



ONLINE COURSE QUALITY DESIGN STANDARDS

Resources

The following resources were used to compile this list of standards. These standards are based upon current best practices in online education and learning and Helena College student feedback.

- University of Utah – Quality Course Framework (n.d.)
- University of Montana - MUS Principles of Quality Online Course Design (2012)
- Montana University System – Core Principles of Quality for Online Courses in the Montana University System (2008)
- BOR Policy 309.1 (1994)
- University of Colorado Denver – The CU Online Handbook (2011)
- Helena College – Online Student Survey Results (Spring 2013)
- Maryland Online – Quality Matters Rubric for Higher Education (2011-2013)
- CAST - National Center on Universal Design for Learning (2011)
- J.V. Boettcher, Ph.D. – Designing for Learning (2011)
- Great Falls College – Online Course Design Guidelines (n.d.)
- EL Camino College

Online Course Quality - Design Standards

MUS Principle	HC Standard	R	D
Course Overview and Introduction: <i>The overall design of the course, navigational information, as well as course, instructor and student information are made clear to the student at the beginning of the course.</i>	1.1 The course includes the following required elements as separate resources or activities within the course in the following defined format.	X	
	1.2 The syllabus contains the course description, learning outcomes, assessments, schedule of learning activities and the Helena College policies for online courses.	X	
	1.3 The course content is professionally presented.		X
	1.4 The course is ready for students.	X	
	1.5 Navigation is logical and consistent.	X	
Learning Outcomes: <i>Learning outcomes are clearly defined and help the student focus on learning activities.</i>	2.1 Module/assignment outcomes/objectives align with the course-level outcomes/objectives and are listed for each assignment, week, unit or module.	X	
	2.2 Learning outcomes form the basis of the activities and the assessments.	X	
Assessment: <i>Assessment strategies measure and promote learning, are aligned to the learning outcomes, and are designed as essential to the learning and course revision process.</i>	3.1 Formative and summative assessments include feedback mechanisms that support student learning.	X	
	3.2 Assessments provide the instructor with feedback that can guide revision/continual improvement of learning experiences.	X	
	3.3 Course grading/scoring guides are provided that makes grading criteria transparent.	X	
	3.4 Authentic assessment is a central part of the assessment strategy.		X
Resources and Materials: <i>Instructional materials are sufficiently comprehensive to achieve course objectives and learning outcomes.</i>	4.1 Additional resources that enrich the course content and/or extend learning opportunities are provided and are appropriately cited.	X	
	4.2 Course resources and materials align directly with the course and module outcomes.	X	
Learner Interaction: <i>The effective incorporation of instructor-student interaction, meaningful student cooperation, and student-content interaction is essential to student motivation, intellectual commitment, and personal development.</i>	5.1 Clear standards are set for instructor response and availability.	X	
	5.2 The design of the course requires the instructors' presence and active facilitation.	X	
	5.3 The design of the course has frequent activities that ensure regular student engagement, and requires student-student, instructor-student and community-student interaction and collaboration.	X	
	5.4 The expectations for student interaction are clearly stated.	X	
	5.5 The content is presented using a variety of instructional methodologies and media to reach student interests and learning styles.	X	
Course Technology: <i>Technology used in the course should enrich instruction and foster learning.</i>	6.1 Technology tools and media are selected based upon their ability to improve the learning experience.	X	
Learner Support: <i>The learner is effectively supported through fully accessible modes of delivery, resources, and student support services.</i>	7.1 The course provides links to additional support resources in a prominent place on the page.	X	
	7.2 The instructor ensures thorough support and instructions are provided for third party instructional resources.	X	X
Accessibility: <i>The course materials, interactions, and policies are intended to accommodate all students.</i>	8.1 The course syllabus articulates the institutions' accessibility policies and links to the Disability Services for Students website.	X	
	8.2 The course incorporates accessible design features for course content.	X	

R=Required D=Desired

Online Course Quality - Design Standards Annotations

Principle 1: Course Overview and Introduction

The overall design of the course, navigational information, as well as course, instructor, and student information are made clear to the student.

(1.1) The course includes the following required elements as separate resources or activities within the course in the following defined format:

HTML Block – Course Links

The course must also include the following links in an HTML block labeled as Course Links:

- Course syllabus
- Instructor Contact Information (linked page includes: name, phone number(s), email address)
- Third party external links required for the course (e.g. MyBizLab, SAM, etc.)

This block may also include:

- Where to get help
- Textbook information and image and/or other required materials
- Appropriate instructor picture
- Other links as desired

Start Here

To meet this standard the course will include an orientation to familiarize students with the course and how the learning is structured:

- Add a Start Here or Get Started link to content that outlines the tasks to be accomplished for the first week, course layout, general course policies, student expectations, or other assignments as desired
- A link (and preferably an assignment) to attend the Online Student Fundamentals course (Get Started Online) provided by the Office of Online Learning.
- An assignment and/or link for students to attend the Moodle Essentials for Students course (students upload the certificate of completion).
- Clear instructions on the course structure. For example:
 - *Provide details of the course structure in the instructor's introductory video.*
 - *Have students complete and turn in the STAR sheet as an assignment.*
- Include an instructor Introduction
- What to do next – First tasks

(1.2) The syllabus contains the course description, learning outcomes, assessments, schedule of learning activities, and Helena College policies for online courses:

To meet this standard the course should include:

- Detailed course description that also includes any on-campus and/or optional synchronous learning
- Learning outcomes that are measureable through relevant assessments.
- A schedule of learning activities that:
 - Align with the learning outcomes and assessments.
 - Have correct dates or other indication of due dates for the semester indicated.
- The following policies:
 - Instructor response within 48 hours (weekdays), next business day following weekends
 - Grading Policy (e.g. scale, points, grading within 7 days and prior to quiz, etc.)
 - Academic accommodations
 - Student engagement expectations (e.g. discussion forums, chats, group work, etc.)

- Academic Integrity
- Academic Rigor
- BOR Policy 309.1 defining contact hours and additional hours for both online and face-to-face classes.

(1.3) The course content is professionally presented.

To meet this standard the course should have:

- Consistent font colors/styles/headings
- Content is free of spelling and grammatical errors
- Relevant, real-world pictures or professional design features.
 - *Wordles of key vocabulary words*
 - *Colored line to separate content*
 - *Real images related to the content.*
- Use of cartoon-like clip-art for design purposes is discouraged

(1.4) The course is ready for students.

To meet this standard the course must:

- Have a course skeleton built inside Moodle to include assignment/activity placeholders for each week, unit, module, etc.
- Include correct assignment due dates/calendar dates prior to opening content for students
- Have current and active links
- In a self-paced online (SPO) course, have one set date for assignment completion prior to mid-term. The assignments due by this date approximately equate to the work for the first half of the course.
- Have the full semester completed for course designers explicitly contracted to develop the full 16 weeks

(1.5) Navigation is logical and consistent.

To meet this standard the course must include a:

- Layout that is intuitive and not visually overwhelming.
 - *Not too text or graphic heavy (has a good balance)*
 - *Use labels and indent levels to provide a consistent organization*
 - *Assignment names are consistent and could provide direction (e.g. Moodle vs. SAM)*
- Course content is organized into manageable and intuitive segments and aligns with the schedule of learning activities in the syllabus. For example:
 - *Modules*
 - *Units*
 - *Lessons*
 - *Weeks*
 - *Etc.*
- Consistent but limited use of various font colors (other than black) (see 8.2)
- Consistent font type (see 8.2)
- Sufficient use of 'white space' to visually break up the page.

Principle 2: Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes are clearly defined and help the student focus on learning activities.

(2.1) Module/assignment outcomes/objectives align with the course-level outcomes/objectives and are listed for each assignment, week, unit or module.

To meet this standard the course must have:

- Outcomes written in a way that makes the assessment tool used easy to identify.
 - *The student will identify the characteristics of different types of welds.*
 - *The student will recite the Spanish alphabet.*
- Outcomes that are easy to locate.
 - *Post them at the beginning of each module or unit*
 - *Include them with of each assignment.*
 - *Include a rubric or marking guide for the assignment with the objectives clearly defined.*
 - *Have an objectives quiz at the beginning of each week/unit.*
 - *Refer to objectives in the textbook or lecture slides*
- Clear, measurable objectives aligned with the program's outcomes and associated professional standards.
- Include key objectives (at the course and module/assignment level) that address: core learning skills related to the specific discipline at both the lower and upper levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (Upper: Creating, Evaluating, Analyzing; Lower: Applying, Understanding, Remembering):
 - *The student will be able to differentiate between potential and kinetic energy (upper).*
 - *The student will be able to explain Newton's laws of motion in his/her own words (lower).*
 - *The student will evaluate sources for credibility and accuracy (upper).*

The course-level or module objectives could also include:

- Life skill or career skill objectives.
 - *The students will be able to collaborate through a variety of communication tools to produce a group project.*
 - *The students will use technology to enhance their learning experience.*

(2.2) Learning outcomes form the basis of the activities and the assessments.

To meet this standard the course must include:

- Activities and assignments that align with the learning outcomes.
- Assessments that measure a student's level of achievement against the stated learning outcomes.

Principle 3: Assessment

Learning outcomes are clearly defined and help the student focus on learning activities.

(3.1) Formative and summative assessments include feedback mechanisms that support student learning.

To meet this standard the course must include formative and summative assessments with feedback. For example, the course could include:

- *Guided and independent practice within each module/unit and throughout the course.*
- *Feedback for improvement.*

(3.2) Assessments provide the instructor with feedback that can guide revisions/continual improvement of learning experiences.

To meet this standard instructors should reflect on the course content, design and delivery and make adjustments to one or all of these course elements to better ensure knowledge and skill transfer. For example:

- *You noted the majority of your students missed a question on the Quadratic Equation. You think back to the lesson and find there could be a video to help students see and pause the video through the steps. You make that adjustment to the next presentation of the course, and also find a way to reteach this concept.*
- *In your feedback, students make comments about your lack of participation in forums. As a result, you begin to interact in forums in appropriate ways so that learning still continues, but the students also sense your presence.*

(3.3) Course grading/scoring guides are provided that makes grading criteria transparent.

To meet this standard the course must include grading criteria for the different graded elements of a course. For example:

- *Include a scoring rubric or marking guide for writing assignments, discussion forums, and projects.*
- *Include a table of point values for each graded category in the course (e.g. quizzes, forums, participation, assignments, etc.).*

(3.4) Authentic assessment is a central part of the assessment strategy.

Authentic assessments are those that resemble the tasks as they would be experienced in the real world. These are the application of skills/concepts learned and more than rote learning. To meet this standard the course must include authentic assessments. For example:

- *Simulations*
- *Case Studies*
- *WebQuests*
- *Presentations*
- *Debates*
- *Performance*
- *Story problems*
- *Community projects*

Principle 4: Resources and Materials

Instructional materials are sufficiently comprehensive to achieve course objectives and learning outcomes.

(4.1) Additional resources that enrich the course and/or extend learning opportunities are provided and are appropriately cited.

To meet this standard the course must include additional resources the students can use to deepen or better their understanding of the course content. All resources (pictures, charts, etc.) should be appropriately cited. In addition, instructors incorporate their own personal experiences and examples to help illustrate the given lesson. Examples of Resources:

- *Professional resources (e.g. organizations, networks, etc.)*
- *Research resources (e.g. how to cite, online journals, etc.)*
- *Technical resources (e.g. Google Drive, etc.)*
- *Informational resources (e.g. plagiarism 101, etc.)*
- *Real-life examples*

(4.2) Course resources and materials align directly with the course and module outcomes.

To meet this standard the resources and materials should directly relate and align with the course and module outcomes.

Principle 5: Learner Interaction

The effective incorporation of instructor-student interaction, meaningful student cooperation, and student-content interaction is essential to student motivation, intellectual commitment, and personal development.

(5.1) Clear standards are set for instructor response and availability.

To meet this standard the course must include a specifics regarding expected instructor response times and availability. Often, students gauge their interaction based upon the instructors. Students need to know what they can expect. These standards must be included and well communicated for:

- Turn around time for responses.
- Grade postings
- Grading homework
- Availability

(5.2) The design of the course requires the instructors' presence and active facilitation.

Instructors need to actively engage in their courses. The course design must include elements that require and encourage the instructor's active facilitation. For example:

- Chats
- Discussion postings
- Individualized emails
- Feedback tool
- Muddies point forum
- Survey/choice tool, etc..

(5.3) The design of the course has frequent activities that ensure regular student engagement, and requires student-student, instructor-student and/or community-student interaction and collaboration.

Students benefit from a class that are engaging and encourages community. The design of the online course should include many of these opportunities. To meet this standard the course must include activities that promote this engagement and/or interaction. For example:

Student engagement activity examples:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ○ Forums | ○ Interview an expert and share the interview |
| ○ Chats | ○ Co-developed blog post |
| ○ WebQuests | ○ Webinar |
| ○ Experiential Learning | ○ Workshop Tool |
| ○ Guided Discovery | ○ Community Project planning |
| ○ Collaboration | ○ Field work |
| ○ Short 5-10 minutes recorded lectures | ○ Virtual field trips |
| ○ Supporting visuals/handouts/guides | ○ Wikis |
| ○ Podcasts | ○ Design with Universal Design for Learning UDL in mind |
| ○ Live Conferencing | ○ Etc. |
| ○ Group projects | |
| ○ Partner work | |
| ○ Notifications | |

(5.4) The expectations for student interaction are clearly stated.

To meet this standard the course must include details on how, when and where students are expected to interact with the instructor and other students. For example:

- Forum participation – defining appropriate and inappropriate responses
- Forum responses – defining the number of responses

- *Group work – define how participation is tracked*
- *Questions – where to post general questions*
- *Rubrics – include assignment rubrics to define the level of success*
- *Chats – protocols and ethics in a live chat*

Note: The Moodle glossary tool could auto display expectations when a keyword is hovered over.

(5.5) The content is presented using a variety of instructional methodologies and media to reach student interests and learning styles.

To meet this standard the course must include various instructional methodologies and media to keep student interests, meets the needs of the different learning styles within a course, and incorporates Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles.

- Visual elements
 - *Videos, charts, graphs, relevant pictures, white space, PowerPoints, participant guides, etc.*
- Audio elements
 - *Videos, podcasts, relevant sounds, etc.*
- Kinesthetic elements
 - *Participant guides, options for research, group work/collaboration, etc*

Principle 6: Course Technology

Technology used in the course should enrich instruction and foster learning.

(6.1) Technology tools and media are selected based upon their ability to improve the learning experience.

To meet this standard the design should make appropriate use of the available technologies to enhance the quality of the course and improve student engagement.

Principle 7: Learner Support

The learner is effectively supported through fully accessible modes of delivery, resources, and student support services.

(7.1) The course provides links to additional support resources in a prominent place on the page.

Helena College addresses this at the site-level and includes links to:

- IT Services
- Library
- Student Support
- Disability Services

(7.2) Students have sufficient instructions and support information for the use of additional required technologies to include third party instructional resources.

To meet this standard the course must include instructions and support to assist students in using technology as required:

- Moodle support (provided through Moodle Help link site-wide)
- 3rd party resources such as:
 - *My Biz Lab*
 - *GDL*
 - *Math XL*
 - *SAM*

Principle 8: Accessibility

The course materials, interactions, and policies are intended to accommodate all students.

(8.1) The course syllabus articulates the institutions' accessibility policies and links to the Disability Services for Students website.

To meet this standard the course must include the Helena College accessibility policy within the course syllabus as well as information on how to access Disability Services.

(8.2) The course incorporates accessible design features for course content.

To meet this standard the instructor will ensure all course materials are accessible to students with visual and auditory impairments. This includes, but is not limited to accessible:

- Word Documents
- PDFs
- PowerPoints
- Course layouts in Moodle
- Use Sans Serifs fonts (e.g. Arial, Tahoma, Verdana, Helvetica)
- Avoid placing text over an image or patterned background
- Use accessible font/background colors
 - Dark grey or black on white or off white is best
 - Have a strong contrast between the font color and the background. Avoid the following combinations:
 - Blue/orange
 - Green/magenta
 - Yellow/cyan
 - Magenta/blue
 - Yellow/orange
 - Avoid using or referencing following colors (e.g. all assignments in red are due Friday)
 - Red
 - Red on green background or green on red backgrounds
 - Blue/yellow
- Videos through captioning
- Audio through transcripts
- Video descriptions, when needed
- Images, through using Alternate Tags
- Tables through appropriate identification of headers
- Page links
 - Do not do this: *To go to the Smithsonian Website, click [here](#).*
 - Do this: *Go to the [Smithsonian Website](#).*