

“Fleshing Out” a Syllabus.

A familiar task facing faculty every semester is the preparation of a course syllabus to be distributed to their students. The syllabus can be a “bare bones” document containing little other than information concerning the required course text and materials, reading and other assignments, office hours, a statement regarding class attendance, and a class/examination schedule. Alternatively, a syllabus may be a more comprehensive document that plays a significant role in facilitating classroom management by insuring that students are aware of their responsibilities and of the instructor’s standards for acceptable behavior. Laying the proper groundwork in the syllabus can help avoid problems as well as provide support for remedial actions when problems arise.

While it may seem superfluous to some, a clause concerning academic honesty in general should be considered. Incidents involving academic misconduct may be dealt with by the instructor either as a non-disciplinary matter using academic sanctions, coupled with notice of such action to the Vice President for Student Affairs (Article IX.A, Code of Student Conduct, *Student Handbook*, p. 116); and/or as a disciplinary matter using Code of Student Conduct procedures (Article IX.B, Code of Student Conduct, *Student Handbook*, p. 117). A provision in the syllabus pointing students to the definition and examples of academic misconduct found in the Code will place them on fair notice regarding the University’s standards. It should also eliminate appeals based on a student’s assertion of ignorance that certain conduct was prohibited. A sample provision in this regard is as follows:

Academic Honesty. Your written assignments and examinations must be your own work. Academic misconduct will not be tolerated. To insure that you are aware of what is considered academic misconduct, you should review carefully the definition and examples provided in Article III, Code of Student Conduct, *Student Handbook*, p. 93. If you have any questions in this regard, please contact me without delay.

The listing of types of academic misconduct in the Code includes “[s]ubmitting in fulfillment of academic requirements, if contrary to course regulations, any work previously presented, submitted, or used in any course.” While the unacceptability of this conduct may seem obvious, students may not understand it without being expressly told. You may impose such a limitation as follows:

Use of Prior Work. You may not submit in fulfillment of requirements in this course any work submitted, presented, or used by you in any other course.

An aspect of academic misconduct that deserves special consideration is plagiarism. While the general “Academic Honesty” clause set out above makes it clear that plagiarism is prohibited, there is another provision that a faculty member may want to add to the syllabus. The University subscribes to Turnitin, a plagiarism detection service. Information concerning this

service can be found at <http://www.uah.edu/library/turnitin/index.htm>. University policy requires all faculty using Turnitin to include a specific provision in their syllabus, course policies, or assignments. Such a provision might read as follows:

Consent to Use of Turnitin.com. UAH is committed to the fundamental values of preserving academic honesty as defined in the *Student Handbook* (7.III.A, Code of Student Conduct). The instructor reserves the right to utilize electronic means to help prevent plagiarism. Students agree that by taking this course all assignments are subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com. Assignments submitted to Turnitin.com will be included as source documents in Turnitin.com's restricted access database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service, as well as additional information about the company, are described at www.uah.edu/library/turnitin.

Classroom behavior is another area where an appropriate syllabus provision can be helpful by expanding the options available to an instructor. Without a provision informing students that civility and respect for others' rights in the classroom constitute an academic requirement for the course, misconduct would have to be dealt with primarily through the student disciplinary process as a "disruption of University activity" (Article III.N., Code of Student Conduct, *Student Handbook*, p. 94). However, an appropriate syllabus provision placing the student on notice will allow the instructor to address such misconduct through academic sanctions. The following provision would accomplish this objective:

Classroom Conduct. All students in the class must treat others with civility and respect and conduct themselves during class sessions in a way that does not unreasonably interfere with the opportunity of other students to learn. Failure to comply with this requirement may result in points being deducted from a student's final numerical average, up to a maximum of 15 points.

Some instructors may wish to take steps to preserve their copyright in class lectures and original materials. See *LegalWatch* Vol. 6-03, p. 2. Those instructors should consider insertion of notice in the syllabus informing students about possible action under the Code of Student Conduct for their unauthorized use of notes and materials. Such notice may also lay the groundwork for possible legal action. The following provision is suggested:

Copyright <Insert faculty member's name here.> <Insert year here.> All federal and state copyrights in my lectures and course materials are reserved by me. You are authorized to take notes in class for your own personal use and for no other purpose. You are not authorized to record my lectures or to make any commercial use of them or to provide them to anyone else <Insert "", other than

students currently enrolled in this course,” here, if so desired.>
without my prior written permission. In addition to legal sanctions
for violations of copyright law, students found in violation of these
prohibitions may be subject to University disciplinary action under
the Code of Student Conduct.

The content of a comprehensive syllabus will necessarily depend upon the subject matter
and the pedagogical devices used by the instructor. With the exception of the provision relating
to use of Turnitin, there is no legal or policy requirement for the inclusion of any of the
provisions suggested. Consultation with departmental colleagues (including the department
chair) may be helpful prior to using any of these provisions.