

UDL Activity: A Syllabus Hunt

AIAI Grant UDL Example ~ Towson University

Title: UDL Syllabus Activity

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Course/Program or Department: Educational Technology & Literacy ISTC 301/501

Notes: 1 file

Introduction and Context of Course

My inspiration to create the *Syllabus Hunt* activity initially came out of my desire to 1) have students actually read the syllabus 2) encourage immediate student engagement in the course. Prior to my knowledge about UDL, I understood and practiced the development of positive classroom climate, and this is why **Engagement** is the focus of the entire first week of every one of my courses.

The Syllabus Hunt activity, among others, is one way I promote a safe learning environment as well as engagement. Courses I teach include Towson Seminar, ISTC 301, and ECED 407. Students in ISTC 301 and ECED 407 are predominately education majors, however TSEM students range in majors from nursing, to communications, to economics, to dance. All three courses have attracted both traditional and non-traditional students, and I have found the Syllabus Hunt is appropriate for all levels, content areas, and students.

Learning Objectives for this activity include students'

- use of QR code technology to retrieve questions about the syllabus which will require students to read the syllabus. Many of the questions focus on the **expectations and beliefs that optimize motivation**. For example, questions are posed about the benefits of good attendance or the options I provide for assignments.
- collaboration to answer those questions. Likewise, the goal is for students to immediately begin **to foster collaboration and community**
- integration of QR code technology. This starts (for some students) with “what is a QR code?” Students are encouraged to download a free QR code reader app. Later in the week, students then use a QR code generator to create their own QR codes.

UDL Related References

This activity incorporates all three UDL Principles, however, the primary focus here is engagement. Therefore, below are related references that focus on Multiple Means of Engagement and other ideas for you to engage your students.

- Multiple Means of Engagement:
<http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/udlguidelines/principle3>

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- Student-Centered Means of Engagement:
<http://www.cast.org/w/page/jff/113;jsessionid=4E7DAB9A2407165DE70CF64FE5D96114?0>
- Accessible Instruction- UDL in Teaching and Learning:
https://ssbp.mycampus.ca/www_ains_dc/Introduction8.html

Reading Resources about the Development of Strong Syllabi

This activity is focused on student engagement with the syllabi. Here are resources about other ways to use the syllabus as well as how to develop a syllabus that is student-centered and effective.

- **Stanford University:** <https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/resources/course-preparation-resources/creating-syllabus>
- **University of Washington's Center for Teaching and Learning:**
<http://www.washington.edu/teaching/teaching-resources/preparing-to-teach/designing-your-course-and-syllabus/#Resources>
- O'Brien, J. G., Millis, B. J., & Cohen, M. G. (2008). *The course syllabus: A learning-centered approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Steps in the Process/Activities

- Prior to this activity, the syllabus needs to be made available both online as well as in print. I provide a few hard copies for those students who would like one, otherwise, a digital version is available on Bb. The digital version contains audio clips for the course description and the rationale (additional audio clips can be added).
- When students come to class that first day or week, they should be put into random groups of no more than three students. Usually, I have students count off by 3's to create the groups.
- Questions about the syllabus can be turned into QR codes using QR Code Generator:
http://www.qr-code-generator.com/?PID=1076&kw=qr%20code%20generator&gclid=CjwKCAjwk4vMBRAgEiwA4ftLs8KJIfyXmoyfuF4xhUBJ-ZTb1Ko94Mon0i08mCbNYitP_tnSRdEgkhoCUcwQAvD_BwE.
- The codes can either be downloaded, copied, then pasted into a Word Document (see my sample). Or, I usually use the Snipping Tool feature to cut out the code, then copy it into a Word document.
- These codes are then cut out and placed around the room prior the students' arrival.
- Students are encouraged to use their own mobile devices. I recommend the free QR Reader app, but others work fine, too. I keep a handful of iPads in the classroom in the event not enough students have access to the QR reader on their phones.
- Students are given approximately 30 minutes to read, answer, and discuss among themselves.
- Students move from code to code and answer the questions. In the groups, all students are expected to take an active role. They have total control about how they wish to answer

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the questions. In other words, the group can decide on the structure of the activity for themselves. Examples of different structures include the following: each student pulls up the QR question and he/she works simultaneously to find the answers on the syllabus (on his/her own computer); one student reads the question off the QR code, and the other students help find the answers; students tackle different questions around the room, then they share what they found with others in the group).

- The instructor should walk around and visit with each group throughout the activity. Instructors can ask additional questions about students' perception of the course content, schedule, assessments, assignments, and/or requirements.
- We conclude the activity with a whole group discussion to clarify questions and/or provide additional information. This provides the instructor a nice opportunity to make any corrections to the syllabus before getting too far into the course.
- As an extension to this activity, students can be asked to work in their groups and create graphic representations of portions of the syllabus. For example, students can represent the dispositions through a short skit/video (e.g. how to positively participate in class). The schedule of course topics/assignments can be redesigned through a digital tool such as Google Calendar, and/or for those syllabus sections that do not currently have an audio component, students can create the audio recordings.

Outcomes and/or Evaluation

One outcome of this activity is students' awareness of the syllabus and the most important elements of the syllabus. Other outcomes include the immediate development of relationships, the easing of students' worries/stress about unfamiliar topics, the clarification of errors/confusion on the syllabus, and the opportunity to informally assess students' technology, reading, collaboration, and comprehension skills.

Reflection

This activity has proven successful because I have far fewer questions about due dates and expectations. Additionally, students regularly comment on the course evaluations that they felt my courses provided them ample opportunities to get to know their peers; they saw our classroom as a collaborative community.