Pod D: Creating Course Policies

***Materials****: a syllabus you plan to revise*

***Instructions****: This pod begins with reading accessible syllabus policies, then asks you to examine your own syllabus’s policies, determine what changes you would be able to make, and revise.*

**To maximize the chance our students will succeed in our classrooms, it is essential to create and adhere to inclusive classroom policies.** This often requires flexibility on the part of instructors regarding topics like attendance, technology use in the classroom, assignments, etc. In addition, classroom policies shouldn’t be punitive and should be based on learning objectives, meeting the goals of our classes while supporting our students.

1. **Read:** Look through the [Accessible Syllabus](https://www.accessiblesyllabus.com/) (<https://www.accessiblesyllabus.com/>) website. What did you already know, what did you learn, and what are useful takeaways?

***I knew…***

*I learned…*

*Useful takeaways:*

1. **Note goals:** Now, look at your syllabus’s course policies and your course goals. For each specific policy, note next to it which course goal it supports.
2. **Analyze policies:** Review the policy suggestions below and on the Accessible Syllabus website. Consider which policies (attendance, deadlines, technology use, etc.) are most important to your pedagogy. What policies work well for your courses, and how to do you know they are working? What would you be comfortable changing? Make some notes regarding potential changes you would be willing to make and why.

***Policies that work well:***

***Policies to change:***

1. **Revision:** How can you affirm inclusivity in your course policies? Instead of “making exceptions” for students with diverse needs, how can you create flexible policies that will work for everyone? Where are you comfortable giving students more flexibility and autonomy, and where do you want to keep a firm line? Think about why you would like to keep these policies firm and how it positively supports the pedagogy and learning objectives of your course. (Inclusive course policy examples below.)

Notes:

# ****Inclusive Policy Examples****

## Attendance

Many UNC courses include accommodation policy information in their syllabi, but do not discuss them or consider the impact on their class if accommodations are needed by students. Many accommodations relate to student attendance in class, allowing for students to miss classes without penalty for various reasons. Students without formal accommodations may need to miss class for diverse and legitimate reasons that may not be obvious: medical treatments, family emergencies or conflicts, to manage immigration or residency documents, etc. Active military students may need to miss class due to their service obligations or for training. Students who are parents might miss class because of lack of childcare, their child’s illness, etc. and pregnant students may have appointments they can only schedule during class time. In addition, having flexibility for parents about bringing their students to class and allowing breastfeeding mothers breaks in class for pumping milk is important for equity for this population.

University schedules are generally scheduled around a Christian calendar. This means some students will have holidays or holy days when classes are in session. UNC university policy allows for students to miss class for this reason. While most classes include this policy in their syllabus, it is generally not discussed in the first class. Discussing this policy with students signals your support of diversity in the classroom and help students feel comfortable approaching you about their needs for this accommodation.

What is your plan for ensuring students are able to keep up with the content of the course when they need to miss class?

## Examples of activities to assist with attendance flexibility:

1. If the student is able to engage in a lecture or in-class activity but unable to physically attend class (for example, an autistic student who needs some space from other people for the day, a student with a chronic illness who is too ill or in too much pain to physically attend class but would be able to participate in activities, students with injuries that limit their mobility, etc.), consider using conferencing software like Zoom to have the student join the class online. If you can integrate the software into the classroom audio system, they can even participate in discussions or group activities.
2. Record lectures that can be supplied to students if the class they are missing is lecture based. However, also provide captions or a transcript for these recordings so students do not miss information if they have hearing difficulties. PowerPoint has an auto captioning feature if you record your lecture in that software.
3. If there is a group activity in the class the student is missing, create an alternative to the activity that the student can do on their own but will still meet the learning objectives of the group activity (for example, if students are doing a group brainstorming activity, record the brainstorm results and ask the student to add to the items included or if students are analyzing an article or case study in small groups in class, have the student write a short essay analyzing the same document).

# Classroom Environment

Course policies are an opportunity to create a welcoming classroom environment. Encourage students to do what they need to do in class to assist their ability to concentrate. For example, some students might need to get up and stretch or walk around occasionally, particularly in long classes. You can build in a 2-minute break for students to move. Students with autism might need to sit separately from other students or curl up on the floor in a ball for a minute. Reassuring students that they can attend to their own needs will help them participate more fully in class. In addition, encouraging students with various impairments to use technology as needed to take notes or record lectures to assist with retention of information delivered in class ensures all your students are included.

## Examples of activities to assist with classroom environment flexibility:

1. Allow students to use tech as needed for note taking or other in class activities.
2. Give tech alternatives for assignments - allowing students to type or write papers or exams, etc.
3. Make clear what is acceptable and unacceptable tech use and activities that could result in the ability to use tech being lost.
4. If tech is required to complete an assignment, make sure the required software or device is accessible. If not, select an alternative for students who cannot use the required tech.

# Grading Policies

When developing assignments, grading policies, and rubrics, we can take into account the impact illness, disability, family issues, or other difficult situations can have on students’ ability to maintain the course schedule. Building flexibility into the assignment and grading policies will assist students when working around these types of scenarios and create an environment that makes them feel more comfortable approaching faculty about their needs and concerns.

## Examples of activities to assist with attendance flexibility:

1. Allow students who are uncomfortable with one particular assignment (i.e. presentation to the group) do another assignment to replace it.
2. Give students one extension they can apply to the assignment of their choice during the semester.
3. Drop the lowest one or two quiz or homework assignment grades during the semester.
4. Allow assignments to be completed using different mediums or formats.

These policies should all be available to students in the syllabus and discussed in class. Ensure the syllabus is created in a format that is accessible to all students and visually engaging. Use of alternate formats, inclusion of some of the suggested policies above, and clear diversity and inclusion statements are some strategies for developing an accessible and inclusive syllabus. If you choose to use a syllabus containing more images and graphics, have an alternative text only version for screen reader compatibility.

# Remote Learning Policies

There are several adaptations you will need to make to your course policies if teaching a class remotely.

The first consideration is whether to make your course **synchronous or asynchronous**. If this is not dictated by your department or the type of class, the first step in this process would be to survey students about their current situation regarding internet access, work schedules, school schedules for children, etc. If students don’t have consistent internet access, are managing their children’s education from home, or have other circumstances that would make attending class at a specific time difficult, requiring synchronous attendance would lead to inequitable access to the course for students in these situations. Students located in multiple time zones may also have difficulty with attending classes that are synchronous.

Whether the course is asynchronous or synchronous, it will be important to consider **attendance policies** and whether or not to include attendance as a graded item. For asynchronous courses, attendance can be considered through participation in regular activities, like forum posts. However, for asynchronous courses it is considered best practices to not include attendance in the grade for the course. For synchronous courses, issues with internet connectivity should be considered when considering attendance. In addition, requiring videos are on to count attendance is not considered best practice as there are many reasons a student might not want to have their video on.

**Changes to participation policies** should also be considered when teaching classes online. For asynchronous courses, speaking during class is not something you would be able to include or grade. Therefore, other types of participation will need to be considered, like online discussions, reflection papers, responses to recorded lectures, etc. For synchronous online courses, speaking during online classes can be a consideration, but additional methods for participating are also going to need to be considered. During live online courses, using the chat can also be considered participation. However, additional participation methods outside of the time of the online class can also be included.

**Assignment due dates** will also need additional flexibility to take into account students who have technical difficulties or internet connectivity issues. Some examples of how this could be done could include having a time bank students can use as needed for extensions, allowing a certain number of extensions throughout the semester, or giving a date range in which assignments are submitted.

**Creating a welcoming environment** for students in an online environment can be difficult, and it will be particularly important to make sure students feel comfortable participating in online classes. Allowing regular breaks will be important for longer classes as concentrating on a computer screen for extended periods of time can be very difficult. Making sure students feel comfortable to share difficulties they are having with taking classes online will also be essential as you will be unable to see problems students are having in the classroom.

**Office hours** should be offered online for all students. There are a few ways this can be organized. Specific hours can be scheduled where the instructor is consistently available through the online system so students can drop in when they have questions. Another option is to provide hours and require students to schedule a time they will attend meetings. Meetings can also be scheduled without the restriction of specific hours.

# Sample Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Statements

### **Diversity Statements**

Sample 1

Respect for Diversity: It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students’ learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. In addition, if any of our class meetings conflict with your religious events, please let me know so that we can make arrangements for you.

Source: University of Iowa College of Education

*Sample 2*

All people have the right to be addressed and referred to in accordance with their personal identity. In this class, we will have the chance to indicate the name that we prefer to be called and, if we choose, to identify pronouns with which we would like to be addressed...I will do my best to address and refer to all students accordingly and support classmates in doing so as well.

Source: University of Michigan, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching

Sample 3

‘A university is a place where the universality of the human experience manifests itself.’ -Albert Einstein In keeping with the spirit of Einstein’s viewpoint, the Department of Communication Studies is committed to providing an atmosphere of learning that is representative of a variety of perspectives. In this class, you will have the opportunity to express and experience cultural diversity as we focus on issues such as: gender and communication in small groups, communication in the multicultural group, and cross- cultural and intercultural work group communication. In addition, writing assignments and daily activities have been designed to encourage individuality and creative expression. You are encouraged to not only take advantage of these opportunities in your own work, but also, learn from the information and ideas shared by other students.”

Source: University of Alabama, Department of Communication Studies

Sample 4

The University of Central Florida considers the diversity of its students, faculty, and staff to be a strength and critical to its educational mission. UCF expects every member of the university community to contribute to an inclusive and respectful culture for all in its classrooms, work environments, and at campus events. Dimensions of diversity can include sex, race, age, national origin, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, intellectual and physical ability, sexual orientation, income, faith and non-faith perspectives, socio-economic class, political ideology, education, primary language, family status, military experience, cognitive style, and communication style. The individual intersection of these experiences and characteristics must be valued in our community.

Title IX prohibits sex discrimination, including sexual misconduct, sexual violence, sexual harassment, and retaliation. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find resources available to support the victim, including confidential resources and information concerning reporting options at www.shield.ucf.edu and http://cares.sdes.ucf.edu/.

If there are aspects of the design, instruction, and/or experiences within this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment of achievement, please notify the instructor as soon as possible and/or contact Student Accessibility Services.

Source: University of Central Florida

### **Inclusion/Classroom Environment Statement Sample**

The topics that we’re covering in this class are often difficult, not just intellectually but emotionally. While I expect there to be rigorous discussion and even disagreement in the course of our class discussions, I ask that you engage in discussion with care and empathy for the other members in the classroom. Aim to disagree without becoming disagreeable. In this class we will not shy away from the uncomfortable. Critically examining and assessing our most basic assumptions and values is not just one of the tasks of philosophy but is an activity vital to living an authentic life. I urge you to have the courage to the uncomfortable in this class. In exchange for your courage, I will work to ensure a classroom environment that supports your taking these intellectual and emotional risks.

Source: Whitman College

### **English as a Second Language Statement Sample**

Brown welcomes students from around the country and the world, and their unique perspectives enrich our learning community. To support students whose primary language is not English, services are available on campus including language workshops and individual appointments. For more information, contact English Language Support at ellwriting@brown.edu or (401) 863- 5672.

Source: Brown University

### **Land Acknowledgement Statement Sample**

"I acknowledge that we are on the traditional homelands of the Narragansett and Wampanoag peoples."

Source: Brown University

### **Accessibility Statements**

Sample 1

Spelman College is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in this class, complete course requirements, or benefit from the College’s programs or services, contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) as soon as possible. To receive any academic accommodation, you must be appropriately registered with ODS. The ODS works with students confidentially and does not disclose any disability-related information without their permission. The ODS serves as a clearinghouse on disability issues and works in partnership with faculty and all other student service offices. For further information about services for students with disabilities, please contact the ODS.

I assume that all of us learn in different ways, and that the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. For example, you may prefer to process information by speaking and listening, so that some of the written handouts I provide may be difficult to absorb. Please talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them. If you do not have a documented disability, remember that other support services, including the Writing Center and the Learning Resources Center, are available to all students.

Source: Spelman College

Sample 2

This class seeks ways to become a working and evolving model of inclusion and universal design for all participants. Individuals with disabilities of any kind (including learning disabilities, ADHD, depression, health conditions), who require instructional, curricular, or test accommodations are responsible for making such needs known to the instructor as early as possible. Every possible effort will be made to accommodate students in a timely and confidential manner. Individuals who request accommodations must be registered with the Office of Disability Services (804 University Avenue, Room 309, 3rd floor, 443- 4498), which authorizes accommodations for students with disabilities.

Students are encouraged to approach Wendy Harbour with any other life circumstances that may affect their participation in the course. These may be personal, health-related, family-related issues, or other concerns. The sooner your instructor knows about these, the earlier we can discuss possible adjustments or alternative arrangements as needed for homework, exams, or class.

Source: Syracuse University

Sample 3

Individuals who have any situation/condition, either permanent or temporary, which might affect their ability to perform in class or access class materials, are encouraged to inform the instructor at the beginning of the term. It is recommended that the student request a meeting in a confidential environment to review course requirements and discuss their need for accommodations. Establishing reasonable accommodations should be considered on a case-by-case basis due to variations in functional limitations of each individual and specific demands of the course.

Source: exploreaccess.org

Sample 4

Our institution values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. Our goal is to create learning environments that are usable, equitable, inclusive and welcoming. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment or achievement, please notify the instructor as soon as possible. Disabled students are also welcome to contact the disability service office to discuss a range of options to removing barriers in the course, including accommodations.

Source: exploreaccess.org

Sample 5

Students with disabilities:It is the policy and practice of the university to create inclusive learning environments. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or to accurate assessment of achievement—such as time-limited exams, inaccessible web content, or the use of non-captioned videos—please notify the instructor as soon as possible. Students are also welcome to contact the disability resource office.

Source: exploreaccess.org

Sample 6

Our university is committed to creating a learning environment that meets the needs of its diverse student body. If you anticipate or experience any barriers to learning, discuss your concerns with the instructor. In addition to speaking with the instructor, the following resources are available to ensure an opportunity to learn in an inclusive environment that values mutual respect.

* For students with disabilities who are experiencing barriers to learning or assessment, contact the disability service office.
* For students who are experiencing conflict that is impacting their educational environment, contact the conflict resolution office.
* For students who believe that they have experienced harassment or discrimination on the basis of age, sex, race, religion, color, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation, contact the social equity office.

Source: exploreaccess.org

Sample 7

I am committed to creating a course that is inclusive in its design. If you encounter barriers, please let me know immediately so that we can determine if there is a design adjustment that can be made or if an accommodation might be needed to overcome the limitations of the design. I am always happy to consider creative solutions as long as they do not compromise the intent of the assessment or learning activity. You are also welcome to contact the disability service office to begin this conversation or to establish accommodations for this or other courses. I welcome feedback that will assist me in improving the usability and experience for all students.

Source: exploreaccess.org

### **First Generation Student Statements**

Sample 1 – 1st Generation Instructor

I am part of the campus community network focused on meeting your unique needs as a First Gen student as you navigate your learning and life experiences here at Chico State. As a First Generation student myself, I can help you connect with resources on campus to address challenges you may face that interfere with your academic and social success on campus and beyond. My goal is to help you be successful and to find the support and guidance you may need to become a 1st Gen GRADUATE.

Source: CSU Chico

Sample 2

I am part of the campus community network focused on meeting your unique needs as a First Gen student as you navigate your learning and life experiences here at Chico State. As a First Gen Student Ally, I can help you connect with resources on campus to address challenges you may face that interfere with your academic and social success on campus and beyond. My goal is to help you be successful and to find the support and guidance you may need to become a 1st Gen GRADUATE.

Source: CSU Chico

### **LGBTQ+ Focused Statements**

Sample 1

I am part of the Safe Zone Ally community network of trained Chico State faculty/staff/students who are available to listen and support you in a safe and confidential manner. As a Safe Zone Ally, I can help you connect with resources on campus to address problems you may face that interfere with your academic and social success on campus as it relates to issues surrounding sexual orientation/gender identity. My goal is to help you be successful and to maintain a safe and equitable campus.

Source: CSU Chico

Sample 2

I am firmly committed to diversity and equality in all areas of campus life, including specifically members of the LGBTQ community. In this class I will work to promote an anti-discriminatory environment where everyone feels safe and welcome. I recognize that discrimination can be direct or indirect and take place at both institutional and personal levels. I believe that such discrimination is unacceptable and I am committed to providing equality of opportunity for all by eliminating any and all discrimination, harassment, bullying, or victimization. The success of this policy relies on the support and understanding of everyone in this class. We all have a responsibility not to be offensive to each other, or to participate in, or condone harassment or discrimination of any kind.

Source: CSU Chico

### **Universal Design and Learning**

Sample 1

In the spirit of Universal Design for Learning, I will strive to provide an environment that is equitable and conducive to achievement and learning for all students. I ask that we all be respectful of diverse opinions and of all class members, regardless of personal attribute. I encourage persons with disabilities or particular needs that impact on performance to meet with me to co-design accommodations, if necessary, beyond those listed under UDL. I ask that we all use inclusive language in written and oral work. Students with disabilities may also want to register with the Office of Disability Resources, located at 19 Campus Ave. Bldg.

Source: Miami University

Sample 2

As your course instructor, I endeavor to provide a learning environment that offers flexible opportunities for your learning using the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework. However, if you experience any barriers to your learning during this course, do not hesitate to discuss this with me. Please contact me using the format that is most accessible to you.

Source: UDL Universe