

# Learner-Centered Syllabi: Conversation with An Assistant Professor of Instruction

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# TEACHx

# Learning Objectives

- **Recognize** the importance of a learner-centered syllabus
- **Identify** the qualities of a learner-centered syllabus
- **Discuss** how your course policies and assignments can be more learner-centered
- *Witnessing*
- *Reflecting*
- *Mind-mapping*
-

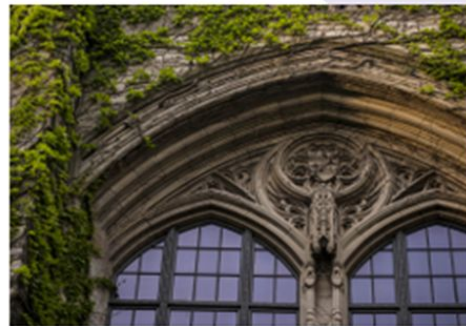
# Positionality Statement

We stand before you as collaborative educators: myself, a Black woman assistant professor navigating spaces designed neither by nor for bodies like mine. Our pedagogical approach emerges from what Collins' calls the "outsider within" perspective and hooks' "**engaged pedagogy**," recognizing **teaching as liberation**. We embody Crenshaw's **intersectionality framework**, acknowledging how race, gender, and institutional power create unique forms of erasure.

Our partnership bridges lived experiences with institutional knowledge, **creating syllabi that honor students' full humanity**. Together, we practice what Lorde calls "the transformation of silence into language and action." This work extends Baker's **participatory leadership** and Hamer's insistence that nobody's free until everybody's free—including in our classrooms where knowledge is **collectively constructed** and institutional barriers are challenged through deliberate design.

# Northwestern Principles of Inclusive Teaching

- Principle 2: Establish and communicate clear standards and expectations



## Northwestern Principles of Inclusive Teaching

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Last updated August 2021

# Learner-Centered Syllabi: Importance & Characteristics

# Qualities of A Learner-Centered Syllabi (Cullen & Harris, 2009; Richmond, 2016 )

- Create Community
- Share Power and Control
  - Over what is learned and how it is learned
- Focus on Evaluation and Assessment
  - As they are tied directly to learning outcomes

## Can a Learner-Centered Syllabus Change Students' Perceptions of Student–Professor Rapport and Master Teacher Behaviors?

Aaron S. Richmond  
Metropolitan State University of Denver

Jeanne M. Slattery  
Clarion University

Nathanael Mitchell  
Spalding University

Robin K. Morgan  
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Jared Becknell  
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Learner-centered policies,  
communicated via syllabi,  
associated with:

Student perceptions of  
faculty as more creative,  
caring, happy, receptive,  
reliable, and enthusiastic

Increased student  
engagement in their class



# Our Connection

## GLB\_HLTH 390-0 (Re)mixing Qualitative Methods Fall 2022

Note: this syllabus is not a contract. The syllabus is subject to further changes and revisions (i.e., student engagement, and feedback) to best accommodate the learning goals for the course. Revisions will be announced in class or in course materials online with proper timing.

**Instructor:** Charlayne F. Mitchell, MSc. Ph.D.  
**Email:** [charlayne.mitchell@northwestern.edu](mailto:charlayne.mitchell@northwestern.edu)

**Class:** TuTh 11:00 am–12:20 pm, Parkes Hall 213  
**Office Hours:** By appointment

- “Mental health days”
- “Grading grace”
- “I aim to be hear and here for you, but there are some aspects of my home life that may seep into class if, for instance, one of my children experiences what they perceive as a crisis, or if our broadband isn’t enough for the number of people aiming to access it.”

# Longitudinal Analysis of a Course Syllabus

# A Longitudinal Review of Learner-Centered Course Policies

## GLB\_HLTH 390-0 (Re)mixing Qualitative Methods Fall 2022

Note: this syllabus is not a contract. The syllabus is subject to further changes and revisions (i.e., student engagement, and feedback) to best accommodate the learning goals for the course. Revisions will be announced in class or in course materials online with proper timing.

**Instructor:** Charlayne F. Mitchell, MSc. Ph.D.  
**Email:** [charlayne.mitchell@northwestern.edu](mailto:charlayne.mitchell@northwestern.edu)

**Class:** TuTh 11:00 am–12:20 pm, Parkes Hall 213  
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## GLB\_HLTH 390 (Re)mixing Qualitative Methods *Winter 2024*

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**Instructor:** Charlayne F. Mitchell, MSc. Ph.D.  
**Email:** [charlayne.mitchell@northwestern.edu](mailto:charlayne.mitchell@northwestern.edu)

**Class:** TuTh 11:00 am–12:20 pm, University Hall 118  
**Office Hours:** By appointment (chat after class or email)

# Evolution of A Syllabus (cont.)

	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023	Winter 2024
Statement of Care/ Open Pedagogy				
Grading Philosophy				
Late Assignments				
Missed Assignments				
Course Objectives and Assignments Alignment				

# Evolution of A Syllabus (cont.)

	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023	Winter 2024
Assignment Additions				
Course Etiquette & Policies				
Accommodations				
University Academic Integrity Policy				
Resources & Support Procedures				

# Conversation:

## Witnessing the Evolution of A Learner-Centered Syllabus

# Evolution of A Syllabus

	Fall 2021	Fal 2022	Fall 2023	Winter 2024
Late Assignments	"No 'strong deadlines' on the assignments"	Removed "no strong deadlines" language	There is <b><i>flextime</i></b> built into each assignment and project, giving up until 11:59 pm on the due date to turn in the assignment without penalty. <b>Flextime</b> allows fluidity for students who need extra time for submitting assignments and projects.	

# Evolution of A Syllabus

	Fall 2021	Fal 2022	Fall 2023	Winter 2024
Late Assignments (cont.)	"No 'strong deadlines' on the assignments"	Removed "no strong deadlines" language	<p>All <b>flextime</b> for Methodological Reading Reflections (MRRs) are given 1 additional week to complete (i.e., if it's due a TH you have until the following TH to submit) w/o penalty. The assignment will be marked as late but has the <b>grace</b> of an additional week to submit.</p> <p>If you need an <b>alternative way of presenting</b> an assignment (i.e. discussion lead and midterm) due to public speaking anxieties, please coordinate with me to find time for you to present to me within 1 week of the discussion lead topic of choice or midterm presentation.</p>	



# Evolution of A Syllabus

	Fall 2021	Fal 2022	Fall 2023	Winter 2024
Missed Assignments		<p>Each student is given the opportunity to make up participation points for a maximum of 3 absences this quarter thereafter you will receive zero points. <u>There will be exceptions.</u></p> <p>Mentioned that absences can be used for illness, <b>mental health days</b>, unexpected travel, family emergencies, or for any other reason you find necessary.</p> <p>If you do miss more than 3 absences this quarter, email me as soon as you realize this will happen/happening so that we can work to make sure that you have the best outcome in this course.</p>	<p>Changed maximum of 3 absences to 2 absences</p> <p>Added “Please note that student who proactively versus reactively communicate the need for assistance with me are most likely to successfully complete this course.”</p> <p>Please also note that I have built two <b>accountability days</b> into our quarter where I will hold office hours space to talk about the mid-term, reflections, or any other concerns in weeks 3 and 6 that can help you facilitate managing circumstances.</p>	No longer specifies how the two absences can be used

# Evolution of A Syllabus

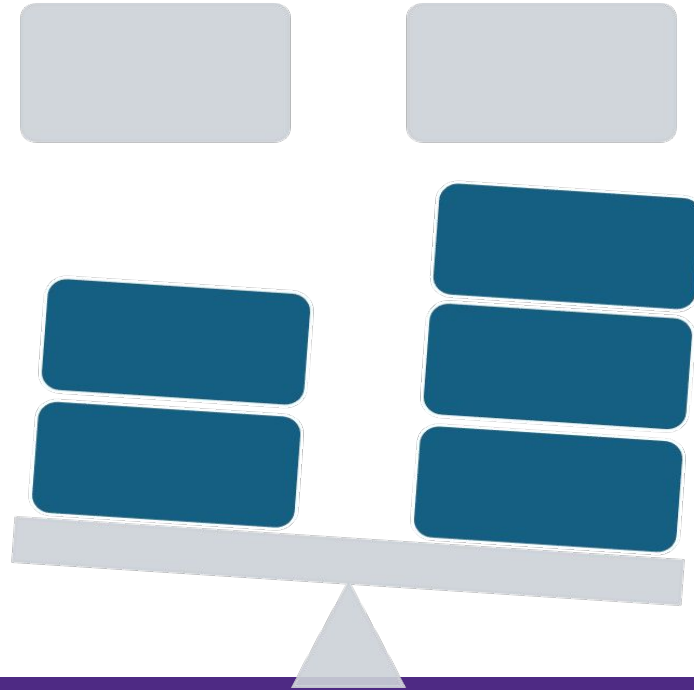
	Fall 2021	Fal 2022	Fall 2023	Winter 2024
Course Objectives and Assignments Alignment			A matrix showing the course objectives that aligned with each assignment	

# Evolution of A Syllabus (cont.)

	Fall 2021	Fal 2022	Fall 2023	Winter 2024
Resources and Support Procedures	Academic Success, Life Skills, Social Support, and Mental Health Services on Campus:	-	Academic Success, Life Skills, Social Support, and Mental Health Services on Campus:  NEW: SANA SANA – monthly gathering centering Latina/e/x/o-identifying students	-

# Learner-Centered Course Policies and Assignments: Mind Mapping Activity

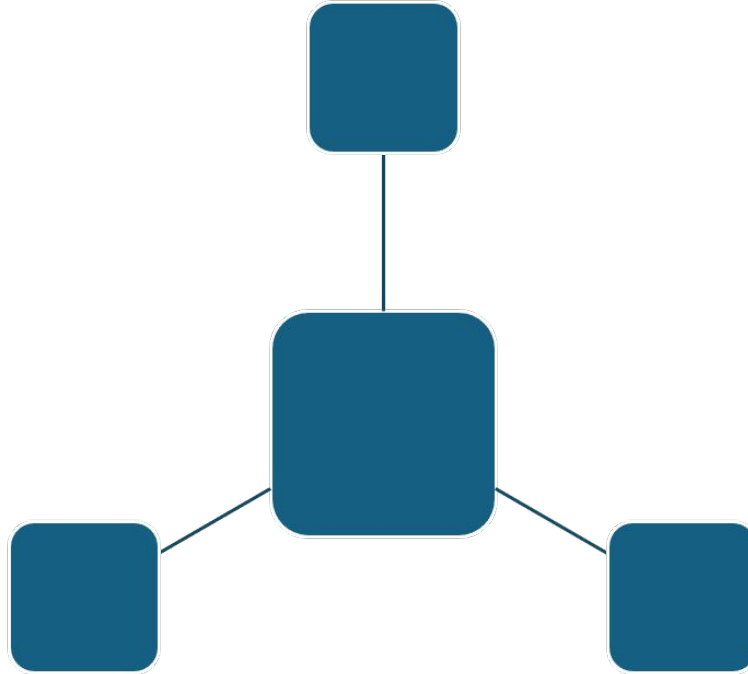
# Strategic Imagination: Tipping Towards a More Student-Centered Syllabus



# Guidelines for Mind Mapping

- Start with a Central Focus
- Branch Out Organically
- Use Color Strategically
- Emphasize with Images and Symbols
- Prioritize Clarity with Keywords
- Create Meaningful Connections

# What's Your Main Idea?



# Sustaining Commitment Towards Learner-Centered Teaching

Few Guidelines

An Action



# Thank you!

## Questions? Contact us!

Veronica: [veronica.womack@northwestern.edu](mailto:veronica.womack@northwestern.edu)

Charlayne: [charlayne.mitchell@northwestern.edu](mailto:charlayne.mitchell@northwestern.edu)

# Appendix

# References

Cullen, R., & Harris, M. (2009). Assessing learner-centredness through course syllabi. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 34(1), 115-125.

Richmond, A. S. (2016). Constructing a Learner-Centered Syllabus: One Professor's Journey. IDEA Paper# 60. *IDEA Center, Inc.*

Richmond, A. S., Slattery, J. M., Mitchell, N., Morgan, R. K., & Becknell, J. (2016). Can a learner-centered syllabus change students' perceptions of student-professor rapport and master teacher behaviors?. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, 2(3), 159.

# Evolution of A Syllabus - AI

	Fall 2021	Fal 2022	Fall 2023	Winter 2024
University Academic Integrity Policy			<p>Any form of cheating, including improper use of content generated by <b>artificial intelligence</b>, constitutes a violation of Northwestern's academic integrity policy. Turnitin, which is already in use at Northwestern, is expanding its system to include <b>artificial intelligence</b> detection.</p> <p>Addition of a table featuring the appropriate and inappropriate uses of AI in this class</p>	

