

Adjunct Faculty Guide

Teaching Foundations



**GRAND VALLEY
STATE UNIVERSITY®**

**THE ROBERT AND MARY PEW
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LEARNING CENTER**

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide was created by the Pew FTLC and is meant to provide Adjunct Faculty at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) with an introduction to teaching at (not an introduction to GVSU as a whole). We encourage faculty to contact us with questions about teaching, our programs and services, or to request a consultation.

Note: Click on the name of a section to go directly to that section.

Last updated September 4, 2025

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3 TEACHING TAKEAWAYS

The following are three overarching themes represented throughout this Adjunct Faculty Teaching Foundations Guide. These themes are centered on the evidence-based practices of teaching and learning scholarship and can apply to all faculty roles.

1. Clearly communicate your expectations

These include what you expect from your students, what your students can expect from the course, and what your students can expect from you, their instructor. Keep in mind that your students have 3 or more other instructors who may teach differently than you do. It's important to be explicit in what you expect because it may differ from what another instructor expects/requires. Explain not only what your policies are, but why you have them. These policies should be included in your course syllabi and reiterated throughout the semester.

In addition, follow through in consistently upholding your policies. For instance, if your syllabus states exams can only be retaken within 1 week of the exam date and a student requests a retake outside this window, you should deny their request and explain why. Of course, there may be instances where extenuating circumstances lead you to still offer the retake, but in general it is best practice to maintain these boundaries so students. Otherwise, the boundary serves no purpose. As McMurtie (2023) explains, "Ad hoc flexibility without consideration of its effect on learning can lead to worse outcomes for students. It's better to build it into a course rather than trying to determine on a case-by-case basis whether students have a "good enough" reason to, say, be granted an extension or an excuse for absence" (McMurtie 2023).

You might also share your policies with colleagues and ask them about their own. Crowdsourcing with other faculty can be a helpful way to get new ideas and gauge where your policies stand in relation to others.

2. Incorporate active learning

Active learning is "the process of learning through activities and/or discussion in class, as opposed to passively listening to an expert" (Freeman et al., p. 8413-8414). Active learning happens when students participate in their learning process, as opposed to being deferential to their learning. Students learn best when they are actively engaged in Active learning is well supported by the scholarship of teaching and learning (general and discipline-specific).

Want to know more about how you can incorporate active learning in your classes? Check out our [Active Learning Teaching Guide!](#)

3. Use Inclusive and Equity-Focused Teaching Strategies

The goal of equitable teaching is for all students to have the opportunity to reach their potential (Addy et al. 2021). Equity-focused teachers design and implement classes so that a student's personal history or identity (often minoritized) does not prevent them from achieving success. Students come from different circumstances and have different needs, and as such may need different resources or support to reach the same outcome.

Inclusion describes “a culture in which all learners feel welcome, valued, and safe, and it requires intentional and deliberate strategies” (Hogan & Sathy, 5). As faculty you can support your students succeed by emphasizing:

- Critical engagement of difference
 - Using a range of examples and/or referencing diverse perspectives in course content
 - Design activities around student's interests, backgrounds, or goals
- Academic belonging
 - Learning and using student's names
 - Designing activities around student's interests, backgrounds, and goals
 - Promoting a growth mindset and normalize challenges
- Transparency in
 - Explaining how your class works
 - Assignments, participation expectations
- Structured interactions
 - Assigning pairs or small groups
 - Providing opportunities for students to reflect
- Flexibility
 - “Life happens” statement in syllabus
 - Areas for student choice

For more on getting started with inclusive teaching, visit our [Inclusive Excellence Teaching Guide](#).

Works Referenced

Addy, T. M., Dube, D., Mitchell, K. A., & SoRelle, M. (2021). *What Inclusive Instructors Do: Principles and Practices for Excellence in College Teaching* (1st edition). Routledge.

Freeman, S., Eddy, S. L., McDonough, M., Smith, M. K., Okoroafor, N., Jordt, H., & Wenderoth, M. P. (2014). Active learning increases student performance in science, engineering, and mathematics. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 111(23), 8410–8415.

Hogan, K. A., & Sathy, V. (2022). [Inclusive Teaching: Strategies for Promoting Equity in the College Classroom](#). West Virginia University Press.

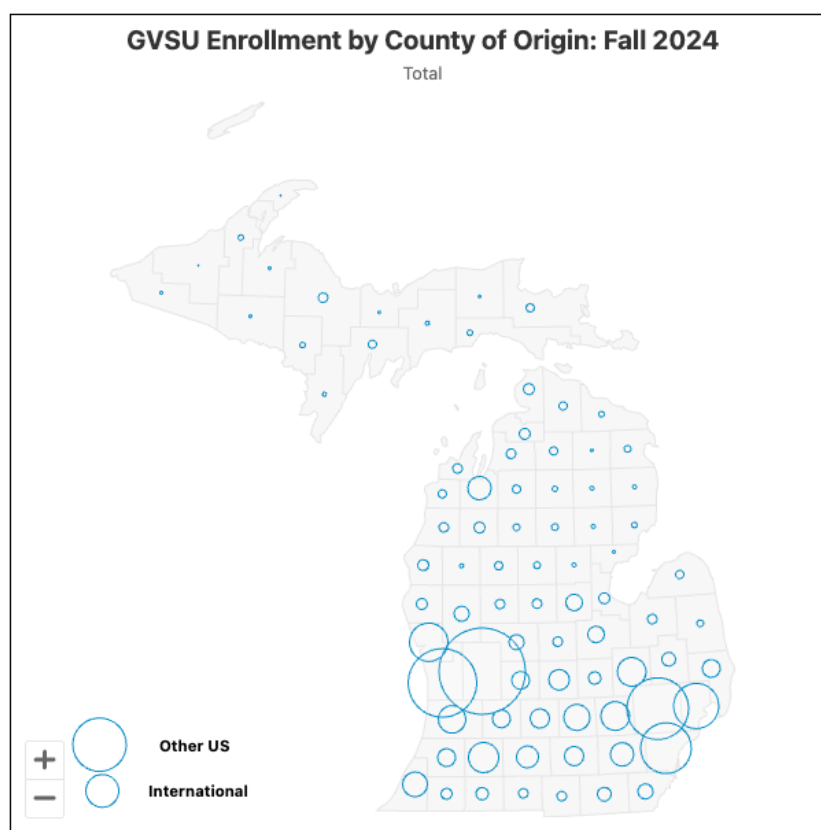
McMurtrie, B. (2023, November 14). [Toxic Emails, Unrealistic Expectations, and Classroom Disruptions](#). *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

WHO ARE GRAND VALLEY STUDENTS?

As of Fall 2024 student geographic origin is as follows:

- 89.9% Michigan
- 7.3% Out of State
- 2.8% International

The map below shows GVSU's Enrollment by County of Origin in the state of Michigan, as of Fall 2024. Faculty can access this map and other data in the [GVSU Factbook](#).



89.9% of students identify Michigan as their geographic state of origin.

In Fall 2024 GVSU enrolled at total of 19,002 Undergraduates and 3,009 Graduates:

- 4,772 Freshman
- 4,494 Sophomores
- 4,141 Juniors
- 5,595 Seniors
- 2,708 Masters
- 301 Doctorate

PREPARING FOR YOUR FIRST DAY OF CLASS

The following section offers a timeline for preparing for the first day of class, ideally beginning a month prior to the semester. We recognize many Adjunct faculty are not hired until right before classes begin; so, this timeline may not perfectly align with when you are assigned classes but is meant as a reference.

More Than One Month Before

- [Start writing goals, objectives or desired learning outcomes.](#)
These may already be listed in the syllabus of record (SOR). Some new faculty are given syllabi to use, while others have a choice in writing their own.
- Begin considering [what kinds of assignments](#) students will do.

One Month Before

- Start drafting your [syllabus](#).
- Order books through the campus bookstore if needed
- Set up your GVSU account.
- Complete the [Blackboard Ultra Instructor Orientation](#) (asynchronous)

One Week Before

- Visit your classroom to make sure you know where it is, what it's like, and what equipment is available to you.
- [Check the A/V and other classroom technology](#) to make sure it works with whatever device you plan to use.
To login into the computer station, enter your username@gvsu.edu and password.
- Make sure you can access your [Roster](#).
Your enrollment will probably change several times over the next month.
- [Prepare for the first day of class.](#)

The First Day of Class

- Set expectations
- Create a welcoming environment
- Gauge student's prior knowledge and motivation
- Engage students in active learning

For more detail, look to the Pew FTLC's [Teaching Guide - The First Day of Class](#).

PREPARING YOUR SYLLABUS

The class syllabus is the place to communicate your course design and expectations to students. Whether you are building a syllabus for a new course or revising an existing syllabus, it is important to clearly communicate your course design and expectations so students understand what they will learn, how they will learn it, and how to be successful in the class.

If you are building a syllabus for a new course, make sure you include the following essential components:

- Title, department, and number of the course
- Instructor information: name, office location, contact information, office hour
- Statement of course objectives
- Prerequisites to (if any) and requirements of the course
- Required texts and/or supplies
- An explanation of the policy relative to student absences
- The basis for grading
- Date and time of final examination
- The following statement: This course is subject to the GVSU policies listed at <http://www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies/>.

[The Pew FTLC also provides a template](#) that you may find useful in getting started.

Other important considerations include:

- Communicating a growth mindset (the belief that intelligence can be developed).
- Normalize challenges
- Help foster students' sense of belonging
- Communicate care for your students
- Show that you value diversity in the classroom
- Share success resources

For more support in revising your syllabus we recommend reviewing the following resources:

- Complete the free asynchronous training, [“Your Syllabus as a Tool to Promote Student Equity, Belonging, and Growth”](#) from the [Student Experience Project](#).
- [Sample resource and policy statements from GVSU](#).
- View the [Pew FTLC's Teaching Guide on Syllabus Design](#), which includes templates!

WRITING LESSON PLANS

Creating lesson plans is important for academic continuity and to ensure you have a plan for classroom activities.

Some considerations include:

- What do you want students to learn? ([the learning objectives](#))
- What activities will you use to engage students in learning?
- How will you check for understanding?
- How long is your class?
- Are students meeting online or in person?

Outline your Learning Objectives for the Day

You first need to determine what you want students to be able to do by the end of the class period. Keep in mind how what they're doing in each class helps them build toward achieving the overall course learning objectives. Consider these questions:

- What is the topic of the lesson?
- What do I want them to understand and be able to do by the end of the class? What are the most important concepts, ideas, skills needed to meet the learning objective(s)?
- If I run out of time, which objectives could be omitted or adapted?

Identify Teaching/Learning Activities

Once you've outlined your lesson learning objectives you will Your lesson plan should (at least loosely) have a beginning, middle, and end structure. At the beginning, orient your students to the day's lesson which might include explaining how today's lesson will build on what they learned in the last class prior or what they did to prepare for class. The beginning of class can also be used to deliver announcements or reminders about upcoming assignments.

The middle, or main body of the lesson, requires the most planning. Consider how you will deliver the material: discussion, illustration through examples, small group application, short lecture, or case studies, to name a few. In developing your activity, we encourage you to use [Active Learning](#). Active Learning is the "process of learning through activities and/or discussion in class, as opposed to passively listening to an expert" (Freeman et al., p. 8413-8414). Active learning happens when students participate in their learning process, as opposed to being deferential in their learning. Active Learning is well supported by the scholarship of teaching and learning (general and discipline-specific). For more support on using Active Learning, [engage with our Active Learning Teaching Guide!](#)

As you plan, identify how much time you will devote to each activity, and try to prepare for what you'll do if an activity takes longer (or less) time than you planned.

Check for Student Understanding

How will you know that your students understand? Consider the kinds of questions you might ask to check for student understanding, beyond questions that can be answered with a “Yes” or “No” response like, “Any questions?” or “Do you understand?”

Some folks find it helpful to frame the check as a statement. For example, you might say, “Tell me what questions you still have.”

Will your assessment be formative or summative? For more support on assessment, check out our Assessing [Student Learning](#) and [Grading](#) teaching guides.

TEACHING ONLINE/HYBRID FORMATS

Many faculty are assigned to teach online courses and hybrid format courses. **All faculty teaching online or hybrid courses must meet a competency requirement.** Faculty have two options for meeting the competency requirement:

1. **eLearning Foundations Self-Paced Workshop.** For additional details and registration instructions, visit the [Foundations of Online and Hybrid Course Development page](#).
2. **If you have previously completed training,** workshops, or coursework outside of the option listed below, you can work with your unit head to request a waiver using the [Online/Hybrid Faculty Certification Waiver Form](#).

You will receive a \$250 stipend after the Pew FTLC is notified that you've completed the Online/Hybrid training! Stipends are paid in March, May and October upon successful completion of the Online/Hybrid training.

The basis for quality online teaching at GVSU has been established with the [Grand Valley State University Online/Hybrid Course Peer Review Rubric](#). This site outlines seven aspects of quality online/hybrid courses that prove useful for not only peer review but the course design process itself. Below are general recommendations for supporting student success in online and hybrid environments.

Welcome your students and orient them to your course

Early on in the semester, ensure students have the appropriate orientation and support to use the technology in your course. You can do this via email, announcements, or a brief video. [Panopto](#) can be an effective tool to record a welcome video to students and give a virtual tour of the Blackboard course site. To help students assess their preparation on the online/hybrid learning experience, you may wish to assign your students GVSU's [online self-assessment](#).

In an easy-to-find location, provide students direct links to resources such as the [Blackboard student support](#), [GVSU IT HelpDesk](#), and other relevant student support services.

Publish your syllabus to your Blackboard site and open the course to students a week or two before the semester begins

We know that students at Grand Valley tend to take W's in online and hybrid courses more frequently than in traditional courses. Research indicates that students benefit when given time to prepare and assess the course expectations ahead of time, so any extra time you give students to assess their readiness for the course and get into the mindset for online or hybrid learning is useful. Upload your syllabus to the course before the semester begins and email students an invitation to peruse it. If you are still building your Blackboard site up to the last minute, consider emailing your

syllabus directly to students and letting them know when the course site will be ready for them to explore.

Organize your Blackboard Course Consistently

Create a simple course menu: Use consistent formatting & organization. Review your course from the viewpoint of a student. Is information clearly labeled by its function and easy to find? In addition to using consistent formatting and terminology, consider adding features such as Blackboard assignment due dates, guideposts, assignment checklists, multiple representations of essential information (reading assignments listed in the syllabus as well as in a course calendar), and introductory text or audio overviews with each folder/module. Will it be crystal clear to students when assignments are due? Which readings are required or optional? How much time should students expect to spend on a quiz or project? Ensuring this information is easy to find and clearly stated will go a long way toward helping students stay on track.

We also recommend review eLearning Technology's guide for faculty on and invite you to [consult with GVSU's own instructional designers in IDeL](#) (part of eLearning Technologies) for more online/hybrid course design support.

Did you know every College has their own eLearning Liaison? [Find yours!](#)

Provide Timely Feedback on Student Work

Students need (and want!) to know how they're doing throughout the semester, so your timely feedback on assignments, discussions, and course activities is essential. This is especially important because your student may not interact with you as frequently as they would in a face-to-face class. And each time you provide feedback to students, you make your presence known--key to making students feel connected to your course and supported in their work. As you craft assignments, consider the frequency of and methods by which you'll provide feedback to students' work. Try audio recording feedback to students' writing, or giving formative, brief feedback more frequently during an assignment to encourage students' reflection and learning. Establish a goal of responding to students' inquiries or activities on Blackboard within 24 hours Monday - Friday, or on Mondays for activities students may complete over the weekend. (It's certainly OK to take more time to grade longer projects or papers.)

Create Opportunities for Students to Develop Mastery

Discussion threads are a popular component of Blackboard courses, but an online conversation is just one of many ways you can help students demonstrate knowledge or practice skills. Think beyond the discussion forum: given your course content, how might you build in multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate knowledge or mastery of a skill across a variety of activities? How will you reinforce skills or knowledge learned in one portion of the course in a future activity? What short assignments might you ask students to engage in and post for quick feedback?

For more resources:

- [Faculty resources for online education](#)
- Tips for successful asynchronous teaching
 - [Part 1: Creating engaging content](#)
 - [Part 2: Supporting students](#)
- [10 effective practices for digital teaching](#)
- Contact [The Bridge](#) for assistance in creating a welcome video or leveraging interactive media in your courses.
- Review [University Library resources](#) for distance learning

IMPORTANT GVSU POLICIES

GVSU Instructional Policies

Approved by the University Academic Senate and Provost, [view the basic expectations instructors must meet when teaching a course at GVSU](#), including:

- A. Absence from Class
- B. Change of Instructor, Time, or Place of Meeting
- C. Information Given at Beginning of Semester
- D. Faculty Availability to Students Selection of Textbooks
- E. Culminating Experience

Note the requirement for a Culminating Experience as scheduled by the Registrar. If you hear other faculty talking about Final Exams, it's likely they are describing their Culminating Experience.

Academic Misconduct Policies and Procedures

Familiarize yourself with [GVSU's policy on Academic Integrity](#) from the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (often abbreviated to OSCCR or "Oscar"). Their mission states:

The Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSCCR) fosters a safe, respectful community by upholding institutional policies through education, individual accountability, and restorative practices. We equip students with conflict management skills, provide fair resolution processes, and ensure procedural fairness. Through collaboration with campus partners, we promote student learning, responsibility, and community well-being ([OSCCR Mission, Vision, and Values](#)).

[OSCCR also provides a webpage devoted to Instructor Resources on Academic Misconduct.](#)

Faculty Resources from the Registrar

The Registrar [has compiled a resource page for Faculty and Staff](#), including information on:

- Schedule changes
- Request forms for grade changes or incompletes
- Photo Rosters
- [Current Academic Calendar and Final Exam/Culminating Experience Schedule](#)

Your college may have other policies – be on the lookout for them. Don't be afraid to ask for their policies!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOUR TEACHING

Pew Faculty Teaching and Learning Center (FTLC)

We are here to support all faculty. Our purpose is to cultivate and sustain a culture of continuous learning and student-centered teaching. We inspire and equip educators with evidence-based and innovative teaching practices. Some of our services include:

- Consultations
- Mid-Semester Student Feedback
- Workshops
- Grants to support teaching innovation
- Grants to support attending Sponsored Teaching and Learning Events

We are happy to work with all adjunct faculty to support their teaching while at GVSU. [Check out our website](#) to peruse upcoming events, special initiatives, teaching guides, and more.

The Teaching Professor Digital Library

Faculty and staff now have access to a new online professional development resource. The [Teaching Professor Digital Library](#) is a growing library of video-based programs to help you address teaching opportunities and challenges. Each video is accompanied by PDF handouts and a transcript.

To activate your Teaching Professor Digital Library subscription, contact us at pewftlc@gvsu.edu and we will send you the GVSU activation code.

eLearning Technologies

The [eLearning Technologies](#) team is dedicated to supporting faculty, contributing to teaching excellence, and enhancing student success through:

- Exemplary Instructional Design - [IDeL](#)
- Effective Application of Instructional Technologies - [Teaching with Technology](#)
- Learning Management System Enhancement - [Blackboard](#)
- Interactive Digital Media Development - [The Bridge](#) (formerly the Digital Studio)

My Banner

Banner is a software system used to manage student, faculty and staff information and processes. As faculty, you have access to [Banner Self-Service \(or My Banner\)](#) to access your course assignments, student rosters, to assign grades, and more.

CARE Referrals

[CARE's primary function](#) is to help keep the university community safe and to connect distressed students to support services. CARE seeks prevention rather than reaction to students in distress. In doing this, CARE:

- Gathers and manages reported information from concerned faculty and staff
- Reaches out to students who have been referred to connects them to support services
- Provides faculty and staff with support and intervention resources

As faculty, if you have a concern about a student's health and safety, family issues, life situations, or resource needs, please [submit a CARE REFERRAL](#).

Navigate 360 Referrals

Grand Valley State University has partnered with the [Educational Advisory Board](#) to bring you Navigate360, a student success software that assists with appointment making and access to services on campus.

If you have a concern about a student's academic success, as faculty you should [submit a Navigate Referral](#). Log in to EAB Navigate to submit an alert for student's academic concern. Please note the first point of contact with the student should always be done by the faculty. If the faculty feels the student could use some pro-active outreach from the Student Academic Success Center concerning an academic need, then they can file a referral through Navigate360. Academic concerns in need of pro-active support might include poor time management, academic procrastination, student was performing well and now all the sudden has stopped attending or stopped turning in assignments. Below is a link for a guide on submitting an alert/case in Navigate.

[Faculty and Staff Guide for How to Submit a Navigate Alert](#).

Workday Learning

Workday Learning is a full learning management system going beyond only registration and supports the delivery of online, in-person, or hybrid courses and programs. It also serves as the hub for all course related content and materials.

To access Workday Learning, navigate to my.gvsu.edu, click on the "Workday" app, and login with your GVSU network credentials. Type Learning" in the search bar and select the Learning Task.

For further support, please view the [Accessing Workday](#) job aid.

