

College Guidelines in the Preparation, Administration, and Grading of Examinations and other Assessments

The following guidelines address the most common concerns that arise in traditional assessment/testing exercises. Some guidelines are identified to be College policy and result from consensus building discussions among College faculty. In some cases, there is a broad consensus and desired procedures which are considered to be College Policy. Other guidelines are recommendations reflecting faculty experience and commonly employed procedures.

All recommendations are based on faculty experiences of what has worked best, or created the least angst, in the past. It is recommended that faculty members not vary from guidelines without discussing their decision fully with the appropriate party named in the guide below. Faculty resources include:

- Director of Assessment & Faculty Development: Assists in assessment strategies or exam development
- Curriculum Committee Chair: Addresses all questions related to syllabus development
- Student Services or the Executive Associate Dean: Addresses all concerns regarding interactions with specific students or groups of students
- Executive Associate Dean: Addresses all questions regarding exceptions to policy or interpretation of how recommendations might be applied to specific courses or situations

The following items are detailed within this guideline. The items below are linked to specific sections of this document to assist in navigation. If there are additional issues that you would like included in future versions of this document, please contact the Executive Associate Dean.

The following icons will help you determine whether you need to seek approval before deviating from these guidelines.



Must discuss with Executive Association Dean before Proceeding



Should review change with appropriate faculty resource individual.

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Composing/Preparing for an Examination

Scheduling exams and other class activities

All course coordinators administering exams or activities within a specific year and term (e.g. P2 fall, P3 winter) should meet (through email or in person) to coordinate dates for assessments and activities at least four weeks prior to the term. Please do not publish course-related dates prior to this meeting.



Once exam and class activity dates have been negotiated and a final schedule determined, these dates are considered set in stone and cannot be changed by the instructors or course coordinators. If something extraordinary arises after the assessment schedule has been established, consult with the Executive Associate Dean before making any changes. The curriculum has many moving pieces, and changing an exam date, however, heartfelt the students' pleas for instructors to do so, has rippling consequences.

Best practices for examination preparation include:

- Development of questions that specifically address stated course outcomes.
- Preparation of multiple choice questions that follow the guidelines posted on the faculty resource website
- The anticipation of likely responses in the preparation of essay questions by proactively developing a rubric of key points used in grading.
- Working with the Director of Assessment, prospectively, if the instructor intends to utilize novel formatting or grading strategies.
- Review of the entire exam by all instructors involved prior to printing. Minimally, the entire exam should be reviewed by the course coordinator. Key aspects to review include the presence of grammatical errors, clarity of expression in stems and items, and the diversity of difficulty in questions to allow for identification of both excellence and competency.

Extra credit in an exam or course

Extra credit on an examination – prospectively

Extra credit questions in an assessment are *at the discretion of the instructors*, but not a common feature of most testing in the College. Typically, extra credit questions focus on supplemental materials or activities that extend achievement of course outcomes. The instructor should indicate prior to the supplemental activity that it could be the basis for extra credit, and the value assigned should be minimal relative to overall points.

Extra credit for an exam or course - retrospectively

Creation of extra credit opportunities as part of adjustments during grading of an exam or creation of extra credit opportunities not included in the course syllabus are *strongly discouraged*. This approach routinely leads to student challenges along with the expectation that accommodations will continue to be made for poor performance in the course and across the curriculum. Retrospective extra credit should only be considered after discussion with the Executive Associate Dean.

Extra credit can be an appropriate strategy in the event of the unanticipated failure of most students to achieve a key course outcome can be an appropriate strategy, but it should not be used simply to address general student performance concerns. Appropriateness of the assignment to achieve the desired outcome, consideration of overall student load, and whether the opportunity is


equitable for students with differing academic or non-academic challenges must also be considered.

Comprehensive final exams

The use of comprehensive final examinations is at the discretion of the course coordinator, who should work in collaboration with course instructors. If a comprehensive exam is used, the emphasis should be on questions that require synthesis of material across the term. In advance of a comprehensive exam, students should be provided with examples of past or typical questions. The Director of Assessment can assist in determining how, or if, a comprehensive examination will be a helpful strategy to achieve outcomes for a specific course.

Administering examinations or assessments

Student requests for accommodation

 Instructors should not respond to students' requests for special accommodations during class, examinations, or other activities. All accommodation requests must be forwarded to Student Services, which will in turn refer the student to the Office for Disability Access Services (DAS). Only accommodations from the DAS office are allowed. Whenever possible, testing accommodations that require deviation from the norm (e.g., extra time and a quiet space) should be administered at the DAS offices.


Instructor discretion is sometimes appropriate for unanticipated concerns. The instructor may handle requests for accommodation resulting from acute events that occur immediately before an examination. For example, a student who is ill might request a separate room to prevent infecting other students, or a student might request permission to respond to a phone call in anticipation of a family concern. Accommodations of this nature should be one-time events. If possible, instructors are strongly encouraged to consult with the Head Advisor or Executive Associate Dean prior to providing any accommodation. Any accommodation must be reported to Student Services to confirm there is not a pattern of requests across classes.

Missing an exam due to illness

If at all possible, students are required to give notice to the course coordinator or an instructor of an illness or medical and personal emergencies that will cause them to miss an examination. The student should specify the nature of the problem, but written evidence of the excuse is not required nor should it be requested by an instructor. All accommodations of this nature should be reported to Student Services to assure that there is not a pattern of similar requests and to allow Student Services to intervene and determine if the student requires additional assistance.

No accommodation for poor performance should be made if the student has completed the examination. If a student becomes ill or has to attend to a family emergency during an examination, then the instructor or exam proctor should –after attending to or securing assistance for the students' needs – treat it as an excused missed exam and report the incident to Student Services.

Missing an exam due to reasons other than illness

 Faculty and other OSU employees who receive any religious accommodation requests must contact the Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI), unless it is for the granting of absences for Religious Holy Days or Celebrations. It is not necessary to contact OEI regarding absences for Religious Holy Days or Celebrations, if the request can be accommodated. OEI must be contacted prior to the denial of any religious accommodation requests including an absence related accommodation. <http://oregonstate.edu/oei/>.



Faculty are not required to accept excuses for absences other than illness. Students are warned that the term is not over until the end of the day on Friday of Finals Week. However, unavoidable conflicts do arise. Bereavement or celebration of events within a student's immediate family and attendance at professional meetings are examples of non-illness reasons for missing class or examinations. Instructors should consult with the Executive Associate Dean regarding the appropriateness of the request and to discuss accommodations.

Accommodation policies for missed examinations specific to the course, for any reason, should be detailed in the course syllabus.

Student behavior during examinations



The College has a policy regarding student behavior during an examination, which is summarized on the faculty resource page and included in the syllabus template. This set of instructions should be a part of every testing period and either posted or attached to each exam. *Please enforce these instructions.* For example, the policy notes that we do not respond to questions about the exam during the examination period, except in cases where questions concern obvious grammatical or numbering errors. Students are instead asked to write their concerns in the margin of their exams, and to direct your attention to their notes by indicating the page number where you may find their question. In the event that a student directs your attention to a written concern, be sure to scan a hard copy of their exam, including their written request.

Technology in examinations

All technology, such as phones (including smart watches, ear buds, noise-cancelling headsets, or any other wearable technology), should be secured inside a backpack along with any other notes prior to the start of the examination. Be certain, however, to provide students with some means to be aware of the time remaining in an exam period.

If calculators are required for basic computation, and there is a concern related to the use of programmable devices, the College can provide four-function calculators for use during the examination. The College must be notified at least one week in advance should you wish to provide four-function calculators.

Academic dishonesty

If you are concerned that academic dishonesty is occurring:

- Attempt to confirm your suspicions with a second observer.
- Most commonly, confirmation can be difficult, so:
 - Do not interrupt the suspected offending student or other students during the exam;
 - Make note of the individual(s) involved and segregate their examinations when collected so that you can evaluate further. Creating a chart of students sitting in the vicinity may help.
 - On rare occasions, you may choose to slip a note to a student indicating that they should take greater care to limit apparent efforts to see others' papers, or they should protect their answer key from the view of others.
 - Less commonly, an obvious "cheat sheet" or other aid will be evident. You may confiscate the aid immediately, but do not otherwise confront the student during the testing period.

All incidents or suspicions of academic dishonesty should be reported, even if there is a decision not to document the possible event.

! If, after reviewing an exam, the instructor is confident that academic dishonesty has occurred, immediately consult with Student Services or the Executive Associate Dean to begin the process of documenting the suspected incident. The appropriate form can be found on the faculty resources page.

Grading guidelines and procedures

Grading and grade distribution

Grading standard for the College is: >90 (A); 89 – 80 (B); 79 – 70 (C); 69 – 65 (D); 65 > (F). Writing strong examinations or assessments is difficult, as much an art as it is a science. The cut off for acceptable performance (70%) should never be increased for a traditionally graded examination, but an instructor (in collaboration with the course coordinator) may choose to modestly lower cut lines.

In general, typical exam averages for a professional student cohort are in the low- to mid-80 percentile with a standard deviation of 7 – 10%. It is reasonably common to find only 10 – 15 % of students in the C-range or lower. Professional students are selected from a strong cohort. Like graduate students, professional students are informed that performance at the C-level is not adequate.



On occasion, if the overall class average is unusually low (<80%, for example), instructors have employed certain grading strategies. One such strategy has been to use the mean as the marker for a B or B- and then to use a statistical approach to set the cut-off for below a C at 2 standard deviations below the mean. This strategy typically catches true outliers. Visual inspection of the score distribution can also sometimes identify an obvious gap in low scores, creating an appropriate cut-off point for acceptable achievement. Consult with the Director of Assessment or Executive Associate Dean if you have concerns that a significant adjustment in grading may be appropriate for an exam or course.

There are assessments or courses for which a specific level of competency is expected (for example, a pass / no pass course). It is advised that the instructor seek assistance in determining how competency will be defined and evaluated to ensure student achievement of course outcomes. In these cases, criteria for achieving competency should be clearly stated in the course syllabus.

Use of plus/minus grades

Use of plus/minus delineators on final course letter grades is at the discretion of the course coordinator. Regardless of whether they are used or not, the policy should be clearly articulated in the syllabus under the Grading section. Some coordinators adhere to a standard scale, such as 93-100=A, 90-92.9=A-, 87-89.9=B+, etc. For others, the +/- is only used to indicate a small number of students who were close to the grade break, or to identify students who are consistently weak or strong or who have demonstrated significant improvement.

Throwing out, or not grading, questions



Choosing to not grade a question should be the last resort. Having the course coordinator effectively proofread and evaluate of all instructors' questions—including those written by guest lecturers—prior to administering the exam should nearly eliminate a need to “throw out” questions. Questions on each examination should display a diversity of difficulty so that difficult but fair questions are retained, just as questions that all students answer correctly should be retained. If necessary, it is a better strategy to adjust the grading scale than to eliminate individual questions.

Occasionally, instructors mistakenly fail to include a correct answer or include more than one correct answer. In the first case, the question must not be scored. In the latter case, the best solution is to award credit to students who selected either correct answer. If there is a question as to the best approach to managing a grading concern, reach out to the Executive Associate Dean or Assessment Director.

Responding to student challenges to grading decisions

Differentiating between a student wanting to understand and learn from their errors and a student wanting to argue points can be difficult at first. Be clear with students that you are willing to help them learn; however if they are looking for points, adhere to the subsequent procedure:

- Do not debate answers with students in person.
- Request that the student write out their rationale for challenging a question. The student should then submit their rationale along with the full exam for consideration. Share with the student that for essay questions, reconsidering the grading decision may involve a more careful regrading of the entire exam.
- Require that all challenges be submitted within one week of the return of an exam or release of scores.
- If you decide to award points, wait until after the one week grace period is over, and then respond to students individually. This avoids the snowball effect of having students learn that someone “got extra points” and then making the same request when they hear of a winning rationale.
- If a student accurately identifies an actual error on a multiple choice question, correct the key and rerun all scantrons.

There will be times in which a student and instructor disagree on grading. In these instances, the instructor is the content expert and needs to respond to the student only one time. Be clear and firm on your decision, and consult with colleagues or the Executive Associate Dean if necessary. If the student persists in arguing a point or wishes to appeal your decision, simply advise them that the department chair is the next person up the ladder in an appeal process. Any inappropriate or persistent behavior following your advising the student of the appeals process should be communicated to Student Services or the Executive Associate Dean. If appropriate, the instructor should also complete an incident form, which can be found on the faculty resource page.

Missed examination policies

The course syllabus should detail the procedure that will be employed if a student is excused from an exam due to illness or other accepted reason. Strategies that have been used include:

- Administering the same exam after others have taken it (rarely before), but asking for written assurance that the student has not been party to discussions about the exam. In this case, the make-up should be administered before the exam is returned to other students.
- If there is a comprehensive final, weighting material missed more heavily on the final.
- Creating a revised or new examination administered at a mutually agreeable time prior to the next midterm or final. The revised exam may be a different format, but should be of comparable difficulty
- In some instances, we have allowed for an exam to be administered at a different location, at the same time, for example, at the site of a professional meeting.

Re-examination policies



Unless there is a clearly stated policy in the grading section of the course syllabus, *allowing a student to retake an exam is strongly discouraged*. If an instructor wishes to allow for retake exams in the syllabus, experience suggests that grade averaging, rather than grade replacement, is preferred.

Any decisions to offer a retake exam, introduce an additional assessment, not in the syllabus, or offer extra credit should fully be discussed with all instructors in the course and the Executive Associate Dean.

Incomplete Grades

Grades should not be assigned until all requirements of the course have been completed. Consult with the Executive Associate Dean regarding appropriate strategies should an “Incomplete” grade be necessary. The College requires that all grades of “Incomplete” be resolved no later than the third week of the following term.

Returning exams: Policies and procedures

A decision whether to return or retain exams is at the discretion of the course coordinator, but must be consistent within a course and ideally within a course sequence. The policy should be clearly communicated to the students.

The rationale for either approach has merit. Returning exams is thought to provide one last opportunity for student learning while retaining exams allows for the progressive building of a validated bank of test questions.

If examinations are returned to students, the instructor should provide the front office with the hard copies of the exam and print out of their individual Scantron results (for multiple choice exams) that allow for the individual performance of students to be attached to the hard copy. The office will define procedures that allow students to pick up their individual examinations. Instructors should advise students on opportunities to discuss areas for improvement. Instructors are also asked to inform students that staff should not be expected to provide other support, such as printing last minute final copies of assigned assessments or papers.

If examinations are not returned to students, the course coordinator or instructor should identify times when students may come to their office or another location to review their performance and, if desired, discuss areas for improvement. Pharmacy office staff can assist in alphabetizing or collating examinations, but should not be expected to hold sessions or oversee time for students to review exams.

! *Regardless of decisions on returning exams, communicate student performance (especially poor student performance) shortly following grading to Student Services, so that they can intervene in real time to assist students.*

Retaining exams and assignments

The [Secretary of State, Archives Division](#) provides the following wording regarding the retention of student assignments, including “Examinations, Tests, Term Papers, and Homework Records”:

! Records document work of student subject mastery in institution courses not returned to the student. Records may include but are not limited to examinations and answers; quizzes and answers; homework assignments; course papers; term papers; and essay assignments. This series does not include graduate student qualifying or comprehensive examinations. (Retention: (a) 1 term after completion for uncontested grade results, destroy (b) Until resolved for contested grade results, destroy).”

End of document.

For additional content requests, please send suggestions to Gary DeLander or Tanya Ostrogorsky.