Ensuring Quality Online Learning
UC Irvine Distance Learning Center

Rubric for Online Extension Courses & Programs

In order to ensure the highest quality learning possible for online courses and programs offered by UC Irvine Extension, the Distance Learning Center provides the following rubric to be utilized during the course and program development process as well as to encourage continuous improvement during and after delivery.

The attached rubrics are to be utilized for extension courses and programs that provide at a minimum 80% of the teaching and learning online. For hybrid courses (up to 80% of the course is taught online) and classroom-based courses and programs please see separate rubrics. While we believe many of the below criteria define quality regardless of the format of the course or program, there are a number of key elements that should be reviewed uniquely depending on the delivery format.

For each standard below, three levels of distinction are detailed in the attached rubrics. They are defined as such:

- **Does Not Meet Standard ("DNM")**: The course does not meet any of the criteria as described and is not effective on this dimension.
- **Partially Meets Standard ("PM")**: The course meets some, but not all, of the criteria described and can be considered somewhat effective on this dimension.
- **Fully Meets Standard ("FM")**: The course meets all of the criteria described and can be considered highly effective on this dimension.

I. The CONTEXT

I.a. **The organization is committed to the online program.**

The organization demonstrates its commitment to online programming by dedicating adequate resources to the training of online instructors and Extension staff, quality assurance activities, and technological infrastructure. The DLC is structured in a manner that is timely, cost-effective, and budgetarily sound, thereby encouraging its constituencies to utilize the DLC to create high quality online courses and programs.

I.b. **Course developers are appropriately selected by the planning unit, as well as trained and supported to develop high quality online courses.**

Instructors are vetted based on academic background, professional experience, references, basic technological capabilities, and, if requested, a sample lesson. Hired instructors are required to enroll and successfully complete all formal online instructor trainings before teaching their first online course. In addition, instructors enjoy ongoing support via interaction with DLC staff and/or mentor instructor, monthly training webinars, self-access resources, and examples of well-designed/facilitated online courses (or shadowing an online instructor).
l.c. **Instructors who will teach online courses are offered substantive training and feedback in the application of current best-practices in instructor-student interaction, feedback, and assessment.**

All new instructors receive a midterm evaluation for the first course they teach and veteran instructors have the option of request a midterm evaluation. All online instructors receive feedback from final evaluations within one month of the close of the course. Instructors with less than ideal feedback have a consultation with respective planner and are enrolled in additional training (if applicable to the situation).

l.d. **Services offered to distant students are equivalent to those offered to on-grounds students.**

Online students have access to high quality support services, via Student Services and the planning units, which help to address broad course/program questions, issues and concerns through phone calls and email. High quality instructional support is also provided to students by the DLC through phone calls and email regarding problems with any technologies utilized in the course. Acknowledgement of all student inquiries – be they programmatic or technological in nature – are provided by the appropriate unit within 24 hours. Additionally, students have remote access to selected resources, such as the library catalogue, offered through main campus student services.

l.e. **Distance learning center staff are committed to research on the online education enterprise and to the sharing of research results with appropriate audiences.**

The DLC staff keeps abreast of innovations in online instruction by regularly attending conferences/webinars, reading related books/articles, and other professional development activities. In addition, DLC staff conducts relevant research projects using data analytics, student surveys, etc. Pertinent information is distributed to planners and support staff regularly via a newsletter, blog, and/or learning community.

l.f. **Distance learning and planning unit staff are committed to financially responsible decision-making and disciplined risk-taking in a resource-constrained environment.**

Planners and support staff regularly share experiences/suggestions/outcomes pertinent to online instruction among themselves and professional development opportunities related to online course development and quality assurance are developed and subsidized by the DLC for planners and support staff. The organization funds general quality assurance projects that benefit all online programs and ABC costs related to online training/support incentivize planners to utilize the expertise/resources of the DLC. Professional development opportunities related to online course development and quality assurance are developed and subsidized by the DLC for planners and support staff.

l.g. **Advances in learning and teaching technology are continuously and systematically evaluated to determine whether adoption of such technology would be both cost effective and educationally sound.**

The DLC is dedicated to researching, evaluating, testing, and costing out new learning and teaching technologies that address general business needs, overall course quality, and specific requests by planning units. Adopted technology is integrated into formal instructor and staff training and lessons learned are regularly shared with planners and support staff via a
II. The COURSE

II.a. The course curriculum quality is assumed by the planning unit, with support from the advisory committee and the DLC.

All programs have an advisory committee that meets to discuss the course curriculum annually, or more often if appropriate. Formal review processes are led by the planning unit every five years, with the support of the advisory committee and the DLC. Planning units and DLC staff work with instructors to ensure curriculum updates are implemented effectively.

II.b. Materials and activities selection and sequencing is based on measurable outcome objectives.

Course and lesson objectives focus on students’ analysis/synthesis/evaluation of the content. Lesson objectives are clearly stated and evaluated activities clearly map to these objectives. Each online course contains a minimum of 10 hours of seat time per unit, which may include the following activities: synchronous lectures, synchronous discussions, synchronous group activities, prerecorded lectures to be viewed asynchronously, asynchronous discussions, interactive web-based lab simulations, or proctored online assessments. Lectures are related to one or more of the lesson objectives and incorporate the instructor’s personal expertise. Opportunities for student collaboration occur weekly. Little to no overlap exists among various content forms.

II.c. The instructional design of the online course allows for substantial interaction and engagement.

Course contains weekly opportunities for asynchronous or synchronous student-instructor and student-student interactions. Discussion prompts are open-ended and encourage students to bring in outside knowledge/examples. Students are incentivized to respond to peers’ contributions and small group interactions are encouraged. Additionally, all course materials for at a minimum of the first two weeks of the course are available at or before the time of instruction.

II.d. The online course meets and exceeds current best practices in universal design.

Fonts, headers, images are easy to read and work on a variety of devices. Content is delivered via a minimum of two mediums (text, video, audio) and the layout of the course adheres to approved course template and style guide. Additionally, instructors utilize the standard Extension PowerPoint template for all lectures.

III. The INSTRUCTION

III.a. Instructors are frequently, predictably, and visibly present in their pedagogical capacity.

Instructors log in to their courses every 24-48 hours, Monday through Friday and at the instructor’s discretion on Saturdays and Sundays. Instructors provide visible feedback (either individual or group) to students every 48 hours, Monday through Friday and at the instructor’s discretion on Saturdays and Sundays. Instructors also provide timely and quality feedback on graded assessments and assignments. Guidelines and expectations for classroom communications are clearly communicated at the start of the course.
III.b. **Instructors encourage higher-level thinking and performance.**

Course and lesson objectives focus on students’ analysis/synthesis/evaluation of the content and all assignments and activities easily map to these objectives. At least three forms of assessments are utilized to evaluate student performance (ex. Interactive discussions, writing assignments, multiple choice questions, portfolio projects).

III.c. **Instructors encourage academic honesty, respect for and among participants, and empirically-based analysis.**

All syllabi clearly display Extension’s academic honesty and netiquette guidelines. Disruptive, inappropriate, or abusive student behavior is quickly reported by the instructor and quickly addressed by the planning unit.

III.d. **Student grading criteria are clearly spelled out and fairly applied.**

Syllabi contain a breakdown of how student performance will be evaluated as well as clearly defined grading scales. Students are provided clear instructions and grading criteria for each evaluated activity, including class participation.

**IV. EVALUATION**

IV.a. **The organization regularly and consistently evaluates course effectiveness and student outcomes.**

Course and instructor evaluations are conducted after every course offering and speak to student outcomes. Planning units review course and instructor evaluations in a timely manner, with support of the DLC, and address issues where courses and/or instructors are not producing intended learning outcomes. Curriculum is reviewed by advisory board members a minimum of every 5 years to ensure that content is accurate, relevant, and timely.

IV.b. **Instructor and support personnel regularly utilize course evaluation metrics to adjust and improve the course.**

The DLC implements a Moodle dashboard (target date: January 2014) to potentially include a mechanism for measuring instructor and student access to course, course materials most clicked on by students, and student completion of activities listed in the Moodle grade book. Planning units and instructors monitor these metrics to ensure timely interventions can occur. In addition, planning units review all course evaluations and work with DLC staff to address any elements of the course that do not meet the quality standards.

IV.c. **Administrators, staff, and instructors are committed to selecting and gathering data from the distance learning effort to continuously improve courses, training, instruction, and support services.**

Administrators, staff, and instructors have participated in formal training programs that address quality standards for online courses and are comfortable using the quality standards rubric to assess the quality of an online course. Additionally, administrators, staff, and instructors know where to access resources and reports related to quality online teaching and learning. Administrators, staff, and instructors regularly participate in continuing education opportunities.
related to quality online teaching and learning. DLC staff reviews all new online courses the first time they are taught and reviews all online course once a year. The DLC generates reports for respective planning units with findings and suggestions and planning units take action on these reports as they see fit.