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From the Provost: Online Instruction Resources and Faculty Evaluation Changes, March 16, 2020

University of Northern Iowa

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University of Northern Iowa

From the Provost: Online Instruction Resources and Faculty Evaluation Changes

Dear UNI Faculty and Staff,

While the current situation is evolving moment by moment, I am comforted by the knowledge of the deep care this community holds for our students and for one another. I truly appreciate the way in which everyone has rallied to continue our focus on teaching and learning, allowing our students to succeed to the best of our abilities. And I deeply appreciate the grace we have been extending to each other as we seek solutions to difficult issues.

We have already provided a great deal of information to campus (all of which is located on the [Prepare website](#)), but I wanted to reach out to faculty in particular as your teaching has been upended, and I wanted you to know that we are here to provide assistance and support as you need it.

While the focus of this message concerns instruction and is directed towards faculty, I want to be clear that we are developing guidelines and messaging for staff as we shift to a new environment, including how we will operationalize social distancing and offer opportunities for teleworking. This message will come from the university as it will impact all staff on campus, not just those in Academic Affairs. I appreciate your patience as we develop our communication about what we discussed this morning in our meeting.

Online Instruction

As you know, class instruction is moving to remote or virtual delivery from March 23 to April 3. During that time face-to-face instruction is not allowed; this includes small groups or off-campus locations. We will be following guidance from the Board of Regents as we make any decision to extend this mandate beyond April 3; I would suggest that you begin to plan for that possibility as I am sure it is very real.

As you move to online instruction there are a number of things to keep in mind related to teaching and learning. While we must adhere to the mandate of not holding face-to-face instruction, how you meet teaching and learning needs of your class is yours to decide. Here are issues you may want to consider:

- Our guiding principle is that we will complete the semester on time and allow our students to make progress toward graduation.

- Be flexible in how you meet the teaching and learning needs of the class. Evaluate and prioritize the remaining material in your classes; consider what content and activities remain that are critical and what you might let go of.
- In many cases the pedagogy, content, activities, assignments, and outcomes of a course taught through remote delivery cannot be, and perhaps should not be, identical to a face-to-face class. You will have to make adjustments, and that is both understandable and encouraged.
- Off campus learning experiences, such as Field Experiences, Student Teaching, and Internships, can continue following the parameters of the site of the experience; if our K12 partners close down, which seems imminent, we will get guidance from the state for our student teachers.
- Please also remember in this time of flexibility to reconsider your expectations of students; remember this is new for them too and we must accommodate their limitations and capabilities.

There are many ways to deliver materials and communicate with students in a virtual environment and IT has a [resource page](#) to help guide you through the options. Pick the method(s) that best fit both the needs of your class and those you feel most comfortable adopting quickly. Although we are in triage mode, please utilize the resources available from Continuing and Distance Education and Educational Technology, including best practices in emergency situations from [Quality Matters](#). At this time, we do not have the resources to add new software or tools.

Communication with Students

In addition, please remember to communicate with students and reassure them that we are focused on their success. This may be one of the most important aspects of how we will get through this situation. Here are some suggestions:

- Consistent, clear, reliable, and upbeat communication from instructors will help students navigate this challenging situation and will make the teaching and learning experience more successful.
- Let students know how to reach you (email, online office hours, through the LMS, etc.), when you are available, how often they should log in for communication or resources, guidelines for interacting with peers, and what technologies you will use to communicate with them and to teach your course.
- Instructors should provide students with information about how their classes will proceed. This includes delivery of content, exams, assignments, and any other activities that will be expected. Consider what you might do if the timeline for virtual instruction is extended; students will want to know this as well.
- Remember to tell students why you're prioritizing the topics or tasks you are focusing on, and why you've selected the mode of delivery you have. Students are part of the process and the more they understand, the more able they will be to adapt.
- Please post or share an updated syllabus as you revise your requirements or assignments. It is likely something about your course will change, so share that as you make those changes.

We have extended the withdrawal date to April 9, 2020. Students can drop classes by sending a message from their UNI email address to registrar@uni.edu.

For graduate students, the Graduate Faculty Leaders and the Graduate College have created recommendations to support the continuation of graduate study during this time. The recommendations and resources for students can be found on the [Graduate Students Prepare site](#) and for faculty on the [Graduate Faculty Prepare site](#).

Faculty Evaluation and Intellectual Property

The Office of the Provost has also held a consultation with the Faculty Handbook Committee and Faculty Leaders and discussed with Deans' Council temporary changes to the evaluation process for this semester as well as reinforced our commitment to the intellectual property of online courses. Here is a summary of how we will move forward:

- Pursuant to [UNI Policy 10.03](#), UNI faculty members retain ownership of the content they develop and use in their teaching. This includes any content they develop and use as part of the shift from in-person instruction to online delivery in response to the temporary suspension of face-to-face classes.
- Because faculty have been asked to move from face-to-face to an online teaching format, we will suspend student assessments of instruction for the Spring 2020 semester. We appreciate that faculty will use their best efforts to adapt to and engage in a new teaching format and work to complete the semester for all students. A statement will be included in each spring faculty evaluation letter stating that this requirement was waived for the spring 2020 semester.
- No peer evaluations will occur after March 13, 2020, due to the changes in instructional delivery unless in-person classes resume. Peer evaluations (if required in PAC Procedures) should be completed to the greatest degree possible but should be jointly discussed between the faculty member and the professional assessment committee chair or faculty member who completed the assessment. Should it not be possible to complete a peer evaluation, professional assessment committees will provide the faculty member with a statement in their Fall PAC Evaluation Letter stating why that particular part of the evaluation process was not completed in Spring 2020. Likewise, department heads will provide a statement in their Spring 2020 annual evaluation letter if they were unable to complete this particular part of the evaluation process.
- For scholarship and service activities, including conference presentations that had been accepted but were not completed due to travel restrictions or a service obligation that was canceled as a result of the virus, faculty will be given credit for these activities, though this should be noted on the CV as not completed but credited; this must also be explicitly included in the annual evaluation letter. In cases where the organizing body offers alternative settings for participation, such as virtual presentations, that activity should be considered as equivalent to in-person participation.

We are also extending the deadline to complete the Faculty Activity Report to Monday, April 20 at noon (the former deadline was April 15). These are all temporary deviations from the Faculty Handbook for the Spring 2020 semester only. I appreciate the

consultation with the Faculty Handbook Committee and Faculty Leaders on these matters.

In Closing

While our operations are changing moment by moment, at this time campus is not closed. Faculty can and should feel comfortable using their offices and continuing with their service and research opportunities so long as they are able to maintain adequate distancing from others. At this time, department offices will remain open and ready to assist faculty, staff, and students. Student advising will begin soon for summer and fall courses, and we need to be available to assist students though this work will be shifted to virtual formats.

But all of this may change in a moment, so I ask that you watch for further communication from the university.

Thank you for all of your great work. I truly appreciate the heroic efforts that are underway as you accommodate this disruption. Please know that your efforts are valued and make a difference.

Sincerely,

Jim Wohlpart, PhD
Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs
Professor of English