What To Do When Students Miss Graded Work
WPI Guidelines on Best Practices

Prepared by the Committee on Advising and Student Life, Spring 2012

One challenge that all instructors must deal with from time to time in their classes is finding an appropriate solution for students who have missed graded work in their classes. In an effort to provide some guidelines on best practices, the Committee on Advising and Student Life has collected suggestions from a number of highly regarded faculty from a variety of disciplines. These are summarized in this document.

A Key Point: If you have significant concerns about a student, please contact the Academic Advising Office. They may be able to provide information about the student’s situation, and they can alert the CARE team, a group of professional staff who monitor students perceived to be at risk.

While there were a number of different responses, there was also a set of recurring themes:

1. Including a statement in the syllabus about your policy for missed work provides both you and the students with the necessary framework for a productive discussion.

2. Almost all faculty reported that they required (and made explicit in the syllabus and in class) that the students inform them ahead of time when the student would miss the (test, deadline for assignment, etc.). All reported being much more willing to work with students who gave this advance warning, and were less willing to accommodate those who did not provide the advance notice. It was very common for faculty to state up front that they did not accept late work, except under extenuating circumstances.

3. Many did not require a note, documentation of the reason or even an extensive explanation, finding it valuable to trust the student. Most reported that they did not feel that the students exploited this, and some reported that the trust exhibited by the faculty member elicited a strong desire on the part of the student to work hard to catch up. (Note: Due to federal HIPPA laws the health services office CANNOT provide a note that says anything beyond that the student was seen in the office.)

4. There was a strong tendency to promote being flexible, and working with the students on a case-by-case basis, appropriate to the situation.

5. Students by and large are given the responsibility of finding out what they missed, and working to compensate for their absence. One faculty member even recommended asking the student to suggest the mechanism for making up the missed work.

For Missed In-Class Assessments (tests, quizzes, etc):

1. Provide a makeup timed so that information about it cannot flow from students who have already taken the assessment.
2. Use assessments from previous offerings of the course.

3. Have an oral assessment – using either the missed one or a similar one as a starting point. This allows probing to see depth of knowledge.

4. Calculate the grade excluding this assessment. This can be done one of two ways – reducing the point total for this student by the amount of the assessment or by averaging other similar assessments and using that average as a replacement for the missed assessment.

5. Provide a single make-up assessment at the end for anyone who missed any of the previous course assessments. This can be comprehensive.

6. Allow all students to miss one (quiz, homework, etc.) no questions asked. But not two!

**For Missed Homework Deadlines:**

1. Extensions for circumstances thought to be significant were largely given. The instructor reserves the right to determine if the circumstances were sufficient (e.g. – illness, family emergency vs. computer died at 1 am the day assignment due).

2. Increase the length of a subsequent assignment.

**For Missed Labs:**

Providing a makeup session for all students who missed any lab during the term is common.

**For Substantial Absence:**

Give the student an Incomplete and work out how to complete the course. This can be by participating in the next offering of the course from the point at which the student was unable to attend.