



This online education handbook was developed with the help of the UW-L online advisory board and provides a single resource for information related to online education.

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UW-L Online Education Handbook

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Academic Expectations and Standards

The academic expectations and standards of online courses are comparable to equivalent face-to-face courses.

Communication

Discussion Forums

Instructor participation is essential in online courses, and discussion forums are the central tools used for collaboration in the online classroom. Students want to know that they are being *heard* in the online classroom and instructors can ensure this by responding to posts in discussion forums. In their responses, instructors should offer their expertise, perspectives, and experiences, information about current events, probing and challenging questions, and statements of encouragement. Online courses are not correspondence-based; instructor presence in the online classroom is essential.

Here are some things to consider when facilitating a discussion forum:

- Ask probing questions that require students to think more in depth about their posts; also encourage other students to respond to thought-provoking questions posed by their peers.
- Have a clear policy on how discussions will be graded from the standpoints of both quantity and quality. For quantity, some instructors require an original post by a certain day of the week and a certain number of substantial reply posts; for quality, define what is meant by a "substantial" post (*e.g.*, going beyond "I agree" statements, asking thought-provoking and open-ended questions, bringing in outside materials related to course content).
- Post to discussion forums at least as frequently as you require your students to post. Model desired behavior and contributions.
- Respond to questions in discussion forums within 24 hours, if not before (exact timing depends on the total length of your course); instructors do not need to respond to every post but should periodically interject their thoughts, questions, experiences, clarifying information, information about current events, *etc.* State in your syllabus what students can expect from you in terms of responses and participation.
- Sometimes questions or comments need to be answered or defined by the instructor immediately so as not to perpetuate false information; however, other students can and should answer some of their peers' questions and comments. Monitor the forums and interject when needed so that students know you are there to assist in their learning.
- Use a supportive, appropriate, and professional tone in all your posts.

Instructors should provide two standard discussion forums in every course: (1) a *Virtual Café, Icebreaker or Lounge* forum where students are encouraged to introduce themselves to their classmates to help foster community in the online course, and (2) a *General Questions* forum that allows students to ask questions about the course structure, course content, syllabus expectations, assignments, and anything else related to the course. Having this second forum will help the instructor to answer questions "publically"; the instructor can then refer other students back to the posts and ensure all students are getting the same answers to questions.



Email

Instructors should use D2L for correspondence with students; instructors should only use email for personal one-on-one issues and not for class-related questions. The *News Item* area is a great place to add announcements, current events, articles, information, *etc.* Posting all updates in the *News Item* area, rather than sharing them through email, keeps all of your communications in one central location. This will allow students to better track information you share regarding the course.

If you do receive emails from students (which is likely), try to respond to questions within 24 hours, if not before (exact timing depends on the total length of your course – the shorter the course, the quicker your response time should be). If a student emails you things that would be important for other students to know, consider asking the student if you can post (anonymously or not) his/her question and your reply in the public *General Questions* discussion forum (see recommendation above in the *Discussion Forums* section of this document). By doing so, the students can see responses to common questions and the instructor does not have to answer the same email several times but rather can refer students to that forum and thread.

Do not allow students to submit assignments via email because there is no easy way to track submission and receipt. Again, D2L should be used for all correspondence, with the exception of personal one-on-one issues.

Group Work

Group work in the online classroom can be an effective collaborative activity because it allows students to discuss and share ideas and solve problems in a more intimate learning environment. When integrating group activities into a course, consider a few things:

- Group activities must be clearly defined in terms of expectations, deliverables, and due dates. Always consider that group members need time to get to know one another, determine work styles, and work out conflicts prior to completing tasks. These steps may take additional time to accomplish due to distance and the asynchronous nature of online courses.
- When deciding whether to assign students to groups, consider the length of your course. Often the process of students self-selecting into groups takes time and it could be detrimental to the success of the group project if too much time is spent selecting members and not on the project itself. For shorter length courses (*e.g.*, three weeks), instructors should consider assigning the group members.
- Group projects work well for activities that require students to compare and contrast concepts, to research different topics then share with the course, and to role-play.
- Consider integrating group project deliverables into other areas of the course. For example, if groups present their findings to the course use the opportunity to have students synthesize another group's findings as part of their final exam.
- Make sure that the course and/or the module/unit objectives address the importance and purpose of the group project or work. This will help students to understand its integration into the course and to prepare for work related to the team projects.



- Consider integrating some level of peer review. Instructors are urged to ask students to evaluate the performance of their teammates and group members at the end of each project. The instructor should review these student evaluations and consider them when determining grades for the group assignments.

Synchronous Tools and Events

Students take online courses because of the flexibility available within the online course format. If you use a synchronous tool (ex. Online Rooms or chat in D2L) for your online class, remember to respect the “anytime, anyplace” principle if you create synchronous events. It is advised that synchronous events are not required or graded unless otherwise explicitly stated to students prior to the start of the term. It is recommended to use synchronous tools that allow for recording and archiving so students are able to review the material presented in a synchronous event after the event has occurred. If you want to require a synchronous event for your students (either face-to-face or virtually), be sure to communicate those dates and times to students in advance of the course start date via a welcome email or via a note in the timetable next to your course.

Netiquette

Netiquette is internet etiquette. You should adhere to netiquette and request that your students do so too. For more information, review the information presented on this website: <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/>

Compensation

Course format (online, hybrid, or face-to-face) should not impact the compensation related to teaching a course.

Course Content

Activities

Active learning is important in the online classroom. Students should engage actively with the content in order to meet the course objectives. While some activities from your face-to-face course may translate appropriately into the online classroom, it is important to consider the activity’s relevance, appropriateness, and purpose in the online classroom.

Activities in the online classroom should meet course and module/unit objectives and accomplish the following:

- Present students with essential information, materials, and resources
 - o Examples: lectures, articles, links to library resources or articles, textbook readings, audio files, videos
- Incorporate appropriate and accessible technology
 - o Examples: screen captures, tutorials, PDFs, PowerPoints with voiceover and specific notes, videos with captioning or corresponding articles
- Engage in collaborative techniques that encourage student-to-student and instructor-to-student interaction
 - o Examples: discussion, chat, group work, debates
- Apply material to real situations
 - o Examples: case studies, virtual field trips, experiments
- Offer an opportunity for students to practice what they have learned
 - o Examples: homework with practice assignments, self-reflection journal



- Include an assessment tool to measure the extent to which objectives were met through assigned activities
 - o Examples: quiz, test, project, portfolio, case study
- NOTE: Adhere to all copyright laws and notifications when posting content, articles, multimedia, etc. to your online courses. Provide direct links to articles from the [Murphy Library](#) site in order to adhere to copyright laws. For additional copyright information, please visit the [Murphy Library Copyright page](#).

Course Objectives

Because online courses have the same academic expectations and standards as face-to-face courses, your online course should have the same (or very comparable) course objectives; however, the way in which you reach the course objectives may be different in the online format.

All course objectives, no matter the course format, should be specific in describing a measurable and observable behavior. Consider behavior, condition, and criterion when developing an objective. The behavior specifies what you want the student to do, the condition outlines the circumstances in which a student can demonstrate the behavior, and the criterion identifies the degree to which the behavior is evaluated. Objectives should be S.M.A.R.T.: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Oriented, and Time-bound. All course objectives should be tied directly to course assessments. Here is more information about objectives: [Writing Course Objectives](#)

Lecture Narratives

A lecture narrative – a written form of what you might talk about in class – is a great way to personalize your online course. The lecture narrative should enhance what is already presented in other resources, such as the textbook, by adding your perspective, highlighting key words and concepts, adding examples to help clarify the content, defining a precise process, demonstrating how the topics relate to current events and/or professional or life experiences, and/or offering other information that is pertinent for students to understand about the content. Even if you use publisher materials in your online course, please consider adding your own lecture narrative to highlight for students your thoughts on the course content. As always, obey copyright laws and proper citation rules when preparing lecture narratives.

Syllabus

Create a course syllabus at least four weeks before the course start date. This will aid in course development. The syllabus then can be sent to students upon request as well as with the recommended welcome email (see *Welcome Email* section of this document). Written expectations are essential in an online course and a syllabus is a great place to outline those expectations. Your syllabus should include the following: course description, instructor contact information, textbook, course objectives, grading schedule and scale, grading policies, course schedule, course structure, and general expectations. Giving a quiz worth a few points is often an effective way to get students to review the syllabus; make sure quiz questions cover critical aspects of the course students need to know. A syllabus template can be found [HERE](#) (opens as a Word document); it can be used as a guide when creating your syllabus for an online course.

Course Enrollments

The instructor, working in conjunction with his/her department chair, should determine appropriate enrollment limits for online courses. Course enrollments per section should not exceed the enrollments set for the same course taught face-to-



face. It is recommended that enrollments in online courses should not exceed 30 students due to the active and collaborative nature of quality online course design.

Course Facilitation

Facilitating an online course requires the instructor to provide encouragement, guidance, and feedback to students. It is important for online instructors to model expected behavior for their students. For example, if you require your students to have substantive discussion posts, use correct grammar and spelling, practice netiquette, properly cite sources, and use appropriate language and tone, then you should do all of these in your posts. In addition, if you require your students to add substantial contributions on 4 of 7 days of the week, then you should be engaged in the course at least that many days.

A major benefit of online learning is the ability of students and instructors to participate from any location, as long as they have a computer and Internet access. Instructors who will not have regular access to an Internet connection during their contracted period should not teach during that time. Unexpected emergencies that interrupt the course should be communicated to the department chair and Director of Online Education as soon as possible to determine appropriate action.

Course Format

The department should determine the format (*e.g.*, face-to-face, hybrid, online) of courses offered through that department.

** NOTE: Approved by Faculty Senate on April 15, 2010.

Course Management System

Any electronic course management system used must comply with all applicable statutes and laws (*e.g.*, FERPA, copyright). It should be noted that only the course management system used by the university can be fully supported with technical and course design assistance. It is recommended that you use the system supported by the university to ease the technical transition for students taking online courses.

Course Preparation

Course Architecture

It is recommended that you section your course into modules in D2L. A module corresponds to one unit of content. All materials for that unit should exist within the module: *e.g.*, the lecture narrative, activities, discussion forum links, external links, tests. Each module should be organized in the same manner. For example, if in Module 1/Unit 1 you list the lecture narrative first, the assignment second, the discussion forum third, and the quiz fourth, you should use that same ordering for all subsequent modules/units.

Course Enrollments

Increasing course enrollments likely will impact the student-to-student and student-to-instructor interaction, along with the instructor workload.



General Course Preparation Tips

Preparing a quality online course is time consuming. Try to create your entire course before the course even starts; this will allow you to focus on interacting with and providing feedback to the students, rather than on preparing course materials, while the course is in session.

One Week Before the Course Starts

Consider activating the course one week before the course start date so students understand what is expected prior to the start of the course. At minimum, and at least one week before the course starts, you should post the following:

- a completed syllabus,
- a welcoming *News Item* with information about how to get started in the course,
- instructor contact information,
- at least one module/unit of content,
- discussion forums for the first module/unit's content,
- a discussion forum used as an icebreaker,
- a discussion forum for general questions, and
- the graded items added to the D2L *Grades* area.

Students with Disabilities

Disability Resource Services recommends that you include the following statement in your syllabus:

Student with Disabilities: Any student with a documented disability (*e.g.*, physical, learning, psychiatric, vision, or hearing) who needs to arrange reasonable accommodations must contact the instructor and the Disability Resource Services office (165 Murphy Library, 608-785-6900, ability@uwlax.edu) at the beginning of the semester. Students who are currently using the Disability Resource Services office will have a copy of a contract that verifies they are qualified students with disabilities who have documentation on file in the Disability Resource Services office. It is the student's responsibility to communicate his/her needs with the instructor in a timely manner. Review the Disability Services office website at <http://www.uwlax.edu/drs/>. Information about accessibility with D2L can be found here: <http://www.desire2learn.com/products/accessibility/>.

Time Releasing

Time releasing is the act of making set content in your course visible at certain dates; this can be accomplished within D2L. Consider time releasing modules one unit at a time but allow students to access the modules from previous units (*e.g.*, in unit 3 a student would see units 1, 2, and 3). This is particularly useful if your course is developed so that unit 2 builds on information that was introduced in unit 1. This is an effective way to keep students focused on the concepts for that module/unit and to help the instructor stay organized in the discussion forums. There are instances when multiple modules/units can be released at the same time. With either set-up, it is important for students to know what is expected of them and what they can expect of you. You should clearly outline in your syllabus what students can and cannot do in advance. For instance, it is recommended that students not participate in discussion forums in advance to ensure the



greatest amount of interactivity. Activities like quizzes and assignments, however, can be completed in advance if you decide that is permissible.

Welcome Email

At both two weeks and one week before the start of your course, consider sending a welcome email that includes information about basic course expectations (possibly the syllabus) and tips to help students succeed in your online course. A copy of a sample announcement can be found [HERE](#) (opens as a Word document).

Course Start and End Dates

Start and end dates for online courses should parallel the start and end dates for face-to-face courses. Should an instructor wish to have an alternate start and end date for an online course, s/he should seek approval through the Committee on Academic Policies and Standards (CAPS).

Definition of Course Types

Online courses are those in which all, or nearly all, instruction is delivered over the Internet.

Hybrid courses require online learning as well as traditional in-class instruction.

Distance education courses utilize real time two-way communication between instructor and student.

** NOTE: Approved by Faculty Senate on September 28, 2006

Dropping Online Courses

This policy applies only to online courses dropped during the normal drop/add period for the course:

1. Online students can drop an online course by emailing the instructor during the normal drop/add period for the course (in which an instructor or advisor signature is required to drop). Include in your e-mail your name, student identification number, and the course and section number you are dropping. Please make arrangements to return Textbook Rental materials immediately so other students adding the course may have access to the materials.
2. The instructor then forwards the student's email to the Records Office (records@uwlax.edu) from the instructor's UW-L email account so the Records Office can process the drop. The drop will be dated with the day the student originally emailed the instructor.
3. The Records Office then will print and file this email with the other drop slips in the Records Office. The student and the instructor will receive a confirmation of the drop from the Records Office once the drop is processed.

If the course is the only course for which a student is registered, a withdrawal from the university will be required and the student should be referred to the Office of Student Life to initiate the withdrawal process.

Final Exam Policy



A final examination will be given in each course within a special examination period except for one-credit courses, which will have exams scheduled at the last regular meeting of the class. The examination periods, dates, and times are included in each semester's Timetable. Final exams for online courses will be administered by the published end date of the course. The relative importance assigned to the final examination is determined by the instructor in charge of each course.

**** NOTE:** Approved by Faculty Senate on November 12, 2010.

Instructor and Student Feedback

Grading Policies

Fair grading standards should be outlined in your syllabus. Students must meet outlined expectations to earn defined grades.

Participation or discussion forum engagement will likely be part of your grading scheme. Participation or discussion forum engagement often makes up between 15 and 40 percent of the final course grade, depending on the course subject and objectives.

It is recommended that you have a set time for all assignments to be due. For example, you might consider having all course requirements due by 11:59pm CST on the specific due dates.

Preventing Cheating

Designing courses to prevent academic dishonesty should be something important to all courses. Here is an important tutorial (with audio) that outlines several ways to design assessments to deter cheating in your online course.

http://www.uwlax.edu/cat/instructionaldesign/cheating_tutorial/engage.html

Student Feedback

Students want to know their status in the course and expect instructors to post this information on a predictable and timely basis. It is recommended that you update student grades in D2L on a weekly basis or per unit. Also, prior to the course start date, create the *Grades* area in D2L to include all course grades. This will allow students to be aware of all graded requirements at the start of the course.

Submit final course grades on time. To find current grade submission deadlines, please review the [Records and Registration website](#).

Instructor Sole Ownership Agreement

Instructors who receive online education grants to develop online courses through UW-L are given the option of signing an Instructor Sole Ownership Agreement. The ownership agreement states that the instructor has sole ownership of the material s/he develops for the course and that UW-L cannot take the course material and share it with another instructor.

**** NOTE:** Approved by Senate Executive Committee on 9/23/2008.

Online Advisory Group



There is an Online Advisory Group that works closely with the Director of Online Education to determine priorities and discuss issues related to online education on campus. Current members of the online advisory group include:

Stephen Brokaw	College of Business Administration: Marketing
Bill Cerbin	Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning
Enilda Delgado	College of Liberal Studies: Sociology/Archeology
Bob Hoar	Faculty Assistant to the Provost; College of Science and Health: Math
Kristin Koepke	Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning
Nishele Lenards	College of Science and Health: Health Professions
Jodie Rindt	College of Liberal Studies: Psychology
Jen Snook	Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning
Brian Udermann	Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning
Lynn Weiland	Continuing Education and Extension

Online Education Grants

UW-L has two internal grant programs related to online education. In the fall, instructors can apply for a grant to complete the 3-week online instructor training course. In the spring, instructors can receive funding to develop online courses.

Questions about online education grants can be directed to online@uwlax.edu.

Online Course Evaluation Guidelines

The *UW-L Online Course Evaluation Guidelines* are intended to help instructors create and teach well-designed online courses. The *Guidelines* outline specific features of online courses and recommend ways to design, deliver and improve courses. Part 1 is Background Information that identifies key features of courses, describes their purposes and gives suggestions on how to implement each one in a course. Part 2 is a Checklist you can use as a reference as you design, teach or review an online course. The *Guidelines* may be used as a tool for self-assessment by instructors during the design and delivery of their online courses, to provide constructive feedback to instructors on the design and delivery of their online courses, in the *UW-L Online Education Grant* review process to determine whether grant recipients have fully completed the design of their online courses, and in the *UW-L Online Instructor Training* to help participants identify the features of effective online course design. Whether the *Guidelines* are used for self-assessment or to give feedback to another instructor, use the checklist to identify the course features that have been included, excluded or need improvement, and supplement the checklist with written annotations and suggestions. The *Guidelines* can be found here:

<http://www.uwlax.edu/online/guidelines.pdf>

Resources

Appropriate Use of D2L Tools

There are many tools available in D2L and it is important that instructors use the tools appropriately when designing and delivering online courses. Here is a brief run-down of the main tools and their proper uses:

- Content — this area should house the content for your course; content should be organized using a consistent and logical flow



- Links — you can add external links in this area; external links can also be added in the content area
- Dropbox — use this area to exchange files with students; it also can be synchronized with the grade book
- Discussions — this area should be used for course and group discussion forums; this area should **not** be used for the presentation of materials, submission/retrieval of assignments/files, or posting of grades
- Chat — use this area for instant communication; it is useful for online office hours and tutoring sessions (consider saving copies of relevant chats to share with other students)
- Classlist — this area can be used to view progress and to email students
- Groups — when you use groups for course activities, you can use this area to set up the groups and corresponding features (discussion forums, lockers, and dropboxes)
- Quizzes — use this area to create quizzes and exams; many question types are available and you can use them as appropriate
- Grades — this area should be used to calculate student grades; make sure you keep it up-to-date
- Survey — you can create non-graded surveys in this area

For questions about the appropriate use of D2L tools, please contact online@uwlax.edu.

Audio and Video Files for Online Courses

Online courses work better if you do not try to completely recreate the face-to-face classroom experience. For example, if you give a lecture in your face-to-face classroom, consider ways to present that information in a different format. Simply video recording your face-to-face lectures for play in your online classroom is probably not the most effective way to present the material online. It may be appropriate for part of your face-to-face lecture material to be presented in another format (e.g., written narrative, chart, PowerPoint).

If you use video or audio in your online classroom, consider the purpose and ensure it is in line with your course objectives and goals. Video is often useful for role-playing activities and for demonstrations, such as how something is made or assembled, or how to solve a problem. Audio is often useful to emphasize the importance of a process, to share a story or experience, or to ensure proper pronunciation. Video and audio are great to use when incorporating a guest lecturer or expert series giving tips, advice, experience, etc.

If there is a component of your lecture that you believe really needs to be demonstrated via video or audio, here are some tips:

- Do not add audio and video simply for the sake of adding audio or video to your course. Always consider the purpose.
- The most universal file format for video is Flash. QuickTime is also an option. MP3 is the standard format for online audio.
- Always incorporate the highest quality (clean audio with enough volume, and stable, in-focus video) into your audio and video.
- Keep the length of your audio and video files to a minimum. Consider using video files from 5-8 minutes and audio files from 10-12 minutes. While these are guidelines, make your audio and video files only as long as they need to be.



- Compress the file to keep downloading times to a realistic limit. Always consider bandwidth when adding audio or video and consider testing with your audience to determine appropriate and tolerable file sizes.
- Plan out and practice your audio or video prior to recording.
- Have objective outsiders review the value of your audio or video file prior to adding it to a course.
- If you embed external video or audio files, be careful to obey copyright laws.

If you would like help creating audio or video files for your online classroom, please contact online@uwlax.edu and you will be directed to the appropriate person for your request.

Instructional Design

Instructional design is the systematic process of designing, delivering, and reviewing instruction. The Instructional Designer at UW-L provides individual consultations for instructors to help develop curricula and pedagogical strategies that enhance teaching and learning. For more information please visit <http://www.uwlax.edu/catl/instructionaldesign/> or contact online@uwlax.edu to schedule your consultation.

Online Instructor Training

The Online Instructor Training sessions take place over three weeks in D2L and cover topics critical to online course design and delivery. The training is asynchronous in nature but requires participants to spend *approximately* 10 hours a week engaging in training activities that assist in preparing and developing an online course. If you are interested in learning the schedule and more information, please visit <http://www.uwlax.edu/catl/instructionaldesign/training.html>.

Technical Support

There are several tutorials and handbooks about D2L listed on our website: <http://www.uwlax.edu/ats/d2l/index.htm>. In addition, you can contact the Eagle Help Desk at 608.785.8774 or helpdesk@uwlax.edu for additional questions about D2L.

Student Evaluation of Instruction (SEI)

The standard UW-L student evaluation of instruction (SEI) items should be administered for online course. If you wish to receive a digital copy of the SEI that you can use in Qualtrics, or if you have additional assessment questions related to online education, please contact online@uwlax.edu.

Textbook Rental

“On-line classes follow the guidelines for traditional classes, with the following additions: Students are allowed to check-out textbooks required for on-line classes two weeks before an academic year semester ends, or two weeks before a summer session or winter intersession (formerly J-Term) on-line class begins, to allow time for shipping. If textbooks need to be shipped, the student will pay for shipping. Textbooks that are returned by mail need to be postmarked on the day prior to the final return date to avoid late fines and/or replacement costs.”

(Taken from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Textbook Services Policy found at:

<http://www.uwlax.edu/textbookrental/TextbookServicesPolicyFinal040610.pdf>)



Workload

Course format (online, hybrid, or face-to-face) should not impact the workload related to teaching a course.