**October 2023**

*Please share with your faculty:*

**Assessment during times of crisis**

Times of crisis, such as the current and horrific terrorist attacks on Israel, make it difficult, if not impossible, to carry on business as usual. How can we fairly assess students during such a time? Right now, there are many student absences, and students who are in attendance are having trouble focusing on their learning. We know from previous crises that balancing the emotional needs of students while meeting teaching and learning goals can be tricky. In keeping with [Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs](https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html), students will not be able to focus on their learning unless their physiological and safety needs are met first. For this reason, one of our first actions should be to locate and reach out to our absent students to assess their needs, and offer emotional and academic support.

We also know from past times of crisis that flexibility is important when it comes to teaching and learning. Events such as the COVID pandemic taught us that we as a community must be prepared to suddenly adjust our current educational practices to accommodate the needs of our community, while at the same time not sacrificing student learning. Prioritizing student learning shifts the focus of assessment away from evaluating students’ performance to providing students with feedback about the extent to which they are meeting learning goals.

There are many ways to be sensitive to students’ needs, while at the same time providing them with the formative assessment feedback that they need. These include, for example, providing flexible assignment deadlines, allowing opportunities for revision, offering different assignment options to demonstrate mastery of material, and providing timely and informative feedback. In addition, flexibility with the types of assignments given also can be helpful. Rather than only having high-stakes, in-person exams, varying the types of assignments, and including more low-key assessments throughout the semester can also provide more ongoing feedback to students, and reduce the anxiety around in-person, cumulative tests. Such assignments could include, for example, end-of-unit quizzes, paper assignments and projects.

It is important to note, however, that one recent concern expressed by faculty about alternative, at-home assignments, is students’ use of AI technology and how it may be compromising academic integrity. While this is a valid concern, by helping students see the goal of assessment as formative in nature and as a learning tool, they will hopefully be more intrinsically motivated to learn, and less likely to even consider resorting to AI technology.

In sum, navigating assessment during times of crisis can be challenging. Evaluating our educational priorities, being flexible in our educational practices, and helping students view assessment as a tool to enhance learning are among some of the ways to balance student needs and continue to facilitate learning during difficult times.

**Check out:**

Gusky, Thomas (2020). Assessment and grading in the midst of the pandemic. *Education Week.* Retrieved October 11, 2023 from <https://www.edweek.org/education/opinion-assessments-and-grading-in-the-midst-of-a-pandemic/2020/04>

Metro, R. (2020). Humane assessments shouldn’t only happen during a pandemic. Inside Higher Education. Retrieved October 11, 2023 from <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2020/09/09/new-approaches-assessment-can-promote-student-success-times-crisis-well-normalcy>

**Reminder:** Please contact me if you have any questions about your Fall assessment plans. Thanks very much.