

EOAS Syllabi and CLOs

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Background

Why is a complete and consistent syllabus needed for every course?

- It provides a standard (i.e. familiar to students), **public-facing** description about the course that will be used by current students, future students, prospective students, new and existing TAs, instructors of co-, pre- and post-requisite courses, and outsiders wanting to know about the course.
- It should set realistic expectations about what will be learned, how that learning will be done, and how students will be assessed. Students need to establish appropriate expectations if they are to be satisfied with the course.
- If students do not know what to expect – or worse, begin the course with misconceptions – they will almost certainly be dissatisfied, resulting in less than optimal learning, negative impressions of the subject, discipline and people teaching, and course evaluations will likely be more negative than they could be.
- Finally, it is of course difficult to attract students into our programs if they are unable to see reliable, correct and inspiring information about what to expect.

An ideal syllabus includes:

- 1) Syllabus needs to be **dated** to demonstrate it is current.
- 2) **Target audiences** include current students, future students, prospective students, new TAs, instructors of co-, pre- and post-requisite courses, and outsiders wanting to know about the course.
- 3) **Succinct** – shorter will be more likely to be read.
- 4) **Inspiring**, if possible, to attract students. Or, put inspiring components on EOAS website's course home page.
- 5) **Easily maintainable** (EOAS website should probably build a form to build these things.)
- 6) Include all the required **"formal" content** – i.e. use the UBC template.
- 7) Sets **realistic expectations** of workload and what "success" looks like in this course.

- 8) Include **well-crafted learning goals**, activities students should expect, assessment practices (maybe even point to rubrics).

Contents of UBC's recommended syllabus

All 17 items are recommended, while *indicates the 12 items that are **required** by [Policy V-130](#).

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1) Acknowledgement (Land, etc) | 10) *Learning outcomes (CLOs) |
| 2) *Course information (title, code, credits) | 11) *Learning activities – listed, not detailed |
| 3) *prerequisites | 12) *Learning materials |
| 4) *Corequisites | 13) *Assessments, passing criteria, late policies |
| 5) *Contacts: names, contact details, office, hrs | 14) *UBC policies & academic integrity & accommod'ns |
| 6) Course instructor bio | 15) Learning analytics |
| 7) *Other instructional staff (eg TAs) | 16) Learning resources & support |
| 8) *Course structure – what to expect. | 17) Copyright statement for course & materials |
| 9) *Schedule of topics | |

Start with the [MS-Word template](#) or use UBC's new online syllabus generator starting [here](#). This is a form that can be filled online and produces a syllabus that follows the template recommended by Senate (Vancouver or Okanagan). See Vancouver's Senate "[Policies and Resources to Support Student Success](#)" page.

A Sampling of EOAS Syllabi

The course syllabus (or an equivalent document) was requested for 27 EOAS courses (mostly quantitative courses), and 23 were received. These were summarized to characterize the extent to which each syllabus was compliant the UBC template, and to indicate where the information was available. Course learning goals were also reviewed and characterized as either "exemplary", "present", "mentioned", or "none found".

Courses for which we received or found syllabi include:

ATSC 201, 301, 303, 313, 404, 409,

ENVR 410, 420, 430, 440,

EOSC 211, 212, 250, 325, 340, 350, 352, 353, 354, 372, 373, 410, 442, 450, 453, 471, 472.

Where are syllabi provided?

Given the range of target audiences (above), a syllabus is ideally a public document. The locations of the 27 syllabi received are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Number of courses with syllabus at each location	
Instructor's website or page at EOAS	8
Not publically available (or on Canvas)	6
Privately on the EOAS Owncloud server	5
EOAS course homepage	4
GitHub (instructors or other)	3
instructor's other website	1

Completeness

Each syllabus was reviewed to determine whether the items recommended or required by the UBC template were present. The seventeen recommended/required items were configured as 15 items (Table 2), and each instance was judged to be either “exemplary”, “present”, “mentioned”, or “none present”. (From the QuEST project perspective it should be noted that 9 of the 13 courses with <50% compliance are geophysics courses.)

Table 2

*Criteria: = required by UBC policy
1. Acknowledgement
2. *Course information (title, code, credits, pre- & co-reqs)
3. *Contacts: names, contact details, office, hrs
4. Course instructor bio
5. *Other instructional staff (eg TAs)
6. *Course structure - setting expectations
7. *Schedule of topics
8. *Learning outcomes (CLOs)
9. *Learning activities - listed, not detailed
10 *Learning materials
11. *Assessments, passing criteria, late policies
12. *UBC policies, academic integrity & accommodations.
13. Analytics; data (etc) for course improvement & evolution
14. Learning resources & support
15. Copyright statement for course & materials

Figure 1 summarizes aggregate results of this assessment. Criteria are sorted in order of “most compliant”. For example, item 11, “*Assessments, passing criteria & late policies*”, was present or exemplary 19 of the 27 syllabi reviewed. In contrast, item 12, “*UBC Policies, academic integrity and accommodations*” was missing or only mentioned in 16 of the 27 syllabi.

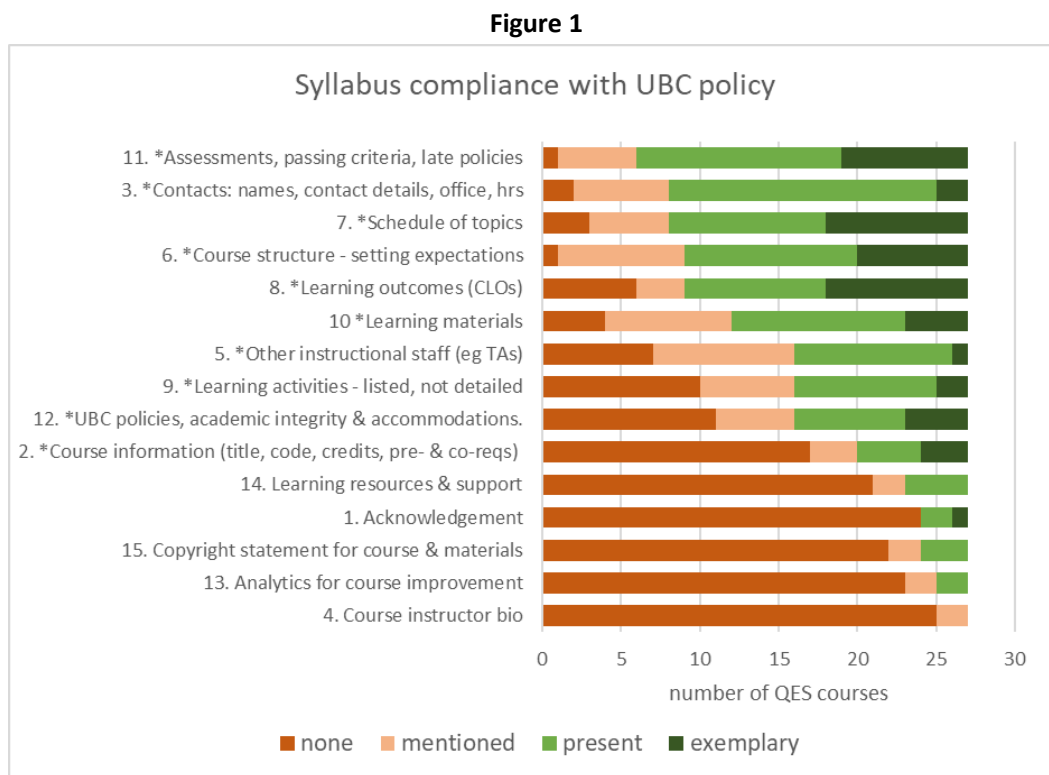


Table 3 illustrates the extent to which syllabi reviewed were “compliant” with the UBC expectations. For example, from this figure, only 9 of the 27 syllabi included 80% or more of the recommended components. This is not a criticism at this stage since very few instructors are even aware that UBC has recommendations regarding the content of a course’s syllabus.

compliance *	No. courses
101% +	2
81 - 100%	3
61 - 80%	4
41 - 60%	8
21 - 40%	8
0 - 20%	2

***100% = "present" for all 15 criteria**
> 100% implies some "exemplary"

Course Learning Outcomes

Carefully crafted statements about exactly what students can expect to be able to do upon succeeding in the course are well recognized as critical for both describing the course and its purpose, and setting appropriate expectations. See extensive guidelines and references at the [CWSEI Learning Goals page](#).

Updating this portion of the syllabus is perhaps the most important (and challenging) aspect of improving syllabi.

Table 4 suggests that EOAS syllabi are in fact not bad at providing CLOs. However, there is certainly room for improvement, and for striving for consistency.

Table 4	
Course learning Goals	
exemplary	9
present	9
mentioned	3
none	6

A possible framework for CLOs

There are advantages to asking for some sort of “standards” when writing learning outcomes for a course. Without going to the literature, here is a suggested framework for characterize course learning outcomes (CLOs) in terms of **4 types of characteristics**. If CLOs are written this way for each course, then each course could be described in terms of number of goals targeting each of the characteristics.

Any CLO should target one or more of these characteristics.

- 1) Students will be developing their ...
 - a) **knowledge** (learning that can be remembered)
 - b) **skills** (abilities that take practice to improve proficiency)
 - c) **attitudes** (habits of mind, professional behaviors (not skills), etc.)
- 2) Students will be learning about ...
 - a) **theory**; discipline specific or more general (fundamentals in math, physics, geoscience, etc.)
 - b) **application** of theory (knowledge & skills) to address real issues, problems, decisions, etc.
 - c) **career-preparation** including ...
 - i) so-called soft skills (writing, communication, work habits, etc.),
 - ii) how professions function (logistics, costs, business context - corporate, consulting, etc.).
 - iii) people skills: teams, leadership, ethics & EDI, networking, consulting, labour market research, etc.
- 3) Consider also characterizing students’ learning experiences as involving:
 - a) **Classroom** learning,
 - b) **Laboratory** learning
 - c) **Homework**
 - d) **Experiences** beyond the classroom or lab (including projects, field work, or other settings).
- 4) Students learn **solo**; with **peers** (pairs, groups, teams) or with **experts** (instructors, TAs, visitors, etc.)

Could we have instructors (or other) characterize each course, assignment, lab, or module in terms of

- the proportions of learning that involve developing knowledge, skills or attitudes (sum to 100%).
- proportions of learning that involve theory, application, or career-prep (sum to 100%).
- Proportions of 4 experiences (sum to 100%).
- Proportions of who with (sum to 100%).