

# THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Senate Academic Policy Committee  
c/o  
Enrolment Services | Senate & Curriculum Services  
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To: Advising Directors; Office of the University Counsel; Office of the Ombudsperson for Students; Access & Diversity; Deans; Enrolment Services; Centre for Teaching, Learning & Technology; Office of the Vice-President Academic; Office of the VP Students; Student Health Service; Counselling Services; Health Promotion and Education; Sexual Violence Prevention & Response Office; Student Development & Services; the AMS; the GSS

From: The Senate Secretariat on behalf of the Vancouver Senate Academic Policy Committee

**Re: Proposal for new Policy V-130: *Content and Distribution of Course Syllabi***

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The Vancouver Senate Academic Policy Committee is drafting a policy that would set and describe the minimum requirements for the content and distribution of course syllabi. In the fall of 2016, the Committee consulted the University community for initial feedback on the proposal. Since then, the Committee has had multiple discussions on the policy, the Chair has met with various offices on campus to get feedback, and multiple revisions to the policy have been made.

The Committee is now seeking feedback from the community on the attached draft. Responses from individuals and groups are welcome. Please forward this consultation package to anyone you feel should be aware of it and/or circulate it among your constituency. Note: the syllabus template that will be attached as an appendix will be developed in conjunction with the Senate Curriculum Committee should this policy be approved.

The Academic Policy Committee will be accepting feedback and questions via email to [lindsey.kovacevic@ubc.ca](mailto:lindsey.kovacevic@ubc.ca) until **Friday, July 27<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Paul Harrison, Chair, Academic Policy Committee

## **Preamble: Proposal for a policy that instructors of all course sections offered should provide the students with a syllabus**

### **Why require a syllabus?**

Students deserve to have access to sufficient information in advance to know what to expect from courses (and instructors) and what will be expected of them. The Academic Calendar is the official record of the courses that UBC offers, but at most it provides a course title and brief description. A syllabus is the standard<sup>1</sup> means of providing students with the information they need and many UBC faculty supply their students with helpful syllabi. A syllabus can be a vehicle for inviting students into the course and preparing them to be successful. Although ideally the course syllabus would be available at the time that students do academic planning and register for courses, the current proposal focuses only on the content and delivery of the syllabus to registered students. Should a policy be adopted, further discussion would ensue about the possibility of developing an electronic archive for syllabi.

A syllabus has been required by Senate for several years for all proposed new courses; to guide the process, a template is provided<sup>2</sup>

([https://senate.ubc.ca/sites/senate.ubc.ca/files/downloads/va\\_H\\_Syllabus\\_Template\\_Example.pdf](https://senate.ubc.ca/sites/senate.ubc.ca/files/downloads/va_H_Syllabus_Template_Example.pdf)).

Courses do change over time, e.g., when a different instructor is assigned or the discipline evolves, so a current syllabus may naturally differ somewhat from the one submitted when a course was approved. Also, many courses were approved by Senate prior to the requirement for a syllabus. In all cases, units offering courses should take the opportunity to reflect on the course title and description (where one exists in the Calendar as it does for the majority of current courses) and ensure that the current offering is representative. Whether or not an original syllabus exists, if the course has changed substantially then a proposal should be made to Senate either for its revision or for deletion of the old course and creation of a new one according to established practice

(<https://senate.ubc.ca/sites/senate.ubc.ca/files/downloads/Curriculum%20Guidelines%20v12.2%20-%20FINAL.pdf>).

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<sup>1</sup> Many other leading universities have policies that require the provision of a syllabus. Examples include the University of Alberta

([http://calendar.ualberta.ca/content.php?catoid=6&navoid=806#Evaluation\\_Procedures\\_and\\_Grading\\_System](http://calendar.ualberta.ca/content.php?catoid=6&navoid=806#Evaluation_Procedures_and_Grading_System)), Dalhousie University

([https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/dept/university\\_secretariat/policy-repository/SyllabusPolicyApproved-2017June27-V2.pdf](https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/dept/university_secretariat/policy-repository/SyllabusPolicyApproved-2017June27-V2.pdf)), McGill

(<https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/teaching/course-design/outline>), and the University of Toronto

(<http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/faculty-staff/teacher-info/pdfs/Academic%20Handbook%20-%20Quick%20Reference.pdf>).

<sup>2</sup> If the proposed policy is adopted, the template may be amended to include additional components.

## **What information is in a basic syllabus?**

The proposal is to include four categories of information:

- information about the course content, format and schedule; identity and contact information for the instructor(s); learning materials required and their costs; broad learning outcomes; learning activities; methods of assessment of learning, their schedule and their weightings in the final grade;
- course-level policies such as participation, late penalties, and regrading procedures;
- summaries of the University's expectations for academic integrity, respect for others, and academic freedom; and policies on sexual misconduct, religious observances, and accommodation for disabilities;
- information on resources to support student wellbeing and learning.

Extensive consultation across campus has identified the value of each item to learners. Some may question why the latter two categories are included when they appear to go beyond the purview of individual courses or course instructors and their inclusion will add to the length of a syllabus. In November of 2014, Senate endorsed the "Framework for Senate Consideration of Student Mental Health and Wellbeing"

(<https://senate.ubc.ca/sites/senate.ubc.ca/files/downloads/Mental-Health-Wellness-Ad-Hoc-November-Senate.pdf>) which requires that policies and practices be designed to support student wellbeing as a means of facilitating learning. There are other means employed (e.g., websites, email) to inform students of the kinds of information in those two categories above, but students report that the policies and resource links become meaningful only in the context of each course, i.e., when instructors acknowledge the importance of the information and take the time to relate it to the outcomes, activities, and assessments used in the course. If the syllabus policy is adopted, an optional syllabus template will be provided so that to comply with the minimum requirements of the policy, an instructor will need only "cut-and-paste" those sections.

## **When should a syllabus be "final"?**

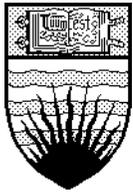
The proposed policy would require that the syllabus be provided to students early in the course, certainly before the last date to drop the course without a "W" on the transcript. That timing allows for instances where the syllabus is designed with input from the students. After that date, unforeseen events could necessitate a change in the posted syllabus; for example, unexpectedly low average achievement on a test could lead the instructor to propose to decrease that test's weight in the final grade or to delay a subsequent test date. Proposed changes should be discussed with the class and any student who sees the change as detrimental (e.g., it could create a conflict with prior commitments) should be provided an alternative. The amended syllabus should be made available to the class.

## **The Syllabus and Academic Freedom**

Requiring that instructors provide students with a syllabus with specific content does not infringe on the instructor's ability to develop the approved course topic within the context of the

discipline. And although the proposed policy (below) does not suggest a mechanism for enforcement, the hope is that instructors will acknowledge their responsibility to students when they are assigned to teach courses by providing them with the information that cannot be included in the Academic Calendar but is essential for students to succeed.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



SENATE POLICY:  
V-130

VANCOUVER SENATE  
c/o Enrolment Services  
2016 - 1874 East Mall  
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z1

**DRAFT VERSION 1.8.6**

**Number & Title**

V-130: *Content and Distribution of Course Syllabi*

**Effective Date:**

01 January 2019 (anticipated)

**Approval Date:**

September 2018 (anticipated)

**Review Date:**

This policy shall be reviewed two (2) years after approval and thereafter as deemed necessary by the *responsible committee*.

**Responsible Committee:**

Vancouver Senate Academic Policy Committee

**Authority:**

*University Act, S. 37(1)*

*“The academic governance of the university is vested in the senate and it has the following powers:*

*(f) to consider, approve and recommend to the board the revision of courses of study, instruction and education in all faculties and departments of the university.”*

**Purpose and Goals:**

This policy is designed to:

- 1) Ensure consistent practices of the distribution of course syllabi and the content areas therein across the University; and
- 2) Establish the method by which information on the course syllabus can be changed.

**Applicability:**

All credit-bearing courses.

**Exclusions:**

Graduate-level theses and dissertation courses are exempt.

**Definitions:**

For the purposes of this policy:

- *Course* shall mean course of instruction.
- *Course instructor* shall mean the member of the University's teaching staff who has primary responsibility for the organization and operation of the *course*.
- *Syllabus* shall mean the document provided by the *course instructor* which communicates the *course instructor's* course design to students including organization, policies, expectations, and requirements.

**Policy:**

- 1) *Course instructors* are required to provide a *syllabus* to students within the first week of class in paper or digital format. In the case where the *syllabus* will be created in consultation with the student(s) at the beginning of a *course* (e.g., directed studies), the *syllabus* must be finalized prior to the last date by which students are permitted to drop the course without receiving a "W" on their transcript.
- 2) The *syllabus* shall inform students about the requirements and expectations of a *course*.
- 3) A *syllabus* includes, at a minimum, the following content areas:
  - a. The *course* title and description (as in the Academic Calendar or, for courses without a published description, a brief representative one) and any prerequisites or corequisites;
  - b. The name of the *course instructor* and any other members of teaching staff involved in the offering of the course, and details of when and by what means students may contact them;
  - c. A description of the *course* structure (e.g., lecture, lab, tutorial, flipped classroom, mixed mode; how many contact hours per week; day, time, and location of classes or other activities);

- d. Cost to the student of learning materials including, among others, textbooks, reading packages, paid access to on-line assessment tools, lab and field trip fees;
  - e. *Course*-level learning outcomes, i.e., what is achieved and assessed in the *course* (more details of module, week, or class learning outcomes may be provided during the course);
  - f. A description of the learning activities the students will engage in, in order to achieve the learning outcomes (e.g., participation in class, written analysis of case studies, required readings, term papers, presentations, lab activities);
  - g. Methods used to assess achievement of learning outcomes, including the weighting of each component in the final grade, the schedule, the late penalty policy and the policy on re-grading of marked work, as appropriate;
  - h. A *course* schedule including a list of topics;
  - i. Any other *course* policies;
  - j. Links to resources to support student learning and wellbeing, including <https://students.ubc.ca>, <https://students.ubc.ca/health-wellness/wellness-centre>, and any others specific to the *course* or academic unit;
  - k. A brief description of the University's values of Academic Integrity, and Academic Freedom, and Freedom from Harassment and Discrimination and how they are supported in the *course*. At a minimum, the following links are to be provided:
    - i. Academic Integrity  
(<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,286,0,0#15620>),
    - ii. Policy on Academic Freedom  
(<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,33,86,0>, and
    - iii. Freedom from Harassment and Discrimination  
(<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,33,87,0>;
  - l. Links to University policies on:
    - i. Religious Observances  
(<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,48,0,0>),
    - ii. Accommodation for Students with Disabilities  
(<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,34,0,0>), and
    - iii. Sexual Assault and Other Sexual Misconduct  
([https://universitycounsel.ubc.ca/files/2017/05/policy131\\_final.pdf](https://universitycounsel.ubc.ca/files/2017/05/policy131_final.pdf));
  - m. A link to resources for the prevention of sexual violence and support for survivors (<https://sexualviolenceresponse.ubc.ca>).
- 4) Nothing in the *syllabus* can contravene any Academic Calendar regulation or University policy. In resolving any discrepancy, Academic Calendar regulations and University policies take precedence.

- 5a) Should the *course instructor* wish to change details on the *syllabus* after the last day by which students are permitted to drop the *course* without receiving a ‘W’ on the transcript, the *course instructor* must explain the rationale to the class. The *course instructor* must provide the updated *syllabus* to the registered students in a timely manner in digital or paper format.
- 5b) Any student who sees the change to the *syllabus* as detrimental is entitled to discuss the case with the *course instructor* and seek an academic concession. Where student and instructor cannot agree, students are encouraged to take their protest to the head of the department concerned and then to the dean of the faculty responsible for the *course* in accordance with the Academic Calendar regulations on protests for academic standings at <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,53,104,0>.

**Calendar Statement:**

As above.

**Consultations**

The following groups have been consulted during the development of this policy:

Office of the University Counsel; Office of the Ombudsperson for Students; Access & Diversity; Deans; Enrolment Services; Centre for Teaching, Learning & Technology; Office of the Vice-President Academic; Office of the VP Students; Student Health Service; Counselling Services; the AMS, the GSS; Advising Directors; Sexual Violence Prevention & Response Office.

**History:**

This is the first version of this policy.

**Related Policies:**

Use of the Formal Examination Periods

<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,41,89,0>

Viewing Marked Work

<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,41,93,0>

Academic Concession

<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,48,0,0>

Attendance

<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,36,0,0>

Grading Practices

<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,42,0,0>

Student Conduct and Discipline

<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,0,0>

Academic Honesty and Standards

<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/?tree=3,286,0,0>

**Appendix:**

A template for the construction of a *syllabus* will be provided but only as an aid.