

Report of the Faculty Roles Subcommittee

Professors affect student well-being in many ways. These include decisions about structuring courses, stipulating learning assignments and experiences, managing classroom interactions, engaging in non-classroom meetings with students, creating and managing class policies, grading, coaching and mentoring students, writing letters of recommendation, and determining final course grades. All of these activities potentially affect student well-being, either favorably or unfavorably.

Faculty rightfully incorporate rigor into their instructional activities by setting expectations that challenge students academically, intellectually, and personally. At the same time, course rigor is compatible, as well as synergistic, with demonstrating empathy, understanding, and flexibility in the classroom. These latter characteristics not only contribute to learning; they also recognize the ever-higher demands our students are facing. The world of “college students” has changed over the years. A significant number of our students hold jobs to meet the rising cost of college education. Many also face societal, family, and personal challenges, all while balancing their coursework. Further, students today have developed in a technologically driven educational system. The Internet, not the library, is where many of them initially seek information. In the increasingly complex and technologically driven world of the 21st century, students want delivery of education in a manner that fits their on-demand circumstances.

For the above reasons, we propose the term “faculty showing grace” to reflect our Cardinal principles and a stance we encourage faculty to aspire to achieve with their students. We are a community of care. As such, we focus on the whole student, not just the student’s performance in class assignments. We respect each other’s humanity and dignity—understanding students are often confronted with seemingly lose-lose scenarios when conflicts emerge with work/school/family demands. All the while, we celebrate diversity of thought, perspectives and life experiences—knowing we cannot assume that our students experience the world as we do. Finally, we understand that circumstances change for our students, often unexpectedly, and when they do, we should adapt and exercise flexibility.

In this context, we offer the following student-centered recommendations in order to promote a culture of “faculty showing grace” for the well-being of our students.

Recommendations for Adopting Student-Centered Course Policies

1. Attendance

Faculty should reflect on the extent to which strict attendance policies are required for student learning. Faculty are encouraged to show grace and compassion when students miss class for university-sanctioned activities, health concerns, family emergencies, or work demands. A health care provider note should not be required for absences of less than two weeks. Accommodations may be necessary for students to complete missed work that counts towards the course grade, and students may be held responsible for completing that work.

2. Deadlines for Assignments

Consider flexibility in assignment deadlines. When possible, avoid syllabus language that prohibits extensions for late assignments, if the student's justification for missing the deadline is reasonable. Also, avoid deadlines that might encourage students to work late into the night; midnight deadlines are not helpful or necessary.

3. Satisfactory Completion of Coursework

Show grace when students have a valid reason for not completing work before the semester's end, by a willingness to grant an incomplete grade and by working with students to ensure completion in a timely manner. In some cases, supporting a compassionate withdrawal may be the better option to allow the student to focus on personal challenges.

4. Clarity in syllabus content and course requirements

Our syllabi are academic contracts with students. As such, we should ensure they clearly state our expectations for learning objectives and success in the course. Syllabi should identify available resources for students who need academic assistance for maintaining well-being. We encourage the university to develop standardized support language to embed in course syllabi across all units to support student success.

5. Grading Policies

Faculty should provide students with timely assessments of their work throughout the semester. Communicate clearly about how long grading will take and when feedback will be provided. Post assignment grades regularly to the Blackboard Gradebook. Participate in the university's early warning system to help students assess their academic performance.

In addition to the above recommendations from the Faculty Roles Subcommittee of the Student Well-Being Committee, the Academic Scenario Planning Committee would like to share the following recommendations for teaching this fall:

6. Synchronous and asynchronous expectations in hybrid and online formats

While many faculty favor synchronous delivery of course material, synchronous participation is not always possible for students whose circumstances, including internet access, are subject to change

rapidly. Faculty are encouraged to make sure all course material that is delivered online is available for both synchronous and asynchronous participation by all students.

7. Availability of Course materials

With the new models of learning and teaching that we are all adapting to, faculty are strongly encouraged to record in-person class sessions when possible so that students who are ill or otherwise unable to attend class can be a part of the class experience. To the extent possible, course materials should be available in Blackboard and use of open educational resources as texts should be considered. In particular, required assignments should be available on-line and clearly marked as required.

8. Faculty should also familiarize themselves with the technological tools that will make online materials accessible to all students such as closed captioning, etc.
9. Consider providing a list of resources for student success on your syllabus, both on campus and virtual resources (REACH, Writing Center, Counseling Center (which has relocated to the SAC), Cardinal Cupboard, Student Emergency Fund.
10. Do your best to respond to student emails within 48 hours, since faculty unresponsiveness was a major concern in the Spring.
11. If your hybrid course requires some hands-on, face-to-face experiences, consider frontloading those requirements so that if we are forced to go fully online again this fall, students will have had an opportunity to complete those requirements.
12. Make sure to include the policy regarding face coverings and physical distancing in your syllabus.
13. If you intend to give exams synchronously in a hybrid or online course, please make sure dates are included in your syllabus from the beginning.