



January 13, 2022

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

FROM: Joseph B. Berger, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

SUBJECT: Minimum Faculty Responsibilities - PLEASE READ THOROUGHLY
Attachment Included as Word doc: Recommended Syllabus Language

We continue to work together in challenging conditions that result from the ongoing development of the COVID-19 pandemic. We remain mindful that each of us has important individual and collective responsibilities to protect the physical, mental, emotional, and social health and well-being of our community. UMass Boston has been a demonstrated leader in promoting health and well-being throughout the pandemic, and we remain dedicated to these commitments. Thus, as we move into the second half of the academic year, I wish to remind you that every faculty member is responsible for contributing to the health and wellbeing of our students in addition to fulfilling agreed-upon basic and best practices that promote meaningful educational experiences for students. To help us all have up-to-date information about these practices and our shared commitments to them, I am providing a summary of these 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 offered during peak advising times. I urge faculty to be especially generous of their time during the coming semester as we navigate the dynamic public health situation, as students may be specially in need of advice and counsel about how to succeed in these uncertain times with a wider range of modalities being utilized and with the chance that we may need to shift for short periods to the remote modality of instruction should the COVID-19 situation require we do so. 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. Faculty may hold virtual office hours for the 2021-22 academic year as long as the students have written instructions that are available throughout the semester about scheduling and attending virtual scheduled office hours.

COURSE SYLLABI

Faculty members are required to provide their department chairs, during the first week of classes, with a syllabus for each course that they are teaching this semester.

CLASS INSTRUCTIONAL MODE

All class sections for the Spring 2022 semester have been scheduled, approved, and listed on WISER to be offered via the most appropriate instructional mode – in-person, hybrid, BeaconFlex, remote, or online. The instructional mode of a class section may not be changed without approval of the department chair, dean, and provost.

MISSED CLASSES

Planned Absences: All planned absences by instructors 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 make-up classes or providing alternative instructional activities.

Unplanned Absences: In addition to unplanned absences that occurred pre-pandemic (e.g., medical procedures), there continue to be emerging situations regarding the emergence and spread of COVID-19 variants and that this may change how we must respond so that we holistically promote health and safety. For example, anticipated events include that an instructor may contract COVID-19 or be a close contact and may not be able to teach a class, or too many students need to miss class or cannot attend a face-to-face class meeting for similar reasons. However, in these situations, we must be equally as vigilant about our students’ learning. Based on consultative work with deans, department chairs, and graduate program directors, the following framework guides how we will be advocates for both community health *and* quality learning when such situations inevitably arise.

As a matter of practice, we expect that the following will be attended to diligently when in-person learning cannot safely proceed for a short period of time (see below for decision-making authority that depends on duration of the short period of time):

- The instructor communicates the potential impact to students and informs them that a careful plan to continue instruction will be implemented to minimize disruption to students’ learning;
- The instructor arranges for a contingent learning path – a well-defined plan is needed that identifies how the contact hours will be covered for the impacted class session(s), including identifying an alternate instructor when necessary;
- The instructor coordinates implementation of the plan in consultation with the department chair – for the majority of classes which are face-to-face (F2F), this includes identifying a point person who goes to the assigned F2F classroom as a resource to help ensure that students who do show up have all the information they need. If the class is proceeding remotely, students who are in the F2F classroom can join remotely while they are in the classroom.

Departments and faculty are strongly advised to consider in advance how to enact a contingent learning plan that is most appropriate for their courses when such situations arise.

Time period of absence from teaching a particular course/section**	Decision-making authority	Required Sequence of Reporting
A week or less	Department Chair	Instructor makes a request to Department Chair. Department Chair conveys details of request to Dean and plans for ensuing communication to students about the instructor’s absence. Instructor or Department Chair (with CC to the other) informs students of continued learning plans that have been provided by the instructor. Dean’s Office tracks approved requests with weekly reporting to the Provost’s Office.
Up to two weeks	Dean’s Office	Same as above, except that Provost’s Office should be informed as soon as such a request is approved in order coordinate with the Registrar’s Office, who will place information about the temporary change in WISER for students. A contingency plan must be developed and provided to the Provost’s Office in the event that the instructor does not return to F2F at the end of the two-week period.
More than two weeks	Provost’s Office	Dean’s Office provides the Provost’s Office with the anticipated dates of absence, the learning plan, and contingency arrangements if the instructor’s absence extends for longer than the anticipated absence. Dean and Department Chair ensure that students’ pedagogical needs are being met. Department Chair informs students of continued learning plans (with CC to instructor and forward afterward to Dean and Provost). Provost’s Office will coordinate with the Registrar’s Office.

**While each request will be reviewed on its own merits, if an instructor seeks approval for a 2nd week during the same semester (i.e. weeks are viewed as cumulative, not necessarily consecutive), the decision-making authority becomes the Dean; if more than two weeks, the decision-making authority becomes the Provost’s Office.

Student Absences: We anticipate that the Spring 2022 semester, whether students attend classes in-person or remotely, will continue to have many uncertainties, given the changing nature of COVID-19 and attendant challenges that continue to be exacerbated by the pandemic. Analysis of student absences during the pandemic has taught us that these unavoidable absences are occurring not only due to contracting COVID-19 or being a close contact but also due to caring for family members who are impacted by COVID-19, childcare closures, and mental health challenges that are amplified by both COVID-19 and ongoing systemic racism.

In general, when students are absent for extended periods, including when they are directed by University Health Services to isolate or quarantine, they should confer directly with their instructors to inform them of the absence and to determine the best course of action, which may include working out arrangements for missed classes and making up coursework, and in some cases might necessitate withdrawing from a course. Staff in the Dean of Students Office and professional advisors in college advising centers and the University Advising Center can help students who have multiple sequential absences work with their instructors and arrange plans for being able to complete their courses.

The excused absence policy (<https://www.umb.edu/registrar/policies/attendance>) was approved and enacted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Clarification regarding excused absences from classes during the pandemic will be separately communicated to the campus prior to the start of the semester; a brief synopsis is here: When a student has excused absences that involve external documentation and/or when students are very ill and would like assistance to communicate the absence and guidance on working with their instructors on making arrangements, there is a mechanism for students to provide a notification of the absence ([Notice of Absence Form](#)), following which all of the student's instructors are notified of the student's absence by staff in the Dean of Students office.

As part of our commitment to be a health-promoting and student-centered university, instructors should accommodate students with excused absences to the greatest extent possible, particularly given the circumstances and the inevitable increase in absences. Instructors can support students by the following actions:

- Plan for student success in courses given the inevitability of student absences. A team of deans and department chairs has begun a crowdsourcing effort for faculty to share ideas and resources for ways to support student success in the event of multiple sequential absences. These resources by faculty for faculty are being made available on the eLearning website.
- Communicate in syllabi what students should do when they are absent (see recommended syllabus sections that are attached as a Word document with this letter).
- When students have multiple sequential absences, instructors are asked to report concerns via the “Student Referral Program” (umb.edu/life_on_campus/dean_of_students/maxientreportingforms) so that Dean of Students staff and professional advisors can follow up with students.

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 Spring 2022 semester is Monday, May 16 through Friday, May 20, 2022. The final examination period for the Spring 2022 semester is posted on the [academic calendar website](#) and exam dates and times will also be posted in WISER for faculty and students. 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. For the spring 2022 semester, the deadline is May 27, 2022. Timeliness of grades submission is particularly essential for students who are graduating, continuing their education at another institution, or updating academic progress status for financial aid eligibility.

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 in their educational paths. 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. The Ross Center for Disability Services determines accommodations by reviewing 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

As a result of competition schedules, it may be necessary for student-athletes to miss an occasional (or partial) day of class. Faculty 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.