

Addressing Student Needs through Individual Accommodations

Shakespeare's Hamlet famously decries, "When sorrows come, they come not single spies. But in battalions!" This describes well one aspect of the human condition we encounter in teaching with each new term. Our students face many sorrows of a variety of types (e.g. illness, injury, death of a loved one, campus trauma, loss of a job, natural disaster, etc.) and also with more than one at once as they also try to navigate learning in our courses. Often, their class attendance, ability to complete assignments, and more are diminished in these times, creating another area of stress and anxiety during a time when (and, indeed, because) they are already suffering. As instructors, our challenge is that it is rarely only one student in our class who is in some form of crisis. We are asked to address the circumstances of multiple students encountering a variety of issues.

While we may be in no position to help our students navigate physical and psychological sorrows, there are ways we can support them by addressing their pedagogical needs. Depending on the form and severity of the challenges students face and the timing in the academic term, we can create paths for them to learn new content and skills, complete activities and projects, connect with their classmates, take exams, etc. Categorizing situations as:

Emergency Situations

Emergency situations are by nature those that need immediate action. Either because the situatio

situations often need a larger plan of action and set of understandings. They may also need agreement between the instructor and student, and also require notifying the department chair, academic advisor, and dean of students. Depending on the exact combination of issues a student is facing, a long-term situation may require that a plan is made only with the intention that a student is able to earn a passing grade, and continue progressing in their program of study without interruption. These plans are made with the understanding that a grade above passing will not be possible.

Such a plan may include: specific types of participation, more or fewer assignments, projects, and exams, working in groups or as an individual, change in format of assignments, projects, and exams, as well as a set of meetings with the instructor and/or teaching assistant. These agreements may also include stipulations about minimum standards of quality or frequency.

Identifying the type of situation a student is facing and addressing with the pedagogical accommodation most appropriate to the situation and the student's need creates ways for us to act as a community of learners.