UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

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May 13, 2009

Elise Miller-Hooks
Chair, University Senate
1100 Marie Mount Hall
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742-7541

Dear Dr. Miller-Hooks:

In reviewing proposals for CORE courses, members of the CORE committee frequently question the lack of or incompleteness of information about assessment and grading provided to students on course syllabi. At the May 4, 2009 CORE Committee meeting, all three proposals reviewed lacked grading information, and committee members discussed these concerns at some length. They noted that there are several different documents that mention assessment and grading in relation to course syllabi, but that the references are very general.

In view of the ongoing implementation of the Strategic Plan including the work of the General Education Task Force, as well as the Campus's continuing efforts on learning outcome assessment and the current review of the Policy on Arbitrary and Capricious Grading, Committee members suggest that it may be helpful to have available a consolidated document/model that is more specific concerning assessment and grading information to be included on course syllabi.

The CORE Committee believes that this would be especially helpful in the proposal and review of general education courses. Both individual members of the CORE Committee and faculty who have presented CORE course proposals think it would be helpful to faculty and to academic units. Because the campus policy/guidelines are so general, some of the individual academic units have developed their own guidelines.

Most faculty serving on the Senate CORE Committee represent academic units where there is clear guidance on assessment and grading information to be included on syllabi. They notice quickly when such information is missing from syllabi included with CORE proposals. They express concern about this in the interest of providing students with clear and reliable information to help them succeed in their courses and in the interest of transparency that serves to protect our faculty and institution. More clarity leads to fewer grievances. Many consider the syllabus to be a contract with students.

On behalf of the Senate CORE Committee, I request that the Senate Executive Committee consider the following questions for referral to the appropriate Senate Committee(s) for review:

- Would it benefit students, faculty, and academic units to have campus policy/guidelines provide more specific guidance for inclusion of assessment and grading information on course syllabi?
- If so, what policies/guidelines are recommended and for which courses (general education, all undergraduate, all courses, other)?

University Grading Policies and Guidelines

University policies and guidelines provide only very general mention of grading information to be included on syllabi. Included below are references to campus documents that bear on this matter.

Syllabus Guidelines (Faculty Affairs Web site)
http://www.faculty.umd.edu/teach/syllabus.html
Three of the items on this document appear to pertain to assessment and grading information:

- Grading procedures
(This is a link with no subtext in the "Syllabus Guidelines" document.)
It links to "Grading Procedures"
http://www.faculty.umd.edu/teach/grading.htm
> This document provides no information or guidelines for what is included on a course syllabus.

It links to "Examination and Course Assessment Guidelines"
http://www.faculty.umd.edu/teach/examination.html
> This document provides no information or guidelines for what is included on a course syllabus.

- Due dates for papers/projects and exam dates including final exams (if a 100 or 200 level course, you are encouraged to have graded work available for your review by the dates for Early Warning Grades.) (See Religious Observances and Rescheduling Classes and Examinations.)
> These documents provide no guidance about what assessment or grading information is to be included on a course syllabus.

- Expectations of students
(This heading has no subtext and provides no links.)
> This statement is sufficiently open-ended to allow for information that may be quite general or quite concrete. It does not appear to require that grading rubrics for assignments or a grading scheme for the course be provided on the syllabus.

University Course Policies & Practices Explanation and Summary (VPAC Web site)
http://www.vpac.umd.edu/policies.html#syllabi
This document includes the following "Guidelines for Syllabi"

- Required components for syllabi considered in the course approval process (approved by the Senate Programs, Curricula & Courses Committee in December 2001, to be updated as needed):
  1. A description of the rationale and overall theme of the course, with an overview of course content.
  2. A statement of the objectives, including what kinds of skills and/or knowledge the students are to take away from the course.
  3. A list of co- and pre-requisites, if applicable.
  4. Examples of texts, readings, or other resource materials.
  5. An overview of the course structure, format, and pedagogies. For example, would the course involve lecture; discussion; laboratories; student presentations; written examinations; oral examinations; papers; homework assignments; or use of the internet or other IT resources for research, chat rooms, or listservs.
  6. A statement of student-faculty interaction opportunities, including, for example, length of office hours, email and telephone access, review sessions, and study groups, *if these are important for defining the nature of the course*.
  7. A general statement of the grading scheme.
  8. The syllabus presented to the class will, of course, include additional information, such as the name of the TA, office hours, grading schemes, policies on make up exams, policies on academic dishonesty, disabilities and religious holidays, and specific readings and assignments.

Examples of Syllabus Guideline References to Assessments and Grading Policy

BSOS: http://www.bsos.umd.edu/for-faculty-and-staff/faculty-resource-guide/faculty-responsibilities-inside-the-classroom-/course-syllabus.aspx

CTE Teaching Resource Guide: http://cte.umd.edu/TRG.pdf
Scroll to page 9 for "Syllabus Construction"

Please let me know if you have questions or if I may be of assistance. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

William M. Rivera
Professor and Chair,
University Senate Committee on CORE

Encl.

Cc: Ellin K. Scholnick, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs
       Donna B. Hamilton, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs and Dean for
              Undergraduate Studies
       Reka S. Montfort, Executive Secretary and Director, University Senate

Faculty Handbook of Policies & Resources
Maintained by the Office of Faculty Affairs

Faculty Personnel Procedures & Forms	Research & Teaching	Information for New Faculty	University Policies & Organization	Search This Site
2009-2010 APT Procedures Manual & Forms	Faculty Mentoring	Faculty Awards	Library Services for Faculty	IT Services for Faculty

Syllabus Guidelines

On the first day of class, instructors are expected to distribute a course syllabus. Although there will be variations, this document should contain the following information:

- The course and section number and title.

- Name of instructor, office phone number and address, email address.

- A general description of the course, its location and meeting times.

- Required textbooks (where used). Include ISBN numbers if available (See also Ordering Textbooks).

- Course outline, if possible by week.

- Grading procedures.

- Due dates for papers/projects and exam dates including final exams (if a 100 or 200 level course, you are encouraged to have graded work available for your review by the dates for Early Warning Grades. (See Religious Observances and Rescheduling Classes and Examinations)

- Expectations of students.

- Attendance policy including handling of religious holidays, inclement weather, excused absences, makeup exam. Specify the nature of the in-class participation expected and the effects of absences on the student's grade.

- Office hours (See Faculty Expectations).

- Reminders about academic integrity including Honors Pledge.

- Arrangements for students with disabilities.

- How courses will be continued/completed in case of an emergency that will close the University for an extended period of time.

ADDENDUM: Because commercial firms have been paying people to take notes and course materials which firms copyright and sell, faculty members may wish to take preventive measures. Legally, course materials, which exist in a tangible medium such as written or recorded lectures, Power Point presentations, study materials and tests are copyright protected and the ability to copy and distribute materials unless it is for personal use and with instructor's permission, is illegal. Faculty may wish to inform students on the course syllabus that the lectures and course matter are copyright protected and that written instructor consent must be obtained for reproduction and distribution of lecture notes and course material, especially for commercial use. Materials may be marked copyrighted e.g., © 2001 Smith. For more information please go to **Student Unauthorized Distribution or Commercial Selling of Course Materials or Notes**.

▶ Back to Teaching Policies & Guidelines main page.

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