



ASPEN
UNIVERSITY

2023-2024

Faculty Handbook

**4615 East Elwood Street
Phoenix, AZ 85040**

Letter from Vice President of Faculty Services and Scholarship

Dear Faculty,

I would like to take a moment to welcome you to the Aspen family. We are excited that you will share your expertise with our students and we hope you will find teaching at Aspen to be rewarding and satisfying. You will discover that there are teams of people who are here to support your success as a faculty member and to help you be effective contributors to your own personal and professional growth. To begin, it is important to start with our mission, which forms the foundation for everything we do at Aspen. It drives our behaviors, thoughts and decisions. At Aspen, we are “dedicated to offering any motivated college-worthy student the opportunity to receive a high quality, responsibly priced distance-learning education for the purpose of achieving sustainable economic and social benefits for themselves and their families.” In today’s world of excessive debt related to getting a college education, Aspen seeks to disrupt the higher education space by providing viable alternatives for paying tuition costs that do not depend on an over-reliance and over-consumption of federal financial aid loans. Instead, we offer a pioneering monthly payment plan for most of our programs and we strive to keep costs down so that we can offer tuition rates that are affordable for the vast majority of Americans.

Another component of our mission is that we will provide high quality, distance-learning education to every Aspen student. This is an area where you can help most. What makes a good faculty member? First, you have to have the appropriate background to teach the content area. Next, you have to have the right mindset to help students when they need it, especially when they are exhibiting counter-productive behaviors that interfere with them reaching graduation. The simplest advice is, “Be present!” That is, show up for class... not just being available on the side, but being actively engaged with the course topics by sharing your knowledge and experience with students through discussion boards, assignment feedback and additional resources you add to the classroom learning experience. Finally, it is important that you have high standards that are fair and consistent for all students while supporting them as they learn new concepts and skills, as well as challenging them to reach higher levels of understanding about their discipline of study.

Our mission is only achievable if a student successfully

completes the program requirements and graduates with a degree. This is the primary goal of teaching at Aspen... graduation. Everything that you do as a faculty member directly impacts student success. Even the smallest things send messages to students about their likelihood of successfully completing their goal of earning a college degree. It all starts with the student-teacher interactions at the course level, so we invite you to take this responsibility seriously and personally as you work with students to develop them, coach them, nurture them, and support them in being successful in every course.

Thank you for "being present" and for all the hard work in getting students to graduation!

Kevin Thrasher, EdD

Vice President, Faculty Services and Scholarship
Aspen University

Certified as true and correct in content and policy by
Joanne Weiss, Provost
August 31, 2023

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History of Institution

Aspen University has a rich history in distance education. It originated in the International Academy, created in the 1960's to improve the way education was disseminated. The International Academy evolved into ISIM University, with a primary focus on technology and business education. In the late 1980's, operations moved to Colorado and in 1993, the University was successful in acquiring national accreditation with the Distance Education and Training Council (DETC), now the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC). In 2003, the University underwent a change in ownership, a name change to Aspen University, and a successful reaccreditation review. Currently, Aspen University offers programs in nursing, business, information management, computer science, education, and healthcare. Degrees awarded at Aspen University include baccalaureate, master, and doctorate. Aspen offers its programs primarily via distance education, except where an in-residence component of a program is additionally considered part of its scope of accreditation by the DEAC. To see more information on the following policies, please refer to the academic catalog.

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Mission and Diversity Statements

Aspen is dedicated to offering any motivated college-worthy student the opportunity to receive a high quality, responsibly priced distance-learning education for the purpose of achieving sustainable economic and social benefits for themselves and their families.

Aspen's Academic Achievement Goal is to transition motivated learners to higher levels of productive citizenship by providing a readily accessible education that teaches knowledge and skills of enduring value. A productive citizen is defined as a self-directed life-long learner who functions successfully in high-performance teams; exhibits professional behavior through leadership, advocacy, cultural competence and ethical conduct; conducts research, using evidence-based practices; leverages technology to produce high-value work products; and achieves a productive professional career.

Aspen's Economic Responsibility Goal is to offer tuition rates low enough that a majority of our students will not incur debt through utilization of federal financial aid. Economic responsibility is defined as Aspen offering tuition rates low enough that a majority of students will be able to afford to pay tuition in cash (maintaining Federal Financial Aid revenues below 50%).

Aspen's Diversity and Equity Statement

Aspen University is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in its faculty, administration, and staff hiring practices, employee policies, and student admissions practices and policies. It is committed to non-discrimination in the delivery of its educational services and employment opportunities. The University does not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, veteran status, physical or mental disability, medical condition as defined by law, or any basis prohibited by law.

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Faculty Governance

Faculty input is essential to the success they experience as they serve their students, grow professionally and participate in decisions that affect them. One way this is accomplished is through serving on a number of faculty-driven committees and approval bodies. The most influential faculty-representative group is the Faculty Senate because they serve to review policies and practices that affect all faculty across the university. The Faculty Senate has representatives from each academic program (SONHS, SAS, SOE, SBT) and consists of both full-time and part-time faculty at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. All the content in this faculty handbook has been reviewed by the Faculty Senate and, as such, all faculty are held to the expectations outlined herein.

Faculty governance refers to the participation by faculty members in the process of policy development, strategic and academic planning, and decision-making over curriculum, instruction and assessment that, in aggregate, helps the University better achieve its mission. One way this is accomplished is through the Faculty Senate. The senate has a faculty senate homepage where all senate business is reported for the full view of all faculty.

Faculty governance is the recognition that by virtue of education, experience, insights of the professional community and industries for which the programs are developed, and daily student contact, faculty bring skills and insights to the process of curriculum development, review, critique, assessment of student learning outcomes, and recommendations for change.

Faculty Senate Meetings

Faculty Senate meetings occur on a monthly basis to discuss current policies and practices related to support systems, performance standards, scholarship opportunities, curriculum development, assessment data and other topics brought forth by faculty. The meetings are called and facilitated by Chair of the Faculty Senate. See the Appendix for the Faculty Senate Bylaws.

All other faculty meetings by School occur on at least a bi-annual basis, typically around Data Dialogues related to specific school programs. These school-based faculty meetings are coordinated by the respective Dean. The School of Nursing and Health Sciences hold all-faculty meetings, once a quarter.

Academic Freedom

“Academic Freedom” is defined as the situation where teachers, scholars and administration are allowed latitude with respect to their discussions with students and the positions they take. Academic freedom is the right of faculty and students to dialogue, examine, question, and investigate ideas as they pursue their academic intellectual interests. This is done within the context of the design of the curriculum, the values of their respective disciplines, and the constraints of research and ethics. In turn, faculty members are obliged to demonstrate critical self-discipline, academic integrity, effective teaching, and exemplary scholarship.

At all levels, programs provide the opportunity for students to examine their world views. The goal is not to mandate an exact set of values and beliefs; rather, it is to challenge each learner to consider his or her present values, beliefs and actions. Structured learning opportunities allow students to clarify and affirm their personal assumptions.

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Faculty Outcomes and Expectations

At Aspen, there are several outcomes that we expect faculty to exhibit while teaching. These outcomes are outlined below and are aligned to the performance evaluation tool, the Classroom Evaluation Rubric (CER), which is explained later in this document. These Outcomes and Expectations for faculty were created and approved by the University Assessment Committee, which comprises of faculty from each school.

- Instructional Effectiveness (IE)- Faculty member utilizes effective instructional techniques for the online classroom to ensure student learning.
- Active Engagement (AE)- Faculty member is actively engaged in the discussion forum to foster critical thinking by interacting with students and challenging them with the course content.
- Responsiveness (R)- Faculty member is responsive and provides quality responses to questions within a timely manner.
- Quality Feedback (QF)- Faculty member demonstrates quality grading as demonstrated by substantive feedback on assignments.
- Community Development (CD)- Faculty develops a sense of community with students through classroom interaction.
- Classroom Compliance (CC)- Faculty adheres to all expectations related to classroom preparation and participation with regards to university policies.

These behaviors are supported by research on best practices in online learning and by student feedback on end-of-course surveys that indicate a positive impact on student success as a result of the faculty intentionally and regularly exhibiting these behaviors in the Aspen classroom.

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Aspen University Philosophy of Teaching

Aspen has a long history in higher education and strives to be excellent in its service to students. As such, we feel that the most impactful variable on student learning is the faculty and their behaviors in the classroom. Years of educational research has consistently indicated that the teacher makes the difference. This is true regardless of context or discipline. Therefore, at Aspen we seek great instructors who dedicate themselves to the students they teach, are regularly present in the classroom, ask genuine higher-order questions to extend student learning, provide quality, fair, and specific feedback in a timely manner, provide supplemental resources beyond the basic curriculum, and continue to participate in professional development opportunities for improving their own pedagogical skills.

In terms of learning and teaching, our philosophy focuses on the partnership between the student and the instructor. Students come to college sometimes scared, underprepared, or unfocused, but with the hope of getting a degree in an area where they are passionate to improve their life economically through better career options. However, every student is different and has variable distractors which can often pull them away from committing their best effort to school. While this is not ideal, here is where a great teacher can make a difference by reaching out and working with the student to help him/her be successful in the course, sometimes only one module at a time. It is also our philosophy that great teachers are caring, motivational, clear, accountable, guiding, supportive, genuine, and understanding while at the same time holding their students accountable for learning and performing at the expected level. Great teachers are also fair, giving the grade earned (not always an A!), being a good example within the classroom (professional, ethical, frequently active, responsive, engaged in discussions), and tailoring support to where the student is currently in his/her development with course concepts. One of the most important contributions during classes is how professors can relate learning to real-world experiences, especially when the experiences are problem-centered rather than content-centered. While these seem like exceptional qualities, many of our Aspen faculty perform at these levels in their courses every day and represent a highly skilled and caring team of dedicated instructors. Aspen will continue to support faculty development opportunities to help faculty grow as great teachers.

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People to Know

President/Chief Academic Officer – Dr. Cheri St. Arnauld

president@aspen.edu

Faculty Senate Chair

facultysenate@aspen.edu

Provost/Sr. Vice President, Institutional Effectiveness/Quality Assurance – Dr. Joanne Weiss

joanne.weiss@aspen.edu

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Vice President, Faculty Services and Scholarship – Dr. Kevin Thrasher

kevin.thrasher@aspen.edu

Director of Faculty Services - Joel Whalen

facultyservices@aspen.edu

Director of Academic Support - James Mathews

james.mathews@aspen.edu

Assistant Director, Faculty Training & Development - Lynda Young

lynda.young@aspen.edu

Assistant Vice President, Student Success & University Registrar – Katie Brown

katie.brown@aspen.edu

Office of Academic Advising- studentservices@aspen.edu

Office of the Registrar – registrar@aspen.edu

Human Resources

For questions related to Human Resources and benefits,
faculty should contact HR@aspen.edu

Programs at Aspen

Aspen has a wide range of academic programs relating to nursing, business and information technology, professional studies, and education. These programs go through an extensive design and review process that is driven by the faculty in those programs. As such, all the curriculum at Aspen has been created and approved by respective faculty groups who teach those courses and content. Faculty are expected to be familiar with the programs in which they teach. Please refer to Aspen University's website for a full description of each school and program.

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Key Leadership in the School of Nursing and Health Sciences

Across the country, the demand for highly educated healthcare workers is growing--thanks to a multitude of studies linking advanced nursing education with improved patient outcomes. Aspen University believes that a more highly qualified healthcare workforce enhances both clinical competency and care delivery. The School of Nursing and Health Sciences aims to produce a more highly qualified healthcare workforce that is responsive to emerging healthcare needs, specifically, the increased relevance of technology in healthcare, changing demographics, and the impact of health policy changes and access to care.

Our faculty members are an integral part of the School of Nursing and Health Sciences and our goal is to promote academic progression in nursing education and to move healthcare workers to advanced degrees more efficiently and with less cost.

The School of Nursing and Health Sciences offers the following programs:

Bachelor of Science in Healthcare Administration

Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Addiction Studies

Bachelor of Science in Nursing - RN to BSN

Bachelor of Science in Nursing – Pre-licensure

Master of Science in Nursing - Nursing Education

Master of Science in Nursing - Administration and Management

Master of Science in Nursing - Forensic Nursing

Master of Science in Nursing - Public Health

Master of Science in Nursing - Informatics

Master of Science in Nursing - RN to MSN Bridge Program - Nursing Education

Master of Science in Nursing - RN to MSN Bridge Program - Administration and Management

Master of Science in Nursing - RN to MSN Bridge Program - Forensic Nursing

Master of Science in Nursing - RN to MSN Bridge Program - Public Health

Master of Science in Nursing - RN to MSN Bridge Program - Informatics

Master of Arts in Psychology and Addiction Studies

Master of Public Health

Doctor of Nursing Practice

Key Leadership in the School of Nursing and Health Sciences

Dr. Nina Beaman- Chief Nurse Administrator

nina.beaman@aspen.edu

“Be the change that you wish to see in the world.”
Mahatma Gandhi

Dr. Marc Gayol- Dean of School of Nursing and Health Sciences – Distance Education

marcos.gayol@aspen.edu

"The best way to predict your future is to create it."
Abraham Lincoln

Dr. Tracy Lookingbill- Associate Dean-Distance Education

tracy.lookingbill@aspen.edu

"Do one thing every day that scares you." Eleanor Roosevelt

Dr. Jenny Erkfitz- Dean of BSN Prelicensure and School of Arts and Sciences

jenny.erkfitz@aspen.edu

"Standardization, the great ally of mediocrity, wins out over imagination." Thomas Sergiovanni

Dr. Teresa Olin- Assistant Dean, BSN PL

teresa.olin@aspen.edu

"Success is not final, failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts." Winston S. Churchill

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Key leadership in the School of Education

The School of Education offers undergraduate programs in early childhood education and graduate programs in leadership, pedagogy, curriculum and assessment, educational technology, higher education, organizational leadership, health care administration, K-12 leadership, and organizational psychology.

The School of Education offers the following programs:

Associate of Applied Science in Early Childhood Studies

Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Studies

Master of Education - Curriculum Development and

Outcomes Assessment

Master of Education - Education Technology

Master of Education - Transformational Leadership

Master of Education - eLearning Pedagogy

Doctoral Degrees (EdD):

Doctor of Education in Leadership and Learning- Organizational Leadership

Doctor of Education in Leadership and Learning- Health Care Administration

Doctor of Education in Leadership and Learning- K-12 Leadership

Doctor of Education in Leadership and Learning- Higher Education

Doctor of Education in Leadership and Learning- Organizational Psychology

Education Specialist Degrees (EdS):

Education Specialist in Leadership and Learning Program – Organizational Leadership

Education Specialist in Leadership and Learning Program – Organizational Psychology

Education Specialist in Leadership and Learning Program – K-12 Leadership

Education Specialist in Leadership and Learning Program – Higher Education Leadership

Education Specialist in Leadership and Learning Program – Health Care Administration

Key Leadership in the School of Education (SOE)

Dr. Eva Ballard- Dean

eva.ballard@aspen.edu

"We are here not only to transform the world but also to be transformed." -Parker Palmer

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Key Leadership in the School of Business and Technology

Aspen University's School of Business and Technology offers Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees in business and technology-focused areas. The Master in Business Administration has various specializations that students can choose.

The School of Business & Technology offers the following programs:

Bachelor of Science in Business Administration
 Master in Business Administration - Finance
 Master in Business Administration - Information Management
 Master in Business Administration - Project Management
 Master of Science in Technology and Innovation
 Doctor of Science in Computer Science

Key Leadership in the School of Business & Technology (SBT)

Dr. Daniel Zimmerman- Dean

daniel.zimmerman@aspen.edu

"Don't wish it was easier, wish you were better. Don't wish for less problems, wish for more skills. Don't wish for less challenge, wish for more wisdom." Jim Rohn

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Role of Faculty for All Schools at Aspen

The faculty form an integral part of the student experience and, as such, our faculty members are critical to each student's success. First and foremost, the role of faculty is

to be highly engaged in the online classroom, especially since virtual learners have different needs in relation to communication, guidance, direction, feedback, clarity, involvement, interaction, and support. Faculty are expected to "be present" in their students' academic journey, to enhance the curriculum by adding personal and professional life experiences, to be a model for how to have dialogue within the discussion boards, to provide quality and useful feedback on student work, and to enrich the academic learning environment with digital, multi-sensory tools (e.g., Web 2.0 Tools like video-conferencing and instructional tutorials) that are current and relevant to the world outside of the classroom, particularly when it pertains to tools used in the real-world work settings. A job description for faculty can be found in the Appendix. For the role and responsibilities of the Preceptor in the School of Nursing & Health Sciences, refer to the Program Handbooks in the Academic Catalog.

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Role of Dean and Program Director in Each School

The Dean of the school is the academic leader and administrator who oversees all faculty, programs, students, and processes associated with that respective school. For faculty, the Dean is the point of contact for questions related to the curriculum or intermittent quality checks on classrooms as faculty teach. The Dean decides who teaches in his/her school, what qualifications are needed to teach each course in the school, and how classroom quality checks of faculty are handled. These responsibilities of the Dean may be delegated to the Assistant Dean or Program Director, as decided by the Dean. A job description for the Dean/Program Director, with regards to responsibilities pertaining to faculty, can be found in the Appendices (p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**).

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Institutional Policies and the Course Catalog

For a better understanding of all University offerings,
please visit our Academic Catalog.

We work to provide the most up to date information, so
please keep in mind, the Catalog is subject to change.

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Intellectual Property Rights

Aspen University retains ownership rights to all course content created by faculty as a result of their work efforts with the University. This includes, but is not limited to, curriculum resources, presentations, videos, materials, or any other course content or project deliverables.

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Conflict of Interest Policy

Conflicts of Interest (COI) come in different forms and are not always apparent. When in doubt, the faculty, or any other staff or student who is aware of the conflict, should err on the side of caution and disclose potential incidences that may cause a conflict of interest. Common sense must prevail in the interpretation of these policies. That is, no matter what the circumstances, if an independent observer might reasonably question whether the individual's professional actions or decisions, including the ethical and objective conduct of scholarship, research or clinical care, are determined to be influenced by personal gain, the relationship should be disclosed immediately. Personal gain can include, but is not limited to, the following examples.

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- Financial Benefits
- Publication
- Research
- Reputation
- Career Advancement
- Product Selection

Disclosure, Review & Determination

When a Conflict of Interest (COI) presents itself, the individual who is alerted to this risk should bring the concern to the attention of University administration by contacting joanne.weiss@aspen.edu. Once a notification of the potential COI is reported for a faculty member, the University administration will log the incidence and bring the claim to the appropriate personnel for review and a determination of the extent of conflict, if any. The faculty member in question will be contacted to provide details about the potential conflict and will be invited to a meeting where the conflict of interest will be discussed. Upon a decision, the faculty will be notified of the review of the case. If it is determined that a conflict exists, the faculty will be asked to immediately remove himself/herself from the specific conflict associated with the identified personal gain. If the faculty continues to participate in the conflict of interest, the outcome could be termination.

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Faculty Development

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Faculty Tuition Assistance Policy

Please refer to the new policy on faculty tuition assistance
[Employee Tuition Reimbursement Policy](#).

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Faculty Availability

To facilitate student learning, faculty will need to:

- Maintain regular and substantive interaction with students. See this section below.
- Based on the schedule of classroom assignments, recommend maintaining regular office hours for students.
- Check on a near-daily basis for student assignment submissions, student questions, student discussions, student requests, new student enrollments in their classes, and any other student activity for which they are expected to monitor.
- Provide scholarly feedback, guidance, supportive interactions and genuine performance assessments (grades) within 3-7 days from the end of the module

deadline.

- Respond to any student questions that are received via email or any other student initiated request as quickly as possible, but certainly within 48 hours of receiving the request. If additional time is needed to research the request, faculty should acknowledge receipt of request and notify the student as to when a complete response can be expected.
- Direct students to resources such as the Student Resource Center and Library.
- Proactively and regularly initiate and post meaningful contributions to all appropriate course discussion threads for the purpose of stimulating the students' academic experience and keeping the discussions on topic.
- Submit Final Grades within 7 days of the course end date.

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Faculty Technology Requirements

Faculty should have the following skills and equipment pertaining to technology.

- A functional computer with an internet connection
- Intermediate familiarity with Microsoft Office products like Word, PowerPoint, and Excel
- Expert familiarity with the Aspen Learning Management System called Brightspace/Desire2Learn (D2L) since that is where all the course interactions take place. Faculty will be trained on D2L during the initial onboarding process.
- Intermediate familiarity with a range of Web 2.0 Tools (e.g., Screencast-o-matic, Zoom)
- Expert familiarity with Turnitin, a program used by the University to check student papers for similarity to other content in order to avoid incidences of plagiarism

Additionally, faculty members need to meet the following

technology requirements.

Supported Operating Systems:

Windows XP (service pack 3 for 32-bit, service pack 2 for 64-bit), Windows Vista, Windows 7, Windows 8, Windows 10

MAC OS X 10.6 (Snow Leopard) and higher

iOS 6 and higher

Android 4.0 (Ice Cream Sandwich) and higher

Blackberry 7 and higher

Browser Support:

Internet Explorer 9 and higher

Firefox 24 and higher

Chrome 32 and higher

Safari 5.1 and higher

Additional Browser Support Info:

Adobe Flash 10.1 or greater

Javascript and Cookies must be enabled

Other Software Needed:

Javascript and Cookies must be enabled

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Course Materials

All course materials are already loaded into Aspen's learning management system, the Brightspace/Desire2Learn (D2L) platform. As mentioned earlier, Aspen faculty who are subject matter experts create the curriculum that all the faculty teach in the program. The Curriculum Department facilitates the management of

the processes related to guiding the schools and faculty as they design their curriculum to meet the needs of their students and programs. The curriculum has been aligned to predetermined goals for the university and the respective degree program. Faculty can add supplemental materials, like videos, websites, and articles, but they should not remove anything since this could disrupt the larger assessment plan and curriculum map associated with that particular course.

For textbooks, many texts are available in the VitalSource website as e-texts. Faculty are expected to set-up a VitalSource account by going to [educators](#). Faculty are required to use the e-text when available in VitalSource. However, not all textbooks are available in VitalSource so when the e-text is not available, the faculty member should contact facultyservices@aspen.edu to request an alternative option. It is recommended that faculty create their account as soon as they receive the directions attached in their welcome onboarding email as it will expedite requests for textbooks on VitalSource.

Fair Use: Because Aspen University is a for-profit entity, we are not protected by the Fair Use in Education court decisions. For that reason, we cannot direct students to view copyrighted material without first seeking permission from the copyright holder.

The court decisions have generally held that "educational purposes" are:

- noncommercial instruction or curriculum-based teaching by educators to students at nonprofit educational institutions
- planned noncommercial study or investigation directed toward making a contribution to a field of knowledge, or
- presentation of research findings at noncommercial peer conferences, workshops, or seminars.

Email acknowledgement by the copyright holder is sufficient to show their approval for use. Most commonly, they only ask for proper attribution for the use. Provide the email approval to the Dean of the school for which the course is taught. Faculty, staff and students are responsible for seeking guidance and complying with the law. Please

confer with the University Librarian if you have any questions regarding this policy or review their tutorials in the Library, which is in every class.

Members of the Aspen University community who willfully disregard this policy do so at their own risk and assume any liability, which may include criminal, and/or civil penalties.

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Early Alert Process

Aspen utilizes an Early Alert Process (EAP) for students who exhibit academic at-risk behavior in the classroom. If a student in your class exhibits the following behaviors, please submit an Early Alert Form.

- Not submitting assignments, or
- Submitting assignments but they are poor quality (earning D or U)

Here is the Early Alert Form. Please save this link to a familiar place. Early Alert Form For any questions, please contact studentservices@aspen.edu.

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What to do for Minor Curriculum Changes

While Aspen tries to keep curriculum updated and accurate, there are times when a dead link, typo, missing resource, or other anomaly in the course content might occur. Please help us to remediate these issues quickly by notifying us so we can fix them. You will complete the Curriculum Issues Reporting Form (CIRF) by submitting a tech ticket.

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Faculty Training Expectations and Topics

Each faculty member will be supported with a robust faculty onboarding orientation and subsequent professional development trainings that focus on increasing faculty's effectiveness in the classroom. Below is the list of trainings, along with some subtopics.

Required of All Faculty

D2L Introduction for Faculty

- Desire2Learn (D2L) Fundamentals
- Simulation Tour
- What must I do each week?
- How do I facilitate discussions?
- How do I assess and grade student assignments?
- Using Turnitin (Tii)
- Rubrics and Feedback
- Email and Pager Messaging
- Aspen University Resources
- Faculty Handbook

Web 2.0- Tools for Increasing Student Engagement is suggested

- Engaging Online Learners
- Creating Micro-Lectures
- Facilitating Effective Asynchronous Discussions
- Personalizing the Online Learning Experience
- Managing Online Groups

Required of School of Nursing and Health Sciences (SONHS) Faculty

- **Shadow Health** (for RN-BSN, RN-MSN, and MSN

faculty teaching N518, N511 and N495)

- **Project Concert** (for all SONHS faculty)
- **Site-Based Expectations** (for faculty teaching in the BSNPL program)
- Classrooms, Storage Rooms
- Labs and Simulations
- Using Shadow Health
- Handling Laerdal Mannequins and the EMS Video Feedback System
- Using Project Concert
- Office Hours and Availability to Students
 - Program-specific Policy Implementation

Required for Faculty Teaching in the EdD, DCS or DNP Programs

1. Dissertation Committee Training

- Doctoral Program Orientation
- Committee Roles and Expectations
- Dissertation/DNP Project Process and Forms
- IRB Process and CITI Training

Professional Development

One way that Aspen supports the professional development and training of faculty is through our Professional Growth and Development Fund, where faculty can apply for up to \$500 reimbursement to attend a workshop, webinar or conference of their choice that relates to their role as an instructor at Aspen. Each request is for one event per year. Aspen values faculty and their continued commitment to quality teaching, learning, and research. As such, we would like to support faculty to stay current in their field to bring quality learning to the student experience. For more information on the program, please refer to the Appendix.

Faculty Scholarship Opportunities

Each year, all Aspen faculty have the opportunity to participate in different scholarship events, which are described below. These events are created based on feedback and direct input from faculty members.

- **Faculty Speaker Series-** A faculty-driven series of presentations on topics selected by faculty
- **Biannual Research Colloquium-** A twice per year virtual gathering of faculty who share their research in the field
- **Aspen Journal-** A peer-reviewed medium for faculty to publish articles on various topics

Go to this link to view the Scholarship Events Center site.

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Faculty Evaluation

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Faculty Evaluations BSN Pre-Licensure

A different CER is used to evaluate hybrid BSNPL classes. The Classroom/Clinical Engagement Rubric (CER): Hybrid Courses (Ground + D2L) is used for courses that have a hybrid component. “Hybrid” refers to a course that has both a ground component (seminar, lab, clinicals) and D2L requirements. All ground courses will have a D2L portion, but not all online courses will have a ground component. For courses that are strictly online (didactic) and without any ground requirements, a different tool is used (the standard CER). The only program which uses this hybrid tool is the BSNPL.

Purpose

Since students are learning in two modalities (face-to-face and digital), the instructor must be proficient in coordinating the different modalities as a single learning experience for the student. The purpose of this hybrid CER is to examine the effectiveness of the faculty in both modalities in an effort to have a more comprehensive and holistic evaluation of an instructor’s pedagogy in ground classes and the online portion of the learning environment.

Structure

The tool is divided into two sections: Ground (highlighted in blue) and D2L portion (highlighted in green). The Program Director of the BSNPL examines the faculty’s performance during a predetermined lesson in the ground classroom and scores the faculty’s performance (section 1). Section 1 has three categories:

- Instructional Effectiveness

- Active Engagement
- Community Development

The Director of Academic Support will score the faculty’s performance in the online portion of the classroom in D2L (section 2) where students and faculty also have learning activities, including grading and providing regular feedback on classroom assignments. Section 2 also has three categories:

- Responsiveness
- Quality Feedback
- Classroom Compliance

The combined score of the Ground portion of this tool and the D2L portion of this tool is used to determine the total score and, thus, the F-status of the instructor. F-status rankings are used for course assignments, with F3 being given high priority for first course assignments.

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Faculty Evaluations Online

While monitoring of faculty performance will be ongoing, faculty evaluations are completed on an annual basis, at a minimum, under the direction of the school Dean and facilitated by the Director of Academic Support.

Evaluations are based on the faculty’s self-assessment, data collected from the End of Course Surveys, and spot-check reviews involving the Classroom Evaluation Rubric (CER). An example of the rubric form can be found at the end of this document in the Appendix. Results of the evaluations are available upon request. The CER is directly aligned to the Faculty Outcomes listed at the beginning of this handbook, which are also reviewed below.

There are six categories for the Classroom Evaluation Rubric, each with several sub-indicators. Refer to the

Appendix for more details.

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- Instructional Effectiveness
- Active Engagement
- Responsiveness
- Quality Feedback
- Community Development
- Classroom Compliance

Classroom Visits

After the self-reflection by faculty in the very beginning, the Dean, Assistant Dean, Program Director and/or Director of Academic Support will visit faculty classrooms intermittently and use the CER tool to score the classroom effectiveness practices. Following the classroom visit, the data will be submitted to the Dean of the school who will follow-up with the faculty member (either email or phone) to discuss the results, if warranted. Both strengths and weaknesses will be addressed, with the focus on maximizing the faculty's impact on student success in the online classroom.

Evaluation Process, Timeline and Frequency

Classroom visits with the CER will vary by faculty member, based on previous performances and length of time working for Aspen. If the faculty is new, Aspen will visit their classroom early on in their course assignment timeline (usually within the first month or two of teaching). Subsequent visits will be based on overall performance on the CER, with F1 faculty being visited more frequently (e.g., every two months or so), with F2 and F3 faculty being visited less frequently (e.g., twice a year). The frequency will depend on "newness" to Aspen and/or overall score on CER for all faculty, experienced or new. Scores for CERs will be submitted to the respective Dean of each school upon completion of the review so that they are aware of performance and can follow-up with positive and/or constructive discussions, as needed. F-status rankings are used for course assignments, with F3 being given high priority for first course assignments.

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Faculty Recruitment

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Faculty Qualifications

We pride ourselves on our quality faculty at Aspen University. We have 46% of our faculty members are doctoral-prepared and 54% hold a Masters degree. According to our accrediting body, the minimum degrees the faculty members possess must have been awarded by institutions accredited by agencies that are recognized by the United States Secretary of Education and /or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or, for non-U.S. institutions, an accepted foreign equivalent that is listed in the International Handbook of Universities (18th ed.).

Faculty must provide the University with the official transcripts of their academic work, or at least from the highest degree obtained. In addition to official transcripts, faculty must ensure the University records include their most current resume/CV* and current Faculty Agreement/Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

*Nursing faculty in SONHS will complete a CV template to include active license numbers and expirations from every

state annually and submit to the Chief Nurse Administrator by January 1. Additionally, SONHS nursing faculty must describe what recent experiences and education qualify them to teach the courses they are assigned. This is reviewed by the SONHS Dean and/or Program Directors and assignments may be revised accordingly depending on the findings.

All Aspen faculty will be expected to demonstrate and maintain professional knowledge of and proficiency in the following:

- Use of Aspen University's Learning Management System (LMS), which is the Brightspace/Desire2Learn (D2L) platform,
- Aspen University's academic offerings (i.e. curricula, programs, courses, policies and procedures),
- Best practices for delivering online education, and
- Best practice for academic mentoring and coaching of college students.

The following provides additional faculty qualification requirements on a degree/program basis. For any clarification on faculty qualifications, please contact the Dean and/or the Director of Faculty Services.

Degrees in Specialized Fields: Faculty teaching courses that are part of a degree in a specialized field must possess the appropriate credential and degree in the subject being taught as demonstrated through their professional experience, along with their terminal degree.

Undergraduate Degrees: Faculty teaching courses that are part of an undergraduate degree program must possess, at a minimum, a degree at least one level above that of the program that they are teaching and demonstrate expertise in the subject field of the discipline. Faculty members teaching general education courses at the undergraduate level must possess a Master's degree in the assigned general education subject field, or have a Master's degree

and 18 semester hours in the general education subject field.

Master's Degree: All Master's program faculty must have an earned doctorate/terminal degree relevant to the program being offered.

Exceptional Cases* for Undergraduate and Master's Programs: In exceptional cases, an earned degree in a relevant field at the same level of the program taught, in addition to outstanding professional experience and demonstrated contributions to the disciplinary subject matter, may be presented. The institution must justify and document in the faculty member's file the academic and professional preparation he or she has to teach the course(s), and what courses(s) is/are being taught. Exceptional cases must be a justifiable minority and ideally represent a small percentage of the total assigned faculty of the program. To be considered for an exceptional case, please contact the appropriate Dean.

**Deans are charged with working with the Faculty Services and Scholarship department to ensure that faculty qualification equivalency is only considered in limited and exceptional cases. The following documentation is required to determine that a faculty member has sufficient experience, knowledge, and expertise necessary to substitute faculty qualification equivalency for the degree qualifications set forth in DEAC Standards VI.C.4. and VI.C.5:*

- *earned degree in a relevant field at the same level of the program taught*
- *training certificates or other credentials in the related field of study, if available*
- *CV or résumé indicating at least 5 years of professional experience in the related field of study*
- *Other documentation that demonstrates contributions to the disciplinary subject matter, e.g. publications*

The Dean or Program Director is charged with ensuring that adequate oversight of teaching and learning is provided by individuals who possess the appropriate degree qualifications as set forth in Standards VI.C.4. and VI.C.5.

Professional Doctoral Degrees: All teaching faculty who instruct doctoral students must have terminal degrees in a relevant field of study from other appropriately accredited institutions, either a professional doctorate or a doctor of philosophy.

At a minimum, all faculty members are required to submit official transcripts as directed above, an up-to-date Curriculum Vitae or resume, an Aspen application, and a signed faculty contract. New faculty will be offered their first course when all required information is received and reviewed.

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Faculty Type and Load

Aspen University has several different categories of faculty. Each has a recommended workload as follows:

- Full-time online faculty who teach in the undergraduate programs carry a student to faculty ratio of up to 110:1.
- Full-time online faculty who teach in the Master's programs carry a student to faculty ratio of up to 100:1
- Full-time online faculty who teach in the Doctoral programs carry a student to faculty ratio of up to 80:1.
- Full-time campus-based faculty carry a credit-based load of up to 16 credits/semester or 8 credits per 8-week session.
- Part-time online leads can carry a student to faculty ratio of up to 60:1
- Part-time online adjunct faculty carry a student to faculty ratio of up to 50:1.
- Part-time Clinical faculty (School of Nursing and Health Sciences- BSN: Pre-Licensure program only) carry student to faculty ratios according to state-specific guidelines which can be found in the clinical handbooks.
- Part-time adjunct Lab faculty (School of Nursing and Health Sciences- BSN: Pre-Licensure program only)

carry a student to faculty ratio of no more than 15:1 in accordance with the requirements of applicable Boards of Nursing.

- Doctoral Chair/Committee loads for the School of Nursing & Health Sciences, School of Education and School of Business & Technology:

	Chair/FT	Chair/PT	Comm (FT/PT)
DNP	20	10	20
EDD	20	15	TBD
DSCS	NA	6	10

Faculty load is monitored by the Office of Faculty Services. For part-time adjunct faculty who convert to a full-time faculty position, their existing students become part of their FT load and salary, and those courses are not paid separately.

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Faculty Agreement and Services

The primary role of the Faculty will be that of an academic coach, teacher and mentor to Aspen University students during the students' academic experiences. In conjunction with these responsibilities, faculty will:

- Complete a Faculty File including official transcripts to meet accreditation,
- Participate in faculty trainings and surveys when appropriate and as requested,
- Remain current in areas of personal expertise and service,
- Communicate with Aspen University Deans and the Curriculum Department on course delivery improvements as needed by submitting a Curriculum Issues Reporting Form (CIRF) via a Tech Ticket.

- Communicate with Academic Advising through the Early Alert system when students are failing at the course mid-point or when assignments are not completed without communication between the faculty and student.

- Maintain and demonstrate professional knowledge for and proficiency in:

- Use of a designated Aspen LMS,
- Aspen University's academic offerings (curricula, programs, courses, policies and procedures).
- Best practices for delivering online education, and
- Best practices for academic mentoring and coaching.

Faculty will execute these roles and responsibilities in accordance with the guidelines presented in the Faculty Handbook as it may be amended from time to time, and the terms of this Agreement.

Aspen University designs a preloaded curriculum for every course. The design is very deliberately connected to not only learning outcomes, but items that are also digitally linked through course settings to transfer grades, initiate different release conditions, gather data on student performance and participation, etc. **Because of this intricate connection of different design components and technical pre-settings in the classroom, we ask that faculty do not edit the pre-loaded content and do not move items from the pre-loaded location in the classroom.** Once you move something, the preset connection does not follow. Then, you have a classroom of broken connections, causing unnecessary disruption to student learning and progress. It is encouraged that you add enhancements, such as articles, videos, news stories, etc., through the News section of your classroom, but do not create new requirements or additional assignments for students. If there is an issue in your course, please complete the Classroom Issue Reporting Form (CIRF) as a Tech Ticket.

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Faculty Appointments

Faculty members are scheduled by the Office of Faculty Services based upon course approvals from the Dean of the associated school. Faculty appointments are made by the school/program administration based on consideration of the following:

- Advanced degrees in appropriate academic disciplines or related fields
- Exemplary teaching skills, especially the ability to communicate and relate to students
- Performance within the classroom (Classroom Evaluation Rubric/CER scores and F-Status rankings)
- Prior teaching experience, including experience with distance learning delivery, and
- Current professional activity in the discipline in which they are employed

Subject Matter Experts (SME) are selected from the faculty pool by the Dean of the school where the course is housed. All SMEs must have a degree at or above the course-level he/she is developing and the degree should specifically and directly pertain to the content of the course being developed. Subject Matter Experts should also have 3+ years of direct experience in the field. This experience should be directly related to the course content. Additionally, this individual should possess knowledge and experience that demonstrate competence in distance education instructional practices and curriculum design principles. SMEs are required to complete Aspen's SME training course as part of their first SME assignment.

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Compensation and Method of Payment

Payout for part-time adjunct is determined by the number of active students in the classroom on the last day of the pay period, excluding students who withdraw or are dropped from a course within that pay period. Pay periods are calculated for a 2-week period. An 8-week class has 4

pay periods. Payroll occurs twice a month, the 15th and the last day of the month.

401K/Retirement

As an added benefit of being part-time or full-time employees of Aspen University, faculty are eligible for Aspen Group's 401k Retirement Plan.

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Early Access to Classes for Faculty

While students will begin class on the Tuesday of the start date, faculty will be assigned to their courses on the Friday before the start date, allowing the faculty to have some extra time to prepare their classroom for the first day before students arrive. During this early access period, faculty are expected to do the following in order to help the students get a good start on Day 1 of class.

- Review the course materials within the **Content tab** to make sure you are familiar with the course since textbooks, assignments, and curriculum changes occur from time to time based on feedback from students and faculty.
- Access the **Classlist tab** and review information about your students.
- In the News section, post a **welcome message** with a preview of what is expected for the first week and what students will learn in the first module. Include any additional resources (articles, videos) that will extend the students' learning experience with the first week's topic(s).
- Post a **short Bio** about yourself. It is best if this is a video introduction using a Web 2.0 tool.
- Post any "**rules**" related to your classroom (e.g., late assignment policy, netiquette guidelines, how to start a new thread in the discussion forums, methods for contacting you, etc.).

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Ways to be Involved at Aspen

Aspen values the rich, diverse background of its faculty members. We believe that we are stronger and better due to the collective decision making we bring to the table. Therefore, we provide many opportunities to be involved in all aspects of the University. Faculty can choose to:

- Participate in the development or revision of curriculum as Subject Matter Experts
- Participate in the bi-annual data dialogues related to the assessment of student learning and other programmatic data points
- Serve on school, university, or community boards or committees related to curriculum, admissions/appeals, experience, University Assessment Committee, and the Faculty Senate
- Participate in or offer trainings for professional development to fellow faculty members, including in the Faculty Speaker series
- Participate in faculty meetings
- Participate in faculty scholarship opportunities, including the Research Colloquium and Aspen Journal

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Term Length Start and End Dates

All courses offered by Aspen University are 8 weeks in duration. There is a start every other Tuesday. Calendars are included in the classroom to help keep track of important dates. Alternating Tuesday start dates offers some distinct advantages for our students and faculty:

- Course start dates and end dates no longer fall on weekends, which allow our staff to provide the best possible student support on start dates and end dates.
- Course end dates always fall on a Monday, which gives our students the weekend to complete their academic work by the Monday deadline.
- Offering start dates every other Tuesday allows us to offer two additional start dates throughout the year.

- This offers both faculty and students the ability to set a consistent schedule for their coursework and their classroom.

For exact start and end dates of courses, faculty should check the Academic Calendar in the Catalog.

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Faculty Support

Faculty are supported in a number of ways. First, all faculty complete a New Faculty Orientation (NFO) training upon initial hire. Then, they participate in advanced student engagement training where they learn to use Web 2.0 tools through a hands-on course. Adjunct training stipends will be awarded for completing these faculty trainings:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------|
| • New Faculty Orientation | \$75 |
| • Web 2.0 | \$100 |
| • Dissertation Training | \$50 |

After these initial trainings, faculty are assigned courses and monitored by the Director of Academic Support, who spot-checks their initial courses and guides them towards the participation expectations of the University. These spot-checks use the Classroom Evaluation Rubric/CER (see Appendix), where faculty are provided feedback on their pedagogical performance in the classroom. These academic conversations or “coaching sessions,” involve the Dean of the respective school and/or the Director of Academic Support. Depending on the faculty member’s performance, spot-checks in classrooms can be more or less frequent, but all new faculty are spot-checked with the CER during their first course of teaching at Aspen. Finally, faculty have support for any questions they might have by contacting Faculty Services at facultyservices@aspen.edu.

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Aspen University Classroom Policies Student Expectations and Faculty Commitment

“Regular and substantive interaction between faculty and student” In Fall of 2017, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) for the US Department of Education completed a federal audit of one of the largest online universities in the country and found them to be in violation of several regulations that govern the field of distance education. Most notably, the OIG determined that the specific university did not provide “regular and substantive interaction between the instructor and the student.” This is considered a very serious offense that could result in the university in question returning \$713 million dollars to the Department of Education. But, what does this mean for Aspen?

Well, as we all know the days of online education being like a correspondence course are over. So are the days of online instructors being absent from their classrooms or not providing meaningful, specific feedback. Not only are we required to be actively engaged with our students on a regular basis, but the interaction needs to be substantive. Also, the interactions need to be faculty-initiated, and not only student-initiated. Any class without these characteristics is simply a correspondence course, which is not the type of curriculum we provide at Aspen.

What does Regular mean? Merriam-Webster uses terms like “happening frequently and consistently” to describe the meaning of *regular*. As an Aspen faculty member, this means we login to our courses 2-3 times a week, although daily is ideal. If you receive University reminders that you are not participating in your courses each week, this is not considered *regular*. Please help Aspen and your students by making **sure you are actively present and regularly engaged with your courses and students**, at least every week but preferably daily.

What does Substantive mean? Merriam-Webster describes *substantive* as “significant, sizeable, substantial, and considerable.” As an Aspen faculty member, this means we provide substantive interaction with our students when we give specific feedback within the document of their assignment using GradeMark or track changes in MS Word, when we include additional resources in our courses (like web links to content-pertinent resources), when we post News announcements on a weekly basis, when we upload Web 2.0 tools that personalize the classroom and give students an opportunity to see and hear us, and when we are actively involved in the discussion boards every

week in an effort to dig deeper with students and challenge them to be cognitively engaged with the content and with us and their peers. Comments or feedback like, “Good job!... I agree... (or, even worse when there are no comments or feedback and there’s just a score)” are not considered substantive. Please help Aspen and your students by taking time to provide high quality interactions with all your students so that the interaction is meaningful, valuable, significant, and authentic.

But, my student hasn’t been in the classroom or discussion board in a while. While we know this occurs, this cannot be a reason for us to take a passive stance and sit back and wait for the student to contact us or do something in the classroom. Students should not be on a boat alone in the ocean of a college course, but instead we, the faculty, should reach out to every student, especially those who are absent or less active, and not wait on the beach until the student sends us a message in a bottle. In other words, interactions cannot be one-sided. They have to be also *faculty-initiated*. If we are sitting on the beach watching our student in a boat that is sinking, we are compelled as educators to throw him a life jacket. It is not hard for us to know who our ‘sinking’ students are. It is obvious from their classroom behavior or performance. However, we should not only initiate interactions with our sinking students but also our soaring students. That is, we should initiate interactions with students and not only interact with students when a student initiates the interaction with us. Whether a student is sinking or soaring, we need to yell from the beach and provide support for those sinking or praise for those soaring. Please help Aspen and your students by reaching out to them often and actively initiating new interactions that provide intellectual development, increase course engagement, and promote social involvement in your classroom. We cannot stand on the beach... we need to sometimes get wet and swim out to the student.

Participation, Discussion Questions, Assignment Due Dates, and Grading

Aspen University requires students to attend class every week in the online learning platform. This is marked by the activity a student participates in each week. An online week for students is Tuesday through Monday, PDT. Students are not permitted to be out of class for more than two consecutive weeks (14 days). An Administrative

Withdrawal will be processed should a student be out of class for more than two weeks.

Participating in classroom discussions is critical to the learning experience. Participating in the weekly discussions allows students and instructors to share experiences, investigate complicated subject matter, and share expertise for new perspectives. For the majority of courses, students must post their initial response to the 1st discussion question by Thursday and respond to a peer's discussion post by Sunday. For some courses, the curriculum may require that you respond to more than one discussion post per week. Always review the course directions and syllabus to ensure you and students are participating fully.

Faculty will also need to participate and respond to student questions during each module. Faculty members are encouraged to bring their own experience and expertise to the discussion. This will ensure students have a full, rich classroom experience when discussing critical elements of the curriculum. Faculty members are also responsible for grading and returning all submitted papers with quality feedback within 7 days after the end of the module, but we recommend 3-7 days after submission. Failure to consistently meet this expectation could result in the loss of faculty appointments. Seven days are given to ensure that our working faculty members have time over the weekend to complete the grading process as our working students have the weekend to complete assignments. However, it is always best if students can incorporate quality feedback from faculty in their assignments from one lesson to the next so prompt feedback is appreciated by both the University and your students.

Faculty feedback on assignments is where the key learning takes place. It is through this interaction that students grow in their understanding of content material, critical thinking skills, and the writing process. Rubrics are available in the online classroom to help faculty provide specific feedback on student performance based on a set of specified criteria. This is often used to begin providing feedback on how to strengthen an assignment for future submissions. See the discussion on Quality Feedback below.

Feedback is critical from both faculty and students. We ask for student feedback at the end of the course through an

automated end of course survey that will examine all aspects of the Aspen experience. Our goal is to share this feedback with faculty and university staff as we all desire to strengthen the learning of students.

Discussion Questions

One area where the faculty can have the greatest impact is in the weekly Discussion Forums of a course. A faculty member's expertise with the subject matter and depth of knowledge and experience with the weekly topic can be a wonderful opportunity to share with the student as the instructor causes the student to reflect further, consider alternative perspectives, challenge established beliefs, make connections to other knowledge, and/or consider the implications of course content within specific real-world settings.

While only required to respond in the Discussion Boards several times a week, many Aspen faculty check discussion forums daily, seeking every opportunity to engage students in genuinely meaningful ways. By viewing the discussion question/forum as a way to cognitively challenge students and to have them process the course content more personally, it provides context for greater, more permanent, learning and a more dynamic interaction between the instructor and the student. The difficulty comes when there are only one or two students in a course. While this is not ideal, because we want students to also learn from the discussions of their peers, it should not prevent the faculty from taking a more active role in the discussion and provide more personal, one-on-one attention to the student in an effort to more deeply process and make connections to the course content.

Although weekly discussion questions are preloaded for you in your Aspen courses, you can extend the discussion by focusing on some of the below best practices of high-quality faculty who excel at being engaged in the classroom discussion forums. Discussion questions should not be discrete questions that have a definite answer, rely solely on opinion, or require minimal insight and investigation. **To maximize student engagement and participation in the discussion, discussion interactions should be student-centered and relevant to the lives and interests of the students, but also directly tied to the content of the course.**

Best practices recommend conversations and replies around the discussion topics should:

- **Speak to a genuine dilemma in the text.** In other words, the discussion should focus on a real confusion, ambiguity or gray area of the text.
- **Yield an answer that is not obvious.** The discussion should allow room for exploration and not be too specific or answered too easily.
- **Suggest an answer complex enough to sustain a vibrant discussion.** If discussions are short answer (like “I agree” or “Good point!”) and do not provide an opportunity to push the conversation further, they won’t elicit deep analysis or reflection and will be seen as a meaningless activity for both the student and the faculty.
- **Can be answered by the text, and/or scholarly research** rather than by just generalizations or emotional feelings.

In addition:

- “How” and “why” responses generally require more analysis than “who,” “what,” “when,” or “where” questions.
- Good analytical responses can highlight patterns and connections OR contradictions, dilemmas and problems.
- Purposeful discussions can also ask about some implications or consequences of the analysis.

Within the online classroom, the discussion boards are the heart of learning. It provides the opportunity to analyze, digest, and synthesize course content in a way that allows the instructor to formatively evaluate each student’s understanding. A great discussion encourages students to “think” about what they are learning, how it relates to their world, what it means, and why it is important. Some of the most powerful learning takes place as a result of discussions that promote critical thinking and hypothesis testing, as well as encourage students to reflect on their worldview(s) and form new mental paradigms based on the discipline of study. Through focused and intentional discussions, students develop a more elaborate system of cognitive connections with the course materials, which not only promotes comprehension but also enhances retrieval

of information from memory. Finally, through engaging discussions students learn to write more thoughtfully and present a logical argument to support their claims and ideas.

As instructors, we set the tone and provide a model for the types of behaviors we expect of our students. They pay attention to our behaviors and adjust theirs accordingly. When we are not involved, they quickly learn they do not need to be involved. While a discussion could be low because there are 1-2 students in a class, this does not mean that there should be very little activity in a discussion board. On the contrary, the discussions have the opportunity to be much livelier and more robust since the faculty can give greater attention to the discussion board by responding to students more personally, as well as more deeply, when there is a small number of students in class.

The greatest tool of an effective teacher is his/her use of questioning techniques. Through this approach, instructors can peel back layers of understanding and take students to a new level of competency with the course content. One particularly effective model that has withstood time is the Socratic Method. The focus of this model is to challenge students to reflect on what they think or believe. It requires them to go deeper and deeper as they answer questions that probe the core of their thinking. Below is a list of some SQT questions, which can also be found at http://changingminds.org/techniques/questioning/socratic_questions.htm. Please start trying some of these questions as you interact with 1 or 30 students in your course, depending on the category that relates to a student’s comment. You might print this list and keep it near your computer as you engage students in deeper and lasting discussions.

Conceptual clarification questions

Get them to think more about what exactly they are asking or thinking about. Prove the concepts behind their argument. Use basic ‘tell me more’ questions that get them to go deeper.

- *Why are you saying that?*
- *What exactly does this mean?*
- *How does this relate to what we have been talking about?*

- *What is the nature of ...?*
- *What do we already know about this?*
- *Can you give me an example?*
- *Are you saying ... or ... ?*
- *Can you rephrase that, please?*
- *How can I be sure of what you are saying?*
- *Why is ... happening?*
- *Why? (keep asking it -- you'll never get past a few times)*
- *What evidence is there to support what you are saying?*
- *On what authority are you basing your argument?*

Probing assumptions

Probing their assumptions makes them think about the presuppositions and unquestioned beliefs on which they are founding their argument. This is shaking the bedrock and should get them really going!

- *What else could we assume?*
- *You seem to be assuming ... ?*
- *How did you choose those assumptions?*
- *Please explain why/how ... ?*
- *How can you verify or disprove that assumption?*
- *What would happen if... ?*
- *Do you agree or disagree with ... ?*

Probing rationale, reasons and evidence

When they give a rationale for their arguments, dig into that reasoning rather than assuming it is a given. People often use un-thought-through or weakly-understood supports for their arguments.

- *Why is that happening?*
- *How do you know this?*
- *Show me ... ?*
- *Can you give me an example of that?*
- *What do you think causes ... ?*
- *What is the nature of this?*
- *Are these reasons good enough?*
- *Would it stand up in court?*
- *How might it be refuted?*

Questioning viewpoints and perspectives

Most arguments are given from a particular position. So attack the position. Show that there are other, equally valid, viewpoints.

- *Another way of looking at this is ..., does this seem reasonable?*
- *What alternative ways of looking at this are there?*
- *Why it is ... necessary?*
- *Who benefits from this?*
- *What is the difference between... and...?*
- *Why is it better than ...?*
- *What are the strengths and weaknesses of...?*
- *How are ... and ... similar?*
- *What would ... say about it?*
- *What if you compared ... and ... ?*
- *How could you look another way at this?*

Probe implications and consequences

The argument that they give may have logical implications that can be forecast. Do these make sense? Are they desirable?

- *Then what would happen?*
- *What are the consequences of that assumption?*
- *How could ... be used to ... ?*
- *What are the implications of ... ?*

- *How does ... affect ... ?*
- *How does ... fit with what we learned before?*
- *Why is ... important?*
- *What is the best ... ? Why?*

Questions about the question

And you can also get reflexive about the whole thing, turning the question in on itself. Use their attack against themselves. Bounce the ball back into their court, etc.

- *What was the point of asking that question?*
- *Why do you think I asked this question?*
- *Am I making sense? Why not?*
- *What else might I ask?*
- *What does that mean?*

For additional resources on online discussion boards, please review the following websites for ideas to increase your presence and impact in the discussion boards.

For some tips on engaging students in meaningful discussions, please review these tips for engaging students..

8 Ways to increase your social presence in online courses.

Offensive Material Policy

While it happens very rarely, there are times when a student (or anyone) may send you something, intentionally or unintentionally, that is considered inappropriate or offensive in nature. In cases where you receive inappropriate or offensive material, please complete the following steps. Thank you for helping keep the learning environment safe.

At this step, only a written description of the incident is needed.

- In the subject line of your email to Faculty Services, include the subject title of “Offensive Material.”
- **Do not send the offensive material forward to anyone, including Faculty Services. In some instances, the transmission of certain material could be considered a serious criminal violation.**
- Save documentation related to the incident.
- Avoid communication with the person who sent the offensive material.
- Wait for University personnel to follow up with you about next steps.

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- Immediately notify facultyervices@aspen.edu to explain what occurred and the nature of the material.

Grading Assignments

There are several components that are assessed in every student's assignment submission:

- Evidence the student understands the material and is achieving the learning objectives of each module
- Critical assessment and synthesis of the course material and information as evidenced by the student's response to assignments
- Evidence of correct spelling, grammar and sentence structure
- Application of APA format in composition and referencing of sources

Students should strive for succinct answers to questions, but should not neglect important details if they believe those details support their ideas. They should cite sources of quotes and paraphrasing, but encourage them not to over-use quotes. At all times, we are most interested in the quality of students' thinking; however, responses should be composed in a scholarly fashion, following APA guidelines.

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Proctored Assessments

Proctoring student assessments is an essential faculty role that ensures the integrity and fairness of the evaluation process. Faculty are expected to familiarize themselves with the format of the assessment (multiple choice, essay, short answer, etc.) and any specific rules or requirements as noted in the assignment instructions. Faculty are also expected to understand the procedures for addressing academic dishonesty or unexpected incidents. Faculty check students' government-issued photo IDs to ensure enrolled students are indeed taking the assessments and report any incidents of academic dishonesty according to Aspen University policies.

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Signature Assignment

Comprehensive Assessments are designed to test a student's overall knowledge of the program's learning goals and are administered at predetermined points during a student's program. During this final recorded video submission, students will verify their identity by reading the following attestation statement and showing proof of identification (driver's license, or another photo identification—Be sure to show only your full name. Please, cover up any additional personal data).

- **Student Attestation:** Begin recording and read the following statement:

All Aspen University students are required to abide by Aspen University's Academic Integrity Policy, as outlined in the university catalog. The Academic Integrity Policy is built upon the concepts of honesty, truth, fairness, respect, and responsibility. By taking this assessment, I agree to abide by both the Academic Integrity Policy and the rules outlined on this exam. With this recording, I am attesting that I have personally completed the Comprehensive Assessment and that the information I submit is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge.

- **Identity Verification:** Show proof of identification by holding ID up to the camera, for 3-5 seconds. Be sure to show only your full name. Please, cover up any additional personal data.
- **Comprehensive Assessment:** Proceed with the assignment presentation.
- **IMPORTANT:** Record your video and upload it directly to the video submission assignment.

Copy the link from the recorded presentation and paste it at the end of the essay to include when you submit the final assignment. If the assignment does not include the link to the recording, or if the link is faulty and the instructor is not able to review the recording, you will earn a zero for this assignment.

**Note: The video must be included to pass the course.

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Late Submissions

Students should submit their weekly assignments on time. However, faculty can accept late work at his/her discretion with proof of mitigating circumstance, but should clearly post his/her Late Submission Policy in the D2L classroom in their initial course announcement. For assignments, a 10% late penalty will be imposed for each week that the submission is late. If a student does not post an initial discussion post by its due date, a zero is awarded, but partial point consideration may still be given for timely submission of replies to classmates. At Aspen, we strive to teach students behaviors that extend beyond the classroom. Submitting work by deadlines is one of those behaviors that carry over into life and work, not just in the classroom. Therefore, faculty should encourage students to not submit late work habitually. Faculty should assist in holding students accountable to course deadlines, except under unusual circumstances. Please see the full University adopted late policy in the University Catalog.

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Grading Policy

As faculty review student assignment submissions, they are encouraged to look for three broad quality areas to be appropriately evident:

- **Demonstrated Comprehension:** Evaluation is primarily focused on the demonstrated quality of thought and the comprehension of the subject matter.
- **Synthesis and Analysis:** Instructors evaluate critical thinking and synthesis of the core material, through an appearance that demonstrates thought provoking analysis of the core concepts, including original ideas presented as an extension of course material.
- **Research and Quality of Resources:** Research and quality of resources are an integral element of a student's work and will constitute a large portion of assignment work. Textbooks are introduced as a single resource amongst many, with the expectation that students will conduct a substantial amount of additional research in order to present a cohesive,

multi-faceted view of subject material.

All Undergraduate students must successfully complete the credits required of their program and earn an overall GPA of 2.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale in order to graduate.

All Graduate-level students must successfully complete the credits required of their program and earn an overall GPA of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale in order to graduate.

Letter grades and GPA value equivalents are assigned according to the following numeric grade percentages as outlined in the Catalog.

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Quality Feedback

Below are some suggestions for providing quality feedback to students.

Provide constructive response. In the online environment, the faculty is an integral part of the course and program experience. The faculty member serves as a facilitator, content expert, and consultant. It is the contribution of the faculty that differentiates interactive online learning from correspondence learning. The faculty role is not merely grading assignments but facilitating the acquisition of knowledge. As such, provide constructive feedback to learners; you are required to provide written feedback and encouraged to provide it in audio form in the D2L classroom. Our learners indicate their delight with audio feedback.

Don't be too brief. Encouragement is good but "*thanks for the submission, good job*" does not have any instructional value to the learner. Learners have indicated that even when they get a good score on an assignment, they want to know why it was correct, what part of the assignment was most on target, and how they can extend their learning.

Give feedback sooner than later. Faculty are required to

provide feedback within 7 days of the end of a course module. However, learners enjoy receiving feedback as quickly as possible. It helps them know how they can improve a future assignment before that assignment is due.

Present the feedback carefully. How faculty presents feedback can have an impact on how learners receive it. couch feedback in positive terms. For example, use a sandwich method by first telling the learner what they did correctly, then where they need improvement, and finishing up with exact directions for how to improve. Don't hesitate to give specific praise where it's been earned.

Take the individual learner into account. It can be easy to provide standardized feedback. Consider the importance to the learner of them knowing you have customized the feedback for their individual submission.

Remediation is an important component of the evaluation and grading process. If a student gets the wrong answer, guide them to the correct answer or the process to reach the correct answer. In some instances, you may need to provide individual guidance to "walk a learner" through the process of a procedural type of assignment. Any points deducted from an assignment should be explained.

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Using Rubrics

Faculty are required to use the rubrics provided within the D2L classroom. To assist in the evaluation process, students are provided with an assignment rubric that is used by faculty to score their assignments. These rubrics are available in each D2L classroom and are specific to the assignment type as follows:

Signature Assignments and their Associated Scoring Rubrics. A signature assignment is a student artifact that represents scaffolded learning across course. It usually is that final assignment of the course, a research paper, a capstone project, etc. As such, the assignment is

summative in nature only and directly reflects and measures course learning objectives, program learning goals, and university mission-based outcomes for both assignment grading and assessment of student learning purposes. It usually occurs in the last module of a course but can be in previous module such as Module 7. In many cases, students who do not pass the signature assignment also do not pass the course. Signature assignment rubrics permit faculty evaluation of student performance along a task-specific set of assignment criteria aligned with 4 standardized expectation levels—Does Not Meet, Approaches, Meets, and Exceeds Expectations—and point values assigned to each rubric cell. These rubrics are analytic, in that they have been built by analyzing the component parts of an assignment and including them in the criteria, hence they are criterion-referenced. Primary trait analysis is used to identify those criteria. Our analytic rubrics are signature assignment specific and are used for the assessment of student learning.

Assignment-Type Rubrics. Rubrics are important tools to direct students' work effort toward needed behavioral changes. In most of the courses in D2L, you will find 'assignment-type' rubrics to help appropriately guide students to Aspen's expectations for assignment deliverables. While they are not used for university assessment data collection and analysis, they also permit faculty evaluation of student performance along a task-specific set of assignment criteria aligned with 4 standardized expectation levels—Does Not Meet, Approaches, Meets, and Exceeds Expectations—and point values assigned to each rubric cell. Faculty should use these assignment-type rubrics to grade, provide feedback, and offer guidance in establishing expectations for discussion board responses and written work. Examples include rubrics for a PowerPoint, for an essay, for a journal entry, for discussion questions, for an article analysis, etc.

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Turnitin Submitting Assignments

Always be on the lookout for potential plagiarism or work that closely resembles the work of another student. Occasionally, a student may copy work directly from the source. All written assignments will go through a two-part system. Aspen uses a software called Turnitin as a way to help monitor how much of the written assignment

is original work versus language copied from another source. When a student submits his/her assignment to the Dropbox, it will automatically go through Turnitin. When the assignment is pulled down for grading, faculty members will be able to see the students Turnitin similarity score. As we guide students and help them learn to be a better scholar, faculty can choose to send a paper back to a student for the opportunity to resubmit. Their paper must cite all sources or they could be held accountable for plagiarism. This is a serious offense that faculty are required to report to the university.

We are providing Turnitin as a tool and a way for faculty and students to discern and correct how much of their paper is original work. Please note that Turnitin is simply a tool and not always perfect. Often a paper can show similarity through titles and lists of references. Faculty should always open a paper and review the report to see what areas of the paper are duplicated. Aspen always defers to the faculty to make the appropriate grading decisions.

When a high percentage of similarity exists in a student's submitted work (>20%), follow these two starter rules: 1) Ask the student what happened (it is possible that he/she is retaking the course), and 2) open the Similarity Report and examine where the similarities exist. Often, these two behaviors can shed considerable light on what is happening. If, however, plagiarism is strongly suspected, the faculty should fill-out a plagiarism form and submit it to the Registrar.

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The Turnitin Process and Reporting Incidences of Suspected Plagiarism

While Turnitin is a tool for helping find matches between a student's work and the work of others, it does not indicate plagiarism. Only a human can make the decision about plagiarism by opening the Similarity Report and considering the similarities. However, when an incident of plagiarism is suspected, the faculty should first review the Similarity Report and also ask the student about what happened. If following this preliminary investigation yields solid suspicion that plagiarism of content was involved, the

faculty should send an email to registrar@aspen.edu to get further guidance on what to do next. Be sure to do this immediately and be prepared to provide documentation of the suspected offense. The University's policy on academic integrity and honesty, the code of conduct policy, and the process for plagiarism violations can be found in the Academic Catalog.

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Course Extension Policy

While most students will be able to complete course requirements on time, there are some cases where certain students need a little extra time to finish, and therefore require a course extension. However, course extensions should only be given in special circumstances involving an extenuating circumstance and the student should be passing the course when the event occurs. Course extensions cannot be used to bulk "dump load" all assignments at the end for a student who was not participating or engaged during the course. Documentation of the extenuating circumstance is required and the course extension cannot be granted for longer than two weeks after the course's end date. Finally, only official requests for course extension through the student portal will be recognized. The faculty member can decide to approve or deny a request for a course extension. The full policy can be found [at here](#).

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Accessibility and Accommodations

If a student requests an accommodation from faculty for disability, faculty should refer them to the Accessibility and Accommodations Policy in the Academic Catalog. They will find the policy and appropriate forms there to work with the Accessibility Office to determine the appropriate accommodations. It is the responsibility of the student to provide their Student Accommodation form to their instructor within the first week of their course.

Note: Faculty cannot ask a student if they have a disability. The student must self-disclose that they require an

accommodation before we can offer accessibility assistance.

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Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

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Purpose and Scope

Aspen University (“Aspen”) complies with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (“FERPA”), 20 U.S.C. § 1232g, 34 C.F.R. part 99. FERPA protects certain information contained in Education Records, giving students rights of privacy, access, and modification. This policy explains how students may exercise these rights and how Aspen complies with FERPA. This policy does not modify students’ rights under FERPA and creates no contractual or any other stand-alone obligation to students. If there is a conflict between Aspen’s rights or obligations under this Policy and FERPA, FERPA controls. All faculty are required to complete training on FERPA regulations annually. **Failure to do so will result in a cessation of course assignments until faculty are in compliance with this policy.** For further details on FERPA policy, please click [here](#).

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Confidentiality

Faculty should never release any information on a student for any reason. Any requests should be forwarded to the Aspen Registrar.

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Acceptable Forms of Communication Methods between Students and Faculty

We would like to bring to your attention the risks of communicating with students outside of the University email system or D2L classroom. The first and most critical concern is related to FERPA protected information. Additional FERPA guidelines can be found in the Faculty Resource Center (FRC).

To protect you and the student, please do not text with students on your personal phone. How do you know if he is truly the student or even his phone number? If it is the student, who else has access to the phone? Another risk is related to potential accusations from students about what was said or sent via the text. If something is on your phone, we cannot investigate the accusation or accuracy of the claim, either for your or the student's protection.

While we know there is a level of convenience in texting, there are also some serious risks. Because we all appreciate being able to use mobile devices for communication, Aspen does realize that this form of communication is useful. However, **we require that you use your Aspen email to communicate with students**. You can still be mobile by downloading the Google Mail app on your phone. This will allow you to receive/send email communications to your students while also being on the move. Also, now that Aspen has converted to the Daylight mobile-friendly version of D2L, you can also access your courses via the D2L phone app and communicate with your students via the course forums and the 'pager' feature in the Classlist section of your course. **However, please refrain from using the 'email' function within D2L**. Also, do not use personal or non-Aspen work emails to communicate with Aspen students and please do not text them. These are not approved forms of communication for the University.

Aspen requests adherence to this policy about communicating with students, asking you to be sure to use the Aspen approved systems (your Aspen email and the D2L classroom forum) for all communication with students. Thank you for helping us to contain this risk and to protect both you and the students, as well as keep

everyone FERPA-compliant.

Acceptable Forms of Communication

- Aspen Email
- Zoom Conferencing
- GoToMeeting Conferencing

Unacceptable Forms of Communication

- Text Messaging
- Non-Aspen Email

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Consensual Relationships Policy

Building relationships between a faculty or staff member and a student is central to the academic mission of the University. Faculty and staff members should get to know students, their goals, and where we can provide mentoring. Consensual sexual relations between a faculty or staff member and a student can adversely affect the academic enterprise, distorting judgments or appearing to do so in the minds of others and can easily degenerate into allegations of sexual harassment and the real or perceived problem of favoritism and/or a “power differential.” Accordingly, such relationships between a faculty or staff member and a student are prohibited, except as mitigated through the notification procedures described next.

The University requires all faculty and staff members who are engaged in a consensual relationship with a student to promptly notify their respective Deans/Supervisors. The

Dean/Supervisor will work with a Human Resources Representative to determine whether it is possible to remove or mitigate a conflict that might prove detrimental to the University and/or to either party in the relationship. In the case of a pre-existing relationship between a faculty or staff member and a student, the faculty or staff member shall, at a minimum, have NO direct assignments with the student (i.e. enrollment, advising, teaching, dissertation, supervision, or evaluation of the work or academic performance of the student). Ignoring this policy is considered a serious violation of University principles and may result in disciplinary action, including termination of employment. If you should have any questions about this, please contact your Dean.

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