August 20, 2020

MEMORANDUM FOR: All Faculty, Deans, Department Chairs, and Program Directors

FROM: Emily McDermott, Interim Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

SUBJECT: Minimum Faculty Responsibilities - PLEASE READ THOROUGHLY

As we prepare for the beginning of a new academic year, I wish to remind you that every faculty member is responsible for conforming to certain basic practices that promote meaningful educational experiences for our students. Most faculty members carry out these practices as a matter of course. I list them here to reaffirm their importance to our students, the faculty, and the university.

OFFICE HOURS
All full-time faculty members must schedule, post, and keep regular office hours. A minimum of three hours per week is required, with additional hours to be offered during peak advising times. I urge faculty to be especially generous of their time during the coming semester of remote operation, as students may be specially in need of advice and counsel about how to succeed in this unfamiliar modality. Part-time faculty members should schedule office hours in proportion to the number of courses taught (e.g., one hour per week for those teaching one course). Additional office hours may be scheduled by appointment.

COURSE SYLLABI
Faculty members are required to provide their department chairs with a syllabus for each course that they teach during the first week of classes. Please see the memorandum on course procedures, appended to this memo, for suggestions about the content of syllabi.

MISSED CLASSES
All planned absences for legitimate professional or personal reasons must be approved in advance by the department chair (or dean or designee in schools and colleges without a departmental structure). In such cases, the instructor is responsible for arranging makeup classes or for providing alternative instructional activities.

When an illness or unforeseen emergency results in the cancellation of a class, the instructor should notify the department chair/dean as soon as possible and arrange for notices to be posted informing students of the cancellation. In the event of an extended absence of the instructor, the chair/dean is responsible for arranging continuing instruction of the course.

FINAL EXAMINATIONS AND SUBMISSION OF GRADES
Faculty members are obligated to restrict the administration of final examinations to the official examination period, which for the fall 2020 semester is Wednesday, December 16 through Monday, December 21, 2020, and for the spring 2021 semester is Monday, May 17 through Friday, May 21, 2020. Faculty members may not, therefore, administer final examinations during the last week of classes or during the study period. Please be reminded, also, that a timely submission of grades is required.
ATTENDANCE AT COMMENCEMENT
Attendance by faculty at Commencement is defined as a minimum faculty responsibility by the FSU collective bargaining agreement, article 15.10. Please arrange summer travel and research plans to accommodate this responsibility and to allow you to celebrate your students fully at this culminating moment of their undergraduate careers. They and their families and friends will appreciate your attendance deeply.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
Students with disabilities must be afforded an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, all postsecondary education programs and activities (including any course, program of study, or activity offered). Rules or policies that would limit students with disabilities from participating fully in a program or activity may not be imposed. Academic standards should not be compromised, but accommodations must be provided to afford qualified students with disabilities an equal-education opportunity. Accommodations are determined by the Ross Center for Disability Services through review of pertinent documentation from qualified medical care providers and consultation with the student. Faculty members should not, however, provide any form of academic accommodations for students with disabilities without approval from the Ross Center for Disability Services. Instead, faculty members should refer students who seek accommodations due to a disability to the Ross Center. Faculty collaboration with the Ross Center is strongly encouraged. If questions or concerns arise about the implementation of reasonable accommodations, please contact the Ross Center at 617-287-7430. Information on faculty responsibilities and rights is available on the Ross Center website (www.rosscenter.umb.edu).

STUDENT ATHLETES: All team sports are suspended for the Fall 2020 term.
As a result of competition schedules, it may be necessary for student-athletes to miss an occasional (or partial) day of class. On the faculty side, instructors are expected to be sensitive to the pressures on students created by competition schedules and to accommodate them in ways that do not disadvantage student-athletes vis-à-vis others in their classes. Aside from absences due to competition, student-athletes are expected to attend all classes. They are also expected to make appropriate arrangements with instructors to make up tests and other assignments missed due to travel.

Thank you for your cooperation in supporting and adhering to these practices. I know that, collectively, the faculty takes its responsibilities very seriously. I view the requirements for holding office hours, distributing course syllabi, meeting all classes, notifying chairs of planned or unplanned absences, making arrangements for missed classes, administering final examinations during the designated examination period only, and attending Commencement as falling under the “minimum assigned duties” referenced in the faculty collective bargaining agreement. I seek the cooperation of department chairs and deans in ensuring that these duties are fulfilled in all instances.

MEMORANDUM ON COURSE OFFERINGS
Each year, an inordinate number of complaints and disputes about grades, evaluations, and course procedures come to department chairs, deans, the Provost’s Office, and the Registrar’s Office. The great majority of those disputes could be avoided if faculty members took note of the minimal guidelines suggested below.

These guidelines suggest possible ways of minimizing some of the confusions and misunderstandings that often lead to grievances. All courses cannot and should not be conducted identically. These guidelines are meant to be helpful. They are suggestions, not prescriptions. They are intended to neither limit faculty’s academic freedom nor to determine course structure and modes of evaluation.

GUIDELINES

1. The syllabus should be a typed Word document to provide easy conversion to alternative format. Faculty can use the document converter tool found at the bottom of all UMass Boston webpages. Should any help be needed to provide an accessible syllabus for a student, please contact the Ross Center for Disability Services. The syllabus should contain the following information:
Try to avoid significant changes in your syllabus as the semester progresses.

2. Since grading and evaluation policies often tend to be a focus of confusion or misunderstanding, take special care to articulate your criteria during class time and invite students to discuss related questions with you early in the course.

3. Avoid further misunderstandings by reminding students of their responsibilities in your course as the semester passes. For instance, remind them that it is their responsibility to take exams at the scheduled times and know the location of their exams, to make alternative arrangements in advance if they have a legitimate reason for not being able to take an exam, and to provide appropriate explanation and documentation if they miss an exam without making prior arrangements. Remind students also of your policies on make-up exams and academic honesty.

4. Announce field trips and other special meetings, preferably in class and in writing. If these require activity on holidays and/or weekends, state this clearly in the syllabus and orally during the add/drop period.

5. Return exams, lab reports, papers, and projects to your students with appropriate feedback in a timely manner. Students have the right to discuss their grades and evaluations with faculty; they should be apprised of your grading policies, be able to see their graded/evaluated work, and allowed, if they seek it, to speak to you directly about your evaluation of their work.

6. Please remember that it is your responsibility to report all instances of academic dishonesty, even if you plan to impose no sanctions, through the Code of Conduct, in order for the university to keep records on recidivism. Keep written records and follow the procedures in the Code scrupulously.

7. Permit me to remind you that our discourse on campus, both toward students and among colleagues, should always be defined by civility.