MARITIME COLLEGE | CENTER FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Online Course Essentials Policy Guide

Introduction

The **Center for Teaching Excellence's** goal is to partner with faculty to develop high quality online and hybrid learning experiences for online students. This document provides information about the research-based standards used to design online and hybrid courses. All new and redeveloped courses are expected to meet "essential" standards and are strongly encouraged to meet "exemplary" standards. Every aspect of an online course is represented in terms of an "essential" standard as well as "exemplary". The CTE Instructional Designer/Ed Technologist, trained as a QM peer reviewer, will support and partner with faculty to ensure standards are met in course reviews.

This **Online Course Essentials Policy Guide** reflects pedagogical frameworks which drives Quality Matters (QM) standards and recommendations of online course design. QM is research based and the foundation for the **Open SUNY Course Quality Review (OSCQR) Rubric,** designed to support Instructional designers and online instructors in a collaborative effort towards quality online learning experiences. The future goal of the Online Subcommittee is to create a committee of QM peer-review trained faculty and staff to conduct periodic online course reviews.

This **Online Course Essentials Policy Guide** is the foundation of a growing online program and is not intended to be an exhaustive guide or list, but the first of many policies to go before the Academic Council. Future Online sub-committee endeavors will be the implementation of the following:

- Online Tutoring services (Policies and/or software)
- Online Library services (Policies and/or software)
- Faculty Intranet access to important online documents (i.e.: OSCQR rubrics and other curriculum docs)
- Testing and proctoring procedures (either in-person and/or via software); and the identification of a campus testing coordinator.
- Policies for an Online Course Review Committee including QM peer review training and the identification of committee members.

Course Introduction and Navigation

A clear introduction to the course and logical, student-centered navigation help students find what they need, reducing frustration. These elements help students avoid missing important instructions or assignments.

Essential
Course is structured into intuitive sections (Modules) with all materials for each section housed with that section (as opposed to lengthy menus or a mass collection of files without a discernible organization). The course is organized with student-centered navigation, and it is clear to students how to get started in the course. Each Module folder contains the following elements or as required by specific learning objectives: ☐ Learning activities for module (by week and/or as dictated by content) ☐ Readings /Resources ☐ Discussion Board links ☐ Assignment links ☐ Online Test / Quiz links (if Applicable)
All SUNY Maritime College (SMC)-required syllabus information is present, including instructor's name, SMC email address, contact information, grading policies, and learning outcomes. Course descriptions match the SMC catalog verbatim, and learning outcomes for online and hybrid sections are the same as for the same course in other modalities.
In addition to SMC-required syllabus information, the syllabus for the online or hybrid section addresses information necessary for online students, including how to access technical support, netiquette expectations for the course, how to contact the instructor, and the following statement about instructor response time for questions and assignment feedback: **Response times: Students can expect responses to questions within 24 hours during the work week and graded assignments with feedback within five-seven business days. If I need to deviate from this schedule, I will inform the class.**
A course schedule with due dates is provided in the syllabus or as a separate document.
Exemplary
An introduction video providing an introduction to the instructor and/or course is available.

Learning Outcomes and Alignment

An SMC course is an SMC course, regardless of the modality in which it is taught. Learning outcomes are the roadmap for the course. Clear, measurable outcomes tell us exactly what should be covered and at which depth. Modular learning outcomes help students understand how daily coursework relates to course outcomes. The SMC Curriculum Committee approves course titles, descriptions, and learning outcomes for each course through a rigorous curricular review process.

Essential
Online and hybrid courses meet the same course learning outcomes as sections taught in other modalities.
Learning outcomes are measurable and observable (avoiding ambiguous verbs such as "understand" or "comprehend") and uses Bloom's Taxonomy action verbs.
Assessments (assignments, exams, projects, discussions, etc.) are aligned with course and Module outcomes in content, and cognitive level.
Exemplary
In addition to course level outcomes, weekly and /or Module-level outcomes are provided.

Assessment and Feedback

Clear expectations help students succeed. Assessments should be aligned with outcomes to ensure that outcomes are being met. Using a 'grade early, grade often' approach helps students monitor progress and know if they are on track for success.

Essential
Instructor feedback on most assessments (assignments, exams, projects) are provided to the student for optimal learning either in a rubric form or in grading center comments.
Grading policies are stated clearly (such as listing grading criteria and supplying rubrics).
Exemplary
Assessments are varied, including formative and summative assessments.

Instructional Materials

Materials for online and hybrid classes should be created for the audience of online and hybrid students. Online students feel at a disadvantage when they are merely given recordings of on-campus activities or lectures. Instructional materials should prepare students for assessments. Research shows that using best practices for presenting instructional materials helps students learn more effectively (for example, using active learning strategies, where students perform meaningful actions involving course content and then reflect on learning).

Essential
Instructional materials are in alignment with the course and weekly outcomes.
Instructional materials drawn from other sources have been through a fair use assessment, and copyright permissions have been requested for any items deemed not to fall under fair use guidelines. (Instructional faculty provide source information for non-original content; The CTE assists with fair use assessment and permissions requests.)
All multimedia is designed and produced for an audience of online and hybrid students (this can include recorded in class lectures).
Audio and visual quality must be clear for all multimedia.
Exemplary
Instructional materials are appropriately cited.
Instructional materials appeal to a variety of learning preferences (readings, audio, visual, multimedia, etc.).
Lecture content is brief and integrated into course learning activities, such as with interactive components, discussion questions, or quiz questions. (Longer lectures should be shortened to less than 20 min. chunks.)
Lectures are not required; it is fine to use existing materials such as links to open education resources, readings, activities, etc.
Weekly introductions to weekly content are provided.

Interaction and Engagement

Research shows that active learning opportunities, as well as the three forms of interaction, are effective in online and hybrid classes and for adult students. Response times help create a structure for interaction.

Essential
Learning activities are aligned with course and weekly learning outcomes.
Three forms of interaction are present, in some form, in the course: • Student/content (such as discussion boards, readings, video, research projects) • Student/instructor (such as discussion boards, response to assignments, inclusion of a Q&A forum the instructor will facilitate, including an "Ask the Professor" forum embedded in Modules section of course. • Student/student (such as discussion boards, group projects, peer-reviewed assignments) including a "Student Café" forum embedded in Modules Section of course. *In hybrid courses, the three forms of interaction are present in both the classroom and online elements of the course. Additionally, the course design integrates classroom and online learning through the ways that classroom and online elements are sequenced and explicitly linked to one another. For instance, a weekly discussion that begins online may be continued in the classroom, or an online reading may be the basis of group problem solving in a subsequent class session.*
Exemplary
Opportunities for active learning (meaningful action + reflection) are provided. *In hybrid courses, active learning opportunities are provided both face-to-face and online.*
Multimedia has been used to address the course's main concepts, to help students master especially challenging concepts, and to effectively communicate concepts that are best conveyed in multimedia format (i.e. Zoom Web Conferencing, Articulate, Interactive PowerPoints).

Course Technology

Using educational technology appropriately is an important aspect of designing and facilitating effective online courses. Reliability, security, record keeping requirements, FERPA and accessibility compliance are all important and complex concerns. Maritime College presently uses the Blackboard learning management system; all online courses are delivered through Blackboard. When external educational technologies are used, integration with Blackboard provides improved usability for online and hybrid students. Additionally, providing privacy policies for outside tools helps students understand and manage their privacy in online spaces.

Essential
Appropriate tools are used for their intended purposes (e.g., using the assignment tool linked to Grade Center for Assignments rather than having students submitting via email.)
Assignments and student progress are tracked through Blackboard. Grades are communicated to students through Blackboard's Grade Center. This enables students to self-assess their progress.
Tools outside of Blackboard are used in ways that comply with FERPA regulations.
Links to outside resources are functional.
Student completion of work through tools used outside of Blackboard is logged within Blackboard Grade Center.
Exemplary
If outside tools are used, they are integrated into Grade Center, when possible, so students have a single point of access.
Privacy policy for any tools used outside of Blackboard is provided.

Learner Support

Sometimes students do not realize they have access to learner support services if they are far from campus. Also, access to student services sometimes differs for campus and online students. Online student fees provide access to Online-specific student services such as Online or off-hours tutors. Some student services, such as disability access services, are required by law. Providing learner support information within online and hybrid courses ensures that students have ready access to support when they need it.

Essential
Information about learner support is provided, such as in the Welcome- Orientation menu section in the Blackboard course development shell or template, which includes a link to Student Services Contacts and information. Access to online library resources such as Interlibrary loans, e-reserves and research search engines.
Exemplary
Lib guides are embedded in Blackboard course shells, when appropriate. And access to communication availability of a librarian via online chat, phone and /or web-conferencing.

Accessibility

Providing accessible content is required by law. Using a universal learning design (ULD) approach during course development is better for students, is more inclusive for diverse learners, and is more efficient than retrofitting a non-accessible course.

Essential
Course content is posted in accessible format (such as a PDF file with document tags, alt-text provided for images, captions or transcripts for narrated lectures, and PowerPoint presentations with sufficient contrast between the background and text.)
Blackboard Modules and downloadable documents are structured in an accessible format (such as using heading styles, in bulleted or paragraph form, providing a visual balance of white space, text and or graphics for ease of reading and visual appeal.
Exemplary
Black, Arial or Sanserif fonts are used. Underlined text (not to be confused with hyperlinks) is used sparingly.
All video content is captioned (not just transcripts).

Academic Integrity

The design of online and hybrid courses can help deter academic integrity violations.

Essential
If proctored exams are desired, proctoring requirements are established with the testing coordinator and communicated in the syllabus. *For hybrid courses, this refers to proctored online exams.*
For exams with multiple choice/short answer questions, questions and/or answers are randomized to help guard against academic integrity violations.
Exams delivered without proctoring are available during specific timeframes (e.g., over a 3-day period including one weekend day) and are time-limited to help guard against academic integrity violations.
Question pools are used, or exams are updated each time a course is offered.
Exemplary
Written assessments such as essays and research papers require multiple steps that incorporate peer, tutor and/or instructor feedback (e.g., multiple drafts, or a proposal or outline as a first step before drafting).
Written assessments such as essays and research papers require students to use plagiarism prevention software to self-check work for originality and possible plagiarism (Turnitin).