

COMMON WORST CASE SCENARIOS

The most crucial ingredient to effective teaching is proper planning. Seasoned instructors often feel that their job is essentially complete when they have organized the materials to be covered during the course. Many of the following scenarios will be familiar to those of you who have taught before. For the rest, you will certainly encounter some variation of many of these during your time at the University of North Texas. Think about how you would handle each situation and ask yourself the following questions:

- (a) How should this be handled?
- (b) What is the underlying “root issue?”
- (c) Do I need a formal policy that addresses this issue?
- (d) Is my formulated policy something should be including in the course syllabus?
- (e) How can I prevent this scenario from arising, if needed?

These scenarios are intended to serve as a springboard for discussion. As you read through the situations, you will find that some have straightforward solutions, while others have many possible solutions/strategies that will work well. For several, there may be no truly optimal solution.

- (1) The class median for the quiz you made up is 25 % .
- (2) You are a recitation instructor and are not responsible for lecturing. The class median on the lecturer’s exam is 25 % .
- (3) A student consistently reads the paper during the first 10 minutes of each class period.
- (4) A student tells you that his roommate is taking the same class from someone else, and in the other class grades/tests/homework/ect. are being done differently.
- (5) A student tells you that her roommate is taking the same class from someone else, and the other instructor does not require the students to know topic yakity-blah.
- (6) A student fails your class in the Fall Semester. Nine months later, you are contacted by the student’s parents who ask you to change the grade so that the student will not lose an academic scholarship. Suppose you are contacted by an academic advisor or athletic advisor with a similar request. What do you do?
- (7) A student hasn’t come to class for several weeks and asks if he can make up all the homework and quizzes he has missed.
- (8) A student shows up for only a few class meetings. The student shows for the first midterm, and scores 53 %. You don’t see him again until the second midterm, on which he scores a 42 %. His next guest appearance is for the third midterm—the outcome, a predictable 27 %. The student comes to your office during the last week of classes to pick up his exams and is shocked and dismayed at his performance; “But I really know this stuff”. The student wants to know what he can do to pass the class.
- (9) A student misses the second of three midterms and asks if he can just let the third midterm count “double” to compensate for his missed midterm. Does your answer depend on whether you have returned the graded second midterm to the other students?
- (10) A student has some type of excuse/reason why she will not be able to
 - (i) take a midterm on time.
 - (ii) take a quiz on time.
 - (iii) Hand in homework on time.

- (11) A student tells you that he has a job and:
 - (i) can't come to recitation most "Tuesdays" all semester long.
 - (ii) would rather attend your other recitation period, even though he isn't registered for that one.
 - (iii) would like to attend someone else's recitation at a different time of day which better "fits" his schedule.
- (12) A student asks if she can attend your recitation/class instead of the one in which she is registered.
- (13) A student tells you that your grading is too harsh. What if several students tell you that your grading is too harsh? What is (if any) the minimal percentage of students required to elicit change in your procedure/policy?
- (14) A student tells you that there is too much homework. What if several students concur? What is (if any) the minimal percentage of students required to elicit change in your procedure/policy?
- (15) A student asks to go to the restroom during a quiz. What about during an exam? The final? Does your answer depend on the context? Does it depend on the grade that the student is currently earning? What if you don't like this particular student?
- (16) A student tells you that he can do a better job if he wears headphones during the exam.
- (17) Your stated policy is that calculators are acceptable for all exams. At the final, you learn a student has been using a calculator that is capable of solving a number of problems once the student has entered the equation. What if the final is multiple choice?
- (18) You are proctoring an exam and there is a student that you do not recognize. He has forgotten his ID card.
- (19) You are the lecturer of a class of 120 students. During the final exam one of your TAs tells you that there is a student who he does not recognize. Your TA is certain that this is not the person she claims to be and she doesn't have her ID.
- (20) A student complains that you gave him no credit when his answer was right. When you look at his paper, you notice that none of his work is correct, but the numerical answer is correct.
- (21) A student complains that you gave her no credit when her answer was right. When you look at her paper, you notice that you made a mistake.
- (22) A student complains that you gave him no credit when his answer was right. When you look at his paper, you notice that his answer looks perfect. In fact, it looks exactly like the solution that you showed the class after handing the exam back.
- (23) You hand back the midterms on Tuesday. On Thursday, a student asks you to look at a problem for which she received no credit. When you look at her paper, you notice that her answer looks perfect.
- (24) After handing back the midterms, a student becomes angry about his grade and will not let the issue die.
- (25) In your office, you have a student who begins to cry.
- (26) In your office, you have a student who becomes angry.
- (27) You have clearly stated that your exam policy is that no calculators are allowed. 25 minutes into the first midterm, you notice that a student is using a calculator.
- (28) You allow calculators on all exams. One of your students has forgotten his, and asks if he can share one with a student sitting nearby.

- (29) You are handing out midterms and find that a student is covering part of his desk with his hand. You notice that there are formulas written on the desk.
- (30) Your midterms are closed book/notes, and during the midterm you find that a student is using a notecard. Suppose you find several students are using notecards?
- (31) You call for the exams and there is a student who continually ignores your requests that he turn in his exam.
- (32) You are giving an exam, which began at 9:00 am. At 9:54, there are still 10 or so students working on the exam. At this point, the door opens and students from the next class begin to flow into the classroom.
- (33) You tell the students to stop writing at the end of a quiz and one refuses to do so, making you wait for 30 seconds? How much time will you wait?
- (34) You have a student who comes to every office hour. Then he starts dropping by informally at other times to see if you can answer a quick question. After a while, he starts coming by daily at all hours, and while he waits for you he asks questions of your office mates. Suppose, in addition, that the student has stopped attempting any of the problems prior to his visit? How might that additional assumption effect your response?
- (35) You are heading off to teach your 12:30 pm class and as you walk into the room, one of your students is eating his lunch in the room. It is obvious that he cannot (and has no intention to) finish it before class begins.
- (36) You are teaching a night class. The class begins at 7:00 pm. When you get to your class, you find that the door is locked.
- (37) You are teaching a class in the Language Building. In an adjoining room, there is a spanish class in which Spanish language music is blasting. The music is sufficiently loud that only those students in the first row can hear what you are saying when you speak in your normal tone.
- (38) As you begin class, two students who you know are dating are involved in a serious discussion. They seem oblivious to their surroundings. What if, in addition, they are being discrete; say they are sitting in the left rear section of the class, with no students within several seats of them?
- (39) You have a student reading a book in his lap during your lecture.
- (40) You have a student who only comes to class to turn in homework or take quizzes. The student leaves immediately after finishing the quiz or turning in the homework. Suppose you have several students who do so?
- (41) One student begins to put his books away and put his coat on several minutes before class ends. Suppose several students do so? Does it make a difference if it is done discretely?
- (42) You notice that a student is consistently late by 10 to 20 minutes. This happens every day except for the midterm; the person is right on time for the midterm. What if several students do so?
- (43) You have an attendance policy that requires students to attend every class. As the semester wears on, several students sign in and leave shortly thereafter. Suppose, you take role at the end of class and several students come late just to sign in.
- (44) You have the students sign in at the beginning of each class. One day you notice that there are 28 students but 29 signatures. You do not yet know everyone's name.
- (45) You are giving a midterm and take a headcount. There are 31 students. At the end of the class there is a rush to turn in midterms. You count them in your office and find that there are only 30. What if you do not yet know everyone's name? What if it is only a quiz?

- (46) During recitation, you get stuck on a problem. Time is running out and it is clear that you are not going to get it straightened out before class is over.
- (47) Same as above, except it is the day before the midterm and such a problem is likely to be on the exam.
- (48) You are reviewing for a midterm (you've already written it) and a student asks you to do problem number 44 from section 6.7...which coincidentally is a problem that you have put, verbatim, on the exam.
- (49) You are proctoring the midterm written by your lecturer. As you are making up the solution sheet, you find that a multiple choice problem has no correct choices.
- (50) Same as above, except it is your exam.
- (51) You are grading a multiple choice problem and 2/3rds of the way through you realize that there are two correct answers. What if there are zero correct answers?
- (52) After a midterm, you discover that you can't find a certain student's midterm. You are certain that the person was there for the midterm.
- (53) You are sorting out your grades before the final, and notice that a student doesn't have a grade for the second of four midterms. When asked the student responds that he definitely took the test but can't remember his score and is unable to produce the midterm.
- (54) A student comes to you after you have returned the latest exam. You have made an honest grading error and so you take the student's exam back to your office and record the new grade. As you look through the exam you find that you mistakenly gave full credit for a problem that is incorrect. You are fairly certain that you did not do the same on any other exam.
- (55) After returning the exams, you find that you incorrectly graded a specific problem by accepting a solution that should not have been acceptable. The mistake was not universal, but your grading was consistent.
- (56) You have misplaced your grades for an entire course the week before the final.
- (57) Your computer dies and you lose all your records. You will not see the students again until the final exam.
- (58) A student comes to you during pre finals week to tell you that he has a job offer from company and that this is the only class he needs to graduate. He is currently failing the class and, barring a score of 193 or higher out of 200, he will certainly end up with an average of strictly below 58 %. He asks if there is anyway that you can give him a C.
- (59) Same as above, with the following addition: the student has shown substantial effort over the course of the semester, participating actively in class and coming to office hours with well prepared questions.
- (60) Final exams are over, and you have turned your grades in on time. A week later, you receive a call from the father of a student who wants to know why his son received a D in the class. The father is condescending and threatens to call the chair if you don't change the grade to a C. Suppose instead of complaining about a D, the father is complaining that his son received a B rather than an A? The father argues that this is the only class that stands between his son and a 4.0 grade point average.
- (61) You have a student who has shown steady improvement throughout the class. Her overall class average is 88 %. Moreover, she scored a blistering 198 out of 210 on the final examination. Your stated grade scale (which is clearly written in the syllabus) is that 90 % is the minimum required for the grade of A.

- (62) A student comes to see you during office hours. Each time the student closes the door. After a while, you begin to feel uncomfortable with this practice. How might you deal with the situation? Suppose the student is the same sex as you; does that make a difference? Should it?
- (63) You gave a take-home quiz and have collected them at the beginning of class. During your lecture, you notice a student who is working on that very same quiz. After class, he asks if you will accept the quiz.
- (64) You gave a take-home quiz. Before class, you notice a number of students furiously copying the solution off of another student's paper.
- (65) At the beginning of class, the noise level is very high. Students continue to talk for some time after you begin to speak to them.
- (66) You have just announced an important change related to an upcoming exam. Ten minutes later, a student shows up to class.
- (67) You are getting ready to administer an exam. A student shows up with both hands in bandages, unable to write.
- (68) You give a final exam which is supposed to have 16 questions. Half an hour into the test, a student points out that Problems 5 and 12 are missing.
- (69) A group of students complain that a homework problem was unfairly graded. You look at their work, and they're right.
- (70) A group of students complain that a homework problem was unfairly graded. You look at their work, and they're wrong.
- (71) A student informs you four days before the final that her grandfather died and that she will miss the test.
- (72) Your grader works faithfully all semester but does not keep records of the students' grades.
- (73) A student makes an inappropriate ethnic slur in class.
- (74) A student comes to your office for help, dressed in attire that leaves very little to the imagination.
- (75) Prior to taking an exam, a student informs you that she tripped on the sidewalk on the way to the test. The next class day, she gives you a doctor's note indicating that she had a minor concussion on the day of the test.
- (76) During the final exam, a student curses loudly.
- (77) During the final exam, a student curses loudly a second time.
- (78) During an exam, a student has a seizure, causing a major disruption. Fifteen minutes later, paramedics come to take the student to the hospital. Before the exams are graded, a number of students e-mail to politely ask for relief, saying that they were unable to concentrate during the disruption and after the student was taken to the hospital. However, you notice a significant number of students were able to work on their exams despite the disruption. As you grade, you notice that the class median is 10 points lower than the earlier exams.
- (79) What if the median was approximately the same?
- (80) What if this happened during the final instead of a regular exam?
- (81) You receive the following e-mail the week before the first exam:

Due to an unfortunate turn of events I have come down with a case of Mononucleosis. The second week of class I was out of town for family reasons, which seems to be where I contracted the virus. I shall be out of class the rest of the next week due to the virus still being communicable. I am e-mailing in regard to request for class work during the time of my absense. I realize the general policy is work turned in in an untimely manner is generally not accepted, but due to extenuating circumstances I would request a reprieve. Would it be possible for you to send me a list of assignments that I have missed.

- (82) You receive the following note attached to a homework assignment in your mailbox at 10:30 am:

Here is my HW due for the 8 am T/Th Stat class. Sorry it is late and I hope it will be accepted. Also, I apologize for my absence the past few classes — as lame as it sounds — I just got a new alarm clock and am still trying to figure it out.

- (83) You wake up feeling deathly ill at 3:00 am, five hours before your 8:00 am class is supposed to meet. The medicine you need causes drowsiness, and you realize that you're not going to be well enough to teach your class that day.