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Faculty Development for Online Teaching

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Online Classes - Faculty Handbook

Welcome Message

GUST has a long and rich history of developing and delivering online material to our students. Over the last several years, we have increasingly understood how online classes and programs provide expanded access to the University and promote student success. We are happy that you are a member of the faculty who contributes to these goals of access and excellence. Whether you are teaching a core course for undergraduate students or a graduate-level course, the role you play is significant to our students.

This handbook should serve as a guide to all online instructors. It includes information on resources, responsibilities, best practices, processes, and policies. However, if you have questions not answered here, please let us know. We will do our best to find the answers for you. Thank you again for the part you play in furthering our students' education.

General Expectations

Scheduling

- The online semester will run for 5 weeks from April 12th until May 14th. Finals are expected to be held (online) from May 16-20. Final grades will be posted by May 23.
- Class lengths will run as per the normal durations: 50 minutes for STT, 80 minutes for MW, and 180 minutes for the MBA.
- The timings of certain classes will be adjusted starting April 12 to accommodate the Ramadan schedule as follows:
 - On STT, classes previously starting at 8:00am will be moved to 8:00pm. Those scheduled at 6:00 pm will begin at 9:00pm
 - On MW, classes previously scheduled at 8:00am will be moved to 8:00pm. Those scheduled at 6:30pm will begin at 9:30pm. It is advised that classes starting at 5:00pm end no later than 6:10pm.
 - For the MBA, classes previously scheduled from 5:00 -8:00pm will be moved to 3:00-6:00 PM
 - EFU class timings will be as follows: 8am-12pm classes will meet from 10am - 12noon. 1pm-5pm classes will meet from 1pm--3pm and the late afternoon class from 3pm-7pm will meet from 3pm-5pm
 - MFU class timings will remain the same
- Faculty will hold virtual (online) office hours for at least 2.5 hours each week, a link to which should be inserted on your course portal page. These are designed to give students additional opportunities for live interaction with you to discuss concerns and queries. Participation in the VOHs is optional, just like regular office hours. They do not need to be recorded.

Technology

- We assume all faculty have the hardware, software, and required materials they will need to get started. If not, then contact your head of department.
- All course content, lecture sessions, and VOHs must be made available through MyGUST.
- All courses lecture sessions should be managed through the BigBlueButton (BBB) software (or MS Teams for FPU). Instructions and tutorials for the BBB can be found in the faculty meeting zone link located under your course listings in MyGUST.
- BBB and Teams sessions must be recorded to ensure that students facing technical issues can still see the content of the sessions. The sessions will be automatically uploaded to your portal page. But missed in-class activities done in class should not be allowed for make up.
- Do not share your password with anyone. Change your password if you think someone else might know it and always log out when you are finished using the system.
- Login to the BBB sessions using a computer/laptop not a phone or tablet. Chrome is the suggested browser.

Course Content

- All remaining course materials for the remainder of the semester must be revised and streamlined to accommodate the new online format. The grades/points should be redistributed to take into account smaller and more frequent class assignments, as well as more participation points and lighter final exams. Assignment deadlines and criteria must also be adjusted to account for a reduction of two weeks of instruction overall.
- Faculty members should have their revised syllabi reviewed by the necessary academic committee for their college/unit. These approved syllabi should be shared with students during the first online class session and posted on the course portal site.
- Class attendance for students will be mandatory and faculty can track attendees using the users' export function on the BBB sessions. These will not be integrated with SIS but should be kept for your records. Instead, attendance should be monitored by holding live activities during each of your class sessions (which can be facilitated through any of the existing Moodle tools on My GUST. Example activities can include questions answered through Moodle's "active quiz", polls, short essays or forum posts, etc. This will reward participation and engagement rather than punish students for a failure to log in. It is suggested that points are taken from the final exam and/or other assignments so that a significant portion of the student's grade is based on these simple but frequent exercises instead.
- Final exams should be designed to be open book where practical. If you have a course that this will not work for, then inform your HOD and explain the alternative you prefer. Specialized proctoring software is also being evaluated to help minimize cheating during the exams.
- In general, the exams need to examine students understanding not memorization.
- Faculty should prepare grades for submission by the deadline designated by the official academic calendar.
- If a student is unable to complete the coursework due to extenuating circumstances, when appropriate, faculty should follow the process of assigning a grade of "I" and later changing that grade when the work is completed.
- Prepare all your materials and activities in advance.

Course Conduct

- Be present a few minutes in advance to ensure the technology is working properly.
- Make sure you are dressed professionally while conducting online classes and VOHs. Create an online office surrounding. Choose a quiet room where you can be undisturbed. Warn your family that your lesson will start.
- Attend your online classes according to the schedule. If you need to cancel any session, inform your students, HOD and Associate Dean beforehand. Rescheduling, cancelling, or shortening classes is not permitted without prior approval, and only for extenuating circumstances. Faculty stranded abroad must still run their classes at the scheduled time.
- Faculty should respond to student communication as quickly as possible.
 - Ideally in no more than two working days.

- If a student concern requires more than two days to resolve, faculty should send an acknowledgment email.
- Faculty should provide regular feedback to students in response to course activities like assignments, tests, and so on.
- Faculty should regularly submit grades in the MyGUST online grade book.
- Faculty who suspect a student of plagiarism or some form of academic dishonesty should report the suspicion to the HOD and Associate Dean of the College/FPU Manager.
- Adhere to the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life, which includes acting ethically and following rules and regulations.

Technical Assistance

- Kindly use the IT department and eLearning ticketing for assistant.
 - <https://help.gust.edu.kw/>
 - <https://ehelp.gust.edu.kw/>

After the Semester

- Academic departments should communicate to faculty the policies and procedures for retaining student records and documents (tests, assignments, etc.) used to determine course grades. Most of these items will have already been retained on the MyGUST course account. These documents should be available for a minimum of one year after the course ends to support compliance with grade appeals.
- A student may request that a final grade be reviewed. The student should address the concern directly to the faculty member. A grade change form can be completed if a grading error was made. If the student disagrees with the faculty member's decision, she or he may also seek assistance or intervention from the department chair or associate dean.

Other Considerations

- The Tutoring center will be available to run online tutoring sessions; Advise students who need help to contact these tutors through the OSC. <https://ssc.gust.edu.kw/>
- If the students fail any course taken in the online format, they will have to repeat it when it is next offered in a regular semester, just like any regular semester.
- “The WRITE way involves communicating online in a manner that is (W)arm, (R)esponsive, (I)nquisitive, (T)entative, and (E)mpathetic.”
 - **Warmth** – “Being warm online is a way of reminding others (and you) that it is people who are engaged in communication, not software”
 - **Responsive** -- “Try to return personal messages as soon as possible and set up a regular rhythm of communication for other responses.”
 - **Inquisitiveness** – “Defensiveness is reduced if people ask questions rather than make statements.”

- **Tentativeness** – “A question – framed in a tentative manner – reduces defensiveness and can also contribute valuable information (e.g., ‘Don’t you think it’d be better if we . . . ‘).”
- **Empathy** – “. . . put yourself in the shoes of your audience.”

Best Practices for Online Teaching

Taken from <https://www.utep.edu/extendeduniversity/online-faculty-resources/faculty-handbook/best-practices.html>

Research shows that students are more successful and engaged in an online class when the instructor is present. Some effective, but simple, ways to improve instructor presence include:

- **Live sessions**
Live sessions need to be recorded so that students can review the material later.
- **Meet and greet**
Some students enjoy the opportunity to meet each other in social discussion threads. Faculty might consider setting up a discussion thread with a name like cafe, campfire, or lounge or give students a fun prompt that allows them to introduce themselves and share interests.
- **Help me!**
Students can be a great resource for each other when questions arise. Creating a thread where students can post questions about how to do something, when something is due, or for clarification on an assignment is a good way to establish a collaborative environment among the students. Very often, classmates will answer the question before the instructor is able to do so.
- **Announcements**
Weekly announcements are a good way to show students that faculty are engaged in the class and to keep students checking in regularly. These can be alerts to important projects coming up, notifications that grades are available, or congratulations on good work.
- **Checklists**
Consider providing a weekly checklist that can keep students organized and on track. The checklist should include each of the activities for the week: readings, class discussions, mini-assignments, project scaffolding, and so on. Faculty can also use the checklists to make sure that feedback has been given where and when appropriate.
- **Details**
Extensive instructions on student responsibilities are appreciated by students. Because they don’t have the opportunity to ask questions during class, adding extra details will help them feel more confident that they are understanding their work.

- **Low-stakes assignments**
Courses that require students to complete a few high-stakes projects often put undue stress on the student and do not necessarily promote deep learning and retention of information. Faculty should consider assigning a series of low-stakes assignments that give students the opportunity to test out ideas, scaffold their work, and engage with their classmates. These don't all have to be "graded" the same way as a test or a major project. Students might receive participation points or receive a pass/fail grade for these activities.
- **Regular feedback**
Whether it's in a face-to-face class or an online one, students are often anxious to receive feedback on their performance. Faculty can alleviate this anxiety by commenting on and/or returning feedback to the students on a regular schedule. Sometimes this feedback may be extensive, but other times it may be quick. Faculty can let students know when to expect feedback to help mitigate questions about the timeline.
- **Collaboration**
Providing students the opportunity to work together in a class not only helps them feel connected to the course, the classmates, and the instructor, but it also helps them to develop collaboration skills and strategies for learning and working in a digital world. Faculty should not assume that students will know how to do this right away. Rather, faculty can help them prepare and plan by providing some guidelines and best practice tips.
- **Flexibility and patience**
While online students should be held to the same standards as face-to-face students, faculty teaching an online class should remain flexible and exercise patience. If this is the first time a student has enrolled in an online class, it may take a bit of time until she or he feels comfortable with the learning management system and with self-regulating habits required to keep up with the work. Working with these students to get on track will pay off for everyone by the end of the semester.
- **Course accessibility**
Just as in a face-to-face course, students with a range of abilities will enroll in online classes. In addition to wanting all students to have access to course materials and activities.
- **Due dates and times**
Setting due dates at a time that reduces anxiety for students. Late in the evening, perhaps 11:59 p.m., and on the weekend allows online students a bit of flexibility for completing their work.