# Conduct and Correspondence Guidelines

The following Departmental guidelines have been compiled to help make explicit some of the basic standards we expect – and adhere to ourselves – when it comes to written correspondence (letters and emails) and professional conduct more generally. This is also a chance to clarify expectations concerning absences and the use of the tea corner.

**General conduct**

- The department is first and foremost a place of work for study, learning and writing. Please therefore try to keep the noise down in the corridors and in the tea corner (see below); sometimes, just pulling the tea corner door to is enough. We strongly discourage the use of cellphones in the corridors.

- If you know you will be missing a class, we expect you to send a short email to your instructor alerting them to the fact and proffering some kind of explanation. (See Absences below.) We consider this a matter of basic professional courtesy. If you have already missed a class, please send an email to apologise and confirm that you will be making necessary arrangements to catch up on the work missed.

- Members of academic and administrative staff should not be addressed on a first-name basis unless you have been specifically invited to address them this way. Being on a first-name basis, however, does not mean that common-sense politeness and professional standards cease to apply.

- In face-to-face interaction, students are commonly addressed by their first name; but please advise staff to address you by family name, if you prefer. In all written communication we ask that you use professional titles along with names – this applies to emails as well. In this regard, …

**Absences**

Our departmental standards are very clear: attendance is expected for all classes; and consistent, active participation is mandatory. We understand this to be a matter of academic, professional and civic responsibility. Our educational mission and your learning is heavily subsidized, and we are therefore responsible to the Bernese public for taking our work seriously and doing it properly.

Active participation does not only mean talking in class (although this is a key feature of academic discourse), but also entails coming prepared, completing assigned readings, engaging with your peers, taking notes, following directions, etc. Students who consistently fail to participate actively in class may be failed. In this regard, we consider recurrent non-participation in more than two sessions of a lecture or seminar, and more than one session of a colloquium, to be unacceptable.

Allowance is always made for university-sanctioned absences such as documented illnesses, deaths in the family, or military service. Absence due to your participation in a departmental excursion seminar <u>may</u> also be excused. Regardless, any absence threatens the success of your learning and missed work should always be caught up and/or made up. Excused absences, like any absence, should always be signaled to your instructor (see above).

**Written correspondence**

All written correspondence – print letters and emails – addressed to members of staff should follow a formal style. We realise that email often blurs the public-private boundary, but in the workplace they are always professional interactions. We expect the following principles to be applied:

### *Openings and closings*
Please always start you emails by addressing staff by name and by using their academic (i.e. professional) title. Please also sign off your emails or letters appropriately. If you do not know the title of a member of staff, consult the website. In the table below we offer some examples of how, in English at least, to begin and end written correspondence.

| OPENING | CLOSING |
| --- | --- |
| *On a separate first line:* | *On a separate penultimate line:* |
| Dear Professor Smith, | Yours sincerely, |
| Dear Dr Brown, | Sincerely, |
| Dear Ms Jones, | |
| Dear Mr Jones, | |
| | |
| Dear Alison, | Best wishes, |
| Dear Timothy, | Kind regards, |

*<u>Note</u>: The commas are optional according to modern "open punctuation" conventions. In US-American practice, the colon can be used after the salutation; in the UK and elsewhere, this would be considered quite odd.*

### *Introducing yourself/stating the subject*
Please always give clear, specific information in the subject line of emails or in the reference line of letters.

Remember, the staff member you are writing to might not immediately know who you are or why you are writing to them. It is usually helpful if you use the opening paragraph to introduce yourself, mention the seminar or lecture concerned and state the issue. It

is also common courtesy to acknowledge emails by, for example, thanking staff for their assistance or by confirming that the issue in question has been resolved.

If you are writing to any member of staff who is not your immediate instructor, we ask that you always reference your student number in the subject line. For example, if you are writing to the Head of Department, your Study Counsellor, the International Coordinator, etc.

### *Register and style*

All emails and letters sent to members of staff should, as we say, be treated as professional correspondence and therefore regarded as formal. This likewise means that you should adhere to the rules of formal writing with regard to, for example, paragraphing, capitalisation, punctuation, and word choice. It helps a lot if your correspondence is succinct and clearly organized so that staff know easily and quickly what your concerns or issues are.

## Tea corner

The department's tea corner is open to all staff and students. This is a special space – not all departments have one. It is also a space that it managed with the help of the Students' Committee. Equipped with a fridge and microwave, plates, cups and cutlery, the tea corner is a space for spending your lunch hour, mid-morning or mid-afternoon breaks, and for other informal moments with peers and staff.

Do please pay for milk and sugar; by the same token, please don't use other people's supplies without asking. Please always clean up after yourself – stacking the dishwasher, washing up and wiping down any surfaces you have used.