

# Our Mathematics Class: Rights and Responsibilities

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Julian F. Fleron, Ph.D.  
Westfield State College

This is my contribution to the creation of a shared learning covenant for our class. Because it is our class I would like your input, contributions, feedback and suggestions. Afterwards, I will update this document and each of us will sign it.

Live as if you were to die tomorrow.

Learn as if you were to live forever.

Mahatma Ghandi

**You have to be here because you want to learn.** If not, please go do something else. There are many that want to learn - give them the opportunity.

**I am here because I want to teach.** Teaching is the central focus of my professional career. It is my calling. I will try to inspire you and nurture your learning. Please know that I have a full life, have problems of my own, and often need inspiration from you as well.

Education is learning more than it is being taught. It's the chemistry of curiosity exposed to information. In that sense all of life is potentially school. And even I can pass that.

Bob Guiccione, jr.

Teaching and learning are complements; duals; two heads of a single coin. **Everything is learning.** It comes from many different experiences: tragedy a la' Katrina's damage, the insights of small children, daily life, flashes of insight, accidental epiphanies, etc. In our class we have the normal challenges of learning but also the somewhat artificial challenge of learning a specified curriculum in a fixed amount of time. We must struggle to learn a given cannon of knowledge with less opportunity for meandering and experimentation than is optimal. We agree to do our best. We will help each other try to integrate these worlds: to stay true to our study of the required curriculum but to also remain grounded in the playful, child-like exploration that is necessary for all true learning.

If there's no struggle, there's no progress.

Fredrick Douglass

**Learning is not easy.** Each of us must respect the sanctity of the learning experience by realizing that we are all struggling to learn things that we did not understand before. We will make an honest effort to learn and we will uphold the motto "Each one, Teach one" by helping our fellow learners.

Learning is a process. It does not happen right away or in a predictable fashion. Respect this. It is absolutely natural to be frustrated and confused - generally this means that you are laying the groundwork for real understanding that is soon to be at hand. As Shelia Tobias tells us in They're Not Dumb, They're Different, "**There is a difference between not knowing and not knowing yet.**" You cannot hope to learn anything of significance without investing in the struggle to make it your own.

**Learning requires an open mind.** We will honestly entertain new, divergent, and controversial ideas in our effort to broaden our understandings. We will respect different learning styles.

When the morning's freshness has been replaced by the weariness of midday, when the leg muscles quiver under the strain, the climb seems endless, and suddenly nothing will go quite as you wish - it is then that you must not hesitate.

Dag Hammarskjöld

The illiterate of the future will not be the person who cannot read. It will be the person who does not know how to learn.

Alvin Toffler

**Learning is your responsibility.** Real learning cannot take place by me transmitting information to you. You have to actively engage the material and make it part of your own understanding.

I realize that I need to help inspire students to learn, and I will do this. But college is a choice you have made - **you need to want to learn.** If you don't take this responsibility seriously you should go do something else - you are wasting everybody's time, energy, and money: mine, yours, your parents, the Commonwealth's, etc.

While I will do everything I can to make productive use of class time, most of your learning will take place outside of the classroom. **For every hour you spend in class you should spend two hours learning outside of class.** Your time should be spent on homework, reading, reviewing class notes, doing research, studying in study groups, coming to office hours, going to the tutoring or The Reading and Writing Center, etc.

I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to seek out others for help. Study groups are critical. My **office hours are critical.** You can also reach me via email if you need help. You must use all of the many resources available to you - they are invaluable to your learning.

Many people work to support their college education. It is not acceptable for this to be used as an excuse for not upholding your learning responsibilities. I will not allow our course to be denigrated in such a way - a reasonable grade in this course will remain a meaningful measure of true learning of significant merit. Completing an undergraduate degree will, on average, increase your lifelong earning potential by over \$1 Million dollars. **\$1 Million dollars for four years of work** - yes, you are going to work to earn this.

If you are differently abled - ADD, ADHD, autism, hearing impaired, ESL,... - or have particularly learning issues that I need to be aware of to help support your learning, it is your responsibility to inform me of these things and remind me on a regular basis. In particular, if you are part of the Disabled Student Services Program and need special arrangements for assignments or exams it is your responsibility to coordinate these arrangements with me.

A smooth lecture... may be pleasant; a good teacher challenges, asks, irritates and maintains high standards - all that is generally not pleasant.

Paul Halmos

I'm not a teacher: only a fellow-traveler of whom you asked the way. I pointed ahead -- ahead of myself as well as you.

George Bernard Shaw

In our classroom I have a dual role. I am a learner, like each of you are. Each day in each class I learn something new from students, from the mathematics we study, and from the experience. I am also a teacher - to me that simply means that I am a learning coach. My sole role is to help us learn. As Hugo

Rossi reminds us, **“The goal of teaching is learning, not teaching.”** I will try to live up to this mantra every day.

**I will demand a great deal of you in our class. I will demand a great deal of myself as well.** If I seem to be demanding too much of you it is your responsibility to tell me in a reasonable, timely way. Similarly, if you think that I am not providing enough support, guidance, information, or feedback, it is your responsibility to tell me in a reasonable, timely way.

**I only care about learning.** If there is anything that I can do to help make this a more successful learning experience, please tell me. I can be a better teacher if I have a better understanding of your learning needs.

We teachers can only help the work going on, as servants wait upon a master.

Maria Montessori

Tell me and I'll forget.

Show me and I may not remember.

Involve me, and I'll understand.

Native American Saying

One cannot learn by having information poured into their brains. Contemporary research in mathematics education has shown this to be particularly true in mathematics. Students learn mathematics only when they are able to construct their own meanings for and understandings of mathematical concepts, objects, ideas, constructs and notation. Such construction requires students to be actively involved in the learning process.

Mathematics is not a spectator sport. **“Mathematics is a process of constructing knowledge, not acquiring it,”** as Susan Ohanian reminds us.

To learn mathematics you must keep problems, questions, and ideas percolating in your mind. It is not sufficient to parrot examples from a text, rely on others for key insights, or expect to be given an explicit algorithm to memorize so you can solve each new type of problem.

**“The only way to learn mathematics is to do mathematics.”** (Paul Halmos) This means sitting with a paper and pencil. Doodling. Trying different approaches. Letting the problem sit for a while. Trying to solve an easier problem. Trying to solve a related problem. But always doing something, for **“Mathematics is something one does.”** (E.E. Moise)

No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.

Eleanor Roosevelt

Each of us has the right to learn/teach in a safe environment which is free from sexual harassment, racial prejudice, religious intolerance, discrimination based on sexual orientation, or any other type of harassment. **Harassment of any type will not be tolerated.**

Massachusetts ranks 48<sup>th</sup> out of the 50 United States in per capita spending on public higher education. Three years ago *Rolling Stone* magazine called Westfield State College a “less prestigious institution... in a run-down town.” (8/25/05, pp. 49, 52) Despite its struggles, Westfield State College continues to stand proudly as a “people’s college” which offers powerful educational opportunities. It is true to its heritage as the nation’s oldest coeducational teachers college founded by Horace Mann - the founder of public education in our country.

I am confident that the educational opportunity you can be part of in our classroom is second to none. I will not treat you as inferior students - I know from direct experience that **Westfield State College students can accomplish as much as any students anywhere.** If at any point your confidence is flagging, please let me know - my most important job is to be your biggest cheerleader.

Etiquette requires us to admire the human race.

Mark Twain

**We are adults who make our own decisions about personal matters.** We need not ask permission to use the bathroom, to sharpen our pencil, or do anything else that will help make our learning environment more comfortable or productive. We realize that on rare occasions we might be late for class or might have to leave early. In such cases we will properly inform the appropriate parties so our tardiness or early dismissal does not seem disrespectful to others.

Seeing as we are surrounded by others that are learning, **we will respect our shared learning environment.** Our cell phones will be turned off unless there are extenuating circumstances in which case we will notify people as appropriate. We will not be disruptive in class by chatting about personal matters, sleeping, being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or otherwise behaving in a disruptive manner.

So the soul of immensity dwells in minutia.

Jacques Bernoulli

Grading papers for over 100 students a semester is a nightmare. Late assignments complicate this already time-consuming process immensely. While I understand sometimes papers cannot be turned in on time, **routinely late papers will not be accepted.**

Projects, posters, or other major assignments will not be accepted late except under extenuating circumstances which have been communicated to me clearly in a timely manner.

It is your responsibility to insure that assignments have reached me appropriately. For important assignments not given to me in person you should make a copy for yourself, check to insure I have gotten the assignment, or keep an email copy.

**Make-up exams will not be given.** If there are legitimate circumstances of sufficient gravity that force you to miss an exam, it is your responsibility to communicate with me clearly about alternatives in a timely manner.

I hope that you will help you become a life-long learner of mathematics. In regard to you the formal part of this course, I here state clearly that **this course ends with the regularly scheduled final exam period, not the last day of classes.** From the outset you should plan appropriate time at the close of the semester to complete the required final work for this course. This may be an exam or may be some other type of work, but in either case the work at the end of the semester will be substantial -- you must make time for it to appropriately complete this course.

Academic honesty requires all work that you submit to be your own or be appropriately referenced. While I encourage working together – anything that you submit to me with your name on it must be your own. Any failure to uphold appropriate standards of academic honesty will be dealt with severely.

I agree to work to uphold the rights spelled out in this covenant and to undertake my responsibilities with diligence and vigor.

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Julian F. Fleron, Ph.D, Learning Coach

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Date

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