

Flexibility as a Specialized Need for Non-Traditional Student Success

This study proposes that consistently and clearly communicated flexibility on late assignment submission policies is a critical factor in institutional models for non-traditional student success, especially in accelerated, online learning environments. While literature on traditional persistence models addresses nuances in the non-traditional student experience, it often focuses on programming like peer mentoring or student clubs. However, activities outside of the classroom are not always desirable or accessible for non-traditional students. The tension between the external stressors (family, job, finances, etc.) and the institution is a factor of equitable access to higher-education for non-traditional students; often even academically successful non-traditional students stop out or drop out of school because of personal emergencies (Rovai, 2003). Indeed, non-college life events (NCLEs) negatively impact students' propensity to graduate successfully. But, in their analysis of the intersection of NCLEs and the higher-education environment, Cox, et al. (2016) suggest that flexible institutional policies could encourage students who are experiencing NCLEs to stay the course toward graduation. This presentation describes the Power of One, a University of Arizona Global Campus (UAGC) program that formally applies flexible assignment submission policies to 1) better understand the urgency of our students' need for this type of flexibility; 2) understand which instructional practices embody a holistic culture of student care, maintaining academic challenge while meeting this student need; and 3) inform necessary updates to UAGC policies so that they most effectively support our non-traditional student population. This study not only serves the UAGC faculty, staff, and student body but also contributes to work that aims to resolve equity gaps in higher-education access. Cox, B.E., Reason, R.D., Nix, S., Gilman, M. (2016). Life Happens (Outside of College): Non-College Life-Events and Students' Likelihood of Graduation. *Research in Higher Education* (57), 823-844. Rovai, A.P. (2003). In search of higher persistence rates in distance education online programs. *Internet and Higher Education*, 1-16.

Matt Phillips

Career Services Resource Designer

Matt Phillips, MFA, facilitates collaboration with multiple departments across student affairs at the University of Arizona Global Campus. He completed his undergraduate education in journalism as an adult student at North Carolina Central University, and later his MFA in creative writing at the University of Texas-El Paso where he focused his craft studies on post-WWII noir fiction. His experience in higher education started as a writing coach for medical school applicants and transitioned into student advising and career coaching. He completed a post-MFA program in writing pedagogy at Antioch University-Los Angeles and, in 2018, was a Fellow in Ideas at Harrison Middleton University.



Dr. Allison Rief

Associate Director, Academic Engagement Center

Dr. Allison Rief is an Associate Professor and Associate Director in the Academic Engagement Center at the University of Arizona Global Campus. Dr. Rief's research interests include virtual professional learning communities, collaborative and reciprocal relationships with online associate faculty, course design with intentional scaffolding within online learning, and the effects of flexibility and care on student learning. Within higher education, she has had experience launching new programs and revising existing programs, developing courses, providing professional development, and working with collaborative teams across the university. Currently, Dr. Rief is a member of the institution's diversity, equity, and inclusion-focused organizations - Change Advisory Group and Turn the Tide – and serves on the Student Conduct and Community Standards Committee and the Forbes Center for Women's Leadership. Dr. Rief also oversees the institutional partnership with No Excuses University schools.



Dr. Tony Farrell

Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

The University of Arizona Global Campus College of Arts and Sciences Dean Dr. Tony Farrell holds graduate degrees from National University and the University of Oklahoma, along with a PhD in Special Education from the University of Hawaii. His professional experiences cover the gamut of education, having been an elementary and high school special education teacher and a school administrator at the elementary and middle school levels. He especially enjoys the University of Arizona Global Campus students, and can relate to them since he worked full-time while going to school himself. "I love hearing their stories and helping them achieve their goals. As an educator, my goal is to have students understand the content of the class and eventually be able to apply what they learn in their chosen fields." He advises students to create a schedule and stick to it, since organization is the key to being successful in the online environment. "Also, I would encourage all students to reach out to their instructors when they need support. That is what we are here for!"



Dr. Maja Zelihic

Interim Dean, Forbes School of Business & Technology

Dr. Maja Zelihic is a Fulbright Specialist and full Professor. She has a PhD in Organizational Management, an MBA, and an MA in Organizational Leadership and Development. In addition to serving in the interim dean position at UAGC, Dr. Zelihic chairs three programs (MBA, BA in Leadership, and Ph. D in Organizational Development and Leadership) and the Center for Women's Leadership. She serves on the Board of Advisors of the International Fellowship Program in Arbitration and Scientific Assessment, the comprehensive global academic review platform. She also serves as an industry advisory member at the Amity University Novel Communication Lab (AUNCL).

Dr. Zelihic is currently serving her Fulbright tenure, having successfully completed one project as a primary investigator, and one as a co-investigator. Furthermore, she is a GLOBE research project Country-Co-Investigator, making her contributions in the unique large-scale study of cultural practices, leadership ideals, and interpersonal trust that GLOBE currently conducts in 160 countries. She is published in more than 20 peer-reviewed journals, and her research ventures took her to Haiti, Cuba, Mexico, Panama, Jordan, Zambia, the Balkan region, and many other parts of the world. In January of 2022, Dr. Zelihic was named as Global 100 Inspirational Leaders by Global Leaders Today.

