

TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT CENTER GUIDE TO GETTING STARTED TEACHING AT WCU

The Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Center (TLAC) 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, but unfortunately, it is sometimes an aspect of our jobs to which we pay little attention. 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 on [TLAC's web page](#) and contact us with questions at TLAC@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.](#)
- Consider adding additional policies to your syllabus, such as a Diversity Statement and Communication Policy (in addition to the email policy). Since we are all teaching online, there may be additional requirements you want to share here as well.
- Familiarize yourself with both the [Undergraduate Catalog](#) and [Graduate Catalog](#), but no need to memorize. You will continue to refer to these resources on a need-to-know basis for information on academic programs and policies, including general education.
- In addition to listing relevant department learning goals and general education goals, you must articulate Student Learning Outcomes for each course you teach, identifying how assessments will get students there. See [University of Wisconsin's tips](#) for writing effective SLOs.

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. This fall, many of us will further be juggling working from home while care-giving for other family members or simply trying to stay focused amid the pandemic. 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.

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.** These are among the most challenging teaching and learning circumstances many of us have ever faced.

Recognize that students' needs are different than they may be during a typical semester. The same goes for you. 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 what and *that* they have learned. 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.
- **You do not need to reinvent the wheel.** Identify a “course mentor” who has taught the course before to guide you through the semester. Previously used syllabi should be on file in your department.

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 references numbers useful if they need to point students to counseling or other services.

Writing Center. FHG Library Room 251, 610-430-5664

<http://www.wcupa.edu/academics/writingcenter/>

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

<https://www.wcupa.edu/universityCollege/larc/>

Office of Support for Students with Disabilities. Lawrence 223, 610-436-2564

<https://www.wcupa.edu/universityCollege/ossd/>

Counseling and Psychological Services. Lawrence 241, 610-436-2301

<https://www.wcupa.edu/services/counselingCenter/>

The Campus Assessment, Response, and Education Team.

<https://www.wcupa.edu/services/studentAssistance/CARE/>

Student Health Services. Commonwealth Hall, Ground Floor, 610-436-2509

<https://www.wcupa.edu/services/studentHealthServices/>

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