Teaching Guidelines for Faculty

Committee on Instruction, 5/6/2009

Members of Dartmouth’s faculty hold excellence in teaching as a central goal. According to the College’s mission statement, academic excellence at Dartmouth is founded on “a culture of collaboration” that promotes the “vigorous and open debate of ideas within a community marked by mutual respect.” In such collaboration, students need to trust the faculty member’s knowledge, judgment and authority, and members of the faculty need to wield that authority responsibly. These guidelines for Dartmouth faculty reflect generally accepted teaching practices at the College meant to foster this trust between student and professor. Members of the faculty, especially those new to the College, should consult with colleagues and department/program chairs for guidance about implementing these guidelines. Formal rules that govern the teaching of courses at Dartmouth, some of which are noted or reproduced here, are found in the Faculty Handbook and in the annual Organization, Regulations and Courses (ORC).

I. Class meetings

Members of the faculty are responsible for instruction in their courses through the entire term, including during reading and examination periods. Course meetings shall be commensurate with those established for the designated course hour in the weekly schedule in the ORC. Class cancellations arise, and are often anticipated, due to other professional, administrative, and/or personal commitments. All scheduled and unscheduled absences should be made up (for example, by arranging for a guest lecture, by using unscheduled x-hours to hold an alternate lecture, or by substituting another pedagogically appropriate alternative). Faculty members who are unable to meet a class because of illness or other emergency should promptly notify their departments/programs and students.

Some courses include a period of time with no class meetings to allow for individual research or project preparation. During such periods, faculty should continue to be available for consultation in office hours on a regular basis at a time accessible for students.

II. Syllabus

A syllabus defines the academic content of a course and establishes expectations regarding course goals, content, requirements, methods of assessment, and procedures. It becomes a matter of record for both faculty and students. As such, a syllabus is essential for each class and should be made available to students at the beginning of the term. Members of the faculty should make every attempt to have all decisions concerning the syllabus made by beginning of the term so that students may plan accordingly.

The Dartmouth Center for the Advancement of Learning (DCAL) provides advice, consultation, and resources that may aid in course organization and design, including templates for syllabi.
Recommendations for Syllabus Content

A. Learning goals or objectives for the course

B. Course requirements
   
   i. Required books, articles, readers and where these may be found (on reserve, online, purchase).
   
   ii. A schedule of topics, readings, and assignments for the course, including missed days and scheduled x-hours (students quickly assume that unless otherwise indicated x-hours will not be used, and they plan accordingly). Any anticipated missed class days should be made up during x-hours or at a specified time outside normal class hours (see section IV on “Other course activities”).
   
   New or experimental courses, as well as advanced seminars, often work differently from regular courses. In such cases, instead of an explicit daily or weekly schedule, the syllabus should provide a description of how topics, readings, and assignments for the course will be determined during the term. This structure permits flexibility while still providing enough of a framework so that students are able to plan and organize their academic time effectively.
   
   iii. Statement on grading, due dates of assignments, exam dates, etc.
   
   iv. Course activities outside normal class hours, such as field trips, films, exams (see section IV on “Other course activities”).
   
   v. Statement on attendance/absences (see section V)

C. Course Procedures
   
   i. Office hours, contact information.
   
   ii. Homework policy, policy on revisions.
   
   iii. Policy for late work, make-up exams.
   
   iv. Disability policy about how students should seek accommodation in the course (see ORC, Access and Accommodation for Students with Disabilities).
   
   v. Honor Principle statement and course policy on limits (if any) to collaborative work in fulfilling course requirements (see ORC, Academic Honor).

While many of the suggested aspects of the syllabus are dependent on the nature of the course and instruction, there are several aspects which are required by the ORC: B.iii, C.iv and C.v. In discussing the required texts for the course (B.i), faculty shall conform to the Higher Education
Opportunity Act by providing textbook information at the time a student registers for a course, in particular the ISBN number and the retail price.

Adjustments to the syllabus are unavoidable and often desirable to accommodate varying pace and interest in a class. Members of the faculty have significant discretion in revising their initial syllabus to adapt to the unique circumstances of each class. However, some aspects of the syllabus shall not be changed after the add/drop date:

- Changing the due dates of papers or timing of exams (unless to the obvious advantage of the students).
- Changing the terms of evaluation of the course (i.e., the grading scheme and weighting of the components) inequitably.
- A major change in the materials for the course that would impose a significant financial burden on the students (e.g., changing the readings so that initial purchases become unnecessary or new readings require additional purchases).

III. Student evaluation and grading

Members of the faculty are directly and solely responsible for assigning and reporting grades for their courses. Students are more confident that they will be evaluated fairly when they receive (or have access to) a clear statement of methods and procedures for grading. Grading policies and standards shall be clearly discussed on the syllabus so that students know the basis for the mark that they will receive. The syllabus should clearly indicate the proportional weight that the various assignments and exams carry. Grading standards shall be consistent with Section 1 under Scholarship Ratings in the ORC, and scheduling of exams shall conform to Section 4 under Working Rules and Procedures in the ORC. Instructors who use undergraduate course assistants should consult the guidelines in the Faculty Handbook concerning the use of undergraduate assistants.

An important purpose of evaluation is to give students timely feedback in order to facilitate subsequent learning and improvement in their work. Therefore, faculty members should ensure that students receive feedback on assignments and exams in a timely fashion. Faculty members are encouraged to provide feedback to students before the withdrawal deadline sufficient to aid those students who are contemplating leaving the course. In the case of work completed at the end of the term (e.g., final papers and/or final exams), faculty members must make the graded work available to students for review.

In the case of a grading dispute, faculty members shall provide a rationale for their grades (either a final grade or the grade on an individual piece of work) to the student. Because grade changes may occur up to the end of the second term after the end of the course (see the section on Scholarship Ratings in the ORC), faculty shall keep relevant materials and records for at least two terms after the end of the course. Many faculty members keep this material for at least one year.
As is described in the section on Scholarship Ratings in the ORC:

Citations are designed to procure an official record of information about undergraduates who have made particularly favorable impressions on members of the faculty because of their unusual talents, dependability, initiative, resourcefulness, or other meritorious characteristics that are not indicated adequately by academic grades.

Because they appear as part of a student’s transcript, citations must be relatively brief (100 words or less). Faculty should take care not to reveal inappropriate information about a student. In addition to information that is legally prohibited (e.g., information concerning disabilities and/or health status), faculty should not reveal information that reflects poorly on the student, even if the information is provided as background to a commendation. When a course has more than one instructor, all instructors shall submit a single citation for each deserving student.

Due to various circumstances, instructors may be unable to submit a student’s final grade for a course before the deadline at the end of the term. There are three designations for these cases: Incomplete (I), Ongoing (ON) and Administrative Delay (AD). Each of these is described in detail in the ORC (Temporary Transcript Designations).

All students retain their privacy rights under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) in every course. Faculty members should review FERPA regulations (Dartmouth Student Handbook, FERPA, Registrar’s FERPA Tutorial). Specifically, graded coursework must not be returned in a manner that can potentially allow students to see each other’s grades. Some classes use a specific FERPA waiver for homework, exams, and/or papers. Examples are available via DCAL.

**IV. Other course activities**

In addition to the internal structure of their courses, faculty members should also consider how their courses relate to other aspects of Dartmouth life outside of their course contact hours. Faculty members shall make clear their policy on attendance and obligations having to do with course activities scheduled outside regular class hours (e.g., exams, field trips, film screenings, make-up classes and labs). Such activities should be carefully constructed to have as minimal an impact as possible on students’ other academic commitments, and reasonable accommodations must be made for students with conflicts. For example, classes requiring exams, field trips, and/or screenings outside of class time are expected to provide alternate times and/or means of satisfying the requirement. When such accommodations are impossible (e.g., attendance of a play with only one performance), the course syllabus shall clearly explain the requirement (and its impact on the course and the student’s grade) to provide students the opportunity to opt out of the course if the requirement is impossible for them to meet. Faculty members should also carefully consider the economic cost of outside activities and make accommodations in the case of economic hardship.

**V. Absences**
Because Dartmouth students invariably pursue a rich and diverse range of activities, faculty members are often confronted with student activities that conflict with class time and/or outside-of-class requirements. No instructor is required to excuse absences during either regularly scheduled class time or required x-hours. The ORC (Section 4 of Working Rules and Procedures) emphasizes this point with regard to College-sponsored or College-recognized extracurricular activities:

Regular class attendance is expected of all students. Though academic schedules may sometimes conflict with College-sponsored or College-recognized extracurricular events, there are no excused absences for participants in such activities. Students who participate in athletics, debates, concerts, or other activities should check their calendars to see that these events do not conflict with their academic schedules. Should such conflicts occur or be anticipated, each student is responsible for discussing the matter with his or her instructor at the beginning of the appropriate term. Instructors may be accommodating if approached well in advance of the critical date.

Such accommodations can be made only when the conflict occurs because of a scheduled College-sponsored or College-recognized event. No participant should expect to be excused in order to attend a team meeting or orientation session, practice session, meal, or other such activity.

No College-sponsored or College-recognized regular-season event may be scheduled during Pre-examination Break or a Final Examination Period.

Faculty members should also be aware that students may wish to participate in religious observances during the academic term; faculty may wish to consult a list of religious holidays to identify potential conflicts and put in place policies to resolve them. The COP reviewed and recommended the following language for adoption on course syllabi:

Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this academic term. If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please meet with me before the end of the second week of the term to discuss appropriate accommodations.

In addition to these guidelines, faculty members may wish to consult the following sources for additional information and/or more detail:

1. Dartmouth’s Mission Statement
2. Academic Honor Principle and Guidelines for Faculty
3. The Academic Skills Center discussion of students with Disabilities
4. Dean of the College’s discussion of confidentiality of student records
5. Registrar’s discussion of course shopping and the add/drop period
6. The Faculty Handbook sections on Sexual Harassment and Consensual Relationships
7. DCAL’s discussion of extensions and incompletes.