Common Misconceptions about Teaching Practices at U of A and Corresponding Policy

Please note: This document was created based on the University-wide policies as outlined in UAPPOL (central repository for University of Alberta policies and procedures) and the University Calendar. Please check with your Department Chair on specific written policies as some exemptions from the policy statements below may occur.

1. I can make up my course outline as the course progresses.

   Course outline requirements are set and must be provided to the students at the beginning of the course. Please see University Calendar §23.4(2)a, for specific course outline requirements. “[C]ircumstances might develop, during a term, where a change to the course outline...makes sense to all concerned. Such changes shall only occur with fair warning or general class consent.” §23.4(2)

2. I have to make accommodations for students claiming a disability, even if the student has not gone to Specialized Support and Disability Services (SSDS).

   “In determining any special circumstances which request the modification of a requirement, consultation will take place between the SSDS and the Deans of Faculties or their designates.” Policy for Students with Disabilities

3. I can ask a student for a sick note after an absence.

   While an instructor has the discretion to approve excused absences from term work, “a medical note cannot be required” §23.3(1). However, if a student chooses to provide a medical note, the University of Alberta Medical Statement Form may be downloaded from the Online Services section of www.registraroffice.ualberta.ca. Instructors may request other adequate documentation at their discretion such as a form from the student's Faculty or a statutory declaration. §23.3(1).

4. I am allowed to fail a student after a certain number of unjustified absences.

   Instructors cannot fail students who do not attend classes but “those who choose not to attend must assume whatever risks are involved” (§23.3). For example, if participation or attendance is required, a student will not be approved to defer an exam if they have not been in regular attendance. §23.3(2c)
5. **Feedback on assignments or exams can be provided to students anytime during the course.**

While the University Calendar states that instructors shall provide appropriate feedback in a “timely manner” §23.4(2) we recommend that you provide students with feedback early enough that they may have time to use that information on subsequent assignments or exams. Some Departments/Faculties may set more specific timeframes. For example, Arts requests instructors to provide feedback to their students prior to the course withdrawal deadline (August 2013 Memo from the Dean of Arts).

6. **Grades are due 72 hours after a course ends.**

Departments may specify a timeframe of when they would like grades handed in from instructors in order to comply with “Notification of Results” regulation that states “[d]epartments shall forward grades to the Office of the Registrar within five working days of the final exam, or (for courses with no final exam) within five working days of the due date for the final assignment.” §23.5.4

7. **An instructor must provide access to all past evaluative material.**

Assessable Materials
Access must be provided to past or representative evaluative course material, listed: Final examinations; Evaluative course material that accounts for 30% or greater of a student’s course grade; Past evaluative course material that is made available by the Faculty, department or professor to students directly or via students’ associations; Past evaluative course material that is permitted to leave the classroom; Representative evaluative course material where actual examinations are not provided.

Exemptions:
Particular courses or entire departments can be exempted from this policy at the discretion of each Faculty Council. Access to Evaluative Course Material Procedure from University of Alberta Policies and Procedures Online (UAPPOL).

8. **Final exams must be 30% of the final course grade.**

“In each course in which a final examination is held, a weight of not less than 30 percent and not more than 70 percent will be assigned to the final examination, except where a departure from this arrangement has been authorized by the council of the Faculty in which the department offering the course is situated. The remaining weight for the course will be assigned to term work.” University Calendar §23.4(1) Evaluation Procedures and Grading
9. As the instructor, I can approve a student’s request for a deferred final exam.

The student must seek the approval of the dean or designate of the student’s Faculty on the application for a deferred final exam. If approved, students should refer to §23.5.6 for details on writing deferred exams. In the case of an approved application for deferred final exam, the student’s Faculty will inform the Department responsible for the course of the approved deferred exam. The Department will then notify the instructor. §23.3(2e & f)

10. There is nothing you can do as an instructor if a student keeps writing after the end of an exam.

"When the signal is given to end the exam, students must promptly cease writing. If a student does not stop at the signal, the instructor has the discretion either not to grade the exam paper or to lower the grade on the examination." Conduct of exams §23.5.1(8).

11. I am allowed to deal with plagiarism or cheating by assigning a zero.

Instructors cannot decide on how to sanction a student suspected of cheating. An instructor suspecting academic dishonesty should meet with the student first to determine whether or not an offence has been committed. If it appears to be a Code violation, the instructor forwards the case to the Dean or designate. For a complete guide to the process please visit Academic Discipline Process

Academic integrity regulations are set out in the Code of Student Behaviour ("the Code"). Everything you need to know about the procedures for dealing with academic misconduct is outlined in Section §30.5.4 of the Code.

12. I must grade on the curve.

Assigning Grades: Grades reflect judgments of student achievement made by instructors and must correspond to the associated descriptor. These judgments are based on a combination of absolute achievement and relative performance in a class. §23.4(4)

Grading Policy
"Grades in any course, examination or other academic assessment shall not be mandated on the basis of a curve or historic distribution of student grades. The distribution of grades shall not be predetermined by any system of quotas that requires a certain number or percentage of grades at a particular level. However, a Faculty, department or unit may develop and provide guidelines to instructors setting out a reasonable distribution of grades in the Faculty or department. Such (i.e., Faculty or department-specific) guidelines must be brought to the Academic Standards Committee for information and communicated to students through the University Calendar." Assessment and Grading Policy (UAPPOL)

Please see next page for Grading Procedure
Grading Procedure

“There will be no pre-determined quota of letter grades in a course. A student’s level of achievement of the goals/outcomes of a course, their grade, and the descriptor of that grade (i.e., A and “excellent”, B and “good”, C and “satisfactory”, etc., as defined in the University Calendar section on Academic Regulations) must be aligned. Grading Procedure (UAPPOL)

13. **Online exams can be booked outside of class time and it is expected students must find time to take the exam.**

In certain cases an instructor may schedule a term examination outside or beyond the regularly scheduled class period. Instructors should be aware that by doing so, conflicts may result for some students that have another class at the time of the scheduled term examinations. Students have the right to attend regularly scheduled class activities. Therefore, if a student has a conflict between a regularly scheduled class and a scheduled term examination, the instructor of the class in which there was a scheduled term examination will be required to make an accommodation for the student. 23.5.2(2)

14. **It is not my responsibility to set the deferred exam.**

Within the timelines described below, the time and place of the deferred final exam will be determined by the instructor. Instructors are encouraged to include the date, time and place of a deferred exam in the course outline should one be required.

a. Fall Term Deferred Final Exams: deferred final exams must be held by the end of Reading Week in accordance with the provisions outlined in the University Calendar 23.5.6

b. Winter Term and Fall/Winter Deferred Final Exams: deferred final exams must be held by June 30 in accordance with the provisions outlined in the University Calendar 23.5.6

(2) Spring/Summer Deferred Final Exams: The exam must be held within two weeks of the date of the final examination missed and not later than August 31. In the case of 13-week classes in Engineering programs, the exam must be scheduled by September 14 and held prior to October 21.

15. **Graduate students may retake an exam they have failed.**

§203.8.3 Graduate students are not permitted to take reexaminations. Regardless of their category, students who do not obtain an acceptable grade, or fail to complete a course that is required as part of their graduate program, must have the approval of the department and the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research to retake the course and must obtain a passing grade. Alternatively, students may take an alternate course recommended by the department and approved by the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, but they must also obtain a passing grade.

16. **A minimum passing grade in a graduate course is C+.**
“Normally, the minimum acceptable passing grade in individual courses is C+ (see §203.8.2); however, some departments may require higher grades.” §203.8.3

17. **First year final exams must be comprehensive.**

There is no University-wide policy about what should be included on final exams. Please check with your Department/Faculty for any specific policies.