

**Student/Faculty Workgroup – Fall 2020**  
**Expectations for Spring 2021**  
**rev December 1, 2020**

In response to student and faculty concerns and feedback about the fall 2020 semester, a faculty and student workgroup was formed to create recommendations for spring 2021 and forward. Workgroup members reviewed survey data from the academic affairs survey and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Pulse survey administered to all students. They also represented concerns from their constituent governance group.

The following expectations are a combination of communication practices, policy guidance, and preferred practices. While student and university governance will be asked to adopt these recommendations, individual items may pass through different governance groups as policy or practice guidance. It is critically important for students and faculty to utilize reporting procedures in order to support the successful implementation of these expectations. The reporting process, timelines, and what happens during each step can be found at the following flowchart ([link SGA document here](#)).

As always, all individuals should assume best intent in communication, course design, and behaviors.

### **Shared Understandings**

Both faculty and students expressed the need for communication on standards and expectations for all involved in instruction. Challenges in the pandemic have hit students and faculty differently and common assumptions taken for granted in a face-to-face modality do not necessarily apply to the pandemic environment.

### *Recommendations*

- All instructors conduct regular or at least mid-semester check-ins to support feedback in the course, regardless of modality.
  - Center for Inclusive Teaching and Learning should create a pre-loaded Canvas tile that can be turned on by default.
- Instructors should be consistent and provide as much lead time as possible in assigning work (e.g. providing a week's worth of assignments at one time on a consistent schedule, or not posting an assignment due in a day or two).
- Instructors should not ask for sick notes or proof of illness to provide schedule or modality accommodation. Students should notify faculty as soon as possible if they are ill or quarantined.
- Clear communication and personal empathy are critical during pandemic semesters. Students should recognize that there are academic outcomes that must be met for degree standards and accreditation. Likewise, faculty need to understand that students

may need flexibilities in how academic outcomes are being met due to the economic and life constraints of the pandemic. (Flexibilities could include due dates, accepting late work, asynchronous attendance, etc).

- Departments should conduct training/discussions to norm flexibilities and standards for both faculty and students (CITL facilitation available).
- Departments across academic affairs should have more crisis intervention training to support students in crises.
- Syllabus should have clear language about how to request an extension, expectations for late work, and other pandemic flexibilities.
- Attendance should be allowed again as a graded component, so long as there are reasonable alternatives for illness or unforeseen life circumstances.
- Students should engage in class work as fully as possible, including responding to course-related communications.
- To support new students: mandatory meetings with advisors, using the Canvas calendar to help students, using dates instead of “week 1, week 2”, staff/peer/student group check in on resources for new students, exit surveys each week in classes

### **Workload Easing for Faculty and Students**

Students and faculty felt overwhelmed by their workload. Faculty expressed concerns with the unsustainability of teaching in multiple formats. Students expressed concerns with multiple kinds of “busy work” that felt above and beyond normal course expectations combined with increased responsibilities outside of the classroom. The common theme is that something needs to shift to alleviate concerns.

#### *Recommendations*

- Faculty should incorporate at least one formal check-in for every four weeks in their classes to connect with students on their experiences with the course. Spring break does not count for these days.
- Take pulse/exit survey of students weekly and/or include a question about workload on the mid-course evaluation to see how students are doing, make adjustments as necessary.
  - [Exit surveys](#) are one to three question surveys that prompt self-reflection about course content. In their simplest application, they allow students to share what they understand and what they have questions about.
- The provost should allow faculty to teach the modality the course is listed in. Flexibility should still be created for students with illness or unforeseen life circumstances. Students with life situations that will keep them from attending a class modality should make arrangements ahead of time/beginning of the semester for alternatives.
- Distance Education fee should be used to purchase technology to support faculty who want to use the hyflex or flexible modalities (e.g. OWLS).

- Honorlock use should be carefully examined. Faculty should not use the screen lock feature due to the lack of private spaces for students to take tests.

### **Reporting Processes**

Students expressed challenges in raising concerns about faculty, both in terms of fearing power dynamics and not wanting to get faculty “in trouble.” Faculty expressed a desire to know any student(s) who were having course challenges so that the established processes in place could address concerns. The working group felt we had sufficient confidential and “chain of command” mechanisms, but students didn’t necessarily know about them.

### *Recommendations*

- Continue both “chain of command” and COVID Ask a Question confidential reporting mechanisms.
- University and SGA should communicate the availability of these mechanisms and will direct students to appropriate forms and/or personnel.
  - Communication should reinforce the confidential mechanisms
  - Refine the COVID webpage to include an “academics” section, perhaps using the [University of Iowa Letters and Science page](#) as an example.
  - Syllabus language about reporting concerns should be developed by CITL/Dean of Students.
  - Departmental student handbooks should include information on these mechanisms.
  - A flow chart will be created to help communicate this process to students.
  - University administration will respond to students with the result of their inquiry while keeping all necessary personnel concerns confidential.

### **Canvas Standards**

Students expressed concerns at the wide variance in adoption of Canvas. Students do not wish to impede academic freedom but agreed that standards should be set to ensure strong and predictable communication pathways with students. The recommendations below are intended to set a baseline for which Canvas functions should be used, not to dictate uniform course design.

### *Recommendations*

- Faculty governance should pass the [Guidelines for Online Courses](#) and [Engaging Students Online](#) as standards for online instruction.
  - Faculty governance should also discuss accountability mechanisms for faculty adherence to these standards.
  - A master course template should be made available to faculty to utilize, including to-do lists for assignments, calendar, and weekly modules.

- Students should be informed of these standards through SGA and University communication channels.
- Training on basic Canvas features should be more visible for students and faculty (e.g. notifications, course set-up, course navigation, syllabi translation).

### **Increasing Engagement and Fostering Connections**

Students and faculty both reported challenges with feeling connected to each other (and fellow faculty and students). Both would like to foster closer connections in the classroom.

#### *Recommendations*

- Information technology and CITL should allow for, educate faculty about, and support technologies that foster and ease collaboration and enhance connections and communication (eg. Flipgrid, Padlet).
- Information technology, TLC Tech Tutors, and CITL should educate students about how to use Canvas and online learning tools.
- Students should attend office hours, reach out to faculty when feeling disconnected, and seek connections with their peers in class.
- Faculty should communicate a predictable way for students to get a hold of them for questions or concerns. This could include set office hours, utilizing a meeting scheduler tool (e.g. Bookings, Outlook), or other scheduled availability.
- Students should seek student connections through tools like TLC tutoring groups, Navigate Study Buddies, and small-group class activities.
- Faculty should be responsive to student emails, with a recommended timeline of responding within 24 hours if the email was sent during the work week, and 48 hours if sent on the weekend.
- Students should become familiar with and use all course content in Canvas, including reviewing items in modules beyond To Do list items.
- Students should utilize tools or create a schedule beyond Canvas to organize dates for exams, quizzes, papers, assignments, etc.
- Faculty should facilitate optional, as-needed student to student and faculty to student interaction in asynchronous courses using some of the methods below.
  - Small group recorded Zoom discussions
  - Bi-weekly optional Zoom Q & A
  - Asynchronous video chats
  - Video feedback on work
  - Flexible Zoom office hours
  - Class-driven check-in times
- Faculty should provide opportunities for student to student and student to faculty interaction during synchronous online class meetings using some of the methods below.

Two supporting resources are [Advice to Overcoming Classroom Zoom Fatigue](#) and [The Human Element in Online Learning](#).

- Use breakout rooms
- Allow students to use the Zoom whiteboard and annotations tools
- Encourage student use of nonverbal reaction buttons and chat
- Utilize a “flipped learning model” where students watch a recorded lecture prior to the live class and during class they work in small groups on projects to apply the learning from the lecture

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