Dear Colleagues:

As Assistant Provost for Academic Advocacy and Conflict Resolution, I work with messy situations that could have been prevented if faculty had known more about Georgia Tech policies and procedures. Please take a look at my tips – each of them will help you provide the learning environment that we want students to experience on our campus.

Best wishes for the semester,

Laura Hollengreen

What's Required?

The Syllabus
The syllabus is a critical document that must be made available to students during the first week of class. In your syllabus you should 1) lay out your course objectives, 2) identify criteria that will be used to determine a student's grade and standing in the course (e.g., your policy about absences and missed work, the kinds and number of assignments and their approximate deadlines, quiz and exam dates, a grade break-down showing how much each element is worth in the final course grade, and an explanation of how letter grade ranges are determined), and 3) describe any materials/supplies that are required. Your syllabus should allow students to make an informed decision at the beginning of the semester about whether the course is right for them. For a template syllabus, visit ctl.gatech.edu/resources/syllabus-guidelines.

Office Hours
You must make it possible for students to consult with you outside of class hours, by means of regularly scheduled office hours or, if necessary, by individual appointment.

Clarifying expectations about collaboration & use of resources
It is vital that you state which kinds of work and resources are acceptable for each assignment and which are not. According to the GT Honor Code (osi.gatech.edu), you must clarify what constitutes academic misconduct in your class, including the use of previously submitted work, collaboration on homework, and so on. Do not harangue students but do be clear and firm.

Returning graded work
Students have a right to the timely return of graded work – typically within a week or two of its submission. This is a concrete way they can understand how they are doing in the course and learn from their mistakes. Research shows that the quicker the return, the greater the impact on learning.

Reviewing students' work when they challenge grades
Students have the right to ask for review of the grading of their work, especially on major assessments like tests, projects, and papers. Make clear to them any constraints on such review (e.g., deadlines by which they must request it, etc.).

Progress Reports
If you are teaching a 1000- or 2000-level course during the fall or spring terms, you must assign either an S (Satisfactory) or U (Unsatisfactory) to students by the end of week six. Even if a student's work is technically passing, a "U" Progress Report can be a way of signaling unproductive behaviors (e.g., non-attendance, if attendance is required) that, if not changed, are likely to result in a poor or failing course grade in the end. While the Progress Report has no permanent or binding effect, it can be an opportunity for instructors and academic advisors to call struggling students in for an individual counseling/ mentoring meeting.

End of Semester Restrictions
Certain kinds of work may not be made due on the two Final Instructional Days each semester. *No work* may be made due during Reading Periods. During Final Exam period, only final exams may be administered; if there is no final exam in your class, another piece of work substituting for it may be made due at the scheduled time of the exam.

Final Grade Submission
Final grade submission deadlines are listed in the official academic calendar (registrar.gatech.edu), and must be adhered to every semester, for every student. Failure to meet grade submission deadlines can cause serious problems and will earn you considerable censure.

Respect for Students
It is important to treat your students professionally and with respect. Do not call out students individually in class for censure or ridicule. This is public humiliation of a sort that is not only unacceptable but also unproductive. Rigorous instruction is not dependent on this kind of shaming.

What legal restrictions exist?

Privacy

You are not permitted to divulge any individual student's attendance, grades, or other aspects of performance to any other student or to any family member without the student's explicit consent. Doing so is a violation of FERPA and is subject to legal challenge. For instance, you may not post grades or leave exams in a pile outside your office door for students to pick up.

Non-Discrimination

You are not permitted to accord some students different treatment on the basis of their race, gender, sexual orientation, class, or age. All students at Georgia Tech are capable of success. Do not make the mistake of judging them based solely on their appearance.

Students with Disabilities

The law requires that you observe the accommodations approved for students with disabilities. Faculty members are obligated to comply with ADA requirements for students who provide them with official notice of their disabilities. If you are unsure how to do this, please contact the Office of Disability Services (disabilityservices. gatech.edu).

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I make changes to my syllabus after it's been issued?

Yes, but you should keep major changes of assignment or due dates to a minimum. If you do make changes, you must give students enough advance warning to be able to reorganize their time accordingly and you must issue a revised syllabus. Please be aware that changes that work for some students often do not work for all, so you can end up disadvantaging some even when your aim is to give extra time or ease a deadline. It's best to consider the workload and deadlines carefully in setting up your syllabus and then not veer far from it.

Can I set a limit to email exchanges with students?

You are expected to reply in a timely way to student inquiries by email (e.g., within 24-48 hours). However, if the answer to a student's question is one that will illuminate the whole class, you may choose to supply the answer in a general message to all via T-Square, Piazza, etc. If you find a student is unreasonably demanding by email (e.g., sending you messages every 45 minutes while working on a paper or problem set), you can distill your responses into a single message in reply. Timely reply does not necessarily mean instantaneous reply.

Can I penalize students for non-attendance?

You can do this if attendance or attendance-dependent activities, like participation in discussion, are explicitly required in the syllabus. In general, students who are present regularly are much more likely to be engaged and to do well than those who are not; in this way, unless it is explicitly figured into the course grade, a student's non-attendance is likely to be its own penalty.

Can I schedule extra course activities in addition to scheduled class meetings?

You may do this only if the activities are optional or if you offer an alternative activity or assignment for students who have conflicts with the time of the additional activity.

Six Teaching Tips for Success

Plan carefully how to use class time

Whatever the major mode of your teaching, plan explicitly to ask and answer questions, think about how to facilitate discussion, and consider how best to orchestrate moments of transition between different activities (a good way to keep students' attention engaged).

Provide feedback to support student success

Setting high expectations will help motivate your students to put in extra effort. However, students will also need frequent, specific feedback from you about how to improve, so that they can rise to meet your expectations.

Give students adequate time to complete work

Be mindful of the heavy load of academic work most students carry, and aim to provide students with enough time to perform their work to your expectations.

Create opportunities for collaboration among students

Learning is enhanced when students have the opportunity to share ideas with others and respond to others' reactions. A supportive classroom environment also promotes motivation and interest in the class.

Meet regularly with your TAs to instruct them about how to support both you and the students

Plan with your TAs, discuss pedagogical issues with them, and provide them with the training to be confident and effective on your behalf and as intermediaries with the students.

Treat students as partners in learning

The respect, civility, and consideration you pay to students will be amply repaid to you and facilitate the kind of challenge and rigor you hope to foster.