

60-Second SoTL

Episode 40 – Student Engagement with Video Syllabi

(Piano Music)

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Jessie L. Moore:

Would a video narration of a graphic syllabus help students engage with and remember syllabus content? That's the focus of this week's 60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning. I'm Jessie Moore.

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In "Syllabus 2.0: Using Videos to Make the Syllabus Active," published in *College Teaching*, John Kerrigan and Christina Bifulco compare student engagement with two syllabus designs – a graphic syllabus and a series of narrated video presentations of that graphic syllabus.

The syllabi were designed for two sections of a Fall 2022 Pre-Calculus College Mathematics course for first-semester, first-year engineering students at a large public research university in the United States. Based on prior studies of syllabus design and of students' perceptions of courses and instructors based on syllabi, the researchers developed a graphic syllabus that:

- Explained the responsibilities of the instructor and the student,
- Offered explanations for policies,
- Used warm language,
- Included a diversity and inclusivity statement that reminded students they could reach out to discuss any issues impacting their learning,
- Unpacked the importance of office hours, which were renamed student hours, and
- Incorporated accessible images.

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The video version was a screencast narration of the graphic syllabus, narrated by the instructor. The video version included closed captioning and was divided into 6 videos, ranging in length from just under a minute to just over six minutes.

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One section of the math class received the graphic syllabus, and the other section received the video syllabus.

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168 students were enrolled in the two sections of the math course, and all completed a ten-question syllabus quiz during the second class session as part of their coursework. 107 of the students consented to also complete a syllabus survey with ten Likert Scale questions about their perceptions of the syllabus they received. The survey, which was administered three weeks into the course, also included two open-ended questions.

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Kerrigan and Bifulco report that there were no statistically significant differences on the syllabus quiz results between the two groups of students – those who received the graphic syllabus and those who received the video syllabus.

However, students who received the graphic syllabus rated ease of navigation to find information higher than students who received the video syllabus, and that difference was statistically significant. When asked to provide one word to describe the syllabus, 91% of the words describing the video syllabus were positive, but some students described the video version as annoying, confusing, or long. In comparison, 100% of the words describing the graphic syllabus were positive.

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Learning Management System analytics suggest that some students in the graphic syllabus group did not access the LMS page where the syllabus was posted, and in the video syllabus group, some students didn't watch all of the videos in their entirety. As a result, Kerrigan and Bifulco suggest that first-semester college students might need more guidance on how to use a syllabus and why it matters.

Ultimately, the authors don't shy away from video syllabi, but they do suggest studying whether a video syllabus with embedded questions would facilitate more student engagement. They also recommend having students collaboratively annotate graphic syllabi to draw more student focus to the syllabus details and to give students opportunities to ask questions about the syllabus content.

To learn more about this study and for additional suggestions about syllabus design, visit our show notes for this episode.

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