

Learner-Centered Syllabus Toolkit: Communicating Design Choices to Learners

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Preamble

The experiences of teaching and learning during COVID-19 have expanded the range of options for course activities, modalities, and expectations. A syllabus is an important resource for communicating the choices that went into designing courses; this toolkit provides questions for reflection, suggestions, and sample language for writing syllabi at UBC Vancouver. There is a syllabus policy at UBCV that provides basic requirements for what must be included in syllabi, as well as information about when and how changes to the syllabus can be made after the course begins. All syllabi must follow that policy; this toolkit provides further advice and suggestions for instructors to consider as they create syllabi that fit their own courses and contexts.

The advice provided here is largely grounded in a “learner-centered” framework: a learner-centered syllabus is one that focuses on what learners will do, and how the course supports them to learn and succeed, in addition to what instructors will do and the content they will teach.

A learner-centered syllabus requires that you shift from what you, the instructor, are going to cover in your course to a concern for what information and tools you can provide for your students to promote learning and intellectual development. (Diamond 1997, p. xi)¹

A learner-centered syllabus will do the following:²

- Use a supporting, caring, and positive tone
- Provide rationale for the course objectives, activities, and assignments
- Communicate what learners need to do to succeed in the course
- Emphasize how the course/instructor can facilitate academic success of learners
- Foster a learning community, communicating that learning is a partnership between learners and instructor(s)

The advice below also aims to support the creation of inclusive syllabi by, for example, suggesting that instructors explain to learners their commitments and actions related to inclusive teaching practices, paying attention to how course learning objectives can take into considering learner diversity and inclusive practices and skills, addressing barriers to access for learning materials, and more.

The toolkit is organized around typical syllabus topics, in a non-prescribed order, and focuses on communicating course design choices. It is understood that not all course design choices are made by individual instructors but can be the result of teaching teams, departmental policies, and/or other factors. Communicating the design choices, even if they are not your own, can help learners understand the intentions behind course strategies. In addition, while the toolkit provides examples of learner-centered language, it is not intended to be a template but rather a resource to help you formulate your own language and syllabus.

The authors welcome feedback to improve this toolkit. Please submit your comments and suggestions to: ctlt.info@ubc.ca

1 Diamond, R. M. (1997). Foreword. In Grunert, J. (Ed.), *The course syllabus: A learning-centered approach*. Bolton, MA: Anker.

2 Adapted from a [Learner-Centered Syllabus resource](#) from the Centre for Teaching, Learning, and Technology at UBC Vancouver, licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).

1. Introduction to the course and instructor

Motivation

Providing in the syllabus an overview of the course, your approach to teaching it, and values infusing that approach, can help learners to understand the rationale for the course design and how it supports their learning.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How might you meaningfully acknowledge the Indigenous lands on which the course takes place, whether in person or online?
- What foundational beliefs and values drive your approach to teaching, and underlie the course design?
- How can sharing with learners the rationale for the course design and teaching methods help them to better engage and learn?

Information and Advice

Land acknowledgement

Acknowledging that UBC Vancouver is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people is an important way to remind learners that UBC and the people who study, work, live, and play within the institution have responsibilities that emerge from past and ongoing relationships with Indigenous host nations.

The [UBC Indigenous Peoples: Language Guidelines \(PDF\)](#) provides foundational wording for land acknowledgements at UBC. It is also helpful to add to these to situate your acknowledgment in relation to the course or your approach to teaching.

Introduction to the instructor/teaching team and approach to teaching the course

Either as part of the course description or a separate section, you could provide some information about yourself and others on the teaching team (if applicable), such as:

- A brief biographical statement about your background in the course topic(s), what interests or excites you about the course, and why you enjoy teaching it
- A general statement of your teaching philosophy, or values underpinning your pedagogical approach to the course, such as a commitment to equity and inclusive teaching practices or to supporting student learning and wellbeing, your rationale for teaching the material in a particular way, etc. You could also include a short statement on your positionality or a reflection of who you are that shapes the course.
- Some specific information about your pedagogical approach and the reasons for it (tied to your general teaching philosophy if you include it); e.g., if you're combining lectures with active learning, explain briefly how, and why you have made these choices
- Opportunities for constructive feedback or suggestions for the course during the term, e.g., providing an opportunity for [mid-course feedback](#)

Sample Language: introduction to the course and instructor

Approach to teaching

I approach teaching this course with the firm belief that all students can learn well and succeed, and my focus is on providing you with the materials, activities, and supports needed for you to do so. The readings and activities in this course can be challenging, but I am striving to make this course a collaborative environment in which we work together to learn with and from each other, and there will be plenty of opportunities for help and advice from peers and from the teaching team. Please reach out to us during office hours or via email; we are here to help you succeed!

Commitment to equity and inclusion

I am committed to supporting an inclusive learning environment, and I am continually learning how best to do so. If you have concerns that I or someone else may not be upholding this commitment, I invite you to either talk with me if you feel comfortable, or share your thoughts on an anonymous feedback survey [include link to survey]. If in class discussions there are derogatory, harassing or hateful statements made, I will intervene to help prevent further harm and uphold a respectful class environment. My pronouns are [she/her/hers], and I invite you to use the option on Canvas to provide your pronouns (find out how in the [Canvas Student Guide](#)). Finally, I have strived to provide a reading list with diverse authors and perspectives; if you have further suggestions for readings, videos, or other resources I am very interested in receiving them.

2. Course modality

Motivation

The experiences of teaching courses during COVID-19 have expanded the range of options for course design, and different course activities may be offered online, in-person, or via some combination of the two. UBC's course schedule and registration system will now show learners the delivery mode of different course-related activities such as lectures, labs, and seminars. It is therefore important to make delivery methods of different course activities clear to learners, especially since their understanding of the terms used to describe these may be different. For example, learners may not fully understand what is expected of them if the course lecture is online but the lab is designed for hybrid delivery. Communicating the "what and how" of all course activities will allow learners to better understand how the course will operate and to make decisions about their learning accordingly.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How does the course modality relate to the goals for the course and have you made that link explicit for your learners?
- What does the delivery method actually mean in terms of the different course activities (e.g. labs vs lecture) and how does that impact the structure and flow of the course?
- Have you communicated how students can engage and participate in the course with respect to the course's modality?

Information and Advice

UBC has expanded the range of options that describe the modality of course activity types (ATs) in the SISC (the Student Information Service Centre), and will carry these over into Workday student, following approval of the course activity modalities by the Senate Curriculum Committees on both campuses. It is important to explain to students the modality of the course and the rationale for why it is designed that way.

The following information about course modality may be helpful as you consider your course design and how to explain your choices to students in the syllabus. An [abbreviated explanation of course modalities](#) is also available on the Student Services website.

Online

- Learners do not need to attend in person to complete learning outcomes for any of the ATs (including examinations). This modality encompasses what was previously called 'distance learning' to reflect modality rather than location of learners.
- Learning activities may be wholly or partly synchronous, asynchronous or a combination of both. **Synchronous learning activities** are those learning activities that happen at the same time for the instructor and the learners, facilitating real-time interaction between them. **Asynchronous learning activities** do not necessarily happen at the same time for the instructor and the learners, facilitating self-paced learning.

In-person

- Learners need to attend some or all elements of the course activities in person to complete learning outcomes for the course: usually a sequence of synchronous, in-person learning activities (often on a regular schedule, e.g., twice weekly lecture sessions).
- Most will be campus-based, but some of the learning activities may take place outside campus facilities, e.g., health care provider sites, community locations, field schools etc.
- May incorporate online digital resources, materials, activities that are intended to *supplement/augment* (but not substantially replace) the in-person learning activities. ATs using these online tools and resources are *technology-enhanced*, but are fundamentally still in-person.
- This modality can incorporate pedagogical approaches such as flipped classroom approaches that provide asynchronous content made available prior to scheduled synchronous sessions, using subsequent class time to deepen understanding.

Hybrid

- Learners need to attend some activities in person to complete learning outcomes, but not all activities take place in person; synonymous with the term *blended learning*.
- Learning activities are a mixture (a hybrid) of on-campus / in-person and online learning activities, such that the online activities *contribute to some significant fraction (at least ~20%) of the total credit value or credit hours*, in a pattern that is determined by instructors.
- The online activities may be asynchronous, synchronous or a combination of both.



Multi-access

- Based on how the ATs are intentionally designed by instructors, learners may choose (or their locations may dictate) whether they participate in person or online.
- E.g., a combination of in-person learning and online learning options could co-exist within the same AT, giving students choice as to how they engage with a course (for example a lecture may be offered both in person and also streamed). Also, in distributed cohort programs, cohorts may join either in person or online, dependent on their location.

Sample Language: course modality

There are clearly many permutations; these are a few examples.

Traditional	Learner-Centered
<p>This course meets face to face on MWF 9am to 10am in IKBLC 201. Attendance will be taken and lectures will not be recorded. You are responsible for all materials discussed during the lecture.</p>	<p>This course comprises in-person activities: this is the most effective way to engage in the [discussions/projects] that form a critical part of your learning in the course. These sessions will not be recorded, due to the nature of the conversations we will be engaging in during the class, but if you have to miss a class for whatever reason, here are the ways that you can catch up on missed sessions.</p>
<p>This course is delivered online, but some class sessions and midterm and final exam will probably take place in person. More details will be given closer to these examinations.</p>	<p>This is a hybrid course: one of our formal class meeting times each week ('the Monday class') will be devoted to you reviewing the pre-recorded short videos that demonstrate key concepts, at a time that works for your schedule (i.e., there is no fixed 'Monday class'). The sessions on Wed and Fri each week will be in person and devoted to deepening your understanding through conceptual questions and example projects: these sessions will not be recorded as there is little content being presented and the time is spent in small group work and discussions.</p>
<p>This course is delivered entirely online. There will be a mixture of fixed class times and asynchronous self-study periods in the course.</p>	<p>This is an online course; there will be no timetabled in-person sessions, but there are still fixed class meeting times each week via [Zoom/Teams] where the whole class will come together for discussion and key components of the course. These will typically be weekly, for a period of 90 minutes, with additional sessions to be scheduled ad hoc ahead of the term paper assessment. Some, but not all of these sessions, will be recorded and these will be noted in advance on the course Canvas site.</p>

3. Course overview and course-level learning outcomes

Motivation

Articulating why the course is useful, how it may function within the overall curriculum and what learners will be able to accomplish at the end of the course helps orient learners to the course and supports them in managing and monitoring their own learning and progress.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER³

- What are the overall course learning outcomes and are they clearly stated? If you had the opportunity to ask learners what they learned from your course six months after completing it, what would they ideally say?
- Does the syllabus provide an understanding of how assessments, and teaching and learning activities, align with learning outcomes?
- To what extent do the course learning outcomes reflect the cognitive (knowledge, comprehension and intellectual skills), affective (attitudes, beliefs, ideas, values) and psycho-motor (motor-skills, physical movement and coordination) domains and the levels of learning as illustrated through [Bloom's Taxonomy](#)?

Information and Advice

A clear statement about the course, including the subject matter and intended goals and learning outcomes, can help establish a connection with learners. It is helpful to include not only a general description of the course topic(s), but also how the knowledge and skills learners gain might be useful to them for other courses, their careers, or everyday life. This is an opportunity not only to describe what the course is about but also to help learners better understand the value of the course to them, and thus further support their motivation to learn in the course.

Whereas a learning objective is written from the perspective of an instructor/program and outlines what an instructor/program may want to accomplish through a teaching and learning activity, a learning outcome is written from the learner's perspective about what the learner will be able to accomplish and gain through teaching and learning activities.

Learner-centered learning outcomes have the following elements:

- Action-oriented verb(s)
- Subject (the "what")
- Context or criteria (details regarding the subject; may include criteria describing the level of performance)

3 The questions to consider include language from [Inclusion By Design: Survey Your Syllabus and Course Design \(PDF\)](#) by Ed Brantmeier, Andreas Broscheid and Carl S. Moore, licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#).

Developing learner-centered learning outcomes starts with thinking about what learners will be able to do at the end of the course. Instructors may find it helpful to think of articulating learning outcomes by starting with:

- “By the end of this course, you will be able to...”

An effective learner-centered course structure involves the alignment of learning outcomes with assessments and teaching and learning strategies.

- Learning outcomes identify the skills and knowledge learners should obtain by the end of the course
- Assessments evaluate and measure how learners are achieving the learning outcomes
- Teaching and learning strategies are activities or opportunities that support learners towards realizing the learning outcomes

By clearly articulating learning outcomes, instructors/programs can select and organize appropriate course content, develop teaching and learning activities, and design targeted assessments that help learners focus and demonstrate their learning.

Sample Language: course overview and learning outcomes

Traditional	Learner-Centered
<p>Course Description</p> <p>Introduction to Psychology⁴</p> <p>Introductory Psychology 101 is the second half of a survey course of all of the major content areas of Psychology. Both Introductory Psychology 100 and 101 cover basic research methodology and current research in the various subject areas, and the basic knowledge and major theories of the field. Introductory Psychology 100 provided an overview of the following areas of psychology: history of psychology; research methods; biological basis of behaviour, sensation and perceptual processes; variations in consciousness, learning, human memory, and language and thought. This course, Introductory Psychology 101, continues the survey of the field with explorations of psychological assessment, motivation and emotions, human development, personality theory, stress and health, psychopathology, therapy, and social psychology.</p>	<p>Course Description</p> <p>Introduction to Psychology⁵</p> <p>Psychology is the scientific study of behaviour. Introductory Psychology 101 is the second half of a survey course of all of the major content areas of Psychology. Together we will explore many of psychology’s key areas, tackling issues such as how we develop, manage mental wellness and illness, affect and are affected by others, experience emotions, and make more effective decisions. Throughout the term, we will explore methods modern psychologists use to learn about behaviour, as well as the theories they develop to organize their results. You will continually be asked to practice thinking like a psychologist by learning to recognize psychological themes and principles in your life, and by questioning information about behaviour that we encounter daily in our society. Learning will be evaluated based on a combination of individual and collaborative exams, and mini-writing assignments including a peer review component. Join us in studying the most fascinating subject matter ever: us!</p>

4 The traditional example language on course descriptions is quoted from the [Introduction to Psychology II Syllabus \(PDF\)](#) by James McClelland, licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#).

5 The Learner-Centered example language for this course description is quoted from the [Introduction to Psychology Part II Course Syllabus 2015 \(PDF\)](#) by Dr. Catherine Rawn, licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#).

Traditional (cont.)	Learner-Centered (cont.)
<p>Course-Level Learning Objectives⁶</p> <p>This course will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Define modern psychology and identify major perspectives within it 2. Outline psychological concepts and theories from specific subfields (e.g., developmental and social psychology) 3. Explore principles and themes to gain insight into learners themselves, others and events in everyday life 4. Communicate ideas about psychology both verbally and in writing 5. Promote opportunities for peer feedback 	<p>Course-Level Learning Outcomes⁷</p> <p>I designed this course with specific goals in mind. If you are willing and able to meet the requirements, by the end of this course, you will be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Define modern psychology and identify some major perspectives within it 2. Recognize, recall, connect and evaluate psychological concepts and theories from specific subfields (e.g., developmental and social psychology) 3. Apply your knowledge of psychological principles and themes to gain insight into yourself, others and events in your everyday life 4. Communicate your ideas about psychology both verbally and in writing 5. Give, receive and use constructive peer feedback in writing and testing contexts

4. Assessments and grading

Motivation

A clear outline of assessments and grading will help learners prepare and plan for their course work and responsibilities ahead. From a learner’s standpoint, meaningful assessment and grading descriptions can inform learners how to scaffold and manage their learning and what they can expect in terms of formative and summative assessment and feedback. Formative assessments, such as polls, self-assessments, discussion boards, diagnostic tests and weekly quizzes, can help learners gauge how well they’ve learned and where they need to focus additional studies to prepare for summative assessments. The purpose of summative assessment, such as midterms, final exams, or final papers or multimodal projects or presentations, is to determine whether students have learned the expected learning outcomes.

6 The Traditional example language for these course-level learning objectives is adapted from the [Introduction to Psychology Part II Course Syllabus 2015 \(PDF\)](#) by Dr. Catherine Rawn, licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#).

7 The Learner-Centered example language for these course-level learning outcomes has been truncated and quoted from the [Introduction to Psychology Part II Course Syllabus 2015 \(PDF\)](#) by Dr. Catherine Rawn, licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER⁸

- Do learners have a variety of ways to show what they know, or does the course rely on only a few types of assessments? To what extent does the course employ a variety of assessments and how is this described in the syllabus?
- Does the syllabus describe how formative assessments (assignments) provide learners with feedback and opportunities to improve?
- Based on the learning outcomes for the course, is divergent, creative thinking rewarded or do assessments require learners to conform to one common norm? Is this articulated in the assessment descriptions?
- Does the distribution of time and effort (yours and the learners') reflect the importance of the learning outcomes and assigned weights described in the syllabus?

Information and Advice

Describe each assessment clearly and meaningfully, including an explanation of how they will help learners attain course outcomes, and what feedback strategies will be used to guide and inform learners along the way. Consider including the following information in the syllabus:⁹

- A rationale for course outcomes and assignments
- Clear and meaningful formative and summative assessment descriptions
- What periodic feedback looks like (graded or ungraded)
- An overall breakdown of how assessment will be translated into grades: consider how learners will be evaluated and how and where grades are assigned, weighted and distributed
- A course timeline, outlining a schedule of topics, teaching and learning activities, associated pre-reading and resources and assessment due dates
- Consider providing learners with options in completing assessments where this is feasible and fits with the learning outcomes of the course, such as choosing to do a paper or project instead of an exam.
 - » Additionally, note that the use of fee-based assessment platforms can represent a barrier to learning for students and alternative assessments can help alleviate this burden. The UBC Senate Endorsed Principles for Digital Learning Materials Used for Assessment provide more information about this topic.
 - » If you do provide options for flexibility or alternatives, explain what they are and how students can exercise them.

8 The questions to consider include language from [Inclusion By Design: Survey Your Syllabus and Course Design \(PDF\)](#) by Ed Brantmeier, Andreas Broscheid and Carl S. Moore, licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#).

9 Some of these considerations are adapted from Bart, M. (2015, July 29). [A learner-centered syllabus helps set the tone for learning](#). Faculty Focus | Higher Ed Teaching & Learning. Retrieved July 22, 2022. Others are adapted from the [Learner-Centered Syllabus Toolkit](#) by the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT), Iowa State University, licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#).

Sample Language: accessing resources

Traditional ¹⁰	Learner-Centered
<p>Term Paper</p> <p>The term paper (1500 words, double-spaced, in docx format) must be submitted online via the assignment tool before 5:00 pm on the last day of class.</p>	<p>Term Paper</p> <p>In order to help you develop a meaningful research paper, we encourage you to submit your paper in three stages:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A 200-word outline stating your research questions, describing why it matters to you and how the topic is relevant to the course content. You should also include a few primary sources. This is due before the Reading Break. 2. A rough draft to be submitted two weeks before the paper due date. The TAs and I will do our best to identify gaps you may have and offer some quick advice. 3. The final version of your term paper (1500 words, double-spaced, in docx format) must be submitted online via the assignment tool before 5:00 pm on the last day of class. <p>The submission of the outline and draft is voluntary. Though you will not receive additional marks for these submissions, I believe that you will benefit from following a timeline and receiving early feedback from the teaching team.</p>
<p>Quizzes</p> <p>There are six quizzes for Modules 1-6 and you will only have 1 attempt for each quiz. The quizzes will be timed (15 mins for each quiz), and each quiz is worth 5 points towards final grade. After the due date, the quizzes will no longer be available.</p>	<p>Quizzes</p> <p>Six quizzes for Modules 1-6 will be due at 11:59PM of weeks 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12 of the course to ensure that you are on track with your readings. You may choose to re-take a quiz once, two days after your initial attempt is completed, as you may wish to use the time in between to review the concepts and be prepared. After the due date, quizzes will remain available until the final exam.</p>

¹⁰ The Traditional example language on course descriptions is adapted from the [Introduction to Psychology II Syllabus \(PDF\)](#) by James McClelland, licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#).

Traditional

Grading¹⁰

Attendance/Participation: 15%

Regular attendance and in class participation, including the use of iClickers, is expected. Missed classes and non-participation will result in a reduction of the mark.

Midterm Exam: 40%

The mid-term is scheduled for the last class of Week 6 and will be a multiple-choice exam.

Final Exam: 45%

The final exam will be comprehensive and take place during the regularly scheduled exam period. It will be 3 hours in duration and will contain multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. Students must achieve a passing grade of 50% on the final examination in order to pass the course.

Total: 100%

Learner-Centered

Grading¹¹

How Will We Know If We Have Met Our Goals?

Learning Appraisal Activity	Percentage of grade	Dates
Five 'Writing to Learn' Mini-Papers with Peer Assessment (5 x 1%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Skeptical Intelligence ▪ Four "Write & Rate" concept-check assignments 	5%	Throughout the term; see Course Schedule for all dates.
Three Two-Stage Midterm Tests worth 16% each (weighted 90% individual, 10% team) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Approximately 25 multiple choice & 5 fill-in-the-blanks 	48%	Friday Jan 30, Wednesday Feb 25, Wed March 18
Cumulative Two-Stage Final Exam <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Approximately 70 multiple choice and 10 fill-in-the-blanks (2-stage, weighted 90% individual, 10% team) and 2 paragraphs (individual only) 	43%	During exam period April 14-29, including Saturdays
Engagement in Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Class participation (i>clicker): 2% ▪ <i>Required</i> Subject Pool Participation: 2 hours = 2% 	4%	Complete by Friday April 10
Base Points available for you to earn	100%	
Bonus Peer Review Completion points (0.5% x up to 5)	2.5%	See Course Schedule for dates
Bonus Subject Pool Participation (up to 3 more hours = up to 3%)	3%	Complete by Friday April 10

¹¹ The Learner-Centered example language for this course description is quoted from the [Introduction to Psychology Part II Course Syllabus 2015 \(PDF\)](#) by Dr. Catherine Rawn, licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#). You can review this syllabus for further learner-centered language on assessment and grading flexibility and options.

5. Accessing resources

Motivation

From a learner's perspective, one of the basic requirements for an effective learning environment is to be able to easily locate and access relevant course resources, such as slides for class meetings, session notes, lecture recordings, readings and more.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Will the course lectures be recorded? Why or why not? How will you explain to students the rationale for either strategy?
- Why have the textbook and other course readings been selected for the course and what are the options for learners to access them?
- How much time should learners anticipate needing to complete any assigned readings?
- Do you have any guidance on how your learners can best learn from the course materials?

Information and Advice

The range of experiences and technologies used for delivering courses during COVID-19 changed both the kinds of course resources that could be shared as well as expectations around their sharing. For example, as video conferencing technologies like Zoom made it easy to record lectures for remote learning, learners were often able to view such recordings for online class meetings, and may wish to be able to continue to do so in other classes regardless of course modality or pedagogical intention.

Being intentional and clearly communicating design choices about if, and how, learners will be able to access course resources can help build understanding for the structure and flow of your course as well as lower the metacognitive load around the use of materials; done properly, learners will be able to focus more of their energy and time learning from the course resources than trying to locate and access the materials when needed.

Some specific learning design choices and information you may want to communicate within your syllabus include:

- **Recordings of lectures:** Providing lecture recordings can help learners revisit and reinforce course concepts as well as provide equitable and flexible options, such as in the case of sickness or other absence. The choice to record or not should be aligned with teaching goals and strategies, and there are various reasons why it may not be appropriate. There could be drawbacks, such as: the changes recordings can introduce to your class culture including attendance levels, increased instructor efforts, challenges around the recording of sensitive content, or others. The [UBC Learning Technology Advisory Group discussion paper on class recordings \(PDF\)](#) provides an overview of the benefits and drawbacks of recording your lectures. Explicitly communicating why you or the teaching team has decided to share or not share recordings can help learners understand the teaching intentions and rationale.

- **How to access course materials:** In addition to recordings, you may also be sharing other course resources such as slides, lecture notes, or online modules. Not knowing what resources are available and where or how to access them in a timely fashion can lead to increased learner frustration and be a barrier to learning. Providing thoughtful, contextual information (and direct links where possible) about how to access course resources can improve the learner experience. Aligning and reinforcing which materials will be used in which week or session of the class can also make it easier for learners to know they are accessing the proper materials when they need to.
- **Required readings, textbooks, and other materials:** Learners appreciate knowing what textbooks and other course materials they will need to acquire as early as possible within the course, and including this information in a syllabus is required in the [UBCV Syllabus Policy](#). It is important to clarify what is required and what is optional. In addition, learners also appreciate understanding why they are being asked to access those materials. Did you find the textbook to be particularly good at explaining course topics? Do the optional readings expand upon what will be covered in class in a way that will help learners master the material? Communicating your choices to learners will help them understand the relevance of the materials to the course topics and their own learning goals. Additionally, providing information about how much time learners will need to complete readings will help them be able to anticipate and plan for their workloads. The [UBCO Workload Calculator](#) can help you determine how much time a learner may need for engaging with your course materials.
- **Textbook costs and other materials fees:** The cost of readings and learning materials such as textbooks, fee-based assessment platforms, and other resources can be a real barrier to learning. According to the [2020 AMS Academic Experience survey \(PDF\)](#), 28 per cent of UBCV undergraduates reported that they frequently or often went without textbooks or other learning materials due specifically to cost, and 19 per cent struggle monthly with food insecurity. Additionally, in 2022, 70 per cent of undergraduates reported that they have at least once gone without a textbook or other course resource because of the cost that is associated with the material. Describing the costs or fees for all learning materials within your syllabus, as well as suggested alternative strategies such as accessing the materials through Library reserves, can help avoid unanticipated financial surprises or stress for learners. Additionally, the use of open educational resources (OER), such as open textbooks or open problem banks, is a widely used [teaching strategy](#) at UBC and learners greatly appreciate the use of OER as it saves them money and is often contextualized to their courses.
- **Advice for learning from the resources:** In addition to describing your design choices around course materials, you may want to provide explicit advice or guidance on how to learn from the resources. Thus, in your syllabus you could include information about where learners should focus their attention or what strategies they should use for best learning from the materials. For example, do you think it would be beneficial for learners to focus on the textbook and only review lecture videos if they missed a class? Stating so will help learners use those resources effectively.

Sample Language: accessing resources

Traditional	Learner-Centered
<p>Required Texts:</p> <p>Young, H. & Freedman, R. (2016). <i>University Physics with Modern Physics, 14th Edition</i>. Toronto, ON: Pearson Canada Inc.</p>	<p>Course Materials:</p> <p>All course materials will be available through our Canvas course site.</p>

Traditional	Learner-Centered (cont.)
<p>Required Texts:</p> <p>Young, H. & Freedman, R. (2016). <i>University Physics with Modern Physics, 14th Edition</i>. Toronto, ON: Pearson Canada Inc.</p>	<p>Lecture recordings, notes, and slides:</p> <p>Lectures will be recorded and the videos, along with my slides and notes, will be available in Canvas under the lecture tab. However, as each class session may involve non-recorded discussions, group activities and active learning opportunities, it will be important that you still attend the class every week. Please note that it may take between 24-48 hours for lecture recordings to be posted.</p> <p>Textbook and optional readings:</p> <p>University Physics Volume 1: This is an excellent textbook that provides in-depth coverage of all the topics we will cover in this course. It is also free and can be viewed online, downloaded as a PDF or as a .mobi file for Kindle devices or as a .epub for other devices.</p> <p>Practice questions:</p> <p>In Canvas, I have also posted practice questions that correspond to each week's topics. These questions are not graded, but can be used to help you understand and master the topics as well as indicate areas where you might need to spend some more time.</p> <p>How to best learn from these materials:</p> <p>You will be able to master the topics in the course and do well if you attend class, work on the problem sets, and do the readings. All weekly readings should take between 1.5 and 2 hours to complete. Previous learners have suggested that the most effective strategy for this course is to read the associated chapters/pages for the textbook before the corresponding class. That way, you'll be familiar with the topics before the class discussion and activities. After class, or before exams, it can be helpful to review class notes and do the practice questions. Please do not spend too much time on rewatching the videos, as reviewing the notes and working on the practice questions is a more effective use of your time.</p>

6. Course communication

Motivation

It is important to communicate clearly with learners about how they can reach out to you or the other members of the teaching team, and how learners can also communicate with each other. For example, office hours may be listed, but not all learners may understand what office hours are, or know how they should engage with instructors during their office hours.¹²

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What are the ways that learners can contact you or the other teaching staff? What should they expect for a turnaround time?
- What are the ways that learners can reach out to each other?
- How can you explain to learners what office hours are for, and how attending will benefit their learning?
- What is your expectation for learners in office hours, and what can learners expect from you?
- Does your syllabus sound welcoming and does it encourage learners to drop by office hours?

Information and Advice

With variations of class modality offered at UBC, learners may reside on campus, off campus or outside of Canada. Some international learners may not even be able to travel to Canada in time for the start of term due to travel restrictions such as COVID-19 status and flight cancellations. Even when learners are on campus, they may have varied class timetables that don't fit with your office hours. Adding to that, learners may have urgent inquiries to instructors (such as being unable to take an exam due to being ill) and want to know the approximate turnaround time for a reply from you. Whether it is virtual or in-person, clearly communicating and providing flexibility on how learners can reach out to you and communicate with each other are vital to support student learning and well-being.

12 This paragraph is adapted from the [Introduction to Inclusive Teaching online module](#) in Canvas from UBC Vancouver, licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).

13 The table is adapted from [Learner Center Syllabus](#) from the Centre for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT) at UBC Vancouver (licensed

Sample Language: course communication

Traditional ¹³	Learner-Centered
<p>Instructor: John Doe</p> <p>Office: 2.22 Irving K. Barber Learning Centre</p> <p>Telephone: 604-123-4567</p> <p>Email: john.doe@ubc.ca</p> <p>Office Hours: By appointment</p>	<p>Instructor: John Doe</p> <p>Office: 2.22 Irving K. Barber Learning Centre</p> <p>Telephone: 604-123-4567</p> <p>Email: john.doe@ubc.ca (please add “PSYC 200” in subject headline)</p> <p>Drop-in Hours: W 1:00pm-2:00pm (PST) (in person), TH 9:30am-10:30am (PST) (online on Zoom)</p> <p>Zoom Drop-in Hours link: virtualoffice.ca/JohnDoe</p> <p>I encourage you to make use of my Drop-in Hours to chat about anything that is related to the course or to discuss how I could better support your learning.</p> <p>The Zoom room is first-come, first-serve, where the first one who joins the room will ask their questions in the Zoom main room. If you prefer to speak one-on-one, please let me know verbally or by Zoom chat.</p> <p>Drop-in Hours Expectations: During these hours, please have a clear topic to discuss so that the time is meaningful and effective. You can expect me to provide guidance, explanations and feedback; however, please do ask for clarification or further examples if the information I am providing isn't clear.</p> <p>Peer Interaction: Your peers are excellent resources. Don't hesitate to use the discussion thread on Canvas to reach out to your peers for help! Just be respectful to your peers. I will sometimes jump in too when needed.</p> <p>Contacting Me: I always welcome you to contact me outside of class and drop-in office hours. During my office hours, my door and my virtual door are always open. If the office hours do not work with your schedule, please let me know and I will work out a time to meet you.</p> <p>If you prefer emails, I aim to respond within two business days. For urgent inquiries, please note in the subject line that the email is urgent.</p>

under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#)), and [Inclusive Syllabus: What is it? \(PDF\)](#) from the CTLT and the Equity and Inclusion Office.



7. Academic integrity

Motivation

Providing a clear, accurate, and explicit statement about how you expect learners to do their work in your course with integrity, and why, as well as how academic integrity is valued in your discipline and course, is a good way to establish a framework of integrity from the very beginning.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How is academic integrity valued in your discipline and how is that reflected in your course?
- Does your Department or Faculty have some template language required or recommended of all syllabi? If you cannot change it, consider augmenting it.
- Have you communicated the following to learners?
 - » To what extent they can collaborate on homework or other assignments
 - » What is permitted to be used during quizzes and tests
 - » The style expectations around citations and references and a style guide or resource they can use if available
- Do your learners know where to find the regulations around academic integrity and the procedures related to academic misconduct?
- How should learners resolve any uncertainty they may have about academic integrity and academic misconduct?

Information and Advice

Academic integrity is a commitment to upholding the values of respect, integrity, and accountability in coursework. For learners, this means completing academic work honestly, and for instructors it means supporting learners to learn with integrity in their courses. Teaching and promoting academic integrity are all part of UBC's culture of academic integrity. Integrating academic integrity education into every course and acknowledging that academic integrity needs to be taught in the context of the disciplines is part of building a culture of academic integrity.

The syllabus is an ideal place to begin addressing academic integrity with learners. In the syllabus, instructors can provide information about UBC regulations and procedures, definitions of academic integrity, and examples of academic integrity in their discipline. This can also serve as a starting point for discussion or questions around this topic.

The components of an effective syllabus statement about academic integrity are:

- Begin with a rationale, stating [why academic integrity matters](#) - in this course, at UBC, in the wider scholarly community, in your discipline - and why you commit to taking it seriously. It's helpful to customize this rationale to fit your course and disciplinary context.
- Articulate briefly what working with integrity looks like: acknowledging others' work you draw upon, for example, or submitting accurate data.

- Provide examples of what violations of academic integrity look like by highlighting the issues that are most common in your discipline.
- Model acting with integrity through use of citations (for example).
- Invite students to review the [Student Declaration and Responsibility](#) to which they are beholden.
- Briefly state how cases of suspected misconduct will be addressed, based on procedures established in your Faculty. E.g., “all cases of suspected misconduct will be investigated and reported to the department head. A report may also be forwarded to the Dean’s office.” If you don’t know what these procedures are, contact your Department Head, Associate Head Undergraduate, or the Dean’s Office in your Faculty.

Include links to resources to help learners know more about the [expectations and policies](#), and how to get help to meet those expectations. Be sure to explain also how they can get help from you or others in the teaching team, if they have questions or concerns.

Sample Language: academic integrity

Note: there is also a [syllabus statement template document](#) with sample language you can adapt, on the UBC Academic Integrity website.

Traditional	Learner-Centered ¹⁴
<p>Cheating is not tolerated in this course and could result in a mark of zero on the assignment or exam, or expulsion, or both. Instances of academic misconduct may be referred to the President’s Advisory Committee on Student Discipline.</p> <p>For details on pertinent University policies and procedures, please see the Academic Misconduct pages in the UBC Calendar.</p>	<p>Participating Ethically in the Academic Community</p> <p>What can you do to ensure you are acting ethically? First, recognize that all graded work in this course, unless otherwise specified, is to be original work done independently by each individual.</p> <p>Visit the Learning Commons’ guide to academic integrity. UBC offers an online guide to preventing unintentional plagiarism and organizing your writing.</p> <p>Be careful and critical of what you read and choose to cite. Unless otherwise specified, in psychology courses reference all material using APA style; if you cannot find a proper reference, question whether that source is appropriate to use. Do not copy and paste text from other sources, even in a draft, as you might unintentionally misrepresent those words as your own in a later draft (which would still qualify as plagiarism).</p>

14 The Learner-Centered example language for academic misconduct has been adapted from the [Introduction to Psychology Part II Course Syllabus 2015 \(PDF\)](#) by Dr. Catherine Rawn, licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#).

Traditional	Learner-Centered (cont.)
<p>Cheating is not tolerated in this course and could result in a mark of zero on the assignment or exam, or expulsion, or both. Instances of academic misconduct may be referred to the President's Advisory Committee on Student Discipline.</p> <p>For details on pertinent University policies and procedures, please see the Academic Misconduct pages in the UBC Calendar.</p>	<p>If you have any questions about what sources to use or how to cite them without plagiarizing, please see your instructor or TA before handing in your assignment.</p> <p>Why is Academic Misconduct Treated So Harshly?</p> <p>Some people don't feel like cheating on a test or taking a sentence or two from someone else's paper without citing it is a big deal. Here's a bit of insight into why we care so much. In the academic community—a community of which you are now a part—we deal in ideas. That's our currency, our way of advancing knowledge.</p> <p>By representing others' ideas in an honest way, we are</p> <p>(1) respecting the rules of this academic community, and (2) showcasing how our own novel ideas are distinct from, but relate to, their ideas. Formatting styles like APA and MLA give us formal ways to indicate where our ideas end and where others' begin. Welcome to the academic community. You are expected to act honestly and ethically, just like the rest of us.</p>

8. Policies and additional supports

Motivation

While most Universities, including UBC, provide boilerplate language for institutional policies, a learner-centered approach to expectations and specific course policies, such as class absences or late work, is a great opportunity to position your course as a partnership between the instructor(s) and the learners. Additionally, learners are often not aware of the types of support and resources that are available to them. Including information about where learners can get support can be helpful to their learning success.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How do you encourage students to read and engage with the teaching and learning policies, those from the institution and/or your department and also those specific to your course?
- How do your course policies support you (and, if applicable, your Teaching Assistants or other teaching team members) to support students, given the resources you have available to you? Who can you ask for advice on finding this balance?
- How do your course policies support learning, and have you communicated that relationship to your learners?
- What other supports are available to help your learners be successful in your course?

Learner-centered policies include language that has an encouraging, not punishing, tone and that focuses on the needs of the learners as they relate to their learning process. Using positive language from a well-being perspective or framing can help learners understand how the course policies support their learning goals. Additionally, having discussions about policies with your learners, and even encouraging them to help design specific course policies, can help foster the idea of your course as a learning community as well as support learners' sense of belonging.

Setting expectations

Teaching and learning involves responsibilities from both learners and educators. Clearly communicating your expectations for students as well as the expectations that learners should have of you can help establish positive ground rules for the course.

Supporting learning and wellness

It is also helpful to provide advice to learners on how they can best learn in the course, and how they can seek help when needed, such as:

- Why keeping up with the course material and homework throughout the term may be important (and what trade-offs students are making if they choose to review everything in a short period before exams).
- How slides, lecture notes, readings, or other materials might be able to be used effectively (and ineffectively) for study purposes, including class recordings if you have chosen to record some or all classes.
- What learners can do if they are struggling: you could invite them to reach out to you if they are falling behind, for example, and also include information about [Early Alert](#) and how you will use it to support learners.
- What learners can do if they are feeling ill or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19: you should ask them to stay at home when sick, follow public health advice and take care of themselves; you could include information about contacting you or the program for further guidance on how their learning can be supported while they recover.
- You might also consider listing a variety of learning resources directly applicable to the course (e.g., links to tutoring resources, the [Learning Commons](#), software, open courses, online videos, and other open educational resources, if available of sufficient quality).
- You could also point to wellness resources for learners, such as the [Wellness Centre](#), [Student Counselling Services](#), and other health resources posted on the [Health page of the Student Services website](#).



Sample Language: policies and additional supports

Expectations

What we will expect of you	What you can expect of us ¹⁵
Acting ethically, practicing academic integrity, and treating learners and the teaching team with dignity and respect	Treat you with dignity and respect, and make decisions ethically and fairly, paying attention to individual circumstances
Actively participate in collaborative activities in class and in your group projects, to support your own learning and that of other learners	Be available to answer questions or provide other support to help your learning, including through office hours, monitoring of discussion boards, and replying to emails within 2 business days
As often as possible, arrive to class on time and stay for the entire class; this reduces distractions for others and helps ensure everyone is contributing to collaborative activities during class	Design most classes with a mix of lectures and activities that engage you actively to support your learning
Communicate with us if you find yourself struggling with the material or falling behind; we are happy to work with you to help you succeed	Reach out if we notice that you are missing a few lower-stakes assignments, or one higher-stakes assignment, to offer help if needed; we will also use Early Alert as a way to provide further support for those who may be struggling

Policies & supports

Traditional	Learner-Centered
<p>Assignment Due Dates:</p> <p>Late Penalty: Course assessments are due at the time and date specified in the syllabus, with no exception. 10% of your assignment grade will be deducted for each late day.</p>	<p>Weekly Assignment Due Dates</p> <p>Success in this class depends upon your active participation and I will ask you to do only those activities that I believe will help you learn. Due dates are set to help you manage your time, and turning in work on time will help you keep on top of course topics and achieve your desired grades. For late assignments, 10% will be deducted for each late day. That said, life does happen and for that reason, you will be able to drop your lowest two weekly assignment grades.</p>

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The Learner-Centered sample language on expectations as well as on policies and supports has been adapted from the [Introduction to Psychology Part II Course Syllabus 2015 \(PDF\)](#) by Dr. Catherine Rawl, licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#), and inspired also from the UC San Diego Teaching and Learning Commons' [Learner-Centered Syllabus Guide \(PDF\)](#).

Traditional	Learner-Centered (cont.)
<p>Assignment Due Dates:</p> <p>Late Penalty: Course assessments are due at the time and date specified in the syllabus, with no exception. 10% of your assignment grade will be deducted for each late day.</p>	<p>If you are feeling sick</p> <p>If you are ill or are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, please stay at home and take care of yourself. You can use the BC COVID-19 self-assessment tool or app for guidance, and be sure to follow guidance from BC public health. Please contact me when you're feeling better to discuss how you might catch up on course materials and assignments when you are able to do so. You may worry about falling behind, but I am happy to help you work out a plan to ensure you can continue to succeed in the course while also prioritizing your health.¹⁶</p> <p><i>Additional support for helping you to be successful in this course:</i></p> <p>Centre for Accessibility: 604.822.5844</p> <p>UBC is committed to equal opportunity in education for all students and so are we. If you have a documented disability that affects your learning in the classroom or your performance on tests or exams, please contact the Centre for Accessibility in Brock Hall 1203, 1874 East Mall</p> <p>Academic Advising</p> <p>UBC's Students Services' Academic Advisors can provide guidance on your academic progress, degree requirements, program planning and more. They can also help you apply for in-term academic concessions if you face extenuating circumstances that prevent you from completing work for your courses.</p> <p>Writing Support</p> <p>The UBC Centre for Writing and Scholarly Communication offers tutoring services and resources and has an amazing collection of information and resources about writing.</p> <p>UBC Learning Commons</p> <p>UBC's Chapman Learning Commons provides information about academic resources, from tutoring and workshops to study groups and online technology tools. It also offers resources on a variety of academic topics.</p>

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The Learner-Centered sample language on illness considerations has been adapted from [UBC Campus Rules & Guidance Documents - COVID 19 Campus Rules](#) from UBC Vancouver - Safety and Risk Services.

Traditional	Learner-Centered (cont.)
<p>Assignment Due Dates:</p> <p>Late Penalty: Course assessments are due at the time and date specified in the syllabus, with no exception. 10% of your assignment grade will be deducted for each late day.</p>	<p>AMS Tutoring</p> <p>The AMS, which is your UBC student society, offers free group tutoring covering a variety of courses.</p> <p>Health and Wellbeing</p> <p>It's important to take care of your physical, mental, and emotional health as you navigate university life. Be sure to check out the resources available through the Wellness Centre, Student Counselling Services, and other health resources posted on the health section of the Student Services website.</p>



Additional Syllabus Resources

Learner-centered and inclusive syllabi

- [Learner-Centered Syllabus](#), from the UBC Vancouver Centre for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT)
- [Guide to Creating a Student-Centered Course Outline](#), from the University of Calgary Taylor Institute
- [Constructing a Learner-Centered Syllabus: One Professor's Journey \(PDF\)](#), by Aaron S. Richmond, IDEA Paper #60, 2016
- [Learner-Centered Syllabus Checklist](#), from Iowa State University
- [Inclusive Syllabus: What is it? \(PDF\)](#), from UBC CTLT and the Equity and Inclusion Office
- [Building an Inclusive Syllabus](#), from Stanford University Teaching Commons
- [Inclusive Syllabus Project](#), by Laura Zanotti
- [Syllabus Challenge: Infusing Inclusive Practices](#) by Kim Case

Learning outcomes

- [Learning Outcomes](#): An overview of learning outcomes from the Centre for Teaching and Learning at UBC Okanagan
- [Learner-Centered Syllabus - Course Overview](#): A sample statement illustrating a learner-centered syllabus course overview and learning outcomes, from the Centre for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT) at UBC Vancouver
- [Online Teaching Program - Why is learning design important?](#) A resource from the CTLT at UBC Vancouver describing the importance of backward design and constructive alignment between learning outcomes, assessment and strategies for teaching and learning
- Resources on writing learning outcomes:
 - » [Mohawk College - How to Write Course Learning Outcomes](#)
 - » [University of Waterloo - Writing Intended Learning Outcomes](#)
 - » [Arizona State University - Learning Objectives Builder](#)
 - » [University of Waterloo - Bloom's Taxonomy](#)

Assessments

- [Assessment Strategies](#): An overview of assessment strategies from the Centre for Teaching and Learning, UBC Okanagan
- [Designing and Grading Assessments](#): An overview of considerations for designing and grading assessments from the Centre for Teaching and Learning, UBC Okanagan
- [Online Teaching Program - Module 3 - Designing Online Assessment](#): A resource outlining online assessment planning and development from the CTLT, UBC Vancouver
- [Creating inclusive course assessments](#): A resource from UBC Skylight outlining the value of designing inclusive course assessments and additional resource links
- [Inclusive Teaching Course - Note on Assessment](#): A resource on developing inclusive assessments, from a UBC online course on inclusive teaching



Recording classes

- The [UBC Learning Technology Advisory Group discussion paper on class recordings \(PDF\)](#) provides information on benefits and drawbacks of recording synchronous, in-person classes at UBC.
- The [Principles for Recording Classroom Activities \(PDF\)](#) provides UBC guidance on topics such as: copyright and intellectual property; notification and consent requirements; privacy and sharing (including guidelines for students on using and sharing class recordings); and more.
- The [Learning Technology Hub's Tools for Lectures and Presentations](#) provides general tips and resources for recording online and on-campus synchronous and asynchronous classes.

Academic integrity

- [Academic integrity syllabus statement template \(DOC\)](#): An editable Word document to help assist in creating a syllabus academic integrity statement
- [Approaches to Academic Integrity in the syllabus](#): A collection of academic integrity statements from faculty at UBC Vancouver, on Google docs
- [UBC Academic Integrity website](#): A repository of resources and information on academic integrity and academic misconduct
- [Introduction to Academic Integrity \(PPT\)](#): An introductory PowerPoint presentation prepared by the UBC Vancouver Academic Integrity Working Group to use as a starting point for discussing academic integrity in class
- [Appendix K](#): A sample statement about academic integrity that is part of A Guide for Curriculum Submissions for UBC Vancouver, which advises that language on academic integrity is strongly recommended in the syllabus

Other resources

- [Student-facing information on course modalities](#), from the UBC Student Services website
- [Interacting with Profs](#): Information for learners from the UBC Vancouver Learning Commons on how to engage with instructors during office hours
- [UBC Disability Accommodation Policy \(LR7\)](#): The principles, responsibilities and processes for the purpose of provision of accommodations for students with disabilities
- [Student Support and Resources](#): A Student Services web page that provides information about finding support for academics, finance, health, and more

Authors, License, and Attribution

This document was written by the following people at UBC Vancouver:

- Simon Bates, Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President, Teaching and Learning *pro tem*
- John Cheng, Educational Consultant, Learning Design, Centre for Teaching, Learning, & Technology (CTLT)
- Will Engle, Strategist, Open Education Initiatives, CTLT
- Christina Hendricks, Academic Director, CTLT
- Rie Namba, Educational Resources Developer—Open Resources, CTLT
- Ainsley Rouse, Senior Manager, Academic Integrity, Office of the Provost and Vice-President Academic

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