

Guide to Getting Started Teaching at WCU

From the Teaching and Learning Center

The Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) is here to point you in the right direction as you begin your career as a teacher-scholar at West Chester University. Teaching is the most important thing we do at WCU. Starting each semester focused, organized, and fearless will enable you to have a great semester.

In addition to what you see here, you can find more resources at wcupa.edu/tlc and contact us with questions at TLC@wcupa.edu.

What you need to know

The university requires certain policies, student learning outcomes, and assessments be clearly articulated in each syllabus.

- See the [Policy on Required Course Information, Evaluations, and Syllabi](#).
- [Access the Syllabus Checklist for details and refer to Syllabus Templates for both undergraduate and graduate courses](#). Note that distance Education offerings have additional requirements.
- Consider adding additional policies to your syllabus, such as a Communication Policy in addition to the email policy, or a classroom climate statement.
- Familiarize yourself with both the [Undergraduate Catalog](#) and [Graduate Catalog](#). You will continue to refer to these resources on a need-to-know basis for information on academic programs and policies, including general education and if your Statement of Expectations requires students advising.

In addition to listing the relevant department learning goals and general education goals on your syllabus, you must articulate Student Learning Outcomes for each course you teach, identifying how students will demonstrate their mastery of the SLOs. See [University of Wisconsin's tips](#) for writing effective SLOs. Per Curriculum and Academic Policies Council (CAPC) policy:

- Syllabi for *required* courses must **state** relevant program-level SLOs and **explicitly align** these goals to how they are assessed.
- Syllabi for *General Education* courses must **state** relevant General Education goals and **explicitly align** these goals to how they are assessed.

How to keep it manageable for both you and students

Teaching up to four course sections at a time is overwhelming, even for the most seasoned instructors. Your students will also be juggling other coursework, jobs, commutes, families, and

extra-curriculars. Develop strategies for keeping the juggling act realistic for both you and your students.

- Space out assignments both within a course (so students are not overwhelmed by assignments) and across courses (so *you* are not overwhelmed by grading).
- Faculty teaching courses below the 400 level should examine student academic progress by means of **at least three major evaluations** during a semester.
- Do your best to notify students of the results of each evaluation during the course, ideally prior to the next scheduled major assessment, rather than waiting until the end, so that students can track their own progress. The D2L (our Learning Management System) Gradebook is a handy way to do this, but not the only way. Choose your method, and make sure it is transparent to students.
- One major evaluation should be given prior to the end of the **eighth week** of the semester or its equivalent during the summer term. For lower-level courses, ideally students should know the results of the first evaluation prior to the end of the withdrawal period.
- Consider using **rubrics** to evaluate assignments. This can help you keep your standards clear and focused, and in some cases can ease the grading time and burden, for example, in the case of grading essays. If possible, provide rubrics and models of completed assignments before assignments are due, integrate them into discussion, use them as teaching tools. D2L has the ability for you to add your rubrics right to the gradebook to streamline the process even further, although this requires time to configure.
- Draw on your department's **teacher-scholar model**. When we use our research and expertise as scholars in the classroom, students get to experience what we are passionate about. Likewise, we can gain new insights into our research questions by working through them with our students. Bring it full circle by publishing in the field of the scholarship of learning and teaching. Everybody wins!
- Stay abreast of the last day for **course withdrawal** each semester, usually in mid-October for fall semester. Notify students if it seems they will not pass the course at this point.
- Use the built-in alert system in Navigate to notify students and Success Coaches when they need extra support. And you can also share kudos to the students you've noticed doing great stuff!
- **You do not need to reinvent the wheel**. Identify a "course mentor" who has taught the course before to be support to you throughout the semester. Previously used syllabi should be on file in your department.

Additional Teaching Tips

- **Be Clear and Explicit.** Include clear and detailed explanations of expectations and assignments (include rubrics and models). Explain your pedagogical rationale for any changes to the calendar, syllabus, or course pacing.
- **Be compassionate toward yourself and your students.** Teaching is hard and it's easy to feel burnt out and overwhelmed! Recognize that students will also be feeling similar ways. Think about how you can acknowledge these challenges and be as supportive to yourself and your students.
- **SRIS and Good Teaching.** We know that student evaluations of teaching only tell part of the story about any classroom and instructor. While WCU uses Student Rating of Instructor Survey (SRIS) scores as part of its larger evaluation and promotion process, it is not worth overthinking or getting stressed about SRIS. However, students' perceptions of a course certainly matter and can provide a window into how our actions and intentions come across to them. One way to make SRIS less daunting is to connect [the language](#) on the (SRIS) to your own teaching. For example:
 - Review “course requirements and grading procedures” regularly. It’s a good idea to review this before major assessments. Help students understand what is expected of them.
 - Remind students once you have addressed or “met the course objectives published in the course description or syllabus.” Help them understand the learning process taking place. This can be done at the end or beginning of a class or a unit.
 - Help students understand what it means to have a graded assignment or paper returned in a “timely manner” especially in the context of the type or level of class they are in. Explain how your approach as well as the values you ascribe to grading impacts the amount of time it might take to return their assignments.
 - Explain how you’ve “organized this class in a way that helped [students] to learn the material.”
 - Highlight moments that reflect a “good use of class time.” Prepare students to make the most of class time, particularly when structuring group-work or collaborative learning exercises. Help them understand the value and rationale behind these pedagogical practices. Be sure to provide them guidance so they do make good use of these modes of learning.
 - Be explicit about what and how you’ve thought about and prepared for the class.

Student Support Resources

You may want to provide information in your syllabi for relevant support services that your students could benefit from. Many faculty find the reference numbers useful if they need to point students to counseling or other services.

[Writing Center](#). FHG Library Room 251, 610-430-5664

[Learning Assistance and Resource Center \(LARC\)](#). Lawrence 224, 610-436-2535

[Office of Educational Accessibility](#). Lawrence 223, 610-436-2564

[Counseling and Psychological Services](#). Lawrence 241, 610-436-2301

[The Campus Assessment, Response, and Education Team](#) (to report concerning student behavior)

[Student Health Services](#). Commonwealth Hall, Ground Floor, 610-436-2509

West Chester Area Resources. Sometimes students may need the support of off-campus resources. Keep these numbers handy or include them in your syllabi.

- **Chester County Crime Victims Center**
 - Services for victims, witnesses, and families, 610-692-1926
- **Valley Creek Crisis Center**
 - Telephone Crisis Counseling and Mobile Outreach, 610-918-2100
- **Chester County Hospital**
 - 610-431-5000