CONTINUING TO SUPPORT OUR STUDENTS THROUGHOUT FALL 2020

Endorsed By

Russell Composto, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Education, SEAS
Diana Robertson, Vice Dean, Wharton Undergraduate Division
Paul Sniegowski, Stephen A. Levin Family Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences
Julie Sochalski, Associate Dean for Academic Programs, Penn Nursing
Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Chair, Faculty Senate
Laura Perna, Vice Provost for Faculty
Beth A. Winkelstein, Deputy Provost
Kelly Diaz, President, Graduate and Professional Student Assembly
Carson Eckhard, Chair External, Student Committee on Undergraduate Education
Mercedes Owens, President, Undergraduate Assembly

October 2020

As we enter the latter half of the Fall semester, we write to remind faculty of ways to support our students' wellbeing particularly in classes. These challenging times underscore the need to continually prioritize the wellness of our students while pursuing our educational mission. We remind faculty of the Mutual Commitment to Academic Integrity, Equitable Instruction, Trust, and Respect which encourages empathy, patience, and a renewed joint commitment among faculty and students to uphold our shared University principles and policies.

Additionally, we remind faculty of the recent message from the President and Provost on the importance of supporting student engagement on Election Day. **We strongly encourage faculty to be flexible and accommodating so that students may participate in the election process**. This includes avoiding assignments and exams on that day and making all possible accommodations to ensure that students who may miss class to participate in the election process can do so without penalty. The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) has launched a guide with resources and workshops for faculty on Preparing for and Responding to the Election in 2020.

The following list highlights some of the simplest and most impactful ways that faculty can support student wellness in the virtual classroom. CTL offers additional details on many of the items below in their extensive array of resources, instructional guides, and workshops on teaching online.

Classes

- Explore ways to balance synchronous and asynchronous content in courses. Consider asynchronous engagement instead of synchronous sessions on days or weeks where there are assessments or major assignments. Students value interacting with faculty, but constant synchronous sessions can lead to Zoom fatigue. CTL provides guidance on the best way to utilize both synchronous class times and asynchronous content and engagement.
- Be mindful of the workload in courses as we approach the end of the semester given the increase in content demands, semester schedule, and multiple stressors facing students.
- Use University-supported tools for synchronous class meetings such as Zoom or BlueJeans. CTL provides a guide on selecting the best synchronous tool for your course.

- Be clear about expectations for participation during synchronous meetings; remember that not all students may have access to a quiet space to participate or feel comfortable with their cameras on during live sessions.
- When recording classes, refer to the [Guidance on Recording Classes](#) and best practices for [storing Zoom recordings](#).

Exams and Assignments

- Consider using more frequent, smaller assignments and exams instead of fewer, more high-stakes exams. Frequent, low-stakes assignments can help take some of the grade and performance pressure off of larger assessments such as final exams and help promote more learning. However, these assignments should not increase the overall workload of the course and the timing of changes to course requirements should be considered carefully. CTL offers guidance on [structuring assignments and exams for the online environment](#) including examples of regular, low-stakes online assessments.
- The final exam period remains December 15-December 22. Final exams must be conducted online for all courses being delivered online. The full policy is listed in the [Preliminary Fall 2020 Final Exam Schedule](#). Instructors should hold asynchronous final exams whenever possible; CTL provides [resources and workshops on developing asynchronous final exams](#), including both timed and untimed formats. Any synchronous exams must be held at the time designated on the Final Exam Schedule and students residing in other time zones must be provided accommodations for synchronous timed exams.

Communication

- Clearly communicate expectations and deadlines to students in the syllabus.
- Keep your Canvas site up to date and organized. Disorganized Canvas sites make it difficult for students to find information and keep up with the course. CTL is offering a [faculty discussion](#) and [guide on how to organize content in Canvas](#). If you need a Canvas refresher, visit [Getting Started in Canvas](#).
- If you offer suggested or supplemental readings and/or assignments, clarify what is required versus what is optional. This helps students best prioritize their time.
- Hold virtual office hours or other opportunities to connect outside of synchronous class time.
- Consider ways to [create community in your course](#), including helping to set up study groups for students in your course. CTL offers an upcoming [workshop on community building](#).
- Remind students that our many support resources are still operating and available remotely - [Tutoring Services](#), [Weingarten Learning Resources Center](#), [Student Disabilities Services](#), [The Marks Family Center for Excellence in Writing](#), [CAPS](#), [Student Health Service](#), [Penn First Plus](#), [the Cultural Centers](#), [Career Services](#), and the [Center for Undergraduate Research and Fellowships](#). Link to these resources on your syllabus or in your Canvas site.