

Infographic Syllabus Introduction Activity

Abstract

On first day of class, students stumble from room to room, as syllabus after syllabus is distributed and explained. Faculty struggle to rise above the “noise” of all the first classes. This session presents an active learning exercise to introduce the syllabus to students in an impactful, engaging and interactive approach. Students groups create a colorful, visual infographic of the course syllabus and share their results with the class. The activity enables each student to read the syllabus and defend their prioritized items. Groups create a visual image of the syllabus, ensuring they will understand and remember key components.

Keywords: Syllabus, active learning, interactive

Introduction

Each semester, instructors publish a syllabus and introduce it to students during the often mind-numbing “syllabus day.” This exercise presents an alternative syllabus introduction by using active learning to engage students during the first day of class and helping them retain more information from the syllabus. Small groups of students study the syllabus, create an infographic version of it and share it with their peers. This allows them to collaborate to create learning rather than passively absorbing it. For instructors who use an active learning format, syllabus introduction is also an opportunity to model the active learning classroom environment for students. This exercise was designed for undergraduate students in face-to-face business courses, but it may also be used for graduate students.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications

Active learning has become widely accepted in higher education and frequently practiced in the college classroom. Students learn better when they collaborate with others, create rather than consume knowledge, activate their brain with total mind and body involvement and use images instead of only text. (*The Center for Accelerated Learning* 2021) The infographic syllabus exercise provides active engagement for the students, and novelty when compared to typical “syllabus day” approaches. At the beginning of each semester, instructors compete for student attention and memory. What students do and think are the determining factors for what a student learns (Ambrose 2010), so using an exercise that enables students to actively think about the syllabus and translate it in a novel and visual way is a method to improve student retention and learning.

During the course of their management education, students learn to synthesize information and present it to their instructors and peers, as they will later do for their employees,

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peers and managers. This infographic activity addresses three important implications for teaching. First, it engages students in collaborating to identify and agree on important information from the syllabus, second, it allows them to translate textual information into a visual representation and third, it affords students the opportunity to both share their results and hear other groups explain different perspectives of the syllabus contents, reinforcing common themes and highlighting items that might have been overlooked. It allows the student to create learning instead of consuming learning.

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of the infographic syllabus exercise, students will be able to identify

1. important components of the course design
2. learning objectives for the course
3. formative and summative assessments used in the course
4. important course policies and instructor expectations
5. instructor expectations for active learning exercises in the classroom
6. steps for depicting and sharing information using an infographic

Relevant Teaching Topics: This activity can be used in any class with a syllabus. It was originally created for use in an undergraduate talent management (training and development) course but it also may be used in a graduate course.

Exercise Overview

Class size: 6 – 45 students (if larger class sizes are used, the group formation and readout would need to be adjusted)

Time requirement: 45 – 60 minutes, depending on class size. Groups typically need 10 – 15 minutes to read the syllabus, discuss and create the infographic. Readout takes 2 – 4 minutes per

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group, although later groups may take less time if their items have been explained by previous groups.

Equipment needed:

- Course syllabus (either paper or electronic version)
- Sample infographic (paper or electronic)
- White board space or easel paper for each student group
- Multi-color markers or dry erase markers for each student group (face to face)

Preparation:

Create an infographic of an assessment or assignment to share with the class as an example. The free service Piktochart <https://piktochart.com/> can be used to create an infographic that can be downloaded as a PDF for printing or posting and may also be presented/projected in a slide version. The site includes easy-to-use templates that assist in the creation of an infographic.

Optional, additional preparation - view this video on creating Infographics:

https://www.linkedin.com/learning-login/share?forceAccount=false&redirect=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.linkedin.com%2Flearning%2Fdesign-your-first-infographic%3Ftrk%3Dshare_ent_url%26shareId%3DnsSZ6FOARzOs6NireiKRfg%253D%253D&account=2344122

Activity description:

The steps for this exercise are

1. Introduce the exercise to the class and briefly explain the desired outcome and steps that will be followed.
2. Share and explain the prepared example infographic.

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3. Post instructions (on board or onscreen) and explain the specific steps student groups will follow. Make sure posted steps are accessible during the entire exercise. The steps are:
 - a. Each student reads the syllabus and lists the most important components.
 - b. Groups discuss and agree on most important syllabus components to include on infographic.
 - c. Groups collaboratively create syllabus infographic.
 - d. Groups add graphics and/or icons to visually depict infographic components.
 - e. Groups share and explain their infographic with the class.
4. Form students into small groups and provide a time guideline for their efforts (10 – 15 minutes).
5. Circulate among groups to answer questions, encourage creativity and gauge progress against remaining time.
6. Provide a 3 or 5 minute warning to enable groups to wrap up their infographics and determine speaking order group members (all members present).
7. Reconvene the class after the time limit and begin the readout. Each group displays and explains their infographic. (Keep a record of any misconceptions or incorrect interpretations to address at the end of the exercise.)
8. To close the exercise, clarify any misrepresentations or misunderstanding of the syllabus.
9. Lead a wrap-up discussion.
 - a. Ask the class how this coverage of the syllabus differs from those students have traditionally experienced (active versus passive).
 - b. Ask why we covered the syllabus this way? (student discovery)

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- c. If the class will be taught in an active learning format most of the time, another follow-up question could be: What does this activity tells students about how the class will be conducted going forward (looking for some version of student-centered activities or active learning classroom).
- d. Reinforce the value of such activities to aid in learning.

Lesson Outline	Instructor Activity	Learner Activity	Time
Introduction	Explain activity, purpose and overview of steps.	Listen, ask questions	2 – 4 minutes
Show example	Share and explain prepared example infographic.	Listen, ask questions	3 – 5 minutes
Display steps for infographic exercise	Project onscreen, reference online, or provide paper list of steps for activity. Include materials to be used by groups, for syllabus and infographic (online resources or physical items such as white boards or easel paper)	Listen, ask questions	3 – 5 minutes

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Break class into groups	Explain group formation, location for group work, and distribute materials. Circulate to each group, asking questions, providing encouragement, monitor for progress, etc.	Move to group location, read syllabus, list important items, share with group, collaborate to create infographic.	10 – 15 minutes
Time warning and reconvene	Give 3 or 5 minute warning. Advise groups to share presentation and determine order of presenters.	Groups wrap up project, determine order of presenters.	3 – 5 minutes
Readout	Invite groups to share their infographics, note misconceptions to correct at conclusion.	Present their infographic, watch other group infographic presentations, ask questions	2 - 4 minutes per group

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Clarification of misconceptions	Explain any misconceptions and answer any syllabus questions.	Listen, ask questions	0 – 4 minutes
Wrap-up discussion	Ask class how infographic exercise differed from typical syllabus day. Ask for the benefits of covering the syllabus this way. Reinforce benefits of classroom activities for improved learning and retention.	Reflect on benefits of activity. Answer questions.	5 minutes

Variations: This could be adapted as a Zoom whiteboard, Google draw or Padlet exercise for online classes.

Session Description

This 60-minute, face-to-face session (which could be adapted to a synchronous, online session) will demonstrate active learning by positioning the participants as students in the class, enabling them to experience the exercise firsthand. Presenter will distribute materials (infographic exercise activity, white board or easel paper and markers, or if online, PDF of

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infographic and use of Zoom whiteboard), introduce and explain the session/desired outcomes and lead the activity. Participants will then be given an opportunity to work in pairs, groups or alone to create an infographic of the exercise. Volunteers will be invited to share their infographics. Questions and discussion will follow the activity.

References

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