

Standards For Online Courses

The following Standards for Online Courses have been carefully developed to ensure the highest quality and consistency of online course offerings (full online, partial online, hybrid) at Clayton State University and are aligned with best practices, national initiatives towards standardizing online teaching, and current research in the practice of teaching in an online environment.

Acknowledgements

The Academy For Online Course Development

Standards For Online Courses Development Team:

Dr. Steven Smith, Faculty Developer - Online | The Academy For Online Course Development

Dr. Jill Lane, Dean - The Center for Instructional Development

The Academy Steering Committee (2010-2011)

Dr. Catherine Matos - CIMS

Dr. Sue Odom - Health and Nursing

Dr. Deborah Gritzmacher - Business

Sheryne Southard, Arts and Sciences

Sources:

Chao, T., Saj, T., Tessier, F. (2006). *Establishing a Quality Review for Online Courses*. Educause Quarterly, 3.

Chickering, A. and Ehrmann, S. (1996). *Implementing the Seven Principles: Technology as Lever*. AHHE Bulletin, October, p.3-6.

Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (2001). *Best Practices For Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs*.

Krauth, B. (1996). *Principles of Good Practice for Electronically Offered Academic Degree and Certificate Programs*, Cause/Effect, Spring, 1996.

MarylandOnline, Inc. (2008-2010). *Quality Matters Rubric Standards*.

Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) (2009). *Principles of Good Practice - The Foundation for Quality of Southern Regional Education Board's Electronic Campus*.

Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) (2006). *Standards for Quality Online Courses*.

University of West Georgia. (2010). *5-Star Online Course Review*. (online: <http://www.westga.edu/~distance/distancefaculty/coursereviewform.pdf>)

Standards Overview

I. Course Overview, Introduction, Content and Design

Course content is carefully organized, current and relevant. Course design and navigation elements are consistent and user-friendly. Instructional materials are comprehensive, achievable and available before the course opens. The design of course materials has been carefully planned and prepared. Learning Management System elements, instructor information, policies, student information and technical support are clearly indicated.

II. Learning Objectives and Learner Engagement

The course effectively incorporates relevant and real-world examples, applications and information resources. Interactive activities and a variety of strategies are used to engage and motivate students. Strategies are employed to develop a community of online learners. The course is current and free of bias. The course offers opportunities to construct meaning, reflect, examine assumptions, critique, question and transfer knowledge. The course offers ample opportunities for interaction and communication and contains an appropriate level of rigor and depth.

III. Assessment and Measurement

The effectiveness of the course is evaluated regularly using a variety of assessment strategies. Findings are used as a basis for improvement. Multiple assessment strategies are used to measure content knowledge, attitudes and/or skills. Feedback is provided throughout the course to enable self-monitoring of progress by students. Expectations, grading policies and rubrics are clear and easily accessible.

IV. Course Technology

The instructor takes full advantage of available interactive, communication, and student engagement technologies. The instructor provides links and connections to resources beyond the online classroom. Course technology is optimized for ease of use and user productivity.

V. Learner Support and Accessibility

Courses are effectively supported for students through fully accessible modes of delivery, resources, and student support. The course meets accessibility standards for interoperability and access for all learners (where appropriate or required).

Standard I: Course Overview, Introduction, Content and Design		
Standard	Suggestions for meeting required standards	H/D Req'd.
The Syllabus is current, easily located, and can be read online or printed by the student.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a PDF version of your syllabus for viewing in the browser window. • Include a copy in your Introductory Folder (module) for your course (i.e. Start Here or Read Me) • Provide a link to your syllabus if you maintain it on your faculty web site 	(H D)
The Syllabus contains a statement that introduces the student to the purpose of the course, its components and expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include your course introduction (i.e. video, audio, chat, etc.) in your course Introductory Folder (i.e. Start Here or Read Me). 	(H D)
The Syllabus includes measurable learning objectives that are appropriately designed for the level of the course and are written in a “conversational voice.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This list of action verbs will help you write “measurable” learning objectives. • Write carefully as you are more than likely not delivering this in person. Consider “additional thoughts” you might have and try to address concerns in advance. • Conversational style provides an easy to read and accessible document. 	(H D)
The Syllabus contains statements addressing academic integrity in an online course, netiquette (Internet etiquette), and issues associated with the use of electronic documents and copyrighted materials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These statements may be copied from the Academy Syllabus Template. • You may want to add additional content here as needed for your particular course. For instance, if you plan to do many online discussions, or you have inexperienced (online) students, you may want to educate them on proper course netiquette. • Review copyright and other university policies for online course materials (provided in Academy Modules) below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Computer and Network Acceptable Use Policy Peer to Peer and Copyright Computer, Network and Information Security Policy and Plan (http://www.clayton.edu/nes/policiesandprocedures) • It is important to be specific and deliberate in your coverage of this content (unless you plan to engage in a discussion online with your students to answer questions and address concerns). 	(H D)

Standard I: Course Overview, Introduction, Content and Design		
Standard	Suggestions for meeting required standards	H/D Req'd.
<p>The Syllabus identifies the policies for required student attendance (if you plan to have any required Face-to-face meetings, testing, etc.).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The difference between Hybrid and Distance online course offerings is primarily the designation of a location. If more than 50% of your course requires students to gather in a specified location, you have a hybrid course. If more than 50% of your course is delivered online, your course is considered a distance course. • There are two designations for distance courses: fully online and partially online. You may still have occasional face-to-face sessions in which students are required to meet at a specific time and location (partially online). These instances must be clearly indicated in your course syllabus or outline and should be noted in Banner. • If you require on campus or proctored testing, you will need to be very clear about these requirements. Students may expect online testing unless told otherwise. • Field work or other learning opportunities that require student participation must be clearly articulated as well. 	(H D)
<p>The Syllabus clearly states minimum student preparation, required prerequisite knowledge in the discipline, and minimum technical skills expected of the student.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since you are delivering your course online, it is important that you be extremely clear and concise about elements of your course that might be affected by prior knowledge and expected technical skills (computer skills) of your students. • You may want to provide hyperlinks to the HUB or other resources where students can assess their skills or get enrichment offerings. http://www.clayton.edu/cid/d2lstudenttraining http://www.clayton.edu/hub/d2l • Check with your department for additional statements and requirements. 	(H D)
<p>The Instructor provides a self-introduction (video, podcast, email, announcement, or other appropriate means) which presents the instructor as approachable and engaged.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing yourself to your students in an online course is important for establishing a relationship with your students. Consider the media that you are most comfortable with and are likely to use in your course to deliver content such as lectures. Video and audio are the best methods as they present you “in person” and allow you to share your passion and interests for the content of the course you are about to teach. 	(D H opt.)

Standard I: Course Overview, Introduction, Content and Design		
Standard	Suggestions for meeting required standards	H/D Req'd.
The Instructor provides carefully planned technology-based learning opportunities and materials to increase student engagement and success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider course resources and materials that stimulate and engage students. Look for ways to increase participation and activity in an online course. You will want to stimulate instructor to student and student to student interaction either through communication or activity. 	(H D)
The Instructor has established an open and non-threatening online environment for communication, a communications policy, and additional opportunities for online community building.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is essential in any online course. The methods often used (chat, forum, phone, email, etc.) are very effective if used consistently. Establishing a routine with a specific method is essential to developing and sustaining student engagement. The first step is to extend yourself to your students and encourage future communications with them. • Establish clear communications policies. Will you have office hours online? How can students contact you? How will you maintain a dialog with your students? How does a student ask a question? How long will it take to receive a response? All of these questions need to be addressed. • You will likely need to be pro-active with some students to get them to participate fully. It is not uncommon for online instructors to set aside time to reach out to students and to encourage them to participate. 	(H D)
The Instructor models professional writing and editing skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since a majority of your online course is text, please make sure you are careful and check your online content before posting (this includes correctly formatted hyperlinks to external resources). 	(H D)
The Instructor provides information regarding performance expectations and participation in online activities (discussions, chats, video conferencing, etc.).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be specific regarding student participation. You may have students who are unclear about procedures or who have never taken an online course before. Also, few instructors share the same expectations. Students may make incorrect assumptions about your course based on previous online course experiences. The more you can articulate what you want, the better. Consider how much information (including possible examples) you want to provide. • You may want to consider using a rubric to evaluate performance and levels of participation for online discussions. • Consider activities in which students are able to peer-evaluate each other. 	(H D)

Standard I: Course Overview, Introduction, Content and Design		
Standard	Suggestions for meeting required standards	H/D Req'd.
The Instructor provides carefully planned technology-based learning opportunities and materials to increase student engagement and success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider course resources and materials that stimulate and engage students. Look for ways to increase participation and activity in an online course. You will want to stimulate instructor to student and student to student interaction either through communication or activity. 	(H D)
The Instructor has established an open and non-threatening online environment for communication, a communications policy, and additional opportunities for online community building.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is essential in any online course. The methods often used (chat, forum, phone, email, etc.) are very effective if used consistently. Establishing a routine with a specific method is essential to developing and sustaining student engagement. The first step is to extend yourself to your students and encourage future communications with them. • Establish clear communications policies. Will you have office hours online? How can students contact you? How will you maintain a dialog with your students? How does a student ask a question? How long will it take to receive a response? All of these questions need to be addressed. • You will likely need to be pro-active with some students to get them to participate fully. It is not uncommon for online instructors to set aside time to reach out to students and to encourage them to participate. 	(H D)
The Instructor models professional writing and editing skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since a majority of your online course is text, please make sure you are careful and check your online content before posting (this includes correctly formatted hyperlinks to external resources). 	(H D)
The Instructor provides information regarding performance expectations and participation in online activities (discussions, chats, video conferencing, etc.).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be specific regarding student participation. You may have students who are unclear about procedures or who have never taken an online course before. Also, few instructors share the same expectations. Students may make incorrect assumptions about your course based on previous online course experiences. The more you can articulate what you want, the better. Consider how much information (including possible examples) you want to provide. • You may want to consider using a rubric to evaluate performance and levels of participation for online discussions. • Consider activities in which students are able to peer-evaluate each other. 	(H D)

Standard I: Course Overview, Introduction, Content and Design		
Standard	Suggestions for meeting required standards	H/D Req'd.
The Instructor provides initial opportunities for students to gain comfort and experience using the Learning Management System.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you know your students have less experience with online courses, consider creating “practice” discussions, assignments, etc., so that they can master the skills for submission. You can provide links to online resources from the HUB, CID or other sites that offer tutorials for the tools you have selected to use in your course. 	(D H opt.)
The Course contains clear and prominent instructions on how to get started, where to find various course components, and where to receive technical assistance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the most successful elements of any online course is the Start Here or Read Me First folder (module) prominently displayed on the course home page. This folder should provide all the necessary information about the course and the course organization, structure and expectations. 	(H D)
The Course contains comprehensive and achievable instructional materials that are divided into manageable sections or chunks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is advisable to create “chunks” of content (i.e., short video and audio, smaller PPT’s, etc.). The smaller chunks of content allow students to consume content without having to block out long periods of time. And, since students may not instinctively block out enough time to study in an online course, this can help them consume the content while at the same time make managing the content easier. 	(D H opt.)
The Course lectures or media-based content contains hyperlinks that are descriptive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using hyperlinks to connect students with online content is a common practice in online courses. To make these links more meaningful, consider embedding them into “text” or adding written descriptions of the link. • Example of an incorrect hyperlink: https://clayton2.view.usg.edu/d2l/lp/homepage/home.d2l?ou=6612 • Example of a correct hyperlink: Course Website 	(D H opt.)
The Course all dates and times are clearly indicated and are prominently displayed. (opt.: uses built-in calendar to list assignments, tests and other important dates.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some tips for making dates and times more prominent in your course include: using color, font, style to add emphasis; using the built-in calendar and news tools as reminders. • Make sure that all dropbox folders and quizzes have the correct due dates. 	(D H opt.)

Standard 2: Learning Objectives and Learner Engagement		
The Course content and materials meet department/school requirements for coverage (breadth and depth).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As with any course, the depth and clarity of the content and materials required to successfully complete the course should meet all university, college and department guidelines. Collaborate with a colleague to ensure that you have met this requirement. 	(H D)
The Course contains clearly stated instructions to students on how to meet the learning objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With an online course, providing written instructions is the norm for communicating important information. A practice common in online courses is to include these instructions in the syllabus and in the directions for the assignment (module level). Desire2Learn includes the option to set goals for an assignment. This is a good place to restate learning objectives. 	(H D)
The Course is comprised of sufficient and appropriate activities and assignments with a reasonable workload.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A common mistake made by "first time" online instructors is to assign too many activities or assignments for the course. Finding the right amount of work, communications and assessment can take some time. • A "best practice" is to offer a mid-term evaluation in which students are able to comment on the course and provide valuable feedback to the instructor. 	(D H opt.)
The Course is designed to facilitate active and self-directed learning and includes authentic activities and real-life tasks that allow students to apply knowledge and skills where appropriate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When choosing assignments, carefully consider the level of interaction the assignment may offer. The best learning opportunities in an online course tend to be those that are interactive and include the instructor and other students. Also, those in which the student actively applies technology to the completion of, or presentation of, the assignment have been shown to increase student involvement with the course. • The fact that your course is offered online requires that a student must actively engage with technology. Carefully consider each assignments potential to take advantage of technology. • It may go without saying, but relating content and assignments to real life experiences, especially through technology enhancements available, helps to build connections and understanding to real world applications and practice. 	(D H opt.)
The Instructor employs strategies to encourage contact between students and instructor, and actively engages students in learning experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for students to co-create knowledge and collaborate. You could assign students to moderate discussions for example. • Students can create knowledge using blogs and wikis. • Provide sufficient opportunities for students to summarize and reflect on what they have learned. 	(D H opt.)

Standard 2: Learning Objectives and Learner Engagement		
The Instructor provides a clear statement of how often students will be required to interact with one another (or the instructor). Indicates expected quality of interactions, and how interactions affect grades.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exemplary online courses always have very clear guidelines for how students are to interact with each other and their instructor, and often have examples that illustrate the expected quality of these interactions. • You may find that doing an introductory discussion is the perfect opportunity to teach students by example. 	(D H opt.)
The Instructor consistently uses forms of communication in the online classroom (chat, email, discussion, etc.) and models effective use of communication tools to accomplish goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency is important, but you can vary your use of tools if needed to increase student engagement. • Remember, these are tools and can be used in a variety of ways. 	(D H opt.)
The Instructor employs innovative teaching methods to enhance student learning and interactively engage students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples include using video to present a lecture, using podcasts or screencasts to present content or engage students individually in directed learning. • You might also find ways to incorporate tools from other sources such as the Internet (web 2.0 tools) or from a textbook supplier/publisher. 	(D H opt.)

Standard 3: Assessment and Measurement		
The Instructor provides assessments that measure stated learning objectives, are appropriate for the online learning environment and encourage academic honesty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While Desire2Learn can grade multiple choice questions, remember that you have other choices. You can use other tools such as Respondus to assist with your testing needs. • You can also take advantage of tools offered online or through your textbook publisher if they offer more flexibility or options. • You can offer proctored testing options as well. Just be sure to inform students as to the procedures, dates and times. • Explore the features of the Desire2Learn assessment tool. D2L offers features such as timed testing, blocking of Internet browsers during testing, security features, timed availability and more. 	(D H opt.)
The Instructor provides assessments that require students to use critical thinking skills to communicate effectively and to demonstrate mastery of course concepts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exemplary online courses often take advantage of varied types of assessments that can include multiple choice, short answer, essay questions and more. Look at D2L's assessment tool to see what options are available. • You might also wish to consider the use of Qualtrics, our online survey tool. This program offers some outstanding testing features that you may want to use. 	(D H opt.)

Standard 3: Assessment and Measurement		
<p>The Instructor provides feedback about student performance promptly throughout the course.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The more often you can provide quality feedback to your students the better. • Post grades quickly or at least once a week. • Respond to student questions quickly, (generally within 24 hours). • Say more! Remember that you are writing your response. We often write considerably less than we might "say" if we were talking to the students about an assignment. Offering a rich and constructive response to your students will be very helpful to them. 	(H D)
<p>The Instructor uses formal and informal student feedback to help with instructional planning throughout the semester.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most instructors use formal feedback. In an online course, the informal feedback can be more rewarding to the student. Dropping a student an email about something they have done, or telling them how much you value their contribution to a discussion is a good way to engage your students. 	(D H opt.)
<p>The Instructor provides self-assessments and peer feedback opportunities in the course.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the value of having students self-assess their work. • Consider the use of the peer feedback and evaluation tools available. 	(D H opt.)
<p>The Instructor offers specific and descriptive commentary for the evaluation of students' work and participation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Again, it is so important to avoid the short and non-descriptive commentary. While it may take longer, you should try to provide specific and descriptive evaluations of all student work. • If writing is not your thing, consider recording your responses and sending the audio files to your students. • There are several tools available that will allow you to grade and comment on a student's work while illustrating your comments with graphic tools. The entire process can be recorded and sent to the student as a small movie or streaming movie file. 	(D H opt.)
<p>The Instructor clarifies when students can expect a response from email, phone or chat inquiries and how they will receive feedback on assignments, grades, and participation (email, discussions, etc.).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will likely be contained in your syllabus, however, restating your policies with an assignment (at the Module level) can help get the message out. 	(D H opt.)

Standard 3: Assessment and Measurement		
<p>The Instructor provides grading policies, performance standards, rubrics, and/or examples of quality assignments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anytime you can provide criteria you will be using to assess your students online is a great opportunity to minimize any confusion that may arise from misunderstanding. • Create rubrics and connect them to assignments, grade book, or the dropbox folder. • Make clear to students the tools you are using, such as “Rubrics” or “Competencies” that are attached to assignments and assessment. • If appropriate and valued, consider posting examples of assignments as an opportunity to further communicate your expectations to students. 	(D H opt.)

Standard 4: Course Technology		
<p>The Instructor demonstrates compliance with TEACH Act (use of copyrighted materials)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cite all use of graphics, video and copyrighted documents. • Annotate resource links • Never use content that is copyright protected without obtaining permission. The CID and the Library Staff can assist you in obtaining or identifying copyrighted materials and permissions. 	(H D)
<p>The Instructor ensures that all graphics, media and documents display properly and do not distract from the learning process. All graphics and scanned resources are readable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small files appear quicker than large files. Whenever possible, use the smallest size (memory) graphic you have. Lower resolution images can be just as effective in most cases at getting the idea across. • When possible, use streaming video and audio. The Center For Instructional Development provides these services and can assist you. • Make sure that all images and links to images and other media are working before your class begins. • If you choose to display a scanned text image, be sure that it is fully legible to the student. 	(H D)
<p>The Instructor uses technology and tools available within the current Learning Management System.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are new to teaching online, allow some time to become familiar with each of the tools that are included in Desire2Learn. • Talk with other online instructors to see what tools they use and how they use them. • Engage the services of the Center For Instructional Development to find out how to use these and other tools to benefit you and your students. • If you do not plan to use a particular tool in Desire2Learn, be sure to disable it by removing it from your navigation bar (NavBar). 	(D H opt.)

Standard 4: Course Technology		
The Instructor offers hyperlinks to software and tools needed for viewing course content (i.e., Adobe Acrobat Reader, Flash, etc.).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you will be using specific software, tools or hardware in your class, be sure to provide the necessary information that a student might need to acquire the tools. • Examples can be seen in the Academy Syllabus Template. • Standard tools that are often required include Adobe Acrobat, Flash, and Quicktime. 	(H D)
The Instructor uses a variety of multimedia elements in the delivery of content (i.e., text, graphics, photos, animation, simulation, video, audio) and as appropriate for conveying subject.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching online means, by definition and practice, that you are using technology to enhance and engage. Look to all forms of media when designing your course. If you can add a picture or link to a web site, do it! If you can find a video, an animation or a simulation, use it! When you can bring content to life, or place it into context using media, you are teaching with technology. 	(D H opt.)
The Instructor selects appropriate online technologies based on an innovative and meaningful approach to online learning and intended student outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your choice of technologies in Desire2Learn or outside of D2L require careful planning and consideration. Any chosen technology must provide a dependable and effective way of enhancing or engaging with the student or content. • Avoid using any technology that appears unreliable or unstable. • Check frequently (at least before each offering of the course) to make sure that your links and other aligned technologies are still working. 	(H D)

Standard 5: Learner Support and Accessibility		
The Syllabus clearly states (or links to) University, ADA, privacy and other policies currently in effect.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These may be copied from the provided Academy Syllabus Template. • Check with your department for additional statements and requirements. 	(H D)
The Course contains web pages and materials that provide equivalent alternatives to auditory and visual content when appropriate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One way to provide these alternatives, when required, is to create a companion script (text document) for all audio resources and too provide alternate (“alt”) text labels for all graphics and video. 	(H D)
The Course contains instructions or a link to institutional technical support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add a link to the HUB and to other services on your homepage. You can out these into a widget and display them anywhere on your page. 	(H D)

Standard 5: Learner Support and Accessibility		
<p>The Instructor provides instructional materials and activities that are adaptable to meet the needs of students with disabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is often accomplished with Desire2Learn, however, you may be asked at some time to provide alternate material for specific needs. If so, please direct the student to the appropriate department/office for special needs. 	(H D)
<p>The Instructor provides instructions that address basic questions related to research, writing, technology, etc., or links to tutorials or other resources that provide this information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This content can be a part of your syllabus or can be a separate “folder” in your course (preferably accessible from the home page). Providing tutorials, or links to tutorials can be a great way to assist students in being successful. Many instructors have created their own tutorials, or procedural screencasts for their courses. • Having information about the technologies being used in your course, and providing links to the HUB and any other online resources will meet this requirement. 	(H D)
<p>The Instructor is flexible and reasonable dealing with technology issues out of control of the instructor or student.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Murphy’s Law: If the technology can fail during your class when you cannot do anything about it and do not have a back up plan...then it will. The lesson here is to remain calm and as flexible as possible and to have some type of backup plan. • You can include a brief statement in your syllabus or with any technology-dependent assignment as to what you are willing to do if there is a problem. 	(H D)