COVID-19 and the Classroom

To help faculty navigate the challenges of teaching in the classroom during to the current pandemic, the Faculty Welfare Committee and the Committee on Scholastic Standards and Petitions, in conjunction with others across campus, have developed materials that we hope faculty will find useful. This document has five sections:

- an overview of related to COVID-19 public health directives,
- guidance on the enforcement of public health directives in the classroom,
- suggestions and recommendations for managing attendance and class participation,
- other ideas and suggestions that faculty can consider implementing in the classroom, and
- recommendations for language that can be used in course syllabi.

Information on COVID-19 Public Health Directives

Overview of University Requirements

- Students in classrooms must adhere to seating arrangements that foster physical distancing.
- The university will provide a washable, reusable face covering for every student.
- The university requires face coverings in all classrooms. Online instruction materials will be available for those who choose that route of instruction.
- Students who fail to comply with these precautions may be denied access to the classroom (and can complete the course by accessing online content).
- If a student fails to comply with the faculty's request to leave the classroom for violations of physical distancing or not wearing a face covering, the student can be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for violation of UNIV 3.04 or STAF 6.26.
- Students are encouraged to use hand sanitizer upon entering the classroom. Likewise, each student will be requested to clean their classroom space (i.e., desk/table and chair) at the beginning of class.
- Hand sanitizer will be placed in high traffic public areas, and Facilities will place cleaning supplies in general use classrooms. Faculty can obtain additional hand sanitizer, cleaning wipes, and disposable masks from their departments/units.
- Faculty should maintain a seating chart. Doing so will help Student Health Services identify students who need to be contacted if a classmate tests positive COVID-19.

A telephone hotline (803-576-8511) and Web site have been established as resources for disseminating information and answering questions concerning COVID-19 issues on campus.

Faculty Guidance on the Enforcement of Public Health Directives in the Classroom

Consistent with university policy (UNIV 3.04), faculty may enforce public health directives during a period of communicable disease outbreak on campus; these directives include the application of mandatory face coverings in all university classrooms and physical distancing. UNIV 3.04 provides the following definitions:

Face Covering: A face covering is a material that covers the nose and mouth. It can be secured to the head with ties or straps or simply wrapped around the lower face. It can be made of a variety of materials, such as paper, cotton, silk, or linen. A face covering may be factory-made, sewn by hand, or can be improvised from household items such as scarfs, T-shirts, sweatshirts, or towels; a face

covering could be a face shield made of a clear material, for particular instructional needs or for individuals who cannot wear a traditional face covering.

Physical Distancing: Based on Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidance, physical distancing, also called "social distancing," means keeping space between yourself and other people outside your home; the core tenets being: (a) stay at least six feet (about two arms' length) from other people; (b) do not gather in groups; and (c) stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings.

The [Risk Mitigation Plan](#) (page 16) and UNIV 3.04 (Appendix) further specify:

Recognizing that there is currently conflicting guidance between CDC and WHO, it is the preference of the Public Health Team to maintain CDC-recommended physical distancing of 6 feet where feasible, but to follow WHO guidance and allow not less than 3 feet in combination with face coverings and other mitigation strategies if spatial adjustment is necessary.

In classrooms, where face coverings are required, seating has been configured to require socially distancing of at least 4 to 6 feet. In classrooms with fixed seating, faculty and students should expect some seats to be marked as unusable and are expected to respect that arrangement. In addition, signage may direct students to use specific doorways for entrance and exit.

For the Fall 2020 semester, faculty are encouraged to highlight the use of mandatory face coverings and the expectation of physical distancing in classrooms as well as consequences for non-compliance in the course syllabus.

Student Who Fails to Wear a Face Covering

If a student attempts to enter a classroom without a face covering, an instructor may:

- Clearly ask the student to remain outside the classroom for the safety of others.
- Ask the student if they have a face covering on their person (in a pocket or backpack); if so, ask them to put it on. If not, ask the student if they have a face covering in their possession (in a car, in their apartment, etc.); if so, ask them to retrieve it and return to class.
- If the student has no face covering or cannot retrieve one in a timely manner, offer the student a disposable face covering. Note that we strongly encourage units to provide disposable face coverings to faculty who teach face-to-face or hybrid classes, so they are able to provide them to students in need.
- If the student refuses to wear a face covering or has no options to retrieve a face covering, the instructor may:
  - tell the student to leave and come to the next class in a face covering;
  - tell the student to leave or you will submit a referral to the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity resulting in disciplinary sanctions that could include removal from the course.
- If the student refuses to leave the classroom as requested, you may:
  - ask the student to sit apart from the rest of the class in an area where physical distancing is possible (if there is space in the classroom), continue to teach the class, and submit a referral to the office of student conduct;
  - dismiss the class and submit a referral to the Office of Student Conduct.
- If the student is causing a disruption (e.g., yelling, using profanity, interrupting your ability to teach), you may also contact UofSC police.

What if the offending student tells me that they have a disability? The [Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC)](#) will work with registered students on accommodations related to the mandatory face covering policy. Those accommodations may be an alternative to the standard cloth face covering (such as a face shield) or changes to online instruction, **but the SDRC will not issue any student permission to be in a classroom without a face covering.** If a student informs you that the SDRC has permitted them access to

your classroom without a face covering and you have no documentation from the SDRC, inform the student that they need to visit the SDRC office in Close-Hipp suite 102.

Student Who Fails to Observe Physical Distancing

If a student fails to abide by physical distancing mandates (e.g., sitting next to each other in a seat not designated for occupancy, gathering together before or after class, etc.), the following options are available:

- Request that the student sit in a seat designated for occupancy. You can remind the students that you have the ability to report students to the Office of Student Conduct if they fail to abide by university policy, and physical distancing is part of university policy at the moment.
- If the student fails to comply, you may:
  - continue to teach the course and optionally report the students to the Office of Student Conduct;
  - dismiss the class and submit a referral to the Office of Student Conduct.

Student Who Violates Quarantine and Isolation Mandates

As outlined in the following section on attendance and class participation, the university has developed a system where students can submit documentation if they have been placed in quarantine or isolation due to exposure to COVID-19 or testing positive for COVID-19, respectively. When this occurs, if the documented student comes to a face-to-face class before they are medically cleared, the student is in violation of UNIV 3.03 and can be referred to the Office of Student Conduct.

Reporting Students to the Office of Student Conduct

If a faculty member needs to report one or more students to the Office of Student Conduct, they should use the Public Health Directive Concern Report. For students who make honest mistakes regarding mark use, social distancing, etc., and who cooperate and correct their behavior, reporting should be unnecessary. The online form should be used for students who display blatant defiance or disregard for the safety of those around them. Faculty should also bear in mind that it may take some time for the Office of Student Conduct to adjudicate these cases fairly; in particular, after a report about a student is made, it will not be possible for the Office of Student Conduct to make a decision about disciplinary actions before the next class meeting.

Recommendations and Suggestions on Attendance and Class Participation

Given the many complexities that are sure to surface during the 2020–2021 academic year (e.g., some students remaining as remote learners but enrolled in face-to-face classes, students missing class because of COVID-19 infections, students having to care for family members who are sick from COVID-19, etc.), faculty should have procedures in place to allow students who do not attend classes in person to be involved and participate remotely. There are also many reasons why synchronous class participation may be unreasonable or impossible for some people. A student may be in a different time zone, making it unreasonable to have them wake up at 4:00 a.m. to attend your class; a student's Internet connection may fail unexpectedly or may not be reliable enough for live streaming; or students may have family obligations, such as caring for siblings while their parents need to work; etc.

For students who miss in-person or synchronous lectures, it is possible to make video recordings of classes. Most online meeting and teaching software packages (including Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, which is supported by UofSC) have the option to tape presentations for later viewing. Faculty are also encouraged to consult the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) for information about how to use other software packages for holding online meetings and lectures, as well as for online video capture and dissemination. We strongly recommend that faculty record all their class sessions, even for synchronous class meetings. If desired, access

can be limited by making the recording available for just 24–48 hours to give everyone a chance to see the material.

In their attendance policies, faculty should be understanding of students who may have unexpected absences. In face-to-face or synchronous online courses where attendance or participation is normally required or represents a significant component of the course grade, we recommend that instructors offer options for students who miss classes to make up the missed participation exercises. Many students will rely heavily on computing technology and Internet access for attending classes and completing assignments. For students who are unable to attend in person, faculty should, whenever possible, develop alternative procedures for handling remote administration of in-class assignments, quizzes, and exams. UofSC's Learning Management System, Blackboard, has the capability for administering online exams using security software options, including ProctorU or Respondus LockDown Browser and Respondus Monitor, which may be used to maintain the integrity of a student's testing environment and to ensure that in-class and online exams are conducted under equivalent circumstances. However, faculty members should also be aware that students may experience unexpected changes to their technology access as result of COVID-19, such was when a quarantine order forces a student to move to a different residence. Students who miss an exam may need to be able to take a makeup test at a later date, and this can also be accommodated by the Blackboard software.

The University's [new attendance policy](#) for undergraduate students will require faculty to excuse absences for documented illness. Although this policy will officially take effect in the 2021–2022 academic year, we nonetheless strongly recommended that faculty adopt its excused absence provisions for the duration of the pandemic. Under this policy, **faculty will not assess grade penalties for excused absences and must make reasonable accommodations for make-up work**. Faculty members should consequently make clear in their syllabi that if a student has a medical issue, the student's priority is to deal with the medical situation, and that the student will not be penalized for missing class. Remember, we do not want students to attend class if they do not feel well.

Faculty should consider crafting attendance policies as "participation" policies for in-person and synchronous class meetings. Suggestions are provided in the section on syllabus statements below.

When students approach faculty members about medical absences related to the pandemic, regardless of class delivery mode, they should be referred to UofSC's [COVID-19 Student Report Form](#). The online form allows students to report their COVID-19 situation (which could be positive test for COVID-19 or a need to quarantine based on COVID-19 exposure) and to upload documentation explaining the situation. The form also gives each student the option to have their information sent to their course instructors. This will provide a documented excuse for the student to miss classes, up until the date when the student is medically allowed to return. A faculty member can then make decisions about how to handle the student's situation based on this information.

Undergraduate students with problems that may lead to absences, but which are not the result of a positive COVID-19 test or a quarantine order, should be referred to the report form available from the [Undergraduate Ombuds](#). Faculty members may also [submit an alert](#) about an undergraduate student who may be experiencing difficulties through the UofSC Student Success Center. These reporting processes take the burden of evaluating the documentation for pandemic-related absences out of the hand of faculty, while also maintaining student confidentiality as much as possible.

Student confidentiality will be an important issue. **UofSC faculty should remember that they cannot provide the name, identifying characteristics such as age or gender, or the number of students in their classes who test positive for COVID-19.** This information is protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and exempt from disclosure pursuant to South Carolina's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). FERPA prohibits faculty from disclosing personally identifiable information (PII) from our student's education records and defines PII to include information that can be used to distinguish or trace an individual's identity either directly or indirectly through linkages with other information. Because of the limited number of students enrolled in a particular class with a known faculty member on campus, the faculty member cannot release any form of COVID-19 testing data without potentially identifying particular

students. In addition, FOIA exempts medical records from the definition of public records subject to disclosure.

Whereas in many cases, it may be possible for students who miss lecture classes to make up the material and still complete the course requirements, there are additional issues associated with courses that have laboratory or clinical components. It is recommended that laboratory class attendance be made more flexible, when possible. When it is not possible for students to do hands-on experiments, it might be reasonable to substitute online methods of data collection—such as having students watch a video of an experiment being performed and noting down the results themselves, as they appear in the video, to be used in their subsequent analyses and reports. Faculty are encouraged to reach out to CTE for other ideas for creatively allowing students to gain hands-on experiences when labs are missed.

For clinical classes (which play a major role in some of UofSC's colleges, including Education, Nursing, and Medicine), instructors should make available options for students to reschedule practicum sessions that they miss, due to illness, quarantine, or other issues related to the ongoing pandemic—although with too many absences (or with absences near the end of the semester), it may not be possible to make up the clinical absences in a timely fashion. In those cases, the incomplete or withdrawal options discussed below may be the best for the student.

In all situations where students have significant absences that impair completion, an instructor should be lenient in offering students the option of an incomplete (I) grade. Incompletes are normally reserved for situations in which a student's ability to complete coursework in the normally allotted time is impaired by "unanticipated illness, accident, work-related responsibility, family hardship, or verified learning disability." Faculty are encouraged to interpret these criteria expansively. For example, a student who is quarantined, whether because the student themselves had a positive test for coronavirus or because there were indications of illness in someone with whom the student had been in close contact, may be considered to have a legitimate illness-related reason for failing to complete all their coursework. However, before completing arrangements to allow a student to receive an incomplete, faculty should require students to first talk with their academic and financial aid advisors as incomplete grades may affect financial aid eligibility and degree progression.

Under appropriate circumstances early in the semester, faculty may also advise students to withdraw from the course. If serious impediments to a student's completion of the course occur later in the semester, undergraduates may be advised to petition for a [late "hardship" withdrawal](). A similar process is available to graduate students through the Graduate School. A petition for late withdrawal may be the best option for a student who misses much of the later portions of the course due to circumstances related to the pandemic.

Supporting students will likely look very different from student to student and from class to class. However, we hope that all instructors will be flexible, compassionate, and understanding as we navigate this complex environment together.

Additional Suggestions for Faculty to Consider Implementing in the Classroom

- As faculty, we can and should be creative in how classes operate. For example, when the weather permits, hold discussion-based classes outside (remembering to maintain physical distance between students). Or, meet one half of your class one day each week and the other half of the class the second day of the week with both "sections" completing online modules that cover the details of the class content. Or, alternate face-to-face and online every other week. CTE is a tremendously useful resource on campus; faculty are encouraged to consult with them, as well as course schedulers in their departments, as they finalize plans for their fall classes.

- To help reinforce the importance of mitigation measures and to help ensure that students hear facts about COVID-19, faculty are encouraged to discuss COVID-19 on the first day of class. The COVID-19 Web site provides a page geared towards students that faculty can use to guide class discussion.
- Faculty are also encouraged to participate in the #IPledgeColumbia Campaign and encourage students to do the same. Social responsibility on and off campus are critical, and faculty are encouraged to remind students of this on a regular basis.
- Remember that missing class is a warning sign of a problem for the student, especially first-year students. Instructors should continue to participate in the early warning system, include graded material in the first few weeks of a course, and reach out to students who miss multiple classes or stop participating. Skipping class is one of the biggest predictors of first year GPA and time to graduation and has a direct connection to misuse of cannabis and prescription drugs. Other concerns (mental health, financial, family, etc.) can also show up as missing class.

Example Syllabus Statements and Other Recommendations

For additional information and syllabus statement examples please refer to the CTE's Syllabus Template Resource page. Examples are for guidance only and not to be considered standard University policy.

Course Delivery Mode Options and Class Meeting Schedule

Example 1:

You are currently enrolled in [course information]. This course is taught [instructional method, e.g. 100% on the Web in a synchronous format]. Students are required to participate in [online meeting or lectures at specific days and times]….

Example 2:

This is a HyFlex course. You may choose, on a day-by-day basis, to participate in person, online, or through a combination of online and in person. You may also complete all or part of the in-person component of the course using [Blackboard Collaborate, Zoom, etc.] from any location. To join the class live via [Collaborate, Zoom, etc.] use this link: _____. Within 24 hours of the end of class time you will be able to view the class recording in the _____ section of the Course Menu.

Example 3:

For this course, class sessions and discussions will be recorded or live-streamed. Such recordings/streaming will only be available to students registered for this class—to assist those who cannot attend the live session or to serve as a resource for those who would like to review content that was presented. These recordings are the intellectual property of the faculty and they may not be shared or reproduced without the explicit written consent of the faculty member. Further, students may not share these sessions with those not in the class or upload them to any other online environment. Doing so would be a breach of the Code of Student Conduct. Students who prefer to participate via audio only will be allowed to disable their video camera, so that only audio will be captured. Please discuss this option with your instructor in advance.

Excused Absences and How to Report an Illness

All absences due to documented illness or quarantine will be excused, and no grade penalty will be assessed for missing classes for this reason. If you experience COVID-19 symptoms, please stay home, contact the COVID-19 Student Health Services (SHS) nurse line (803-576-8511), complete the COVID-19 Student Report Form (go.sc.edu/covidstudentreport), and select the option allowing the Student Ombuds to contact your professors. When talking with the SHS nurse, be sure to ask for documentation of the consult as you will need this to document why you missed class. You will also use the COVID-19 Student Report Form if you have tested positive for COVID-19 or if you have been ordered to quarantine because of close contact

with a person who was COVID-19 positive. In each of these situations you will be provided appropriate documentation that can be shared through the Student Report Form.

Participation and Attendance Policy

Example 1:

Class Presence and Participation. Class presence and participation points are given to encourage your active class participation and discussion. You will be rewarded with a high score (see rubric below) as long as you frequently come to class and/or actively contribute to the discussion during class times. Participation in weekly discussion sessions will be graded on the following scale:

- Unexcused absence = 0 points
- In class, but asleep or obsessed w/laptop or phone = 1 point
- In class, but silent or ill prepared = 2 points
- In class and making an okay contribution = 3 points
- In class and making quality contributions = 4 points
- In class, but your cell phone rings = −3 points

Example 2:

If you know you are going to be absent from class (either face-to-face or synchronous sessions), I request that you please send me a brief e-mail to explain your absence in advance. Students who repeatedly arrive late to the lecture or recitation will have their class participation grade lowered.

Late/Missed Assignments and Exams

Example 1:

Late Assignments: Group projects, your individual paper, and your final paper, are due at 11:59 PM on their respective due dates. These items may be turned in after the deadline, but you will be eligible for fewer points once the deadline has passed; you will only be eligible for 95% of the total grade if it is submitted by 3 AM the following morning, and you will lose an additional 10% from the total you are eligible to earn for every 12-hour period it is late thereafter. Papers more than 3 days late will earn a grade of 0. Note also that extensions will not generally be permitted, but if you think you are subject to an exceptional circumstance, please discuss it with me outside of class (and as soon as possible).

Example 2:

Late Assignments and Missed Exams: To avoid dealing with lateness and missed exams, I provide you with more assessment opportunities than you need for your grade. If you miss an exam or an assignment for any reason, your grade on that item will be zero. To calculate your grade, I will select the best ones to count toward your grade. This means that NO arrangements will be made for late assignments or missed exams, so please be careful in choosing to skip assignments or exams early in the semester: You may be overwhelmed later, get sick, or otherwise need to miss an exam or assignment later in the semester.

Face Coverings

Face coverings protect you and your classmates in case the wearer is unknowingly infected but does not have symptoms. Faculty, students and staff are required to wear an appropriate face covering in all classrooms and in other designated areas on campus. Face coverings should cover your nose and mouth in a community setting. Students with conditions that prohibit them from wearing a face covering must register with the Student Disabilities Resource Center (SDRC); appropriate accommodations will be approved by the SDRC, and I will be notified. Failure or refusal to wear the required face coverings in designated areas may result in

your immediate removal from the classroom and corrective action, including referral to the Office of Student Conduct, in accordance with University policies and procedures (UNIV 3.04).

Important Links:

- Proper use, removal, and washing of cloth face coverings
- CDC Recommendation Regarding the Use of Face Coverings

Hand and Surface Hygiene

Please use hand sanitizer upon entering the classroom and wipe down your desk/table and chair at the beginning of class. All wipes should be disposed of in the trash can and not left on the desk or floor.

Student Well-Being

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support. If you are comfortable doing so, please notify me as the professor so that we can find resources that may be helpful.

Students do not learn when they do not feel safe. If you feel unsafe on campus at any time in any place, please contact Police Dispatch at 803-777-4215 (in an emergency, please call 911) and reach out to the Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support. Again, if you are comfortable doing so, please notify me as the professor, and I will do my best to make appropriate accommodations.

Students may experience situations or challenges that can interfere with learning and interpersonal functioning including stress, anxiety, depression, substance use, concern for a family/friend, or feelings of hopelessness. Pay attention to what is happening in the classroom and in the lives of your fellow students. There are numerous campus resources available to students including University Counseling & Psychiatry Service and University Student Health Services. Help is available 24/7. Students who need immediate help should call 803-777-5223. An outside resource is the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-8255).