Setting Up Your CROPS Course Sites

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UCMCROPS (or CROPS for short) stands for UC Merced Courses, Research, Organizations, and Projects System. CROPS enables members faculty, staff, and students to communicate, collaborate, and work together within a structured environment. Projects enjoy a central repository for messages, documents, and collaborative tools that encourage interaction and sharing.

As a faculty or TA, how you set up your course site can impact how your students engage with your course. This handout provides a list of best-practices for setting up a course site, such as creating a course description, adding and deleting tools, uploading syllabus and other resources, managing resources using WebDAV, and adding podcasts, news feeds, and website links. Obviously, this is not an exhaustive list. If you have any suggestions, please let me know.

1. **Make your "Home" page inviting.**
   a. Provide a brief overview of your course, a list of learning outcomes, and other important information, such as OH, external links, and contact info.

2. **Use "Site Editor" to manage tools, participants, and groups.**
   a. Activate only the tools you'll use, and turn off all other tools to minimize confusion.
   b. In addition to enrolled students, you can add other participants to the site.
   c. You can also create groups within your course for group work and other purposes.

3. **Send general announcements using "Announcements" or "Email Archive"**
   a. While there are four communication tools on CROPS (Announcements, Email Archive, Mailtool, and Messages), general announcements – relevant to entire class – should be sent through Announcements or Email Archive because these tools provide an archived log of postings, allowing students to easily view past announcements.

4. **Use "Syllabus" to post course syllabus**
   a. When you post your syllabus, add it both as text (copy and paste into textbox) and an attachment.

5. **Use "Resources" to manage course-related materials**
   a. Create the appropriate folders within Resources, and upload all course-related materials, including readings and handouts. For assignments and homework that have a grade component, it's recommended that you use the Assignment tool (see below), not the Resources tool.
   b. For a convenient access to your folders on Resources, you can create network folder on local computer using WebDAV connection (upload/download multiple files). Instruction for creating a WebDAV connection is available under Resources.

6. **Use "Assignments" to manage homework, assignments, and other projects**
   a. Use Assignments to distribute, collect, grade, and return assignments. Advantages of posting assignments here (as opposed to Resources) include having a centralized place for all assignments, integrating with Gradebook, and archiving of past assignment. You can choose how students submit assignments: as in-line text, as an attachment, or both.
   b. Use the Download All and Upload All to collect and return all assignments in one transaction (as opposed to one at a time).

7. **Setup your "Gradebook"**
   a. Begin by using the Gradebook Setup feature within Gradebook to configure the Categories and Weighting of your grades. Once that's done, assignments created within the Assignments tool will give you the option to associate it with a particular category within Gradebook.
   b. You can use the Course Grade Option to make adjustments to letter grades, pass/not pass, and satisfactory/unsatisfactory, especially relevant if there's a curve used in a course.

8. **Use "Web Content" and "News" to add useful external resources**
   a. Using the Web Content tool to create a short-cut to external resources on your course site provides a convenient way for your students to access these resources without having to leave CROPS.
   b. Using the News tool to display a dynamic news source allows you to bring RSS feeds to your course site. This type of resource could be useful in courses that require students to keep up-to-date with a particular field.

9. **Use "Turning Technologies" to enable students to register their clickers in your course**
   a. If you use clickers in your course, you'll need to turn the Turning Technologies tool on so that students can register their clickers, pairing their device with their student id.

10. **Use "Podcasts" to upload audio lectures/presentations of your course**
    a. If you are podcasting your course, you can use the Podcasts tool to upload you weekly episodes. Students can subscribe to the RSS feed with their favorite podcatcher to get up-to-date info about new episodes.

11. **Use "Site Statistics" to view statistics on your site by user, event, or resource.**
    a. You can use Site Statistics tool to check whether your students are logging into CROPS and accessing the resources you've uploaded. You can also see what tools are used most, which user is most active, and what resources are opened more often.