Create a ‘Living Syllabus’ for Your Blackboard Course Site

While a syllabus represents a ‘formal academic agreement’ between an instructor and students, many students don’t read or keep track of the course syllabus. Rather than a schedule of events, a syllabus serves to define how students can successfully meet the objectives of the course. How many times have you and your TAs answered repetitive questions about course policies, due dates, and expectations that could be answered by reading the syllabus? Embedding a ‘living syllabus’ (content, supported by links, built into an online Learning Management System) into the course Blackboard site provides students with 24-7 access to an ‘official document of record’ regarding all course activities and policies. Without such a record, misunderstandings between students and faculty can occur.

Key Elements of a ‘Living Syllabus’

Contact Information for course instructor(s) and TAs – posted through the ‘Contacts’ link on side toolbar.

Instructor: Name
Office: Location
Office Hours: Times & Days
Office Telephone: Phone Number
E-mail: E-mail address
**Textbook & Course Materials** - posted through the ‘Required Materials’ link on side toolbar.

Use the ‘Required Materials’ link to create an ‘item’ detailing the materials students need to acquire for the course.

Include full name of textbook(s), author, edition, ISBN, and where it can be purchased (provide link if available). If a required text is available online, provide access link.

For example:

---

_We can be reached via phone at 255-9760 and via email at acadtech@cornell.edu_
Required Books and Materials

PROVIDE DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT REQUIRED MATERIALS

1) Evolution: Making Sense of Life, 2nd edition


This is a highly accessible survey of evolutionary biology. Zimmer is a science writer and reporter for the New York Times; Emlen is an evolutionary biologist who also happens to be a Cornell alumnus. Reading assignments from the textbook will complement and supplement the lecture material.

Questions about posting pdfs of publisher resources? Go to Cornell's Copyright Information Center: http://copyright.cornell.edu/

Post Other Required Materials (e.g., iClicker)

- Where it can be purchased (provide link if available).

For example:

2) iClicker.

You will need to have an iClicker remote registered for [COURSE NAME]. If you have an iClicker from another class you can use it again here. If you do not own one, iClickers can be purchased at the Cornell store.

iClickers need to be re-registered each academic year, and specifically for this class.
Build the remaining information under the ‘General Course Information’ link.

You may want to consider setting the ‘General Course Information’ as the entry point for your course. Do this by selecting ‘Teaching Style’ from the ‘Customization’ menu.

Next, set the ‘Course Entry Point’ to ‘General Course Information’

Create a Welcome Statement and Course Overview – Built into ‘General Course Information’ link

Welcome to COURSE NAME

PROVIDE A ‘PITCH’ HIGHLIGHTING COOL THINGS ABOUT THE COURSE AND WHAT STUDENTS WILL TAKE AWAY FROM IT.

We can be reached via phone at 255-9760 and via email at acadtech@cornell.edu.
This course is both a survey of the earth’s spectacular biodiversity and an introduction to the fascinating processes of evolution that have produced the grand Tree of Life. The effects of evolution span all of biology, from protein function to the most complex animal behaviors. And both evolution and biodiversity are relevant to your personal life in ways you might not anticipate.

We have three basic goals for the course. First, we want you to gain an understanding of the major evolutionary processes and an appreciation for the ways that evolutionary biologists approach their work. Second, we want to give you the knowledge and tools needed to understand the evolutionary issues you will encounter in the future, in both academic and nonacademic settings. Finally, we will survey all major groups of organisms, from bacteria to mammals, and learn how we are all related via the Tree of Life.

In this course, we get to explore questions like: Why is sex so pervasive in the natural world? Why do we age? How did life originate? Why are there 1000 times more species of beetles than species of mammals? What factors determine whether a particular pest species will cause heavy damage to a crop? What do we know about the relationships between humans and other primates? What evolutionary challenges do medical professionals deal with every day?

The course is organized into thematic learning modules. Each learning module includes lectures, readings, section activities, and online assessments. As professors and practicing scientists, we think that evolution and biodiversity are fun and fascinating topics. All of us involved in teaching the course are excited about this opportunity to share our intellectual passions with you, and we hope that you come to share our sense of wonder at the processes that have enriched our world with such an amazing diversity of organisms and adaptations.

*We look forward to working with you!*
State desired learning outcomes and how they will be accomplished (e.g., section activities, online assessments, polling during lectures, group lecture activities, and exams)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Accomplished by ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>★ Identify key players in cellular signaling events that guide early brain and</td>
<td>Quiz Game, Readings, Lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spinal cord development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Describe key steps in early nervous system patterning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Apply principles of intercellular signaling to predict the effects of specific</td>
<td>Readings, Lecture, Lab, Exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gene mutations on neural development, as in neurodevelopmental disorders</td>
<td>Group ?’s, Write-ups, Exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Integrate new information from current primary literature with material</td>
<td>Group ?’s, Research Portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learned in class.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Ask questions about aspects of neurodevelopment that are not yet fully</td>
<td>Group ?’s, Lab, Research Portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understood, and understand experimental approaches that could be used to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>address these questions in the future.</td>
<td>Research Portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Evaluate the potential effectiveness and impact of proposed research projects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in neurodevelopment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Post Course Expectations & Printable Syllabus - posted through the ‘General Course Information’ link on side toolbar.

- Provide a “pitch” highlighting cool things about the course and what students will take away from it
- Clearly outline course expectations and policies
- Identify prerequisites (if any)
- Provide a printable copy of the syllabus – many faculty opt to exclusively post the syllabus on Blackboard and don’t distribute hard copies during lecture

Course Expectations and Syllabus

Enabled: Statistics Tracking
Attached Files: Course_Syllabus.docx (21.096 KB)
COMMUNICATE EXPECTATIONS

An outline of assignments and due dates is provided in the course syllabus (attached above), so you can evaluate the weekly time commitment relative to your schedule. Typical workloads for Cornell science courses are 3-4 hours per credit, which in the case of our class will mean 12-16 hours per week.

- You will be assigned a short pre-lecture reading assignment in advance of most lectures this semester. Pre-lecture assignments are accessible through the side toolbar. We will often ask an easy question or two about these assignments at the beginning of lecture using the iClicker system. [ALERT STUDENTS TO USE OF PRE-LECTURE ASSIGNMENTS]

- Section meetings start the week of [POST START DATE].
- A schedule listing section activities and assignment due dates is available through the Section Activities link on Blackboard. [POST A LIST OF ASSIGNMENTS AND DUE DATES]
- Section activity handouts will be made available on Blackboard by 5:00PM Friday the week before the activity runs. [STANDARDIZE THE DAY/TIME]
- Pre-discussion 'talking points' for Section Activity 5 must be submitted through the appropriate link provided on Blackboard by 10:00 AM on Tuesday, October 6. [ALERT STUDENTS TO DATE/TIME of PRE-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS]
- Take-home assignments (e.g., activity worksheets) are due by 5:00PM the Friday following the week the activity was completed. Submit all section homework through the appropriate section activity link on Blackboard. [STANDARDIZE THE DAY/TIME and SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS for WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS]
- In general late assignments will not be graded, however, to accommodate short-term difficulties we will allow each student one late section assignment per semester, with no penalty. You are required to notify your TA that you will be handing in the assignment late before it is due. The late assignment must be turned in electronically by 5:00PM Saturday (the day after the activity was due). [ALERT STUDENTS TO COURSE POLICIES]
- If you are 5 minutes late for section you will be docked 10% of the possible points for that activity. Anyone arriving to section over 10 minutes late will be marked as absent for that section activity and forfeit participation points. If you miss more than four sections, you will receive a failing grade in this class. [ALERT STUDENTS TO COURSE POLICIES]

Consider use of a dedicated course email to manage communication with students. Centralizing course related emails allows you to assign a TA or staff member to monitor the account and track
student emails and responses. Request a dedicated course email (‘Resource Account’) through the Exchange Account Manager.

For example:
Course business is handled by email through XXXX@cornell.edu. Please use this address for all inquiries about grades, waitlists, iClickers or other course logistics.

**How You Will Be Evaluated** – Post grading expectations through the ‘General Course Information’ link on side toolbar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Weighted Percentage of Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Section Activities</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in Lecture</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-lecture assignments/in class activities</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prelim 1*</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prelim 2*</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prelim 3*</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Possible</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* We automatically drop the lowest of your three Prelim grades

**DISCUSSION SECTIONS**: In addition to weekly graded section assignments, we will be using the Blackboard system to provide section handouts, diversity lesson modules, and population genetics simulations to support active learning exercises taught in section. This material will also be covered on the prelims and will be part of the comprehensive final exam. Please note that if you miss more than four sections you will automatically fail the course. [Provide planning, instructional design, and policy insights to the students]

**iCLICKER QUESTIONS**: We will be using the iClicker system in lecture starting on [Post START DATE]. Some iClicker responses earn you credit simply for answering, others will require you to answer correctly. There will be many more opportunities to obtain iClicker points than are minimally required to reach the 50 point maximum, so do not worry too much about individually missed points. Additional points scored over the maximum 50 will not be awarded. Our objective with the iClickers is to engage you in the class, not to shape your grade. As the iClicker points from any given lecture session are a trivial component of your overall course grade, we do not offer make-up or replacement points for lecture absences. [Explain polling policies and how absences are handled] You will be assigned a short pre-lecture reading

We can be reached via phone at 255-9760 and via email at acadtech@cornell.edu
assignment in advance of most lectures this semester. We will often ask an easy question or two about these assignments at the beginning of lecture using the iClicker system. It is very important to register your iClicker at the beginning of the semester, as we do not give retroactive iClicker points.

PRELIM EXAMS: The first two prelims will be held in the evenings of [Post Exam Dates/Times/Locations]. The third prelim will be held during the first hour of the final exam period. Your lowest prelim score will be automatically dropped before calculating your final point total for the semester. If you miss a prelim exam, your missed score will automatically be the one that is dropped. Make-up exams are offered only in truly exceptional circumstances. [Clearly state and POST EXAM POLICIES]

CALCULATORS AND OTHER DEVICES: Electronic devices are not allowed during exams. This includes any and all calculators, phones, and/or tablet devices. Any devices you have in your possession must be completely turned off during exams. If we find you in possession of a device that is turned on during an exam, you may be subject to an Academic Integrity investigation. [Clearly state and POST COURSE POLICIES pertaining to the exam environment]

LETTER GRADES: Your point total at the end of the semester will be used to determine your letter grade for the course. We will use Blackboard to track your performance throughout the semester. The course grading is not curved; end-of-semester point totals of 90% or greater will earn a letter grade in the A range; point totals between 80-90% are in the B range; 70-80% in the C range; 60-70% in the D range; and 60 and below a grade of F. Breakpoints for – and + grades are determined at the discretion of the instructor after the end of the semester, and A+ grades are granted only to students with exceptional performance in all components of the course. Office hours for instructors and TAs are accessible through the Teaching Team Contacts link on the main tool bar.

LEARNING SKILLS CENTER: Undergraduate tutors offer drop-in office hours in G24 Stimson Hall. Tutoring hours will be posted at http://lsc.cornell.edu/tutor/tutordefault.htm by the second week of classes. [Post information about student support services]

Polling Registration Information – Posted through the ‘General Course Information’ link on side toolbar. For example:
PROVIDE REGISTRATION INFORMATION FOR POLLING DEVICES

**i>clicker Remotes:**
Each student must register his/her iClicker every semester for each course that uses iClickers.

To register your iClicker:

Login to Blackboard at [http://blackboard.cornell.edu](http://blackboard.cornell.edu)

- Under your list of "My Courses" click on the name of the course using iClickers.
- Click on the "Tools" button in your Course Menu.
- Click on "iClicker Remote Registration".
- Type in the iClicker Remote ID on the back of your clicker.
- Click Submit.

Do not register iClickers at the iClicker.com site.

**If you cannot read the clicker ID.** To find your iClicker ID # please go to one of the following locations for help: [Provide information and link for Polling Tech Support]

- Carpenter Hall Reading Room (1st floor) between 9:00am - Noon, Monday - Friday
- Uris Library Tower Room between 9:00am - Noon, Monday - Friday
- Academic Technology Center, 123 Computing & Communications Center building (on the Ag Quad, next to Bailey Hall), between 9:00am - 5:00pm, Monday - Friday.

**Provide General Technology Support Information** – Posted through the ‘General Course Information’ link on side toolbar. For example:

© We can be reached via phone at 255-9760 and via email at acadtech@cornell.edu
Provide General Technology Support
Information and Links to Address Common Questions

Our course uses Cornell's Blackboard system (blackboard.cornell.edu) to support a number of learning activities including online assignment submission.

We expect you to always have a backup plan in the event your computer should crash, or for some reason, you can't access the work on your computer. ALWAYS REMEMBER TO BACK UP YOUR WORK! Make sure you have a contingency plan for computer access should your computer become nonfunctional during the course.

To access all features of Blackboard you will need to use a supported web browsers. These desktop browsers work best with Blackboard Learn 9.1 Q4 2015.

- Firefox 24® and later
- Chrome™ 30 and later
- Safari® 6 and later [Safari for Windows is no longer supported by Apple and is not supported for the new Blackboard Learn experience.]
- Internet Explorer® 9 and later

Both newer and older browsers from these vendors may be supported [To learn more, Go to: http://bbhelp.cit.cornell.edu/blackboard-faq/]

Having problems with technology?
We are fortunate to have the help of experts from Academic Technologies, in the event of difficulties.

If you have technical problems with the submission of assignments, or the Blackboard site in general contact: acadtech@cornell.edu

Student FAQ for Frequently Asked Questions

We can be reached via phone at 255-9760 and via email at acadtech@cornell.edu
Provide a Statement About Intellectual Integrity – Posted through the ‘General Course Information’ link on side toolbar. For example:

**Intellectual Integrity**

**IDENTIFY ACADEMIC INTEGRITY REQUIREMENTS**

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND RELATED SUBJECTS**: Each student in the course is expected to abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity. Any work submitted by a student in [COURSE NAME] for academic credit must be the student’s own work. Violations of academic integrity have occurred (though rarely) in past semesters when students copied one another’s discussion section assignments, cheated on exams, or plagiarized materials from outside sources such as Wikipedia. Any such violation automatically initiates Cornell’s academic integrity hearing process, and the resulting penalties are significant. Whatever the pressures and stresses of the moment, it is wiser to turn in an assignment late (or not turn at all) than to plagiarize it.

All required written assignments might be subject to submission to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. Submitted work may be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database to be used for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Usage Policy posted on the Turnitin.com site.

**USING CALCULATORS AND OTHER DEVICES DURING EXAMS**: Electronic devices are not allowed during exams. This includes any and all calculators, phones, and/or tablet devices. Any devices you have in your possession must be completely turned off during exams. If we find you in possession of a device that is turned on during an exam, you may be subject to an Academic Integrity investigation.

**THIRD PARTY VENDORS (e.g., 'COURSE HERO') HAVE BEEN SELLING COURSE MATERIALS ON THE INTERNET. YOU MAY WANT TO CONSIDER POSTING A COPYRIGHT STATEMENT TO PROTECT YOUR COURSE MATERIALS.**

All lecture and written materials created by the faculty and staff of [COURSE NAME] are copyrighted by course staff. Course materials posted on Blackboard are intellectual property belonging to the author. Students are not permitted to buy or sell any course materials without the express permission of the instructor. Such unauthorized behavior constitutes academic misconduct.

Finally, build links to lecture materials, assessments, etc. into the side tool bar. Each of these sites can be updated as you move through the semester. For example:
All pre-lecture assignments and quizzes must be completed by 3:00PM of the assigned due date. Assignments will be added as the semester progresses. Your cumulative performance on the companion pre-lecture quizzes will contribute towards your final grade.

A copy of the pre-lecture assignment schedule is posted above. The pre-lecture assignments will be updated as we move through the semester.

Lecture slides provided in pdf format will be added under the module headings listed below as we progress through the semester. Lecture topic title color is coded to reflect exam coverage:

- Dark blue titles include lectures covered on Exam 1 held the evening of Tuesday, September 22 at 7:30pm Location: Call Auditorium, Kennedy Hall 116
- Green titles include lectures covered on Exam 2 held the evening of Tuesday, October 27 at 7:30pm Location: Call Auditorium, Kennedy Hall 116
Black titles include lectures covered on Exam 3 (TBA)