



## Online Standards & Best Practices



## Reimagining Education

**A Guide for Implementing Quality Standards and Best Practices in the E-Learning Environment - 2015-2016**

**Be seen. Be heard.**

Online Standards and Best Practices: A Guide for Implementing Quality Standards and Best Practices into the E-Learning Environment at Minot State University, copyright 2014, Minot State University, Center for Extended Learning.

This guide is also viewable as a PDF file at:

[http://www.minotstateu.edu/online\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.minotstateu.edu/online_handbook.pdf)

The guide is part of MSU Online's strategy for assuring faculty responsible for delivering online learning curricula and evaluating the student's success in achieving online learning goals are appropriately qualified and effectively supported as required by the Higher Learning Commission. The guide is subject to change.

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## Welcome from the Dean, Center for Extended Learning



**Figure 1. Dr. Kristen Warmoth**

In 1997 Minot State University (MSU) was the recipient of a \$1.3 million dollar Title III grant that was originally entitled “Distance Education ... Strengthening MSU by Reaching Rural Communities.” The grant provided financial support for two activities. The first activity was to provide faculty skills and training necessary for online teaching. The second activity was to develop the student services necessary to support the developing online program. Minot State far exceeded all targets that were originally included with the grant. A Title III Management Team met weekly for 6 years to thoughtfully design programs and services to support MSU Online. Even though this grant was officially ended September 2003, this team continues to meet and manage program operations.

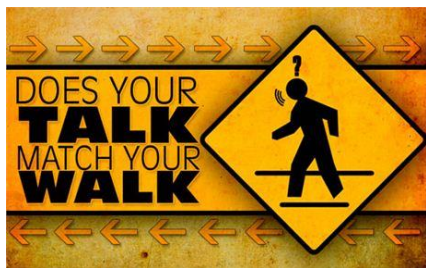
MSU Online has changed significantly from its original five participating faculty members and six online courses offered that first fall in 1989. Today the program consists of over 350 online courses and 150 faculty members and includes an almost equal number of blended courses. The program was the first Internet course delivery program in the state of North Dakota. From its humble roots grew the North Dakota University System Online and currently every institution of higher education in North Dakota offers some type of course delivery via the World Wide Web. MSU Online has grown into an integral part of the campus. In 2011, MSU Online contributed \$1.7 million to MSU operations and online students constitute a large segment of the total student population

Over the course of the previous decade; designers, instructors, deans and department chairs, and students have learned many valuable lessons regarding course development, faculty training, quality management and best practices, grade management, complaint systems, and student and faculty support. As a consequence of those experiences, MSU Online has developed a set of tried-and-true guidelines to facilitate the effective and efficient operation of our courses. I encourage you to become familiar with these guidelines; they will enhance your success as an MSU Online instructor and provide a quality experience for the students you teach.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kristen M. Warmoth".

Dr. Kristen Warmoth  
Dean, Center for Extended Learning

## Key Terminology



**Blended:** A traditional on-campus course that includes a Blackboard shell for support materials, testing, and web conferencing tools. These shells are not beta tested or included in technical checks. Students are required to self-enroll. Instructors will provide students with the [Instructions to Self-Enroll for Blended Courses](#). If students have trouble with their User Name or Password, they

should contact MSU Online or OIT for assistance. However, MSU Online and OIT will not manually enroll any students in blended sections. These courses have a Mode of Instruction of Traditional Classroom and pay on-campus tuition rates.

**Beta Test:** An institutional review designed to check your course before releasing it to the general public. It evaluates the effectiveness of your course design based on best practices, usability of the course structure, and compliance with state and University policy and the American Disability Act.

**Course Shell:** A space in Blackboard Learn that houses online curriculum. Course shells can be used to store course documents, enable online discussions, deliver online tests and assignments, etc.

**Course Storage Shell:** A space in Blackboard Learn that houses fully beta tested and department approved online synchronous and asynchronous courses. Course storage shells are used each semester to create online course sections, therefore it is imperative that they are kept current.

**Office of Instructional Technology (OIT):** Consists of two staff members: and instructional designer and a media specialist.

**Online-Synchronous (IS):** A course offered entirely through the Internet so students worldwide have access. Online-Synchronous courses have a scheduled day and time when students must login to attend live classroom sessions. Students must have high speed Internet access, a headset with microphone, and a web cam (if required by the instructor). Online-Synchronous courses have a Mode of Instruction of Online-Synchronous and a Location of Web Based in Campus Connection. Students are charged distance education tuition rates. New Online-Synchronous course shells will be included in the technical check for online courses. (See Process for Online-Synchronous Courses: Development)

Online-Synchronous courses can be offered in the following ways:

- Example 1:
  - All students attend class via a web conferencing tool (i.e. Blackboard Collaborate) at the days and times listed in Campus Connection. The instructor typically uses his/her office computer or a personal computer to log in and



teach class. In this example, there is not an on-campus section (Traditional Classroom) but all students enroll into an Online-Synchronous section in Campus Connection. Distance education tuition is charged. Students will be automatically uploaded into the course shell and MSU Online will send access instructions to students.

- Example 2:
  - The instructor holds class on-campus and connects to distance education students using web conferencing tools (i.e. Blackboard Collaborate). Distance and campus students are taught at the same time and on the same days typically in a specially equipped classroom.
    - Students who attend on-campus will enroll in a Traditional Classroom section in Campus Connection and pay on-campus tuition rates. If the instructor chooses to use a Blackboard shell, students will be required to self-enroll in the Blackboard shell.  
[Instructions to Self-Enroll for Blended Courses](#)
    - Students who attend at a distance will enroll in an Online-Synchronous section in Campus Connection, pay distance education tuition rates, and will be automatically uploaded into the Blackboard shell.

**Online-Asynchronous:** A course offered entirely through the Internet so students worldwide have access. There are no scheduled meeting days and times and this course is typically referred to as an “online” course. Students complete their course work at any time, meeting any due dates set by the instructor. Some synchronous sessions could be required, but archives may be provided as alternatives for those who cannot attend. Students are uploaded in the online-asynchronous section and pay distance education rates. New courses are required to pass a beta test and all online courses are included in semester technical checks. Courses will also be required to go through a peer review process every four years.

**Technical Check:** A brief check of online asynchronous and online synchronous courses scheduled for public access within the next 15-days. The check verifies the course is current and ready for student’s access and use for the upcoming semester.

## Online Course Development Process

The development of an online course is a multi-step process that involves department nomination, CEL approval, design and development, initial beta testing, department sign-off on course content, and review following the first semester of delivery

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accreditation guideline suggest that faculty “be carefully selected, appropriately trained, and frequently trained.” To accomplish this, faculty designing, developing, and delivering the course must have completed the Blackboard Learn Online Foundations Course or Crash Course before teaching online.

The final portion of the course development stipend is released after a review of the mid-semester course design survey and end-of-course student evaluations. Instructors will meet with OIT and

possibly the CEL, Dean and department chair depending on student feedback. These meetings may result in a list of recommendations for course revisions that must be completed before the final portion of the development stipend is released.

A Course Development Process document and Course Development Checklist are provided on the OIT web site to assist the instructor in preparing the course for online delivery.

### **Developing an Online Course**

Step 1: The faculty member completes the Course Nomination Form

- This process alerts the chair and dean of the intent to put a course online.
- Courses are not automatically funded for online development. A distance delivery need must be shown.
- Completed paperwork is sent to Jolina Miller in CEL.
- The CEL dean must approve all online courses especially those where faculty are requesting a development stipend.

Step 2: Once the course is approved for development, the faculty member meets with the OIT design team to present the course storyboard.

- The storyboard can take many forms (from poster boards to PowerPoint) depending on faculty member's preference
- The storyboard must
  - show the core components of the course
  - reflect the overall structure of the course
  - show the sequence and connectivity of all course activities
  - outline the various methods of assessment
  - outline the technologies by used across the course

Once the storyboard passes evaluation by OIT, 20% of the course development stipend is released and OIT will create a development shell for the new course.

Step 3: The faculty member works with OIT in the design and development of the course.

Step 4: The course is beta tested for ADA compliance, best practices for online delivery, course tool and design compliance, minimum engagement standards, institutional policies, and compliance with the North Dakota University System FERPA and [intellectual property](#) policies.

- The faculty member will work with OIT to make the **required** changes listed in the beta test report.
- The beta test will be forwarded to the responsible department for content review and approval.

- Courses not approved by the department will return to OIT and the faculty member for corrective action in design.
- When the course is approved for first-time delivery by the department, 60% of the stipend is released.

Step 5: The final step in the process is when the course is taught in the online environment. Midway through the session, students are asked to voluntarily complete a short course design survey, as shown below.

NOTE: A term 1 or term 2 course would have the survey delivered in the 8<sup>th</sup> week.

MSU Online Minimum Engagement Survey  
Office of Instructional Technology

1. Rate the effectiveness of instructions for assignments, papers, and course work using a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest.

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

2. Rate the ease of finding assignments, discussions, and assessments in this course using a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest.

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

3. The following materials were beneficial in the learning process:

|  | Agree | Disagree | Available but didn't use | Not present in the course |
|--|-------|----------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Videos                                     |       |          |                          |                           |
| Graphics (images, photographs)             |       |          |                          |                           |
| Audio alternatives for the lecture pages   |       |          |                          |                           |
| Discussion or other interactive activities |       |          |                          |                           |
| Self-tests or other ungraded activities    |       |          |                          |                           |
| Graded tests or assessments                |       |          |                          |                           |

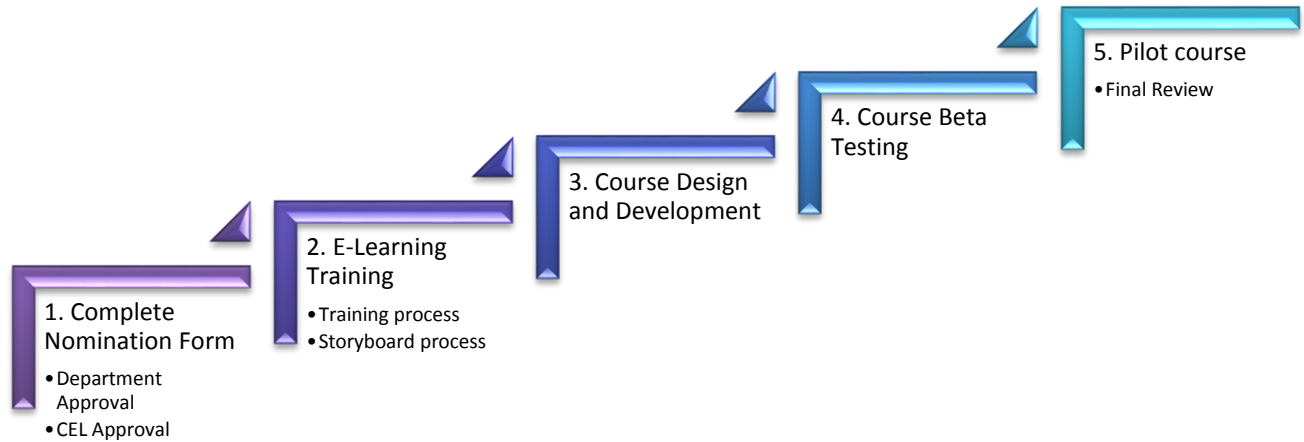
4. Comments:

Figure 2. Current engagement survey (2015).

Following the first semester use, the instructor will:

- Meet with OIT:
  - discuss problems encountered by students and the instructor,
  - address any issues in design that impacted student success or instructor facilitation,
  - address any action forwarded by the CEL dean and/or department chair.

Once corrective actions are addressed, corrected, and with recommendation of the academic department and CEL, the remaining 20% of the stipend will be released to the instructor.



**Figure 3. Graphic representation of course development process.**

## The Storyboard and Design Process

The storyboard is used to generate holistic thinking as the instructor goes about determining how teaching and learning will be accomplished in a specific online course. It also provides a way for the instructor to demonstrate an understanding of the relationships of course elements and the application of learning theory.

Lastly, it serves as a plan of action for the design team, which includes the faculty member, instructional designer, and instructional media specialist.

To begin, think of the storyboard as a reflection of the design process (see page 16, Dick and Carey<sup>2</sup> Design Model).

**STEP 1:** Your first step is to consider your future students:

- Consider who they are
- Consider what they know
- Consider what you want them to learn and master
- Consider what life experience they bring to the classroom
- Consider their resources
- Consider learning theory
- Consider teaching strategy



**Figure 4. Who your students are plays a critical role in course design. One that is often overlooked.**

**STEP 2:** Develop your course learning outcomes and module learning objectives. Remember a good learning outcome/objective has a description of performance, condition, and criterion or standard, and lastly, it is observable and measurable. If you need help in finding terms to describe the action you need, refer to Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning. Terms are defined in domains, to include cognitive, perceptive, and psychomotor.

**STEP 3:** Plan your assessment methodology, types, frequency, and locations. Keep in mind there are direct, indirect, and self-assessment types and each measures success in a different way and add value in the online environment. There are also many different ways to assess student knowledge to include:

1. Discussions
2. Assignments
3. Quizzes
4. High stake exams
5. Wiki and blogs
6. Flash interactions
7. Student presentations
8. Student research
9. Student papers
10. Rubric-based
11. Paper-based with proctor or web-based proctored
12. Face-to-face, on the ground, or experiential course work (HLC requires that work of this nature must be clearly stated to students in the syllabus)

You must also consider how often is assessment necessary and where they will be located in the flow of content.

Lastly, assessments must do three things

1. They must cover course learning outcome
2. They must cover module learning objectives

3. They must take into consideration the performance, criterion, and condition of each outcome

**STEP 4:** Select and design your course content. This is all about brainstorming on steroids, where you can generate a range of possible solutions, approaches, and techniques to convey the core of the course. Things to remember ...

1. Content is information a student must master to meet course learning objectives and module learning outcomes
2. Content must provide all the necessary information to achieve objectives/outcomes (keeping in mind some knowledge is fundamental core and part of previous courses, activities, events, and experiences)
3. Content leads the user to success in related course assessments
4. Examples of content include:
  - a. Syllabus
  - b. Text-based lecture (with mp3 audio, OIT created)
  - c. Recorded lecture
  - d. Audio
  - e. Synchronous sessions
  - f. Tegrity recordings
  - g. PowerPoint with voiceover
5. Video-Professional Source
6. Interactive Flash Engagement
7. Student created content (Wiki, Blog, presentations, etc.)
8. Mashups (YouTube and other sources)
9. Diagrams, charts, photographs, checklists, rubrics, and PDF

**STEP 5:** Plan your required student-to-student and instructor-to-student interactions and collaborations. These can be used to develop student-created content, build connections in content, or develop community relationships (HLC requires course design and delivery to support student-to-student and instructor-to-student interaction).

**STEP 6:** Using the example image below, plan out the logical flow of these items in a storyboard fashion. Be prepared to explain and expound these feature during the instructional design meeting.

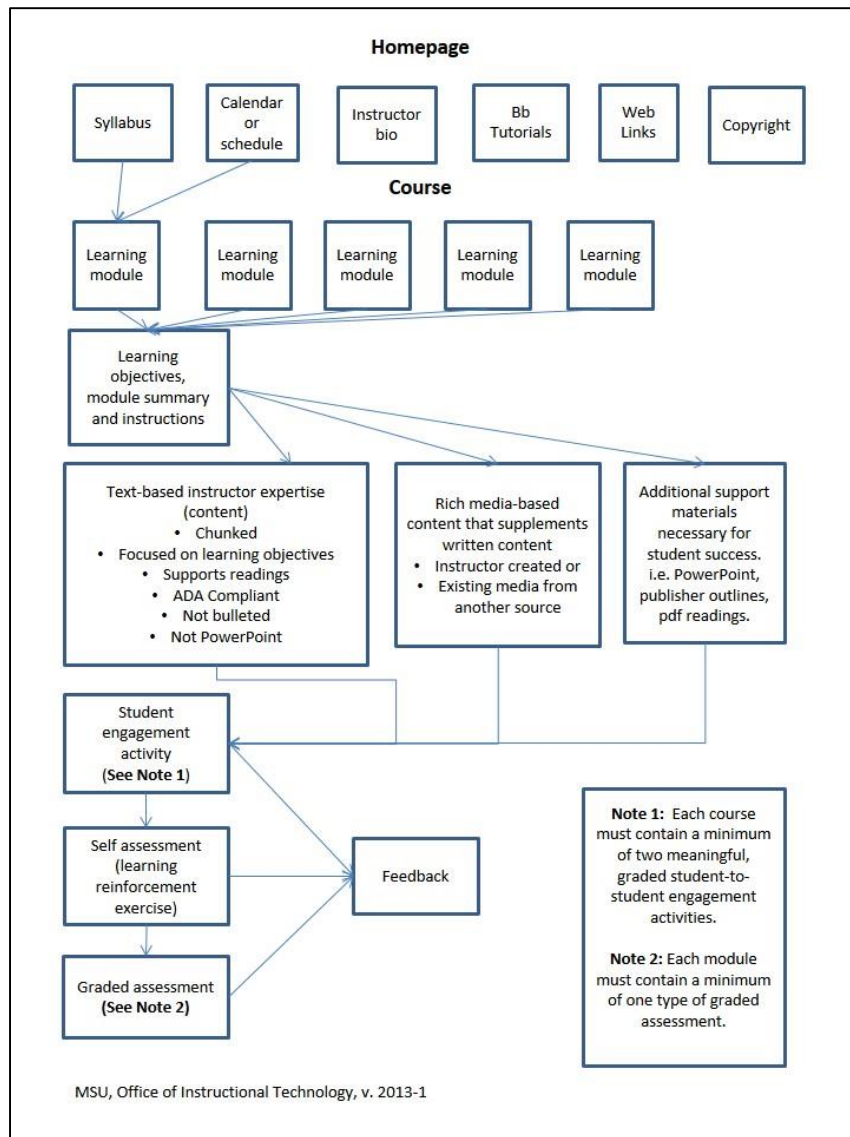


Figure 5. Example of a Storyboard

## Online Course Development Model

The development of an online course is not a simple task, sometimes taking as long as 6-months to complete. To assist you with the process, OIT forms a Course Design Team for each course under construction consisting of the instructor or subject matter expert, the instructional designer and media specialist. The team walks the course through the design, development, and evaluation phase with the instructor.

The instructional design team addresses the actual build issues and recommends learning/teaching strategies. OIT normally uses the Dick and Carey<sup>2</sup> instructional design model,

which you were partially introduced to in the previous section of this guide. The Dick and Carey<sup>2</sup> model has an iterative cycle and includes 9 steps:

1. Assess needs to identify instructional goal(s): to identify what it is the learners are expected to be able to do at the end of the instruction
2. Conduct instructional analysis: to determine a step-by-step of what learners are doing when they are performing the goal; to determine what skills and knowledge are required
3. Analyze learners and contexts: to identify learners' present skills, preferences and attitude as well as the characteristics of the instructional setting; the useful information about the target population includes entry behaviors, prior knowledge of the topic area, academic motivation, attitudes toward the organization
4. Write performance objectives: to specify what it is the learners will be able to do with the statements of the skills to be learned, the conditions, and the criteria
5. Develop Assessment Instruments: to develop a criteria-referenced assessment consistent with the performance objectives
6. Develop instructional strategy: to develop strategies in pre-instructional activities (motivation, objectives and entry behavior), presentation of information (instructional sequence, information, examples), learner's participation (practice and feedback), testing and follow-through activities (remediation, memorization and transfer)
7. Develop and select instruction: to use the instructional strategies to produce the instruction
8. Design and conduct formative evaluation: to collect data that are used to identify how to improve the instruction
9. Revise Instruction: to use the data from the formative evaluation to examine the validity of the instructional analysis, learner and context analysis, performance objectives, assessment instruments, instructional strategies, and instruction.

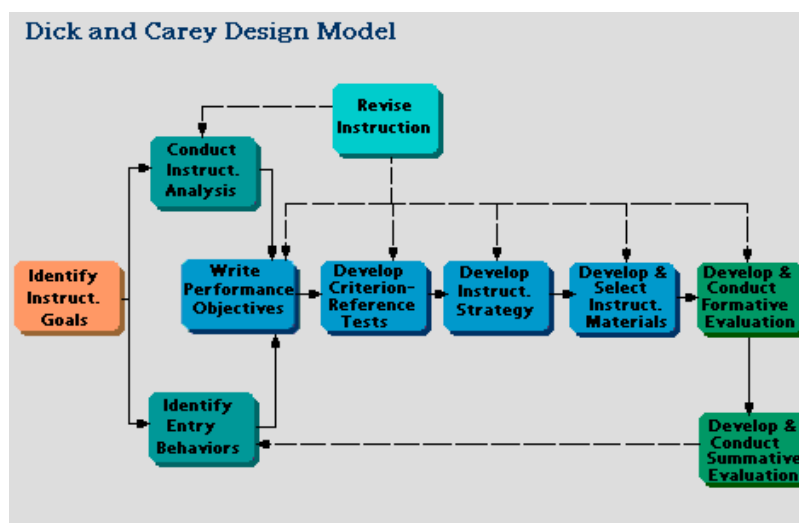


Figure 6. The Dick and Carey<sup>2</sup> design model used by the Office of Instructional Technology.



## MSU Online Instructor Support

To ensure the success of faculty in the design and development phase of the course build, OIT maintains various support systems to include:

1. Technology Loan Program
2. Media Services
3. Audio Studio
4. Video and Green Screen Lab
5. Technology Sandbox
6. Faculty Development Sessions
  - a. Annual Cohort Series (once fall, once spring)
  - b. Summer Technology Conference
  - c. Group face-to-face
  - d. Individual face-to face
  - e. Live web-based
  - f. Recorded web-based
7. Handouts, brochures, and training materials

## MSU Online Faculty Development Program

OIT will provide the following faculty development sessions based on institutional needs:

- Blackboard Learn Instructional Foundations Basics Course
- Blackboard Learn Crash Course
- Just-in-Time Training

## The Online Course Evaluation Process

All fully online and synchronous courses must undergo a regiment of review during their lifetime, as described below.

**Initial Online Course Beta Test Process:** All newly developed or redeveloped online courses must have an initial beta test performed by the Office of Instructional Technology before it is offered. The beta test focuses on best practices for online education, compliance with the American Disability Act (ADA) and current institutional policies. Once OIT completes the beta test a copy is forwarded to the appropriate department head for review and action, as necessary.

**Four-Year Peer Review and Beta Test:** The Higher Learning Commission recognizes the growing demand for online courses and the need for their inclusion in “*regular department curricular review.*” Institutions seeking reaccreditation or new accreditation for online degrees are asked to demonstrate how they assure quality in their distance programs. MSU has put in place a system of review that will help us meet these guidelines on an on-going basis and ensure that we only offer high quality courses online. The Department Peer Review and Beta Test of MSU

Online courses are based on a rotating four-year schedule. Reviews are conducted during the spring and fall of each academic year. Reviews are not conducted during the summer months.

**CEL/Department Coordinate Peer Review:** At the start of the review semester, the Department will be provided with a list of their online courses. The Department is asked to inform CEL which courses are obsolete and can be deleted and off the schedule they will use to review their courses.

**OIT staff:** OIT will beta test the courses listed by the department and a report will be provided to the department chair for each course, for action, as necessary.

**Department Action:** Department representatives, appointed by the Department Chair, will review each beta test and associated online course in their discipline. Review areas should include: adherence to minimum content specifications as per departmental assessment plans, comparison of campus courses and online courses with regard to comparable learning outcomes, evidence of academic rigor, adherence to specific department requirements. In the case where a department consists of a single faculty member the department chair shall determine the best way to handle the review. A sample rubric will be provided via email.

**Department Chair:** The chair should review and sign all completed Department Online Course Review Rubrics. Copies should be made for department records. Completed rubrics are sent to the Dean, Center for Extended Learning and to the department's associated, college dean. If there are long-term revisions needed, a timeline should be included.

**Technical Checks:** In order to demonstrate that commitment and support MSU Online instructors, the Office of Instructional Technology and Online Coordinator conduct technical checks of every online course offered before the semester begins. The checks ensure basic instructions for students have been provided, the correct year and semester are listed, the correct instructor is loaded in the syllabus, the calendar, assessment, and assignment dates are related to the semester, minimum required tools are present, and current instructions are provided for instructional and assessment tools. The technical checks are then forwarded to the appropriate instructors for action.

### **Master Course Development (MCD) Process:**

Only courses with multiple sections and multiple instructors are eligible to be Master Courses. The department chair nominates the Master Course and assigns a Master Course Manager (MCM). The course is then designed, built (by instructor or OIT), and reviewed for best practice, ADA, and recommended course tool compliance. A beta test report is generated and the Office of Instructional Technology staff work with the MCM to make required changes. Once required changes are completed, the course is reviewed by the department chair or a designee for content and compliance to department standards. The department reviewer signs and returns a content sign-off sheet if all standards are met. Once a course successfully completes the MCD process, a yearly stipend of \$500 is paid to the MCM the following summer for maintenance of

the course. In order to receive the stipend, the MCM must complete the Master Course Manager Checklist and return it to CEL prior to May 31 each year.

## General Education and Diversity Course Requirements:

The syllabi for online general education and diversity classes must contain the Statement of Philosophy, general education objectives, department or division required pre and post-assessments, and an explanation of how the assessment outcomes will be used.

## Getting Ready for the Semester Process

**Instructor Welcome Message:** Instructors should send a welcome message to their online students the first day of the semester or term. By welcoming students to class, the instructors begin the semester on a positive note. They are able to direct students to the syllabus, calendar, and other important course elements that require emphasis, such as technical requirements or instructor expectations. We recommend use of the Announcement tool or as an alternative the Discussions tool.

**Instructor Bio, Photo or Avatar:** The course home page should contain a short bio covering the instructor's educational background and experience in their field. A photograph is optional; however, at a minimum, an avatar is recommended.

**Course Introduction Assignment:** It is recommended that online courses have a discussion (text-based) or Collaborate or Tegrity (audio-based) student and instructor introduction assignment. This helps address student isolation and the frustration of feeling alone in the online environment. Given the lack of a physical presence in an online course, students need a way to connect with other students, and build a sense of an online community. It also introduces students to the use of the Blackboard Discussion or Collaborate or Tegrity tools. Keep in mind FERPA guidelines when developing your course introduction Assignment.

**Instructor Presence:** One of the most important factors in online student success is the instructor's presence and accessibility. Knowing the instructor is present provides a natural motivation and sense of student confidence. If possible, let students know when you plan to access the course. For example, will you work evenings or on weekends? Online office hours are also critical. MSU wants our online instructors to check their online courses for student activity and interaction at least daily, but when necessary, not to exceed a 48-hour period.

**Technology Instructions:** When using technologies other than Blackboard tools, it is important to include adequate instructions on the use and support of these technologies. This is critical to student success. It greatly reduces frustration during the course. Technologies include (but are not inclusive): SafeAssign, Respondus Lockdown Browser, Blackboard Collaborate, Blackboard IM, Tegrity, Tegrity Lecture Capture, and Scholar. The Office of Instructional Technology has boiler plate instructions for most online tools.

**Online Syllabus Components:** Faculty must ensure they include the following attributes in all online syllabi.

- Expectations with regard to course communication for both the instructor and students
- directions for how to contact the MSU and NDUS Help Desks
- information regarding the download and support of any software required to navigate or otherwise successfully complete of the course
- netiquette for online discussions, chat, and voice tools
- expectations regarding academic honesty
- adequate information regarding what software is required for the submission of assignments and papers
- MSU approved ADA Accommodation statement.

**Course Content:** It is recommended that instructors prepare lecture sharing their individual expertise using a variety of formats, unless they are narrated. Lecture should be “chunked” for the online environment, connected to other course materials and/or the World Wide Web, course tools, and address course and unit learning objectives. Departments will be the review authority for content during the beta test process.

**Grading:** Instructors have the ability to release assessment grades in relation to test dates; however, all grades, when released, must be visible in the student’s grade book. Should grading activities occur outside the course shell, for instance in publisher-based test tools or a field trip, a column for grading these events must be created and be visible to the students.

**Course Schedule/Plan:** Every course should have a schedule of events and assessments either created using the Blackboard Tool or separately uploaded document. This information helps students stay on task while progressing through the course.

**Last Page of Course:** Online courses must use the MSU approved “last page of course” in the content path or as an attachment to the syllabus. The document outlines course evaluations, procedures on how to access student grades, and transcript information. Again, this page is designed to save the instructor work and provide the student information for accessing for grades and course evaluations.

## **Institutionally Mandated Instructor Activities**

**Attendance Reporting:** After the seventh day of a regular (16-week) session in fall/spring and the fourth day of a summer or eight-week session, online instructors are required to report students who have never attended any class sessions or logged into their Internet course(s). This is accomplished by printing the official class roster in Campus Connection and noting any student who

has never attended the class. The instructor must then sign in ink and mail the original to their department administrative assistant. A copy can be sent via e-mail for use until the original arrives.

If such absence is reported by the instructor, the Registrar's Office will administratively drop or withdraw the student. As a result a "W" will be recorded on the student's official transcript and the course(s) will be subject to published refund policies. The Registrar's Office will send a letter to the student notifying him/her of the changes in his/her enrollment status. If the student would like to re-enroll in the course(s), he/she must obtain approval of the instructor and the chair overseeing the course with a department/division stamp provided by the department/division offices.

### **Documenting attendance when students are enrolled in distance education courses**

Documenting that a student has logged into an online course is not sufficient to demonstrate academic attendance by the student. Students must have participated in an academically related activity, such as participating in an online discussion about academic matters or initiating contact with faculty to ask a question about the academic subject studies in the course.

**Mid-Term Grading Report:** Online faculty members are required to submit midterm grading reports using Campus Connection. This is accomplished by entering your faculty center in the MSU Campus Connection and selecting the Grade Roster icon. Enter the student grades and change the approval status to *Ready for Review* and click the Save button.

Students receiving midterm deficiencies will receive a letter from the Registrar's Office. Academic Advisors will also be notified of their advisees receiving deficiencies. Midterm deficiencies are not a part of the student's official record and will not appear on the transcript. An advisor hold is placed on the account for those students who receive two or more midterm deficiencies. This hold will prevent students from dropping a course(s) for the current semester and add courses for the upcoming term. Students who have two or more midterm deficiencies are required to visit with their assigned academic advisor to discuss available options and services.

**Grade Reporting:** At the end of each term, instructors are required to post (report) student grades in Connect Connection prior to close of business the Monday following the end of finals. The option of Incomplete (I) is no longer available. A course completion agreement (between the student and instructor) must be completed and provided to the Registrar by noon on Monday.

Please remember to use the new FN/UN and FNN/UNN grades, as necessary. FN/UN are for students who are failing due to no longer attending and the last date of attendance/participation in the course must be submitted. FNN/UNN grades should only be used for second eight-week courses since Minot State University has an attendance reporting process in place for 16-week courses and are meant for students who did not ever attend the course.

Also, please keep in mind that the option to enter an "I" or "X" is no longer available (except for 589 or 599 courses). A Course Completion Agreement must be submitted to the Registrar's Office. Upon

receipt, the Registrar's Office will post the "I" to the grade roster. Faculty who wish to submit grades prior to submitting the Course Completion Agreement will enter all but the "I" grade and change the approval status to "Ready for Review." As a reminder, A-F/SU grades cannot be changed to an "I" once posted. Please contact the records specialist, at 858-3349 with questions concerning the Course Completion Agreement.

If grades or Course Completion Agreements are not submitted by the deadline for grades to be posted, all students not graded will be assigned an "F."

## End of Course Activities

**Course Archive:** Have you ever had a grade challenge in one of your face-to-faces courses? Challenges of this nature also occur online and unless you backup your course on DVD or thumb drive, you will have no material to support the decisions you made.

You may wonder why a backup is necessary; after all you can open the shell and look at the course? Due to the size of courses we can only maintain the most recent course shells and student data on the Blackboard server. Every semester OIT deletes shells unless the faculty member identifies an incomplete in the course. MSU Online instructors must archive their online courses within 24 hours of posting grades.

We have no backup requirement for blended courses; however, if you keep assessment data and student scores in the course shell, you may want to back it up as well. Blended shells are "overwritten" every semester, so the student data is erased. See the Office of Instructional Technology web site for a video and PDF demonstration of course archiving.

**End of Semester Student Course Access:** Within 72-hours after final grades are posted with the Registrar, and the course back up has been completed (see paragraph 22), online faculty should enter their online course and deny access to students by changing their "availability" to access the course. This does not apply to students with incompletes. Do **NOT** unenroll students in a fully online course! This will delete all student and related grade information permanently.

Instructors with **blended course shells** are encouraged delete their students immediately after they create their archived copy and grades are posted. Message in the Discussion tool must be manually deleted by each topic. These actions will protect course materials, assignments, and assessments from compromise after the term has ended.

**Course Shell Deletion Policy:** At the end of each semester, the Office of Instructional Technology will delete all shells from the previous semester. For example, at the end of the summer semester, OIT will delete all spring semester. This allows time for students to finish incompletes and faculty to update storage shells. Online instructors are responsible for ensuring their storage shells are current or overwritten by the deadline.

**NDUS Copyright Policy:** Section: 611.2 Employee Responsibility and Activities: Intellectual Property. Effective: November 20, 2104.

Paragraph 4: General Copyright Policy.

- a. Each Institution's IP procedures shall provide for the disclosure, review, and evaluation of original works of authorship, and for the protection and commercialization of works in which copyright is owned by the Institution under this Policy. Copyrightable works that are also patent-eligible Inventions, such as software, shall be governed by the General IP Policy set forth in section 3.
- b. An Institution shall own copyright in works prepared by its employees at the specific direction of the Institution.
  - i. An employee shall report such work in accordance with the General IP Policy set forth in section 3.
  - ii. Net Royalties received by an Institution as a result of copyright ownership will be disbursed in accordance with the General IP Policy set forth in section 3.
- c. Institution employees shall be entitled to own copyright in works that are prepared within the scope of employment but not at the specific direction of the Institution.
  - i. An Institution shall relinquish copyright ownership in any work that arises by operation of law and, if necessary, shall execute assignments conveying such copyright ownership to employees. As a condition of any such relinquishment or assignment, the Institution shall retain a perpetual, non-exclusive, worldwide and royalty-free license to use the work for teaching, educational, archival, and research purposes. This subsection shall not apply to companion works that enable, or are incidental to or necessary for the practice of, an Invention owned by the Institution under this Policy.
  - ii. In the event an employee has made a Significant Use of Resources in the creation of a work governed by this subsection, an Institution may require the employee to reimburse the Institution for the value of such use.
  - iii. Institution employees shall not use any work governed by this subsection, including textbooks and other course materials, either printed or electronic, in any manner that competes in a substantial way with the for-credit offerings of the Institution employer unless such use has received the approval of the chief academic officer of the Institution.

**Institutionalization.** The Dean, Center for Extended Learning provides leadership and strategic planning for all distance education programs and reports directly to the Vice President of Academics.

The Office of Instructional Technology consists of two positions, which include an Instructional Designer and a Media Support and Instructional Designer. The office is responsible for coordinating faculty training, assists faculty with course creation, and provides support during the academic year. Both positions report to the Dean, Center for Extended Learning

The Online Advisor and the Online Coordinator provide support primarily to online students. Both positions report to the Dean, Center for Extended Learning. Finally, the Online Studies Committee was created to provide guidance and strategic planning input. Members of this institutional committee include

- VPAA (Co-Chair)
- Dean, Center for Extended Learning (Co-Chair)
- One Dean
- One Chair
- One SGA representative
- Three faculty, College of Arts and Sciences
- Three faculty, College of Education and Health Sciences
- Three faculty, College of Business

### **State Authorization for Out of State Students.** State and federal laws require colleges



and universities to be authorized to offer online programs to residents of states other than their own. There are three levels of authorization: full, partial, and none. In states where MSU has full authorization, we are allowed to offer all online programs and courses. In states with partial authorization, we are only able to offer fully online programs without a field experience such as an internship, clinical, or practicum. This means that in states with partial authorization, we cannot admit students in programs that require a field

experience unless they agree to complete it in North Dakota or in a state where we have full authorization.

In states where we have no authorization, we cannot offer **any** online courses or programs.

Admissions and MSU Online monitors applications after they are processed for students from states where we cannot accept students. However, it is also important that departments and advisors monitor inquiries and applications to help identify students earlier.

### **Student Evaluation Process for Online Courses**

Electronic course evaluations will be sent for all online and Internet-Synchronous course sections using Class Climate software. Faculty Senate approved evaluation are used for online and online synchronous courses.

Course evaluations will be sent electronically by MSU Online approximately two weeks prior to the last day of finals in a Regular Session course. Evaluations will not be sent to Traditional Classroom sections unless requested by the instructor or department chair.



# Course Design Guidelines and Best Practices

## Online Course Home Page

The following course home page standards must be maintained to meet student needs and program standards:

- Faculty will provide a short, concise description on how to start each course and incorporate the statement in the content frame of their course.
- Each course home page will include a course schedule/plan
- Each course home page will include an instructor bio
- Each course home page will include and online Web Links
- Each course home page will include a Bb Student Tutorial link
- Each course using Blackboard Collaborate with provide a link to the appropriate student tutorial
- Only approved icons will be used in the course
- The approved campus copyright statement will be displayed as the last “item” on the initial course page:

This course is protected by copyright law as established in Title 17 of the U.S. Code. No individual or entity is permitted to copy, publish, or commercially use any portion of this site without express written permission of the author. If you would like more information about the copyrighted information used in this course, please contact [mycourse@minotstateu.edu](mailto:mycourse@minotstateu.edu)

## MSU Online Syllabus Standards

- Faculty will clearly define the primary sources for communication within the course. Students should know how and where to go to contact the instructor
- Faculty will clearly state the turn-around time for responses to student messages and grading
- Faculty will clearly state student-instructor communication expectations
- Faculty will clearly state what the student-student communication expectations
- The syllabus will provide an overview of assessment tools used in the course
- The syllabus will provide a breakdown of assessment methods, point values for each method, point values for grades, and the total point value for the course
- The syllabus will contain the approved ADA Accommodation statement
- The syllabus will contain a statement addressing academic honesty, along with:
  - Information on how to access the MSU Help Desk
  - Information on technologies required to successfully complete the course
  - Information on the software required for use to submit assignments and papers (Microsoft Word, etc.)
- The syllabus will contain the course learning outcomes/goals

## **Educating Students and Enforcing Academic Honesty**

This list of best practices is based on “Institutional Policies and Practices and Course Design Strategies to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Courses,” produced by WCET in May 2009. The material is used under a Creative Commons license.

- Foremost we highly encourage online faculty to support their students:
- Define academic integrity and cheating and clearly explain what is considered dishonest and unacceptable behavior.
- Provide information and examples to help students understand the difference between collaboration on assignments and cheating, and identify plagiarism.
- Teach the proper use of citations.
- State how much collaboration is permissible on each assignment.
- State what the instructor’s expectations are for the students and explain what they should expect from the instructor. For example:
  - Include a statement in the syllabus encouraging honest work.
  - Repeat the campus academic integrity statement and provide a link to campus policies.
  - Describe academic dishonesty.
  - Describe the repercussions for academic dishonesty.
  - Describe permissible and impermissible collaboration.
  - Include outside links to information on plagiarism, self-tests and examples.
  - Include information on acceptable sources.
  - Include information about the college’s writing center, library or other support.
- Provide a writing style sheet or handbook with information on plagiarism and campus policies.
- Indicate assessments may require follow-up documentation, questions or assignments.
- State expectations for the time needed to complete coursework.
- State whether the instructor/college will use a plagiarism detection service.

Secondly, we encourage faculty to design assessment methods with academic honesty in mind.

- Provide rubrics, or detailed grading criteria, for every assignment at the beginning of the course so students understand how they will be graded.
- Train faculty on ways to use the settings on the college’s learning management system to reduce cheating:
  - Use a test bank with more questions than will be used on any particular test and have the learning management system pull a smaller number of questions from the test bank
  - Randomize the order of answers for multiple test questions so for example, the correct answer for a particular question might be “a” for one student and “b” for another.
  - Require forced completion on exams so students cannot re-enter a test.

- Set a short window for testing completion, i.e. one or two days to take an exam rather than a whole week. Setting a completion time reduces a student's ability to access the test, look up the answer, and re-enter the test. Most test-taking software applications keep track of time on the server, not on the student's computer.
- Password protect exams.
- Show questions one at a time (makes more difficult for students to copy and paste the test in order to give it to someone else).
- Use a Web browser lock-down service during testing.
- Check the computer "properties" for the "creation date" and "author" for essay or term paper submissions if students are suspected of submitting work created by someone else.
- Clarify that students with disabilities and requesting testing accommodations (extended time for completion of examinations and quizzes) must identify themselves to the college's office of disabilities and provide appropriate documentation.
- Change test items and assignment topics each semester.
- Emphasize assignments that require written work and problem solving (e.g., essays, papers, online discussions).
- Use a variety of assessment strategies (quizzes, short and long papers, test questions that require the application of a theory or concept).
- Adopt the following practices to encourage authentic written work:
  - Require students to turn in copies of reference articles with cited text highlighted.
  - Require annotated bibliographies.
  - Do not allow last minute changes in assignment topics.
  - Require specific references be used (this might be the course text).
  - Require an abstract.
  - Give narrow assignment topics (tied into class experience) and require thesis statements prior to topic approval.
  - Require students to turn in a draft, bibliography or references prior to the paper's due date.
  - Require students to write a concept paper and project plan prior to completing an assignment.
- Evaluate the research process and the product.
- After an assignment is due, have students post in the discussion board, describing the assignment and the research method used, a summary of conclusions and an abstract (a meta-learning essay).
- When evaluating student written work, consider following these practices:
  - Be wary of student writing that reads like an encyclopedia, newspaper article or expert in the field.

- Look for whether a paper reflects the assignment, has changes in tense, includes odd sentences within a well-written paper, is based on references older than three years, refers to past events as current, or uses jargon.
- Compare student writing on the discussion board with that on assignments and papers. A writing sample collected at the start of the semester can be helpful.
- Compare the writing at the beginning and end of the paper with that in the middle of the paper -- language, sentence length and reading level.
- Check references; compare quotations with cited sources; look for the same author in multiple references.
- Read all papers on the same topic together.
- Make assignments cumulative (students turn in parts of a project or paper throughout the semester).
- Give open book exams.
- Other than grades, do not provide students feedback on tests until all of the students in the class have completed them.
- Use proctored test sites where appropriate.
- Faculty should use a robust user name and password to protect their computer-based grade book and keep a printed copy in a secure place in case students are able to hack into the computer system.

**Course Minimum Engagement Standards:** Online courses must meet the standards of minimum engagement:

- Use modular design
- Each module should have learning objectives
- Each module should have a graded assessment
- Most modules should have ungraded reinforcement exercises
- Most modules should include multimedia (Use a variety across the course when feasible)
- Each course should have a minimum of one major engagement activity (high stake with intensive student-to-student and instructor-to-student)

**Test Security:** Online instructors have various options to enhance the security of testing with their online or blended courses.

***Respondus Lockdown Browser*** is a browser, like Internet Explorer or Mozilla, however, this modality prevents the student from exiting the assessment until it is completed. It also prevents the student from accessing any web or computer based applications outside the testing environment. So web browsing, searching, or copying and pasting is impossible.

***Course Security Controls.*** Various behind the scene setting allow faculty to control what a student sees and when they see it. For example, after completing an online

assessment, students can be restricted from seeing the assessment questions, responses, feedback, and even scores until a testing period passes, all tests have been graded, or when released by the instructor. Combined with other security measures, course controls provide a good degree of security.

**Proctoring is another option.** As of this printing, the instructor has five options for proctor control. Instructors may approve:

- Community-based proctors: Community proctors are professionals within your student's community that have been approved to supervise examinations for online courses. Students are responsible for contacting professionals within their community BEFORE submitting the Proctor Request Form to the instructor. Testing must take place in the proctor's school or place of business. The request form should be submitted within the first two-weeks of the semester, unless a different deadline is assigned by the instructor. Identification of the student must be confirmed using a government or institution issued identification.
- Institutional-based proctor services. Several institutions of higher education across the state operate testing centers with test proctoring options. A student can call the test center directly, complete the proctoring approval process, and then complete testing at one of these locations. Identification of the student must be confirmed using a government or institution issued identification.
  - Bismarck State College, Proctoring Services: (701) 224-5658 or 5479 for \$10 per hour, one hour minimum.
  - University of North Dakota, Online & Distance Education: (701) 777-3000. At the moment there is no fee but this will be changing in 2012.
  - North Dakota State University, Proctoring Services: (701) 231-6317 or 7671 for \$15 per exam up to 2 hours.
  - North Dakota State College of Science, Test Center: (701) 671-2441 or 2256 at \$5 per test or \$20 per semester.
  - Williston State College, Test Center: (701) 774-4594 or 4228 at \$10 per test or \$20 per semester.
  - MSU at Bismarck State College, Horizon Building: (701) 224-5496. Based on availability of personnel and schedule.
  - MSU at Minot Air Force Base, Base Education Center (Deignan Building): (701) 727-9044. Based on availability of personnel and schedule. Course instructor (in-office testing)
- Course instructor or designee on-campus proctors (department secretary, etc.). Identification of the student must be confirmed using a government or institution issued identification.
- MSU Testing Center: The MSU Testing Center is located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor of the Administration Building on the Minot State University Campus. To schedule a

proctor-based test, the student must contact the testing center and schedule the examination two-weeks in advance by calling (701)858-3990. The service is free for MSU Online students and there is a \$20 fee for students not in an MSU credit granting course. Identification of the student must be confirmed using a government or institution issued identification.

- Tegrity Remote Proctoring (TRP) TRP is a web-based examination taken via a third-party vendor in conjunction with Respondus Lockdown Browser. You must have a web-camera and headset with microphone to use this option.



Figure 7. Tegrity icon.

- Agree to the testing policy
  - The institutional test policy, controlled by the Tegrity Administrator is presented to the student, and they are asked to accept it in order to proceed.
  - Optionally, the individual instructor for the course also has the option of adding a course-level testing policy for the student to review and accept.
- Prove identity
  - The student is asked to hold up a government or institution issued identification to their webcam in order to prove their identity. They then click a button to take a still image of their ID. If the image isn't clear, they can retake the photo (this is another means of meeting the HLC requirement to ensure the person taking the test is the student).
- Take the exam
  - When the student is ready to begin the online exam, they click start and Tegrity records the screen activity, plus video of the student taking the exam. Remote Proctoring recordings do not allow the student to pause the recording. It can also be used in conjunction with the Respondus Lockdown Browser.
- Complete the exam
  - When the exam is completed, students click the stop button on the Tegrity toolbar icon, and the exam is uploaded to the appropriate course, automatically.
- Instructor review: The instructor or department test manager clicks on the "Tests" tab in Tegrity and selects the recording to review.

**Multimedia Standards:** While multimedia adds another option for course delivery, multimedia should never be used for the sake of using it. All media should be tied directly to critical course materials, hard to understand concepts, and be designed to enhance student learning outcomes. In all cases, the faculty should be prepared to provide a text alternative to audio supported formats. Students must be warned of its use and provided plug-ins to facilitate the use of the media.

The following guidelines cover use of media in online courses.

1. **Tegrity Lecture Capture:** The OIT Tegrity manager will delete all recordings on the Tegrity server that are associated with courses two-weeks after the last day of finals. Faculty wanting to save and archive recording must notify OIT before this deadline. These recordings will be downloaded, converted, and moved to the streaming server. Recordings cannot be retrieved once deleted.
2. **PowerPoint Presentations:** The first consideration is to ask if the PowerPoint presentation is to be used as primary content material or support information.
  - a. The use of an ordinary PowerPoint presentation as primary content is considered as not pedagogically sound.
  - b. When PowerPoint is supported by voice over by the instructor, this changes the pedagogical dynamics and it is accepted. Reading the PowerPoint slides is NOT a sound strategy. The voice over must be used to expound and demonstrate instructor expertise
  - c. The PowerPoint presentations should be made accessible, especially if they are critical to the successful completion of the course. This is a faculty task since they are the content expert. The Office of Instructional Technology can show faculty how to perform this function. Regardless, PowerPoint presentations must be accompanied by the appropriate “use definition” for students. For example:
    - i. PowerPoint presentations in this course are supplemental in nature and are intended to serve as a study aid only. There is no ‘requirement’ to view them.
    - ii. PowerPoint presentations in this course contain primary course materials and their review is essential to the successful completion of this course.

**NOTE:** Regardless of a PowerPoint presentations nature, if used in the course, the instructor must be prepared to provide a reasonable accommodation, if requested by a student.

3. **Audio Standards:** The incorporation of audio files into an online course must provide for:
  - a. When feasible audio will be provided in both mp3 and wma format for PC and Mac accessibility
  - b. Audio files should not exceed 30 minutes.
  - c. Hyperlinks to audio files will be name-based, not URL-based (i.e. Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address not [www.AmericanHeroes.org/lincoln](http://www.AmericanHeroes.org/lincoln))
  - d. All audio should be clear and functional
    - 1) Audio files will have an “approximate” text alternative or be closed captioned
    - 2) Audio copyright will be strictly observed. Use of audio from external sources must be cited and permission to be used obtained and on file with the faculty member

- 3) Audio files will normally undergo FTP to the campus streaming server and linked into the course shell. Audio should not be loaded into course directly by faculty, due to course size limitations
4. **Video Standards.** The incorporation of video files into an online course must:
  - a. When feasible, video will be in mp4 format
  - b. Copyright will be strictly adhered to. External video must be approved before they are integrated and written permission must be obtained by and on file with the faculty member
  - c. Video files should not exceed 15 minutes, unless lecture capture is used. When larger video projects are needed, chunking is recommended (i.e.; Part 1 of Teaching Myths, Part 2 of Teaching Myths, Part 3 of Teaching Myths)
  - d. Compression of at least 512kbps is required
  - e. All video should be clear and functional
  - f. An “approximate” text alternative or close captioning is required
  - g. All video must be placed on the campus streaming server
  - h. Faculty will not download video directly into courses due to size limitations on the server side
5. **PDF Documents:**
  - a. PDF must be screen readable and functional in Adobe “Read out Loud”
  - b. PDF “scanned images” will not be used as content material

#### **Additional Video Information**

Video and audio are force multipliers in an online course when selected and utilized wisely. They are better than just reading since they impact two channels of working memory. However, media you select:

- Must have its importance in the learning process emphasized
- Must be tied to key concepts, ideas, and learning outcomes
- Must be testable
- Must be limited in length
- Must be of high quality (visually and audibly)
- Must have a transcript or closed captions
- Must have a stop or pause option
- Must be loaded as a mashup or on the campus streaming server, NOT embedded in the course

It is also critical that faculty know that video selected for online courses must be copyright use approved and streamed from the institutional streaming server at 165.235.216.68. The server is controlled by ITC in Old Main and managed by OIT in the Center for Extended Learning.



## Use of Images, Graphics, and Diagrams

Faculty members are encouraged to use meaningful visual media such as images, graphics, and diagrams in their online courses. This type of media can be best determined as “meaningful,” when they contribute directly to the learning process and tie to unit or course learning objectives/outcomes.

Ideally images should be clear and limited in size, due to the image of load time on student computers. Images must also be permitted by copyright law, if not the direct property of the course instructor. All media of this type, requires captions and alt text. Captions can be short and concise; however, they must provide the source. Alt tags must be designed to convey to the student with a visual disability what sighted students see and comprehend.

## Integration of Best Practices

The integration of best practices is an essential, ongoing feature of MSU Online. These practices are based on a decades long collection of data and experience with online courses and degree programs, student feedback, ADA standards, LMS functionality, and of course, pedagogical styles. The following Best Practices have been developed by the eight regional accrediting commissions in response to the emergence of technologically mediated instruction offered at a distance as an important component of higher education. Expressing in detail what currently constitutes best practice in distance education, specifically electronically offered degree and certificate programs, they seek to address concerns that regional accreditation standards are not relevant to the new distributed learning environments, especially when those environments are experienced by off-campus students.

The Best Practices, however, are not new evaluative criteria. Rather they explicate how the well-established essentials of institutional quality found in regional accreditation standards are applicable to the emergent forms of learning; much of the detail of their content would find application in any learning environment. Taken together those essentials reflect the values which the regional commissions foster among their affiliated colleges and universities:

- that education is best experienced within a community of learning where competent professionals are actively and cooperatively involved with creating, providing, and improving the instructional program;
- that learning is dynamic and interactive, regardless of the setting in which it occurs;
- that instructional programs leading to degrees having integrity are organized around substantive and coherent curricula which define expected learning outcomes;
- that institutions accept the obligation to address student needs related to, and to provide the resources necessary for, their academic success;
- that institutions are responsible for the education provided in their name;
- that institutions undertake the assessment and improvement of their quality, giving particular emphasis to student learning and voluntarily subject themselves to peer review

## Show up and teach

An online course does not “teach itself.” This idea is generated by the fact that most institutions require their courses to be fully developed and ready to go on the first day of class. In reality, the instructor is far more important than a troubleshooter waiting in the background of the course. Students look for and expect to find three distinct personalities: teacher, guide, and facilitator.



Figure 8. Instructor presence is perhaps the most important ingredient in the online classroom.

Show up and teach translates as such ... with the course designed and developed, more time can now be spent interacting with the students around the course learning objectives. This is especially true when you take in account the free time gained by no longer being required to prepare for the next classroom encounter (lecture and handouts, etc.).

In short, you can spend that time responding to questions, helping with difficult subject matter, discussing current events that are relevant to your content, and assessing student growth. It really is an efficiency. It is also the instructor’s responsibility to be familiar with the institution’s learning management system (LMS) and to help students navigate their course. Being competent with the LMS provides the online instructor several advantages:

1. Their students view them as competent with the learning management system.
2. Their students view them as competent with the course they are teaching and responsible for.
3. Their students have more “up-time” to complete course work and stay on track.
4. Instructors don’t have to contact support and request for assistance and wait for a response, which translates to lower frustration levels and more up-time for everyone in the class.

The online course runs as well as it is designed and managed. Being the teacher, guide, and facilitator requires your presence, time, and communication. Your course is not self-taught ... show up and teach.

## Meet Response Expectations

Communication is essential to the successful operation and management of an online course. For the student, it is essential for mastery of the course learning objectives and completion of the course. So, communication sounds important ... right? Despite of its apparent importance, timely response from instructors remains at the top of student complaints across higher education.



Figure 9. An example of feedback expectation for online interactions.

Students of the twenty-first century have different expectations of the communications and technologies they use for work and play. Most have come to count on timely, if not, immediate response. They become quickly annoyed with a web site or video that loads slowly, or worse, fails to load. They quickly become frustrated when a colleague or peer fails to respond within a business day. And it is a fact, that we all have developed some level of similar expectation. It has become the norm.

A delay in an online course, whether it be with the technology or a response from the instructor or a peer in the classroom compounds the issues for the student, because it delays, if not in some cases, stops the forward momentum in the course. Remember:

- The distant student can't just drop by your office and in some cases (time zones), calling isn't even a simple solution.
- The distant student is trying to meet your deadlines, time delays often result in those deadlines not being met.

Timely response is critical to everyone involved in the course. But then, what is timely?

Timely is hard to define, because it involves several variables. You may respond immediately to every inquiry you encounter, but what if you only check your course twice a week? As you can imagine, this scenario will not work. First, consider the duration of your course; is it a 16-week course, or a ten or eight-week course? It should be understood that a short duration course is going to require more frequent exposure to the course and communication with the students.

Then you have to consider the nature of the course work, course load, types of assignments, and the level of the students being engaged. Industry standards suggest a business day as the norm, 24-hours during the work week and 48-hours over the weekend. This also needs to be clearly defined in the syllabus and not just for the instructor, but also for your expectation for the student responses.

Once defined and communicated, a rhythm of communication can be created and expectations enjoyed, not frustrated. When both sides meet expectations, another benefit emerges—students see the instructor attending to their needs, and present and engaged.

However, there are times when the “defined” expectation may be inadequate. Examples include:

1. When questions or problems arise immediately before high stake exams, assignments, or projects
2. When students appear confused over course details or instructions
3. When students appear confused or do not understand course material
4. When you as the instructor determine additional content or feedback is essential to student success

Get the point? And we are certain you can think of other examples. Response time can be 24-hours in the syllabus, but remember the solution does not fit all situations. The standard you set in the syllabus will for the most part allow students to plan their learning experience. It will also remove the myth of 24/7 access to the instructor. Your commitment to the standard, mixed with flexibility, will help students respect your need to balance the course with your other teaching obligations and home life.

## **Design and Build with Quality**

Quality in this instance is associated with content, the materials essentials for the learning experience. Under this umbrella term, we find accuracy, integrity, editing, instructional method and interface with the rest of the course. We’ll try to keep in short. Most online instructors would agree quality is critical in ensuring their course does not provide students a poor educational experience. The consequences should be obvious. A poor designed or managed course easily translates to a less than desirable degree program and the need to move on. Quality must also be found at the support level, admissions level, and information level. It is a team effort that eventually culminates in the course and with the instructor that owns and teaches the course.

Recent innovations of on-the-fly media and the myriad of online publication methods, makes quality (integrity and andragogical concerns) a constant watch word for the instructor. The rule here is simple. If you are not the subject matter expert when considering the use of specific topic media, consult them first, or make them part of the course review process. Despite our

best efforts, technology, advancements in our field, and media development can easily outpace the course design process.

Content accuracy and relevance are also critical. Regardless of the type of content, (text, audio presentations, video, and slide presentations with voiceover) make sure it is andragogically effective for the audience. Be certain it ties together learning objectives and the assessments.

Students also tie appearance and use of multimedia to quality. The course should be free of typing and graphic design errors. Students can be encouraged to report errors and your prompt response to change them, will be to your benefit. Some instructors balk at using multimedia. However, multimedia (audio, video, interactive content) is a learning preference supported by research. And evidence of its use should be found across the course design.

Make sure the links out to the Internet (embedded in text or standalone) work appropriately and the sites you select are quality and offer some type of American Disability Act compliance (script or closed captions).

Is the course designed with consistency and easy to navigate? Will talk more about this in modular design, but course materials and assessments should be easy to find. Resources and instructions should be clear and in the right location.

Quality increases student satisfaction, attention to the learning process, retention and success. It also dramatically decreases time spent on fixing failures, adding content, and responding to student tech issues. Lastly, it provides a more robust, engaging and interactive learning and teaching experience. Putting the work up front, decreases the repair work through the semester.

The path to a quality course also involves the development of relationships with your colleagues, subject matter experts, learning management system, instructional designers, and your students. Ultimately, course quality can be gauged by how successfully your students master their learning outcomes and objectives.

## **Use Modular Design**

Modular design is based on the creation of “units” which focus on a central, related core of concepts or topics not by chapters and weeks. One of our guest speakers will talk more about this tomorrow. The modular design also incorporates all of the resources necessary for students to successfully achieve its associated learning objectives. This includes:

1. The module learning objectives
2. All content (text-based, audio, video, etc.)
3. All assessments
4. All assignments
5. All discussions, blogs, wikis, etc.

6. Any special instructions for projects and assignment
7. Any module supporting materials

Students should not be forced to leave a learning module to complete any specific segment of the course.

Consistency between courses is essential. All module related materials should be located in the module, named appropriately, in a meaningful sequence. This will reduce student confusion, keep the course design consistent with other MSU courses, and simplify course navigation.

### **Include a Welcome Message**

Every course must have a “welcome message.” Foremost, this message sets the stage for instructor presence in the course. This means, “I am here and ready to teach, guide, and facilitate the course.” It also marks the initial steps in the formation of the course’s online community, which must be a safe, secure, and trusting environment for student success.

Many instructors use the welcome message to explain the importance of the online community in their course and expectations for its use and student involvement. It can also be used to outline the course, the importance of the syllabus, as well as an introduction to your online teaching philosophy and if you wish, your personality. It can be text-based, audio, or even video.

### **Effectively use Introductions and Build Online Community**

Don’t get this mixed up with the welcome message. Introductions provide students the opportunity to talk about themselves. Many faculty just leave the “discussion” up to students, but a smart instructor will set the stage and try to connect students to the course content, its relevance, and course outcomes, and professional relationships within the course. These connections can be used later to create effective groups, define leaders and followers, specific expertise, etc.



Figure 10. A successful online community does not just happen, it takes effort and well-thought out interactions.

The point is to begin the construction of the course online community. A community of communication, trust, and interaction, which includes you (teacher, guide, and facilitator).

Building the online community, does not happen overnight and it takes work on your part and students too. Consider appointing students to facilitate specific discussion topics, based on their unique skills, knowledge level, or ambition, and reward them for success. When using small and large group activities, have students take positions of leadership such as group leader, time manager, topic focus, technology manager, and archivist.

Remember the online community has lots of potential. It depends on your choice of application(s).

1. Professional connections and relationships
2. Study community
3. Technology issues
4. Course issues
5. Teaching and learning resource (student life experiences)
6. Group and team dynamics
7. How to collaborate with others
8. Plus others ...

## Use Content that Fits and Works in the e-Learning Environment

Imagine walking into a traditional classroom and being handed 16-weeks' worth of PowerPoint presentations (created by the textbook publisher), 16 pages of bulleted text for each chapter (also created by the publisher), and 18 sealed envelopes that contain the

course exams. The teacher then walks out of the room. This is how some faculty want to teach online, but this does not an online course make.

Content must be designed to the audience. It must meet their learning preferences and andragogical needs. This means text-based, with meaningful graphics and images supporting the text message, audio lectures, video lecture, support video, interactive presentations, and consistent course structure, and coupled with instructor interaction and engagement.



Figure 11. Content goes well beyond the written word. Today, it involves multimedia, instructor to student interactions, social interaction, blogs, wikis, and more.

Consider this. Fifteen years ago, faculty were concerned about being replaced by their online courses. Content that involved “their experience and expertise” as subject matter experts was critical to their debate. Now, 2014. Instructional designers struggle each course to get the instructor’s voice. If all we need is publisher materials and readings from the text, why do we need you?

Answer: You are the subject matter expert and you bring the content to life and ensure the response to the content meets the course objectives. YOU TEACH. YOU GUIDE. YOU FACILITATE.

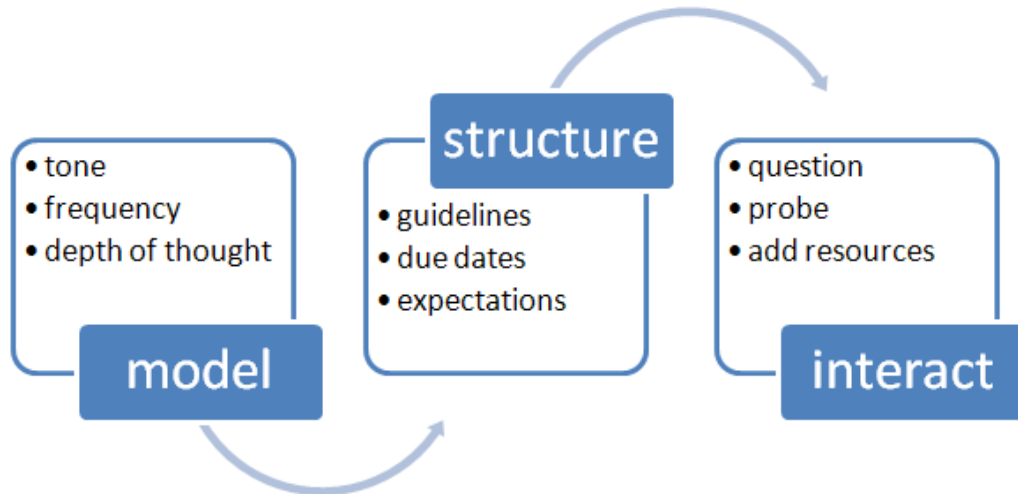
Find the content or develop the content that meets the department learning outcomes, mix it up (variation), be engaged (presence) with it, and be interactive with the student’s application of it. You are the teacher, guide, and facilitator.

## Make Discussion Meaningful

Too often, discussion is solely between students, and the instructor is nowhere to be found. Conversations start with determination, but quickly dissolve because no is watching, cares, or is doing discussion by demand, and not for its instruction value. This ranks in the top five



complaints from students ... no interaction and low quality discussion projects. To counter this, we encourage the creation of a rubric which defines your expectations. We also encourage heavy instructor participation. An example of a rubric is provided on the next page.



**Figure 12. Discussion is a confirmation of knowledge, understanding complex concepts, and real-world application. It requires instructor participation.**

Discussion, regardless of methodology, should involve the instructor in all three roles (teacher, guide, and facilitator). For instance, the instructor should be monitoring peer-to-peer discussion for accuracy, ensuring the material exchanged is current and accurate? If not, then misconceptions can be addressed.

Instructors also need to determine if material being used in groups should be being shared across the discussion topic with all players? These and other questions must be considered when designing and responding to discussion topics.

It all begins by connecting discussion to learning objectives, content, and assessment. Do the topics demand reflection and critical thought? How do you plan on sharing your particular experience or expertise in the topic to add value? Are you considering current events to add relevance? What about providing introductory or closing comments to a discussion topic?

Remember, one of the basic tenants of successful online instruction is interaction and engagement. Discussion provides a venue for both, plus a well-defined presence. For many instructors, discussion is a painful requirement, when it should be used as a means to know your student and get an affirmation that “they get it!”

### ONLINE DISCUSSION RUBRIC

|   | Expected Level of Competence<br>2 point   | Moving Toward Expected Level<br>1 point  | Not Acceptable<br>0 points   |
|---|---|--|--|
| <b>Content Understanding (comprehension of the content under discussion)</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student understands significant ideas relevant to the issue under discussion. This is indicated by correct use of terminology, precise selection of the pieces of information required to make a point, correct and appropriate use of examples and counterexamples, demonstrations of which distinctions are important to make, and explanations that are concise and to the point.</li> <li>Information and knowledge are accurate.</li> <li>The student elaborates statements with accurate explanations, reasons, or evidence.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ideas are reasonably clear, but the listener needs to make some guesses as to what the student meant.</li> <li>Some vocabulary is used correctly and some is not.</li> <li>Ideas are correct but not concise.</li> <li>Contributions to the group are generally supported by some facts, examples, analogies, statistics, and so forth, but there's a sense that more is needed.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student uses foundational knowledge incorrectly.</li> <li>The student struggles to provide ideas or support for ideas.</li> <li>Ideas are extremely limited or hard to understand.</li> <li>The student has difficulty understanding themes and distinguishing main ideas and supporting details.</li> <li>Terminology is used incorrectly.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Reasoning (ability to use the content to explore an issue, answer a question, make a decision, or discuss a point)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student actively stimulates and sustains inquiry by asking thoughtful questions.</li> <li>The student has a clear idea of the topic under discussion and sustains inquiry until in order to explore relevant issues.</li> <li>The student stipulates claims or definitions (e.g., "For our discussion, let's agree that prior knowledge refers to BOTH overall and specific knowledge."). The student realizes when such stipulations are needed.</li> <li>The student recognizes values or value conflict as things that form the assumption basis of arguments and recognizes when it is important to acknowledge these values.</li> <li>The student argues by analogy.</li> <li>The student recognizes the accuracy, logic,</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student relies on the momentum of the group to motivate inquiry.</li> <li>The student generally distinguishes fact from opinions.</li> <li>The student may be repetitive with comments.</li> <li>The student takes a position but with little evidence or explanation.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student accepts ideas of others without much thought.</li> <li>The student jumps randomly from one aspect of an issue to another.</li> <li>The student provides little relevant information or contributes little to the discussion.</li> <li>Opinions may be stated as facts.</li> <li>The student shows little evidence of understanding the topic under discussion and how to sustain the inquiry to adequately explore issues related to it.</li> <li>There is little sense of which information is of most importance.</li> </ul>  |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>relevance, or clarity of statements. The student recognizes contradictions and irrelevant comments.</li> <li>The student asks clarifying questions and knows when clarifying questions need to be asked.</li> <li>The student distinguishes fact from opinion.</li> <li>The student summarizes points of agreement and disagreement to set the stage for further movement; the student knows when such summaries are useful.</li> </ul>  |  |  |
| <b>Interaction with Others</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student initiates the dialogue with thoughtful and reflective comments and questions.</li> <li>The interactions of the student are appropriate for educators in a graduate setting.</li> <li>The student invites contributions from others as needed and the student knows when such contributions are needed.</li> <li>The student acknowledges the statements of others in a way that builds a consecutive interchange between participants.</li> <li>Replies to others are responsive to the statement and indicate that the student understood it and thought about it.</li> <li>When disagreeing, the student does it respectfully. The nature of the disagreement is stated and an invitation to respond extended.</li> <li>The student encourages a variety of points of view.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student attends to the discussion but contributes little new knowledge or ideas.</li> <li>The student's contributions do not detract from the discussions.</li> <li>The student participates in the group but does little to involve others or encourage others to think critically.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The interactions of the student are inappropriate for educators in a graduate setting.</li> <li>The student makes irrelevant or distracting statements.</li> <li>Some comments are unconstructive and non-courteous.</li> <li>The student makes a personal attack; language might suggest bias toward a group member or others.</li> <li>The student does not contribute to the discussion.</li> <li>The student appears unaware of cultural differences in conducting discussions.</li> <li>Discussion does not take into consideration the ideas/comments by the group; there is little attempt at collaborative thinking.</li> </ul> |

|                             |   |  |  |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--|
|                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student is courteous and attentive</li> <li>• The student is aware of cultural differences in social interactions and behaves in an appropriate fashion.</li> <li>• When conflicts arise, the student attempts to resolve them.</li> <li>• The student is aware of the value of group input and decision making.</li> </ul>  |  |  |
| <b>Language Conventions</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student uses precise vocabulary and economical syntax. Words and syntax are purposefully chosen to make a point.</li> <li>• The student uses language that others in the group will understand.</li> <li>• The student defines or clearly explains language or concepts that might be unfamiliar to others; the student knows when such explanations might be necessary.</li> <li>•</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student uses general vocabulary and tends to express ideas wordily.</li> <li>• Although correct, language might not be equally understandable to all members of the group.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student uses language that others in the group are unlikely to understand.</li> <li>• Ideas appear disproportionately lengthy and are difficult to follow.</li> <li>• Language choices are vague, abstract, or trite. Jargon may be used when more precise language is needed.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Mechanics</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student shows mastery of academic English.</li> <li>• The student uses English conventionally without grammatical or typographical errors.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student occasionally misspells words and makes grammatical errors.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student frequently misspells words and makes grammatical errors.</li> </ul>   |

Figure 13. One example of a discussion rubric.

## Visual Content is a Learning Preference

Based on recent research and cognitive theory, we highly encourage the use of graphics (charts, images, and photographs) in conjunction with words to explain a key concept or idea, instead of words (text) alone. The rationale is simple. Students are more likely to engage and understand when a supporting image is provided. The image also attends to the brain's need when associating content and moving it to long-term memory and later recall. It engages two mental channels by representing content in words and graphics and making the connections.

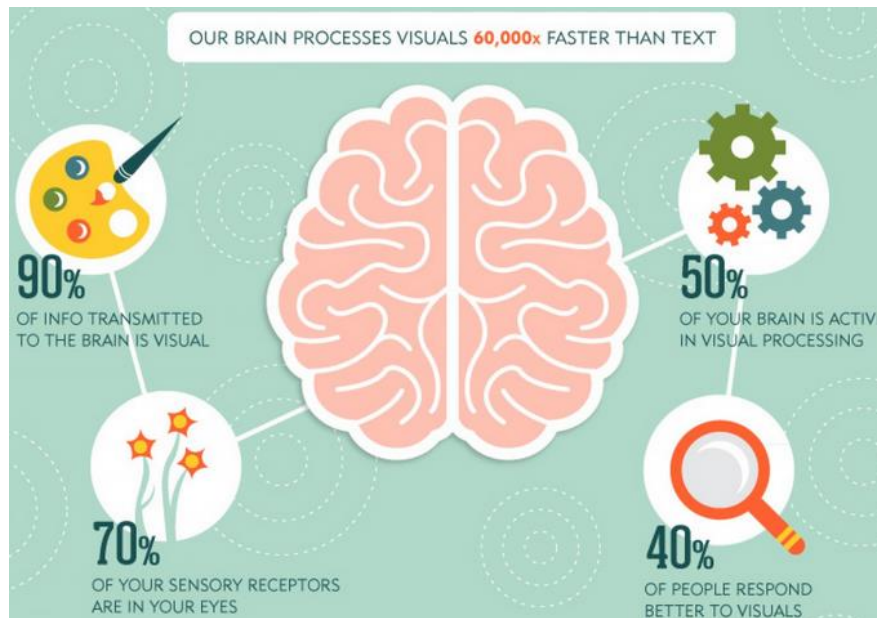


Figure 14. What does this visual convey to you?

In short, use graphics that support learning. When using visual materials, decorative or aesthetic aims are not the objective—learning is. There are other guiding principles to consider the use of graphics in the e-learning environment, one of which is the *Contiguity Principle*. There is empirical evidence that states learning occurs when text and graphics are integrated in the same location as opposed to being located in different locations. In short, something is lost when supporting graphics are separated from their text-based explanation.

Lastly, considering the contemporary learner’s preference, graphics should be incorporated across the learning materials. In fact, evidence should be found in each learning module. Several guiding principles will help with this area:

1. Graphics are useful to explain difficult concepts, ideas, or procedures
2. Remember to address course quality when selecting graphics
3. All graphics must be relevant to course content and learning objectives
4. All graphics must contribute to learning (Does not play a role in content aesthetics)

## Educate about Academic Integrity

This list was compiled by Lori McNabb and Michael Anderson, University of Texas TeleCampus and used with permission.

| Type of Dishonesty       | Online       | On Ground    | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|----------|
| Cheating on Tests        | 6<br>(13.5)* | 16<br>(8.5)  | .0013    |
| Plagiarism               | 2<br>(7.4)   | 10<br>(4.6)  | .0031    |
| Fabrication              | 5<br>(13.5)  | 17<br>(8.5)  | .002     |
| Unfair Advantage         | 2<br>(6.8)   | 9<br>(4.2)   | .0065    |
| Aiding and Abetting      | 7<br>(20.9)  | 27<br>(13.1) | .0001    |
| Falsification of Records | 0<br>(5.6)   | 9<br>(3.4)   | .0004    |
| Unauthorized Access      | 0<br>(.6)    | 1<br>(.4)    | .8       |

Figure 15. Chi Square Test Comparing Online and On Ground Students by *Form of Academic Dishonesty* at <http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdl/fall123/stuber123.html>

Ideas for the Virtue Approach: Develop students who do not want to cheat.

1. Make information on academic integrity very easy to find on your campus website, library website, department website, course, within the syllabus and within assignment specifics

2. Include ethics instruction within the core curriculum and/or area-specific within degree plans
3. Talk about academic integrity at orientation programs and events
4. Provide students with a course or course lesson on research and/or study skills
5. Develop boilerplate language on academic integrity for all courses – for the campus and/or department
6. Assign a department academic integrity liaison to support faculty
7. Write a letter to your students about integrity and post it in your course
8. Link to information about academic integrity on your campus website
9. Require students to read and agree to the campus academic integrity policy
10. Provide students with a writing handbook which includes information on plagiarism and campus policies
11. Ask students to restate the academic integrity policy (this can also be used as a writing sample to use when grading and reviewing student work)
12. Ask students to reflect on the academic integrity policy in the discussion board
13. Include a lesson on academic integrity – especially in introductory courses
14. Include a lesson on avoiding plagiarism
15. Provide opportunities for students to apply their values to decision-making as a part of case studies, current events or historical issue assignments
16. Include an ethical decision-making case study within your course
17. Have a syllabus quiz that includes an academic integrity statement
18. Develop a class honor code at the start of the semester
19. Ask students to reflect on integrity and honor and how it applies to education in the discussion board

Ideas for Prevention: Eliminate or reduce the opportunities to cheat and reduce the pressure to cheat.

1. Be clear about how much collaboration is permissible on each assignment given
2. Develop a learning contract and have students sign it
3. Give each student a different version of a test
4. Change test items and assignment topics each semester
5. Use test timing or force completion (but not both together!)
6. Include application questions on tests
7. Use “smart-people” tests – essays, problem solving, etc.
8. Give open book exams
9. Don’t allow students to get test feedback other than grades until all the students have taken a test
1. Have essay tests on course readings
2. Proctor tests
3. Lock down the student’s browser during testing
4. Require students to turn in copies of reference articles with cited text highlighted
5. Require annotated bibliographies
6. Do not allow last minute changes in assignment topics
7. Require or encourage the use of a writing center (on campus or online) – if required, tell students they may need to turn in their draft with the writing center comments
8. Require specific references be used (this might be the course text)
9. Require an abstract



10. Make assignments cumulative (students turn in parts of a project or paper throughout the semester)
11. Assign specific books or articles for review
12. Require interviews, surveys or experiments as a part of research
13. Have students state and justify their own opinion on a topic
14. Have students write about how they would apply what they learned to their life, work, or current events
15. Have students develop “personal concept” papers that are turned in at least twice during the course, as their personal concept evolves through course learning
16. Require that students use references that are no more than 3-5 years old, depending on your field of study
17. Base assignments on class readings
18. Give narrow assignment topics
19. Evaluate the research process and the product
20. Work with your library staff to design assignments and prepare materials on plagiarism and research techniques
21. Have students post papers to the discussion board and have other students pose questions for the author’s response
22. Require that students turn in their bibliography or references prior to the due date for the paper
23. Require that students turn in their drafts prior to the due date for the paper

Ideas for Syllabi: Use the syllabus to communicate with students about the policing, prevention, and virtue approaches being used.

1. Repeat the campus academic integrity statement and a link to campus policies
2. Include a description of academic dishonesty
3. Include information on repercussions for academic dishonesty
4. Include statements about expectations for one another
5. Include information about writing center, library and other support
6. Include links to plagiarism information, including self-tests and examples
7. Include information on acceptable sources
8. Describe permissible and non-permissible collaboration
9. Indicate that assessments may require follow-up documentation
10. Indicate that assessments may include follow-up questions or assignments
11. Include a statement that you reserve the right to require alternative forms and/or locations of assessments (i.e. proctoring)
12. Include expected time for coursework
13. Include policy on late work (consider some acceptance with penalties)
14. Include policy on test retakes (consider alternate tests or assessment requirements)
15. Indicate if you will drop any test or quiz grades
16. Include a policy on receiving an incomplete
17. Include a policy on missed tests
18. Include statement about the use of a plagiarism detection service
19. State expectations for student and faculty roles and responsibilities

WCET published *Best Strategies to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education*, June 2009. Its recommendations remain valid and offer you some additional measures you can use to

address assessment and evaluation concerns. Some have been listed already in this guide, but are worthy of the repetition.

1. Provide rubrics, or detailed grading criteria, for every assignment at the beginning of the course so students understand how they will be graded.
2. Train faculty on ways to use the settings on the college's learning management system to reduce cheating:
3. Use a test bank with more questions than will be used on any particular test and have the learning management system pull a smaller number of questions from the test bank
4. Randomize the order of answers for multiple test questions so for example, the correct answer for a particular question might be "a" for one student and "b" for another.
5. Require forced completion on exams so students cannot re-enter a test.
6. Set a short window for testing completion, i.e. one or two days to take an exam rather than a whole week. Setting a completion time reduces a student's ability to access the test, look up the answer, and re-enter the test. Most test-taking software applications keep track of time on the server, not on the student's computer.
7. Password protect exams.
8. Show questions one at a time (makes more difficult for students to copy and paste the test in order to give it to someone else).
9. Use a Web browser lock-down service during testing.
10. Check the computer "properties" for the "creation date" and "author" for essay or term paper submissions if students are suspected of submitting work created by someone else.
11. Clarify that students with disabilities and requesting testing accommodations (extended time for completion of examinations and quizzes) must identify themselves to the college's office of disabilities and provide appropriate documentation.
12. Change test items and assignment topics each semester.
13. Emphasize assignments that require written work and problem solving (e.g., essays, papers, online discussions).
14. Use a variety of assessment strategies (quizzes, short and long papers, test questions that require the application of a theory or concept).
15. Require students to turn in copies of reference articles with cited text highlighted.
16. Require annotated bibliographies.
17. Do not allow last minute changes in assignment topics.
18. Require specific references be used (this might be the course text).
19. Require an abstract.
20. Give narrow assignment topics (tied into class experience) and require thesis statements prior to topic approval.
21. Require students to turn in a draft, and their bibliography or references prior to the paper's due date.
22. Require students to write a concept paper and project plan prior to completing an assignment
23. Evaluate the research process and the product.
24. After an assignment is due, have students post in the discussion board, describing the assignment and the research method used, a summary of conclusions and an abstract (a meta-learning essay).
25. Be wary of student writing that reads like an encyclopedia, newspaper article or expert in the field.

26. Look for whether a paper reflects the assignment, has changes in tense, includes odd sentences within a well-written paper, is based on references older than three years, refers to past events as current, or uses jargon.
27. Compare student writing on the discussion board with that on assignments and papers. A writing sample collected at the start of the semester can be helpful.
28. Compare the writing at the beginning and end of the paper with that in the middle of the paper -- language, sentence length and reading level.
29. Check references; compare quotations with cited sources; look for the same author in multiple references.
30. Read all papers on the same topic together.
31. Make assignments cumulative (students turn in parts of a project or paper throughout the semester).
32. Give open book exams.
33. Other than grades, do not provide students feedback on tests until all of the students in the class have completed them.
34. Use proctored test sites where appropriate.
35. Faculty should use a robust user name and password to protect their computer-based grade book and keep a printed copy in a secure place in case students are able to hack into the computer system

## Be Interactive

There are three levels of interaction in the online course.

1. Student to content
2. Student to student
3. Student to instructor

A quality course will have evidence of all three levels of interaction across the design. These can include discussions, web-conferencing events, instructor-based recordings (audio and/or video), online office hours, blogs, wikis, group projects and/or presentations. Interaction involves contact and collaboration between participants. It is an exchange of information and communication that are high risk and of high value, content (learning objective) focused, and involves instructor participation and feedback across the exercise.

During the initial beta test and subsequent four-year peer review we look for examples of each. But each course should contain at least one major interaction that involves all three levels. While some instructors provide quantitative requirements to these major exercises, such as a discussion project that requires students to “read five peer responses” and “respond to three peer posts,” we recommend qualitative standards through the use of rubrics and/or specific learning objectives. Interaction addresses boredom, enhances the learning environment, and speaks to learner preferences for the modality, increases retention, and student success. More importantly, interaction in the course leads to a more concrete learning community, trust, and the development of formal classroom relationships that are critical to the distant student’s success.



**NOTE:** The Department of Education and the Higher Learning Commission provide Higher Education two critical definitions: Distant Education and Correspondence Education (*Italics added*). Please become familiar with the distinct differences between these two delivery methods.

Distance education means education that uses one or more of the {following} technologies (1) to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and (2) *to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, synchronously or asynchronously*. The technologies used may include: (a) the Internet; (b) one way and two way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; (c) audio-conferencing; or (d) videocassettes, DVDs, and CD Roms, if the videocassettes, DVDs or CD Roms are used in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in clauses (a) through (c).

Correspondence education/course means: (1) Education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. (2) Interaction between the instructor and the student is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. (3) Correspondence courses are typically self-paced. (4) *Correspondence education is not distance education*. NOTE ADDED: Correspondence does NOT qualify for financial aid.

## Diversify and Protect Online Assessments

Best practice in assessment, necessitates variation, security, and shifts in methodology. For example, since using the modular design involves focused content, each module should have assessment before the student moves on to the next module. This is for your benefit as much as the students, especially as the course escalates in difficulty/complexity over time.

Module assessment should to some degree vary. Using multiple choice quizzes for every assessment may be not be wise considering the objectives of the course, plus it gets really boring very quickly. So mix up your assessment methods. Consider group work, research, papers, discussions, essay, and other methods.

Best practice also tells us to give students the opportunity to fail on occasion without points. This is called reinforcement. Self-tests are a good example—a set of 5 to 10 questions they can take prior to a high stake exam. They get a score, but it doesn't count against their grade.

Lastly, exam security is a must. Security starts the first day of instruction with a clearly defined set of rules in the syllabus. The penalties for failure to practice academic honesty should be clearly defined. Faculty can also highlight academic honesty prior to each exam. Despite the repetitive narration on honesty, faculty should also design their course exams to be more secure.

1. Use question pools and sets

2. Randomize questions
3. Use reasonable time limits
4. Limit access to one question at a time
5. Use automatic controls to close the test
6. Deny access to test results until the entire class has completed the exam
7. Be aware of the release settings used to score scores, questions missed, answers, etc., following the test period
8. Change the wording in several key questions each semester so that student responses are going to be recognizably different from the previous terms (and keep an eye on these answers)

Respondus Lockdown Browser is another partial solution to cheating during examination. However, it can be frustrating for students to use and with the availability of browsers on secondary devices, easily defeated. I was once a big advocate for this technology, but believe it is now dated and useless.

In review, each module should have some type of assessment on content and learning objectives. Variation is highly recommended, but create the variation using a common rhythm across the course. When feasible, reinforcement exercises should be used, as a minimum, before high stake exams. And always think about the security of your assessment tools.

## State Your Expectations

This is perhaps one of the most important best practices. It seems apparent, but is very often overlooked in online. How do students know what you want (expect of them) if you don't tell them. Ideally, the best place is the syllabus.

When designing an assignment for a course paper, you need to develop the process for revealing the assignment and the stages necessary to get the student to the point of submission. If it is a sophomore course and you want the paper built in stages, then ...

1. You want the assignment in stages, for instance, an overview of the assignment, a topic selection, thesis presentation and approval, paper outline, first draft, and final submission.
2. You may want to consider specific instructions and expectations for each of these stages to keep the students on track, using the right format (APA, MLA, etc.), on time, and doing the necessary research.

Just requiring an 8-10 page paper in APA format really opens the door for variation. And unless, you provide your "real" expectations, you can plan on lots of variation. Font type and size will vary, page width and length will vary, pictures of various sizes will be used, some students will use a cover page and others won't. Did you want a bibliography, footnotes, endnotes, figure table, and the list goes on.

Tell online students what your expectations are ... they can't read your mind. This is especially true with group assignments and activities. Expectations define group behavior and without it, most online groups will face chaos, unless they are lucky enough to have a member or two with previous experience with groups.

## **Build Asynchronous Activity, Offer Optional Synchronous Activity**

While your course may be marketed as asynchronous, it is highly encourage to offer some option for synchronous activity. This may simply be office hours or perhaps a brief overview before a high stakes mid-term or final, or even the use of optional web conferencing for group projects or presentations.

It's simple ... it is hard to replace the opportunity for groups to talk real time and brainstorm, coordinate activities, and collaborate on design of documents or presentations. The sessions can be archived, so you can watch them later and see whom is doing what and when. Giving this option to your students empowers them and provides them the tools for a successful project.

Office hours gives students the opportunity to engage the 'physical' you in contrast to the 'virtual' version. It makes the connection more real and develops a sense of place, security, and sorry, but reality for the learner. E-learning can often result in isolation for the learner, when in fact they should be connected to an active online community that has much to co-teach and share.

## **Use Effective Multimedia**

We have already talked about graphics, but have not fully addressed multimedia in the broader sense with the inclusion of audio and video. Again, the use of multimedia in an online course is at the top of the 21<sup>st</sup> century student "learning preference" list. Failure to use this tool is a failure in two ways.

1. We are not meeting student expectations
2. Cognitive theory states we are doing them a disservice

As Clarke and Mayer note, students learn better from words and images than words alone. Top that off with the student recognition of preference, we need to promote lecture capture, images presentations with voiceover, and audio with graphics. But when do we use it?

1. Multimedia Principle: Students learn better from words and pictures than from words alone.
2. Spatial Contiguity Principle: Students learn better when corresponding words and pictures are presented near rather than far from each other on the page or screen.
3. Temporal Contiguity Principle: Students learn better when corresponding words and pictures are presented simultaneously rather than successively.
4. Coherence Principle: Students learn better when extraneous words, pictures, and sounds are excluded rather than included.
5. Modality Principle: Students learn better from animation and narration than from animation and on-screen text.
6. Redundancy Principle: Students learn better from animation and narration than from animation, narration, and on-screen text.
7. Individual Differences Principle: Design effects are stronger for low-knowledge learners than for high-knowledge learners and for high-spatial learners rather than for low-spatial learners.

Figure 16. Seven research-based principles for use of multimedia online by Clark and Mayer.

Ideally, multimedia should be used when imagery and voice can do a better job explaining than text alone. It is not used as entertainment---it is for learning. It can be used to support facts, concepts, processes, procedures, and even principles. And when used, it should have good visual clarity, be a reasonable length as to not impact download and student focus, and have reasonable American Disability Act accommodation (meaning a text script or closed captioning).

We expect to find multimedia in most all learning modules with transitions/connections to other content in the module (discussed in the next reading). Remember not to cause cognitive overload with content and there is a growing tendency to use too much video, especially in regards to duration of play.

Here are some final hints on use of multimedia. When creating it yourself, consider the following:

1. Keep the presentation under 15 minutes
2. Consider a brief introduction and brief summary
3. Keep content focused on key concepts and ideas
4. Avoid going off on tangents (use a script or outline), it will keep you focused and prevent retakes
5. Remind students to use the pause and/or stop feature, as needed
6. Dress professionally
7. Ensure proper lighting and watch your background
8. Speak louder than normal; microphones and video processing dim voice
9. Get rid of background noise and white noise to the extent possible
10. Pause every few minutes and emphasize key points or ask a question
11. You can sign out FLIP cameras from the Office of Instructional Technology (OIT)

12. You can also use PowerPoint to do voiceovers. Microphones can be signed out from OIT too

Have fun doing your video. It is an opportunity to be yourself and enjoy sharing information with your distant students.

## Help Students Navigate Content

When students open a learning module, they should access a meaningful, sequenced set of content, support, and assessment. The module should be focused and consistent in design with other courses. They should be able to navigate from the top to the bottom of the module in an easy fashion and not leave the module until it is completed.

However, often as students' transition from a text-based content item to a video, audio, or even a PDF, something can be lost. It is critical to remember your audience. So, when moving from one piece of content to another, within a learning module (i.e., text-to video or audio), your role as guide should kick in. For example:

1. Inform students they are going to watch a video next in the module sequence.
2. Tell them what the video is about.
3. Tell them how the video relates or contributes to understand the module's learning objectives.
4. Tell them if the material is testable (should be).
5. Tell them the item will help complete or be part of an assignment later in the module

Connect content items for the distant learning, by making them relevant. A content item should never stand alone without explanation. There are just too many questions. So have a meaningful transition between technologies. The same rule applies between modules. Some instructors call these Overview and Summary, but in short they tell students where they have been and where they are going. They can also be a point for reflection, analysis, the integration of new material, and even closure for social and cognitive experiences.

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