Covid-19 Academic Continency Planning Information
April 6, 2020
Message #6

Dear colleagues:

The end of term is approaching as we head into our last week of classes and then to exams. Below are a few messages about the last weeks of term including soliciting informal student feedback, exam preparation, Student Accessibility Services and preparation for the next spring and summer sessions.

I also want to take a moment to thank everyone who has contributed to the discussion and creation of the messages coming from this office over the last three weeks. This includes the Associate Deans and Assistant Deans from all of our Faculties as well as representatives from across campus including the Registrar’s Office, the Secretariat’s Office, the Office of the AVP (Students and Learning), the Office of Equity and Inclusion, Student Accessibility Services, the MacPherson Institute, the University Technology team, the Campus Store, the Libraries, and Communications and Public Affairs. All have been working tirelessly on identifying and anticipating information that we need for the academic success of our students over the past three weeks and over the upcoming months.

Student evaluations of teaching
Formal student evaluations of teaching were suspended for the Winter 2020 term as announced on March 17, 2020. Given the dramatic changes occurring at both the university and in students’ personal lives, the formal student evaluations of teaching may more significantly reflect the students’ experience during the most recent time period rather than their experience in the overall course. It also did not seem fair to request that our students take on this added responsibility during this time.

That said, we encourage instructors to solicit informal feedback from their students about the term including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their learning, the dramatic switch to online learning environments, the changes in course evaluations and any concerns that students continue to have.

This questionnaire should be tailored to your course and to the specific changes that you and your students experienced. This is optional for instructors, chairs and directors cannot require faculty members to conduct informal evaluations and departments and programs should not create any formal templates. Instructors may choose to use the anonymous survey tool available in Avenue to Learn to solicit feedback or other anonymous survey tools available including LimeSurvey, Survey Monkey or other survey tools. Although feedback is important and useful for all instructors, it is the prerogative of the instructor to choose if and how they would like to ask their students for feedback. An informal survey will be available in Avenue to Learn that may be modified to suit individual instructor needs.
This feedback is an opportunity for you to reflect on your teaching and your course during this unique time. This reflection may be shared with chairs and directors as part of ROA and tenure and promotion processes, if you choose. Similarly, our sessional instructors may share this feedback and their reflection for future employment opportunities. A letter from McMaster University will be made available to all of our instructors that explains why formal student evaluations of teaching are not available for the Winter 2020 term and which they may choose to include in further academic review or job application processes.

Exam preparation
The exam period begins on Monday April 13, 2020. Please see the attached information from the MacPherson Institute on best practices for preparing online tests and examinations. This information is also available on the MacPherson website and here: https://mi.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2020/04/Tests-and-Exams-in-Avenue-to-Learn.pdf

Academic integrity in online tests and exams
McMaster values the importance of academic integrity in all of our work. The following text has been provided by the McMaster Office of Academic Integrity as a sample statement for use in online tests and exams.

*By submitting this work, I certify that the work represents solely my own independent efforts. I confirm that I am expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. I confirm that it is my responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty under the Academic Integrity Policy.*

Link: https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/Academic-Integrity-Policy-1-1.pdf

Student Accessibility Services
Please remember as we head into the exam period that staff members in Student Accessibility Services (SAS) are available to assist students and instructors with academic accommodations. Tips for incorporating accessibility for all of our students are available on the SAS website. Instructors can reach out to SAS if they have questions or require additional support and provide contact information: sas@mcmaster.ca.

Spring and Summer Sessions
Departments and programs have begun to turn their heads to Spring and Summer courses that require a shift to virtual classrooms and online learning. Thank you to all departments for sharing their plans for spring and summer course offerings. Happily, the majority of courses will continue to be offered with the exception of some lab and placements that cannot be easily modified for remote learning. Attached is a guide for spring and summer with consideration to instructional methods, digital and online resources for students, online classroom interactions, student accessibility, and expectations around hiring practices. Please direct students to the growing list of courses available to them for Spring and Summer Learning at McMaster. Also attached are brief definitions for students that can be used to clarify expectations for virtual classrooms and online courses in the Spring and Summer terms.

In addition, our inaugural Intersession courses will be offered in Spring/Summer 2020 in anticipation of the launch of the Intersession term. For more information please go to McMaster Intersession.

Sincerely,
Kim Dej
Acting Vice-Provost, Faculty