



“We, Not ‘I’ in Syllabi

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From Sue Frantz:

I’ve been thinking about syllabi as we get ready to slide out of fall and into winter – perhaps even literally given the weather here in the Greater Puget Sound area.

At this past summer’s Stanford Psych One Conference, cultural psychologist Alana Conner spoke of how many students lean more collectivist (students who are working class, for example). [To see which way you lean, [here’s a handy worksheet](#).]. In short, students who are more collectivist do better in an environment that uses collectivist language (e.g., “we” instead of “you”); students who lean more individualistic do fine either way.

Many of our students come from collectivist cultures. In a recent class, I had my students complete the worksheet. Almost all of my students leaned collectivist.

After seeing that presentation, I revised my syllabus to use more “we” language than “you” language as one step toward a more collectivist-friendly course. But does the language in the syllabus really matter?

A recent article in the *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology* journal says it does, at least in terms of perception of faculty and student engagement -- and student engagement has been associated with student success. “Student perceptions of faculty using a learner-centered syllabus were markedly more positive; they rated faculty as more creative, caring, happy, receptive, reliable, and enthusiastic as well as having more student engagement in their class than faculty using a teacher-centered syllabus.” Of course student engagement measured after reading the syllabus is different than student engagement after the first class session. But it seems like starting off with students ready to be engaged is easier than not.

Articles

[Can a Learner-Centered Syllabus Change Students’ Perceptions of Student–Professor Rapport and Master Teacher Behaviors?](#)

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology 2016, Vol. 2, No. 3, 159–168

[Assessing Learner-Centredness Through Course Syllabi.](#)

Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education. Vol. 34, No. 1, February 2009, 115–125