

**TUSM Curriculum Committee
Teaching and Learning Policies Subcommittee**

**Defining an Effective Course Syllabus
June 2008**

The Subcommittee on Learning and Teaching Policies has discussed the various aspects of a course syllabus that contribute to its usefulness in promoting learning of course material. We have focused on syllabi for lectures presented during the first two years. The following are “working principles” that we offer for feedback from the Curriculum Committee.

General considerations:

- I. It is not desirable to mandate a specific format or style for course syllabi. Rather, syllabi are expected to reflect differences in both the teaching style of the course director and differences inherent in the course material. The specific role of a syllabus may vary significantly in different courses depending on the use of other teaching resources, for example required textbook(s) or material on TUSK.
- II. Students have indicated specific features (both content and presentation) that enhance the usefulness of a syllabus. Course directors should be provided this information (included as “guidelines” below) and asked to incorporate these guidelines as fully as appropriate.
- III. Integrating material between multiple disciplines in the new curriculum will necessitate syllabus revisions. This is, therefore, the appropriate time to address syllabus design and content with the course directors.
- IV. Lecturers must review their syllabus material annually and make any revisions necessary to ensure accuracy and relevance to the learning objectives of the lecture. Course directors must provide lecturers with course evaluations as soon as they become available. Lecturers should be encouraged to review/edit their syllabus material while their lectures and student feedback are fresh in their memory.
- V. The course director is ultimately responsible for providing students with a high-quality syllabus that facilitates the learning of course-specific information and provides the clinical context for course material.

Guidelines for an effective course syllabus:

1. The student should easily locate course information at the beginning of the syllabus. OEA should check for the inclusion of this information and contact the Director if information is missing. It should be noted that most current syllabi include this information. OEA will help assemble and upload course information on TUSK.
 - a. Course schedule
 - b. Course objectives
 - c. Course director information, including contact information
 - d. Exam and grade information

- e. Reading assignments
2. Material for an individual lecture should include a list of 3-5 key learning objectives
 3. All of the following material should be provided for individual lectures as appropriate:
 - a. Case study
 - b. Key references (1-3 primary source or review articles)
 - c. Study questions
 - d. Links to online resources (including course specific materials on TUSK)
 4. Syllabus information should follow the lecture. Students find it very useful to have the syllabus material dove-tail with material discussed in lecture. This facilitates note-taking in the syllabus and reviewing class notes and syllabus information together. This does not mean that the syllabus should contain the lecture *verbatim* – rather it provides an outline of the important material and highlights the major concepts of the lecture.
 5. The physical layout of the material should allow sufficient space for notes to be made in the syllabus. At a minimum, right hand margins should be 1.5 inches and three lines should be left between paragraphs.
 6. Students *do not* find the inclusion of Powerpoint slide lectures (with or without note space) particularly useful. However, the inclusion of significant charts/graphs or “critical slides” in the syllabus, together with explanatory text, is generally very helpful.
 7. Students look to the syllabus to guide them in identifying the key material they must know from a lecture. The inclusion of extraneous information (comprehensive lists, tables etc) can hinder the ability to highlight the critical concepts that students should focus on. The syllabus should facilitate the School’s goal to emphasize long-term learning of critical information and concepts and the elimination of short-term memorization.
 8. Readings included in syllabus should clearly distinguish between “required” and “enrichment.”
 9. The style of individual lecture entries within a syllabus should be reasonably uniform. This requires a director to clearly indicate to lecturers what the style should be.