August 16, 2021

Dear Colleagues:

Welcome back to Fall 2021 on the Hilltop! We look forward to the semester ahead. As you finalize your syllabi and make preparations for this academic term, I wanted to ensure we all have an opportunity for clear and consistent communication, particularly in light of the ongoing adaptations to our circumstances.

First, we have a new approach to providing you with the required syllabus language each term. We have created a website where you can access this required language with support to integrate it into your Canvas syllabus. Sharing this information in writing with your students creates a record that you have outlined the accommodations as provided by University policy. It provides students with a reminder not only of the policies themselves, but also of how to access the services and accommodations available. After adding this language, make sure your syllabi are uploaded to the Syllabus Library, a required step that serves as a resource for SMU faculty, staff, and students, and can only be accessed with an SMU ID and password.

Next, to meet our SMU-in-Four goals, as described in my communications with faculty over the summer, we need everyone’s help to improve our graduation rate and close persistent equity gaps. A key step in this plan for the fall of 2021 is to continue making use of Canvas to support our students. The plan, built by a team of faculty, staff and leadership from all five undergraduate schools, requires all 3-credit courses offered as part of the undergraduate curriculum (with the exception of independent studies) to include three technical features of Canvas to meet our goals:

- Syllabus tool to post the course information so that students have access to all their course syllabi on Canvas.
- Calendar tool so that students can keep up to date on assignment due dates and other time-sensitive course information such as when exams are scheduled.
- Gradebook tool to record grades so that that students have access to their ongoing progress.

The Office of Information Technology (OIT) created this new, simplified web support portal that includes detailed help guides as well as a schedule of past and upcoming support and training events.

We want to continue addressing your questions related to the ongoing adjustments being made in response to COVID-related circumstances. We will continue to update this Fall 2021 Faculty FAQ with the most recent communications. As you are aware, the university has a temporary required masking policy. You can safely assume that, once the requirement is lifted,
we will rely on faculty to use the online form provided over the last two weeks to indicate whether masks will continue to be required in their classrooms. If you have already filled out the online form, you do not need to fill it out again; rather, you should just add the approved language to your syllabus. Please note that the online form has been paused but will be made available again when the temporary requirement is lifted so that faculty who have not yet made a determination or who wish to change their choice can do so.

Please be reminded that classes are to be held in person. The COVID-related emergency, temporary relocation of instruction has been removed, so SMU is not currently approved for emergency temporary relocation of teaching via Zoom for the fall semester. Individual faculty cannot decide to teach remotely. Faculty with a disability may request a reasonable accommodation on the basis of a disability through the Office of Institutional Access and Equity as outlined in the Needs of Persons with Disabilities Policy (3.2). Students with a disability may request an exemption through the DASS office. In all such cases, approved accommodation options will be shared with the appropriate faculty and students.

Finally, because there is a temporary mask mandate across campus, students, faculty, and staff are expected to bring their own masks. However, in the event that faculty would like to have backup masks available to students, they can pick up extra masks from their dean’s office and/or from various distribution areas that each dean designates for faculty. All deans’ offices have been provided with sufficient masks to distribute on an as-requested basis.

Thank you for your help in promoting a good start to the fall 2021 semester. A copy of this letter will be posted on the Office of the Provost website under “Provost’s Communications” and will be linked in the next several Friday updates.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth G. Loboa, PhD
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Southern Methodist University
https://www.smu.edu/provost

World Changers Shaped Here