

To: Fort Wayne Senate Executive Committee
From: Student Affairs Committee
Regarding: "Leveraging Covid-19 Data" review and findings
Date: 10/28/2022

In Spring 2022, the Student Affairs Committee reviewed documents provided by Dr. Jeff Malanson, director of the Office of Strategic Planning. The documents, collected under the title "Leveraging COVID 19 Data," were the results of an internal study conducted by Dr. Malanson's office, to collect and analyze how different university units adapted to challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. One focus in the documents is the new challenges students faced during the pandemic and how units responded. Twenty-two university units responded to the call for reports and the collection includes individual reports as well as analyses and summaries completed by Dr. Malanson's office.

The Committee reviewed the findings in these reports. It notes that the data speak to two of the PFW Strategic Plan's four Aspirations: "Champion Student Success" and "Enhance Quality of Place." It also noted that the overwhelming take-away from these reports is how much effort and care faculty have put into responding to the pandemic in such a way as to ensure student success and well-being. The Student Affairs Committee felt the report confirmed conventional wisdom on our campus that faculty truly care about students, are expert teachers, and that they are devoted to doing what is best for students, even if that means additional time, effort, and thought.

SAC offers the following recommendations regarding what the reports reveal about how faculty can support student success as the university moves out of the pandemic crisis.

ATTENDANCE POLICIES

1. During the pandemic, many faculty instituted more flexibility in their attendance policies, but some are now reverting to earlier practices. Although attendance is important, "Leveraging Covid-19" findings suggest it may be appropriate for some faculty to maintain flexible attendance policies, allowing students to determine how to prioritize attendance in relation to other challenges they face.
2. Faculty that use attendance in calculating grades should ensure they are applying these policies consistently to students. Inconsistent policies is one of the most frequent complaints the Student Affairs Office hears from students. Toward creating more consistency, faculty are reminded that the Disability Access Center can assess students' health and mental health challenges and determine whether a student faces a situation that requires additional flexibility. Faculty who are approached by students about leniency because of a health or mental health issue should encourage their students to go to DAC to ask about an official accommodation letter. DAC is the only office on campus that is authorized to ask for medical information and documentation from students, so they are best positioned to determine whether students are dealing with a health (or mental health) issue that merits more
3. "Leveraging Covid-19" revealed that during the pandemic, many faculty were willing to add additional materials to their courses to accommodate students who had trouble attending class in

person. These materials included recording lectures and creating discussion boards. Some reports indicate that some faculty are scaling back these practices. Students have reported that even as Covid-19 conditions are relaxed, they really appreciate having these additional resources. Faculty should consider continuing these enhancements permanently.

SUPPORTING STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

4. As many faculty are aware, many PFW student face mental health struggles, some of which were intensified during the pandemic. “Leveraging Covid-19” confirmed the value of maintaining a tone of patience, empathy, and compassion when dealing with PFW students. Treating students with kindness first, even if they present with possible disciplinary or academic deficiencies, can go far toward helping every student succeed. For our most vulnerable students, even a little bit of institutional “friction” can be enough to lose course.

5. Faculty should communicate to students that students may bring up to them personal challenges they face, such as mental health and family issues. At the same time, faculty are not counselors and should not offer therapy to students. Instead, faculty who hear from students about mental health struggles, family emergencies, and related struggles should immediately contact the CARE team to submit a CARE referral. Faculty can also encourage students to make use of the newly-expanded walk-in counseling hours at the student health clinic.

TEACHING ONLINE

6. Students communicate consistently that they prefer in-person educational experiences to being on-line. Nevertheless, on-line teaching is an important part of many faculty members’ jobs. Faculty are encouraged, whenever possible, to explore ways to incentivize active participation when teaching online, so that students are engaged.

RESOURCES

SAC offers the following best practices and other resources for faculty who would like more guidance and support as they navigate this part of the pandemic.

Disability Access Center:

Ryan McCombs, M.A. (He, Him, His)

Director, Disability Access Center

Purdue University Fort Wayne

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<https://www.pfw.edu/offices/disability-access-center/>

Office of Student Conduct and CARE

<https://www.pfw.edu/student-conduct-care/policies-and-resources>

CELT list of pedagogical resources: <https://www.pfw.edu/offices/enhancement-learning-teaching/pedagogical-resources/>.

Approving

Noor Borbieva
Stephen Buttes
Lynn Acevedo
Cutter Mask
Wylie Sirk
Nashwan Younis

Opposed

Abstention

Absent

Kristina Creager (ex officio)
Kerrie Fineran, 2020-23