SoTL
Snapshot

A synopsis of a scholarship of teaching and learning journal article

Students prefer *"learning-focused syllabus"* to *"content-focused syllabus"*

What is this Research About?
Most syllabi used in Canadian universities are"content-focused,"mainly consisting of the class schedule, grading scheme, and policies. "Learning-focused syllabi" include additional information aboutthe goals and learning outcomes of the course, assessment of learning, and ways for students to be successful. This study compared student perceptions of a content-focused and a learning-focused syllabus for ahistory course.

What did the Researchers Do?
The researchers randomly assigned participants to rate a content-focused or a learning-focused syllabus for a history course.

What did the Researchers Find?
The researchers found that students preferred many aspects of the learning-focused syllabusand indicated that they would be more likely to return to thelearning-focused syllabus throughout the semester. Specifically, students rated the learning-focused syllabus as more interestingand thoroughthan the content-focused syllabus. Some participants described the learning-focused syllabusas difficult to follow (possibly because they were not used to the style). Students expected the course described in the learning-focused syllabus to be more engaging, more rigorous,and include more active learning strategies. Students rated the instructor in the learning-focused syllabus as more caring,encouraging, and approachable. These results suggest that creating a learning-focused syllabus is a low-stakes way for instructors to motivate students to succeed in their course.For a sample learning-focused syllabus, view the Wheeler et al (2019)–Appendix C.

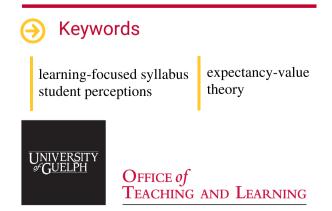### → How to Implement this Research in Your Classroom
Consider creating a learning-focused syllabusfor your course. Learning-focused syllabi use a friendly and approachable toneand focus on how the student can be successful in the course. In addition to typical elements (e.g., class schedule, grading scheme, etc.) additionalelements can include the following sections:
- What you will learn along the way(the learning outcomes)
- How you'll know you're learning(description of the course activities and the expectations for students)
- What you'll be doing(an enhanced class schedule including Questions we'll exploreand How to prepare for discussions)
- Tips to succeed in this course (information about where to find resourcesand additional ideas for improving learning)

→ Citation

Wheeler, L. B., Palmer, M., & Aneece, I. (2019). Students' perceptions of course syllabi: The role of syllabi in motivating students. International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 13(3),https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2019.130307

→ Keywords

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