Best Practices and Expectations for Online Teaching

The online learning environment presents a unique set of challenges that require clear definition of instructor performance. The following Instructor Performance Expectations are considered best practices. They identify the minimum level of interaction and management needed between students and instructors to maintain a quality online learning environment.

As a course instructor, it is anticipated that you will…

1. Follow the established course start and end dates. When students register for your course, they expect that it will start and end as stated in the Schedule of Classes [http://mypurdue.purdue.edu/schedule].

2. Follow our guidelines for managing your course throughout the semester. That document outlines things that should be done on a daily, weekly, or semester basis.

3. Monitor assignment submissions, and communicate and remind students of missed and/or upcoming deadlines. You can help insure a successful learning experience by practicing proactive course management strategies. We suggest posting a note to your class at least once a week, telling students what you will be covering in the coming week and reminding them of any due dates.

4. Establish and communicate to students, early in the course, a regular schedule for when you will be logging in to the course. Normally this is once per business day. Nearly all of the students studying via Engineering Professional Education are adult learners who have work and family responsibilities. These students tend to be more active in courses on weekends, so you may wish to also include in your schedule time to monitor courses at least once on weekends.

5. Give prior notice to your students in the event that you will be unable to log into the course for several days or more (e.g., during professional travel). This will help to forestall many student inquiries! You also should consider finding coverage for your online course if you are going to be out of contact with students for more than a couple of days, especially if they are to be working on assignments while you are gone. In cases of personal emergency, you are asked to notify students and Engineering Professional Education as soon as possible if you will be away from the course.

6. Provide feedback to student inquiries within one business day. Because online learners must manage their time carefully, timely instructor feedback is especially important to them. If you cannot provide a detailed response within one business day, we suggest that you respond to the student within one business day to simply let them know when a more detailed response will be provided.
7. Provide meaningful feedback on student work using clear and concise language. When providing feedback on student work, you have an ideal "teachable moment"! Simply telling a student "good job" or "needs work" doesn't give them the information they need to succeed. They need (and want!) more specifics. What needs work and how can they improve? (Specifically!)

8. Communicate to your students, in advance, when you will grade and return all assignments and exams. If you don't tell them this information, you will definitely be asked!

9. Encourage your students to complete the End-of-Course Survey. At the end of each semester, Engineering Professional Education will send your students an e-mail, addressed to their purdue.edu e-mail account, asking them to complete an online course evaluation. That note includes the direct URL to the survey. The distance students are not included in the University Course Evaluation system survey. As reinforcement, your course should have a link to the URL for the survey, https://engineering.purdue.edu/ProEd/App/current_student/survey.

The link from the Engineering Professional Education Web site is "hidden" until it is time for students to complete the survey.

Please send your students a note encouraging them to complete the survey and assuring them that the information will be used to improve the course is important, too. Research has shown that the biggest influence on whether a student completes an end-of-course survey is you, the instructor!

10. Post final course grades to myPurdue (Banner) by the Tuesday after the semester end, in accordance with University policy.

Adapted from John A. Dutton e-Education Institute, Penn State World Campus
Managing Your Online Class

Several Weeks (or more!) Before Your Class Begins...

One Week Before the Class Starts (a.k.a. "Orientation Week)...

During the First Week of Class...

During Weeks 2 through 6…

- On a Daily Basis Throughout the Class...
- On a Weekly Basis Throughout the Class...

Before the Class Ends...

On the Last Day of the Class (and soon after)!

Several Weeks (or more!) Before Your Class Begins...

1. Review Best Practices and Expectations for Online Teaching [Document]

2. Review your Blackboard course section (if you have taught your course in Blackboard previously and want to reuse the same materials for the upcoming semester).

NOTE: View Best Practices [Website]

3. Review your course content and fix any broken hyperlinks, images, etc.

4. Update your syllabus and any other instructor-specific course materials

5. Update your course calendar. Many faculty include that information on their syllabus or a stand-alone web page. Regardless of location, busy students appreciate having this information!

6. Update any content open/close dates. Some instructors like to set items in Blackboard to automatically be hidden or revealed on certain dates/times. Need help? See Blackboard Help>Release Content.

7. Determine which tool you will use to keep track of student grades and set up that tool for your new class. It is recommended that faculty use the Blackboard Grade Center. See Grade Center Resources at http://www.itap.purdue.edu/learning/tools/blackboard/learn_res/fac_res/gradecenter.html.
8. Choose a tool to encourage interactivity: Blackboard's discussion board, Mixable, Piazza, or maybe you have another favorite. Consider adding a link to Mixable within your Blackboard course. You can also add Piazza to Blackboard.

9. Send your students a welcome letter (by e-mail) that tells them:
   - The URL/location of the course (streaming video login: https://engineering.purdue.edu/ProEd/App/current_student
   - The URL/location of the syllabus (or attach a copy)
   - How to login (typically using their Purdue Career Account username and password)
   - What materials they need to purchase and where they can get them
   - Who to contact if they need technical assistance (students should contact the ITaP Help Desk (http://www.itap.purdue.edu/help/) for Blackboard questions and Engineering Professional Education with streaming video lecture questions.)
   - Reinforce course pre-requisites - What are they? How necessary? Will you mandate them?

NOTE: We suggest that instructors send a class welcome letter out at least once per week through the first week or two of class in order to catch any late adds.

INSTRUCTORS: The Engineering Professional Education office sends out a confirmation e-mail to students upon registration. The e-mail contains information about accessing the lectures, the exam proctor process and other administrative details.

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One Week Before the Class Starts (a.k.a. "Orientation Week")...
A standard practice for online courses is to give students an "orientation week"—access to the class one week before it officially begins. This practice enables distance learners to try out their Blackboard classes and to familiarize themselves with the class environment so that they will be comfortable and ready to learn on the first day of class.

1. "Enable" your class

   By default, a new class section is "disabled," meaning that registered students will not be able access the course when they log in to Blackboard. As the instructor of record, you are responsible for "enabling" your class so students can access it (unless other arrangements have been made).

   - Need help? See Making Your Course Available to Students

NOTES:

Students are added to your class automatically through their registration in Banner.

You may merge your lecture and distance course sections into one Learn course. Follow the instructions at: http://www.purdue.edu/goldanswers/187753

2. Provide a link to EPE's orientation materials to help your students prepare for the online class environment. (PDF)

3. Hide select class materials from student view. (Optional)

If there are materials that you are not ready to have students see, it is possible to "hide" materials in Blackboard.
• Learn how to control the availability of materials that are located in Blackboard

4. Post a "welcome" announcement for your students. This should ideally go wherever you think your students will "land" when they first enter your course. Many faculty like to use the "Announcements" section in Blackboard (a Menu item) and/or e-mail for this purpose. (Include the name of the course in the title of your announcement)

• Need help? See Creating Announcements.

NOTE: There are a few things we recommend that you mention in your welcome message:

Tell your students to begin the class by reviewing the syllabus and working through any class orientation materials...and provide directions for accessing those materials!

Remind them of the official class start date.

EXAMPLE:

Hello and Welcome to AAE 554!

This class will officially begin on January 7, 2013.

Meanwhile, feel free to familiarize yourself with the material in our class. The Course Content Menu Items contains modules for the syllabus, reference materials, PowerPoint slides, and more.

You can always contact me with your questions and comments using the e-mail tool in Blackboard.

See you soon!

- Prof. Joe Smith, class instructor

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During the First Week of Class...
Most courses begin by asking students to post a self-introduction to a class discussion forum (typically in Blackboard) as a way to break the ice and begin to build a sense of community. This is also a great way for the instructor to get a feel for who the students are and what experience they bring to the class.

1. Make your own "personal introduction" post to the class to get the ball rolling. In your post, tell students what information you would like them to include in their own introductions.

2. Review the personal introductions that your students post to the class discussion forum and respond to each, or to the entire class in a single note, as a way of welcome.

3. Summarize the postings for your class by posting a note to the appropriate discussion forum or send an e-mail to all students, sharing what you've learned about the class make-up and addressing their class expectations (e.g., "Several of you stated that you hoped to learn more about XYZ in this class. While we won't be covering XYZ specifically, we will address the more general issue of...")

4. Contact students who have not yet accessed your Blackboard or course site. In Blackboard, you can easily see who has, and has not, accessed your class. If a student hasn't accessed the class yet, there may be a problem that needs your attention.

   NOTE: Access Course Reports in the Control Panel under Evaluation.
   
   - Learn how to Send Email.

During Weeks 2 through 6…

Send an e-mail notice to low-performing students. It is an important retention strategy to notify students who are off to a bad start in your class! Send them a private e-mail letting them know their current grade and suggest strategies for improvement.

INSTRUCTORS: The Engineering Professional Education office will send your students an e-mail to complete 2 surveys within the first half of the course. The preliminary survey occurs around week 2 and is focused around aspects of the course delivery (can they see it, read it, hear it…). The responsiveness survey occurs around week 5 and asks students to evaluate the communication with their instructor and TA’s.
On a Daily Basis Throughout the Class...
How often you check the class is an individual decision, but you should let your students know, up front, how often they can expect to hear from you. Checking in at least once each business day and once over the weekend is a good way to keep in touch and to keep the e-mail and discussion forums from piling too high!

1. Monitor the Class Discussion Forums
2. Monitor the class e-mail tool for new messages
3. Grade all assignments. Students appreciate timely feedback on their assignments...and will let you know if they feel they are waiting too long!
   - If you use Blackboard for Assignments, see Getting Started with Assignments. Inline grading provides a new option for accepting, grading, and returning student work.
   - Use the Feedback to User feature in the Full Grade Center to provide comments and/or attach the graded paper for the student to retrieve. See AddaQuickCommentstotheGrade.pdf.

On a Weekly Basis Throughout the Class...
Once a week (preferably on the same day each week) we recommend that you:

1. Post a note to the class announcements area, telling students what you will be covering in the coming week and reminding them of any due dates.
2. Update your class schedule with any new or revised due dates
3. Summarize discussion forum conversations, since it can be hard to bring a close to those discussions and/or call out the important points before moving on to other discussions!
4. Consider holding online office hours

Giving your students a chance to communicate with you in real-time can help build strong relationships and motivate students to fully engage in the class. Two popular options for conducting live office hours with geographically dispersed students are chat rooms (text-based discussions) and WebEx (web conferencing) sessions. Just let your students know when and how to join your office hours!

- To use WebEx:
  - All faculty and staff have access to WebEx [Login]
  - Review the great training resources on the WebEx support site to get started! [Web Site]
Before the Class Ends...

Encourage your students to complete the online End-of-Course-Survey.

Research has shown that the biggest influence on whether a student completes an end-of-class survey is the instructor! So a note from you that encourages your students to complete the survey and that assures them that the information will be used to improve the class is important.

EXAMPLE: "I hope that you will be able to find about 10 minutes to complete the class evaluation survey. We rely upon your anonymous feedback to guide our continuing efforts to make this class worth the time and money you (and in many cases, your employers) invest. Whether your feelings about the class are positive, negative, or mixed, please take a few minutes to let us know. The URL for the survey is https://engineering.purdue.edu/ProEd/App/current_student/survey.

NOTE: The link from the Engineering Professional Education Web site is “hidden” until it is time for students to complete the survey.

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On the Last Day of the Class (and soon after!)...

1. Post an end-of-class announcement to wrap-up to the class.

2. Handle any incomplete grade requests (see Item 4 under Academic Regulations and Procedures for Grades and Grade Reports posted at http://www.purdue.edu/studentregulations/regulations_procedures/grades.html.

3. Post final grades on myPurdue by Tuesday after the semester ends.
   • See options to load grades from Blackboard Learn to Banner [Web Site]

4. Review and revise your course materials while everything is still fresh in your mind. Will there be a different instructor next time the course is offered? It would also be good to meet with that individual now to share your experiences.
Exam Procedures for Instructors

Providing your Exam to ProEd
ProEd requires either a hard copy or a digital PDF copy of each midterm & final exam, along with the accompanying exam cover sheet, to be hand-delivered or emailed to the ProEd Office Coordinator 7 calendar days before the exam date. If providing an electronic copy, please embed fonts. In advance of the scheduled exams, you will receive a reminder email from ProEd advising you of the deadline for submitting the exams. Take-home exams are not handled through ProEd.

The exam coversheet serves to instruct the off-campus Proctors of the conditions to be met when administering your exam. You must specify all conditions for your students so that the Proctors at every location will administer the exam consistent with your expectations. These conditions should include whether the exam is closed or open book, how much time is allotted, and permitted aids such as calculators, tables, crib sheets, mobile devices, laptop computer, and so on. You would also indicate if you want crib sheets, notes, scrap paper, etc. returned along with the exam. Please be specific.

ProEd Exam Distribution to Proctors
Once the exam original is sent or delivered to ProEd, it is uploaded in a PDF format with the coversheet attached and posted on our website. The Exam Proctors will be notified prior to the scheduled exam date when the exam is available for download. They will access the exam and class roster for their location with their secure log-in information provided by ProEd.

Test Day
Proctors will be present at the remote sites to administer the exam when required (no proctors are assigned for take-home exams). It is imperative that you establish an exam schedule at the beginning of the semester and stick to it. Your exam schedule should be announced at the beginning of the course, and must be provided to ProEd at your earliest convenience. This way, arrangements can be made for proctors at the remote sites, and students can begin to plan their work-related travel now so as to minimize the risk of missing any exams.

If questions arise during the exam, the Proctor will instruct the student to make a reasonable assumption, note the assumption on the exam, and continue with the exam. The Proctor should note it on the exam coversheet as well.

The students taking your course off-campus most likely will not be able to take the exam at the same time as it is given in West Lafayette, but are obligated to take it on the same day as on-campus students.

Handling Exception Requests
Only the instructor of the course may grant exceptions to the scheduled exam date. The ProEd office must be notified of any students taking scheduled exams on alternate dates.
While we do think that some flexibility is good practice, and we leave it to the instructors’ discretion to make exceptions for the exam dates, the distance students are supposed to be held to the same standards as their on-campus peers as much as possible. Therefore, we recommend that you set a precedent for granting exceptions based on such situations as whether a student has work-related travel or a shutdown, for example, rather than granting an exception because a proctor is unable to administer an exam on a particular day. In the event that a proctor is unable to administer an exam as scheduled, the first course of action for the student is to find a back-up proctor rather than to be granted an extension to take the exam on a different date. The student is urged to contact the ProEd office for assistance.

**Return of Exams for Grading**

Once the exams are administered, the Proctors scan the completed exams to a PDF format and upload them to our website. ProEd receives the completed exams, and checks each one to ensure that they are legible, that they have the correct number of pages, and that no information is cut off in the scanning process. We then log them and release them to the Professor for grading. Professors will be advised via email when the exams have been received and released as well as where they can then be accessed, downloaded and saved/printed from our website.

**Providing Feedback to Students**

The Purdue Registrar’s FERPA office recommends ITaP’s Filelocker tool to securely share files rather than sending attachments to the students’ Purdue email addresses, as email is not viewed as a secure method. Log in at [https://filelocker.purdue.edu/](https://filelocker.purdue.edu/). There is a Quick Help resource available within the tool.

There is also a way in the Blackboard Learn Grade Center to attach files associated with a grade. These files can only be retrieved by the intended student. Use the Feedback to User feature in the Full Grade Center to provide comments and/or attach the graded exam for the student to retrieve. See [https://wiki.itap.purdue.edu/download/attachments/25640600/G07-AddaQuickCommenttotheGrade.pdf](https://wiki.itap.purdue.edu/download/attachments/25640600/G07-AddaQuickCommenttotheGrade.pdf).

You may find it more convenient to markup the PDF exam within the electronic document itself, rather than printing it out and then making handwritten notes. Common tools available for this are Adobe Acrobat Pro and Adobe Reader (Comment pane), Foxit Reader, and Mac OS X Preview. These and other free and paid versions are not necessarily endorsed by Purdue.

Thank you!
ProEd Exam Retrieval Instructions for Faculty and TAs

STEP 1: Go to the Course Rosters page on the ProEd website: https://engineering.purdue.edu/ProEd/App/faculty.

STEP 2: Log into your course using your Purdue Career Account.

STEP 3: Click on the Class Roster link.

STEP 4: Download exams.

Once a student’s exam is available, a link will appear next to the student’s record in the class roster. Exams may be downloaded individually, or the entire set of exams may be downloaded by clicking “Download Selected” at the bottom right. All downloads are in scanned PDF format.

Additional Information:
• Before exams are posted, they are received, logged and verified to be legible by ProEd Staff.
• The instructor (or designated TA) will be responsible for printing the exams for grading. There is no limit to the number of times you may access a student’s exam. It is recommended that you print a class roster before every exam, and devise a system for tracking when you have printed and/or graded a specific student’s exam.
Thank you! Contact us if you have any questions.

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