

## UW-La Crosse Online Course Evaluation Guidelines

The *UW-L Online Course Evaluation Guidelines* are intended to help instructors create and teach well-designed online courses. The *Guidelines* outline specific features of online courses and recommend ways to design, deliver and improve courses. Part 1 is *Background Information* that identifies key features of courses, describes their purposes and gives suggestions on how to implement each one in a course. Part 2 is a *Checklist* you can use as a reference as you design, teach or review an online course.

The *Guidelines* may be used as a tool:

- for self-assessment by instructors during the design and delivery of their online courses.
- to provide constructive feedback to instructors on the design and delivery of their online courses.
- in the *UW-L Online Education Grant* review process to determine whether grant recipients have fully completed the design of their online courses.
- in the *UW-L Online Instructor Training* to help participants identify the features of effective online course design.

Whether the *Guidelines* are used for self-assessment or to give feedback to another instructor, use the checklist to identify the course features that have been included, excluded or need improvement, and supplement the checklist with written annotations and suggestions.

### Part 1: Background Information

Design and Development		
Guideline	Purpose	Suggestions
Information about being an online learner.	To provide students with information related to online learning as well as tips and strategies for being successful in an online course.	Offer general information related to online learning (e.g., time management skills, deadline awareness). You might provide a self-assessment of student readiness, which would give students an opportunity to practice the technology/online tools before being evaluated.
A comprehensive syllabus.	To provide students with all the information they need to be successful in the course in one location.	A comprehensive syllabus should include the following: course description, instructor contact information, course prerequisites, explanation of any face-to-face or synchronous requirements, course objectives, textbook and other instructional materials, credit hours, schedule with content coverage and due dates, grading policy, grade scale/weights, any special technical requirements beyond <a href="#">UW-L Online Course standard</a> , code of conduct, netiquette, instructor expectations regarding discussion activities, feedback, late policies, extra credit, tech support resources, ADA/DRS statement, and preferred communication method.
A list of university academic resources with links to appropriate websites.	To make it easier for students to access the academic support services they may need to be successful in the class.	Provide links to university units such as the library, tutoring center, counseling and testing, records and registration, the writing center, multicultural student services, disability resource services, career support services, etc.
A welcome message with instructions on how to get started.	To clarify what students need to do when they first log in and begin the class; to facilitate student familiarity with D2L, student participation	Create a welcome message in the “News Item” area in D2L. Give students directions on where to find the syllabus and how to get started in the class. You may wish to have students complete a scavenger hunt or syllabus quiz. You might create a Jing or Mediasite video orienting students to the class that includes

	expectations, the syllabus, and course requirements.	directions on how to get started.
A consistent navigation structure.	To make it easier for students to navigate the course, know where things are located, stay on track with deadlines, <i>etc.</i>	All units/modules should be created in a consistent manner with the same layout, content areas and activity types, structure, <i>etc.</i> Hyperlinks should be used to easily link to outside websites or areas in D2L ( <i>e.g.</i> , discussions, quizzes).
Student-to-student interaction.	To help students get to know each other and develop a sense of community while collaboratively learning about the course content.	Create content-specific discussion boards, use groups in the class, have students provide peer feedback.
Student-to-instructor interaction.	To facilitate student and instructor interaction in the course and help students know the instructor is available to aid learning in the online environment.	Model consistent and deep interactions in the discussion boards. Offer informal assessments. Provide feedback on assignments and assessments. Respond to emails in a timely manner.
Course and unit/module learning objectives that are measurable and clearly stated.	To make students aware of how and what they will be expected to learn as a result of the instruction.	Create course and unit/module learning objectives that are measurable, action-oriented, reasonable and time-bound. Here is a handout with information about writing measurable learning objectives: <a href="http://www.uwlax.edu/catl/instructionaldesign/Writing_Course_Objectives_HANDOUT_v2.pdf">http://www.uwlax.edu/catl/instructionaldesign/Writing_Course_Objectives_HANDOUT_v2.pdf</a>
Assessments and activities that are aligned with the learning objectives.	To ensure that what students are doing in the class and being evaluated on relate to the learning objectives.	Create a matrix or table that shows the alignment of course activities and assessments with the appropriate learning objectives. Use unit checklists for students that list the objectives that each checklist item accomplishes.
Checklists or schedules for students that detail what they are to do each week/unit/module.	To help students stay on track with course requirements.	Create checklists that include due dates for weekly/unit/module requirements. Add items to the course schedule in D2L. Include a detailed schedule in your course syllabus.
An introductory or icebreaker discussion activity.	To help students get to know each other and you as the instructor; to establish a sense of community from the beginning of the course.	This could be an icebreaker or introduction forum on the discussion board. You could encourage students to share where they are from, what year they are in school, what their major is, why they are taking the class, <i>etc.</i> Icebreakers also can provide an introductory question related to course content. You also could encourage students to share a picture or avatar in their D2L profile so that they can visualize each other.
Separate discussion forums for items related to course content, course questions and community building.	To clearly relay the purpose of the various discussion forums and to decrease confusion between community-based discussions and content-based discussions.	Clearly label the discussion forums and discussion topics under each forum. For example, discussions related to units or modules in the class could be in a discussion forum titled "course content" with discussion topics titled "unit 1," "unit 2," <i>etc.</i> A discussion forum for community building could be titled "student lounge" and topics within could be a "raise your hand" area that allows students to ask course-related questions, a "student lounge" area that allows students to socialize, and an "icebreaker" area that generates a welcoming environment at the beginning of the course.
Discussion topics that stimulate	To facilitate student engagement with course	Avoid questions that have one correct answer. Discussions might ask students to view and discuss podcasts or videos, or to

thought and reflection related to course content.	content and each other.	complete activities and then share their reactions.
Clearly articulated group work expectations.	To have group activities completed in a smooth and effective manner with clear expectations of all group members.	Inform students how groups will be determined, clearly define tasks and participation expectations, provide clear expectations for any final products or deliverables, and clearly articulate any peer evaluation that will occur and if individual as well as group grades will be given.
Varied opportunities for students to interact with content.	To take advantage of multimedia and multiple sources of content to provide broad exposure to the material and help students develop a better understanding of the subject matter.	Present course content using written narratives, text-based presentations, videos, podcasts, websites, presentations with audio, readings, <i>etc.</i>
Illustrations and examples to explain important concepts.	To provide students with more than written text or narratives as they are exposed to and learn course material.	Develop things like charts, graphs, images, audio files, videos, case studies, <i>etc.</i> to add to your course when students need assistance to learn important course concepts. Add examples and stories from your experience as a practitioner.
Assessments and evaluations designed to uphold academic integrity.	To deter academic dishonesty in your course.	Here is a tutorial with several ideas: <a href="http://www.uwlax.edu/catl/instructionaldesign/cheating_tutorial/engage.html">http://www.uwlax.edu/catl/instructionaldesign/cheating_tutorial/engage.html</a>
Ongoing, varied and multiple activities and assessments to assess student learning.	To allow students to demonstrate mastery of course material in a variety of ways.	Use self-assessments, assignments, papers, projects, quizzes, exams, <i>etc.</i> to assess student learning.
Detailed instructions and explanations for all assessments.	To provide students with adequate information to complete all assignments, papers, quizzes, exams, discussion requirements, group work, <i>etc.</i> ; to decrease confusion related to these assessments and to facilitate student completion of course requirements.	Clearly describe the requirements for all assessments in the course; this would include the quantity and quality of discussion board requirements. Share any rubrics that will be used to grade course requirements with the students.
A grades area set up with all graded activities.	To make it easier to keep student grades up to date and comply with FERPA standards.	Have the grades area fully set up prior to the beginning of the course so students can see all the graded items up front. Review the FERPA website: <a href="http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/index.html">http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/index.html</a> . Use the grades tool in D2L to ensure grades are distributed within a secure setting.
A variety of opportunities for students to give course and content related feedback.	To gather feedback from students to use in continually improving the course.	Gather student feedback about the ease of navigation in the class, instructor involvement and quality, as well as course content and delivery. Use classroom assessment techniques such as " <a href="#">muddiest point</a> ." Create an overall course evaluation plan.
Transitions from one unit to the next.	To show students how course content is related to or	Create weekly, unit or module reviews that could include short introductions to upcoming course work; you might use "News

	important for future course material they will be exposed to.	Items” to provide this transitional information.
Appropriate technology tools to facilitate learning.	To ensure that technology/media used in the course is integrated with a purpose.	Evaluate the reasons for using various forms of technology and consider how that technology will enhance learning. Integrate technology when students have issues meeting a measurable objective.
Appropriate media to facilitate learning.	Use media appropriately to enhance teaching and learning, and explain expectations/requirements for using the media.	Make sure audio and video files are clear, file length is adequate, players required are compatible with multiple systems, images are optimized for efficient loading, and hyperlinks open in appropriate windows; explain download requirements and/or identify file types.
Attention to appropriate copyright and fair use laws.	To make sure you are not breaking any copyright or fair use laws with your course.	Review the following pages: <a href="http://www.uwlax.edu/murphylibrary/research/copyrgt.html">http://www.uwlax.edu/murphylibrary/research/copyrgt.html</a> , <a href="http://www.copyright.gov">http://www.copyright.gov</a> , and <a href="http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html">http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html</a>
Attention to student accessibility issues.	To ensure that the course is accessible to all students.	Include captioning and/or transcripts for audio and video files, do not use color to convey meaning, use alternative text or descriptions for images, define hyperlinks in writing (not “click here” with no explanation of where “here” is); more information can be found in these tutorials: <a href="http://www.accesslearning.net/">http://www.accesslearning.net/</a>
<b>Delivery</b>		
<b>Guideline</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Suggestions</b>
A message to students prior to the beginning of the course that shares course related information.	To allow students to get acclimated to the course management system and to understand course expectations prior to the scheduled start date of the course.	One to two weeks before the class starts, send students an e-mail letting them know how they can access the course. Let them start to review course related information but not start working on assignments, quizzes, <i>etc.</i> Give them your contact information should they have questions. If completed, send them the syllabus to review. Let them know approximately how many hours per week they can expect to work on the course and share tips for student success.
A welcome message with instructions on how to get started.	To make it clear what students need to do when they first log in and begin the class; to facilitate student familiarity with D2L, establish expectations, introduce the syllabus, and describe course requirements.	Post your welcome message in the “News Item” area in D2L and format it so it is the first news item seen when students log in to the course in D2L.
A message to missing students early in the class to encourage participation.	To help students that might not be sure of participation expectations to get on track and to help you as the instructor finalize the class roster.	Contact any students not participating in class early ( <i>e.g.</i> , first week in a regular semester course, first or second day in an intersession course) to encourage participation and to determine their class status. If participation is due to technological issue, direct the student to the ITS Support Center.
Regular and timely feedback regarding student performance.	Providing feedback regarding grades is greatly appreciated by students and helps them make necessary adjustments for upcoming assessments.	Share with students the time frame ( <i>e.g.</i> , 48 hours) during which they can expect to receive feedback related to their grades and do your best to provide feedback as promised. Set aside time each week or day to provide quality feedback to your students.
Use of the time-release function in D2L, or scheduled-opening of course material.	To help decrease confusion and keep students on track with course requirements to optimize learning.	Time release only the course material students need to successfully complete course activities for a given week, unit or module.

An invitation that encourages students to use online office hours.	To increase instructor accessibility to students to answer questions, provide help with course content, course requirements, <i>etc.</i>	Let students know if there will be scheduled online office hours in the class. Utilize synchronous tools such as the chat feature in D2L.
Modeling of discussion board participation, behavior and tone.	To set a good example to the students regarding interactions on the discussion board and to encourage the community of the course.	Meet or exceed the requirements you have for your students with discussion board participation. Always communicate on the discussion board in a respectful manner. Introduce yourself in the “icebreaker” discussion board.
Monitoring of discussion board activities for appropriate student behavior and accurate information.	To make sure student posts on the discussion board are respectful and appropriate, and that all information shared is accurate.	Monitor the discussion board in your class on a regular basis and immediately address inappropriate posts and inaccurate information.
Summaries of discussions.	To share with students various themes and interesting points that come up during discussion board activities.	Since students are not always required to read every discussion board post in a class, or are working in groups for discussion, consider summarizing and sharing the major themes that emerge during a week, unit or module on the discussion board.
Effective group work practices.	To take proactive steps to have group projects run smoothly so that they are a meaningful contribution to the class.	Let students know group rosters before they are to get started on a project. Monitor group progress and offer continual feedback and support. Consider assigning students to groups to eliminate the time and difficulty sometimes involved if left at the discretion of students. If groups decide to work in a synchronous way they must meet the needs of all group members. Develop assessments students can use for peer review.
Prompt responses to student questions.	To show students you are fully engaged with the class and promptly address questions or concerns students may have; to keep students learning content at a consistent rate.	Share with students when they can expect to hear back from you if they contact you with a question, and then make sure you follow what you establish. Often instructors will strive to contact students within 24 to 48 hours during a 14-week semester course and on the same day (possibly within 8 hours) for an intersession (3-4 week) course. Let students know if you will or will not be available for questions on the weekends.
Regular communication with students to maintain positive rapport.	Helps students feel like the instructor is fully engaged with the class and is concerned about them learning the course material.	Post messages and share current events in the “News Item” area in D2L. Provide meaningful and regular feedback to student work. Regularly participate in discussion board activities.
A designated schedule that is followed.	To help decrease confusion and to minimize disruption among students.	Do your best to follow the published schedule of activities and assessments shared at the beginning of the class. If changes in the schedule cannot be avoided, communicate this clearly and as early as possible with the students.
Questions to encourage students to look at content in meaningful and deeper ways.	To encourage students to be fully engaged with course content and learn course material beyond a superficial level.	This can be accomplished with discussion board activities, group work, assignments, quizzes, exams, projects and other selected assessments.
Illustrations and examples to explain important concepts.	To provide students with more than written text or narratives as they are exposed to and learn	Post things like charts, graphs, images, audio files, videos, case studies, <i>etc.</i> when students need assistance to learn importance course concepts. Add examples and stories from your experience

	course material.	as a practitioner.
Enforcement of expectations and guidelines for learner behavior.	To help promote consistency and decrease disruptions in the class.	Have a late work policy outlined in the syllabus and stick to it. Enforce netiquette expectations. Enforce due dates and deadlines. Regularly communicate course expectations with students.
Assessments and evaluations that are administered to uphold academic integrity.	To deter academic dishonesty in your course.	Here is a tutorial with several ideas: <a href="http://www.uwlax.edu/catl/instructionaldesign/cheating_tutorial/engage.html">http://www.uwlax.edu/catl/instructionaldesign/cheating_tutorial/engage.html</a>
Rubrics and grading criteria that are the basis for grading feedback.	To promote consistency when scoring graded assessments and to let students know what is expected of them for graded assessments.	Develop rubrics or detailed grading criteria for graded assessments in the class. Share those rubrics with students. Use the Rubric tool in D2L.
Regularly updated grades in D2L.	Updating students' grades in a timely manner is greatly appreciated by students and allows them to monitor their progress in the class.	Share with students the time frame (e.g., 48 hours) during which they can expect to have their scores updated in the Grades area in D2L and do your best to update grades as promised. Set aside time each week or day to grade assessments and update grades in D2L.
Transitions from one topic to the next.	To show students how course content is related to or important for future course material they will be exposed to.	Post weekly, unit or module reviews or "News Items" that include this transitional information.
A note to students on how long course materials will be available after the course completion date.	To notify students of how long they will have access to course material.	Clearly communicate with students when they will no longer have access to course materials in D2L.
Information about the process to complete the SEI.	To make it easy for students to have access to complete the SEI.	Clearly let students know how they can access the SEI, how long it will be available, what they need to do to complete it, etc.
Prompt posting of final grades.	To notify students of their final grade in the class as soon as possible.	Use the Grades area in D2L to determine students' final grades in the class as early as you can. Encourage students to view their final grade in D2L and contact you with any questions. This helps reduce grade-related questions after final grades have been posted in Wings, reduces the number of grade change forms instructors need to complete, etc.
A final course wrap-up.	Share any final information regarding the course with the students.	This can be done in the "News Item" area in D2L or with an e-mail to the entire class.

Review		
Instructor:	Purpose	Purpose
Uses student feedback to improve the course.	Use student feedback to continually improve the course.	Collect student feedback regarding the course in a variety of ways. Document updates/improvements made in the course based on student feedback.
Corrects spelling and grammar mistakes.	To present all course related materials in a professional manner.	Review all course related materials prior to teaching the class and check for spelling and grammar mistakes. Ask students to inform you if they ever find mistakes in course material (they often let you know even if you don't ask them). If possible, immediately correct any mistakes you find.

Fixes broken links and tests media.	To present all course related materials in a professional manner.	Review all links and media used in the class prior to teaching to make sure links are live and media is working correctly.
Reflects on course improvements.	To continuously strive for quality improvement.	Consider what ideas or concepts students often struggle with or usually need help with. Consider using technology to help students better learn or understand course concepts.
Updates the course to include new features in D2L.	To fully utilize D2L and to enhance your course.	Consider using tools/features in D2L ( <i>e.g.</i> News Item, Dropbox, Discussion, Links, Groups, Chat) for course related activities if you feel this would improve your course.
Meets department standards for currency of content and student learning outcomes.	To ensure that content covered is consistent with the departmental standards and to allow students exposure to the most current research and content in your field.	Discuss course outcomes and objectives with your department. Ensure that what you are teaching is current, consistent with the same courses being taught by colleagues, and meeting the needs of students taking your course as a prerequisite to other courses.
Incorporates ongoing strategies to deter cheating.	To stay engaged in the course, to keep the content current, and to deter cheating by altering assessments and assignments.	Change quizzes and tests each time you offer the course, create higher-order questions, randomize questions, develop from a pool, and randomize answer order. Create projects instead of quizzes and tests, have students deliver sections of a project at different stages of the course, and assign different topics to groups or individual students. Add details and resources about academic dishonesty to your syllabus. More details can be found here: <a href="http://www.uwlax.edu/cat/instructionaldesign/cheating_tutorial/engage.html">http://www.uwlax.edu/cat/instructionaldesign/cheating_tutorial/engage.html</a>

## Part 2: Checklist

Design and Development	
Demonstrates	Course includes:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Information about being an online learner.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A comprehensive syllabus.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A list of university academic resources with links to appropriate websites.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A welcome message with instructions on how to get started.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A consistent navigation structure.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Student-to-student interaction.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Student-to-instructor interaction.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Course and unit/module learning objectives that are measurable and clearly stated.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Assessments and activities that are aligned with the learning objectives.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Checklists or schedules for students that detail what they are to do each week/unit/module.
<input type="checkbox"/>	An introductory or icebreaker discussion activity.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Separate discussion forums for items related to course content, course questions and community building.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Discussion topics that stimulate thought and reflection related to course content.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearly articulated group work expectations.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Varied opportunities for students to interact with content.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Illustrations and examples to explain important concepts.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Assessments and evaluations designed to uphold academic integrity.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ongoing, varied and multiple activities and assessments to assess student learning.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Detailed instructions and explanations for all assessments.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A grades area set up with all graded activities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A variety of opportunities for students to give course and content related feedback.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Transitions from one unit to the next.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Appropriate technology tools to facilitate learning.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Appropriate media to facilitate learning.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Attention to appropriate copyright and fair use laws.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Attention to student accessibility issues.
Comments:	
Delivery	
Demonstrates	Course includes:
<input type="checkbox"/>	A message to students prior to the beginning of the course that shares course related information.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A welcome message with instructions on how to get started.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A message to missing students early in the class to encourage participation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Regular and timely feedback regarding student performance.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use of the time-release function in D2L, or scheduled-opening of course material.
<input type="checkbox"/>	An invitation that encourages students to use online office hours.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Modeling of discussion board participation, behavior and tone.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitoring of discussion board activities for appropriate student behavior and accurate information.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Summaries of discussions.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Effective group work practices.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Prompt responses to student questions.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Regular communication with students to maintain positive rapport.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A designated schedule that is followed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Questions to encourage students to look at content in meaningful and deeper ways.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Illustrations and examples to explain important concepts.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Enforcement of expectations and guidelines for learner behavior.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Assessments and evaluations that are administered to uphold academic integrity.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rubrics and grading criteria that are the basis for grading feedback.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Regularly updated grades in D2L.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Transitions from one topic to the next.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A note to students on how long course materials will be available after the course completion date.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Information about the process to complete the SEI.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Prompt posting of final grades.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A final course wrap-up.
Comments:	
<b>Course Revisions and Improvements</b>	
<b>Demonstrates</b>	<b>Instructor:</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Uses student feedback to improve the course.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Corrects spelling and grammar mistakes.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fixes broken links and tests media.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reflects on course improvements.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Updates the course to include new features in D2L.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Meets department standards for currency of content and student learning outcomes.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Incorporates ongoing strategies to deter cheating.
Comments:	

**Credits**

- Rubric for Online Instruction from California State University Chico (<http://www.csuchico.edu/celt/roi/>)
- Quality Online Course Initiative: Illinois Online Network, University of Illinois (<http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/initiatives/qoci/index.asp>)
- Assessing Online Facilitation Instrument: A 2007 TIGERS Project Sponsored by CSU Center for Distributed Learning ([www.humboldt.edu/aof/AssessingOnlineFacilitationInstrument.pdf](http://www.humboldt.edu/aof/AssessingOnlineFacilitationInstrument.pdf))
- University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Handbook for Peer Evaluation of Online and Blended Courses
- Penn State Quality Assurance eLearning Design Standards (<http://www.sc.edu/cte/larryragan/doc/designstandards.pdf>)