

Guidelines for Quality Online Instruction

Introduction

These guidelines are designed to assist the instructors of State Technical College of Missouri (State Tech) plan, develop, and teach web assisted and web-based courses and programs. To ensure quality education is taking place at State Tech, this guide provides a basic overview for effective online education.

Online instruction should maintain standards and encourage academic integrity equal to courses offered in the traditional classroom-based environment. As with any course, planning is essential to ensure success. The following four areas have been identified as essential components to developing and teaching an effective online course.

1. Course Development: What essential elements must be considered and in place before setting up the course in Moodle?
2. Course Structure: How should the course be set up to ensure content is presented clearly and students understand the expectations of the course?
3. Teaching/Learning: How can the various instructional tools be used to ensure the teaching and learning environment is effective in meeting course objectives?
4. Support: What support is available to instructors and students when problems arise?

This is meant to be a general guide. Specifics and details regarding content and the best delivery method for that content will change depending on the discipline using online instruction and the course(s) being taught.

Course Development

1. Development & Design
 - The course is organized into units, sections, or lessons. Course organization should be the same between the Learning Management System (Moodle) and the course syllabus “Plan of Instruction”.
 - The instructor will control the pace of the class and control when resources and lessons become available.
 - The course incorporates multiple instruction methods to meet the course objectives.
 - Instructor lecture notes and documents
 - PowerPoints (with or without lecture)
 - Desktop Recordings (Panopto)
 - Discussion Board, chat, course Wikis, blogs, journals, or other methods of student collaboration (Moodle or other online interaction tools)

- Active links to other informative and relevant web sites
- Textbook based assignments
- Web based assignments
- Links to sample documents
- Other presentational or instructional software compatible with Moodle
- If the individual course or instructor requires more specific or expanded guidelines, these will be posted along with the general expectations and requirements, and students should be directed to them at the beginning of class.

2. Delivery

- Multiple methods of delivering course materials are developed and determined prior to the course's begin date. **These methods could include, but are not limited to, the following:**
 - Instructor lecture notes and documents
 - PowerPoints (with or without lecture)
 - Desktop Recordings (Panopto)
 - Discussion Board, chat, course Wikis, blogs, journals, or other methods of student collaboration (Moodle or other online interaction tools)
 - Active links to other informative and relevant web sites
 - Textbook based assignments
 - Web based assignments
 - Links to sample documents
 - Other presentational or instructional software compatible with Moodle
- Instructors should delivery short video lectures in sessions of less than 15 minutes in length.
- Instructors are encouraged to incorporate other online learning environments that will enhance the delivery of course content.

3. Academic Content

- The course content is of sufficient rigor and depth to support the objectives of the course. Assignments, exams, and activities relate back to course objectives.
- The course instruction engages students in a combination of passive, active, and collaborative learning. (Note: Student/instructor engagement needs to be more than just passive reading of chapters.)
 - Passive= Reading and listening.
 - Active= Discussion, activities, and written exercises.
 - Collaborative= Group interaction while learning or applying course materials.

- Students engage in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation while participating in course units or lessons. (Note: Students engagement in the course units or lessons are required.)
 - Analysis= Students can take new information and can break it into parts and differentiate between the separate units.
 - Synthesis= Students can take separate pieces of information and combine the pieces into a single, coherent whole.
 - Evaluation= Students can examine another’s work and recognize the value of the conclusion or result.

Course Structure

1. Student Evaluation

- Multiple student evaluation tools are developed and determined prior to the course’s begin date. **These methods could include, but are not limited to, the following:**
 - Quizzes are used for a quick understanding of a topic or section.
 - Exams are used for a depth of understanding of a topic or section.
- Student evaluation feedback through point totals and evaluation methods are clear. Student need to be provided the criteria that will be used for grading and the points associated with each piece of criteria.

2. Course Documentation

- A clear and complete course plan of instruction and syllabus are included in the course. Students are directed to the syllabus at the beginning of the class and questions regarding the syllabus are encouraged.
- Course deadlines need to be outlined in the syllabus “Plan of Instruction”.
- A clear and complete grade distribution needs to be outlined in the syllabus.
- Course time restrictions need to be clear and complete in the course documentation.

3. Student Resources

- Students have access to a course textbook or online text.
- Students have access to, and can effectively use, appropriate library resources. Resources could be electronic or traditional community and educational libraries.

Teaching/Learning

1. Student must interact with other students within the class to provide discussion opportunities, as if it were face-to-face instruction.

- Multiple methods of student interaction could include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - Discussion Board, chat, course Wikis, blogs, journals, or other methods of student collaboration (Moodle or other online interaction tools)
 - Group assignment are provided for active problem solving through teamwork.
2. Student must interact with instructor(s) for the course to provide discussion opportunities and/or clarity, as if it were face-to-face instruction.
- Students have a clear, pre-determined way to interact with the instructor. Students should be informed at the beginning of class of how communication will take place and should be encouraged to monitor this method carefully throughout the course.
 - Questions are answered in a timely, pre-determined manner. Twenty-four hours is a reasonable time frame for students to expect a response.
 - Students are made aware of how questions will be handled.
 - Students are aware of how questions submitted outside of a standard work week will be handled. The instructor's definition of timely may change if a question is submitted during evening hours, on a weekend, during a holiday, or over a scheduled break in the semester.
 - In the absence of a traditional lecture format, the importance of the textbook or other text resource(s) is stressed throughout the course.
3. Feedback to Students
- Assignments
 - Feedback is provided to students in a timely, pre-determined manner. Instructor notifies students if time frames change or if the instructor will be unavailable for some period during the semester.
 - Feedback on assignments provides detailed critique as well as positive recognition of good work and suggestions for improvement. (Good Job, Job Well Done, Needs Work, etc. are not allowed.)
4. Instruction
- Assignments
 - i. Assignments are directly related to the course objectives.
 - ii. Due dates and manner of submission are clear.
 - As in the classroom, quality assessment uses a variety of testing methods. The integrity of an assessment in an online setting are kept by incorporating a time limitation, secure window, shuffle feature for questions, and a shuffle feature for answers. The number of assessment attempts can also be limited.
 - Multiple Choice – Measures mastery of details and specific knowledge.

- Matching – Measures recognition of relationships.
- Short Essay- Measures ability to organize, interpret, and express ideas or concepts.
- Problem Sets- More effective in testing mathematic skill or scientific knowledge.
- Demonstration- Measures proficiency in performing a task, following instructions, or using equipment. This method may require students to visit campus for a live demonstration or require students to video the demonstration and submit digitally. The latter would require some level of proficiency in the use and submission of digital video.
- Discussion Boards (Classroom Interaction)
 - Discussion questions are relevant to the course and parallel traditional classroom discussions as much as possible.
 - Instructors monitor discussion boards and are prepared to comment as well and keep discussion focused on topic.
- External Links (Classroom Instructional Method)
 - Verify web links used for instruction remain active.
 - Verify web links still contain content relevant to the course objectives.
 - Examples: textbook based assignment or course instruction materials.

Support

1. Faculty

- Faculty has convenient access to technical support for the duration of the course.
- Policies are set to address technical problems experienced by the student when they are unrelated to State Tech's technology.
- Instructors have had basic training in the use of the college's Course Management System (Moodle) including gradebook, job readiness, and attendance. Online instructional training should include testing, assignments, discussion boards, uploading documents, and incorporating links to web sites.

2. Student

- Students are informed of the expectations and requirements for online students. These will help determine:
 - If they possess the self-motivation and commitment to learn in the online environment.
 - If they have access to the minimal technology required by the course.
 - If they have acceptable reading comprehension skills.

- A copy of the Expectations and Requirements for Online Students will be included on the Learning Management System (Moodle) class page along with the class syllabus. **Instructors** should direct students to review the expectations and requirements at the beginning of class.
- Students are provided with detailed instructions on how to acquire technical support when experiencing problems accessing STC's Course Management System.
- Students receive introduction to using Moodle and using student email system prior to enrolling in an online course.

Basic online course checklist:

- Online Gradebook
- Online Assignments
- Online Lectures (voice over or recorded video preferred, PPTs minimally).
- The ability to submit assignments electronically
- The ability to grade assignments electronically
- Online message board for students to interact

State Technical College of Missouri supports the effective and meaningful use of technology as a means to educate students and to prepare them “for profitable employment and a life of learning.” These guidelines are meant to provide a beginning point to ensure quality online instruction. They are meant to enhance the academic integrity of State Tech’s online course offerings and also meet the Coordinating Board for Higher Education’s Principles of Good Practice for Distance Learning/Web Based Courses.

(This guide is intended for internal use only and is not intended for publication.)

Resources

Coordinating Board for Higher Education. (2010, February). *Tab g – Distance education policy update*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.dhe.mo.gov/boardbook/bb_021110_tabg.html> [2010, September 9]

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