

March 6, 2020

To: UCSC Faculty & Instructors

From: Lindsay Hinck, Chair, Committee on Courses of Instruction

Onuttom Narayan, Chair, Committee on Educational Policy

Don Smith, Chair, Graduate Council

Maureen Callanan, Chair, Committee on Teaching

RE: Changes to Syllabus

Faculty and Instructors have been raising questions regarding how closely their courses should remain consistent with their syllabus when unusual events (such as campus closures) occur, and the Academic Senate has been asked to provide guidance. Several Senate committees have plenary responsibility for oversight of curriculum. In particular, CCI approves the original course organization and syllabus when new courses are proposed. However, the Senate does not micro-manage the details of how courses are taught; we know and expect that courses evolve from one offering to the next, and we see it as an important component of academic freedom that faculty decide how to revise their courses.

When unusual events occur that make it difficult for courses to be taught as planned, however, we understand that faculty are often faced with challenging decisions about how to maintain excellence in their teaching and how to prioritize the students' learning. Our recommendation is that when making adjustments, faculty should make every effort to teach in a way that continues to support students in achieving the learning goals of the course, even as we recognize that some course elements may need to change due to extreme unplanned events such as campus closures. Individual faculty are the ones who are in the position to determine how to best maintain the learning goals for their particular courses when unexpected events occur. We recognize that it may not be possible to maintain the learning goals exactly as stated on the syllabus.

In addition to keeping the learning goals in mind as you consider changes to the course delivery, assessment, and course organization, we recommend that faculty do their best to maintain clear communication with students about the proposed changes. Changing the method of assessment of student performance from what is indicated on the syllabus is generally not permissible according to CCI and CEP policy, but there may need to be exceptions under extreme circumstances. Students should be kept informed about changes, and preferably given a chance to express their views about alternative options when possible.

We recommend that instructors take advantage of the many resources offered by the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning (CITL) for adapting classes when modifications are needed. CITL staff are working to provide support for instructors as they consider solutions to challenging situations while maintaining focus on students' learning.

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