

## “Creating a Syllabus”

The Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching Effectiveness

University of Saskatchewan, Canada

Interview with Amelia Horsburgh, Barbara Phillips, Heather M. Ross, and Tracie Risling

**Heather M. Moss, Instructional Design Specialist:** “There are three things that I think you need to keep in mind when designing your syllabus.

One, as a teacher, what are the things that you really want your students to know, in terms of your expectations, what the activities are, what the assignments are, what topics you’re going to cover, if you’ve got your schedule in there. These are the things that you really want your students to know. And then take a little bit of time and think about it. If you were a student in this class, after you’ve drafted this, is there anything as a student that you would still want to know about this course. And maybe those are things you need to add to your syllabus.

And, finally, and this is something that you really need to think about at the very beginning, is [that] there are certain elements of the syllabus that are required by the university and you have to make sure that those are included.”

**Amelia Horsburgh, Doctoral candidate, Department of English:**

“Keep in mind that you want to describe the assignments that are going to be due throughout term. I think students really appreciate right from the get-go [knowing] what the assignments are going to be, what they’re going to be worth, [and] when they’re going to be due. And, in particular, describe what your exam is going to look like as well. A lot of instructors don’t know, usually at the beginning of term, what exactly, their exam is going to look like, specific questions that sort of thing. But you can give a general idea. Usually, I give, say multiple choice, and some short answers, and an essay. That gives students a clear idea about what the commitment level is going to have to be on their part. And some students will say, right from the beginning, that’s just not for me, and then they can drop the course. It’s important to be honest in your syllabus, [about] what your expectations are of them, so they know if they can meet them or not.”

[Ms.] Tracie Risling, associate professor, College of Nursing:

“But it should be a complete overview of what’s to come. And I think the expectations of the students need to be there, especially in terms of evaluation. The students will have anxiety over that. They will want [it] to be very clear on what needs to be completed by them in order for them to be successful. But other than that, I think we over, we “over syllabi.” We put too many things in there that maybe don’t need to be in there, and then that becomes a point of confusion. It should be a really useful tool for the students. We started putting them online so they have links to many things on them. And I think that’s great. And I think it actually makes it a useful document for the students. So I also get it brought to class, and we go through some things, as many people do, and make sure everything’s all clear, so it’s good that way, too.”

**Barbara Phillips, professor, Edwards School of Business:** “It’s really important, I think, not to change your syllabus. So if you say that something is due on that day, it’s due on that day, because all of your

students have worked around that. And so those kinds of things are important to me because ... First of all, don't be vague. You know, 'Oh, something might happen to you if you turn it in late.' But, on the other hand, you want to be, I think welcoming. You want to be like, 'This is going to be awesomely fun. This class, we're going to learn all of this cool stuff.' So, I think you have to have both. You have to have the structure, and the organization, and the clarity of the rules. But on the other hand, you can't just have that because it's almost like a sadness of students: 'Aw, rules.' You want them to understand that you love it; it's going to be great. So, it has to be both."

**Editor's note:** This YouTube video can be accessed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mxln5qBDr94>