

SYLLABUS DESIGN FOR LEARNING

10 elements for creating a clear, meaningful and useful learner-centred syllabus

CTSI Tune Into Teaching Workshop Series

July 14, 2022

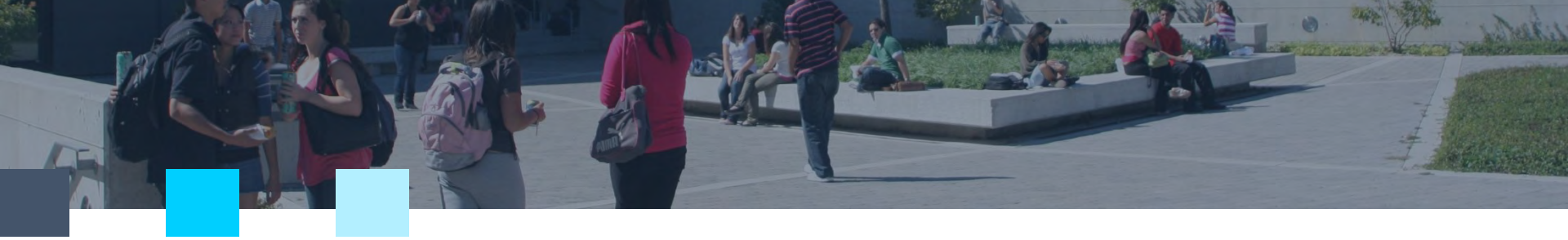


UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

CENTRE FOR TEACHING SUPPORT & INNOVATION

Checking in:
**On this sheep
scale, how
do you feel
today?**





Land Acknowledgment

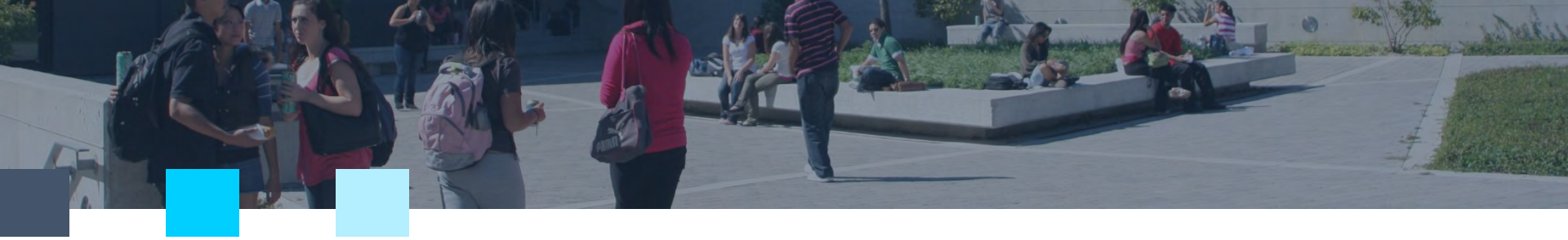
I wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

What commitments did you make during National Indigenous History Month?

Access Check

We understand access to be a shared responsibility between everyone in this space. We will strive to create an accessible space that reduces the need for you to disclose a disability or impairment for the purposes of gaining an accommodation. In doing this together, we strive to welcome disability, and the changes it brings, into our space.

- Is there anything about the virtual space that we should address now?
- Are there any other access needs that might affect your participation in the session that we could address?



Learning Outcomes

By the end of the this session, you should be able to:

- explore a range of considerations for integrating resiliency in effective syllabus design;
- adapt strategies to leverage your syllabus as a tool for learning;
- review key components of a syllabus.

Today's Resources: OneDrive shareable document; sample syllabus; syllabus checklist

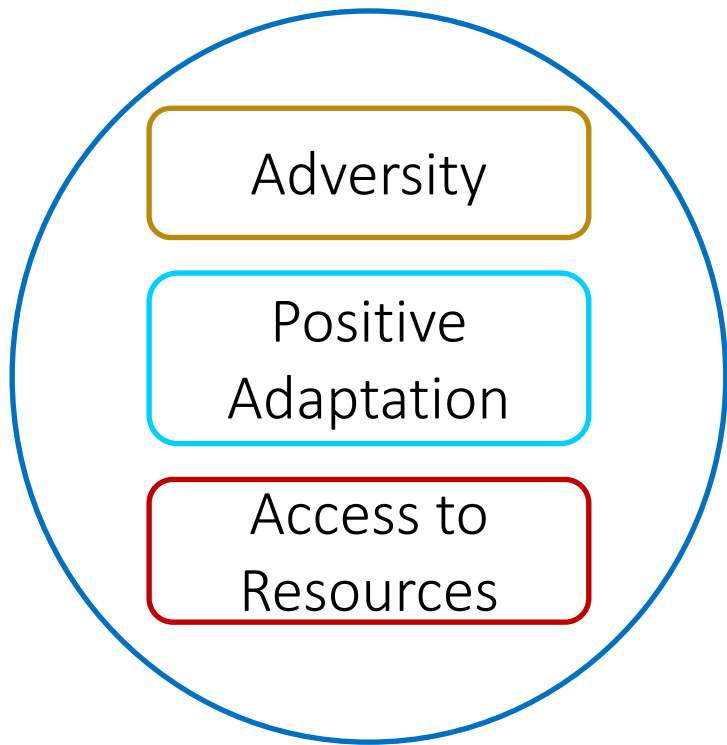


The Importance of Resilience in Course Design



Resilience Defined

(from Resiliency Series)



- Resilience is the capacity to meet and positively adapt to adversity and the capacity to bounce back from setbacks.
- Resilience is not just an individual capacity – it is also the capacity of a community to provide relevant and accessible resources of support.

(Ye, Strietholt, Blömeke, 2021; Holdsworth, Turner, and Scott-Young, 2018; Ungar, 2016; Martin, 2013.)



Integrating Resiliency to Create a Positive Course Culture

- Resilient course design builds a constructive and supportive “course culture” that values:
 - mastery over performance
 - learning as a process that includes practice and failure
 - learning as a collective experience
 - the capacity to seek help before the moment of crisis
 - the capacity to share, receive and apply feedback



Strategies for Fostering Academic Resilience

Metacognition is thinking about one's own thinking – the process of planning, monitoring, and assessing one's own learning.



Metacognition

Resourcefulness is the ability to problem-solve and find ways to overcome academic challenges.

Resourcefulness



Self-Efficacy



Self-efficacy is a personal belief in one's capability to organize and execute effective action for academic engagement.



Mental Set

In the shareable doc, reflect on:

- What could be done before a course starts to help develop academic resilience?
- How could you leverage your syllabus as a tool to build your students' academic resilience?



Integrating Resilience through Intentional Course Design

Intentional course design **creates space** for students to process what they are learning and reflect on what and how they are learning

**How we hope the syllabus will be
perceived.**



A photograph of a dense forest. The ground is covered in a thick layer of green moss and fallen branches. Tall, thin trees stand in the background, and the overall atmosphere is quiet and somewhat mysterious.

How students may perceive the syllabus.

Syllabus for communicating beyond expectations and policies

- **Essential information:** administrative details, course description, learning outcomes, required readings, policy statements, etc.
 - **Resiliency: Are mental health supports mentioned?**
- **Attitude:** tone, voice, placement of elements
 - **Resiliency: Are you using supportive and inclusive language about mental health?**
- **Format:** length, design (e.g., graphic, liquid, interactive), etc.
 - **Resiliency: Are mental health supports mentioned early on?**
- **Navigation:** how to use the syllabus, how it connects to other course elements, etc.
 - **Resiliency: Is the conversation about mental health normalized?**
- **Models:** negotiated syllabus, contractual syllabus, etc.



In the chat:

- What are some strategies to **communicate empathy** in a syllabus?
- How can we make a syllabus more **student-centred**?

Voice and Choice in Syllabus Design

Voice: Does the syllabus sound like you?

- Bring your authentic self to the syllabus narrative
- Use the first-person to empathize and connect
- Use humour and colloquial language (if that's your style!)

Choice: Does the syllabus consider the reader?

- Will students feel like they have a sense of agency in the course?
- Do the course policies make assumptions about what students want or need out of the course?

us history II

HI 112-02
HI 112-H2

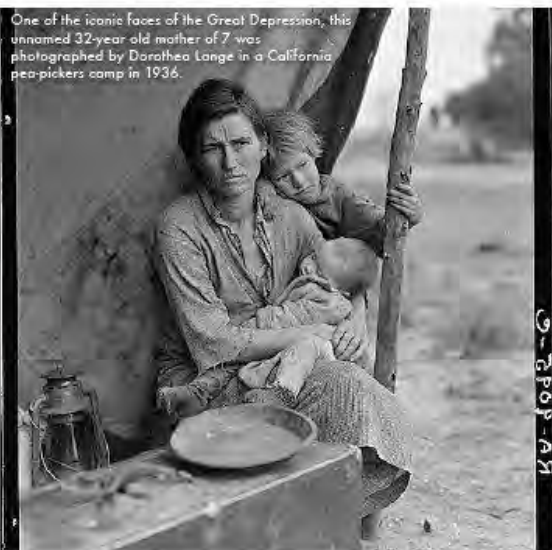
SPRING 2011

MWF 9-30 AM

ROOM TBA

WORCESTER
STATE
UNIVERSITY

One of the iconic faces of the Great Depression, this unnamed 32-year-old mother of 7 was photographed by Dorothea Lange in a California pea-pickers camp in 1936.



Course Description and Objectives

In this course, we explore US history since the end of the Civil War & Reconstruction

You will learn about broad themes in the history of modern America, including immigration, race and ethnicity, social and political reform, mobility and population growth, contested meanings of freedom, industrialization, cycles of prosperity and recession, popular culture, modernity, and rights movements. You will also develop ways of thinking historically through critical analysis of primary and secondary sources; setting events, documents and people in their historical

contexts; and crafting interpretations and historical narratives from the "raw material" of the past. In this course, you should expect to do much more than memorize facts or dates – you will be busy actively doing history, not passively learning about history.

Since it fulfills your "Constitutions" requirement, the course will also cover relevant aspects of the US and Massachusetts state constitutions. This is in accordance with MA General Laws, Chapter 73, Section 2A, which reads: "In all state colleges the constitutions of the United States and of the commonwealth shall be taught as

required subjects for the purpose of fitting the students, morally and intellectually, for the duties of citizenship and of school teaching."

What's in this syllabus

How to take this course	2
Course Requirements	2
Grading Scale & Syllabus	3
Details of the "Document Duel"	4
Policies and Resources	5

course details

Website: <http://tonahangen.com/us/us2>

LASC: USW, CON

Required texts: James West Davidson et al, *Experience History: Interpreting America's Past* Volume 2, From 1865 (McGraw Hill 2011), ISBN: 978-0077368326

David Emory Shi and Holly Mayer, *For the Record: A Documentary History of America: From Reconstruction through Contemporary Times* 4th edition (WW Norton), ISBN: 978-0393934045

how to take this course

It's not what you "got" in this course, it's how deep you go. People take a US History survey for lots of reasons, usually variations on "it's required." Think about why someone has decided that learning this material might be essential to your college experience, and what that means for you personally.

It is entirely possible to do well in the class without being transformed by your newfound historical knowledge, but it would be a darn shame. I like to think that this (and indeed, any) course operates on three levels. Imagine we are standing on the seashore; the course is the ocean. Enter with me and go as deep as you dare...

wading

you need the basic outlines of US history; the highlights, the main characters & ideas, the surface-level knowledge

There's nothing wrong with staying in the shallows; this approach may work for you if this is likely to be your only history course, or if you've never taken one before & it's all new

"Waders" will tend to assume that textbook, documents, and professor are mutually reinforcing, telling basically the same story. Waders are mainly concerned with WHAT happened in the past.

marking

you have a grasp of the basics and are ready to think historically and explore what's below the surface

Perhaps you've taken US history before, or are a beginning history major. You already know that history is a conversation among differing and/or contradictory perspectives.

"Snorkelers" notice historical inconsistencies and they respectfully challenge assumptions through lively debate. Snorkelers are interested in HOW & WHY things happened as they did.

submerging

you want to go deeper into the past, using the cognitive equipment & tools of history as a focused critical thinker

Experienced? You are well aware of historical controversy and how historical knowledge is constructed. You actively seek alternative sources, interpretations, and voices.

"Divers" don't take any of the course's structure or content as natural or inevitable. They see (and then fill) the course's gaps. They are curious, passionate, and concerned with WHY HISTORY MATTERS.

Course Requirements

This course involves reading, writing, and group discussion. It is fast-paced; you will need to absorb textbook material on your own outside of class. You will write the equivalent of 30 pages over the course of the term. You will need to put in consistent effort throughout the whole semester. You'll need to have (or learn) basic library and online research skills. You will need to speak up in class and demonstrate active learning, not passive absorption.

Learning is not a spectator sport.

Attendance and Daily Work (20%) I take attendance in each class. You should be on time and ready for discussion each day. I expect class discussion will be lively, respectful, substantive, and that you will have done that day's assigned reading before class. There's no such thing as an "excused absence" – you're either in class, or you're not. Daily Work may include pop quizzes, discussion questions, in-class short writings, and class participation. These cannot be made up, since they depend on being present in class.

Exams (30%) We will have 4 exams. The last one will take place during the final exam period, but will be the equivalent of the other three exams (not a cumulative final). Your lowest exam is dropped; **there are no makeup exams.**

You'll note at this point that fully half of your grade involves showing up prepared for class, participating intelligently, and taking at least 3 of the 4 exams. The other half of your grade is based on original written work and research.

Document Duel (30%) – 2 double-spaced pages, no more and no less. You can turn in one of these each week on Fridays. They are short papers that give you practice working with primary sources and developing historical interpretations. You can safely skip one week, since there are 11 possible Fridays (but you will get the extra credit if you do all 11). They need to be turned in DURING CLASS or uploaded to Digital Dropbox BEFORE CLASSTIME on Friday. There are NO makeups or late work accepted on these short papers. See p. X for more information on the DDs.

Projects (20%) – you will do two projects of your own original work, each of which involves planning ahead, research, and well-crafted, evidence-based historical writing. For the first project you will compare two documents from the *For the Record* reader, and then write a paper that uses these documents as evidence for a historical argument. For the second project, you'll use and then improve a student-made packet of sources for studying a recent event in American history. Each of these projects is worth 10% of your final grade.

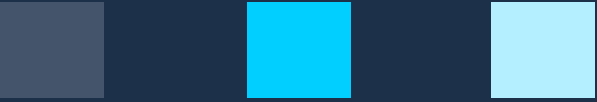


This President campaigned as a Republican, a Democrat and for the Progressive Party... just not all in the same election. He's also responsible for a canal, a war, a national park, and the most popular toy ever.

Your Instructor: Dr. Tona Hangen
Office: Sullivan 327-B
Phone extension: 8688
email: thangen@worchester.edu
Email is the preferred way to reach me

Office Hours (signup posted on door)
M 2-3, W 1:30-2:30, F 10:30-11:30,
and by appointment

Example of [Graphic Syllabus](#) from Tona Hangen, Professor of U.S. History, Worcester State University



Using the Syllabus as a Learning Tool: 10 Considerations





Using the Syllabus as a Learning Tool:

#1 Place your course in a broader learning context

- How does this course fit into the broader department undergraduate/graduate program?
- How does this course fit into your broader disciplinary field?
- Why is it important for your students to take this course/learn this content?

TIP: Share with students your enthusiasm for the course content.



Using the Syllabus as a Learning Tool: **#2 Locate the course within your frame of experience and expertise**

- How does this course link to your own research interests and/or disciplinary expertise?
- How does your area of specialization inform your approach to this course?

TIP: Students want to know about your own research and experience working in the discipline. You can treat your students as partners!



Using the Syllabus as a Learning Tool:

#3 Define student success in the course

- What behaviours and/or habits of mind should a student demonstrate/practice if they are to be a successful learner of this topic?
- What should it *look like/sound like* to be a fully engaged student in this class?

TIP: Model for students what an academic discussion looks like.



Quick Check-in:

Helping students build effective habits (learning to learn)

Take a few minutes to reflect and share in the **chat**:

- What does success look like? What does failure look like?
- How do you communicate that struggles and failures are part of learning?
- How do you teach students how to negotiate effort and time investment in the course?
- How do you reach ALL students, not just the high-achievers?



Using the Syllabus as a Learning Tool:

#4 Identify and describe the instructional methods and assessments to be used in the course (i.e., not just the evaluation methods)

Lecture? Small group discussion? In-class writing and reflection? Collaborative projects? Practical experiments? Design projects? Case studies? Field work/community work? Close textual analysis? Use/design/review of digital media? Online posts? Oral presentations?

TIP: Make no assumptions about students' previous engagement with different pedagogical practices.



Using the Syllabus as a Learning Tool:

#5 Define and describe key learning activities and associated expectations for preparedness and performance,

- In-class participation/interaction
- Online and/or tutorial participation
- Processes for collaborative work
- Interactions with members of the teaching team (e.g. Teaching Assistants, Lab Techs, etc.)

TIP: Identify what students can expect from you! Link expectations to course policies.



Using the Syllabus as a Learning Tool:

#6 Identify all essential learning resources (people and tools) related to skills development, not just content mastery

- Information on research methods in your field
- Disciplinary standards and expectations
- Writing/math/academic skills support
- Technical requirements

TIP: Normalize the use of resources by talking about them from the beginning of the course and on an ongoing basis.



Quick check-in:
**What are essential learning resources
(people and tools) related to skills
development, not just content
mastery**

In the **shareable document**, please list any resources or services that you include on your syllabus and you refer students to based on categories:

- Academic skills
- Health and wellness
- Community engagement
- Careers, networking and transferable skills
- Sports and clubs
- Equity, diversity and inclusion
- Edtech and IT supports



Using the Syllabus as a Learning Tool:

#7 Provide students with information that will support their learning outside the lecture hall/lab/seminar

What does participation look like during class time?
What does engagement look like outside of class?

Provide instructions/expectations and **strategies** for:

- online learning environments, including any specialized tools or software;
- tutorial and/or lab and/or field work;
- library work or other research endeavours
- receiving and applying feedback

TIP: Be explicit and realistic in estimating effort, resources, and difficulty of different course requirements, engagements and assessments.



Using the Syllabus as a Learning Tool:

#8 Provide guidance around self-regulation (time management, stress management)

- Be clear about deadlines, but also *timelines* for getting assignments started
- Provide signposts for moving the work along
- Talk about study skills; underline importance of “interleaving”

(<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-interleaving-effect-mixing-it-up-boosts-learning/>)

TIP: Discuss opportunities for productive successes and productive failures. Speak to your own learning journey.



Using the Syllabus as a Learning Tool:

#9 Provide a framework for effective skills development

- In weekly schedule, indicate what the key takeaways or themes are per week or per instructional unit (i.e. not just the titles of the articles to be read or chapters to be covered).
- Model the thinking processes involved in your field.
- Discuss with students what weekly lessons will look like.
- Explicitly identify hard and soft skills that students may acquire.

TIP: Get students to reflect on the skills they would like to achieve (or have achieved).



Using the Syllabus as a Learning Tool: **#10 Design the document/ module with the reader/learner in mind**

- Clear headings, chunking of information, lots of white space, not too crowded, not too much text
- Visually interesting with quotes, tables, images
- Consider section headings that guide students: *What you'll learn along the way, How you'll you know you're learning, What you'll be doing, A few things to help you be successful*

TIP: Don't forget to check your documents/digital pages for accessibility compliance.

ADDITIONAL TIPS:

Approach syllabus design as a team sport

- Liaison Librarian
- Library Syllabus Service
- Copyright Office
- Faculty Liaison
- Learning Strategist

Consult CTSI Guide!

- Statements on:
 - academic integrity
 - accessibility
 - Turnitin.com

Stay flexible

- be ready to pivot across modalities (from in-person to online)
- create a culture of feedback to respond to student needs
- continue the conversation about academic resilience throughout the course



Syllabus Review / Self-Assessment



ACTIVITY:

Syllabus Review or Self-assessment



Instructions:

1. Independently read the sample syllabus or your own syllabus while keeping your students' perspective in mind.
2. Read through the “**Checklist for Course Syllabus.**”
3. Complete the Checklist for your own or the sample syllabus.
4. Make additional notes on your observations.

ACTIVITY DEBRIEF:

3-2-1 Syllabus Review



Take a few minutes to reflect and share in the **chat**:

- 3 strengths in the sample syllabus
- 2 opportunities to enhance further
- 1 unexpected learning

Students as Partners in Syllabus Exploration



Closing Reflection:

Engaging students in syllabus exploration

What **in-person, synchronous (webinar) and asynchronous strategies** do you use to engage students in exploring your syllabus in order to enhance their academic resiliency?



THANK YOU!



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