

Transcript Video 6 Principle 5: Supportive Course Policies

There is no question that we need to include in our syllabi policy statements on matters like attendance, academic honesty, and disability accommodations. Most institutions require such statements. In this video, we will explore how you can reframe course policies in ways that communicate support and interest in students' success. In doing so, you will optimize motivation and facilitate personal coping skills.

The language we use to describe course policies and procedures in the syllabus reflects cultural norms and expectations. Interestingly, many course policies, particularly those about attendance, punctuality, deadlines and more recently classroom civility take a punitive approach and stress accountability and students' self-presentation as keys to success. How about instead framing your course policies and expectations in terms of students' active engagement with learning processes? What if encouraged students to raise questions, to be involved, and embrace active learning?

Think about how you can write your course policies in ways that will help students understand the rationale behind expectations and values. Use these statements to provide students with comprehensive information about resources and supports that will help them be successful learners.

Consider expanding the disability statement into an "Inclusive Learning and Disability Accommodation Statement" that you begin by stating "Your success in this class is important to me." Why does this matter? The official disability statement informs students with disabilities about their legal right to reasonable accommodations. While this information is critical, the disability statement does not consider issues of access for students who do not meet the minimum legal guidelines for accommodations.

An "Inclusive Learning and Disability Accommodation Statement" signals to your students that you acknowledge that all students learn differently and that you are willing to provide needed supports so that they can succeed. Include hyperlinks to important student services on our campus, such as the Disability Services office, the Writing Center, the Learning Resource Center, the Student Success website, the Center for Psychological Services and Counseling, and the ESL program for non-native speakers of English. Add links to resources offered by your college and department.

Often the disability accommodation statement is hidden towards the end of the syllabus. Consider placing the inclusive learning statement in a more prominent place in your syllabus. Doing so further signals to your students that you care about their success and are willing to support them.

How often have you sat in your office waiting for students to show up and not one did? Simply listing office hours in the syllabus does not encourage students to check in with their instructor. In fact, some students, especially those from historically underrepresented populations,

hesitate to contact their instructors or they don't understand the purpose of office hours. This can create social barriers to their learning.

How can you motivate students to come to office hours? Offer online office hours, use a scheduling system, and explain to your students what they gain from connecting with you in that way. Offer brief greeting chats at the beginning of the semester so that you and your students can get to know each other. Tell your students that more traditional longer meetings are for helping them with specific course content questions, assignments, other course-related problems, or to talk about other school and life matters, including future plans. Consider offering group meetings to support students as they work on projects, presentations, or other assignments.

Flexible virtual office hours are a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate availability, caring and support. Many students have other obligations so that they can't make it to office hours that are only offered on specific days and times. Use an online scheduling system or an online document for sign-up.

Every syllabus needs to include an Academic Honesty Statement. In writing this statement through the lens of inclusiveness, assume your students' best intentions and ask yourself what they need to know to be able to comply with academic honesty. Adopt a warm tone that explains what plagiarism is and is not, let students know they can consult with you to clarify any points of confusion, and provide hyperlinks to the institutional policy, campus resources on the topic and external resources, such as the Purdue Owl Online Writing Lab.

Students have the opportunity to identify chosen names and pronouns in SPIRE. Placing a statement about names and pronouns in the syllabus helps to contribute to an increased sense of belonging for transgender and gender-variant students. It signals your commitment to creating an inclusive learning environment. Include hyperlinks to additional resources on the use of pronouns in this statement. The statement one on this slide is the one developed by the Stonewall Center at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Consider building flexibility in attendance as well as assignment deadlines into your course plan from the start. Strict mandatory attendance policies and fixed deadlines often function as barriers to student success. Explain to students the value of attending class and turning in assignments on time. Offer options if students are not able to do so.

It's time to pause so that you can reflect on how you frame important course policies.

1. How supportive and motivating are your course policies?
2. How do they clarify important expectations and regulations?
3. How do they empower your students as learners?

Check out the next video to learn about some basic steps that you can take to design your syllabus in ways that makes it accessible, readable, and easy to navigate.