

10 Principles of Online Teaching at National Louis University

At National Louis University (NLU) we strive to create signature educational experiences in a safe and intellectually stimulating environment. Our 10 Principles of Teaching is our commitment to our students and what we feel makes attending NLU unique, valuable and enriching.

Each Principle is articulated as to which domain it reinforces in the Community of Inquiry framework of learning (<https://coi.athabasca.ca/>) and then followed by suggestions from our vast experiences on how to implement these principles. We ask that you join us in our commitment to the 10 Principles and invite you to implement suggested practices as is applicable and appropriate to your course, program and/or discipline.

Principle #1: Establish relationships and a safe learning environment



Community of Inquiry Domains: Teaching Presence; Social Presence

Fostering relationships and the “rules” that go along with them to create a safe environment is the most basic need that must be met before moving onto a strong learning community. Make your expectations clear regarding online behavior (netiquette), monitor discussion boards to watch for contentious issues or posts, and immediately halt any communications that could be perceived as hostile.

Principle #1 Practices:

- 1) Be sure to use the current, approved Syllabus template that has language about university policies. No need to recreate the wheel; we have done most of the work for you.
- 2) Respond to every Introduction post in your course, and if you don’t have one, you can create it – no points need to be assigned. This is a great way to establish a warm, inviting and personable presence right away. First impressions are so important!
- 3) Ask for and publicize the use of the Start Here menu that has netiquette guidelines listed. And, even though emoticons are not suggested, feel free to let your personality shine in your communication with students!
- 4) Monitor and post in the Discussion Boards frequently to model, coach, and facilitate the learning.

Principle #2: Communicate frequently through diverse channels in the learning platform, including Announcements, Email, Discussion topics, and Assignment feedback.



Community of Inquiry Domains: Teaching Presence; Social Presence

Online learning can be isolating, with your only recourse for help often being your email. Therefore, it is vital that instructors respond to student emails within 24-48 hours during the week, and 48-72 hours on the weekend.

Use other forms of communication, such as posting a weekly announcement; watch discussion boards and reply to questions posted within 48-72 hours; and respond to voice mail messages with 48 hours.

Principles #2 Practices:

- 1) Set-up your NLU email to go to your smart devices so responding is more efficient—it only takes 5 minutes to set up!
- 2) Post a Weekly Announcement that summarizes the expectations for the week. Students flourish when they are reminded of what bar to rise to.
- 3) Post a Weekly Wrap-Up that summarizes what was covered and perhaps group-level feedback on the activities and/or assignments that you observed and graded that week. Saves you time on giving the same feedback to everyone, individually!
- 4) Host and post at least one hour of office hours, preferably synchronously. TIP 💡 : we have free Zoom accounts you can use -- did you know that web conferencing is considered as rich a communication channel as face-to-face meetings?
- 5) Provide substantive feedback on all written assignment submissions that minimally includes, a) how the student performed overall, b) specific details on items that could be improved, and, c) advice for the next submission.
- 6) Provide feedback on Discussion items, even if you are simply reinforcing the points you had already made while you were facilitating the Discussion earlier in the week. For example, "I responded to your initial post in the Forum, you did an excellent job highlighting how important start-up financing is to a small business – great work!"

Principle #3: Post responses to discussion boards at least 2-3 times per week



Community of Inquiry Domains: Teaching Presence; Social Presence

For those discussion boards designed to be an open forum, respond to student posts at least 2-3 times per week. Look for posts asking for help every time you log into your course and respond to those immediately.

Respond personally to all your students at least once; post several times across the class discussion weekly. Consider the discussions boards like a dinner party. You would always greet your dinner guests individually as they enter your home. Then, throughout the night, you would circulate around the party, checking on each person to make sure everything is ok, joining in on conversations here and there, and always responding to any questions directly asked of you. Finally, you would say good-bye to all of your guests when it's time to leave. (Faculty Focus, <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/how-many-faculty-discussion-posts-each-week-a-simply-delicious-answer/>)

Principles #3 Practices:

- 1) Did you ever send an email to someone and never hear back from them? Did you feel valued? Our students feel the same way when they craft a response to a Discussion

prompt and no one replies.

- a. TIP  : In small classes, we want to strongly encourage you to respond to each initial post to encourage the dialog between peers and to encourage them to interact with other materials on the subject matter. For example, “Julie, this is a great definition of micro-financing – thank you! As I was reading it, I was thinking about developing nations and how critical this type of financing can be in building critical infrastructure and economic sustainability. Here is a video <link> on that – what are your thoughts?”
 - b. TIP  : In larger classes, we suggest you respond to at least 30% of initial posts each week and rotate through the class roster so that in just about three weeks, each student has at least one response from you on their initial post—by the end of the course, they likely have at least two. What a great way to demonstrate you value their input!
- 2) Set up an alert on the Class Café and/or Question forum(s) so you can immediately reply to student posts/questions in this area. A huge time saver!

Principle #4: Return grades and feedback for assignments within 7 days



Community of Inquiry Domains: Teaching Presence; Cognitive Presence

Post student feedback and grades promptly. Use rubrics and/or clear grading criteria. Students need to receive prompt feedback so that it can be incorporated into their work for the next unit or module. Providing them feedback on the fact that they did not complete the weekly assignment to your expectations three weeks after they initially submitted it means that they have completed three more weeks of inferior work, without the benefit of your feedback from the first submission.

Principles #4 Practices:

- 1) Utilize the Rubrics loaded in templated courses for each graded item. TIP  : if there are no Rubrics in your course, please ask your Chair/Program Director/Lead for examples for you to load and use.
- 2) Grade all assignments within 7 calendar days and provide substantive feedback on written assignments and reinforcing feedback on Discussions, at a minimum.
- 3) It's a great practice to email students who do not turn in work by the deadline to remind them of the missing work and/or to offer assistance or referrals to tutoring or other academic services. Also, please think about utilizing EAB to flag these instances, especially if they are chronic, so Advising can intervene.
- 4) Email students who are failing at the midpoint and raise an EAB flag for intervention.
- 5) Especially in Gateway courses and/or those that are a pre-requisite for another, we want to encourage you to create an EAB flag during the last week of the class if a student is failing. This helps our advising department reschedule students appropriately.

- 6) Oh, and please don't forget that your final grades need to be entered into Banner within 10 calendar days.

Principle #5: Communicate high expectations.



Community of Inquiry Domains: Teaching Presence

Inform students clearly of your expectations with regard to communication, instructions, schedule, and course protocols. Use rubrics or detailed grading criteria to communicate grading expectations. Pay particular attention to any deviances from the stated expectations during the first two weeks of class. Remedy immediately.

Principles #5 Practices:

- 1) Be sure the following are clearly outlined in your syllabus and in D2L:
 - a. Your turnaround time for student inquiries (see # 2).
 - b. Your turnaround time for grading (see #4).
 - c. Your expectations about online participation (discussion posting frequency and word counts / examples of substantive posts / frequency of participating in the course each week, if applicable),
 - d. Your late work policy. Most programs have general guidelines around late work policies; please do state them clearly. If you are taking late work, clearly articulate the penalty expressed as points or percentages and the increment (day, week, etc.).
 - e. A weekly outline of course activities and assignments with due dates – in the syllabus and in D2L, please.
 - f. A clear grading matrix that shows what points and percentages are allocated to each graded item (be sure the syllabus matches D2L).
- 2) Turn on TurnItIn for written assignments and communicate this feature to your students during the first week of the course—you can also encourage students to view their own reports (if you select the student view setting).

Principle #6: Provide multiple formats of content in your course



Community of Inquiry Domains: Cognitive Presence

People have diverse talents and diverse learning preferences. Respect those by providing varying kinds of course materials and activities. Include text-based materials, audio, multimedia, writing assignments, case studies, etc. Don't rely on the same mode of delivery for your content, and include a variety of formats for student assignments.

Principles #6 Practices:

- 1) Most templated courses already have a mix of course materials; feel free to utilize video, audio, and multimedia in the Discussion forum. It is very easy to insert videos in the Discussion forum using "Insert Stuff" on the reply menu!

- 2) Utilize audio feedback on assignments and/or discussion grading, as applicable. TIP  Panapto is embedded into D2L and allows you to record up to 3 minutes, which is plenty of time for audio feedback.

Principle #7: Encourage and create community engagement.



Community of Inquiry Domains: Social Presence; Cognitive Presence

Engaged learners spend more time learning. Building and encouraging a learning community helps students learn from each other, through reciprocity and cooperation. Reward collaborative work to encourage forward momentum of the class.

Principles #7 Practices:

- 1) Don't forget that first impression in the Introduction post; this is a great way to model what healthy interactivity looks like in an online class—from the very first day!
- 2) Utilize peer review for one assignment in your course.
- 3) Upgrade one assignment to a group assignment (be sure to ask for individual group member reviews to enforce group citizenship).
- 4) Refer students to other student posts in the Discussion board that either a) align to, or, b) directly oppose that student's post to encourage dialog and debate.

Principle #8: Log in at least every other day (every day is preferable)



Community of Inquiry Domains: Teaching Presence

Logging in, or otherwise staying connected, frequently, helps you respond quickly to any student questions/issues.

Principles #8 Practices:

- 1) Just login each day – trust us! There is plenty to do in an online course, each day. TIP



: if you are going to be absent from an online course for more than 3 days, please contact your Chair/Program Director/Lead to let them know. We are here to help!

- 2) A lot of that logging in each day will be dedicated to Direct Instruction. It is critical and about compliance, in addition to student learning.
 - a. In fully online courses, all the time you would spend teaching a face-to-face course (Direct Instruction) is spent on the following items:
 - i. Facilitating Discussion Forums that are counted as part of Direct Instruction for the course.
 - ii. Responding to student questions in Class Café and Question forums.
 - iii. Responding to student questions via email and phone.
 - iv. Hosting office hours and/or other synchronous meetings/events with your students.

- b. 1QH is 10 hours of Direction Instruction over the 5-10 weeks the course meets.
 - c. 1SH is 16.67 hours of Direct Instruction over the 5-10 weeks the course meets.
- 3) The rest of your logging in each day is grading, which is not counted towards Direct

Instruction. TIP 💡 : Many online faculty “chunk up” their grading time so that they grade Discussions on Mondays and Tuesdays and Written Assignments over Wednesdays through that Friday (so they can also enjoy their weekends and to keep the grading well within the 7 day turnaround time we ask of you at NLU).

Principle #9: Use consistency and patterns.



Community of Inquiry Domains: Teaching Presence

We are creatures of habit, and students are no different. They benefit from a consistent schedule and use of terminology from week to week. Establish patterns of behavior so students can more effectively and efficiently complete course-related tasks.

Principles #9 Practices:

- 1) Post Weekly Announcements each Sunday evening (TIP 💡 : you can schedule them to post) that reiterate what is due that week and suggest when to start items for helpful references.
- 2) Schedule your grading and try to stay consistent so students generally know when to look for their grades. TIP 💡 : send the students an email when that weeks' grading is done – they always appreciate knowing!
- 3) Email students who are missing work each week and utilize EAB to call for other resources to intervene.

Principle #10: Be ready to teach.



Community of Inquiry Domains: Teaching Presence; Cognitive Presence

Be sure that you know your class, the materials, assignments, deadlines, and schedules. Prepare yourself before the class starts so you are ready to quickly respond to student questions and inquiries. Make sure all the course content is still relevant, all links found in your course function, and dates are current. Know the assignments and expectations being placed on students before the first day of class.

Principles #10 Practices:

- 1) Be sure to give yourself enough time to prep your course prior to the two-week per-term deadline where we ask each faculty member to have the following in their courses:
 - a. A customized syllabus with correct course start/end dates.
 - b. Assignments set up that match the syllabus.

- c. Gradebook set up that matches the Syllabus.
 - d. The course is brought active.
 - e. TIP  : reach out the NLU helpdesk if something isn't working correctly or if you are experiencing issues setting up your course—they are here to help!
- 2) Set aside time each week to reflect on how the course went that past week. View Student Analytics and review grades for potential in-course corrections that need to be made. TIP  : many faculty keep teaching reflection journals to continue to improve on their practice and recall what went right, wrong or indifferent in their courses. Try it!
- 3) Cross-reference the Syllabus and textbook to each module to be sure nothing has changed. We also recommend clicking the links in your course to be sure they are all still working before that week opens.