

GUIDANCE AND FAQs ON SYLLABUS COURSE REVIEW

For System Policies 08.01 and 12.01

General Overview

Texas A&M University remains committed to delivering a rigorous and high-quality education to our students, preparing our graduates as responsible and engaged citizens ready for successful careers in a global economy. Moreover, we hold strong to our commitment to academic freedom and to academic responsibility. We have hired excellent faculty who are experts, the best in their fields, and we rely on them to bring that expertise to their teaching. Our faculty, instructors and graduate teaching assistants want to be good teachers and provide an excellent education to our students.

The purpose of this memo is to provide general guidance on course content and syllabi regarding recent System policy changes to **08.01 Civil Rights Protections and Compliance** and **12.01 Academic Freedom, Responsibility and Tenure** and to provide more clarity on key terms, timelines, and some frequently asked questions. With the wide variety of courses and subjects at our large and complex university, there undoubtedly will be the need for interpretation for individual situations. Faculty are first directed to seek feedback and advice from their department head and dean. As we continue to receive updates and clarifications from the System, it will be shared quickly with you.

Relevant System Policy Sections

08.01 Civil Rights Protections and Compliance, Section 2.1.b: "...No system academic course will advocate race or gender ideology, or topics related to sexual orientation or gender identity, unless the course and the relevant course materials are approved in advance by the member CEO."

12.01 Academic Freedom, Responsibility and Tenure, Section 1.2 "...but a faculty member will not introduce a controversial matter that has no relation to the classroom subject or teach material that is inconsistent with the approved syllabus for the course..."

Key Definitions

Advocate: To advocate is to support or argue for a cause, policy, or group, or to plead in favor of it¹; when teaching and course materials extend learning objectives in a way that requires students to hold certain beliefs, and/or to ridicule certain beliefs.

Teach: Imparting information or skill so that others may learn; to cause to know something; to cause to know how; to guide the study of; to instruct by precept, example, or experience.¹

Gender Ideology: means a concept that self-assessed gender identity should replace the biological category of sex or that biological sex has less value or legitimacy than self-assessed gender identity.²

Race Ideology: means a concept that attempts to shame a particular race or ethnicity, accuse them of being oppressors in a racial hierarchy or conspiracy, ascribe to them less value as contributors to society and public discourse because of their race or ethnicity, or assign them intrinsic guilt based on the actions of their presumed ancestors or relatives in other areas of the world. This also includes course content that promotes activism on issues related to race or ethnicity, rather than academic instruction.²

1. Merriam Webster Dictionary
2. **08.01 Civil Rights Protections and Compliance**

Classroom Context

The revised policy does not preclude courses from covering topics such as slavery or the civil rights movement in an American history course, covering the Holocaust in a European history course, covering varying definitions and theories regarding gender identity in a course related to gender, or material on same sex relationships in a course on sexuality, as examples. However, race and gender ideology content in any course should have a curricular or professional purpose in the course of that level, be of an appropriate preponderance in the course material, and should be an expected component of such a course by the discipline/profession, and in general terms by a lay person and by the student based on their reading of the title and course description in the catalog.

What the policy does preclude is requiring or encouraging students to hold certain beliefs, particularly regarding gender or race ideology or sexual orientation, or to feel shame for belonging to certain racial or ethnic groups, due to historical practices associated with said groups, such as the treatment of people enslaved. Furthermore, the revised policy precludes the expectation or requirement for students to hold specific positions on policies related to gender or race ideology or sexual orientation. Race and gender ideologies should only be covered in courses of an appropriate level and in appropriate ways, meaning in compliance with the policy and the guiding considerations in this document. Forcing a student to accept/adopt certain beliefs as the way to get a certain grade is considered advocacy.

This is not to say that instructors cannot present concepts and theories that are contrary to what a student believes. One of the things universities need to do is challenge students to be critical thinkers who are able to understand the new and different, as well as understand how that information is used to form or evaluate new theories and ideas. Teaching students to know and understand contrary concepts and facts, rather than it becoming what they believe, is a common part of teaching and is the fine balance teachers and learners need to reach.

It is important to note that students also have a clear understanding of the meaning of advocacy and are able to discern it from teaching. Therefore, this concept will be added to student orientation information as well as other opportunities to build awareness.

Phase I

*Syllabus Review: Spring Semester Courses, 2026 (as feasible)*³

Deans are to work with departments to:

1. Verify the accuracy of the syllabus for each course to be offered in the spring 2026, semester; ensuring the syllabus is current and its content reflects the course description and learning outcomes for the course².
2. Ensure compliance with **Texas Education Code Chapter 51.974 (HB 2504)** for all undergraduate (classroom) courses⁴
3. Reinforce to all instructors that there is to be one and only one official syllabus for each course and section
4. Verify consistency across sections for all multi-section courses. There should be a single course description and set of learning outcomes across sections.

Reviews of course syllabi should be undertaken with the relevant faculty at the department (or equivalent) level with written verification provided to the dean by the department head (or equivalent) upon completion. In the event inconsistencies or course topics or material advocating race or gender ideology or sexual orientation are identified, adjustments should be made or a justification for the appropriateness of the content (i.e., level of the course, professional requirements, etc.) is to be provided for review and approval by the dean, provost, and president, with all reviews and approvals completed by January 28, 2026. See the following questions in this document to guide the review of syllabi and course content. If there are questions about a course, faculty are encouraged to seek guidance from their department head or dean. The Vice Provost for Academic Affairs can also be consulted, if needed.

3. *Given the limited time prior to the spring semester, deans and department heads are asked to use their best judgement in terms of the ordering of syllabi for review. Consideration should be given to completing the review of undergraduate syllabi covering material related to gender or race ideology, or sexual orientation, core curriculum courses, or the syllabi for multi-section courses prior to the beginning of the spring 2026 semester.*
4. *Not including **standard courses**.*

Questions to Guide Syllabi and Course Review

Faculty, department heads and deans are expected to use their best informed judgment in considering the following questions:

1. Is the course material (as summarized on the syllabus) appropriate for the level of the course? For example, undergraduate (core or non-core), graduate, or professional.
2. Are the course materials and topics/examples used consistent with the course description and the learning outcomes?
3. Are the course materials and topics/examples used consistent with the field of study and established body of knowledge in the discipline?
4. If the material addresses race or gender ideology or sexual orientation, is the course required for students to take or do they have alternative choices to meet graduation requirements?
5. Are the topics covered in the course essential for students to be prepared to enter their chosen profession? Would someone in that field need or be expected to know that information?
6. Are there any requirements or grade expectations where a student must adopt or affirm a particular belief, specifically as it pertains to race or gender ideology or sexual orientation?
7. Are the required materials clearly slanted toward a particular ideology in subject, preponderance or presentation?
8. Are topics or readings outlined on the syllabus consistent with students' or the public's expectations of what would be in the course (as per a non-expert's reading of the course description)?

For Multi-Section Courses:

9. Are the course title, course description, and learning outcomes the same across sections of a multi-section course?
10. Who is responsible for ensuring that all sections are being properly coordinated and following the descriptions and learning outcomes?

Phase II

Syllabus Review: Preparation for AY2026-27

Beginning with the fall 2026 semester, the plan is that all course syllabi will be approved and created through Simple Syllabus to ensure compliance with university, System, state and federal mandates. To assist in this endeavor, the soft launch of Simple Syllabus is already ongoing, with the expectation that all course syllabi will be created in Simple Syllabus as of the fall 2026. The full implementation of Simple Syllabus will ensure that public syllabi are the same as those provided to students via an automatic Canvas integration. The curriculum vitae module will also be adopted in Simple Syllabus removing the need for the Howdy system of pdf uploads to comply with Texas Education Code Chapter 51.974 (HB 2504). Syllabi will be able to be reviewed and approved in the Simple Syllabus system.

Provided by the Texas A&M University System

Implementation of 08.01 and 12.01 Changes

Frequently Asked Questions

Should universities implement/improve their course and syllabus review process? Expand +

Should there be variance in what is taught (and approved) based on the level of the course? Expand +

Can faculty teach difficult and historically sensitive subjects, subjects that may evoke strong reactions? Expand +

What does it mean to "advocate?" Expand +

What happens when a class veers off the assigned material? Expand +

What happens if a faculty member chooses to teach material that has been reviewed and ruled inappropriate for that course or level? Expand +

Is the faculty member accountable for student led and student selected projects that may focus on gender ideology, sexual orientation, or gender identity? Expand +

Do these policy changes place limitations on faculty discussions outside of course instruction? Such as conversations between colleagues on matters of public concern? Expand +

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