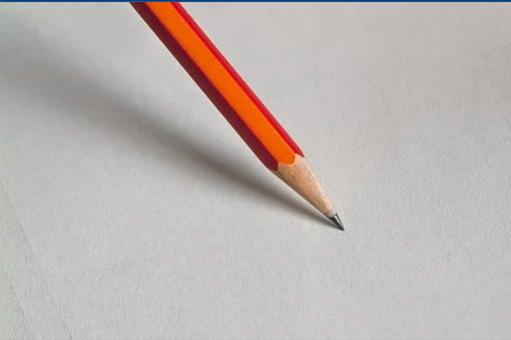




WELCOME!

**ATTUNED SYLLABUS
WORKSHOP**

**New Faculty Orientation
2021**



“It's in the syllabus!”

The syllabus is a cultural artifact that:

- presents a plan for the course
- outlines expectations

and

- provides an initial introduction to course culture

Why conduct a syllabus review?

Your syllabus is a powerful tool for course planning and development. Conducting a syllabus review provides instructors with a framework for creating a course that promotes equity in students' experiences and outcomes in its structure and content throughout the term.

Research demonstrates that:

- when students feel like their instructor believes they are capable of learning new things and growing their academic abilities -- i.e., has a **growth mindset** -- students' classroom experiences and academic outcomes improve.
- when students feel as though they are valued and connected to others in their learning community -- i.e., have a sense of **belonging** -- students are more likely to stay academically engaged and utilize the resources and supports provided by their institution that will ultimately help them graduate.
- students from groups that have been historically underserved in higher education are especially likely to benefit from cues from course instructors that indicate growth mindset and that counter uncertainty they might have about belonging in college.

The syllabus sets the tone!

The aims of this workshop are to:

1. Provide you with basic information and resources to construct effective syllabi
2. Assist you in sharpening the language about instructor mindset as conveyed in the course policies, design, and phrasing in your syllabus
3. Identify opportunities to promote equity in student experience and outcomes by explicitly promoting belonging in your syllabus
4. Provide examples of wording to convey a growth mindset and to address uncertainty and/or anxiety students may have about their sense of belonging in your course.



These are starting points for developing your own wording that is authentic to you as an instructor and the way you teach.

Syllabus Basics

- The [UToledo Syllabus Template](#)
 - All syllabi must contain required basic elements (as indicated by *) on [UTC Syllabus webpage](#)
 - Why these elements?
 - Transparency
 - Accreditation requirements
- [Fall 2021 COVID-19 Syllabus Language](#)
 - All syllabi this fall must contain this language

EARLY ALERT TOOLS

Attendance Tracking

- Completed by Census date
- Must respond for each student, or will be recorded as not-attending
- For more info:
https://www.utoledo.edu/offices/provost/docs/FAQs-Participation_Attendance-Tracker_FINAL_18May2021.pdf

Starfish Early Alert

- Report on high academic course concerns or outstanding performance kudos in early weeks of term
- Can raise Flags or Referrals at any point in the term
- For more info:
<https://www.utoledo.edu/offices/provost/starfish/faculty.html>

Midterm Grade Reports

- Completed between weeks 6 and 8 of term, in Banner (same process as recording final grades)

STUDENT SUPPORT RESOURCES

Center for Success
Coaching

Learning Enhancement
Center

Rocket Solution Central
- one-stop service
location for assistance
with financial aid,
student account and
registration questions

Food Pantries

Rocket Emergency Aid

Rocket Care Report –
to report concerns
about a student's safety
or well-being

Student Disability
Services

Student "How-To" Page
-
[https://www.utoledo.edu
/success/how-to/](https://www.utoledo.edu/success/how-to/)

REFLECTING ON BELONGING

•Breakout session (5 min) – Choose 1 question and discuss:

1. Think of a professor, teacher, or supervisor you had who conveyed a growth mindset about your ability. How did that affect your experience in working with them?
2. Think of a time in school or work when you felt like you, or people like you, didn't belong or were not welcome. How did that affect your experience?

Sense of Belonging

Students' sense of belonging shapes their responses to adversity in school

Do the messages in your syllabus communicate that it is normal to be challenged in your course material? Do they indicate that struggling with course material is typical, part of learning, and *not* an indication of a student's fixed potential for learning or lack of belonging in your course?

Be sure to communicate in clear terms that struggling is part of the course and is a sign that a student does not belong in college. Be sure also to include clear language for how students can take active steps to overcome these challenges. Help in your syllabus to prevent students from concluding that they do not belong or from disengaging socially and academically on account of your course.

What Does This Look Like?

In an “About Your Instructor” section of the syllabus, instructors can summarize their own stories about how they faced challenges and belonging concerns, which resolved with time and strategies. This can also be done in the first class of the term.

Example 1: “I became fascinated by statistics while going to college. I was intimidated by statistics at first, and after I failed my first midterm, I wondered if I was cut out for this field... However, I accessed tutoring services and put in some extra hours, and I earned a significantly higher grade on the final. In time, I developed a passion for the subject, and I hope to share that passion with you.”

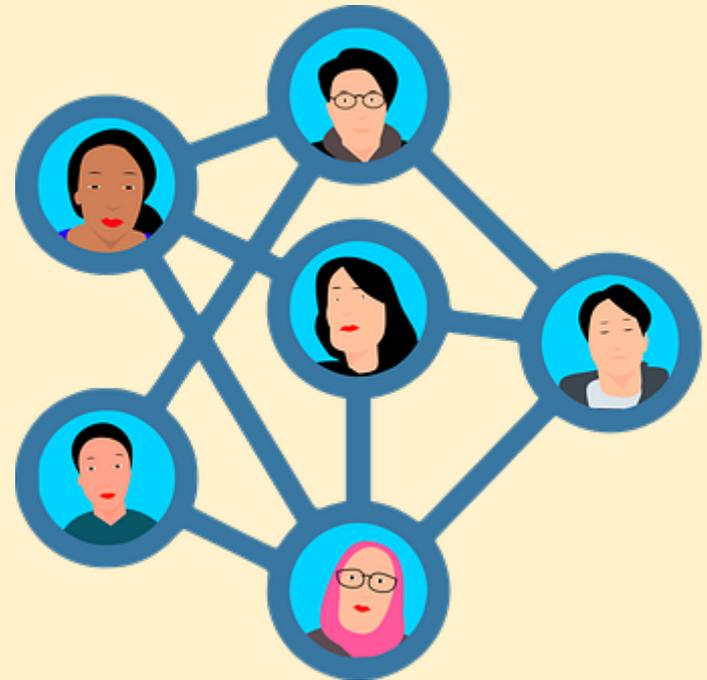
An alternative is in the “Course Notes” section of the syllabus:

Example 2: “In previous years, some students have told me that they had times during the course when they felt that they weren’t doing well and became uncertain about whether they belonged in this class or should change majors. I advised them to hang in there, and in the meantime to access the tutoring center, put in some extra hours studying, and join a study group. A number of these students contacted me later in the year to tell me that, now that some time had passed and they had taken some positive steps, they did feel like they belonged.”

Does the syllabus communicate that diversity is valued in the classroom?

Learning environments that support a diversity of thoughts, perspectives, experiences, and identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.) can have a powerful impact on students' sense of belonging, particularly for students from marginalized groups, or groups that have been historically excluded from higher education.

Syllabi that acknowledge the diversity and complexities of student populations signal to students from all backgrounds that they are seen, valued, and respected in the classroom environment.



What Does This Look Like?

Ex: “Course Conduct: I am committed to creating a positive learning environment where diverse perspectives are recognized and valued as a source of strength. I request that all students work with me to create a classroom culture based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. As a class we will approach all discussions with respect and civility. Disagreements and debates in academic discourse are expected and welcome, but personal attacks are never OK, and will not be tolerated. I strive to ensure an open and welcoming classroom for all students. If I ever miss the mark, please don’t hesitate to come and talk to me. We are all learning together.”

EX: “Accessibility: Many students have visible or less visible disabilities, and the university offers accommodations that allow everyone to achieve their full potential. The Office of Accessibility collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities, without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you have a documented disability or suspect you have an undocumented disability, contact them as early as possible in the term.”

SYLLABUS WORK: BELONGING

Instructor Pair & Share: Pair with another instructor and choose 2-3 questions. Take turns discussing each:

What, in your original syllabus, already conveyed equity promoting messages about belonging, caring, diversity, normalized challenges, etc.?

Are there any statements or policies in your original syllabus that might cause some students to question whether they belong or can succeed in the course?

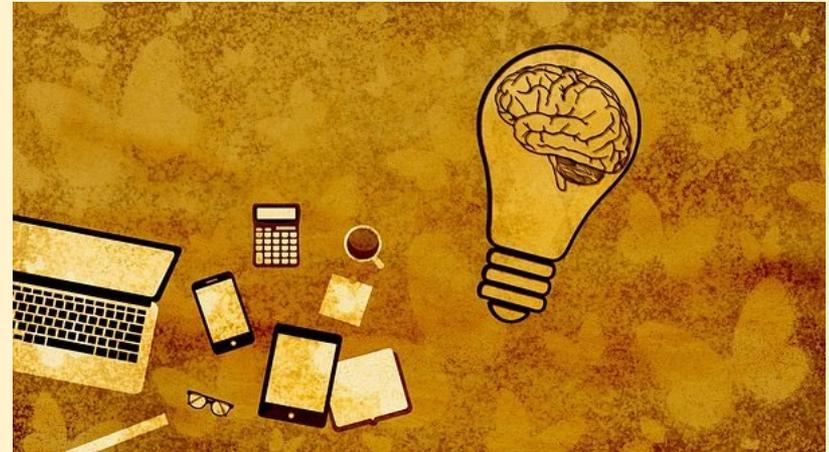
What statements or policies are you thinking of adding or revising to help students feel like they belong in the course and in college?

Fixed Vs. Growth Mindset

A fixed mindset is the belief that intelligence and ability are innate; that they cannot be changed over time.

A Syllabus with fixed mindset messaging conveys that students have or do not have the ability to succeed, and that there is not much that can be done to change this.

This type of message disproportionately affects structurally disadvantaged students

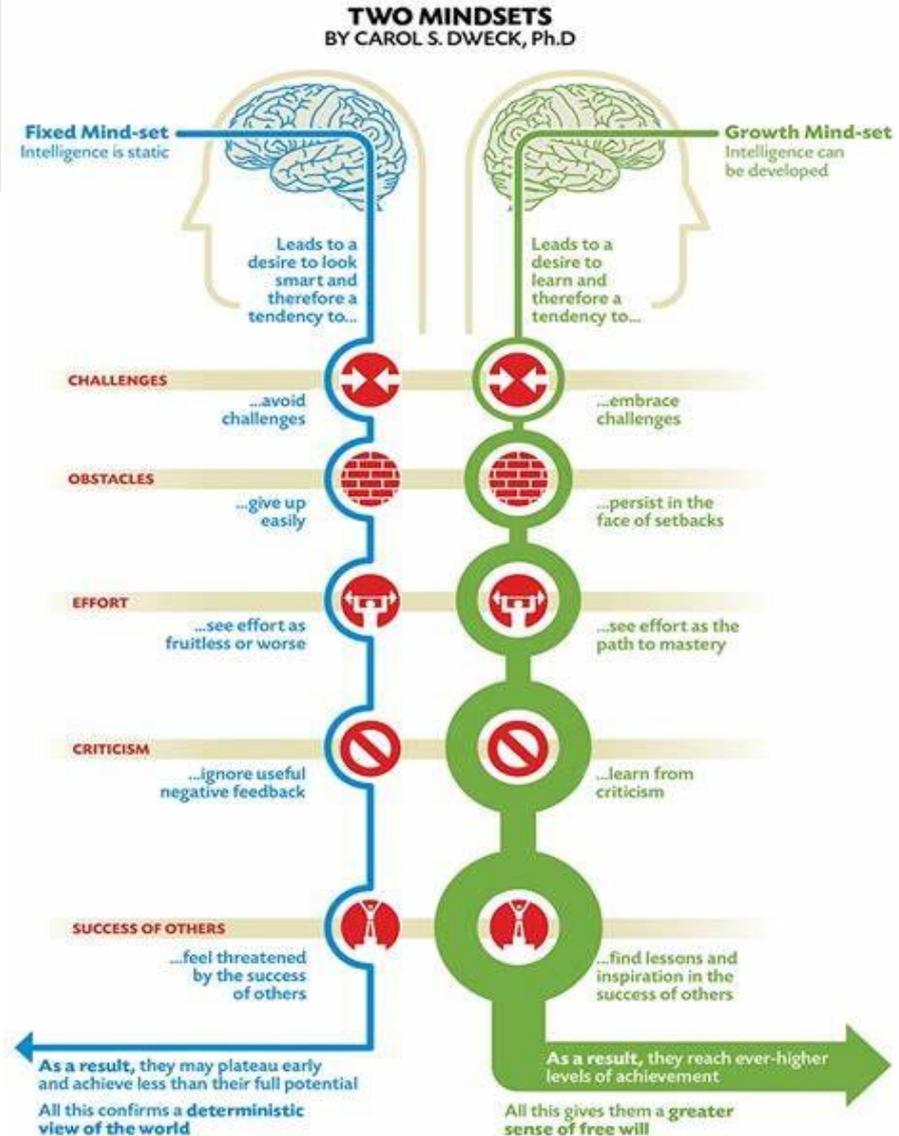


Ex: “A note about this course: This is a difficult course. Succeeding on tests and assignments will require a thorough understanding of the course material. Students who are not quick learners should consider dropping the course.”

Growth vs. Fixed Mindset

- When instructor has a fixed mindset about students' capacities to succeed:
 - Overall course grades are lower
 - Racial achievement gaps are twice as high
 - Students report more negative experiences in class, and more negative impact of instructor on motivation to succeed
- Instructor mindset is a **stronger predictor of student achievement** than instructor: *level of teaching experience, tenure status, age, gender, race/ethnicity*

Canning, Muenks, Green & Murphy, 2019



EXAMPLE OF ADVERSITY
 Student receives a poor grade on an assignment or exam

If the student believes her intelligence is fixed

MINDSET

If the student believes her intelligence can grow

"I am stupid at this. I shouldn't even bother trying."

PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

"I haven't mastered this yet. I need to work harder or try a new approach."

Decreased effort

BEHAVIORAL RESPONSE

Increased effort and use of positive learning strategies

Diminished academic engagement and performance

ACADEMIC OUTCOME

Increased academic engagement and performance



Negative outcomes reinforce fixed mindset



Positive outcomes reinforce growth mindset

Growth Mindset

Does your syllabus communicate that you have a “growth mindset” rather than a “fixed mindset” about each students’ abilities?

An instructor growth mindset conveys that the instructor believes that students are capable of growing; that abilities are not fixed. Principally, with time, effort and the right strategies for success, every student can succeed. Also, it is imperative that students reach out for help when they are struggling.

Common Misconceptions About Growth Mindset

It does not mean that the instructor believes that every student is equally prepared for a given course, or that every student can grow their ability enough in a single term to succeed in a given course.

It does not mean the instructor believes that success is merely a matter of effort. Encouraging students to “try harder” will not promote growth unless they have the preparation, strategies, or resources they need for the effort to pay off. This can exacerbate some of the very issues that growth mindset is intended to address.

Growth mindset is also not just about being nice or having low standards. Classes that take a growth mindset approach are challenging, because challenges are part of how students grow.

A growth mindset means that the instructor does not regard struggling with the material as a sign that the student is incapable.

Struggling often just conveys needing to review material more closely or possibly returning to more foundational classes.

Does the syllabus communicate that utilizing academic resources is a standard part of succeeding? Does the syllabus provide flexible opportunities for accessing support?



What Does This Look Like?

Sometimes, a simple wording change can make academic resources feel more accessible to students.

EX: Rephrasing “office hours” as “student drop-in hours” is a small change that more clearly conveys that students are welcome during that time.

EX: “UT provides services designed to help students achieve the academic success they are truly capable of. Most students access them at some point in pursuit of their degree. I have provided a list of the academic support offices offered below.”

SYLLABUS WORK: GROWTH MINDSET

Instructor Pair & Share – Take turns discussing:

1. What statements or policies are you thinking of adding or revising in your syllabus to message your belief that students can succeed in the course and in college (i.e., your growth mindset about their abilities)?
2. What statements or policies are you thinking of adding or revising to message resources and support for students facing challenges in the course?

WRAPPING UP AND NEXT STEPS

- What do you want to learn more about?
- Some suggested next steps:
 - Fully review your syllabus for language attuned to belonging and growth mindset
 - Share what you learned with colleagues

Thank you!

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Please use the
[University Teaching Center](#)
webpage for resources and links
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Events!