

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

March 27, 2020

Dear colleagues,

First and foremost, a hearty thanks for all you continue to do in support of student learning and student success. I am grateful for your thoughtful, creative, and collaborative work and appreciate the care and dedication you have demonstrated in this transition to remote learning. The challenges you have faced and continue to encounter have no doubt taxed you all. Given what I have witnessed in just this past week, I have every confidence in your abilities to successfully navigate through the remainder of the semester.

As we work through this coming month, please continue to keep your health and safety—and the health and safety of your loved ones—a top priority, and to calibrate your expectations of yourself and your students in light of our current circumstances. The Coronavirus pandemic has created fear and anxiety for nearly everyone, including you and your students.

In this message I'd like to address some specific concerns that have been raised this week.



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Satisfactory/Not Satisfactory Grading Option for Spring 2020

Yesterday the MSU community learned of a Satisfactory/Not Satisfactory grading option for Spring 2020. This one-time grading option was introduced in an effort to alleviate some of the stress students are experiencing during this challenging time. This policy gives most students the option of selecting an ungraded designation for their transcript, should they select to do so. No one is required to take this option. More information on this Spring 2020 grading policy, as well as FAQs, may be found at <https://remote.msu.edu/grading-option/>.

There will also be a notation on the transcripts of all students who receive any grade in Spring 2020 that this semester was disrupted by the epidemic. This transcript notation is for the benefit of future admissions committees and employers who might forget just which semester it was that was affected.

Extending the Tenure Clock

Yesterday the University Committee on Faculty Tenure voted unanimously in favor of a provision to automatically extend the tenure clock of probationary tenure system faculty by one year, with the option for individual faculty members to waive that extension if they choose. President Stanley and I proposed this action. We intend to finalize it in short order. Extensions for probationary Librarians, Academic Specialists in the continuing appointment system, and those in the FRIB faculty appointment system have been discussed with UCFT and the Academic Specialist Advisory Committee and are anticipated.

Hiring Chill

There is a hiring chill—not quite a freeze—in place for new hires. In general, faculty searches that are already posted and in progress will not be affected. I am communicating with the deans about the application of the policy in specific circumstances.

Teaching Evaluations

Discussions related to how SIRS forms may be used for Spring 2020 are underway, in consultation with various groups across campus. SIRS or other forms of student evaluation represent just one component of what we hope is a more robust approach to assessing faculty performance in teaching and learning. We are interested in capturing student reaction to how well the transition to remote teaching worked for them. We recognize, however, that a purely evaluative use of the SIRS this semester would be unfair to many faculty members. Additional information on this issue will be shared broadly once a decision is reached.

Scheduling Final Exams for Online Teaching

Please ensure that your final examinations delivered online comply with the University Final Exam Policy, found at <https://reg.msu.edu/ROInfo/Calendar/FinalExam.aspx>.

The Final Examination policy notes that no student should be required to take more than two examinations during any one day of the final examination period. Students who have more than two examinations scheduled during one calendar day during the final examination period may contact the Academic Student Affairs Office in their colleges for assistance in arranging for an alternate time for one of the three examinations.

Faculty may broaden student flexibility by offering a timed exam with a broader window of eligibility to begin and complete. For instance, in D2L you might allow students 90 minutes to complete the exam within a 24-hour window that you define. If you do so, please anchor your window of eligibility to fully include your originally scheduled exam slot, to minimize the potential of conflicting with other courses. The MSU IT Support Desk can help you properly configure your exam and handle exceptions that you might need to make for individual students who need accommodations for a VISA or because they have more than two exams scheduled that day and need to arrange an alternate time for your exam.

An [Exam Strategy for Remote Teaching](#) resource document has been added to the Assessment area of the Videos and Quick Guides page of the Keep Teaching site.

Software in MSU Labs, Adapting Teaching and Expectations

The service desk is receiving many questions regarding software in labs. We have feedback from students that instructors are asking students to use specialized software that is typically only available in labs and studios. With the added constraint of the Governor's stay home order, please make adaptations to teaching and expectations that do not require access to tools and technologies that are unavailable to students. Even if this software can be purchased online, many students may not be able to afford their own copy.

Student Class Recordings on Social Media Platforms

It has also been brought to our attention that students are recording clips from online classes and posting them on Snapchat, TikTok, and other social media platforms. There is also at least one third-party organization that is encouraging students to share clips of classroom “indoctrination.” *Faculty members may choose to remind their students that their class and its content are not to be used elsewhere without permission of the instructor, if that is indeed their wish.*

Resources and Support: Keep Teaching, WorkLife Office, WKAR

The [Keep Teaching website](#) continues to be updated with new trainings and workshops, found on the [Trainings and Staying Connected page](#). The site provides support across a broad range of topics and opportunities to stay connected, including Spartan Fireside, Teachers’ Lounge, and Open Office Hours. I was the guest on Thursday’s Spartan Fireside chat with Jeff Grabill and Mark Largent, and that chat will be archived on the site, along with other [recordings of past events](#). A new “Support Students” area that provides resources related to remote learning has also been added to the site. Please visit the Keep Teaching site often to learn more and stay connected.

The [MSU WorkLife Office](#) is providing resources faculty members may not have yet seen. They have developed a number of supportive online webinars which are being recorded and posted on the [blog area of their website](#). Blog posts and webinars address topics such as Remote Work Structures and Working Together with Your Supervisor; Taking Care of Yourself in Times of Uncertainty; Best Practices for Working from Home with Children; and Things to Do to Keep Kids Active, Engaged and Learning While Home. The blog area is adding more short Q&As, along with some uplifting posts to provide a place where members of the MSU community can check in on work-life fit and find some connection, answers, and inspiration. They have also been featuring open community conversations focused on [identified themes](#) of interest, complementing the faculty-focused Spartan Fireside chats.

WKAR is producing a WKAR Family and PBS Kids Daily Newsletter for parents and caregivers. If you are now caring for children at home, you will find helpful, educational activities for children in the newsletter. [Subscription](#) is free.

You are an important resource for your students

It is important to check in routinely with your students to see how they are doing. Even if this has never been a part of your teaching approach in the past, please adopt it now. Like you, the students have had to make many adjustments in this new learning environment. Some of them are in time zones far away, struggling to keep up with synchronous classes through the night. Some have greatly restricted digital access. Many of them, especially those who worked in East Lansing retail or restaurants, have lost their jobs.

One department asked all of its students what their concerns were, and the most frequent response was “I’m scared.” These unprecedented situations have created enough uncertainty and anxiety for those of us who are hoary with years (septuagenarian provost here). Imagine how difficult it is for a young adult. Please don’t hesitate in just asking them to tell you how it is going for them. There is great value in extending grace, generosity, and compassion to our students as they navigate these new remote and virtual settings.

On a related note, CAPS is still operating through phone calls and other remote means. Some of the general advice for getting through these days of social isolation is to make and keep a daily schedule, try to get some exercise, and reach out through telephone and social media to check in with others. Keeping this advice in mind, **you** are an important part of the daily schedule and the contact with others for your students.

Digital Citizenship and Code of Teaching Responsibility

As you teach, please be mindful of your digital citizenship, the civility of your classroom environments, and of the digital citizenship expectations of your students as they engage with their peers. We have had some complaints about faculty being rude. I doubt that faculty have become rude, but rather we lack some of the nonverbal cues associated with in-person instruction. We all need to pay more deliberate attention to fostering civil learning environments. [Guidelines for Productive Online Conversations](#) have been added to the Communication area of the “Implement” page of the Keep Teaching site. Please continue to model the kind of civil discourse and behavior that you expect of your students.

For those interested, next Tuesday’s Teachers’ Lounge, at 11 a.m. on March 31, will focus on Digital Citizenship – Guidelines for Productive Online Conversations. Scroll down on the [Trainings and Staying Connected page](#) to find the link for Teachers’ Lounge.

I would also like to remind all faculty that the [Code of Teaching Responsibility](#), which outlines student rights in the classroom, is still in effect. We have seen cases this week which could open faculty up to formal grievances from students. Just as examples, we have had a couple of cases of faculty not letting students see their assignments, because they couldn’t figure out how to do it online. If you encounter that sort of difficulty, please check in with the Keep Teaching team for advice. And we had a case of a professor who changed the weighting of an exam with only a 12-hour notice of that change. No doubt that was a response to something about the online experience. While these are extraordinary times, we still need to be aware that students have these rights in the classroom, even in the transition to remote learning and in the context of the new Satisfactory/Not Satisfactory grading policy option.

Spartan Resilience

How many times have we read or heard the word “unprecedented” this past week? At each turn, we have certainly been faced with unprecedented circumstances and challenges. What I have seen, however, is our faculty stepping up again and again, in deed and in spirit, truly bringing their Spartan will to each encounter. And for that, I thank you.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Terry".

Teresa A. Sullivan

Interim Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs