



Educational Policies for Teachers at the Davidson Academy

Basic Info

Our phone number: 682-5800

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Guidelines and Procedures

If you have questions or concerns about any of the following information, please feel free to stop me, so we can discuss the issue. We are well aware that many of these procedures are not what you would find in other schools, and they may seem very odd at first. However, they are born out of a combination of our experiences with this population and our overriding goals for this school. The Davidsons' ambition is to create a school that is innovative and rigorous, but also student centered and highly flexible.

Things to Consider When Designing Your Classes

1. All teachers need to write a syllabus for each of their classes. These need to be sent to the Curriculum Coordinator no later than the 24th. Course objectives should be very specific to your class.
2. DA teachers are strongly encouraged to adjust their syllabi according to the needs of their students. Responsive teaching frequently involves slowing down, speeding up, or completely altering courses, and such actions are valued far beyond any given iteration of a syllabus.
3. All teachers need to plan for a diagnostic period of about two weeks at the beginning of the school year. This time should be spent doing a variety of tasks designed to determine whether or not students are placed correctly. This will give you a good handle on the strengths and weaknesses of your students as a whole and individually. The data from the diagnostic period will also be used to move students who should be moved, and defend the placements of students who should not be moved.

4. We prefer thinking, analyzing, discovering, and discussing to memorizing, regurgitating, and lecturing. Obviously there is a time and place for everything, but try to emphasize the higher level skills when designing your classes and assignments.
5. Do not plan more than one mandatory group project per class, per semester (especially if students are expected to meet outside of class time).
6. Many of these students are outstanding in certain subjects, but only high-average in others. The “gifted” label may not apply across all subjects. Please keep this in mind as you set expectations.
7. Bear in mind that while these students are ready for highly advanced academic material, they are still children. Many of them lack the “school skills” that one might expect them to have. Teachers need to be willing to help their students learn skills like: note taking, studying, organizing, managing time, etc. Also keep their ages in mind when determining whether or not certain material is appropriate content-wise (feel free to ask about anything that you’re not sure is suitable).
8. Students burn out about two weeks before the end of each semester. Whenever possible, plan tests and assignments accordingly.

Regarding Assignments

1. Whenever possible, all assignments should be sent to the students via email or should be posted using WebCT. We have a template to use for emailed assignments in the hope that students will become accustomed this unified format. If you are giving out assignments in hard copy formats, you need to stay on top of updating your syllabus to reflect changes you make as you go along. Regardless of how you hand out assignments, the Curriculum Director needs to be copied on all assignments. She will take the assignments you give her in lieu of required lesson plans or monthly scope and sequence memos which saves all of us a ton of time. This is easiest if you are emailing assignments since you can just add her to your class groups. If you use WebCT, let her know so she can look at your assignments online. If you give students hardcopies, make an extra copy for the Curriculum Director, and put it in her mailbox.
2. A class list has been created in Outlook for everyone. You are responsible for maintaining the accuracy of those lists as students add or drop your classes.
3. One of the challenges for many of these students is getting work in on time. We have a school-wide late-work policy which is fully explained on the last page of this document.
4. Teachers will offer students the opportunity to make up assignments that were missed due to excused absences. If the student misses three days of class, a reasonable time-frame to complete missed work would be five or six class days (bearing in mind that the student will have current work and make-up work in every class).
5. Some assignments should be basic knowledge checks. Their purpose should be to help the students see what they do and don’t know. These formative measures are necessary

before giving summative tests as they help students recognize what they need to study. Students should also have academic discussions and guided questions to help them focus their attention on the most important information.

6. When you are ready to do book checkout, let the front desk know, and they will check out books to your students.

Regarding Homework

1. Homework should be kept to a minimum, but of course this will vary from class to class. Ideally, students will get some class time to work on their assignments, and whatever they don't finish in class becomes homework.
2. Make sure your homework load is fairly evenly spaced—no “feast and famine” routines.
3. Monitor, evaluate, and/or acknowledge student homework, returning that homework in a timely manner or making returned homework available for student review. This is especially important right before tests—students need to see if they did their work correctly before being testing on those concepts.
4. If certain students have established *a pattern* of not getting their work in on time, please email those students directly, explaining the issue and laying out a plan, and visibly copy the students' parents, their advisors, and the Curriculum Director. Make sure you copy your emails into our database, and look there before you send yours to see if this is an issue for these students in any other classes.

Regarding Tests

1. Free response testing is strongly encouraged. Essay questions, short response questions, and problem solving are considered to be better reflections of learning than forced response questions such as multiple choice, true/false, etc.
2. Tests should have study guides given to the students at least a week in advance whenever possible. These guides might include questions the students should be able to answer, terms they need to know, or specific topics they need to focus on studying. Essay topics should also be distributed as soon as possible even for essays that are to be written in class. We want students to think as intensely as possible about all of their responses, and better, more thoughtful work will be the result of this approach.
3. In order to prevent too many tests falling on one day, we often check in with our students, giving them a choice about their test days. This is not always possible depending on the structure of the class, but the students are very appreciative of this when it works. This is especially important midway and at the end of each semester since nearly all classes have tests during those periods.

Regarding Grades

1. It is very important to understand how much pressure there is in this school to get A's. The students need plenty of opportunities/points to give them the chance to compensate for a bad grade here and there. This can be done with participation points, extra credit, a plethora of assignments, the opportunity to redo poor work, the opportunity to drop the lowest grade, etc.
2. Teachers should have no fewer than ten grades per semester that add up to no less than 400 points (most classes will have many more than that). This policy is intended to keep any one assignment from having too much weight and to give students the opportunity to recover from one or two poor grades in a class.
3. Grades need to be entered into PowerSchool as soon as possible, and updated at least weekly.
4. Grades may not be derived exclusively from summative assignments. In addition to tests, students need the opportunity to show thought, effort, and learning through writing, discussing, projects, presentations, etc.
5. Whenever appropriate, students should be given the opportunity to improve their grades (and learn more) by redoing assignments based on teacher feedback. We prefer the emphasis to be on learning and meeting benchmarks rather than on grades. This is why late work, one on one assistance, and the opportunity to re-do assignments is encouraged. This is with the understanding that such opportunities should not become excessive.

Dealing with Behavior Issues

1. Every classroom has a small envelope of "red and green cards." If a student is misbehaving in your class, you may give the student either one of these cards. A green card means they need to go to the office and email their parents about why they were sent out of class, and then they may return to class. A red card requires the same email, but the student may not return to class until the following period.
2. Anytime there is a potential conflict with a student or parent, inform the Curriculum Director as quickly as possible.
3. Bullying of any kind, or other conflicts between students, should be reported to the Guidance Counselor as soon as possible.
4. Students who treat Davidson Academy laptops carelessly, download anything, or use them to play games (at any time during the day) will lose some or all of their laptop privileges. Please report any of computer issues to the Information Technology Coordinator.
5. Before and after school, and during transitions between classes, teachers need to keep their eyes and ears on the hallway to monitor student behavior.

6. The Academy has a “hands off” policy. This is intended mostly to address disruptive behavior, but please bear in mind that even affectionate touching can be uncomfortable for some people.
7. Do not assume that tears or angry looks are personal. Many of these students are very emotional and are under a lot of pressure. They are not always aware of how they come across to others, and what’s bothering them may not have anything to do with you at all.

Keeping Track of the Where the Students Are

1. Instructors are expected to maintain daily attendance records in Powerschool.
2. If you need to work with students during their study hall times, make sure the students check in with the study hall supervisor before they leave.
3. If you take students out of the building for any reason, you must sign them out at the front desk.
4. All classrooms will have a clipboard with class rosters, a hall pass sign out sheet, and hall passes. When students have to leave the room, they need to sign out and sign back in, and they need to take a hall pass with them.
5. That same clipboard is what you need to take with you during emergencies (drills or otherwise). The combination of the student rosters and the in/out sheet is what you’ll use to make certain you have accounted for all of your students.
6. Students should not be in unsupervised locations of the building. They should be in their classes or in designated study halls, the writing center, or the library. Even at lunch time, it is not acceptable for students to wander around or hang out in unsupervised places.

Technology

1. All of your school related emails should be kept in folders in Outlook. Your Sent Items folder should not be emptied.
2. We have a faculty broadcast list which includes all DA staff (including part time faculty). If you need to let everyone know something, this is the most efficient way to do it.
3. When you save work on your computer, always save to My Documents—this gets backed up to the school server every day. Students should be doing the same thing, so it would be good to remind them of this.
4. Student laptop checkout works like this: teachers may get out the number of laptops they need for their rooms. Students will use them in class and leave them there. Make sure you have your last class of the day wrap up the laptops and put them away neatly.
5. Teachers will collect and save electronic work samples from their students periodically throughout the semester. If this is not possible, photocopies of occasional

assignments/tests are acceptable. There should be no fewer than five samples per student each semester (there must be 2-3 samples just from the diagnostic period during the first 2 weeks of school).

Miscellaneous Information

1. While in many settings, teachers are better off starting out strict and demanding and then lightening up, this population requires building trust and respect first, and then they will work very hard for you.
2. When students first come to this school, they often experience shock and anxiety about no longer being the top student. This can make them angry, teary, scared, apprehensive, etc.
3. We do have some students with ADHD, learning disabilities, or medical conditions that interfere with their work. Those students who have IEPs or 504s often have academic or behavioral accommodations. If one of these students is in a class you teach, you will be given information about what modifications are needed—this is a non-negotiable legal issue.
4. Do not be alone with a student in a room that isn't open and public. This is to protect both students and teachers, and is required by law as well as insurance. If a student wants academic assistance, you can work together in the writing center or computer lab. If a student wants to talk, please find an open area in which to meet. If you need to talk to a student away from peers, please ask another adult to be present.
5. When giving constructive feedback in verbal or written form, be sure to include compliments as well. Feedback should be specific advice designed to help students gain mastery in the benchmarks.
6. You will hear references to PLPs—Personalized Learning Plans. These are working documents developed in cooperation with each family for their student. They help guide the classes we choose to offer, they help direct a student's course of study, and they help us know more about the interests and goals of our students.
7. The Davidson Institute is a national organization to support gifted children, and many people from the Institute help us at the school. The types of tasks the Institute helps us with include: planning and running our school tours, take care of media and publicity, do student advising, and teaching some elective classes.
8. We have school tour days and prospective student assessment days about once a month.
9. All visitors (for students or staff) need to be cleared with the Academy's Director.

Late-work Policy

1. Teachers will accept late work without penalty within 2 days of the due date.
2. If teachers are willing to give a penalty-free extended due date (past two days) that's great!
3. If an assignment is turned in more than 2 days late, or past the agreed upon extension date, then the student may start losing points on that assignment.
4. Students should lose only a couple points each day . . . no more than 5% of what the assignment was worth per day (I don't even do that . . . I just knock off a few points total and let them know that I had to bump their grades down a little since the work was late). This means that an assignment worth 100 points that is turned in one day past the grace period (or one day past the extended due date) would be graded normally, and would then lose 5 points. Whenever possible, please remind students if they have missing work.
5. Even if something is weeks late, students should still be able to earn up to ½ credit for doing it. That's still an F, but as I tell my students, some points are better than no points at all, and at least I've still met my goal which was to get the kid to do the work.
6. Students are supposed to email teachers ahead of time if they are not able to get their work in on time. If they do this, great . . . follow the steps above. If they don't contact you ahead of time, you may dock their participation points for that day. Participation points are used to promote responsibility, organization, time management, etc. This is a much better place to penalize forgetfulness/laziness rather than docking the academic grade of the work itself. It still teaches accountability, while leaving intact the motivation for students to get their work done.

Our reasons for this:

1. Our number one goal as a school is to teach students the material we've deemed important. If the homework was important enough to bother assigning, then getting all students to do that work should be your first priority. Grades are a distant second to actual learning.
2. We want students to have enough time to do their work well. This is for your benefit as well as theirs. Since, in this school, we allow students to redo poor assignments, a strict due date policy encourages students to turn in poor work, get a poor grade, and then redo it. It's much easier just to grant a reasonable extension and get better quality work the first time.
3. The "absent-minded professor" syndrome runs rampant in this school. Learning time-management and organization does not come easily to everyone, and this is secondary school—it is a place in which students are assisted in learning these skills but are not expected to have mastered them yet (not to ignore the fact that many of our students have mastered these skills—but we're talking about the ones who have not).

Exceptions:

1. If accepting late work for a particular assignment really would jeopardize the next task, assignment, lesson, etc., you may make it clear in advance to your students that you will not accept any late work for this particular assignment (if your class activity will flop if the students haven't done the prep work, make sure they know that—understanding this encourages students to feel like they are collaborating with the teacher in order to have a successful class).

2. If a student falls into a pattern of always (or frequently) turning in his work late, there are several ways to approach this. The best first step is to write to the student—copying his parents, his advisor, the Guidance Counselor and the Curriculum Director—and let him know that because he has used up all the flexibility allotted to him for late work in your class, you are changing the rules for him. If you send assignments by email, let him know that you will be adding his parents to all assignment emails, so they can help him get his work in on time. You may also take away the two day “grace” period, and begin taking off a few points as soon as an assignment is late. From there, the student can work with his advisors and/or his parents to learn better skills for staying on top of his work. The next time he does not turn something in on time, write to him (copying everyone), “just a quick note to remind you that you didn’t get your work in, so your grade on this assignment is in jeopardy.” The idea, here, is to help the student learn how to get a handle on all this, not to punish him.

This full policy should not be in your syllabi, but do not include any information in your syllabi that contradicts this policy either. You may want to insert something like, “Students should always do their best to get their work in on time, all the time. However, if you know you cannot make a deadline, it is your responsibility to contact me **before** the assignment is due (in person or by email), and ask about getting an extension.”