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Student Impressions of Syllabus Design: Engaging Versus Contractual Syllabus

Mary-Jon Ludy
Bowling Green State University, mludy@bgsu.edu

Tim Brackenbury
Bowling Green State University, tbracke@bgsu.edu

John Wm Folkins
Bowling Green State University, folkins@bgsu.edu

Susan H. Peet
Bowling Green State University, speet@bgsu.edu

Stephen J. Langendorfer
Bowling Green State University, slangen@bgsu.edu

See next page for additional authors

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Abstract

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Mary-Jon Ludy[1], Tim Brackenbury[2], John Wm. Folkins[2], Susan H. Peet[3], Stephen J. Langendorfer[4], and Kari Beining[2]

[1]*Department of Public & Allied Health,* [2]*Department of Communication Sciences & Disorders,* [3]*School of Family & Consumer Sciences,* [4]*School of Human Movement, Sport, & Leisure Studies, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43403, USA*

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INTRODUCTION

Many sources of information may influence students' interest, attitude, and motivation about a course they are beginning. These factors include the appeal of the topic and how closely it connects with the students' purposes for enrolling in the course, the opinions and experiences of their classmates, and on- and off-line ratings of the course and its instructor. The course syllabus is one place where an instructor directly can influence students' interest and motivation. The syllabus may provide an overview of the content areas, elaborate on how the course will be taught, and introduce the instructor. The syllabus provides a first impression, which may be important (Matejka & Kurke, 1994) because it can motivate students or, alternatively, disinterest them in the course.

The course syllabus can vary in format and purpose. For example, one type of syllabus may be a traditional, brief document that gives basic introductory information, while another type may be a long, contractual document that specifies details about the course and its implementation. Only recently has there been explicit concern for influencing the students' interest, attitude, and motivation about the course with the syllabus. This has led to a third type of syllabus, the learner-centered syllabus (Grunert O'Brien, Mills, & Cohen, 2008). Research on student impressions and preferences for the syllabus have focused almost exclusively on the first two types. The present study compares student impressions of a contractual syllabus designed to embody obligatory features to a learner-centered syllabus incorporating graphic features designed to promote student engagement.

The Purposes of the Course Syllabus

Many authors have reviewed the purposes of the course syllabus (e.g., Fink, 2012; Grunert O'Brien, et al., 2008; Matejka & Kurke, 1994; Parkes & Harris, 2002). Parkes and Harris, for example, emphasized the role of the syllabus in the personnel review of faculty members to evaluate their teaching competency as well as its ability to be used by administrative entities to assess course accountability and rigor. Matejka and Kurke noted that a syllabus could serve several different purposes, and they emphasized that a syllabus served as a legalistic contract between a faculty member and the students in the course. Like Nilson (2007) and Smith and Razzouk (1993), they felt that a syllabus also serves a function analogous to a map or script by guiding students through the complexities of a course, its content, and learning outcomes.

These different purposes for a syllabus have led to three major categories of syllabus mentioned above: the *traditional syllabus*, the *contractual syllabus*, and the *learner-centered syllabus*. Primary features of each type are presented below and in Table 1, along with a variation of the learner-centered syllabus we have called the *engaging syllabus*. The categories of syllabus are presented in order of their historical development from the earliest to most recent. Although the more recent syllabus categories have evolved from earlier categories, each of the three types is currently used by instructors (Beining, Schardt, & Brackenbury, 2015).

The traditional syllabus. The traditional syllabus is a short document focused on a limited range of the most important course information from the instructors' perspective. It typically includes the instructor's name and contact information and a schedule of when different topics, events, and deadlines will occur throughout the term. It may provide students with a map to follow during the course and links to materials that they can access as needed (e.g., a bibliography of readings; online resources). The traditional syllabus may provide both the instructor and students a common source to find key information and resources. It is designed as a scholarly document so that visual embellishments or personal anecdotes are seen as distractions. There is usually little attempt to get the student interested in the material or to be concerned about the student's impressions of the syllabus or the class in general (Matejka & Kurke, 1994).

The contractual syllabus. The contractual syllabus is more comprehensive and detailed than the traditional syllabus. It contains not only extensive information about course content and procedures, but it emphasizes the contractual relationship between the instructor and the students, stressing course requirements and policies (Davis & Schrader, 2009). It explicitly states the behaviors and work products the instructor expects from students to earn a particular grade in the course. The emphasis is on making sure all of the contractual obligations for both student and instructor are explained and documented in detail.

The contractual syllabus often has been considered important because a clear and concrete list of student and instructor expectations is helpful to document shortcomings, provide direction, and mediate disputes. Examples of contractual aspects of a syllabus include the policies and expectations for attendance, late submissions, and make-up opportunities. The contractual nature of the syllabus has expanded greatly in recent years because

TABLE 1. Major Syllabus Categories			
Generation	**Primary Focus**	**Features**	**Graphic Style**
1. Traditional	Introduction and summary of course	Styled like an abstract	Scholarly, black and white, succinct, text-only
2. Contractual	Detailed explanation of obligations for both instructor and students	Explicit explanations of what to do about problems	Scholarly, black and white, effusive, text-only
3. Learner-centered	Promising, motivating students to take an active role in their learning	Provide student with control and choices throughout the course	Text-rich, yet student-friendly explanations
3a. Engaging	Captivate and sustain student enthusiasm for learning	Contemporary design features integrated with course outcomes	Purposeful use of graphics, media, and color

policy statements are increasingly used to help settle appeals and grievances that may occur. Legal implications often have pushed instructors to add more and more explicit contractual information to the syllabus. As a result, a contractual syllabus can end up being quite lengthy and reading more like legal document than a course description. Jones (2011) has referred to this as syllabus bloat.

The learner-centered syllabus. The learner-centered (also referred to as promising) syllabus concentrates on being a tool to influence student attitudes, perspectives, and motivation for learning (Bain, 2004; Brigham Young University Center for Teaching and Learning, n.d.; Fink, 2012; Grunert O'Brien et al., 2008; Parkes & Harris, 2002; Weimer, 2011). A fundamental principle behind the learner-centered syllabus, as well as learner-centered teaching in general, is that it allows students the opportunity to make choices in how they will learn and to take responsibility for those choices. This is intended to motivate students to embrace learning through the course as well as to appreciate how the learning outcomes of the course may enhance their professional preparation and even their lives (Fink, 2003). There is emphasis on student and instructor intentions, roles, attitudes, and strategies. This is done in a way that helps students understand and work toward the learning goals. It should be noted that the learner-centered syllabus, in contrast to the traditional or contractual syllabus, has often been designed to appeal to the student. For example, Weimer (2011) asks: "Does your syllabus convey the excitement, intrigue, and wonder that's inherently a part of the content you teach?" (p. 1).

The engaging syllabus. The present study examines a variation of the learner-centered syllabus that we call the *engaging syllabus* (See Table 1 and Appendix A). Along with motivating students to take active roles in their learning, the engaging syllabus is designed to captivate and sustain their interest in the course. It attempts to meet Nilson's (2010) assertion that a syllabus might "not only [be] the road map for the term's foray into knowledge but also a travelogue to pique students' interest in the expedition and its leader" (p. 33). This is achieved through three primary methods. First, the engaging syllabus uses images, color, and other elements of graphic design (See Williams, 2014) to create a document whose layout is similar to that of a contemporary newsletter. Second, the orientation of the engaging syllabus' text is student-focused.

The writing considers the incoming students' perspectives and incorporates them into the plans for the class. Third, the description of the course presents an entire experience that is about more than just the content to be covered. This is achieved in a number of ways, such as connecting the course to broader themes or professional experiences. Taken together, these elements of the engaging syllabus are designed to work toward increasing student motivation through a visually-appealing document that assures an intriguing experience.

Studies Evaluating the Use and Function of the Syllabus
The scholarly literature on the syllabus provides an empirical base for identifying college-student perceptions of the most important, most frequently referenced, and most preferred components of the syllabus. Although many instructors complain that students do not refer to the syllabus, 70 percent or more of students report using the syllabus from the first day and throughout the rest of the semester (Calhoon & Becker, 2008). The majority of this research has addressed the traditional and contractual types of syllabus.

A number of studies have sought to identify the aspects of a syllabus that students perceive as the most important. For example, Zucker (1992) found that students first looked at examination dates, the number of examinations, and topics covered in the course. Meuschke, Gribbons, and Dixon (2002) revealed that students preferred a syllabus which contains clear and important information, while Marcus and Carr (2004) showed that examinations, grading policies, and due dates were most frequently mentioned as important. Becker and Calhoon (1999) observed that the importance of items varied by the students' years of college experience (first-semester vs. continuing), the students' age (traditional versus nontraditional age), and the time of the semester when the question was asked (the first day vs. the last week).

More recent studies have highlighted the role of the syllabus in creating a positive learning environment. For example, Saville, Zinn, Brown, and Marchuk (2010) found that students rated an instructor more highly if the syllabus contained a high degree of detail. Similarly, Jenkins, Bugeja, and Barber (2014) showed that instructors were judged as more competent if they added detailed course policies.

Although there continues to be significant interest in the learner-centered syllabus, the only study of the effectiveness of the learner-centered syllabus is by Davis and Shrader (2009), who found that students preferred a syllabus with a learner-centered approach to one with a contractual approach.

Examining the Engaging Syllabus
We have used the engaging syllabus in our courses for the past three years. Our students have described it as being attention-getting, interesting, and motivating. As one student wrote in response to a general question on an end-of-the-semester reflective paper, "The first time I read the course syllabus, I was impressed by the way it was organized. It was very encouraging, supportive, and full of excitement and energy that pushes the students to read and enjoy it." While such feedback is encouraging, anecdotal responses like these are not enough to warrant widespread adoption of a new practice. As Shulman (2004) and Boyer (1990) suggested, instructors should critically examine assumptions about what they do and test aspects of each course as if evaluating a scholarly argument.

The present study directly compares student impressions of an engaging syllabus with those of a contractual syllabus for the same course. It was motivated by our experiences using an engaging syllabus, as well as the lack of comparative research in the literature evaluating the syllabus. The questions in the present study included: Does the type of syllabus (engaging vs. contractual) affect students' impressions of the document itself, the instructor, or the course? Does the type of syllabus influence students' desire to take a course? Which aspects of each type of syllabus design do students find beneficial? Which do they find to be problematic?

METHOD
Participants
Three hundred sixty-eight students who were enrolled in two sections of an undergraduate introductory nutrition course at a large Midwestern state-supported university were invited to participate in an online survey regarding their use of the syllabus in previous courses, as well as impressions of a sample syllabus for a follow-up nutrition course.

Two types of syllabus were presented, contractual and engaging, with each participant viewing only one syllabus type. One hundred fifty-five surveys were completed about the syllabus with a contractual design (from a course section with 196 students), while 125 surveys were completed about the same syllabus with an engaging design (from a section with 172 students). Exclusions occurred due to incomplete surveys (3 contractual, 2 engaging); surveys completed twice (2 contractual, 0 engaging); surveys in which at least half of the informational content questions about the syllabus was incorrectly answered (6 contractual, 10 engaging); and surveys in which qualitative responses were implausible (e.g., "has pictures and quotes" – 6 contractual). When surveys were completed twice with correct answers to content questions, the first survey was used in data analysis. One student completed the survey twice and incorrectly answered at least half of content questions on the first survey. In this case, the second survey was used in data analysis. A total of 139 contractual syllabus surveys and 113 engaging syllabus surveys were used in data analysis. Overall, students who completed the survey were 19.7±2.1 years of age; predominantly female (74.6%), Caucasian (86.1%), and in their first year of college (47.2%); and had a grade point average (GPA) 3.2±0.6. This is reflective of the gender distribution and class standing of introductory nutrition courses and the racial/ethnic background of students on the university's main campus. There were no differences in age, gender, racial/ethnic background, class standing, or GPA between students who evaluated the contractual syllabus and those who evaluated the engaging syllabus.

Procedures
The contractual syllabus and engaging syllabus used in this study are presented in Appendices A and B. While the general information contained in each syllabus was similar, the formatting was quite different. The format of the contractual syllabus was conventional (i.e., black-and-white and text-heavy). It was four pages long and contained material one might expect in a contractual syllabus: contact information for the instructor and graduate assistant, a course description, learning outcomes, required textbooks and materials, sources for outside help and resources, course policies and expectations, evaluation and grading procedures, and a calendar with the course schedule.

The engaging syllabus was five pages in length and contained the same major divisions as the contractual syllabus. But, it was presented in color using a contemporary newsletter-style layout. The quantity and density of the text was reduced to allow incorporation of graphic design elements; such as tables, sidebars, charts, and photographic images. For example, headshots of the instructor and graduate assistant were included alongside the contact information. A table of contents for the syllabus was included on the first page. The instructor's teaching philosophy was presented in metaphorical terms related to the course content (i.e., diet versus lifestyle change--high grade versus lifelong application). Reflective quotes about major course components were presented in a "Students on the Street" section, as a take-off from a prominent feature in the university's student-run newspaper.

Survey. After receiving the printed version of the syllabus in class, students were invited to complete a 23-item survey online for extra credit. The survey instrument is shown in Appendix C. Briefly, questions 1-2 related to syllabus use in previous college courses. Specific syllabus components were selected from Grunert O'Brien et al.'s *The Course Syllabus: A Learning-Centered Approach* (2008). Question 3 addressed the student's interest in taking the course for the experimental syllabus *prior to* reviewing the experimental syllabus. In an attempt to show whether the student had adequately reviewed the experimental syllabus, questions 4-7 asked about specific content that was presented in multiple sections of the experimental syllabus. If students missed half or more of these questions about the syllabus' content, their surveys were excluded from data analysis as a quality-control measure. Questions 8-10 addressed impressions of the experimental syllabus, impressions of the course instructor, and overall feelings about both the course and instructor. Impressions of the course instructor were based on the top qualities rated by students and faculty as representative of master teachers using the Teacher Behavior Checklist (Buskist et al., 2002). The questions about the student's overall feelings about the course and instructor were adapted from the Saville et al. (2010) questionnaire about *Syllabus Detail and Students' Perceptions of Teacher Effectiveness*. Questions 11-14 were open ended. They elicited feedback about similarities and differences between the experimental syllabus and other college syllabi, as well as specific components of the experimental syllabus that were liked and disliked. Question 15 dealt with particular uses for the experimental syllabus. Question 16 addressed the students' interest in the follow-up nutrition course, *after* reviewing the experimental syllabus in depth. Question 17 was a yes-or-no question about whether they liked the syllabus overall. Questions 18-23 concerned student demographics.

Quantitative Analysis
Independent samples t-tests were used to quantify differences in student impressions of the contractual syllabus and the engaging syllabus. They were also used to determine whether past syllabus use and demographic variables varied in the two groups of student participants, as well as to assess interest in a follow-up nutrition course before and after reviewing an experimental syllabus. Analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Version 21 for Windows (IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY). The criterion for statistical significance was $p<0.05$, two-tailed. *P*-values between 0.05 and 0.10 were considered trends worthy of exploration. Data are reported as mean ± standard deviation (SD).

Qualitative Analysis

A qualitative analysis was conducted on the participants' responses to the four open-ended survey questions described above. The analysis was consensus-based and followed the procedures commonly associated with phenomenological research (Creswell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Moustakas, 1994). It was conducted by four of the study's authors, who began the process with independent self-evaluations about their thoughts and experiences with different forms of syllabi (i.e., bracketing). They each reported positive impressions of the engaging syllabus and interest in more fully understanding its potential to enhance student motivation.

The participants' responses to the open-ended questions were divided into individual idea statements. These were phrases, individual sentences, or multiple sentences that expressed a cohesive thought or impression. Two of the four examiners identified idea statements from the contractual syllabus group and the other two did the same for the engaging syllabus group. The results within the same syllabus group were then compared and a consensus spreadsheet was created. To ensure consistency across the examiners, each team evaluated the other's consensus document before it was finalized. A similar process of individual and group analysis was followed to sort the idea statements into categories and themes.

RESULTS
Qualitative Results

Past syllabus use. There were no significant group differences for the survey items relating to past syllabus use (all *p*-values >0.05). As a result, the responses to these items are presented here collectively. The students reported viewing past syllabi an average of 12 times per semester (12.3±20.8). The specific sections of syllabi that they most frequently reported viewing on a weekly basis were the course calendar/schedule and assignments/readings. The evaluation/grading procedures were most frequently identified as being viewed on a monthly basis. Three sections were most frequently selected as being viewed only once or twice a semester: instructor information, objectives/purposes, and policies/expectations.

Content questions. The students who evaluated the contractual syllabus averaged 92.8% accuracy on the survey items about the content of the syllabus. This was not significantly different from the mean 98.2% accuracy of the students who evaluated the engaging syllabus (p=0.062). An item analysis revealed no differences in accuracy for the correct number of examinations (92.8% contractual vs. 98.2% engaging, p=0.062), the correct last name of the course instructor (93.5% contractual vs. 99.1% engaging, p=0.066), or the acceptance of late quizzes (97.3% contractual vs. 99.3% accuracy, p=0.210). There was, however, a significant difference in accuracy regarding the correct course meeting time (95.7% contractual vs. 88.5% engaging, p<0.05). This may be related to authors' error, as the times listed in contractual syllabus were accidently listed as the same for the nutrition course the students were currently in, rather than the alternative times that were in the engaging syllabus.

Syllabus impressions. As shown in Figure 1, impressions of both syllabi were consistently positive and indicated a rating of "agree" regardless of syllabus design. Students who evaluated the engaging syllabus, compared to those who evaluated the contractual

syllabus, were more likely to agree that the syllabus was visually appealing (p<0.001), comprehensive (p<0.05), and motivated interest in the class (p<0.05). There were no between-group differences in agreement with the statements that the syllabus was easy to navigate/find information or easy to read/understand.
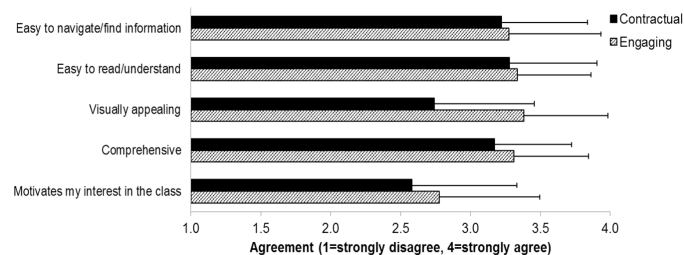

Figure 1. Impressions of the two types of syllabus. After viewing a syllabus, each student rated his/her level of agreement with statements concerning his/her impressions of the syllabus.

Impressions about the course instructor. As shown in Figure 2, impressions about the course instructor were consistently positive and indicated a rating of "agree" regardless of syllabus design. Students who evaluated the engaging syllabus, compared to those who evaluated the contractual syllabus, were more likely to agree that the instructor had the following characteristics: approachable/personable (p<0.05), creative/interesting (p<0.001), encouraging/caring for students (p<0.001), enthusiastic (p<0.001), flexible/open-minded (p=0.001), happy/positive (p<0.001), knowledgeable (p<0.05), prepared (p<0.05), current (p<0.01), and realistic and fair (p=0.01). There were no between group differences in agreement that the course instructor was an effective communicator or promotes critical thinking.

Compared to students who evaluated the contractual syllabus, students who evaluated the engaging syllabus were more likely to agree that they would take another course from this instructor (p<0.05). There were no between group differences in agreement to items indicating that they would like to take this course, would recommend it to others, believe that they could be successful in this course, or believe that they could be successful in another course taught by this instructor.
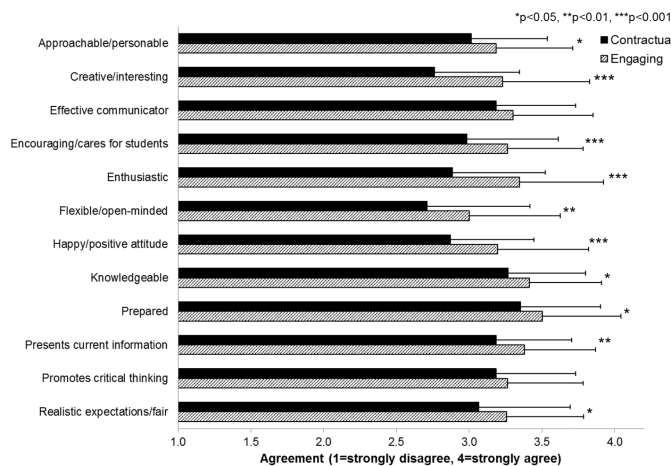

Figure 2. Instructor impressions after viewing the syllabus. Each student rated his or her level of agreement with statements concerning impressions of the course instructor.

Experimental syllabus uses. Compared to students who evaluated the contractual syllabus, students who evaluated the engaging syllabus were more likely to believe that the syllabus would be particularly useful for learning about the instructor (31.7% vs. 50.4%, p<0.01) and motivating them to learn in the course (25.2% vs. 39.8%, p<0.05). They also tended to believe that the syllabus would be particularly useful for determining how much work was expected (71.9% vs. 81.3%, p=0.054). There were no between group differences in belief that the syllabus would be particularly useful for finding due dates (87.8% vs. 91.2%), learning about evaluation and grading (e.g., how assignments are weighted; 79.1% vs. 84.1%), motivating them to be in the course (24.5% vs. 31.9%), and planning their schedule (79.1% vs. 78.8%).

Interest in taking the follow-up course. Students rated their interest in taking a follow-up nutrition course before answering the survey and after reviewing the experimental syllabus in depth (1=not at all interested, 4=very interested). As shown in Figure 3, level of interest in the follow-up course was greater among students who viewed the engaging syllabus than the contractual syllabus (*p*<0.01), when they were students who were initially "somewhat interested" (*p*<0.05) or "interested" (*p*<0.01). Interest did not change with in-depth reading for students who initially indicated "not at all interested" or "very interested." For all students who were initially "somewhat interested" in the follow-up course, interest among those students who viewed the engaging syllabus (n=37 of 113) increased while interest did not change for students who viewed the contractual syllabus (n=51 of 139, *p*<0.05). For students who were initially "interested" in the follow-up course, interest remained stable for students who viewed the engaging syllabus (n=15) but decreased among students who viewed the contractual syllabus (n=22, *p*<0.05). Change in interest for taking the follow-up course did not vary among students who were initially "not at all interested" (n=46 engaging, 47 contractual, *p*=0.764) or "very interested" (n=15 engaging, 19 contractual, *p*=0.784).
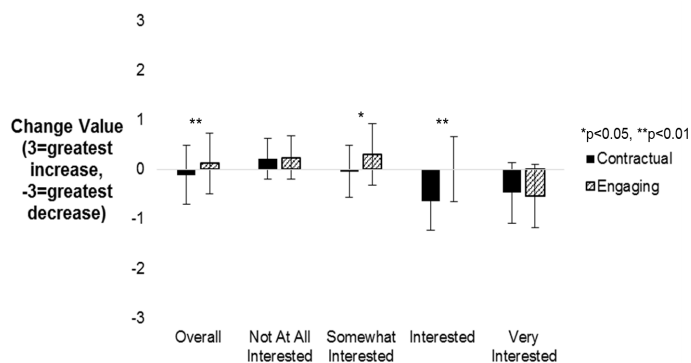

Figure 3. Students' change in interest in taking the follow-up course based on the syllabus they reviewed. For example, 3 would indicate a change from "not at all interested" before to "very interested" in taking a follow-up course after reviewing the experimental syllabus in depth, whereas -2 would indicate a decrease from "very interested" to "somewhat interested," or "interested" to "not at all interested."

Overall impressions. When asked "all things considered, did you like this syllabus?" there were no between group differences (p=0.132). Among students who evaluated the contractual syllabus, 90.6% liked it, while 95.6% of students who evaluated the engaging syllabus liked it.

Qualitative Results

Close to 2,000 individual idea statements were identified from the participants' responses to the four open-ended questions. These were organized into five different thematic categories: general statements, artistic impressions, course components, design features, and usability. Samples of idea statements within each category, by syllabus type, are listed in Table 2.

General statements. The general statements thematic category consisted of broad responses that were no more specific than any of the other thematic categories. They included both positive and negative responses to the questions, as well as comments about the general extent to which the syllabus was informative.

The contractual syllabus group identified it as being "very similar" in terms of design, layout, and information to those that they had seen before. The contractual syllabus was described as either equal to or more informative than other syllabi, as shown by the statement "everything one needs to know is right there on paper." Positive general statements emphasized the information given, "It presents all of the basic information regarding the course that any student will need to know." The negative statements focused on the contractual syllabus being boring, "I don't like how bland it was. I was very uninterested in looking at it."

The general statements made by the participants who reviewed the engaging syllabus also emphasized its similarities to other syllabi. These statements focused on the engaging syllabus having the "essential information" and "all of the same components" as other syllabi. The difference statements emphasized it being "a lot more appealing," "more detailed," and "more dynamic." The participants' overall approval of the engaging syllabus was demonstrated by 53 positive general statements written in response to the question "What did you *not* like about the design of this syllabus?" The few negative general statements made about the engaging syllabus referenced it being "a waste of resources (i.e., paper, color ink)."

Artistic impressions. The participants who read the engaging syllabus wrote many idea statements that related to its visual features, while those who reviewed the contractual syllabus did not produce any such statements. Artistic impressions of the engaging syllabus included broad statements about it being "unique," "creative," "professional," and "personable." The engaging syllabus was described as looking less like a syllabus and more like an "article," "brochure," and "newsletter." The effects of these overall artistic impressions can be summed up by the participant who wrote, "The syllabus given is much more visually appealing, using more designs, an interesting layout, and easy to navigate sections."

The participants specifically wrote about the engaging syllabus' use of colors and pictures. Positive statements about the colors included that they "draw my attention to the syllabus," make the syllabus "more interesting to read," and "make the class seem more interesting." The few negative impressions of the use of colors expressed concerns over the cost of printing the syllabus and overuse of the same color. The participants liked the pictures in the engaging syllabus because they "help you understand what goes on in the actual class." One participant wrote that the pictures were unnecessary, while another stated that there were too many pictures.

Course components. The participants wrote more about the individual components of the course than any other thematic category regardless of the syllabus that they reviewed. The following eleven

TABLE 2. Representative idea statements within the five thematic categories, based on the type of syllabus reviewed.

Thematic Category	Contractual Syllabus	Engaging Syllabus
General statements	It did not seem to be any different from other syllabi that I have come across in my college career.	This syllabus is like no other syllabus I have received in college.
Artistic impressions	None.	I like that it is almost designed like a newsletter. It draws the student in and encourages them to refer to it more often, in my opinion.
Course components	I liked that it laid out what was going on week-by-week including what the topic was, what to read, and what was due.	I feel as though most syllabi follow the same pattern with office hours, assignment dates and the grading scale etc. There is certain information they have to convey so they can't be too different.
Design features	It is very clear, organized, and to the point.	I also like that it highlights key information with different colors, text, highlighting, and the use of underlining or bold print.
Usability	It is easy to find information you're looking for as long as you're willing to read through everything or skim for key words.	I like the idea that someone is trying to make the syllabus more user friendly. That may not directly answer your question but, focusing on usability is a great start.

course components were identified by participants in both groups as being similar to other syllabi: description, evaluation, expectations, grading, help and resources, instructor information, logistics, materials, objectives, rules and policies, and schedule.

Atypical, but helpful, components that were reported in the contractual syllabus included the evaluation and class schedule sections, "the assignments and quizzes with their points next to them," the list of resources for help, the "very detailed course policy list," and the class' required items (such as dry erase markers and an audience response device). The contractual syllabus readers also commented on the level of detail within the course components through statements like, "You know how many points you'll need to get an A in the class, which I like."

There were, however, a number of negative statements that the participants made about the course components of the contractual syllabus. Some did not like how the information was presented. For example, "I think it [the evaluation section] could have been executed differently in a table that is easier on the eyes" and "I disliked that the syllabus has a very long list of course policies, because even though it is important, a student may not read it since it is quite long." Other participants wrote about how the contractual syllabus gave them either ambivalent or negative feelings about the instructor, such as, "[it] didn't reveal any kind of clue of the type of person the professor

was" and "The course policy section of the syllabus made the class less appealing due to its tendency to be aggressive."

As noted earlier, the participants who read the engaging syllabus identified similar course components as those who read the contractual syllabus. They also identified three components as being different from their previous experiences; quotations from past students, the syllabus table of contents, and the pictures of the instructors. The few negative statements made about the engaging syllabus' course components focused on a lack of specific breakdown within the assignments, attendance, and exams.

Design features. The category of design features consisted of statements about the syllabus' length, layout, and organization. Comments about the length of both the contractual and engaging syllabi included responses in each of the following categories; too short, short, not too short and vague, not too long and boring, long, and too long.

The layout of the contractual syllabus was described as being "nearly identical" to other syllabi that the participants had experienced, with minor differences noted in its use of bold fonts, underlines, text boxes, charts, and bullet points. Some of the participants wrote positively about the layout of the contractual syllabus, referring to it as "more clear and professional looking," and "concise with not much white space or visual distractions." Many of the comments, like the following, were positive statements about the organization of the contractual syllabus, "I think that the syllabus is very organized and easy to follow and very helpful." There were a number of comments, however, that were critical of the layout and organization of the contractual syllabus. These included statements about how it was "not well structured," that "all the course policies are lumped together and it makes it very difficult to read," and that the syllabus "was very dry and wordy."

Two design elements of the engaging syllabus that were identified as being similar to other syllabi were its separations of topics into different sections and the general outline and breakdown of the course. Many more comments, however, were made about how the design of the engaging syllabus was different from others. These emphasized the "newsletter" layout and the use of colors to organize and highlight different sections. One participant, for example, wrote, "This one has more of a design. Usually syllabi tend to be bland. Just text on a page. This one has formatting and color. Additionally, photos of instructors are provided." Despite positive statements like these, a number of students wrote about the engaging syllabus being cluttered, confusing, and overwhelming because there was "too much going on." Some of the comments of this nature focused on the colors and pictures, such as "with all the boxes and colors it seems almost too much organization" and "too energetic for a syllabus." Other such comments identified general or specific content that could be eliminated, such as, "I think the syllabus should focus primarily on the schedule, course descriptions, and expectations."

Usability. The participants wrote many statements about the contractual syllabus being easy to read and navigate. As one stated, "The set-up was very simple and easy to follow, which made referring back to it easy to do." Of the few negative statements made about the contractual syllabus' usability, most were general (e.g., "It is a little hard to understand and scattered.").

The idea statements expressed about the engaging syllabus' organization and readability reflected the ones listed above for the contractual syllabus, as well as how it was "easy to determine different

sections," how "the table of contents made it easier to navigate," and how its usability was enhanced by the amount of detail. There was no evidence that the design elements made the engaging syllabus harder to navigate, and in fact, these elements may enhance navigability for students with disabilities.

Some of the participants commented on impressions they had formed about the instructor after reading the engaging syllabus. They appreciated the amount of time it must have taken to develop the syllabus and that she was trying to make a syllabus that was more appealing and "user friendly." One participant, on the other hand, felt the instructor came off as, "really specific and nitpicky."

The participants also wrote about ways that the engaging syllabus was motivating. Examples of these statements include, "The design is stimulating and actually makes me want to read everything as opposed to previous syllabus I have received that I just flip straight to the assignment section," and, "It draws the student in and encourages them to refer to it more often."

DISCUSSION
Comparison of the Engaging and Contractual Syllabus

Two different types of syllabus were examined. One was a well-constructed contractual syllabus. It was scholarly in design in that it was black and white and without frills or ornamentation. The other syllabus was an engaging, learner-centered syllabus intended to be much more visually appealing. It included photographs, color, and other graphic design elements one might expect to see in a newsletter, magazine, or web page. It is important to stress that, as far as we know, the present study is the first study to compare different types of syllabus with a matched set of students doing the evaluation. All other studies have only evaluated components of a single type of syllabus without comparing and contrasting types. The decision to compare responses from very similar groups of student raters was supported by the lack of group differences in their background characteristics, reported use of previous syllabi, and accuracies with syllabus content questions.

In agreement with Davis and Shrader (2009), who found the contractual syllabus to be a useful tool for learning, our respondents judged the contractual syllabus positively in both the quantitative and qualitative analyses. The engaging syllabus was also judged positively.

The overall impressions of the two types of syllabus were not only overwhelmingly positive, but not statistically different (contractual syllabus - 90.6%; engaging syllabus - 95.6%). The qualitative findings, on the other hand, had four times as many statements about the students liking the engaging syllabus than did the contractual syllabus. It may be that greater quantitative differences would have been observed if the contractual syllabus used for comparison was not as well liked by the students or if the question allowed more precision than a binary choice. Even though respondents liked the contractual syllabus overall, the engaging syllabus was judged substantially higher in many specific areas related to both the students' impressions of the course and the instructor. The engaging syllabus was judged to be more visually appealing, comprehensive, and motivating. These quantitative findings were reinforced by the qualitative analyses showing that respondents offered many more positive comments in these areas. The engaging syllabus was purposely designed to be more visually appealing than a contractual syllabus. Thus, it is not surprising that it was consistently judged as more "visually appealing" and "interesting."

Preference for the engaging syllabus was not higher on some measures. For example, no significant difference was noted in navigability. It could be that the graphic elements distracted some from the navigability. However, it should be noted that both syllabi received generally positive judgments on these aspects. Thus, failure to see a difference may also reflect that there was little room for improvement in the sample syllabi we used.

A major finding of this study was that the differences in judgments went well beyond descriptors for how the syllabi themselves were actually different. Just as Saville et al. (2010) and Jenkins et al. (2014) showed that a more detailed syllabus increased students' positive impressions of the instructor, the present study demonstrated that student impressions of the instructor were significantly more positive in 10 out of 12 comparisons. The only two comparisons that did not differ, i.e., promoting critical thinking and being an effective communicator, were not less for the engaging syllabus, either. It may be expected that an engaging syllabus would not be perceived by students as necessarily promoting more critical thinking. In fact, this may have been an ambiguous question as the students may not have had a clear or consistent understanding of what we meant by the term, critical thinking.

Both the quantitative and qualitative analyses indicated that students who viewed the engaging syllabus were more likely to express an interest in taking another class from this instructor or on this topic. Interestingly, further analysis of the interest for taking a follow up course in this area revealed that students who were already interested or somewhat interested in doing so were most positively influenced by the engaging syllabus. Students who were already very interested or not at all interested in a follow up course did not change their impressions.

Students viewing the engaging syllabus were more likely to take another course from this instructor. They were more likely to think of the course as "dynamic" and they said they would be more motivated to learn. They thought the syllabus was more usable and that information about the course was easier to find and to understand. Since the syllabus acts as a first impression to a class, the engaging syllabus sets a more positive and engaging tone. This positive tone becomes symbolic for the course to come.

The Appeal of the Engaging Syllabus

Overall, the students in this study found the engaging syllabus to be more appealing than a contractual syllabus. They also responded more positively to the hypothetical course and its instructor. This may be due to more than just color and pictures in the syllabus. The visual design of the engaging syllabus may be a closer match to what students experience on a daily basis with websites, magazines, and newsletters. Oblinger (2003) identified generational differences in learners and suggested that we should design learning experiences with a form and style that appeals to them. As she pointed out "An essential component of facilitating learning is understanding learners" (p. 37). Instructors, who are used to a traditional contractual syllabus, may want to consider changing to an engaging type of syllabus in order to pique their students' interest.

The engaging syllabus may have also been particularly appealing to today's students because of its connections with current trends in higher education. Previously, the culture of the learning environment in undergraduate education was formal and structured. Courses were teacher-centered, emphasizing the acquisition of information through

lectures and repetition. A contractual syllabus, with its formal structure, was an understandable match with this type of course. Current students may be more used to learner-centered courses that actively engage them in multiple ways (e.g., Weimer, 2002). As such, they may have found the engaging syllabus and its motivational features to more closely reflect the type of classes they are taking.

Charting Future Research in Syllabus Design

As characterized in Table 1, the form and structure of the syllabus has changed over the years. Some of these changes have been improvements motivated by the studies cited earlier. However, many of the changes have evolved from anecdotal evidence. That is, as courses are improved from semester-to-semester, instructors add new material to the syllabus and refine its organization and style. Instructors also influence each other and when one sees an effective variation on a syllabus, it might be adopted, typically without referring to evidence about what makes a syllabus effective. As with other forms of scholarship, however, teaching and learning functions best through practices that are based in theory, research, and practical application (e.g., Boyer, 1990; Shulman, 2004).

This study looked at the differences in student reactions to two very different types of syllabus, the contractual syllabus and the engaging syllabus. It is the first study to compare syllabus types with matched groups of students. Although a number of differences were found, these findings raise some interesting questions. For example, how representative were the two examples of their respective types of syllabus? Future studies could examine many more exemplars of each syllabus type, with fewer measures to make the analysis more practical. Then we would know the extent to which the overall characteristics of each type of syllabus influence students' perspectives.

The qualitative results suggest that the students' impressions were influenced differentially by the various features of the engaging syllabus. It is unclear which features had the most significant and meaningful effects and how variations within a feature strengthened or weakened their responses. Follow-up studies could systematically vary design features in a way that would allow an assessment of separate characteristics of syllabus design. It is especially important to point out that the engaging syllabus we used is a learner-centered syllabus, but it has a number of innovative features such as the use of color, media, and graphic design elements. What aspects of the differences we found between the contractual syllabus and the engaging syllabus are due to the learner-centered design and what aspects are due to other more-novel features, such as our use of graphic design elements?

The two syllabi included in the present study were both printed documents. For a number of years, many college classes have used computer-based learning management systems (e.g., Blackboard, Canvas, Sakai), which have the capability to integrate the functions of the syllabus into the course's web platform. For example, the course calendar tool for the Canvas learning management system (Instructure Inc.) connects information between the syllabus, calendar, and grade book. A new type of syllabus that is based online within these systems and includes links to additional information has been called the interactive syllabus (e.g., Richards, 2003). Further investigation is needed to compare interactive and paper-based syllabi, as more online interactivity does not necessarily result in students having more positive perceptions of a course or its instructor (Grigorovici, Nam, & Russill, 2003). It is noted, however, that the visual and motivational features of the engaging syllabus are compatible with interactive online syllabi.

A third general area for future studies goes beyond just the students' perception of the syllabus. Although reactions of the students are important, there is more to teaching an effective course than being interesting or appealing. The most important question may be: To what extent does the engaging syllabus improve the achievement of course learning outcomes? Unfortunately, this larger question is difficult to assess. We may be able to work in that direction with studies that further explore the impact of the syllabus on student behavior, approaches to learning, and motivation to learn. Another aspect of the concern for enhancing achievement of learning outcomes is the type and level of course (e.g., introductory course or graduate seminar) and the role of the syllabus might be very different across course types. In a similar vein, one might consider the impacts of the syllabus on different types of learning outcomes for a course. That is, if one has learning outcomes that are primarily focused on the lower levels of Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Bloom, 1956) such as remembering or applying information, the most important features of a syllabus might be very different from a course with higher-level learning outcomes of synthesis, interpretation, or creation of new material.

CONCLUSION

Instructors make many choices when developing their courses and syllabi. Historically, the syllabus has focused on class content, teaching methods, and requirements. The results of the present study suggest that instructors and students benefit from additional consideration of the syllabus in a) how the content and methods can be presented in a student-centered, engaging, yet clear and meaningful way and b) what impact the form of presentation may have on students' perception of the instructor as well as their interest and motivation in the course. Even though the students in this study responded positively to both types of syllabus, the engaging syllabus was rated more favorably in areas related to their interest and motivation for the class as well as impressions of the instructor. As a result, the engaging syllabus may be particularly beneficial to instructors who seek to increase students' perceptions in these ways.

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Appendix A
The Engaging Syllabus Used in Study.
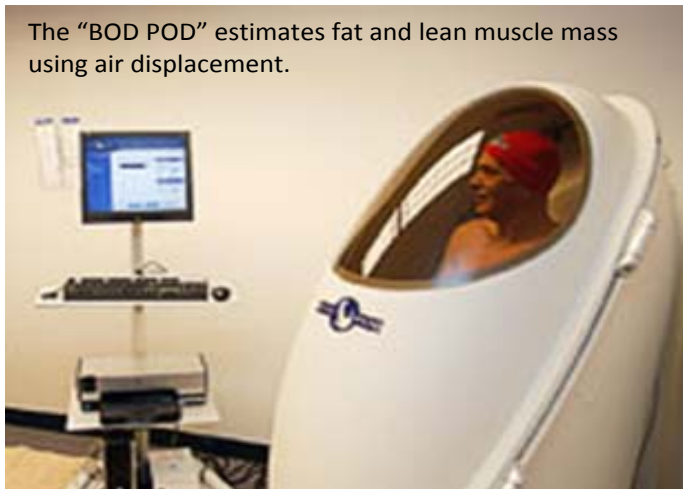
Nutritional Assessment and Counseling

FN 3100

FALL 2014

TR 2:30-3:45PM

OLSCAMP 203

BOWLING GREEN
STATE UNIVERSITY

The "BOD POD" estimates fat and lean muscle mass using air displacement.

Course Description and Objectives

This course examines methods for evaluating nutritional status of individuals and population groups and techniques used in diet instruction in addition to methods of quality assurance, program evaluation, laws, regulations, and standards affecting dietetic practice.

During this course, you will develop and enhance the following skills:

- Explain the impact of a public policy position on dietetics practice
- Explain the impact of health care policy and different health care delivery systems on food and nutrition services
- Identify and describe the roles of others with whom the Registered Dietitian collaborates in the delivery of food and nutrition services
- Use the nutrition care process to make decisions, to identify nutrition-related problems and determine and evaluate nutrition interventions
- Demonstrate how to locate, interpret, evaluate, and use professional literature to make ethical evidence-based practice decisions
- Use current information technologies to locate and apply evidence-based guidelines and protocols
- Demonstrate counseling techniques to facilitate behavior change
- Demonstrate effective and professional oral and written communication and documentation
- Develop an educational session or program/educational strategy for a target population

These competencies are in accordance with the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics' *Core Knowledge for the RD* guidelines.

Syllabus Contents

Course Details

Your Professor
Dr. Allison Brown, PhD, RD
16G FCS Building
419.372.6461
arbrown@bgsu.edu
Office hours: TR 12-2PM
  and by appointment

Your Graduate Assistant
Tracy Zinn
MFN student
109 FCS Building
tezinn@bgsu.edu
Office hours: MW 9-11AM
  and by appointment

1

Taking This Course

Ultimately, it's not the grade that you "get" in FN 3100 – it's your ability to apply and translate the information later. Students take this course for many reasons. Most often "it's required" for your dietetics or nutrition science major, or nutrition minor. Think about why the "powers that be" have decided that learning this material is <u>essential</u> to your career path. What does it mean to you as a future exercise physiologist? long-term care administrator? dietitian? food scientist?

It's completely possible to earn an "A" or "B" without being transformed by your newfound nutritional knowledge, but it would be a pity!

Use the quick-fix "diet" vs. long-term "lifestyle change" metaphor to guide your experience…

Diet

You've taken a nutrition class before. You grasp the basics.

You tend to assume that the textbooks, supplemental readings, and professor tell the same basic story. You are mainly concerned with surface-level information. You are interested in "WHAT" is the recommendation?

Lifestyle Change

You're on a quest to dig deeper. You think critically.

You're aware that the field of nutrition is ever-changing. You seek alternative sources and interpretations. You are curious, passionate, and concerned about "HOW" and "WHY" nutrition matters.

Course Policies

- Communication is very Pimportant. If you have any questions, technical difficulties, or problems with the course, please notify Dr. Brown or Tracy as soon as possible.
- Do NOT chat with your neighbor about non-class related matters during class.
- Silence your cell phone and/or other mobile devices before class.

Materials for Success

Texts	Lee R, Nieman D. Nutritional Assessment. 6th ed. New York: McGraw Hill; 2013.
	Snetselaar L. Nutrition Counseling Skills for the Nutrition Care Process, 4th ed. Boston: Jones and Bartlett; 2009.
	One copy of each text is on reserve in the Jerome Library and can be checked out in 2 hour increments.
Audience Response Device	Each student must bring a mobile device to every class. You will participate in class polling by sending text messages or submitting responses online at PollEv.com/DrBrown. You may use your cell phone, laptop, tablet, or other device capable of texting or web surfing.
Dry Erase Materials	Each student must bring dry erase marker(s) and an eraser or alternative (e.g., rag, old sock, sponge).

- During the class, please refrain from sending emails, updating your Facebook status, reading the BGNews, doing homework for other classes, answering your phone, sleeping, or the like.
- In the event of inclement weather, please check the "Announcements" section of Canvas to see if there has been any adjustment to the class meeting schedule.
- You are expected to keep up with textbook and supplemental readings on your own. It is impossible to cover everything in class. Exams, assignments, and quizzes are based on class discussions and assigned readings.
- Unless otherwise specified, it is not necessary to bring your textbooks to class.

Grading Scale

Letter	Percentage	Points
A	90-100	900-1000
B	80-89.9	800-899.9
C	70-79.9	700-799.9
D	60-69.9	600-699.9
F	< 60	< 600

* Class grade will be lowered one letter with excessive unexcused absences (> 3). Confirmed illnesses, family emergencies, military/jury duty, religious observances, and university-sponsored events (such as intercollegiate sports) will be excused with proper documentation. For each of these instances, you must (1) provide written documentation from an authority (such as a doctor's note or published obituary) and (2) notify Dr. Ludy before the absence.

Evaluation (*tentative*) — Points

Active Reading Worksheets (best 12 of 13@5 points: 9/2, 9/9, 9/11, 9/16, 9/30, 10/30, 11/4, 11/6, 11/18, 11/20, 11/25, 12/2, 12/4) 60
Canvas Avatar (8/28)... 5
Quizzes (best 3 of 4@10 points each: 8/28, 9/9, 9/16, 11/4) 30
Discussion Boards (4@10 points: 9/30, 10/16, 10/23, 12/2)...... 40
Lesson Plan Part 1: Location and Pre-Assessment (10/7) 20
Lesson Plan Part 2: Development (DRAFT: 10/28)....................... 5
Lesson Plan Part 2: Development (FINAL: 10/30) 40
Lesson Plan Part 3: Self-Assessment (12/2) 20
Lesson Plan Part 4: Sign-In Sheet (12/2, in class)........................ 5
Lesson Plan Part 5: Follow-Up (12/9) 20
Lesson Plan Part 6: Oral Reflection (12/9, in class)...................... 5
Term Project Part 1: 3-Day Food Record (10/2).......................... 10
Term Project Part 2: NDSR and SuperTracker Reports (10/14) .. 20
Term Project Part 3: Diet Assessment (11/18).......................... 100
Term Project Part 4: Counseling (12/4)..................................... 100
Fair Exam Questions (4@5 points: 9/18, 10/16, 11/11, 12/11).. 20
Exams (3@100 points: 9/23, 10/21, 11/13)............................... 300
Final Exam (12/16) 200
TOTAL 1000

Fine Print

• Each exam must be taken on its assigned date. Makeup exams will NOT be given. In an <u>emergency</u>, your final exam may be substituted for a missed grade – only with Dr. Brown's prior approval.

• Late quizzes will NOT be accepted. The reason is that late quizzes place all students at a disadvantage, because correct answers cannot be discussed or posted.

• Late active reading worksheets, avatars, discussion board posts, lesson plans, term projects, counseling dialogues, and fair exam questions will be penalized 10% per week and will NOT be accepted more than two weeks after the due date. No assignments will be accepted after the final exam.

• All assignments/discussion board posts must be submitted on Canvas before class, unless otherwise indicated by the class schedule (last 2 pages). Written assignments should be typed and completed in a professional format with proper grammar and punctuation.

• Any questions about points for exams, quizzes, or assignments must be asked within one week of the date the points are assigned.

• Please familiarize yourself with the Code of Academic Conduct (Academic Honesty Policy) in BGSU's Student Handbook: http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/sa/studentconduct/. This requires that students do NOT cheat, forge, bribe, threaten, fabricate, plagiarize, or facilitate academic dishonesty. These violations are taken seriously. You will, at minimum, receive partial or zero credit on the assignment and may fail the course, at Dr. Brown's discretion.

3

Class Schedule (*tentative*)

Date	Topic	What to Read	What's Due
T 8/26	Introduction to Nutritional Assessment	NA* Ch 1	
R 8/28	Dietary Guidelines	Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010	Quiz Syllabus and Academic Honesty (10 pts) Canvas Avatar (5 pts)
T 9/2	Dietary Standards	NA Ch 2	Active Reading Worksheet Ch 1-2 (NA, 5 pts)
R 9/4	Exchanges		
T 9/9	Diet Assessment	NA Ch 3	Quiz Exchange List (10 pts) Active Reading Worksheet Ch 3 (NA, 5 pts)
R 9/11	National Surveys	NA Ch 4	Active Reading Worksheet Ch 4 (NA, 5 pts)
T 9/16	Measuring Food Insecurity and Hunger	Household Food Security in the US 2010	Quiz BRFSS (10 pts) Active Reading Worksheet Household Food Security (5 pts)
R 9/18	Review		Fair Exam Question (5 pts)
T 9/23	EXAM 1		EXAM (100 pts)
R 9/25	Creating Lesson Plans	Review Lesson Assignment	
T 9/30	Computer Dietary Analysis	NA Ch 5; Review Term Project Assignment	Discussion Board ASA 24 (10 pts) Active Reading Worksheet Ch 5 (NA, 5 pts)
R 10/2	NDSR/SuperTracker	Class in EDHD 222 Computer Lab	Term Project Part 1 (3-Day Food Record, 10 pts)
T 10/7	Library Database Searches	Class in Jerome Library 150A Pallister Conference Room (1st floor, back)	Lesson Plan Part 1 (Location and Pre-Assessment, 20 pts)
R 10/9 – Fall Break – NO CLASS			
T 10/14	Scientific Writing; DETERMINE Checklist		Term Project Part 2 (SuperTracker Reports, 10 pts; NDSR Reports, 10 pts)
R 10/16	Review		Fair Exam Question (5 pts); Discussion Board Scientific Journal Article Assignment (10 pts)
T 10/21	EXAM 2		EXAM (100 pts)
R 10/22	iPad Weight Management Apps		Discussion Board Weight Management App Review (10 pts)
T 10/28	Lesson Plan Peer Review		Lesson Plan Part 2 (Development DRAFT, 5 pts due in class for peer review)
R 10/30	Hospitalized Patients	NA Ch 6 and 7	Lesson Plan Part 2 (Development FINAL, 40 pts) Active Reading Worksheet Ch 6-7 (NA, 5 pts)

FN 3100 Students on the Street

"Helped me apply what I was learning to someone I could look at as 'my client.'"

Term Project

"Being able to teach nutritional information really helped me to understand it better."

Lesson Plan

"They help me navigate information in the book. I didn't realize how much I learned from simply reading the chapters."

Worksheets

"Kept me paying attention and able to interact."

Polling

"I've heard a lot of people say they're really hard, but I think they were adequately challenging. This is stuff we really need to know!"
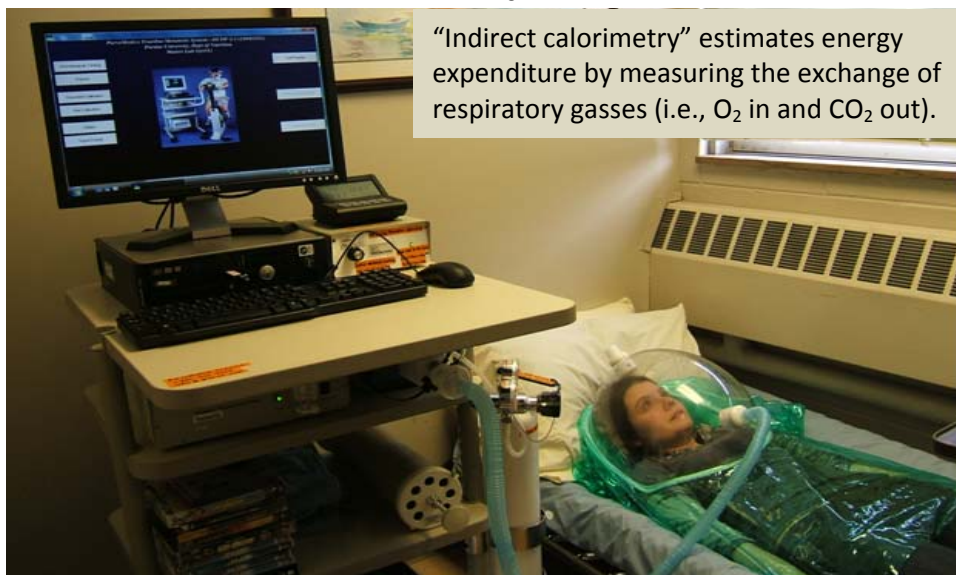
Tests

"If you're not a good test taker, these projects can help you improve your grade. They are worth a lot of points."

Projects

4

T 11/4	Biochemical Assessment	NA Ch 9	Quiz ^{Energy Requirements (10 pts)} Active Reading Worksheet ^{Ch 9 (NA, 5 pts)}
R 11/6	Clinical Assessment	NA Ch 10	Active Reading Worksheet ^{Ch 10 (NA, 5 pts)}
T 11/11	Review		Fair Exam Question ^(5 pts)
R 11/13	EXAM 3		EXAM (100 pts)
T 11/18	Nutrition Counseling Communication Skills	NA Ch 11 NCS** Ch 1	Term Project ^{Part 3 (Diet Assessment; 100 pts)} Active Reading Worksheet Ch 11 (NA) and Ch 1 (NCS; 5 pts)
R 11/20	Nutrition Counseling Obesity	NCS Ch 4	Active Reading Worksheet ^{Ch 4 (NCS; 5 pts)}
T 11/25	Nutrition Counseling Diabetes	NCS Ch 6	Active Reading Worksheet ^{Ch 6 (NCS; 5 pts)}
R 11/27 – Thanksgiving Break – NO CLASS			
T 12/2	Nutrition Counseling Heart Disease	NA Ch 8 NCS Ch 5	Discussion Board ^{DETERMINE Checklist} (10 pts, basic checklist and level 1 screen due **in class**) Lesson Plan ^{Part 3 (Self-Assessment, 20 pts) and} Part 4 (Sign-In Sheet, 5 pts, due **in class**) Active Reading Worksheet Ch 8 (NA) and Ch 5 (NCS; 5 pts)
R 12/4	Nutrition Counseling Hypertension	NCS Ch 8	Term Project ^{Part 4 (Counseling; 100 pts)} Active Reading Worksheet ^{Ch 8 (NCS; 5 pts)}
T 12/9	Lesson Plan Presentations		Lesson Plan ^{Part 5 (Follow-Up, 20 pts) and Part 6} (Oral Reflection, 5 pts, 2-3 minutes **in class**)
R 12/11	Review		Fair Exam Question ^(5 pts)
F 12/16, 3:30-5:30PM, FINAL EXAM (200 pts)			

*NA = Nutritional Assessment text **NCS = Nutrition Counseling Skills for the Nutrition Care Process text

"Indirect calorimetry" estimates energy expenditure by measuring the exchange of respiratory gasses (i.e., O_2 in and CO_2 out).

Syllabus format and structure adapted from: Dr. Tona Hangen, Worcester State University, www.tonahangen.com.

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Help and Resources

1. Talk with Dr. Brown or Tracy
- You are welcome to email us, drop by during office hours, or make an appointment to meet with either of us at another time.

2. Visit the Learning Commons
- BGSU Learning Commons, 419.372.2823, TLC@bgsu.edu, www.bgsu.edu/learningcommons
- Tutorial Center – request one-to-one or group study sessions with students who have taken this course (or any other course) and received an "A."
- Writing Center – request in-person or online writing support at any stage of writing projects.

3. Get to know the library
- Jerome Library, http://www.bgsu.edu/colleges/library/infosrv/ref/ask.html
- The library staff is eager to help you – IM, text, call, email, visit, or make an appointment with a research librarian.

4. Accommodations
- If you are a student with a disability and request accommodation(s), please contact the Office of Disability Services, 38 College Park Office Building, 419.372.8495, http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/sa/disability/
- Since accommodations may require early planning, requests should be made as early as possible.

Appendix B
The Contractual Syllabus Used in Study.

> **FN 3100 Nutritional Assessment and Counseling**
> **Course Syllabus**
> **Fall 2014: TR 2:30-3:45PM; Olscamp 203**

Instructor:	**Office Hours:**	**Graduate Assistant:**	**Office Hours:**
Allison Brown, PhD, RD	TR 12-2PM and	Tracy Zinn, MFN Student	MW 9-11AM and
16G FCS Building	by appointment	109 FCS Building	by appointment
419.372.6461			tezinn@bgsu.edu
arbrown@bgsu.edu			

Course Description:
This course examines methods for evaluating nutritional status of individuals and population groups and techniques used in diet instruction in addition to methods of quality assurance, program evaluation, laws, regulations, and standards affecting dietetic practice.

Learning Outcomes:
During this course, you will develop and enhance the following skills:
- Explain the impact of a public policy position on dietetics practice
- Explain the impact of health care policy and different health care delivery systems on food and nutrition services
- Identify and describe the roles of others with whom the Registered Dietitian collaborates in the delivery of food and nutrition services
- Use the nutrition care process to make decisions, to identify nutrition-related problems and determine and evaluate nutrition interventions
- Demonstrate how to locate, interpret, evaluate, and use professional literature to make ethical evidence-based practice decisions
- Use current information technologies to locate and apply evidence-based guidelines and protocols
- Demonstrate counseling techniques to facilitate behavior change
- Demonstrate effective and professional oral and written communication and documentation
- Develop an educational session or program/educational strategy for a target population
  These competencies are in accordance with the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics' *Core Knowledge for the RD* guidelines.

Texts:
* Lee R, Nieman D. Nutritional Assessment. 6th ed. New York: McGraw Hill; 2013.
**Snetselaar L. Nutrition Counseling Skills for the Nutrition Care Process, 4th ed. Boston: Jones and Bartlett; 2009.
(One copy of each text is on reserve in the Jerome Library and can be checked out in 2 hours increments.)

Audience Response Devices:
Each student must bring a mobile device to every class. You will participate in class polling by sending text messages or submitting responses online at PollEv.com/DrBrown. You may use your cell phone, laptop, tablet, or other device capable of texting or web surfing.

Dry Erase Materials:
Each student must bring dry erase marker(s) and an eraser or alternative (e.g., rag, old sock, sponge).

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Help and Resources:

Learning Commons
- BGSU Learning Commons, 419.372.2823, TLC@bgsu.edu, www.bgsu.edu/learningcommons
- Tutorial Center – request one-to-one or group study sessions with students who have taken this course (or any other course) and received an "A."
- Writing Center – request in-person or online writing support at any stage of writing projects.

Library
- Jerome Library, http://www.bgsu.edu/colleges/library/infosrv/ref/ask.html
- IM, text, call, email, visit, or make an appointment with a research librarian.

Accommodations
- If you are a student with a disability and request accommodation(s), please contact the Office of Disability Services, 38 College Park Office Building, 419.372.8495, http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/sa/disability/
- Since accommodations may require early planning, requests should be made as early as possible.

Course Policies:
- Communication is very important. If you have any questions, technical difficulties, or problems with the course, please notify Dr. Brown or Tracy as soon as possible.
- Do NOT chat with your neighbor about non-class related matters during class.
- Silence your cell phone and/or other mobile devices before class.
- During the class, please refrain from sending emails, updating your Facebook status, reading the BGNews, doing homework for other classes, answering your phone, sleeping, or the like.
- In the event of inclement weather, please check the "Announcements" section of Canvas to see if there has been any adjustment to the class meeting schedule.
- You are expected to keep up with textbook and supplemental readings on your own. It is impossible to cover everything in class. Exams, assignments, and quizzes are based on class discussions and assigned readings.
- Unless otherwise specified, it is not necessary to bring your textbooks to class.
- Each exam must be taken on its assigned date. Makeup exams will NOT be given. In an emergency, your final exam may be substituted for a missed grade – only with Dr. Brown's prior approval.
- Late quizzes will NOT be accepted. The reason is that late quizzes place all students at a disadvantage, because correct answers cannot be discussed or posted.
- Late active reading worksheets, avatars, discussion board posts, lesson plans, term projects, counseling dialogues, and fair exam questions will be penalized 10% per week and will NOT be accepted more than two weeks after the due date. No assignments will be accepted after the final exam.
- All assignments/discussion board posts must be submitted on Canvas before class, unless otherwise indicated by the class schedule (last 2 pages). Written assignments should be typed and completed in a professional format with proper grammar and punctuation.
- Any questions about points for exams, quizzes, or assignments must be asked within one week of the date the points are assigned.
- Please familiarize yourself with the Code of Academic Conduct (Academic Honesty Policy) in BGSU's Student Handbook: http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/sa/studentconduct/. This requires that students do NOT cheat, forge, bribe, threaten, fabricate, plagiarize, or facilitate academic dishonesty. These violations are taken seriously. You will, at minimum, receive partial or zero credit on the assignment and may fail the course, at Dr. Brown's discretion.

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Evaluation (tentative):   **Points**:
Active Reading Worksheets (best 12 of 13@5 points: 9/2, 9/9, 9/11, 9/16,
9/30, 10/30, 11/4, 11/6, 11/18, 11/20, 11/25, 12/2, 12/4..5
Canvas Avatar (8/28)..5
Quizzes (best 3 of 4@10 points each: 8/28, 9/9, 9/16, 11/4) 30
Discussion Boards (4@10 points: 9/30, 10/16, 10/23, 12/2) 40
Lesson Plan Part 1: Location and Pre-Assessment (10/7)..20
Lesson Plan Part 2: Development (DRAFT: 10/28)..5
Lesson Plan Part 2: Development (FINAL: 10/30) 40
Lesson Plan Part 3: Self-Assessment (12/2) 20
Lesson Plan Part 4: Sign-In Sheet (12/2, in class)..5
Lesson Plan Part 5: Follow-Up (12/9)..20
Lesson Plan Part 6: Oral Reflection (12/9, in class)...5
Term Project Part 1: 3-Day Food Record (10/2) 10
Term Project Part 2: NDSR and SuperTracker Reports (10/14) 20
Term Project Part 3: Diet Assessment (11/18) 100
Term Project Part 4: Counseling (12/4) 100
Fair Exam Questions (4@5 points: 9/18, 10/16, 11/11, 12/11) 20
Exams (3@100 points: 9/23, 10/21, 11/13)..300
Final Exam (12/16) 200
TOTAL..1000

Grading:

Letter	Percentage	Points
A	90-100	900-1000
B	80-89.9	800-899.9
C	70-79.9	700-799.9
D	60-69.9	600-699.9
F	< 60	< 600

* Class grade will be lowered one letter with excessive unexcused absences (> 3). Confirmed illnesses, family emergencies, military/jury duty, religious observances, and university-sponsored events (such as intercollegiate sports) will be excused with proper documentation. For each of these instances, you must (1) provide written documentation from an authority (such as a doctor's note or published obituary) and (2) notify Dr. Brown before the absence.

Class Schedule (tentative):

Date	Topic	What to Read	What's Due
T 8/26	Introduction to Nutritional Assessment	NA* Ch 1	
R 8/28	Dietary Guidelines	Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010	Quiz [Syllabus and Academic Honesty (10 pts)] Canvas Avatar (5 pts)
T 9/2	Dietary Standards	NA Ch 2	Active Reading Worksheet [Ch 1-2 (NA, 5 pts)]
R 9/4	Exchanges		
T 9/9	Diet Assessment	NA Ch 3	Quiz [Exchange List (10 pts)] Active Reading Worksheet [Ch 3 (NA, 5 pts)]
R 9/11	National Surveys	NA Ch 4	Active Reading Worksheet [Ch 4 (NA, 5 pts)]
T 9/16	Measuring Food Insecurity and Hunger	Household Food Security in the US 2010	Quiz [BRFSS (10 pts)] Active Reading Worksheet [Household Food Security (5 pts)]

R 9/18	Review		Fair Exam Question (5 pts)
T 9/23	EXAM 1		EXAM (100 pts)
R 9/25	Creating Lesson Plans	Review Lesson Assignment	
T 9/30	Computer Dietary Analysis	NA Ch 5; Review Term Project Assignment	Discussion Board ASA 24 (10 pts) Active Reading Worksheet Ch 5 (NA, 5 pts)
R 10/2	NDSR/SuperTracker	Class in EDHD 222 Computer Lab	Term Project Part 1 (3-Day Food Record, 10 pts)
T 10/7	Library Database Searches	Class in Jerome Library 150A Pallister Conference Room (1st floor, back)	Lesson Plan Part 1 (Location and Pre-Assessment, 20 pts)
R 10/9 – Fall Break – NO CLASS		
T 10/14	Scientific Writing; DETERMINE Checklist		Term Project Part 2 (SuperTracker Reports, 10 pts; NDSR Reports, 10 pts)
R 10/16	Review		Fair Exam Question (5 pts); Discussion Board Scientific Journal Article Assignment (10 pts)
T 10/21	EXAM 2		EXAM (100 pts)
R 10/22	iPad Weight Management Apps		Discussion Board Weight Management App Review (10 pts)
T 10/28	Lesson Plan Peer Review		Lesson Plan Part 2 (Development DRAFT, 5 pts due **in class** for peer review)
R 10/30	Hospitalized Patients	NA Ch 6 and 7	Lesson Plan Part 2 (Development FINAL, 40 pts) Active Reading Worksheet Ch 6-7 (NA, 5 pts)
T 11/4	Biochemical Assessment	NA Ch 9	Quiz Energy Requirements (10 pts) Active Reading Worksheet Ch 9 (NA, 5 pts)
R 11/6	Clinical Assessment	NA Ch 10	Active Reading Worksheet Ch 10 (NA, 5 pts)
T 11/11	Review		Fair Exam Question (5 pts)
R 11/13	EXAM 3		EXAM (100 pts)
T 11/18	Nutrition Counseling Communication Skills	NA Ch 11 NCS** Ch 1	Term Project Part 3 (Diet Assessment; 100 pts) Active Reading Worksheet Ch 11 (NA) and Ch 1 (NCS; 5 pts)
R 11/20	Nutrition Counseling Obesity	NCS Ch 4	Active Reading Worksheet Ch 4 (NCS; 5 pts)
T 11/25	Nutrition Counseling Diabetes	NCS Ch 6	Active Reading Worksheet Ch 6 (NCS; 5 pts)
R 11/27 – Thanksgiving Break – NO CLASS		
T 12/2	Nutrition Counseling Heart Disease	NA Ch 8 NCS Ch 5	Discussion Board DETERMINE Checklist (10 pts, basic checklist and level 1 screen due **in class**) Lesson Plan Part 3 (Self-Assessment, 20 pts) and Part 4 (Sign-In Sheet, 5 pts, due **in class**) Active Reading Worksheet Ch 8 (NA) and Ch 5 (NCS; 5 pts)
R 12/4	Nutrition Counseling Hypertension	NCS Ch 8	Term Project Part 4 (Counseling; 100 pts) Active Reading Worksheet Ch 8 (NCS; 5 pts)
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R 12/11	Review		Fair Exam Question (5 pts)
F 12/16, 3:30-5:30PM, FINAL EXAM (200 pts)		

*NA = Nutritional Assessment text **NCS = Nutrition Counseling Skills for the Nutrition Care Process text

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Appendix C
Survey Instrument

***Thanks for agreeing to participate in the
"Course Syllabus Questionnaire!"***

First, you'll answer some questions about your background.
Then, you'll answer a few questions about how you use course syllabi.
Finally, you'll share your impressions about the FN 3100 course syllabus.
The entire process will take about 10 minutes.

-------------------------------- Page Break --------------------------------

PRIOR EXPERIENCE

Please fill-in-the-blank or choose the answers that best describe you.

1. In past college courses, how many times per semester do you typically refer to your syllabus? _____

2. In past college courses, how frequently do you refer to the following information on course syllabi after the initial class?

	Never Again	Once or Twice a SEMESTER	Once or Twice a MONTH	Once or Twice a WEEK	More Than Twice a Week
Instructor information	○	○	○	○	○
Objectives/purpose	○	○	○	○	○
Resources/materials (e.g., textbook)	○	○	○	○	○
Course calendar/ schedule	○	○	○	○	○
Assignments/readings	○	○	○	○	○
Policies/expectations (e.g., attendance)	○	○	○	○	○
Evaluation/ grading procedures	○	○	○	○	○

--------------------------------------- Page Break ---------------------------------------

THE REST OF THIS SURVEY WILL DEAL WITH FN 3100

By taking (and passing) FN 2070, you automatically meet the prerequisites for FN 3100.

FN 3100 is a course that examines methods for evaluating nutritional status of individuals and population groups and techniques used in diet instruction in addition to methods of quality assurance, program evaluation, laws, regulations, and standards affecting dietetic practice.

3. How _**interested**_ are you in taking _**FN 3100**_?
    ○ Not at all interested
    ○ Somewhat interested
    ○ Interested
    ○ Very interested

-------------------------------------- Page Break --------------------------------------

Please review the FN 3100 syllabus and answer the questions that follow.

FN 3100 SYLLABUS QUESTIONS

Please choose the answer that best reflects your answer.

4. Including the final, how many total exams are there?
    ○ 3
    ○ 4
    ○ 5
    ○ 6

5. The professor's last name is:
    ○ Brown.
    ○ Marchuk.
    ○ Saville.
    ○ Zinn.

6. Late quizzes are accepted.
    ○ True
    ○ False

7. The course meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays from:
    ○ 9:30AM to 10:45AM.
    ○ 11:30AM to 12:45PM.
    ○ 2:30PM to 3:45PM.
    ○ 4:00PM to 5:15PM.

-------------------------------------- Page Break --------------------------------------

8. What are your impressions about this ***syllabus***?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The syllabus is easy to navigate and find information.	○	○	○	○
The syllabus is easy to read and understand.	○	○	○	○
The syllabus is visually appealing.	○	○	○	○
The syllabus is comprehensive.	○	○	○	○
The syllabus is motivates my interest in the class.	○	○	○	○

9. Based on the syllabus, what are your impressions about the ***course instructor***?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The course instructor is approachable and personable.	○	○	○	○
The course instructor is creative and interesting.	○	○	○	○
The course instructor is an effective communicator.	○	○	○	○
The course instructor is encouraging and cares for students.	○	○	○	○
The course instructor is enthusiastic.	○	○	○	○
The course instructor is flexible and open-minded.	○	○	○	○
The course instructor is happy and has a positive attitude.	○	○	○	○
The course instructor is knowledgeable.	○	○	○	○
The course instructor is prepared.	○	○	○	○
The course instructor will present current information.	○	○	○	○
The course instructor will promote critical thinking.	○	○	○	○
The course instructor has realistic expectations and is fair.	○	○	○	○

10. Based on the syllabus, rate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I would like to take this course.	○	○	○	○
I would recommend this course to others.	○	○	○	○
I would take another course from this instructor.	○	○	○	○
I believe I could be successful in this course.	○	○	○	○
I believe I could be successful in another course taught by this instructor.	○	○	○	○

-- Page Break --

11. How is the design of the syllabus you just reviewed ***similar*** to other syllabi you have seen in college?

12. How is the design of the syllabus you just reviewed ***different*** from other syllabi you have seen in college?

13. What did you ***like*** about the design of this syllabus?

14. What did you ***dislike*** about the design of this syllabus?

15. This syllabus would be particularly useful for:
Please select all that apply.
- ○ Determining how much work is expected.
- ○ Finding due dates.
- ○ Learning about the instructor.
- ○ Learning about evaluation and grading (e.g., how assignments are weighted).
- ○ Motivating me to be in the course.
- ○ Motivating me to learn in the course.
- ○ Planning my schedule
- ○ None of the above.

-------------------------------------- Page Break --------------------------------------

16. Now that you have read this syllabus, how interested are you in taking FN 3100?
- ○ Not at all interested
- ○ Somewhat interested
- ○ Interested
- ○ Very interested

-------------------------------------- Page Break --------------------------------------

17. All things considered, did you like this syllabus?
- ○ Yes. I liked it.
- ○ No. I didn't like it.

-------------------------------------- Page Break --------------------------------------

BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

Please fill-in-the-blank or choose the answers that best describe you.

18. My age in years is: _____

19. My gender is:
    ○ Male
    ○ Female

20. My racial/ethnic background is:
    ○ American Indian/Alaskan
    ○ Asian/Pacific Islander
    ○ Black/African American
    ○ Hispanic
    ○ White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic)
    ○ Other _____

21. My major is: _____

22. My class standing is:
    ○ Freshman
    ○ Sophomore
    ○ Junior
    ○ Senior
    ○ Graduate student
    ○ Not seeking a degree

23. My grade point average (GPA) at this point is: _____

-------------------------------------- Page Break --------------------------------------

Thanks for your participation!