MEMORANDUM

To: The Faculty
From: Jen Scanlon, Dean for Academic Affairs
        Elizabeth Pritchard, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
        Steve Perkinson, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
Date: August 5, 2020
Subject: Start of Fall 2020 Semester: Notes and Reminders

We write to remind you of our usual college policies and practices for instruction (found in the Faculty Handbook Section V., on the Teaching and Advising page, and in the Academic Calendar) as well as to highlight some key points as we begin this distinctive fall semester amid highly challenging times for the world, for the nation, and for Bowdoin.

What’s New for Fall 2020 (Sometimes it feels like everything)

We embark on the 2020-21 academic year with a new dean for academic affairs, amid the enormous and ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the continued violence of systemic racism, and in the midst of our own learning about how to deliver an excellent and inclusive Bowdoin education online. Many among us face continued and frightening uncertainty about our own children’s educational prospects in the fall. It is daunting in a way we might not have been able to imagine just months ago, but we are here to support you—and to do our own work on your behalf.

As you know, many resources are available to support you in navigating this semester’s challenges. Most importantly, please become familiar with the resources offered by Bowdoin Online Learning and Teaching (BOLT) and the Baldwin Center for Learning and Teaching. We encourage you also to refer back to both Dean Scanlon’s July 15th Expectations for Fall 2020 Teaching memo and the June report of the Continuity in Teaching and Learning Group (CTLG).

A note on grading: Although in the emergency pivot to remote teaching in the spring semester we adopted a temporary credit/no credit policy for all courses, the College will return to its standard grading policy for the 2020-21 academic year, as announced by President Rose on July 2nd. At the same time, recognizing that students may encounter challenges this fall, several temporary grade-related policy changes for the fall semester will be implemented as recommended by the Curriculum and Educational Policy Committee (CEP). These involve expanding availability of the Credit/D/Fail grading option for courses that currently allow it (see details in the Faculty FAQs here). In the coming weeks, CEP will ask departments and programs to consider whether to expand this option further on a temporary basis for courses required for the major or minor.
Course Meeting Times

As you know, the course time blocks for Fall 2020 are structured differently than in the past, using special Fall 2020 time blocks, designed to accommodate students in different time zones with both synchronous and asynchronous elements.

Each course was assigned a time block consisting of three eighty-minute periods at different times of day, from which instructors were asked to decide, in consultation with their students, which part of these “holds” to use for full class meetings, small group sessions, or other engagement with the class, with remaining times given back to students. There’s a helpful explainer video here.

Please keep in mind:
- Soon you should be reaching out to your students to finalize the specific course plans within your course’s set of time blocks. Members of BOLT are working on a simple survey form that you can use to collect information from students about their scheduling constraints. This survey will be added to the Blackboard sites for your classes.
- Please make sure you communicate clearly with students these specific times and plans.
- Include this information on your course syllabus also.
- Note that students may find adding a course during Add/Drop II (Sept. 2-16) more complicated in this context. If a student contacts you wishing to add your course, please be responsive and give them information about when synchronous sessions will take place, as this will not necessarily be reflected in the time blocks listed in Class Finder.
- Be sure to share your course schedules and office hours with your coordinator.

Start of Semester Dates

One thing remains the same: the first day of classes for fall semester is Wednesday, September 2, 2020. Also, we will still hold an “Advisor Breakfast” meeting (remotely) for all pre-major advisors two days before classes begin (August 31 at 8:00am). Following this meeting, advisors will hold individual advising sessions with first-year advisees to guide them through Add/Drop II. While first-years will have already registered for four courses, they may be thinking about changes. Watch for detailed instructions and support from Faculty Liaison for Advising Karen Topp. Please refer to the Academic Calendar and the Registrar’s Calendar, but here is a summary of opening events:

August 29 First-Year and Transfer Student Arrival Day
August 31, 8:00-9:00am Advisor ‘Breakfast’ followed by Advising Sessions
September 1, 3:30pm Convocation
September 2 First Day of Classes
Advising

Advising is another of our responsibilities that has been modified this year. As you know, all first-years were advised by a set of dedicated advisors, and each has been placed in four classes. Those of you engaged in first-year advising will have already received an email from Karen Topp, Faculty Liaison for Advising, about the particulars of the opening “breakfast” (Monday, August 31, 8:00 am) and your first-year advising, which will follow immediately after. Please give that memo your close attention.

Conduct of Instruction

While most courses will be conducted remotely this semester, the principles for faculty conduct of instruction, as specified in the Faculty Handbook, remain important. Faculty members teaching in-person classes should review and become familiar with the FAQs for Faculty Teaching First-Year Writing Seminars which include specifics related to public health and safety amid COVID-19, classroom hygiene, and other expectations.

Please start and end each class at the times you have designated so students have a clear sense of their schedules and your expectations. Whether teaching in-person or remotely, faculty are expected to conduct all classes as scheduled. In the case of a conflict between a scheduled class session and some other professional activity, such as a scholarly conference, it is the faculty member’s responsibility to inform their students and department chair/program director well in advance and to arrange either appropriate alternative activities or make-up sessions for missed class sessions. Those who find it necessary, under extraordinary circumstances, to be absent from more than two synchronous sessions in any one course during a semester should contact the Office of the Dean for Academic Affairs for prior approval.

While winter weather is not our highest concern these days, it may be worth mentioning that Bowdoin classes are almost never canceled because of snow or inclement weather. Remote teaching and learning will, hopefully, be able to proceed no matter what the weather. In the case of severe weather, the College might announce that “non-essential” employees need not report to work, but keep in mind that faculty are “essential” employees and expected to carry out their responsibilities throughout.

Religious Holidays

As members of a multicultural community, our students come from a variety of religious backgrounds who wish to observe important religious holidays. While it is not feasible to schedule coursework around all religious holidays for a class as a whole, requests from individual students to reschedule assignments and to be absent from classes that conflict with observances of major religious holidays should be honored.

No student is required to take an examination or fulfill any other scheduled course requirements on recognized major religious holidays. Please note that Jewish holidays require the cessation of work for the entire day, not simply during the time when services are held. A list of religious holidays to be aware of and the full Religious Holiday policy can be found here.
Final Exams and Projects

Final exams will constitute one more element of difference in the Fall 2020 semester. We expect that students in residence will leave campus by Thanksgiving and complete the semester from home. All finals, then, will be held online. We do have a Reading Period scheduled (Dec. 12-15) and a Final Exam Period scheduled (Dec. 16-21). As always, all academic work, except for final examinations, final papers, final lab reports, and final projects, is due on or before the last day of classes. Reading Period is a time for students to prepare for their final exams and to work on other final assignments. Neither extra classes nor final exams should be scheduled during Reading Period, nor should deadlines for any other assignment be set during this time.

We ask, on the other hand, that faculty approach finals differently than they might in a “normal” semester, given the CTLG Report’s recommendation that more frequent and lower stakes assessments throughout the semester increases student confidence, opportunities for learning, and the likelihood of success. The principles of universal design for learning (flexible, varied, and accessible assignments and assessments for equal opportunity of student success) are especially important in the context of ongoing transmission of COVID-19, students residing in different time zones, and students having additional family or work responsibilities and/or variable internet access. In response to this context, faculty are strongly advised to consider offering a choice of different final projects or a generous window of time during which students can decide when to start a timed exam.

With this in mind, courses this semester will not be assigned a specific final exam time. We highly recommend that faculty view the Final Exam Period (Dec. 16-21) as an open period with all work (including work assigned in lieu of a final exam, such as final papers) due by 5:00 p.m. on the last day (Dec. 21). This will allow students to structure their time commitments in a manner appropriate to the particulars of their situation, reducing the cognitive load on them, and sparing faculty from the need to negotiate individualized deadlines. If a faculty member chooses to give students a synchronous final exam, they will need to request an exam time from the registrar by the start of classes (Wednesday, 9/2). Moreover, you are asked to consider offering the exam on Zoom, or to be available in some way, in order to answer any questions students may have. For additional questions about timed assignments on Blackboard, further information about the CTLG Report, universal design for learning, or ideas for flexible finals, please post your questions on the BOLT team in Microsoft Teams.

No final academic work, including final examinations, final papers, final lab reports, and final projects, may be turned in after 5:00 p.m. on the last day of the Final Examination Period without an approved grade of ‘Incomplete’ in place.

Access to Course Materials

Blackboard: Blackboard is Bowdoin’s Learning Management System and is the go-to platform for you and your students. Each course is set up with a Blackboard space where you may upload a wide array of content and use various tools to, for example, provide timed assessments and maintain and report grades. Fall 2020 courses have already been loaded onto Blackboard. Only students registered for the course have access to the materials, which can be viewed, downloaded, and printed, as needed. Additionally, you can create links in your courses to library-licensed ebooks, database articles, and streaming audio and video. Course materials can be re-used by copying them from a previous course to a current course. For assistance, contact Jennifer Snow, 207-725-3707.
Teams: In addition, each class has a dedicated space on Teams for holding synchronous class sessions. Because the version of Blackboard we are using is not the most recent, some of you have noticed some challenges with the interface between Teams and Blackboard. This is certainly unfortunate, but it is beyond our control. We will continue to offer workshops in both Teams and Zoom, given that you have different preferences and because these tools have different functionalities. Both provide synchronous sessions for your classes. In addition, Zoom provides breakout sessions and easy polling and Teams provides messaging and file-sharing.

Library Reserves: The library will not place physical books on reserve in the fall. An ebook version of all course adoption books will be purchased if available. If an ebook is unavailable, the library will purchase a print copy to be added to the general collection. The library can scan, and make available through the E-reserves service, a limited number of book chapters (see below). Questions about ebook availability should be directed to Kate Wing, the library’s Course Materials and Collections Specialist.

E-reserves—articles and book chapters—will proceed as usual. Information on e-reserves may be found here. Please note that due to copyright restrictions, the library is unable to scan books in their entirety. Faculty should consult with Carmen Greenlee, Humanities and Media Librarian, about copyright-related questions.

DVDs owned by the library can be digitized and made available to students through Blackboard. Information on requesting digitization may be found on the Reserves page.

Virtual Bookstore: If you have adopted books for your courses, please ensure they are correct by finding your course in Classfinder and clicking "Order Books". If you have not yet adopted books, please do so as soon as possible using this form so that students can receive their materials by the first day of classes. If you have questions about course adoptions, please email Kate Wing. Some materials, such as art supplies and molecule sets, are sold by the Bowdoin Store through their website. For questions about course supplies sold by the Bowdoin Store, contact Andrea Sehestedt.

Mindful Printing (for students in residence): Students are allocated a quota of up to 1,200 monochrome, double-sided pages. Single-sided or color printing will reduce their quota at a faster rate. Consider specifying those articles that you would like your students to print and making others optional. Students are responsible for costs if they exceed their quota. You might encourage students to read and annotate electronic versions of articles. More information can be found at https://www.bowdoin.edu/onecard/services/printing.html.

Annual Professional Activities Forms

Each spring, faculty members are asked to complete a Professional Activity Form. If you are someone who likes to plan ahead or want to add to your form as you go through the year, blank forms are available to be downloaded from the website here.

We in academic affairs, the dean, the associate deans, and all our staff, are here to support you throughout the coming year. You may e-mail, call, or message any one of us through Teams. Thank you for all you do for your students and for the College.