

CAWG SNAPSHOT OF STUDENT EXPERIENCES

SELECTING COURSES AND USING SYLLABI

University of Maryland

2016 – Issue 1, AUGUST

This Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG) Snapshot reports findings on junior and senior students' perceptions syllabi and how they select courses. The data included represent results from the University of Maryland Student Survey (UMSS), an annual survey administered by the CAWG Assessing Campus Experiences Subgroup (ACES). Respondents complete the survey during the spring semester in Professional Writing courses.

During the spring 2015 semester, out of 3,272 juniors and seniors enrolled in spring semester Professional Writing courses 2,201 (67%) completed the survey.

Race/Ethnicity:

- 53% were White:U.S.
- 16% were Asian:U.S.
- 13% were Black or African American:U.S.
- 8% were Hispanic:U.S.
- 4% were Foreign
- 4% were Two or More Races:U.S.
- 2% were Unknown:U.S.
- <1% were classified as Other, including American Indian and Hawaiian:U.S.

Gender:

- 53% were male
- 47% were female.

GPA:

- 31% had a GPA of 3.50 – 4.00 (the range for which students earn honors)
- 63% had a GPA of 2.30-3.49
- 6% had a GPA of 0.00 – 2.29 (the range for which students are flagged for advising intervention)

The demographic breakdown of respondents is representative of the university as a whole. The data below represent only the responses of survey respondents, not all UMD students; therefore, use caution when generalizing. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Syllabus Resources

In September 2012, the Student Government Association (SGA) passed a bill urging the University Senate to establish a policy to make syllabi available during class registration and the Senate voted in favor. In February 2016, the SGA passed a resolution urging the University to implement the syllabus bill passed earlier. Source: <http://www.dbknews.com/2016/02/16/umd-sga-passes-syllabus-resolution-to-revive-university-senate-bill/>

The University is committed to finding a solution and is actively working to provide one that meets these requirements. CAWG surveyed students on these questions to understand the value of syllabi and their experiences selecting courses. Note that students responded to these questions based on their current expectations and uses of resources, but these responses may change depending on increased availability of syllabi.

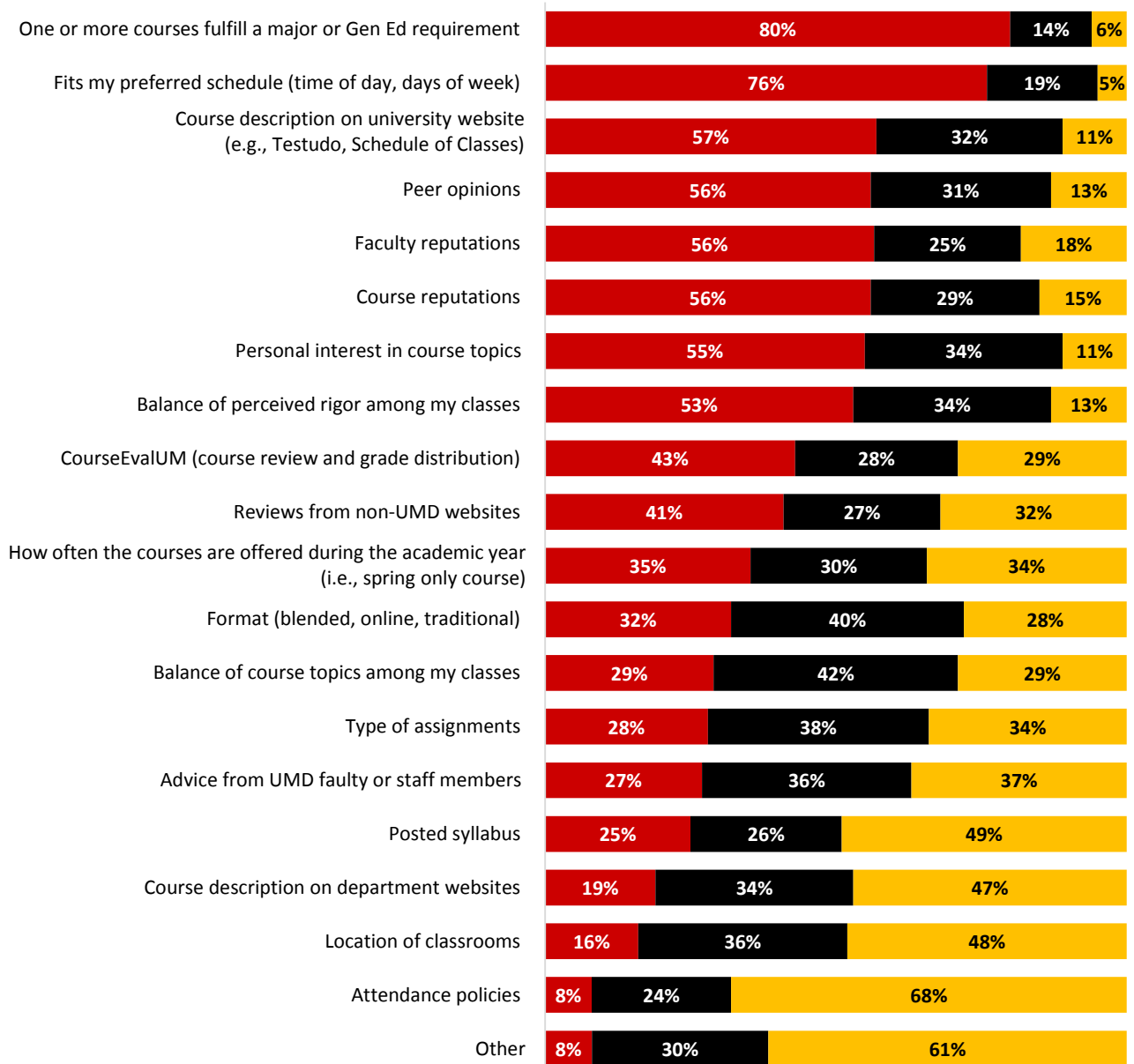
The Faculty Handbook and the Teaching and Learning Transformation Center (TLTC) have resources for creating syllabi:

- Syllabus Guidelines: <https://faculty.umd.edu/teach/syllabus.html>
- Useful Information for Preparing the Syllabus: <https://faculty.umd.edu/teach/useful.html>
- Beyond the Guidelines – Writing a Great Syllabus: <http://tltc.umd.edu/beyond-guidelines-writing-great-syllabus>

Selecting Courses

To what degree did you consider the following factors in choosing your courses this semester?

■ A major factor ■ A minor factor ■ Not a factor

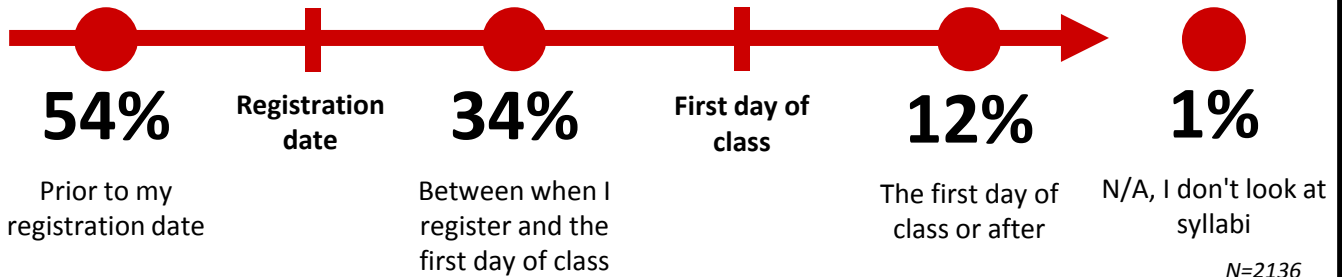


N=2183-2196, except "Other" where N=1583

- Logistical considerations are major factors – fulfilling a major or Gen Ed requirement (80%) and fitting a preferred schedule (76%).
- Course descriptions are more of a factor when posted on the university website than when posted on a departmental website (57% compared to 19%).
- Reputations and opinions (perception, faculty reputation, course reputation, reviews and evaluations) are more often a major factor in choosing classes than actual class design (format, posted syllabus, attendance policies, types of assignments).
- Fewer respondents cite location of classes and attendance policy as major factors in choosing courses.

Using Syllabi

Ideally, when would you FIRST like to see a syllabus? Select only one.



N=2136

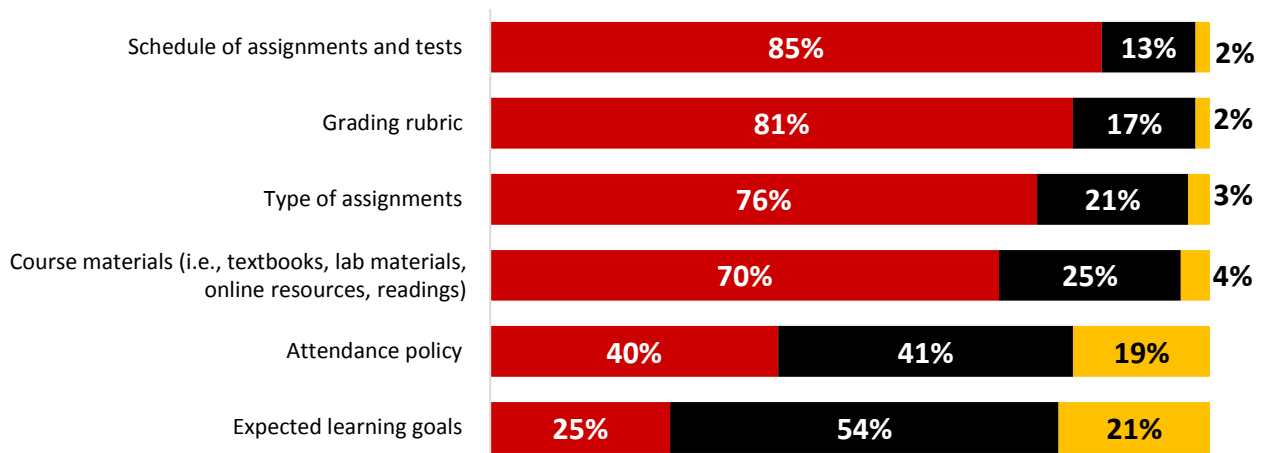
- The majority (54%) of respondents would like to see the syllabus prior to registration, and 88% want to see the syllabus prior to the first day of class.

Questions to consider: Why would 54% say that they want to see a syllabus prior to their registration date but only 25% consider a posted syllabus a major factor when choosing courses? How might these numbers change if all syllabi were made available earlier?



How valuable are the following elements of a syllabus?

■ Very valuable ■ Somewhat valuable ■ Not at all valuable



N=2182-2192

- Course design (schedule, grading rubric, assignments, course materials) is very valuable to more respondents than expected learning goals (25%).



The Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG) regularly gathers and exchanges information about UMD student and alumni experiences. The group is charged with developing a campus "Culture of Evidence" in which data and assessment can inform campus decision making. Its three subgroups focus on freshman experiences, junior/senior student experiences, and retention and completion efforts. For more information, to view past reports, or to join a CAWG subgroup, please visit www.umd.edu/cawg.