



August 23, 2024

Dear Colleagues,

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Teaching memo

Welcome back to the fall semester. I hope you are refreshed from the summer and looking forward to the new academic year.

This letter identifies current issues affecting undergraduate teaching to help you prepare for your first course meetings. (I have also included the Registrar's memo concerning course deadlines, examinations, and grading.) I will begin with some specific matters related to the syllabus and conclude with some resources for students.

The Syllabus

Clarity is incredibly important in enabling students to engage fully and with integrity with the course materials. Although it may run the risk of bulking out the prefatory material on your syllabus, you may want to explicitly address several topics. Sample syllabus policy language is available [from the McGraw Center](#). Some matters of particular note:

- **Class expectations.** State your expectations for class attendance and participation on your course syllabus and then reinforce them, and any penalties for absences or lack of engagement, in your early class meetings. The College's policy on attendance is [here](#).
- **Grading policy.** Students are sensitive to perceived discrepancies between the grades they receive and what they believe they deserve. [Clarifying the course's grading policy](#) and standards in writing and applying them consistently across all graders (if there are several instructors) will assist in setting expectations. Midterm grades, although only required for 100–200 level courses, are useful for students in all courses.
- **Deadlines.** Set your deadlines for end-of-semester work in line with the University regulations governing [Dean's Date \(December 13\) and the final examination period \(December 14–20\)](#). 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 or assistant dean for studies.
- **Generative AI.** Generative AI tools like ChatGPT have already had significant implications for how students read, write, code, and research. Incoming first-years may have already adapted to a very different level of permissiveness concerning its use than those that obtain in your course. I urge all faculty to *clearly and unambiguously* state on the syllabus what is and is not permitted in your course. [Rights, Rules, and Responsibilities](#) has been revised to account for recent developments in the technology (Section 2.4.6), and I recommend you read that section. If you would like to proscribe



any use, please do so explicitly. In all events, please note that Section 2.4.5 states that “students are prohibited from representing output generated by or derived from generative artificial intelligence (AI) as their own on any work submitted to fulfill an academic requirement.” For more on these issues, please see the [McGraw Center’s resource page](#). Do also consider scheduling [a teaching consultation with McGraw](#) to discuss whether or how to incorporate generative AI tools into your assignments.

- **Collaboration.** Please also be as explicit and unambiguous as possible about your course policy on student collaboration, whether with students currently taking the class or with students who have taken it previously.

Resources for Students

- **Mental health challenges.** We are all aware of the marked uptick in mental health challenges among college-aged students. As faculty, you do not have to assess or ameliorate these alone, especially when student requests extend beyond the scope of your course policies. Refer students to [Counseling and Psychological Services](#), as well as to their [residential college staff](#), who can provide or direct students to appropriate support.
- **Academic accommodations.** These have also been on the rise. The [Office of Disability Services](#) (ODS) must approve all requests for accommodations. Please do not act on any student request unless you have been formally notified of ODS’s approval for a documented disability. If you have difficulty managing multiple approved accommodations, or if you believe an approved accommodation is incompatible with your course, please reach out to ODS or my office for guidance.
- **Academic support.** Be open with your students about the rigors of academic programs at Princeton and do encourage them to seek help. Refer undergraduate students to the McGraw Center’s free [learning support resources](#), including tutoring in introductory STEM+ courses, learning consultations, and their study group “matching” service. McGraw also offers workshops on organization, time management, overcoming procrastination, and effective reading and exam prep, to name a few. The Writing Center offers individual [peer-to-peer conferences](#) to assist students with writing and research projects. Please contact your student’s residential college staff, using the Academic Early Alert [website](#), with concerns about their academic progress or well-being.

I recognize this is a challenging time for everyone, students and faculty alike, for a host of domestic, international, geopolitical, electoral, economic, and other reasons. If you are noticing new developments in your classrooms, such as changes in student expectations or emergent challenges to your pedagogy, we would be grateful to hear about them.

I wish you the best for a successful semester,



Michael Gordin
Dean of the College