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# THE MANY PURPOSES OF COURSE SYLLABI: WHICH ARE ESSENTIAL AND USEFUL?

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*Despite the almost universal agreement on the need for a syllabus in college courses, what actually constitutes a syllabus – content, format, and function – remains unclear. This lack of consensus may derive from the need of the syllabus to fulfill multiple purposes and to satisfy multiple constituents. (Doolittle & Siudzinsla, 2010, p. 30)*

## INTRODUCTION

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The purpose of the study was to explore how instructors at a mid-sized Midwest four-year undergraduate private university view the purpose, structure, format and use of their course syllabi. This article focuses on the first of those four areas: How do instructors at a mid-sized Midwest private university view the purpose/function of their syllabi?

Syllabi are part of a higher education institution's structure just like the people (students and faculty), buildings, and books. However, "syllabus construction remains under theorized" (Cardozo, 2006, p. 412). Although instructors are masters in their field of expertise, syllabus construction is not typically included in graduate school. Instructors look to senior instructors for input and suggestions on how to create and what to include in a syllabus (Eberly et al., 2001).

Some may not realize that syllabi play a variety of valuable functions for different groups within an institution such as a communication mechanism, a planning tool for instructors, a course plan for students, a teaching tool or resource, an artifact for teacher evaluation, and evidence for accreditation (Albers, 2003; Hockensmith, 1988; Matejka & Kurke, 1994; Parkes & Harris, 2002; Slattery & Carlson, 2005; Smith & Razzouk, 1993; Thompson, 2007). The function a syllabus serves depends on who is using it. While there are some similarities in use, overall students, faculty, administrators, and accreditation personnel all use the document for different purposes.

If the instructor uses a syllabus as a communication mechanism to share assignments and grading information with students, that information may not be sufficient if the department wants to conduct curriculum reviews for program development purposes. The departments would need the syllabus to include items such as course goals, objectives and outcomes. Administrators need the syllabi to provide certain information for the integrity of programs and ultimately for accreditation. Meanwhile, students want to first know what they need to have done and by what date as was seen in a study by Becker and Calhoon (1999).

A review of the literature revealed eight major themes for the purpose or use of syllabi in higher education: a communication mechanism; a planning tool for instructor; a course plan for students; a teaching or pedagogical tool (resource for student learning); artifact for teacher evaluations/record keeping tool; a contract of policies and procedures to be followed; a socialization process for students to the academic environment; and a scholarship opportunity for instructors.

**Communication Mechanism.** By the traditional definition and historic perspective of a syllabus, communication is clearly a purpose for the document. Communication is a broad term that has two basic categories – the communication of content and how the content is expressed.

**Communication of Content** such as the course information, instructor information, assignment and grading information and any specific policy information is typically considered basic information that instructors provide to students (Albers, 2003; Baecker, 1998; Doolittle & Siudzinski, 2010; Grunert O'Brien et al., 2008; Hammons & Shock, 1994; Matejka & Kurke, 1994; McDonald et al., 2010; Parkes et al., 2003; Raymark & Connor-Green, 2002; Slattery & Carlson, 2005; Thompson, 2007). Though instructors typically explain the information on the first day of class, the hard copy syllabus is helpful for the student to have, to refer to and to take notes on if the instructor gives additional details the student should remember.

As teaching approaches have changed over the years, so have the communication needs and strategies. The university classroom was traditionally a lecture environment and the syllabus would indicate what chapters to read, what homework to complete and when tests were scheduled. Now more instructors are incorporating active learning techniques that can change how students learn (Grunert O'Brien et al., 2008). The students are interested in knowing the relevance of the course or course material to the broader context of their education; this explanation is not a traditional piece of information included on the syllabus. Instructors might explain it during class, but if the course is online, it would be important to have it documented in some fashion such as in the syllabus. Communicating that relevance is also useful for curriculum review and accreditation.

Additional content that can be shared is classified as 'preventative' (Doolittle & Siudzinski, 2010). The idea is teachers will anticipate the students' needs and questions and provide the answers in the syllabi. The information is not necessarily different or unique but that the instructor purposely anticipates student questions and includes the material as a preventative measure.

**How Content is Expressed** can have an impact on the student and the course. First impressions are important in most relationships and a teacher/student relationship is no different (Danielson, 1995; Matejka & Kurke, 1994). The syllabus is usually the first topic of discussion on the first day of class before the students have typically made an opinion about the teacher or the class. The teacher has this opportunity to introduce him/herself to the class using the syllabus and to discuss things such as pedagogical philosophies (Appleby, 1994). The construction of the syllabus document, the inclusion or exclusion of information, the tone of the document as well as how the instructor discusses the syllabus and explains it, all go into that one and only opportunity to make a first impression (Grunert O'Brien et al., 2008; Thompson, 2007).

The rhetoric of the syllabus, the use of pronouns in the syllabus and how the use affects classroom power and authority was examined in Baecker's (1998) study. Based on findings from the study, Baeker suggests to avoid using the pronoun 'we.' "We is an example of an ambiguous linguistic marker for power, which can be used both to indicate solidarity or community and as a means to coerce the

audience into behavior that benefits the speaker" (p. 58). An instructor wanting to set the appropriate level of authority in the classroom might use 'I' when indicating what he or she will be doing versus what the student will be doing instead using the a royal 'we' to refer to everyone which in some situation would not be accurate or appropriate. An example of an inaccurate or inappropriate use is including sentences in the syllabus such as 'We will be learning about xyz.' The instructor already knows the material so using 'we' might be a way to try to build community as Baeker (1998) mentioned but it might not be received in that manner by the students. The consideration of rhetoric also reflects back on the importance of first impressions of syllabi mentioned in the previous section.

Instructors "modeling enthusiasm for the course material" (Thompson, 2007, p. 55) and encouraging student interest can also be done through the syllabus. Some students might not appreciate or recognize the importance and value of a course. The course might be one required for the major but the student does not like the topic or maybe it is a general education course the student is not interested in. Instructors have the opportunity to help or encourage students to be excited about the course by how the instructor presents the course (Harris, 1993). The syllabus can be written in a positive tone that provides information that is important to the student.

**Planning Tool for Instructor.** Designing or planning a course and writing the syllabus for the course can be interrelated activities for some instructors (Slattery & Carlson, 2005). Writing the syllabus can aid in the course design and development process. Syllabus "construction represents a critical moment in instructors' curriculum/ course development thought process" (Doolittle & Siudzinski, 2010, pp. 29-30). The syllabus design process as a planning tool is logistical in nature such as assigning time frames or days to the content structure. For example – chapter 3 will take approximately 45 minutes to discuss and show examples and the activity included will be another 15 minutes so that could fit into a 75 minute class period. The instructor needs to plan for schedule issues related to holidays or breaks in the term, when to plan assessment exercises and allowing for appropriate amounts of time to complete homework or assignments.

The purpose of a syllabus as that of a planning and development tool may initially benefit the instructor but the students could possibly benefit from the instructor taking extra time for planning the course and syllabus. Also, the more complete and informative the syllabus is for the student, the more likely it will be beneficial for administrators to review as well as accreditation organizations.

**A Course Plan for Students.** "The syllabus should represent the overall plan of action for the course" (Matejka & Kurke, 1994, p. 115). By definition, a syllabus will document the schedule of topics but laying it out in a timeline with an explanation of the goals and the necessary requirements to achieve the goals is the creation of a plan that the students can follow (Slattery & Carlson, 2005). A similar approach is through the use of a graphic syllabus or a concept map to visually demonstrate how all of the topics come together for the particular course (Nilson, 2007). Regardless of whether the syllabus is more text or graphic based, the point of having a course plan for the student to follow is a major purpose for the syllabus. The course plan purpose can be beneficial to the students but the course plan goes along with being a planning tool for instructors to layout the course with assignments and readings and other classroom activities.

**Teaching (pedagogical) Tool / Resource for Student Learning.** A teaching tool is an approach that is supposed to enhance or help facilitate an instructor's ability to impart knowledge or give instruction. The use of a course syllabus could be a teaching or learning tool (Eberly et al., 2001), which helps students. The simple function of a syllabus as a communication device that lists the course objective and

outcomes on the syllabus helps the students understand what is expected thus a teaching tool as well (Albers, 2003). Having specific assignment information on the syllabus or including a grading rubric (Grunert O'Brien et al., 2008) for the assignment can give students instructions on what skills to work on. An instructor could include more specific information to help students improve their time management skills, to identify the time spent outside of class or tips on how to do well in the course, to provide information about campus resources that might help the students and to indicate when he or she is available to meet with the student (Parkes & Harris, 2002).

The syllabus is the tool or guide that students refer to regarding their learning in-class and out-of-class learning (Hockensmith, 1988). In a study of student perceptions of syllabi (Doolittle & Lusk, 2007), students were asked how they made use of course syllabi during the term and their choices were study tool, reference tool, time management tool or a documentation tool. Each choice had a short description behind it that referred to items on the syllabus. Of the 1399 participants, 88% indicated reference tool, 80% indicated time management tool, 53% indicated study tool and 32% indicated a documentation tool. "The syllabus [can be] used as a *knowledge repository*, explained on the first day of class and never addressed again, or [as] a *knowledge guide*, introduced the first day and referred to repeatedly during the semester as a road map" (p. 74).

**An Artifact for Teacher Evaluations / Record Keeping Tool.** The course syllabus can easily be an archival document. Administrators typically want copies of the syllabus for the purpose of teacher evaluations or a supplement to class observation evaluations and student evaluations. Instructors might want to keep copies to observe their own growth and changes over the years as well as for documentation on application portfolios (Appleby, 1994) or for tenure and promotion reviews (Slattery & Carlson, 2005). Syllabi have numerous pieces of information that institutions need to keep for legal and planning reasons such as transfer and articulation agreements, promotion requirements, curriculum planning, and accreditation document. These pieces include course title, dates for the course, number of credit hours, instructor of record name and rank, any prerequisites, name of required textbook and other material, course objectives, description of course content, and description of the assessment procedures (Abdous & He, 2008; Albers, 2003; Doolittle & Lusk, 2007; Parkes & Harris, 1992; Slattery & Carlson, 2005).

The artifact purpose might not be of much interest to some students but instructors should have an interest for their own professional development. The information needed for artifact purposes is not different or unique; it goes back to record keeping for the administration and accreditation organizations.

**Contract - Policies and Procedures to Be Followed.** A contract is a written agreement between two or more people and in higher education by the 1970s; the syllabus became that type of implied contract (Brosman, 1998). The syllabus sets forth the course requirements for the class and what is expected of the students to earn certain grades including specific policies and procedures (Danielson, 1995; Doolittle & Lusk, 2007; Eberly et al., 2001; Matejka & Kurke, 1994; Parkes & Harris, 2002; Singham, 2007; Slattery & Carlson, 2005; Smith & Razzouk, 1993). Though many campus legal counsels encourage their institutions to not refer to syllabi as contracts (Grunert O'Brien et al., 2008), it is still important for instructors to know that administrators will refer to the syllabi during grievance hearing. Adding a syllabus disclaimer such as, "The above schedule and procedures in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances" (Hammons & Shock, 1994, p. 14) is a common practice (Appleby, 1994; Behnke & Miller, 1989; Hammons & Shock, 1994; Nilson, 2007). "Probably no other

contract [meaning the syllabus] we will ever encounter is drafted with so little attention paid to the language" (Baecker, 1998, p. 7).

The contract purpose does not necessarily benefit the student, the instructor or the administration but having an instructor realize that the document could be reviewed like a legal document at a later time could lead the instructor to include specific information such as policy statements including a disability policy as well as a disclaimer.

***Socialization for Students to Academic Environment.*** Understanding that a classroom environment has its own culture and as students enter new classroom environments, they might come with anxiety of not knowing what to expect. The instructor can reduce that anxiety with communication or help socialize the student to the new environment through communication. One of the strategies for communication in the classroom environment is the course syllabus especially in an online course. "To the extent that the syllabi can transmit role-related and cultural knowledge, it is contributing to the classroom socialization process" (Danielson, 1995, p. 8). The socialization purpose has benefits for all the groups but in different ways. The information provided on a syllabus would not be different but how it is stated or presented might be. The benefit to the student would be the added comfort in the class.

***Scholarship Opportunity for Instructors.*** Instructors are typically expected to do research in their field and write books or articles to share their scholarship or intellectual property with other academics but not all instructors are equally focused on research. Many instructors focus on improving their teaching and enhancing teaching and learning strategies. In the early 1990s, institutions started considering other activities to fall under scholarship (Boyer, 1990) including "teaching, integration, application, and discovery [which] provides a framework to capture the complexity and the scholarliness associated with the syllabus and its design" (McDonald et al., 2010, p. 113). Individual instructor's syllabi are likely to be very unique and even if the institution requires certain items to be added, the instructor still decides how the course will be taught (Albers, 2003). "A syllabus reflects the professional judgment of faculty in higher education" (Nilson, 2008, p. 7) and could share with the students how scholars work in a given field (Shulman, 2004).

Besides the issue of including syllabus creation as a teaching related scholarship activity, there is controversy about who owns the syllabus content. The American Association of University Professor's Statement of Copyright identified faculty intellectual property to include class notes and syllabi (Smith, 2002). Some institutions consider syllabi university property since instructors were hired to teach courses and the course syllabi are part of that contract (Diaz, 2010; Loggie et al., 2007; Sinor, 2008).

## METHOD

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The research setting was a mid-sized, Midwest four-year private undergraduate university with six schools or colleges including liberal arts and professional programs. The university's faculty handbook and academic charter did not make reference to instructors' course syllabi. This decision had been left to the specific college, school, or department to regulate. The population group was all instructors of record who were teaching undergraduate courses in the fall semester of 2011- the total number of instructors came to 352. The survey questionnaire consisted of 74 items created specifically for this research which included 6 series of side by side matrix format questions.

## SURVEY DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

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**Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of Survey Respondents Demographics**

Variables	Frequencies, <i>n</i>		Percentage, %	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Gender</b> ( <i>n</i> = 123)	58	65	46.0	51.6
Educational Background ( <i>n</i> = 122)				
Masters	11	21	8.7	16.7
PhD/EdD/PharmD/JD	46	44	36.5	34.9
<b>College/School/Department Affiliation</b> ( <i>n</i> = 123)				
Liberal Arts and Science	33	31	26.2	24.6
Business and Public Administration	12	6	9.5	4.8
Journalism	2	6	1.6	4.8
Pharmacy	5	5	4.0	4.0
Education	5	13	4.0	10.3
Library	1	2	0.8	1.6
First Year Seminar	0	1	0.0	0.8
Other	0	1	0.0	0.8
<b>Position Designation</b> ( <i>n</i> = 123)				
Tenured faculty	29	30	23.0	23.8
Tenured track faculty	14	16	11.1	12.7
Visiting faculty/instructor	3	5	2.4	4.0
Adjunct faculty/instructor	9	10	7.1	7.9
University Lecturer	1	0	0.8	0.0
Other	2	4	1.6	3.2

## RESULTS

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The survey provided a list of eight purposes for using syllabi and the respondents were to identify on a 1(low) to 5(high) scale their perception of how 'essential' and 'useful' each syllabi purpose is. The researcher used both terms on the survey to avoid assumptions that because a purpose may be determined essential at a certain level that it would be equally useful or vice versa. As shown in Table 2, instructors tended to rate each purpose differently from the other, but when determining if a particular purpose was 'essential' or 'useful,' the values were usually similar. The purpose as a Communication Mechanism rated the highest for 'essential' followed by Course Plan for Student but Course Plan for Students was rated the highest for 'useful' by a small margin over the purpose of a Contract. The purpose of Scholarship was rated the lowest for both 'essential' and 'useful.'

**Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for the Eight Purposes of Syllabi**

	Essential			Useful		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Communication	125	4.58	.720	123	4.16	.961
Course Plan	124	4.38	.852	124	4.27	.903
Contract	126	4.29	.920	122	4.26	.880
Planning Tool	125	4.22	.980	125	4.37	.828
Artifact	124	3.82	1.098	122	3.69	1.207
Teaching Tool/Resource	125	3.08	1.182	124	3.06	1.171
Socialization	123	2.76	1.248	123	2.76	1.222
Scholarship	123	1.78	.954	121	1.94	1.142

Scale: 1 = low to 5 = high

As displayed in Table 3, instructors indicated that the syllabi purposes they considered to be 'essential' (rating 5 on the survey is the highest rating of essential and a 1 rating is low) was a syllabus used as a Communication Mechanism (69.6%); a Course Plan for Students (57.3%); a Contract (55.6%); and a Planning Tool for Instructor (52%). The syllabus purpose that had the most in the 1 rating as low was Scholarship.

**Table 3. Frequencies and Percentage for Rating on the Essential Scale for Syllabi Purposes**

	Rating on the Essential Scale					
	n	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
Communication	125	1 (0.8)	0 (0.0)	11 (8.8)	26 (20.8)	87 (69.6)
Planning Tool	125	1 (0.8)	8 (6.4)	19 (15.2)	32 (25.6)	65 (52.0)
Course Plan	124	0 (0.0)	6 (4.8)	12 (9.7)	35 (28.2)	71 (57.3)
Teaching Tool / Resource	125	13 (10.4)	24 (19.2)	47 (37.6)	22 (17.6)	19 (15.2)
Artifact	124	3 (2.4)	14 (11.3)	27 (21.8)	38 (30.6)	42 (33.9)
Contract	126	0 (0.0)	6 (4.8)	22 (17.5)	28 (22.2)	70 (55.6)
Socialization	123	25 (20.3)	27 (22.0)	34 (27.6)	26 (21.1)	11 (8.9)
Scholarship	123	63 (51.2)	31 (25.2)	24 (19.5)	3 (2.4)	2 (1.6)

Scale: 1 = low to 5 = high

In Table 4, a slightly different frequency order can be seen for what the instructors identified to be 'useful' – a Planning Tool for Instructor (56%); a Course Plan for Students (51.6%); a Contract (51.6%); and a Communication Mechanism (47.2%). Again the syllabus purpose ranked most in the 1 rating for low was Scholarship.

**Table 4. Frequencies and Percentage for Rating on the Useful Scale for Syllabi Purposes**

	Ratings on the Useful Scale					
	n	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
Communication	123	1 (0.8)	7 (5.7)	21 (17.1)	36 (29.3)	58 (47.2)
Planning Tool	125	0 (0.0)	4 (3.2)	16 (12.8)	35 (28.0)	70 (56.0)
Course Plan	124	0 (0.0)	7 (5.6)	17 (13.7)	36 (29.0)	64 (57.6)
Teaching Tool/ Resource	124	15 (12.1)	19 (15.3)	51 (41.1)	22 (17.7)	17 (13.7)
Artifact	122	6 (4.9)	17 (13.9)	26 (21.3)	33 (27.0)	40 (32.8)
Contract	122	0 (0.0)	4 (3.3)	23 (18.9)	32 (26.2)	63 (51.6)
Socialization	123	24 (19.5)	25 (20.3)	42 (34.1)	20 (16.3)	12 (9.8)
Scholarship	121	60 (49.6)	24 (19.8)	27 (22.3)	4 (3.3)	6 (5.0)

Scale: 1 = low to 5 = high

The survey did not include definitions for the different syllabi purposes and a few respondents indicated they did not know what socialization and scholarship meant in the context of the syllabi purpose.

## DISCUSSION

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The research study covered four areas: syllabus purpose, syllabus components, syllabus format and syllabus use. This article is focused on the syllabus purpose and to what degree they consider those purposes as essential or useful.

Some of the syllabi purposes are more specific to certain users and syllabi can have more than one purpose or function. The most basic purpose is as a *Communication Mechanism*. The main point of a syllabus is to share information thus a communication mechanism but also for more specific purposes such as a planning tool or course plan. A factor that Thompson (2007) mentions is how instructors try to balance their caring and nurturing side for the student with the need to be focused on teaching and the student learning and how to communicate those two mindsets carefully in a syllabus. The author also explained how these different users have conflicting perspectives. Part of this research study asked instructors to identify syllabi purposes they considered to be essential. Over half of the instructors identified syllabi as a *Planning Tool for Instructors* and a *Course Plan for Students* to be essential purposes while the purpose of *Socialization for Students* was considered less essential. The socialization syllabus purpose can include some of Thompson's (2007) notion of balancing teacher's caring side to help students' socialization while also maintaining their role as instructor. So even though the instructors identified *Socialization for Students* as low on the essential scale, they still identified both a purpose that focuses on their own instructor needs as well as a purpose that focuses on the students' needs.

Additionally, the instructors indicated the syllabus as a *Course Plan for Students* to be useful. The *Course Plan for Students* is probably the one purpose that all syllabi users (students, instructors, administrators and accreditation organizations) would have relatively the same level of interest but for different reasons. Students want to know what the assignments will be. If students are aware of what is happening in the class, it makes the instructor's job potentially easier. The administration and



accreditation organizations want the students to be informed of course goals and outcomes, which can be part of the course plan.

In addition to identifying syllabi as a *Planning Tool for Instructors* as being essential, instructors also selected syllabi as a *Contract*. The *Contract* perspective of a syllabus can be very controversial. Since the syllabus typically includes grading information and policy type of information, it would lead some to view the syllabus as a contract. Grading and policy components could be disputed and litigated; however, a course timeline or a list of topics to cover in a semester is something that might change and typically does. Calling that part of a syllabus a contract and holding it up to the same standard as a grading policy such as 'no late assignments will be accepted' may not seem practical to everyone. At a basic level, the syllabus starts to layout the student-faculty relationship but with laws such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) that can involve the classroom, the relationship structure has become more rigid and formal (Singham, 2005). The dynamics of the classroom and the pace at which the class is learning material are common and legitimate reasons to alter the course syllabus schedule. However, many institutions recommend the inclusion of a disclaimer on the syllabus indicating that it is subject to change. Over 50% of the respondents in this study agree with the inclusion of the disclaimer indicating that it is both essential and useful. The *Contract* purpose of a syllabus also relates to issues that concern administrators – such as policies and grading. Course specific policies as well as college or university level policies can become reasons for administrators to review disputed grades or disciplinary actions.

The purpose of syllabi as *Artifact for Teacher Evaluation/ Permanent Record/Evidence for Accreditation, Administration, Assessment or Curriculum Planning* had a mean score of 3.82 on a 1 to 5 scale for essential and a mean score of 3.69 for useful thus it was neither high nor low on being considered essential or useful by instructors. In Seldin's (1998) study, he indicated an increase in the importance of seven different sources of instructor evaluation over a ten year period. One of those sources of instructor evaluation was course syllabi. Though this study was not longitudinal, instructors may already be experiencing the use of syllabi in their evaluations.

Two other purposes, *Teaching Tool/Resource for Student Learning* and *Socialization for Students*, have mean scores that are around the 3.0 on the essential and useful scales, which makes them neither low nor high. Regarding the purpose of *Teaching Tool/Resource for Student Learning*, a couple of survey respondents indicated that some of the components related to resources might be on the syllabus and some are in separate documents. For this institution, most instructors did not consider the addition of resources for student learning on syllabi as essential or useful. They could be providing it in different documents.

*Socialization for Students* might not be a purpose that instructors at this institution consider to be essential or that students would have an immediate interest in but if the students' experiences in the classroom were unpleasant and filled with anxiety, both students and instructors might see how a purpose like this would help. Creating a syllabus that provides information (or communicates the information) about assessment and grading might help minimize student stress and anxiety as well as prevent grievance and complaints against faculty (Parkes, Fix & Harris, 2003). Newer instructors might need mentoring in this area to determine if socialization has benefits.

The survey results were clear that instructors at the institution do not consider the purpose of a syllabus as *Scholarship for Faculty* to be essential or useful; it was rated very low on both the 'essential' and 'useful' scales. What is not clear is why they responded that way. They might not have been exposed to

this idea of scholarship including syllabi, but as Albers (2003) describes, "the syllabus is one of the few tools available for documenting the scholarship required for integrating isolated learning activities into a coherent meaningful whole" (p. 63). If instructors consider their course documents and even the syllabus as their intellectual property in part by the amount of work they put into its creation, then they might have rated this differently. Some may be protective about who they share the documents with and how public they become because it is their intellectual property. Some institutions make their syllabi and other course documents available for all to view.

Syllabi can have and typically do have more than one purpose they are serving. As the literature shows, instructors may find additional benefits if they consider additional purposes for their syllabi.

## RECOMMENDATION FOR PRACTICE

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When instructors are creating or updating syllabi, they should review and consider the multiple purposes the syllabus document can fill and which purposes would best help them in the teaching approach. Most instructors agree that syllabi are for communication purposes but how might the document change if the instructors consider the document as an example of their scholarship. The document might include more teaching tools and resources for the students or sound more enthusiastic about the course content to help excite the students.

Part of this process for instructors is reflecting on what assumptions they have about the course content, about themselves as instructors, as well as assumptions about students. These assumptions will have an impact on the syllabus (Lowther, Stark, & Martens, 1989) and the content that they communicate and how they communicate it. Instructors need to understand or remember that what they think students want to know from a syllabus and what students actually want to know from a syllabus might not be the same. Studies (Garavalia, Hummel, Wiley & Huitt, 1999; McDonald et al., 2010) have indicated that typically the information that instructors consider the most important is not the same information that students do.

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