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GUIDELINES AND BEST PRACTICES FOR TEACHING

This document is prepared to assist new faculty members who may not be familiar with Bilkent and the values, expectations, and practices at the university.

This document was prepared with feedback from students and colleagues at the university.

Bilkent Values

- The educational philosophy of Bilkent University rests on the premise that those who produce new knowledge also have the best potential to impart it.
- We view students as future colleagues and treat them as we wish to be treated.
- We respond to their inquiries in a timely and polite manner.
- All exchanges with students in and out of class are professional and polite.
- We avoid comments that may convey feeling that we do not like teaching, we would prefer to do research, and similar comments that can place serious doubt in students' mind about our abilities and interest.
- Office hours and meetings with students must take place on campus, preferably in faculty offices.
- In class, except for designated courses, all exchange must be in English.

At the Start of the Semester

- Preferably, open a Moodle account for the course at the beginning of the semester to communicate with students. Some faculty may choose to use another learning management system or develop a web site for a particular course.
- Announce office hours.
- If teaching a course with multiple sections, work closely with the course coordinator.
- Course coordinators update standard syllabus in Academic Information Review System (AIRS); all instructors adhere to this syllabus, or contact course coordinator for modifications. Updates on course syllabus should be completed one week before the course registration dates.
- Courses given with multiple sections should be taught in coordination among all instructors. Exams in these courses should also be coordinated — e.g., same exam given at the same time. The grading scheme for determining letter grades for the course should be identical for all sections.
- Clarify ethics rules and expectations from students ahead of time.
- Announce and include in syllabus at the start of the semester how final grades and the FZ grade are to be determined. This appears in the standard syllabus posted in AIRS; for modifications consult course coordinator. FZ grade is given to the students who have not met the minimum performance and/or attendance requirements to qualify to take the final exam.

During the Semester

- Post attendance and grades for assignments, quizzes, projects, labs and exams in Student Academic Performance Monitoring System (SAPS) as soon as possible (at least one major assessment should be graded and announced before the withdrawal deadline).
- If you have to miss a class, inform students and the department head in advance and arrange a make-up lecture during spare hours, or at another time convenient for all the students. Times convenient for all students can be easily determined using the Student Academic Information Registration System (STARS) system.

At the End of Semester

- At Bilkent, at the end of each semester, students fill out an online form titled "Instructor and Course Evaluation by Students". The form consists of several standard questions about the course and the instructor, and has a free text area for students' comments. These comments, and scores of the questions are posted on STARS and are accessible for public viewing on the computers within Bilkent campus. The primary purpose of this survey is to collect feedback for improvements in the course and instructor's teaching.
- A course folder including a copy of each course activity (exam, homework, project, etc.), exam and class attendance records, and other relevant material should be submitted to the department chair at the end of the academic semester.

Exams:

- Exams are to ascertain the knowledge and skills students gained in a course but should also be viewed as a learning tool.
- Questions should be designed to assess students' analytical thinking skills and not their ability to memorize. Such questions also help avoid potential cheating attempts. Therefore, we normally avoid questions that start with "define, who, what, where." Multiple-choice questions should also be avoided in exams.
- All the final exams must be given during the final exam period. Undergraduate final exams are automatically scheduled by the university.
- Students must be allowed to see and examine their graded exams and be able to understand what mistakes they may have made and how they were graded. They should be able to view their exams in class or, preferably, during office hours.
- Exams should be graded by the instructors, not by graders.
- During in-class exams, if there is a suspicion of cheating, do not collect the paper and dismiss student from the room; instead collect the evidence and prepare a written statement, with co-signatures from other exam proctors (if any) describing the nature of cheating and submit this to the department chair.
- More specific recommendations for the conduct of exams will be given separately.

Homework, Quizzes, Projects & Essay Writing:

- Homework and quizzes (in-class mini exams consisting of short questions) help students learn the material covered in class and encourage them to review material in due course. If possible, regularly assign a few thought provoking questions. Quizzes may or may not be announced ahead of time.
- Homework and quizzes may be assessed by the graders, if available, unless they contribute a large proportion to course grade.
- Widespread cheating has been observed in some homework assignments. In some cases, giving occasional quizzes (in-class mini exams consisting of short questions) based on homework questions can be very helpful in encouraging students to work on homework problems. In other cases, instructors give or allow students to choose different parameters for the assignments to reduce copying from each other. Projects can be thought of as grand-scale homework that tackle open-ended problems requiring some design, research and/or creativity.
- Essay writing is one of the most common methods of assessing student learning in the Arts and Humanities. It also helps the students to practise and develop their communication skills and other intellectual abilities. However, in essay-based assignments plagiarism appears as a serious issue that needs to be handled appropriately. Useful software tools exist to deal with plagiarism, including the Turnitin integration with Moodle.

Grades:

- Letter grades must be given within the deadline announced on the academic calendar.
- Letter grades should be based on the final total score accumulated on SAPS. There is no set criteria by which letter grades are assigned. Those students who demonstrated that they achieve the minimum learning objectives should receive passing scores.
- Bilkent has successfully avoided grade inflation; average class GPA is between 2.3 – 2.5 in most classes. Instructors can see previous average GPA of their course on the AIRS page where grades are entered.