



University of Maine Student Government

Syllabus Bank Report '25

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Background

The University of Maine Student Government, Inc. (UMSG) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit operated by students focused on enhancing campus life through advocacy and resource allocation. This report, prepared by the sitting Academic Affairs Chair Thompson and President Tripp (with advice and assistance from Associate Provost Scott Marzilli), summarizes the research and results of a survey conducted by Vice President for Student Leadership Jacob Chaplin in the Spring of 2023 and contextualizes the project.

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Introduction:

A syllabus bank is an online resource that provides a database of previous course syllabi. Students most often use it during registration to understand how courses are run, learn about a professor's teaching style, and ensure that they want to spend money and time on a class. Currently, students must refer to small paragraph descriptions within the course catalog when selecting classes, which often do not match actual classroom experiences.

Benefits:

For Students...

- 1) Students would have more accurate and comprehensive information when making course selections, which would increase their engagement and commitment to their classes.
- 2) Students can also access course reading lists with highly specific readings on course topics to aid their research or dissertations.

For Faculty...

- 1) It would allow faculty to have more straightforward course information *during advising periods* when advising students.
- 2) Identifying adjacent courses or courses on related topics, across departments.
- 3) Gaining general familiarity with courses offered by colleagues may prove particularly useful for newer faculty members.
- 4) Discovering useful language to inform your own syllabi, such as class attendance or participation policy, assignment structure, inclusivity statements, etc.
- 5) Consulting syllabi or prior version(s) of a course if you take over responsibility for said course.

Drawbacks:

Syllabi represents a unique body of work, research, years of academic specialization, and intellectual property (rightfully so). Therefore, the security of the syllabus bank is very important, and the recommended steps can be taken to prevent these issues from arising...

- 1) Placing the syllabus bank behind the UMaine authorization wall is similar to our email system and brightspace.
- 2) Users must agree to an acceptable use policy (written as a collaboration between UMSG, GSG, Faculty Senate, and the Administration)

Student Opinion

UMSG, facilitated by former VPSL Jacob Chaplin, conducted a survey during the fall of 2023 to gauge student opinion on creating a repository and if it would benefit them. Over 140 students responded, and the results were as follows...

Key reasons for this:

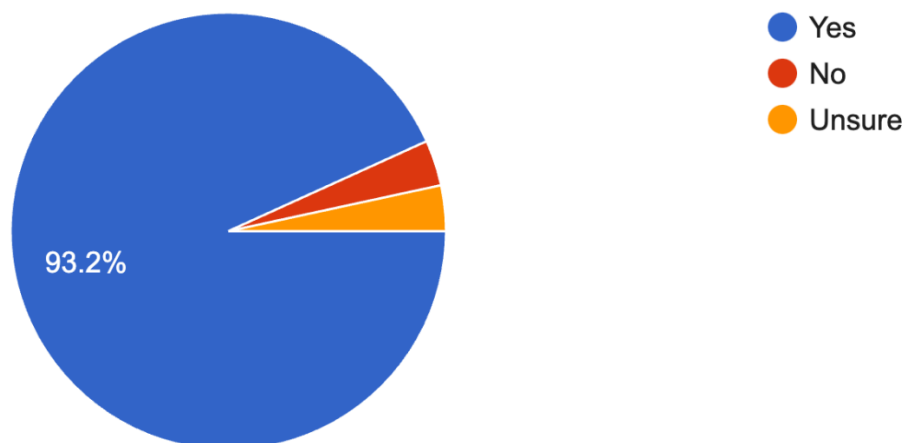
Currently, only students who belong to selective student groups can access syllabus banks that those groups have created internally. This means that many students do not have equal information when selecting courses.

Executive Summary of Survey Results:

A centralized repository of current and past syllabi accessible to UMaine students could benefit students as they plan their academic schedules. A recent survey by UMaine's Student Government found that **93.2% of surveyed students supported the idea**, and the data highlights a critical gap in course selection tools. Currently, students rely on **word of mouth (77%)** and **course catalog descriptions (79%)** and often resort to **waiting for class to start (57%)** to gather information. The current course selection process leads to significant misalignment in expectations, with **37% of students reporting dropping a course after it began** because the syllabus did not match their expectations. A syllabus repository could improve academic planning, transparency, and student success.

Would a syllabus bank benefit you during course registration?

148 responses



Main Categories:

1) Enhanced Academic Transparency

Course catalog descriptions often lack depth, offering only a few sentences with minimal details on workload, grading policies, or assignment types. Students frequently cite discrepancies between catalog descriptions and course content, leading to frustration and unnecessary course drops. As one student observed:

- a) "The course description looks much different than the actual class itself, often not matching up with the description."
- b) "I think it would be beneficial for students to see what a class entails before they sign up for it so they can properly prepare themselves for the semester."

A syllabus repository would allow students to access historical and current syllabi, clarifying course requirements and enabling better course selection and semester-long preparation.

2) Improved Student Outcomes and Retention

The ability to preview syllabi before registration could help students make informed decisions, reducing instances of dropping or withdrawing from courses mid-semester. Dropped courses often result in financial and academic repercussions. A student noted:

- a) "Having to drop or withdraw from a course often presents financial hardship to students as they try to hang on further into the semester."
- b) "Providing syllabi will allow students to best understand what courses they can be comfortable and successful in."

A UMaine syllabi repository could offer insight into grading structures and course rigor. This would enable students to align their course load with their strengths and other academic and non-academic commitments, ultimately enhancing retention and satisfaction.

3) Support for Career and Graduate School Applications

Archived syllabi would provide essential documentation for transfer credits and applications. Employers and graduate schools often request course details to assess content and workload.

- a) "Jobs will want to see past syllabi to understand the workload and work intensity and compare it to what they're expecting."
- b) "It would also be really helpful when applying to grad school if students can't find or access their syllabi anymore."

A UMaine syllabus repository would streamline this process, allowing students to showcase detailed academic records effortlessly.

4) **Broad Institutional Impact and Precedents**

States like Texas and institutions across the U.S. already mandate or provide access to syllabi for transparency. Since 2009, the [Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board](#) has required public institutions to post course syllabi online, highlighting a growing trend toward institutions fostering an informed academic environment. Software packages, such as [Simple Syllabus](#), [Coursedog](#), [CourseLeaf](#), and many others, provide clear and easy pathways for students to research courses during registration, as well as access all syllabi related to their course history, thus facilitating course transfer and career and graduate school applications.

Syllabus Banks at Similar Institutions

Several factors Student Government recognizes are essential to consider when establishing a Syllabus Bank at the University...

- 1) *Faculty Perspective:* We want to respect the faculty members' opinions, concerns, and current agreements with the faculty union.
- 2) *Public University:* Other universities established syllabus banks by state legislation that requires such. Maine does not have such legislation, so building out a policy from the ground up will be required.
- 3) *Flagship Universities:* As the flagship state university, it is essential that we remain competitive in all areas. We must answer the question of whether or not our direct contenders currently have such a resource for their students.

University of Connecticut:

The University of Connecticut is the state's public flagship research university. Its student government passed a resolution that eventually led to the creation of a syllabus repository through its [Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning](#). There are two pathways to access the site: (1) via a University email account, which includes advanced search capabilities (similar to UMaine's single sign-on), and (2) as a Guest for members of the public. The portal can be found at <https://syllabus.uconn.edu/>.

University of Arkansas:

The University of Arkansas is the state's public flagship research university. By request of its student government, too, was a syllabus repository created by its IT department. In this model, only those with University emails can access the syllabi. Additionally, faculty are responsible for their uploading. Their portal can be found at <https://syllabus.uark.edu/>.

University of Georgia:

The University of Georgia is the state's public flagship research university, coincidentally the nation's oldest. Their syllabus repository was made in response to a University policy requiring such. In this model, only those with University emails can access the syllabi. Additionally, faculty are responsible for their uploading. Their portal is located at <https://syllabus.uga.edu/Browse.aspx>.

Syllabus Bank Policy Examples

University of Connecticut:

There appears to be no formal policy governing the infrastructure of UConn's syllabus repository on an administrative level. According to UConn's student body president, the repository is severely underutilized, with only about 50 syllabi uploaded for Spring 2025—largely due to limited awareness among faculty. A recent follow-up resolution was passed to urge the University's academic offices to encourage greater repository use. Yet, no clear guidelines exist for regularly updating or maintaining its content. The relevant student government legislative actions are included at the end of this report.

University of Arkansas:

Once again, there appears to be no formal policy governing the infrastructure of the syllabus bank repository at UArk. Created in 2014 at the request of the Associated Student Government (and developed by IT Services), the system depends on faculty to upload syllabi. Despite a 2023 update request, the site remains painfully underutilized—so much so that many students, including student government students, are unaware it exists, rendering it mostly unusable. While physical records may illuminate its origins, no digital legislation is available. The bank has substantial potential but needs a stronger partnership with the administration or library staff to stay updated and relevant.

University of Georgia:

Academic Affairs Policy Statement No. 13, Syllabus, *Subsection 6* “Departments and programs will make the course syllabus of the most recent offering of each course under each instructor readily available for inspection by students who may wish to enroll in the course. Departments and programs will make these course syllabi available to students on a website accessible by students. Instructors should submit a syllabus via the online syllabus system each semester. The Office of Instruction will make these course syllabi available in the Student Information System.”

Recommendations - President Tripp

- 1) **Collaboration with Stakeholders:** UMSG should seek input and potential support for establishing a Syllabus Bank from three key groups: the Office of the Provost, the Graduate Student Government, and the Faculty Senate. This report, a draft *Act To Urge* resolution, and any other useful supporting documents should be provided to each, and a subsequent meeting with myself and the Academic Affairs Chair should be planned to address questions and concerns. The goal is to receive written support from each body or have them also pass a similar *Act to Urge*.
- 2) **Policy Framework:** A robust policy framework is critical for the syllabus bank's long-term success. This framework should define clear responsibilities for all parties involved, *be created collaboratively with all relevant stakeholders*, and address key areas such as:
 - a) Will it be Faculty members or Admin Assistants that will be responsible for uploading and updating the database?
 - b) A university policy that is fundamental to ensuring a syllabus repository doesn't become irrelevant, like at peer institutions, is needed.
 - c) Where will the site itself be housed? The library website? University department?The policy should incorporate flexibility, allowing faculty to request exemptions in special cases while ensuring wide participation. Drawing on successful models from institutions like the University of Georgia, this policy should mandate regular updates and provide clear guidelines for syllabus submission, access, and maintenance.
- 3) **Technology Implementation and Accessibility:** The syllabus bank's success will rely on its security, user-friendliness, and accessibility for all. The platform should integrate with UMaine systems and meet accessibility standards to ensure usability for those requiring assistive technologies. While commercial options like [Simple Syllabus](#) or [CourseLeaf](#) offer features such as searchable databases and single sign-on, UMaine's IT team is capable of creating a custom platform, as shown by UMSG's collaboration with the library on a [mock repository](#) using SharePoint. Access should be restricted to UMaine students, faculty, and staff to protect intellectual property, with an acceptable use policy ensuring responsible usage. The interface must be intuitive, enabling efficient searches by course, instructor, or semester, with initial efforts focused on integrating existing syllabi.
- 4) **Pilot Program:** A pilot program should be launched to test the syllabus bank within select colleges or departments, ensuring the platform is functional and adaptable. Participating colleges or departments should represent diverse course offerings, including high and low-enrollment courses and graduate-level studies. Metrics such as usage rates,

faculty compliance, and student satisfaction should be tracked, and participant feedback should inform improvements to the platform's design and policies. The pilot program should also include aspects of "how-to" training for faculty and students in the selected areas, ensuring effective utilization. After reviewing the pilot's outcomes and addressing any challenges, the syllabus bank can be expanded to the entire university.

- 5) **Awareness and Training:** A robust awareness and training campaign is necessary to ensure the syllabus bank is utilized effectively. Spittingballing from what I know about administrating, efforts should include presentations at faculty meetings, updates in campus newsletters/emails, and student government social media campaigns targeting students. Faculty should be provided a "how-to" video or training and user guides that simplify the syllabus submission process. For students, demonstrations during orientations and ensuring it is well placed in academic resource pages. Feedback mechanisms should be established early, allowing students and faculty to provide input and suggest improvements so the repository evolves to meet the community's needs.

Conclusion

The establishment of a syllabus bank at the University of Maine has the potential to really improve how students approach their academic planning. By providing a centralized repository of syllabi, the university can address the critical gaps in course selection transparency, improve student satisfaction and retention, and support academic and professional success. With overwhelming student support for this initiative and successful models from peer institutions to draw upon, UMaine is well-positioned to lead this transformative effort.

Key recommendations outlined in this report—including collaboration with stakeholders, a clear policy framework, robust technology implementation, a college-based pilot program, and ongoing awareness campaigns—ensure that the syllabus bank will meet the needs of the UMaine community. As we move forward, it is essential to prioritize accessibility, security, and usability, ensuring the resource is inclusive and effective for all students and faculty. By taking these steps, the University of Maine can set a precedent for academic transparency and equity innovation, benefiting current and future students.

Reference Materials

UConn Intro Resolution:

 A Statement of Position Regarding a University-Wide Syllabus Repository.pdf

UConn Follow-up Resolution:

 A Statement of Position Regarding the University's Syllabus Repository.docx (2) (2).pdf