

Guidelines for Online Teaching Success

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Years ago at a faculty meeting Larry Ragan, PhD, director of Faculty Development for Penn State's World Campus, was trying to soft-sell the idea of performance expectations for online faculty. He didn't want the discussion to be misinterpreted as an indictment against their teaching style, but he also saw an opportunity to share proven practices for improving the online teaching and learning experience. Finally a senior faculty member grew tired of the tip-toeing around the subject and said, "If you don't tell us what is expected, how will we know what to do to succeed?"

The faculty member's point was well taken, and over the years Ragan and others on various committees at Penn State have worked to define:

Core competencies for online teaching success – Currently there are 28 competencies across the three main topic areas of technology, course administration, and pedagogy.

Online instructors' performance expectations – Currently there are eight key performance expectations and a description of the associated behaviors.

Performance metrics – Although not all of the behaviors lend themselves to metrics, items such as feedback, availability and communication can be quantified.

"The online performance expectations are shared with online instructors as both a way to set the context for their online teaching experience and as a tool to help balance their own teaching expectations," Ragan said. "They have been developed from almost 15 years of experience, best practices research, observations of what good instructors do, and student feedback."

During the recent online video seminar [Setting Expectations for Online Instructor Performance](#), Ragan explained the importance of defining expectations for the online classroom, as well as how to keep new instructors from getting overwhelmed.

Ragan also provided an overview of the eight performance expectations developed by the Penn State World Campus Performance Expectations Committee, and encouraged participants to adapt the categories and associated behaviors to the culture of their specific college or unit.

The online instructor performance expectations he discussed are:

1. Technology Access

The instructor is responsible for meeting the same technology requirements as required for students.

The instructor is expected to:

- Secure access to a high-speed bandwidth connection for class activities.
- Test all course-related technology prior to the start of the course.

2. Course Management and Instruction

The instructor is responsible for managing and teaching the class from start to finish.

The instructor is expected to:

- Follow the established and published course schedule.
- Conduct (that is, "teach") the course within the scheduled time frame.
- Make and communicate schedule adjustments as necessary.
- Provide each student equal opportunity to succeed.

3. Preparation

The instructor is responsible for assuring that they possess the required skills and competencies for teaching online.

The instructor is expected to:

- Be operationally proficient in the course technology.
- Be prepared with the skills to teach online.
- Be able to complete the required administrative tasks necessary to complete the course.

4. Course Familiarity

The instructor is responsible for being adequately familiar with the online course.

The instructor is expected to:

- Be familiar with the syllabus including course milestones, due dates and critical course activities.
- Make changes to the syllabus as necessary and communicate the changes to the students.
- Review and be familiar with the course content.
- Identify and report inaccurate course content, confusing information and/or instructions, broken links, and other course design issues.
- Review the course teaching guide to gain an understanding of the intent/context of the course such as the author's teaching philosophy, content, learning activities, and assessments.

5. Availability

The instructor is required to be available to the online learner for the duration of the course.

The instructor is expected to:

- Regularly access the online course.
- Notify students and appropriate administrative units if unable to log in to the course.

6. Communication

The online instructor is responsible for managing course-related communications.

The instructor is expected to:

- Clearly communicate student expectations.
- Communicate instructor class schedule and access.
- Actively participate in course-related discussions and activities where appropriate.

7. Feedback

The online instructor is responsible communicating with and providing feedback to students.

The instructor is expected to:

- Provide prompt feedback.
- Inform the learner of when they can expect a response if the instructor cannot provide a detailed response within 12 hours.

- Provide clear and concise feedback to explain the degree to which the student is achieving the course/lesson outcomes.
- Communicate to students when they can expect to receive graded feedback on assignments and exams.

8. Documentation & Record Keeping

The online instructor is responsible for maintaining records of course transactions and communications.

The instructor is expected to:

- Keep a record of communications with students including when other modes of communications are used.
- Record and communicate student progress information such as assignment and quiz grades.
- Post the final course grade promptly.