



Contents

Introduction.....	2
Policies for Online Education.....	2
Course Start and End Dates	2
Course Enrollment	2
Course Format.....	2
Course Management System	2
Academic Expectations and Standards	3
Workload.....	3
Student Evaluation of Instruction (SEI)	3
Online Instructor Training	3
Definition of Course Types	3
Guidelines in Online Education	5
Course Preparation	5
Course Content	6
Course Facilitation	7
Resources.....	8
Communication.....	10
Instructor and Student Feedback.....	12
Information about Online Education.....	14
Online Education Grants	14
Online Advisory Group.....	14
Additional Fee for Online Courses	14
Quality Matters	14



Introduction

This online education policy and guidelines manual provides a single resource for information related to online education. The manual contains policies and procedures (section 1), best practice recommendations (section 2), and general information related to online education at UW-L (section 3).

Please note that the policies and procedures section (section 1) may or may not be appropriate for online degree programs; confirm appropriate policies with Program Directors.

If you have questions regarding this manual, please contact the Director of Online Education at online@uwlax.edu.

Policies for Online Education

*****This section is appropriate for Online courses that are also offered face-to-face. Fully online programs need to contact program directors to determine appropriateness of the policies for the program.***

Instructor Sole Ownership Agreement

Instructors who receive online education grants to develop online courses through UW-L are given the option of signing an Instructor Sole Ownership Agreement. The ownership agreement states that the instructor has sole ownership of the material s/he develops for the course and that UW-L cannot take the course material and share it with another instructor.

Course Start and End Dates

Start and end dates for online courses should parallel the start and end dates for face-to-face courses. Should an instructor wish to have an alternate start and end date for an online course, s/he should seek approval through the Committee on Academic Policies and Standards (CAPS).

Course Enrollment

An instructor working in conjunction with his/her Department Chair should determine appropriate enrollment limits for online courses. Course enrollments per section should not exceed the enrollments set for the same course taught face-to-face.

Course Format

Instructors working in conjunction with their Department Chair should determine the format (e.g., face-to-face, hybrid, online) of courses offered through the department. Required courses offered in an online format must also be offered face-to-face during the academic year.

Course Management System

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2009-2010



Instructors should use Desire2Learn (D2L) as the Course Management System for all online courses. Exceptions must be approved by the Department Chair, Dean of the College, and the Director of Online Education.

Academic Expectations and Standards

The academic expectations and standards of online courses will be comparable to equivalent face-to-face courses.

Workload

The workload assigned to an instructor for teaching an online course should parallel that of equivalent face-to-face courses. No more than 50% of an instructor's teaching load should be comprised of online courses (unless teaching for an online program, or as agreed upon by the Department Chair and Dean.) Instructors teaching online courses are expected to provide a full level of service to the department, college, and the university. In addition, instructors should continue to post and hold on-campus office hours for advisees and students in face-to-face courses.

Student Evaluation of Instruction (SEI)

The standard UW-L student evaluation of instruction (SEI) items should be administered for online course.

Online Instructor Training

Instructors teaching their first online course with UW-L will be required to complete a three-week, asynchronous, online training about how to design and delivery quality online courses. The training will be offered once a term, including interim terms. This policy is anticipated to go into effect in summer 2010.

Procedure for Dropping Online Courses

This policy applies only to online courses dropped during the normal drop/add period for the course.

1. Online students can drop an online course by e-mailing the instructor during the normal drop/add period for the course (in which instructor or advisor signature is required to drop).
2. Second, the instructor forwards the student's e-mail to the Records Office (records@uwlax.edu) from the instructor's UW-L e-mail account so the Records Office can process the drop. The drop will be dated with the day the student originally e-mailed the instructor.
3. Third, the Records Office will print and file this e-mail with the other drop slips in the Records Office. The student and the instructor will receive a confirmation of the drop from the Records Office once the drop is processed.

If the course is the only course a student is registered for, a withdrawal from the university will be required and the student will be referred to the Office of Student Life to initiate the withdrawal process.

Definition of Course Types

Online Courses

Online courses are delivered over the Internet and are usually web-based, and more than 75% of content is delivered online. Courseware management systems are often used to organize content, activities, communication, and

DRAFT -- UW-L Online Policies and Guidelines

2009-2010



assessment. Direct online interactions with the instructor and among students are usually components of this delivery method. Online courses are assigned a 400 section number through the Office of Records and Registration.

Hybrid Courses

Course content is covered through some combination of traditional face-to-face on-campus classroom hours, online instruction, and/or Interactive Television (ITV). Courses have between 25% and 75% of course content delivered online.

Distance Education (ITV) Courses

This type of course connects instructors and students in simultaneous two-way communication. Students are able to see and speak with each other for real-time discussions. Multiple Distance Education ITV (Interactive TV) sites are located on the UW-L campus with connectivity to sites located outside of UW-L at public or private organizations.

Face-to-Face Courses

This type of course has zero to 24% of course content delivered online.



Guidelines in Online Education

Course Preparation

Course Enrollments

As course enrollments increase it will likely impact the student-to-student and student-to-instructor interaction, along with the instructor workload.

General Course Preparation Tips

Preparing a quality online course is time consuming. Try to create your entire course before the course even starts; this will allow you to focus on interaction with, and feedback for students rather than on preparing course materials during the course.

One Week Before the Course Starts

Consider activating the course one week before the course start date so students understand what is expected prior to the start of the course. At minimum, it is recommended that at least one week before the course starts to post the following:

- a completed syllabus,
- a "news item" with welcoming and *first steps* information,
- discussion forums for the first week's content,
- a discussion forum used as an icebreaker,
- a discussion forum for general questions,
- at least one week of content,
- instructor contact information, and
- the graded items added to the D2L Grade tool.

Course Architecture

It is recommended that you section your course into modules in D2L. A module corresponds to one week of content. Within the module should exist all materials for that week such as lecture narrative, activities, discussion forum links, external links, tests, etc. Each module should be listed in the same order. For example, if in Module 1/Week 1 you list the lecture narrative first, the assignment second, the discussion forum third, and the quiz fourth, you should use that same ordering for all subsequent modules. If you would like to build your online course using a Module course architecture in D2L, please contact online@uwlax.edu to receive a template course that will provide the structure allowing you to add your own pieces.

Time Releasing

Time releasing is the act of making set content visible at certain dates; this can be accomplished within Desire2Learn. Consider time releasing modules one week at a time but allow students to access previous week's modules (e.g., in week 3 a student would see weeks 1, 2, and 3). This is particularly useful if your course is developed so that week one covers some information and week two builds on that. This is an effective way to keep students focused on the concepts for that week along with helping the instructor stay organized in the discussion forums. There are instances when multiple weeks can be

DRAFT -- UW-L Online Policies and Guidelines

2009-2010



released at the same time. With either set-up, it is important for students to know what is expected of them and what they can expect of you. You should clearly outline in your syllabus what students can and cannot do in advance. It is recommended that students do not participate in discussion forums in advance to ensure the greatest amount of interactivity. However, activities like quizzes and assignments can be completed in advance if you decide that is permissible.

Welcome Email

At both two weeks and one week before the start of your course, consider sending a welcome email that also includes information about basic course expectations (possibly the syllabus) and tips to help students succeed in your online course. A copy of a sample announcement can be found [HERE](#) (opens as a Word document).

Students with Disabilities

Disability Resource Services recommends that you include the following statement in your syllabus:

Student with Disabilities: Any student with a documented disability (e.g., physical, learning, psychiatric, vision, or hearing, etc.) who needs to arrange reasonable accommodations must contact the instructor and the Disability Resource Services office (165 Murphy Library, 608-785-6900, ability@uwlax.edu) at the beginning of the semester. Students who are currently using the Disability Resource Services office will have a copy of a contract that verifies they are qualified students with disabilities who have documentation on file in the Disability Resource Services office. It is the student's responsibility to communicate his/her needs with the instructor in a timely manner. Review the Disability Services office website at <http://www.uwlax.edu/drs/>. Information about accessibility with Desire2Learn can be found here: <http://www.desire2learn.com/products/accessibility/>.

Course Content

Syllabus

Create a course syllabus at least four weeks before the course start date. This will aid in course development and can be sent to students upon request and with the recommended welcome email. Written expectations are essential in an online course and a syllabus is a great place to outline those expectations. Your syllabus should include: course description, instructor contact information, textbook, course objectives, grading schedule and scale, grading policies, course schedule, course structure, and general expectations. A syllabus template has been created and can be used as a guide when creating your syllabus for an online course; a copy of this syllabus template can be found [HERE](#) (opens as a Word document). Giving a quiz worth a few points is often an effective way to get students to review the syllabus; make sure quiz questions cover critical aspects of the course students need to know.

Course Objectives

Since online courses require the same academic expectations and standards as face-to-face courses, your online course should have the same (or very comparable) course objectives. However, the way in which you reach the course objectives may be different in the online format.

All course objectives, no matter what the course format, should be specific in describing a measurable and observable



behavior. Consider behavior, condition, and criterion when developing an objective. The behavior specifies what you want the student to do; the condition outlines the circumstances in which a student demonstrates the behavior, and the criterion identifies the degree to which the behavior is evaluated. Objectives should be S.M.A.R.T.: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Oriented, and Time-bound. All course objectives should be tied directly to course assessments.

Lectures Narratives

Lecture narratives, a written form of what you might talk about in class, are a great way to personalize your online courses. The lecture narrative should enhance what is already presented in other resources, such as the textbook, to add your perspective, highlight key words and concepts, add examples to help clarify the content, define a precise process, demonstrate how the topics relate to current events and/or professional or life experiences, and other information that is pertinent and key for students to understand about the content. Even if you use publisher materials in your online course, please also consider adding a lecture narrative of your own to outline for students your thoughts on highlights from the course content. As always, obey copyright laws and proper citation rules when preparing lecture narratives.

Activities

An active learning approach is important in the online environment. Students should actively engage in the content in order to meet course objectives. While some activities from your face-to-face course may translate appropriately into the online classroom, it is important to consider the activity's relevance, appropriateness, and purpose in the online classroom.

Activities in the online classroom should meet course and weekly objectives and consider the following:

- Present students with essential information, materials, and resources
 - o Examples: lectures, articles, links to library resources or articles, textbook readings, audio files, video)
- Incorporate appropriate and accessible technology
 - o Examples: screen captures, tutorials, PDFs, PowerPoints with voiceover and specific notes, videos with captioning or corresponding articles
- Engage in collaborative techniques that encourage student-to-student and instructor-to-student interaction
 - o Examples: discussion, chat, group work, debates
- Apply material to real situations
 - o Examples: case studies, virtual field trips, experiments
- Offer an opportunity for students to practice what they have learned
 - o Examples: homework with practice assignments, self-reflection journal
- Include an assessment tool to measure if objectives were met through assigned activities
 - o Examples: quiz, test, project, portfolio, case study
- NOTE: Adhere to all copyright laws and notifications when posting content, articles, multimedia, etc. to your online courses. Provide direct links to articles from the [Murphy Library](#) site in order to adhere to copyright laws. For additional copyright information, please visit the [Murphy Library Copyright page](#).

Course Facilitation

The Role of Facilitation

DRAFT -- UW-L Online Policies and Guidelines

2009-2010



Facilitating an online course requires the instructor to provide encouragement, guidance, and feedback to students. It is important for online instructors to role-model expected behavior for their students. For example, if you require your students to have substantive discussion posts, use correct grammar and spelling, practice netiquette, properly cite sources, and use appropriate language and tone, then you should do all of these in your posts. In addition, if you require your students to add substantial contributions on 4 of 7 days of the week, then you should be engaged in the course at least that many days.

A major benefit of online learning is the ability of students and instructors to participate from any location, as long as they have a computer and Internet access. Instructors who will not have regular access to an Internet connection during their contracted period should not teach during that time. Unexpected emergencies that interrupt the course should be communicated immediately to the Department Chair and Director of Online Education as soon as possible to determine appropriate action.

Course Drops

If a student drops your course, the student sends you an email. This email gives you a chance to inquire about why the student wishes to drop, to gain perspective and feedback about your course.

Resources

Technical Support

There are several tutorials and handbooks about D2L listed on this website:

<http://www.uwlax.edu/itssupport/onlinehelp/d2linstructor.htm>. In addition, you can contact ITS Support Center at (608) 785-8774 or itssupport@uwlax.edu for additional questions about D2L.

Instructional Design

Instructional design is the systematic process of designing, delivering, and reviewing instruction. The Instructional Designer at UW-L supports curricular development by providing individual consultations for instructors to help develop curricula and pedagogical strategies to enhance teaching and learning. For more information please visit

<http://www.uwlax.edu/catl/instructionaldesign/> or contact online@uwlax.edu to schedule your consultation.

Online Instructor Resource Area in D2L

The Online Instructor Resource Area in D2L is a place for online instructors to find information about various topics, to collaborate about online teaching ideas, and to ask questions about online design and delivery. If you would like to be enrolled in this area upon its rollout in November of 2009, please contact online@uwlax.edu.

Online Instructor Training

The Online Instructor will take place over three weeks in D2L and cover topics critical to online course design and delivery. The training will be asynchronous in nature but require participants to spend *approximately* 7-10 hours a week engaging in training activities that will assist in preparing and developing an online course. As of October 2009, the anticipated start date of this training is January 2010. If you are interested in learning of the schedule and more information, please contact online@uwlax.edu.



Audio and Video Files for Online Courses

Online courses work better if you do not try to completely re-create the face-to-face classroom. For example, if you give a lecture in your face-to-face classroom, consider ways to present that information in a different format. Simply video recording your face-to-face lectures for play in your online classroom is probably not the most effective way to present material online. It may be appropriate for part of your face-to-face lecture material to be presented in another format (written narrative, chart, PowerPoint, etc.).

It is important to consider the purpose of the video or audio and be sure the purpose is in line with your course objectives and goals. Video is often useful for demonstrations such as how something is made or assembled, how to solve a problem, or role-play activities. Audio is often useful to emphasize the importance of process, to share a story or experience, or to ensure proper pronunciation. Video and audio are great to use when incorporating a guest lecturer or expert series giving tips, advice, experience, etc.

If there is a component of your lecture that you believe really needs to be demonstrated via video or audio, here are some tips:

- Always incorporate the highest quality (clean audio with enough volume, stable, in-focus video) into your audio and video.
- Keep the length of your audio and video files to a minimum. Consider using video files from 5-8 minutes and audio files from 10-12 minutes. While these are guidelines, make your audio and video only as long as it needs to be.
- Plan out and practice your audio or video prior to recording.
- Have objective outsiders review the value of your audio or video file prior to adding it to a course.
- Do not add audio and video simply for the sake of adding audio or video to your course. Always consider purpose.
- Compress the file to keep downloading times to a realistic limit. Always consider bandwidth when adding audio or video and consider testing with your audience to determine appropriate and tolerable file sizes.
- The most universal file format for video is Flash. QuickTime is also an option. MP3 is the standard format for online audio.
- If you embed external video or audio files, be careful to obey copyright law.

If you would like help creating audio or video files for your online classroom, please contact online@uwlax.edu and you will be directed to the appropriate person for your request.

Appropriate Use of D2L Tools

There are many tools available in D2L and it is important that instructors use the tools appropriately when designing and delivering online course. Here is a brief run-down of the main tools and proper uses:

- Content — this area should house the content for your course; content should be delivered in a consistent and logical flow
- Links — you can add external links in this area; external links can also be added in the content area
- Dropbox — this is used for file exchange with students; can also be synchronized with the grade book
- Discussions — this area should be used for discussions for the course and for groups; this area should **not** be used for the presentation of materials, submission/retrieval of assignments/files, or posting of grades

DRAFT -- UW-L Online Policies and Guidelines

2009-2010



- Chat — used for instant communication; useful for online office hours and tutoring session; consider saving copies of the chat to share with other students
- Classlist — used to view progress and email students
- Groups — set up groups and corresponding features (discussion forums, lockers, and dropbox) when groups are used in course activities
- Quizzes — used to create quizzes and exams; many question types are available and can be used as appropriate
- Grades — keep up-to-date and use to calculate student grades
- Survey — used to create non-graded surveys

For more questions about the appropriate use of D2L tools, please contact online@uwlax.edu.

Communication

Email

Use D2L for correspondence with students; email should be avoided when submitting assignments as there is no easy way to track submission and receipt. It is recommended to use email for personal one-to-one issues and not for class-related information. The “News” area is a great place to add announcements, current events, articles, information, etc. Posting all updates in the “News” area rather than sharing through email keeps all of your communications in one central location. This may allow students to better track information you share regarding the course.

If you do receive emails from students (which is likely), try to respond to student emails and questions within 24 hours. If students email you things that would be important for other students to know, consider asking the student if you can post (anonymously or not) his/her question and your reply in the public “General Questions” discussion forum (see recommendation below in “Discussion Forums” section of this document). By doing so, the students can see responses to common questions and the instructor does not have to answer the same email several times but rather refer students to that forum and thread. Again, email should be reserved for personal one-on-one issues.

Discussion Forums

Instructor participation is essential in online courses, and discussion forums are often the central tool used for collaboration in the online classroom. Students want to know that they are being *heard* in the online classroom and this often occurs through responses to posts in discussion forums. Instructors are encouraged to add expertise, perspectives, experience, current events, probing and challenging questions, and statements of encouragement. Online courses are not correspondence based and instructor presence in the online classroom is essential.

Here are some things to consider when facilitating a discussion forum:

- Ask probing questions requiring students to think more in-depth about their post; also encourage others to respond to thought-provoking questions posed by other students.
- Have a clear policy on how discussion will be graded from both a quantity and quality stand-point; for quantity, some instructors will require an original post by a certain day of the week and a certain number of substantial reply posts; for quality, define what is meant by a “substantial” post (going beyond I agree, asking questions, bringing in outside materials, related to course content, etc.).

DRAFT -- UW-L Online Policies and Guidelines

2009-2010



- Post to discussion forums at least as frequently as you require your students to post. Model desired behavior and contributions.
- Respond to questions in discussion forums within 24 hours; instructors do not need to respond to every post but should interject their thoughts, questions, clarifying information, current events, experience, etc.; state in your syllabus what students can expect from you in terms of responses and participation.
- Use a supportive, appropriate, and professional tone in all your posts.
- Sometimes questions or comments need to be answered or defined by the instructor immediately as not to perpetuate false information; however, sometimes questions and comments can be answered by other students; monitor the forums and interject when needed but be sure students know you are there to assist in their learning.

It is recommended to provide two standard discussion forums in every course: (1) a "Virtual Café", "Icebreaker" or "Lounge" forum where students are encouraged to introduce themselves to their classmates to help foster the community in the online course, and (2) a "General Questions" forum that allows students to ask questions about the course structure, course content, syllabus expectations, assignments, and any other course-related question. Having this forum will help the instructor to "publically" answer questions and can refer other students back to the posts to ensure all students are getting the same answers to their questions.

Group Work

Group work in the online classroom can be an effective collaborative activity and allows students to discuss and share ideas and solve problems in a more intimate learning environment. When integrating group activities into a course, consider a few things:

- Group activities must be clearly defined in terms of expectations, deliverables, and due dates. Always consider that group members need time to get to know one another, determine work styles, and work out conflicts prior to completing tasks. These steps may take additional time to accomplish due to distance and the asynchronous nature of online courses.
- When deciding whether to assign students to groups, consider the length of your course. Often the process of students self-selecting into groups takes time and it could be detrimental to the success of the group project if too much time is spent selecting members and not on the project itself. For shorter length courses (example: 3 weeks), instructors should consider assigning the group members.
- Group projects or activities work well for activities that require comparing and contrasting concepts, having different groups research different topics then share with the course, and role play activities.
- Consider integrating group project deliverables into other areas of the course. For example, if groups present their findings to the course use the opportunity to have students synthesize another group's findings as part of their final exam.
- Make sure that course and/or module objectives address the importance and/or purpose of the group project or work. This will help students understand its integration into the course and for the students' preparation for work related team projects.
- Some level of peer review is encouraged. Instructors are urged to ask students to evaluate the performance of their teammates and group members at the end of each project. The evaluation should be reviewed by the instructor and considered when determining grades for the group assignments.

Netiquette

DRAFT -- UW-L Online Policies and Guidelines

2009-2010



Netiquette is internet etiquette. It is recommended that you adhere to netiquette and request that your students do so also. For more information, review information presented on this website: <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/>

Instructor and Student Feedback

Instructor: SEI

If you wish to receive a digital copy of the SEI that you can use in Qualtrics or would like additional assessment questions related to online education, please contact online@uwlax.edu.

Student: Feedback

Students want to know their status in the course and expect instructors to post this information on a continual and timely basis. It is recommended that you update student grades in D2L on a weekly basis. Also, prior to the course start date, create the Grade area in D2L to include all course grades. This will allow students to be aware of all graded requirements at the start of the course.

Submit final course grades on time. For more information about this time, please review the [Records and Registration website](#).

Grading Policies

Fair grading standards should be outlined in your syllabus. Students must meet outlined expectations to earn defined grades.

Participation or discussion forum engagement will likely be part of your grading scheme. Participation / discussion forums engagement often makes up between 15 and 40 percent of the final course grade, depending on the course subject and objectives. It is recommended to have a set time for all assignments to be due. For example, you might consider having all course requirements due by 11:59pm CST on the specific due date.

Incomplete grades should be reserved for instances of student extenuating circumstances and not due to instructor lack of preparedness.

Preventing Cheating

Good design in online courses helps prevent cheating. Some ways to design assessments to deter cheating include:

- If using an exam or quiz, create higher-order thinking questions that require students to do more than just recall information. [Bloom's Taxonomy](#) provides information about the levels of the cognitive domain. Understating these levels will help in creating higher-order questions.
- Consider using projects and asking students to submit deliverables at set intervals to watch the project progress. The deliverables requested at intervals could be various drafts of the project or separate sections of the project. For example, if your project is to have students develop a marketing plan ask that students present you different parts of the plan at different delivery dates. This process allows you to provide various levels of feedback while also learning the writing and/or presentation style of the student.
- Have a variety of assessment methods in the course allowing you to evaluate student's learning in a variety of ways.

DRAFT -- UW-L Online Policies and Guidelines

2009-2010



- If using tests or quizzes, considering setting a reasonable time limit in which the exam is completed and randomize the order of and/or the questions.
- Disable the right-click option when creating quizzes in D2L.
- When assigning papers, give students a specific area to analyze. Also consider giving each student a different sub-topic to analyze in their paper. For example, if you are asking students to write a paper about the book *The Scarlet Letter*, assign each student a different and specific passage to analyze versus the entire book.
- Change your tests and quizzes each time you offer the course.



Information about Online Education

Online Education Grants

UW-L has an internal grants program that awards grants for instructors to receive funding to develop online courses (\$1,000 per credit) or a proposal to offer a program online (\$5,000). Questions about grants can be directed to online@uwlax.edu.

Online Advisory Group

There is an Online Advisory Group that works closely with the Director of Online Education to determine priorities and discuss issues related to online education on campus. Current members of the online advisory group include:

Stephen Brokaw	College of Business Administration: Marketing
Bill Cerbin	Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning
Joel Elgin	College of Liberal Studies: Art
Bob Hoar	Faculty Assistant to the Provost; College of Science and Health: Math
Kristin Koepke	Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning
Nishele Lenards	College of Science and Health: Health Professions
Jodie Rindt	College of Liberal Studies: Psychology
Gaelle Talhouarne	Student
Brian Udermann	Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning
Jordan Viegut	Student
Lynn Weiland	Continuing Education and Extension

Additional Fee for Online Courses

Students at UW-L are charged a \$75 per credit fee for taking online courses. The revenue generated from these fees is used to support the advancement of online education on campus by funding the Director of Online Education and Instructional Designer positions. These monies are also used to fund the online education grants program on campus.

Quality Matters

The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse is part of a UW-System consortium membership to Quality Matters (other UW-System schools include UW-Colleges, UW-Madison, UW-Oshkosh, UW-Whitewater and UW-Superior). Quality Matters (QM) is an instructor-centered, peer review process designed to certify the quality of online courses and online components. Sponsored by MarylandOnline, Inc, Quality Matters has generated widespread interest and received national recognition for its peer-based approach to quality assurance and continuous improvement in online education. QM developed a rubric outlining 40 specific elements in eight categories including course overview and introduction, learning objectives, assessment and measurement, resources and materials, learner engagement, course technology, learner support, and accessibility. At UW-L, the QM Rubric will be used as a self-assessment tool for online instructors and as part of the online course grant review process. You can find the rubric [HERE](#). The "Guidelines in Online Education" section of this manual is designed using the categories of the QM Rubric.