

Complete Policy Title

Graduate Course Management Policy

Policy Number (if applicable):

Approved by

Senate

Date of Most Recent Approval

June 8, 2022

Date of Original Approval(s)

June 8, 2022

Supersedes/Amends Policy dated

Graduate Course Outlines Policy, June 3, 2009

Responsible Executive

Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

Policy Specific Enquiries

[Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies](#)

General Policy Enquiries

[Policy \(University Secretariat\)](#)

DISCLAIMER:

If there is a discrepancy between this electronic policy and the written copy held by the policy owner, the written copy prevails.

PURPOSE

1. This Policy summarizes instructor responsibilities regarding graduate courses. The University expects instructors to clearly communicate their course expectations, so students are able to plan ahead and manage their time accordingly. Additionally, graduate students should normally be assessed more than once and receive feedback early enough to make decisions about their enrollment in the course.
2. This policy applies to all graduate courses at the University. Academic courses are highly varied in format, delivery, objectives, and structure. No course management policy can anticipate all possible circumstances and configurations.

SECTION A: PROGRAM HANDBOOKS AND THE GRADUATE CALENDAR

3. All departments, schools, programs at the graduate level must have an online Student/Program Handbook that contains the policies, procedures, and items outlined in Procedures Section. These handbooks should be reviewed and approved by the Faculty's graduate curriculum and policy committee.
4. In the event of a conflict between what is written in the program handbook and the Graduate Calendar, the Graduate Calendar prevails.

SECTION B: COURSE OUTLINES

5. A course outline is a document that sets the expectations for graduate students in terms of course objectives, content, format, assignments, and evaluation.
6. This policy outlines the minimum elements to be included in every graduate course outline. A graduate course outline must include the following:
 - a) Administrative details, such as the year and semester of the course, contact information for the instructor, instructor availability for student consultation, and any prerequisite courses;
 - b) Course objectives;
 - c) Required readings and any other required course material;
 - d) Overview of the course content and its format;
 - e) Description of all assignments (including participation), methods of evaluation, the weight given to each course component, due dates for student work, as well as penalties for late submissions;
 - f) Required prerequisite knowledge, if applicable;
 - g) Course absenteeism policy, if applicable;
 - h) The Academic Integrity Policy;
 - i) Any additional relevant statements, such as references to related policies (see section K Related Policies) or statements referring to the possible modifications of the course, or research ethics;

7. The graduate course outline must be made available to the Department/Graduate Program at least one week before the start of the course, and to students either before or at the first course meeting.
8. It is sometimes difficult to predict accurately the content and direction the course will take, so course outlines may indicate that alterations might take place as the course progresses. Instructors who wish to revise the course outline during the term should inform students in writing as early as possible in the course but certainly before implementing the change.
9. Departments/Graduate programs reserve the right to change dates, deadlines, and methods and weight of assessment for courses in the case of unforeseen circumstances, such as the illness of the instructor or a labour disruption. Changes made to the course outline must be made in such a way as to maintain the course integrity while not creating undue disadvantages for students. Any changes must be communicated to the students and graduate program by as many means as possible to reach everyone involved quickly but as a minimum by email.
10. Many graduate students register for 'reading' or 'independent study' courses, often taken by an individual student working with an instructor. Reading or independent study courses are not exempt from the requirement to have a course outline.
11. It is the responsibility of the Department/Graduate Program to keep the course outline up to date; the graduate course outline should be kept on file by the Department/Graduate Program for a minimum of one year after its last use.

SECTION C: DUE DATE RESTRICTIONS

12. Academic assessments, due dates and evaluations are described in course outlines except where other University policies apply, e.g., Student Accessibility Services (SAS) accommodations, deferred exams, etc. Restrictions are placed on academic obligations to enable students to plan their work schedules;
13. Due dates for all term work must be on or before the end of the term indicated in the sessional dates;
14. Academic obligations cannot be due during the December holiday break.

SECTION D: ACADEMIC ASSESSMENTS AND FEEDBACK ON STUDENT PERFORMANCE

15. Each course must have at least two individual assessments per term in the evaluation scheme. Where appropriate these assessments should be of different types. Normally a single assessment should not be worth more than 50% of a student's final grade. For courses that do not lend itself to two individual assessments per term, this must be clearly stipulated in the course outline, and requires approval from Graduate Curriculum and Policy Committees.
16. All tests/exams, including those online, are assumed to be closed book unless stipulated otherwise in the course outline.

17. Student assessment must comply with the provisions of SAS Policies for students with registered accommodations.
18. Establish guidelines regarding Group Work and procedures to ensure that students are afforded sufficient individual assessment. Clearly define fair, appropriate, and timely procedures for students who encounter difficulty with their working group.
19. Course descriptions and overall objectives must be consistent and there should be comparable assignment structures and grading schemes in all sections of the same course.
20. Determine what policies, if any, are appropriate regarding the use of class attendance and in class participation (in person or remote) as a basis for grades. If attendance and participation grades are permitted, a rubric must be established and included in the course outline.

SECTION E: MCMASTER UNIVERSITY GRADING SCALE

Graduate Student Grading Scale (except for MBA and Master of Finance):

Grade	Points	Equivalent Percentages	Pass/Fail
A+	12	90-100	P+
A	11	85-89	P
A-	10	80-84	
B+	9	77-79	
B	8	73-76	
B-	7	70-72	
F	0	69 and under	F

MBA and Master of Finance Grading Scale:

Grade	Points	Equivalent Percentages	Pass/Fail
A+	12	90-100	P+
A	11	85-89	P
A-	10	80-84	
B+	9	75-79	
B	8	70-74	
B-	7	60-69	
F	0	59 and under	F

SECTION F: RETURNING MARKED WORK AND POSTING OF GRADES

21. Course outlines must inform students of the method to be used for advising them of their grades.
22. Where graded work is returned to students, this must be done in a confidential manner (done in compliance with FIPPA), as determined by the department/ school/ program.
23. Timely (normally 15 days) and constructive feedback in response to student work must be provided.
24. As there may be other considerations in the releasing of final grades, only the School of Graduate Studies may release official course grades.

SECTION G: RETENTION OF EXAMINATION PAPERS AND OTHER GRADED MATERIAL

25. Department Chairs (or Director/Assistant Dean of Program) are responsible for ensuring that all graded materials not meant to be returned to students, and the instructor's record of how the final grades in a course were determined, are:
 - a) retained for at least one year after last use; and
 - b) remain accessible to the Department Chair/Program Director for that period.

This applies to all instructors. Sessional lecturers and those retiring or otherwise leaving the service of the University must notify their immediate supervisor of the on-campus storage location of the material.

SECTION H AUTHENTICITY/PLAGIARISM DETECTION

26. McMaster University approves the use of software to check the authenticity of academic work for the following reasons:
 - a) Prevention – if students know their academic work is being checked for plagiarism, they will use proper citation methods;
 - b) Protection of honest students and their work; and
 - c) Detection – with the type of technology in common use today, it is necessary to use a detection tool which checks academic work against the internet, scholarly publications and previously submitted assignments to McMaster and other institutions.
27. If plagiarism checking software is used, the instructor should indicate this in the course outline.

SECTION I: CONFLICT OF INTEREST GUIDELINES

28. Faculty members and University officers normally shall not take part in any proceedings at any level which affect the academic standing of an immediate family member (spouse, common-law partner, parent, in-law, sibling, child or step-child). Such proceedings include admission, scholarships, financial assistance and reviewing.

29. There shall be no restriction against a student registering in a course taught by an immediate family member. In all such cases, however, the instructor must inform their Department Chair who shall ensure that arrangements are made for an appropriate assessment of the student's performance involving a qualified person or persons other than the instructor.

SECTION J: PROTECTION OF PRIVACY

30. The Privacy Governance and Accountability Framework applies to all McMaster University faculty, staff and students when handling personal information or personal health information on behalf of the institution. The policy sets out the accountabilities for ensuring that all individuals involved in the planning, management and day-to-day operations of McMaster University are in compliance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA), the *McMaster University Statement on the Collection of Personal Information and the Protection of Privacy*, and the privacy policies, procedures and practices set out by the University.
31. Instructors should take care to protect student names, student numbers, grades and all other personal information at all times. For example, the submission and return of assignments and the posting of grades must be done in a manner that ensures confidentiality.

SECTION K: RELATED POLICIES

- [Graduate Examinations Policy \(mcmaster.ca\)](#)
- [Academic Integrity Policy \(mcmaster.ca\)](#)
- [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities Policy \(mcmaster.ca\)](#)
- [Research-Plagiarism-Checking-Policy.pdf \(mcmaster.ca\)](#)
- [Incomplete Grades \(Graduate Calendar\)](#)
- [Policy on Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual Observances](#)