

TEACHING GUIDELINES: SYLLABI, SAMPLE EXAMS, AND GRADING

Date: December 4, 2009
To: Instructors in the SOM
From: Chris Heil and Fred Andrew
Re: Course syllabi and materials

The purpose of this memorandum is to present some guidelines related to syllabi and course content, based both on Institute and SOM requirements. With rare exceptions, these guidelines apply to all courses, both undergraduate and graduate. Exceptions include courses such as senior projects (MATH 4080, 4090), reading courses (MATH 4999, 8900), undergraduate research (MATH 4698), thesis credits.

1. SYLLABI

Your course syllabus should be posted on the web prior to the beginning of the semester or distributed on the first day of class. It should include the following material, plus any other information that you deem important to the course. The syllabus should be discussed in class at the beginning of the first lecture.

- Your name, office, office hours, email address, address for the course webpage or T-Square information.
- The course name, meeting time, meeting location.
- If appropriate: Teaching assistants' names, offices, email addresses, and office hours.
- Textbook and list of topics or sections that will be covered in the text.
- A clear description of the grading scheme.
- Dates of exams. These can be identified as tentative, but students should know exactly how many exams there will be and a good idea of when they will be. Give your policy on missed exams.
- A link to the GA Tech honor code: <http://www.honor.gatech.edu/>

Many sample syllabi are available at the DOTE webpage:

<http://www.math.gatech.edu/~heil/dote>

2. SAMPLE EXAMS

Sample exams should be provided for all undergraduate courses. Some of the easiest methods for doing this are as follows.

- Provide a link on your course webpage to exams that you used in a previous semester for the same course.
- Obtain permission from an instructor who has taught the course previously to use their exams as samples.
- Check the DOTE webpage at: <http://www.math.gatech.edu/~heil/dote>
Many links to webpages for courses from previous semesters are given there, most of which include practice exams, If an appropriate match is found, provide a link to it on your course webpage.

3. GRADING

- All classes should include a substantive grading element that includes exams. These should be appropriate and substantial evaluations of the material in the course. It may or may not be appropriate to allow a notesheet or calculator on an exam, but “open book, open notes” exams are not appropriate. Quizzes, homework, and other types of evaluation may also be appropriate. The grading scheme and the dates of exams should be clearly explained in the course syllabus.
- “Drop day” occurs midway through the semester. Before this time, a student may withdraw from a course and have a “W” appear on this transcript. After this day, students cannot withdraw from courses without special arrangements with the registrar. You should have a substantive assignment, preferably an exam, well before the drop day and have it returned to the students in time for them to make an informed decision about whether to drop your class or not.
- Midterm grades must be assigned in 1000 and 2000 level classes. These are “S” or “U” grades and are for informational purposes only: they have no impact on a student’s final grade. Students who receive a “U” must meet with an advisor in their major department.
- Especially in large classes, there will be students who miss an exam. You should have some policy in place to deal with these cases. Be aware that students do miss exams for justifiable reasons. Some justifiable excuses are predictable beforehand, e.g., religious holidays that fall on an exam date.
- Nondisclosure of grades: You *cannot* discuss a student’s grades with parents or anyone else without *prior written permission* from the student. A parent may call you on the phone and ask “how is my child doing in class?”, but you are not at liberty to discuss this with them!
- If, after your final grades have been assigned and submitted, you find that you made a mistake, see Sharon McDowell to fill out a grade change form. Note that this must be done *within one semester* after the course is completed.
- Every class should have a final exam, although in some graduate courses and advanced undergraduate courses an alternative final assessment, such as a take home final or final project, may be an appropriate substitute for a traditional in-class final examination. However, most undergraduate courses and all graduate courses related to the Comprehensive Exams should have a traditional in-class final exam. This exam must take place during the officially scheduled final exam time for the course. The final exam schedule is at
<http://www.registrar.gatech.edu/home/calendar.php>
- Final exams should be kept for one year after they are given.
- A new institute policy on assignments due during the week preceding final exams (“WPFE,” formerly known as “dead week”) takes place in Spring 2010. For courses with a traditional in-class final exam, the policy allows homework assignments or projects to be due during the WPFE, but no tests, quizzes, *major* projects, or exams may be given during this week. Additionally, aside from the final exam, no assignments of any kind are allowed during finals week. The institute guidelines are available at
<http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/updates/rules/12c.php>