Academic Guidance for Faculty for Continuing the Semester

PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide some academic guidelines for continuing courses as we make the transition to remote learning. While understanding the need for flexibility, as faculty, we should strive to minimize adjustments to the course and syllabi wherever possible in order to maintain course integrity and to mitigate anxiety among students.

Faculty should test our remote education delivery capabilities during the week of March 23. No formal instruction will take place that week. We expect that all faculty will complete their courses, and that students should not be given the option to complete their courses without fulfilling the requirements.

For more information on continuing courses in a distance learning environment, please see the Instructional Continuity Plan.

For more technical information and resources on distance learning technology, please see the Instructional Continuity Resources site.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES*

No set of rules or regulations can cover every situation, especially when the circumstances may be changing rapidly. So, it is useful to have overarching principles to guide actions. These guiding principles were developed by the Associate Deans of the Colleges.

Be empathetic:
- Recognize that a transition to distance learning may be stressful for everyone involved and students will look to you for guidance.
- Provide reassurance and, most of all, a human “touch.”
- Emphasize that their health and safety come first.
- Focus on keeping students engaged in this new phase of the semester.

Be transparent:
- Communicate early and often with your students (using multiple means: email, Canvas, etc.).
- Be open and honest about your plan moving forward.
- Stress that changes being made are ones that will help them to master the material.
- Set and communicate expectations early.
- Let your students know when and how to reach you.

Respond quickly:
- Stay connected with your students so that you can respond to their concerns quickly.

• Communicate with your students regularly, even though you may not have every aspect of your course redesigned on Day One.
• Provide modified materials to the students in a timely manner.
• Understand that your user interface/hardware/software may be different than your students’ and work to resolve any conflicts quickly.

Be agile:
• Accept that a transition to distance learning may not be smooth.
• Be ready to adapt to what the new environment may bring.
• Let students know when things do not happen as expected and what changes need to be made and why.
• Consider that your students may be in a variety of locations and time zones.
• Understand that students have a range of learning or sensory abilities and select your remote tools in response.

Be creative:
• Work with the Institute and others to provide the best remote learning experience for your students.
• Engage with your colleagues to learn from successes and failures to improve student learning.
• Use these new tools as an opportunity to engage your students in new ways.

SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR FACULTY

• Set expectations: Explain to students that this is a special situation that requires every one of us to work together, and we need and appreciate their flexibility and cooperation. The health and safety of our students, staff and faculty are our priority, and we also take their education seriously. We may need to adjust the assessments, syllabi, and grading metrics, and we will strive to minimize those changes. We need their understanding and flexibility so that we can function as normally as possible under the circumstances.

• Update the syllabus: No instruction will take place the week of March 23. Assessments and homework deadlines previously scheduled for the week of March 23 should be postponed until March 30 or later. We expect a shift to distance learning will require changes to some courses. To the extent possible, minimize changes to the syllabi, but do make reasonable adjustments to suit the new delivery format. Please communicate any changes to syllabi as soon as possible, and explain that other changes may be necessary as the course progresses.

• Be mindful of any changes to the grading criteria: Any changes to the grading criteria can cause significant anxiety among students. Please make every effort to avoid making changes that would affect students adversely. Explain clearly any changes to the grading criteria and why they are necessary.
• **Demonstrate flexibility:** Students may have special situations that they are experiencing (e.g., illness and health concerns, inability to access remote sessions, taking care of children who are not in school, etc.). Please emphasize to them that you will try your best to accommodate their special needs to the extent possible while still maintaining a vibrant learning environment. Solicit their feedback and try to respond to student concerns.

• **Carefully consider course format and synchronous meeting times:** Should you choose to teach your course synchronously, please offer the class remotely during the regularly scheduled class time, as this minimizes conflicts with other courses. In addition, some course formats may involve group-based work that require synchronous instruction. Please be mindful that some students may experience challenges with accessing courses remotely at their regularly scheduled class time (e.g., different time zone). Please demonstrate flexibility and consider accommodations that will allow all students to actively engage in the course. If you teach a course with a supervised lab or studio component and have questions regarding how to adapt the course format to a distance learning environment, please consult your unit administrators for additional guidance.

• **Communicate with students:** Perhaps the most important action you can take to help your students succeed during this stressful time is to stay in touch. By emphasizing communications, whether by email or the Canvas Announcement tool, you are letting your students know you are available to them and care about their academic and personal well-being. Send email to students through Canvas or through Outlook and post important messages using the Canvas Announcement tool so that they are always available in a single location.

• **Provide office hours:** If you normally provide dedicated times for live one-on-one or small group discussions outside class time, these sessions should continue with distance learning. The same web conferencing tools (e.g., BlueJeans and WebEx) allow for you to continue to provide this experience to your students at predefined times.

• **Work closely with your GTAs:** If you have a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) assigned to the class, the student should continue to work the hours originally agreed upon and be paid for those hours, unless circumstances no longer allow the student to do so. However, those circumstances should be rare, and you should consult with GT HR or your HR partner before taking action that results in the GTA not being paid. GTAs need to be available to work with their faculty the week of March 23 to prepare in case there is a shift to distance learning after March 29. GTAs also need to be available thereafter while delivering this instruction. The GTA may be helpful in adapting and completing the course (e.g., setting up the course, using the technology, grading, and monitoring discussion forums).

• **Carefully consider exams:** Exams may comprise a significant portion of the overall course grade, and changes to exam format and timing can cause anxiety for students. There is no electronic proctoring currently available, and you should consider exam format changes
that best fit your course. For example, exams may be take-home (i.e., open notes and open book) or administered online as timed or untimed assessments using Canvas (i.e., multiple choice and/or short answers). If your exam requires students to write mathematical symbols and formulas, you may ask them to download the exam, print it out and then scan and upload their answers. Be sure to communicate these changes in exam format and timing to students so that expectations are clear. You should remind the students about the Georgia Tech honor code.

- **Carefully consider a final assessment**: If your course includes a final assessment (e.g., final exam or project), consider what modifications may be needed for successful completion of the course. You may consider replacing the final exam with an alternate assessment (e.g., paper, project, online or take-home exam). You may also consider keeping a final exam with modifications to the exam format. If you hold a final exam, please follow the published final exam schedule, as this spreads the exams out for students. Be sure to communicate any changes in the final assessment to students so that expectations are clear.

- **Submit grades on time**: Please submit all grades on time. This is important so that students can graduate and/or complete their courses on time.

- **Be mindful about giving incompletes**: Incompletes should not be given to large groups of students due to these circumstances alone, but be mindful of students whose health or living conditions may be seriously impacted by these circumstances.