

## **Repurposing Current Course Syllabi and Materials for use in an Online Course.**

*[From Smith, S.B. (2005). Strategies for Repurposing Face-to-Face Courses into Online Courses: An Instructor's e-manual]*

### **Introduction**

University professors transitioning to online teaching often do not have a considerable amount of time to reorganize their courses for delivery online. Deciding what to change, reword, or delete can be unnecessarily frustrating. The elements that change with the development of an online syllabus might seem considerable, depending on the structure of your course and the technology delivery system(s) you intend to use. Therefore, it is important to consider all aspects of evaluation and assessment when repurposing your face-to-face syllabus. In repurposing your online course syllabus, reflect upon your teaching style and methods of instruction. Many methods are adaptable to online courses with a minimum of effort. Other methods require more sophisticated software products or tools to effectively administer them. It will be well worth the time to select only those methods that meet your immediate needs as an instructor and are achievable online.

The very appearance of your syllabus can send students a message about your online course. Carefully select images and text that convey to the student that this course is being held online. It is also a good idea to alter the appearance of syllabi that are being used to teach the same course both online and face-to-face. This will prevent any possibility of confusion should the wrong copy of a syllabus manage to find its way to the “other” course.

Every online syllabus is an electronic document and as such can be designed using appropriate graphics and links to enhance its function. Consider emphasizing the “interactive” capabilities of your syllabus. Your interactive syllabus will set the tone for using interactive documents in your course.

### **Course/Syllabus Content**

Here are some suggestions for ways to repurpose your existing syllabus so that it is ready for the online environment and the needs of your students.

- Remove any unnecessary or confusing statements in your syllabus that refer to the typical “classroom”, “office hours”. These can be very misleading in a course taught online.
- Be careful how you refer to time elements. For example, references to “once a week” may be misleading when students now have a virtual 24/7week.
- Be as specific as you can about due dates, times (and time zones). Try to leave as little as possible to student interpretation. While students can email you with

questions about assignments and due dates, they are just as likely to not ask. Clarifying this information can save you time and frustration.

- Decide how you will organize your course activities. Will you have weekly assignments, or, will you use a modular format?
- Plan to provide frequent instructor feedback. Opportunities that are available for “informal” student-instructor conversation before or after class in which you can discuss assignments, suggest ideas, or clarify expectations will not present themselves in the same way online. The more feedback you can provide a student, the more opportunity you have to get to know your students and assist them with their learning. This “connect” that will be established with your students comes at a price: your time and devotion to communicating with your students electronically.

### **Communication**

Communicating with students is one of the most important aspects of any online course. You will need to determine the amount, depth and frequency of communications within your course. For example:

- How you will communicate to your students the location of the syllabus? Since they will not be required to show up to your first class in person (where you can hand out printed copies of your syllabus), how you will provide a “map” to the location of the course syllabus. You may want to send an introductory email to all registered students shortly before the class is to begin. In this email, you can introduce yourself, provide links to the syllabus and any other important documents or information you feel the students will benefit from having in advance.
- Determine if you will hold office hours for in-person visits or strictly for online “virtual” office hours.
- Consider how often will you want to hold online discussions? How long should they last? Should you divide students into topic groups?
- Email is a vital and essential communication tool when teaching online. Clearly state all expectations in regard to sending, checking, and saving email communications in your syllabus. Have a clear statement or policy regarding your email response times. You may want to consider a statement such as:

Dr. Smith will be <b>online</b> for e-mail Monday thru Friday; there will be no email communication with Dr. Smith on Saturdays or Sundays. Students should expect an email response from Dr. Smith within a 48-hour time frame.
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## Procedures

For your online course syllabus, you will need to carefully define procedures. You can link to university guidelines such as:

- Blackboard student help <http://it.nku.edu/index.asp?sectionid=96&id=316>
- Email account help <http://it.nku.edu/index.asp?id=261>
- Student Honor Code  
[http://www.nku.edu/~deanstudents/student\\_rights/honor\\_code.htm](http://www.nku.edu/~deanstudents/student_rights/honor_code.htm)
- Plagiarism <http://library.nku.edu/how/plagiarism.html>

## Assessment

You will want to consider how you will administer exams for your online course and then clearly state the procedures in your syllabus. And a new element you will need to consider is online participation. There are numerous ways in which an instructor can gauge student participation in an online course.

- Indicate how frequently you expect students to log on to the course website.
- Be very clear about the frequency and quality of online discussions and individual levels of participation.  
*Without the built-in structure of attending class in a physical space on specific days, students might misinterpret their responsibilities and quickly fall behind.*
- Consider that unless you indicate that online participation is a significant graded component of the course, students will probably not participate to your expectations.

## Technology Requirements

When redesigning content in your course, you will want to consider the appropriateness and reliability of the delivery mechanism (technology) and the level of technology awareness/skills students have. While it may not be possible to “know what your students know” about using technology, you can certainly assume basic proficiencies based upon the educational experiences of the student and prerequisites for your course. Some basic skills associated with the successful completion of an online course are listed below.

Do your students have:

- 1) the ability to navigate the Web (use a browser) and handle multiple open windows?
- 2) the ability to attach documents to an email and send to instructor?
- 3) the ability to browse web pages?
- 4) basic word processing skills?
- 5) knowledge of how to create, open, close, and save files and attachments?
- 6) sufficient skills to search the Internet.

Be very careful to specify technology requirements for your course. For example, if your course requires a CD-ROM or other computer hardware, this must be indicated in the syllabus. Or, if a student is required to take tests at a Testing Center on campus, clearly indicate this as well. It is also a good idea to provide specific information in the syllabus about minimum technology (hardware/software) requirements established for this course. Consider creating a link to a separate webpage describing the general technological competencies required. Thanks to Dr. Kimberly Code for the following example:

*Course Requirements:*

Students enrolled in the course must also have the following technology and knowledge:

**Minimum System Requirements:**

**Platform:** Windows 95, 98, 2000, NT, or ME; MacOS 9 or MacOS X

**Hardware:** 64 MB of RAM, 1 G of free disk space

**Software:** [Microsoft Word](#), [Adobe Acrobat Reader](#) [PowerPoint Reader](#)

**Browser:** [Client Browser Configuration Guide](#)

NOTE: JavaScript & Cookies must be enabled.

**Modem:** 56 K

**Connection:** Reliable connection is critical to accessibility

**Browser Plug-ins:** as required by your instructor

**Email:** NKU email account (must be used for NKU online courses)

**Competencies:**

- Ability to navigate the Web (use a browser) and handle multiple open windows
- Basic word processing skills
- Knowledge of how to send and receive email
- The ability to send, open, close, and save files and attachments

You may also want to consider adding:

Textbook and Course Materials with ISBN Numbers

NKU Bookstore Link [www.nku.edu/~bookstore/](http://www.nku.edu/~bookstore/)  
Amazon.Com [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)  
Barnes and Noble [www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com)

Required Technology with Links to Support Software

[Adobe Acrobat Reader](#)  
[PowerPoint Viewer](#)  
[QuickTime Player](#)  
[Real Player](#)

Help Desk Information

Telephone: (859) 572 – 6911 Location: AC 109  
Blackboard Student Help <http://it.nku.edu/index.asp?sectionid=96&id=316>  
E-mail Account <http://it.nku.edu/index.asp?id=261>

Student Honor Code [http://www.nku.edu/~deanstudents/student\\_rights/honor\\_code.htm](http://www.nku.edu/~deanstudents/student_rights/honor_code.htm)  
Plagiarism <http://library.nku.edu/how/plagiarism.html>

Finally, share your repurposed syllabus with a colleague who has taught courses online or with your technology support team. Getting a second opinion can be beneficial. Since your online course syllabus will be an interactive document, you will need to make sure that all links to and from your online syllabus are working properly. An unnecessary level of confusion by students is often associated with broken or incorrect links. Students rely upon the accuracy of hyperlinked documents. A broken or incorrect link can often result in a negative learning experience that could spill over into other online activities.

### **Examples of online syllabi:**

#### ED 299: Teaching an Online Course

A syllabus for a course focusing on teaching online. Note the design features and the use of links throughout. Look for elements used and commentary specific to online teaching.  
<http://cis2.cuyamaca.net/jreed/299/default.asp>

This is an annotated example of an online syllabus. Note the commentary to the right.  
<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/syllab-5.htm>

#### EDG 625 | Dr. Kimberly Code

<http://access.nku.edu/ucc/2004/SYLLABI/edg625.pdf>

#### EDG 625 | Dr. Kimberly Code

<http://www.nku.edu/~education/syllabi/Fall/EDU300kcf05.pdf>

#### EDU 313 | Dr. Steven Smith

[http://thedigitalclassroom.com/download/Syllabus\\_EDU313.pdf](http://thedigitalclassroom.com/download/Syllabus_EDU313.pdf)

Example using video for Instructor Introduction:

<http://www.soe.ku.edu/faculty/Meyen.php>

### **Recommended Reading:**

S. Ko & S. Rossen (2001). Teaching Online: A practical guide. College Teaching Series. Houghton Mifflin Co., New York.

### **Recommended Website:**

University of Kansas eLearning Design Lab:

<http://elearndesign.org/index.html>