

Vancouver Island University

Teaching and Learning Principles and Responsibilities

STATEMENT:

Preamble

The purpose of this document is to provide a set of basic *Teaching and Learning Principles and Responsibilities* to guide faculty in exercising their professional responsibilities.

Teaching and Learning Principles and Responsibilities are conceptualized here as general guidelines, ideals, or expectations to be taken into account, along with other relevant conditions and circumstances, in the design and analysis of University teaching in all disciplines and courses offered at Vancouver Island University (VIU).

The intent of this document is not to provide a list of binding rules, or a systematic code of conduct, that will apply automatically in all situations and govern all eventualities. Departments are expected to discuss these *Teaching and Learning Principles and Responsibilities* and to develop interpretations and examples relevant to their specific discipline or program.

Similarly, the intent is not to undermine the principle of academic freedom, but rather to describe ways in which academic freedom can be exercised in a responsible manner.

Principle 1:

Student Development

The overriding responsibility of faculty is to contribute to the cognitive, affective, and physical development of the student, at least in the context of the faculty's own area of expertise, and to avoid actions such as exploitation and discrimination that detract from student development.

This principle means that the faculty's most basic responsibility is to design teaching and learning opportunities that encourage autonomy and independent thinking, to manage the learning environment in order that everyone is treated with respect and dignity, and to avoid actions that detract from student development. Faculty are expected to adhere to VIU's *Human Rights, Personal Harassment, and Diversity and Educational Policies*.

Principle 2:

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

VIU values human diversity in all its dimensions and promotes an equitable university that is inclusive and representative of our diverse communities.

This principle recognizes that people sometimes experience forms of social and economic marginalization and exclusion based on social identities and, therefore, that faculty are

committed to maintaining learning and working environments that are equitable, diverse, and inclusive.

Principle 3:

Content Competence

Faculty maintain a high level of subject-matter knowledge and ensure that course content is current, accurate, and representative.

As teaching is a main priority in VIU's *Academic Plan*, this principle means that faculty are responsible for maintaining (or acquiring) subject matter competence not only in areas of personal interest but in all areas relevant to course goals or objectives.

Principle 4:

Pedagogical Competence

Pedagogically competent faculty communicate the objectives of the course to students, are aware of alternative teaching and learning strategies, and select teaching and learning methods that, according to research evidence (including personal or self-reflective research), are effective in helping students achieve the course objectives. This principle also embraces the notion that educational work can be difficult and challenging.

This principle means that, in addition to knowing the subject matter, faculty have adequate pedagogical knowledge and skills to: communicate objectives clearly, select effective teaching and learning strategies, provide opportunity for practice and feedback, and deal with student diversity. In particular, faculty should be mindful of the increasing numbers of Aboriginal and International students on our campuses, and the different 'ways of knowing' by which they enrich university life. In addition, while education can and should be enjoyable, it is important to recognize that studying in trades or academic disciplines is demanding, and the challenges such work presents should be communicated clearly to students.

Principle 5:

Dealing With Sensitive Topics

Topics that students are likely to find sensitive or discomfiting are dealt with in an open, honest, and respectful way.

This principle means that faculty acknowledge from the outset that a particular topic is sensitive, explain why it is included in the course syllabus, and work toward fostering an understanding of the material, respecting diverse viewpoints in the process.

Principle 6:

Dual Relationships With Students

To avoid conflict of interest, faculty do not enter into dual-role relationships with students that are likely to detract from student development or lead to actual or perceived favouritism on the part of the faculty.

While there are definite pedagogical benefits to establishing good rapport with students, it is the responsibility of faculty to keep relationships with students focused on pedagogical goals and academic requirements. However, certain forms of dual relationships are inherently improper. Examples include any form of sexual or intimate relationship with a current student; lending or borrowing money from students; giving or accepting from students gifts of significant value. It is the responsibility of the faculty to avoid entering into dual relationships of this nature. (See VIU's *Policy on Conflicts of Interest Related to Employees and Students*, and *Policies on Human Rights and Personal Harassment* (links provided at end of document).

Principle 7:

Confidentiality

Student grades, other academic records, and private communications are treated as confidential materials, and should be released only if the student has consented, in writing, to disclosure and if the disclosure is necessary for the performance of the faculty's duties.

This principle means that faculty are responsible for treating student grades, academic records and private communications as strictly confidential. Rules or policies regarding confidentiality are clearly outlined in the Academic Calendar and are available from the Registrar's office, and should be disclosed in full to students. (There may be exceptions to this principle, for example, if one has reasonable grounds to believe there is a risk of significant harm to the health or safety of the student or others, or if one suspects criminal activity.)

Principle 8:

Respect For Colleagues

Faculty respect the dignity of colleagues and work cooperatively with colleagues in the interest of fostering student development.

This principle means that in interactions among colleagues with respect to teaching, the overriding concern is the affective, physical, and cognitive development of students. Disagreements between colleagues are settled privately, if possible, with no harm to student development.

Principle 9:Valid Assessment of Students

Given the importance of assessment and evaluation of student performance in university teaching and in students' lives and careers, faculty are responsible for taking adequate steps to ensure that assessment and evaluation of students is valid, open, fair, and congruent with course objectives.

This principle means that faculty are aware of research (including personal or self-reflective research) on the advantages and disadvantages of alternative methods of assessment, and assessment procedures and grading standards are communicated clearly to students at the beginning of the course.

Principle 10:Respect for Institution

In the interests of student development, faculty are aware and respectful of the educational goals, policies, and standards of Vancouver Island University.

This principle means that faculty share a collective responsibility to uphold the mission and Academic Plan of the University as a whole, and to abide by University policies and regulations pertaining to the education of students. This principle is not intended to abridge the institution's commitment to academic freedom.

Links:

Equity and Human Rights – <http://www.viu.ca/humanrights/index.asp/>

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act – <http://www.viu.ca/foipop/>

Prevention of Violence, Threats, and Intimidation (under review) – <http://www.viu.ca/policies/documents/Policy41.10AUG2011.pdf>