Online Course Standards

Designing a course that is mostly or entirely online presents a number of challenges that you don’t encounter in the classroom. Many of these challenges have little to do with course content; they are technical or related to the design of course materials. Since online students cannot easily turn to their neighbor for help, they can easily get frustrated as they take time to focus issues unrelated to the course. Ultimately, this can have an effect on how well they do in your course.

The sections in this document standards and suggestions dealing with different aspects of online learning that are drawn from many years’ experience. While we haven’t thought of everything or addressed every issue, this information can help you avoid some common problems that keep your students from succeeding.

Also included in this document is information about the services that CASIT Online Education is committed to providing to support your classes. If you have any questions, or can’t find information about a particular issue, please contact us.

Course Website Standards

1. Consistent layout and design orients users throughout course websites.
2. Font type, size, and colors are readable and consistent throughout websites. See Technical Standards at the end of this document for more info.
3. Audio/Video hardware requirements for the student do not extend beyond the basic sound cards, speakers, and video players unless appropriately needed to meet course goals and objectives. If specific requirements are needed, the requirements will be clearly identified and made available to the students in the course description.
4. Audio files meet minimum standards in the following areas: 1) audio is clear; 2) audio file length is adequate to meet the goals of the activity without being too large to restrict users’ ability to download the file on computers with lower bandwidths. See Technical Standards at the end of this document for more info.
5. Navigation aids are located in the same repeated locations and are consistent across the course sites.
6. Navigation cues are present, clearly identifiable, offered in text, and are obvious links based on visual cues such as color, underlining, and text use directives.
7. Course sites have no broken links, and internal functionality is fully operational at the beginning of the course each term the course is taught.
8. Links open in appropriate windows.
9. Images are clear, image files are optimized for efficient delivery to the student. See Technical Standards at the end of this document for more info.
10. Scrolling is minimized or facilitated with named anchors. These are links to particular sections of a long web pages.
11. Minimal use of pop-up windows (windows with specific information, no scroll bars, and no menus) is appropriate with clearly discernible “close window” button.
12. Windows open in appropriate frames that do not confuse users. The use of additional frames, other than those within the content management system, is to be avoided.
13. Course content will be kept current each term the course is taught.
14. Use of technology in the course is appropriate to the course pedagogy.
15. The course feedback form link will be available from each page of a course website.

Course Evaluation Standards

1. Data is collected on costs, enrollment, and use of available technology to assess the course.
2. The course meets or exceeds UO academic standards.
3. The Instructor is evaluated according to UO/CAS policy.
4. Student evaluations, website organization, documentation update frequency, data collected about the course, and instructor performance are used to assess program effectiveness.

Faculty Support

1. Technical assistance will be readily available to the instructor via CASIT.
2. Instructors will be encouraged to participate in an Online Education course preparation seminar, a workshop conducted by CASIT, or one on one with the CASIT Online Instructional Technologist.
3. Peer mentoring will be available to DE faculty.
4. Infrastructure will be in place to deliver the course in a safe, secure and reliable manner.

Student Support

1. Admission requirements, hardware and software requirements, fees, required materials including books and other supplies will be made available before the course sign-up process has been completed.
2. Students will have access to a demo site of a course before the sign-up process is complete, including a demo of a testing or assessment environment.
3. Minimum course competencies are made available to the student prior to the course sign-up process completion.
4. Students will be made aware of proctoring policies prior to the course beginning.
5. Students will receive course instruction and materials in a timely manner two weeks before the course begins.
6. Students will have access to technical assistance throughout the duration of the course from CASIT.
7. Students will receive answers to email communication within 2 working days, feedback from exams within 7 working days and replies to phone calls with one working day.
8. Students will have a uniform and structured system to address complaints and concerns.
9. Courses will all share the same proctoring policies.
10. Students must accept they will adhere to the UO Student Conduct Code before beginning the course.
11. Processes and technology will be in place to ensure student privacy in-line with existing FERPA laws.
12. Students will have instructions on how to obtain copies of their work electronically.
Instructional Standards

Teaching

1. Students are given course requirements in advance; equipment, hardware, software, and a “techniques for success” section are clearly spelled out in the course description.
2. Course specific documentation is clearly visible on the course website (how to submit assignments, communication, etc.)
3. Examinations are related and relevant to given course materials and readings.
4. Students are strongly encouraged to participate in regular, frequent interactions between other students, and with the instructor – therefore creating active learners.
5. Students are encouraged to create and apply course information, followed by sharing new ideas and knowledge with other students in the course.
6. Students will receive regular constructive feedback in a timely manner by responding to email within 2 working days, and will communicate exam results within 7 working days.
7. Course will be built around active learning and allow students the opportunity to engage with peers in activities and assignments furthering the knowledge and understanding of course material.

Preparing a Course for Delivery

1. Faculty must ensure they have the commitment to teaching online.
2. Faculty must get department approval to teach an online course.
3. Faculty must be familiar with software that will be used to deliver the course. An online course seminar or one-on-one instruction is available to faculty through CASIT.
4. Faculty will post class policy and a general course outline for course structure prior to the first week of course delivery.
5. The course should be modularized (one topic per week or two week period).
6. Each module can contain Web-based and lecture materials, collaborative assignments, student assessment activities, and questions for discussion or response. Included will be a communications component, such as threaded discussions, chats, whiteboard, or other online meeting place.
7. Faculty will select multimedia that supports the goals and objectives of the course.
8. Faculty must comply with copyright laws and encourage the same from their students.
9. Instructors are encouraged to consider having an online tutor available for students with needs. A request for a tutor should be addressed to the Teaching and Learning Center.
10. Faculty must consider ADA requirements for online accessibility when designing the course. For example, alternative text information for graphics and images must be included in the website design. Backgrounds need to have contrast and clarity.
11. CASIT will provide course design, training, and support to interested instructors.

Conducting a Course

1. Faculty should exhibit patience with students for the duration of the course, but especially in the beginning of the semester as students get acclimated to the online environment.
2. Faculty will notify students within 7 days of their new grades through an online grade book. A student must authenticate with DuckID to view the grade book.
3. Faculty should consider providing models or student samples of the expected quality of work at the beginning of the course.
4. Faculty will design assignments that allow for group collaboration and cooperative learning, like threaded discussions, group projects or team problem solving.
5. The instructor will regularly monitor group collaboration activities and discussions.
6. Faculty will keep a record of student work (eg. a copy of the grade book) for at least one year after the course is complete.

Evaluating and Improving the Course, Faculty should:

1. Encourage students to fill out the online evaluation form and the end of the course.
2. Be committed to review comments on evaluations and make appropriate changes to the course as necessary.
3. Discuss online evaluations with a department representative.
4. Attend Online Education training offered on campus to constantly update skills and the course site.
5. Revise and improve the course content including assessment question pool annually.

Student Assessment

1. Instructors will use CAS-approved course assessment forms and software.
2. Students will be given the opportunity to experience a “demo” of the testing environment within the first week of the course.
3. Students have an ongoing opportunity to give feedback on the website, the instructor’s performance, and the assessment process.
4. Students are evaluated on materials available to the students from the beginning of the course.
5. Course assessment questions made into a pool of questions will be refreshed annually. The oldest question in a test pool should be no older than two years.
6. CASIT recommends students take proctored exams. Quizzes can be taken without a proctor.
7. Proctors must be pre-approved and a part of the course sign-up process.

*Any proposals to use alternatives to SSIL proctored exams will have to be evaluated by SSIL staff, vetted by the CAS Curriculum Committee, and get final approval from the Dean. We also understand that some courses may have substantial written assignments in lieu of exams for pedagogical reasons. In these cases, we will want instructors to coordinate with CASIT and SSIL staff to use anti-plagiarism software to evaluate these major assignments. To be clear, we are not requiring that every single assignment in an online course undergo a rigorous ID verification. Quizzes, homework assignments, and other exercises that each comprise a small portion of a person’s grade can be exempt. However, we expect that exams and major written assignments compose the majority of the grade in a course and will be subject to these ID verification procedures.
Technical Design Standards

Audio File Format

The .mp3 format is one of the best to use since files are small compared to other formats and they can be played on most devices. If you are recording your own audio for the class (e.g. for a screencast), we have a laptop you can check out and access to a sound booth where you can make high quality recordings.

Color Blind Design

Can you see the numbers in all of the circles? If you can you're lucky. Approximately 8% of the population is color blind and may see some, or none of these numbers. Keep this in mind if you are using color to differentiate design elements.

Unfortunately, there are no set rules for color blind web design, but you’re relatively safe if you use any of the more popular color palettes found on the Adobe® Kuler website.

Image File Format

In order to ensure file sizes are easy to download and will display on most devices and browsers, use formats that are designed for the web. The three most popular image formats have different uses:

- .jpg – best for images with lots of colors, text can be blurry (larger size)
- .gif – best for simple images with few colors, charts, icons, and images with text (smaller size)
- .png – can represent more colors than .gif, but files are much larger.

Note that each of these files has different options that can have a dramatic impact on file size. Experiment with different formats/options and find out which works best for your needs. It will vary based on the image.