



INFORMED *AND* INSPIRED

Session 2

Jeremiah J. Sims, Ph.D., Rachel Sims, M.A. & Kayla Pezolano

www.rootedinlove.education

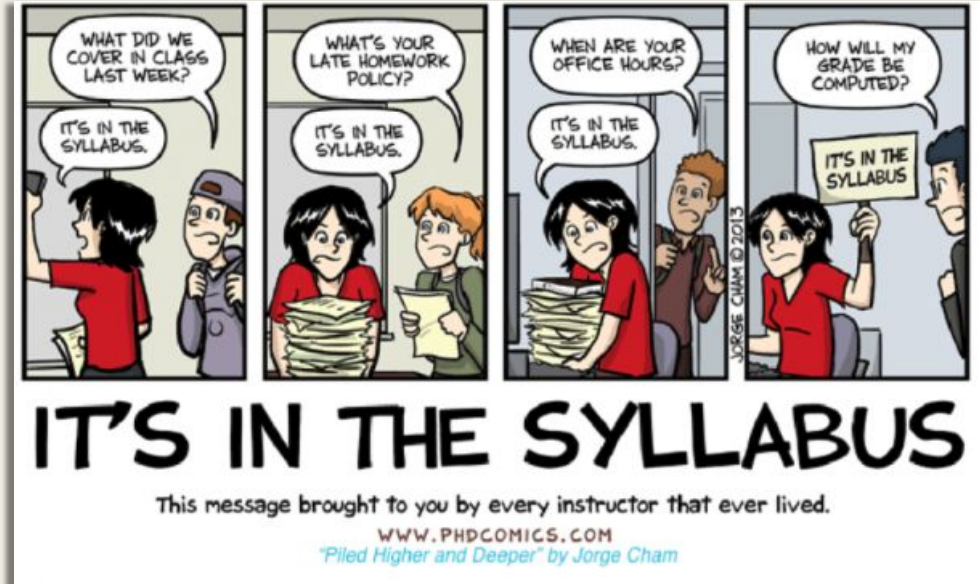




RADICALLY REIMAGINING YOUR SYLLABUS

THE GOAL

IF our goal is to engage all students in active and meaningful learning, our course syllabi and curriculum must acknowledge the experiences and identities of all people.



ROOTED
IN
LOVE

As we go through the slides, **MARK UP YOUR SYLLABUS.**



Underline/highlight words, phrases and statements that you might want to change.



Put a star next to words, phrases and statements that are welcoming, inclusive and equity-centered.

DIVERSITY

Diversity is understood to be intellectual, practical, and personal engagement with issues related to social justice and equity, particularly in relation to minority and marginalized groups such as African Americans, Latina/os, Native Americans, international peoples, women, people with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community.



- Some groups, including, students of color, non-traditional students, first generation students, working students, parents, and older students, are often especially marginalized.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Individuals can experience social categories such as race, class, and gender as overlapping and interdependent factors of discrimination or disadvantage, a phenomenon understood as *intersectionality*.



- All instructors can take steps to recognize the diverse experiences their students live and to make their classrooms more inclusive and equitable.

CULTURE OF BELONGING

competency, respectively. And, what is more, all 16 of the students who ended the year as shakers also improved in that math-specific and CS concept inventories, respectively, which further strengthens the proposed corollary between the critical contextualization of STEM and increases in STEM competency. This is important because it suggests that there is a positive relationship between these students' feelings of belongingness, in that, in contradistinction to ubiquitous, negative stereotypes of Black male failure in school and in STEM specifically, they succeeded in STEM when working with a group of peers who were also excelling in STEM and who were deeply invested in devising ways to critically apply STEM for social justice. According to the YPSS, 16 out of



- **Critically read your syllabus and note if and where you address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.**

KNOWING BETTER, DOING BETTER

Taking a closer look:



The next level of improving your course involves reviewing the descriptive sections (the introduction, objectives, course format, policies, etc.) of your syllabus and focusing on how the course climate you create and the pedagogy you use does or does not address issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

- **This focus makes a greater impact on student's understanding of how these issues will be addressed in the course.**

BUILD ON FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

Express to your students that you are interested in getting to know them. Who are they?
Where do they come from?
Why are they in your class?
What background experiences do they have?

- **Students don't care about what you know until they know that you care!**

Clearly indicate your availability for consultation outside of class to students by including contact information, office hours, and a welcoming statement in syllabi; many students from marginalized groups assume they should not bother instructors.

DEVELOP A CARING CLASSROOM

BE AUTHENTIC

Add a personal touch to the syllabus to let students know that you are human and approachable; for students who feel less welcome at a university, such statements can make instructors seem more accessible and approachable.



- **Create a class climate in which students feel comfortable critiquing the instruction, including the selection of topics, materials, and pedagogy.**



INCLUSION

Include a clear statement of your teaching philosophy in your syllabi, particularly how it addresses issue of diversity, inclusion, and overall engagement.



Part of creating an open climate begins with the instructor's attitude and statements early in the semester.



An open climate can be reinforced through structured activities used at strategic points in the semester



Such activities can increase trust in the classroom, as well as improve student learning and student perceptions of instructional quality.

AVOID ESSENTIALIZING!!

- Students will seek help when they are struggling in class;
- Students from certain groups are less (or more) intellectual or motivated than students from other groups;
- Students from certain backgrounds are poor writers;
- Poor writing suggests limited intellectual ability;
- Older students or students with disabilities are slower learners;
- Students whose cultural affiliation is not European-related are not native English speakers (e.g. a student whose family is Chinese is not necessarily from China);
- A student affiliated with a particular group is an expert on issues related to that group;

■ **Consider your own potentially problematic assumptions about students.**

AVOID ESSENTIALIZING!!

- A student affiliated with a particular group is an expert on issues related to that group;
- A student affiliated with a particular group feels comfortable speaking about their own experiences or the experiences of other people in that group;
- All students in a particular group share the same views on any issue;
- Students only relate to characters or historical figures that resemble them;
- Students from certain groups are more likely to have any particular personality characteristic, approach to conflict, political views, or otherwise stereotypical characteristic.



CONSIDERING “ACADEMIC INTEGRITY”



- Is your plagiarism statement accusatory?
 - *Does it assume or read like students want to cheat?*
- How can you reimagine and reword it so that assumes students' best intentions and ensures they are clear about the message?

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Acknowledge and respect difference
- Center equity and justice
- Consider who is and who is not included in course material
- Frame difference
- Include multiple perspectives
- Invite students to co-create knowledge
- Create agency-inciting opportunities
- Consider and interweave student expertise
- Be pliable: sometimes you have to be a student, too

■ **We have to strive for radical inclusivity!**



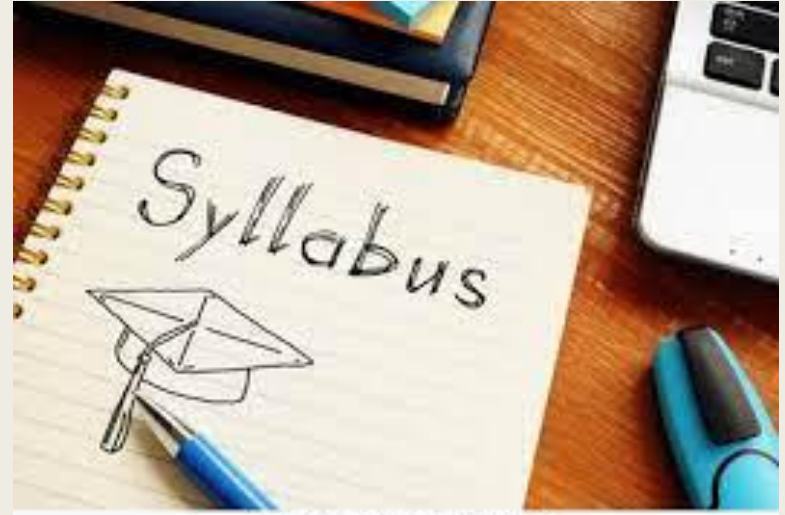
Example Syllabus Statements



Sensitive Subjects Warning

For classes with sensitive and controversial topics, include a paragraph like this in your syllabi.

“Many of us may get triggered while in this class because engaging with academic material can evoke strong emotions. For some of us, the emotions are evoked because the issues are very real in our everyday lives. Others of us will get triggered because we are just finding this stuff out and it upsets us. Then there are some that will get triggered because we feel guilt or shame for not having known or understood how things have been working in our society. All of these feelings are okay. It’s how we handle them that matters. I hope we can challenge ourselves to pay attention to our emotions, consider what’s triggering us, listen to and respect one another, and share this honestly with the class (or with me in private if you prefer). This is how authentic learning and growth take place.”



Inclusivity Statement

Include a paragraph like this in your syllabi.

Every student in this classroom, regardless of personal history or identity categories, is a member of this group. Your experiences are important, and you should share them as they become relevant to our class. No student in this class is ever expected or believed to speak for all members of their group(s).

In this classroom, you have the right to determine your own identity. You have the right to be called by whatever name you wish. You have the right to be referred to by whatever pronouns you wish. You have the right to adjust those things at any point in your education.

If you find that there are aspects of course instruction, subject matter, or class environment that result in barriers to your inclusion, please contact me privately without fear of reprisal.



Respectful Dialogue

Include a paragraph like this in your syllabi.

“Everyone thinks; it is our nature to do so. But much of our thinking, left to itself, is biased, distorted, partial, uninformed or down-right prejudiced. Yet the quality of our life and that of what we produce, make, or build depends on the quality of our thought. Shoddy thinking is costly, both in money and in quality of life. Excellence in thought, however, must be systematically cultivated.” -Linda Elder and Richard Paul, *Critical Thinking: Teaching Students How to Study and Learn*

In this class, I would like us to cultivate “excellence of thought” by creating a learning environment that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and experiences, and that honors all our identities (including race, gender, class, veteran status, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.). With this in mind, let’s discuss what we all need in order to slow down, recognize our own positions (including unexamined biases), and take another look at someone’s ideas, experiences, or values. How can we listen and hear different opinions, even if we don’t accept them or understand them, with an open heart and mind? In this class, let’s practice these skills together.



Syllabus Reflection Questions through Students' Eyes

Use these Syllabus Reflection questions yourself to see your syllabus through your students' eyes or have them respond to these questions after they've seen your syllabus.

- What do you see when you look at the syllabus? How does it make you feel?
- What is most strongly communicated in this syllabus? In other words, what's your main take-away?
- How clearly is the instructor's personal teaching philosophy stated? What is clear to you about what the instructor values and what is important in this class?
- What resources for course success and overall college success are included?
- Does the syllabus emphasize inclusion, student-centeredness, and commitment to your success as a student? How so?

Radically Reimagining Your Syllabus

- Use the term “**Help Sessions**” or “**Student Hours**” instead of “Office Hours,” since some students think “Office Hours” means “I’m working; don’t bother me.”
- Use “**We**” in syllabus instead of “Students” or “You”: *We respect each other’s ideas, etc.*
- Include **pronoun preferences** and how students should/can address you (e.g., *I’m Emily Moss, and I’m your instructor for this course. My pronouns are she/her/hers, and you are free to call me Emily.*)
- Include **links to important student resources** in your syllabus and on your Canvas site (e.g., Food Pantry, Veterans Services, EOPS, Scholarship Office, Student Wellness Counseling, Tutoring, DSS, etc.).
- Spend half an hour **fixing up the classrooms** you’re in: What’s posted on the bulletin boards? Is there trash that’s been sitting around for semesters? Consider putting up flyers or student posters and helping to make the space more welcoming.

Share out!

Did you realize anything about your syllabus?

What can you build on?

What can you improve?





Thank you!

jeremiah@rootedinlove.education

rachel@rootedinlove.education

kayla@rootedinlove.education



Further Reflection Questions

Instructor Self-Assessment of the Syllabus and Class
Spend some time considering the following questions.

How will my class and/or syllabus...

- **incorporate processes of self-reflection and self-critique (for both students and you)?**
- **implement a commitment to understanding and respecting different points of view?**
- **implement processes to engage with others humbly and authentically, from a place of learning?**
- **incorporate social justice consciousness and education?**
- **incorporate multiple narratives to decenter and question traditionally dominant narratives?**
- **incorporate students' background knowledge and honor different lived experiences?**
- **engage students' feedback of your development and implementation of the course?**

Thanks to Veronica Keiffer-Lewis, Ed.D, for her workshop "The Equity-Centered Classroom," from which most of these ideas came. Additional thanks to USC's Center for Urban Education, and DVC Librarian Emily Moss.