

## High-Impact Practices for Online Instruction

### Overview

In response to faculty interest in engaging more with their students and with SPS, we surveyed you about faculty development programming needs, and asked you to share your ideas about instructor presence and feedback. To create this resource, we drew on your input, along with research cited in [Quality Matters](#) and the [Community of Inquiry Model](#). A 2016 survey of SPS students also showed that while they were satisfied with many aspects of their academic experience, there were inconsistencies in instructor presence and instructor feedback on student work across courses. This list of practices is meant to establish a set of shared expectations to reinforce what's already happening and to provide additional ideas to support high quality instruction in all our courses. The graduate team or the faculty director of your program will also refer to these practices in assessing the learning environment of your course.

### Instructor Presence

When you establish your presence in an online course, students get the sense that you're paying attention and guiding them through the course. Regular updates and a back-and-forth between you and your students indicate that you're monitoring their progress and adjusting and updating the course along the way to meet their learning needs. Instructor presence can be established and maintained through the following ways.

#### Communication

Through various channels on the course site, you actively communicate with students.

- Post weekly welcome and wrap-up announcements about course activities
- Hold at least 3 synchronous office hours via web conference during the term
- Interact with students at least once a week via announcements or sync sessions and 2 or 3 times a week via discussion boards
- Check email daily; respond to urgent questions (individual or group) ASAP; other questions within 24-48 hours
- Encourage students to ask questions and take the time to respond

#### Community Building

Through activities during the first weeks of the course, you make an effort to get to know each student and let the students get to know you and each other.

- Address students by name or by how they prefer to be addressed

- List contact information, with specific information about availability and typical response time (Use your NU email; listing cell phone numbers is optional)
- Post a welcome announcement or video for the first day of course
- Respond directly to each student in the introductions discussion
- Encourage connections among students and try to integrate students' individual interests, skills, and experiences into the course as it progresses

## Discussion Facilitation

Through participation in discussion, you show that you're paying attention to students and advancing their thinking. This doesn't mean responding to every student's individual posts every time, but stepping in at appropriate times to ensure that the discussion is productive. You should actively monitor discussion boards and respond *at a minimum* 2 or 3 times per week.

- Pose questions or introduce alternative ideas/viewpoints to push students' thinking and deepen discussion
- Get discussion back on track or refocused if it goes off on tangents
- Synthesize comments at some point in a discussion to emphasize and explain core course concepts
- Elicit participation from all students
- Create a respectful forum to test ideas (students express conflicting viewpoints, challenging each other)
- Use practical examples to illustrate complex concepts
- Respond to instructor-directed student questions on Canvas discussion boards within 48 hours

## Conveying Real World Relevance

Through announcements, emails, discussions, and sync sessions you provide practical examples of how to use concepts in professional contexts.

- Create an interest in understanding the relevance of the subject to the everyday or professional world
- Post current articles or other resources relevant to the topic for students
- Encourage students to share relevant scholarship and other resources with each other
- Encourage involvement in professional associations through resources or end-of-course wrap up to further students' professional development

## Instructor Feedback

Feedback is essential to learning. While group feedback may be sufficient for informal assignments and discussions, substantive individual feedback on graded assignments is critical for student learning. Individual feedback does not need to be extensive to be effective, but it should be **timely, relevant, and focused** on what the student can do to improve (including building on demonstrated strengths). The purpose of feedback is not just to evaluate a specific performance, but to treat that performance as an occasion for further teaching and learning.

## Providing Individual Student Feedback

Understanding that feedback is a teaching opportunity, not just an evaluation of a single performance, you tailor your comments to engage with each student's ideas. You provide timely, relevant, and focused feedback that makes concrete suggestions for improvement on future assignments or work beyond the class.

- Establish and communicate clear criteria used to evaluate assignments (through a rubric, checklist, or written instructions)
- Provide opportunities for drafting and receiving feedback on drafts from you and/or peers before assignment is due
- Make yourself available via telephone or video conference to take students through their assignments and answer questions
- Respond thoroughly to assignments, with grades, in time for feedback to be applied to the next graded assignment or next stage of a larger project
- Provide comments to each student that engage with that student's ideas, noting strengths as well as suggestions for continued improvement/learning
- Focus feedback on the most relevant course concepts and skills (i.e. apply evaluative criteria consistently and fairly)

## Providing Group Feedback

At regular intervals, you provide a progress report on course proceedings, summarizing key course concepts and insights, as well as clearing up misconceptions or confusion and addressing questions that have come up. This feedback helps guide students by highlighting what's most important, how students should approach assignments and projects, and how specific content is connected to course learning goals and outcomes.

- Summarize the weekly discussion in an announcement, email, or recording at the end of the module, highlighting key questions, themes, or ideas
- Summarize the weekly content in an announcement, email, or recording at the end of the module highlighting key questions, themes, or ideas
- Preview the weekly content in an announcement, email, or recording to help students transition from one week to the next
- Use video conferences to conduct individual or team meetings

## Additional Resources

- [Community of Inquiry Model](#)
- [Importance of Instructor Presence in Online Courses](#)
- [Quality Matters](#)
- [Providing Great Feedback to Students](#)
- [SPS Distance Learning Blog](#)
- [Searle Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning](#)