

Northwestern State University

Guidelines
For
Online Programs



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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide a set of guidelines for online teaching. This document is not intended to be all inclusive, but it does provide a foundation in support of electronic learning standards as prescribed by the Southern Regional Electronic Board. It is with best practices in mind that this document guides the development and delivery of online courses at Northwestern State University.

SREB Standards

According to the Southern Regional Electronic Board's "Principles of Good Practice," adopted from WICHE (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education) and in alignment with SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) standards, the following standards should apply to distance learning courses:

Basic Assumptions

Several assumptions are central to these principles:

- The program or course offered electronically is provided by or through an institution that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting body and is authorized to operate in the state where the program or course originates.
- The institution's programs and courses holding specialized accreditation meet the same requirements when offered electronically.
- The institution may be a single institution or a consortium of institutions.
- These principles are generally applicable to degree or certificate programs and to courses offered for academic credit.
- It is the institution's responsibility to review educational programs and courses it provides electronically and to ensure continued compliance with these principles.
- The appropriate state agencies or organizations in the state where courses or programs are offered will coordinate participation in the Electronic Campus.
- Institutions offering programs or for-credit courses are responsible for satisfying all in-state approval and accreditation requirements before students are enrolled.
- Participating states agree to accept the listing on the Electronic Campus as assurance that courses and programs meet the Principles of Good Practice.
- Institutions should give priority for enrolling in Electronic Campus courses and programs to qualified residents of the SREB region.

Curriculum and Instruction

- Each program or course of study results in learning appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the degree or certificate awarded.
- The degree or certificate program or course offered electronically is coherent and complete.
- The course or program provides for appropriate interaction between faculty and students and among students.
- Qualified faculty provide appropriate supervision of the program or course that is offered electronically.
- Academic standards for all programs or courses offered electronically are the same as those for other courses or programs delivered at the institution where they originate.

Institutional Context and Commitment

Role and Mission

- The program or course is consistent with the institution's role and mission.
- Review and approval processes ensure the appropriateness of the technology being used to meet program or course objectives.

Students and Student Services

- The program or course provides students with clear, complete and timely information on the curriculum, course and degree requirements, nature of faculty/student interaction, prerequisite technology competencies and skills, technical equipment requirements, availability of academic support services, financial aid resources, and costs and payment policies.,
- Enrolled students have reasonable and adequate access to student services and resources appropriate to support their learning.
- The institution has admission/acceptance criteria to assess whether the student has the background, knowledge and technical skills required for undertaking the course or program.
- Advertising, recruiting and admissions materials clearly and accurately represent the program and the services available.

Faculty Support

- The program or course provides faculty support services specifically related to teaching via an electronic system.
- The institution ensures appropriate training for faculty who teach using technology.
- The program or course provides faculty with adequate equipment, software and communications for interaction with students, institutions and other faculty.

Resources for Learning

- The program or course ensures that appropriate learning resources are available to students.
- The program or course evaluates the adequacy of access to learning resources and the cost to students for access to those resources. It also documents the use of electronic resources.

Commitment to Support

- Policies for faculty evaluation include appropriate recognition of teaching and scholarly activities related to programs or courses offered electronically.
- The institution demonstrates a commitment to ongoing support, both financial and technical, and to the continuation of the program or course for a period sufficient for students to complete a degree or certificate.

Evaluation and Assessment

- The institution evaluates program and course effectiveness, including assessments of student learning, student retention, and student and faculty satisfaction.
- At the completion of the program or course, the institution provides for assessment and documentation of student achievement in each course
- Program or course announcements and electronic catalog entries provide appropriate information.

“Principles of Good Practice” can be found at <http://www.ecinitiatives.org/publications/principles.asp>.

University Guidelines

Curriculum and Instruction

Qualified Faculty

As per university hiring practices, the dean, the department head, or applicable departmental committee is responsible for reviewing the credentials of any potential faculty member to determine whether an applicant possesses appropriate academic credentials. The Office of Electronic and Continuing Education can assist in evaluating a potential new hire's technical competence.

The Office of Electronic and Continuing Education will provide appropriate training relevant to the delivery of online courses. This training may include, but is not limited to, basic computer proficiency, Blackboard "buttonology," and Instructional Design. In order to be approved to teach an online course, an instructor at a minimum, **MUST** participate in a Blackboard Orientation session.

Academic Standards/Student Learning

Courses and degree programs are selected to be offered online by departments, in consultation with the Office of Electronic and Continuing Education and University administration. Once a department has approval to place a degree program online, the course development process begins. The development of a specified sequence of courses to be delivered to fulfill program requirements (course rotation) ensures that students can complete the program within a reasonable and predictable time frame.

It is the responsibility of each department to ensure that online courses meet the same academic standards as courses being offered face to face. Course stewards/department heads should review each course prior to delivery in order to ensure that the online version of a course covers the same material and produces the same learning outcomes as the face to face version of the course.

The Office of Electronic and Continuing Education provides guidelines for the evaluation of aspects of the course that are unique to the online environment (see appendix).

Guidelines for Interaction within online courses

Online courses will provide appropriate opportunities for interaction between faculty and students and among students.

- Instructors will log in to the online course a minimum of one time per week in order to read and respond to messages posted by students.
- Instructors will check email daily, and respond to email from students within 48 hours, or as specified in the syllabus.

- Instructors will provide feedback on assignments within two weeks of the submission deadline.
- Students will be encouraged to share ideas with one another via asynchronous discussion board posts, group activities, email and/or live chat opportunities.

Courses and instructors will be evaluated in order to ensure that content remains current and effective teaching methods are employed. This course evaluation should include the following:

- Student evaluation of instructors
- Department head/course steward/mentor evaluation of course utilizing SREB standards

Administrative access will be available for the appropriate administrator/mentor for evaluation.

Department heads and/or mentors will work with faculty members to address any deficiencies that are found.

At Northwestern State University, each Department Head/Dean is responsible for the evaluation of content that is delivered in each course, and for ensuring that each instructor facilitates his or her courses effectively. Each new instructor will be assigned a mentor who may observe the new instructor's teaching throughout the semester and provide answers to that instructor's questions as necessary throughout the semester. The mentor must have prior successful experience teaching online. This mentor can provide support related to content, university policies and procedures, and best practices in course facilitation. Whenever possible, a mentor should be provided release time for his/her additional duties.

Institutional Context and Commitment

Role and Mission

Mission

Northwestern State University is a responsive, student-oriented institution that is committed to the creation, dissemination, and acquisition of knowledge through teaching, research, and service. The University maintains as its highest priority excellence in teaching in graduate and undergraduate programs. Northwestern State University prepares its students to become productive members of society and promotes economic development and improvements in the quality of life of the citizens in its region.

- To create and maintain a responsive, student-oriented environment.
- To provide programs, services, and operations throughout the University of high quality and effectiveness.
- To enhance institutional viability through effective enrollment management.
- To promote economic development, community service, and an improved quality of life in the region.

Institutional Objectives

Institutional Objective #1: Identify and support programs and services responsive to the needs of the service area and student clientele.

(e.g., adult learning, distance education niche, new degree programs, student activities, registration, financial aid, accreditation, financial services)

Institutional Objective #2: Evaluate and respond to the changing environment to assure student learning and development.

(e.g., enrollment management, advising, retention, orientation, transition to new student profile, living learning environment, facilities maintenance, service learning, technology enhancement)

Institutional Objective #3: Provide support for economic and cultural development through community outreach.

(e.g., diversity plan, CAPA activities, small business development activities, grant related activities, intercollegiate activities, work force enhancement, tourism, applied and basic research)

The delivery of online courses has been identified as an important strategy through which the university can achieve its mission. Northwestern encourages the use of electronic media for course delivery as a way to reach adult citizens in our largely rural service area, who may not have the means to travel to the Natchitoches campus to complete a degree.

Course Identification/Selection

- The selection of course delivery method will be made by faculty members in consultation with other faculty in the discipline and with their department heads/deans. Electronic and Continuing Education staff may make recommendations for courses to be developed. ECE will assist in identification of necessary equipment and software and will provide support as necessary.
- The selection of a course to be leased or purchased from outside of the University will be made by the Dean of the College, Director of Electronic and Continuing Education, and the Vice President of Academic Affairs.
- In order for a course to be delivered online, appropriate approval processes must be followed. Online instruction cannot replace class time in face to face sections.

Development and Delivery of Locally Produced Electronic Courses

- When the faculty member and the Dean of the College, in consultation with the Director of Electronic and Continuing Education agree on a course for development, the Dean of the College will determine if faculty will be given release time for one semester in order to produce the course.
- The size of a class should be considered carefully by the appropriate Dean and Department Head as it relates to instruction and course content. The use of creativity to maximize capacity without impacting quality is encouraged.
- Northwestern State University Policy will determine ownership and copyright of course materials in accordance with policies set forth by the State Board of Supervisors and the Louisiana Board of Regents.
- The design and development of electronic learning credit and non-credit modules, courses, certificates, and programs should follow priorities established by the college as informed by educational requirements, market studies, societal demand, community and business needs, and the competitive advantage of Northwestern State University. Offerings may include instruction for undergraduates, those in professional and graduate degree programs, other advanced degree programs, practitioner-oriented programs, specialized training, and K-12 outreach efforts.
- Electronic courses should be designed according to those academic standards utilized for regular courses and the standards identified by SREB and SACS.

- Once the course has met approval by the department, the course must then be submitted to the Office of Electronic and Continuing Education and Registrar's office for inclusion into the class schedules. The online electronic course registration located at https://secure.nsula.edu/online_courses must be completed, and the Electronic Course Submission Form must be submitted to the Registrar's Office. Submission of the electronic course through online and printed documentation should occur according to the dates specified. The Office of Electronic and Continuing Education will then report the courses to the Southern Regional Electronic Board. All requests for submission of an electronic course beyond the approved date of submission must be in writing and directed to the Director of Electronic and Continuing Education and the Vice President of Academic Affairs. With the approval of the Vice President of Academic Affairs, the course will be submitted to the SREB.

SREB submission dates:

Spring: September 30

Summer: January 31

Fall: April 30

- Through the online course submission process, appropriate course details are posted on the Electronic and Continuing Education web site. Departments will submit changes as necessary (textbooks, instructors) prior to the beginning of class.

Program Approval Process

When a college decides to offer an entire program online, the proposal should be submitted to the Provost, who will determine whether the program is in line with the University's stated mission and goals. Upon approval by the Provost, the program proposal is submitted to the Board of Regents and as required, a substantive change request is presented to SACS.

SACS substantive change policy:

<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/sub%20change%20final.pdf>

Students and Student Services

NSU provides a host of online services to students, including but not limited to online admission, registration, financial aid, fee payment, email, student help desk, and the student portal.

The ability of a student to succeed in distance education classes depends on his or her ability to understand the class structure and technology. Prior to enrollment in online courses, students are informed of prerequisite technology skills required to succeed in the online environment. Prospective students have the opportunity to complete an online self-assessment of their ability to succeed in online courses. Students are also advised by admissions counselors and academic advisors prior to enrollment.

Located on the Office of Electronic and Continuing Education web site is a list of the minimum computer requirements for participation in online courses.

Instructors are encouraged to provide information related to academic student resources either through advising or through links posted within their online classes. It is the instructor's responsibility to ensure that any information provided is accurate and up to date. It is suggested that, at a minimum, instructors provide links to library services, student technical assistance, and the Office of Disability Services.

Syllabi for online courses should include the same content-related information as required by the academic department and the university for face to face courses. In addition to that information, a syllabus for an online course should include:

- Instructor email address/fax number
- Information regarding any proctored testing
- Any special software/hardware requirements
- Appropriate expectations for instructor response time (i.e. email response within 48 hours)
- Civility statement
- Plagiarism statement

Watson Memorial Library (available on-line at: http://www.nsula.edu/watson_library) provides students on-campus and off-campus electronic access to library resources, including:

- the Library On-line Catalog
- remote access with full text capability
- academic databases and/or indexes to periodicals
- access to libraries with the NSU system
- electronic journals and books
- Cammie G. Henry Research Center

Faculty can receive assistance from Watson Memorial Library's staff in determining availability of online resources.

Specialized services offered for distance learners include:

- on-line Interlibrary Loan Request forms
- e-mail reference assistance
- on-line capabilities to renew books
- a toll free 800 number
- access to account information concerning the library

A Student Online Support desk, funded by Student Technology Fees, is available by telephone and e-mail for students who are experiencing technical problems with their computers, email, or the course management software. The hours of operation are located on-line at: http://www.nsula.edu/help_desk. Students can also use the help desk website to receive answers to commonly asked questions.

It is the responsibility of the departments to ensure the accuracy and currency of any recruiting materials that are disseminated to potential students.

Faculty Support

The Office of Electronic and Continuing Education will provide appropriate training relevant to the delivery of online courses. This training may include, but is not limited to, basic computer proficiency, Blackboard "buttonology," Instructional Design, and online pedagogy. In order to be approved to teach an online course, an instructor at a minimum, MUST participate in a Blackboard Orientation session.

The university provides a Course Management System to deliver online courses and *university* email accounts through which faculty communicate with their students.

The academic departments and/or Information Systems ensure that faculty members have appropriate hardware and software. The academic department and/or ECE ensure that adjunct faculty members have minimum system requirements for online teaching.

Resources for Learning

Within online courses, instructors are responsible for ensuring that students are provided with appropriate electronic resources related to course content. This may include links to online Web references and links to any plug-ins necessary for downloading course materials.

It is the university's responsibility to provide accommodations for disabled students as identified by the Office of Students with Disabilities.

The university provides various learning resources for online students including, but not limited to:

- Blackboard Course Management System
- Email
- Library resources
- Student portal (my NSU)
- Computer labs
- Tutoring services

These services are all provided at no additional cost to the student.

The use of Blackboard, email, and the student portal is monitored by Information Systems. The use of departmental computer labs is monitored by the departments; Student Tech Fee labs are monitored by the Student Tech Fee staff.

The Library monitors the number of times the databases and catalogs are accessed by students. The library also monitors book circulation, interlibrary loan requests, and counts of students going in and out of the library. Students are surveyed during their exit interviews about their satisfaction of the library and library resources.

Commitment to Support

The university has invested significant monies into hardware and software required to host online courses.

Northwestern ensures that each online program can be completed by students within a predictable time frame by providing a course rotation.

The teaching of online courses and related activities will be equivalent as related to tenure, promotion, and merit.

Evaluation and Assessment

Course Evaluation

It is the responsibility of the department head/course steward/mentor to conduct evaluation of courses in a timely manner and to ensure that content is kept up-to-date.

Elements to be evaluated may include the following:

- Audience and grade level
- Breadth of coverage
- Writing style and accuracy
- Course orientation and syllabus
- Statement of learning objectives
- Exercises, projects, and activities
- Additional text material
- Instructional philosophy
- Navigation
- Student accessibility of course progress information
- Structure for timely feedback
- Consistency of placement of elements and presentation
- Pedagogical features
- Effectiveness of multimedia elements
- Text
- Accommodation of a variety of media types and learning styles
- Student interaction with the content
- Assessment Methods
- Assessment Grading
- Grading Rubrics
- Support materials for the student
- Course effectiveness and structure

These were adapted from the Online Course Evaluation Project, a joint venture between the Monterey Institute for Technology in Education, WCET, and EduTools (http://www.montereyinstitute.org/pdf/OCEP%20Evaluation%20Categories_Distribution%20Version%204_28.pdf).

Student Evaluation of Courses

Students are asked to complete an evaluation of each course at the end of the semester. The Office of Institutional Research is responsible for the creation of this survey instrument and for analyzing and disseminating the results. Information Systems maintains the database and the Web interface required for the online delivery of the survey to students. Results of the student evaluation are distributed to department heads,

which use these results as one element of faculty evaluation. Instructors will also be provided with copies of their survey results.

Faculty Evaluation

Faculty members, whether teaching traditionally or online, are evaluated on an annual basis as stated in the faculty handbook. Each faculty member must be evaluated under the guidelines set forth by the university. Faculty members are evaluated on their teaching effectiveness as well as their scholarly and professional activities. Documents such as student evaluations of teaching, department head/coordinator or dean evaluation, student appraisal of academic advising, and self-reporting activities are used as methods of evaluation. Online courses may be visited as a part of the evaluation process.

Program Evaluation

The Office of Institutional Research gathers and presents data on student retention and graduation rates.

Departments, where applicable, track students beyond graduation. The results are used to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the program and applicability of the program to students' careers.

Course Ownership/Intellectual Property

Per university policy.