Course Description

Your course description should provide a brief introduction to the scope, purpose & relevance of the course. Note also that it is perfectly acceptable for the course description in your syllabus to go beyond the description in the course catalogue, provided it is consistent with that description.

Read your colleague's course description, make some notes, and give feedback based on the following criteria:						
This Course Description…	not at all 1	2	3	4	very well 5	**Notes for Discussion**
…tells me what the course is about	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
…gives me a sense of what is interesting/useful about this course	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
…avoids the use of jargon, and terms students who haven't yet taken the course might not understand	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
…will be useful to its various audiences	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

Learning Objectives

Developing learning objectives is an important first step in course design, and they should be articulated on your syllabus. Your learning objectives are meant to identify your main goals for your students, in terms of the skills and knowledge they will develop in your class. They should be student-centered, action-oriented, and measurable, and should reflect a big-picture view of the purpose of the course.

Read your colleague's learning objectives, make some notes, and discuss your thoughts on the following questions:			
	Yes	**No**	**Notes for Discussion**
Are the learning objectives student-centered, action-oriented, and measurable?	☐	☐	
Are there 3-8 learning objectives?	☐	☐	
Are there learning objectives that seem more like descriptions of assessments and/or classroom activities?	☐	☐	
Are there vague/ambiguous phrases in use (like *understand* and *obtain a working knowledge of*)?	☐	☐	
What is your sense of the scope of the course (e.g. topical breadth & depth, introductory vs. advanced, etc.), given the learning objectives provided?			
What do you expect students' prior knowledge of the content will be?			

Assessments and Graded Components

Your syllabus should explain how you will assess student learning and determine your students' final grades. What is your approach to grading (e.g. standards-based, mastery-based, specifications grading, etc.)? Include enough details and information so that students can transparently understand what kind and quantity of work will be expected of them. Some things can be lumped together (e.g. midterms & final exams), but there should be a descriptive blurb associated with every component of your course that counts toward a student's final grade.

1. Take turns explaining your basic approach to grading to your colleagues, and discuss together the ways in which you think each measures (or fails to measure) student achievement of the course's learning objectives.

2. Read and discuss your colleagues' descriptions of their assessments and graded components, withthe following questions in mind:

   ☐ Does the syllabus include many different measures and many different kinds of measures of learning? Does it include a mix of formative assessments (to demonstrate learning and improvement) or rely mainly on summative assessments (to demonstrate achievement)?

   ☐ If you were a student, what questions would you still have about the requirements, after reading the descriptions?

   ☐ Is the purpose of each assignment clear?

   ☐ Is there sufficient detail for students to understand the task they must complete?

   ☐ Is information about how students' work will be evaluated provided (e.g. rubric)? Are examples of excellent work available?

   ☐ Are there places where sentences like "More details about this assignment will be distributed in class" and/or "See our Canvas site for more information" would be helpful?

Course Policies and Structure

Course Policies are an important part of every syllabus, as they are an opportunity to make your expectations about your students' behavior clear to them. As you write your course policies, use language that emphasizes your students' role in the process, and aim for a tone that supports community, student engagement, and student learning.

Take turns reading each other's individual policies, and discuss the following questions:

☐ Does the syllabus share expectations around drop-in office hours, guidance, questions, and help-seeking?

☐ Does the syllabus share information about what kinds of interactions or collaborations among students are expected in this class (e.g. out of class group work, in-person learning activities)?

☐ Does the syllabus include information about what kind of resources and support are available to your students, such as through the Office of Disability Services, Tutoring and Academic Support, and the Communication Center?

☐ Does the syllabus include expectations around academic integrity aligned with the Georgia Tech Honor Code and a statement about acceptable student conduct aligned with the Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement?

☐ Is it sufficiently clear **what is and is not expected/permissible** in this class?

☐ Does the **rationale or motivation** behind the policy need to be made more explicit/clear?

☐ Is it clear **what students need to do** in extenuating circumstances, and what the **consequences** will be if they fail to live up to the expectations laid out in this policy?

☐ Does the **tone** of this policy seem **too harsh**, **too soft**, or **just right**?

Academic Well-being and Inclusion

A sense of belonging, safety, and acceptance are fundamental conditions for effective learning. As you write your syllabus, consider ways to convey that you care about your students' academic well-being. Signal to students that all identities are welcome and that harassment and discrimination will not be tolerated. For more information about supporting student academic well-being, see the Center for Teaching and Learning's Learning Environment Toolkit.

☐ Competence/Mastery: Is there an opportunity for students to work with the material or practice skills and to become aware of their progress?

☐ Autonomy: Is there an opportunity for students to make decisions about the assignment, such as the topic, the process for completing it, or the presentation format of their project?

☐ Psychological relatedness: Are the students able to have peer interactions throughout the learning process that can offer them a sense of relatedness?

☐ Does the syllabus include a diversity statement about how you recognize and value diversity in your classroom, represent diversity in course content, and work together with your students to create an inclusive classroom climate? For examples of diversity statements, see here, here, and here.

☐ Does the syllabus identify campus resources and supports for students such as support for students with specific identities? Success at Tech is a website that links to many student resources including the LGBTQIA Center, OMED, Women's Resource Center), study supports (Tutoring and Academic Support, the Communication Center), mental health resources (CARE), food banks and food security resources (STAR), resources for veterans, service members, and their families, and others?