

Suggested Preliminary Review for Distance Education Courses

Diagnostic Standards for Online and Hybrid Courses

Category 1: Accessibility

1. Course provides access to plug-ins or other applications supporting course content
2. Provides instructor contact information
3. Course materials provide link to campus resources, including support for the learning management system (Blackboard)
4. Complies with Section 508 standards for accessibility

Category 2: Communication

1. Course uses a variety of media to communicate course materials. (For example, text, graphics, audio, video, etc.)
2. Use of standard online communication tools. (Examples may include email, discussion boards, chat, announcements, etc.)
3. Evidence of provision for regular effective contact between instructor and students. (Examples may include expectations of availability of and turnaround time for contact with instructor.)

Category 3: Assessment

1. Student learning outcomes are clearly identified; course objectives and completion requirements are present. Expectation of student's participation, honesty, etc. is clear.
2. Assignments and grading standards are clearly stated. (Examples may include sample assignments, clear directions, criteria used to evaluate discussion board participation or peer review.)
3. Feedback provided throughout the course; self-tests, written feedback, discussion board, email, etc.
4. Student knowledge, attitudes, and/or skills assessed in multiple ways.

Category 4: Navigation

1. Syllabus or orientation (online and/or in person) provide course navigation guidance
2. Course is well organized and easy to navigate; navigation is clear, simple and friendly. Content is organized in a logical format.

Category 5: Design/Presentation

1. Course is visually and functionally consistent
2. Font is easy to read and course pages are a comfortable length using white space
3. Sufficient contrast between text and background
4. Language of written material is friendly and supportive
5. Netiquette expectations are clearly stated

Suggested Evaluation Questions for Distance Education Instructors

Adopted from spring 2008 Academic Senate Paper “Ensuring the Appropriate Use of Educational Technology: An Update for Local Academic Senates” and the spring 2005 Academic Senate Rostrum, “Observing Online Classes.”

How does one visit an online class when the class exists only in cyberspace?

Peer Evaluation

1. An observer could simply choose a week to observe, and, over the course of the week, examine how the instructor delivers course content and interacts with the students. The observer may also ask to see any email communications with students for that week and evaluate
 - 1.1. whether communication is indeed taking place, and
 - 1.2. if the instructor is responding to student emails in a timely manner.
2. The course observer should review the instructor’s policies on communication. If an instructor waits 48 hours to respond to a student’s email, or if the instructor completely neglects to do so over the weekend, it’s not necessarily a bad thing. However, the observer should make sure the instructor has established this as a policy somewhere in the course. In an online course, the information typically found in a syllabus, including course organizational material, may appear in one place, or it may be distributed at key spots throughout the course.
3. The observer may want to review any start-up or welcome instructions for the course. If you, as an observer, can’t figure out where the lecture materials, assignments and learning resources are in the course, it is likely the students can’t either.
4. Determine whether the instructor creates effective communication with opportunities for student interaction, response and collaboration; effective student/teacher contact is required by Title 5. Observers should go to the online discussion board as part of the observation. Additional opportunities may include online office hours, scheduled chat times, and phone communication.
5. Determine whether the instructor uses a variety of instructional methods to accommodate different learning styles.