

Online Learning Communications Plan

Having a clear communications plan is essential to effective online learning. In traditional bricks-and-mortar education, regular in-person meetings do the work of focusing students' attention on the course and of reminding students that there are particular milestones they must meet at set dates. Instructors may go over upcoming work at the beginning or end of an in-person class period. And because of physical proximity, students have the opportunity to interact informally about upcoming work.

In an online environment, because students may not access the course site every day, achieving this type of focus is more challenging. Part of the goal of online learning is to offer students more flexibility about how and when they do their work. And because of personal and professional obligations, students often use that flexibility to push their coursework to weekends and evenings, when they have time. But this is an out of sight, out of mind situation; because students may interact with the class less frequently and at unpredictable intervals, it is more likely to drop off their list of priorities.

Strategic communication, in a medium like email that students check regularly, helps. Among your course communications, consider:

- **Weekly kickoff announcements** that mark time and set the pace of the course while also serving to preview upcoming content and remind students of upcoming due dates.
- **Just-in-time reminders** that alert students of upcoming course events like synchronous classes, as well as imminent deadlines.

In MEHP Online's courses in health care innovation, the instructional team uses the [Canvas Announcements](#) feature to preload and schedule most student communications before the start of each course. Preloaded communications include:

- A kickoff message for each week of the course.
- A reminder 24 hours before each synchronous interaction.
- A reminder 48 hours before the first set of assignments for the course are due.
- Reminders 1 week, and then 48 hours, before the final assignments for the course are due.

A member of the course team also makes announcements when recordings of synchronous classes become available and when the instructor wishes to share supplementary resources like current articles related to topics in the course.

We believe that this strategy has helped us maintain high retention rates (over 90% in most courses and 100% among our Master's cohorts) and has led to high overall student satisfaction. And we believe that a similar strategy would be beneficial to instructors attempting to maintain continuity in their courses during the current coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak by taking their courses online.

To that end, what follows are versions of the templates MEHP Online uses to create our student communications. Please adapt them as necessary to suit your own course. And if you have questions or need help, please reach out to MEHPhelp@penncare.upenn.edu.

MEHP Online Course Announcement Templates

Bracketed areas ask you to fill in course-specific information. Underlined areas should include links.

Weekly Kickoff Announcement

WHEN: Start of each course week at 8am

TITLE: Week I: [Course Name]

Hi everybody –

This week in **[INSERT COURSE NAME HERE]** we will be learning about [1-SENTENCE DESCRIPTION]. And as part of your work this week, you will be [KEY INFO ABOUT ASSIGNMENTS].

To get started, make sure you review the policies and due dates in the course syllabus. And please remember to:

- Watch the lectures.
- Read assigned materials.
- Complete your discussion post by [DUE DATE] and your replies by [DUE DATE].
- Complete the weekly quiz (Recommended due date [DUE DATE]).
- Attend this week's synchronous session ([DATE AND TIME]).

Please reach out to course TA [NAME, LINKED WITH EMAIL ADDRESS] if you have questions or concerns, or need clarification.

I will see you at this week's synchronous session.

Best,

[FACULTY NAME]

Synchronous Interaction

WHEN: 1 day before the sync class is scheduled.

TITLE: [DAY, DATE, & TIME]: Synchronous Class

Hi all,

This is a reminder to attend tomorrow's synchronous class, [DAY, DATE, and TIME] Eastern. [PROFESSOR NAME] will lead the class. To prepare, please come prepared with questions about this week's material, or [CHECK ASSIGNMENT FOR SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS FOR WHAT STUDENTS SHOULD PREPARE].

To get the most out of this class, please attend live. If you are unable to do so, a recording will be made available later.

Thank you,

[FACULTY or TA NAME + EMAIL LINKED]

Week I Assignments, Due Date Reminder

WHEN: 48 hours before the first set of assignments are due in the course.

TITLE: Due Soon: Your First Assignments

Hi everyone,

This is a reminder that Week I Assignments are due tomorrow, [DAY, DATE], before 11:59 PM.

Please reach out to course TA [NAME, LINKED WITH EMAIL ADDRESS] if you have questions or concerns, or need clarification.

Best,

[TA NAME – Link to Freshdesk email]

Final Assignment Reminder – 1 Week Prior to the Due Date

WHEN: 1 week before the final assignment is due.

TITLE: Reminder: [ASSIGNMENT NAME] due [DUE DATE]

Good morning,

This is a friendly reminder that your **[ASSIGNMENT NAME]** are due on [DUE DATE]. If you need any help, please let me know as soon as possible, and review the course submission policies here.

Please note: Any extension requests for the final project are due 5 days before the project deadline. Send us an email, and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

Have a wonderful day,

[TA or FACULTY NAME + EMAIL LINKED]

Final Assignment Reminder – 48 Hours Prior to the Due Date

- WHEN: 48 hours before the final assignment is due.
- TITLE: Due tomorrow: [ASSIGNMENT NAME] due [DUE DATE]

Good morning,

This is a reminder that your **[ASSIGNMENT NAME]** is due tomorrow, [DATE]. If you need any help, please let me know as soon as possible and review the course submission policies here.

Best,

[TA or FACULTY NAME + EMAIL LINKED]