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Adjusting Class Policies amid a Pandemic: How Lessons Learned During COVID-19 Can Help Faculty Prepare for Other Institution-Wide Crises

ABSTRACT

Research consistently suggests that student learning is maximized when faculty balance stringency and leniency in their classroom policies. However, the COVID-19 crisis raised an important question: In the face of a wide-scale crisis, should faculty instead adopt forgiving policies? This study uses interview data with 43 university faculty across the United States to examine policy adjustments made in response to COVID-19, as well as the impact faculty felt those adjustments had on course learning objectives. Results suggest that even amid a wide-scale crisis, balancing leniency and stringency offers benefits to both students and instructors. Implications for future crisis-response and crisis-preparedness are also discussed.

KEYWORDS

classroom policies, COVID-19, pedagogical adjustments

INTRODUCTION

As COVID-19 upended the lives of everyone in early 2020, university faculty throughout the world faced a unique dilemma: Should they proceed—to whatever extent possible—with their pre-established plans and learning goals, or should they throw out assignments, deadlines, and attendance expectations in order to extend empathy to students? As faculty wrestled with this question, they faced a barrage of advice from academic and non-academic sources. Student requests, administrator emails, blog entries, newspaper articles, tweets, and Facebook posts advocated for dropping assignments, extending deadlines, waiving late penalties, and even passing students regardless of their actual course grades (Flaherty 2020; Foucault Welles 2021; Krause 2020; Saige 2020; Sawchuk 2020; Shmis et al. 2020). Public opinion, especially in the US, was clear: anything other than grace, empathy, and extensive leniency was an inappropriate faculty response to the pandemic.

Yet, research consistently suggests that student learning is maximized when faculty balance stringency and leniency in their classroom policies (Pollak and Parnell 2018; Zhu et al. 2019). That is, students perform better when they are asked to meet deadlines and participate in class regularly while having some flexibility in how they do so (Bosch 2020; Snyder and Frank 2016; Tyler, Peveler, and Cutler 2017). Because that is the case, many faculty worried that extremely lenient policies would harm student learning in the long term (Soni 2020; Supiano 2020; Whitt 2020).

Juxtaposed against this concern was the need to deal with an emergent crisis of massive proportions. Perhaps teaching amid such a crisis requires more leniency than faculty would normally

adopt in their classes—public opinion certainly suggested as much. The scholarship on teaching and learning, however, is largely silent about pedagogical best practices for dealing with large-scale crises that affect entire institutions, as opposed to those which only impact individual students. In short, although scholarship on the best ways to accommodate students in distress is plentiful (Cook and Krupar 2010; Forthun and McCombie 2011; Guzzardo et al. 2021; Jenkins 2015), there is little discussion of how faculty should proceed when institution-wide disruptions occur. Of the research that does exist on institutional-level responses to disasters (such as hurricanes or tornadoes), it focuses on how to address power outages, housing displacements, loss of property, and so forth (Lucas and Katz 2011; Ray and Hocutt 2016). Scholarship on how to navigate the pedagogical upheavals that accompany such disasters is lacking. Thus, this study uses interview data from 43 university faculty across the United States to address three questions.

1) How did instructors adapt their policies around assignments, attendance, and late submissions in response to COVID-19?
2) Did faculty feel those adjustments helped or hindered student achievement of learning objectives?
3) Can instructors' experiences during COVID-19 offer insights for potential responses to future wide-scale upheavals?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Extensive pedagogical research demonstrates that student learning is maximized when faculty design their classroom policies to account for both structure and flexibility. For instance, a policy requiring course attendance is associated with higher student grades (Credé, Roch, and Kieszczynka 2010; Pollak and Parnell 2018; Zhu et al. 2019), but providing students with some agency around attendance improves overall levels of learning, positive perceptions of faculty, and feelings of fairness (Duplaga and Astani 2010; Snyder and Frank 2016). Likewise, a policy asking students to be accountable to course schedules and assignment deadlines helps scaffold life skills, including dependability and timeliness (Campana and Peterson 2013). Allowing some flexibility around those deadlines, however, recognizes that unexpected upheavals occur in life (Bosch 2020; Moen, Davies, Dykstra 2010; Tyler, Peveler, and Cutler 2017). As such, policies that allow a limited number of late submissions, dropped assignments, and/or make-up exams demonstrate faculty compassion (Dickson and Tennant 2017; Gelles et al. 2020) and provide students with tools for balancing the realities of life (Cook and Krupar 2010). In short, research suggests that students perform better when they are held accountable to the course requirements but are also provided some flexibility regarding how they meet those requirements (Bosch 2020; Snyder and Frank 2016; Tyler, Peveler, and Cutler 2017).

The benefits of balancing stringency and flexibility notwithstanding, when the COVID-19 pandemic began, faculty were forced to completely reevaluate their pedagogies and classroom policies. Moreover, they were inundated with messages telling them to scale back course requirements, remove attendance expectations, soften assignment due dates, and refrain from issuing failing grades (Foucault Welles 2021; Retta 2020; Saige 2020; Sawchuk 2020). These recommendations were not offered solely by students, parents, and the public—they were also suggested by other educators and university administrators (Flaherty 2020; Goings 2020; Krause 2020). This raised an important question for faculty: In the face of such a wide-scale crisis, should they ignore the benefits of balancing stringency and leniency and instead adopt extremely flexible policies?

Answering this question proved challenging for two reasons. First, much of the existing research on how faculty should respond to a crisis focuses on best practices for handling disruptions—such as food insecurity or job loss—that are faced by individual students (Cook and Krupar 2010; Guzzardo et al. 2021; Jenkins 2015). Faculty, however, were confronted with a crisis that affected every student in their class to some extent. As universities in the US and abroad shifted online for part of the spring 2020 semester (Shmis et al. 2020), these changes fundamentally altered teaching methods and policies across entire courses. Faculty were facing institution-wide disruptions and they needed insights and recommended changes given those circumstances.

Second, the limited amount of research on institution-wide disruptions focuses primarily on pragmatic issues (Murphy et al., 2019; Ray and Hocutt 2016). For instance, Lucas and Katz (2011) used their experiences with Hurricane Katrina to offer preparedness advice for future disasters, but this advice focused on dealing with power outages, clean-up efforts, and the provision of necessary supplies. Likewise, a recent study about administrators who ushered their campuses through disasters, such as tornadoes and fires, focused on the crisis-management skills employed by senior leaders (Schmidt 2016). This research was not useful for faculty trying to determine how to simultaneously achieve their learning objectives and accommodate their students during the COVID-19 crisis.

Since the pandemic began, publications about faculty, administrator, and student responses to the crisis have been plentiful (Gelles et al. 2020; Shmis et al. 2020; Sparkman-Key, Dice, and Gantt 2021). Research has examined the difficulties associated with working and studying from home (Fouche and Andrews 2022), the challenges of teaching about trauma during a global crisis (Sherwood et al. 2021), the benefits and drawbacks of transitioning courses to online modalities (Ahmed and Opoku 2022), and best practices in crisis communication (Liu et al. 2021). Yet, no study has examined if or how faculty should adjust classroom policies during an institution-wide upheaval. This research, thus, uses interview data with faculty to examine the policy adjustments they made in response to COVID-19, the degree to which faculty felt those adjustments helped or hindered the students' achievement of learning objectives, and whether those adjustments could help in a future institution-wide crisis.

METHODS

Sampling procedures

This study is based on a convenience and a snowball sample, and it utilizes interview data from university faculty throughout the United States. Participants were recruited via emails sent to the authors' personal contacts and via recruitment flyers posted on social media. Additionally, participants were asked to share information about the study with other potential respondents. These efforts generated interest from 51 individuals, 43 of whom agreed to and completed an interview. Participation was incentivized with a $20 Tango gift card. In total, 24 respondents were from the authors' personal contacts and 19 were recruited through social media or snowball sampling. All study protocols and primary data collection were approved by the Ball State University Institutional Review Board.

Data collection

The data reported here came from a larger study examining stringency and leniency in faculty classroom policies, how those policies align with faculty learning objectives, and how faculty develop the policies they utilize. (See Appendix for full interview guide.) Interviews were conducted between June and November of 2020, and faculty were asked to reflect on their pre-COVID class policies as well as the

changes they made in response to the pandemic. Specifically, interview questions asked faculty to discuss their policies around late work, alternative assignments, and attendance. Likewise, the questions asked faculty to comment upon the purpose of those policies, how the policies were developed, and how the policies compared with those of their colleagues. Faculty were then asked to discuss how they altered their policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and what messages they received from university administration regarding curriculum and modality changes. Finally, faculty were asked about which policy adjustments they liked, regretted, and planned to keep or abandon. The questions about COVID-19 serve as the primary source of data for this study, but the questions about pre-COVID classrooms did provide relevant context for understanding the extent to which faculty did or did not make policy changes in response to the pandemic.

All data were collected remotely. Respondents were given the choice to conduct the interview over Zoom or telephone. Each participant agreed to have their interview audio recorded on both a primary and backup recording device. A semi-structured interview guide was used, and interviews lasted an average of 46 minutes, with a median of 43 minutes. The range of interview times varied widely between 13 and 126 minutes, with the length of time largely shaped by respondents' years of experience teaching and the complexity of the policies they described. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the transcription was generated by Otter AI to generate an initial transcript. The authors and trained graduate assistants then listened to each recording and corrected any inconsistencies in the initial transcripts.

Participants

Although this study relies on a convenience and a snowball sample, the authors emphasized analytical generalizability within recruitment, with a focus on variation across gender, race/ethnicity, school type, discipline, and academic rank. As such, there is considerable variation in participants' characteristics, as displayed in Table 1. Specifically, of the 43 faculty members interviewed, 29 (67%) were women, 13 (30%) were men, and one individual preferred not to indicate a gender. Moreover, 28 (65%) were White, seven (16%) were Asian American, four (9%) were Latinx, three (7%) were Black, and one person identified as bi-racial. Participants ranged in age from 24 to 69, with an average age of 41. The faculty participants also represented a variety of school types, academic ranks, and disciplines within the US. Twenty-three (53%) of the faculty reported working at universities that emphasized both teaching and research equally, 13 (30%) worked at research-intensive universities, four (9%) were at liberal arts/teaching focused schools, and three (7%) were teaching at community colleges. Twenty-eight participants (65%) were classified as tenure-line faculty and 15 (35%) were contingent faculty (e.g., adjuncts, lecturers). Of the tenure-line faculty, 12 (28%) were assistant professors, eight (19%) were associate professors, and eight (19%) were full professors. Of the contingent faculty, three (7%) were instructors, four (9%) were adjunct faculty, four (9%) were lecturers, and four (9%) were teaching professors. On average, participants had been teaching for 11 years. Twenty-one faculty (49%) had expertise in the social sciences (e.g., criminology, psychology, sociology), nine (21%) in the humanities (e.g., history, language, philosophy), six (14%) in the natural sciences (e.g., biology, chemistry, geology), five (12%) in the formal sciences (e.g., math, computer science), and two (5%) were not disclosed. The interviewees further represented a range of experience in levels of course instruction, including lower-division, upper-division, and graduate-level classes (however, these percentages are not represented in the table since faculty frequently taught courses at multiple levels during the time period of interest).

Table 1. Demographic profile of participants (n=43)

		%	*n*
Gender			
	Women	67%	29
	Men	30%	13
	Unknown	2%	1
Race			
	White	65%	28
	Asian American	16%	7
	Hispanic/Latinx	9%	4
	Black	7%	3
	Biracial	2%	1
Age (mean)		41	43
University type			
	Equally teaching- and research-focused university	53%	23
	Research-intensive university	30%	13
	Liberal arts or teaching-focused university	9%	4
	Community college	7%	3
Faculty position[1]			
	Tenure-line faculty	65%	28
	Assistant professor	28%	12
	Associate professor	19%	8
	Full professor	19%	8
	Contingent faculty	35%	15
	Instructor	7%	3
	Adjunct	9%	4
	Lecturer	9%	4
	Teaching professor	9%	4
Discipline			
	Social sciences	49%	21
	Humanities	21%	9
	Natural sciences	14%	6
	Formal sciences	12%	5
	Unknown	5%	2

[1]Indented instructor positions sum to the total percentage of tenure-line faculty and contingent faculty, respectively.

Analytic strategy

This analysis used qualitative research techniques associated with grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998) and the constant comparative method (Ragin 1982). Qualitative analyses are useful for uncovering patterns of meaning within interview data (Charmaz 2014; Creswell 1998; Denzin and Lincoln 1998). As such, one of the authors read every transcript three times to create and refine a set of individual-level codes that could be applied to the data. Although many of these codes were informed by literature on collegiate-level teaching and learning, codes were not limited to those expected based upon existing literature. For instance, research suggested discussions of flexibility around late work would likely be present in the data (coded as "lenient"). Additionally, faculty regularly noted that they attempt to motivate students by telling them they will not accept late work even when they really will. Although existing literature did not point to this as a possible area of comment by faculty, these discussions seemed meaningful and were coded as "mislead to motivate."

In total, 52 individual-level codes were created for the full set of interviews. These codes were then categorized by theme. (Full list of codes and themes available upon request.) For instance, the individual-level codes "removals" and "alterations" were part of the broader theme "COVID policy responses," while "regrets" and "successes" were part of the broader theme "assessing COVID-inspired alterations." These two themes are central to the analysis presented in this paper. Other broad themes from the data included "typical classroom policies," "purpose of policies," "forms of flexibility," and "development of policies." Because these themes are specific to participants' pre-COVID-19 classroom policies, they provided contextual information, but are not central to the analysis presented here.

Initial coding and theming were completed by one of the study's authors. An additional author then independently applied those codes to the data as well. The authors compared their efforts, discussed any discrepancies in their coding, and settled on the final application of codes. This comparison was not completed to increase inter-rater reliability scores. Instead, multiple coders were used to ensure that the greatest nuance and widest interpretation of the interviews was captured in the finalized data. Lastly, the authors identified and interpreted patterns in the data by creating coding tables, writing lengthy research memos, and continuously referring to prior theory and research.

FINDINGS

Although the COVID-19 crisis presented colleges and universities with numerous challenges, this research suggests it can also provide faculty with important insight about preparing for and responding to institution-wide upheavals. Specifically, the findings suggest faculty should not adopt extremely flexible policies when faced with a wide-scale crisis. Instead, they should seek to balance leniency and stringency. Moreover, if their classes are designed to balance structure and flexibility at the outset, they will likely find the transitions necessitated by emergent crises easier to navigate.

The need for flexibility when responding to COVID-19

When faculty were asked how they responded to the COVID-19 crisis, nearly everyone reported they had to make "pretty significant changes" to their class policies. In fact, numerous faculty said they "dramatically loosened," "threw out," "dropped," "let go of," "did away with," and "jettisoned" not only course content, but assignment deadlines, attendance policies, and penalties for late or missed work. Moreover, faculty reported that they "became a lot more lenient," "decided not to fail anybody," and

even "gave everyone full points for the second half of the semester" because they felt the realities of COVID-19 and the upheavals it created in students' lives required that they show students "some grace."

Given the circumstances, faculty said that leniency was not only a pragmatic necessity, but a moral requirement. For instance, one individual said, "Morally, I do not feel like I can require students to come to class right now." Others asserted, "it's hard to ignore the context when kids are absent right now," "it's better to be kind than be a hard ass," and "we're in the middle of a crisis and they've got family that're sick or dying—this class isn't the most important thing in the world." In short, faculty believed flexible policies were essential for navigating the COVID-19 crisis. That belief was corroborated by faculty who reported they did not have to make any policy changes in response to the pandemic. Of the seven faculty who made this claim, all said it was because their policies were "already pretty lenient," "already [gave] students flexibility," and already provided students with "choices" and "cushions" to help them juggle competing demands. For these faculty, their already-established flexible submission and attendance policies meant they could easily adjust their classroom policies in response to COVID-19.

The experiences of faculty who started with lenient policies and those who adopted lenient policies later seemed to suggest that extreme flexibility may be an important technique for responding to emergent crises, especially those that affect entire institutions. Such a finding would be consistent with the advice faculty received from the public. However, a close examination of instructors' regrets with respect to COVID-19 reveals there were disadvantages to extensive flexibility.

The limits of flexibility when responding to COVID-19

When reflecting on the overall experience of the spring 2020 semester, faculty routinely said their "community collapsed" and their students "came a little unmoored," "lost their momentum," and "shot themselves in the foot." This happened because the students disengaged from the class and put off doing assignments once the deadlines and late penalties were removed. As a result, faculty felt "sad," "discouraged," and even "torn" by the thought that "maybe [they had] gone too far on the lenient side." Faculty said, "I regret that I didn't encourage the students more strongly to come to class when they could," "I think I should have figured out a way to encourage more engagement on the discussion boards," and "Instead of [giving everyone 100 for attendance], I should have said 'You need to do three of these things to get a full attendance grade.'"

Faculty asserted that "students need structure" and they "rely on the orderliness" of set schedules and deadlines. When those things were suddenly lost, students became "overwhelmed" and "lost motivation." Faculty also argued that attendance and participation policies communicated "the value of being in class" and they "create more learning." Thus, doing away with these policies entirely resulted in lost learning opportunities. As one faculty member noted, "flexibility is good, but too much of it sometimes makes it harder for students too." To that end, the faculty who were most satisfied with their classes after the pandemic began were those who found a way to balance flexibility and structure in their classes.

Balancing flexibility and structure to facilitate student learning

Many faculty achieved balance by offering students choices within a particular set of boundaries. For instance, some faculty offered synchronous online class sessions but made attendance optional. For those students who could not attend class, the instructors recorded class and posted videos online for later viewing. Faculty said this benefitted student learning because "some students really liked the

synchronous [classes] and some students really liked the asynchronous [classes]—being able to offer both worked really well." Another faculty member noted that maintaining synchronous attendance requirements, even while providing some asynchronous options, was important, especially for at-risk students, because "those are the students who [otherwise] won't show up to class; those are the students who will slip through the cracks."

In contrast, faculty who adopted fully asynchronous classroom models regretted that decision. One said, "That's something I should have done differently—I should have kept the class schedule but just recorded [class] for those who couldn't make it." Another faculty member said they felt moving to a fully asynchronous model hampered student motivation and class cohesion because "some [students] just want to see your face every other day." It seems, then, that some modality flexibility made it easier for faculty to achieve their learning goals, but too much flexibility hindered student learning.

Some instructors also required students to participate in the course through "discussion board posts" or "optional synchronous class discussions." Faculty noted that their goal was "to simulate the same type of idea exchange" that would have taken place in a face-to-face class but offer students the ability to "do what they need to do at any time during the day." Some even noted that discussion boards helped bring normally quiet students into the conversation because they "[gave] people more time to think" and eliminated the ability for a few students to "dominate the conversation just because of their personality." For that reason, several faculty said they were going to continue using discussion boards even after their classes returned to an in-person modality.

Many faculty, in fact, said they intended to keep some of the changes they instituted in response to COVID-19. One instructor, for instance, removed the daily due dates from class and instead created weekly checklists—doing so provided students a level of choice within a delimited timeframe. The instructor noted, "I am actually including a checklist in my syllabus for this fall instead of the traditional course calendar. I think it'll help everyone keep [their] ducks in a row." Similarly, several faculty said they planned to continue using technologies like Zoom, online homework submissions, and posted lectures because these options provided students with flexibility and aided in their learning while holding them accountable to class material. As one instructor noted, "I think the availability of content on demand has shown me that our student population can really benefit from being able to access a lecture when it's convenient for them." And another said, "after COVID, I'll have a whole library of my lectures that are now recorded over PowerPoint videos [and] that will give [students] some flexibility; it might help them with their particular learning style."

These comments highlighted the benefits of classroom policies that balance flexibility and structure. By offering students choices within boundaries, faculty said their COVID-19 responses were "helpful" and ensured their students were "still achieving the learning outcomes." In contrast, those faculty who adopted extremely lenient policies without simultaneously imposing some structure on their students felt less satisfied with their course outcomes. They noted that their students missed "impactful [course] components" and their learning suffered.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study explored how faculty adjusted their classroom policies in the wake of COVID-19, whether they felt their efforts helped or hindered student learning, and whether their experiences could offer insights for dealing with future wide-spread upheavals. We found that all faculty felt compelled to adopt flexible policies in response to the pandemic, but those who balanced flexibility with structure

were the most satisfied with their students' class performance. Extremely flexible policies, in contrast, were believed to stymie student learning. Moreover, for the faculty who had flexibility in place at the beginning of the semester, the transitions associated with COVID-19 were particularly easy.

What, then, do these findings mean for our broader understanding of how faculty can and/or should respond to major learning disruptions? More importantly, do they tell us anything about how faculty might be able to plan for such disruptions?

Planning for a pandemic?

The immense impact of COVID-19 across higher education illuminates the general lack of preparation for a crisis of this magnitude. Our findings suggest that prior to the spring 2020 semester, faculty generally did not consider potential wide-scale emergencies, such as hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, earthquakes, or pandemics, when planning their courses. Yet, emergencies that impact entire institutions do happen and the pedagogical transitions they necessitate are rarely easy. The sudden need for major changes to course structures can be stressful—the faculty interviewed for this study noted that responding to COVID-19 was "hard," "crazy," "a pain," and "super draining." They also lamented that the adjustments required "a colossal amount of attention," made them feel resentful, and made them feel as if they were "working with one hand tied behind [their] back." These data, however, suggest there are course design elements that may make adjustments in the face of a disaster much easier.

Specifically, having some built-in flexibility around attendance, participation, and assignment due dates can be helpful. Faculty can do this by allowing students to miss a certain number of classes without penalty, to choose when and/or how they participate in class, or to submit a specified number of assignments late before grade reductions are applied. They can allow students to make up a predetermined number of quizzes or tests, or to drop a set number of assignments. Instructors could include a "crisis plan" in the syllabus that tells students what their options are in the event they are not able to attend a regular class meeting. Options could include enabling students to access lecture videos, submit alternative assignments for missed in-class group work, or make-up missed attendance and participation points.

Policies such as these provide flexibility within a set of boundaries. In other words, they balance leniency and structure. Most importantly, though, these policies can be put in place before a crisis emerges. That means faculty may, in fact, be able to plan for a pandemic—or any other large-scale disaster that could arise. By adopting policies that balance leniency and stringency—a technique already shown to benefit student learning (Pollak and Parnell 2018; Zhu et al. 2019)—faculty may find that they and their students can more easily adjust to unexpected upheavals.

Study limitations

This research is not without limitations. It is based on a convenience and a snowball sample, it is limited to US respondents, and it does not account for the perspectives of students. Follow-up studies with larger and more diverse samples are warranted. Likewise, quantitative studies that can better control the influence of demographic factors, school type, subject area, and so forth would further scholarly understandings of this issue. Nonetheless, these data offer an important preliminary look at the pedagogical adjustments faculty must make in the wake of institutional-level disasters. Moreover, because the scope of the COVID-19 crisis extended beyond a single institution or a specific locale, these data provide a unique opportunity to examine faculty responses at a national level to the same crisis. The

patterns that emerged from these data, thus, suggest that the benefits of balancing flexibility and structure are not idiosyncratic to particular faculty members, disciplines, or institutions. Instead, those benefits appear to apply quite broadly, at least with respect to responding to COVID-19 within the US. It seems reasonable to assume that these findings would also apply outside the United States, but additional research is necessary to explore that assumption. Moreover, future research should examine whether these benefits extend to other kinds of wide-scale crises. Assuming they do, these findings can serve as an initial blueprint for crisis-adaptive course design.

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APPENDIX

Interview questions

1. Was your most recent teaching position at a four-year college or university, or at a community college?
2. Only if at a four-year institution: What is the Carnegie classification of your school (such as R1, R2, etc.)? Probe, if they are not sure: Would you describe your school as more research-focused, teaching-focused, or equally balanced between the two?
3. What is your primary academic field or discipline?
4. What was your job position during the most recent college class that you instructed (e.g. graduate student instructor, assistant professor, etc.)?
5. What is your typical teaching load per semester?
6. Please describe your typical approach to dealing with late submissions for assignments in your courses. Probe: Do you have specific policies that you incorporate in your syllabus or assignments, or do you make late penalty decisions on a case-by case basis? Please provide an example of the policy. Please describe for me a situation where you used this policy. If respondent focuses on policies they applied in the aftermath of COVID-19, probe: How did this compare with your approach prior to COVID-19? What was your typical approach in your courses prior to the pandemic?
7. Please describe your approach to make-up or alternative assignments. By this, I mean assignments that are offered as an alternative to what was originally assigned, rather than late submissions. Have you ever offered alternative assignments, and if yes, under what circumstances do you offer them? What benefits does allowing make up assignments have? Are there any drawbacks? If you don't offer alternative assignments, can you tell me a bit about that decision? If respondent focuses on policies they applied in the aftermath of COVID-19, probe: Did you offer any make-up assignments prior to COVID-19? What was your typical approach in your courses prior to the pandemic?
8. Describe your approach to grading in-class attendance. Do you allow any flexibility with attendance? When do you excuse absences for students? Please explain. Probe: Do you have specific policies in your syllabus regarding attendance, or do you tend to make decisions on a case-by-case basis? If respondent focuses on policies they applied in the aftermath of COVID-19, probe: How did you grade attendance within your classes prior to the pandemic?
9. What other strategies, if any, do you use in your classes that offer students some flexibility? Are there other policies or practices that you use, beyond what you have already described, that enable flexibility for students with assignments or attendance?
10. What do you think are some of the common reasons why students need an extension or miss class? What are some of the reasons you often hear from students?
11. Please describe your general teaching philosophy. How do your policies around assignments and attendance fit in with your teaching philosophy? Please give me an example.
12. Please describe some of the learning goals you have for your students. How do your policies around flexibility with assignments and attendance connect to the learning goals you have for your students?

13. How did you develop your approach to class policies around late penalties, make-up assignments, and class attendance policies? Probe: Are there specific experiences or trainings that have influenced your approach? Are there any requirements within your department or institution that inform the policies you use in your classes?
14. How do you feel you compare to other instructors in your department or institution regarding the flexibility that you allow in your courses? In other words, do you feel like you are more or less flexible than your colleagues? Please explain.
15. How, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced your approach to assignments and attendance? What, if any, kinds of changes did you make in your classes in response to the pandemic? Are there any changes that you felt worked particularly well for students during this time, and is there anything you would do differently in retrospect? Probe: If the pandemic had little influence over your approach to assignments and attendance, why do you think that was the case? If respondent has described the impact of COVID-19 in response to previous questions, ask: Are there any other changes you made in response to COVID-19 in terms of policies around assignments and attendance?
16. Are there any changes you plan on making in the future in terms of the flexibility you incorporate into your classes? Please explain and provide an example. Probe: Are you planning on making these changes only while COVID-19 remains an issue, or keeping these policies long-term?
17. What, if any, policies around attendance requirements or other class policies is your college or university requiring for the Fall 2020 semester, while COVID-19 is still an issue? Please provide an example. How do you feel about these required policies?

Finally, I have just a few demographic questions for you. (For the following questions, do not ask if the answer was provided previously in the interview.)

18. For how many years have you been teaching at the collegiate level?
19. What is your highest level of education?
20. What is your gender identity?
21. How do you racially identify?
22. And finally, would you feel comfortable telling me your age or age range?