What is the main purpose of college?

Challenges
Communication: Different perspectives

Images from Creative Commons
The Perspective Myriad

(Tannen, Hamilton, & Schiffrin, 2015)
Divergent faculty views: Use of honorifics

- Honorific:
  - With first name: 14
  - Honorific only: 31
  - Honorific with last name: 12

- No honorific:
  - First name only: 38
### Differing faculty approaches to syllabi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professor 1</th>
<th>Professor 2</th>
<th>Professor 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The minimalist</td>
<td>Assignment guidelines</td>
<td>Don’t kill me with email!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.25 pages</td>
<td>“A good response paper will…”</td>
<td>Email protocol includes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“You are expected to be an active participant. …”</td>
<td>● No response to a question answered in syllabus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>● Use an appropriate subject line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>● FYI: Students x 7 emails per term = 1000 emails!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Challenges

- Divided views on the syllabi
- Differing performance expectations (*What sort of work merits an A?*)
- Appropriate one-on-one interactions and avenues for feedback
Challenge #1

Divided views on the syllabi
Differing views on the syllabus

- The syllabus can cause information overload
  - Document
  - Delivery

- Students have different experiences “using” a syllabus
The role of the syllabus

Explicit Guide

Information Overload
Reading the syllabus

Most students do not read syllabi carefully and have difficulty recalling relevant information (Raymark & Connor-Greene, 2002; Smith & Razzouk, 1993).

Students report that they consult syllabi fairly regularly (Calhoon & Becker, 2008).
Zucker (1992) asked students to identify the first thing they looked for when they first received the syllabus. The top three responses (made by 16 - 19% of the students) were test dates, number of tests, and course content/topics.
Communication breakdown $\rightarrow$ frustration

Communication breakdown → frustration

WHAT DID WE COVER IN CLASS LAST WEEK?
IT'S IN THE SYLLABUS.

WHAT'S YOUR LATE HOMEWORK POLICY?
IT'S IN THE SYLLABUS.

WHEN ARE YOUR OFFICE HOURS?
IT'S IN THE SYLLABUS.

HOW WILL MY GRADE BE COMPUTED?
IT'S IN THE SYLLABUS.

IT'S IN THE SYLLABUS

This message brought to you by every instructor that ever lived.

WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM
Delivery of the syllabus

Emphasize important information

Need-to-know now?
Walk in your students’ shoes

“We must teach the students we have, not the students we want (or the students we imagine we were back in the mists of time)” (Cooper, M.L., 1992).
Kris Kristofferson - “To Beat The Devil”

If you waste your time a talking
To the people who don't listen
To the things that you are saying
Who do you thinks gonna hear?
And if you should die explaining how
The things that they complain about
Are things they could be changing
Who do you thinks gonna care?
Read the following EULA (1 of 1)

To install updates, you must accept the terms of the End User License Agreement (EULA).

Windows XP Service Pack 2

SUPPLEMENTAL END USER LICENSE AGREEMENT FOR MICROSOFT SOFTWARE

MICROSOFT WINDOWS XP SERVICE PACK 2

PLEASE READ THIS SUPPLEMENTAL END-USER LICENSE AGREEMENT (“SUPPLEMENTAL EULA”) CAREFULLY. BY INSTALLING OR USING THE SOFTWARE THAT ACCOMPANIES THIS SUPPLEMENTAL EULA, YOU AGREE TO THE TERMS OF THIS SUPPLEMENTAL EULA. IF YOU DO NOT AGREE, DO NOT INSTALL OR USE THE SOFTWARE AND, IF APPLICABLE, RETURN IT TO THE PLACE OF PURCHASE FOR A FULL REFUND.

THIS SOFTWARE DOES NOT TRANSMIT ANY PERSONALLY IDENTIFIABLE INFORMATION FROM YOUR COMPUTER TO MICROSOFT COMPUTER SYSTEMS WITHOUT YOUR CONSENT.
Modify expectations

Remind students that the information is in the syllabus at the time in which they need it (Calhoon & Becker, 2008).
See things from a student’s perspective

The basic format of exams, length and format of required papers and projects, statement of course withdrawal policy, listing of day-to-day class activities, and specific goals/objectives for each topic were rated considerably more important by students than by faculty.

(Garavalia, Hummel, Wiley, & Huitt, 2000)
Consider an interactive syllabus

http://lindalemus.georgetown.domains/workshops/interactive-syllabus/
Students have different experiences “using” a syllabus
Facilitate understanding of the syllabus

Introduction to Sociology:
● What should you do if you are having difficulties with Canvas in Intro to Sociology?
● What is ADA?
● A citation mistake such as wrong page number is considered an Honor System violation. True or false?
● What will happen if a student’s phone rings during Intro to Sociology?
● How far in advance should a student contact the professor in the case of an absence due to religious reasons?
Poll students’ understanding of the syllabus

1. What should you do if you are late?
   A. Apologize to the professor immediately
   B. Explain why you were late
   C. Sit down quickly and quietly
   D. Wait outside the class until you are invited in
“Hitting the target”
Challenge #2

Differing performance expectations
What merits an $A$?
Possible underlying causes

- Student and professor have different grading criteria and/or weights in mind.
  - Assignment length
  - Grammatical accuracy
  - Effort
- Students encounter a variety of grading standards.
- Students are poor judges of the quality of their own work.
- Students do not understand professor’s purpose for the assignment or the parameters of a task.
Strategies for prevention

- Provide clear and detailed assignment instructions
  - Be sure the title of an assignment is a clear description of the task that you want students to complete and that guiding verbs clearly match your expectations
  - Give a clear, brief description of the task
  - Consider identifying your purpose for the assignment
  - Consider identifying an audience for students to address in their work
  - Consider providing a suggested rhetorical structure
  - Consider providing suggested steps for the process of completing the assignment
Strategies for prevention

- Use rubrics for major assignments - not just *summatively*, but *formatively*
  - Design rubrics that outline grading criteria and their weights
  - Include descriptors of what constitutes A-level, B-level, etc. work
  - Distribute rubrics when you give the assignment
  - Review models as a class using the rubric (or provide annotated samples)
  - Ask students to rate their own work using the rubric as part of their writing process
  - Ask students to use the rubric (or portions of it) as a guideline for feedback in peer review
Strategies for prevention

- Encourage students to seek feedback (from professor or TA) during the process; ask them to bring *specific* questions
- If you give feedback at periodic stages / on drafts, consider focusing on what needs to be improved and not yet mentioning what students have done well
Strategies for repair

- Have a grade review policy in place
- Encourage students to view grades as a learning opportunity (and remind yourself of that point, too: in a sense, grading is teaching)
- Remind students that even with use of a rubric, grading is subjective - but that you (or your TAs) are connoisseurs; encourage students to meet with one of you to discuss ways that an aspect of an assignment could be stronger
References / Useful Resources

Designing Assignments
- Yale Center for Teaching and Learning: https://ctl.yale.edu/writing/wr-instructor-resources/designing-assignments

Creating rubrics / assessment tools
- University of Minnesota Writing Center: http://writing.umn.edu/tww/responding/rubrics.html
- Teaching Commons, DePaul University: https://resources.depaul.edu/teaching-commons/teaching-guides/feedback-grading/rubrics/Pages/default.aspx
Challenge #3

Appropriate interactions & methods for feedback
Helpful resources

Georgetown U: The Teaching Commons

Stanford U: Tomorrow’s Professor Postings (online professional development)

Vanderbilt U: Center for Teaching

U of Waterloo: Centre for Teaching Excellence

U of Washington: Center for Teaching and Learning
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Your colleagues!
## Common frustrations

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| Our own stress levels | Test anxiety  
Perfectionism  
Imposter syndrome  
Identity conflicts  
(American Psychological Association; Vanderbilt Office of Wellness Programs & Alcohol Education) |
## Signs of student distress

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<tr>
<th>Behavioral Signs</th>
<th>Psychological &amp; Emotional Signs</th>
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<td><strong>Academic performance concerns</strong>, uncharacteristic changes</td>
<td>Chronic fatigue, <strong>falling asleep in class</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Declining grades</strong> or reduced class participation</td>
<td>Symptoms of being <strong>easily distracted</strong>, “spacey,” or a tendency to daydream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete or <strong>missing assignments</strong></td>
<td>Extreme boredom, <strong>negativism, defensiveness</strong>, and secretiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated <strong>requests for extensions</strong>, incompletes, or withdraws</td>
<td><strong>Erratic behavior</strong>, sudden mood swings, inappropriate anger, <strong>hostility</strong>, and irritability</td>
</tr>
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<td>Increased absenteeism or <strong>tardiness</strong></td>
<td>(Vanderbilt Office of Wellness Programs &amp; Alcohol Education)</td>
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<td><strong>Disruptive</strong> classroom behavior</td>
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<td><strong>Cheating, rule breaking, or defiance</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Poor organization skills</strong> or trouble with note taking</td>
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# Roots of frustration & misunderstanding

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What’s your trigger?
Strategies for repair

- Learn and use names when possible
- Gather information from students about their past experiences and future goals
- Suggest and work with GU venues for student help:
  - Academic Resource Center
  - CAPS
- Minimize possibilities for triggers and miscommunication*
Establishing rapport: Course contract

University of Waterloo - Syllabus language example

This is a large class but you are not a small part of it! To make our time together as valuable as possible, we both have to work hard at it. The following basic principles may give us some guidelines:

- Every student has the right to learn as well as the responsibility not to deprive others of their right to learn.
- Every student is accountable for his or her own actions.

In order for you to get the most out of this class, please consider the following:

- Attend all scheduled classes and arrive on time. Late arrivals and early departures are very disruptive and violate the first basic principle.
- Please do not schedule other activities during this class time. I will try to make class as interesting and informative as possible, but I can't learn the material for you.

Please let me know immediately if you have a problem that is preventing you from performing satisfactorily in this class.

I am looking forward to working with you this term.
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Strategies for repair

- Communicate expectations frequently
- Establish greater rapport with students
- Give alternate venues for feedback
Providing spaces for feedback

Give a variety of times and spaces for students to ask questions:

- Prepare student for times in lecture to ask questions
  - “After this section/In just a couple of minutes, I'll open the floor for clarification.”
- When possible, consider reflective writing assignments*
- Have students record questions or confusion anonymously at the end of class (handwritten or Google Form)
Week 4 - Friday Survey

These answers will help in our meetings next week :)

Your email address (sg985@georgetown.edu) will be recorded when you submit this form. Not you? Switch account

* Required

How do you feel at the end of week 4 compared to the end of week 2? *

- I feel more comfortable and organized now.
- I feel more confused and overwhelmed.
- I'm not sure how I feel.
- Other:

How is the homework amount for you, overall (across all 3 classes)? *

- It is more than I expected.
- It is about what I expected.
- It is less than what I expected.

Compared to other intensive English reading/writing classes you have taken, this class is: *

- Similar
- A little or somewhat different
- Very different

What is similar about this class and past classes? *

Your answer

What is different about this class? *

Your answer

Do you have any other concerns or questions to share? *

Your answer
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- Very different
- A little or somewhat different
- Similar

60% 56%
Strategies for repair

- Communicate expectations frequently
- Establish greater rapport with students
- Give alternate venues for feedback
- Revisit parameters of office hours
Revisiting office hours

**Encourage students to attend office hours**

- Require at beginning of semester
  - Make assignments due during office hours
  - Consider group attendance
- Use scheduling applications
  - (Canvas, Google Calendar, YouCanBook.Me)
- Consider alternate locations

**Designate office hour times for specific purposes**

- Study sessions/review
- Group sessions
- Open Q&A
Revisiting office hours

Make students responsible for time

- Ask students to come prepared to office hours
  - Materials
  - Written rationale for grade change

- Make explicit rules for office hours
  - What is appropriate (or not) to discuss
  - Give cut-off times for exam Qs (e.g., 24 hours before exam)

- Remind students office hours are **not** recap for missed classes*
  - *We have different “triggers”*
Virtual office hours

Email “office hours”
- Establish when and how often you check email
- Give guidelines for email messages, as works for you
  - Topics
  - Number of words*
  - Must ask a question*
Strategies for repair

- Communicate expectations frequently
- Establish greater rapport with students
- Revisit parameters of office hours
- Give alternate venues for feedback


