Math 8001: Syllabi

March 2, 2012

Any current issues in your own teaching?

Today: Designing a Syllabus

Two components:

- The practical details of writing a syllabus.
- Designing a course.

Syllabus Requirements

The University has a very long list of required elements for any syllabus, separated into two categories:

- Course Information
- Policy Statements

See `http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/SYLLABUSREQUIREMENTS.html`.

Required Course Information

1. Catalogue Information: Course name, number, department, meeting time and location, number of credits.
2. Instructor's name and contact information
3. Prerequisites
4. Course goals and objectives.
5. Required and recommended materials.

Required Course Information

6. General description of student work (homework, papers, exams, etc.)
7. Description of any extra course meetings
8. Attendance requirements and penalties, if any.
9. Statement on extra credit.
10. Policy for missed exams and late work.
11. The date, time and place of the final examination.

Required Policy Statements

"Instructors must have as part of the syllabus copies of, references to, or statements on the following and are encouraged to discuss elements of the policies particularly applicable to their course (see Appendix - Recommended Policy Statements for Syllabi):"

Required Policy Statements

1. Grade Definitions
2. Scholastic Dishonesty
3. Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences
4. Use of Personal Electronic Devices in the Classroom.
5. Appropriate Student Use of Class Notes and Course Materials.
6. Student Conduct Code
7. Student Responsibilities
8. Sexual Harassment
9. Equity, Diversity, Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action
10. Availability of Mental Health and Stress Management Services
11. Academic Freedom and Responsibility.

In other words...

"We will follow all University and College policies regarding academic honesty and other matters."

Additional Information

What else would you include as part of (or in addition to) the syllabus?

Designing Your Course

Suppose you could design a new course from scratch. What would you incorporate?

- Groupwork? Group quizzes?
- Test corrections?
- Extra Credit?
- Would you emphasize homework scores? Exam scores?
- Would you have a non-standard grading scheme?

Grading Scheme I

You'll have a GPA grade for each Test, your homework, the Special Problems and the Final. The weighting of the grades, though subject to change, is, at present: 10% for each Test, 25% for homework, 20% for Special Problems, and 35% for the Final. Grades will perhaps amount to 80-85% for A, 65-70% for B, 50-55% for C, 40-45% for D.

Each grading item will have "Gradelines" assigned to it. For example, if the B gradeline is 70, the A gradeline is 85, and your score is 80, then your GPA grade, G, for that item is $G := 3 + \frac{80-70}{85-70}$ "=" 3.67. Here, (G is rounded to 2 places after "."). In other words, your GPA grade is a B plus 2/3 of the way between B and A. Your GPA grade, G, on *any* grading item is computed using your score on it, and numbers g (the grade corresponding to the highest gradeline smaller or equal to your score), glb (the highest gradeline smaller or equal to your score), gla (the lowest gradeline greater than your score):

$$G = g + \frac{\text{your score} \quad - glb}{gla - glb},$$

where glb is the gradeline just below your score, gla is the next gradeline - above your score and g is the grade number: 5 for a 100% score, 4 for the A gradeline, 3 for B, etc. If your score falls on a gradeline, then $G = g$. If your score is 100% on a Test, your $G = 5$.
When the G's are combined with their weights and added, the total is your GPA grade for the course. If that total is within 0.1 of an integer, your grade is "borderline." Case-by-case decisions are made, in borderline cases, whether to award the higher or the lower grade. An important factor then is the direction your grades have taken at course's end!

Grading Scheme II

Grading Scheme:

30% Homework
40% Midterms (20% each)
30% Final Exam

Overall course grades will be at least this generous; I reserve the right to *lower* gradelines if a test or homework assignment turns out to be harder than intended.

90%-100%	A-, A
80%-89%	B-, B, B+
70%-79%	C-, C, C+
60%-69%	D, D+

Other Examples

Other Advice

- Krantz: The syllabus is a contract.
- Avoid changing the syllabus mid-semester. If you must, be sure the changes benefit the students. (*Every* student!)
- A complete syllabus–especially the grading scheme section–helps deal with (or avoid) grievances.
- Don't specify a specific grade distribution in your syllabus.

Your assignment

Write a syllabus for a lower-level math department of your choice; don't include a homework schedule.

Due: Friday April 6, 2012.