

Talking Points and FAQs for Launch of Faculty Playbook and Checklist

Introduction to the WHAT and WHY

What is the Instructional Faculty Playbook?

The playbook is a guide to Excelsior University's teaching expectations and best practices centered around ensuring a high-quality, supportive, and engaging learning environment to promote student success. In the document you will find descriptions of the "how" and "why" of faculty teaching expectations, rather than just the "what." The document was created through a collaborative process involving Department Chairs, Faculty, and Academic Affairs and Operations staff. It represents decades of research and insight into the classroom experience at Excelsior, our students' needs, and which faculty activities make the most significant impact on the student experience. These are tried-and-true methods that we know significantly impact student success.

The Playbook will continue to evolve over time to stay current in best practices in teaching, engagement, and student success.

What is the Instructional Checklist?

The checklist is a companion document to the Playbook that was created to provide guidelines around the ideal timing of teaching expectations within a typical 8-week term across all disciplines. Faculty can use the checklist as a resource before, during, and after each term they are teaching to ensure that all students receive a consistent and high-quality learning experience across all courses. The checklist was likewise created through a collaborative process involving Department Chairs, Faculty, and Academic Affairs and Operations staff.

Why are we instituting this Playbook and Checklist?

All of us at Excelsior have a common mission centered around student success. The aim of this project is to put student success at the center of the classroom experience, ensuring that every student at Excelsior has a consistent, high-quality experience in every course, providing them with the tools and knowledge to persist through their courses to meet their goals and complete their degrees.

By creating these documents and trainings on shared best practices, we can ensure that all students receive personalized attention and feedback that allows them learn, grow, and improve. All students will experience welcoming, inclusive, and supportive relationships with faculty, and be met with resources and support whenever needed.

How Will This Benefit Students?

- **Clear Expectations for Learning:** Faculty will have tools to provide clarity and structure, reducing confusion for students.
 - **Improved Course Consistency:** Students will experience a unified approach across courses, making navigation and engagement more intuitive.
 - **Enhanced Support for Online Learning:** Particularly helpful for students new to the online environment, the checklist promotes a welcoming and effective learning space.
 - **Proven Strategies for Success:** Incorporates methods that have been shown to improve student engagement, comprehension, and academic achievement.
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How Was the Checklist Created?

- **Designed with Student Success in Mind:**
 - Developed by a collaborative team of **academic leaders** and **support staff**, including the Provost, Vice Provost, Deans, Department Chairs, full-time faculty, and instructional designers.
 - Reflects input from those deeply invested in ensuring students get the most out of their learning experience.
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What's in the Checklist?

- **Strategies for Success:** Tailored recommendations to foster an engaging and effective online classroom.
 - **Guidance for Faculty:** Clear, actionable steps that align with the goal of providing a consistent, student-centered approach.
 - **Best Practices:** A collection of tried-and-true methods that enhance teaching and learning outcomes.
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What's Next?

- **Training for Faculty:**
 - **Asynchronous and Synchronous Training Options:** Flexible opportunities for faculty to master the checklist and apply its strategies effectively.
 - **Ongoing Support:** Faculty will receive continuous assistance to ensure these practices benefit students throughout the semester.
- **Upcoming Events:**
 - Instructional Playbook Information Session: **December 17, 2024, 4:00 PM ET.**

- Three training sessions in **January 2025**.
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Why This Matters for Students

- **Elevated Learning Experience:** Students benefit when faculty are equipped with tools and strategies that put their needs first.
 - **Commitment to Excellence:** This initiative underscores our dedication to providing the best possible education for every student.
 - **Support at Every Level:** From teaching strategies to course design, the checklist ensures students have the guidance and resources they need to succeed.
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Closing Message

- The **Instructional Checklist** is more than a faculty tool—it's a commitment to enhancing the student experience.
 - By fostering consistency, clarity, and excellence, this initiative helps us deliver on our promise to provide every student with the opportunity to succeed.
 - We are excited to work together to make this a game-changer for students in Spring 2025 and beyond!
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General/Procedural Questions:

Why is Excelsior making this change?

- Excelsior University is introducing this change to strengthen its focus on academic excellence and student success. As the institution grows, the new Playbook and Checklist aim to bring consistency, equity, and clarity to the online classroom, ensuring that faculty have the necessary resources and tools to engage and retain students effectively.
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When will the checklist requirements go into effect?

- The checklist will go into effect in the **Spring 1 2025 term**, starting in January.
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Will we receive training on how to use the checklist?

- Yes, there will be **Information Sessions** on December 10 and December 17 at 4pm Eastern. Recordings of these sessions will also be available.
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How will the university evaluate faculty performance according to the checklist?

- Faculty performance will be reviewed by Department Chairs and Associate Deans, who will monitor faculty activity each term.
 - Faculty who go above and beyond will be recognized and celebrated.
 - Faculty who are struggling with items on the checklist can expect extra support from their department chair. Support can include things like, explanations of why an item is necessary or guidance on technology. Faculty who refuse to implement items from the checklist regularly and who will not work with their department chair could then lose opportunities to teach future sections.
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Should I print/download a copy of the checklist to check off my own work weekly?

- Yes, it is recommended to use the checklist as a tool to ensure all items are completed, particularly new processes for your teaching.
 - Faculty will receive a **weekly form** from their respective **department chairs** to check off items from the checklist as they are completed. This form will be used to help **academic leadership** monitor progress on specific tasks that contribute to improving the student experience. The goal is to identify which actions are enhancing student outcomes and which areas may need additional support or improvement.
 - By tracking this data, the university can gain insights into areas where faculty may need further resources or training, and recognize and celebrate the efforts of faculty who are making a significant positive impact on student success.
 - **The forms are a short-term solution, and academic leaders are working on options to automate this work with a data dashboard.**
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What if some items don't apply to my course?

- The checklist contains general items suitable for most courses, but if an item doesn't apply to your course, consult with your **Department Chair** to confirm.
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What if my course is not an 8-week term, does this checklist still apply?

- A separate checklist will be provided for **15-week courses** and for **1-credit courses** to address the specific requirements for those sections.
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What should I do if I don't understand how to complete an item on the checklist?

- Start by referring to the **Playbook** for detailed guidance. If further clarification is needed, consult your **Department Chair**.
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Specifics about the Checklist:

Can I use personal email for communication?

- No, using personal email is not advisable due to privacy, security, and FERPA compliance. It is important to use your **Excelsior email** to receive important communications.
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What tools should we use to create the weekly videos? You can use tools such as **Zoom**, **Screencast-O-Matic**, **Panopto**, or **Canvas Studio**.

- The tool should include closed captions or a transcript for accessibility. Choose what works best for you.
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Do we need to appear on screen in the weekly videos?

- While it is encouraged to appear on screen to personalize the classroom experience, if you prefer not to, you can use tools like Zoom to share a whiteboard or slides while keeping your image minimized.
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What does "multiple discussion board replies on at least 3 days" mean?

- This means you should post at least **two replies** on **three separate days** each week. Quality and engagement are the primary focus, so prioritize meaningful interactions with students.
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What counts as direct communication with students twice a week?

- Direct communication includes grading feedback, inbox messages, or 1-on-1 meetings. The goal is to ensure that every student receives personalized attention and support, which helps them succeed.
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What if no one attends my office hours?

- You can switch to offering **office hours by appointment** instead. Make sure to clearly communicate availability in your Instructor Information and course announcements.
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How do I turn on the “Notes” function in the Grade Center?

- In the Grade Center, click on the **gear icon**, then go to **View Options** and check the box for **Notes**.
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When should I alert an advisor about a struggling student?

- Don’t wait until the midpoint. It’s best to raise a flag in **Salesforce** early (in weeks 1-3) when you first notice issues with a student’s performance or engagement. Early intervention can improve their chances of success.
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What if a student doesn’t respond to outreach efforts?

- Continue reaching out and use **multiple methods** (inbox, grade center feedback, and flagging for advising). If no response is received after 3+ weeks of minimal participation, consult your Department Chair about potentially withdrawing the student.
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What should I do if I’m offline due to illness or a family emergency?

- Notify your **Department Chair** as soon as possible. If you can, post an announcement to inform students of your temporary unavailability and delays in grading. Work with your Department Chair to ensure support during your absence.
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What if I’m teaching a course with extensive group work?

- You may still meet individual engagement requirements through **substantive group discussions** or by contacting your Department Chair for guidance on how the checklist applies to group-based courses.
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What should I do if I encounter tech issues with university platforms?

- Submit a **Remedy ticket** through Faculty Connects. Specify the type of issue and describe the problem. For issues with **Turnitin**, contact the appropriate department at CLAS@excelsior.edu or CNHS@excelsior.edu for assistance.
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