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Syllabus Tool

User Guide

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Syllabus Tool User Guide

Document Overview

This guide provides comprehensive information about the Syllabus Tool for Brightspace, designed to help learners, instructors, and administrators understand and utilize the tool's features effectively. The Syllabus Tool creates a centralized, dynamic course overview that automatically integrates course content, calendar events, assignments, and grading information into a single, easy-to-navigate interface.

1. Introduction

WHAT IS THE SYLLABUS TOOL?

The Syllabus Tool is an integrated Brightspace component that provides a comprehensive, dynamic course syllabus experience. Unlike traditional static syllabi, this tool automatically pulls information from various course elements (assignments, quizzes, discussions, calendar events, and grade settings) to create a living document that stays current throughout the term.

KEY BENEFITS

- **Always Current**: Automatically reflects changes made to assignments, due dates, and course content
- **Centralized Information**: Combines course description, calendar, assignments, and grading information in one location
- **Role-Based Access**: Different views and capabilities for learners, instructors, and administrators
- **Interactive Elements**: Clickable links to assignments, discussions, and course activities
- **Grade Transparency**: Clear visibility into grade categories, weights, and calculation methods

ACCESSING THE SYLLABUS TOOL

The Syllabus Tool is accessible via a custom navigation link labelled "Syllabus" in the course navigation bar. All enrolled users (learners, instructors, teaching assistants, and administrators) can access the syllabus from this link.

2. For Learners

OVERVIEW

As a learner, the Syllabus Tool serves as your comprehensive guide to the course, providing easy access to course expectations, upcoming deadlines, and grading policies. The syllabus view is designed to help you plan your work and understand how your final grade will be calculated.

ACCESSING THE SYLLABUS

1. Navigate to your course in Brightspace
2. Locate the "Syllabus" link in the course navigation bar
3. Click to open the syllabus page

WHAT YOU'LL SEE

COURSE OVERVIEW SECTION

This section contains the instructor-authored course description, which typically includes:

- Course objectives and learning outcomes
- Weekly topics or module descriptions
- Course policies and expectations
- Instructor contact information and office hours
- Important course-specific announcements
- Embedded videos, images, or other rich media content

The Course Overview section may also include links to important course resources or external websites relevant to the course.

COURSE SUMMARY (ACTIVITIES LIST)

The Course Summary provides a comprehensive list of all published course activities with due dates, organized chronologically. This section includes:

- All assignments with submission requirements
- All quizzes and tests
- Discussion topics requiring participation
- Content items with associated due dates
- Direct links to each activity for quick access

For each activity, you can see:

- Activity type (indicated by an icon)
- Activity name
- Due date and time
- Status (Upcoming or Overdue)

How to Use This Section:

- Click on any activity name to navigate directly to that assignment, quiz, or discussion
- Review due dates to plan your study schedule
- Check status indicators to prioritize items
- Use this as a checklist to ensure you haven't missed any assignments

GRADE BREAKDOWN AND WEIGHTING

The grading section explains how your final grade will be calculated. It displays:

Grade Categories:

- Category names (e.g., Assignments, Quizzes, Participation, Final Exam)
- Weight of each category toward your final grade (e.g., Assignments: 40%, Quizzes: 30%) in a weighted gradebook or the overall number of points

Grade Items:

- Individual assignments, quizzes, and activities are listed under their respective categories

- Individual weight of each item within its category
- This information is displayed in an expandable panel format for easy navigation

Understanding Your Grade:

- If categories are weighted, each collapsible panel shows the category weight
- If categories are not weighted, you'll see the overall points each category contributes to your overall grade

Grade Calculator

The Syllabus Tool includes an interactive "What-If" Grade Calculator that allows you to:

- View current grades for all completed assignments
- Enter hypothetical scores for upcoming assignments
- Calculate how different scores would affect your final grade
- Plan the scores you need to achieve your target grade

How to Use the Grade Calculator:

1. Click the "Open Grade Calculator" button
2. View your current grades organized by category
3. Enter potential scores for ungraded items
4. See your projected final grade update in real-time
5. Experiment with different scenarios to plan your performance goals

TIPS FOR LEARNERS

- **Check Regularly**: Visit the syllabus at the beginning of each week to review upcoming deadlines
- **Bookmark Important Items**: Use the direct links to navigate quickly to high-priority assignments
- **Monitor Status Indicators**: Pay attention to overdue alerts and address them promptly
- **Use the Grade Calculator**: Plan your study priorities based on assignment weights and your goals
- **Read the Course Overview**: Review instructor-provided information for policies and expectations
- **Contact Your Instructor**: If any syllabus information is unclear, reach out for clarification

3. For Instructors

OVERVIEW

As an instructor, the Syllabus Tool provides you with both content authoring and automatic aggregation capabilities. You can customize the course description while the tool automatically displays assignments, events, and grading information pulled from other areas of your course.

ACCESSING THE SYLLABUS

1. Navigate to your course in Brightspace
2. Click the "Syllabus" link in the course navigation bar
3. You'll see the complete syllabus view as your students see it

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CREATING AND EDITING THE COURSE OVERVIEW

The Course Overview is the primary section where you can add custom content to your syllabus. The Course Overview section supports display of PDFs and DOCX files, as well as provides a rich text editor if you prefer to enter the syllabus information directly in Brightspace as HTML.

HOW TO EDIT THE COURSE OVERVIEW:

1. From the syllabus page, click the "Edit" button or icon
2. Select the file you wish to upload or swap to the Rich Text editor
3. If using the Rich Text editor, enter or modify your course description, policies, and information
4. Use the Rich Content Editor's formatting tools to:
    - Format text (bold, italics, headers, lists)
    - Insert images, videos, or other multimedia content
    - Add hyperlinks to external resources
    - Embed videos from YouTube or other platforms
    - Create tables to organize information
    - Insert equations or special characters
5. Click Save.

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN COURSE OVERVIEW:

Consider including:

- Course title and code
- Instructor contact information and office hours
- Course description and learning objectives
- Required textbooks and materials
- Course policies (attendance, late work, academic integrity)
- Weekly schedule or module overview
- Communication expectations
- Technical requirements or prerequisites
- Important course-specific information

SAVING YOUR CHANGES:

- Click "Save" to publish your changes immediately
- Changes are visible to learners instantly
- You can edit the Course Overview as many times as needed throughout the term

UNDERSTANDING AUTO-GENERATED SECTIONS

Several sections of the syllabus are automatically populated and updated from other areas of your course:

COURSE SUMMARY (ACTIVITIES LIST)

This comprehensive list automatically includes:

- All published assignments from the Assignments tool
- All published quizzes from the Quizzes tool
- All published discussion topics from the Discussions tool
- Content items with due dates

- Direct links to each activity

You control this section by:

- Publishing or unpublishing activities in their respective tools
- Setting or changing due dates
- Creating or deleting assignments, quizzes, or discussions
- The tool pulls this information automatically; no manual entry is required

GRADE BREAKDOWN SECTION

This section automatically displays:

- Grade categories (e.g., Assignments, Quizzes, Participation)
- Category weights (if you've configured weighted categories) or points
- Individual grade items listed under their categories
- Individual item weights or points

You control this section by:

- Configuring grade categories in the Grades tool
- Setting category weights or points
- Creating grade items and associating them with categories
- The syllabus automatically reflects your gradebook configuration

CONTROLLING VISIBILITY

WHAT STUDENTS SEE VS. WHAT YOU SEE

Students only see published content:

- Draft assignments, quizzes, or discussions do not appear in the syllabus
- Unpublished activities are hidden from the Course Summary
- This is consistent with Brightspace's default behavior

MANAGING ASSIGNMENTS AND DUE DATES

When you modify assignments or due dates in other course tools, the syllabus updates automatically:

1. **To Update a Due Date:**
   - Navigate to the Assignments, Quizzes, or Discussions tool
   - Edit the specific activity
   - Change the due date
   - Save your changes
   - The syllabus will reflect the new date immediately

2. **To Add a New Assignment:**
   - Create the assignment in the Assignments tool
   - Set a due date
   - Publish the assignment

- It will automatically appear in the Course Summary

3. **To Remove an Assignment from the Syllabus:**
   - Navigate to the assignment in the Assignments tool
   - Either unpublish it or remove its due date
   - It will no longer appear in the Course Summary

MODIFYING GRADE CATEGORIES AND WEIGHTS/POINTS

To update the grading information displayed in the syllabus:

1. Navigate to Grades in your course
2. Manage grade categories and their weights
3. Associate grade items with categories
4. Set individual item weights/points if desired
5. The syllabus automatically updates to reflect your grade setup

BEST PRACTICES FOR INSTRUCTORS

- **Complete Setup Early**: Configure your Course Overview, assignments, and grading structure before the course begins
- **Keep Information Current**: Update the Course Overview whenever policies or expectations change
- **Use the Rich Content Editor**: Make your Course Overview engaging with formatting, images, and videos
- **Verify Links**: Test any hyperlinks you include in the Course Overview to ensure they work
- **Review After Changes**: Check the syllabus view after making changes to assignments or grades
- **Communicate Updates**: Notify students when significant syllabus changes occur
- **Leverage Automation**: Let the tool handle the activities list and grading information rather than duplicating this content in your Course Overview

4. For Administrators

OVERVIEW

As an administrator, you have oversight of the Syllabus Tool's deployment and configuration across your institution. Your role ensures consistent implementation while allowing instructors appropriate flexibility to customize their course syllabi.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Administrators at the institution or sub-account level are responsible for:

- Managing the deployment and configuration of the Syllabus Tool
- Managing access permissions and roles
- Ensuring the tool is properly integrated into the course navigation
- Establishing institutional guidelines for syllabus content
- Providing support and training to instructors
- Monitoring tool usage and adoption

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UNDERSTANDING THE TOOL ARCHITECTURE

COMPONENT STRUCTURE

The Syllabus Tool consists of several integrated components:

1. **Course Overview Section**: Editable by instructors using Rich Content Editor or file upload
2. **Course Summary**: Auto-populated list of all published assignments, quizzes, and discussions
3. **Grade Breakdown**: Auto-populated from the Grades tool configuration
4. **What-If Calculator**: Interactive tool for grade projection

DATA SOURCES

The tool pulls information from:

- Course description/overview (user-entered content)
- Assignments tool (published assignments with due dates)
- Quizzes tool (published quizzes with due dates)
- Discussions tool (published discussions with due dates)
- Content tool (published content items with due dates)
- Calendar tool (course events)
- Grades tool (categories, weights, points, grade items)
- Gradebook (current student grades for What-If Calculator)

PERMISSIONS AND ACCESS CONTROL

ROLE-BASED PERMISSIONS

The Syllabus Tool respects Brightspace's standard roles and permissions:

Learner Roles:

- View-only access to the syllabus
- Can see only published content
- Can use the What-If Grade Calculator

Instructor Roles (Instructor, Teaching Assistant, Course Builder):

- Can edit the Course Overview section
- Can modify underlying course elements (assignments, quizzes, grades) that populate auto-generated sections
- See the same published view as students

Administrator Roles:

- Full access to all functionality
- Can edit Course Overview in any course
- Can view and modify tool configuration
- Can pull and view telemetry compliance report to view which org unit IDs have configured syllabi

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CONFIGURING PERMISSIONS

Syllabus Tool uses course-level widget data to manage data persistence. Permissions are managed through Brightspace's standard role and permission settings:

1. Navigate to Admin Tools → Roles and Permissions
2. Locate the relevant roles (Instructor, Learner, etc.)
3. Ensure appropriate permissions are set for:
    a. All roles require: Homepages > Retrieve Org Unit Custom Widget Data at Course Offering level
    b. Editing roles require: Homepages > Modify Org Unit Custom Widget Data at Course offering level

Important: The Syllabus Tool does not require special permissions beyond standard Brightspace roles.

DEPLOYMENT AND SETUP

COURSE-LEVEL CONFIGURATION

For Individual Courses:

- The tool requires no course-specific configuration
- Once installed, it automatically works with existing course content
- Instructors can begin using it immediately

Institution-Wide Rollout:

- Deploy the navbar link across relevant org units
- Consider phased rollout (pilot courses, then full deployment)
- Provide training and support materials to instructors

ESTABLISHING INSTITUTIONAL GUIDELINES

As an administrator, you may want to establish guidelines for syllabus content:

CONTENT STANDARDS

Consider establishing requirements for:

- Mandatory elements (e.g., course objectives, grading policy, contact information)
- Accessibility standards for uploaded content
- Branding guidelines (institutional logos, formatting)
- Policy statements (academic integrity, accommodations)

EDITABLE VS. LOCKED CONTENT

Current Implementation:

- Only the Course Overview section is editable by instructors
- Calendar, Upcoming Events, and Course Summary are automatically populated and cannot be manually edited
- This ensures consistency while allowing instructor customization

Benefits of This Approach:

- Prevents duplication of information
- Ensures accuracy (auto-generated content is always current)
- Reduces instructor workload
- Maintains consistency across courses

TRAINING AND SUPPORT

INSTRUCTOR TRAINING

Provide instructors with:

- Overview of the Syllabus Tool's features and benefits
- Step-by-step guides for editing the Course Overview
- Best practices for syllabus content
- Information about auto-generated sections and how they're controlled
- Contact information for support

STUDENT COMMUNICATION

Consider providing students with:

- Announcement or orientation about the Syllabus Tool
- Instructions on how to access and use the syllabus
- Information about the What-If Grade Calculator
- Encouragement to check the syllabus regularly

MONITORING AND REPORTING

USAGE TRACKING

The Syllabus Tool includes telemetry capabilities for tracking:

- Course configuration status (which courses have configured syllabi)

Accessing Configuration Reports:

- Administrators can generate configuration reports showing which courses have active syllabi
- Reports include course codes, org unit ID and configuration status
- Use this data to identify courses needing support or follow-up
- Reports are available to be generated in the Admin Dashboard, accessible in the Syllabus Tool

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

- Modern web browser (Chrome, Firefox, Safari, Edge)
- JavaScript enabled
- Standard Brightspace LMS access
- No additional plugins or extensions required

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SUPPORT AND MAINTENANCE

ONGOING MAINTENANCE

- Regular updates are deployed automatically
- Bug fixes and improvements are applied to the production environment
- No action required from administrators for routine updates

GETTING SUPPORT

For technical support or questions, contact D2L Support and ask for a dev assist with the Learning Services team

BEST PRACTICES FOR ADMINISTRATORS

- **Plan Rollout Carefully**: Consider starting with a pilot group before institution-wide deployment
- **Provide Comprehensive Training**: Ensure instructors understand both the tool and its benefits
- **Set Clear Expectations**: Establish guidelines for syllabus content and quality
- **Monitor Adoption**: Use configuration reports to track which courses are using the tool
- **Gather Feedback**: Regularly solicit feedback from instructors and students
- **Communicate Benefits**: Help instructors understand how the tool reduces their workload
- **Support Accessibility**: Ensure instructors create accessible content in the Course Overview
- **Document Locally**: Create institution-specific documentation and support materials

5. Frequently Asked Questions

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Q: Is the syllabus automatically created for my course?

A: The Syllabus Tool framework is available once installed by your administrator, but instructors need to add content to the Course Overview section. The Course Summary, and Grade Breakdown sections are automatically populated from your existing course content.

Q: Is the syllabus mobile-friendly?

A: Yes, the Syllabus Tool is designed to work on mobile devices, tablets, and desktop computers.

Q: What happens if I don't have any assignments or quizzes yet?

A: The Course Summary section will be empty until you create and publish assignments, quizzes, or discussions with due dates. The Course Overview section will still be available for you to edit.

FOR LEARNERS

Q: Why don't I see an assignment that my instructor mentioned?

A: The assignment might not be published yet, or it might not have a due date assigned. Only published activities with due dates appear in the Course Summary. Contact your instructor if you have questions about specific assignments.

Q: Can I edit my scores in the What-If Calculator, and will it affect my real grades?

A: The What-If Calculator is a planning tool only. Any scores you enter are hypothetical and do not affect your actual grades. Only your instructor can enter real grades in the gradebook.

Q: How often is the syllabus updated?

A: The syllabus updates in real-time. Any changes your instructor makes to assignments, due dates, or grades are reflected immediately. Refresh your browser to see the latest information.

FOR INSTRUCTORS

Q: Do I need to manually add my assignments to the syllabus?

A: No. Once you create assignments, quizzes, or discussions in their respective tools and publish them with due dates, they automatically appear in the Course Summary section.

Q: Can I hide the Grade Breakdown section from students?

A: Currently, all sections of the syllabus are visible to students. If you don't want grade information displayed, you would need to avoid setting up weighted categories in your gradebook, though this is not recommended as it reduces transparency.

Q: I updated an assignment due date, but it's not showing in the syllabus. Why?

A: Make sure the assignment is published and that you've saved your changes. Then refresh the syllabus page. If the issue persists, contact your administrator or support team.

Q: Can teaching assistants edit the Course Overview?

A: Yes, any role with instructor-level permissions (including TAs and Course Builders) can edit the Course Overview section.

Q: What happens to the syllabus when I copy my course?

A: Syllabus Tool does not currently support course copy. The Course Overview content will not be copied along with your course and will need to be configured in the new course shell. The auto-generated sections (Course Summary, Grade Breakdown) will populate based on the assignments and grade setup in the new course copy.

FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Q: Do we need to install the Syllabus Tool in every course individually?

A: No. The tool is deployed at the organizational unit level. Once the navbar link is added to an org unit (department, institution, etc.), it's available to all courses within that org unit. You will need to add it to the navbar for it to be available to your learners and instructors.

Q: Is there a cost for the Syllabus Tool?

A: Pricing and licensing information should be obtained from your D2L account representative.

Q: How do we train instructors on using the tool?

A: This guide can serve as a foundation for training. You may also want to create institution-specific training materials, offer workshops, or provide video tutorials.

Q: What data does the tool collect?

A: There is no external data collection in the Syllabus Tool. All student data (grades, assignments) remains in Brightspace's standard data storage and is not collected separately by the tool.

Q: Can we make the Syllabus Tool mandatory for all courses?

A: While you can deploy the tool to all courses, instructors must actively add content to the Course Overview section. You can establish institutional policies requiring instructors to complete their syllabi.

Conclusion

The Syllabus Tool streamlines syllabus creation and maintenance while providing students with a dynamic, always-current view of course information. By automatically integrating assignments, calendars, and grading information, the tool reduces instructor workload and improves the student experience.

For additional support or questions not covered in this guide, please contact your institutional administrator or the D2L support team.

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About D2L

D2L is transforming the way the world learns, helping learners achieve more than they dreamed possible. Working closely with customers all over the world, D2L is on a mission to make learning more inspiring, engaging and human. Find out how D2L helps transform lives and delivers outstanding learning outcomes in K-12, higher education and business at **D2L.com**.

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