



# Memo - Syllabus Uniformization

## TiSEM Faculty Council, Term 2020-2021, Cycle 2

**Memo from:** Student Party ECCO

**Memo to:** Faculty Council of Tilburg School of Economics and Management

**Date:** November 5, 2020

### Introduction

Course syllabi can be of significant added value to students. A clear and complete course syllabus offers the student guidance throughout the complete duration of a course. On the other hand, an unclear or incomplete syllabus can yield unnecessary indistinctness and stress amongst students. In conversations we had with students in the past period, it unfortunately came to our attention that not all course coordinators are able to design and write a good syllabus for their course. The students that we have spoken to have faced several problems in the past. Roughly speaking, they can be divided into three types of issues, which are outlined directly below.

First, some courses do not have a clear syllabus document (in Word or PDF format) or no syllabus at all. In our view, especially the latter is a shame. Not providing students with a syllabus is simply missing out on a good, if not the best, opportunity to provide them with information that helps to prepare for -and participate in the course. Second, some syllabi are not clearly written or do not have a clear structure, which causes confusion amongst students, especially first-year students. Lastly, it seems to be unclear to course coordinators what could, or should, be included in a syllabus, resulting in big differences from course to course. Because of this, students feel uninformed and not totally prepared for the courses with a less complete syllabus, which results in unnecessary extra questions to the instructors or course coordinator.

The remainder of this memo will first discuss what we see as the solution to this problem. Second, it will highlight the benefits that this solution brings, after which an additional opportunity that comes with uniforming the course syllabi will be discussed, namely an additional section that will touch upon TEP. Consequently, the specific actions we propose are outlined. Lastly, some brief notes on the appendices to this memo can be found.

### Solution

Student Party ECCO sees a **standardized syllabus for each individual program**, initiated by the Academic Director as the solution to the problems described earlier in this memo.

If the Academic Director provides all course coordinators with a format that they can use to either rewrite or develop the syllabus for their course, we are confident that the different problems outlined above will be resolved. Course coordinators that have not developed a syllabus yet would now only have to fill in the format, which lowers the barrier to create a syllabus at all. If all course coordinators that already developed a syllabus in the past would undertake the effort to reshape their current syllabus into the provided format as well, this would lead to a situation in which all students of a specific program are provided with only

one type of syllabus throughout their study. Assuming that the provided format is clear and complete, confusion amongst students would be resolved. Lastly, since all syllabi would contain the same information, students feel just as informed for every course, resulting in less stress and less additional questions to instructors/course coordinators throughout the course.

Standardizing the syllabus per program allows to create different formats for the different programs. This is important, since the needed sections might differ from program to program (e.g. a bachelor student might need other (types of) information than a master student).

Examples of what we propose can already be found within the faculty. All courses within the bachelor IBA for instance make use of the same template. Here, it has proven to work very well and responses from both staff members and students have been (very) positive.

## Benefits

1. Students will have a clearer overview of the structure and content of the different courses, resulting in more clarity as for what is expected from them and ultimately in less stress.
2. Students will have less questions to ask throughout the semester if all syllabi are complete and contain the same information, because no information is missing and students do not feel uninformed due to differences between different syllabi. This results in less questions to be answered by instructors/course coordinators.
3. Not only students will benefit from a clear, standardized overview per course. Also for instructors and the academic director, a good syllabus for every course would be of added value. For example, if an academic director receives a question about one of the courses offered within his or her program, he or she would be assured of the fact that a clear overview of this course can be found in an instant.
4. Developing the format is a long-term investment, since it can be used for every course and for multiple years. Besides, the workload for course coordinators would be lowered, since they do not have to think about their syllabus that carefully anymore themselves.

## Additional opportunity - Tilburg Educational Profile (TEP)

Besides improving the study experience of students, a uniform syllabus per program would yield an additional opportunity: including a small section about the Tilburg Educational Profile (hereinafter referred to as TEP) in every course syllabus.

In conversation with students, we have noticed that they are oftentimes not aware of the TEP and what it entails. Uniforming all syllabi of a specific program allows to add a section about the TEP to the template that course coordinators should use. In this section, course coordinators should explain in what way their course fits within the TEP (i.e. in what way does the completion of this course contribute to the development of a student's knowledge, skills and character). Since Tilburg University has been focusing much on developing this Educational Profile and bringing it to the attention of staff and students, we think it is rather regrettable that a lot of the students are not aware of the existence. A section in every syllabus that the student reads would undoubtedly increase the awareness and thereby the added value of the TEP.

The advantages of adding such a section to the templates would be threefold. First, it would force course coordinators and instructors to, at least briefly, think about the TEP and the way in which their course adds value. Second, students will be more aware of the existence of

the TEP, which would in turn make them more conscious of what they are studying and why different courses are important for their development. Third, the accreditation committee that judges the different programs offered at TiSEM will see that the TEP is proactively embedded in the education of our faculty, which would most likely increase their satisfaction.

## Proposed actions

1. Student Party ECCO would **urge the Management Team** to strongly advise each of the Academic Directors to implement a standardized syllabus for all the courses within their respective program.
2. When Academic Directors agree to implement a standardized template for their program, Student Party ECCO would **strongly advise the Management Team** to bring them in touch with an education expert of the faculty that can help to develop the template. We have for instance been in touch with Yvonne de Vries, who indicated that she likes our idea and that she would be willing to think with Academic Directors in such a case.
3. Student Party ECCO would **suggest that the Management Team** advises the Academic Directors, both the ones that already make use of a standardized syllabus and the ones that should still develop and implement such a template, to urge all course coordinators to include a section on the TEP in their syllabus.

## Appendices

Attached to this memo, two appendices can be found. Appendix 1 provides an elaborate list of elements that could potentially be included in a syllabus template. Appendix 2 is the template currently used within the bachelor IBA. This second attachment provides the reader with a clear case example of how our proposal could be operationalized.