Creative Use of the Syllabus

Some Ideas…

1. Make reading the syllabus a part of an in-class or reading assignment.
   a. Give a small prize for the first student to get to and follow a specific set of directions (example- “Put a star next to this scheduled assignment.”)
   b. Include hidden messages or interesting trivia to engage the reader more
   c. Ask students to write their own course objectives before discussing the syllabus in class- collect and consider their responses
2. Allow students to decide some elements of the assignments or make some assignments optional.
3. Incorporate students’ interests and ideas into the syllabus throughout the semester.
4. Create rubrics with the students- help them to think about which course objectives or assignments are important and why it is imperative that they learn these.

An Example of Creative Use of the Syllabus:

Sociology Course- Collaborative Construction of Assignments by Suzanne S. Hudd, a sociology professor at Quinnipiac University (Source: Studies in Higher Education Vol. 31 No.3, pp.341-356)

Hudd asked students to make up their own assignments in her introductory course in sociology. Her schedule for the first three days of class:

1st Day of Class
1. Discuss her teaching philosophy- emphasis on group, collaborative exercises.
2. Give a mini lecture on “group decision-making techniques.”
3. Distribute “skeleton” syllabus- weekly topics, supplemental reading, etc. but list no assignments.
4. Tell students that their first task is to create assignments independently and be prepared to present them during the next class.

2nd Day of Class
1. Divide students into small groups and ask each group to come to a consensus, using the “group decision-making techniques” that were discussed earlier, on which assignments should be included in the syllabus.
2. Provide a refresher or overview of the decision-making techniques.
3. Ask groups to present their consensuses to the rest of the class.
4. Hold a class discussion on the assignments that were presented.

3rd Day of Class
1. Distribute the full/revised syllabus and review it with the class