

Teaching Guide for the Department of Mathematics University of Oregon

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1. OVERVIEW

Most mathematics courses at the University of Oregon have fewer than 40 students. There are three sets of large-lecture courses that are exceptions to this:

- MA105–106–107 (University Math)
- MA231 (Elements of Discrete Mathematics)
- MA241–242 (Business Calculus) and MA243 (Introduction to Statistics)

These large-lecture courses have special needs and will largely be excluded from the discussions in this document.

As a general rule, classes at the 200-level and below meet four times per week (MTuWF), whereas classes at the 300-level and above meet three times per week (MWF). The main exception is MA341–342 (Linear Algebra), which in most ways functions more like a 200-level course in spite of its numbering. MA307 and MA315 are “transition courses” (helping students transition into proof-based mathematics) and also meet four days a week.

For the four-meeting-per-week courses, it is common to use one meeting as a problem session where the direction of the interactions is driven entirely by the students. It is not required for instructors to conduct their courses this way, but it is useful for combatting the demands that the four-class-per-week schedule imposes on an instructor’s research activity.

Generally speaking, the Department of Mathematics expects excellence in teaching. Numerical course evaluations are done on a five-point scale (1–5), and most math instructors and courses receive ratings in the 4.0–5.0 range. Ratings under 3.5 don’t necessarily represent poor teaching, or a poor course; students are not always reliable judges of what is good for them! Nevertheless, it is a good idea for evaluations in this range to prompt some reflection and perhaps a discussion with some of the experienced teachers in the department.

2. MECHANICS

Syllabi:

Students should be provided with syllabi on the first day of classes. Syllabi should include a section on “Learning Outcomes”: these are goals that describe how a student will be different after taking the course. For more detailed information, see

<http://sa-assessment.uoregon.edu/ResourcesandTraining/WritingStudentLearningOutcomes.aspx>

If you intend to collect homework during week 10, and have this contribute to the students' grades, this should be explicitly stated on the syllabus (see also the section on Dead Week below).

For courses that are taught multiple times per year, there is an official Course Coordinator and a Master Syllabus. The latter can be found under "Resources" on the department's home page; the precise link is

<http://pages.uoregon.edu/math/syllabi>

Theoretically, the master syllabi are updated each year, but sometimes it is hard to get the Course Coordinators to do their job. If you don't see a master syllabus for the current year, look to the year before.

The intent is not for every instructor to use the Master Syllabus verbatim. Instructors are free to choose their own grading schemes, and have some flexibility in how they cover the material. The point of the Master Syllabus is to establish a common textbook and a common set of topics that will be covered. This is especially important for courses such as 341–342 that occur in a sequence: 342 teachers need to have a common expectation for what was covered in the prior course.

If you have good reason for wanting to use a different textbook than the official one on the Master Syllabus, there is a possibility that you can do this. Talk with the Course Coordinator and the Director of Undergraduate Studies.

Textbooks:

Textbooks are available on the shelves in the main office. To check one out, fill out a green form (upfront in the main office) and give it to either the Undergraduate or Graduate Coordinator. When returning books, do not just put the book directly on the shelves—give it to one of the Coordinators.

Dead week:

Dead week is the 10th week of the term, immediately preceding the final exam period. Regarding this period, the registrar's office says the following:

- No examination worth more than 20% of the grade will be given, with the exception of make-up examinations.
- No final examinations will be given under any guise.
- No projects will be due unless they have been clearly specified on the class syllabus within the first two weeks of the term.
- Take-home examinations will be due no earlier than the day of the formally assigned final examination for the class in question.

It is okay to have a homework assignment due during Dead Week, but it is better if this is spelled out on the syllabus at the beginning of the term.

Students sometimes have the illusion that Dead Week is supposed to be reserved only for review. In contrast, it is very common in math classes to cover new material up through (and sometimes including) the last day of classes. Instructors are welcome to dedicate time during Dead Week for review, but this is not required.

Final exams:

The final exam schedule for two years in advance is available here:

<http://registrar.uoregon.edu/calendars/final-exam-schedule>

For combined final exams, choose the appropriate tab under “Complete Final Exam Schedule”.

Frequently one has the issue of a student asking to take the final exam early. In most cases such requests should be denied. To quote from the registrar’s page above: “Final examinations must be given during the scheduled final examination period. Faculty Legislation prohibits the early administration of final examinations. Final exam week is considered to be part of the regular term, and to end the term prior to its scheduled date reduces instructional days to which students are entitled.”

Proctoring exams:

You should proctor exams, and you should keep an eye on students. Cheating does occur, and should be discouraged. If you do not know the students in your class by sight, have them bring a student ID and show it to you when they hand in their exam. It does occasionally happen that students will try to have someone else take their exam for them.

For how to handle cheating, see the “Cheating” section lower in this document.

Grading policies:

For undergraduate courses, see the link

<http://math.uoregon.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/MathGradingStandards-1tli4lj.pdf>

Also, instructors should consult typical grade distributions from past years in the department. This is not to say that grades should be given to conform to a distribution, but past grade distributions give a sense of departmental standards. Such distributions are available from the Director of Undergraduate Studies.

For graduate courses, faculty have agreed on the following basic system:

A+	Truly outstanding work
A	Good Ph.D or M.S./M.A. level work
A-	Clearly Ph.D level work, but below average. Good at M.S./M.A. level.
B+	Work which is at the lower margin of Ph.D level work, but quite satisfactory at M.S./M.A. level
B	Substandard at the Ph.D level, but satisfactory at the M.S./M.A. level
B-	Barely passing at the graduate level
C+ or below	Unsatisfactory at the graduate level.

Failing grades: There is a peculiar policy that comes into play when you fail students: the university requires that any F be accompanied by a “last known date of attendance”. This has to do with reporting requirements regarding federal grants/loans to students. Most math instructors do not take attendance, and so instead we record

the last known date of submitted work. If the student showed up to take the final exam, this is easy: it is the date of the final. Otherwise, it is the date of the last submitted homework assignment or the last midterm taken (whichever is later). If you are certain that the student continued to attend class after the date of the last submitted work, you can try to estimate a last date of attendance based on your recollection. However, going with the last date of submitted work tends to be the best option.

Homework graders:

Undergraduate graders are available for low-level courses, and sometimes for higher-level courses as well. If you want a grader for your course, ask the Undergraduate Coordinator before the beginning of the term.

Graders are typically assigned to grade up to four hours per week, which of course means they can only grade a small subset of the homework problems. If you have a special reason for needing more grading hours, you can always make this request to the department head.

An alternative to traditional written homework is a computer-graded homework system called WebWork. A WebWork server is maintained by the department, and this system has been used successfully in courses up through multivariable calculus. As with any software package, there is a bit of a learning curve at the beginning—but with WebWork it is really not so bad.

Arranging a classroom for a review session:

To reserve a classroom for an extra class session (such as a review session), use the online form available at:

<http://registrar.uoregon.edu/faculty-staff/academic-scheduling/classroom-reservation-request>

The Graduate Coordinator can also arrange the reservation for you.

Course evaluations:

Course evaluations are done online at the end of the quarter: the system opens during week 9 (usually Friday, sometimes Wednesday) and closes early Monday morning of finals weeks. There are two components: numerical evaluations and written comments. The numerical score is on a scale of 1–5, and this part of the evaluation becomes publicly available to everyone in the UO community. For the written comments, the *signed* comments become part of the teacher’s record and can be reviewed by supervisors and during promotion cases. Unsigned comments are only seen by the instructors themselves.

Course evaluations become available to the instructor on the Friday after the Friday of finals week. They can be accessed from DuckWeb, by using the “Course Evaluations” link on the main page.

It can be difficult to motivate students to do course evaluations. There is some small motivation built into the system, which forces students who do not fill out evaluations to wait longer to view their final course grade. However, this is not enough motivation for most students.

One thing that seems to help is to send out several email reminders to the class, asking students to do evaluations and stressing that this is an important thing to do. Although nagging the students probably has a negative effect, a few nicely-worded emails can have a positive one. During the evaluation period, instructors can see the percentage of student participation by going to the Course Evaluation link in DuckWeb. It can be helpful to send out an email Saturday or Sunday before finals week saying something like “I see that only 68% of students have done evaluations so far. It would be really great to get that up to 85%, this is very important and I would appreciate it. Can we do it?! Please take a moment and do course evaluations if you get a chance!”

For teachers new to UO, it usually takes a few quarters for course evaluations to reflect one’s own internal expectations. In other words, it is a common experience to feel a little let down by the results of course evaluations during one’s first few quarters teaching here. Adjusting to the rhythms of the quarter system can take time, and it also takes time to adjust to the particular expectations of UO students. Just be aware that this is an issue many people experience, and it usually resolves itself naturally.

If you need to miss class:

This falls into two categories, depending on whether the absence is planned or unplanned. If you find that you cannot make it to class, due to illness or some other emergency, it is best to try to get word to the students ahead of time over email. You should also notify the Undergraduate Coordinator, and she will take care of posting a sign outside your classroom cancelling the class.

From time to time, conferences or other professional events conflict with teaching. This is normal, and expected. It is not a big deal when an instructor has to miss a few days of class, but arrangements should be made so that the students do not suffer a shortfall in their educational experience. Substitute teachers can usually be found, or with modern technology one can also record video lectures and have the students watch those. Obviously some effort should be put into ensuring that the teacher’s absence does not negatively affect the students’ opportunities for success on homework and exams, but this can usually be handled with thoughtful preparation.

It is, of course, a judgement call as to how much of an absence is acceptable in a given term. Missing a day or two is completely standard, and having a teacher gone for 5 weeks of a term is clearly too much. If you are planning on missing more than a week in a given term, you should consult with the department head in advance. See the CAS policy on short-term absences at

<http://casweb.uoregon.edu/faculty-sick-leave-short-term-absence>

3. MISCELLANY

Registration overrides:

Students register for classes online, via DuckWeb. The computer system will not let them register if they do not have the correct prerequisites, or if the class is full. Sometimes students find themselves in the following situations:

- (a) They have the necessary prerequisites, but due to transfer articulation issues the registration system cannot see them;
- (b) They do not have the necessary prerequisites, but nevertheless feel they are ready for the class;
- (c) They desperately want to take your class but find that the class is full.

In situation (a), the student should be sent to an advisor to help them with the articulation issues (they can ask about advisors in the main math office). In situations (b) and (c), the instructor can arrange for an “override” that allows the student to register for the class. Situation (c) is easiest: if the class is “full” but there are spaces in the room, the instructor is welcome (but not required) to approve an override. In these cases please make sure that the number of students you are admitting does not exceed the room capacity! While you might observe that there are free seats on a normal class day, this does not imply that there will be free seats on exam day. You can find out the capacity of your room by going to

<http://registrar.uoregon.edu/faculty-staff/academic-scheduling/classrooms-chart>

In situation (b), the instructor should talk with the student and try to assess whether or not the student is indeed qualified to take the course and be successful. Keep in mind that students (especially weak students) overestimate their own knowledge, and that having an underprepared student in class is not good for the student and can also be an extreme hardship for the instructor.

The procedure for processing an override is as follows. Override forms are available up front in the main office. Students should fill out the form, have it signed by the instructor, and then take it to the Graduate or Undergraduate Coordinator for processing. After the override is processed, the student must go register in DuckWeb via the normal process.

Canvas:

Canvas is the university’s official tool for online course instruction. It gives you the ability to post course information, maintain a gradebook, and email students. Like most software of this ilk, it is not very good and can be very frustrating to use. There is no requirement that instructors use Canvas, and there is no requirement that instructors maintain an electronic gradebook that is accessible to students.

If you do use Canvas, remember that for students to access your course on Canvas you will have to “Publish” it. This simply amounts to clicking the “Publish” tab under “Course Status”.

The email features of Canvas are somewhat confusing. To email your class, go to “Inbox” (upper right corner of the page, near “Logout”) and select the appropriate course under the “All Courses” link. Then click the “Compose” icon.

Course webpages:

You can create your own course webpage, independent of Canvas, in the following way. This assumes you know how to use basic Unix utilities and that you know how to create your own html file. SSH to `shell.uoregon.edu` and log in with your DuckID (UO email address without the “@uoregon.edu” part) and password. Change into the

public.html directory and create an html file such as “ma252.html”. If your DuckID is johndoe then the webaddress

`pages.uoregon.edu/johndoe/ma252.html`

will link to your course webpage.

Likewise, your UO homepage is the “index.html” file in the public.html directory, accessed via `pages.uoregon.edu/johndoe`.

Spam filter:

This is good to know about only because sometimes emails from students are sucked up by the spam filter. This happens rarely, but it can be confusing and frustrating when it does. You can access your spam filter from `http://proofpoint.uoregon.edu`, logging in with your DuckID and password. The “Quarantine” tab at the bottom of the page contains your quarantined emails.

Photocopying:

Photocopying for university purposes is free on departmental machines, but a password is required. There is one machine in Fenton (main office) and one in Deady (second floor mezzanine). Consult the Graduate Coordinator for questions about passwords and use of these machines.

Student photos:

Student photos are available in DuckWeb, and can be very useful. In DuckWeb, select the “Faculty Menu” and then “Course Administration Center”. Choose your term, and then under “Action” choose “View Class Photos”.

Students with learning disabilities:

Some students have documented learning disabilities and are given special accommodations. This is handled through the Accessible Education Center on campus. Such students should identify themselves to their instructors the first day of class, and will have a form explaining the nature of their accommodation. In most cases this takes the form of extra time on exams, e.g. for a 50 minute exam the student must be allowed 75 minutes.

The administration of these “extra time” exams is usually handled via the Accessible Education Center, who arranges for the student to take the exam in the Testing Center. The fact that there are two separate entities here can be a little confusing.

The typical procedure is for the instructor to email a pdf of the exam to the Accessible Education Center in advance of the scheduled time for the exam. The student then takes the exam and delivers it back to the instructor in a sealed envelope. Other variations are possible: the instructor can hand-deliver the exam, and can also pick up the exam in person. The student is responsible for working out the arrangements with the instructor ahead of time.

For the most part, the system works well and easily. The biggest drawback is for instructors who write exams at the last minute, as this is no longer a possibility. It is best to get a copy of the exam to the Accessible Education Center at least a

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day before the disabled student's exam (although in extreme cases the exam can be delivered in person by the instructor).

Peer review:

The Teaching Effectiveness Committee does periodic peer reviews of all teaching faculty, producing a written report that goes into an instructor's personnel file. The general procedure is as follows. The instructor under review is contacted by the reviewer, and a time is selected where the reviewer can attend the instructor's class. The reviewer attends, writes up a report, and discusses the report with the instructor (sometimes this discussion is very brief, over email). If the instructor feels that the report is inaccurate, this should be discussed with the reviewer. Finally, the reviewer gives a signed copy of the finalized report to the department manager to be placed in the instructor's personnel file.

Cheating:

Instructors view cheating in different ways, with perhaps the following two extremes:

- (1) Anything resembling cheating must be confronted and stomped out with zero tolerance;
- (2) The students who cheat tend to not be any better at cheating than they are at learning the material, and the grades naturally work themselves out to reflect that.

Some instructors deal with instances of cheating every quarter, whereas other instructors go ten years and never have a single case. You get to decide where you are on this spectrum!

No matter where you are on the spectrum, though, you should be aware of the following: *if you confront a student about cheating, this must be documented and an official report filed.* See the Instructor Policy Manual (under "Resources" on the math department webpage) for complete information.

Extra help for students:

For official math department advising, students can ask in the main office and they will be provided with a list of advisors' office hours.

There is tutoring/help available in two places on campus:

- The Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) offers tutoring in their math lab on the fourth floor of the Knight Library;
- The Mathematics Library, on the second floor of Fenton, offers homework help during hours when the library is open (for technical reasons this is not called tutoring).

For both sites, students can get help in courses up through calculus. Tutoring for more advanced courses is much harder to come by.

4. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For further questions about teaching, consult any of the following people:

- Chair of the Undergraduate Affairs Committee (sometimes listed as the Director of Undergraduate Studies)
- Assistant Department Head (in charge of scheduling)
- Department Head

To find out who these people are, go to the “Resources” tab on the department’s main page and then find the “Departmental Committees” document near the bottom of the page.

Under “Resources” and “Teaching stuff” on the departmental webpage, there is also an **Instructor policy manual**. That document is loaded with useful information!