Welcome Back to the 2023-2024 academic year

Welcome back, instructors!

I truly hope that September finds you ready to jump back into teaching, and if not, that you have access to a high-quality espresso machine.

In hopes that your teaching will go as smoothly as possible this September, I wanted to flag a few items for your attention and offer a few suggestions before your first day in the classroom. Some of these may be worth incorporating into your course syllabi if you haven't already.

Double check your classroom's capacity.

Room assignments and course scheduling happens long before we know final registration numbers. Given that our fantastic programs are growing rapidly, it is worth double checking now rather than finding out you have a shortage of seats on the first day of classes. Chiara Longhi (chiara.longhi@ubc.ca) can help if needed.

Some key dates to be aware of:

1. Thursday Oct 12 is "Make-up Monday." No Thursday classes will happen and instead the schedule will follow that of Monday courses. More info here: https://educ.ubc.ca/make-up-monday/.
2. Oct. 2nd is observed Truth and Reconciliation Day
3. Oct. 9th is Thanksgiving
4. Nov. 13th to 15th is a combination Fall reading break and Remembrance Day

Discuss the required hours allocation form with your TAs.

Discussing this form with your TA can prevent misunderstandings between you and your TA(s) in terms of what is expected for their duties and time spent on different activities.

Consider Adding a Statement to Your Syllabus on Generative AI

There is no overall ban in using AI tools in teaching and learning at UBC. As a result, this leaves it as a course-level decision. UBC policy (see here) states that students should not assume that all available technologies are permitted, but it also states that the use of ChatGPT or other generative AI tools does not automatically equate to academic misconduct at UBC.

Ideally, instructors should set clear expectations around the use of these tools. Consider including text in the syllabus on whether there are any course restrictions on using AI tools and provide a rationale for why. Read more at Generative AI Syllabus for further resources and sample syllabus statements that can be used.

Privacy Implications of AI Tools

Currently, **no generative AI tools have passed a** Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) **at UBC**. Make sure to file a PIA if using ChatGPT or other generative AI tools in teaching, especially for assessments and grading. Note that using ChatGPT or AI tools in grading may cause privacy or equity issues. Please contact forestry.tls@ubc.ca for consultation and support.

Give a sober second thought to the academic integrity of your assessments and exams, especially those in an online format.

Attached are a few things to think about when you consider whether large assessments and exams should be online or in person. Things are rapidly changing and I expect may look different as we move through the term. For example, new tools are in development to enable students to by-pass lockdown browsers. At a minimum, consider proactive rather than reactive/punitive ways to prevent and discourage inappropriate use of AI or online web resources in your classrooms. Some of your peers may be switching back to old-school in person pen-and-paper midterm and exams this term to maintain academic integrity.

Consider applying for funding to further support your teaching.

Michelle Zeng has a new funding stream (FTIF) for supporting classroom AI initiatives found here. Deadline is **September 29 2023**. Also, you can expect an announcement soon for small TLEF grants and you can read about past TLEF initiatives here.

Be aware of UBC's updated snow closure policy related to moving classes online.

In essence, UBC has offered individual units control over the decision to move classes online in the event of a snow closure (or other weather event) at UBC instead of cancelling a class. In Forestry, we'd like to implement this as follows. It's not required (or even recommended) that you move your course online in the event of a UBC snow closure. You can simply cancel class. But if you choose to move online, we'd like instructors to follow these guidelines to make the move online as equitable and reasonable as possible:

1. Provide an asynchronous option (and/or set of materials available later) for any students who miss the synchronous online snow day session.
2. If the snow closure day falls on an in person midterm day (or some other in person larger assessment) reschedule the exam. **No last minute pivots to online exams can be**

supported. Please see some of the issues raised in the attached document about online assessments which really do require substantive adjustments and advance planning (not last minute!) to be successful.

3. If a class is already fully online, you may proceed as usual online unless it's simply untenable for the instructor.
4. Be sensitive to the fact that TAs as well as students with caregiver responsibilities may not be available on snow days due to other school or daycare closures and factor this into your decisions about snow days.

Looking forward to another fun and exciting term. And a special nod to folks teaching a new class for the first time. Please reach out if I can help as you navigate the term.

Sarah

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