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Office of the Provost

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In early February 2023, SMU was forced to cancel classes over a three-day period as a result of an inclement weather event. Pursuant to that cancellation, I convened an ad-hoc committee, including the Academic Policies Committee of Faculty Senate, to recommend a strategy for making up the missed contact hours that resulted from this cancellation, while taking into account our commitment to our students, the needs and strength of our faculty, current constraints on faculty and students, and the impact on the current university calendar. Based on their careful consideration of all factors and recommendation, I have determined that ***all missed contact hours will be made-up through asynchronous instruction.***

A number of considerations went into this decision. I have outlined these below.

SACSCOC and federal credit hour requirements: The Department of Education requires that universities meet universal standards per hour of academic credit awarded to students, regardless of missed classes or disruptions to operations. The federal definition of a credit hour is 15 contact hours, plus 30 outside hours, or the equivalent. SACSCOC's credit hour policy follows from the federal policy (<https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/Credit-Hours.pdf>). Per SACSCOC, SMU is required to make up all missed contact hours due to inclement weather (or for any other reason), but we are not required to make up those contact hours with in-person instructional hours. In fact, we have the discretion to substitute asynchronous instruction or asynchronous work for missed contact hours, within limits.

Meeting days versus contact hours: In crafting a plan for making up missed time, it is important that we focus on the missed contact hours, not on the class days missed. Because of the variable scheduling used on our campus, the three-day closure of the campus resulted in a range of missed contact hours, depending on the course. For some courses, three hours were missed (this is true of courses that meet once per week on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday or for classes that meet twice per week on Tuesday and Thursday). For some courses, only one contact hour was missed (this is true of courses that meet MWF for one hour), and some courses may not have missed any contact hours (courses that meet Monday only for three hours, for example). Moreover, because of this variability, a one-size-fits-all solution, like adding an additional day of instruction to the calendar, will not address the problem and will likely cause more problems than it solves.

Ensure equity and access to support resources: In selecting a strategy of asynchronous make-up of missed contact hours, I weighed concerns about equity across the student and faculty experience as well as the feedback received, at scale, that students and faculty don't necessarily have access to either WiFi or power during inclement weather. I am also operating from the assumption that many faculty and students will have extenuating circumstances during closure, such as childcare or elder care responsibilities. I am also aware of how the technological infrastructure required for moving to Zoom *en masse* during inclement weather relies heavily on our staff in OIT, who would then be required to come to campus during closure. I also recognize that many students rely on wraparound supports at SMU, such as A-LEC for tutoring and counseling during stressful times, and these are not available during campus closures. For all of these reasons, as well as the difficulty that arises in trying to make late amendments to the academic calendar, asynchronous make-up is the optimal strategy for SMU.

After careful consideration of all of these factors, I have determined that asynchronous make-up of missed contact hours is the optimal solution to the missed contact hours that resulted from the inclement weather cancellation of classes. Each instructor will need to determine the number of contact hours missed (if any) for each class they teach and develop and communicate to their students in writing a plan for making up those hours through asynchronous instruction. There will be no formal, synchronous make-up class meetings for this inclement weather event, and ***class meetings on the reading day are not permitted, per policy***. However, if individual students and faculty members in scheduled, one-on-one classes (i.e. independent studies, individualized instruction classes, tutorials) mutually agree to meetings outside of class, during scheduled office hours, that will be permitted. Students cannot be compelled or required, however, to attend such meetings.

I have provided, at the end of this memo, a non-exhaustive list of options that faculty may choose to use in order to fulfill any contact hours missed during the week of February 1st. Faculty members, in consultation with colleagues, their Chair, and their Dean, should consult these options, reflect on the needs of their students and the composition of their courses, and make a plan to deliver any contact hours that were missed during the week of February 1st.

In making their plan, faculty members should ensure that students are given a reasonable time frame (a minimum of three weeks and maximum of until the end of the term prior to reading day) to do any work that results from this asynchronous make-up of contact hours. Each faculty member must also ensure that they communicate their plan to make-up these contact hours clearly to their students in writing.

Potential Approaches for Asynchronous Make-Up Instruction and Work

*This list is not exhaustive

- For large classes, a faculty-recorded lecture with embedded assessment questions to monitor student comprehension.
- For smaller classes, an assignment that is set up for peer review and feedback (completion grade). Faculty contact time could be allocated to requesting that each student attend a required 15-minute office hour on Zoom or in person to ensure that any

questions about the concepts in the assignment (or material missed on the inclement weather day) are understood. This works better in classes of 12 or fewer, as you can cycle through 12 meetings in a 3-hour contact hour block.

- A self-paced, instructor-developed study guide (if the material covered is critical to moving the concepts forward) with a formative self-assessment at the completion of the study guide (this could be graded as “complete/incomplete”).
- If the content missed was a guest speaker who is no longer available, line up a series of web-based TEDTalks or other speakers with relevant messages whom students can watch on their own time and provide a brief (“complete/incomplete”) reflection on and/or tie in their learning to an ongoing assignment.

Beyond this past February’s inclement-weather cancellations, I have consulted with President Turner and the President’s Executive Council, and we have collectively determined that SMU will rely on asynchronous make-up of contact hours during any future inclement weather or other events that result in cancellation of classes. To that end, I will be sending an email to each of the Deans to ask that they work with their faculty to create a detailed plan, for each school, that outlines the specific approach to making up missed contact hours in individual departments.

I have also asked the Associate Provost for Faculty Success, in conjunction with Deans, Academic Policies Committee of the Faculty Senate, the Center for Teaching Excellence, and other key stakeholders, to develop an evergreen website, hosted on the SMU Faculty Success website, to accompany the SMU inclement weather policy. This website will make clear that inclement weather make-up of missed contact hours will be done through asynchronous work and instruction, and will provide a curated list of asynchronous options, as well as guidance to faculty on using these options.

I want to clarify that, although SMU will not hold make-up classes after inclement weather cancellations, neither students nor faculty should feel constrained from maintaining as much continuity as possible during closures due to inclement weather. For example, if faculty wish to provide the make-up plan to students or record asynchronous lectures to be completed in the above-mentioned time frame, even during the window of inclement weather, they should feel free to do so, and there should be no prohibition on making work *available* to students during the closure. Students, should they choose and have no discontinuity in power or Internet, can also work during the inclement weather closure. Should faculty choose to offer remote office hours during inclement weather, they should feel free to do so as well, provided students are not compelled to attend or penalized when they do not. Any material or content provided to students during inclement weather periods or other times when contact hours are missed should be provided to all students; we reiterate the expectation that students be given a period ranging from three weeks from the date of the closure or missed contact hours until the end of the affected term to complete any assigned make-up asynchronous work.

I hope this memo brings clarity to faculty and students about how SMU will deliver the missed contact hours incurred during the February inclement weather event as well as clear guidance as to how such cancellations will be handled going forward. This should allow faculty and students to plan ahead and to be prepared, should we experience additional, unforeseen, cancellations. For further clarifications related to this memo, please reach out to facultysuccess@smu.edu.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth G. Loba', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke at the end.

Elizabeth G. Loba, PhD
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Southern Methodist University

<https://www.smu.edu/provost>

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