The Problem
The syllabus is typically the most boring document a student receives throughout the course of a semester. Many times students do not bother even reading it. And who can blame them?!

Due in large part to university administrations and lawyers, instructors have been encouraged to have their syllabi mimick legal documents. We are told to think of syllabi as contracts. Yet, contract has nothing to do with the definition of a syllabus -- “a list of topics or books that will be studied in a course” (Merriam-Webster, 2014). I argue that everything other than content and assessment on syllabi is of tertiary importance.

The Objective
Can We Reinvent the Syllabus so...
1. Course content, assessment, and student learning are emphasized?
2. Students will actually want to read and re-read it?
3. It excites students about the content and semester?
4. It includes all of the (bullish*) legalese necessary to comply with today’s academic environment?
5. It fits on two pages that can be printed back-to-back?
6. Every semester the same template can be used for quick updating and redesign?

THE ORIGINAL CARTOGRAPHY SYLLABUS
Four pages // 2/3 page of wasted space //
1-1/3 pages spent on legalese

THE RESULTS
In Fall 2013 I created three syllabi for different courses using the template shown here. Overall, students expressed excitement at receiving a two-page, full-color syllabus. Moreover, they rarely forgot where they put it or what it looked like if they needed to refer to it. Numerous students told me they “loved it” when they first saw it; this is certainly something that I have never heard about my syllabi before!

Overall, I found that the redesigned syllabi set the tone of the course early, resulted in more engaged learning throughout the semester, and doubled as course propaganda.

To download this poster and/or the InDesign Template, visit: www.ian.muehlenhaus.com/syllabus

*The term “bullish” is being used here sarcastically. All legalese necessary to comply with today’s academic environment is italicized.