Policies Regarding Progress Reports

1.0 Progress Reports:

Over the course of the semester, all students are expected to maintain an electronic progress report detailing their individual progress and contributions towards their senior design projects. Progress reports are to be written on a weekly basis, and are evaluated by the ECE477 course staff frequently over the semester. Progress reports are one of the primary resources available to any individuals attempting to reproduce a particular project or ECE477 student's work.

Progress reports contribute to 12% of a student's overall grade, and constitute a course outcome that must be satisfied in order to pass the course. In the event that a team member's contribution to a project is contested, a well-written and thorough project report can assist the student in defending his or her effort on a senior design project. Therefore, doing well on one's progress reprort will have a significant positive impact on a student's experience in ECE477.

1.1 Individual Nature of Progress Reports

Progress reports are individual efforts designed to capture the development activities of a particular student, and as such are written and graded individually. Use of progress report entries to detail the efforts of team member development efforts that the author had no part in is not allowed. Copying portions of progress report entries from other team members is similarly prohibited; violation of this rule could subject the student or students in question to grade penalties or academic dishonesty.

1.2 Use of Progress Report Templates

Students will be provided with a standard template to use for their progress reports. For ease of grading and evaluating reports, all students are expected to use the provided templates.

2.0 Progress Report Grading Criteria

As referenced in the report evaluation rubrics in the homework section of the ECE477 course website, there are 3 categories used for grading progress reports. These categories are:

1. Level of Technical Detail
2. Pictures, Drawings, and Diagrams
3. Technical Writing Style and Clarity

2.1 Level of Technical Detail:

This is the “meat” of a progress report, and as such is weighted the most heavily of the grading criterion. With a thorough, detailed report, a student's work can be readily reproduced by others, and helps to result in a high-quality overall project. Sloppy, poorly-written reports are not worth the paper they are printed on, and are of little or no help to an end user who is attempting to reproduce a student's work from his or her notes.

A technically detailed progress report entry answers the following questions (where applicable) clearly and concisely:

- What did the student work on?
- How did the student work on it? (Tools? Programs? Test rig? Etc.)
- What was the result, and how does this affect the project?
- What did the student learn?
- What are the next steps that must be taken?

2.2 Pictures, Drawings, and Diagrams:

Large, endless blocks of text can be very formidable to a reader, and sometimes the content of a student's report can be improved considerably through the inclusion of pictures (or other visual content). This is where the pictures, drawings, and diagrams portion of the report score comes in. Getting a good score on this is as simple as including relevant, unique pictures and diagrams related to your project. Pictures could include but aren't limited to: screenshots/images of schematics or PCB designs generated in software, photographs of your project and/or prototyping setups you have created to test features of your project, MATLAB graphs, and screenshots from oscilloscopes or other laboratory measurement equipment. Even students whose responsibility is primarily with code can include relevant pictures of their work on a project in the form of screenshots of pseudocode, GUI screenshots, flowcharts, graphical representations of algorithms, or useful graphical output produced by one's code.

It is important that the pictures a student chooses to include in his or her progress report be relevant to the work he or she, as opposed to the other team members, is performing. If, for example, a student's report entries detail their efforts on a project's firmware but the pictures for those entries are of hardware being assembled, this may reflect negatively on that student's pictures score. In addition, pictures utilized in student progress reports should be unique; several images of an object taken from different angles will only be counted as a single image. Pictures instantiated in progress reports should be small, in terms of physical size as well as in terms of file size. This will ensure that the report loads quickly and is simultaneously easy to read. However, the course staff would like to see actual images in the content of student reports, so please do not simply use hyperlinks to thumbnails.

The recommended best practice for report images is to create a small (600x450 px or less) image, insert that into the report, and then modify that image to include a hyperlink to the larger source image. Gimp and ImageMagick are two excellent programs that students may find useful for resizing images and converting between file formats.

A student's progress report should contain at least one image each week. Notebooks containing zero images will receive a score of zero for the Pictures, Drawings, and Diagrams section of their report grade.

2.3 Technical Writing Style and Clarity:

Along with technical detail, this section of your report forms the “core” of your progress report, and is thus weighted heavily in the evaluation grade. To receive a high score in this section, a student must write professionally. Proper spelling and good grammar are essential for high quality technical writing, and are thus necessary for full points. A useful method for improving one's score in this section is to copy and paste the contents of one's project notebook into a text editor that features a spell checker. Spelling and grammar mistakes can then be identified and corrected prior to evaluation.

3.0 Additional Notes Concerning Progress Reports

3.1 Maintaining Progress Reports in the Event of Student Absences

Over the course of the semester, circumstances may arise in which a student is unable to maintain his or her ECE477 progress report for an extended period of time. Examples of such circumstances include conferences, unexpected illness or accident, or family bereavement. In the event that such circumstances arise, please contact course staff so that they are aware of the absence and can handle it accordingly. No activity is required in the event of holidays and official university student breaks and holidays (such as fall break, spring break, etc.).