Course Design Syllabus Review Checklist

The Chan Division Course Design Syllabus Review Checklist provides standards for course design through syllabus review. The first, second, and third tiers include a progression of recommended course design practices. The substandard tier includes items that are contrary to best practices and/or USC policies. The checklist can be used for three purposes. It can be used as a developmental tool in two ways, for faculty to complete self-study of a course syllabus and as a tool for peers to provide faculty formative feedback to enhance their teaching, showing progression over time. It can also be used as an evaluative tool to document evidence of one aspect of teaching performance for promotion, tenure, or continuing appointment. Each dimension in the checklist measures one or more criteria in the Chan Definition of Excellence in Teaching, and those criteria are noted next to the dimension name. The practices in Tiers 1, 2, and 3 are supported through training provided by CET's faculty institutes.

Not Included in the Course Design Syllabus Review Checklist

- Evaluation of classroom teaching practice, which is addressed in a separate Classroom Teaching Observation Checklist

Peer Reviewer Characteristics:

- Is a member of the Chan Division Teaching Peer Review Committee.*
- Is (when possible) the same person who completes the Course Design Syllabus Review Checklist, Assessment Practices Review and Classroom Teaching Observation Checklist.
- Has been trained by CET or by a CET Faculty Fellow to use the checklist.

Suggested Instructions for Use

- Faculty will complete a self-review using the Course Design Syllabus Review Checklist.
- Peer reviewer(s) will independently mark as present all checklist items observed in the course syllabus and/or other course documents.
- Ideally, course design syllabus review will be accompanied by an in-person dialogue between faculty and peer reviewer(s), and followed by an Assessment Practices Review and Classroom Teaching Observation Checklist.

*Chan Division Peer Review Teaching Committee: faculty with experience in teaching and development of teaching, e.g. participation in CET workshop series, continuing education, etc.; representative of both classroom and clinical teaching/diverse teaching experiences; and appointed for three-year (staggered) terms, with possible reappointment.

Course Design Syllabus Review Checklist

Check as many as apply; checkmarks can be placed in any of the four tiers.

DIMENSION	SUBSTANDARD TIER	TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3
*Chan Definition of Excellence in Teaching criteria measured by each dimension are noted.	Performing Below Minimum USC Teaching Policy Standard	Performing at Minimum USC Teaching Policy Standard	Performing at Proficient Level of Teaching Standard at USC	Performing at Excellence Level of Teaching Standard at USC
Syllabus format (includes policies) 1b, 2g, 6e*	☐ Syllabus contradicts university-policy statements on Academic Conduct and Support Systems. ☐ Syllabus does not specify policy regarding absences.	☐ Syllabus contains the Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems provided in the Curriculum Coordination Office syllabus template.[7] ☐ Syllabus specifies policy regarding absences ☐ Syllabus includes a policy on use of electronic devices during class. ☐ Technology requirements are clearly stated and instructions provided. ☐ Minimum technical skills required are clearly stated.	☐ Syllabus contains all components of the Curriculum Coordination Office template. ☐ Policy on electronic devices encourages applications for educational purposes when relevant.	☐ Course description section includes aspirational goals that frame why the skills in the learning objective section are important. ☐ Syllabus mirrors that of other sections of the same course (same prefix and course number, within the same academic year) taught on-ground, online, or off-campus (if applicable[8]).

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[7] See Curriculum Coordination Office Syllabus Template https://arr.usc.edu/services/curriculum/resources.html
[8] This may not be feasible if the course has only one section or if mirroring is not possible for other reasons, e.g. differences between entry- and post-professional course sections.

DIMENSION	SUBSTANDARD TIER	TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3
Comments:				
Communication 1b, 1c, 5b, 6e*	☐ Preferred method of contact is inappropriate or not feasible for all students.	☐ Syllabus provides contact information for all those involved in course instruction, as well as preferred method of contact.	☐ Syllabus indicates how long students should wait for a response from all those involved in instruction.	☐ Syllabus encourages students to contact instructor outside of class. ☐ Syllabus encourages students to provide feedback to the instructor.
Comments:				
Learning objectives 2a, 5b, 6a, 6c*	☐ Aspirational statements[9] are listed as learning objectives.[10]	☐ Learning objectives are listed in the syllabus and identify specific, measurable outcomes.[11] ☐ Every learning objective is measured by at least one graded assignment.	☐ The learning objective being measured is noted in the assignment.	☐ Learning objectives are explicitly cited in the syllabus as related to standards/goals set by program (curriculum design), university, profession, and/or accrediting body.
Comments:				

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[9] Examples of aspirational statements are "Students will appreciate X," or "value X," or "develop creativity," etc.

[10] See the CET resource A Clear Guide to Writing Learning Objectives.

[11] Use of the verbs "know," "understand," "learn" or other outcomes that cannot be measured are avoided. See the CET resource A Clear Guide to Writing Learning Objectives.

DIMENSION	SUBSTANDARD TIER	TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3
Assignments, Assessments and Grading 2a, 2b, 2d, 4e, 5b, 6a, 6b, 6c, 6d, 6e*	☐ Course credit is awarded solely for attendance. ☐ An inaccurate or incomplete grade scale is provided. ☐ Assignments are mis-weighted (don't add up to 100%). ☐ The method of grading/scoring for assignments and assessments is unclear, inappropriate, or unfair. ☐ There are no specified methods for student assessment/evaluation in the syllabus. ☐ Syllabus does not outline policy regarding late/missing assignments or assessments.	☐ A grading scale includes points or percentages, and the corresponding letter grade. ☐ The syllabus displays the weight of each assignment/assessment toward the overall course grade. ☐ Due dates for all assignments are specified. ☐ Information is provided for when graded assignments/assessments will be returned. ☐ If credit is awarded for participation, it is no more than 15% of the grade, and the method for grading participation is specified. ☐ The method of grading/scoring for each assignment or assessment is specified in the syllabus. ☐ Syllabus outlines policy regarding late/missing assignments or assessments	☐ Each assessment or assignment has its own specific description, with reference to additional guidelines and rubric as relevant. ☐ Student grades are based on their performance against clear grading criteria aligned with course learning objectives. ☐ Group work has a method of measuring individual student's contribution to the project, e.g. peer review/evaluation. ☐ The majority of the student's grade is determined by individual (vs. group) performance. ☐ Extra credit is not offered. ☐ Assessment is done using a variety of methods (e.g., exams, projects, presentations, etc.) ☐ Syllabus includes student self- and/or peer-evaluation	☐ Course includes multiple low-stakes assignments distributed across the course to prepare for larger assignments. ☐ Grading rubrics are provided for all major assignments along with the assignment description. Syllabus indicates that a grading rubric will be provided, if not included therein. ☐ Grading rubric requirements align to the assignment description. ☐ Participation credit is awarded only for in-class work.

Comments:

DIMENSION	SUBSTANDARD TIER	TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3
Course materials (can include readings, videos, audio recordings, etc.) 1c, 4a*	☐ There is no reference to or evidence of course materials.	☐ Required and optional (if any) course materials are specified separately in the syllabus.	☐ Course materials are related to current local, national, and/or global events, when pertinent to course learning objectives. [12]	☐ Course readings include influential and current peer-reviewed journal articles (or discipline equivalent) when pertinent to course learning objectives.
Comments:				
Inclusive Teaching Practices 3d, 3e, 3f*	☐ Required resources are not equitably available to all students. ☐ Consequences for late assignment submission and missed classes unduly burden certain populations.	☐ Syllabus is available on the LMS[13] as a downloadable document. ☐ Grades are maintained on a secure online system for students to access, such as a LMS. ☐ Syllabus specifies which	☐ Assignment due dates are not scheduled on religious days of obligation. ☐ Syllabus outlines expectations for inclusive behavior in the course.	☐ Linked content follows recommended best practices for accessibility.[14] ☐ Course content is presented in multiple formats (e.g., video, text).

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[12] See the CET resource A Clear Guide to Writing Learning Objectives.

[13] Learning Management Systems such as Blackboard, Moodle, or Canvas.

[14] Images are described, videos are captioned and transcripts provided, documents are .pdf or .doc, documents use headings rather than individually-styled text, etc.

DIMENSION	SUBSTANDARD TIER	TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3
	☐ Policy on use of electronic devices during class unduly burdens certain populations who may be required to use it (i.e., due to an accommodation).	resources must be purchased and where/how other resources are available. ☐ Technology is equitably attainable/accessible to students. ☐ Assessments are not scheduled on religious days of obligation		
Comments:				
Representation of Diverse Perspectives 3a, 3b, 3c*	☐ Course materials reflect a bias toward one perspective on course topics	☐ Course materials or topics include diverse perspectives, authors, or applications.	☐ Course materials include examination of underrepresented perspectives or populations	☐ Learning objectives include development of skills relevant to living and working in a diverse world. ☐ When aligned with/relevant to course content and learning objectives, course includes community engagement
Comments:				

DIMENSION	SUBSTANDARD TIER	TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3
Course outline 4b, 5a, 5b, 5c, 6a*	☐ The weekly plan indicates cancelled classes and/or changes to the official listed class meeting time or duration/contact hours.	☐ A weekly plan for the semester is provided and includes class topics, readings, and assignment due dates.	☐ The weekly plan for the semester includes description of in-class work and active learning.	☐ The weekly plan for the semester includes specific instructional plans for each class meeting with a lesson objective tied to the course learning objectives.
Comments:				
Student participation and engagement in course 1b, 1c, 1d, 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 2g, 3a, 3b, 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d, 4e, 4f, 5b, 5c, 6e*	☐ Syllabus has no reference to expectations for classroom behavior.	☐ Syllabus establishes expectations that students' communication, behavior, and participation are respectful, professional, and relevant. ☐ Syllabus incorporates professional codes of ethics, USC student code of conduct,[15] and/or USC code of ethics.[16]	☐ Syllabus provides other classroom norms relevant to course learning objectives, or indicates that the class will work together to compose classroom norms. ☐ Syllabus establishes expectations that students assume responsibility for their learning through active learning or experiential learning.	☐ Syllabus indicates students' statements of fact should be based on course materials or other credible sources, and appropriately cited during class discussions. ☐ Syllabus outlines opportunities for students to share their own perspectives and to take leadership roles in the class or profession. ☐ Syllabus includes opportunities for students to add unique, discipline-based content to the course.
Comments:				

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[15] See SCampus Part B
[16] See USC Code of Ethics.

DIMENSION	SUBSTANDARD TIER	TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3
Course and Instructor Evaluation 1a, 1c, 2b, 2c, 2e, 3a, 3b, 5b, 7a, 7b*	☐ Syllabus indicates inappropriate consequences or rewards for completing the end-of-semester university student learning experience evaluation.	☐ Syllabus explains end-of-semester university student learning experience evaluation process.	☐ Syllabus explains end-of-semester university student learning experience evaluation purpose and the importance of student engagement with the process. ☐ Syllabus indicates plan for mid-semester course evaluation	☐ Syllabus explains use of feedback from mid-semester course evaluation[17]
Comments:				

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[17] See the CET resource Mid-Semester Evaluations.