

Online Course Review Document

Sections

1. Course Organization
2. Learner Support
3. Instructional Design
4. Information Design
5. Feedback, Assessment, and Evaluation
6. Communication and Interaction
7. Resources

References

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1. Course Organization

Objectives

Effective course organization will enable learners to...

1. Grasp the course structure intuitively and perceive the overall framework as meaningful
2. Navigate through the course easily and find current, complete, and concise course content
3. Process course content in manageable chunks
4. Evaluate the course and gain a positive first impression that creates interest
5. Experience initial success given the appropriate effort

Indicators

A. Overall Structure

- Content is logically organized using a folder structure that makes sense for the course (i.e. Module-based? Unit-based? Weekly-based? Chapter/Lesson-based)
- Naming conventions and file structures are consistent throughout the course
- Navigational flow is intuitive for users and clearly indicates where learners are and where they need to go next (sandwich approach)
- Objectives for each learning unit are concise, meaningful, and linked to assessment
- Timelines and due dates are clearly communicated in a way that is easy to process visually
- All course elements are accessible within less than 3 clicks
- All buttons in the navigation panel contain appropriate information
- Look and feel of the course is customized (i.e. banner, buttons) and creates interest

B. Course Information

- Official college course outline is current and accessible
- Course outline meets all the standards identified in the curriculum handbook
- Policies and procedures related to course are clearly articulated (assignment submission, academic dishonesty, etc.)
- Staff information includes contact info for faculty and possibly a photo and some personal information

C. Course Syllabus

- Communicates course outcomes in a way that makes them relevant for learners
- Presents course schedule and general explanation of course organization in a clear and visually appealing way
- Describes required and recommended instructional resources as well as any additional expectations for learning (i.e. field trips)
- Includes a detailed evaluation plan that aligns with course outcomes, meets the standards of the curriculum handbook, and reflects a reasonable workload
- Outlines expectations for successful participation (i.e. Tips for Success)

2. Learner Support

Objectives:

Effective learner support will enable learners to...

1. Receive a positive and productive introduction to online learning – how it works, expectations, online tools
2. Stimulate positive interaction among all members of the learning community (teachers and students)
3. Become aware of the support services available to them

Indicators:

A. Announcements

- Includes a welcome message
- Clearly explains how students should proceed and what the expectations are
- Reminds students to check announcements regularly

B. Orientation

- Directs students to a "To Do" list
- Provides learners with
 - Information on getting organized for the course
 - Information on getting oriented to Blackboard
 - Information on the technical requirements and skill requirements for the course
 - Links to tutorials and/or tip sheets for basic Blackboard skills
 - Information on accessing introductory documents such as the outline and syllabus
- Has students introducing themselves to each other in a way that is relevant to the course
- Introduces students to the instructor (i.e. photo, bio, interest in course, etc.)
- Communicates the requirements for success in the course (i.e. Tips for Success)
- Provides learners with an opportunity to assess whether the course is appropriate for them (i.e. Online Learning Self-Assessment)
- Provides answers to common questions (i.e. FAQ page)
- Allows students adequate time to complete orientation activities
- Makes students aware of expectations and protocols regarding etiquette, communication, etc.

C. Support Resources

- Communicates how, when, and where students can get support related to course content
 - Office hours and process for meeting face to face
 - E-mail of instructor and parameters for e-mail receipt and response
 - Procedures in case of network failures
- Outlines college support services for students related to required skills
 - Write-On, Click-On
 - Computer Services, Blackboard Student Support
- Provides links to other relevant college services and resources
 - Registration, Bookstore, Library
 - Student Services – Counseling, Career Services
 - College Policies – IT, Academic Honesty,

3. Instructional Design

Objectives:

Effective instructional design will enable learners to...

1. Learn based on proven principles for online learning.
2. Participate in learning units that are structured for success, provided the student has the appropriate pre-requisite skills and puts in the required effort.
3. Engage in learning that goes beyond content and information acquisition.

Indicators:

A. Instructional Unit Design

- Units contain clear instructional objectives that are measurable and linked to assessment
- Units are organized using a consistent pattern that is clear and logical
- Units contain an appropriate balance of information, learning activities, and assessments
- All elements are clearly linked to the objectives and course outcomes
- Units include visual organizers (i.e. charts, diagrams) and graphic highlighting (i.e. lists, bolding, underline) to clearly communicate the following:
 - a. Where learners are in the course
 - b. What came before and what comes next (sandwich approach)
 - c. Required readings, learning tasks, etc.
 - d. Timelines and due dates
- Online resources and tools are used as an integral part of the instructional process
- All resources are current and accessible to learners
- Units build on one other and lead students to achieving the outcomes of the course
- Instruction promotes interaction on several levels - student/content, student/student, student/faculty, and student/discipline (i.e. websites, experts, videos)

B. Learning Activities and Assignments

- Promotes active learning using a variety of strategies
 - problem-solving activities
 - knowledge building and knowledge sharing activities
 - case studies
 - reflective activities
 - collaborative activities
- Explanations, directions, expectations, and assessment criteria for all learning activities and assignments are clearly communicated (i.e. self checks, rubrics, step by step instructions, worksheets, etc.)
- Learning activities reflect pedagogical principles and theories such as the following:
 - Constructivism
 - Promotion of Essential Skills including higher level thinking
 - Relevance
- Activities and assignments promote knowledge building through the sharing of information, resources, and relevant experiences.
- Students have some options and flexibility in learning activities where appropriate
- Submission processes for all assignments and learning tasks are clearly outlined and easy to follow. They are outlined in several places with no contradictory information.

4. Information Design

Objectives:

Effective information design will enable learners to...

1. Process online information without experiencing a continuous “wall of words” or undue hardship
2. Recognize visually the hierarchical structure and key elements of the course
3. Interact with course information at a variety of levels in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains

Indicators:

A. Content and Writing

- Information is chunked into manageable and easy to read segments
- Accessing content does not require excessive scrolling or clicking
- Information is as concise as possible with all extraneous phrases and words eliminated
- All text information leads students to a learning activity, in a learning activity, or in the follow-up of a learning activity
- All written text is grammatically sound and free of errors
- Online content adds to the textbook information in a meaningful way
- Information is selected, organized, and presented to minimize information overload for the average student
- Bullets and lists are used to condense information and improve visual impact. Information in lists or bullets adheres to a parallel structure
- All information is current and correct including all hyperlinks
- Course content is easy to print
- Course content can be viewed effectively online in a variety of resolutions
- Course content can be easily read using a text reader (not currently possible with Blackboard)

B. Fonts and Presentation

- Fonts and headings are used in a consistent way throughout the course and clearly delineate organizational hierarchies for information (i.e. headings and subheadings).
- Text contrasts with background and is easy to read (i.e. sans serif) both online and in printed format
- Text colour selections take colour-blindness into account
- Information is enhanced with visual and auditory resources as much as possible. This could include:
 - Graphics and images that support but do not distract from the learning
 - Visual organizers
 - Audio
 - Video clips

C. Interaction with Content

- Interaction with the content of the course is facilitated using a variety of tools and methods. This could include:
 - Low-level questions (i.e. T/F, multiple choice, ordering, matching; open-ended questions)
 - Checklists
 - Surveys
 - Reflective questions
 - Worksheets and other graphic organizers (i.e. mind maps, charts, flowcharts, timelines)
 - Short writing tasks

5. Feedback, Assessment, and Evaluation

Objectives:

Effective feedback, assessment, and evaluation will enable learners to...

1. Engage in multiple and varied opportunities to practice and demonstrate skills related to course outcomes
2. Receive clear and explicit communication regarding performance criteria and understand how they might improve
3. Use specific criteria constructively to engage in self-assessment and peer assessment

Indicators:

A. Feedback

- The feedback loop gives students regular information regarding their performance and on what is needed to improve performance
- All feedback is positive and constructive
- The online grade book is set up in a logical, easy to follow way that provides students with clear feedback regarding their marks

B. Assessment for Learning (Formative)

- Assessment opportunities occur on a regular basis and are clearly linked to objectives
- Assessments for learning are relatively low stakes with clear feedback on performance
- Assessments offer several opportunities to practice skills identified in the course outcomes
- Performance criteria are explicit and clearly communicated
- Students receive assessment results in a timely manner
- A variety of assessment tools and methods are used
 - Surveys
 - Quizzes
 - Short writing tasks
 - Self-assessments
 - Mini-assignments and/or process assignments
- Processes for completing and submitting assessments are clear

C. Evaluations of Learning (Summative)

- Evaluations are clearly linked to course outcomes
- Skills and knowledge required for successful performance have been taught or scaffolding (support) resources have been made available to students (i.e. tip sheets, exemplars, online resources)
- Evaluations are designed to promote academic integrity
- Performance criteria for evaluations are explicit, measurable, and meaningful to learners (i.e. rubrics, marking sheets)
- Evaluations are meaningful, relevant, and appropriate for college students
- Evaluations offer students options and flexibility so they can focus on areas of interest
- Evaluations maximize the use of online resources and tools
- A variety of evaluation methods are used throughout the course
 - Tests and exams
 - Case studies
 - Projects
 - Writing Tasks
 - Presentations
 - Other
- Results of evaluations are communicated to students in a clear and timely manner

6. Communication and Interaction

Objectives:

Effective communication and interaction will enable learners to...

1. Participate in a positive, constructive learning community
2. Feel connected to the teacher, the institution, and other students in the course
3. Overcome some of the challenges and barriers related to online learning

Indicators:

A. Instructor Communication

- Announcements are posted regularly for purposes such as the following:
 - Welcome learners to the course
 - Focus on where they are suppose to be and where they are going next
 - Clarify instructions, expectations, issues that arise
 - Remind learners of upcoming deadlines
 - Summarize key points or information
 - Provide advice or “tips for success”
 - Correct errors in course content
 - Advise students of technical issues
- Instructor communication during the first quarter of the course gets the majority of students on track and comfortably participating in the online learning community. This includes
 - Individual e-mails as well as announcements
 - Monitoring of individual students performance
 - Follow-up with students who are not participating regularly
- Instructor communication moves students towards independence and interdependence
 - Encourage students to post questions in a General Discussion
 - Encourage students to help each other
- Instructor participation in discussions effectively supports and promotes learning. This includes
 - keeping the dialogue on track
 - moving the dialogue forward
 - leading learners to higher levels of thinking
- Instructor sets and adheres to reasonable parameters for responding to and supporting learners (turnaround time, virtual office hours, on-campus support, etc.)
- Instructor has communicated expectations and guidelines of interactions in the course and enforces these in a positive constructive way, especially at the beginning of the course.
- Discussion questions are clearly worded, open-ended, and promote the integration of course content and personal input
- Discussions are structured to achieve specific, meaningful learning objectives and promote a high level of interaction among students

B. Student Interaction

- Peer to peer interaction is positive and constructive
- Students regularly contribute knowledge or information that adds to everyone’s understanding of the subject
- Students have to opportunity to communicate on an informal level in a “Course Café” type discussion
- Students are able to provide their feedback on the course and its various elements in a positive and constructive way

7. Resources

Objectives:

Effective resources will enable learners to...

1. Access a variety of online resources related to the discipline – websites, academic journals, professional organizations, etc.
2. Use multi-media materials to enhance their learning – graphics, video, audio
3. Recognize and follow appropriate guidelines for the legal and ethical use of resources

Indicators:

A. Online Resources

- Selected resources are academically appropriate and linked to learning objectives
- Resources are delivered to students in a format that is as stable as possible
- Resources are high quality and expose learners to a wide variety of sources related to the discipline
- Resources are organized in a logical way that is accessible to learners

B. Multi-Media Resources

- Resources are designed to enhance and support learning goals (i.e. support diverse learning styles, present complex concepts in a visual manner)
- Resources are optimized for web delivery
- Where possible, text is supported with audio files
- Where possible, text is supported with meaningful images

C. Legal and Ethical Use

- All resources adhere to both ethical and legal guidelines for use
- Ethical and legal expectations for student work are clearly stated

Observations and Suggestions

Course Name:

Instructor:

Date:

1. Course Organization

Observations:

Suggestions/Recommendations:

2. Learner Support

Observations:

Suggestions/Recommendations:

3. Instructional Design

Observations:

Suggestions/Recommendations:

4. Information Design

Observations:

Suggestions/Recommendations:

5. Feedback, Assessment, and Evaluation

Observations:

Suggestions/Recommendations:

6. Communication and Interaction

Observations:

Suggestions/Recommendations:

7. Resources

Observations:

Suggestions/Recommendations: