

Running head: ONLINE WEB COURSE DESIGN AND DELIVERY STANDARDS

Online University Web Course Design and Delivery Standards

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Online University Web Course Design and Delivery Standards

Dick, Carey, and Carey (2005) outline a process of designing instruction. Their text is based on the premise of knowing the required skills and knowledge before beginning instruction (p. 39). By developing a job aid for outlining the requirements of a course, instructors reduce the need to recall information about delivery, thereby minimizing error (Stolovitch & Keeps, 1999). Developing delivery standards helps make sure instructors know how to prepare instruction, students are able to receive the instruction, and students are aware of course expectations.

Overview

The following proposed quality standards for the Online University (OU) have been developed by the Distance Learning (DL) committee of OU in collaboration with faculty, existing published standards, and international educational guidelines. The standards are grouped by relevant areas to make them as user friendly as possible.

List of Quality Standards

A. Technical Standards

A.1. All online courses must comply with the ADA specifications for people with disabilities (see <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/websites2.htm> for specific details).

A.1.1. This would include such standards as page color, font type, alt-text, etc.

A.2. All courses should follow web content standards as specified by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) (see <http://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/wcag20.php> for specific details).

A.2.1. Content must be perceivable

A.2.2. Interface elements in the content must be operable

A.2.3 Content and controls must be understandable, etc.

A.3. All students must be aware of minimum and suggested technology requirements for the course. This would include any hardware, software, and any other required resources.

A.3.1. Minimum Browser Required (Internet Explorer, Firefox)

A.3.2. Identification of Required Connection Speed

A.3.3. Identification of Audio and Video Capabilities

A.3.4. Identification of Required Browser Plug-ins

A.3.5. Identification of Software Requirements

A.3.6. Identification of Operating System

A.3.7. Identification of Hardware Requirements

A.4. Required minimum proficiency of course audience

A.4.1. Basic Internet Skills Needed

A.4.2. Advanced Internet Skills Needed

A.4.3. Basic Software Skills Needed

A.4.3.1. Identify Email Skills Required

A.4.3.2. Identify Word Processing and other application software skills needed

A.4.4. Hardware Usability Skills Needed.

A.4.4.1. Ability to Operate a Mouse or Other Pointing Device

A.4.4.2. Minimum Keyboard Skills Needed

A.5. Technical Functionality

A.5.1. Hyperlink Errors

A.5.2. Coding/Programming Errors

A.5.3. Other Errors (Server, Image, etc.)

A.5.3. Procedure for Identifying and Reporting Errors

B. Course Content and Syllabus Standards

B.1. All courses must include a syllabus that adheres to university guidelines

B.1.1. Syllabus must include all mandated OU information.

B.1.1.1. Emergency numbers.

B.1.1.2. Web address in case of inclement weather

B.1.1.3. Student services contact information

B.1.2. Clearly defined course description consistent with course catalog

B.1.3. Instructor name and contact information

B.1.3.1. Office location

B.1.3.2. Office hours (virtual and physical)

B.1.3.3. Office phone

B.1.3.4. Instructor URL, etc

B.1.4. Any meetings times and locations if needed (online or physical).

B.1.5. Clearly listed final course objectives

B.1.6. Course prerequisite knowledge (course numbers, etc.)

B.1.7. Listing of required materials (text, software, etc.)

B.1.8. Assignments and assignment submission

B.1.9. Clear grading criteria to include grading scale, percentages, etc.

B.1.10. A calendar that includes a listing of university start/stop dates, holidays, special events, and a tentative listing of course assignments and tests.

B.1.11. Topics of study to coincide with course objectives

B.2. Requirements for successful completion of the course

B.3. Standard university guidelines on student behavior and standards of conduct

B.4. Help instructions on using the online course tools (WebCT, Blackboard, Email, FTP, etc.).

C. Pedagogical Standards

C.1. Course materials are to be logically organized adhering to accepted OU standards.

C.2. All course materials are to be in an easy to read format and posted in an acceptable format (Word, PPT, HTML, etc.).

C.3. Students will be provided with clearly defined course assignments that complement the course instructional material.

C.4. Course assignments are to promote dynamic student to student and student to teacher interaction.

C.5. Examinations are to be consistent with accepted testing standards as outlined in the OU pedagogy guide.

C.5.1. For purely online courses students should be able to take all exams in a distance format.

C.6. Course instruction and assignments should be done to appeal to a wide variety of learning styles (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor).

D. Pre-Course Standards

D.1. Students are to receive a welcome letter with pertinent course information prior to start of course.

D.2. Login name and password are to be provided by the first day of class via email.

D.2.1. Login names and passwords are to be consistent with OU naming guidelines.

D.2.2. Passwords are to include characters and numbers and one symbol.

D.2.3. Passwords are to be changeable by the student upon successful first login.

D.3. Students are to be clearly aware of course requirements and level of work expected to be successful in the course.

E. Communication Standards

E.1. Instructor is to provide regular and consistent communication with students

E.2. Required level of interaction by students in the course

E.2.1. Number of posts to online discussion board

E.2.2. Other required interactions between instructor and students

E.3. Other acceptable forms of communication with instructor and students

E.4. Instructor and student reply parameters to questions and discussions

E.5. In case of emergency contact information

E.6. Specific ways to communicate with instructor over course issues.

E.7. Communication from instructor to student on assignment and examination feedback

The quality standards will be applied to any faculty member teaching a distance education course. This will include purely online web based courses, mixed-mode courses (part online and face-to-face), and any other course that utilizes distance education technologies.

Like Northeastern State University in Oklahoma, we are recommending a total quality management (TQM) plan for distance learning programs and courses. This includes complete

quality-measuring rubrics, and application forms. The following is a list of how our TQM plan will be implemented to ensure that the quality standards are properly measured.

One method of encouraging adherence to the standards is to tie compensation to following the standards. Faculty who successfully implement the standards will have the ability to increase their compensation level for the given course. This could include such factors as a 10% increase for a given course where the faculty member clearly demonstrates how the standards have been implemented, and through peer-review and evaluation. Funding course development that adheres to the quality standards will also be funded at a higher rate. Furthermore, early adopters of the quality standards at the university will be appropriately awarded (the DE committee will determine an appropriate compensation formula).

Student evaluations and perception of instruction forms will be closely analyzed to determine if the standards are being met by the faculty members, and to what degree they are being met. The evaluation forms for distance courses will include questions and statements that are directly tied to the quality standards that are not covered in face-to-face courses.

For example, videoconference course development can be linked to a certification program offered by the university. UCF does this by requiring that DE instructors complete a course on how to teach online courses using WebCT. This helps to insure that the quality standards adopted by the school are passed on to the faculty member and makes sure that the faculty member has a minimum level of expertise using the required DE tools. Faculty will need to make sure that they are able to operate the necessary equipment for different types of courses, such as a videoconference course, or course requiring videotaping of the course lectures (like UCF's FEEDS program). This could also include such things as making sure that course web sites are Section 508 compliant as specified by the federal government. Faculty members will

have the opportunity to attend training courses beyond the minimum DE required course that encourages the quality standards and also places the standards in a continuous quality evaluation loop (faculty will be rewarded for making recommendations for updating and improving them).

An online course development instrument will be used to evaluate adherence to the quality standards. It will be comprised of a Likert scale with the following measures: Does Not Meet Criteria, Partially Meets Criteria, or Meets Criteria. Course design will be the primary measurement of this instrument. The DE committee at OU has developed the following criteria for determining objectives to be evaluated. They are:

1. The learning experiences have a clear purpose with well-defined objectives and outcomes.
2. Well-designed discussion and cooperative assignments are incorporated to facilitate collaborative learning among students.
3. The learner is actively engaged.
4. The course goes beyond knowledge transmission to knowledge creation and critical thinking.
5. The learning environment makes appropriate use of a variety of media.
6. There are clear mechanisms and guidelines for interaction between the student and the instructor.
7. The course emphasizes time on task.
8. Prompt feedback is provided.
9. Effective procedures are in place for acquiring access to appropriate resources to support the course.
10. The course respects diversity, varied talents, and different learning styles.

Faculty members developing DE courses will be made aware of these evaluation criteria as they begin the development process. The DE committee at OU will evaluate 8-10 courses this coming year to see how well they adhere to the standards. Volunteer faculty members will be sought for this part of the evaluation process, but if not enough volunteer then random courses will be reviewed from different departments and programs. Members of the DE committee will be responsible for the evaluations along with other faculty members from the program area of the DE course being evaluated.

Dropout rates in DE courses will be closely monitored and statistical measurements will be applied to contrast between online and face-to-face courses, and between courses that clearly follow the quality standards and those that have not been properly evaluated and certified.

The committee plans to do continual studies so that informed recommendations can be made to change, update, and improve OU's quality standards. The rubrics will need to be re-evaluated on a regular basis but this will benefit students, faculty, and the entire OU community.

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