Applying principles of <u>universal design</u> to develop inclusive assessments

An instructor's way of assessing student performance can create a sense of belonging and inclusion and provide opportunities for students to showcase some of their individual strengths or unique knowledges around the topic. Given the wide range of skills, knowledge, competencies that professions require and academic course and programs seek to cultivate, it is important that different types of assessments are used and that creative assessment policies are developed to support diverse students. This document provides some first steps to help accurately reflect student learning, support student growth in a course, promote equity and minimize instructor bias.

Allow for "bad days" for all students

- **Provide multiple opportunities for students** to receive feedback and demonstrate mastery of subject matter.

  1. Consider other <u>classroom</u> and <u>assessment practices</u> such as <u>concept maps</u> and frequent low-stakes assessments (eg. weekly reflections or write ups) that provide multiple opportunities for learners to communicate knowledge and understanding of topics.

- **Avoid single, high-stakes exams**

  1. Allowing students to drop one of the quizzes provides students with the opportunity to <u>practice retrieval</u> of information (by doing the quizzes) while reducing pressure.
  2. **Provide opportunities for students to re-write responses** to questions for some additional points. This allows students to revisit something they got incorrect and to revise it again with a remedial score. This exercise can not only help create another opportunity for retrieval but can also help to model a <u>growth mind-set</u>. To further advance learning, instructors could provide this opportunity to only students who show up for group learning sessions in which students are given an opportunity to discuss, debate and <u>teach each other</u> the answers to questions that created challenges.
  3. **Create the option to replace the score for the mid-term exam with the section of the final exam** related to the mid-term exam section (if they scored higher in the section for the final exam).

4. **Provide opportunities for all students to entirely re-write major mid-terms and exams**. This requires faculty to create multiple versions of the exam, however if faculty are already creating additional exams (to minimize cheating), opening up re-write to other students may be a more inclusive option that would also help to model a growth mind-set.

Provide some flexibility for late assignments and communicate these policies to all students

o Consider giving all students **24 bonus hours** that they can divide up and allocate to whatever assignment they would like. This fosters greater autonomy for students and also ensures that *all students* can benefit from this option (rather than students who know to ask for extensions).

o **Provide a "window" rather than a firm due date**. If an instructor has flexibility in terms of when to do grading, they can make the assignment due on Friday, but also give up to the end of the weekend (midnight on Sunday) to submit without a late penalty.

o Instead of automatically punishing students for late assignments, provide a policy whereby students need to meet with instructors to let them know that they will not submit an assignment on time at least 3 days prior to a deadline. At this meeting, students can show the instructor what they had already done and why they needed the extra time. This lateness policy helps to build relationships, provide more opportunities for feedback and helps students develop better time management strategies.

o **Help students understand the importance of a late assignment policy.** At the beginning of class discuss why you have late policies and why it in a student's best interest to submit assignments on time. The opportunity to receive feedback, manage instructor workload, and provide opportunities to practice recall of information at appropriate times are all important reasons to stick to the course lateness policy. Explaining teaching practices and course policies in general may enhance a sense of autonomy and positive attitudes about the course and instructor.

Create assessments to help showcase the strengths of diverse students

- Provide some **choice in assessment format** Giving students some autonomy to make these kinds of decisions can be an effective means of supporting student achievement. For example, students can show mastery of topics through a film project, an art project, a pod-cast, an info-graphic, presentation or other summative assessment as an alternative to a formal research paper or can choose between doing multiple smaller assignments or one larger assignment.

- Provide options around the **grade weighting** for assignments can help students prioritize efforts and communicate mastery of the topic using different media.

- Provide choice **on the topic for an assessment**. By allowing students agency in selecting an essay topic or research project students may be able to showcase their own different expertise, identities and interests (eg. personal experience in a fishing or farming family, or coming from a tropical country, focusing on an LGBTQ+ scientist), and build off of existing strengths that they may have. Students may want to engage in authentic learning opportunities to benefit their own communities. Such practices may help to enhance a sense of belonging within STEM for diverse groups.

- **Clearly indicate on the syllabus (and on the first day of class) how you would like students to approach you to discuss registered CFA's** (formal accommodations) and how it relates to course assessments and what policies you have for sickness/mental health, family emergencies and assessments.