveal an over-reliance on paper and pencil tests, whether in the form of essay or multiple choice examinations. Very few of our general education syllabi included performance assessment, such as oral presentations or projects for determining grades. Use of pencil-and-paper evaluation methods imply that students who do well in the class are those who do well on that particular type of assessment. While paper and pencil tests evaluate a student's level of knowledge acquisition, they do little to evaluate skills and abilities needed to function as an educated person. Moreover, employing multiple-choice and essay tests predisposes the classroom as a unidirectional discourse of knowledge.

If one goal of the college experience is to promote competency as well as increased knowledge in our students, then broader assessment experiences are required. Performance assessment and project-based learning require that students construct their own understanding and take more responsibility for their own learning. Yet, in the syllabi examined in the present investigation, fewer than 7% encouraged even such limited responsibility as editing and revising based on instructor feedback. In contrast, one third indicated that students had only one chance to complete assignments correctly. Students were expected to work independently without assistance from the instructor or peers and within a very restrictive time frame.

A final, and perhaps most important point for general education syllabi, is the way in which syllabi articulate the guidelines of the general education program. Table 4 clearly shows that most syllabi mentioned these guidelines infrequently. When general education guidelines are absent from syllabi, students are unlikely to be aware of the purpose or meaning of the course or the way in which the course contributes to an overarching educational program. Currently, the aim of the university's general education curriculum is for each field category to develop student knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Oakland University, 1999). The analyzed syllabi emphasized basic knowledge in each field, but gave little

attention to the methods of inquiry. Content knowledge is the necessary first step; it provides students with the "what"—the vocabulary and the primary concepts and theories of each field. If students do not know how information in a particular field is generated, however, then they are unable to ask questions related to that field. Students may not understand that questioning is critical to the advancement of knowledge, and they may experience knowledge as static rather than dynamic and evolving. This would imply that Methods of Inquiry should be articulated in every syllabus, because proficiency in the methods depends on an understanding of the requisite skills. The development of inquiry stems from the underlying assumptions that shape the belief system of the field. As students wrestle with important questions, they develop the attitudes and values consistent with the discipline.

Conclusions

According to the catalog, Oakland University is "Dedicated to providing students with the knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in a complex and rapidly changing workplace… A strong core of liberal arts is the basis on which undergraduates develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes essential for successful living and active concerned citizenship" (1999, p. 8). From our analysis, however, knowledge transmission was primary, whereas skills and attitude development were less emphasized in the syllabi. Our analysis raises an important question. If the goals of general education and the university mission as stated in the catalog are not consistently being addressed in the syllabi, what drives syllabus construction? Does the syllabus reflect department goals, individual faculty goals, or some other influence yet unknown? We may be forced to accept the idea that nothing substantial drives syllabus construction. Syllabi are passed from one generation of faculty to the next with the established format, adhering to departmental tradition and/or custom. With the whirlwind of responsibilities surrounding the initiation of new faculty and development of new courses, syllabus construction becomes a minor task. Yet, the importance of syllabi and their presentation on the first day of class cannot be understated (Hansen, 1991). It

stands to reason that the effort instructors put into the syllabus is likely to be related directly to the value students place on the syllabus as a learning tool.

It must be restated that we have not investigated all that occurs in the classroom, only the information contained in the syllabus. There may be other ways instructors communicate information and convey expectations to students. However, these are not documented in written form and, therefore, not subject to review. In addition, information shared informally increases the risk for miscommunication. We agree that the syllabus is a contract that outlines the parameters of student/teacher interaction. It needs to be explicit and clear to all parties. An incomplete syllabus is too elusive and might allow hidden agendas to take precedence. Having a more complete syllabus—one that stems from an awareness of the three domains—insures consistency and confidence that accurate information has been conveyed to students.

In conclusion, a syllabus can be an important learning tool. It can articulate the goals of general education in addition to the course goals. It can direct student effort and outline expectations for student responsibility for their educational success. These expectations are not conveyed clearly or explicitly when the syllabus primarily consists of a topical outline. Beyond the course outline, thought-provoking statements should be included in the course outline to promote a more learning-centered classroom. Authentic and intriguing questions can drive student learning as students may come away with a sense of how professionals in each discipline investigate important questions in the field (Hayes-Jacobs, 1998; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). Learning what students value in the syllabus might also contribute to its usefulness as an instrument of education.

The present study is an initial attempt to understand how the elements of syllabi reflect their multiple roles in higher education. Although the sample of syllabi was limited by number and by courses covered (i.e., general education), we determined that syllabi continue to be employed as a clerical document that includes a broad topical outline. We propose that syllabi can be used as valuable educational tools by promoting the implicit contract and defining the expectations for the instructor and students. Syl-

labus analysis is a useful methodology and should prove fruitful for assessing curriculums in individual academic units. Future research might explore the relationship between elements of syllabi and student success, as well as determining those components most valued by students and by faculty.

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