

COURSE PROTOCOL

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This document outlines a number of policies that govern every course that I am teaching. The purpose of the policies is to ensure an equitable environment for all in a course. These policies are equipped with examples for the purpose of illustration.

SCOPE

The policies are fait accompli and non-negotiable. The policies stated herein will be enforced unconditionally.

The policies must be read, understood, and followed as-is (that is, in their entirety, without any exception), by every student, in the course. The responsibility of complying with the policies stated herein, in their entirety, rests solely on the students, and not on others. A student's inability, at any stage of the course, to read, to understand, or to recall these policies, is not an acceptable reason for a non-enforcement of these policies.

POLICY 1

A student must understand the meanings of choice and necessity, and the difference between a choice and a necessity.

For example, a student must understand that he or she is in the course by choice, not by necessity. A program, in general, and the courses in it, in particular, is not imposed on anybody. Therefore, a student registers to be in a course by choice.

POLICY 2

A student adapts to the course. A course does not adapt to any particular student. A course may adapt to the benefit of the entire class, if such a need arises.

A course has a number of constants and a number of variables. In general, a constant must not be converted into a variable, and conversely, a variable must not be converted into a constant.

For example, timeline of submission of an assignment or project deliverable is a constant.

For example, a policy set for tests is a constant.

For example, the marks for a project deliverable are a variable. (Therefore, even though a student has the right to submit a claim along with a proof of his or her work, he or she should not dictate the marks he or she is entitled to receive.)

For example, the grade for a course is a variable. (Therefore, a student should not decide a priori his or her grade, or dictate the grade he or she is entitled to receive.)

POLICY 3

A student must understand the meanings of claim and proof, and the difference between a claim and a proof (of that claim).

A claim in and of itself may or may not be acceptable. This is because a claim may or may not be true.

A claim may be acceptable if it is supported a proof, although that will depend on the validity of that proof. A proof is a form of substantiation.

POLICY 4

A student must understand that in a causation claim, the end-effect always matters and a cause may or may not matter.

A cause-effect relation (or causation) is a kind of correlation. However, a correlation is not causation. Therefore, a student must understand a correlation in and of itself is not acceptable. This is because, for a given effect, something presented as cause may be untrue or (even if true, then it may be) irrelevant to the course.

For example, “I could not come to Test 1 (effect) because I missed the bus (cause)” is a cause-effect relation.

For example, “I missed the bus (effect) because I had forgotten to bring a pen needed for Test 1 and had to go back home (cause)” is a cause-effect relation.

POLICY 5

A student who strains from the expected requirements of the course should not expected the same treatment as the students who do not.

For example, one such requirement is regularity. Therefore, a student who is does not attend lectures regularly should not expect the same treatment as the students who are regular. It is the responsibility of a student to understand the implications of his/her non-attendance for any reason whatsoever, including the implications of it on tests.

POLICY 6

Any action by any student that has a negative impact, or has the potential for a negative impact, on other students in the course will not be accepted.

For example, it is assumed that the sound of a device in the possession of a student during a test disturbs the other students who are writing the test, and cannot be accepted. In such a case, the offending student should expect that his/her test can be terminated.

For example, a non-contribution towards a deliverable by a student as a member of a project team has a negative impact on the rest of the team, and cannot be accepted. In such a case, the offending student should expect that he/she may not receive any credit for the deliverable in question.

For example, submitting copied work towards a deliverable by a student as a member of a project team has a negative impact on the rest of the team, and cannot be accepted. In such a case, the offending student should expect that he/she may not receive any credit for the deliverable in question and may be removed from the team.

POLICY 7

A student must understand the meanings of privilege and right, and the difference between a privilege and a right.

For example, expecting that certain marks assure a certain grade is neither a privilege, nor a right. (It is a policy issue.)

For example, having an opportunity to be part of a group assignment or team project is a privilege, not a right.

For example, expecting that timeline of submission of an assignment or project deliverable will be changed upon request is a privilege, not a right.

For example, expecting that marks will be given for a partially correct solution to a problem on a test is a privilege, not a right.

For example, expecting that this document will apply to every student in the class unreservedly is a right.

For example, expecting that the course meets the topical coverage set out in the outline is a right.

POLICY 8

A student must understand that a course cannot, in general, run on exceptions.

A student must understand that a course cannot, in particular, entertain individual circumstances and/or personal reasons external to that course.

These individual circumstances include, but are not limited to, date of completion of program, situations involving family, situations involving friends, constraints set by company, and constraints set by sponsor.

For example, a student request of the type “I need grade X, for purpose Y, for reason Z” cannot be complied. (A grade is assigned on performance only, not on need.)

For example, a student request of the type “I cannot do X, for reason Y” cannot be complied. The following are some common instantiations, that are by no means exhaustive: “I cannot write the second test, as I have to take care of my sick friend, I have to observe a religious custom, I have to babysit my daughter, I have to be out-of-town for company work, or I am busy with my guests, and so on, so the test should be rescheduled at a date and time that is convenient for me.”

For example, a student request of the type “I can do extra work to make-up”, “I can resubmit an assignment/deliverable/report/...”, and so on, cannot be complied. (A course runs linearly and forward in time, not nonlinearly and backward in time. In particular, there is no provision for retroactive work in a course.)

POLICY 9

A student must understand that the burden of proof of work, at any time during the course, is on that student only, and not on others.

For example, in a team project, the burden of proof of a team member making a non-trivial contribution to a project deliverable rests solely on that team member, and not on other team members.

POLICY 10

In general, credit is given to explicit information, not inferred information.

In particular, the marks are given based on what is communicated (in some modality such as text, graphics, sound, and so on), not on what is intended.

For example, if you wrote “cube” when you intended “square” in a solution to some problem, then marks are given based on the solution having “cube” instead of “square”.

For example, if you wrote “FALSE” when you claim that you intended “TRUE” in a solution to some problem, then your intention is not relevant to marking, regardless of the validity of the claim.

POLICY 11

A student must understand his or her role in a course clearly.

In particular, a student must understand that he or she is not supposed to participate in assessment (marking or grading).

For example, a student can ask for a reassessment based on the Reassessment Protocol, but should not ask whether he or she could be assigned certain marks or a specific grade.

POLICY 12

A student must note that, barring certain exceptions, determined by me and by me only, any arguments regarding marking of any assessment mode must be expressed in writing via e-mail only.

This is important for keeping the assessment process systematic and for the sake of keeping an official record.

POLICY 13

A student must understand the meaning of plagiarism and its consequences as outlined by the University.

A student must understand that policies on plagiarism are not limited to the duration of the course. For example, even after the course has ended and grades have been assigned, a discovery of plagiarism by a student can lead to a change in marks and perhaps a change in the original grade of that student. For example, the impact of plagiarism in one course can carry over to another course, in the same or different term.