

## Problem Solving for Teachers

### SCENARIO 1

It's the day after the midterm examination. The lecturer in charge has a policy of not permitting make-up exams.

A male student who missed the exam comes in to your office hour to ask for a make-up. He says he had to take his roommate to the hospital emergency room yesterday because he was acutely ill with food poisoning.

A female student later comes to you with the same request. She says her child was sick on exam day, so she had to stay home with the child.

Now it's a week after the midterm exam. Another student comes to your office hour to ask for a make-up. She is from Guam, where her grandfather died the day before the exam; she was out to be with her family. Your professor is out of the country this week and is unavailable for consultation. The student wants to take the exam right away so she does not fall behind in the class.

### SCENARIO 2

One particular student has turned every assignment in late. It is the day before a 15-page essay is due and she comes to your office hours in a very agitated state. She tells you that she has not started the paper and asks for an extension. The rules for late papers have been clearly stated in the syllabus for the course. It states that papers will be marked down half of a letter grade for each additional day that they are late. The extension that this student would like to receive would automatically make her paper have a failing grade according to the rules of the syllabus.

She has an excuse for not being able to turn in the assignment. A good friend of hers is very sick and she has been taking care of him. However, for all of her previous difficulties in meeting deadlines there have also been plausible excuses given. The student obviously has a problem with procrastination issues but there might also be some underlying emotional or learning disability issues.

What resources on campus could be marshaled to help this student and who is the appropriate person to make suggestions or referrals to the student?

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### SCENARIO 3

It is Friday evening and on your desk you have a stack of mid-semester papers waiting to be graded. You've had them for more than a week, and were supposed to get them back to the professor so they could be returned to students in next Monday's class. You were hoping to have them graded already, as you're giving a poster presentation at a conference next week and need the weekend to prepare. You're not even sure if you could get all the papers graded even if that's all you did all weekend.

Now you're procrastinating doing either task by taking stock of the semester so far: you're at least a week behind in the readings for each of your own classes; the only readings you're on top of are the ones for the course you're teaching; even still, you're not sleeping well on nights before discussion section, but rather stay up worrying about how things will go in class and that your students aren't getting anything out of section; you don't see any way that you'll be able to prepare the term paper whose deadline is creeping nearer; and for lack of time and energy you haven't been out socially for nearly a month.

### SCENARIO 4

Before the midterm, the professor asked you and each of the other 5 GSIs to email a suggestion for an appropriate question for the exam. You had reservations that this was not the best way to design an exam, and emailed them to the professor. Not having received a response, you dutifully sent in a suggestion.

On the day of the exam, you see that the professor has not used your suggestion. One of the problems is about an obscure topic that's relevant but peripheral to the course material. When you're grading, you learn that this was the question suggested by one of your fellow GSI's, and that he had thought it such an interesting topic that he spent 30 minutes on it in his discussion section in the week before the exam. His students seem to have done very well on the problem compared to yours. The professor doesn't see any problem.

Now it's week after the exam, and one of your students, who failed the exam, comes to your office hour to complain. "My friend's GSI is Rob, and he said Rob covered that obscure topic in depth in his discussion section. So that question was a freebie for his students, and it's not fair!"

## CAMPUS RESOURCE SUMMARY

When issues present themselves over the course of the semester, it's important to remember that help is available to you and to your students. We all need sometimes to be reminded that it's ok to ask for help. Below are a few of the resources available to you and your students. (Excerpted from the resource list available in the On-Line Professional Standards and Ethics Course at <http://gsi.berkeley.edu/ethics/>)

### **GSI Teaching and Resource Center**

301 Sproul Hall - (510) 642-4456 - [gsi@berkeley.edu](mailto:gsi@berkeley.edu) - <http://gsi.berkeley.edu>

The GSI Teaching and Resource Center provides pedagogical support and guidance for Graduate Student Instructors. Programs include fall and spring teaching conferences, noon-hour workshops, course improvement grants, teaching awards, confidential consultations, courses on teaching and learning in higher education, and the Language Proficiency Program for GSIs who do not speak English as a native language. The Center publishes annually both a print and online version of its *Teaching Guide for GSIs*. Located in 301 Sproul Hall, the Center houses a library of books, articles, videos, and other reference materials on teaching.

### **University Health Services (UHS) – Tang Center**

Counseling and Psychological Services - 2222 Bancroft Way - 642-9494 - <http://uhs.berkeley.edu>

The UHS Counseling and Psychological Services staff provides confidential assistance to students managing problems that can emerge from illness such as financial, academic, legal, family concerns, and more. In the realm of sexual harassment, UHS coordinates education programs, crisis counseling, advocacy, and medical care for women and men who have been harassed or assaulted

(Prevention, 642-7202; Victim Assistance and Counseling, 642-6074; Counseling Services, 642-9494; Medical, 642-318).

### **Student Learning Center**

César Chávez Student Center - 642-9494 - <http://slc.berkeley.edu>

As the primary academic support service for students at the University of California at Berkeley, the Student Learning Center (SLC) assists students in transitioning to Cal; navigating the academic terrain; creating networks of resources; and achieving academic, personal and professional goals. Through various services including tutoring, study groups, workshops and courses, SLC supports students in Biological and Physical Sciences, Business Administration, Computer Science, Economics, Mathematics, Social Sciences, Statistics, Study Strategies and Writing

### **Disabled Students' Program (DSP)**

260 César Chávez Student Center - 642-0518 - <http://dsp.berkeley.edu>

The Disabled Student's Program serves students with disabilities of all kinds, including mobility, visual, or hearing impairments; speech impairments; chronic illnesses such as AIDS, diabetes, and lupus; seizure disorders; head injuries; painful conditions such as back injuries and carpal tunnel syndrome; psychological disabilities such as bipolar disorder and severe anxiety or depression; attention deficit disorder; and learning disabilities. Services are individually designed and based on the specific needs of each student as identified by DSP's Specialists. The Program's official Web site includes information on DSP staff, UC's disabilities policy, application procedures, campus access guides for most university buildings, and portals for students and faculty respectively. *[Consult DSP if you have questions about how to implement academic accommodations.]*

### **Ombudsperson for Students (Total confidentiality)**

642-5754

The Ombudsperson for Students provides a confidential service for students involved in a University related problem (either academic or administrative), acting as a neutral complaint resolver and not as an advocate for any of the parties involved in a dispute. The Ombudsman can provide information on policies and procedures affecting students, facilitate students' contact with services able to assist in resolving the problem, and assist students in complaints concerning improper application of University policies or procedures. All matters referred to this office are held in strict confidence. The only exceptions, at the sole discretion of the Ombudsman, are cases where there appears to be imminent threat of serious harm.