

A Few Words of Advice to Instructors of Online Courses

Many of the things that instructors of online courses should do are no less worth doing in courses taught face-to-face, but their importance is heightened by the online format, especially at a time when a student's entire experience of the college may be online. In this environment, students can easily become detached from their classes, so it's important to make an extra effort to sustain the relationship between teacher and student that is at the heart of every successful educational experience. One good way to do so is to make a point of helping students understand some of the ground rules of that experience. Here are a few suggestions.

1. As with any course, an online course should have a syllabus that makes clear exactly what the instructor's expectations are concerning attendance at synchronous sessions, preparation for those sessions, coursework, and grading policies. It should also address the issue of conduct, which can easily erode in the online environment, and academic dishonesty, which can become an especially strong temptation in online classes. Finally, the syllabus should indicate when the professor is available for office hours, which are required by the PSC's Collective Bargaining Agreement, and how students can contact him or her if any special concerns arise.
2. Each semester has a "drop date" (in the Fall 2020 semester, it's Friday, November 6th).
 - Students may drop a course without penalty for any reason at any time through the drop date.
 - Students must drop courses themselves through the Registrar's Office.
 - If a student drops a course, it will remain on the transcript with the non-prejudicial grade of **W**. W grades do not affect a student's GPA.
 - Before dropping a course, international students should consult the Office of International Student Services, and students on financial aid should consult their academic advisors and the Office of Financial Aid.
 - Not only should instructors make a point of explaining this information to students, they should also make sure they've given students enough feedback—that is, graded work—before the drop date for the students to make an informed decision about whether to stay in the course.
3. If a student experiences an outside problem after the drop date—illness, a death in the family, or some equally serious catastrophe—he or she may appeal for a "drop after the deadline" to the Committee on Academic Standing of the school to which the student has been admitted (or to the Joint Committee on Academic Standing if the student has not yet been admitted to one of the three schools). Should the appeal be granted, the non-prejudicial grade of W will be substituted for whatever grade the student received, and his or her GPA will be adjusted accordingly.
4. Abandoning a course mid-semester by ceasing to attend and hand in work will result in the prejudicial grade of **WU**, which is figured into the student's GPA as an F and, even more importantly, may violate the terms of his or her financial aid or threaten an international student's visa status.

- International students and students receiving financial aid should make every effort to finish all their courses, even if they anticipate that they will fail.
 - A student who has ceased to hand in work should never be assigned the grade of INC (Incomplete) unless he or she has specifically requested it and convinced the instructor that it is appropriate, usually by presenting evidence that an outside factor is preventing the student from finishing coursework on time. Many students who are failing a course intend to retake it the following semester and use the F-replacement policy (which also applies to the grade of WU). Giving a student an unwanted INC forces him or her to wait an additional semester to retake the course, as a student with an open Incomplete will not be allowed to enroll in another section of the same course until the INC is resolved. In such a case, the instructor's attempt at charity only delays the student's progress toward graduation.
5. Instructors should remember that students must be awarded the grades they have earned, not the ones that seem most advantageous after the fact.
- If a student disappears mid-semester, the instructor *must* give the student a WU and resist any later pleas that the grade be changed to an F. This is a matter of the college's responsibility to outside authorities and the integrity of academic records, which may be audited.
 - If instructors remind students of these ground rules ahead of time, it places the responsibility all the more clearly on the students to do what they must to comply with the terms under which they have been permitted to take the course.
 - Instructors should be familiar with the definition of all grades as described by the Office of the Registrar:
<https://www.baruch.cuny.edu/confluence/display/undergraduatebulletinfall18spring19/Letter+Grades+and+Grade+Point+Equivalents>
6. The college offers tutoring services in the Student Academic Consulting Center (SACC), the Writing Center, and Tools for Clear Speech (for oral communication); and these services continue to be available online. Students should be advised to visit the centers' respective pages on the Baruch website to make appointments for tutoring.
7. The Center for Academic Advisement is also fully operational online, and it is a good idea to make sure that students are aware that they can schedule advisement sessions, even though they are not, at present, able to visit the center in person. The same is true of the Starr Career Development Center and the Counseling Center.