Online Course Best Practices Checklist

Diablo Valley College was advised to develop a means of validating the quality of its Distance Education program. The Faculty Senate Distance Education Committee researched and developed this checklist. The committee used the process of reviewing the relevant literature and ACCJC DE Review Guidelines, other institutions' guidelines, and then distilled statements and questions from the above sources to create the following document.

The instructor may use the checklist with any online course being developed or offered as a self-assessment, or with another faculty member, such as the Department Chair or Instructional Technology Coordinator, Neal Skapura.

This checklist provides a roadmap to developing a high quality course, beginning with the online syllabus and continuing with course design/organization, aesthetic design, interaction and collaboration, effective use of technology and assessments. In addition, the course design shows a good-faith effort to impart to instructors the requirements of Section 508 standards of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (e.g., captions and transcripts for video or audio, Alt-tags for images, using headings and style ribbons within MS Word when designing documents so that screen readers may read them).

Use the columns to the right of each statement to assess whether or not the course contains that particular element:
- Place a checkmark [✓] in the Yes column if that statement has been met.
- Place a checkmark [✓] in the Not Applicable (N/A) column is marked when the element does not apply to a particular course.
- List comments near each checkbox so you can leave yourself notes and follow-up reminders.

Section 1: Course Information

This section refers to the online course syllabus and course information including objectives, student learning outcomes, course requirements and	Yes	N/A
Syllabus is easily located.		
Instructor contact information is available.		
Instructor office hours are available (online/on campus).		
Required and supplemental textbooks, readings lists and course materials are listed.		
Objectives/Student Learning Outcomes are stated.		
Course communication instructions/guidelines are stated (i.e. Instructor and Student email guidelines).		
Grading policy is clearly stated.		
Online Class Attendance Policy is stated.		
Academic Integrity policy is stated or referenced.		
Directions are CLEAR and easy to understand for tasks/assignments and submission of homework.		
Specific technology requirements are stated (if needed).		
Late and make-up work policy is clearly stated.		
Student support: Course contains information about being an online learner.		

Section 2: Course Design and Organization

Course Design and Organization refers to elements of instructional design in an online course. This includes: the structure, instructional strategies, and the overall	Yes	N/A
Course is well-organized and easy to navigate.		
Content is made available to students in manageable segments or "chunks" (e.g. organized by weeks, units, chapters).		
Content is appropriate for student learning of course objectives.		
Course schedule (calendar) is summarized in one place and clearly identifies overall plan of the course.		
Accessibility issues are addressed: color compliance, captions for videos, alt-tags for images, simple PDFs (text with headings) so that screen-readers can identify document structure		
All links used in the course are accurate and up-to-date.		

Section 3: Aesthetic Design

Aesthetic design refers to the overall appearance of the course and includes visual aspects such as color, typeface, images and other elements key to presenting	Yes	N/A
Sufficient contrast between text and background makes information easy to read.		
Design keeps course pages to a comfortable length with good use of white space – not too much crowding.		
Images, if used, are used in course design to support course content.		
Images are accompanied by text descriptions (Alt text) or captions for images that require a more complex description.		
Typeface is easy to read. Documents are created using Sans Serif fonts (e.g. Calibri, Verdana, Arial or Tahoma) with a size of 12 point or higher.		
Styles such as titles and headings are used to format the document.		
Data organized in rows and columns are put in a table.		

Section 4: Interaction and Collaboration

	Yes	N/A
Interaction and collaboration refers to the extent to which there is student-to-instructor, student-to-student, and student content interaction. Exemplary courses should integrate many different ways to interact and collaborate in the online environment.		
Student participation requirements/expectations are clearly stated on syllabus or in D2L.		
Instructor provides frequent announcements/reminders.		
Instructor email response time is clearly stated (24-48 hrs.).		
Regular feedback about student performance is provided in a timely manner throughout the course (example: discussion board posts, assignments, quizzes, etc.).		
If applicable, the course promotes an active discussion area which encourages students to reply to each other.		

**Contact is initiated by the Instructor with students
in a variety of ways: (Select all that apply)**

£ Announcements £ Phone conversations £ Participation in discussion board £ Chat sessions £ Email Voice enabled messages	□ Participation in online group collaboration projects □ Face-to-face meetings (review sessions, scheduled meetings) £ Virtual meetings - CCConfer (Google Hangout, WebEx, or Similar) □ Other_____

**Communication/collaboration tools used in the course:
(Select all that apply)**

   Chat room
£ Email
£ Discussion board
£ Whiteboard
£ CCConfer, Google Hangout, WebEx, Zoom, or similar technology
£ Student presentations
£ Other_____

Section 5: Effective use of Technology

Effective Use of Course Technology refers to the successful integration of technology into the online course and its use in a variety of formats that help students to achieve course goals and objectives.	Yes	N/A
Course makes effective use of online instructional tools with D2L.		
Course materials are presented using appropriate formats compatible across computer platform (pdf, rtf, mp3, etc.).		
Book publisher content and external book publisher websites are used.		
Audio and video include a transcript or are closed-captioned		
Presentations are created using design templates so that screen readers can read them.		
What tools are used in the course? (Select all that apply) £ Email £ Chat £ Journals £ Calendar £ Gradebook £ Video/DVD £ Graphics/Images £ Wikis £ Image Database £ Blogs £ Animations £ Whiteboard £ Audio £ Survey £ Podcasts £ Quiz tool £ Glossary £ Presentations/portfolios		

Section 6: Assessment /Evaluation

The assessment category focuses on the ways in which the student is evaluated toward achieving the student learning outcomes and the quality, type, structure, and security of the assessments used.	Yes	N/A
Which type of assessments are used throughout the course and how often are students assessed?		
Is anti-plagiarism software used for written assignments, accessible through D2L's dropbox?		
Sample assignments are provided to illustrate instructor expectations.		
Detailed instructions and tips for completing assignments are provided.		
Time limitations are placed on exams given online.		
Exams are password protected.		
Exams are proctored (by instructor) in a supervised environment if exams are given f2f at DVC.		
Exams are composed of question pools which are randomized.		
Questions on exams are seen one at a time.		

References

California State University – Chico's influential *Rubric for Online Instruction* was developed to "develop and evaluate online courses"   http://www.csuchico.edu/celt/roi/ This rating system is now used throughout the California State University system as well as in other colleges and universities.

The North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL) produced a document "designed to provide states, districts, online programs, and other organizations with a set of quality guidelines for online teaching." That document, *The National Standards for Quality Online Teaching* consists of a rating guide intended to identify high quality online courses http://www.inacol.org/cms/wpcontent/uploads/2013/02/iNACOL_TeachingStandardsv2.pdf

The seminal article by Chickering and Gamson, *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* has been used as a guide to good practice in thousands of college classrooms. Chickering and Ehrmann, in *Implementing The Seven Principles: Technology as Lever* showed how the seven principles could be implemented in a technology-‐‐rich environment http://www.tltgroup.org/programs/seven.html

The University of Miami's *Good Practices in Teaching with Technology*   http://www.campbell.edu/content/661/1,1770,2666-‐‐1;3212-‐‐3,00.html

Quality Matters (QM) is a faculty-centered, peer review process designed to certify the quality of online courses and online components. https://www.qualitymatters.org/rubric (*You have to create a login to get this document*)

Ensuring The Appropriate use Of Educational Technology: An Update For Local Academic Senates. The Academic Senate For California Community Colleges. ATC educational tech asccc.pdf/ http://asccc.org/sites/default/files/Educational_Technology.pdf

Georgia Southern University Center For Online Learning.   http://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/col/

2013 Blackboard Exemplary Course Program Rubric. http://www.blackboard.com/About-‐‐Bb/Catalyst-‐‐Awards/Exemplary-‐‐Course-‐‐Program.aspx

Sunal, D.W., Sunal, C.S., Odell, M.R., Sundberg, C.A. *Research-‐‐Supported Best Practices for Developing Online Learning*. Journal of Interactive Online Learning. http://www.ncolr.org/jiol/issues/pdf/2.1.1.pdf

PALOMAR COLLEGE – Best Practices Checklist – Spring 2012 (update 2014)

http://www2.palomar.edu/poet/BestPracticesChecklist-Jan-2014.pdf