



Online Edge Guidelines Implementing Edge Advantages in Online Classes

This document identifies ways in which the UTEP Edge Advantages can be incorporated into online courses. It is not an attempt to standardize online courses at UTEP but both to represent and regularize UTEP's priorities for online undergraduate education. The setting of standards to evaluate student success in these courses is left to the faculty who teach them and the academic programs with which they are affiliated.

CID's goal is to assist faculty in recognizing and incorporating the Edge Advantages into online courses to the end that students will have the opportunity to learn about, practice, and become skilled at these Advantages. It is not the expectation that all Advantages will be present in any one course. Nor is it that students will achieve mastery in any one course. Rather, student learning and abilities will be reinforced and diversified across all courses they enroll in—both in person and online.

This document provides guidelines for both how students can engage with the Edge Advantages in online courses as well as how instructors can incorporate the Advantages to improve the quality of the course itself. It is not meant to be exhaustive, and it is meant to be revised.

Communication

This Edge Advantage encourages UTEP students to reach mutual understanding through the effective exchange of information, ideas, and feelings.

Students can develop and strengthen their communication skills in online courses through opportunities to share and respond via a variety of media and to varied audiences. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Writing in a professional, academic voice
 - *This can be achieved through emails, Blackboard Messages, journal entries, wikis, and discussion boards.*
- Orally communicating ideas and solutions in the form of video conferencing, creating a video, and/or creating an audio file
 - *Blackboard Collaborate sessions, online office hours via Collaborate or Skype, introductory videos and podcasts are good ways for students to practice oral communication online.*
- Engaging in online discourse with small groups or with the entire class
 - *Some examples include: small group and whole class blogs, discussions, wikis, and peer reviews. Faculty developing online courses can assist in students' learning by:*
- Establishing instructor presence
 - *Syllabus and course content should reflect an instructor's proactive plan for response time and feedback. Instructors must commit to being reactive and available on a consistent basis.*

- ❑ Frontloading accurate information and directives
 - *Some examples include: correct dates and deadlines, proper use of Blackboard announcements, assessments and activities tested prior to release. Instructors must ensure that the delivery of information is accurate and proofread prior to course release.*
- ❑ Providing specific and sufficient guidelines and prompts
 - *Students will have a better chance of successful completion of assignments when the guidelines, prompts, and criteria are clearly articulated.*
- ❑ Articulating clear course objectives/outcomes
 - *To promote extrinsic motivation, instructors can help students see purpose in the course, assessments, and activities.*
- ❑ Course contains Week/Module at a glance
 - *This organization promotes effective time management and organizational skills for both instructors and students.*

Confidence

This Edge Advantage emphasizes the importance of being self-assured by encouraging students to appreciate their own talents, abilities, skills, and qualities.

Students can increase their confidence in online courses by receiving formative and summative feedback as well as reflecting on what they have learned. This may include, but is not limited to:

- ❑ Evaluating and reflecting on their performance and/or the quality of the course material
 - *Some examples include: reflective essays, discussion boards, or a brief 2- to 3- minute video. This can take place at the end of each unit/module, or at end of course. These activities should not be graded to encourage participation and candid feedback.*

Faculty developing online courses can assist in students' learning by:

- ❑ Providing timely and consistent feedback at the end of an activity/module/milestone
 - *Some examples include: instructors may use the achievements tool within Blackboard, send individual emails, or share a student's work with class as an example of exceptional effort (student release form required).*
- ❑ Providing personalized feedback or engaging message by sending a personal email or short 30-second video

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is an important Edge Advantage in which students become adept at analyzing and evaluating issues in order to solve problems and develop informed opinions.

Students can practice their critical thinking abilities in online classes through assignments that ask them to be engaged with important issues in the discipline and to share and challenge their opinions. This may include, but is not limited to:

- ❑ Practicing how to ask productive questions
 - *Sharing these questions in a discussion forum allows fellow students to evaluate and comment on the significance and quality of the questions.*

- ❑ Demonstrating how one’s newfound knowledge can be applied to a topic
 - *Some examples include: discussion board topics that connect the course material to current events.*
- ❑ Articulating the significance of an assignment in relation to course objectives and outcomes
 - *Some examples include: Reflective essays, discussion boards, or a brief 2- to 3-minute video containing a visual argument.*

Faculty developing online courses can assist in students’ learning by:

- ❑ Providing opportunities for students to ask questions, analyze research, and communicate their findings
 - *Students learn more by going through this process than reading/watching videos and answering multiple-choice questions. Clear instructions and scaffolding are required for success.*
- ❑ Rather than updating students on their progress, ask them to monitor their progress and consider what they need to correct to reach the goals
 - *Students can post 1-minute videos in which they reflect on their progress and predict what their next course of action should be.*

Entrepreneurship

This Edge Advantage is achieved when students develop, organize, and manage ideas and opportunities turning them into new products, services, firms, or industries.

Students can practice entrepreneurship in online courses through projects that encourage them to engage in design-based projects. This may include, but is not limited to:

- ❑ Writing a proposal (including leveling statement, objectives, scope, timeline, budget, survey/feedback, analysis, and outcomes)
 - *Some examples include: grants, conference presentations, call for papers.*
- ❑ Participating in problem-based learning (PBL) activities
 - *Some examples include: how to start a business, create an action plan to solve an issue in an existing business, and so on.*
- ❑ Completing a semester-long or capstone project
 - *Some examples include: independent research, market analysis, data collection, analysis, and findings.*

Faculty developing the online courses can assist in students’ learning by:

- ❑ Developing or utilizing already existing gaming experiences that ask students to participate in decision making, risk assessment, and teamwork
- ❑ Providing both theoretical and practical instruction on how to evaluate choices and complete a project
- ❑ Evaluating student performance not just on the end project but also on the overall project organization
 - *Asking students to provide periodic check-ins via emails, Blackboard Collaborate sessions, digital office hours, or short videos.*
- ❑ Making use of a variety of digital programs and applications for research, analysis, and communication

- ❑ Providing students with the opportunity to reflect on their practices and decisions
 - *Use discussion boards and provide guiding questions. Students can answer individually or as groups and respond to one another.*

Global Awareness

This Edge Advantage promotes a mindset in which students understand and appreciate people, cultures, and ideas from around the world that impact our community.

Students can expand their global awareness in online courses through projects that encourage them to think beyond their course content. This may include, but is not limited to:

- ❑ Tying course content to local, regional, national, and global issues and concerns
 - *Some examples include: discussion board post reflecting on a documentary or video, survey and analysis assignment, op-ed, or online opinion piece.*
- ❑ Engaging in global research using UTEP's online databases as well as digital technologies that connect them with other students or experts around the globe
- ❑ Communicating with people from around the globe to complete a project
 - *Instructors can provide students (or encourage them to develop) research questions that require they make contact with someone outside of their immediate geographical region.*

Faculty developing online courses can assist in students' learning by:

- ❑ Providing guidelines on using digital technologies to research and communicate with people around the globe in order to answer a research question
- ❑ Inviting "guest speakers" from around the globe into the class
 - *Use Blackboard Collaborate to interact in real time or discussion boards to create a question/answer forum.*

Leadership

Students can feel more confident with their leadership abilities in online courses through projects that encourage them to take responsibility for facilitating their own and others' learning. This may include, but is not limited to:

- ❑ Taking a leadership role in a variety of projects
 - *Some examples include managing a group project, leading a discussion, facilitating a Blackboard Collaborate study session.*
- ❑ Reflecting on class performance. This can take place at the end of each unit/module, or at end of course
 - *Some examples include: reflective essays, discussion boards, or a brief 2- to 3-minute video. These activities should not be graded to encourage participation and candid feedback.*

Faculty developing online courses can assist in students' learning by:

- ❑ Articulating clear course objectives/outcomes
 - *To promote extrinsic motivation, students must see purpose in the course, assessments, and activities.*

- ❑ Establishing a student responsibility statement
 - *Some examples include: student must take ownership of the course and check Blackboard and emails on a consistent basis, Student must contact the instructor immediately if she/he is going to miss a major assignment or exam, and so on.*
- ❑ Establishing an instructor's responsibility statement
 - *Some examples include: the instructor commits to answering all email correspondence within 48 hours of receipt, Instructor commits to availability during posted online office hours via email, chat, or video conference, and so on.*
- ❑ Assigning and tracking leadership roles so that each student has an opportunity to lead at least one activity in the course.
 - *Post a schedule or log where student leadership roles are visible and can be planned.*

Problem Solving

Problem solving is an Edge Advantage where students find solutions to difficult or complex issues.

Students can practice their problem-solving skills in online courses through projects that encourage them to identify, analyze, and provide solutions to challenges. This may include, but is not limited to:

- ❑ Working on projects that mimic real-world scenarios
 - *Groups can use Blackboard tools to increase peer interaction (group discussion board, Blackboard collaborate ultra, wiki, file sharing) and commit to meeting frequently via Blackboard Collaborate and/or Google Drive, or One Drive.*
- ❑ Make digital or video presentations that explain their solution to the problem and why it is effective

Faculty developing online courses can assist in students' learning by:

- ❑ Assigning problem-based learning activities
 - *Some examples include: how to start a business, create an action plan to solve an issue in an existing business, create an experiment, solve a community problem, and so on.*
- ❑ Providing guidance on how to identify and understand the problem and make criteria-based decisions
- ❑ Providing the opportunity for students to evaluate their solution and the process they used to reach it
 - *Discussion boards provide a good space for students to provide comments on each other's solutions.*

Social Responsibility

As an Edge Advantage, social responsibility encourages students to act ethically and responsibly for the benefit of society and the public good.

Students can develop their sense of social responsibility in online courses through projects that encourage them to understand the impact of decisions and behaviors. This may include, but is not limited to:

- ❑ Identifying and resolving conflicts
 - *Some examples include: op-ed or opinion piece, 2 to 3-minute video containing a visual argument.*
- ❑ Addressing controversial issues and practicing methods for reaching consensus or determining the most ethical solution
 - *Small group discussions provide a good way to start the process before a group presents their opinions to the whole class via Blackboard Collaborate or a video.*

Faculty developing online courses can assist in students' learning by:

- ❑ Developing a democratic and participatory course
 - *Provide students with opportunities to determine classroom policies, readings, or projects through discussion boards. Votes can be taken via Blackboard survey tool.*
- ❑ Providing a statement on proper netiquette and guidelines or a template
 - *An example can be found at: <https://www.utep.edu/extendeduniversity/cid/preparing-for-online-learning/index.html>*
- ❑ Providing students with the opportunity to reflect on how their thoughts and opinions may have changed during the process of reaching consensus
 - *Discussion boards involving the whole class are a good place to record these changes.*

Teamwork

Teamwork is an Edge Advantage that finds students participating as an effective, efficient member of a group in order to meet a common goal.

Students can practice their teamwork abilities in online courses through projects that encourage them to cooperate and/or collaborate on projects. This may include, but is not limited to:

- ❑ Participating in a group assignment(s)
 - *Some important parameters to follow:*
 - *Each group utilizes Blackboard tools to increase peer interaction (group discussion board, blackboard collaborate ultra, wiki, file sharing).*
 - *Each group commits to contract assigning roles (manager, research, writer, editor, proof reader, and so on).*
 - *Each group commits to meet frequently via Blackboard Collaborate and/or Google Drive, or One Drive.*
- ❑ Participating in a peer review activity
 - *The peer review should be timed appropriately in the progress of the project.*

Faculty developing online courses can assist in students' learning by:

- ❑ Providing at least one assignment where students are required to work together
 - *Students can communicate and work together using wikis, blogs, discussion boards, Blackboard Collaborate, and/or Google Docs or One Drive.*
- ❑ Providing guidelines, tips, and expectations about how to work effectively as a group
 - *Instructor should provide a template or set of guidelines for the type and quality of feedback expected.*