

Drexel University Course Baseline Practices

With only two short weeks to pivot to remote teaching, Drexel University faculty faced an enormous challenge for the spring quarter and to a great extent rose to the occasion. As we now look toward the future both with hope and uncertainty, it is important to learn from our experiences, as well as pedagogical research, in order to continue developing positive, meaningful and long-lasting learning experiences for our students. The following recommendations for baseline practices draw from [Drexel student survey data](#) regarding their experiences in remotely taught courses, and nationally recognized, faculty-driven peer-reviewed standards used to ensure the quality of online, remote, and blended courses. Implementing baseline practices in all courses at Drexel University helps us to develop more resilient and adaptable pedagogies and learning experiences—not just for fall 2020—but for the long-term.

These baseline practices were selected for a number of reasons, but the main criteria included:

- high impact on student engagement, learning, and overall satisfaction
- applicability across disciplines, contexts, and course modalities
- alignment with research-based standards and student survey data
- adherence to federal guidelines for higher education

While it may take some effort to integrate these practices initially, in the long run there will be benefits to faculty and students alike. It should be acknowledged that there are a vast range of teaching contexts and many ways to create meaningful learning experiences for Drexel University students. Therefore, exceptions to the baseline practices may exist. As a result, leadership and faculty at all levels should use common sense, be guided by research, and seek collegial advice when implementing these practices.

Course Baseline Practices

Practice	Rationale	Resources and Recommendations
Drexel Blackboard Learn is used as the official course learning management system (LMS).	Provides students with a more consistent experience and reduces barriers to learning.	A to Z Guide to Drexel Blackboard Learn. How to log in to Drexel Blackboard Learn. How to enter your Drexel Blackboard Learn Course.

<p>A course syllabus, expectations for participation, and assignment instructions are provided in Drexel Blackboard Learn.</p>	<p>Expectations for student participation range widely from course to course. Providing clear expectations, requirements, and instructions reduces confusion, frustration, and logistical questions allowing students to spend more time on the work of learning.</p> <p>Drexel Blackboard Learn courses are open to students one week prior to the start of classes. Whenever possible, the course syllabus should be posted by then.</p>	<p>Drexel Syllabus Checklist.</p> <p>How to create a content area and add an item.</p>
<p>Course materials within Drexel Blackboard Learn are clearly labeled and logically organized.</p>	<p>Students report that the absence of a logical organizational method results in challenges finding assignments and course materials. Providing folders organized by week, unit, or another time-based structure helps students navigate and progress through the course and can reduce confusion, frustration, and logistical questions.</p>	<p>How to create and edit your Drexel Blackboard Learn course menu.</p> <p>Moving or copying items, files, and objects in Drexel Blackboard Learn.</p> <p>Reordering items, files, and objects in Drexel Blackboard Learn.</p> <p>Examples of recommended organizational structures in Drexel Blackboard Learn.</p>
<p>Course assignments and learning activities incorporate regular and substantive interactions between students and other students, and students and the instructor.</p>	<p>It is assumed that in-person classes inherently include these interactions, subsequently the U.S. Department of Education requires that online courses for which students use federal financial aid have “regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors.” Decades of research have also established that teacher-student interactions are an essential component of learning.</p>	<p>Research and examples of student and instructor interactions.</p> <p>Research and examples of interactions between students and other students.</p>

	<p>Student-student interactions have also shown to increase engagement, a sense of belonging, build community, and help students achieve key learning goals such as critical thinking, analytical thinking and problem solving.</p>	
<p>The Grade Center in Drexel Blackboard Learn is used to share grades in a timely manner with students throughout the course and to submit students' final banner grades. Students should have an adequate idea of their course grade prior to the last date to withdraw.</p>	<p>Feedback is critical to student learning and growth. The longer the delay in receiving feedback, the longer the delay will be for students to apply that feedback and the more students will struggle to connect to the feedback in meaningful ways.</p> <p>Students report that having a consistent way to keep track of and check their grades leads them to improve their performance. Not knowing whether or not they are meeting course learning goals and standards increases anxiety and limits the student's ability to improve their performance.</p> <p>One way to accomplish this is to offer multiple low-stakes assessments early in the course. Low-stakes assessments enable students to seek help as needed and have been shown to increase the likelihood that students will attend class and be active and engaged.</p>	<p>3 Types of Grade Columns in the Blackboard Grade Center.</p> <p>How to manually create a grade column and add grades.</p> <p>How to enter grades in a column.</p> <p>How to work offline with the Blackboard Grade Center.</p> <p>How to add "my grades" link to your Drexel Blackboard Learn course menu so students can see their assignment and course grades.</p> <p>How to submit final grades to Banner using the Blackboard Grade Center.</p> <p>Best practices and tips for grading and providing feedback.</p>

Training and Professional Development Opportunities

All instructors at Drexel University are welcome to register and participate in technology trainings and teaching workshops. A list of technology trainings and resources are available on [Drexel University's Instructional Technology Group's website](#). A list of workshops provided by the Teaching and Learning Center is updated quarterly on [the Office of Faculty Affairs website](#). To learn about additional resources, programs, and development opportunities contact teaching@drexel.edu.

Additional Recommendations

Blackboard Ally is an accessibility tool which is already on by default within several schools and colleges at Drexel University. Ally automatically converts text-based course content into alternative formats such as audio, electronic braille, and HTML. As a means to improve student accessibility to our courses, and the materials included within, all schools and colleges are encouraged to engage in discussions about activating and using the accessibility software to ensure that our students can benefit to the fullest extent. Support for using Blackboard Ally is available from [Drexel University's Instructional Technology Group](#).

Courses that include activities which pose potential health and safety risks to students (i.e. labs, studios, clinics) must adhere to safety protocol and include a link displayed prominently in Drexel Blackboard Learn to specific safety guidelines regardless of whether those activities take place on or off Drexel's campuses.

Final Considerations

These baseline practices were developed to provide students with engaging, positive, and effective learning experiences whether it be in the classroom, remotely, or online. At the same time, implementing these baseline practices helps prepare Drexel University courses to quickly adapt to a different modality when needed or for a more seamless handoff in the middle of a term should an instructor to become ill.

Steps to adopt and implement these practices should be determined at the department, school, and college level. Departments, schools or colleges may want to include additional course baseline practices that are specific to their discipline or teaching context.

Drexel University's highest priority will always be the health and safety of the students, faculty, staff, and community. All courses *must* follow the most current public health guidelines. For current regulations regarding COVID-19, refer to [Drexel's Response to](#)

[Coronavirus website](#). For general safety and public health guidelines visit [Drexel's public safety website](#).

This document was created by a collaborative working group that includes Drexel University faculty, students, and staff members. After initial review by Drexel University faculty senate, feedback about the document was provided to the baseline working group. This document includes revisions that were made to accommodate much of that feedback.

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