

**GLOBAL OBJECTIVES OF WORKSHOP SERIES**

1. Transform your syllabus into a means of accomplishing the goals of the Student Success Plan (see synopsis).
2. Adapt and incorporate proven teaching and assessment practices in your syllabi to enhance student success.

**OUTLINE OF WORKSHOP 1**

Feb. 26, 2008 from 3-5 PM + Dinner

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Length of Time</b>	<b>Team Member</b>
Introduction	15 minutes	Bobbi
Reading the Syllabus from Your Student's Perspective	45 minutes	Meena and Ruben
Faculty Members as Agents of Change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part I: Inventory</li> <li>• Part II: Academic Know-How and Cultural Resources</li> <li>• Part III: Attributes of Faculty as Agents of Student Success</li> <li>• Part IV: Resources Quiz</li> </ul>	60 minutes 15 minutes 15 minutes 15 minutes 15 minutes	Meena, Bobbi, Sabrina, Trevor, Ruben, Hannah, and Lydia
Facilitated Discussion	Dinner	

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES OF WORKSHOP #1

1. Become aware of what your syllabus communicates—explicitly and implicitly—to your students.
2. Conceptualize the role of faculty members as agents of change capable of making a difference in students' educational aspirations and achievement.
3. Learn about strategies to make your syllabus a roadmap to guide students learning and familiarize them with the “invisible” practices of academic success that you learned as a college student.

### CORRESPONDING ACTIVITIES FOR EACH OBJECTIVE

- **Objective #1:** Become aware of what your syllabus communicates—explicitly and implicitly—to your students.

#### Activity 1.1: Reading a Syllabus from Your Student's Perspective

Purpose: The purpose of this exercise is for participants to look at their own syllabus and consider (1) What does it communicate to students about the instructor, the students, and the course (2) If I was a student and saw the syllabus for this course on the first day how would I react to the instructor and the course? (3) Does the syllabus communicate what you would like it to? (4) Does the syllabus communicate what you would like it to communicate? (5) What would you like it to communicate that it currently does not?

#### Materials Needed:

##### Post-it Notes

Large sheets pre-labeled with the following descriptors: **Tone, Clarity, Organization, Instructor Accessibility, Teaching Methods, Inclusiveness, Expectations, Rigor, Other**  
Self-adhesive poster paper to place on the walls

Magic markers and Pens

Syllabi, without identifying information, for people who forget to bring their own.

Handout with the following questions:

- ‘What does your syllabus communicate to students about the instructor?’
- ‘What does it communicate about the course?’
- ‘If you were a student and saw your syllabus on the first day of class, what would be my impressions or reactions about the course?’ ‘What would be my reactions about the instructor?’

### Step 1: Facilitator's Introduction to Exercise 1

The facilitator will address the entire group and will informally say something about the purposes of a syllabus. For example, one purpose is to provide a roadmap to the course. A syllabus also conveys messages to students. Some of the messages are intentional, for example, “students are expected to come to class prepared.” In the same manner that each one of us interprets a book, an article, or a place through our own eyes, experiences, values, and knowledge, students are also likely to make meaning of a syllabus on the basis of their own expectations, experiences with other classes, etc. It is also possible that we may convey unintentional messages in our syllabus that could have a positive or negative effect.

For example, Estela wrote in her syllabus “If you are more than 5 minutes late to class, behave as though you are at the ‘opera’—wait until intermission to be seated.” One of her students pointed out that she was assuming that all students in the class would be familiar (i.e., have the cultural knowledge) with “opera customs,” and that they would have attended an opera at a place like the Walt Disney Music Center in Los Angeles or similar venue. Estela, who considers herself a student-centered instructor and believes herself to be culturally sensitive and inclusive, was surprised to realize that her reference to the “opera” might give students unintended messages, which could be detrimental. For example, a student who has never gone to the opera might not know what the instructor intends and may feel embarrassed to admit that she does not understand the comment; a student who understands what the opera is and associates it with a certain social class may interpret the comment as a sign that the instructor is a snob; whereas a student who is an opera aficionado may immediately feel that she has something in common with the instructor. The opera comment can make some students feel “affirmed” and while making others feel insecure, apprehensive, or anxious.

### Step 2: Explain the Exercise and Distribute Materials

--Ask if everyone has a syllabus; for those people who did not bring a syllabus, provide them with one of the extra syllabi.

--Provide everyone with handouts, post-it notes and markers

--Say something to the participants like: “I want you to try to envision yourself as a student on the first day of class. Read your syllabus from the standpoint of a student. As you read the syllabus, consider the questions provided in the handout and jot your reactions on the post-it notes. Your reactions can be one word or a short sentence. Use the questions in the handout as a guide to write your reactions.

Step 3: Execute the exercise

--Give people about 10-15 minutes to review the syllabus and create 3 to 5 post-it notes

--Make sure that the sheets are on the wall and direct the participants to put their notes where they think they fit best. If they don't think they fit under any of them, have them place under "Other." Each sheet is labeled with one of the following:

**Tone, Clarity, Organization, Instructor's Personality, Teaching Methods, Other**

Step 4: Discussion of Exercise

--See if the notes are concentrated on any particular area.

--Ask one of the participants to look at the notes under each area and ask them if they see any themes or to choose maybe 3 of them and read them out loud. If you do the latter ask if they notice any themes.

--Ask the participants if after having examined their syllabus: 'Did you learn anything new about your syllabus?' 'Are there things you would like your syllabus to communicate that it presently does not?'

Step 5: Wrap-Up and Segue way to the topic of instructors as Agents of Change

--As you can see, syllabi can communicate a variety of messages. One of the most important initiatives in our college is the Student Success Plan. Possibly refer them to the synopsis of the Student Success Plan (will be included in the workshop "syllabus" for participants). Instructors are the persons who spend the most time on a regular basis with students so they are in the best position to help students become successful. Instructors can make a difference in the educational experience and outcomes of students.

--In order for instructors to be agents of change it is important to understand who your students are. Just like it never occurred to Estela that she should not take-it-for-granted that the opera or cultural rules of opera-going are not part of everyone's experience, the same may be true for instructors at LBCC. In fact, because LBCC is a college with large concentrations of low-income, minority, and/or non-English speakers there is probably a big cultural divide between students and instructors. If instructors are not aware of this cultural divide and its manifestations, it is very possible that instructors will make assumptions or engage in actions that turn out to be detrimental to students' learning or that are not helpful.

The purpose of the next activity is to help us consider cultural differences between instructors and students.

- **Objective #2:** Conceptualize the role of faculty members as agents of change capable of making a difference in students' educational aspirations and achievement.

Activity 1.2: Faculty Members as Agents of Change

Purpose: The purpose of this activity is to increase participants' awareness that their own college experience may be very different from that of their students. It is important for instructors to realize that students may not do what is expected of them or may do things that are inconsistent with common knowledge about how one behaves in a college classroom or what it takes to be a good student because they have not been socialized to be college students. Just like "going to the opera" is an activity that has social class and income status connotations, the same happens to be true about going to college. Although going to college is no longer a privilege of those who can afford it and just about anyone who wants to go to college will be able to do so, it is still true that some of us grew up knowing that we were expected to go to college after high school. Some of us went to high schools where just about everyone went to college and prepared for it from a very early age by following the college prep curriculum, taking honors classes, accumulating AP credits, and making sure to be actively involved in school and community activities in anticipation of admissions committees' preference for students who are academically competitive, well rounded, and socially conscious. Those of us who could afford it were sent to private courses and tutors to prepare for the SAT. Students from well-off backgrounds often go on a college tour to visit the colleges that interest them and have private counselors who coach them through every step of the admissions process. Such students may apply to ten or more colleges, expect to live on campus, and not have to work.

Simply put, some students come from families with a great deal of specialized "college knowledge" and others come from families with little to no "cultural knowledge." Students in community colleges generally, and in urban ones like LBCC in particular, are far more likely to lack "college knowledge." An important difference between those who possess "college knowledge" and those who do not is having the cultural resources that are essential to be successful. Students with a limited amount of "college knowledge" lack familiarity with the rules, customs, language, expected behaviors, and values that are necessary for academic success.

Instructors with a preponderance of students without "college knowledge" have to do more than transmit content knowledge. They also need to share with them the "tricks" of being a good student.

Materials: Academic Cultural Knowledge Inventory, discussion questions for facilitators, poster paper, campus resources quiz

Step 1: Facilitator will ask the group to sit in a circle and explain how the activity works: “I am going to read statements from the Academic Cultural Knowledge Inventory. I want those people whose personal experience resonates with the statement to stand up. If the statement does not reflect your experience, please remain seated. The inventory consists of \_\_\_\_ statements, so stand or sit in response to each statement. For example, if I read a statement as follows: “I work at LBCC,” all of us except the people from USC would stand up.” [This may be linked to the video clip of students doing the inventory.]

Step 2: Discussion ideas. Once the exercise is over provide each participant with their own Academic Cultural Knowledge Inventory. Ask participants, “For which items did most people stand up?” “For which items did fewer people stand up?” “What does this exercise suggest about differences in the experience of a student who starts out in a basic skills course, or who is an undocumented immigrant from a small town in Mexico or Central America, or whose family does not understand the benefits of a college education?”

“Given the statements you just heard, what are some of the “cultural resources” your students may need you to give them?” On the left column of a poster paper divided into two columns, list the Academic Know-How and Cultural Resources students need.

Academic Know-How and Cultural Resources our students need	Ways of sharing our Academic Know-How and Cultural Resources with students
1. Learn how to study for an exam 2.	--Provide practice sessions; provide mock exams; provide review sessions, etc.

If participants have a hard time coming up with items, ask them what kinds of things helped them do well in college or what kinds of things they wish their students knew how to do. If the following items are not mentioned, bring them up: 1) study skills, 2) money to buy books (you might also ask if they know how much books cost), 3) how to plan for assignments, how to get organized, 4) how to use the library, 5) how to ask for help without feeling embarrassed, 6) how not to feel inadequate because they do not know something, 7) computer skills, 8) being equipped for class (e.g., having notebook, pens, etc.), 9) identifying additional resources in the Web.

Next ask participants for specific ways in which they can provide students with the “know-how” and “academic cultural resources” and write the strategies down on the right side column. After the workshop all the ideas can be provided in typewritten form. In fact, a “resource packet” based on the ideas derived over the course of the workshop could be prepared to share with all faculty and to provide to new and part-time faculty during orientation.

Step 3: Discussion of attributes of a faculty member-as-change agent. To complete the exercise the facilitator might say something like: “Faculty members who are agents of student success share with their students the “hidden curriculum” or the “unwritten rules” that can help them be successful. One of the ways in which they do this is through the information they provide in their syllabus to help students navigate the course and get a sense of the college. It is also helpful to develop teaching practices that help students contextualize academic know-how and cultural resources in their own personal experience such as work, community activities, immigration, coping with hardships, caretaking, etc.

To continue the discussion, ask participants to provide examples from content included in their syllabus and classroom practices that are indicative of acting as agents of student success.

Guiding questions for facilitators (some of these questions can be saved for dinner):

1. What kinds of things do you do to get to know your students?
2. What kinds of things do you do to incorporate students’ experiences and knowledge into the content of your course?
3. What kinds of things do you do to validate or affirm students’ knowledge, culture, and experiences?
4. Can you think of a particular time when you acted as an agent of student success? What did you do? Why? What happened?
5. When a student is not doing well in your class what do you do?
6. Can you think of a student in one of your classes who might be in need of an “agent of success?” Can you describe the student and what makes you think he/she may benefit from an agent of success? What could you do?
7. Some people think that the role of faculty members is to transmit content knowledge to their students and that it is up to the students to be self-motivated and be the agents of their own success?
8. What are some of the reasons that make it difficult for instructors to be agents of student success?
9. Given the attributes of an agent of student success, about how many students would ascribe these attributes to you? i.e., all but a few students, a very small number, I have no idea, I don’t really care.
10. Can you think of a colleague who fits the description of an institutional agent? What does this person do?

11. If a colleague said to you, “can you give me some advice on how I can be more helpful to students,” what would you say?
12. Now that we have discussed the role of instructors as agents of change, can you think of ways in which you could become a more effective agent of change?

*Potential response:*

- i. Critical analysis of your own practice
- ii. Reflective dialogue and collaboration with colleagues
- iii. Consider factors that affect your practice (e.g. bureaucracy)

#### Step 4: Instructors as Guides to Campus’ Resources

Being an institutional agent also requires knowledge of campus resources in order to be able to guide students appropriately. How well do you know the resources available on your campus?

- Participants will take a short quiz on where various campus offices and resources are located. The quiz is intended to help them become sources of referral for students.
- Discussion: Provide the correct answers and ask for a show of hand how many got the right answer. Facilitator can follow-up with a question: “Can you suggest creative or unexpected resources for students that you can put in your syllabus? (E.g. web pages, textbook toll-free numbers)?”

**ATTACHMENT A: ACADEMIC CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE INVENTORY**

As a college student...

1. I lived on-campus for at least one year.
2. I completed my baccalaureate degree in four years.
3. I worked more than 20 hours per week.
4. I was afraid to ask my professors questions in class.
5. I had to take a remedial/developmental course.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.