



COURSE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR GOOD PRACTICE PROPOSAL

Draft for Discussion

**Special thanks to Dr. Brian Whitworth for his continued support
in the compilation of this proposal**

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Executive Summary

In an ongoing effort to ensure a higher quality of education at NJIT, the Graduate Student Association has proposed a set of bare minimum standards that a college-level course should adhere to. These Course Standards, which were approved by the Graduate student body, address issues regarding a clear and proper syllabus, modes of assessment, and promptness in returning graded work. In addition, GSA has also drafted a list of Recommended Course Guidelines that are designed to be used in addition to the Course Standards. Both of these documents, presented as drafts for recommendations, are designed to be used by course coordinators, as well as professors on a voluntary basis to improve the consistency of graduate level courses and to establish a university-wide standard that can be met by all courses.

Description of Problem

Every semester, the individual graduate program department representatives hold a feedback session to provide a forum for their constituents to raise issues and concerns, both with their respective department and with the university in general. One of the most common issues persistently raised has been regarding the lack of consistency among graduate courses. Students have commented most vehemently about unclear or sometimes even a lack of a syllabus, lack of variation on exams and assignments and failure to return exams and assignments within a reasonable period of time.

In addition, issues have also been brought up regarding professors not responding to e-mail communiqué within a reasonable time, lack of proper information regarding textbook and other resources required for the course, and unclear office hours. Other comments were also regarding modes of assessment that were unfair, such as a midterm that was 45% of a student's overall grade for the course or a midterm that included material that was not covered in the course.

Proposed Solution & Benefits

The Graduate Student Association, therefore, is proposing a list of Courses Standards, aimed at course coordinators to improve the quality of courses and establishing consistency by first addressing the bare minimum criteria of what a college-level course should consist of.

The graduate student body has approved these Course Standards, which are:

COURSE STANDARDS:

1. A *course syllabus* is given to all students on or before the first day of class which has all of the following components:
 - a. Course number, title and prerequisites.
 - b. A course description and outline.
 - c. An assessment criteria and grading scheme with weights.

- d. A weekly listing of course topics and assignments/projects with their due dates.
 - e. Professor's contact information, office hours and office location.
 - f. Title, author, publisher and edition of all required texts.
 - g. A statement indicating that the NJIT Honor Code will be upheld, and that any violations will be brought to the immediate attention of the Dean of Students.
 - h. Students should be made aware of any modifications or deviations from the syllabus throughout the course of the semester.
2. Exams and assignments should undergo variations *every semester*.
 3. The normal turn-around time for exams and assignments to be graded and returned is *two weeks* after submission.
 4. Midterm-exam results, if applicable, are known to students before the drop date.
 5. The class begins and ends on time, if applicable.

The GSA, therefore, would like to take the initiative to award courses that comply with the above standards with a special "seal" that can go on the syllabus or course website.

In addition, GSA also has a secondary set of guidelines aimed at professors, which we understand cannot be held as "standards" for maintaining teaching quality. Those recommended guidelines are:

COURSE GUIDELINES RECOMMENDED FOR GOOD PRACTICE:

1. Office hours are made available for students, either scheduled or by appointment, a minimum of *one hour per credit*.
2. Communications to the professor are responded to promptly, in most cases *forty-eight hours or less*.
3. The syllabus is made available to students online before the first day of class.
4. Information regarding required texts is given to the NJIT bookstore such that a sufficient number of books are in stock before the first day of class.
5. All modes of assessment (i.e. exams and assignment) are *valid* in terms of the content presented in the course.
6. All modes of assessment (i.e. exams and assignments) are *sufficient* in terms of evaluating the content the student learned in the course.

Professors who are able to follow these guidelines will be awarded a special “gold seal” for their course syllabus or website.

Compliance with the Course Standards as well as the Course Guidelines on the part of course coordinators and professors is on a voluntary basis. However, GSA will recognize those coordinators and professors along with the courses that fulfill the above set of standards and/or guidelines on the graduate level. In addition, GSA is prepared to offer a yearly teaching excellence award to a selected professor that is exemplary in the areas of maintaining course and teaching quality. This award will also come with a research grant, funded by GSA (details to be announced). By wide-adoption of this strategy, the student body will also feel reassured that the standards they approved are being adhered to.

Recommendations

The Graduate Student Association would like to work in conjunction with all the graduate departments to receive feedback regarding both of the attached drafts (Appendix A and Appendix B). The target for the implementation of this proposal is during the Fall 2004 semester, and we would like all professors begin to think about what they need to change to be in compliance. Please direct all feedback to gsa@njit.edu.

Appendix A – Course Standards- Draft for Recommendation



COURSE STANDARDS:

1. A *course syllabus* is given to all students on or before the first day of class which has all of the following components:
 - a. Course number, title and prerequisites.
 - b. A course description and outline.
 - c. An assessment criteria and grading scheme with weights.
 - d. A weekly listing of course topics and assignments/projects with their due dates.
 - e. Professor's contact information, office hours and office location.
 - f. Title, author, publisher and edition of all required texts.
 - g. A statement indicating that the NJIT Honor Code will be upheld, and that any violations will be brought to the immediate attention of the Dean of Students.
 - h. Students should be made aware of any modifications or deviations from the syllabus throughout the course of the semester.
2. Exams and assignments should undergo variations *every semester*.
3. The normal turn-around time for exams and assignments to be graded and returned is *two weeks* after submission.
4. Midterm-exam results, if applicable, are known to students before the drop date.
5. The class begins and ends on time, if applicable.

Appendix B – Guidelines Recommended for Good Practice – Draft for Recommendation



COURSE GUIDELINES RECOMMENDED FOR GOOD PRACTICE:

1. Office hours are made available for students, either scheduled or by appointment, a minimum of *one hour per credit*.
2. Communications to the professor are responded to promptly, in most cases *forty-eight hours or less*.
3. The syllabus is made available to students online before the first day of class.
4. Information regarding required texts is given to the NJIT bookstore such that a sufficient number of books are in stock before the first day of class.
5. All modes of assessment (i.e. exams and assignment) are *valid* in terms of the content presented in the course.
6. All modes of assessment (i.e. exams and assignments) are *sufficient* in terms of evaluating the content the student learned in the course.

Appendix C – Sample Syllabus

GSA-101 Introduction to Syllabus Writing¹

Dr. Michael Staff

(973) 596-2993

michael.staff@njit.edu

<http://web.njit.edu/~staff>

Office: 310 East Building

Office Hours: Sat 10:00pm-11:30pm, Wed 2:30am-3:30am & by appointment

About this Course

Course Description and Objectives:

This course will explore and analyze the complex and controversial issues that surround syllabus writing in the 21st century. A course syllabus is a tool for professors to organize their courses but even more so it is the central document referenced throughout the semester by the students of that course. Students utilize their syllabi to manage their time and get the most out of the courses they take.

Required Text:

Staff, Michael. *Syllabi and You*. New York: McGraw Hill, Edition 3.

ISBN: 4938XO8909

Prerequisites:

Successful completion of GSA-100 and experience teaching graduate-level courses

Assessment

| Assessment | Allocation |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| Assignment 1: Bad Syllabi | 10% |
| Assignment 2: Interview a Student | 10% |
| Assignment 3: Class Presentation | 10% |
| Assignment 4: Good Syllabi | 20% |
| Midterm | 15% |
| Final | 20% |
| Class Participation | 5% |

Course Policies

Late Submissions: Assignments are expected to be done professionally and submitted on time. Being on time is part of being professional. You should plan to complete assignments with this in mind. Late assignments will be deducted one letter grade per day.

¹ Some content and formatting of this syllabus is courtesy for Dr. Brian Whitworth's syllabi available online at <http://web.njit.edu/~whitwort/>

Exams: Exams will cover all material presented in the course and will not cover any material not presented. A different exam is given each semester. Sample exams from the previous semester are available at the circulation desk of the Van Houten library.

Course Schedule

| Week | Topic | Reading | Assignment |
|-------------|--|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| 9/1 | Course introduction | Chapter 1 | Get required materials |
| 9/8 | What is a syllabus? | Chapter 2 | |
| 9/15 | Bad Syllabi | Chapter 3 | Assignment #1: Bad Syllabi |
| 9/22 | Syllabi: Ethical and Legal Issues | Chapter 4 | |
| 9/29 | Student's information needs | Chapter 5 | Assignment #2: Interview a Student |
| 10/6 | <i>MIDTERM</i> | | Assignment #3: Class Presentation |
| 10/13 | Midterm Review and Class Presentations | Chapter 6 | |
| 10/20 | Course information requirements | Chapter 7 | Assignment #4: Interview a Professor |
| 10/27 | Grading Policies | Chapter 8 | |
| 11/3 | Importance of stating the Obvious: Honor Code Issues | Chapter 9 | Assignment #5: Good Syllabi |
| 11/10 | Good Syllabi | Chapter 10 | |
| 11/17 | Syllabus Distribution | Chapter 11 | |
| 11/20 | Online Syllabi | Chapter 12 | |
| 11/27 | Final Exam Review | | |

Honor Code

Any evidence of cheating in any form, including plagiarism, will be dealt with according to the honor code of NJIT (course failure and suspension or expulsion). Please note: There will be no warnings or chances with regard to cheating. Any discovered case of cheating will be immediately passed to the Dean of Students for further investigation. ***This is your warning now.*** Cheating is not worth it - you may not only fail this course, but also be suspended from NJIT. The full text of the NJIT Honor Code is available for your review at <http://www.njit.edu/academics/honorcode.php>