

# BOWDOIN COLLEGE

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT AND DEAN FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

January 19, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

We thank you for the incredible work you did this fall to keep our campus healthy and to provide excellent, caring, and flexible instruction for our students. We hope that you were able to take full advantage of the College's holiday closure to rest and recharge. *All* spring semester courses will begin online on **Monday, February 8**. Starting on **Wednesday, February 17**, courses designated as in-person courses will shift to meeting in person *so long as the campus is at status level yellow*. The in-person components of classes may also begin meeting on this date. The College Library will not open for in-person use until February 22, but students will have access to a take-out service before then. Whether you are teaching in person or online, please remember: **the critical mechanism for ensuring safety is a combination of masks, social distancing, hygiene, and testing**.

As you well know, our two principal teaching challenges remain for the coming spring semester: delivering high-quality online instruction and dismantling systemic institutional racism. We are hopeful that this work is made easier this spring by having significantly more students on campus, by faculty having designed and delivered online courses in the fall, and by our offering on-going opportunities for conversation and training in antiracism work. In addition, we remind you that support for both of these efforts is always available from the Office of Academic Affairs, the [Bowdoin Online Learning and Teaching \(BOLT\) team](#), and the [Baldwin Center for Learning and Teaching](#).

Drawing from student and faculty feedback from this past fall, we offer the following set of expectations for the spring semester. They detail our shared understanding of teaching excellence in the context of the challenges mentioned above. Most of them are applicable across all three types of courses to be offered this spring: in-person, online, and online with in-person components.

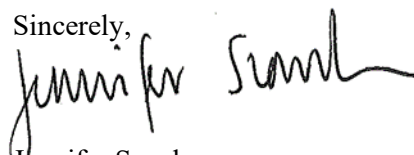
- 1. Commit to Inclusive Excellence:** As was made clear in the fall faculty meetings and the November 30, 2020 email communication from Clayton Rose and Michael Reed, Bowdoin has made an explicit commitment to inclusive excellence. Elaboration of inclusive excellence and the necessity for this commitment can be found in these reports [here](#) and [here](#).  
For ideas on infusing your classes with inclusive practices, we urge you to attend the **Promoting Equity through Inclusive Teaching Practices Workshop** with Dr. Kelly Hogan and Dr. Viji Sathy from the University of North Carolina on January 27, 10:00-11:30am. [Register here](#). Learn about the work of Drs. Hogan and Sathy [here](#).
- 2. Start with Learning Goals:** Course design is made easier and course structure more apparent to your students if you start with learning goals: what do I want my students to learn in this course? In addition, students will more easily adapt to new pedagogical models if you explain the rationales for adopting your methods. If you have not already taken a **CBB Course Design Experience workshop**, there is still time to [register for the Jan. 25-27 one](#).
- 3. Communicate Expectations:** Set expectations for attendance, for etiquette (e.g. require that students turn on their video during synchronous meetings in online classes) and for grading (devise and distribute grading rubrics and provide a grading scale). It is also helpful to remind students that a Bowdoin course credit is equivalent to approximately twelve hours of work each week for fifteen weeks. In order to estimate the time students will spend learning course material and completing assignments (apart from synchronous meetings) see Rice University's [comprehensive workload estimator](#). If you assign group projects, be sure to set expectations for each member and checkpoints for accountability.
- 4. Two Things to Add to Your Syllabus:** If your class meets in-person make it clear, ideally on your syllabus, that you expect students to remain in residence and attend in-person classes for the duration of the semester. And to encourage feedback from your students, include on your syllabus a note along the lines of the following:

“I greatly value your detailed feedback on what contributed to your learning in this class and how I can improve it for the students who will follow you. Please fill out BCQs for this course between May 10-20, 2021. Your responses are completely anonymous, and I will not have access to them until after grades are submitted.”

5. **Balance Structure with Flexibility:** Clear expectations, detailed directions, advance deadlines, and timely reminders help students plan their workweek and maintain and recover their bandwidth. At the same time, it is important to extend flexibility given the continued challenges of living and learning during a pandemic and amidst ongoing racist violence. Consider extending a certain number of free deadline extensions to each student.
6. **Exercise Care:** A commitment to the common good is the hallmark of a Bowdoin education and Bowdoin’s community standards. Our effort to keep Bowdoin’s residential and learning community as safe and healthy as possible, and to maintain the ability to continue some in-person classes for the duration of the spring 2021 semester, must be a *collective* one. *Everyone*—students, faculty, and staff—has a responsibility to look out for everyone else. In addition to complying with **masks, social distancing, hygiene, and testing**, if you are teaching in person, we ask that you follow College’s COVID-19 rules for sharing indoor learning spaces. Although the specifics are yet to be updated, the guidelines developed for classroom practices will be available on the COVID-19 page on the College website shortly.
7. **Take Steps toward Universal Design:** We encourage you to attend the BOLT webinar, [You've Been UDL'd \(Universal Design for Learning\)](#), on January 28, 1:30-2:15pm to learn of readily available tools and services that can help create a more inclusive learning environment for all students. Bowdoin’s efforts in this area are not simply about the legal requirement to accommodate those students who formally request accommodations, but from a conviction that only through building an inclusive campus community will the College best prepare graduates to be informed and thoughtful citizens of the world.
8. **Schedule Two Synchronous Meetings Each Week:** Students reported that two synchronous meetings each week was significantly more helpful to their learning than a single long meeting. They also commented on the helpfulness of shorter prerecorded lecture videos with visual aids.
9. **Post Regular Office Hours:** Faculty can schedule their office hours through Blackboard’s Calendar feature or via Microsoft Bookings, which links to their Outlook calendar.
10. **Assess regularly and thoughtfully:** Assessments should be regular, some should be formative and low-stakes, and all should be tied to learning goals. With this, as with other elements of your pedagogical approach, please discuss your approach with students and provide clarity about the weight of individual assessments.
11. **Supply Timely and Constructive Feedback:** Time savers include recording short audio or video comments for students (affords personalization and a reassuring tone), utilizing a grading rubric (provides transparency and reduces bias), and incorporating peer review. Reach out to the BOLT team ([askBOLT@bowdoin.edu](mailto:askBOLT@bowdoin.edu)) for tools and tips.
12. **Solicit Feedback from Students During the Semester:** Utilize the semester course questionnaires attached to your Blackboard courses early to mid-semester or reach out to BOLT for guidance on using Microsoft Forms to design your own course questionnaires.

On behalf of everyone in academic affairs, thank you for your ongoing hard work and dedication.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Scanlon