

WCIT IT Curriculum Development Toolkit

Step 6: What to Include in Online Courses and Content

A. ORIENT STUDENTS TO SITE AND COURSE

Practice 1: Provide Solid and Stable Calendar for the Quarter

It is difficult for students to keep track of what they are doing in an online classroom. A calendar is a MUST. You should try to schedule your quarter so that you do not have to make changes to due dates for student activities. You should also try to use parallelism whenever possible. Can you make assignments due on the same day each week? Can you make discussions happen at the same time each week? This type of regularity helps students plan and schedule for your course. Remember: When you schedule activities for your students, you need to take into consideration the time it takes you and your students to move information to each other. For example, it is impossible to conduct a peer review in less than three days. Student would need to post work the first day and then they would need two days to respond to each other's work.

Practice 2: Provide Well Developed Syllabus to Student

A syllabus is a contract between a faculty member and his or her students. It should include a course description, learning outcomes, description of how learning outcomes will be assessed (assignments, assessments, required discussion and group activities, etc.), grading and materials required for the course. **BE SURE TO SUBMIT YOUR SYLLABUS TO YOUR DIVISION SECRETARY AT THE BEGINNING OF EACH QUARTER.** Students use syllabi to contest grades and having a copy of the syllabus reside with a third party will help protect you.

Practice 3: Provide an Overview of the Course Structure

Providing an outline of the course structures is one way to help a student build a mental model of the organization and rhythm of your course. A course overview should describe the weekly or unit patterns a student should follow. Describe the learning tasks required of students. Describe how students should schedule those tasks. Tell students which tasks they should complete in order to be successful in the course: graded or not. If possible, include how students can get feedback on whether they are satisfactorily completing their learning tasks.

Practice 4: Articulate Expectations of Student Behavior and Performance

Students come into online learning with a wide variety of assumptions. Articulate what you expect from students in terms of participation (frequency, quality, quantity) and responsibility for achieving learning outcomes. Whose fault is it if the student misunderstands an assignment? What are students expected to do to prevent this from happening? Whose fault is it if a student is unable to successfully submit an assignment? What are students expected to do to prevent this from happening? What learning tasks are students expected to undertake on their own, without feedback or guidance from you?

Practice 5: Help Students Create a Technical Support Plan

Students need to know what you expect them to be able to do technically and what resources are available to support them. Do you expect students to own and be able to use certain software applications? Do you expect students to be responsible for their own access to the course? If they can suddenly no longer access the site from home, but still can from their local library or from the school's open lab, are they responsible for getting assignments/assessments completed on time?

Practice 6: Provide Instructor Information

Students like to know who you are. Most online instructors provide information about themselves but the kinds of information they choose to share varies.

B. ORGANIZE CONTENT TO GUIDE/FACILITATE STUDENT LEARNING ACTIVITY

Practice 7: Place Content in Units or Modules

An online course interface in VISTA can mirror the organization instructors use in their face-to-face course when they organize content and learning activities into units or modules. If you organize your face-to-face course by week, do so online. If you organize your face-to-face course by unit or topic, do so online. Feedback from students tells us that they want to know what they have to do and then how those learning activities link to the learning objectives of the unit, module or course.

Practice 8: Provide an Overview for Each Unit/Module

Units or modules should provide an overview that includes learning goals for the unit or module and a brief description of how the learning activities are scheduled for that unit or module. A good rule for determining what kind of organization to use online is this: When would you summarize progress for students in your face-to-face course? At the beginning of each week? At the beginning of a new chapter in the textbook? "Last week we did this and you should have learned such and such. This week we will begin X, Y and Z and you should learn such and such." An overview for a module or unit provides this kind of contextualization for students.

Practice 9: Provide Multiple Opportunities for Interactivity in Each Module/Unit

Students should have some sort of interactive learning activity that provides them with information on how well they are accessing the content they are expected to master and/or how well they are achieving the learning outcomes for the unit/module. This can take many forms: Peer Review, Class Seminar Discussion, Small Group Work, Quizzes, 'Check Points' in large projects where instructors give feedback at multiple points during the project timeline, etc.

Practice 10: Provide Summative Activity or Assessment for Each Module/Unit

Each module or unit should require students to demonstrate how well they have met the learning outcomes for that module or unit. Examples of this can be a final draft of a paper, a test, an essay, a finished project portion or product of some sort, etc.

C. ESTABLISH INTERACTION AND FEEDBACK LOOPS IN A LEARNING COMMUNITY

Practice 11: Provide Opportunity and Guidance for Student-to-Student Interaction

The form that student-to-student interaction takes will vary widely according to the content and the instructional approach used. Even students enrolled in a keyboarding course however might benefit from having access to a discussion room where they can ask questions of other students. The intended purpose of the discussion area along with guidelines for appropriate behavior should be made available. Students should be made aware of whether the instructor intends to participate and if so, when and how.

Practice 12: Provide Clear Schedule of Instructor Availability and Set Expectations for Response Times. Apply consistently.

BCC holds each instructor responsible for maintaining the integrity of their course so that it meets the disciplinary expectations set for in the learning outcomes and it also meets a departmental ethos of instructional quality. As a relatively new learning environment, online instruction can sometimes have a less defined ethos of instructional quality. The Faculty Resource Center recommends that departments set up some basic parameters regarding instructor responsiveness. Would, for example, an instructor who chooses to respond to students once a week be fulfilling his or her instructional role as defined in your department?