

# APPLYING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING TO YOUR SYLLABUS

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# HELLO!

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## Learning Objective

1. To create a syllabus that reflects culturally responsive teaching



## Norms of Collaboration

- > Be present
- > Contribute to a safe and respectful community space
- > Presume Positive Intentions

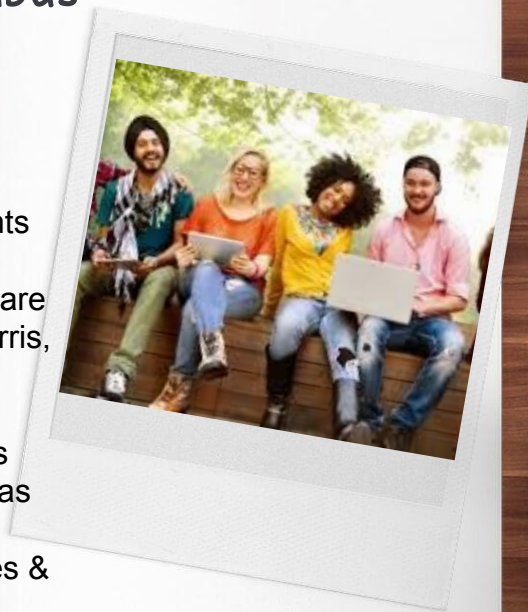


# What purpose does your syllabus serve?

The syllabus is a key feature of every academic course. It serves multiple purposes.

Often, syllabi are seen as contracts between students and the instructor and as a record of what courses cover and how student outcomes and performance are evaluated for accountability purposes (Parkes & Harris, 2002).

Syllabi are also learning tools that can help students develop effective learning practices and strategies, as well as communication devices that share how teaching will be approached (Grunnert, 1997; Parkes & Harris, 2002).



## What purpose does your syllabus serve?

Syllabus review is an opportunity for structured inquiry and reflection, providing a safe space to assess aspects of teaching as reflected in syllabi, for example, course goals, class norms and rules, expectations for and evaluations of student learning, and forms of assistance and support.

As artifacts of practice that capture how faculty see the course, what they assume students should be able to accomplish, and what they will do to advance student learning, inquiry into syllabi has the potential to reveal the assumptions, attitudes, values, and beliefs that shape teaching. Also, examining the content and language of a syllabus can help make explicit who it is written for (e.g., students, faculty, institution) and who it best serves.





## WHO DOES YOUR SYLLABI SERVE?

Think about your syllabus. A proportional assessment of who—among higher education audiences like faculty, students, accreditation agencies, and the system office—your syllabus is currently designed to serve.

Although syllabi are documents used primarily by faculty and students, they often contain information for a wider range of higher education audiences.

- > Is the syllabus important to you as instructor? Why or Why not?
- > What types of changes have you made to your course syllabus (e.g., layout, content)?
- > If you made changes, what are two changes you made? Why?

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF AS YOU REVIEW YOUR OWN SYLLABUS

1. Which aspects of equity-minded practice are generally present in your syllabus? Which are generally absent?
2. Imagine you're a student reading the syllabus on the first day of class. Do you feel that the instructor is willing to provide opportunities and resources for you to do well in the course? Why or why not?
3. Imagining yourself again as a student reading your syllabus, do you feel that the instructor assumes that you want to learn and cares for your development as scholars and human beings? Why or why not?
4. Based on your understanding of Culturally Relevant Teaching Theory Do you feel that your syllabus will speak to the experiences of all the students that you serve? Will you students know that you are an advocate for ensuring that they can perform to their personal best in your course?



## CRT SYLLABUS CHECKLIST

- > Do students know who you are? Consider introducing yourself—race or ethnicity, gender pronouns, academic experience, cultural identity, etc.—as the instructor of the course and providing anti-racist and equity-minded messaging to welcome your students.
- > Can students contact you through multiple methods and with flexibility in communication times?
- > What books, articles, and readings have been selected in your course? Are your course resources inclusive to race, socio-economic standing, gender, sexuality, disability, immigration status, English language learner, and first-generation students?
- > Do students have input in shaping content and co-creating community rules outlined in the course syllabus?

## CRT SYLLABUS CHECKLIST

- > Does the syllabus include explicit language about the intolerance of microaggressions and racist remarks, action, and behavior in the course? ( example of microaggression Were you born here? Does your family speak English? Is English your first language? )
- > Allocating points can cause students to assume they have no room for growth, and therefore they may drop out of the course (Rose, 2017). Faculty may consider holistic modalities and progression steps—for example, beginning, emerging, and proficiency—to develop opportunities for the learner to grow (Feldman, 2019) before finalizing student grading in the class. ( Power of zero. What is your intention for grades)?
- > Are mistakes expected, respected, and used to elevate students' understanding of the subject? Do you offer opportunities for retaking missed or late work? What opportunities do students have to catch up if they are behind due to technological barriers or other personal deterrents?.



## CRT SYLLABUS CHECKLIST

- > Is language around policies and expectations of students supportive and not punitive or deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010)?
- > Does your course syllabus provide information regarding housing and food insecurities, along with other on and off campus resources that benefits economically disadvantaged students?
- > Is your course on Canvas ( or whatever platform you use) accessible, clear, inclusive, welcoming, and supportive for all learners to follow despite the modality of asynchronous or synchronous teaching?
- > Do you include messaging regarding your responsibility as a faculty member to alert learners early if participation, learning, and attendance are not met?

## DEMYSTIFYING

- > Does your syllabus provide students with information they need to successfully complete the course?
- > What is the course about (course description)?
- > What is the aim of the course (goals and objectives)?
- > How can students get in touch with you (contact information, office hours)?
- > How will the course be taught (e.g., lecture, group work, student-led discussion)? When will students be learning specific course topics (e.g., calendar, timeline)? What will students be doing (e.g., assignments, exams)?





## DEMYSTIFYING

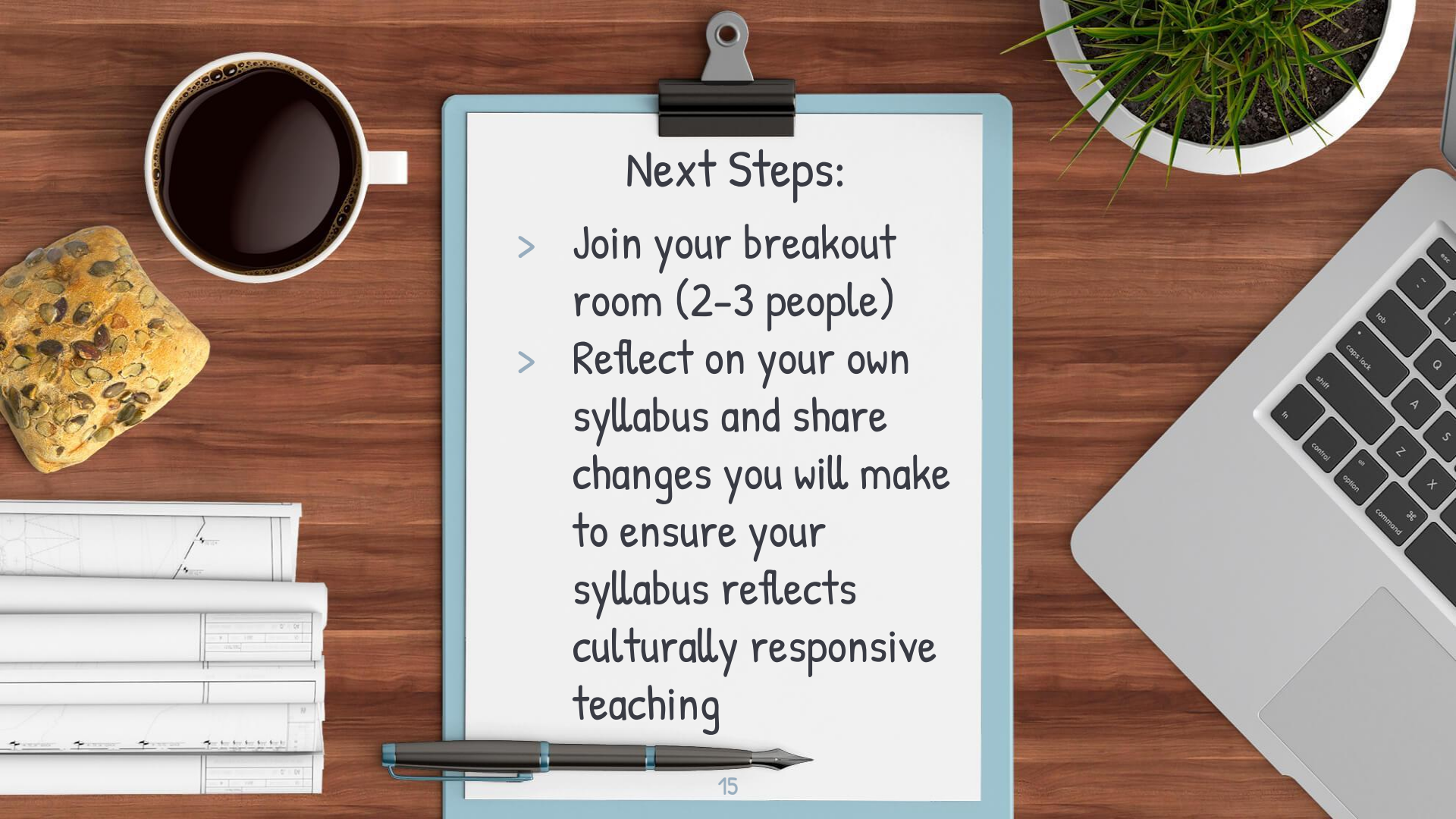
- > How will students' learning be assessed (grading)?
- > How can students obtain additional support (e.g., tutoring, office hours)?
- > What policies are students obliged to adhere to (e.g., policies on grading, accommodations)?
- > Does it include information on how students can seek help from you, in and out of class?
- > Does it include information on how students can seek help from their peers, in and out of class?
- > Does it include information on what academic support services are available on campus, and how students can access them?

## EXAMPLE OF A POSITIVE OPENING STATEMENT

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. In addition, if any of our class meetings conflict with your religious events, please let me know so that we can make arrangements for you.







## Next Steps:

- > Join your breakout room (2-3 people)
- > Reflect on your own syllabus and share changes you will make to ensure your syllabus reflects culturally responsive teaching



Thank You

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