Course Management and Learner Guidance

1 What is it?

Both face-to-face and online courses require a clear structure for students to follow. Online courses, however, require students to understand this structure with minimal in-person guidance. There are several learner-centered practices for setting up a course and creating course policies that can best guide learners in an online learning environment.

2 Why is it important?

Students in online classes are typically expected to take ownership of their learning with the support of their peers and instructor. Many students have not been adequately prepared for managing their own time before taking their first online course. Creating predictable patterns for course activities will aid students in planning and managing their learning and non-learning time (Faculty Focus, n.d.).

3 How to do it?

To support students' satisfaction and engagement in online learning, help students learn to be self-motivated and self-regulated through strategies and supports, including a detailed course schedule, clear course policies, a specific communication plan, and a short discussion on time management strategies. Policies and supports should be included in the syllabus (see Syllabus for Online Teaching) outlining major considerations for expected behaviors, netiquette, plagiarism, ways to resolve issues (e.g., contacting an instructor). Additional supports and guidance can be provided as part of the structure of your course (see Tips for more suggestions). Finally, maintain open lines of communications to ensure that students feel comfortable and open to contact you in case of challenges with the course or grievances with other students.

Tips and Tricks

- **Course structure that supports independence.** Set up a course structure that is easy and intuitive for students to navigate, even if they may not have prior online learning experience. Provide additional supports that may help navigation, including:
  - A clear location for the syllabus and supporting documents (e.g., "Start Here")
  - Overviews and deadlines for activities
  - Course readings, discussions, and other activities clearly labeled
  - Opportunities for students to communicate outside of the immediate course topics (e.g., Watercooler discussion, the Muddiest Points)
  - Provide general course FAQs
- **Overview for students new to online learning.** Create a short lecture, discussion, or activity that covers time management strategies. Make this discussion tailored to the specific course by giving students estimated amounts of time they will spend on instructional content and assignments.
- **Structure and monitor student behaviors online**. Clearly state rules for online behavior and communication (netiquette). Monitor student communication and posts to ensure that students follow the rules.
- **Structure class participation.** Give students a time frame and minimum requirements for class participation activities. If participation is graded, set up a clear rubric and give the students the rubric (See Sample Discussion Board Rubric LDT) to inform them about the requirements.
- **Time management supports.** Most LMSs have both a calendar and announcements tool. Assignments entered into Blackboard can be set

to automatically populate the calendar. Announcements give students an active reminder of due dates and important events. Have sections of the course outline available in multiple places, such as in the syllabus or at the start of each unit.

- **Hold virtual office hours**. Virtual office hours (e.g., **WebEx**, **Zoom**, **Skype**) allow students to meet and ask questions about concepts and assignments and also allow instructor(s) and -student(s) to build rapport. For undergraduates, setting a clear policy and providing incentives for attending office hours (such as review materials) will improve student attendance.

- **At-risk proactive communication.** Engage at-risk students in communication to address any issues related to challenges with the course (e.g., missed discussions, assignment deadlines) and suggest ways to remedy the situation, as well as clearly stating the consequences for not taking action.
  - The **Blackboard Retention Center** can provide an overview for instructors based on rules the instructor creates. It can report grades that fall below a certain threshold, missed deadlines, and how much time a student is spending on individual course tasks.

- **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism.** Purdue prohibits "dishonesty in connection with any University activity. Cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information to the University are examples of dishonesty" (Part 5, Section III-B-2-a, Student Regulations).

- Shape assignments to avoid plagiarism. Such assignments can focus on strategies that help students critically analyze and synthesize information (e.g., reflections, critique).

4 Additional resources

- For Purdue users, consult with **The Teaching and Learning Technologies group** for help with tools or course development.
- **Faculty Focus. 11 Strategies for Managing Your Online Courses**
- **Purdue's Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities**
- **Indiana University (2016). How to recognize plagiarism: Tutorials and tests.**

5 References

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