Designing for Flexibility:
Adapting Policies on Student Work
Pivotal Pedagogy Fundamentals

Rationale: Why you might revise a policy about student work or participation

Although attendance, timeliness, and consistency are expected in students' current and future workplaces (e.g., "the real world") and so faculty are right to encourage these in our classrooms, most productive workplaces have also—especially recently—demonstrated that they allow for exceptions, particularly in exceptional times.

Students this semester may have even less control than usual over their workload, workspaces, and time management: they may face emergencies at home, extended illness, shared or unstable sites for doing class work, or university-imposed quarantine. Also, *more students in each class* are likely to experience these challenges, so it can be helpful to have policies ready ahead of time rather than adapting on an individual basis.

Finally, you yourself may feel overloaded this semester. Often, creating policies with some official "give" can create more time for the faculty member: instead of negotiating with every student over every instance, you can refer students to your policy on exceptions.

Complications: Why you might not revise a policy

- You might not have permission to revise a policy (please check with your department or coordinator)
- Your policies might be necessary for your time management
- Your policies might be necessary to ensure academic integrity
- Your policies might be necessary to enable special projects, collaborations, or guests
- Your course or profession might rely very heavily on timeliness or consistency

Options: What revisions you might make to design for flexibility

Feel free to modify these suggestions as needed to match your course and students, or to create your own policies that address similar issues.

Note that many of these policies are "a rising tide lifts all ships" kinds of policies: while they specifically support students in a significant crisis, students who are experiencing less extreme difficulties often find they have lower stress and better performance when some flexibility is available. Policies **visible to all students** keep your class from being a "squeaky wheel gets the grease" class, in which only brave/experienced/argumentative students benefit from additional opportunities that they request.

- *Revise a participation/visibility policy* to allow non-video participation by students whose workspaces are not private or whose technology or family situations make live video streaming difficult
  - Students who add comments to a chat or poll, perhaps at the beginning and ending of a class, could be counted "present" even if they do not share video of themselves
  - Students who submit brief class notes could be counted "present" without sharing video (e.g., "Three major points and one question")
  - Students who complete a "minute paper" to submit at the end of class could be counted "present" without sharing video (e.g., "The clearest point and the muddiest point for me from today's class were ___")
  - For more ideas about how to allow students to participate variably in synchronous web-conferencing, see this short article by faculty developer Karen Costa
- *Revise a late-work policy* to allow students clear options when they need a reasonable amount of additional time
  - A "Life Happens Pass" Policy can give any student an automatic 72-hour extension on a (major) assignment once per semester, no questions asked, as long as the student informs you in writing
  - A "Standard Deduction" Policy can indicate that any late assignment will earn a flat 10% grade deduction as long as they are completed within 7 days of the deadline
  - A "One Extension" Policy can give any student the option to propose a reasonable deadline extension, subject to your approval, once during the semester (perhaps as long as they provide a plan for how they will complete the work)
- *Revise a policy about make-up or revision work* to allow students clear options when they find that their access to or performance in the course is negatively affected by outside circumstances
  - A standard "Discussion Forum Make-Up" Assignment can indicate that students who have to miss a class meeting when their participation was expected can provide a summary, analysis, and/or additional contribution based on the day's questions/materials, and post asynchronously by a reasonable deadline to earn equivalent credit
  - A standard "One Revision" Policy can allow any student to revise one (major) assignment within two weeks after it is graded, either for a new grade or for up to a 15% increase on their prior grade provided that the revisions are significant (not just error corrections). Note that
    - Fewer students than you might expect tend to participate in these efforts, because revision is hard!

- Grading revisions can be quick, especially if you use something like MS Word's "Compare Documents" feature to spot changes, and provide very few comments along with any revised grade.
- ***Revise a policy about credit*** to allow students whose performance is suffering due to outside circumstances to demonstrate as much competency as they are capable of
  - Partial-credit policies on exams and short assignments can give students credit for making progress toward mastery even if their work is incomplete or not fully correct due to extreme circumstances
  - Bonus-credit policies can allow students who have a down-cycle at some point in the course to put in additional work at a different point
    - Very small bonus credit offered at several points throughout the course benefits learning more than a single large bonus opportunity at the end
    - Bonus credit offered for supporting other students' learning—additional research to share with the class, additional peer reviews of other students' drafts, additional leadership in groups or teams—or extending one's own learning (through tasks that ask students to "level up" on a common assignment) are preferable to placeholder assignments