

Penn State Online
Faculty Competencies for Online Teaching

Teaching in an online environment can be considerably different in nature than teaching face-to-face. The competencies listed in this document are intended to provide faculty and administrators with a better understanding of the instructional requirements of online teaching.

PEDAGOGICAL COMPETENCIES			
An online instructor should be able to:		Additional Guidelines	Examples & Best Practices
1	Attend to the unique challenges of distance learning where learners are separated by time and geographic proximity and interactions are primarily asynchronous in nature	Online course content is typically developed in advance of the course's start date. In effect, the "lecturing" has already been done! As a result, the role of the online instructor shifts from "the sage on the stage" to "the guide on the side." Teaching online focuses one's efforts on facilitating, guiding, and directing learning, as well as assessing progress.	Instructors should strive to adhere to the published course schedule to ensure that all course goals are met by the end of the semester.
2	Be familiar with the unique learning needs and situations of both traditional age and adult learners, providing an educational experience that is appropriate for both	Adult learners bring a different perspective, motivation, and set of experiences to the classroom than traditional college students. Online courses are apt to attract working adult professionals who need the flexibility that online learning can afford. Faculty may find, however, that traditional college students also populate their courses, so it is important to be aware of the learning needs of both audiences.	There are many resources available to orient oneself to the principles of teaching adults. A nice summary can be found at http://www2.honolulu.hawaii.edu/facdev/guidebk/teachtip/adults-2.htm . A more detailed Penn State report of Best Practices can be found at http://www.outreach.psu.edu/commission/files/Best_Practices.pdf
3	Have mastery of course content, structure, and organization	Review all course materials, as well as the structure and organization of course environment, in order to become comfortable with all aspects of the teaching and learning environment.	Instructors should be familiar with all course materials, structure, and organization <i>before</i> the course begins. If new to online teaching, having an experience as an online student is recommended, such as the World Campus online course "OL 2000: Effective Online Teaching" - see http://psuwcfacdev.ning.com/
4	Respond to student inquiries	Guide student inquiries towards a positive learning outcome.	Instructors are encouraged to respond to student inquiries within 12-24 hours.
5	Provide detailed feedback on assignments and exams.	Facilitate student understanding and progress by providing students with timely, formative, and meaningful feedback that communicates areas of strength and areas for improvement.	Feedback on assignments and exams should be returned to students as soon as possible in order to help students to improve on subsequent learning tasks.

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6	Communicate with students about course progress and changes.	Post periodic announcements that remind students of upcoming topics and due dates, as well as any modifications that may have been made to the course.	Weekly announcements are recommended. Students studying online are typically juggling busy lives. Communicating progress, as well as any changes to assignments or schedules, is an important way to keep students progressing toward goals.
7	Promote and encourage a learning environment that is safe and inviting and mutually respectful.	Communicate with students in a positive tone and follow and promote Netiquette guidelines.	Include a course policy on Netiquette on the syllabus, such as: "The term 'Netiquette' refers to the etiquette guidelines for electronic communications, such as e-mail and bulletin board postings. Netiquette covers not only rules to maintain civility in discussions, but also special guidelines unique to the electronic nature of forum messages. See Virginia Shea's 'The Core Rules of Netiquette' at http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html) for general guidelines that should be followed when communicating in this course."
8	Monitor and manage student progress.	Utilize any available course statistics or reports to identify students who are not accessing course materials, participating in discussion forums, etc., and reach out to those students to encourage them to engage.	Shortly after the beginning of the course, contact any "no shows" to see if they are encountering problems with logging in and to encourage their participation.
9	Communicate course goals and outcomes	This is typically done at the start of the course, via course announcements and/or the syllabus.	"Action verbs" help articulate clear learning goals and outcomes. See https://www.e-education.psu.edu/files/sites/file/Blooms_ActionVerbs.pdf
10	Provide evidence to students of their presence in the course on a regular basis	Provide students with an instructor "presence" in the course by posting periodic course announcements, participating in discussion forums, sending individual student emails, holding office hours, etc.	Ideally, instructors should be interacting with students in their class on a daily basis. Simple audio and video communications can significantly add to a sense of instructor presence. For an easy way to add audio and/or video to a course, see https://www.e-education.psu.edu/assets/jing

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II	Demonstrate sensitivity to disabilities and diversities including aspects of cultural, cognitive, emotional and physical differences	Provide a statement about accessibility to the course syllabus, be aware of institutional policies regarding accommodations, and be sensitive to cultural and geographic perspectives. Information for faculty is located at http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods/faculty/overview.asp	Sample syllabus statement: "If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the campus disability liaison as soon as possible: (name, office, telephone, email). For additional information, check the university web site: http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods/ NOTE: Accommodations require documentation."
TECHNICAL COMPETENCIES			
An online instructor should be able to:		Additional Guidelines	
1	Complete basic computer operations	Know how to create and manipulate documents, manage files and folders, and work with multiple windows.	
2	Successfully log into the LMS and access the course		
3	Successfully navigate the course space	Know how to locate critical course elements, such as syllabus, lessons, grade book, and e-mail.	
4	Set-up and manage student grades	See PSU Faculty Senate Policy - http://www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/47-00.html	
5	Effectively use course communications systems	Be able to converse via email, chat, web conferencing, discussion forums, and announcements as needed.	
7	Manage the course roster	Know how to set-up and manage teams/groups within a course and add instructors, teaching assistants, and outside guests with the appropriate permissions.	
8	Manage student submissions	Know how to upload and download submissions via LMS dropbox, GoogleDocs, or other student submission tools.	
9	Manage the course files and folders within the LMS (when appropriate)	Be able to create and manipulate files and folders.	
ADMINISTRATIVE COMPETENCIES			
An online instructor should be able to:		Additional Guidelines	Examples & Best Practices
I	Log-in to the course and actively participate	Be able to comfortably use a variety of communications tools within the course environment.	Log in a minimum of once per day in order to respond to student inquiries, monitor student progress, engage in student activities, etc.

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2	Communicate to students when assignments and exams will be graded and returned.	Information should also be reiterated each time an assignment or exam is assigned. (NOTE: Per University policy 47-20, "the instructor should provide written notification of the basis for grades to students within the first ten calendar days of a semester or its equivalent.")	Communicate this metric via the syllabus and also at time of assignment.
3	Provide a comprehensive syllabus that adheres to institutional Syllabus Policy 43-00.	University policy 43-00 requires that the syllabus include a course examination policy, basis for grades, and an academic integrity policy for the course. (See http://www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/43-00.html)	Guidelines for creating a comprehensive syllabus are located at http://www.personal.psu.edu/bxb11/Syllabus/
4	Mediate course-related student conflicts	See http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/judicial/classdisrupt.shtml and http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/judicial/codeofconduct.shtml	Course-related conflicts should be mediated promptly and closely monitored through to resolution.
5	Adhere to the institutional policies regarding the Federal Educational Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA)	See http://www.registrar.psu.edu/confidentiality/FERPA_faq.cfm	Familiarize yourself with students' rights under this Federal Law.
6	Revise course content and instructional materials based on student feedback	Any problems with course content should be fixed as soon as possible.	Instructors who do not have editing access to course materials should work closely with the course's administrative support person and/or learning designer to make revisions in a timely manner.
7	Know where and when to get technical assistance and support for you and your students	Depending on the campus through which the course is being offered, there are different sources for technical support. For example, World Campus students and instructors should utilize the World Campus Help Desk. Resident instruction students and instructors should refer to the ITS Help Desk.	Identify the appropriated contacts before the course begins and share the relevant contact information to your students.
8	Communicate expectations of student course behavior	At a minimum, Netiquette guidelines should be provided to students (see http://www.albion.com/netiquette/orerules.html).	Describe expectations for student behavior on the course syllabus, and also include a description of what students can expect from you, the instructor.

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9	Be aware of, inform students about, and monitor compliance to institutional academic integrity policies.	See a faculty guide to plagiarism located at http://tlt.its.psu.edu/plagiarism/facguide . See also Faculty Senate Policy 49-20, located at http://www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/47-00.html#49-20 .	Share the following tutorial on plagiarism with students - http://tlt.its.psu.edu/plagiarism/tutorial
10	Report grades to students and record grades to the University's grading system as required.	Per University policy, final grades are to be posted to eLion within 48 hours from the last day of the course. (See http://www.psu.edu/dept/vprov/pdfs/pt_faculty_handbook.pdf)	Familiarize yourself with the University's eLion system at the beginning of the semester.