

# Instructor Guide

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SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL FOR PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

## Welcome to the School for Professional Studies!

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We are so pleased that you will be joining us as an educator in this endeavor.

This valuable guide is designed to facilitate your role as an instructor in the SPS program. It is our hope you will find your teaching experience to be engaging and rewarding. We are here to support you. Please do not hesitate to contact us with your questions or concerns.

### Important Contacts

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## School for Professional Studies Instructor Handbook

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### Course Instructor

A Course Instructor teaches a particular section of a course during a specific term. Course Instructor duties include, but are not limited to, 1) facilitating student learning by responding to student discussion board posts and email inquiries, 2) providing feedback on assignments, and 3) grading. Course Instructors teach using the approved course syllabus and course site. If the Course Instructor feels a change is needed to either, please contact the Course Director.

### Preparing for Your Course

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#### Beginning Steps

- Complete Foundations of Effective Online Teaching and Learning Seminar.** This seminar is completely online and introduces the best practices for teaching online.
- Preview Online Course.** The Instructional Developer will grant you access to your course in Canvas. You will get an email about this when your course is ready.
- Textbooks.** Make sure you have a textbook picked out and a copy for yourself as well. You can contact the publisher directly for an instructor copy and resources.
- Communicate with the Instructional Developer as needed.** The Instructional Designer will contact you about training for technologies used in the course. She/he will review the online course with you.

### Expectations During Your Course – Communicating with Students

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Emphasizing your instructor presence is critical for successful online learning. Whereas instructors in traditional classroom settings can demonstrate their presence by simply walking into the room, this physical proximity is not always possible in virtual environments. You will thus need to provide your students with an even stronger sense of your presence. This will add to the students' feeling that "class is in session" – that they are accountable and that they are being monitored, guided, and supported. In doing so, you will help to counterbalance feelings of distance and disconnect. Remember, students must feel like they are part of a classroom community, led by you, the Course Instructor.

Your approach, however, must be balanced. Too much intervention may detract from student autonomy, interrupt group interactions and synergy, or leave the student feeling confused and distracted. We want to be active members of the learning process – but not to interject our own view in every post students make.

- **Access your course daily.**
- **Monitor student engagement.** Proactively follow up, via e-mail or phone, with students who are not contributing to discussion boards, not submitting assignments, or who are otherwise performing poorly.
  - If you suspect a student is at risk of falling too far behind or dropping out, notify the Program Director and the Academic Coach immediately.
  - If a student becomes ill, requests an incomplete, indicates they would like to drop the course, or requests accommodations due to disability, contact the Program Director and the Academic Coach immediately.
- **Check the Instructor Discussion Board Often.** In this forum, students ask teachers questions of general interest: technical issues, reading material queries, due dates, etc. Monitor the discussions here and respond promptly to questions. Students may try to help you by answering questions.
- **Communicate with Students Often**
  - **Always Use Canvas.** Aim to keep all course communications within the Canvas system. Here, you can send messages to the entire course or to individual students. If you must communicate outside Canvas, always use the student's SLU email address and send the messages from your SLU email

address. Students are told to likewise communicate with you, so it is imperative that you set a good example.

- **Edit Canvas Notifications.** If required, you can edit the frequency of Canvas notifications sent to your SLU email address. Start by selecting “Notifications” on the side navigation bar.

## Discussion Forum Posts

We suggest that you review the discussion forum at least once a day. Respond as you deem appropriate, while trying to seek balance. Don’t overwhelm students with your posts, but don’t be absent.

Consider mixing several types of posts in the discussion forum:

- Substantive posts.** Comment on a topic or start a post, and add new substantive information.
- Practice posts.** Relate the discussion/topic/reading to your own experience in practice.
- Question posts.** Comment on a post and ask students to expand, clarify, or suggest.
- Conversational posts.** A good amount of lighter conversation will occur in the discussion forum. As you establish relationships with students, occasionally participate in these posts.
- Wrap-up posts.** At the end of every week, consider a wrap-up post, summarizing some of the discussion themes, adding an insight or two, connecting it to next week’s material, and inviting students to add their own comments.

## Facilitating Discussion

- Don’t “drop out” unexpectedly.** Students notice when the teacher disappears. If you will be unable to access your course for more than a day or two because of travel or illness, let students know. Keep the Program Director updated.
- Contribute to major discussion threads.** You’ll notice that every week, some threads command a lot of attention and participation. These are good threads to participate in, both for showing presence and for affecting the flow of the conversation.

- **Prevent marginalization.** Sometimes, group dynamics cause certain students to be marginalized. Their comments are disregarded or their posts do not receive responses. Bring them into the fold, with a comment or question that will encourage others to respond. Make sure that you do not engage exclusively with the same students time and again. All students need your attention, support, and guidance!
- **Don't be the first to respond.** As a general rule, try to avoid being the first to respond to a student's primary post. Your response could unintentionally abbreviate or narrow conversation. It is often better to rechannel after a discussion has developed, than to channel and limit too early. One exception to this rule is when dealing with marginalized students (above).
- **Questions are better than comments.** An instructor's comment can effectively end a discussion thread, no matter how lively. A question, however, can maintain and provoke discussion. Try to always include questions in your posts.
- **Personalized messages.** Consider also connecting with students one-on-one. For example, send a student a message with an article related to a post the student placed in a forum, or a link to a website you think they might be interested in. Taking care of one student's needs shows presence not only to that student, but to others as well (it is hard to keep this in mind in an online course, but students talk! They have extensive interactions, by e-mail, chat and phone which we know nothing about). *Remember to use the Canvas system for individual messages.*

## Helpful Weekly Checklist

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Before each week begins, be sure to check for common errors or missing information:

- Introduction/close out video for the week.
- Common introduction slide for all lectures that includes the SLU logo somewhere and weekly main topic name (provides familiarity).
- Turn on discussions
- Turn on quizzes
- Place all weekly course materials (PDFs of slides, documents, etc) in the Additional Resources file for the week – if applicable
- Ensure due dates are correct.

- Subscribe to all lecture and discussions so that you will be notified when a student responds.
- Provide video feedback to students as much as possible.

## Preventing Students from Falling Behind

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- **Communicate.** Proactively follow-up, via email or phone, with students that are not contributing to discussion boards, not submitting assignments, or who are otherwise performing poorly.
  - *Because the accelerated eight-week term moves quickly, you must contact the Course Director if a student has not submitted assignments or participated in discussions in one full week.*
  - If you suspect a student is at risk of falling too far behind or dropping out, notify the Academic Coach immediately. Please see the [“Academic Coach”](#) section of this handbook for more information.
  - If a student becomes ill, requests an incomplete, indicates they would like to drop the course, or requests accommodations due to disability, contact the Program Director. For incompletes, an “I” will need to be entered as their final grade in Banner, in addition to filling out the form found here: [https://www.slu.edu/registrar/pdfs/course\\_extension.pdf](https://www.slu.edu/registrar/pdfs/course_extension.pdf)  
  
Once complete, send to the registrar.
- **Send reminders.** If a student misses a deadline for an assignment, it is helpful to send a message reminding them of penalties for late assignments.
- **Be specific and consistent.** If you allow extensions, be specific about how late points will be calculated if they failed to meet the extended deadlines. Consistently apply the penalties that are outlined in the course syllabus.

## Writing Assistance

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- **Online Writing Center.** If your students are struggling with their writing, you may refer them to SLU's online writing assistance. SLU is pleased to partner with Smarthinking, an online writing service from Pearson. This accessible, user-friendly service allows students to upload a piece of writing and to have it read by writing specialist (tutor) for specific issues - organization, grammar, APA, and so forth. The tutor then meets virtually with the student to discuss the writing. Each student needs credentials to login to the SmartThinking web site.

## Technical Problems

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- **Canvas Issues:** Instructors can contact the IT for assistance with technical problems in Canvas.
- **Don't delay.** If students are experiencing technical issues that prevent them from completing assignments, it is imperative that you encourage students to solve these problems immediately, rather than providing alternative ways to submit assignments.

## Grades and Post-Course Review

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- **Submit grades.** Your final grades will be submitted via Banner Self-Service. Grade submission deadlines will vary based on the session, so check your SLU email often for updates.
  - **Incomplete Grade:** An incomplete grade may be given in circumstances where a student cannot complete their work by the deadline of grades being due. For a student to receive an incomplete a request must be made in writing during the seventh or eighth week of the SPS eight-week term. Incompletes requested during weeks one through six of a term will be denied and students will be encouraged to withdraw from the course. The student must hold a passing grade of a C or better provide proof of an extenuating circumstance.

Process for awarding an incomplete during weeks seven or eight:

1. Student contacts the instructor, explains the circumstances and requests an incomplete. A detailed email outlining the circumstances must be sent to the instructor.
2. The instructor contacts the program director, discusses the circumstances, and determines if the circumstances merit an incomplete. The detailed email outlining the circumstances must be sent to the program director. The mark of incomplete is given at the discretion of the instructor in consultation with the



program director. However, the student must meet both criteria for an incomplete to be considered.

3. If the instructor in consultation with the program director agrees to award an incomplete, a [Petition for Course Extension form](#) must be completed and submitted.

An incomplete course will be awarded a grade of “F” by the Office of the University Registrar if the course is not completed by the approved deadline.

- Post-Course Review.** After your course ends, you will receive your student evaluations through Blue Course Evaluations. You will get an email alerting you when it is ready. Your director will also look through the student evaluations and email you with any comments or concerns.

## Academic Coach Information

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Each student is assigned an academic coach to assist with curriculum development and planning through the entirety of the students’ academic career. The coach is approachable, personable, and always available to communicate curriculum, graduation requirements, and the policies/ procedures in the School for Professional Studies. Coaches can access the online courses to monitor student success.

For students you may have concerns about, please contact their academic coach immediately. Each program is assigned an academic coach, so please contact the one appropriate to your students’ major/program. If you are unsure of who your student’ academic coach is, contact Justin Smith at [justin.smith@slu.edu](mailto:justin.smith@slu.edu), who will direct your concern to the appropriate coach.

For more information on the student engagement team, please visit their website at:

<https://www.slu.edu/online/contact-us/student-engagement-team.php>