Missouri S&T Online/Blended Course Development Guide

Handbook

Background

The University of Missouri System has embraced eLearning as a strategy to reach place-bound students in the state of Missouri. Additionally, the strategy includes providing eLearning experiences to current students to prepare them for technology-based learning that is becoming pervasive especially for continuing education for professionals. There is also concern that competitors offering eLearning options may attract potential students away from the UM campuses if those options are not available locally.

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to provide instructors interested in developing online or blended courses a set of criteria to consider so that such a course is consistent with the state-of-the-art body of knowledge for competitive performance in the online or blended environment. It is based on a nationally developed rubric called Quality Matters but has been modified to fit the culture and context of Missouri S&T.

The Development Guide is not designed to address the content, level, or prerequisites of the course. That is strictly within the purview of the faculty member. The guide is designed to assist the faculty member in the format, structure, and delivery of the course in an online or blended mode and provides best practice considerations in facilitating student learning in that mode.

Application of the Development Guide

The guide consists of 15 criteria spread over eight areas that address the effective delivery of a course in an online or blended format. For each criterion there is a set of descriptors that can be used to characterize whether the course meets, exceeds, or needs additional work for that criterion. There is a space to insert comments as appropriate especially where the evaluation suggests additional work is needed.

The guide can be used by the faculty member developing the course as a developmental tool or it can be used for an independent evaluation by an experienced faculty eFellow, faculty eMentor, or EdTech staff member. It is recommended that before a course is launched initially in an online or blended format that an independent evaluation be completed.

Criteria that are assessed as needing additional work should be a flag to the faculty member. If two or less criteria are assessed this way, the course initially could be launched pending further development in the areas needing work. However, if more than two of the 15 criteria are classified as needing work, it is recommended that the launch of the course in the online/hybrid format be delayed until those criteria can be addressed. Ultimately, the decision to launch a course in an online or blended format rests with the academic department.
Evaluation Areas

Course Overview and Introduction
This criterion focuses on the availability and clarity of the information students need to get started in the course. The information includes how to access course components and provide introductions as well as specific information on requirements for the course. This is particularly important for students who are often apprehensive in the beginning about working in this environment. Access to good information can ease the anxiety.

Learning Objectives
This criterion focuses on the availability of specific course learning objectives and how they are to be measured. It also addresses instructions on how the student can achieve the objectives. Many online students are working adults, and as a result, have considerable time constraints. Clear statements on what must be mastered and the approaches to doing that create an efficient learning environment that will be greatly appreciated by working students. In the hybrid environment, it is important to send a consistent message between what is communicated face-to-face and what appears in the online part of the course.

Assessment and Measurement
This criterion addresses the approaches used to assess progress in meeting the learning objectives. Requirements, access, and methodology, and success criteria all need to be clear to the student in working individually online or outside of class.

Resources and Materials
This criterion focuses on the relationship of the course materials and learning activities to the achievement of the learning objectives. The instructions, explanations, and layout of these items should guide the student through the course units and facilitate meeting the learning objectives.

Learner Engagement
This criterion focuses on learning activities to engage the remote student and promote the achievement of the learning objectives. For students isolated by space and time, the ability to sustain interest and motivation and to have good access to the instructor is crucial to success.

Course Technology
This criterion focuses on the appropriateness of the technology based tools and media used to deliver course content. The key components here are accessibility and usability so as not to impede the students in working on the course content. A key focus is on guiding the students in active learning.

Institutional Services
This criterion focuses on the various services available to online students including technical, accessibility, and academic. Such services may not always be transparent to students who are not on campus regularly.

Accessibility Features
This criterion focuses on using technologies that make the course accessible to students with auditory or visual impairments. The online and blended formats may present significant challenges to these students.
Using the Guide

The Online/Blended Course Design Evaluation Guide that accompanies this handbook provides a method for in-process evaluation of a course as it is being developed as well as a way to assess the overall readiness of a course for online or blended delivery. Each of the eight evaluation areas described above is broken down into one or more specific criteria, and for each of these criteria, descriptive statements are provided for classification as Exceeds, Meets, or Needs Additional Work. An example has been extracted from the guide as shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific criterion</th>
<th>Exceeds</th>
<th>Meets</th>
<th>Needs Additional Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructions make clear how to get started and where to find various components.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Both the necessary prerequisite courses/knowledge and specific technical skills are clearly stated.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Etiquette expectations for all forms of online communication are included.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructions about how to get started and where to find course components are missing or are unclear.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one of the following is clearly stated: prerequisite courses, prerequisite knowledge, or specific technical skills.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is no information about whether there are course, knowledge or technical prerequisites for this course.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Criterion Evaluation: Exceeds_____  Meets_____  Needs Additional Work_____

Comments:

Clarifying comments or explanation go here. May be appropriate to explain a rating where the course does not exactly fit into one of the three areas, e.g. Course meets expectations with the exception of lack of clarity on specifically how to find the assignments.

Some required elements may span two ratings while others may only apply to one rating.
Overall Course Evaluation

Upon completion of the evaluation of each of the criterion in the eight evaluation areas, the status of the state of development of the course can be assessed.

To satisfactorily deliver a course in an online or blended environment, all elements of the criterion should at least be rated as “Meets” each criterion.

Courses that have no more than two criteria that are rated as “Needs Additional Work” may be recommended to the academic department for an initial launch as an online/blended course pending completion of the additional development by the end of the first semester in which the course is offered. The acceptance of this recommendation is at the discretion of the academic department and should be based on the specific areas where additional work is needed.

For greater numbers of criteria that “Needs Additional Work” a recommendation to the academic department will be that the initial launch as an online/blended course be delayed until the additional development is completed. However, the academic departments will have the final decision on the initial launch.

For a specific criterion rated as “Needs Additional Work” specific recommendations to raise the criterion to “Meets” may be included in the Comments in that section. If not or if the comments are insufficient to guide further development, the faculty member should consult with the evaluator. The academic department may also request clarification from these same sources in attempting to reach a launch decision. EdTech staff, eFellows, and eMentors are available to assist with areas that need additional work.

It should be noted that the intent of the overall assessment of the course is to provide the instructor feedback on the course development effort. For the instructor as the course developer, the evaluator, department representatives, Ed Tech Staff, eMentors, and eFellows represent a collective resource to facilitate the optimum delivery of the course in an online or blended format. Using the feedback provided by the overall course assessment in a constructive manner will increase the probability of a successful delivery in an online or blended format.
Definitions

Online course:  A course where most or all of the content is delivered in an online format. At Missouri S&T, many online course use Blackboard for the delivery platform. Typically no face-to-face meetings and no classrooms required.

Blended course:  A course that blends online and face-to-face delivery. Sometimes referred to as a hybrid course. Substantial portions of the content is delivered online with a reduced number of face-to-face meetings. Blended formats provide some classroom savings without going fully online.

Web-facilitated course:  A course that uses web-based technology to facilitate what is essentially a live, real-time course delivered to remote students. Some courses of this type often have local students participating live as well. Historically, this is the method of delivery used at Missouri S&T for its distance courses. Requires a studio-classroom for delivery.

Traditional course:  Course with no online technology used. The content is delivered live to local students. Requires a classroom for most if not all class sessions.

Asynchronous delivery:  Refers to a course delivered with no specific class session time or space constraints. There are still time constraints on assignments, course activities, and course completion.

Synchronous Delivery:  Refers to a course delivered live to all student audiences at a specific time.