



Office of Instructional Technology

Planning and Delivering Online Courses: a Guide to Good Practice

Introduction

Many factors affect the quality of student learning in hybrid and asynchronous classes. Feedback from students suggests that a strong sense of the presence and availability of the instructor is more important than any other consideration for engaging and retaining students in online course environments. The following guidelines will provide some criteria for best online pedagogical practices and will serve as a guide for both monitoring the preparation of faculty and self-evaluation of teaching.

I. Presence of the Instructor

- Detailed contact information should be provided by the instructor at the beginning of the course. Specific times when the instructor can be reached by phone or email should be listed. These should include office hours.
- The instructor should check in on the active parts of their course site and look for email messages from students on a daily basis. Students should expect to receive a response to a question within 24 hours; a 48-hour response time would be acceptable for "weekends." Response-time expectations should be made clear at the beginning of the course.
- Faculty should be an active presence on discussion boards and in team projects. The form of the participation can be neutral or directive, but students should know that their instructor is there in the work space.
- Faculty should post a welcome message at the beginning of the course or include audio as appropriate.

II. Responsiveness to Students' Circumstances

In Asynchronous Courses:

- Assignment deadlines should be clear and testing periods should not be set so that they fall within the typical work day. Instructors should remember that there are students who live in different time zones and, where there are specific end times for activities, indicate the time zone that will apply, e.g. 10:00 PM EST.

- Instructors should keep track of religious holidays and other observances that might preclude participation for individual students.
- Since asynchronicity is a key feature, it should be honored and respected in all courses and for all assignments.

In Hybrid Courses:

- There should be clear expectations of when the class will meet online and when it will meet face-to-face. Indicate percentages and in-class meeting days as specifically as possible.
- Faculty should understand and explain to students the rationale for creating certain activities online while leaving others to face to face interaction. It is important to convey to students a sense that the instructor has knowledge of both the subject matter and of the online environment.
- Make sure that your specific course learning objectives are enhanced by the online environment. Technology use should always serve academic objectives.

III. Content of Course Site

- A detailed syllabus, which includes a sequential mapping of course activities, should be available when the course begins and students should be informed promptly concerning deviations from the syllabus.
- Attendance (including online attendance) and lateness policies should be clearly stated.
- All important online course activities should take place within the Blackboard site. Any external sites used in the course should be easily linked to and from the Blackboard site.
- If online quizzes or tests will be used in a hybrid course, this should be announced and explained at the beginning of the term.
- Whenever they log on to the course site, students should always see accurate and current information about course assignments and deadlines.

IV. Design of Course Site

- The different parts of a course should form a coherent whole, with mechanisms for students to navigate easily from one part to another. Redundant parallel paths should provide convenient access from different starting places to connected materials.
- On the first day of class, students should be given clear, complete instructions about
 - How to navigate the course site;

- A course calendar: what they will need to do and when they will need to do it;
 - Appropriate behavior in an online course environment.
- Course banners should be attractive and appropriate for the course content. Efforts should be made to create an attractive course site.
- Be consistent in the terms and labels that are used for certain kinds of activities and sections of the course.
- Courses should be designed to take full advantage of the current version of Blackboard.
- Course sites should include all information and resources, such as web links, for any browser plug-ins or other downloads necessary for access to any file type (text, image, video, audio, PowerPoint, pdf) used in the course.
- Courses should be designed to take advantage, as appropriate, of internet resources and of the multimedia capabilities of online work. Graphics and hyperlinks, as well as video and audio as needed, should be included.
- Alternate text should be provided for graphics, audio, and video material, to provide accessibility for vision- or hearing-impaired students.

V. Quality of Assignments

- Discussion questions or introductions to discussions should be complex and interesting enough that they engage students and levels of participation are sustained across the semester.
- Discussion questions should be open-ended and provocative--questions which require specific and limited answers should be used for assignments or quizzes. The discussion board should reward active thinking and the exploration of course concepts.
- Instructions and grading schemes for discussions and other group activities should require and provide rewards for (1) students responding to one another and (2) participating in the activity throughout the assignment period, rather than just on the deadline day.
- There should be variety in assignments to accommodate different learning styles.
- Requirements for the formatting of assignments should be clearly stated. Clear instructions should be provided for the method by which assignments are handed in.
- Any necessary resources for the completion of assignments should be provided with the instructions, including necessary links to library search engines, the media server, or online resources outside the College.

VI. Evaluation of Student Work

- Rubrics or other detailed guidelines for grading should be provided for all assignments.
- Expectations of the instructor, especially for activities that will be used in assigning grades, should be described clearly, provided to students at the beginning of the term, and rewards attached to doing what is expected.
- Students should be informed of how assignments will be weighted in final grades.
- Students should be assessed on an ongoing basis and informed of their progress.

VII. Accuracy and Currency

- Course sites should be free of typographical, grammatical and other errors. All components should be carefully edited for accuracy and completeness.
- Instructors should check all links to ensure they are in working order prior to the beginning of the semester.
- Update all course material each semester; don't roll over assignments without reviewing and updating all links, due dates, and references to other sources that may have changed.

VIII. Academic Integrity and Intellectual Property

- Students should be informed about BCC's Academic Integrity policy (Bronx Community College 2009-2011 Catalog, pp. 59-61).
- Students and faculty should be informed about Fair Use guidelines at the beginning of the course and faculty should monitor compliance to the extent possible. See <http://www.cuny.edu/libraries/services/copyright/basics.html>
- Students should be informed which assignments must be completed completely independently and what is expected from group work.