Spring 2021 Working Break Q & A for Faculty

1. What is a working break?
   A working break is a period of time during which no assignments, exams, or papers are due. Classes may be held as normal or modified at the discretion of the instructor. No examinations may be administered, and no take-home exams may be due during the working break. No paper or other assignments may be due on the days of the working break.

2. When are the working breaks scheduled?

3. Who is this for?
   The working breaks are required for all undergraduate courses. Instructors of graduate courses may also follow the practice at their discretion. This policy was created in response to reports of high stress levels in students due to the compressed schedule in the fall. In student surveys in Fall 2020, the top concern was that students missed having a break and that they felt that they had been assigned more work than usual last semester (whether or not that was true).

4. Can I still hold class during a working break?
   Yes, you can hold class as usual, or consider a modified approach. Potential modifications include having an asynchronous activity in place of class or requiring a webinar or other outside resource for students to view.

5. Can I still conduct labs during a working break?
   For lab courses, the experiments/activities scheduled to occur in the lab on a working break day should still occur.

6. Why not just give students these days off?
   Villanova has a credit hour policy that ensures compliance with accreditation regulations. In order to satisfy the correct number of credit hours, new official days off cannot be added to the spring 2021 schedule.

7. Can I assign readings during a working break?
   Yes, readings that contribute to class meetings during the working break can still be assigned. We encourage you to arrange to have a lighter reading load for those days in the spirit of giving students a break.

8. What are some ideas for alternate class activities and low-stakes assessments?
   A class during a working break can be made into a team trivia game to review past topics and create some interaction between students. For an example of a low-stakes assessment, consider a type of “quiz” where students work individually for 10 minutes, then have a class discussion afterward and allow everyone to correct their work in the margins.

9. How should I inform student about my expectations for the working breaks?
   Please make a note of the working breaks in your syllabus and indicate what your expectations will be for those days. For example, if you are making your normally synchronous class asynchronous on those days, the syllabus should have some details on that change.

In consultation with the Academic Policy Committee (APC) and the Council of Deans, approved by the Provost, Villanova University, December 2020