ESF State University of New York College of
Environmental Science and Forestry

Teaching with Technology: Best Practices
Learning Management Systems

About Learning Management Systems

A Learning Management System (LMS) is a tool that helps plan, implement, and assess learning. You can use it to help you communicate and interact with students, deliver and collect assignments and assessments, and provide information and materials. With any tool, however, there are some practices that will make using it more effective for both you and your students. Keep reading for some best practices and ideas adapted from the [SUNY OSCQR rubric](https://oscqr.suny.edu) (https://oscqr.suny.edu)

Course Information

Providing basic course information in the LMS is a really helpful resource for students. This allows them to easily find important details, such as contact information, due dates, and help resources.

Syllabus

- Post a copy of your syllabus that students can download
- Make sure to use the most up-to-date ESF Syllabus Template provided by Academic Governance
- For parts of the syllabus that students may refer back to regularly (e.g., class schedule), add a copy of that content to the course menu or landing page for quick access

Contact Information

- Identify your preferred method(s) of communication. Should students use email, phone, or another form of contact?
- Let students know your availability by listing office hours but also times when you check and respond to email (and times you do not!)
- If you have a TA, make sure to include their information as well

Relevant Help Resources

- Outline what on-campus and remote resources are available to students in your course, such as the Academic Success Center, Writing Center, Public Speaking Lab, Library, and Tutoring
- Include contact information for any resources as well as your perspective on the benefits of using these services

Third-Party Tools

When using technology in your teaching, especially technology that students will need to create profiles or accounts to access, consider the following points. If you are using technology like this in your class, please communicate with students as early as possible so that they can sign up or acquire any needed software.

1. Cost: How much will access to the technology cost students? Is this in addition to any textbook or course fees? Will they use it in multiple courses?
2. Security & Privacy: Look at the company's Terms of Service. Consider the data they are collecting and what they are doing with that information. Send students the links to the Terms of Service and Privacy Policies before class
3. Support: With technology comes the occasional issue. If you or your students are having trouble, who will support the program or hardware?
4. Accessibility: LMS tools typically adhere to accessibility standards, but those outside the LMS need to be reviewed for accessibility before being included in your course
5. Platform compatibility: Some programs only run on Windows, Mac, iOS, or Android. If a program cannot be used on all devices, consider how students who have different platforms can access the program

Help is available!
For support on best practices using the LMS, please reach out to the Open Academy Teaching and Learning Center by contacting Ashley Gouger or Brandon Murphy.
For questions on how to do specific tasks or for troubleshooting, please reach out to Syracuse University ITS. Contact information can be found on the next page.

Design & Layout
A clear and logical design and layout of your course will help learners find what they are looking for easily and quickly.

Consistency
- A consistent layout within your course, across your courses, and even in your department/program can help students reduce confusion about where things are and how to navigate your LMS page
- Consistently sequencing communication, overviews of content, learning activities, and interactions allows learners to routinely access what they need and anticipate where to find course materials

Logical & Clear
To help create a logical and clear layout, consider the following:
- Use intuitive and descriptive labels for activities, homework, content, etc.
- Implement a sequential organization
- Group content, materials and assignments by time period (e.g., weekly) or by topic to create modules
- Put commonly used tools (e.g., Zoom, discussions, etc.) as part of the main navigation

Interaction
An important part of the learning process is interaction and communication. There are tools available through the LMS that can help you communicate and interact with students.

Communication
- Announcements are a great communication tool. They are emailed to students as well as persistent in your course so students can easily return to them
- Consider setting up a communication schedule. Send a weekly message (email or announcement) on the same day of the week with the same structure. Consider including important upcoming dates, new content, class-level feedback, and any other information you'd like to include
- Communication can be used to provide consistency and clarity in your course

Interaction
- For group projects, consider giving groups a digital workspace including discussion board, virtual meeting room, and file center so they can work together virtually
- Set up a general Q&A discussion board for general questions about the course (e.g., "Are we meeting in the computer lab Thursday?") Students can answer each other and you can jump in and reply too, if needed

Assessment & Feedback
As with design and layout and communication and interaction, clarity and consistency is an important part of assessment and feedback. Clear instructions and labels will help students know what to do. A consistent schedule of due dates and expected feedback dates will help students stay on track.

Distibution & Collection
- Use the built-in assignments and tests functions in the LMS to distribute and collect assignments. Using the built-in tools connects the assignments right to the grade book and reduces email/inbox clutter
- Use consistent labels for assignments so that everyone knows what assignment is due when

Due Dates
- Use the Due Date feature in your LMS to automatically create a calendar of assignment due dates for students
- Try to use consistent days of the week and time of day to create due dates

Gradebook
- Keep the gradebook uncluttered and up-to-date. This helps students know how they are doing in your course
- Use rubrics to help with giving feedback and grades

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