

Teaching Tips

A Forum for discussion and tips for advancing teaching and learning at Mona

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Special points of interest:

- The Teaching Tips Newsletter is a publication of the Centre for excellent in Teaching and Learning (CETL) at the UWI, Mona.
- The Newsletter is published once per month and provides tips for improving teaching and learning in higher education. It is available online (<http://myspot.mona.uwi.edu/CETL/>) as well as in the office of the CETL.
- If you have an area that you would like to explore using this medium, do not hesitate to contact us at the CETL.

Additional Thoughts for the Syllabus/Course Outline

Does your course outline contain the information that your students need to be successful in your course?

A course outline also called a course syllabus is a very important document. It should contain the policies, expectations and also the course assignments. Some persons use the term course outline and course syllabus interchangeably. Others prefer to think of the syllabus as the content to be covered. However, the syllabus or the course outline should be more than just a list of the topics to be studied. There are those who think about the syllabus in terms of a master plan for a course and then think about the course outline in terms of the document prepared by the classroom teacher/lecturer to be distributed to the students.

This summer you might want to think about your syllabus or course outline and decide whether it contains all the information you want to convey to your students. Here are some suggestions about how you might want to rewrite your syllabus/course outline and hopefully improve its usefulness to your students.

Teaching and Learning Philosophy

Include a very brief statement of your philosophy which provides the framework for the ensuing approach to teaching and learning might prove useful. You might also indicate to your students your commitment to democratization of education particularly at the higher education level. This could take the form of creating opportunities for them to inform the final syllabus, for instance the development of some of the rules and policies for the class. Clearly, this would mean that your syllabus is not fixed on the first day in relation to policies.



Course Description

Include a general course description. It provides some context and focus for the course.



Contact Information and Policies



It is important to include your name, office number/location, office phone number, e-mail address, and office hours (ensure that you check with your department for the number of required office hours). Some faculty members provide their home or cell phone numbers and this is certainly optional, however if you do, please ensure that you indicate the acceptable hours for contacting you using those numbers. It is also good to include some guidelines about your approach to responding to emails, particularly how many hours or days you will need to respond to different types of queries.

Course Objectives



Objectives or course learning outcomes must be included in your syllabus or course outline. These would have already been submitted and approved and can be taken from the master syllabus/course outline. Students should be able to match almost all the content taught in the class to the learning objectives/outcomes.

Required and Recommended Texts and Supplies



It is important to clarify the required and recommended texts and supplies. Please ensure that the book edition stated is the one required. Indicate other requirements including workbooks and software.

Grading System



You should provide an overview of how the grades for the course will be broken down in relation to examination and course work in the first instance but also how the individual course work pieces will be graded and how the scores will contribute to final course grade. It is also good to have copies of your grading rubrics or analytical mark scheme attached or at least available online for your students to look at and download if possible. Include any additional policies that you might have that will impact how the grade for the course will be decided.

Additional Thoughts for the Syllabus/Course Outline

Attendance Policy/Lateness/late Work

It is advisable to include specific rules concerning attendance, lateness, consequences of absence, absence due to illness and acceptable excuses. Of course, university, faculty and departmental policies should be observed in relation to the aforementioned items. Some faculty members like to include some rationale for attendance policy. This might include the importance of collaborative and cooperative learning in the class. Your policies should be consistent with the university, faculty and the department's.



Academic Integrity Policy

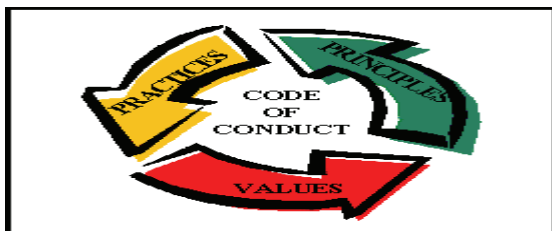
It is imperative that you provide clear statements on the importance of academic integrity in your classroom.

This should include the consequences of cheating on tests and plagiarizing papers etc. You must ensure that these policies are consistent with the institutional and faculty policies that might be available. It might also be important to include a statement that clarifies for the student what is plagiarism.



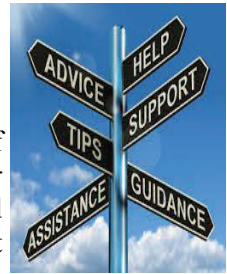
Rules of Conduct

This section might be constructed with some input from your students. However you choose to develop rules and regulations, it is important to document them for students especially as more and more electronic equipment are being taken to class. Clarify the classroom policy on the use of cell phones, iPads, laptops, tablets and other gadgets. It is also good to include the rationale for the rules and regulations governing the use of electronic equipment, for instance the disruption caused to the class. The importance of civility and respect might also be underscored and these could be linked to the monopolization of classroom discussion. If your class is important for professional practice in a particular field, you might want to indicate the demands of professionalization in the workplace. Hence, you will have every opportunity to draw on behavioural guidelines in the profession to guide classroom conduct.



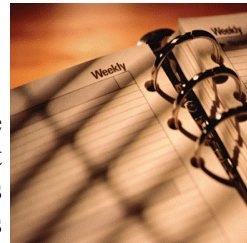
Student Assistance/Tips for Success

There is a place for the provision of academic assistance to students. For instance, if your course is associated with the Academic Support Unit (ASU) then indicate that additional assistance might be available. If you teach other sections of the course, indicate your willingness to accommodate students in other sections who might need additional tutoring/guidance in order to develop greater levels of content mastery. There might be supplemental instruction or review sessions, graduate assistants (GAs) availability for additional help etc. Additional tips for success might be included that you are aware of, for instance an approach that others have found helpful in the past. Some students might experience great levels of stress and you might also reassure them that the counselling centre is a place that they can go to seek professional help.



Tentative Schedule

It is important to provide a schedule of assignments and due dates. It should be tentative at first and as much as possible give your students an opportunity to contribute to this schedule bearing in mind that they might be doing several courses and might have several pieces of assignments due at the same time or nearly the same time.



Affidavit

This is definitely optional however, you might want to provide a section that students will tear off and return to you indicating that they have read the syllabus/course outline and they have read and understood the requirements of the syllabus/course outline. In some cases a learning contract might be included and this will call on students to commit themselves to do their part (these requirements should be clearly stated) to ensure that they are successful and of course the faculty member will also commit to doing his or her part to support the student in his or her quest to be successful.

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which features our monthly *Teaching Tips*, Newsletters and Assessment Handbook.

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