

It's on the Syllabus: Building Your Best Course Outline



**THOMPSON
RIVERS
UNIVERSITY**

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Overview

- Discussion: what do you want your course outline to do?
- Expectations
- Do they even read it?
- The graphic syllabus
- The promising syllabus
- Syllabus under construction
- Providing a course structure or framework

Discussion

- Why do we give students a course outline?
- What do you ultimately want your course outline to do?

Expectations

- Defining your expectations—and those of your institution, program, and department
- Determining student expectations
- The power of positive language
- Creating a positive class culture
- The course outline as a “motivational tool” (Bowen, 2012)
- The course outline as an introduction to disciplinary practice (Nilson, 2007)

Do They Even Read It?

- Weimer (2013): “Do less telling so students can do more discovering”
- Avoid “going over” the course outline if possible
- Give them 10 minutes to review it and give them a chance to ask questions
- Lang (2010): Ask them to find a partner for a syllabus-related activity
- Bowen (2012): Provide the outline in advance and tell them there will be a brief quiz on the first day
- Other strategies?

The Graphic Syllabus

- Text-only syllabi can be difficult for some students to grasp

Figure 1.2

How Students Might See a Syllabus

Organization of Course BLAH 300: "Something I Gotta Take"

Week 1: Overview of Something I Gotta Take

Week 2: The Composition of Apple Peel

Week 3: Introduction to Giraffe Consciousness

Week 4: Cooking with Sugar and Eggs

Week 5: Sugar and Eggs Continued: Challenges and Solutions

Week 6: The Modern Car: The Carburetor

Week 7: The Modern Car: Seat Belts

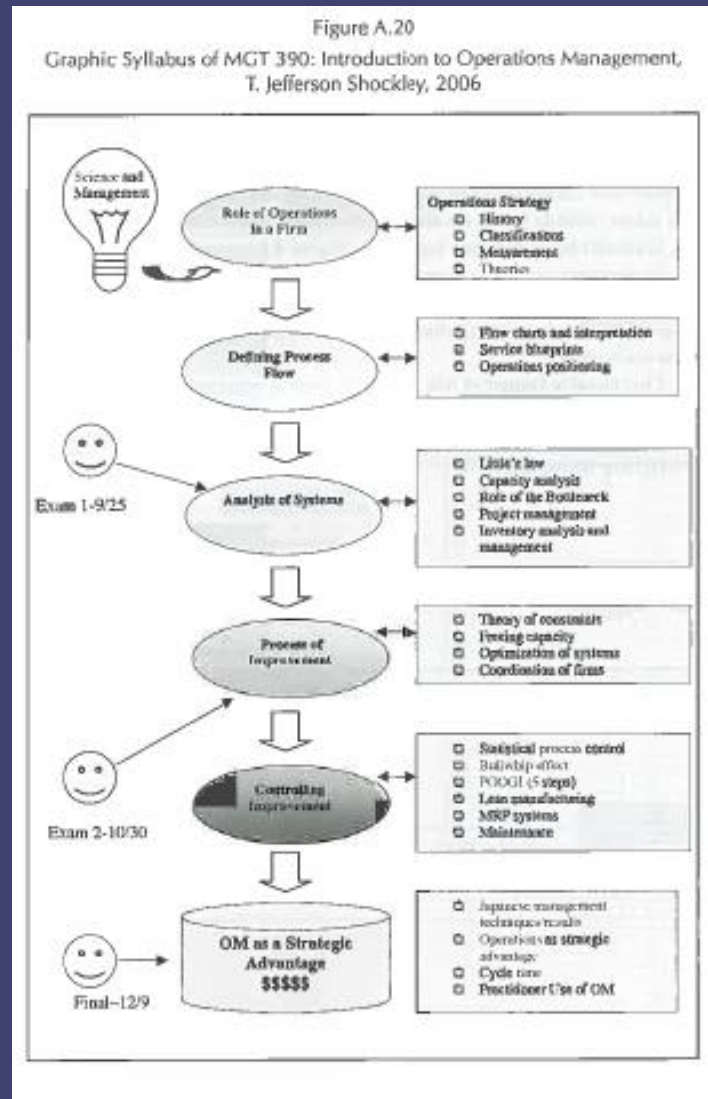
Week 8: Advanced Giraffe Consciousness and Introduction to Pineapples

Week 9: The Relationship Between Pineapples and Buses

The Graphic Syllabus

- Nilson (2007): If possible, provide a concept map or other visual road map of the course so students can share your vision (and maybe develop their own)

The Graphic Syllabus



(Nilson, 2007)

The Graphic Syllabus

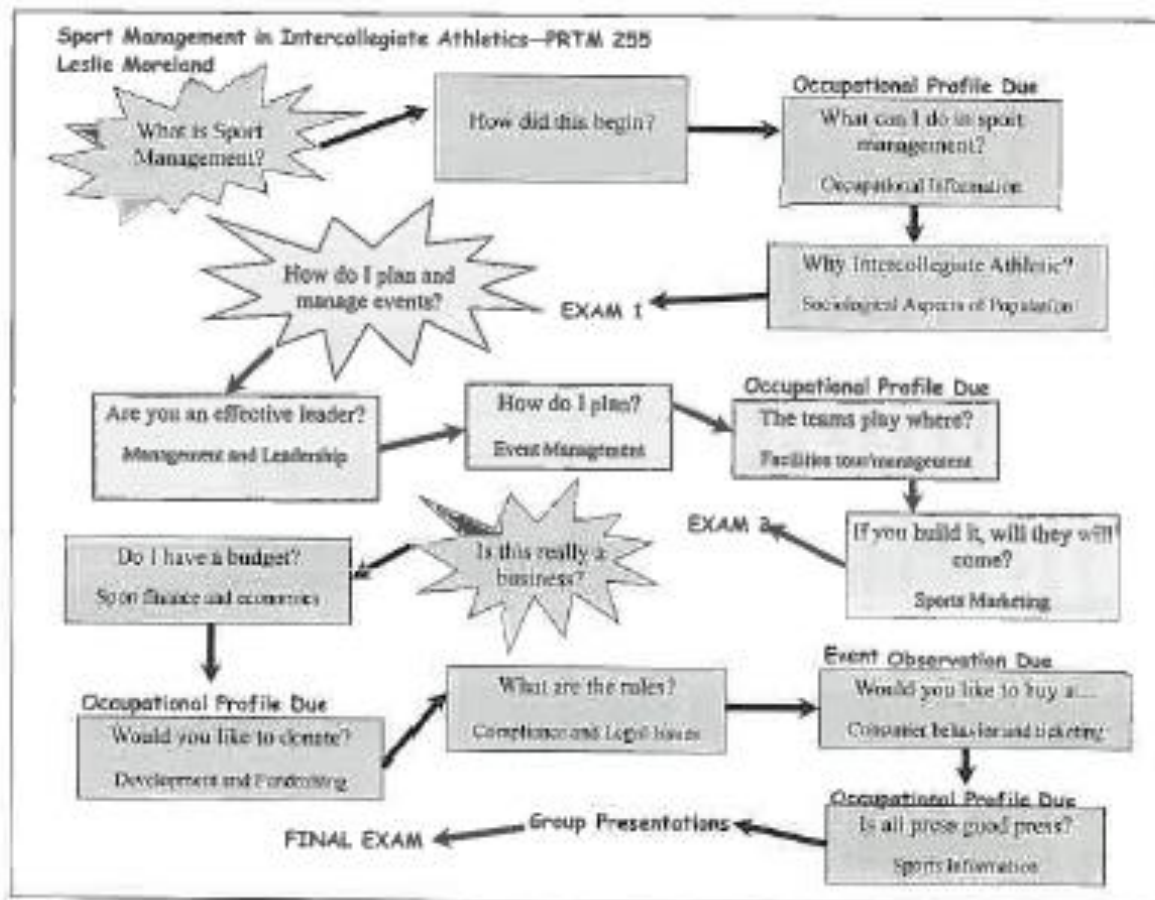


Figure A.22
 Graphic Syllabus of PRTM 255:
 Sport Management for Intercollegiate Athletics,
 Leslie Moreland, 2006

The Promising Syllabus

- “‘The promising syllabus,’ Bain wrote to me via e-mail, ‘fundamentally recognizes that people will learn best and most deeply when they have a strong sense of control over their own education rather than feel manipulated by someone else’s demands’” (Lang, 2006).

The Promising Syllabus

- According to Bain and Lang, a promising syllabus does three main things:
 - It explains the course's promise to the students
 - It describes the activities that will help them fulfill the promise
 - It begins a conversation about how the instructor and student would best come to understand the nature and progress of the student's learning

Syllabus Under Construction

- Is there an opportunity for students to provide input into the course?
- The amount of student control may vary dramatically depending on the course, its level, and the program it is in (Lang, Bain, Hudd)

Structure?

- How much structure is enough? How much is too much?
- How can you ensure your course doesn't fall apart if you give students some autonomy?
- How can you meet institutional requirements while still offering students some control over their learning?

Final Thoughts

- From Lang (2006): “In putting together the syllabus, Bain says, and possibly ceding some of your control of it to the students, you have to ask yourself the only question that really matters: ‘What will help them learn?’”

Examples of creative course outlines

<http://www.thetattooedprof.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/332.syllabus.Fall2012.pdf>

<http://www.thetattooedprof.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/349.syllabus.Fall2014.pdf>

<http://faculty.sites.uci.edu/ajenks/files/2013/08/Jenks-Anth-102-Fall-12-syllabus.pdf>

<http://wsu.tonahangen.com/fysroadside/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/193.Roadside-revised.Fall15.pdf>

<http://www.tonahangen.com/wsc/us2/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/112.Spr11.pdf>

Resources

- Bain, Ken. *What the Best College Teachers Do*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004. Print.
- Bowen, José Antonio. *Teaching Naked: How Moving Technology Out of Your College Classroom Will Improve Student Learning*. 1 edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012. Print.
- Hudd, S. “Syllabus under Construction: Involving Students in the Creation of Class Assignments.” *Teaching Sociology* 31.2 (2003): 195–202. Print.
- Lang, James M. “The Promising Syllabus.” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2006): n. pag. Web. http://chronicle.com/article/The_Promising_Syllabus/46748
- --. *On Course: A Week-by-Week Guide to Your First Semester of College Teaching*. 1 edition. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010. Print.
- Nilson, Linda B. *The Graphic Syllabus and the Outcomes Map: Communicating Your Course*. 1 edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007. Print.
- Weimer, Maryellen. *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*. 2 edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013. Print.