

Proposed Context for Peer Review of Course Syllabi

Purpose: Peer review of course syllabi is one aspect of recognizing the scholarship of teaching and acknowledging leadership by faculty in designing and preparing the courses they teach.

Peer review of syllabi is a formative part of the process for peer review of teaching through which faculty may elect to demonstrate their commitment to, and involvement in, the scholarship of teaching. Formative evaluation is the prime focus of peer review of syllabi but faculty may, at their discretion, elect to include the results of the peer review in their portfolio to be used in the Promotion, Tenure, and Evaluation process (See the NDSU Policy Manual, Section 352).

Process: Faculty electing to use review of course syllabi as part of their documentation of their scholarship should select one syllabus (or more than one) and request that the item(s) be reviewed by their peers. The peer review team will typically be composed of two members; one peer from the same academic unit as the participant and one peer from a department external to the academic unit of the participant. In some instances, a reviewer external to NDSU may be recommended, by the faculty participant, to be invited to participate in the formative evaluation of a syllabus.

The members of the peer review team who are NDSU faculty will meet with the participant to discuss the context of the syllabus (discuss recent offerings of the course (if any); learn of the background for selection of the text, assignments, and examination format; review a reflective statement on teaching and/or identify teaching goals. The peer review team will individually review the syllabus (or syllabi) and meet to develop a joint response to the participant. After a joint summary has been developed, the peer review team will meet with the participant to discuss their analysis and share any constructive suggestions for strengthening the syllabus (or syllabi). Where a peer reviewer external to NDSU is a part of this process, communication by conference call or e-mail may be appropriate.

The faculty participant will receive the original copy of the summary of the peer review of the syllabus (or syllabi). The members of the peer review team will retain copies of the syllabus or syllabi reviewed and the summary of the peer review to serve as an archive for the participant, if needed. The results of the peer review process become the property and responsibility of the individual faculty participant.

How this format was developed: The University Senate ad hoc Committee on Peer Review of Teaching and the Teaching and Professional Service Committee of the University Senate have reviewed traditional and electronic examples and sources of information on the preparation and evaluation of course syllabi. (A partial bibliography appears at the end of this document.)

The product was (will be) presented to the University Senate on April 9, 2001 by the Teaching and Professional Service Committee and approved by the University Senate on _____.

All syllabi for courses at North Dakota State University must meet the “Minimum Information for Syllabi Accompanying Course Proposals” as established by the Academic Affairs Committee. For additional information, see:
http://www.ndsu.nodak.edu/ndsu/administration/committees/academic_affairs/syllabi.html

The standards established by the Academic Affairs Committee include:

- Course prefix, number, (credits and Call #), and title
- Instructor and contact information (including teaching assistants)
- Course description and course objectives
- Evaluation procedures and criteria
- Course schedule/outline/calendar of events
- Required student resources (texts, reprints, Web-sites, etc.)
- Americans With Disabilities Act statement about students with special needs
- The approved academic honesty statement (or identification of a college honor code).

In addition, syllabi may identify:

- Prerequisites (if any)
- Whether or not the instructor’s permission *is* required to enroll?
- The URL of the electronic version of course materials, including the syllabus
- Expectations for student participation
- Notices related to health and safety
- Time and location of class meetings
- Place, date, and time of the final examination
- Policy regarding late assignments
- Policy on make-up quizzes and examinations
- Policy on re-writing examinations (entire or in part)
- Rationale for course organization
- Rationale for selection of the required text (s), if any
- A detailed list of reading assignments
- Special activities not part of regular class meeting times
- Identification of support services that may be available
- What students *can* expect to learn from the course?
- Objectives and learning goals identified by segment of the class or by period.

Peer review should emphasize aspects of teaching that are beyond the expected capacity of student evaluation. Examples of components of teaching that would be difficult for students to evaluate include:

- Appropriateness of the course objectives
- Are the course materials up-to-date?
- Does the syllabus provide adequate information to students?
- Innovative or creative features of the syllabus
- Is feedback to students from assignments, quizzes, and examinations timely and support learning?
- Are expectations of students reasonable and realistic?
- What measures (in addition to exams and quizzes) of student learning will be applied?
- Are the measures of student learning appropriate?
- Is at least one direct measure of student learning applied?

Selected References:

- Altman, H. B. and W. E. Cashin. 1992. Writing a Syllabus. IDEA Paper No. 27 Center for Faculty Evaluation and Development, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS (available electronically)
- Anonymous. Undated. Peer Evaluation. In: Evaluation of Instruction (Ohio State University Faculty Handbook)
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- Arreola, R. A. 1999. Developing a Comprehensive Faculty Evaluation System. A Handbook for College Faculty and Administrators on Designing and Operating a Comprehensive Faculty Evaluation System. Anker Publishing, Bolton, MA.
- Braskamp, L. A. and J. C. Ory. 1994. Assessing Faculty Work. Enhancing Individual and Institutional Performance. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco
- Centra, John A. 1993. Reflective Faculty Evaluation. Enhancing Teaching and Determining Faculty Effectiveness. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Diamond, R. M. 1998. Designing and Assessing Courses and Curricula. A Practical Guide. (Revised Edition). Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
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