

Complete Policy Title:
Undergraduate Course Management Policies

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N/A

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Senate

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- Senate Resolutions on Course Outlines – June 14, 1995
- Guidelines for Student Evaluation – March 10, 2004
- Examination Ban – March 1995
- Academic Integrity Statement for Course Outlines – April 13, 2005
- Turnitin.com Guidelines – April 13, 2005
- Retention of Examination Papers and Other Graded Materials – May 13, 2009

Responsible Executive:
Vice-Provost (Faculty)

Enquiries:
[Policy \(University Secretariat\)](#)

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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

1. This policy summarizes instructor responsibilities in regard to undergraduate courses. The University expects instructors to clearly communicate their course expectations so students are able to plan ahead and manage their time accordingly. Additionally, undergraduate students should normally be assessed more than once and receive feedback early enough to make decisions.

[Section A Course Outlines](#)

[Section B Due Date Restrictions](#)

[Section C Maximum Value of Academic Assessments](#)

[Section D Early Feedback](#)

[Section E Returning Marked Work and the Posting of Grades](#)

[Section F Retention of Examination Papers and Other Graded Material](#)

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[Appendix I Components of a Course Outline](#)

[Appendix II Approved Statements for Inclusion in Course Outlines](#)

[Appendix III McMaster University Grading Scale](#)

SECTION A: COURSE OUTLINES

2. A course outline sets the expectations for students and what they can expect in terms of the course experience they will receive, the format in which the course will be delivered and the knowledge and skills that can be gained. The outline introduces the course and the instructor and sets out the expectations of the instructor so that students are aware of how they will learn, what level of participation will be expected and how they will be assessed. Instructors are responsible for ensuring course outlines are compliant with all policies.
3. Since Calendar descriptions of courses are necessarily brief, instructors are required to provide students with a more detailed course outline describing the administrative and academic details of the course. Such outlines are to be made available to students at the beginning of the course and must be kept on file for 10 years in the department administering the course. Instructors are encouraged to make course outlines available as soon as possible, but at the very least two weeks before the start of classes.
4. Students will expect the course to unfold as described in the course outline and will plan their time and resources accordingly. As questions or concerns during the course will be referred back to the course outline, instructors are encouraged to anticipate issues that might arise and specify how those issues will be addressed (e.g., late submission of assignments, missed tests).
5. If it becomes necessary to make changes to some part of the course during the term, reasonable notice and communication between the instructor and students is critical. Students should be provided with an explanation and an opportunity to comment. The instructor is encouraged to use multiple communication methods with students (e.g. class announcements, e-mail message sent to the class through Mosaic, message posted on the course web-site or A2L, etc.).
6. The arrangement proposed in the course outline should not be interpreted in a way that discourages flexibility in course presentation and organization exclusive of grade weighting. If an instructor wishes to reserve decisions to be made as the course progresses, that intention should be stated in the course outline, for example:
"At certain points in the course it may make good sense to modify the schedule. The instructor may modify elements of the course and will notify students accordingly (in class, on the course website)".
7. Any changes related to evaluation must be made in consultation with the Department Chair.
8. The University reserves the right to change dates and/or deadlines etc. for any or all courses in the case of an extreme circumstance, such as an emergency situation or labour disruption.
9. Instructors must include the following in their course outlines:
 - a) the [Academic Integrity statement](#), and
 - b) the [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities statement](#), and
 - c) the [Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work statement](#), and
 - d) the [Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances statement](#), and

- e) the [Extreme Circumstances statement](#).
10. Instructors are asked to make announcements encouraging students to discuss the implementation of their accommodations with you as soon as possible.
 11. Courses requiring online access/work or courses which will be checking student work for plagiarism, should include the "[Language for Use in Courses with an On-Line Element](#)" and/or the "[Authenticity/Plagiarism Detection Language](#)" statements in the course outline.
 12. All of the above statements can be found in [Appendix II](#) of this policy.
 13. Instructors must ensure course outlines include the components shown in [Appendix I](#).

SECTION B: DUE DATE RESTRICTIONS

14. Academic assessments and due dates are described in course outlines except where other University policies apply, e.g., [Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#) accommodations, deferred exams, etc. Restrictions are placed on due dates to enable students to plan their work load.
15. Due dates for all term work must be on or before the final day of classes for courses with a final examination. For courses with no final examination, academic assessments can be due on or before the final date of examinations.
16. Tests, quizzes, exams and take home exams worth more than 10% cannot be assigned or due during the last 5 days of classes plus the day(s) between the end of classes and the beginning of examinations. Assignments worth more than 10% that are assigned at the beginning of the course and noted on the course outline can be due during this time period, provided students are given sufficient additional detail to enable them to work on the assignment in advance of the due date.
17. Academic assessments cannot be due during the December holiday break or the fall and winter mid-term recesses, with the exception of deferred exams scheduled by the [Office of the Registrar](#).

SECTION C: MAXIMUM VALUE OF ACADEMIC ASSESSMENTS

18. Student learning in undergraduate courses should be assessed on more than one occasion. To that end, no single academic obligation (e.g., essay, test, examination, etc.) should have a value of more than 75% of the final grade without approval from the Department Chair or Associate Dean's Office. Clinical, placement, thesis and capstone courses are exempt.
19. For students requiring relief from an academic obligation, it is at the discretion of the instructor to determine the nature of the relief. In cases such as this, students can be offered the choice of another assessment or the option of writing a final examination which may be worth more than 75% of the course grade.

SECTION D: EARLY FEEDBACK

20. All students must receive feedback regarding their progress prior to the final date by which a student may cancel the course without failure by default.
21. For Level I and Level II courses, this feedback must equal a minimum of 20% of the final grade.
22. For Level III courses and above, this feedback must equal a minimum of 10% of the final grade.
23. For courses where it is difficult to achieve a numeric grade due to the design of the course (e.g., supervised study, thesis, capstone, inquiry, independent research/study, experiential courses, etc.), clear and early feedback must be provided.
24. When academic obligations are completed by the due dates in the course outline, early feedback will be received by the final date by which a student can cancel a course without failure by default. Students who use the MSAF process and other petitionable accommodations may not receive feedback by the early feedback deadline.

SECTION E: RETURNING MARKED WORK AND THE POSTING OF GRADES

25. It is always preferable to return marked work or grades directly to students either electronically or physically. However, if there is a need to return marked work to students in an indirect manner or to post grades, the work must be returned and the grades posted in a manner designed to protect the anonymity of the students.
26. All posting of final grades will note that the grades are unofficial until released by the Office of the Registrar.

SECTION F: RETENTION OF EXAMINATION PAPERS AND OTHER GRADED MATERIAL

27. Department Chairs (or Director of a School or Program) are responsible for ensuring that final examinations and all other graded material not meant to be returned to students, and the instructor's record of how the final grades in a course were determined, are retained for at least one year after last use, and remain accessible to the Department Chair for that period.
28. This policy applies to all instructors. Sessional lecturers and those retiring or otherwise leaving the service of the University must notify their immediate supervisor of the on-campus storage location of the material.

SECTION G: AUTHENTICITY / PLAGIARISM DETECTION

29. McMaster University approves the use of software to check authenticity of academic work for the following reasons:
- a) prevention – if students know their academic work is being checked for plagiarism, they will use proper citation methods;
 - b) protection of honest students and their work; and
 - c) detection – with the type of technology in common use today, it is necessary to use a detection tool which checks academic work against the internet, scholarly publications and previously submitted assignments to McMaster and other institutions.
30. Guidelines for the use of Turnitin.com:
- a) papers/assignments submitted via Avenue to Learn (A2L) or Turnitin.com may be subject to a plagiarism and similarity check using Turnitin.com;
 - b) the instructor should indicate that Turnitin.com will be used in the course outline and/or on the assignment details;
 - c) the use of Turnitin.com cannot be mandatory (see clause 31 below). If a student refuses to submit their work to A2L or Turnitin.com for plagiarism detection, they cannot be compelled to do so and should not be penalized. Instructors are advised to accept an electronic and/or hard copy of the assignment and grade it as per normal methods. The assignment can be subjected to a Google search or some other kind of detection method if the instructor wishes.
31. Some students object to the use of Turnitin.com because of ownership issues. All work submitted to Turnitin.com becomes part of their database and is used to check authenticity of other student's assignments. Some students object to their work being put in the database and others object to their work being used by Turnitin.com.

SECTION H: ACCOMMODATIONS AND PETITIONS

32. Instructors are expected and required to support all McMaster University Policies. As per the [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy, instructors cannot ask or require medical notes from students. A student may be allowed modifications to academic obligations, including deadlines, under the following circumstances:

Accommodation on the basis of disability, religion, family status, or other human rights-related grounds.

- a) Accommodation decisions are normally made through a collaborative process involving the student, [Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#) (if disability related), the instructor, and possibly the Faculty Office and/or the [Equity and Inclusion Office \(EIO\)](#).¹

Relief from the consequences of missed term work or examinations based on compelling personal, family or medical circumstances.

- b) A student may self-declare an illness or other personal situation granting themselves relief from academic work under certain conditions using the [McMaster Student Absence Form \(MSAF\)](#) process.
- c) For all other compelling circumstances, the student is required to request relief from their Faculty Office. If the petition is granted, the faculty office will notify the instructor of the time period for which the student has been granted an approved absence.
- d) It is at the discretion of the instructor to determine the nature of the relief, bearing in mind re-weighting one component of the grade to 75% of the final grade or more is discouraged without approval from the Department Chair or Associate Dean's Office.
33. Instructors are encouraged, where possible, to design Academic Obligations (assessments) in a manner that anticipates the need for modifications for some students and that protects the academic integrity of the course. For example, preparing and scheduling a make-up mid-term test, anticipating that deadlines may need to be extended, preparing a deferred exam, etc.
34. Instructors are encouraged to adopt Universal Design principles and practices to ensure the course is accessible and that assessments are designed with flexibility where possible. The [MacPherson Institute](#) located in [Mills Library](#) is available to assist instructors.

¹ Accommodations may or may not affect the academic obligations outlined in the course outline. For example, an accommodation may be that the student receive the course material in an alternate format or bring a service animal to class.

35. If a student brings an informal request directly to the instructor, the instructor is encouraged to re-direct the student to the appropriate office. Usually the correct office is the Faculty/Program Office, except in the case of disability related or other human rights- related requests, in which case students should be directed to SAS. Any request to instructors for additional modification beyond what has been formally granted, should be directed back to the appropriate office.

SECTION I: CONFLICT OF INTEREST GUIDELINES

36. Faculty members and University officers normally shall not take part in any proceedings at any level which affect the academic standing of an immediate family member (spouse, common-law partner, parent, in-law, sibling, child or step-child). Such proceedings include admission, scholarships, financial assistance and reviewing.
37. There shall be no restriction against a student registering in a course taught by an immediate family member. In all such cases, however, the instructor must inform his/her Department Chair who shall ensure that arrangements are made for an appropriate assessment of the student's performance involving a qualified person or persons other than the instructor.

RELATED POLICIES

The *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA)* applies to universities. Instructors should take care to protect student names, student numbers, grades and all other personal information at all times. For example, the submission and return of assignments and the posting of grades must be done in a manner that ensures confidentiality - see <http://www.mcmaster.ca/univsec/fippa/fippa.cfm>

- [Academic Integrity Policy](#)
- [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#)
- [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#)
- [Field Trips, Student Placements and Research Activity Planning and Approval Program](#)
- [Conflict of Interest Guidelines – Undergraduate Studies and Graduate Studies](#)
- [Rights and Responsibilities of Undergraduate Students During Work Stoppages That Substantially Disrupt Academic Activities](#)
- [Storm Emergency Policy](#)
- [Fair Dealing Policy](#)
- [Guidelines for Digital Learning Resources](#)

APPENDIX I: COMPONENTS OF A COURSE OUTLINE

Administrative Details	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact information • Office hours or how/when available • Session and term of the class 	<p><i>If applicable include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TA and/or Course Coordinator contact information • Website address or alternative methods of communication
Course and Learning Objectives	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of course and learning objectives (by the end of the course, what should the students know, be able to do, value, demonstrate, etc.) 	
Materials & Fees	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of all required materials e.g. textbooks, materials (calculators (use McMaster standard calculator), art supplies, etc). • Any additional expenses which may be required (e.g., digital learning resources, trips) 	
Course Overview and Assessment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear breakdown of the course requirements or expectations including the weight given to each and due date (if possible) • How work is to be submitted • Policy on missed work, extensions, and late penalties 	<p><i>If applicable include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final exam (specify if a final is included, and whether it tests cumulative knowledge) • Weekly breakdown of class topics and readings • Attendance requirements • Class participation expectations • Group work expectations and how group work will be evaluated • Grade adjustment techniques • Where possible, include the criteria to be used in evaluating a student's work
Additional statements – see Appendix II	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Integrity statement • Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities statement • Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work statement • RISO policy statement • Notice regarding possible course modification • Any other policy relevant to the course 	<p><i>If applicable include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authenticity/Plagiarism statement • On-line statement for courses requiring online access or work • Reference to Research Ethics

APPENDIX II: APPROVED STATEMENTS FOR INCLUSION IN COURSE OUTLINES

1. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY LANGUAGE FOR COURSE OUTLINES

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity), located at www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- Improper collaboration in group work.
- Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

2. AUTHENTICITY / PLAGIARISM DETECTION LANGUAGE FOR COURSE OUTLINES

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via Avenue to Learn (A2L) plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish to submit their work through A2L and/or Turnitin.com must still submit an electronic and/or hardcopy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com or A2L. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

3. LANGUAGE FOR USE IN COURSES WITH AN ON-LINE ELEMENT

In this course we will be using X. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

X = e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.

4. ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES LANGUAGE

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. [Student Accessibility Services](#) can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

5. REQUESTS FOR RELIEF FOR MISSED ACADEMIC TERM WORK McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF)

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar "Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work".

6. ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCES (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students requiring a RISO accommodation should submit their request to their Faculty Office normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

7. EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.

APPENDIX III: MCMaster UNIVERSITY GRADING SCALE

Grade	Equivalent Grade Point	Equivalent Percentages
A+	12	90-100
A	11	85-89
A-	10	80-84
B+	9	77-79
B	8	73-76
B-	7	70-72
C+	6	67-69
C	5	63-66
C-	4	60-62
D+	3	57-59
D	2	53-56
D-	1	50-52
F	0	0-49