Meiji Gakuin University

Syllabus Creation Guidelines

MEIJI GAKUIN UNIVERSITY

Introduction

Vice-President (FD Director) Shigeki TAKEO

We revised our " 教務 (Kyomu)Web" for FY2019, and so decided to revise our syllabus system alongside those changes. One shortcoming of the previous syllabus system was that it places text length limitations for each item, so the new system removes those limitations, generally allowing for unlimited text entry. We also added a "draft" feature that allows multiple revisions before submission.

In consideration of the Phase-Three Certification Evaluations scheduled for FY2022 and other future revisions to university criteria standards, we added four new items: "ability to be acquired in this class," "language," "active learning," and "expected time for preparation and review at home." These measures improve clarity of course content and improve internal quality assurance, but above all the goal is to allow enrolled students to more clearly understand what abilities they can expect to obtain from courses, and how much time they will be expected to spend studying and reviewing outside of class.

Conventional courses have focused on knowledge transmission—in other words, what they intend to teach students—but in the future there will be increased focus on the specific skills that students should expect to acquire. From this perspective, syllabi provide fundamental information for course design that allows self-directed learning and are thus tools that should be employed to maximal extent.

We have therefore created these syllabus creation guidelines and summarized key points for writing each item. We hope that you will utilize these guidelines not only when creating syllabi, but also as a tool for course design.

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Syllabus items need for writing

Required and non-required items	Syllabus items	
Default display	Course code	
Default display	Year of Class	
Default display	Course Mode	
Default display	Class Name	
Default display	Theme	
Default display	Name of Subject	
Default display	English name of Subject	
Default display	Ability to be acquired in this class	
Default display	Credit	
Default display	Term	
Default display	Name of Teacher	
Default display	Campus	
Default display	Day and Period	
Required input	Course Description	⇒ See pg. 6 for details
Required input	Class Goals	⇒ See pg. 7 for details
Required selections	Language	
Required selections	Active learning	⇒ See pg. 9 for details
Required input	Daily Class Schedule	⇒ See pg. 11 for details
Required input	Remarks for Class	
Required input	Texts	⇒ See pg. 14 for details
Required input	Reference Books	⇒ See pg. 14 for details
Required input	Evaluation Criteria	⇒ See pg. 14 for details
Optional input	Related URL	
Optional input	Notes	
Optional input	Attachment	
Optional input	Remarks for Attachment	
Default display	Date of Update	

Required input	Items that must be input by faculty
Required selections	Items where one of the displayed options must be selected
Optional input	Items that faculty can input as needed
Default display	Items describing content that are displayed by the syllabus system by default and cannot be edited

Before creating a syllabus…

Before you start...

Part 1

Definition and role of the syllabus

"Syllabus" is generally defined as follows.

Syllabus (definition)

A detailed lesson plan for a course. Generally presents course specifics such as the university's name for the course, the instructor's name, lecture objectives, the content of each lesson, the method or standard for course grades, specific instructions for preparatory learning, and required textbooks and references. It serves as the basis for students to prepare and study for each lesson. Syllabi are also used as a document for student decisions regarding course enrollment, to adjust educational content among instructors, and in course evaluations by students.

Central Education Council (2008) *Toward Building Baccalaureate Education*

As shown here, a syllabus is like a lesson plans for teachers, but for students it is not only a document for course selection, but also a source of motivation and learning effects. "Classroom methods and design for university teachers" (Sato, 2010) defines eight roles for the syllabus, as follows.

Roles of the syllabus

1. A guide for student course selection
2. A contract between the instructor and the student
3. A document for heightening student learning effects
4. A tool for relationship-building between the instructor and students
5. A document for imparting the atmosphere of the course
6. A document for overall course design
7. A document for overall curriculum consistency, and a documentary basis for quality assurance
8. Evidence of the instructor's educational performance

Sato H. (ed.) (2010) *Classroom methods and design for university teachers*

In recent years, the importance of syllabi has been pointed out from the perspective of quality assurance in university education and certification evaluations. However, a syllabus's essence lies in encouraging students' active learning. It shows the approach and objectives of lessons (role 6.) and allows students to understand course contents and better choose enrollments (1.), thereby motivating students to learn (3.). The syllabus is thus something like a Sherpa, guiding students to the summit of an educational peak.

Before you start...

Part 2

Connections between syllabi and educational objectives, DP, and CP

Undergraduate and graduate schools establish diploma policies (DP) and curriculum policies (CP) based on the school motto, educational philosophy and educational goals. These have organic connections with course subjects, and so should be kept in mind when creating course syllabi. The chart below shows this relationship.

School motto

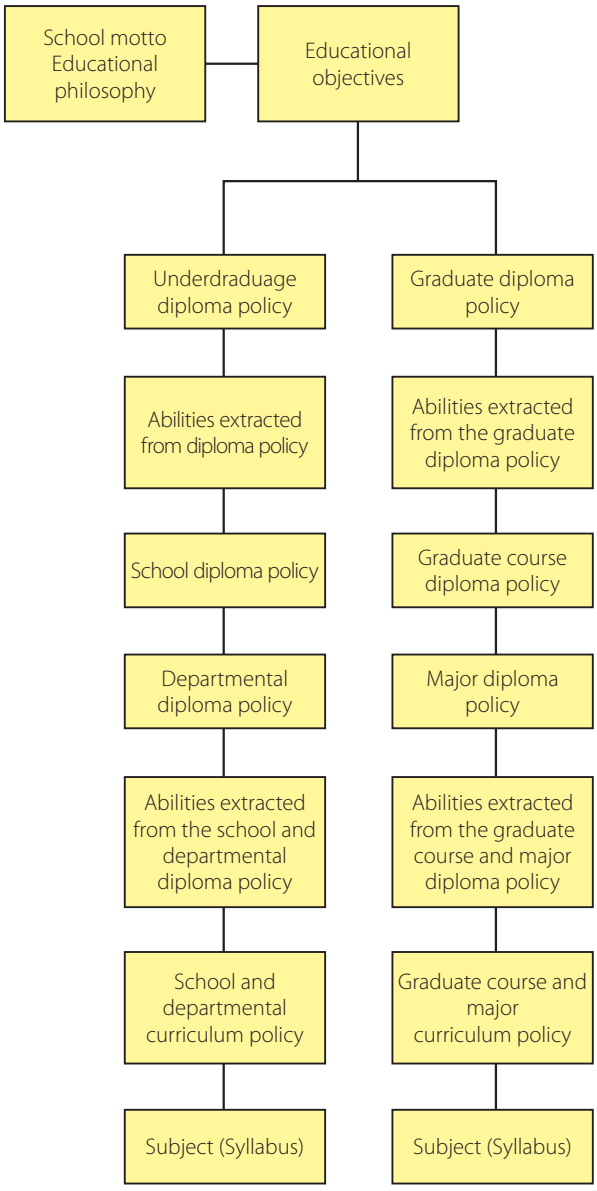
Our school motto comes from the Christian character-building concept: "Do for Others"

Educational philosophy

"Do for Others"

Educational goals

1. To acquire the ability to understand others.
2. To acquire analytical and planning skills.
3. To acquire communication skills.
4. To acquire career planning skills.
5. To acquire abilities for supporting a society based on coexistence.



Before you start...

Part 3

Abilities to be acquired

A report by the Central Education Council (2008) titled "Toward Building a Baccalaureate Education" describes the skills that students should acquire in the pursuit of a bachelor's degree. In reference to these baccalaureate abilities, we have extracted ability requirements from the Meiji Gakuin University diploma policy and organized them as follows.

Main content related to bachelor degree skills (Central Council for Education)	Ability to be acquired as defined by the university
(1) Knowledge and understanding Systematic understanding of basic knowledge in the specific academic field of the major (multicultural understanding of different cultures; understanding and knowledge of human cultures, society, and nature)	(1) Knowledge and understanding · Broad cultural education of history, culture, society, nature, health · Basic knowledge and systematic understanding in the field of specialization
(2) General-Purpose Skills Skills necessary for intellectual activities as well as for occupational and social life (communication skills, quantitative skills, information literacy, logical thinking and problem solving abilities)	(2) General-purpose skills · Abilities and practical skills for acquiring knowledge · Abilities and practical skills for utilizing knowledge
(3) Attitude and orientation Self-management ability, teamwork and leadership, ethics, social responsibility as a citizen, lifelong learning ability	(3) Attitudes and orientation · Abilities for independent behavior · Sense of social responsibility and an ethical viewpoint · Abilities for cooperation and coexistence with others
(4) Integrated learning experience and creative thinking abilities Ability to comprehensively utilize acquired knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc., for application to new self-directed tasks and problem-solving therein	(4) Integrated learning experience and creative thinking ability · Ability to discover tasks for comprehensively utilizing knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc. · Ability to resolve tasks for comprehensively utilizing knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc.

In addition to the abilities to be acquired as established by the university, we created an ability requirements table for class goals in accordance with the skills to be acquired from the diploma policies of the departments in each undergraduate faculties and graduate school. We will include these in the course guidelines and graduate school handbook from FY2019.

The syllabus input screen displays the ability requirements for each course subject, so when creating a syllabus it is essential to design courses that not only promote acquisition of expertise and skills, but also consider development of these desired skills. The following notation can be used to indicate three levels of relation to skills to be acquired.

◎ : Highly related to skills　○ : Related to skills
No symbol: Relatively low relation to skills

Syllabus Creation Guidelines

Key points for syllabus creation

Lesson design linked with DP

The following describes items that must be included when creating a syllabus. All items 1 through 6 are mandatory.

CONTENTS

POINT 1

Course description

• The "Course description" section describes the purpose of the course. It answers student questions regarding what they can learn by taking the course. Write content that states "If you take this course, this is what you will learn."

• Always write objectives as they pertain to the student.

Ex: "Today, ___ is a serious problem in international society. By taking this course, you will learn about ___ as a way to contribute to solving this problem."

• Example verbs to use when describing the objectives:

> Learn / acquire / understand / create / position / appreciate / know / recognize / etc.
>
> Source: Japan Society for Medical Education (2006)

• Write the course description in a way that is concrete and easy to understand. Avoid abstract and technical terms as much as possible.

• When writing the course descrition, keep in mind the abilities that students should acquire by taking the course. See the examples in "2. Class goals."

POINT 2

Class goals

- The "Class goals" section should explicitly state the objectives presented in the course description. This is important because class goals are associated with evaluation criteria.

This approach is called "backward design." Traditionally, instructors first consider what they will teach on the basis of grading recollection of taught content. Today, however, the "quality assurance" approach asks not what students know, but what they can do. This is established through the class goals, with curriculum and course design performed so as to state beforehand the criteria by which those skills will be evaluated.

The "backward design" concept

1) Goals (Class Goals: What ability should the class provide?)
↓
2) Assessments (Consider measurement methods)
↓
3) Curriculum design and implementation (How to teach what)

Wiggins & McTighe, *Understanding by Design* (2005)

Specifically, pay attention to the following:

- Express actions that you can observe (i.e., evaluate) using concrete verbs.
- State one goal per sentence; multiple goals make measuring achievement more difficult.
- Describe knowledge and understanding in a manner that can be evaluated through testing; e.g., "Describe ___," "Explain the relationship between ___ and ___."
- Describe general-purpose skills in a manner that can be tested or observed; e.g., "Use your knowledge of ___ to solve the problem of ___," "Use the technique of ___ to ___."
- Describe attitudes and aspirations in a way that can be evaluated through observation; e.g., "Can proactively engage in ___," "Can cooperate with others to ___."
- For integrated learning experiences and creative thinking skills, describe contents that can be comprehensively evaluated in final exams and reports; e.g., "Solve the problem of ___ by comprehensively utilizing your knowledge of and skills in ___."

POINT 2

Class goals

Consider the following verbs when describing class goals.

Class Goals	Example verbs
Knowledge and understanding	List / describe / infer / write / explain / classify / compare / contrast/ categorize / associate / forecast / concretely describe / conclude / etc.
General-purpose skills	Measure / implement / model / master / devise / touch / perform / investigate / operate / prepare / etc.
Attitudes and orientation	Cooperate / consider / join / communicate / discuss / inquire / demonstrate / show / help / feel / perform / consult / etc.
Integrated learning experience and creative thinking ability	Integrate / generalize / formulate / apply / adapt / select / create / etc.

Source: Japan Society for Medical Education (2006)

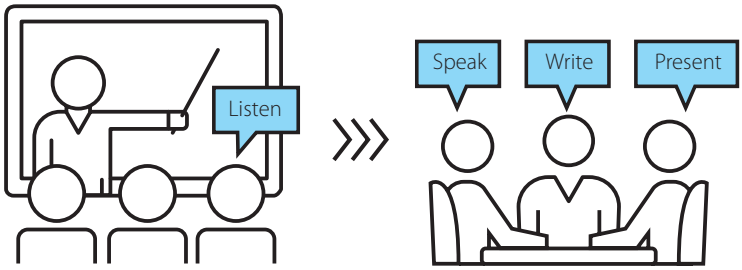
POINT 3

Active learning

The August 2012 Central Education Council report "Toward Qualitative Transformation of University Education to Build a New Future" describes the importance of active learning for nurturing human resources that can autonomously think and learn. Through subsequent practice and research, Mizokami (2014) defined active learning as follows:

> Active learning stands in contrast to passive learning, typically unidirectional knowledge transfer in a lecture format. Active learning includes involvement in activities such as writing, speaking, and presenting, and the externalized cognitive processes arising there.
>
> Mizokami S., "Active learning and the paradigm shift in teaching and learning" (2014)

Here, "cognitive processes" refers to perception, memory, and thinking, including inference, judgment, decision making, problem solving, and logical, critical, and creative thinking. Simply put, "externalized cognitive processes" refers to having students expected to have learned course content to speak or write about what they have learned, or to give a presentation based on the course content. Through student outputs of their understanding, they can evaluate whether understanding did in fact take place. Put another way, students can find their misunderstandings through their own externalizations.



Externalized understanding processes = visualization

↓

Students can find their misunderstandings (Learning metacognition)

Metacognition

Recognition of one's own cognitive activities or cognitive characteristics. Monitoring one's own understanding, thinking about what the problem is, and how to cope with problems to overcome them. For example, if your memory is characterized by forgetfulness, you might try to memorize things through repetition. Grasping one's own state of understanding is difficult, so "externalization" in the form of writing or speaking one's thoughts is a necessary vehicle through which we can utilize the comments of others, etc., as opportunities for clarifying our own understanding.

Source: Saeki, Y. *A Companion to the Cognitive Science of Learning* (2010)

POINT 3

Active learning

While this is a minimal definition of active learning, we can even consider students exchanging opinions with those sitting next to them in a large lecture hall as active learning, so active learning can be incorporated in a stepwise manner. Combining ordinary lectures with active learning in this way is called "Active Learning-Based Instruction."

With this in mind, we define active learning as follows.

We consider courses that implement at least one of the following educational methods in each class as an active learning-based course:

1) Discovery learning, problem-solving learning, experiential learning, investigatory learning

2) Group discussions, debates, groupwork, presentations, reflection

According to this definition, it is possible to incorporate the essence of active learning even in ordinary lecture-based classes. Note that to smoothly facilitate active learning-type courses, some classrooms should have movable desks and chairs.

The sole reason for incorporating active learning is to achieve class goals. For example, if one class goal is "Apply knowledge of ___ to a multifaceted investigation of the ___ problem," this goal cannot be achieved simply by listening to lectures; it can only be achieved by thinking as a group, searching through the literature, and independent collection of information. It is therefore important to pair class goals with learning methods that make their realization possible.

POINT 4

Daily class schedule (with instructions and guidelines for preparation and review)

- Plan the content of each class in an organized way that allows maximal efficiency in achieving class goals.
- Present course material in an order that makes it easy to understand, more likely to be understood, remembered, and easily acquired, which may not be the order of the textbook's table of contents.

There are two typical lesson patterns: considering cases after describing a principle or learning a principle through considering cases. Neither approach will always be the most effective, so choose the pattern that allows for easiest understanding and learning.

Examples of effective course design

- Simple → complex
- Known → unknown
- Conclusion → reason
- Specific → general
- Specific → abstract
- Past (background, causes) → Current (state) → Future (effects)
- Overall → detail → overall

Source: Kurita K., Japan Center for Educational Research and Innovation, "Interactive Teaching" (2016)

- The Standards for Establishment of Universities stipulate that one credit hour for a course should represent content requiring 45 hours of learning. In principle, we set credit hours in a similar manner according to the school charter. Study time includes not only time spent in a classroom, but also extracurricular self-directed study such as preparation and review.

- Refer to the table below for approximate time requirements for lesson preparation and review.

A 2-credit lecture/seminar course		
Preparation	Weekly class time	Review
2 hrs	2 hrs	2 hrs
A 1:2 ratio between classroom and self study		
Total 6 hrs		
×		
15 classes		
=		
90 hours of learning		

POINT 4

Daily class schedule

• Effective utilization of self-directed study outside the classroom is expected to increase interactions between faculty and students, deepen student understanding, increase student motivation, etc. See the concrete examples below.

Concrete example

Preparation		Lesson		Review
Reading textbook summaries	➡	Commentary based on preparation	➡	Answers to applied problems
Material searches	➡	Discussion of materials	➡	Report creation
e-Learning	➡	Detailed commentary lectures	➡	Problem practice

POINT 4

Daily class schedule

- Please note the following when giving instructions about extracurricular self-directed activities such as study and review.

Associate activities with the course

- There are two aspects to association with the course: content and activities.
- Regarding content, show associations with lessons by indicating in advance necessary textbook content that cannot be covered in class and places in textbooks you want students to study.
- There are many possibilities related to activities, such as investigating topics related to the lesson content, summarizing content learned in class, solving homework problems, or considering issues alone or in groups.
- In either case, be sure to mention assignments during the next lesson. If extracurricular studies are not tied to the next lesson, student motivation for performing them will drop greatly.

Associate class goals and abilities to be acquired

- Associate instructions for study and review with class goals and abilities to be acquired to indicate the purpose for incorporating extracurricular study.

Give concrete instructions regarding content

- When assigning textbook study, give concrete instructions describing the content and activities that should be performed, such as "Read pages X through Y in the textbook" or "Summarize the main points of what you studied."
- Give instructions associating assignments with the next class, such as "We will review what you studied at the beginning of the next class" or "You will discuss your summaries as a group."
- When assigning homework or problems, associate those activities with the class. For example, "Please do this homework related to what we discussed today; we will compare answers in the next class" or "Discuss this issue in groups, and write a summary of your conclusions. You will present these in our next class," or "This homework will help increase your understanding of what we studied today," or "This assignment will help you learn how to ____."

POINT 5

Texts and reference books

- Describe textbooks and references used in the course. Also specify whether these sources will be actively used or simply referred to. Indicate any books that must be purchased.

POINT 6

Evaluation criteria

- Decide what, when and how grades will be determined on the basis of the class goals and abilities to be acquired.
- Write evaluation criteria following “ 2. Class goals” on pg. 7.

Appendix 1

Syllabus checklist

Use the following as a checklist when entering your syllabus.

Item	☑	Content
Course Description		The student is the subject of the objective
		Clear association with the ability to be acquired (ability requirement)
Class Goals		The subject of the objective is the student
		The objective can be evaluated
		Each sentence describes one objective
		Specific evaluation conditions are clearly stated
		The objective is of an appropriate level
Active learning		The 15 classes per semester should adopt the following teaching methods at least once (1) Discovery learning, problem-solving learning, experiential learning, investigatory learning (2) Group discussion, debate, groupwork, presentation and reflection
Daily Class Schedule		Sequencing is appropriate for understanding
		Appropriate work amounts are set
		Association between preparations, lessons, and reviews
		Association with learning objectives and ability to be acquired
Evaluation Criteria		Association between class goals and evaluation criteria
		Measurement methods are clearly stated
		Measurement timings are clearly stated
		Grading distributions are clearly stated
Overall		Descriptions focus on student learning

Glossary

Baccalaureate skills

A concept from a report by the Central Education Council (2008) titled "Toward Building a Baccalaureate Education," which describes abilities that should be acquired by the end of an undergraduate course of studies to advance globalization and a knowledge-based society. The following is an overview:

Baccalaureate skills cultivated through various specialized fields
(reference guidelines for learning outcomes common to all undergraduate majors)

1. Knowledge and understanding

Understand fundamental knowledge in the academic field of major studies, and systematically understand the meaning of that knowledge system and its existence in relation to history, society, and nature.

(1) An understanding of multicultural and cross-cultural knowledge
(2) An understanding of knowledge related to human culture, society, and nature

2. General skills

Skills necessary for intellectual activities and for occupational and social life

(1) **Communication skills:** Ability to read, write, and speak Japanese and a foreign language.
(2) **Quantitative skills:** Ability to symbolically analyze, understand, and describe natural and social events.
(3) **Information literacy:** Ability to use information and communication technologies (ICT) to gather and analyze information, judge it appropriately, and effectively utilize it in a moral way.
(4) **Logical thinking ability:** Ability to logically analyze and express information and knowledge from multiple perspectives.
(5) **Problem-solving ability:** Ability to discover problems, collect, analyze, and organize information necessary for their solution, and reliably resolve them.

3. Attitudes and aspirations

(1) **Self-management:** Ability to act on one's own.
(2) **Teamwork and leadership:** Ability to cooperatively work with other people. Also, ability to direct and mobilize others to attain goals.
(3) **Ethics:** Ability to act according to one's conscience and social norms and rules.
(4) **Social responsibility as a citizen:** Awareness as a member of society, actively participating in social development while appropriately exercising obligations and rights.
(5) **Life-learning skills:** Ability for autonomous and independent learning after graduation.

4. Comprehensive learning experiences and creative thinking ability

Ability to comprehensively utilize the knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc., acquired thus far, to apply them to new tasks, and to solve problems.

Performance evaluations

Use of a rubric, etc., to evaluate application of knowledge and skills to tasks requiring some form of demonstration or performance. Specifically, evaluation of completed works such as reports, papers, or practical demonstrations such as presentations.

Rubric

Evaluation criteria showing learning achievements as a table consisting of one or more viewpoints and one or more scales, used to evaluate performance issues.

Example rubric for grading a report

Topic and attainment	Achieved (4 pts)	Room for improvement (3 pts)	Insufficient (2 pts)	Not achieved (0 pts)
(1) Information analysis / Understanding of materials	Current situation is described based on the materials.		Insufficient citation of materials. / Insufficient description of current situation.	Materials not used. / Current status not indicated.
(2) Topic discovery / Topic identification	Topic is clearly stated.	Topic is vague.	Content is off-topic.	Topic is not stated.
(3) Concept / Presentation of solution	An appropriate solution is presented.	A solution is presented but lacks persuasiveness or applicability.	A solution is presented but is off-topic.	Solution is not stated.
(4) Expression / Development of concept and logic	Grounds are legitimate, consistent with opinions, and persuasive. (1) and (2) appropriately function on the basis of assertions.	Grounds are legitimate, but description is incomplete or not persuasive. Low persuasiveness of basis of assertions for (1) and (2).	Weak legitimacy of grounds, high subjectivity, or inappropriateness of (1) and (2) as grounds.	Grounds are not stated.

Portfolio

"Portfolio" originally referred to a case for holding documents or files, but portfolios have attracted attention in recent years as a method of learning evaluation. For example, Glauert (1999) defined portfolios as a method for storing photos or videos of student-created compositions, reports, works, tests, etc., in a file to demonstrate learning activities. Portfolios are not simple records, but a self-selection of files that are meaningful to the learner. Portfolios are intended to foster meta-cognition by 1) allowing learners to transmit to themselves what they have accomplished, 2) informing them why these are highly evaluated, 3) increasing learners' sense of accomplishment, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, and 4) controlling learning activities by showing what the next task is.

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