



January 26, 2024

Dear Colleagues,

I write as we look forward to the beginning of the spring semester next week. I hope you had restful winter holidays and that 2024 is treating you and yours very well to date.

Although I send a teaching memo every fall, I write to update it and to invite faculty and instructors joining us for the first time this spring to read along. The memo includes some notes on current trends and issues in undergraduate teaching that might help you navigate your first course meetings of the semester. And given that COVID continues to be in the air (literally), if you need our policies around the illness, they can be found [here](#). I also encourage you to review the “Conduct of Courses” memo sent along with this note.

Trends in Undergraduate Student Learning for the Spring:

- Since the pandemic, some students continue to seem less prepared to overcome obstacles and ask for help. If you notice these trends in your classes, invite your students to take advantage of the academic supports mentioned below, and write to me and my staff with your observations. Also underline that you’re available to your students in office hours and invite them to come see you. Our safety nets at Princeton are strong, but faculty and instructors typically initiate our concern for student progress. I urge you to use our Academic Early Alert (AEA) website to let our residential college staff know about students who are struggling. You can access the site [here](#).
- As faculty, you shouldn’t feel you have to adjudicate or ameliorate alone the increasing number of student mental health challenges we’re seeing on campus, especially when student requests concern coursework extensions or class absences that fall beyond the scope of your course policy. Refer students to [Counseling and Psychological Services](#), as well as to our [residential college staff](#), who are best positioned to provide or direct students to appropriate support.
- We also see an upward trend in requests for academic accommodations, including special arrangements for examinations and assignment extensions. All requests for accommodations must be approved by the [Office of Disability Services](#) (ODS). Please don’t approve any student request unless you’re formally notified of ODS’s accommodation approval for a documented disability. Without ODS authorization, all students are expected to meet course requirements for attendance, participation, and assessment. If you’re struggling to manage multiple (or too many) approved learning



accommodations, especially in a single course, please reach out to ODS or my office for guidance.

- Students will seek your guidance on whether you permit generative AI tools in your courses and on how to use them effectively and ethically. The Fall 2023 memo available [here](#) outlines our policies to date. You might consult the [pedagogical resources and syllabus statements](#) the McGraw Center has curated, as well as this [repository of classroom policies for generative AI tools](#). Do also consider scheduling [a teaching consultation with McGraw](#) to discuss whether or how to incorporate generative AI tools into your assignments.

Helpful advice:

- **Course syllabi.** The University expects that every undergraduate course provide a syllabus, which represents an agreement between faculty and students. A syllabus allows students to understand your vision for the course and your expectations for their work. Although some adjustments to a syllabus will be inevitable due to the flow and rhythm of an individual class, faculty should not make major changes to large assignment due dates in ways that inhibit students' ability to plan ahead, given their obligations across multiple courses.
- **Class expectations.** Attendance and class participation remain the cornerstone of our residential liberal arts teaching model. Encourage your students to adhere to your guidelines and to take them seriously. I encourage you to state your expectations for class attendance and participation on your course syllabus and articulate any penalties for absences or lack of adequate engagement at your first several class meetings. The College's policy on attendance is [here](#). Sample syllabus language for communicating course policies is available [from the McGraw Center](#).
- **Grading policy.** A clearly articulated grading rubric is important to manage students' questions about how you'll assess their learning. Be aware that more and more students dispute what they see as the dissonance between what they think they deserve and the grade they've been given in a course. [Clarifying your expectations](#) in writing will give you a place to start your conversations about their work. Midterms grades can help students measure their progress in your course.
- **Deadlines.** Set expectations for assignment deadlines and end-of-semester work in line with the University regulations governing [Dean's Date \(May 7th\) and the final examination period \(May 10 – 16\)](#). While instructors now have the discretion to authorize a 24-hour extension beyond Dean's Date, equity requires that all requests for lengthier extensions must be approved by the student's residential college dean.
- **Academic support.** Refer undergraduate students to the McGraw Center's tutoring in introductory STEM+ courses, learning consultations (academic coaching), and their

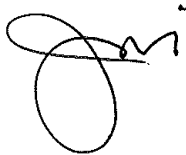
study group “matching” service. McGraw offers workshops on a host of topics, including organization, planning, time management, overcoming procrastination, and academic skills like effective reading and exam prep. McGraw [learning support resources](#) are free and unlimited. As always, you should contact your student’s residential college staff should you have concerns about their academic progress or well-being. A student’s college affiliation can be found on your course roster.

- **Writing support.** The Writing Center offers individual [peer-to-peer conferences](#) to assist students with writing and research projects. Writing Center Fellows can help with any part of the writing process, from brainstorming ideas, developing a thesis, and structuring an argument to revising a draft. Although the Writing Center is not an editing or proofreading service, Fellows can help students learn techniques to improve sentences and check mechanics.
- **Disability accommodations.** Students who need accommodations for any reason (learning, physical, or mental health) must be approved by ODS. Formal, authorized expectations should be sent to you for your records.
- **Mental health and wellbeing.** All students can access Counseling and Psychological Services ([CPS](#)) resources. The [Tiger Well](#) initiative supports students’ well-being.

Finally, it’s fair to say that a host of complex cultural trends are also influencing how faculty teach and how students learn. The war in Israel and Gaza continues, as does the war in the Ukraine. Other geopolitical issues (and the upcoming presidential election) preoccupy many of us and our students. So too do the debates now raging about plagiarism and other important issues in higher education. I encourage you to read President Eisgruber’s incisive thinking on these topics [here](#).

Please let us know what you’re seeing and how you’re managing student expectations, anxieties, and concerns. We’re eager to stage conversations about these trends and how they may affect undergraduate education.

With my best wishes for a successful Spring semester,



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