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The 21st-Century Syllabus: From Pedagogy to Andragogy

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Abstract

While the scholarship of teaching and learning literature has made great advances in our understanding of how learning might best occur, the syllabus as a teaching and learning tool appears to have been almost completely left out of the developmental conversation. Overwhelmingly, extant literature about syllabi and their use focuses on operational course norms—what to include, policies to be delineated, structural aspects to be covered. However, the student development literature and in particular, the Generation Y age cohort literature, indicates that information processing norms may increasingly degrade students' ability to use course syllabi for their intended purpose. In this article, we explore how and why the role of a course syllabus has changed, particularly in the management education realm, using the andragogy literature to frame the discussion. Employing four analytic frames from the current syllabus development literature—syllabus as contract, as power, as communication or signaling device, and as collaboration—we offer current and andragogically revised excerpts from our own syllabi as part of the conversation.

Keywords

syllabus, andragogy, pedagogy, student development

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Introduction

The scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL) has found its place in the mainstream of management education literature. Research into evidence-based educational best practices and effective learning has offered a much more rigorous insight into how we help students learn what we would like them to learn (e.g., Armstrong & Fukami, 2009; Chia, 2009; Sadler-Smith, 2009). In this article, we add to the body of SOTL literature with a timely examination of a relatively pedestrian but exceptionally important teaching and learning tool: the course syllabus. Syllabi have been fundamental to how we manage our courses, yet they have been the subject of little innovation.

Overwhelmingly, extant literature about syllabi and their use focuses on operational course norms—what to include, policies to be delineated, and structural aspects to be covered (Berschback, 2010; Cunningham & Omolayole, 1998; Filene, 2005). While SOTL literature has made great advances in our understanding of how learning might best occur, the syllabus as a teaching and learning tool appears to have been almost completely left out of the developmental conversation.

In this article, we build on work that examines how student information processing norms and changing expectations with respect to teaching and learning have fundamentally shifted (e.g., Sadler-Smith, 2009). This body of research makes a compelling case that we have an opportunity to change the way we use syllabi before we risk its role being considered increasingly irrelevant. To that end, we argue that an historical focus on pedagogy needs to give way to a new focus on andragogy and recognize our increasingly facilitative, rather than denotative, roles as educators. By understanding the historical usage of syllabi, symbolic signals of syllabi, and their developmental trajectory, we reframe syllabus usage within SOTL, arguing that the syllabus can and should be much more closely integrated into teaching and learning as not only an operational tool but more importantly, as a class culture–building and collaboration opportunity. In a companion article in this issue, we move our conceptual discussion firmly toward practice. We offer readers specific aspects of syllabus construction and usage to consider as they develop syllabi using andragogical principles.

Andragogy and its principles provide a theoretical base that is well-suited for reconsidering the syllabus' role. Knowles's (e.g., Knowles, 1977; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005) principles of andragogy (adult education) lay orthogonally with respect to pedagogy (child education). Theoretically, andragogy accepts six general principles: adults need to know the "why" of learning; adults learn through trial-and-error experience; adults should own their own decisions about learning; adults prefer learning that which is immediately relevant to their lives; adults learn better from problem-based than content-based environments; and adults learn better with intrinsic versus extrinsic motivators (Knowles, 1977). Andragogy principles firmly move power, responsibility, and motivation toward the learner, away from the instructor. Decision-making about and ownership of learning outcomes are shared among students and instructor.

Thus, andragogy principles help us see what is possible for syllabi: They are much more than unidirectional instruments and can assist in constructing both intellectual and psychosocial meaning with students. Using two incidents that one of us experienced as the catalyst to examine the syllabus development literature more closely, we highlight four dominant frames by which we use syllabi, and ultimately argue that only two of the four current syllabus frames (syllabus as communication or signaling device and syllabus as collaboration) hold developmental promise.

Issue Framing

Syllabi have traditionally been considered a standard step in crafting courses and teaching college students. The course syllabus is an operational roadmap. In a very practical sense, the course syllabus lays out "answers" to common course questions, such as,

- Course title, number, and level
- When and where the course will meet
- Who the instructor is, and when and how to make contact
- What topical material will be covered and required
- What the course learning objectives and course policies are
- What students' assignments will be, and when they are due
- How assignments will be assessed, and what the grading scale is

There is no shortage of guidebooks that list common syllabus elements, many of which are specifically targeted to new faculty or teaching assistants (Filene, 2005; Lieberg, 2008; Richlin, 2006). With little variation, these books assist with the nuts-and-bolts of crafting a course syllabus and help the instructor anticipate student information needs to begin the course.

Such operational information is indeed valuable and gives some structure that allows the course to proceed. Over the years, however, as more precise student issues surface or student exceptions to policies must be managed, we noticed that our syllabi had grown in length and specificity (see also Jones, 2011; Keith-Spiegel, Whitley, Ware Balogh, Perkins, & Wittig, 2002). Perhaps more important, the tone of our syllabi had shifted toward being punitive and consequential rather than simply informational, a practice one of our colleagues had dubbed “defensive syllabi-ing” (J. M. Beggs, 2002, *Defensive syllabi*, personal conversation with author).

One of us had two independent experiences that further brought our attention to the fact that our syllabi had become unwieldy and unhelpful. The first was when a new faculty member joined the college and asked for current faculty’s syllabi for a course he was hired to teach. The author sent it along, and a few days later asked the new faculty member for his impressions of it. His response was, “Well, your syllabus sure is complete. It makes me tired just glancing through it!” This comment gave the author pause to consider what was a 12-page, single-spaced document.

The second experience was during a sabbatical about a year later, during which she had the opportunity to teach internationally in an executive MBA program. When she was crafting that course’s syllabus, she asked her international colleagues for a sample, and received a 1-page, brief outline of the course. This brief structure served as the norm for essentially all courses taught in the college. Despite initial apprehension about the syllabus’ brevity, she delighted multiple times during that teaching experience about how liberating it was to *not* have a tightly delineated course structure.

Research about changes in teaching and learning appears to be consistent that traditionally structured course syllabi are simply not the tools they had been (Anonymous, 2009; Gallos, 2008; Project Tomorrow, 2011). The current Generation Y students manage information in small chunks (not paragraphs explaining assignments and rationales), default to digital information retrieval and storage (not paper copies we hand out on the first day of class), expect learning to be interactive and interesting (not dry bullet points), and believe that their personal situations and needs are unique and should be attended to (not blanket policies and consequences). All of these well-documented factors contributed to our relatively slow-dawning realization that our students are not using our syllabi with any regularity toward its intended purpose. Nilson (2007), with respect to traditionally structured syllabi, notes,

> We know very little about how students respond to syllabi. We don’t really know what kind of information they home in on to decide whether to stay in or drop a course . . . The only thing we *do* know about how students respond to syllabi is that many students don’t read them carefully or completely . . . All syllabi contain standard information of the type students seem to want to know, yet many students don’t consult them. (pp. 8-9)

It seemed ironic that while we routinely freshened our course materials and processes, and integrated student feedback each semester into improvements, we had not at root reexamined our syllabus content or form since we began our academic careers a combined total of 30 years prior. We move ahead now with our frames discussion from the literature, practical suggestions, and a risk/reward discussion that balances our calls for changing the fundamental role of our syllabi.

"Syllabus as . . .": Frames and Discussions

As we examine new uses and structures for the syllabus, it is helpful to examine where the conversation currently resides (cf. Bolman & Deal, 1997; Morgan, 1986). Throughout our literature review, we found four frames dominated the literature about syllabi, their development and course usage: syllabus as contract, syllabus as power instrument, syllabus as communication or signaling device, and syllabus as collaboration. Of the four frames, the first two (contract and power instrument) were by far the norm. After discussing the four frames briefly, we offer reasoning as to why the latter two frames (communication device and collaboration) are much rarer but hold the most promise for matching teaching and learning with andragogical and student-centered learning.

Syllabus as Contract

"Syllabus as contract" dominates the literature and is the longest enduring and most common metaphor (cf. Davidson & Ambrose, 1994; Davis & Schrader, 2009; Habanek, 2005; Hess, 2008; Parks & Harris, 2002; Singham, 2005). It is a familiar mindset that generally offers few surprises; university administrators offer "friendly advice" to faculty to view the syllabus "like a legally binding contract" and to recognize "the implied contractual nature of the syllabus" (Singham, 2005, p. 53). Contractually oriented syllabi are common for a variety of reasons, the great majority of which have to do with increasingly common regulatory efforts in higher education, including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) restrictions and other issues, such as university policies and fear of lawsuits resulting not only from ambiguous syllabi but also because of instructor attempts to anticipate every possible classroom event (Behnke & Miller, 1989; Singham, 2005).

Moreover, interpretations of accreditation assurance of learning requirements add more documentation to syllabi in the form of bulleted learning objectives and assessment techniques (Kilpatrick, Lund Dean, & Kilpatrick, 2008). Lieberg (2008, p. 51) indicates that instructors should expect their institutions to weigh in on a variety of contract-based issues to include within any syllabus, including grievance procedures and human rights concerns. And Nilson (2007, pp. 10-11) offers entertaining and effective examples of syllabus “nonsense words.” These are technical terms that instructors include in syllabi describing course content for which students would have no context, and thus no way of understanding them, at the beginning of a course. One example Nilson provides is a topical description for a seminar course: “The specter of programmed sociopolitical determinism in the 1930s” (p. 10). The professor might as well be talking about “giraffe consciousness” (p. 11) for all the student knows. “Nonsense words” and their analogy to contract language, which is usually full of legalistic jargon, are striking.

Weimer’s (2010) career worry has been the assumptions instructors make about students as learners, and their routinely negative impact on learning. These include assumptions that forcing students to participate means (linearly) they will learn more or that requiring assignment deadlines means students would not turn in their work without them. Contractual and policy-oriented language stifles effective learning and dishonors student differences (see especially p. 31 of Weimer for a synopsis of how a policy or legalistic focus can corrode learning).

A number of serious concerns, then, arise with the syllabus as contract model. Contractual syllabi are often long, defensive, and designed to close policy loopholes. They are often written in “thou shall” and “thou shall not” language, recalling J. M. Beggs’s (2002, *Defensive syllabi*, personal conversation with author) terminology. Contract syllabi often serve to demotivate students by constraining any excitement they may generate, and as Singham (2005) notes, there are some things that you cannot make happen through syllabus language, such as trust and engagement.

Syllabus as Power Instrument

Singham (2005) muses,

> By devising complex general rules to cope with any and all anticipated behavior, we tend to constrain, alienate, and dehumanize students, and we remove a great deal of the enjoyment from the learning experience. Surely students are like us in flourishing under conditions of freedom. Why is it that given the choice between creating a freer classroom atmosphere that risks the occasional problem and establishing an authoritarian classroom that tries to anticipate and thwart any and all problems, we choose the latter? (pp. 56-57)

The *classroom* as instructor power base is not a new concept and has been well-examined within higher education, beginning most notably as the subject of Dewey’s criticism (Dewey, 1897/1959a, 1928/1959b, 1938). The *syllabus* as an instrument of power in its own right is a relatively newer examination. Syllabus as power means that by following its policies and requirements, classroom events are controlled as closely as possible by the instructor. Although probably not intended as such, traditional contents of a syllabus (see the representative list above) provide the instructor with a usually non-negotiable structure to control what happens in each course: content dictates the "what," policies dictate the "how," and assignment deadlines dictate the "when." The instructor, who crafted the detailed syllabus, remains the focus of course delivery and thus becomes the "who." The "why," or rationales behind assignments and policies, have been frequently left out of syllabus design (Baecker, 1998; Brookfield, 1995).

Weimer (2002) devoted an entire chapter to "the balance of power" in classroom settings. She asserted that even pedantic details of course and syllabus design require our reflection to understand how they reinforce power imbalance norms.

> Look at the number and tone of the directives contained in most syllabi . . . "No late papers accepted, ever, under any circumstances." "Failure to meet participation expectations will result in lower grades.". . . . "You must do the reading before you come to class. Your uninformed opinion does not add to the discussion." (p. 24)

While behavioral expectations are appropriate, and respect different readiness levels for college work, Weimer objects to the nonnegotiated, dictatorial, and monological nature of such edicts. The instructor remains the focus of the course, making all practical and value-based decisions.

Weimer and others who insist on breaking down power barriers represented by classroom practice and normalized by tools, such as syllabi, owe ideological debts to Freire (1970), who disdained the "banking" concept in education. Students were empty "accounts" waiting to be filled up by teachers; students had no voice and brought no useful knowledge to the classroom. Baecker (1998) documents how syllabi may counteract our voyage toward co-learning communities and balances of power. Her unique syllabus-vetting sociological study revealed how power resided in pronoun use—relative usage of "I," "you," and the more power-balanced "we." She found, not surprisingly given the above discussions, that "you" dominated the syllabi she examined, appearing at an average rate of four to nine times higher than "I" or "we."

Clearly, syllabus as power creates a challenge for instructors devoted to experiential learning and to sharing responsibility for student learning. While power resides within the instructor role and is operationalized with syllabus design, responsibility for learning remains diffused and can be deflected by instructors—thus giving them authority without accountability. It is perhaps because of this persistent mismatch that frustrated stakeholders pushed for accreditation's now ubiquitous assurance of learning standards.

Syllabus as Communication or Signaling Device

Extant literature provides very little relative focus on syllabus as a communication or signaling device. Furthermore, what little research exists focuses on instructors' verbal communication strategies employed on the first day of class to present the syllabus versus studying the message communicated by the syllabus document itself (cf. Thompson, 2007). Understanding the syllabus as communication/signaling vehicle means acknowledging that we send powerful expectations about what we and the course will be like through our syllabi. "Signaling" means the syllabus may be a proxy for what is to come, and our associated communication patterns and behaviors can support those signals for better or worse.

In addition to concerns already raised about tone and monological directive, communicating and signaling are done via actual construction of the syllabus–font size, length, and level of detail–as well as related behaviors. Matejka and Kurke (1994) rhetorically ask, for example, what message is sent to students when the teacher dismisses the class early on the first day after the only activity of reading the syllabus aloud?

Although Grunert (1997, 2008) discusses the communicative element of syllabus design, we understand her orientation to be that of communicating instructor-crafted expectations. Action steps to be taken by the instructor include "Decide on desired outcomes and assessment measures" (1997, p. 6) and "define and delimit course content" (p. 8). Cullen and Harris (2009) concur, and indicate that "The clear articulation of learning outcomes and clear methods of assessing those outcomes is a fundamental requirement of learner-centered pedagogy" (p. 117). While we can appreciate the up-front nature of expectations, and it is fair to communicate those standards by which students will be evaluated, the instructor is still making every important decision about how the course will be run, and "communication" is assessed by clarity and completeness in a monodirectional way.

We communicate our own orientation toward the syllabus and its role in the course by how much time we spend exploring it, and the manner by which we cover it (Thompson, 2007). For example, do we exhaustively read it word-for-word with students on the first day of class and return to it only when some policy has been violated? Or, perhaps, do we pick and choose which sections get attention and which are left for the student to explore later? Choosing to discuss course policies in detail while skipping over the student resources section can signal a more contractual orientation and dissuade students from viewing the syllabus as holistically valuable. When the syllabus is revisited over the course of the semester, or frequently alluded to as a resource, those activities communicate its privileged and active role.

The nonverbal and subtle messages that are communicated via syllabus design and instructor integration have become even more compelling because we also understand that students tend not to read syllabi all that closely for content. The relatively few studies that have looked at the student side of the equation show they generally tend to place greatest emphasis on things like due dates (Becker & Calhoon, 1999; Davis & Schrader, 2009; Singham, 2005). Other research indicates that students tend to either ignore or have difficulty remembering great portions of syllabi (Smith & Razzouk, 1993; Thompson, 2007) and tend to get bogged down in details (Leeds, 1992).

We may be lulled into thinking not much has changed when we consider Bers, Davis, and Taylor's (2000) findings that students appeared to be satisfied with syllabi information. Those authors suggested that more information is delivered to students in class, thus also helping to raise their satisfaction, but also found that "students may not be as discriminating about syllabi as we were" (p. 4). Marcis and Carr (2003) also surveyed student expectations of syllabi with similar findings. Smith and Razzouk (1993) looked at what students read, remembered, and revisited from syllabi, and straightforwardly concluded that their results "confirmed" students' lack of syllabus use for course information.

Thus, as we considered this particular frame through which to view the syllabus, we were starkly confronted with the mismatch between our own content-and policy-heavy syllabi while we espouse and (try to) integrate learning communities in our courses. From a practical standpoint, we may be unwilling to let go of that policy language because it does provide a set of instructions with which it is easy to communicate responses to similar operational questions: we communicate our late work policy, we provide an iterative list of course topics and activities, and we communicate assignment resources. Similarly, we show students we have prepared the course and are not just ad-libbing week to week, something that routinely and positively shapes our student evaluations. However, there is balance to be struck, and when we vetted our syllabi for directive language and "you" commands, we sheepishly acknowledged the results (Baecker, 1998; Singham, 2005).

Syllabus as Collaboration

Syllabus as collaboration is the least well-examined frame in syllabus literature. Singham (2005) insists that his courses, and correspondingly his syllabi, be a collaborative venture between students and the instructor, and delineates what that entails from an attitude/philosophy perspective on both sides: a focus on creative learning rather than compliance on specific tasks, letting go of most of the instructor's position power, and a belief that students will, if given the chance, own their own learning (Singham, 2005, pp. 54, 56). Hess (2008) initially determines where his students fall on Grow's (1991) four continuum-based stages of self-directed learning (dependent, interested, involved, self-directed) and then determines the extent to which students will collaborate in course and syllabus design. While Hess (2008) supports student collaboration, he does so only with upper-level students and does not allow first-year students input into syllabus design, believing that first years are simply not ready to participate effectively in this way (p. 380). Hess still believes in the syllabus as ideally representing a contract between student and instructor (p. 374), but that may be due to his being a law professor!

Weimer (2002, 2010) is consistently enthusiastic about collaboration and remains the most cited authority when it comes to involving students in syllabus design. Weimer includes almost every aspect of the course and correspondent syllabus as eligible for student input, but like others, including Hess (see also, e.g., Clarke, 1991; Green & Stortz, 2006; Hudd, 2003), Weimer both recognizes and operationally honors student readiness levels and motivational differences in her advocacy (2002, see pp. 176-177 for a representative discussion). However, this approach requires students' maturity and ownership over their own learning if the decision-making process is going to be truly collaborative.

Authors who advocate for student collaboration in crafting syllabi focus mainly on intrinsic student motivation and self-determination theories to support collaborative syllabus construction. However, Chickering's (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993) seminal work on student development underscores both Weimer's and Hess's qualifications of student collaboration opportunities. Chickering (1969) challenges the syllabus as collaboration if we accept his characterizations of the bewilderment that students experience during their college years. His particularly rich analogy of a college student resembling a "hog on ice" (Chickering, 1969, p. 12) likens the student experience to an ungrounded, destabilizing time where formerly useful and effective behaviors are no longer so.

For our purposes, then, offering to collaborate with students to generate a course syllabus may be an experience for which students are patently unprepared, and it may represent a disengaging and confusing experience rather than an opportunity to share learning responsibilities. That said, Chickering would be against dictatorial course designs wherein students have no voice. Rather he would recommend moving along what we consider to be a continuum of growth of responsibility and choice as the student matures and adjusts her readiness level for learning.

Ideally, syllabus as collaboration serves to bring students into the process, but this anticipates that students are willing to go along for the ride. Andragogical syllabus design, then, fundamentally depends on student readiness levels to participate, not on specific levels such as undergraduate, graduate, or executive. Leaving these key decisions open to discussion is also uncomfortable for most professors and runs counter to the training most PhD students receive in teaching and learning programs. Syllabus as collaboration leaves undecided how to deal with outlier or disruptive behavior and makes the assumption that students will not try to game ultimate course decisions to their own advantage (Singham, 2005, p. 57). It also adds uncertainty into the process as the collaboration is established and may inappropriately signal to students that the syllabus is open for negotiation throughout the semester (Hess, 2008; Weimer, 2002).

Reinventing the Syllabus

Considering the promise that a collaborative approach offers to syllabus usage means considering the *kinds* of approaches to teaching and learning it implies. Forrest and Peterson (2006) begin their article with a broad critique of management education: while the SOTL literature has firmly shifted from teaching *per se* toward learning and its facilitation, we continue to anchor our discussions within pedagogy. Those authors assert that it is more than just a poor word choice, but emblematic of a persistent model viewing the learner as passive and dependent.

The bulk of andragogy work reviewed for this article provides differing examples of how andragogical principles were put into practice and the outcomes therein. Knowles' (Knowles, 1977; Knowles et al., 2005) work remains the most cited set of principles that we saw put into action within various learning environments and assignments. Bishop (2006), for example, experimented with providing only course-learning objectives, allowing his adult students to choose their own course texts and readings. He argued that facilitating student ownership over course materials increased student creativity and motivation, increased students' confidence that they had learned valuable material, and helped students' understanding of their unique learning styles (p. 45).

A first-person reflective account, Green and Stortz (2006, p. 221) discussed their need to develop new learner-centered strategies at a time of feeling "adrift." Similar to Bishop's (2006) account of outcomes, Green and Stortz (2006) report being energized by giving up control of their courses and feeling "braver" as instructors (p. 227). Hudd (2003, p. 199) allows students to craft their own assignments for her course within the constraint of her having already decided on course topics and readings. She notes that students generally are not terribly innovative in their decisions, and that the biggest issues that arise are logistical in nature. But she also alludes to what we consider non-logistical issues, including students' notions that the syllabus continues to be malleable and negotiable throughout the semester. Ultimately, though, Hudd's reporting of findings concurs with others who allow student input into syllabus construction—students find the exercise "overwhelmingly positive" (2003, p. 199) with only one allusion to students' confusion or intolerance for the ambiguity of this process.

Weimer (e.g., 1996, 2002, 2010) argues for andragogical principles and provides tried-and-true practical assistance. She notes five fundamental shifts toward learner-centered (cf. andragogical) teaching practice, involving changes for both student and instructor. Some of her principles recall our four frames discussions (Weimer, 2002, pp. 1-21):

1. The balance of power must shift toward the learner from the instructor.
2. The almost manic focus on course content must shift toward actively teaching process, or, *how* to learn rather than *what* to learn.
3. The role of the instructor must routinely shift from center stage to sidelines, where they coach and empower, not direct.
4. The responsibility for learning shifts from instructor enacted to student owned.
5. The evaluation of assignments and assessment of learning shifts from solely instructor driven toward student—instructor collaboration. Evaluation is used both to assign course marks as well as to offer an opportunity to learn.

She also advocates allowing students to "discover" what the course is about in lieu of the instructor "going over" the syllabus content (Weimer, 2002, pp. 83-84), offering students time in class to digest the syllabus, then administering a quiz that fosters a more in-depth examination. Referring continually to the syllabus as a resource rather than a delimiter of activities is another method for shifting the syllabus' role from denoted and restrictive to facilitative.

Taken as a whole, the literature is consistent in reporting rosy outcomes. We did not find a serious treatment of syllabi, or their use, even in critical theory-based journals like *Management Learning*. Forrest and Peterson (2006) might conclude that andragogy in practice is still too new and experimental, precluding critical review, but one aspect we noticed in almost every article was that the length of the andragogical syllabus has shifted from long and contractually detailed to short(er) and more flexibly constructed. We discuss that more later in the companion practical article in this issue.

Starting New Practice With an Andragogically Based Syllabus

We have argued that syllabus design, content, and tone deserve as much reflection as course topics decisions. The importance of teaching philosophies and matching that philosophy with what actually happens in the classroom (Beatty, Leigh, & Lund Dean, 2009) underscores the need for sending consistent and clear signals to students via syllabi.

Table 1 offers examples of our former pedagogical syllabus language and policies, corresponding revised andragogical language that at least one of us now uses (the manuscript uses the collective "we" below for writing simplicity as we each have our own comfort zones and preferences to how we are moving our respective syllabi forward), suggestions for moving even further toward instructor—student collaboration, and commentary discussing the changes.

All the suggested changes derive from our discussions above:

- Sharing responsibility for course learning as a community, rather than an instructor-directed "banking" model
- Offering student input into evaluation measures
- Integrating more positive, learning-oriented policy statements and including rationales for them
- Moving away from contractual and consequential language toward encouraging and student-owned experiences

We would not consider most changes to be major, and some may encounter them as only moderately effective toward our andragogical goals. Our intent is certainly to move ahead with andragogical design as we reflect on and develop our own comfort level with giving up control.

The examples in Table 1 include familiar and common types of assignments and policies, such as how missed exams will be handled, or whether late work earns any credit. The first example, reminding students of their responsibilities to read and prepare before class, is perhaps so common now that students view it as "white noise" (a real student comment on our midterm evaluations). The revised language includes the "why" of pre-class preparation as well as what the instructor is responsible for. The "going further" language is the most collaborative, giving students real choices within a delineated readings set.

Similarly, a professional behavior norm is increasingly common in business schools, such as in the McCombs School of Business at Texas, or in Illinois

Table 1. Pedagogical Versus Andragogical Syllabus Examples and Revisions.

Current language or example	Revise to . . .	Commentary
I do not maintain a lecture format and I expect full participation from you. I have prepared an interactive course. Thus, reading and preparing before class is critical.	As partners in learning, we each have responsibilities for every class period. I have prepared an interactive and engaging set of activities for which your reading and pre-class preparation is critical. *Going even further*: From a list of acceptable readings, we decide together which will most contribute toward learning deemed most vital for that particular section of students. We negotiate common pre-class preparation behaviors suitable for our needs.	In the original, the language is instructor owned with "I" statements, but course design is already set and the tone is a bit fearsome. In the revision, instructor and student pre-class preparation are linked meaningfully.
Because I expect professional behavior, you begin the course with 25 points that are yours to keep as you continue your professional demeanor. Unfortunately, you lose professionalism points for arriving late to class repeatedly, leaving early without a reason, interrupting class with conversations or bathroom breaks, reading the newspaper, working on material from another class, surfing during discussions, and other inappropriate actions.	We owe each other professional behavior and mutual respect. I will model expected behavior and will refrain from inappropriate activities, such as being late to class, going off on irrelevant tangents, and ending class early. Your 25 professionalism points for the course may be maintained by refraining from inappropriate actions, including arriving late repeatedly, reading the newspaper, or surfing during discussions. *Going even further*: We decide together what "professional" behaviors include, and how to measure them. We negotiate the points structure: how many points are allocated, how many one loses when behaving unprofessionally, and how instructors notify students of the ding to their grade.	The original has lots of "you" and holds the assumption that it is always the student behaving inappropriately. What about the instructor's responsibilities? We're reminded of Baecker's (1998) pronoun assessment and the power structures within pronoun usage. The revision includes shared norms and responsibilities, plus the addition of the elusive instructor "I" taking ownership over course behaviors along with students.

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Current language or example	Revise to . . .	Commentary
Should you miss an exam, a makeup may be available (depending on the circumstance) and is an oral exam to be taken within 5 days of the missed written exam. It is your responsibility to schedule this with me.	I offer a makeup exam as an oral exam, because I want to discourage students missing exams. We can discuss a mutually acceptable time for you to sit for this exam should you miss the regularly scheduled one. Sooner is better than later, since course material tends to be fresher for recall. *Going even further*: We negotiate the time and structure of the make-up exam.	The original hedges on whether a make-up exam will be available; availability is predicated on the instructor's notion of acceptable versus unacceptable absences. The instructor has also chosen the time frame and the format for the makeup, the latter of which is designed to deter makeups. The revision offers a rationale for the oral format and offers a collaborative time frame to work with the student's schedule. The "Going even further" option allows both the timing and the style of the exam to be collaboratively crafted, but removes the deterrence role that having a set oral exam structure plays, which we do not want to remove.
I will take late work; there is a 50% penalty of the graded points for being late.	Let me encourage you to turn in work even if it is late. You may earn 50% of the graded points for late work. *Going even further*: We negotiate and come to shared agreement with students as to what "late" means. We also negotiate what the earned percentage will be for turning in work deemed late.	The word, "penalty" has such an authority basis to it, and it immediately reverts anyone to a childlike state. The revision is a half-full approach and is additive rather than punitive. It also transfers choice to the student to make up missed work rather than conferring a stigma of being a bad child for missing a deadline.
Grading policy: A = 93% to 100% A− = 90% to 92.9% B+ = 88% to 89.9% B = 83% to 87.9% etc.	Negotiated with students using a starting draft. (NB: The literature recommends using some framework as a point of departure, arguing that starting from scratch is unhelpfully unstructured.)	Weimer (2002, 2010), Hess (2008), and Singham (2005) would all argue that important evaluative elements of the syllabus can be negotiated with students, but offering a beginning draft or set of suggestions can help less experienced students frame their decisions.

State University's College of Business. Even without college-wide acceptance, we can hold students accountable for professionalism within courses with a graded item, the second example in Table 1. The revised language embeds the discussion as a mutual respect construct and also outlines specific undesirable behaviors. The "going further" language allows the list of sanctioned behaviors to be student-generated, increasing ownership and awareness.

Makeup work, be it exams or missed assignments, inhabits a special place of frustration for most faculty. The revised language comes clean about the instructor's intent—the oral exam is meant to be a deterrent to students missing the written exam, and has frankly been very effective at doing so for us! It also signals that making up the exam soon after the missed one is better for the student, offering a scheduling incentive. The "going further" opportunity honors a more flexible student experience but removes some of the deterrence value. Because of that, neither of us allows this type of negotiation.

We have been delighted by our changes to the late work policy, noted in the revised language. Students have responded positively to the additive language rather than the punitive language. We have experienced students proactively managing their assignments when they are late: "I wrote my paper yesterday that was from Wednesday and would like to turn it in for half credit on Monday. Thanks for letting us do this" is a representative student response. Neither of us yet offers the "going further" percentage deduction negotiation, mainly because of the positive changes we have already seen, but we came to shared agreement with students that "late" meant after class had started.

Finally, negotiating the grading structure has many proponents, with the *caveat* that students should be given some framework to which to respond. We have used and integrated student-negotiated grading schemes in various courses, mainly upper division and graduate student courses, with successes consonant with others' experiences (e.g., Singham, 2005; Weimer, 2010).

Risks and Payoffs

Any change to accepted structural norms comes with attendant risks and payoffs that must be considered. These include issues of psychological safety, giving up power and control, time to modify an existing syllabus, and the need to redesign related classroom activities and assignments. There may be performance appraisal costs involved for faculty members whose institutional evaluations of teaching effectiveness do not allow for risk taking and potentially negative student course evaluations.

Likewise, instructors may also have to overcome some profound institutional pressures to build "contract" syllabi. For example, one author's institution has a document detailing 19 required and five recommended items for each course syllabus, including nearly a page of single-spaced required language regarding academic integrity, disability services, and religious holidays. Taking on an institutional battle rejecting syllabus requirements may not be the best use of our energy, and we have to carefully consider engaging.

The syllabus as contract and power instrument approaches have the benefit of structure and [perceived] certainty—for both the student and the instructor—but at the cost of self-directed student learning and creativity. As such, contractual approaches provide a certain level of psychological safety for both instructor and student. Thus, despite the extensive literature on benefits of self-directed student learning, instructors face possible pushback from students who will suddenly find themselves needing to be much more involved in their own education. Those activities may stand in direct conflict with years of their educational experiences and perhaps even with their views of their own education. Indeed, we have experienced such resistance with student evaluation comments, such as, "[The course] would be better if the professor told us exactly what she is looking for and maybe give us a couple examples of what other students who got As have done."

And, despite the drawbacks, longer and more structured syllabi may be appropriate if these approaches indeed are connected to deeper learning processes, objectives, or situations, such as a predominant learning style of students within a particular curriculum. As Grow (1991) asserts, "There is more than one way to teach well. With some exceptions, good teaching is situational—it varies in response to the learners" (p. 127). Thus, it is not necessary for a teacher to completely abandon old approaches in favor of new techniques; rather, it is a continuum, a view held by supporters of self-directed student learning (e.g., Monaghan, 2011, pp. 429-430).

The practicality of moving to an andragogical syllabus includes a consideration of the payoffs as well. These payoffs can occur in several areas, ranging from increased student performance, individual satisfaction, improved evaluations, and even attendant connections to assurance of learning outcomes.

One of the primary goals of moving to an andragogically-based syllabus is increased student performance. This can be interpreted in several ways. One relates to classical measures of improved scores on standardized tests, assignments, and so on. Since an andragogically-based syllabus requires students to participate much more actively in their own learning compared with traditional approaches, there is evidence that students simply perform better (e.g., Green & Stortz, 2006; Hudd, 2003). Also, because andragogical designs require a different, more user-friendly syllabus crafting approach, students would be much more likely to read and pay attention to syllabi information. At least part of a student's renewed engagement would happen because andragogical approaches contain fewer "performance trip ups" that populate conventional syllabi—such as when Singham (2005) notes that his old physics syllabus specified how papers should be folded and what the penalties would be for failing to follow directions.

If instructors are motivated by crafting an egalitarian classroom basis for learning, another likely benefit of moving toward an andragogically-based syllabus is increased instructor satisfaction. As the literature has made clear, syllabus as contract and syllabus as power instrument typically builds a wall between the student and the teacher. While the above discussion explored the impact on students by tearing down the wall, we as teachers may experience increased personal instructional satisfaction as we move away from the "contract" and "power" positions that inevitably lead us to view our own students as antagonists in our own personal classroom dramas. As J. M. Beggs (2002, *Defensive syllabi*, personal conversation with author) notes with her phraseology, this "defensive" posture is both time- and energy-consuming. While we recognize that not every instructor looks for ways to give up both power and control in the classroom, traditional syllabi are often barriers that prevent us from experiencing the satisfaction and fulfillment that we initially sought within the profession.

A third benefit of moving toward andragogically-driven syllabi is improved student evaluation of teaching. This is not automatic, particularly among younger and less experienced students who may be perplexed by a collaborative process. But based on our own experiences, students mirror the experience of being appreciated as adults back to us in our evaluations. Reaping improvements in evaluations may involve some initial costs before ratings go up, ranging from failed experiments to time invested, but ideally students will recognize and reward instructors who sincerely try to maximize their learning, and this is likely to translate into better teaching evaluations.

Finally, syllabi that are constructed according to andragogical principles are likely to help with assurance of learning (AOL) measurements and outcomes. We need to qualify here that overall we concur with concerns about AOL efforts on student learning (Kilpatrick et al., 2008), but appreciate that newer research takes AOL in stride and has found ways to acceptably implement AOL (e.g., Lawrence, Reed, & Locander, 2011; Zocco, 2011). For all practical purposes, the contract syllabus model essentially views the student as an object to be manipulated, and therefore outcomes assessment measures inherently reflect this limited worldview. Consequently, any measures are likely to be coarse grained—witness, for example, the explosion of commonly used "multiple choice"–based measures, such as the ETS Major Field Tests (Mason, Coleman, Steagall, Gallo, & Fabritius, 2011) or the outcomes modules in business strategy/capstone simulations.

Under this system, for example, when students score poorly on a learning assessment, a typical response is for the instructor to design a new approach for teaching the material better—a new lesson plan, increased emphasis of the material in a classroom lecture, and so forth. What is missing from many of these "improvement plans" is the actual student. Why students performed poorly is feedback that is not typically sought *directly* from students under the power and contract model since students are objectified. With an andragogical approach, the learning process becomes a partnership between the instructor and the student, and thus student responses to the learning process become an integral, and not incidental, part of the entire system. Andragogical approaches more closely approximate the spirit and philosophy of the entire AOL process.

Closing Comments

We have advocated that management educators move away from traditionally pedagogical, instructor-centered syllabi in favor of andragogical, community-oriented syllabi. We believe that the syllabus is a boundary-crafting object (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) used for both instructor and student sensemaking. However, multiple authors have realistically shared their experiences that increasing student ownership and control over syllabus design is not a cost- or hassle-free endeavor. Consider this recent blog post from a discussion about increasing syllabi's andragogical focus:

> I love this idea [of syllabi as tone-setting tools], until the very first student lawyer comes up with some kind of wacky behaviour and justifies it by saying "but the syllabus isn't clear!" If the purpose of your syllabus isn't to state your requirements in such a way that it is a defense against shenanigans, I would suggest you are a very new prof. (Whatladder, 2011)

There were many other posters sympathetic to these comments. For an andragogical syllabus to be an effective collaborative tool, we have to recognize the dialogical nature of those principles. Students must be mature and experienced enough in the *process* of learning to make good decisions, and not every student will engage. Instructors have professional responsibilities to create courses where learning outcomes have been defined and well-considered. Andragogy, in other words, is not abdication.

Trust and mutually crafted respect are key components of andragogical syllabus design. Bishop (2006) and Singham (2005) remind us that we can force students to do very little beyond mere compliance, but we can foster learning environments that turn into learning communities when we let go of control and consequentialism. Finally, flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity help reduce the anxiety of challenging long-accepted norms supporting structure and instructor-focused decision making. Moving toward andragogical syllabi and being alert to the syllabus as both a communication and collaboration tool are not easy processes—but represent syllabi's greatest developmental potential and student-learning opportunity. We now draw attention to the practical companion piece that delineates seven andragogical considerations readers can use to vet their own syllabi for developmental opportunities.

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