



# FAS Syllabus Review Report

A report on syllabus policy compliance  
in the Faculty of Arts and Science at the  
University of Toronto

Executive Committee 2013-2014  
Arts and Science Students' Union

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## Contents

<b>I. Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>II. Required Elements of the Course Syllabus .....</b>	<b>5</b>
(2.4) Contact Info .....	5
(2.5) Office Hours .....	6
(2.8) Marking Scheme .....	6
(2.10) Assignment Due Dates.....	6
(2.11) Assignment Weights & Return Dates — Faculty Rules.....	7
(2.12) Term Test Dates — Faculty Rules .....	8
(2.13) Final Examinations.....	8
<b>III. Voluntary Elements of the Course Syllabus .....</b>	<b>10</b>
(2.9) Modes & Number of Assessments .....	10
(2.15) Turnitin.com .....	10
(2.16) Late Penalty Policy.....	11
(2.19) Accommodations for Disability .....	11
(2.21) Academic Integrity Message .....	11
<b>IV. Recommendations .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>V. Conclusions .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: Reviewed FAS Syllabi.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: Required element non-compliance.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: Voluntary element data .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>APPENDIX D: Relevant documents.....</b>	<b>21</b>

Dedicated to the loving memory of our colleague,  
friend, and brother Mohammad Ali Saeed.

## **I. Introduction**

In the fall of 2013, ASSU received a number of reports of instructors not returning the required percentage of the final mark back to their classes in time for the drop date. Due to our close relationship with the Faculty of Arts and Science (FAS), and specifically the Office of the Dean, we were able to have these particular instances addressed. However, our executive team discussed the possibility that there could be other instances of policy non-compliance occurring unbeknownst to us because of a lack of policy knowledge amongst our constituents.

Out of this concern grew the idea for a review of course syllabi from across the Faculty, as a means of acquiring solid data regarding policy compliance instead of relying on anecdotal evidence in our discussions and lobbying efforts with the Faculty. As the syllabus is essentially a “contract” for the requirements of a course and the primary source of course-related information, ASSU recognizes the importance of these documents to students.

Our team began collecting syllabi through our course unions, personal contacts and by donating our own syllabi to the cause. We must acknowledge the support of Course Union executives who actively participated in the collection process. We were able to compile 93 syllabi from across the Faculty, representing a vast majority of program indicators, series level and both fall and full year courses.

During the spring semester of 2014, members of the ASSU executive committee analyzed these syllabi for compliance with mandatory FAS policy, standard practice regarding non-essential elements of course syllabi, and for other relevant information. We appreciate the invaluable contributions of executives Charles Dalrymple-Fraser, Branden Rizzuto and Mohammad Ali Saeed, who completed a majority of the data analysis for this project.

The following report outlines the findings of our review. We also offer some recommendations aimed at improving policy compliance and the overall quality of syllabi for students in the Faculty of Arts and Science.

Sincerely,

Dylan Chauvin-Smith, Treasurer

Executive Committee, 2013-2014  
Arts and Science Students' Union



## II. Required Elements of the Course Syllabus

The *Academic Handbook for Instructors* outlines how an instructor should structure the syllabus for each course. Included in these guidelines are a number of required headings – indicated by the symbol (\*R\*) – which explain what mandatory information must be provided to students in the form of the course syllabus.

This section of the report outlines our findings with respect to mandatory elements of a course syllabus, organized by required heading:

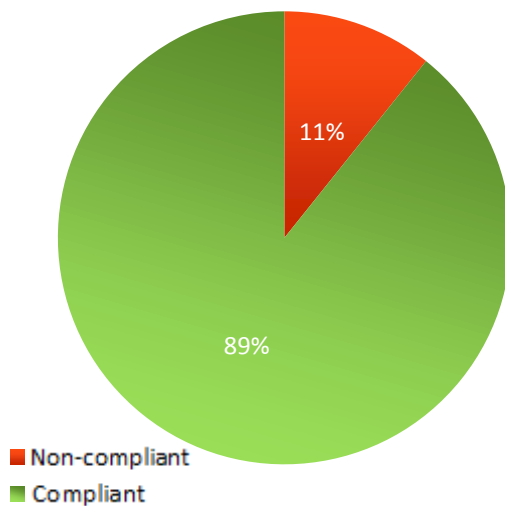
### (2.4) Contact Info

Most syllabi included contact information for at the very least, the primary instructor of the course. Some instructors even went to the extent of including TA and Program coordinator contact info. We applaud those who go above and beyond.

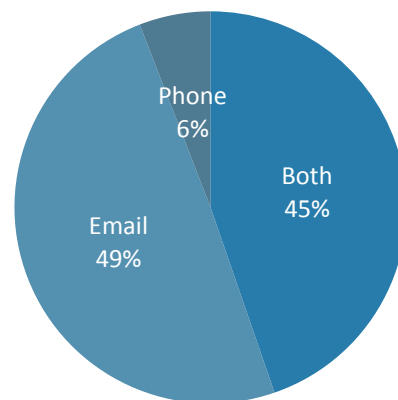
10 of 93, approximately 10% of the syllabi in our study, failed to include contact information of any kind on the syllabus. Two of these documents indicated that students should use alternate means of communicating with professors, which we believe are in contradiction to the spirit of this policy. One asks students to meet with their instructor before/during/after class; the other asks students to use the online discussion board for such communication.

38 courses (40% of our sample) included both the email and phone number of the instructor in the contact information. 42 courses (45% of our sample) included only the instructor's email as contact info for the course. 5 courses (5% of our sample) included only the instructor's phone number as contact info for the course. Clearly email has become the primary mode by which students and their instructors communicate, but it is interesting to note that some professors still use telephones.

**Contact Information Compliance**



**Modes of Contact**

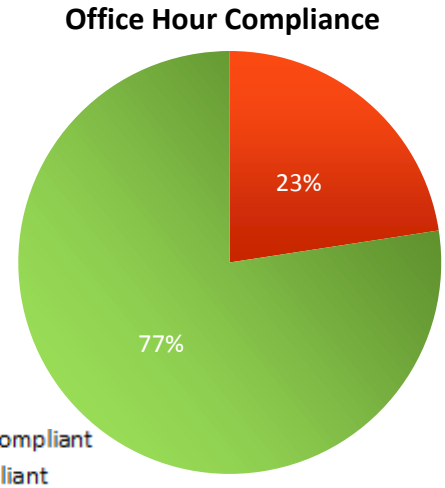


**(2.5) Office Hours**

Most syllabi complied with the requirement for the instructor’s MANDATORY office hours to be listed, though there were variations. Most instructors chose to be specific about the time of their office hours, while others had them by appointment or immediately after class.

21 of 93, approximately 22% of the syllabi in our study, failed to include information regarding the instructor’s office hours. Some of these instructors did have information about where their office is, but failed to explain when or how a student could meet them there. Others made no mention of where their office is.

One course, (HPS100H1F), uses online office hours.



**(2.8) Marking Scheme**

All of the syllabi reviewed for this project included a marking breakdown as required by the instructor’s handbook.

However, a marking scheme on one syllabus included assignment weights that added up to 105%. The document might also be interpreted as providing no concrete weighting for second term assignments, in which case it would violate the requirement that students have a finalized marking scheme by no later than the last day to add courses.

With such a low frequency of mistakes of this kind, we don’t see this as a systemic issue, but an online syllabus builder could eliminate future miscalculations through its digital structure.

**(2.10) Assignment Due Dates**

While not spelled out by the instructor’s handbook, one can infer that instructors must include assignment due dates on the syllabus. Every syllabi reviewed, save for two (2), included the dates of all assignments. One of these documents failed to indicate when the 2-3 homework assignments (worth 30% of the final mark) would be due; despite having a zero tolerance late policy. The other document offered blank spaces next to assignment information for students to fill in the information.

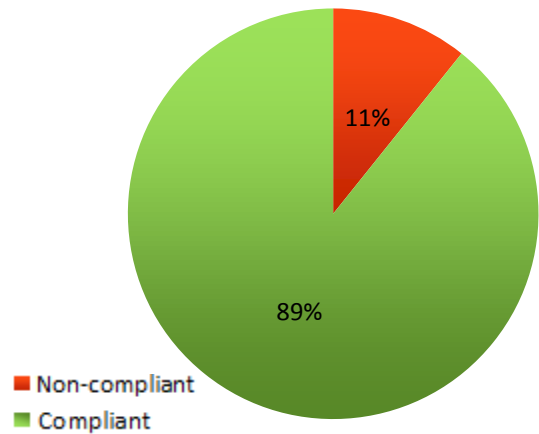
*Assignments Due During Term*

According to the instructor’s handbook, “**Term work deadlines should be within term and not normally extended into the Final Examination Period.**” As such, term work should be submitted between the first and last day of classes each semester (September 9<sup>th</sup> to December 3<sup>rd</sup>, January

6<sup>th</sup> to April 4<sup>th</sup>). While instructors may offer informal extensions into the exam period, initial and published dates must be within the term period.

10 of the 93 syllabi reviewed failed to meet this requirement. 8 included due dates either after the last day of classes or actually within the exam period. The other 2 syllabi did not include dates and therefore could not be evaluated for compliance, but nevertheless will be counted as non-compliant.

Assignments Due During Term



**(2.11) Assignment Weights & Return Dates — Faculty Rules**

University policy stipulates that students must receive “**at least one piece of marked term work before the last date to drop the course.**” Faculty policy is even more specific about this requirement:

- **Instructors shall return by the deadline one or more marked assignments worth a combined total of at least 10% of the total course mark for H courses and 20% for Y courses.**
- **The deadline for returning such marked work shall be the last regularly-scheduled class meeting prior to the Drop Date, with one exception: for courses that run the entire Fall/Winter Session (Y1Y or H1Y courses), the deadline shall be the last regularly-scheduled class meeting of the first week of classes in January.**

Unfortunately, reviewing syllabi cannot give us very much data regarding this particular policy compliance issue, as instructors do not normally include assignment return dates on their syllabi. Nevertheless we wanted to get a better understanding of the timelines at play.

*Average Number of Days Between Due Dates and Drop Dates*

Half Year Courses, Faculty-wide: 22 Days

Full Year Courses, Faculty-wide: 66 Days

Humanities / Social Science Courses, Full & Half Year: 40 Days

Science Courses, Full & Half Year: 40 Days

*Average Percentage of Final Mark Due prior to Drop Date*

Half Year Courses, Faculty-wide: 27%



Full Year Courses, Faculty-wide: 32%

Humanities / Social Science Courses, Full & Half Year: 27%

Science Courses, Full & Half Year: 32%

**[Full data available upon request]**

### **(2.12) Term Test Dates — Faculty Rules**

Of the 93 syllabi studied for this report, 66 included information regarding term tests; we assume the other 27 courses did not include term tests. 3 of the 66, approximately 3%, failed to include dates for one or more tests which we understand to be a violation of Faculty policy, as “**Term Test Dates**” is a required heading and therefore term test dates should at least appear on course syllabi.

The instructor’s handbook explains that, “**Term tests must be scheduled within the term, between the first and last day of classes.**” It specifically identifies the Final Examination period, the November Break, Reading Week, and the Study Period after the end of classes and before the beginning of the Examination Period as dates during which no tests should be scheduled.

*Term Tests (etc) Worth >25% in last two weeks of class*

According to the instructor’s handbook, “**No term test or combination of term tests having a value greater than 25% of the final mark may be held in the final two weeks of classes at the end of any session - Fall, Winter, or Summer.**” It goes on to include any assignments “**where the topics or questions are both assigned and due within the last two weeks of classes.**”

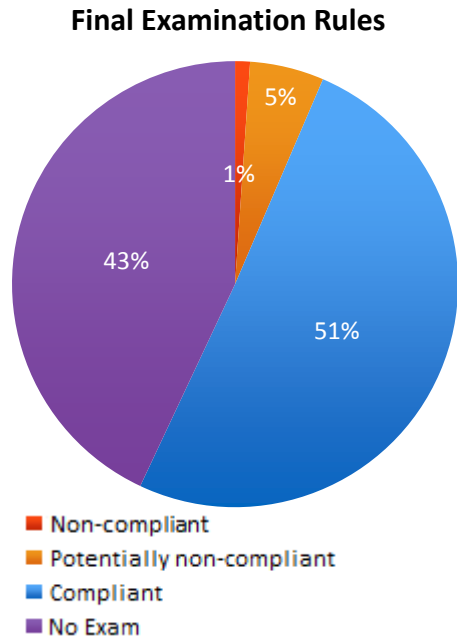
6 of the 66 syllabi (9%) which indicated the use of Term Test failed to meet the requirements laid out above. 5 courses, according to their syllabi, held term tests weighted higher than 25% within the last two weeks of classes, in direct violation of the “**strict rule**” explained in the instructor’s handbook.

### **(2.13) Final Examinations**

The instructor’s handbook outlines how the Faculty implements the *Grading Practices Policy*, stating specifically that “**All 100-series courses (except 199Y courses) must have a Faculty-run final examination, and that examination must carry a weight of at least 1/3 and not more than 2/3 of the final mark.**” 200+ level courses have less definite prescriptions around whether final examinations must be held.

40 of the 93 syllabi studied, approximately 43%, made no mention of final examinations but were nonetheless in compliance as they were for 200+ level courses and therefore broke no Faculty regulations.

However, 53 syllabi did include information on final examinations. 47 (88%) of these were within Faculty guidelines. 5 syllabi (5%) from 100-series courses failed to include a final exam for their courses, however these courses may have had permission from the Faculty to break this particular rule (as the handbook states that, “**Requests for 100-series exemptions are made through the academic unit to the Dean’s Office via the Faculty Registrar**”). The syllabus for TRN190Y1Y violates Faculty policy because the Final Examination for this 100-series course is weighted at 30%, 3% shy of the required 1/3 of the final mark.



### III. Voluntary Elements of the Course Syllabus

The Academic Handbook for Instructors provides guidelines for many other elements of the average course syllabus that are not considered required headings. In the course of our survey, ASSU noted that some voluntary headings include information on policy and practice that are mandatory, some even indicated with the (\*R\*) symbol that indicates required headings throughout the handbook. This section of the report indicates our findings with respect to headings in the handbook considered voluntary, as well as other Faculty policy indicated throughout the handbook.

#### (2.9) Modes & Number of Assessments

##### *Number of Assessments*

According to University Policy, student performance should “**be assessed on more than one occasion.**” All of the syllabi studied for our report met this basic requirement. More information on distribution of weightings by evaluation type can be found in APPENDIX C.

##### *No 80% Weightings*

University policy also states that “**no one essay, test, examination, etc. should have a value of more than 80% of the grade.**” All of the syllabi studied for our report met this requirement as well.

#### (2.15) Turnitin.com

The instructor’s handbook provides clear regulations for instructors who choose to utilize turnitin.com. The handbook explicitly states that if instructors intend to employ turnitin.com, “[they] **must inform students of this at the beginning of [the] course.**” 15 of the 93 syllabi studied (16%) indicated that the instructor would be using Turnitin.com.

The handbook also states that instructors must include a mandatory statement which outlines what turnitin.com is and its terms of use in their syllabus if they choose to use the tool. This mandatory statement is marked with the (\*R\*) symbol which indicates a required element of the syllabus. Of the syllabi which indicated they were using turnitin.com, 13% failed to include the mandatory text (ENG340H1F and DRM362H1F).

Moreover, the handbook explicitly states that instructors “**must inform [students] that use of turnitin.com is voluntary.**” According to our study, only 1 out of 15 syllabi which indicated the use of turnitin.com actually made mention of the student’s right to refuse using the tool. To reiterate, that’s 93% of syllabi that indicated use of turnitin.com failing to inform students in writing that its use is voluntary. That same syllabus (NEW250Y1Y) was also the only one to explicitly state the alternative students were to use should they refuse to use the tool.

**(2.16) Late Penalty Policy**

Despite the fact that the handbook states that instructors who intend to “**accept and apply penalties to late assignments, [...] must spell out the rules in [the] syllabus,**” this guideline is not marked with the (\*R\*) symbol to indicate it is mandatory.

49 of the 93 syllabi studied included a late policy. Of the 41 others, only 11 indicated that they would not accept late work. 16 of the 41 made no indication of the instructor’s late policy (whether accepting late work or not), while the final 14 did not require Late Penalties because the course included no assignments, only tests/exams.

**(2.19) Accommodations for Disability**

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) lays out the framework for the development of province-wide mandatory standards on accessibility in all areas of daily life, with the goal of making all public establishments accessible by 2025. As such, we felt that it was important to understand what the current standard practice is regarding Accessibility or Accommodation statements in FAS syllabi. Currently, the instructor’s handbook does not require instructors to include accessibility statements in their syllabi but does provide sample text which an instructor might use if they are inclined to have such a statement.

Our study found that 35% of syllabi included some form of accessibility statement which made reference to Accessibility Services (AS) and the instructor’s willingness to provide accommodation for students registered with AS. This also means that 65% of the syllabi made no reference to Accessibility concerns or the potential for accommodation.

**(2.21) Academic Integrity Message**

This was another voluntary heading which we felt was important to measure. As breaches of academic integrity are some of the most egregious offences that students can commit on campus, we think consistent reminders to avoid such behaviour are in the best interest of students.

Outstandingly, 59 of the 93 syllabi studied for this report, or approximately 63%, included references to academic integrity, iterations of Faculty policy on academic integrity, and/or links to further information on plagiarism/inappropriate collaboration. On the other hand, 34 syllabi made no mention of academic integrity. We are encouraged by the fact that a vast majority of instructors seem to agree that students need consistent reminders of the consequences of such behaviours.

## IV. Recommendations

### Strengthening Language of Requirement

In Section 1 of the handbook, it states that instructors **“are required to include in [their] syllabus anything that contributes to the student’s mark, e.g. the marking scheme, and any policy or rule that affects the mark, such as late penalties.”** Many things covered in the handbook are well explained, but we believe that language that more clearly defines what is required.

### Strengthening Departmental Oversight

Currently, the only oversight for syllabi appears to be in the following guideline: that **“a copy of [instructor’s] marking scheme must be deposited with the UG administrator of [their] academic unit.”** As our results show, the marking schemes have negligible issues and therefore we can infer that this oversight has ensured quality in this element of course syllabi.

However, a review of syllabi by each department or unit instead of simply checking the marking scheme would likely have the largest impact on policy compliance. Very rarely do we find students versed in the specific policies that govern syllabi and it seems therefore unfair to expect students to catch mistakes.

### Turnitin.com

The guidelines for using turnitin.com seemed to be the least well understood by instructors, and we therefore believe that a full review of the guidelines for its use is in order. In terms of a specific recommendation, we believe that the required statement should inform students that use of turnitin.com is voluntary. Moreover, we think that instructors should be encouraged to include their alternative assignment or mode of submission in their syllabus to facilitate students who choose to exercise their right to refuse.

### Late Penalty Policy

We think that instructors should be required to include their Late Penalty Policy on course syllabi. As it stands, only instructors who intend to accept late work with a penalty must spell out exactly how they will do so. We believe that it is in the best interest of students that instructors who intend not to accept late work include that in writing on their course syllabus.

**Multiple Instructors**

A number of the syllabi which seemed to be lacking proper contact information and/or documentation of office hours, were for courses with multiple instructors throughout the period of the course. This may have led to confusion regarding who is responsible for office hours and who students should contact. Further iterations of the instructor's handbook should make specific recommendations for courses being taught by multiple instructors, providing guidelines for areas of policy that instructors may find vague.

**Fill-in-the-Blanks**

One of the syllabi reviewed during our project included blanks throughout the document in lieu of vitally important information including instructor details, assignment due dates, and dates of tests. We think this is unacceptable, because not every student will be present when an instructor goes over the syllabus in the first class. The document needs to be accessible for students regardless of when they enter the course and which classes they are able to attend.

## V. Conclusions

ASSU strongly encourages the Faculty of Arts and Science to consider implementing the recommendations contained in this report, as we believe they will greatly increase the quality of future syllabi in FAS. Nevertheless, the diligent application of policy by instructors is likely the most effective way for FAS to see improvements in syllabus policy compliance.

Broadly, ASSU recommends the strengthening of language used in the instructor's handbook to explain required elements of FAS syllabi as a means of ensuring clarity for instructors who may be new to the Faculty, and those who may be less familiar with the handbook.

Moreover, ASSU suggests that the Faculty consider looking to the standard practice of instructors to provide more detailed guidelines with respect to voluntary elements of FAS syllabi. In other cases, the Faculty may consider making mandatory items such as Accessibility statements which would help the University meet its commitments to the AODA.

Finally ASSU is very interested in the potential for a digital syllabi tool which could help instructors build syllabi and offer a means of ensuring that required text appears on FAS syllabi.

**APPENDIX A: Reviewed FAS Syllabi**

ANA300Y1Y  
ANT110H1F  
ANT204H1F  
ANT253H1F  
ANT324H1S  
CHM338H1F  
CIN301Y1Y  
CLA160H1F  
CSB328H1F  
CSB349H1F  
CSB351Y1Y  
DRM362H1F  
EAS242H1F  
EAS247H1F  
ECO220Y1Y  
EEB202H1F  
ENG306Y1Y  
ENG340H1F  
ENV341H1F  
ETH220H1F  
ETH401Y1Y  
FAH341H1F  
FOR305H1F  
FOR416H1F  
GGR254H1F  
GRK101H1F  
HIS107Y1Y  
HIS312H1F  
HPS100F1H  
HPS250H1F  
HPS300H1S  
IMM334Y1Y  
IMM429H1F  
ITA240Y1Y  
ITA250Y1Y  
JAL104H1S  
JHN350H1F  
JSV200H1F  
LIN323H1F  
LMP402H1F  
LMP412H1F  
MAT223H1F  
NEW103Y1Y  
NEW240Y1Y  
NEW241Y1Y  
NEW250Y1Y  
NEW374H1F  
NFS487H1F  
NFS489H1F  
NMC364H1F  
PHC300H1F  
PCL201H1S  
PHL100Y1Y  
PHL245H1F  
PHL265H1F  
PHL273H1F  
PHL281H1F  
PHL320H1F  
PHL351H1F  
PHL382H1F  
PHL413H1F  
POL200Y1Y  
POL208Y1Y  
POL214Y1Y  
POL242Y1Y  
POL320Y1Y  
POL330Y1Y  
POL337Y1Y  
POL340Y1Y  
POL343Y1Y  
POL482H1F  
PSL300H1F  
PSY100H1F  
PSY220H1F  
PSY327H1F  
PSY424H1F  
RLG241Y1Y  
RLG449H1F  
RSM435H1F  
SLA100H1F  
SLA220Y1Y  
SLA302H1F  
SMC240Y1Y  
SOC218H1F  
STA220H1F  
STA410H1F  
TRN190Y1Y  
TRN303H1F  
TRN304Y1Y  
TRN425Y1Y  
UNI101Y1Y  
VIC171Y1Y  
VIC324H1F



## APPENDIX B: Required element non-compliance

### (2.4) Contact Information

EAS247H1F, EEB202H1F<sup>1</sup>, LMP402H1F, LMP412H1F<sup>2</sup>, NFS489H1F, NMC364H1F, PCH300H1F, STA220H1F<sup>3</sup>, STA410H1F

### (2.5) Office hours

ANA300Y1Y(b), ANT110H1F(b), ANT235H1F(b), CSB351Y1Y(b), EAS247H1F(a), EEB202H1F(a), FOR416H1F(b), HPS250H1F(c), LIN323H1F(a), LMP402H1F(a), NFS489H1F(a), NMC364H1F(a), PHC300H1F(a), POL340Y1Y(a), RLG241Y1Y(b), RLG449H1F(b), SLA100H1F(d), STA220H1F(a), STA410H1F(a), VIC171Y1Y(b), VIC324H1F(b)

- (a) Indicates that no office information is provided on the syllabus.
- (b) Indicates that office location was provided, but no time or appointment instructions
- (c) Indicates that no office location was provided, but students could schedule an appointment
- (d) Indicates that blanks were left for students to fill in information

### (2.8) Marking Scheme

SMC240Y1Y

### (2.10) Assignment Due Dates

SLA100H1F, STA410H1F

*Assignments Due During Term*

EAS247H1F, FOR416H1F, HIS107Y1Y, HPS250H1F, PHL100Y1Y, PHL320H1F, SLA100H1F, SLA302H1F, STA410H1F, UNI101Y1Y

### (2.11) Assignments Weights & Return Dates – Faculty Rules

[full data is available upon request]

### (2.12) Term Test Dates – Faculty Rules

*Term Tests (etc) Worth >25% in last two weeks of class*

### (2.13) Final Examinations

CSB349H1F, PHL265H1F, PHL273H1F, POL200Y1Y, PSL300H1F

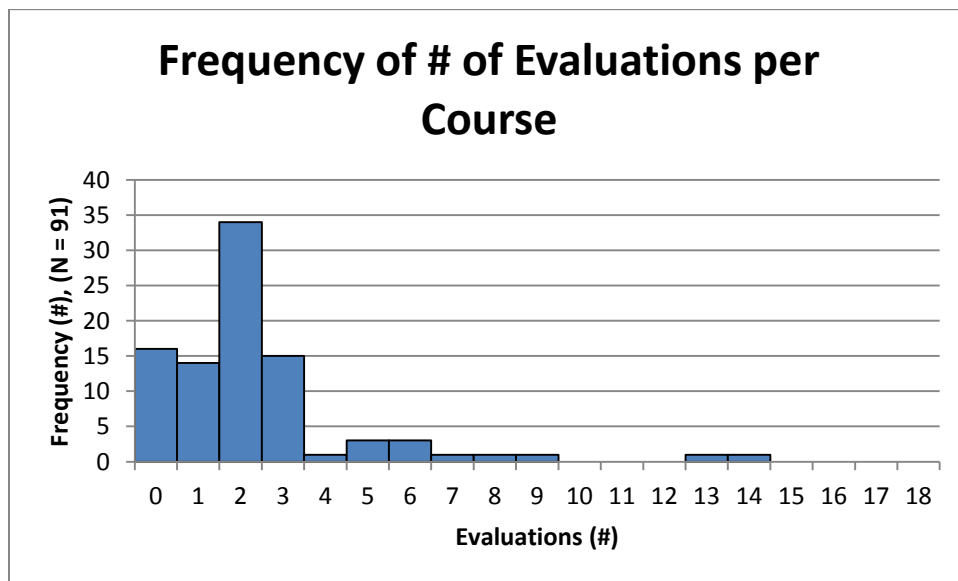
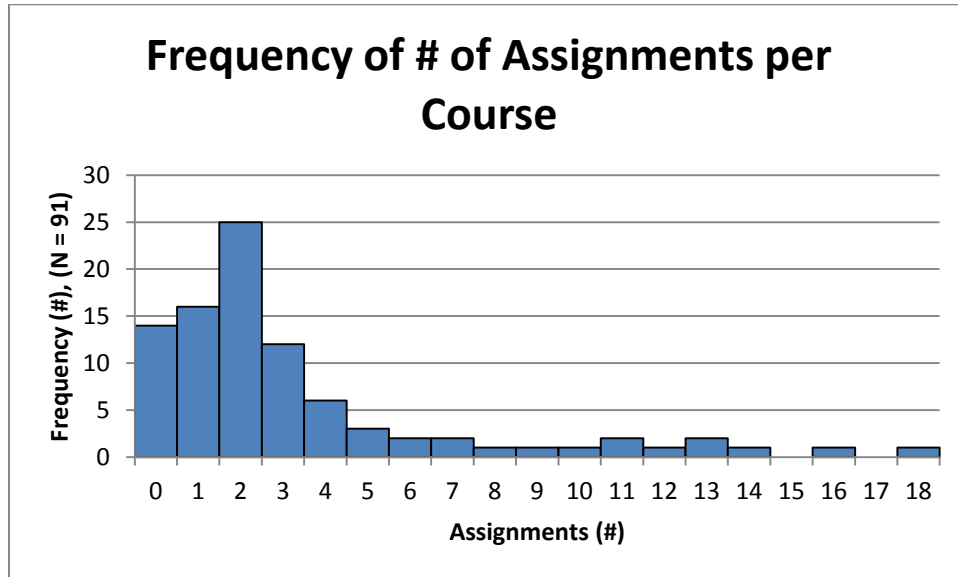
<sup>1</sup> Course email policy indicated on the document: "Instructors will not answer questions via email or phone. Please ask your questions before, during or after the lecture when the instructors will be available."

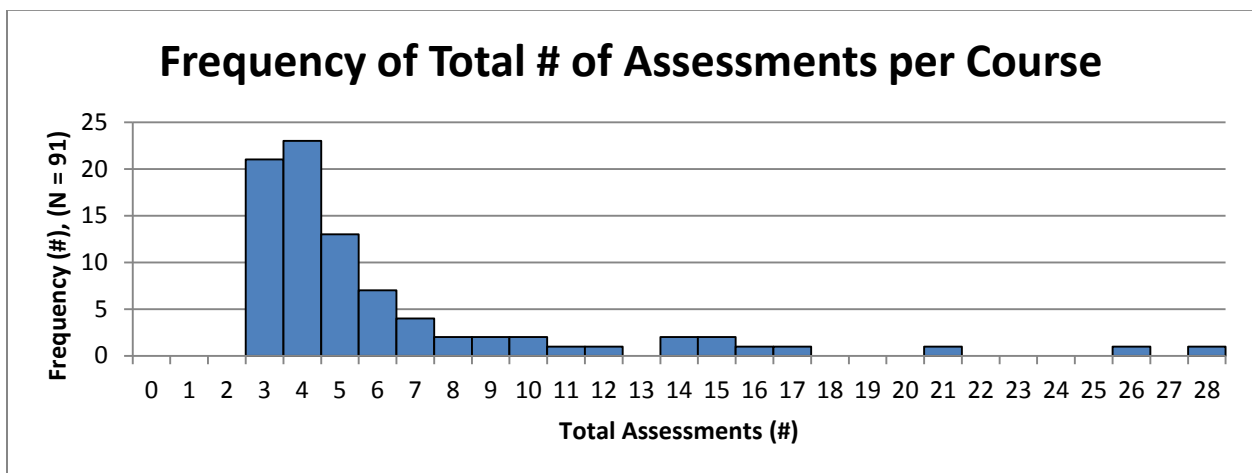
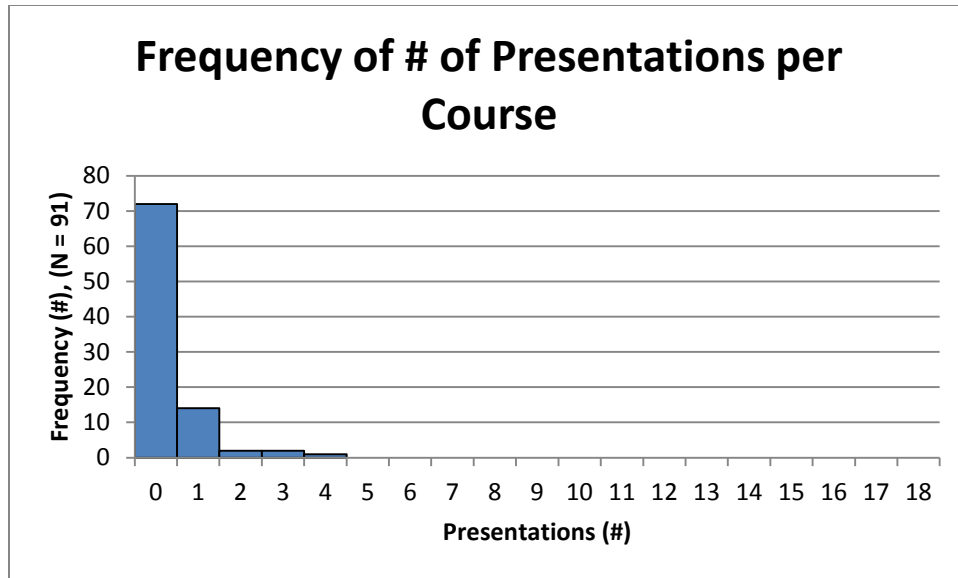
<sup>2</sup> The document provides email contact information for the TA, but not for the instructor; does not make clear that all communication should be done through the TA.

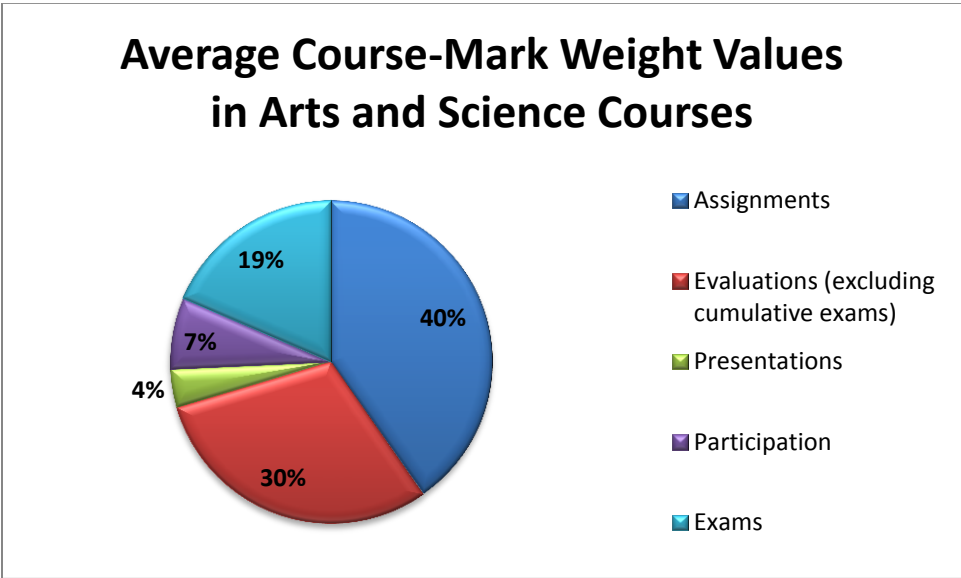
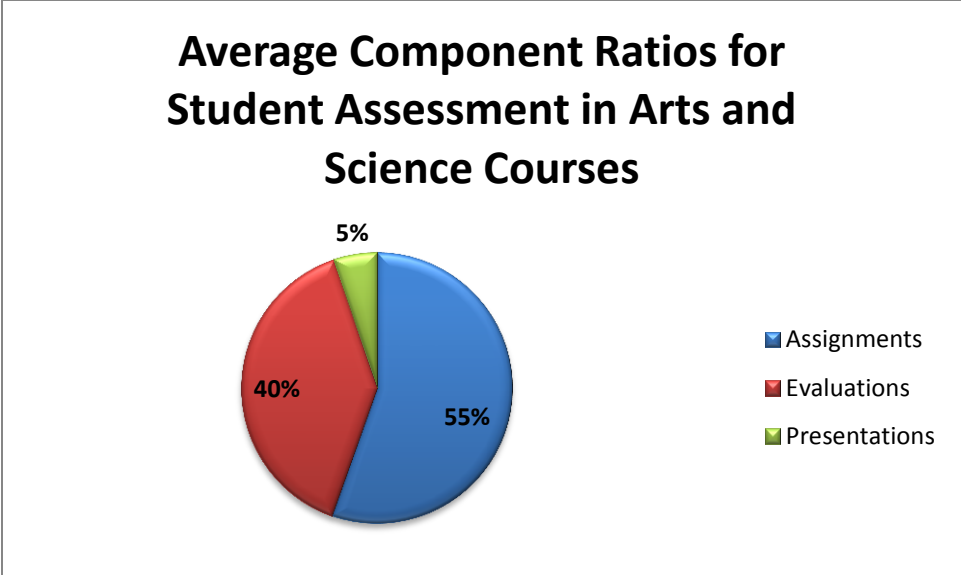
<sup>3</sup> The document instructs students to use the online discussion board in place of email, but does provide email and phone for the Stats department.

**APPENDIX C: Voluntary element data**

(2.9) Modes & Number of Assessments







(2.15) Turnitin.com

*Using turnitin.com*

DRM362H1F, ENG340H1F, HIS107Y1Y, HIS312H1F, NEW250Y1Y, PHL351H1F, POL200Y1Y, POL208Y1Y, POL214Y1Y, POL320Y1Y, POL330Y1Y, POL343Y1Y, PSY220H1F, RLG241Y1Y, TRN303H1F

*Failed to include mandatory text*

DRM326H1F, ENG340H1F

*Failed to indicate right to refuse/voluntary nature*

DRM362H1F, ENG340H1F, HIS107Y1Y, HIS312H1F, PHL351H1F, POL200Y1Y, POL208Y1Y, POL214Y1Y, POL320Y1Y, POL330Y1Y, POL343Y1Y, PSY220H1F, RLG241Y1Y, TRN303H1F

*Listed Alternatives to turnitin.com*

NEW250Y1Y

(2.16) Late Penalty Policy

*No Late Penalty Policy and No indication of not accepting late work*

ANT253H1F, CLA160H1F, CHM338H1F, DRM362H1F, EAS242H1F, JAL104H1S, LIN323H1F, LMP402H1F, NFS487H1F, NFS489H1F, NMC364H1F, PHL273H1F, PHL413H1F, RLG449H1F, SLA220Y1Y, STA220H1F

(2.19) Accommodations for Disability

*Included Accessibility Statement in Syllabus*

ANT204H1F, ANT324H1S, CIN301Y1Y, CSB328H1F, ECO220Y1Y, ENV341H1F, GGR254H1F, GRK101H1F, ITA240Y1Y, ITA250Y1Y, JHN350H1F, JSV200H1F, MAT223H1F, NEW241Y1Y, NEW250Y1Y, PHL100Y1Y, PHL320H1F, POL214Y1Y, POL242Y1Y, POL337Y1Y, POL343Y1Y, POL482H1F, PSY100H1F, PSY220H1F, PSY327H1F, RSM435H1F, SLA220Y1Y, SMC240Y1Y, STA220H1F, TRN190Y1Y, UNI101Y1Y, SLA100H1F

(2.21) Academic Integrity Message

*Included information on Academic Integrity*

ANT253H1F, ANT324H1S, CIN301Y1Y, CLA160H1F, CSB328H1F, CSB349H1F, DRM362H1F\*, ECO220Y1Y, ENG340H1F\*, ENV341H1F, ETH220H1F, FAH341H1F, FOR416H1F, GGR254H1F, GRK101H1F, HIS107Y1Y, HPS100H1F, ITA240Y1Y, ITA250Y1Y, JHN350H1F, JSV200H1F, MAT223H1F, NEW103Y1Y, NEW240Y1Y, NEW241Y1Y, NEW250Y1Y, NEW374H1F, PHL100Y1Y, PHL273H1F\*, PHL281Y1Y, PHL320H1F, PHL382H1F, POL208Y1Y, POL214Y1Y, POL242Y1Y, POL330Y1Y, POL337Y1Y, POL340Y1Y, POL343Y1Y, POL482H1F, PSL300H1F, RLG241Y1Y, RLG449H1F, RSM435H1F, SLA220Y1Y, SMC240Y1Y, SOC218, STA220H1F, TRN190Y1, TRN303H1F, TRN304Y1Y, TRN425Y1Y, UNI101Y1Y, VIC171Y1Y, VIC324H1F\*

## APPENDIX D: Relevant documents

*Academic Handbook for Instructors*, Faculty of Arts and Science

<http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/faculty-staff/teacher-info/academic-handbook-for-instructors>

*Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)*, Government of Ontario

<http://www.aoda.ca/the-act/>