

Subject: Communication from the Committee on Instruction on Winter Term Instruction
Date: Monday, December 7, 2020 at 10:13:45 AM Central Standard Time
From: Peter A. Blitstein
To: FACULTY-L
CC: Meralis N. Alvarez-Morales, Monita Mohammadian Gray, Angi Long
Priority: High
Attachments: image001.png

Dear Colleagues,

Over the course of the last few weeks of the term, the Committee on Instruction reviewed its instructional guidance from the summer (available [here](#)) and considered what adjustments we might recommend based on student experiences in the fall term. On the whole, we reaffirm our recommendations, and encourage all faculty to review that document again as we prepare for the winter term. We also wanted to comment on two issues that have continued to arise since the fall term began.

Workload and Communication

The Committee on Instruction acknowledges that all of us are still learning how teaching during the pandemic looks different from teaching in normal times. Few of us have experience teaching online courses. We need to continue to adapt and learn from this fall term as we look ahead to winter, just as we adapted after last spring; flexibility and creativity should remain guiding principles. One thing we've been hearing from students is that communication about your expectations, about assignments, about everything in your courses, is more critical than ever. As you plan your winter courses, remember that the assignments you require of our students in a normal in-person course may take longer in a remote environment, and that students do not have more time or attention to complete them than they normally would. [Research](#) shows that it takes longer to read a digital text as opposed to a paper text and that readers are more likely to skim when reading online. As we noted in the instructional guidelines from the summer, the amount of work in a remote environment should not be different from that in a face-to-face environment, but you may need to adjust assignments in order to fulfill the learning outcomes of your courses (which should not change without approval from the Instruction Committee). Some possible adjustments include:

- Reducing the number of readings, having tiered levels of required readings, or a choice of readings.
- Offering reading guides or walk-throughs of a text.
- Offering choice-based assessments (either through modality, topic, or presentation style).
- Making time in the course for community-building.

Camera Use in Classes Conducted Over Zoom

Obligating students to keep their cameras on during Zoom classes has been the subject of much discussion in the higher education media since the start of the pandemic. Two resources that have guided the Committee are:

[Dear Professors: Don't Let Students Webcams Trick You](#) (Educause Review, Sept. 2020)

[Zoom Camera Pros and Cons](#) (Oregon State University)

In the Instructional guidelines issued over the summer, we urged faculty to make camera use by

students optional. Experience over the fall term reinforces our conviction that requiring students to keep their cameras on reinforces inequities among students. For that reason, the Instruction Committee has decided that faculty should not require students to keep their cameras on during Zoom classes, and must not penalize them for not doing so, except in circumstances where camera usage is absolutely necessary for pedagogical reasons (e.g., performance classes). In particular, faculty should avoid using cameras as a proxy for participation (that is, do not deduct points for participation based on camera use alone) and should consider alternatives to required camera use in discussion courses: calling on students, asking students to use emojis to indicate they wish to speak, and using the chat feature are all possibilities.

Thank you all for the work you have been doing and will be doing in this most challenging academic year.

Peter Blitstein, Meralis Alvarez-Moralis, Bill Hixon, Angi Long, Randall McNeill, Andy Mast, Monita Mohammadian, Gray, Amy Ongiri, and Jodi Sedlock

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