

## Communication Rules

### Office Hours c.f. 'By Appointment'

Some faculty prefer to see the students during designated office hours. Some prefer to see students by appointment. Normally, faculty specify their preferences and necessary contact information in the course syllabus.

**Office hours:** Faculty 'office hours' are hours during which faculty conduct their advising, all course-related contact with students, and all of their other duties and responsibilities towards the students. Students are advised to make their best effort to see the professor during their designated 'office hours'. Students are not entitled to a meeting with faculty outside the faculty's specified office hours. If your schedule does not permit you to see the professor during their designated office hours, you may request for a meeting by appointment.

**'By appointment':** students must make a prior appointment to see the professor through means specified in the syllabus. Students are not entitled to a meeting with professors without an appointment.

Students are advised to respect faculty time and meet with them only during the faculty's 'office hours' or 'by appointment'. Follow the information about the ways in which faculty prefer to be contacted and met. Such information is normally available in the course syllabus. If in doubt, send faculty an email. Students are reminded that the presence of faculty at their desk does not imply their availability and should expect to be refused any contact without appointment or outside 'office hours'.

### Contact about Grades and Coursework

Majority of the student-faculty communication is about grades and coursework. In this communication, faculty are happy to provide feedback that will help improve student performance in their next assessment and provide information about coursework that is not included in the syllabus.

It is not acceptable to contact faculty solely for the purpose of requesting a 'grade change'.

The quality of your communication with faculty often depends on how you phrase your question and/or concerns. For example, if you wish to discuss your grade, it is much better to phrase your request in a manner that implies your wish to improve your skills and future performance. It signals

to the professor that you are asking for additional feedback and they will be happy to help you improve.

Here are some examples of attempts to negotiate, bargain, intimidate, plead or just plainly rude and unprofessional ways of talking to faculty about grades: ‘you were tough’, ‘the course was overwhelming’, ‘you expected too much from us’, ‘I got higher grades from other professors, who are, by the way, very nice people’, ‘my future is in your hands’, ‘nobody needs this class anyway or cares what grade you give, so why not just add something to my grade’, ‘please, just please please please’, ‘I will not tell anyone...’, ‘all you cared about was what we know about [title of the course or subject], you never cared about [course or subject outside the scope of the given course/subject]’, ‘you never gave me the chance to show you my knowledge in ways I know best’, ‘You never noticed this, I came prepared every day’, ‘you are scary’, ‘You gave me a zero for participation, which is unfair, because I did participate [followed by an unverifiable example of insignificant participation in class]’, ‘I am unhappy with my grade’, ‘YOU GAVE me a bad grade’, ‘You gave a difficult assignment’, ‘You gave me this grade and now I cannot sleep’, ‘Your grade is cruel’, ‘You are cruel’, ‘You are unfair’, ‘I worked so hard for this paper, this grade is unfair’, ‘Your grade made me cry’, ‘Why did you give me such a bad grade?!’, ‘My grade is low, please recheck my grade’, ‘Other professors give better grades’, ‘I am better than other students, so change my grade’, ‘You gave a higher grade to my classmate who is worse than me’, ‘No one has ever required such things from us’, ‘I have never heard of such thing as citation and references’, ‘other professors do not care about this’, ‘I get higher grades in other departments’, ‘This is not Harvard, why do you require this?’, ‘Please change my grade and I promise I will do better next time’

**If you are indeed surprised by your grade**, you will be able to have a more beneficial conversation with the professor if you indicate that you did not expect to receive such a grade and that you wish to talk further with the professor about areas that they think you need to improve. Students are advised to keep in mind that their personal opinion about their own work may be exaggerated. Therefore, they will benefit more from applying the criteria of the assessment to their own essay with as much objectivity and critical self-awareness as possible.

Unless there are reasonable grounds for mitigation, students that ask for preferential treatment shall be rejected. Persistent requests from the same student for “extra” points may be forwarded to the Chair of the ICP Department and dealt with via appropriate disciplinary procedures at AUCA. Students are expected to request for the reasons they received any grade (for additional feedback) and may request a revision of the calculations if they have substantial reasons to believe an error may have occurred (for example, your final grade does not make much sense in light of your previous grades in the course). Requests for recalculation because of an unfounded hope that a low grade was mistaken will be ignored.

**Students shall not negotiate, bargain, plead and/or intimidate faculty for grades.**

Any conversation related to your grade or feedback is not an opportunity for you to convince your professor that you deserve a different grade. It is an opportunity for you to get a better insight on how you can improve your skills, knowledge, and understanding, so you are better prepared for your next assignments and to achieve better grades in the future.

If you are planning on referring to your lack of skills and knowledge as reasons to change your grade, ask yourself the following question: would you write these reasons in your university admissions essay and expect to be admitted? If your answer is 'no', then definitely avoid talking about them as reasons your professor should reconsider your grade. Instead, talk to your professor about ways you can improve those skills.

Students are reminded that university-level education is about setting challenging standards and showing students how to reach them. We all lose if our academic standards and rigor do not challenge and push students to develop. If the standards are lowered for one, they must be lowered for all. Therefore, students are encouraged to reflect on the nature of their contact with faculty and its long-term consequences. The main point of their contact should not be about the lowering of the standards. The main point should be about getting advice on how to reach those standards.

If you threaten AUCA faculty, the faculty will report the incident to relevant bodies at AUCA, which may result in your expulsion. Threatening to harm faculty's career, livelihood, or reputation, threatening to harm one's own health, livelihood, wellness, making any kinds of intimidating remarks if faculty do not comply with your demands shall be reported immediately to the relevant AUCA institutions. There are no circumstances that justify such forms of intimidation and threats. If you wish to be persuasive and heard, use reason, evidence, and the logic of a good argument. When they fail, suggest that your dispute is attended by a third independent party.

Furthermore, it is not appropriate to threaten to disclose any faults of the faculty unless they comply with your demands. If there is a fault, act in good faith and inform the ICP Manager or Chair about it in due time instead of using it in your own interests as leverage against faculty. Please note that you are subject to disciplinary procedures if you try to leverage information in an attempt to make faculty or staff comply with your demands. You must at all times act in good faith.

In all circumstances, avoid escalation by maintaining formal and professional attitude and demeanor.

In short, students must keep in mind that their correspondence and statements in written and spoken form will be taken seriously by AUCA faculty and staff, which means that students may be required to justify their statements.

### **Interpreting Feedback**

Your professor will provide feedback on your assessment in written form and/or communicate it to you during your meeting. Feedbacks normally highlight the main strengths and weaknesses of your work and the main points for improvement. They are not exhaustive. Sometimes, due to time constraints, your professor may only highlight the points that you need to improve. It is your responsibility to make the best use out of feedback provided to you.

Feedback is never given to justify a grade, so it is not an appropriate source for you to make accurate judgements about your or others' grades. The primary purpose of feedback is to help students improve their skills.

When you receive your grade and feedback, make sure you carefully read the feedback and identify the points that the feedback is suggesting you improve. Go back to your submitted work and review the areas your feedback is highlighting and think about how you would do them differently.

Given that you will be receiving multiple feedbacks from different professors, try your best to identify patterns in them. What are the common points mentioned in all the feedback? Which points are not common? Common points require your attention most urgently as they would normally indicate a necessity in the improvement of key skills.

Do not take feedback personally. Even though there may be pronouns present in your feedback, the object of feedback is always the work submitted and the skills involved, not the person.

### **Reporting Problems, Issues, and Concerns Related to Courses and Faculty**

Problems and concerns related to courses and faculty may be communicated to the Head of the ICP Department. Depending on the sensitivity of the issue, however, students are advised to first exhaust the possibility to address the problem with respective faculty directly.

**When reporting any issues, problems, or concerns, students must make their best effort in identifying the problem as clearly as possible and act in good faith.**

Students are also obligated to provide all the evidence that supports their claims. The Department may ignore any reports without evidence or anonymous reports.

Students should take the Teaching Evaluations distributed at the end of each term for every course as an opportunity to make their suggestions for improvement and to inform the department about their concerns.

### **Requesting Recommendation Letters**

Students are welcome to request for recommendation or reference letters from the ICP faculty. However, students must understand that they are not entitled to a recommendation letter and that professors have the right to refuse to write students any recommendations or references.

Students must ensure to give faculty as much advance notice as possible. It is courteous to request recommendations at least two weeks before your deadline.

If you are required only to submit the contact information of your referee, you must only do so with the permission and consent of your referee.

It is unethical to ask faculty to write you a ‘good’ recommendation or to fabricate or misrepresent any information.

If the faculty agrees to write you a recommendation letter, make sure that you send them your CV and highlight any of your achievements that you would like them to consider. Also, remind faculty about any of their classes that you have attended and the final grade you received for those classes.

In short, do your best to provide all the key information that they will need to consider when writing your recommendation letter.

Request for recommendations from faculty that know you well.