



August 22, 2023

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome back to the fall semester. I hope the summer treated you very well.

As we approach the beginning of 2023-24, I write with some notes on current trends and issues in undergraduate teaching that might help you navigate your first course meetings of the year. I might say, parenthetically, that this is the first fall teaching memo since 2019 that (thankfully) won't address campus COVID policies. If you need them, they can be found [here](#).

Trends in Undergraduate Student Learning:

- As we continue to see the **effects of pandemic-era learning loss** or knowledge gaps, some departments find that our students—though smart and capable—are placing lower in introductory course sequences, especially in math and STEM fields. In addition, some faculty note increased challenges with student writing and classroom engagement. Since the pandemic, some students 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. We need to hear from you so that we can best help address these issues.
- As you know, we're seeing a **marked uptick in mental health challenges among high school and college-aged students**. As faculty, you shouldn't feel you have to adjudicate or ameliorate these alone, 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 approved learning accommodations, especially in a single course, please reach out to ODS or my office for guidance.



- We expect that **generative AI tools** like ChatGPT will have significant new implications for how students read, write, code, conduct research, and access academic support. Students will seek your guidance on whether you permit generative AI tools in your courses and on how to use them effectively and ethically. A forthcoming memo will soon outline a policy response; in the meantime, please 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.

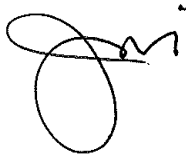
Helpful advice:

- **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 assignments deadlines and end-of-semester work in line with the University regulations governing [Dean's Date \(December 15th\) and the final examination period \(December 16 – 22\)](#). 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. Please let us know what you're seeing and how you're managing student expectations. We're eager to stage conversations about these trends that might be useful across our campus teaching and learning populations.

With my best wishes for a successful semester,



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