**Principles and Policies for Teaching and Learning during the COVID-19 pandemic**

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*This is a draft – suggestions welcome!*

**Suggested principles for endorsement by faculty**

Building on [recommendations from organizations supporting mental health awareness and education for students](https://www.activeminds.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/COVID-19-Position-Statement.pdf), in keeping with [recent arguments](https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2020/07/29/will-virtual-learning-be-better-fall-will-it-be-better-enough?utm_source=Inside+Higher+Ed&utm_campaign=4b92ecb55f-DNU_2020_COPY_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1fcbc04421-4b92ecb55f-197314581&mc_cid=4b92ecb55f&mc_eid=9f3fa7023d) by the director of Every Learner Everywhere (as reported by Doug Lederman in *Inside Higher Ed* [see except below\*]), and consistent with the [recommendations of students](http://digitalpedagogy.haverford.edu/perspectives/lessons-from-students/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank%22%20%5Co%20%22http%3A//digitalpedagogy.haverford.edu/perspectives/lessons-from-students/), we commit to the following principles and practices:

* Creating classroom communities that are inclusive, equitable, and conducive to learning for all students. This entails learning from students about their situations and needs and regularly assessing their wellbeing as well as their academic progress.
* Focusing course design and assignments on students’ strong grasp of main concepts, integrating choice in assignments and windows of time for submitting them rather than requiring that every single assignment be completed by fixed deadlines.
* Providing students with explicit articulations of expectations regarding the course and grading criteria that take into account the variety of circumstances and challenges in which students will be working and offer flexibility as well as clarity.
* Establishing clear policies about student absences that provides non-punitive alternatives for students to complete work should they fall ill or experience challenge related to the current state of the world (not only COVID-19 itself but also the inequities it exacerbates as those intersect with anti-Blackness and other forms of racism).
* Establishing clear policies about extensions and putting grades on hold should students fall ill or experience challenge related to the current state of the world

**Suggested Covid-19-Related Language for Course Syllabi**

In this course, I am committed to creating and supporting a classroom community that is inclusive, equitable, and conducive to learning for all students, as well as sensitive to the specific, unique, and unpredictable challenges we will each and all encounter this term. To this end, I am designing course activities and assignments meant to help you gain and demonstrate understanding of key course content in ways that are flexible and personally meaningful. Our class meetings will include group check-ins and the syllabus includes structured occasions for one on one and small group conferences with me.

If you are unable to attend class or complete an assignment by the due date, I ask that whenever possible you let me know ahead of time and work with me to determine when you will complete the work (from class or assigned). In this situation there will be no grade penalty for late work. If not possible to ask ahead of time, I ask that you keep in communication as immediately as possible so that we can work together to determine a good course of action. I ask students who need more than a one-week extension to talk with both me and with your Dean to arrive at a practical, non-judgmental, and gentle plan for completing the work. Your course grade will be determined holistically and with consideration for your self-assessment, using a process we will co-create as a class. If you wish to shift the course to credit/no credit or to take an incomplete in order to finish work after the semester, I will advocate with you for this.

\* Excerpt from Doug Lederman’s “[Virtual Learning Will Be Better This Fall. Right?](https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2020/07/29/will-virtual-learning-be-better-fall-will-it-be-better-enough?utm_source=Inside+Higher+Ed&utm_campaign=4b92ecb55f-DNU_2020_COPY_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1fcbc04421-4b92ecb55f-197314581&mc_cid=4b92ecb55f&mc_eid=9f3fa7023d" \t "_blank)”

[...Jessica Rowland Williams](https://www.everylearnereverywhere.org/about-us/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), director of Every Learner Everywhere, has a different worry. Her organization focuses on the use of technology to improve learning for first-generation and other students historically underserved by colleges and universities, and she acknowledges that disadvantaged students on balance struggled more than their peers with the shift to remote learning -- given inconsistent access to computers and high-speed internet, greater likelihood of having caregiving or work responsibilities, and lesser access to quiet and comfortable places to study.

That doesn’t, however, mean that online learning is by definition a worse option for those students, as some educators suggest, Williams says. “What we have to do instead is actually design learning experiences for the students that are struggling, that we have not served well in the past.

“If we design a course for students who have internet, and students who didn’t have internet did much worse, it's not those students’ fault – it’s ours,” she says. “Whereas if I told you you need to design a course for students with no internet access, you would design the course very differently. That’s how we need to think.”

That will not be easy work, she says. “We have to acknowledge that we’ve never gotten it right in the hundreds of years we’ve been educating people – we’re certainly not going to in four months this summer … In moving things online, we've essentially digitized the discrimination, all the other things in the classroom” that make first-generation and low-income students and students of color struggle, Williams says.

Undoing that will be a challenge, but also a “fantastic opportunity,” Williams says. Marginalized students most need the sorts of things that all students say they want (and missed this spring) in their virtual learning: one-on-one engagement, clear communication, mentorship, a sense of belonging.

So if “you intentionally design [learning experiences] for the marginalized student, you’re not somehow leaving out the other students,” Williams says, “you’re building something that all students say they want. It starts with listening to your students, not making assumptions about what they need, and finding a way to understand their perspective.”