

Syllabus Project for 300-level Courses

I've used this assignment in ENL 304: Survey of American Lit II 1865-the present. It asks students to develop their own syllabus for a hypothetical American Lit II survey. In my surveys I often try to stress to students that there are many different ways to tell the "story" of American literature, many ways to narrate American literary history. I try to be transparent about the stories I'm telling and to encourage students to think about other ways to tell that story. I also try to help them to see how power is bound up with the different ways we narrate literary history. I developed this scaffolded assignment to empower students to develop their own stories of American literature and to think about teaching and learning as knowledge creation rather than just knowledge consumption.

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ENL 304 Syllabus Project

Overview of What We're Doing: The syllabus project asks you to develop your own course calendar section of a syllabus for ENL 304 Survey of American Literature II. It asks you to imagine that you are going to be teaching the class and to come up with the readings, the topics, and the overall structure for a 12-week course. It also asks you to provide the reasoning and research behind your choices. The project is broken up into a few different writing assignments that you'll work on over the course of the semester: the syllabus, the narrative statement, and the research reflections. Please see below for a breakdown of each assignment.

Why We're Doing This: If we look back at the pyramid for Bloom's Taxonomy, two of the big goals at the top have to do with students evaluating and creating knowledge themselves. This project gives you the opportunity to really make the material from the course your own by evaluating different narratives of U.S. literary history--different ways we tell the story of what U.S. literature is and how it has developed--and creating a narrative of your own through the reading plan on your syllabus.

Requirements for the Syllabus: The syllabus you're creating is just the course calendar section that outlines the readings and the topics for the course. You are not writing class policies, assignments, etc. Here are the requirements for the syllabus:

- You will be completing the course calendar for a hypothetical 12-week American lit II survey that meets on T/Th. I have given you 12 weeks instead of 14 and made it T/TH instead of MWF to make it a bit easier. So you need to come up with readings for 24 days total. There is a template for the syllabus on myCourses that you can use to build your syllabus.
- Your syllabus must somehow cover the period from roughly 1865 to roughly the present in U.S. literature. You do have a good deal of freedom in how you cover that period.
- The syllabus must have **at least 12 readings that are not on our regular syllabus that I made up for ENL 304**, meaning that you must come up with at least 12 of the readings on

your own instead of taking them from what I put on the syllabus I designed. If you want, you don't have to use any of the readings from my syllabus. You can do all different stuff.

- There must be a reading assigned for every day (so 24 days in all). You can't say "free day" or "workshop day." How many readings you assign per day will usually depend on length. If they are short stories, essays, or excerpts, you could do between 1 and 3 a day. With shorter poems, you can usually assign a bunch. If you're assigning a novel or play, you might break it up over a few days.
- The readings don't have to come from the Norton anthology but they can.
- Your syllabus must have some organization around topics or units. Note how my course calendar has larger units and then different topics for each week. You could do something like that or you could play around with other ideas, but you do need some kind of organization into topics.
- This is an opportunity for you to be creative in crafting your own narrative of U.S. literary history based on your research, interests, and values. Want to do a survey of American lit from 1865 to the present that focuses on horror or sci-fi? Go for it. Want to organize readings based on theme or geographical location instead of chronology? Go for it. Want to go backwards chronologically? Go for it. Want to make Asian American writers the sole focus of your syllabus? Want to focus on literature about the city? Want to focus on LGBTQ literature? Want to focus on literature about the working class? Want to keep roughly the same topics I have but use different texts or expand or shrink certain sections? Cover something big that I'm missing? Go for it. Try to be creative. Try to be innovative. Don't copy what I've done. Do your own thing.

Narrative Statement: Along with the syllabus itself, you'll be writing a narrative statement. As you'll see in the grading rubric on the next page, your narrative statement is the largest portion of your final grade for this project. This is because your narrative statement is the place where you explain and defend the choices you've made for your syllabus. You provide the rational and the research supporting what you're doing and what story you're looking to tell. Here are some requirements:

- The statement should be between 1200 and 1500 hundred words.
- The statement should incorporate at least 4 outside sources (see recommend sources for more info). Please follow MLA formatting, including in-text citations and a works cited entry for anything you quote, paraphrase, or summarize.
- Your statement should be an essay that addresses the following questions. You don't have to address them in this order or write out the questions themselves. You just want to make sure your narrative touches upon them:
 1. What is the organizing principle or principles of your syllabus? Explain the overall focus, structure, use of topics, etc.
 2. Why have you organized the syllabus in this way? What story are you trying to tell and why? You can bring some of your outside research in here.
 3. How do the readings you've chosen fit into this structure or story you're outlining? This is a place to highlight and explain some of the choices you've made for readings. You don't have to explain every single reading on the syllabus but try to highlight some and explain the reasoning behind your choices and how they fit. You can bring some of your research in here as well.
 4. What do you hope students will gain from your syllabus? What are the potential limitations of your syllabus?
 5. What have you learned from working on this project?

Research Reflections: To help you build toward your syllabus and narrative statement and get some feedback from me along the way, you will write two short research reflection papers. In these reflections papers, you work on learning more about different areas of American literature that you're interested in and thinking about how what you've learned might impact your syllabus. Here are the requirements:

- Each paper should be about 500 words
- Each paper should include research from at least 2 outside sources (see recommended sources guidelines). Please follow MLA formatting when citing sources. These are sources you can then potentially use when you write your narrative statement later.
- These papers are informal reflections that should address the following:
 1. What topic, era, author, or idea are you interested in learning more about for your syllabus? So, for example, if you're thinking that you want to write a syllabus that focuses more on Latinx literature and puts American literature in the context of the Americas and the larger Spanish-speaking hemisphere, you could say that.
 2. What sources did you research and what did you learn from them? Going with the previous example, maybe you consulted the *Cambridge Companion to Latina/o American Literature* at the library and looked up some information on the *Literature Criticism* database. Maybe you also did a little googling and read a couple of wikipedia articles on certain authors. Explain what you learned from these sources.
 3. How does what you've learned impact what you're planning to do with your syllabus? For example, maybe now you have certain authors and works you would want to include or a particular topic for a unit of the course or a question that you would want part of your syllabus to focus on.

Grading

Your paper will be scored out of 100 according to the following criteria:

Criteria	Score	Brief Comments
Research reflection one: complete/incomplete (10 or 0)	/10	
Research reflection two: complete/incomplete (10 or 0)	/10	
Rough drafts of syllabus: complete/incomplete (10 or 0)	/10	
Rough drafts of narrative statement: complete/incomplete (10 or 0)	/10	

Syllabus: Follows criteria outlined in assignment sheet (up to 5 points)	/5	
Syllabus: Coherence and organization (up to 5 points)	/5	
Syllabus: Creativity and innovation (up to 10 points)	/10	
Narrative statement: Follows criteria outlined in assignment sheet (up to 5 points)	/5	
Narrative statement: Argument and reasoning (up to 25 points)	/25	
Narrative statement: clarity, style, and organization (up to 10 points)	/10	

Explanation of criteria:

- 5/5 Syllabus Coherence and Organization: The units, topics, and readings on the syllabus are extraordinarily very well-structured and organized. There is a clear set of principles behind this organization, and the reader can begin to see the story or stories the syllabus is attempting to tell.
- 10/10 Syllabus Creativity and Innovation: The focus, topics, readings, and organizing principles of the syllabus demonstrate an extraordinarily high level of creativity, flexibility, and critical thinking. They reflect the writer's own original thinker instead of rehashing thinking that's already out there. They demonstrate a good deal of care.
- 25/25 Narrative Statement Argument and Reasoning: The narrative's argument is extraordinarily thoughtful, thought-provoking, focused, and clear. The reasoning the author provides to justify their syllabus choices is thoroughly convincing. Their ideas move beyond the obvious and the common place, demonstrating a high level of critical thought and a deep engagement with research. This research, along with the authors own ideas, values, and

interests provide robust support for their choices. Ultimately, the author's argument suggests their ability to create a compelling, well-informed story of American literature.

- 10/10 Narrative Statement Clarity, Style, and Organization: The statement demonstrates an advanced grasp of style, grammar, and mechanics. The writing is not only clear and easy to read but also lively and engaging with a well-defined authorial voice. The structure of paragraphs and sentences is logical and easy to follow. MLA in-text citations and works cited are also done correctly. The writing is polished.
- **Extra Credit:** Remember that students who present their work at the English and Comm Department's Student Research Conference on Thurs. April will receive 1/3 of a letter grade boost on their final grade for this project and 1/3 of a letter grade boost for their participation grade. Students who attend the conference but don't present will receive 1/3 letter grade boost for participation.

Due Dates (these are also on the course calendar)

2/23: Research reflection one

3/23: Research reflection two

4/1: First draft of syllabus

4/15: Second draft of syllabus and first draft of narrative statement

4/27: Third draft of syllabus and second draft of narrative statement

5/2: Final version of syllabus and final version of narrative statement

Recommended Sources

I highly recommend that you consult some of the following as you create your syllabus and write your narrative.

Cambridge Companion Series (Available in the stacks at our library. Just look it up in the catalog for call numbers)

- The library owns a lot of books in this series. Examples include *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism*, *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction After 1945*, *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing*, and the *Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, but there are many more. Of course you aren't going to read all of them. The volumes you consult will depend on what you're trying to learn about. If you're interested in rethinking the place of Asian American authors on the survey syllabus, then you might consult the *Companion to Asian American Literature*, for example. You can see all the volumes we own in the catalog or go to the stacks and browse.

Histories of American Literature

- There are many large reference histories of American lit. The library has a bunch of them; however, try to keep in mind when a particular history was published. A history published in 1970 might tell a bit of a different story about American lit than a history published in 2010, for example. You can check the catalog for these histories, but some that I would recommend include: *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (at library); *The Cambridge History of African American Literature* (at library); *The Cambridge History of Native American Literature* (at library); *A History of American Working Class Literature* (at library); *Columbia Literary History of the United States* (at library); *A History of American Literature* (on reserve); *A New Literary History of America* (on reserve).

Concise Dictionary of American Literary Biography (available online through our library catalog)

- This source is useful if you're looking for information on a particular author.

Keywords for American Cultural Studies (available online through our library catalog): This provides useful overview of keywords like nation, race, etc.

Literature Criticism (Gale) database (available online through library)

- This is a helpful database for in-depth background information and suggested further reading on topics, eras, movements, authors, and individual works.

Peer-Reviewed Journals

- If you're looking to get a grasp on newer research in a particular area so you can think about how that research might impact your syllabus, you get check out some peer-reviewed journals publishing scholarship in American literary studies. Again, you don't have to go looking through everything. Try to let your questions and interests guide you. So if you're interesting in getting a handle on new ideas about Reconstruction literature because that's an area of your syllabus you're particularly interested in working on, you could look for what **newer** (like within the last 10 years or so) work it out on Reconstruction. You might then come across the special issue of the journal *American Literary History* devoted to rethinking Reconstruction literature. Some journals that you might find useful include: *American Literary History*; *American Literature*; *J19: The Journal for Nineteenth-Century Americanists*; *ESQ: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture*; *The African American Review*; *MELUS: The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*; *Modernism/modernity*; *The Space Between*; *Contemporary Literature*.