



OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE  
VICE PRESIDENT AND PROVOST

111 Jessup Hall  
Iowa City, Iowa 52242-1316  
319-335-3565 Fax 319-335-3560  
www.uiowa.edu/~provost

TO: Members of the Faculty Council  
FROM: Mark Young, Chair, Council on Teaching  
DATE: October 20, 2006

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Mark Young".

The Council on Teaching has had recent discussions regarding instructor-student communications, particularly as related to electronic formats such as email, and the related topic of instructor accessibility. These discussions were prompted by concerns about University policy and the wide differences associated with the use of electronic communication in teaching and the potential disparities in expectations between students and instructors. The Council conducted its discussion in the context of the policies detailed in section III-15.2 of the University Operations Manual. I would like to summarize the salient points of our discussion as follows:

- o The Council recognized that electronic forms of communication play an important and growing role in interactions between students and instructors. In many instances, such communications have replaced the traditional office hour and are often preferred by students and faculty alike. However, while they can bring convenience, there is also the potential for an increased, and possibly unrecognized, time penalty associated with the use of technology such as email. The utilization of electronic communications certainly varies amongst courses, faculty and disciplines. However, the Council recognized a common problem in the potential disparity between instructors and students in their expectations for what constitutes an acceptable response time. Such differences could lead to frustration. In addition, there was concern about mixing professional and instructional-related communications, especially in large enrollment courses.
- o Similarly, the Council also discussed existing policies regarding instructor availability, particularly the setting of office hours. It was noted that there were no specific guidelines in the Operations Manual for office hours while some units, such as the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, mandate a certain number of hours per week. The Council felt that there were too many variables (number of courses taught by an instructor, number of semester hours, enrollment) to support a rule for a required number of hours. However, the consensus was that some statement regarding the need for an instructor to set and hold office hours and otherwise be reasonably available for individual appointments should be part of the Operations Manual. Section III-15.2(g) partially addresses this issue but appears to be directed more towards the mentoring aspect of the student-teacher relationship.

In addition to informing the Faculty Council of our deliberations, the Council on Teaching would like to also suggest some possible changes to the Operations Manual as a consequence of our discussions and make some suggestions for further debate and/or action. Specifically,

- Either modify section 15.2(g) of the Operations Manual or add a new section with language to the effect that “faculty must hold office hours and be reasonably available for appointments.”
- Add the responsibility to include a valid email address in the syllabus contents specified in section 15.2(j)(1).
- Add a recommendation that instructors discuss expectations for electronic communications, especially the typical response times for such communications, at the beginning of the course.
- Increase faculty awareness of the electronic communications capability of ICON (course email, chat, bulletin board).
- Urge ITS to be accommodating for requests for separate course-related email accounts with dedicated storage space for faculty, especially for large enrollment courses.
- Begin a discussion of the increased demand for electronic communication in teaching, the implications for traditional in-office interactions, and the consequent potential for an incremental increase in the faculty workload.

Thank you for your time and consideration.