# **Best Practices in Designing Online Courses**

#### **Draft 1**

- I. Course Organization and Design
- II. Instructional Design
- III. Course Introduction

### I. Course Organization and Design

Structure your course in a well-organized manner, and make it easy to navigate. Students should be able to intuitively get from place to place within the course.

The MC template has been provided for each subject within the departments. You should import the template and then make edits where needed. If you do not have access to this template, contact your liaison. Learn more. [link]

Course weekly content should be divided into "learning blocks" either by week or topic, appropriately labeled, and presented in a logical manner. Instructors typically divide these weekly blocks into modules, chapters, etc.

If you are updating course content and need design help, consult your department liaison and/or the college's instructional technologist, Jessica Manzo at <a href="manzo@mc.edu">manzo@mc.edu</a> or ext.7795.

Standard	Description
1. Course Description	Course name and description should be at the top of your course home page. This can be directly from the course catalog or your syllabus.
2. Instructor's Manual	Designed for the instructor by the instructor. A guide to help others who may teach a second section of the course
2. Contact the Instructor	Web page with the instructor's contact information. Stock verbiage has been provided for the online instructor and should read as follows:  Instructor: [Name]
	Ways to Contact: General questions should be posted on

	the "Ask the Instructor" forum, where other students may view the questions and see my response. If you have a special request, contact me via "QuickMail", located on the top-right side of your course home page, which goes to my MC email inbox.
2. News Forum	Designed for the instructor to make daily announcements and special instructions
3. Ask the Instructor	A forum where students can ask and answer class-related questions. Please stress that this is not a forum for posting personal information or concerns, such as late assignments or grades. Such messages should be sent via the QuickMail block.
	Also, you may want to post a web page of frequently-asked questions in your course.
4. Introduce Yourself	A forum provided for students to post introductions once they have logged in to their course for the first time. This provides community online, and is not necessarily a graded assignment.
5. Daily Attendance	A hybrid or traditional course may choose this module to keep track of their students' attendance. The student can review the latest update online.
6. Course Outline and Expectations	Description of student assignments "a week at a glance" style, providing a calendar that shows when activities open and close within a week's time. This also outlines the general terms of each activity type.
7. Grade Scale & Evaluation	Course information on weighting and percentages of grades based on activity type
8. Due Dates	At-a-glance look at all due dates of all activities throughout the course
9. "About"	Web pages can be created to describe details of a course project, forums, and other activities that may require special instructions.
10. Required Textbook	Complete information, if more than one text book or handout is used, you may consider creating a web page where all content and links can be created.
11. Course Resources	Additional resources the instructor will have students

reference

# **II. Instructional Design**

Standard	Description
1. Introduce weekly learning blocks with an overview of the topic.	This can simply be a topic title and paragraph that briefly explains the topic to be studied. (Place holders are provided on the template.)
2. Connect what the students already know about the topic to what they are going to learn.	This can include questions or activities to make this connection. Recalling prior knowledge should help provide a context for the students and get them excited about the learning tasks ahead of them.
3. Write and post objectives for each learning unit.	Your objectives should emanate from your course's learning outcomes and detail the specific tasks that students will be able to complete. Create a webpage for these objectives.
4. Align your learning activities to your objectives and outcomes.	Use your objectives and outcomes to determine your learning activities. Be consistent. For example, if one of your objectives states that students will discuss a topic, make sure the activity is a class discussion in the discussion board.
5. Align your assessments to your objectives and outcomes.	Use your objectives and outcomes to determine your assessments. Be consistent. For example, if one of your objectives states that students will evaluate a topic, make sure the assessment has a corresponding essay question that asks students to evaluate.
6. Structure your learning activities to foster student-instructor, student-student, and	Strive to design a student-centered classroom where active learning and engaging activities are present.  For examples of how to do this, click <u>Learning Activities that</u>

student-content interactions.	Foster Interaction (PDF).
7. Clearly write your content and lessons.	Ambiguity will result in confused students and a lot of emails to you. If your instructions aren't clear, the students don't have you in front of them to ask clarifying questions. The clearer you write, the less confusion for your students.  Include formatting techniques such as bolds, bullets, and white space, and make sure your text contains no spelling or grammar errors.
8. Post model submission assignments.	Model assignments are examples that your students can view in order to better understand the differences between quality and non-quality work.  To use model assignments from former students, get their permission in writing, and remove their names from the assignments prior to posting. If you can't get these from former students, consider creating them yourself.
9. Post rubrics for grading.	Rubrics are criteria for grading non-objective tests and assignments. They let students know exactly how you will grade them, and they take the subjectivity out of your grading.  You can develop rubrics for individual assignments, or in the case of discussion board postings, you can develop a generic rubric that applies to all posting assignments.
10. Ensure that the breadth of your content covers all of the content in the course outline of record.	If your course doesn't cover everything in the course outline, your students won't learn everything they are supposed to learn. This especially has a negative impact on students who transfer to four-year institutions and are expected to know specific content.
11. "Chunk" the course content that you post for students.	Written material posted to students, particularly written and/or video lectures, should be divided into short ("chunked") sections with links to subsequent pages, if necessary. PowerPoint presentations—with or without audio narration—should be chunked and 5-10 minutes in

	duration. Podcast lectures should be chunked and the same length.
12. Ensure that your content meets the needs of students with different learning styles.	Multimedia works best to meet the needs of audio, visual, and kinesthetic learners. Audio narrations, podcasts, videos, pictures, charts and graphs, and simulations all enhance learning.
13. Extend your students' learning with optional web resources.	For those students who get excited about a topic and want to learn more on their own, provide links to web sites that you think will be helpful. Conversely, you can also provide links that will help remediate students who struggled through a topic.
14. When designing lengthy quizzes or exams, design them so students see 1-5 questions at a time.	Each answer gets saved once the student goes to the next question, which is helpful in case the student's browser times out. A quiz/exam should have a set time and open/close dates when students are able to access. To discourage cheating: (1) use the "shuffle within questions" and random shuffle for question order feature and create more question/answers in your quiz bank, (2) make the allocated amount of time a minute to 90 seconds per question; (3) 1 attempt; (4) force one question per page; and (5) use Respondus solution(s). For more information on Respondus, view here. [link]
15. Gather feedback from your students on the course so you can improve it for the future.	Gathering feedback is not done as an official evaluation of the course; it is merely an way to improve the course. Surveys can be used to gather the feedback, and they can be used at any point during, and/or toward the end of, the course.
16. Refrain from illegally using copyrighted materials.	If you are unsure as to whether you are violating copyright law, seek permission to use the copyrighted material. For more information on the U.S. Copyright Law, visit the <u>U.S. Copyright Office's web site</u> .
17. Design your course so that handouts and videos can be downloaded within a reasonable period of time even without a	Do not upload extremely large files to your course. Image file size should be under 50k. The JPEG format should be used for photos; GIF should be used for all other graphics. Audio and video can be streamed, instead of downloaded. Design for users with a 56k modem.
high-speed Internet	If you need assistance with any of the above, consult the

connection.	college's instructional technology staff.
	Use a connection speed-download speed calculator
18. Ensure that your links are active and upto-date.	Instructors should check all links prior to the course and prior to each segment of the course.
	Inactive links should be fixed or removed. Links with outdated information should be updated.

# III. Course Introduction (The first week)

Standard	Description
1. Detail the general course content and student responsibilities, among other items, in your syllabus.	Course description     Faculty contact information. Include a statement on how long students should expect to get a reply from you.     Textbooks     Learning outcomes that are measurable     How the course is organized and how it works     Grading policy     Exams     Term papers/projects     Course schedule     Research information and links     Netiquette     Plagiarism     How to succeed in an online course     The college withdrawal policy     Technical requirements for the course     Downloads/plug-ins     Technical support     Help for students with disabilities     Copyright information for students     Others who might have access to the course, including invited guests, technical support people, and course evaluators

2. Greet your students
with a welcome
message, and tell them
how to get started in the
course.

This welcome message should be the first thing students see when they initially log into the course. Keep the tone of this message warm and inviting.

3. Introduce yourself to the class, and have students introduce themselves to you and to one another in order to begin building a "community of learners".

The instructor might ask students to answer specific questions, such as their year in college, major, what high school they attended, city they live in, hobbies, future goals, family, pets, job, and anything else they are willing to share.

If you want to create more community, you can incorporate a blog.

# 4. Acquaint students with the course software.

#### Instructors can have students:

- Send an email in which students explain why they enrolled in the course, what they already know about the content of the course, and what they hope to learn.
- Introduce themselves in the discussion board.
- Send an email that details their computer-related skills and experience.
- Post a message in the appropriate group discussion board with a link to a web site they think will benefit students in the class.
- Post to a blog.
- Complete a quiz based on the syllabus.

# 5. Ensure that students understand what is required for them to succeed in an online course.

Include an activity that teaches students:

- Successful study strategies
- How to communicate online
- How to behave ethically online
- How to prepare technologically for the course
- Where to access college resources

An interactive tutorial called Succeeding in an Online Course is on the LPC Online Learning web site.

Quizzes for each chapter have been created and can be inputted into online courses. For more information about these quizzes, contact Jessica Manzo.

## **Sources for information on best practices:**

Guidelines for Good Practice: Technology Mediated Instruction, The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges

Distance Learning Manual, Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

Rubric for Online Instruction, CSU Chico

Quality Matters Peer Course Review Rubric, Maryland Online

Best Practices in Distance Learning Programming – Award Criteria, U.S. Distance Learning Association

Selection Criteria for Best Online Teaching Website, California Virtual Campus

ADEC Guiding Principles for Distance Teaching and Learning, The American Distance Education Consortium

Quality on the Line, National Education Association and Blackboard, Inc.

Website: http://lpc1.clpccd.cc.ca.us/lpc/blackboard/best\_practices/