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Introduction

The following policies, procedures, and guidelines govern all undergraduate and graduate courses taught within the Department of Psychology. In publishing them the department seeks to:

1. improve the quality and consistency of teaching throughout the department's academic programs.
2. improve communication between faculty and students by providing specific guidelines for course syllabi.
3. avoid practices that interfere with or reduce the effectiveness of teaching, infringe on the rights of students, violate university policy, precipitate student complaints, or otherwise interfere with the smooth operation of the department.
4. provide guidance to new and occasional faculty.
5. establish who must be consulted when deviations from policy are considered.

It should be clear that what follows is not intended to alter instructional methods or philosophies or infringe on academic freedom. These policies are silent on course content, and instructors are encouraged to adopt the teaching style that is best for their particular situation. Otherwise we seek to do things in a uniform manner. An instructor who feels the need to deviate from these policies should seek the approval of the chair and the relevant undergraduate or graduate program director(s). Questions concerning these policies should be directed to the department chair.

I. Course Scheduling and the Agreement to Teach a Course

A. Committing to Teach a Course

The department undertakes scheduling of courses and instructors each spring, both for the upcoming summer and for the upcoming academic year. All instructors (including primary faculty, secondary and adjunct faculty, and other instructors such as graduate students and interns) who agree to teach a course must realize that once the schedule is submitted for publication to the registrar's office, it is virtually impossible to make changes. Therefore once an instructor agrees to teach a course, that agreement is considered firm. The department does not generally require instructors to sign written contracts to teach specific courses, but instructors should understand that their verbal agreement to teach a course is considered every bit as binding. This applies to graduate teaching assistants (TAs) as well as course instructors.
Graduate students who agree to teach for the department are required to immediately seek the approval of their graduate program director at the time that they agree to teach. Other required approvals vary by program and if applicable must also be obtained at this time. It is inappropriate to wait to seek this approval until the last minute, when the graduate program's disapproval of the request would leave the department without an instructor or TA for a course.

B. Assignment of Teaching Responsibilities

Instructors may not assign their teaching responsibilities to a third party. When a class has an official TA, some shuffling of responsibilities between the instructor and the TA is possible by mutual consent, as long as the teaching responsibilities of the TA are not increased by these arrangements. Faculty are not permitted to hire TAs to teach parts of their courses without prior consent of the chair and the relevant program director(s).

II. Course Syllabus and Logistics

A. Contents

The syllabus for each course should minimally contain the following information:
  Course name, number, and section  
  Days, times, and location(s) of class meetings  
  Instructor's name, office hours and location, and telephone number  
  Schedule of class topics and assignments  
  List of required and optional readings  
  Course requirements (exams, quizzes, term papers, other assignments)  
  Descriptions of the requirements (e.g., type of exams).  
  Criteria by which non-exam, non-quiz assignments will be evaluated.  
  Extra credit possibilities, if any.  
  Weighting scheme for computing the final percentage score.  
  Thresholds for converting percentages to letter grades.  
  Make-up exam policy (see below)  
  Statement on Academic Dishonesty

B. Alterations to the Course Syllabus

In general, the course syllabus should be considered a contract with students. Every effort should be made to avoid altering the arrangements established in the course syllabus during the academic term. It is not acceptable to poll the class to see if the students have a problem with such a change. Instructors who make such changes open themselves to complaints and possible litigation from angry students. These are time-consuming and embarrassing for instructors and the department alike.
Note that it is not acceptable to simply poll a class to determine if a change is acceptable. Such a vote places undue pressure on the individual student to conform to the wishes of the majority of the students or of the instructor. Where a change seems to be in the best interests of most students, the instructor should still take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that no individual student is disadvantaged by the change.

Issues concerning specific changes to course logistics are presented below:

C. Changing the Course Meeting Time or Location

Instructors may not alter the meeting time or location of a class so that they deviate from the university-published schedule. Exceptions must be cleared with the director(s) of the appropriate program(s), and with the departmental chair.

D. Missed Classes; Altering the Meeting Time or Location for a Single Class

It is every instructor's responsibility to meet each scheduled class. Occasionally, however, it may be necessary to miss a class for a legitimate reason, such as attending a scientific conference or participating in federal grant reviews. In such circumstances, there are 2 options. Generally the preferred option is to arrange for a substitute instructor. This is the only acceptable option for large undergraduate classes. On some occasions, particularly with a small seminar, it may be preferable to reschedule an individual class meeting. In doing so, the instructor must take care to make sure that the rescheduled time does not conflict with another class for any student, and to make sure that all students recognize their individual right to veto a particular change.

Faculty who need to miss a class should inform the chair of how their class(es) is (are) being covered in their absence. A limited amount of money is available to pay graduate students who proctor exams or present lectures for faculty members who are absent for a legitimate purpose.

It is recognized that it will sometimes be necessary to cancel a class at the last minute due to illness, and that in such cases arranging a substitute instructor may be impossible.

E. Class Duration and the Scheduling of Final Exams

Courses are scheduled for a specific number of contact hours, which translate into credit hours. Instructors should make every effort to meet each scheduled class and provide instruction for the entire class period. It is not acceptable to routinely start classes late or to dismiss classes early because “I’ve covered the material for today”. Likewise, it is not acceptable to end class early on the first day so that students have
time to do the reading, or to skip the last class meeting because all the material has been covered.

It is university policy that final exams may not be given during regular class meetings. They must be given during the officially scheduled final exam period which will always come after the regular meetings have been completed. This is true regardless of whether the final exam is cumulative or not.

When an instructor signs a contract to teach a Special Studies course (now called “SBS Outreach”), he or she is agreeing to teach the same course that is taught during the regular term. Nothing of substance should be omitted as a result of the Outreach format. For example, if one agrees to teach a course requiring four hours of lecture one day of the week, you should meet for the entire four hours. If you feel you cannot speak for four hours, or if you feel that requiring students to listen to you for four hours constitutes cruel and unusual punishment, then you should not teach in this format.

In general, instructors should take no steps that reduce the amount of instructional time associated with a class beyond that allocated in the published class schedule. None of the topics covered by any of our courses are so narrow as to not require all of the allocated time.

F. Distribution of Course Syllabi

The syllabus should be distributed to the class at the first class meeting. A copy of the syllabus must be directed to the front office; these copies are kept on file for accreditation and administrative purposes.

III. Issues Related to Academic Honesty and Dishonesty

A. Overview and Suggested Wording for Syllabus

Cheating and other acts of academic dishonesty should not be tolerated, overlooked, or taken lightly. Such practices reduce the value of the academic achievements of honest students and assault the integrity of the academic process.

The department scrupulously follows the university's policy regarding academic dishonesty, and will aggressively attempt to insure that such behavior receives the strongest penalties that that policy permits. Thus, any student caught cheating in a psychology course should be given an “F” for the course.

Instructors who suspect cheating should immediately consult the policy on Academic Misconduct that is published in the catalog, and contact the Vice Chair before dealing with the student. One purpose of this contact is to make sure that the current version
of the policy is followed. In Psychology, the Vice Chair generally serves as the Chair's designate in the implementation of the Academic Misconduct policy.

Amazingly enough, students occasionally cite ignorance of policies regarding cheating and plagiarism as their reason for committing such acts. To educate students and pre-empt such claims, the following clause is a recommended addition to syllabuses for PY classes:

The Department of Psychology considers academic honesty and dishonesty to be very serious matters. The undergraduate and graduate catalogs present the university's policy on Academic Misconduct, which the Department scrupulously follows. Note that academic dishonesty can take various forms, from cheating on an exam, to assisting someone else in cheating, to presenting someone else's written material as your own. In general, the Department of Psychology will seek the most severe penalty for acts of academic misconduct that are detected. This is generally an “F” in the course for a first offense and expulsion from the university for a second offense. For further details consult the catalog.

B. In-class Exams and Quizzes

Instructors should take steps to avoid cheating on in-class exams and quizzes. Such steps would generally include:

1. Protecting exams and quizzes from being passed among students. In classes utilizing multiple choice exams, instructors should not allow students to keep the exams. This is especially pertinent to introductory courses where several instructors utilize the same test-item file. The selective availability of old exams provides an unfair advantage for some students. If selective availability is suspected, instructors should make an effort to provide access to old exams to all students. In such cases it is of course necessary to prepare new exams for use in assigning grades.

Balancing the need to protect exams is the desireability of students learning from specific errors on exams. One possibility is to allow students to view their exams during office hours, but as a practical matter that will discourage many students. A preferable strategy is to take some time to go over the exam in class. This will allow students to learn the correct answers, why they are correct, and why the student’s wrong answers are indeed wrong.

2. Proctoring exams in a diligent manner. In general faculty should not leave the room while a test is being administered, particularly if the ratio of students to seats in the room requires students to sit in adjacent seats. Faculty requiring assistance with proctoring should consult with Kathy McConnell to determine whether such assistance is available.
3. Using alternate forms of the exam for alternate seats. Generally this involves developing two test forms (and therefore two keys) that contain the same items but differ in the order in which the items are presented. Psychology office staff are accustomed to preparing such alternate forms and can assist instructors who wish to make use of this option.

C. Take-home Exams, Projects, and Assignments

At the undergraduate level, take-home exams are vigorously discouraged. Take-home exams should never be given in large classes or in classes where the range of correct answers is narrow, because both of these factors make it difficult to detect plagiarism.

Individual projects completed outside of class should be supplemented with in-class examinations or other activities that do not allow for unapproved assistance. Only in very rare circumstances should take-home assignments account for more than ½ of the final grade in a class, and in most cases that fraction should be considerably smaller.

Students may misperceive take-home assignments as an invitation to work in teams, and indeed in some cases it may be positive for students to work together to comprehend the material. In such cases it is worth some class time and syllabus space to describe the boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate collaboration, and to encourage students to consult with the instructor if ambiguous situations arise.

If you typically require students to complete written projects (e.g., term papers) for a particular course, it is not a bad idea to keep a file of these projects for future reference. It is not unlikely that you will see some of these projects again, submitted under a brand new name.

IV. Grading

A. Considerations in Setting Performance Thresholds for Grades

To the extent possible, the means by which students' performance will ultimately be translated into a letter grade should be established prior to the quarter and distributed in the syllabus, as noted above.

B. Extra-credit Work

It is absolutely essential that every student in a particular class has the same opportunities with respect to his or her grade. No special opportunities should be provided to an individual student on an ad hoc basis. All opportunities for extra credit should be published in the syllabus, distributed on the first day of class or other
handouts distributed during the first two or three class meetings. There should never be any impromptu, mid-quarter possibilities for raising one’s grade.

Students should never be permitted to raise their grade with extra-credit work completed after the term ends. Once the term is over, it's over! Begging, threatening, bribing, and/or flattery should never alter this basic fact of higher education.

C. Athletes

Instructors should not agree to special consideration for athletes, regardless of any pressure applied by the Athletic Department. All students should be treated equally regardless of playing status: first-string, second-string, or no string at all. Instructors should, however, make allowances for student-athletes who cannot be present for exams due to game conflicts.

D. Submission of Final Grades

Each instructor is responsible for submitting his or her signed final grade sheet on time to the departmental Academic Advisor (Shea Schindeler). Grade sheets are distributed to instructors before the beginning of the final exam period, and the deadline for submitting grades is listed on an attached memo. Faculty who need to submit their final grades by phone or fax must make arrangements ahead of time to provide Ms. Schindeler with a signed grade sheet.

E. Grade Changes and Incompletes

The university has very specific policies concerning the circumstances under which a grade can be changed after the class is over, and these must be followed. Both the department chair and the dean are required to sign off on grade changes, and such changes should occur very rarely.

An Incomplete (I) is assigned only when extenuating circumstances exist (usually a medical emergency) and the student has made a bona fide arrangement with the instructor for completion of class work within a reasonable period after the term ends. Even in situations involving illness, an “I” should only be assigned if the student has completed most of the work in a course. If a student has been in class only a few weeks, he or she should withdraw from the course. Most important, the instructor should never allow the student to start over and delete the grades earned up to that point. If a student is not doing well, and would like to retake the course in a subsequent quarter, the only option is withdrawal from the course, and that option ends approximately 60% of the way through the term (see below). The instructor should never assign an Incomplete in this situation.

The above comments notwithstanding, the department's policy is to assign a grade of Incomplete to PY 101 students who have not completed their research requirement.
F. Withdrawal from a Class

The WP/WF policy has ended, effective in the Fall term of 1999. The withdrawal period now ends approximately 60% of the way through a term, on a date that is published in the class schedule. After that date the student must be assigned a grade in the class. It is therefore advisable that students receive some feedback on their performance in the class before the end of the withdrawal period.

V. Miscellaneous Issues

A. Administrative Drops

Although instructors may drop from their class rolls any students who fail to appear for the first class, this policy has not been workable for many classes taught in our department. Therefore, we apply the first-day attendance policy to the following classes: PY 214, 217, and all undergraduate classes numbered above 300. Instructors of these classes are not required to exercise the policy, but we recommend that it be used when there are students on the waiting list who need the course for the major or core requirements. To make use of the policy, instructors should do the following:

1. Note the number of seats that are available in your class. This information is provided at the bottom of the class waiting list that you receive from the Academic Advisor (Shea Schindeler) prior to your first class.

2. Call the class roll on the first day. This must be done very carefully if the roll will be used as a basis for dropping students. For example, you might call the entire roll at the beginning of class, and then check on apparently-absent students before and after the break, and once more at the end of class. You should also announce that you will be exercising the policy, so that students will understand the importance of making their presence known.

3. At the end of class, determine how many seats are available in your class (i.e., the number of seats originally marked available on your waiting list, plus the number of absentees). Sign add slips for students you are adding. Do not exceed your class enrollment limit.

4. Send or fax to the Academic Advisor (Shea Schindeler) a list of names and student numbers for the absentees you wish to drop. She will call them and inform them that they have been dropped. Excuses will be referred back to the instructor, who must inform Shea immediately of any changes in the list of students to drop.

B. Special Topics and Readings Courses

Such courses must be approved each term they are offered. A memo describing such a course, along with a syllabus and/or relevant reading list, should be submitted to the relevant program director(s) and the department chair. The chair approves or
disapproves such courses after consultation with relevant program director(s). Credit hours for such courses are awarded as follows:

- 13-25 contact hours 1 credit
- 26-38 contact hours 2 credits
- 39 or more contact hours 3 credits

Contact hours must be documented for credit to be awarded.

Special Topics courses must be publicly announced (e.g., in the published class schedule or via the Academic Advisors' listserv) at least one month prior to the beginning of the term in which they are offered.

C. Course Evaluations

Course evaluations must be obtained from students in every course taught in the Department of Psychology. Blank evaluation forms are distributed by the Academic Advisor before the beginning of the last week of the quarter. They must be returned to the Psychology office by the end of the final exam period.

At least 15 minutes of class time during the last week of classes must be dedicated to course evaluations. Procedures are detailed in a memo distributed with the forms. Note that the instructor must be out of the room while the evaluations are being completed. Allowing students to evaluate your courses is not optional. It is department policy. Students should be encouraged to take the evaluations seriously. In the past, some instructors have had as little as 10 percent participation for certain classes. This is unacceptable.

Course evaluations are potentially sensitive documents, and serve primarily a personnel function. In general, evaluations are made available only to the department chair, who may in the case of non-primary faculty, graduate teaching assistants, and other instructors make the evaluations available to the relevant program director(s). Teaching evaluations of primary faculty member will be distributed more widely within the department and school if the faculty member applies for promotion.

To encourage honest feedback, students are permitted and indeed encouraged to respond anonymously. In small classes, however, it is still possible that individual students' comments may be recognizable on the basis of content, handwriting, etc. To avoid even the perception of intimidation, instructors may not approach any individual student regarding his or her evaluations for a course. It is totally inappropriate to take any action against a student on the basis of a belief that he or she has submitted or will submit a negative evaluation.

D. Compensation of Instructors Paid on a Course-by-Course Basis

In general, such instructors are paid at the end of the term, after their grades and evaluations have been turned in.
E. Policy on Recruiting Students as Undergraduate Research Assistants

An instructor may take a few minutes of class time to provide information on research assistantship opportunities in the instructor's laboratory. In fact this is especially appropriate in advanced and more specialized classes where the course content and the research opportunity overlap. However, it is the department's policy that students may not be asked to commit to or begin a research assistant position (whether paid, or for PY 398 credit) with an instructor while they are enrolled in an instructor's course. The purpose of this policy is to prevent any perception that agreeing to serve as a research assistant could contribute to a higher course grade.

For essentially the same reason, students may not be recruited to serve as research subjects by an instructor, outside of the usual PY 101 subject pool procedures.

VI. Sexual Harassment

This is, of course, a sensitive and difficult issue. All of us can and should read the University’s formal policy on this matter (see below). Whereas, the pervasiveness of sexual harassment issues on college campuses has no doubt reduced sexual discrimination, some careers have been damaged and many faculty and students operate under a realistic fear of being accused of sexual harassment. Therefore, as a practical matter, we should note: All that is currently required to damage one’s career is the accusation of sexual harassment. The following comments and recommendations are intended to urge you to avoid practices that could elicit such an accusation:

First and foremost, it is strongly recommended that you do not place your career in the hands of a student or employee who has the power to cause you a great deal of difficulty and pain. For example, while the university does not prohibit faculty from dating students, it is nonetheless ill-advised. You should ask yourself, “Do I trust this person enough to place my career in his or her hands?” If that relationship goes sour, could you predict with 100 percent certainty that it would not become the basis of a charge of sexual harassment? It used to be sufficient to state simply that one should not date a student currently enrolled in one’s class or graduate program. We are now to the point where it might be advisable to avoid faculty/student dating altogether.

Flirtation is apparently okay, according to Title IX, if the sexual overtones are welcome. If the flirtation is unwelcome, you might be in trouble. But how do you know for sure if your flirtation is welcome? Furthermore, how do you know that your welcome flirtation today will not become unwelcome tomorrow? You should consider whether or not it is worth the risk. It probably is not. Flirtatious interactions with students also have great potential for interfering with other required professional interactions, related for example, to grading, research evaluation, fellowship and assistantship awards, etc. Moreover, students who become aware of such interactions with other students have reasonable grounds for concern about bias and favoritism.
Finally, if you have any reason to think a student is angry with you, or has acted strangely around you, you are advised to avoid meeting with him or her alone behind a closed door. You might even want to have another faculty or staff member sit in on any meetings with the student and you. This is especially advisable if the student is a member of the opposite sex.

One more thing: Remember that the Department of Psychology does not assign grades, hire, fire, promote or demote on the basis of sex. Members of the department are expected to apply this standard in their own laboratories.

UAB Sexual Harassment Policy (January 27, 1999)

The University of Alabama at Birmingham is firmly committed to providing an environment that is free of discrimination, including sexual harassment. Sexual harassment includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when (1) submission to such conduct is made, either explicitly or implicitly, a term or condition of an individual’s employment or academic evaluation, (2) submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment or academic decisions affecting such individual, or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonable interfering with an individual’s work performance or of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working or educational environment. Such behavior may violate federal law and/or give rise to personal liability for the results of such behavior. Consequently, UAB prohibits all forms of sexual harassment and will investigate complaints thoroughly and with the utmost seriousness.

A violation of this policy may result in the taking of disciplinary action up to, and including, discharge.

Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

It is a violation of UAB policy for any employee, including faculty, to engage in sexual harassment in the workplace or in work-related situations. Employees who believe that they have been sexually harassed by a supervisor, co-worker, or other employee of UAB should report the incident promptly to the Human Resource Management Relations Office. Only Human Resource Management has the responsibility for coordinating and conducting an investigation of sexual harassment claims in the workplace and also for recommending corrective action to the UAB administration.

Sexual Harassment in the Instructional Setting

UAB prohibits sexual harassment of students by teaching staff or other employees of UAB. For purposes of this policy, the term "teaching staff" means all those who teach at UAB and includes, but is not limited to,
full-time faculty, part-time faculty, students functioning in teaching roles (such as graduate assistants), and academic administrators.

A student who believes that he or she has been sexually harassed should report the incident promptly to the Vice President for Student Affairs.

Sexual harassment by a student is considered nonacademic misconduct, and the alleged student offender will be subject to the disciplinary process contained in the Direction Student Handbook.

**Sexual Harassment--General**

Full and prompt reporting is necessary for effective implementation of this policy, and UAB encourages such reporting. However, UAB’s duty to protect employees and student exists when UAB’s supervisory personnel know, or have reason to know, of unreported sexual harassment. Supervisors therefore are directed to take all appropriate steps to prevent sexual harassment in their areas of responsibility and to take corrective action, including disciplinary action, in response to inappropriate behavior which may constitute sexual harassment even in the absence of a complaint.

This policy seeks to encourage students, staff, and faculty to express freely and responsibly, through established procedure, complaints of sexual harassment. All such complaints shall be treated as confidential information and shall be disclosed only to those with a need to know as part of the investigatory and resolution process. Any act of interference, retaliation, or coercion by a UAB employee against a student or employee for using this policy interferes with such free expression and is itself a violation of this policy.

**Implementation**

This policy will be published regularly in the UAB Reporter and in the Class Schedule. The policy will be included in revisions of handbooks relating to staff, faculty, and students.

The Vice President for Financial Affairs and Administration is responsible for implementation of this policy as it relates to sexual harassment in the workplace. The Vice President for Student Affairs is responsible for implementation of this policy as it relates to sexual harassment in the instructional setting.
VII. Finally, Some Recommendations for Improving the Quality of Teaching

Instructors are strongly encouraged to communicate with other instructors with regard to every aspect of teaching. Within the Department (including secondary and adjunct faculty) we have a vast resource of content expertise as well as teaching experience. When lecturing outside of one’s area of expertise, it is very helpful to seek information and advice from someone who is an expert in a particular area. This is especially true for dealing with some of the oversimplifications we find in textbooks and in obtaining updates on research areas that are represented in textbooks with data that are 3-4 years old. One of the best places to receive such current information is in the Department’s colloquium series. With respect to teaching experience, when an instructor is faced with a particular problem, he or she can rest assured that another instructor has faced this problem in the past and is available for worthwhile consultation. Each instructor also develops a large number of examples to assist in the description of various psychological concepts. For example, Introductory Psychology students typically have a great deal of trouble with the concepts of independent and dependent variables, and for some reason, they struggle with the basic framework in a classical conditioning experiment. These situations call for creative approaches and unusual examples. It is surely the case that a wealth of such information is available within the Department.

Believe it or not, some instructors lecture straight from a textbook. They tend to move through the book by explaining various highlighted concepts and commenting on the issues identified on each page. Many of these instructors go so far as to read big chunks of the textbook to the class. This should not be regarded as university-level instruction. It requires very little preparation, it essentially makes the textbook the de facto instructor of the course, and it is an embarrassment to this department. Students rarely complain about such teaching because it does prepare them for exams based closely on the textbook. What it does not do is present students with any reason to think that professors are necessary at a university. We should be able to present our material with some inherent excitement, wonder, and originality that cannot be matched by a textbook, videotape, or software program. Otherwise, we are an unnecessary luxury.

To assist you in your teaching, the department is providing each instructor (full-time and part-time faculty, graduate students) with a copy of Learned Lessons: Practical Advice for the Teaching of Psychology, a collection of essays on teaching published in the American Psychological Society’s Observer over the past several years. Not all of these essays will benefit you, but some will if you give them a chance.