Wharton County Junior College
DISTANCE EDUCATION FACULTY HANDBOOK

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ACADEMIC STANDARDS OF ONLINE INSTRUCTION

Wharton County Junior College (WCJC) will provide quality Distance Education opportunities for students in support of the vision and mission of the college.

Online instruction will adhere to the guidelines outlined in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) distance education policy statement and Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate programs. WCJC Regulation 772 defines Distance Education and outlines the applicable policies and procedures related to distance education.

- Instruction shall meet the quality standards applicable to on-campus instruction.
- Students shall satisfy the same requirements for admission to the College, to the program of which the course is a part, and to the class/section itself, as are required of on-campus students. Students in programs to be offered collaboratively must meet the admission standards of their home institutions.
- Faculty shall be selected and evaluated by the same standards, review, and approval procedures used by the institution to select and evaluate faculty responsible for on-campus instruction. College Districts shall provide training and support to enhance the added skills required of faculty teaching classes through electronic means.
- The instructor of record shall bear responsibility for the delivery of instruction and for evaluation of student progress.
- All instruction shall be administered by the same entity administering the corresponding on-campus instruction. The supervision, monitoring, and evaluation processes for instructors shall be comparable to those for on-campus instruction.
- Students shall be provided academic support services, including academic advising, counseling, library and other learning resources, and financial aid, appropriate for distance education and off-campus learners.
- Electronic communication with students shall be made using WCJC authenticated accounts ONLY (i.e. WCJC email accounts or within Blackboard).

DISTANCE EDUCATION DEFINITIONS

Wharton County Junior College provides students with the opportunity to enhance their educational experience through the Distance Education Department. Many classes are offered through the internet, ITV or blended formats.

- **Online (WWW) Course** – Internet courses are conducted almost, if not entirely (85-100%) online. Some instructors may require that students come to campus for orientations, field trips, or to take exams in an approved testing location. Students must have access to the internet and be familiar with email, the web, creating and saving documents and uploading files.
- **Hybrid (HYB) Course** – Hybrid courses combine online learning and face-to-face instruction. These courses provide 50 to 85% of class instruction in an online setting. The
remainder of the instruction (15-50%) takes place in a traditional face-to-face setting. Students must have access to the internet and be familiar with email, the web, creating and saving documents and uploading files.

- **Interactive Television (ITV) Course** – ITV provides instructional content via a two way video communication network. It provides real-time face-to-face instruction between the instructor and students at multiple locations. In most instances ITV courses are also web supplemented, requiring students actively engage in an online component. This may include elements such as the submission of assignments, online testing and/or participation in discussion boards. Students should have access to the internet and be familiar with email, the web, creating and saving documents and uploading files.

**ONLINE CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

Courses offered via distance education will have the same credit value as the face-to-face equivalent and the cost per credit hour will be identical to the per-credit hour cost of other courses in the College catalog.

All faculty are required to complete training in the learning management system (LMS) prior to offering any hybrid, internet, or web-supplemented courses. Division Chairs are strongly encouraged to complete training in order to effectively monitor distance education courses at WCJC.

All published class schedules must indicate which course sections will be delivered by distance education, but these courses will not be distinguished on transcripts from sections of these courses delivered in more traditional ways.

WCJC utilizes a single course management system, currently Blackboard Learn 9.1, to maximize consistency and minimize students’ confusion and frustration. Courses may use additional publisher websites to supplement and enhance the student learning environment (e.g., MyCompLab, WebAssign, and Connect).

Decisions to offer courses or programs through distance education should reflect student need or the necessity for the College to compete with other institutions of higher education. If a degree program is designed to be offered entirely by distance education, the enrolled student must be able to satisfy all requirements of the degree program online.

The Vice President of Instruction, the appropriate Dean, and the relevant Division Chairs shall have the same access to distance education courses and its materials as any teaching assistant. The Director of Distance Education shall have the same access to distance education courses as the instructor of record.

The same faculty qualifications will be applied to WCJC Distance Education instructors as to all instructors who teach in a traditional face-to-face setting with Wharton County Junior College. Although the instructor's specific duties in teaching Distance Education courses will vary from those used in teaching within the traditional classroom, the ultimate goal of quality education remains the same.
FACULTY WORKLOAD

In determining faculty teaching load, a distance education course will be considered the equivalent of a traditional on-campus course that has the same number of credit hours and will be considered part of faculty members’ regularly compensated responsibilities.

When faculty teach courses to be offered via distance education, they may do so as part of their regularly compensated responsibilities to WCJC or as an overload. Distance Education Faculty are expected to maintain the same number of office hours as traditional faculty. (See Full Time and Part Time Instructor Procedures)

A faculty member who is new to the online teaching environment should not teach more than 20% of his/her course load in an internet or hybrid format until after his/her course(s) have successfully completed the Online Course Evaluation process.

Online teaching load can subsequently be increased provided:

1. Student evaluations of the initial internet or hybrid course(s) indicate a successful online experience for the students and,

2. Recommended course improvements made in the initial Online Course Evaluation Report have been implemented thus moving all online courses taught to a rating of Effective or Exemplary.

Division Chair approval is required.

A faculty member may have their online course load reduced based on unsatisfactory feedback from student evaluations and/or by receiving an Online Course Evaluation Report with a rating of Shows Potential or lower.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY / COPYRIGHT

All Distance Education courses taught at WCJC should be developed through the College’s approved course development process. WCJC Regulation 276 defines intellectual property and ownership of instructional material. WCJC Regulation 277 defines Copyright, Fair Use, and the TEACH Act.

Faculty are expected to understand and adhere to the copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code), as updated by the Technology, Education, and Copyright Harmonization Act (TEACH Act) and with the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA). Copyright law must be followed when performances, displays, copies or other reproductions of copyrighted material are made available to students. This includes the posting of copyrighted material on course management software or other online sites. Under the TEACH Act, it is permissible to make copyrighted materials available to students, providing that such materials (1) do not exceed an amount or duration comparable to that typically displayed in a live classroom setting; (2) are directly related to the course content; (3) are an integral part of the teaching content; (4) are intended solely for and are available only to students enrolled in the course; and (5) are retained only for the class session. The students must be notified that the materials may be subject to copyright protection.

The Distance Education Department will regularly hold professional development workshops and provide additional information for faculty related to these topics.
ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Faculty wishing to develop their first distance education course will complete the “Application to Develop an Online Course” which shall be approved by the Department Head and appropriate Division Chair prior to developing of the course and again before delivery of the course for the first time. Faculty who request to develop an online course will commit to teaching the course for a minimum of two semesters.

NEW COURSE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

1. Instructor submits request / or is assigned to teach an online or hybrid course.
2. Online Course Development Form is completed. Course Pre-Development Approvals secured and forwarded to the Director of Distance Education.
3. Instructor must complete the required faculty training in WCJC’s LMS. Request for Blackboard Training form available on the WCJC Distance Education Web Page and on the Blackboard login page under the For Faculty section.
4. Instructor receives Certificate of Completion for required online training.
5. Instructor develops course.
6. Instructor submits course for review before applicable deadline.
7. Course Evaluation Report returned to instructor and department chair.
8. Any required course revisions completed.
9. Director of Distance Education verifies that the course meets minimum requirements based on the course evaluation rubric.
10. Division Chair reviews documentation and gives final approval for online delivery.
11. Stipend (if applicable) paid.
12. Course periodically reviewed to maintain quality.
ONLINE COURSE APPROVAL PROCESS

1. Proposal
- Online Course Development Form
  Completed → Department Head Approval →
  Division Chair Approval →
  Pre-Development Approvals →
  Director of Distance Education Notified

2. Training
- Instructor Completes Required Training in
  CMS & Course Design →
  Instructor Develops Course →
  Course Evaluation Checklist (Self-Assessment) →
  Online Course Evaluation Committee Reviews Course

3. Course Review
- Course Evaluation Report
  Completed → Instructor Revises
  Course to meet Minimum
  Requirements →
  DED Certifies Course
  Meets Minimum
  Requirements

Resources

4. Final Approval
- Division Chair Approves →
  Final Online Delivery Approval →
  Instructor Teaches Course

5. Course is Taught
- Course Periodically Reviewed to
  Maintain Quality

COURSE DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developed course submitted for review by:</th>
<th>To teach online/hybrid this semester:</th>
<th>Final approval deadline:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>August 15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>January 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Summer I &amp; Summer II</td>
<td>May 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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BLACKBOARD TRAINING

All full-time and part-time faculty members wishing to teach Internet, hybrid or web-supplemented courses using Blackboard Learn, WCJC’s learning management system, are required to successfully complete in-house training. Online supplemental instructors, course designers, or others seeking to use the LMS are also required to complete the in-house training.

REQUIRED TRAINING

Level 1 - Fundamentals Training (4 Hours)

- Faculty members teaching web-supplemented, Internet or hybrid courses will complete Level 1 training. Level 1 training consists of material that provides basic instruction in Blackboard Learn.
- This training provides an introduction to the Blackboard Learn Course Management system, highlighting some of the instructional tools that enhance student learning and save time for Online and Web-supplemented Instructors. Participants will learn how to use Best Practices for Online Teaching and Learning, customization, announcements, messages, email, uploading course syllabi, presenting course materials, discussions, and the basics of the grade center.

Level 2 – Core Training (4 Hours)

- Faculty members teaching hybrid and/or Internet courses, online course facilitators and/or online course designers must also complete Level 2 training after successfully completing Level 1 training. Level 2 training consists of material that builds on Level 1 skills. Level 2 training provides in depth course management system training and best practices of online instruction.
- This training provides the second part of the introduction to the Blackboard Learn Course Management system. Participants will learn how to use and deploy assignments, rubrics, tests, surveys, and pools, packages and utilities, and the grade center advanced features. A focus will also be placed on online pedagogy and enhancing communication to provide a more effective teaching and learning environment.

Experienced Blackboard Learn Instructor Option

- Experienced Blackboard Learn instructors (e.g. part-time faculty member who has been trained on and used Blackboard Learn at another institution) may have training requirements waived if documentation is submitted that they have completed comparable training at another institution and have taught using Blackboard Learn for at least one semester.
TRAINING FORMATS

Face-to-Face Workshops

- Each month an email will be sent listing the various workshops, dates, times, and locations, as well as announcing workshops via the Faculty Resources section of the Blackboard log-in page. It is requested that the faculty member sign-up in advance to ensure adequate staff on hand to facilitate the workshop effectively.

- Certificates of Completion are provided upon successful completion of this training. Successful completion of this training will also be notated in Banner so that sections will automatically be created in the Learning Management System.

Online Training Course

- The online training course is designed in a self-paced format for convenience. Both of the required levels are offered online. Each level builds on the content learned in the previous Level. Online training is generally recommended for individuals who have stronger computer skills and knowledge, have prior online teaching experience with another course management system, or who cannot attend any of the face-to-face sessions.

- Once a request has been received for an online training course, faculty will receive start-up/login instructions via email. The entire Blackboard Learn training course is online; however, open workshops and one-on-one assistance are available for faculty who need extra assistance.

- Certificates of Completion are provided upon successful completion of this training. Successful completion of this training will also be notated in Banner so sections will automatically be created in the Learning Management System.

ADDITIONAL DISTANCE EDUCATION AND LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES TRAINING

Keeping current with technology, trends in online learning, Blackboard, and various training opportunities are important components in maintaining a high quality, effective DE course.

Additional training opportunities are available through workshops, online reference materials, PDF quick start guides, and videos. In addition, DE and Title V staff are available to provide training and one-on-one assistance to WCJC faculty.

It is important for the DE instructor to assess whether or not additional training is needed in order to effectively design, develop, deliver, and evaluate a DE course. Some of the areas which need to be considered for additional training are:

- Online Pedagogy
- Blackboard Advanced Skills (Adaptive Release, Groups, Reports etc...)
- Lecture Capture
- Respondus Monitor (Student Identification/Online Proctoring Solution)
- Accessibility Compliance in Online Courses
- Academic Integrity & Plagiarism Detection
Major changes to the institution’s instructional technology will require that all full-time and part-time faculty members update their skills prior to using the new technology. Notification of training dates, times and locations will be sent via email and will be listed in the Faculty section of the distance education website.

ONLINE COURSE QUALITY

The Online Course Evaluation (OCE) process allows WCJC to confirm and improve the quality of the online and hybrid courses offered at the college. The course evaluation is exclusively formative in nature. The primary goal is to give faculty participants extensive feedback aimed at enhancing the design and delivery of their courses.

The evaluation process is instrumental in helping WCJC to offer and maintain high quality online courses by:

- Helping faculty to establish and maintain high quality online courses through constructive feedback and suggestions about how to improve the course to align with nationally recognized standards of best practice
- Helping faculty to transition from a teacher-centered to learning-centered pedagogy
- Ensuring courses are designed to successfully meet the diverse needs of students
- Enhancing student success and satisfaction
- Improving overall retention rates for students

The evaluation will focus solely on the design of the course, offering observations and suggestions on, for example, how well the course is structured, how easy it is for students to navigate, whether the teaching and learning activities are well aligned with learning objectives, how appropriately the instructional strategies and technologies are being used, and the extent to which materials are made accessible for students with different learning needs.

This evaluation process is not intended to review course content, nor will it review faculty performance during the delivery of the course.

The evaluation process utilizes an Online Course Evaluation Rubric as the method for evaluating effective online course design. As course content is the purview of the faculty and division, the OCE process does not focus on course content specifically, but rather the extent to which material is presented in a clear, well-organized and learner-focused manner.
The Online Course Evaluation Rubric is based on nationally recognized standards of exemplary online courses, which provides standards in the following areas:

- Online Organization and Design
- Course Overview and Introduction
- Learning Objectives
- Assessment and Measurement
- Resources and Materials
- Learner Engagement
- Course Technology
- Learner Support
- Accessibility

Division Chairs are responsible for monitoring the compliance of courses with the standards outlined in the Online Course Evaluation Checklist for any course classified as an Internet or Hybrid course. The purpose of the Online Course Evaluation process is to provide faculty members and Department Chairs with information addressing the quality of online course delivery and design. The final decision on section assignment is the responsibility of the Department Heads and/or Division Chair. The Online Course Evaluation Checklist can be found on the Faculty page of the Distance Education web site.

### REVIEW PROCESS

### NEW COURSES

All course information documents (e.g., syllabus, read me first etc...) as well as the content (e.g., lecture notes, assignments, exams, discussions, etc...) that would be necessary for a student to complete 50% of the course must be completed in order to submit the course for evaluation.

Once the Director of Distance Education receives notification from the instructor that the course is ready to be evaluated, a copy of the course will be made available to the Online Course Evaluation Review Team. Please refer to the Course Development Timeline above to ensure all reviews and necessary revisions can be completed 30 days prior to the start of the term in which the course will be offered.

A course meets the minimum requirements to be delivered online by receiving a rating of Shows Potential, Effective, or Exemplary. The Director of Distance Education will certify that the course meets minimum requirements and forward the Online Course Development form for final approval. The faculty member will also be provided with a copy of the Online Course Evaluation Report showing strengths and weaknesses in the course design along with recommendations for future improvements. Once a course has met the minimum standards it will be placed in the regular Online Course Evaluation cycle.

If a course receives a rating of Needs Improvement, the course fails to meet the minimum requirements for online delivery. A copy of the Online Course Evaluation Report, including feedback and suggestions for revisions will be provided to the faculty member to make required
revisions. The Online Course Evaluation Report will be provided to the instructor to allow sufficient time for faculty to make the required revisions and acquire the final deployment approvals before the start of the semester.

The Distance Education Department will provide open labs and one-on-one training opportunities to assist the faculty member with the revisions. It is the responsibility of the faculty member to make revisions to his/her course with guidance from the Distance Education Department and acquire the final approvals before the deadline outlined in the Course Development Timeline.

Once the course revisions are completed, the faculty member should submit the Course Revision Form to notify the Director of Distance Education that the course is ready for a second review. One member of the original review team will confirm that the course has been revised in line with the original suggestions for improvement to meet the minimum acceptable standards. A copy of the revised Online Evaluation Report will be forwarded to the faculty member, Department Head, and Division Chair. If the course is successfully revised, it will be appropriately designated as Satisfactory, Effective, or Exemplary and will be forwarded for final approvals.

If course revisions have not been made by the Final Approval Deadline, the Director of Distance Education will communicate with the appropriate Division Chair who will determine if the course will be removed from the schedule or assigned to another online faculty member. Successfully revising the course by meeting minimum acceptable standards is not the only consideration when assigning online classes. The final decision on section assignment is the responsibility of the Department Head and/or Division Chair.

________________________________________________________________________________

EXISTING COURSES

Formal Online Course Evaluations follow a schedule determined by the Director of Distance Education or at the request of a Division Chair. All online courses will be reviewed using appropriate Course Evaluation Criteria, Checklists, and Reports. Reviewed courses will periodically undergo subsequent reviews to verify quality standards. Courses are not typically reviewed more often than once every three years if they have met quality standards. A faculty member will generally not have more than one course scheduled for a Formal Online Course Evaluation in any single semester unless the Division Chair makes a request for additional courses to be reviewed. Additional course reviews could be necessary if a faculty member teaches a large number of courses in the internet/hybrid format making it necessary to review more than one per semester.

For courses selected as part of the regularly scheduled Online Course Evaluation process, faculty members, along with their Division Chairs, will be informed of upcoming reviews during the semester prior to when the course will be reviewed. Faculty members whose courses will be up for review are strongly encouraged to attend the Online Evaluation Workshop offered by the Distance Education Department each semester. Faculty are also encouraged to familiarize themselves with the applicable Course Evaluation Criteria and Checklist in order to better understand the review process. Copies of these documents are available on the Intranet and the Faculty Resources Course.

At the beginning of the course evaluation process, the Distance Education Department will export a copy of the section to be evaluated ensuring that no live sections are impacted by the process. If the course content does not reside on WCJC’s LMS (e.g., Aplia, WebAssign,
MyCompLab, etc) the faculty member will provide access information to the evaluation committee.

If a course meets minimum acceptable standards, the final Evaluation Report will be forwarded to the Faculty Member, Department Head, and Division Chair. Faculty are still encouraged to make revisions that are suggested to continually improve their course.

If a course no longer meets the minimum standards of online design and delivery, a copy of the Report will include constructive feedback and suggestions for revisions to achieve minimum readiness standards.

The Distance Education Department will provide open labs and one-on-one training opportunities to assist the faculty member with the revisions. It is the responsibility of the faculty member to make revisions to his/her course with guidance from the Distance Education Department and acquire the final approvals before the deadline outlined in the Course Development Timeline.

Once the course revisions are completed, the faculty member should submit the Course Revision Form to notify the Director of Distance Education that the course is ready for a second review. One member of the original review team will confirm that the course has been revised in line with the original suggestions for improvement. A copy of the revised Online Evaluation Report will be forwarded to the faculty member, Department Head, and Division Chair. If the course is successfully revised, it will be appropriately designated as Shows Potential, Effective, or Exemplary.

If the course is not successfully revised by the faculty member in adequate time to offer the course again, the relevant Department Head, in consultation with the faculty member, will decide how to effect the needed changes to the course so that it will meet the rubric’s standards of good practice.

Successfully revising the course by meeting the appropriate evaluation criteria is not the only consideration when assigning online classes. The final decision on section assignment is the responsibility of the Department Head, Division Chair, and/or Dean.

**COURSE REVIEW OUTCOMES**

**Exemplary**

- Courses that are identified as Exemplary show outstanding content and format and only require updating as changes occur. These courses have met the rubric standards for quality in an online course and have scored a 58 or above (no “1’s” or “2’s” in any category) on the Online Evaluation Report. Courses that are identified as Exemplary are recognized as courses that meet or exceed almost all of the national standards of best practice in online learning. This recognition will be communicated with the faculty member, Department Head, Division Chair, and VPI. Conditional rankings will be assigned to courses that meet the minimum numeric score, but have a section that have scored a “1” or “2.”

**Effective**

- Courses that are identified as Effective show extra effort above minimum acceptable standards. These courses have met the rubric standards for quality in an online course and have scored between 51 and 57.5 (no “1’s,” no more than 4 “2’s,” and no more than 2
“2’s” in any one section) Courses that are identified as Effective are recognized as courses that meet national standards of best practice in online learning. This recognition will be communicated with the faculty member, Department Head, Division Chair, and VPI. Conditional rankings will be assigned to courses that meet the minimum numeric score, but have a section that have scored a “1” or “2.”

**Shows Potential**

- Courses that are identified as Satisfactory meet minimum standards to be acceptable for instructional use, however faculty are encouraged to make improvements to enhance the overall quality of the course. These courses have minimally met the rubric standards for quality in an online course and have scored between 43 and 50.5. Courses that are identified as Shows Potential are recognized as courses that can be taught online but does not currently meet national standards of best practice in online learning. Feedback will be provided using the Online Evaluation Report and communicated to the faculty member and Division Chair.

**Needs Improvement**

- Courses that are identified as Needs Improvement must make improvements in identified areas to reach satisfactory level. These courses have not met the minimal rubric standards for quality in an online course and have a score below 43 on the Online Course Evaluation Report.

- These courses do not meet national standards of best practice in online learning. Feedback will be provided using the Online Evaluation Report to the faculty member and Division Chair.

- Course revisions must be made before the course can be offered in subsequent semesters except upon approval by the Vice President of Instruction. Exceptions will be rare and based upon student need. The Distance Education Department will provide open workshops and one-on-one training opportunities to assist the faculty member with the revisions. It is the responsibility of the faculty member to make revisions to his/her course with guidance from the Distance Education Department and acquire the final approvals before the deadline outlined in the Course Development Timeline.

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**MINIMUM EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL ONLINE COURSES**

In addition to meeting all of the OCE criteria, and to ensure consistent and quality elements in all of the WCJC online courses, distance education instructors will be expected to include the following in their online course(s):

- A “Getting Started” section that contains the Read Me First, course syllabus, a course orientation/overview, the syllabus acknowledgement quiz, and any other front-end documents.

- The “READ ME FIRST” file is course linked at the top of the Course Menu and provides guidance to the students as they begin the semester.
“Contact your Instructor” – linked as a contact on the course menu. Should include office location, office hours, WCJC email, and course communication policy (e.g., “the instructor will return phone calls, emails, etc. within 24 hours.”)

A COMPLETE syllabus which includes all of the elements found on the OCE Checklist.

Syllabus Acknowledgement Quiz (see Full and Part Time Instructor Procedures)

Approved Copyright Notice

Approved Academic Integrity Statement

Supplemental Platform Information (if applicable. E.g., WebAssign, Aplia, MyCompLab, SAM, etc.)

Attachments in a “user friendly” format (i.e. PDF, html, SoftChalk) which don’t require special software to open.

ACCESSIBILITY COMPLIANCE REVIEW

Accessibility compliance will be integrated into the overall Online Course Evaluation (OCE) process in order to prevent duplication of time and effort of the Distance Education staff. The Accessibility Compliance Review (ACR) utilizes a stand-alone process and scoring worksheet to determine level of compliance and remediation action plan.

Accessibility Compliance will be conducted using the Accessibility Worksheets.
If a course meets minimum acceptable standards of accessibility compliance, the final Accessibility Compliance Report will be forwarded to the Faculty Member, Department Head, and Division Chair.

If a course does not meet the minimum standards of accessibility compliance, a copy of the Accessibility Compliance Report will include an action plan with recommendations and a timeline for course revisions to achieve accessibility compliance standards. Courses will be scored on a scale of 0-4 for each of the accessibility criteria. The scoring criteria are discussed in greater detail below.

The Distance Education Department will provide open labs as well as group and one-on-one training opportunities to assist faculty members with remediation of individual courses. It is the responsibility of the faculty member to make revisions to his/her course with guidance and assistance from the Distance Education Department. In situations where there is a large volume or technical elements to remediate (e.g. closed captioning, long descriptions for complex images and tables, math formulas etc.) the Media Support Specialist will remediate those elements with input and assistance from the faculty subject matter expert. In the event that specific accommodations are requested for the current semester, on a course that has not yet been remediated, the Distance Education Department, in conjunction with the faculty member, will work to remediate the course in an expedited fashion.

Once the course revisions are completed, the faculty member should submit the Accessibility Compliance Remediation Form to notify the Director of Distance Education that the course has been remediated to an acceptable level of compliance.

If the course is not successfully revised in adequate time, the relevant Division Chair, in consultation with the faculty member and the Director of Distance Education, will decide how to effect the needed changes to the course so that it will meet the minimum level of compliance.

ACCESSIBILITY COMPLIANCE REVIEW SCORING CRITERIA

N/A: Does not apply to course content

0: Accessibility met in all aspects of the course on these criteria

1: Low level of difficulty to remediate (syllabus, hyperlinks, document structure, tables, small number of alt tags & long descriptions); faculty remediated.

2: Moderate level of difficulty to remediate (audio transcriptions, video close captioning, large number of alt tags & long descriptions); faculty remediate with Media Support Specialist assistance.

3: High level of difficulty to remediate (large number of audio transcriptions and video close captioning, 3rd party platform materials); Media Support Specialist remediates course with guidance from faculty member.

4: Content does not meet OCE standards. During process of remediating for course design, faculty member should also ensure that accessibility issues are also addressed.

The higher the score on any given criteria, the greater the time necessary to remediate the course to full compliance. The individual action plan will lay out a manageable timeline for faculty course
remediation. Remediation that must be done by Media Support Specialist will be prioritized based on active accommodation requests.

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**SAMPLE EXCERPT FROM ACR WORKSHEET WITH ACTION PLAN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documents</th>
<th>Accessibility Standard</th>
<th>Action Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Syllabus Accessibility</td>
<td>a Uses approved ADA cover sheet template &amp; maintains formatting</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b Uses ADA formatted student syllabus OR properly structures student syllabus with appropriate headings and styles</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c Tables included in student syllabus are properly formatted</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Styles, Headings, and Document Structure</td>
<td>a Document title is Heading 1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b Document properly utilizes Heading 2s and Heading 3s to further organize course information</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c Numbered and bulleted lists are properly formatted</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Text Equivalent for all Images</td>
<td>a All images found in all documents contain alternative text. Decorative images use an empty alt tag (alt = &quot;&quot;) or an alt tag with a space (alt = &quot; &quot;)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b Complex images (graphs, charts, etc.) also contain a long description</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Math</td>
<td>a Math formulas and symbols are coded for screen readers. Recommended standard is to use MathML.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Begin by addressing the accessibility of the course syllabus and then address styles, headings, structure of all course documents. You may want to attend an Open Lab or contact Kim, the Media Support Specialist, for assistance with remediation the images and math content.**

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**ONLINE READINESS**

WCJC currently utilizes the Online Learning Assessment tool to assist students in identifying their readiness for online learning. Links to this assessment can be found on the Distance Education page of the WCJC website.

The Learning Assessment will take about 20 minutes from start to finish. The score will not prevent a student from registering for online classes. Students will receive immediate feedback for each section of the assessment, along with selected resources and readings.

The Online Learning Assessment will help students identify strengths and opportunities for growth related to distance learning in 6 key areas:

- Life Factors (work life, home life, study time, etc.)
- Academic Readiness (reading & writing skills, etc.)
• Personal Attributes (self-direction & time management)
• Learning Preferences
• Technology Skills (am I good with computers?)
• Computer Capabilities (is my computer sufficient for online courses?)

Faculty are encouraged to direct potential students, who have questions about online learning, to this assessment. Many faculty have also found it useful to incorporate the online readiness assessment in the Getting Started section of their course.

EARLY ALERT SYSTEM

As student success and retention are essential elements of online learning, faculty are encouraged to use the Blackboard Retention Center. The Retention Center is a powerful tool that enables faculty to give focused attention to students who need it. From the Retention Center, faculty can communicate with struggling students and help them take immediate action for improvement.

• Email students who are falling behind in course work via the Retention Center. Email notifications have a default subject and message that can be edited. If sending an email to more than one recipient, the list is not revealed to the group.
• View and create rules to track specific items that are good indicators of risk (course access, course activity, missed deadlines, and grades are default).
• Monitor at risk students' activities from the Retention Center main page.

If students continue to experience difficulties in the course, faculty members should refer them to the Early Alert/Academic Warning Program. Referral forms can be found on the Intranet under College Forms. If a student is referred through the Early Alert/Academic Warning Program, they will be contacted by someone in the Counseling Department.

INSTRUCTIONAL TELEVISION (ITV)

Instructional television is a synchronous learning environment that provides unique opportunities and benefits to both instructors and students located in different locations. In addition to all of the organizational tasks normally performed when teaching, the ITV instructor will need to be even more organized for teaching ITV. Materials should be distributed and assignments graded and returned before class (electronically through the LMS works best).

See Best Practices for ITV Instruction Appendix.

LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM PROCEDURES

LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM ADMINISTRATION

The Director of Distance Education shall be responsible for the administration of the Learning Management System (LMS).
The Director of Distance Education will work with the Information Technology Services to coordinate assistance with issues involving, but not limited to, infrastructure and data transfer between systems.

Every course listed in the College’s Student Information System (Banner) will have a course shell created on the LMS. Creation of course shells will be the responsibility of the Learning Management System Administrator (LMS Administrator).

User accounts and enrollments into the LMS sections will be the responsibility of the LMS Administrator and will be coordinated with the Director of Distance Education.

Courses will be maintained on the live LMS for one year. All sections will be systematically archived by the LMS Administrator before they are permanently removed from the LMS. Section archives will be maintained offline for an additional two years. Sections will be retained (either on the live system or offline) for a total of three years before they are permanently deleted.

Offline archiving and purging of all courses will be the responsibility of the LMS Administrator and will be coordinated with the Director of Distance Education.

Faculty members are responsible for archiving and maintaining a local copy of each section every semester. Should a section need to be restored for any reason (grade appeal etc.), it will be done by the faculty member providing a copy of his/her section archive to the Director of Distance Education. Students accessing WCJC’s LMS will authenticate using their Banner student user account.

SECTION VISIBILITY

The creation of course sections on the LMS server is an automated process. Every attempt will be made to have all sections available 6 weeks prior to the start of that section. Faculty members will be notified via email by the LMS Administrator when sections have been created.

Courses will only be visible to faculty members who have completed the required LMS training (See Required Training section above). Sections that do not have a faculty member assigned cannot be created until a faculty member has been officially assigned in Banner. Once a faculty member has been designated as the faculty of record, the automated integration process will give the faculty member access to the course within 12 hours of their assignment in the student information system.

Sections will be visible to faculty members as soon as the section has been created and will remain visible for one year after which time they will be purged from the LMS. Faculty members will be responsible for configuring the list of courses they see on the course management system.

Sections will be visible to students by 3 am on the first official day of the section and will be removed from their view by 9 AM 2 weeks after the official end date of the section.

If students need continued access to a section after the official end date for the section (perhaps in the case of an “I” grade) the faculty member must email the LMS Administrator and provide the course number, section number and the name of the student who will need additional access. The faculty member must notify the DE department when this extended access is no longer needed and request that the student’s access be disabled.

UNMERGE REQUEST
By default, like sections (i.e., format, length, course) have been merged together. Once merged, the merged sections will function as one large section. For a variety of reasons, faculty members of face-to-face sections that utilize Blackboard to supplement their courses may desire that their courses be unmerged. To request a change, please complete the Request to Unmerge Blackboard Sections form that can be found on the Intranet, or on the Blackboard log in page. These forms **MUST** be received one week prior to the starting date for those classes.

**Once the request to unmerge has been completed, it cannot be reversed that semester.**

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**PLACING COURSE CONTENT INTO LMS SHELL**

Once the LMS Administrator has created the LMS course shells the faculty member can begin placing content into the course shell. This will be done in one of three ways:

**Installing a Publishers Cartridge (e-Pack)**

If a new course cartridge (online ready content supplied by the textbook publisher) is to be used for the course, the faculty member will acquire access to the content and follow the publisher's emailed instructions on downloading the content file. The instructor can import the cartridge into their course or may contact the LMS Administrator to ask for assistance.

**Creating a New Course with Original Content**

If an instructor will be creating a new online/hybrid/web supplemented course using original content, that faculty member may begin uploading their original content as soon as the shell is made available.

**Copying Content from a Previous Course**

If the course was taught in the previous year, the content will still be available to copy into the new semester’s course. Instructions on how to copy content from a previous semester can be found in the Online Faculty Resource Course.

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**USING YOUR STUDENT ACCOUNT**

All faculty members have been given student credentials to allow them to fully view the course from the student perspective. The student log in information is:

- **Username:** stu_email ID (example: stu_doej)
- **Password:** Email ID (example: doej)

Faculty are strongly encouraged to log in as a student prior to the start of the semester and before any major exam or assignment to ensure that students have the desired access to the materials.

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**ONLINE FACULTY RESOURCES COURSE**

Upon logging in to Blackboard faculty should notice that they have been enrolled as a student in the following course:

**Fac_Resources: Online Faculty Resources**
This course is continually updated to bring the very latest information on a variety of distance education and instructional technology tools. Faculty are encouraged to e-mail suggestions, web links, and/or articles to the Distance Education Department.

The Online Faculty Resources section is the centralized location to access information on a variety of topics such as:

- Online Course Evaluation
  - Online Course Development Form
  - Internet Course Checklists & Rubrics
  - Hybrid Course Checklists & Rubrics
  - Master Course Checklists & Rubrics
- Course Building & Maintenance
  - Building a Getting Started Section
  - Building Lesson Units
  - Course Maintenance
- Online Teaching and Learning Articles
  - Best Practices
  - Online Pedagogy
  - Maintaining Academic Integrity
  - Course Design
- Legal Issues and Copyright in Education
  - ADA
  - FERPA
  - Fair Use
- Social Media, Apps, and Web 2.0 Tools
  - Twitter
  - Pinterest
  - Facebook
- Instructional Technology Applications
  - TurnItIn Plagiarism Detection Tool
  - SoftChalk Cloud
  - Dallas Learning Solutions: Digital Resource Repository
  - Respondus Test Bank & Respondus Monitor
  - ITV
  - Classroom Symposiums
  - Classroom Response Systems (Clickers)
  - MOBIs
  - Technology in the Classroom

Additionally, there are links to support and training information including:

- Training Calendar
- Workshop Descriptions and Materials
- Distance Education Policies, Procedures, and Forms
- Blackboard Support
  - On Demand Videos
  - Tutorials
  - WCJC Quick Guides
- Contact Information for Distance Education
ARCHIVING AND DOWNLOADING A LOCAL COPY OF COURSE

All faculty members are encouraged to archive their own courses (with enrollments) at the end of each semester. Archives should be downloaded and saved to a local location and the archived file removed from the online section. Blackboard Managed Hosting will back up the LMS server on a nightly basis which includes all sections currently on the server. The backup is intended for use in case of a catastrophic failure of the LMS server. It is not intended to be used to restore individual sections.

DELETION OF LMS USER ACCOUNTS

It is the responsibility of each Division Chair to inform the Director of Distance Education when a full-time or part-time faculty member who teaches online is no longer employed by WCJC. All user accounts that have shown no activity for two years will be permanently removed from the LMS.

VIRTUAL COLLEGE OF TEXAS

The Virtual College of Texas (VCT) is a collaboration between many of the public community and technical colleges in Texas. Students may register to take distance learning courses that are not currently offered at WCJC from other colleges throughout Texas.

Faculty may consult their Department Heads and/or Division Chairs if they wish to make their course available to VCT students statewide.

Complete VCT Procedures for students can be viewed on the VCT section of the Distance Education Program web page. Forms to offer WCJC courses through VCT can be found on the Intranet.

BEST PRACTICES FOR ONLINE INSTRUCTION

1. Employing Effective Course Design
2. Preparing Students to Learn Online
3. Creating an Inviting and Supportive Course Environment
4. Promoting Active Learning
5. Monitoring Student Progress and Encouraging Lagging Students
6. Specifying Clear Course Expectations
7. Being Present in the Course
8. Soliciting Informal Feedback and Suggestions
9. Managing Grades and Exams
10. Managing Time and Workload Effectively

BEST PRACTICES: EMPLOYING EFFECTIVE COURSE DESIGN

Half of the headaches that faculty members encounter in an online course result from poor course design and/or not managing students' expectations. Here are some of the ways to employ effective course design in your online course

**Keep your Course Menu simple**
• If you are not using a tool, or you have an empty content area, delete it. Having tools available that are not being used in a course will confuse students, lead to frustration, and make navigation difficult.

**Use Subheaders and Dividers on Course Menu**

• Just like tool links and content areas, you can add subheaders (with text) to group like items together. Suggested subheaders include Course Materials (content; the "work" of the course), Course Tools (the "things" they will use to interact with the course), and Resources (links to help, tutoring services, etc). Dividers can also be useful, but unlike subheaders are simple lines that split content on the Course Menu into sections.

**Don’t Bury Important Information**

• Maintain a minimal number of "clicks" to reach important documents and tools - syllabus, graded work, course schedule, etc. should be easily accessible and not buried deep within content areas.

**Appeal to multiple learning styles**

• Use interactive activities such as crossword puzzles, drag and drop activities, and flash cards (all available with the SoftChalk program) to appeal to kinesthetic learners. Use charts, graphs, and tables to appeal to visual learners. Use audio files and videos to appeal to auditory learners. Online learning tends to be "text heavy" and any way to break that up is going to be a plus.

"**Chunk" Material**

• Refrain from having long, uninterrupted sections of text. Break up text using images, videos, and activities; sort information into bulleted lists; break large sections of text into segments using headers and subheaders. Even humorous images can prevent fatigue and refresh the mind momentarily for the next section of material.

**Use PDF files**

• Convert everything to PDF - Microsoft Word documents, PowerPoint files, etc. PDFs offer one-click printing, one-click saving, and the Blackboard system doesn't give students a notification that kicks them back to the main page as it does when they attempt to access Microsoft Word documents. Students will be required to have access to the Adobe Reader program, a free download from the Adobe website. Your “Getting Started” module would be a perfect place to post a Web Link to the download, and your Course Orientation document would be a great place to discuss the need for this download as well.

**Make your course Mobile Friendly**

• Mobile is the next big thing. Students are accessing information on their smart phones and tablets. The SoftChalk program is very mobile friendly, but PDF is also typically mobile friendly as well. Consider converting all of you lesson notes from MS Word or PDF to SoftChalk. View SoftChalk training information on the Training Schedule located in the Faculty Resource course in Blackboard.

**Think about Universal Accessibility**

• Accessibility issues should be confronted at the time of course development, not once an accommodation request has been made. When confronted with the choice between YouTube video "A" and YouTube video "B," choose the one that comes with a transcript for
individuals with hearing difficulties. Even students without documented disabilities will benefit from your consideration. Those visual students mentioned earlier would appreciate reading text alongside a video! At a minimum, tell students where they can go for assistive technology at the college (office information, location, and contact information). Link this information in multiple locations in your course (i.e., syllabus, course orientation document, Getting Started module, Course Menu, etc.) For more information on accessibility, please consider attending the Accessibility Compliance in Online Courses workshop.

Be consistent

- Once you have determined how your course will be structured, stick with the same structure (organize all units/modules the same) - whatever hierarchy you set up, be consistent in how you use it. If your Lesson Module contains an Overview, Study Guide, Lesson Notes, Web Links, Assignment, and Quiz, in that order, stick with that structure for each of your modules. Consistency in course structuring minimizes student confusion, frustration, and anxiety.

**BEST PRACTICES: PREPARING YOUR STUDENTS TO LEARN ONLINE**

The following section will discuss how to prepare your students for online learning. Effective online instructors orient students to the tools used in the course, technical help, and strategies for learning online. Here are some tips for getting your students ready for online learning.

**Email Course Syllabus prior to start of the semester**

- Access your course roster two to three days before the start of the semester and email all of your students the current semester's syllabus. This allows students to acquire textbooks and other required materials prior to the start of the semester, so they will be ready to learn on the first day of class. Also include a short welcome statement.

**Create a Read Me First Document.**

- A read me first document is a short, concise introduction that directs students where to go when they first enter the course. This document will inform students of any first week activities that are to be completed as well. The Read Me First document should be prominently displayed in your course. It is recommended that you place it within your Getting Started Module and then create a Course Link to it on the Course Menu.

**Post a Welcome Announcement**

- This announcement is another tool that instructors use to help orient students the first day of the semester. See the Online Faculty Resources Course for a sample Welcome Announcement.

**Create a Detailed Course Orientation Document.**

This document will supplement your course syllabus and provide students on information such as:

- A short section introducing yourself to your class. Include personal information about yourself, include a picture, and share some interesting facts about you. All of this helps
students to connect with you on a personal level and may relieve some of their anxieties about feeling alone within the course.

- Testing information within Blackboard, including the quirks of the timer, the pitfalls of saving and resuming a test while the timer is running, how many points they will lose if they go over the time limit for the test, etc.

- Assignment submission details. Indicate which file formats you accept when students submit assignments. If you do not have Microsoft Works, for example, then you will not be able to open files with .wps file extensions. Students will need to know this before submitting assignments as an attachment. How do you prefer students to submit assignments? Attachment? Attachment to an e-mail? Copy & Paste into the submission box?

- Discussion guidelines and Netiquette. Let students know what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior with regards to class discussions and other forms of communication. Tell them what types of forums they will see on the discussion board, and what types of questions and information they will find in each. Inform the students of standards for appropriate behavior within the online class environment. Attached to this section you will find documents containing information regarding online etiquette.

- Links to college resources, technical support, and necessary software downloads. Provide links to student services for students with disabilities. Provide students with a link to obtain support for technical issues that arise. Give students access to web links for any necessary software downloads they will require for your class (i.e., Adobe Reader, etc).

- Provide students with a list of FAQs pertaining to the course. A list of FAQs will dramatically reduce the number of first week questions you will receive from students. Update your FAQs at the beginning of each semester to reflect policy changes, procedural changes, and any new questions that have arisen during the previous semester.

- Be sure to include your contact information. Using the Contacts tool is a good way to provide students with your contact information, office number and location, and office hours each semester. If you use the contact tool, it is again recommended that you include a picture of yourself to personalize your course. Your “Getting Started” module is a prime location for this information.

- Let students know what it takes to be successful in an online course. Post a document in your class similar to the one linked below. Learning at home, or in any environment other than a classroom, is very different than face-to-face learning. Give students an idea of how to prepare themselves to be successful in an online course.

BEST PRACTICES: CREATING AN INVITING AND SUPPORTIVE COURSE ENVIRONMENT

- Create a Warm and Inviting Atmosphere to Build Community
- Write in an informal tone
- Provide lots of encouragement and support, especially in the beginning of the course.
- Incorporate the "human touch"
- Commend students privately by email
BEST PRACTICES: PROMOTE ACTIVE LEARNING

Encourage your students to be proactive in their learning by doing the following:

- Regularly logging into course site
- Submitting assignments on time
- Completing quizzes within required timeframe
- Reading messages posted and replying within required timeframe
- Cooperating with teammates, etc.
- Provide opportunities for your students to interact, to collaborate, or to review a peer’s work.

- Use different discussion formats listed below to cultivate students’ critical thinking
  - Small group discussions
  - Buzz group: two people discussing for a short period of time
  - Case discussions using real-world problems for analysis and suggested solutions
  - Debating teams wherein students present ideas, defend positions, and argue against opposition’s reasoning
  - Jigsaw groups where subgroups discuss various parts of a topic and report to the others
  - Role play mocking real settings

- Encourage your students to participate in online discussions actively by:
  - Designing thought-provoking discussion questions
  - Encouraging students to respond to questions at a deeper level
  - Using discussion forums effectively by posting messages that weave several strands of conversation into a summarization that may prompt people to pursue the topic further
  - Pointing out opposing perspectives, different directions, or conflicting opinions.

Model Effective Online Interaction

- Respond to student comments or questions within time frames set at beginning of the course.
  - If circumstances require you to change the time frame for responses, notify students beforehand and provide new time frames.
- If you will be unavailable for some period during the semester (i.e., traveling), notify students beforehand.
- Provide general feedback to the entire class on specific assignments or discussions.
- Provide specific encouragement and comments to students who have completed assignments.
- Provide meaningful feedback on graded assignments with recognition of good work as well as specific suggestions for improvement.
- Provide a weekly wrap up before the next lesson begins.
- Introduce a new week with an overview (including deadlines) of what is coming up.

BEST PRACTICES: MONITOR STUDENT PROGRESS/ENCOURAGE LAGGING STUDENTS
Be aware that students who fall behind are in jeopardy of not completing the course within the same semester of enrollment. This may endanger student financial aid for the following semester or student reimbursement of tuition if the student is receiving funds from a third party (such as an employer).

- The Blackboard Retention Center is a great way to easily monitor student activities from a single screen.
- Contact students who haven't logged in for over a week to inquire whether they're experiencing technical difficulties or problems with course content, team communications, etc.
- If students cannot participate due to technical problems, contact them immediately to get them technical help. Direct them to where they can receive technical assistance.
- Contact students who have not completed assignments by email or phone.
- Send a weekly email summarizing course activities as a general reminder to the whole class near the end of the week.
- Introduce a new week with an overview of upcoming events and deadlines.
- Include flexibility in grading if possible (e.g. Allow students to drop lowest grade; Give choices for when students can complete assignments (e.g. Pick 2 out of 5, etc.).

**Sustain Students’ Motivation**

- Provide opportunities for student collaboration.
- Choose the right tone of conversation in online communication to make students feel comfortable with the learning environment, to establish trust in communication, and to reduce feelings of isolation and enhance a sense of community.
- Provide meaningful feedback on graded assignments with recognition of good work as well as specific suggestions for improvement.
- Provide a weekly wrap up before the next lesson begins.
- Take an active role in helping your students think and learn actively through careful task structuring, questioning, and scaffolding.
- In online discussions, consider:
  - Designing thought-provoking questions to elicit student discussions on the topics of your focus.
  - Providing a weekly summary of discussion topics to demonstrate your participation.
  - Redirecting o-topic discussion through gentle reminders or a recast of the question.
  - Assessing messages by both quantity and quality.

**BEST PRACTICES: SPECIFY CLEAR COURSE EXPECTATIONS**

Create a thorough online Course Syllabus. Online students are legal minded and will search for any loop-hole in your documentation. Prevent any disputes by outlining all policies as specific as possible within your course syllabus. Think about writing your syllabus like you were writing a contract. Try to close any loose ends and loop holes before the semester ever begins. It is always best to provide more information rather than less information in an online environment. Students feel comforted knowing that the course documents contain the answers, and instructors avoid
having to answer the same question over and over. Simply putting your face-to-face course syllabus online is not enough. Specify clear expectations for students in this document with regard to:

- Course goals and learning objectives
- Communication policy - preferred method of communication (Messages, Discussion Board, etc.), your standard response time (best practice is 24 hour turn-around on student communications), office hours, etc
- Detailed description of late work policy
- Assignment information for any major projects and/or papers
- Grading policies
- Academic integrity & plagiarism policies
- Guidelines for student participation and collaboration
- All required elements as dictated by the College and the Distance Education Handbook

Create a concise and well organized Course Schedule. Course schedules are a key element in the creation of a quality online course. It should outline all important dates including open dates (the dates when lesson modules, assignments and exams open) and all closing and due dates (lesson modules, assignments, discussions, exams, quizzes, etc). Please view the following document for a sample of a quality online course schedule:

**BEST PRACTICES: BE PRESENT IN THE COURSE**

Maintain a presence in your course. This does not always mean that you have to be constantly logged in to Blackboard. Announcements that release automatically - notifying students of module open dates, due dates for assignments and exams, and other regularly-scheduled items - can be set to release using date and time criteria based on your specific course schedule, and can be rolled-over from semester to semester. Students "see" you in the course at least once a week, and they also see you in other areas as well (discussion board, grading assignments, responding to Messages, etc.). Here are some other ways to maintain a presence in a course:

- Respond to questions within time frames set at beginning of the course.
- If circumstances require you to change the time frame for responses, notify students beforehand and provide new time frames.
- Let students know if you will be unavailable.
- Provide general feedback to the entire class on specific assignments or discussions.
- Provide specific encouragement and comments to students who have completed assignments.
- Provide meaningful feedback on graded assignments recognition of good work as well as specific suggestions for improvement.
- Provide a weekly wrap up before the next lesson begins.
- Introduce a new week with an overview (including deadlines) of what is coming up.

**BEST PRACTICES: SOLICITING INFORMAL FEEDBACK AND SUGGESTIONS**

One of the best ways to improve your course for future semesters is to solicit feedback from students each semester. This can be accomplished using tools within Blackboard.
• Set aside a Discussion Board within Blackboard soliciting feedback on the course and respond publicly to feedback.
  o Ask students for feedback by creating a "Suggestion Box" where students can post suggestions for improving the course. Allow students to do so anonymously if they so desire.
  o Create a "Course Questions" section on the discussion board where students can post general questions related to the course. Invite students to answer questions where appropriate, but ensure that you monitor for misinformation.

Incorporate student course evaluation data into your teaching and encourage and reward students to report substantive errors in the course.

Through careful instructional design, support, and guidance from the instructor, along with ongoing feedback from students to the instructor and from the instructor to the students, an online course can evolve into a robust, productive, and enjoyable learning community.

**BEST PRACTICES: MANAGING GRADES AND EXAMS**

Clearly communicate to students the grading policies in your course, either in the course syllabus, announcements, or in the assignment instructions. Specify grading policies in your syllabus.

• Grade the assignment submissions in a timely fashion, especially those assignments that build on other assignments.
• Include flexibility in grading if possible:
  o Allow students to drop lowest grade
  o Give choices for when students can complete assignments (e.g. Pick 2 out of 5, etc.)
• Provide clear guidelines regarding your timeframe for responding to student questions and assignment grading.
• Be aware that some of your students may need to submit their assignments and exams early to get grades prior to graduation, and this may affect some date availability restrictions that you set on course components.
• Keep grades/exams related communications within the course management system.
• Effectively manage your students’ grades by using the gradebook.

**BEST PRACTICES: MANAGE TIME AND WORKLOAD EFFECTIVELY**

Use the right communication tool for the right task

• Post announcements to reach entire class.
• Use collaboration tools.
• Create feedback rubrics to respond to common questions or issues.
• Post a student FAQ.
• Establish a routine for regular and planned interaction within the course and with the students.
• Establish and notify students of acceptable formats for submitting assignments.
• Establish and notify students of reasonable response times so they know when to expect your answer.
• Use peer assessment to provide an additional feedback opportunity while reducing faculty workload.
• Use checklists.

INSTRUCTIONAL TELEVISION (ITV) BEST PRACTICES

Teaching via ITV is similar to face-to-face, with some differences. The following is a list of ideas, techniques, and common practices that are shown to be successful in an ITV setting.

BEST PRACTICES: DISTRIBUTING MATERIALS

Using the LMS is the most effective means of distributing materials for ITV courses. Post course materials (handouts, assignment details, study guides, etc.) well before the date of class meeting. Use the date release option to ensure that students gain access to the appropriate materials before the scheduled class meeting times. You can post syllabi; post assignments; return assignments, grades, and feedback with minimal time and effort.

BEST PRACTICES: INSTRUCTIONAL TIPS AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

One difficult aspect of ITV instruction is not having all of the students in the same classroom.

• Consider using seat assignments to facilitate and streamline attendance/roll call process. Check attendance/call roll every time your class meets.
• Engage students from other campuses in conversation and ask them questions. Alternate between lecture and discussion regularly during the class.
• Engage students with direct questions and reward their contributions to the class. When students ask questions, get in the habit of repeating the questions so they are clear to students at all locations. Do not assume that students will say that they did not hear the question or ask you to repeat the question.
• Focus attention regularly on the instructor camera – this will give the appearance that you are looking at the off campus students.
• Utilize multiple forms of student interaction: polling, discussion, reading, writing, etc.
• Switch presentation modes often. Changing presentation mode keeps students focus and maintains their attention. For example, if using PowerPoint, an instructor may become a disembodied voice if they do not switch to the instructor camera occasionally.
• When using PowerPoint, give students a study guide (distributed via the LMS) to fill in and do not provide them with the full PowerPoint presentation. Consider providing students with partial notes for them to fill in as you move through your lecture.
• Remind students to identify themselves when addressing you from an off-site location. This includes those students in your local classroom.

BEST PRACTICES: VISUAL ELEMENTS
• Use photographs when possible. Photos are preferred over line drawings by most learners, except when the color component is critical to the content to be learned (such as colored wires). Photographs add the “real life” reference that some students need.
• Use simple, uncomplicated visuals. Simpler visuals are usually more effective, regardless of age group.
• Use a consistent background. Consistent background color and/or design add continuity and structure to a set of visuals. For example, keep background designs consistent in PowerPoint slides.
• Select color combinations with care. Easy-to-read color combinations enhance visuals. A light background with dark text is usually recommended. The opposite approach – dark background with light text – may be used, but it is not necessarily to the liking of the majority of people.
• Keep letter styles simple. A sans serif style should be used and instructors should avoid “fancy” variations such as outline or shadow, as these may be difficult to read.
• Use appropriate font size. The rule of thumb is that whatever the format, the materials should be readable by all members of the audience in the situation for which they were intended.
• Incorporate white space. White space makes the visual more “inviting” and should be incorporated in materials design.
• Keep special effects to a minimum (bold, italics, underscoring, etc). Special effects have their place but should be used sparingly.
• Design and use an image for “wait times.” Design and use some type of signage to be transmitted while awaiting arrival of students or during break times. This can be a slide transmitted via document camera, a PowerPoint slide, etc. Make the image “catchy” with the school logo or a funny cartoon, or design an image using the computer with color graphics and text. This image is a cue to students that there is a break in the lecture presentation.

BEST PRACTICES: DOCUMENT CAMERAS

Many ITV systems utilize document cameras – the projection system for hardcopy materials. The following are just a few guidelines that will address the hardcopy materials.

• Practice the “big is better” concept. Advance preparations allows for very professional looking materials. These can be completed on a laser printer, using large print (18 or larger, preferably size 24).
• Beware of handwritten documents. Use a bold pen that is blue, black, or red.
• Use “live write” sparingly. “Live write” works only if the instructor has legible handwriting. If the handwriting is not legible, either print or use a computer to prepare the materials in advance.
• Use a guide sheet. When handwritten material is to be transmitted, use either lined paper or a linked backing sheet. This will reduce the “hills and valleys” output that does not work well with ITV.

BEST PRACTICES: MAKING A PRESENTATION GREAT
• Less is more. Students must be able to absorb both the information on the slides and the oral lecture. Instead of complicated single slides, create multiple slides that each contains a distinct idea or concept.
• Avoid reading your lecture when possible. Talking directly to the audience is more engaging, especially when dealing with distant learners.
• Appropriate hand gestures and body movements, in moderations, can also make for a dynamic presentations.
• Vary your tone of voice and the amount of eye contact made with the camera.
• Keep the lecture area clutter free. Book bags, coats, power cables, loose paper, and open folders can be visually distracting.
• Similarly, avoid wearing neon colors, bold stripes, bright reds, or elaborately patterned clothing. Avoid large pieces of jewelry (flash distractions). Attend to manicure if you use the document camera (hands will be seen in extreme close-up).
• Practice in front of a mirror or camera if possible before the lecture.
• Use visual aids frequently. To avoid the “talking head” problem rely on visual aids in the class. To increase student interest, mix your use of visuals when you can.

BEST PRACTICES: PATIENCE

While the ITV system runs very well and there are minimal problems throughout the year, issues do happen. Be prepared for the system to occasionally fail. A back-up plan is essential to effectively cope with system problems. Off-site students should know how long to wait in the classroom should a technical problem arise.

Additionally, use the LMS and have students check in there if a course is interrupted. Most students will adjust to the situation and minimal instructional time will be lost if a back-up plan is in place.

BEST PRACTICES: DISCIPLINE

To minimize distractions, clarify to the class what kinds of behaviors will be tolerated. Some instructors insist on a seating chart for remote students and require all students to be in view of the camera at all times. Discourage ambient noise. Caution students at all sites to avoid unnecessary noise, casual conversation, or excessive fidgeting in class because the microphones are noise sensitive and will pick up on the slightest noise.

Visiting other campuses and teaching from different locations can aid in a smooth semester. The students at distance sites enjoy meeting the instructor face-to-face and the local students better understand what the distance sites have to deal with. Be sure to let the Distance Education Department know in advance of any changes to the teaching location.

BEST PRACTICES: LOGISTICS

This section attempts to discuss a number of procedures for some of the logistical issues with ITV.

Testing
One of the most uncomfortable areas for some instructors using ITV is that they are not in the room when students are being tested. These are some of the options available to you:

- Change your testing to more of a “take home” test or an open book type test. Consider application questions (essay and short answer) that would make cheating difficult in the face-to-face setting.
- The LMS has a testing feature that allows you to set up tests that are accessible through the campus or a student’s internet connection. The LMS test tool allows for random question selection so no two tests are exactly the same, timed testing – limiting the length of time the student has to complete the exam, and large pools of questions.
- Consider splitting an exam into two parts: Part 1 that is automatically graded and feedback is automatically given by the LMS (multiple choice, matching, True/False, etc.) and Part 2 that is graded by the instructor (essay, short answer, etc.). Students will receive immediate feedback on a portion of the exam, and the instructor can weigh both parts accordingly to accommodate for potential academic dishonesty.

Homework

The most effective means for collecting classroom and out of classroom assignments is to use the LMS assignments tool. Assignments turned in via the LMS are time/date stamped and there is minimal danger of “lost” assignments (which often seems to happen with email).

Other Considerations

- Prepare handouts for students whenever large amounts of material are being covered and have them posted on the LMS well in advance of the face-to-face class. Remember: handouts should be study guides or partial notes that students have to fill in. Do not just provide your students with your completed PowerPoint presentations.
- Overheads/Document Camera: paper copies of transparencies work best. Plastic reflects and is difficult for remote sites to read.
- Layout: A horizontal format with sans serif 24 point font works best for presentation of written materials. Be sure that any handouts uploaded to the LMS are optimized for saving and printing (pdf or html).
- Presentations: Create presentations using PowerPoint or on the Web. ITV classrooms are equipped with computers and internet access.
- Videos: Use video guides when watching videos to make the activity an active learning experience. Also remember that videos can be viewed outside of class time via the LMS.

**ADA SECTION 508 INFORMATION AND BEST PRACTICES**

The Federal Government is clear that online classes must fulfill the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. These requirements deal with things such as media, format, alternate descriptions, colors, tables, and images. This section provides faculty with best practices for incorporating Universal Design into hybrid and internet courses. Educational access for all students is the joint responsibility of administration, faculty and staff.
The Distance Education Department will make every effort to provide training and support to faculty involved with the creation and teaching of online content to ensure universal accessibility.

SECTION 508 STANDARDS SUBPART B – TECHNICAL STANDARDS

§ 1194.22 Identifies several key factors when dealing with Web-based intranet and internet information and applications.

(a) A text equivalent for every non-text element shall be provided (e.g., via “alt”, “longdesc”, or in element content).

(b) Equivalent alternatives for any multimedia presentation shall be synchronized with the presentation.

(c) Web pages shall be designed so that all information conveyed with color is also available without color, for example from context or markup.

(d) Documents shall be organized so they are readable without requiring an associated style sheet.

(e) Redundant text links shall be provided for each active region of a server-side image map.

(f) Client-side image maps shall be provided instead of server-side image maps except where the regions cannot be defined with an available geometric shape.

(g) Row and column headers shall be identified for data tables.

(h) Markup shall be used to associate data cells and header cells for data tables that have two or more logical levels of row or column headers.

(i) Frames shall be titled with text that facilitates frame identification and navigation.

(j) Pages shall be designed to avoid causing the screen to flicker with a frequency greater than 2 Hz and lower than 55 Hz.

(k) A text-only page, with equivalent information or functionality, shall be provided to make a web site comply with the provisions of this part, when compliance cannot be accomplished in any other way. The content of the text-only page shall be updated whenever the primary page changes.
(l) When pages utilize scripting languages to display content, or to create interface elements, the information provided by the script shall be identified with functional text that can be read by assistive technology.

(m) When a web page requires that an applet, plug-in or other application be present on the client system to interpret page content, the page must provide a link to a plug-in or applet that complies with §1194.21(a) through (l).

(n) When electronic forms are designed to be completed on-line, the form shall allow people using assistive technology to access the information, field elements, and functionality required for completion and submission of the form, including all directions and cues.

(o) A method shall be provided that permits users to skip repetitive navigation links.

(p) When a timed response is required, the user shall be alerted and given sufficient time to indicate more time is required.

In an effort to comply with all sections of this standard, the following best practices shall be effective.

**BEST PRACTICES: NON-TEXT ELEMENTS**

- All images used in distance education courses must have alt-tags (a text equivalent).
- Be sure to run an accessibility check on all PowerPoint files to ensure that all images have proper alt-tags.
- Make alternative text concise and descriptive.
- Create alt-tags in HTML editors such as SoftChalk, Kompozer (Macs) or Dreamweaver.

**BEST PRACTICES: MULTIMEDIA**

- Multimedia presentations will provide closed captioning to describe important information or will include text transcripts. Camtasia, CapScribe and Jubler have closed captioning capabilities.
- Text transcripts will be provided for all audio files.
- Offer multimedia content in alternate formats such as CD, diskette, videotape or audiotape.

**BEST PRACTICES: COLOR**

- Text and graphics must be viewable without color.
- Use a single colored background rather than textured or patterned background.
- Create high contrast between the background and the text, such as bold white font on black or blue.
- Avoid using color combinations that cause difficulty for people with color blindness or low visual acuity such as: - Red and green (Most common. 1 in 10 affected)
- Blue and yellow
- Red and purple (low contrast)
- Yellow and white/light grey (low contrast)
- Pink/lavender pastel colors (low contrast)

- White text on a black background will appear thinner than the same weight of font in black on a lighter background. Use a heavier font such as bold to compensate. White text out of blue is particularly legible.
- Ensure colors can be overwritten by the viewer’s browser settings.
- When a color such as red is used as an indicator, use a secondary method such as bold, italics or underline.
- Test pages for readability by photocopying them several times.
- Test web pages using multiple browsers and/or a web page accessibility validation service such as WAVE.

**BEST PRACTICES: STYLE SHEETS**

- Write well-structured HTML pages that are readable when the associated style sheet is disabled. Font sizes defined in the Cascading Style Sheet must be customizable by the end user - do not hard code.

**BEST PRACTICES: CLIENT-SIDE IMAGE MAPS (LINKS)**

- Image maps (links to other pages) need redundant text for each link located either above or below the link. “Click Here” is not an appropriate descriptor. Consider using the destinations web page title.
- Make these text links concise and descriptive.
- Make links the traditional blue text with an underscore.

**BEST PRACTICES: TABLES**

- Use text instead of a table or add a text transcript as an alternative to a table.
- Only use tables readable from left to right.
- Identify the headers (first cells) in the rows and columns. Use header HTML tags such as `<th>` or `<th scope="col">` in tables. This enables screen readers to read the information as intended, instead of left to right. Headers can be used by screen readers to identify important information.

**BEST PRACTICES: AUTO-REFRESH**

- Ensure user control of time-sensitive content changes. Avoid screen elements that move, blink, flicker or scroll to prevent screen readers from locking up.
- To call the user’s attention to specific information, use a secondary method such as bold, increase font size or CAPITALIZATION in addition to color.
Blackboard Learn 9.x Messages and Blackboard Collaborate’s instant messaging tools auto refresh, alerting users to new mail and to new people entering the online environment. The user can disable these features.

**BEST PRACTICES: TEXT-ONLY PAGE**

- Provide a single printable page when content spans several web pages.
- Prominently display links, such as “back to homepage”, at the top and bottom of the text only page.
- Save PowerPoints in outline view. Review the resulting file to confirm that it accurately conveys your content. Insert a blank line between each slide.
- Use sans serif font greater than or equal to 10 points for documents and greater than or equal to 14 points for web pages.
- Separate text into short 3 to 5 sentence paragraphs with white space in between.
- Alternatively, convert long paragraphs into bullets.
- Avoid using more than 2 or 3 carriage returns of white space.
- Use text rows instead of text columns because screen readers read across the entire display left to right. Users must be able to customize the text.

**BEST PRACTICES: SCRIPTING LANGUAGES**

- Confirm web pages are viewable with JAVA scripting disabled.

**BEST PRACTICES: PLUG-INS**

- Content designers or faculty using an activity requiring a plug-in or applet must provide a download link to the required plug-in or applet.

**BEST PRACTICES: FORMS**

- Forms included in an online course, such as course evaluations, must be readable by assistive technology or an alternative method of completing the form must be provided. For example, the form could be printed, completed, scanned, and returned via email.

**BEST PRACTICES: NAVIGATION LINKS**

- Make navigation between pages intuitive, logical and easy to follow. Minimize repetitive navigation links.

**BEST PRACTICES: TIMED RESPONSES**

- Timed activities must allow students the ability to indicate when more time is needed. Blackboard Learn 9.1 warns students with a pop-up alert when time is running out.
BEST PRACTICES: CHATS

- Offer students with disabilities alternative Chat options such as emailing or posting questions in a discussion forum.
- Offer students with disabilities the option of contacting the instructor by telephone during office hours.

BEST PRACTICE: POWERPOINT

- Run accessibility check on all PowerPoint files to ensure screen reader compatibility. Revise slides as appropriate based on results.
- Be especially careful when using Publisher provided PowerPoints as they are rarely ADA compliant.