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Inside Independent Learning

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Dealing with "Time Crunch" Students

One of the major advantages of Independent Learning is that students can complete the coursework for a semester-long class on their own timeline within the space of 12 months. However, some students find that life events (or procrastination) prevent their timely completion of the course. Sometimes, the two allowed extensions are still not enough time for the students to complete their course. For other students, the looming deadlines of graduation or the start date of a new program or project put a tight timeline on their IL course completion plans. As instructors, it is our job to help students progress through the course at a reasonable pace.

The 12 Month Mark

Students who register for IL courses have 12 months from the registration date to complete their course. Students have the option of purchasing two 3 month extensions, as long as their total course time with extensions does not exceed 18 months.

Discussing a student's goals for course completion at the beginning of the course can be helpful to both instructors and students. Instructors can use this conversation to better understand student goals and share advice for setting a realistic plan to successfully complete the course. In addition, such a conversation can alert instructors when a student may have unrealistic expectations. A clear understanding of course policy at the beginning of the course not only sets students up for success, but also prevents students from being disappointed or upset if their timelines cannot be met.

If you notice that a student is reaching the 12 month mark for the course, feel free to send a friendly email reminding the student about their course deadline and the possibility of purchasing an extension. Many students forget about this option, or ignore the proactive advising emails that Extension's Student Services send them. A quick note from the instructor might be just the thing a student needs to help him or her get motivated to complete the course.

Because the course is an independent learning course with a flexible schedule, some students procrastinate or prioritize other tasks above their courses. Reminding a student of a looming deadline can also help the student reorder priorities and successfully complete the course.

Outside Influences on schedule

"I need a quick credit in order to graduate, so I just need to do the minimum to complete my course in the next 2 weeks."

"I already paid for my second extension, and I really need to complete the course this month."

"Dear Professor, Well, it has been a long time, and I am finally getting down to working on my course. I submitted the first 8 assignments over the weekend, and I plan to submit the remaining assignments by Wednesday. If you can grade them right away so I can take my exam, that would be great."

IL students face a host of outside influences that might dictate their schedules for course completion.

Some students have a deadline, like graduation or the start of a new job, which dictates when they must have the coursework completed. Such students may be quite proactive about setting a schedule that allows them to meet their deadlines. If you are asked, please remind these students that they do need to leave processing time for their exam feedback, final grade calculation, and transcript transfer.

Other students may be required to complete the course in a shorter period of time by their high schools or universities. Students who take their IL course with a UW System tuition waiver often are required to complete the course within the current semester. Students with questions about deadlines imposed by outside institutions should contact their institutions directly regarding the completion date.

While some students rush to complete the course well before their 12-month registration deadline, others may need to take the full 12 month timeframe to complete their course. Some students work and/or care for family members in addition to their IL coursework. Student work may ebb and flow depending on outside commitments. The key for students is to be aware of and actively working toward course completion within the realistic timeline they set. As an IL instructor, our role is to give the same high quality assignment feedback to each student, regardless of the individual timeframes. All IL students, regardless of their personal timeline, deserve constructive assignment feedback within 3 calendar days of submission. Additionally, all IL students should feel free to contact their instructor with course content related questions, and be confident that they will receive a reply from their instructor within a 24 hour window on business days.

Minimum Time Required

Mentoring students toward a realistic timeframe can be a challenge at times. The IL website states: "It is not a good idea to rush through a course. We recommend taking a minimum of three months for a course...If you have a more pressing deadline...be sure to contact your instructor..."

As you can see, there is no minimum time requirement, but a suggestion of at least 3 months. If you are faced with a student who wants to complete the course in under 3 months, remind the student that the course is equivalent to a semester-long undergraduate course, and they should plan their workload accordingly. If their IL course is the only commitment a student has, it may be possible for students to successfully complete the course in under 3 months.

Max Submissions

To preserve the academic integrity of the course, many instructors have imposed a 4 -assignment per week submission maximum. If you have or adopt such a policy, be sure that the information is included in your welcome email and the course syllabus. Please contact Sarah (skorpi@dcs.wisc.edu) if your course syllabus needs to be updated.

Completing Exams

Students who are nearing their IL course completion deadline often wonder if they must also have their exams completed by their course deadline.

Students must have all assignments submitted by their course deadline and they must have requested their exams by the course deadline. They then have 30 days from the date the exam request was processed by Extension to complete their exam.

For example, if Sally's completion date is August 2nd, all assignments must be submitted and the exam must be requested by August 2nd. If Extension processes the request on August 4th, then Sally has 30 days, or until September 4th to complete the exam(s) for the course. If Sally turned in all assignments by August 2nd but forgot to request the exam, then she would have to purchase an extension in order to take the exam and complete the course.

D2L Gem: News Items

Remember to remove your old items from D2L Newsfeed!

"I will be away from the office and unable to reply to emails or grade assignments from December 23rd to January 8th."

One of the fantastic features of D2L courses is that instructors can leave messages for all students registered for the course in the News section on the Course Home page. This is a great place to post vacation messages and major course update messages for students.

However, students will only look at the news section of the course homepage for news if the news items are up to date. Next time you log in to D2L to grade student assignments, take a minute to read your news items. If you find an item that is out-of-date or no longer relevant, delete that item. It is ok for the Course Welcome Message to be the only message in the news section.

In order to edit or delete a news item, click the arrow to the right of the heading.

To create a new item, click the arrow to the right of the "News" banner, and then click "New News Item." If you are creating a vacation message, use the end date function to remove the message at the end of your time away.

You can also reorder news items. To do this, you will again click on the arrow to the right of the "News" header. Then click "reorder news items" and use the "sort order" drop down menus to set a different order. Be sure that you click "save" to set the new order.

Feel free to contact Sarah (skorpi@dcs.wisc.edu) with any questions.

Good Practice Reminder: Extended time for testing

If you have experience teaching in the traditional classroom setting, you might be familiar with student requests for accessibility accommodations. In the IL course format, the most requested accommodation is extended time for testing.

Students who, in the past, have discussed course accommodations with their instructors might contact their IL course instructors about testing accommodations. If you receive such a request, please refer the student to Extension's Student Services.

Student Services processes and approves any accommodation requests. In addition, they will place a note in the student file and will change testing instructions that are sent to test proctors accordingly. As an IL instructor, you might not know that one of your students has an accommodation for extra time when testing and you are not required to keep track of this information. If you ever have a question about accommodations or extended testing time, please contact Sarah (skorpi@dcs.wisc.edu).

Who Students should contact when…

As an IL student, it can be a challenge to know who to contact in different situations. Feel free to share this list with your students!

Contact Extension:

Technology Issues (i.e. D2L is down, forgotten passwords, etc.) .....Extension (techsupport@uwex.edu)

Student Services Issues (i.e. Proctor approval, exam requests, transcript requests, etc.) .....IL Extension (il@uwex.edu)

Contact the Instructor:

For all course content and course assignment questions

Contact the IL Program Coordinator (skorpi@dcs.wisc.edu):

If your question does not fit into one of the categories above

Ideas & Suggestions

Remember, if you have any questions or concerns that you think would be of interest to your IL colleagues, please submit them for future IL e-mails.

Coming Next Month: Assignment Feedback

Teaching in D2L and teaching a print course have many things in common, including providing constructive feedback on assignments. Next month, look for articles about types of feedback, reminders of how to leave feedback and enter grades into LRMS, and the option of allowing students to resubmit an assignment for partial or full credit if the student was not able to achieve the lesson goals.

If you have any helpful feedback tips or hints that you would like to share with your IL colleagues, please be sure to let Sarah know by August 15th.

Introducing: Joan Bell

I am currently the instructor for eleven different online and print-based English courses offered by Independent Learning. This profession- and Nature- have always been at the center of my life, along with my two sons, Joe and Ted, and toddler and twin-baby grandsons (Grant, Alex/Evan). Madison is my current home, but there are weekly trips to some inherited NE properties about 100 miles from UW; on this land I exercise my hobby/obsession, creating habitat for threatened and "of concern" populations of migratory bird species.

I have been instructing, revising, and writing English courses since I earned my Ph.D. at UW-Milwaukee, a few decades ago. My enthusiasm for this work continues as the tools of learning have evolved, from hand-written postal mail lessons and printed course guides, to the current online courses we offer. Each year, along with my students, I continue to look forward to "learning and growing" as a part of the instructional team.