Welcome back from the winter break. At the University of Kentucky, our highest priority is an education that prepares students for personal success, as leaders to improve the well-being of the Commonwealth and the Nation and to effectively address Global Issues. Effective communication and transparency of processes are key ingredients in our ongoing efforts to improve student success, retention and progress towards graduation.

Academic Ombud Services (AOS) is a confidential, impartial and independent resource to assist students and faculty in resolving academic issues. This update contains a number of reminders as well as guidelines for issues that have come to the Ombud’s attention. As well, links to various resources and relevant University Senate Rules (SR) that may be helpful to faculty are included. Should you have questions or concerns involving academic policies, please contact AOS at ombud@uky.edu or 859-257-3737. You may also visit our website or our office at 109 Bradley Hall. Best wishes for a stimulating and successful semester.

Topics:
1. Title IV Compliance Requirements Update
2. Dead Week Issues
3. Meeting with Students Regarding Academic Integrity Issues
4. Requirement of TCE Participation for Grading
5. DRC Accommodations
6. Excused Absence During Finals Week for Commencement Ceremonies

1. Title IV Compliance Requirements Update

Last Fall the University instituted new requirements for documenting student attendance/engagement in classes in order to comply with Title IV Regulations. Briefly, the Title IV regulation states that “Federal regulation mandates that federal financial aid funds (Title IV) may only be disbursed to students who are actually enrolled and engaged in coursework. This regulation mandates that institutions provide evidence of engagement early in each semester. Failure to provide evidence includes sizeable fees and fines for the university. To comply with this mandate, all instructors of undergraduate and graduate courses (including lab courses), independent studies, online courses, and research credit) will be required to confirm student attendance or engagement in classes during the two-week period following the last day to add a class.

More information can be found on the Registrar’s website. The page contains a link for FAQs as well. Briefly, from the website, “to comply with the new Title IV regulation, faculty will be required to report students for non-attendance/non-participation/non-engagement through the class roll in MyUK. Faculty only need to mark students that are not attending versus marking each student on the roster. If all students are attending, faculty can indicate this in one place on the roster. Once a student is marked for non-attendance/non-participation/non-engagement in the class roster, the student will be dropped from the class and from CANVAS with a grade symbol “NA”. The student, faculty member and advisor will be notified of the drop action via the ACT platform. If an undergraduate student drops below full-time, financial aid disbursement will be reduced. The drop will result in a 50% refund to the student. Courses dropped for non-attendance/non-participation/non-engagement will not appear on the student’s transcript. If a student is adversely or unfairly impacted by the new requirements and forced to withdraw from a class, the student may seek relief through the tuition appeals process”.

The dates for the monitoring period and reporting periods for Spring Semester 2019 will be posted at the link on the Registrar’s webpage.

2. Dead Week

There continue to be concerns raised by students that faculty are not conforming to the Senate Rules on Dead Week activities defined by SR 5.2.4.6. As a reminder:

- No written exams or quizzes or final examinations may be scheduled during Dead Week
- Make-up exams or quizzes may be scheduled.
- No projects, lab practicals, papers, presentation deadlines or oral/listening examinations may be scheduled during Dead Week unless they were scheduled in the syllabus AND the course has no final examination (or assignment that acts as a final examination) scheduled during finals week.
- A course with a lab component may schedule the lab practical of the course during Dead Week if the lab portion does not also require a final examination during finals week.
- Graded homework that is a routine part of the course and is announced in the course syllabus may be assigned for submission during Dead Week.

Feel free to contact AOS if you have any questions regarding Dead Week.

3. Meeting with Students Regarding Academic Integrity Issues
A number of students have expressed concerns that they have not been given adequate opportunity to have express their perspective in initial meetings with the faculty and chair. Faculty are reminded that when they set up an initial meeting with a student to discuss an academic offense, one of the reasons for the meeting is to allow students due process rights to ensure the student has had the opportunity to explain his or her perspective of the issue.

Senate Rule 6.4.3.A.1. Allegation; Opportunity of Student to Respond. This rule provides that after the instructor and chair (or chair’s designee) review the evidence and decide the evidence supports an academic offense allegation, “the student shall be notified of the allegation and invited to meet with the instructor and chair to discuss the allegation and to state his or her case”.

Senate Rule 6.4.3.A.2, Finding. This rule states that “The instructor shall consider the evidence and the student’s response and shall decide, based on the standard of proof, whether the student committed an academic offense”. Implicit in both rules is that this meeting should be an opportunity for the student to explain their perspective of the issue. The meeting should not be adversarial. The faculty member, with the Chair (or Chair’s designee) present, should explain to the student the issue with the assignment or exam, and then allow the student the opportunity to explain what happened.

The Academic Ombud Services webpage contains more information for faculty the process and procedures for academic offenses. If you have any questions on processing an academic offense, please feel free to contact Academic Ombud Services at 257-3737.

4. Requirement of TCE Participation for Grading

A question has arisen about whether participation in the online Teacher Course Evaluation (TCE) system could serve as the basis for grading in courses. This question was previously addressed by AOS before the report by the UK Senate Teaching & Course Evaluation Implementation Ad-Hoc Committee, March 2016 that was approved by the University Senate at its May 2016 meeting. The prior opinion found the rules to be unclear with respect to basing grading on completion of the TCE. While there was nothing in the Senate Rules that specifically forbade use of the TCE as a graded element, there were concerns raised about confidentiality. In some cases, instructors or colleges issued an incomplete 'I' grade until the TCE was completed. While this procedure was in place at the time, the prior opinion also held that it was not consistent with the intent in the Senate Rules regarding the circumstances for awarding a temporary I grade, e.g., that the process be initiated by the student (Senate Rule 5.1.3.2 Grade I . . . Except under exceptional circumstances, the student shall initiate the request for the I grade).

The report by the Ad-Hoc Committee, approved by the University Senate contains the following language: “Instructors may not offer additional incentives (e.g., food, extra credit) for TCE completion”. The report can be found on the University Senate website.

Based on this policy, it is not appropriate to base grades or offer any ‘incentives’ to complete the TCE. It should be noted that this policy does include an inducement for students to complete the TCE in the form of a ‘TCE Grade Release Policy’ where by students ‘who do not complete a TCE for a course will not receive their grade until 8 days after the deadline for submission of grades as set by the Registrar’s office.

5. DRC Accommodations

The Disability Resource Center (DRC) serves students with a wide array of disabilities and provides students with a number of resources to aid in their academic success. The DRC seeks to facilitate an environment of inclusion and accessibility for students with disabilities to insure they receive equal opportunity and access to education and campus activities at the University of Kentucky. More information can be found on the DRC website. DRC staff work with students to design accommodations that will aid students in their academic endeavors. In many cases students are provided with specific accommodations that frequently include:

- Classroom accommodations
- Accommodated exams (can be provided in the DRC Center Located on the fourth floor of the MDS building at 725 Rose Street)
- Flexibility with attendance policies and due dates for assignments

To develop a program of accommodations, students must meet with DRC staff to determine their needs. In all cases they will be provided with an accommodation letter that defines the specific accommodations students must be provided. Students must provide the accommodation letter to faculty to receive accommodations. We recommend that instructors remind students during the first week of classes that any students requiring accommodations should meet with the instructor and provide the instructor with a copy of their DRC accommodations letter. Students may download a pdf copy which can be provided to the instructor by email or may print out a hard copy depending on the instructor’s preference. Faculty are reminded to be sure that they understand the accommodations that have been authorized and to provide these accommodations in a discrete manner to avoid embarrassment to the student.

For students with accommodation requests related to flexibility with attendance and/or due dates, the DRC has developed an agreement form to assist in the determination of how this accommodation will be instituted. The form, with guidance for the instructor included, is located on the faculty resources page of the DRC website. A copy is also provided to the student. Utilizing the guidelines, faculty can work with the student to develop an acceptable number of absences, how the absences will be communicated to the faculty, and a plan for completing any missed/late assignments or tests. Please note this accommodation is not intended as a blanket excuse that allows the student to be absent an unlimited number of times or have open ended testing/assignment due date windows. If you feel a student is abusing this accommodation, please contact the student’s DRC consultant.
We continue to see students with concerns regarding their DRC accommodations not being met. One concern is reports by students of instructors calling them out regarding their accommodations or mentioning them in front of the class. This a problem for a couple of reasons. First, it breaches confidentiality. Second, students are often sensitive about their conditions and may feel uncomfortable having their issues discussed in front of a class. Instructors are reminded to respect the student’s privacy and to only discuss DRC issues one on one in a private setting.

As a reminder, students also bear responsibility in making their instructors aware of their required accommodations. The DRC website has a document on its website outlining students’ responsibilities. Faculty who have students with DRC accommodations are encouraged to review this document.

Another issue that we have seen in the Ombud Office is that accommodations are not retroactive. Should a student provide an accommodation letter after an exam, assignment, absence, etc., it is strictly at the instructor’s discretion whether to offer the student any accommodation. Finally, faculty with questions are encouraged to visit the DRC website or directly contact the DRC at 859-257-2754 with questions or concerns.

6. Excused Absence During Finals Week for Commencement Ceremonies

Faculty are reminded that graduating students who have a final exam scheduled during commencement have the right to have the exam rescheduled according to SR 5.2.4.7. For Spring Semester 2018, commencement is scheduled for Friday May 3. Students are required to notify the “instructor no later than two weeks prior to the scheduled examination”. The exam may be rescheduled “for another time agreed to by the Instructor of Record during the final examination period”. Faculty teaching courses with a Friday May 3 exam are encouraged to remind students early in the course that they must file a request to reschedule an exam that conflicts with commencement by the two-week deadline, which this fall will be by Friday April 19.

LINKS:
The Course Syllabus
Academic Offense Policy
Accommodation of Religious Observances
Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
Dead Week
Final Examinations
Cheating During Examinations
Class Records & Papers
Course Evaluations
Cancellation of Classes