

Kent State University Office Hours Instructor Toolkit

Office Hours, Student Belonging, and Student Success

Many students do not fully appreciate the benefits of attending office hours. Students may be concerned that they will be perceived negatively by their instructor or peers, that office hours are only for people who are struggling with the course material, or that they will be bothering their busy instructor. The utility of office hours may be particularly unclear for first-generation students and students of marginalized identities. At the same time, research shows that students who build personal connections with their instructors are more likely to be successful in college.

Building inclusive office hours begins with clear and open communication with your students about the purpose and benefits of attending office hours. By providing students with the opportunity to get to know you better, and by taking the time to get to know your students better in return, you will contribute to Kent State's mission of building a greater sense of belonging for all students while significantly contributing to the academic success of your students.¹

Strategies

Section 1: Before the Student Arrives

Let students know what to expect in office hours

When you first introduce your students to your office hours, take the time to explain what office hours are. Office hours represent time saved on your calendar specifically for the purpose of supporting your students' needs, and *all* students should feel welcome to utilize this time. Let them know that office hours are intended to be supportive, give them a heads up about the types of "get to know you" questions you or they may ask, and offer a few tips for suggested conversation starters or commonly asked questions from previous semesters (see below). The more transparent you can be with your students about the role of office hours, the more likely your students will be to show up. This transparency will also contribute to the equity of your course, ensuring that all students understand that they have access to this support. The following slide may be used for this purpose:

¹ For more information on the specific requirements for office hours within your academic unit, please contact your department chair. More information on the official Kent State policies regarding office hours may be found here: www.kent.edu/policyreg/operational-procedures-and-regulations-regarding-faculty-office-hours.



You may consider including a statement in your syllabus that explains the purpose of office hours to your students. Here is an example of a syllabus statement:

Weekly office hours are a dedicated time that I am available to answer your questions, discuss course content, and generally be of support. Please drop in or sign up for a time to attend office hours on Teams or in-person (provide URL link and building/office #). If you would like to meet with me but have a scheduling conflict that prevents you from attending my regular office hours, please email me to schedule an appointment. Talking with students is a highlight of my job — I look forward to speaking with you!

Adapted from <https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/strategic-resources-digital-publications/writing-syllabus/office-hours>

Structure your office hours

It is important to decide, and clearly communicate with your students, how you plan to structure your office hours. Transparency is key so that all students will know what to expect. Consider the following:

1. **Location-** your office is a great option, but you may also consider a more public space on campus, such as the library. If you do not have a private office space, consider utilizing the library or a common space near your office. Recognizing that there are many reasons that students (and you) may be uncomfortable meeting behind closed doors (e.g. claustrophobia), we recommend keeping your office door open when meeting with a student in your office.
2. **Modality-** you may want to offer office hours in-person, virtually, or both! The university recommends that at least some of your office hours are offered in the same modality as your course.

3. Timing- if possible, try to offer a variety of times for your office hours to accommodate student schedules. You may consider surveying your students to find times that work for them or offering additional opportunities to meet by appointment.
4. Solo vs. Groups- depending on your course subject and class size, you may consider offering opportunities for groups of students to attend your office hours together. This will still allow you to support your students in a more personal manner with the added benefit of helping students to build community with each other.
5. Sign-ups: you may want to ask students to sign up for particular times to meet within your established office hours or you may have additional office hours by appointment. This strategy may be particularly useful for a large course or a fully online course. How you ask students to sign up for office hours is up to you. [Many faculty use Microsoft Bookings for this purpose.](#)

Offer personal invitations to attend office hours

Often, students will not attend office hours because they are concerned that they will be inconveniencing their busy instructor. Personal invitations to office hours may be exactly what your students need to show that office hours are truly for them. For example, if a student asks you a question before class about your research, suggest that they come to your office hours for a chat. Let them know that you would enjoy the opportunity to get to know a bit more about their interests, as well. If a student is asking a lot of questions about how to approach their homework, you might suggest that they start their homework during your office hours so you can offer timely support.

Try not to look too busy

When you are sitting in your office waiting for students to show up for office hours, it is okay to do work! However, be sure that you are doing work that can easily be dropped when a student arrives. If you look too busy, students may continue to walk past your office and/or stop attending office hours out of fear of interrupting your work. You should also avoid telling students about how busy you are, as students may perceive this to mean that they are annoying you by asking for help. One way that you can signal to students that you are not too busy for them is to post a welcoming sign on your door during office hours. See our Office Hours Signs below for examples.

Section 2: During the Student's Visit

Get the conversation started

Rather than immediately asking the student why they came to office hours, spend a few minutes to get to know them. Ask them to remind you of their name and pronouns, if they are comfortable, and check in on how they are doing. This is also a great chance to ask them about their major or other interests. You may ask what they do for fun or how they are managing their coursework. By putting in just a little bit of effort to get to know your student, you will demonstrate that you care about them and their

success. You can learn more about the various campus resources designed to support student success below.

You may also want to provide a few conversation starters that your students can use. Because students do not need to have a content question to attend office hours, you can encourage students to use office hours as a chance to chat and get to know you. Here are a few conversation starters for your students to consider [adapted from Nunn 2019]:

1. What was your major in college?
2. Did you always know that you wanted to be a professor?
3. Can you tell me more about your research?
4. That photo on your desk, is that your family?

Provide students with commonly asked questions

Students may be nervous about what types of content questions are acceptable at office hours out of fear that their questions may be perceived negatively. By offering a list of commonly asked questions, you will help to destigmatize the question-asking process.

Here are a few examples of commonly asked questions you can provide for your students. You will want to personalize these questions for your own course content and add more specific questions [adapted from <https://lsadvising.berkeley.edu/news/icebreakers-office-hours>]:

1. I am struggling with the new concept that we covered last class. Can you please go over it again with me?
2. I keep getting stuck on this assignment. Can we work together to answer question 10?
3. I am disappointed with my latest test result. Are there specific areas I should be working on for next time?
4. What are the best ways for me to be more successful at learning in this class?

Section 3: Virtual Office Hours

Virtual office hours can be a great opportunity to connect with your online students in real time or offer greater flexibility for your in-person course. If you are considering utilizing virtual office hours, please keep in mind that you are required to offer at least some of your office hours in a manner consistent with the instructional modality of your course, per Kent State policy.² As with in-person office hours, you may wish to offer some variability and flexibility in times for your office hours, as many of your students may have a multitude of life responsibilities that prevent them from attending during set hours. You may encourage all students to consider attending Office Hours through [Announcements in Canvas](#).

Message Students Who...

² <https://www.kent.edu/policyreg/operational-procedures-and-regulations-regarding-faculty-office-hours>

Canvas has a [Message Students Who feature](#) that allows you to quickly send messages to all students in your course who are missing certain assignments. This tool is a great way to reach out to those students who may need additional support and send a personal invitation to join you during office hours.

Bookings

The Bookings app allows you to list available days/ times in your calendar. Your students will then be able to sign up for a specific office hours appointment that works best for their schedule. This system will help you to avoid any interruptions to private conversations and offers your students additional flexibility. [Kent State IT offers trainings on how to utilize Bookings](#).

Breakout Rooms

It may be challenging to manage virtual office hours in Teams when anyone can drop in unannounced. You may consider enabling a waiting room on your virtual call so that students cannot enter the call without permission. Breakout rooms can be used so that students can drop into the main room and chat with one another while you have a private conversation with a student in a breakout room. Breakout rooms may also be useful if students wish to attend your office hours as a large group— simply send students to different rooms and jump between the rooms as needed to offer support.

Section 4: Additional Tips

Tips for Large Classes

Running office hours for a large class can be challenging, either because few students show up or too many students show up at once. It is nevertheless important to encourage students to attend your office hours and build that personal connection with you as the instructor. One strategy is to offer group office hours, in which you encourage students to join you as a group and work collaboratively to answer questions or work through an assignment. Another strategy is to ask students to sign up for specific times to make the meeting manageable. It is easy for a student in a large class to feel lost in the crowd and unnoticed by their instructor, so personal invitations to attend office hours may help students to feel seen.

Taking Office Hours to the Next Level

1. Snacks- who doesn't like a treat now and then? You might keep a variety of snacks in your office or even offer a large "office hours" gathering with pizza or other treats. This will encourage students to attend and provide you all with the opportunity to build community. If you utilize this strategy at the start of the semester, it may help to destigmatize office hours for the rest of the semester and make your students more comfortable seeking support in the future. It might also provide a needed energy boost for students trying to get through the day, especially if they are food insecure.

2. Collaborative Office Hours- although this is not a substitute for your regular office hours, you may occasionally consider offering a large group office hours session in collaboration with other instructors. This strategy is particularly useful in a large department with many sections of the same course. This office hours gathering could include support from tutors or more advanced students, perhaps to help students prepare for a large assignment or exam.
3. Required Meetings- some instructors may choose to require each student to meet with them one-on-one in the first part of the semester. This strategy ensures that you have the opportunity to personally interact with every student and demonstrate that they are welcome to seek further conversation in office hours. The added benefit of requiring office hours at the start of the semester is to show your students that office hours are not scary!

Resources

Kent State's official Office Hours policies: www.kent.edu/policyreg/operational-procedures-and-regulations-regarding-faculty-office-hours

Nunn, L. 2018. *33 Simple Strategies for Faculty: A Week-by-Week Resource for Teaching First-Year and First-Generation Students*, Rutgers University Press.

Smith, M., Y. Chen, R. Berndtson, K. Burson, and W. Griffin. (2017). "'Office Hours are Kind of Weird': Reclaiming a Resource to Foster Student-Faculty Interaction," *InSight: A Journal of Scholarly Teaching* 12, pp. 14-29. DOI:[10.46504/12201701sm](https://doi.org/10.46504/12201701sm).

Advice for Instructors: www.facultyfocus.com/articles/equality-inclusion-and-diversity/for-those-who-need-it-most-using-active-inclusivity-to-increase-office-hour-attendance-and-extracurricular-activities/

Tips for Re-Branding: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/student-success/academic-life/2023/04/19/academic-success-tip-rebrand-office-hours>

Research on offices hours: <https://guides.library.stonybrook.edu/c.php?g=1275202>

Tips for virtual office hours: <https://teachonline.asu.edu/2021/03/how-to-make-virtual-office-hours-work-for-you-and-your-students/>

Tips for Students: <https://learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/using-office-hours-effectively/>

Funny video about office hours: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQq1-_ujXrM

Additional Support for Students

Academic Coaching: www.kent.edu/coaching

CARES Center: Assistance with basic needs including financial empowerment, food security, stable housing, and mental well-being; www.kent.edu/CARESCenter

Center for Adult and Veteran Services (CAVS): Support for adult, military connected, and parenting students; www.kent.edu/cavs

Center for Sexual and Relationship Violence Support Services: www.kent.edu/srvss

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): Individual and group therapy, tele-therapy, workshops, resources, and more; www.kent.edu/caps

Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Professional development, advocacy, mentoring, and support for underrepresented and underserved populations; www.kent.edu/diversity

FERPA: Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records, both financial and academic; www.kent.edu/registrar/ferpa

Gender Equity and Title IX: Federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education programs or activities; www.kent.edu/studentaffairs/genderequity-titleix

Information Technology (IT): Service and support across the university to assist with the use of technology; www.kent.edu/it

LGBTQ+ Center: Events, advocacy, and support for LGBTQ+ folks, including an emergency fund for students in need; www.kent.edu/lgbtq

Mental Health Resources and Support: All mental health and well-being services that support the Kent State University community across our campus system and abroad; www.kent.edu/mentalhealth

Office of Compliance, Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action: Information, consultation, and guidance to the Kent State community on affirmative action, equal opportunity, harassment prevention and discrimination matters; www.kent.edu/hr/compliance-eoaa

Office of Global Education (OGE): Admissions, advising, and support for international students; www.kent.edu/globaleducation

One Stop for Student Services: Resources for Financial Aid and Scholarships, Billing and Payment, Student Records and Academic Transcripts, and Financial Wellness; www.kent.edu/onestop

Research and Sponsored Programs (RASP): Resources, facilities, and services for groundbreaking research and scholarship; www.kent.edu/research

Student Accessibility Services (SAS): Accommodations, resources, support, and advocacy for students with disabilities and other accessibility concerns; www.kent.edu/sas

Student Legal Services: Non-profit law firm that represents students attending KSU; www.kent.edu/sls

Student Multicultural Center: Support, trainings, and celebrations of the cultural diversity of Kent State students; www.kent.edu/smc

Student Ombuds: Confidential consultation for concerns, grievances, or appeals; www.kent.edu/studentaffairs/student-ombuds

Student Support Services: Support for first generation, designated income, and students registered with Student Accessibility Services; www.kent.edu/student-support-services

Tutoring Services: www.kent.edu/asc/univ-tutoring

University Health Services: Student health insurance, doctors, pharmacy, immunizations;
www.kent.edu/uhs

University Libraries: Resources about writing, research, copyright, and book loans, as well as spaces for studying and computers and printers available for use; www.library.kent.edu

Women's Center: Support, advocacy, and trainings about women, gender, and diversity;
www.kent.edu/womenscenter