

Dr. Kenneth Lutchen, University Provost and Chief Academic Officer ad interim

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TO: Boston University Faculty

FROM: Kenneth Lutchen, University Provost and Chief Academic Officer ad interim 

DATE: April 18, 2024

SUBJECT: End-of-Semester Guidance

As we approach the end of the spring semester, I want to take a moment to acknowledge your hard work under exceptionally challenging circumstances and thank you for your commitment to all our students. While we continue to bargain with our graduate student union in good faith and remain hopeful that we will complete a mutually beneficial collective bargaining agreement, it remains possible the strike may continue through the end of this semester. In response to your requests, I am writing today to provide guidance as we focus on meeting our obligations around assessing the academic progress of our students.

We will proceed with final examinations as scheduled. Our students expect to be evaluated in accordance with the assessment rubric for the courses in which they are enrolled. Where part of that assessment includes a final exam, that exam must be given. Please also keep in mind that the Incomplete (I) grade may be used only for **individual** students in accordance with the [Incomplete Coursework Policy](#). As the policy states, the instructor and student must agree to the nature of the work and a date (within one year) by which that work will be completed to meet course requirements, and both are required to sign the Incomplete Grade Agreement.

Faculty/course instructors may not issue blanket incompletes or pass/fails in lieu of class grading.

Some faculty members may be concerned about the prospect of grading exams and other student work. Nevertheless, it is our collective obligation and requirement to ensure our students receive their grades on time. If you anticipate difficulty meeting grading deadlines, please contact your department chair or associate dean by **no later than end of day, Wednesday, April 24**. There may be ways to provide assistance ensuring timely submission of grades. For example, postponement of other end-of-semester duties to allow additional time for grading may be possible.

The great majority of faculty have plans to complete their course grading even under difficult circumstances. Nevertheless, a few have voiced they may not fulfill this obligation. **To be clear, a faculty member may not choose to withhold letter grades.** For all faculty, timely submission of grades is an essential function of their positions. More specifically, our full-time represented faculty are prohibited from withholding or delaying any grades under Article 19, Section 1 of their collective bargaining agreement with Boston University. Failure of *non*-represented faculty to submit grades in a timely way would be considered

gross neglect of duty under the Faculty Handbook as well as fundamentally inconsistent with their roles as part of the University's governance structure.

More importantly, however, I ask that you think about the harm to our students that would arise from failure to submit grades on time. For example, our international students may face visa challenges; students who receive financial aid may confront restrictions on continued aid; and many may find it more difficult to obtain gainful employment in the absence of complete and up-to-date transcripts. In sum, I trust that all faculty realize that failure to submit grades would have no impact on the outcome of the strike negotiations and only serve to harm our students.

Finally, some faculty members have concerns about how to grade their striking graduate students. In addressing this question, faculty should make a distinction between academic obligations and work for pay, seeking assistance from their department chair or associate dean if they have questions. Faculty may speak to their graduate students about academic matters. While students have a right to strike for employment-based work for which they are being paid, they are expected to complete their academic coursework to receive course credit.

Thank you again for all you do on a daily basis to support our students. I am confident you will do what is needed to ensure a positive outcome and am deeply grateful.

Cc: Kenneth W. Freeman, President
Amie Grills, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Affairs
Daniel Kleinman, Associate Provost for Graduate Affairs
Maureen O'Rourke, Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs
Gloria Waters, Vice President and Associate Provost for Research