

GUIDELINES FOR ONLINE & HYBRID COURSE DESIGN AND REVIEW

Volunteer State Community College

The faculty at Vol State is committed to implementing the following *Guidelines for Online & Hybrid Course Design and Review*. The guidelines assure that distance education courses are designed to promote student engagement and success.

Distance education model courses are online or hybrid courses developed by faculty under contract and regularly taught by other full-time or adjunct faculty. Some courses may also qualify for development based on program requirements. Model courses must pass a team review as outlined below before they are added to the class schedule in an online or hybrid format. Existing model courses will be scheduled for routine evaluation on a 3 to 4-year cycle. The intent behind the use of model courses is that most, if not all, of the faculty teaching a given online or hybrid course would use that model as the basis for their own instruction to provide continuity to the student experience and assessment of key learning outcomes.

Full-time faculty members who develop courses for their own use as they teach online or hybrid sections should follow the peer evaluation guidelines as practiced in their divisions and are responsible for following the guidelines below. Individual faculty teaching their own online or hybrid courses are encouraged to obtain an instructional design review from Distributed Education, particularly related to verifying the accessibility of course materials.

The course review process should be collaborative and collegial. Refer to the *Course Review Timeline* for an explanation of the review process timeliness and expectations.

Upon completion, a copy of this final review will be filed in the Distributed Education office and shared with the course developer, the department chair or program director, and review team members.

The guidelines are divided into two major parts: I) Course Organization, Content Accessibility, and Copyright and II) Team and Subject Matter Review Guidelines. The course developer(s) partner with an instructional design specialist to complete part I. The instructional design specialist and two faculty members complete part II.

Part I. Course Organization, Content Accessibility, and Copyright

All items in part I are mandatory. Any part I item marked as "Needs Improvement" must be remediated before the course moves on to Part II: Team and Subject Matter Review.

A. Course Welcome & Overview

Instructions: The course developer will provide the location (e.g., Getting Started module-Syllabus) of the item in the guideline. Typically, the developer should place this information in the syllabus and supporting pages of the Get Started Here module. The model course template provides a layout for developers to follow. Use "N/A" in the course location field if a guideline does not apply to the course and indicate in the notes why the guideline does not apply. An instructional designer will confirm that the guidelines are met and provide suggestions for improvement as needed.

Upon completion of the initial review, the course developer will be provided with an opportunity to meet with the instructional designer to discuss findings and respond to the recommendations. Instructional design assistance will be available to help remediate any deficient guidelines. The instructional designer will keep a copy of this review and any substantiating evidence of collaboration with the course developer for audit purposes.

Guideline	Course Location	Needs Improvement	Acceptable	Exemplary
1. An announcement provides a welcome and clear instructions for getting started and finding more detailed course information.				
2. Instructor information includes multiple methods for being contacted by students and availability information/office hours. For model courses being taught by various faculty members, a placeholder for this information is present.				
3. Instructor provides a professional introduction in the content, discussion board, or announcement area. For model courses to be taught by multiple faculty members, a placeholder for this information is present in the content area. Video introductions are optional but strongly encouraged for online courses.				
4. The syllabus includes contact information for the academic division.				
5. The course description matches the college catalog, including prerequisites.				
6. The course format and structure are clearly stated, including meeting dates and times, if applicable.				
7. Vol State college-wide policies are provided in the syllabus, or students are directed to the policy widget on the course homepage.				
8. Course-specific policies and procedures, such as grading, late work, or participation, are clearly stated in the syllabus.				
9. Expectations for timely and regular communication and feedback from the instructor are clearly stated (e.g., questions, email, assignments, and discussions). The standard response time is up to 48 hours on business days for communications and two weeks for assessment feedback.				
10. Online communication expectations (e.g., netiquette for email, discussion boards, etc.) are presented clearly.				

11. The course explains or links to resources that support student success (e.g., Learning Commons, Veterans Affairs, Thigpen Library, TRIO, etc.).				
12. A course developer contact page is included for all model courses and may contain instructor notes.				

B. Technology Skills and Technical Requirements

Instructions: The course developer will provide the location of the item in the guideline. Typically, the developer should place this information in the Get Started Here module on the Technology Information and How to Get Help pages. The model course template provides a layout for developers to use. Use "N/A" in a course location field if a guideline does not apply to the course and indicate in the notes why the guideline does not apply. An instructional designer will confirm that the guidelines are met and provide suggestions for improvement as needed.

Guideline	Course Location	Needs Improvement	Acceptable	Exemplary
13. Required course technology tools (hardware, software, websites, subscriptions) are listed. Any special technical skills related to these tools are listed.				
14. Clear instructions indicate where and how students will access or purchase any required technology tools.				
15. Instructions for how to obtain technical support are provided, including links to any publisher or third-party tools.				

C. Accessibility and Copyright

Instructions: The course developer should refer to the list below while developing a model course. An instructional designer will review the course accessibility and provide suggestions for improvement as needed.

If the accessibility of a course resource or activity cannot be achieved (related to undue burden to the institution or department), the course developer provides an equally effective accessible alternative for students and documentation that such alternatives are equitable (THEC/TBR Requirement).

Guideline	Needs Improvement	Acceptable	Exemplary
16. LAYOUT: A logical, consistent, and uncluttered layout is established. (consistent font template/color scheme, related content organized together, self-evident titles)			
17. PAGE FORMAT: Large blocks of information are divided into manageable sections with ample white space around and between the blocks.			
18. COLOR & CONTRAST: There is enough contrast between text and background for the content to be easily viewed. Text, graphics, and images are understandable when viewed without color.			
19. GRAMMAR & MECHANICS: The course looks collegiate with few grammatical, spelling, and technical errors.			
20. TEXT: Content is available in an easily accessed format, preferably HTML. All text content is readable by assistive technology, including slides, PDF files, or any text contained in an image.			
21. TEXT: Content is formatted with titles, headings, and other styles to enhance readability and improve the structure.			
22. LISTS: Are formatted (numbered or bulleted) as appropriate.			

23. TABLES: When possible, information is displayed in a linear format instead of as a table. Tables are used to compare data and are accompanied by a title and summary description. Header rows and columns are assigned.			
24. SLIDESHOWS: When used, slides use a predefined slide layout and include unique slide titles. Only simple, non-automatic transitions between slides are used.			
25. ALT TEXT: Alternative text descriptions are applied to all instructional and non-instructional graphics.			
26. LINKS: Hyperlink text is descriptive and makes sense when out of context (avoid using "click here"). Hyperlinks are indicated by underlined text and not through color alone. The purpose of external web links is clear. Links work. Links to external content should open in a new tab or window. Links to internal (eLearn) content should open in the same window.			
27. VIDEO: 99% accurate captions are provided on all videos and include proper punctuation. Audio descriptions are provided for all key visual content related to assessments.			
28. AUDIO ONLY: A 99% accurate text transcript is provided for audio content.			
29. ALL MEDIA: Videos and interactive content do not contain extraneous animations and can be controlled using only a keyboard. Flashing and/or blinking content are avoided. The purpose for media is clearly explained.			
30. TECHNOLOGIES: The instructor has included accessibility documentation from the vendor/publisher about unique technology tools used in this course.			

Guideline	Needs Improvement	Acceptable	Exemplary
31. When used, copyrighted material is appropriately cited.			

Concluding Part I

Note that the part I course review should be collaborative and collegial. Multiple iterations of reviewing and editing may be necessary before the parties reach a consensus about guidelines being met. Concerns with part I of the review may be escalated to the Dean of Academic Support for mediation.

By signing below, each of the parties listed agree that effective collaboration has transpired throughout the process, and the course is ready to move on to part II: Team and Subject Matter Review Guidelines.

Instructional Designer Comments:

Instructional Designer (e-sign, date)

Course Developer Comments:

Course Developer (e-sign, date)

Part II. Team and Subject Matter Review Guidelines

A review team will consist of two faculty members and an instructional designer. A faculty member with strong online experience will serve as the team lead, and at least one should be a subject matter expert when possible. All review team members will be approved by the academic department and the Dean of Academic Support.

Upon completion of part II, the course developer will be provided with an opportunity to meet with the review team lead to discuss findings and respond to the recommendations. Upon mutual agreement, assistance will be provided to remediate any deficient guidelines. The team lead will keep record of any substantiating evidence of collaboration with the course developer for audit purposes.

Any part II item marked as "Needs Improvement" by at least two of the team members must be remediated before the course review is finalized.

A. Affirmation/Review of Part I Guidelines

Instructions: Faculty team members should indicate below their review of Part I.

Statement	Yes	No
I have reviewed the course and results of Part I and agree the guidelines have been met to the best of my ability.		
I have additional recommendations pertaining to Part I. (If yes, provide detailed comments.)		

Reviewer Comments:

B. Outcomes, Objectives, and Assessments

Instructions: Indicate below whether each guideline has been met (acceptable), is exemplary, or needs improvement. Provide suggestions for all guidelines marked as "needs improvement" and elsewhere as needed.

Vol State Definitions:

Course Student Learning Outcomes: Describe the abilities of a student after the completion of a course in observable and measurable terms. Course Student Learning Outcomes should be established by the division and must be consistently utilized and properly published in all course sections and delivery methods.

Program Student Learning Outcomes: Describe the abilities of a student after the completion of a program in observable and measurable terms. Program Student Learning Outcome are broad and encompass the comprehensive abilities throughout the program. Course Student Learning Outcomes are to be mapped appropriately to Program Student Learning Outcomes for Key Assessment Courses. Program Student Learning Outcomes should be established by the division and must be consistently utilized and properly published in the catalog.

Course Objectives: Describe what material or content the course aims to cover and what learning activities they will use to demonstrate the Course Student Learning Outcomes.

Learning Activities: The pursuit of course content used to achieve Course Student Learning Outcomes and Course Objectives. Learning Activities may include, but are not limited to, lecture, discussions, assignments, quizzes, tests, presentations, critiques, practical exams, observations, projects, and other exams.

Assessment: Refers to the activities that evaluate a student's level of proficiency regarding Course Student Learning Outcomes and Course Objectives. Assessments evaluating proficiency of Key Course Student Learning Outcomes are required to be collected using a Via Assessment Activity.

Alignment: Refers to the connection between Program Student Learning Outcomes, Course Student Learning Outcomes, Learning Activities, and Assessment. An aligned course means that the Program Student Learning Outcomes, Course Student Learning Outcomes, Learning Activities, and Assessment are properly calibrated so students understand what and how they will learn as well as how they will be evaluated.

Guideline	Needs Improvement	Acceptable	Exemplary	Not Applicable
1. Course Student Learning Outcomes follow the Outcomes Formula of Subject, Verb, Result, and the verb is observable and measurable through course assessments. Note: some Course Learning Outcomes are specifically prescribed per TBR or program accreditors and cannot be modified.				
2. Module learning objectives are optional but highly encouraged. If present, each module-level objective should be measurable and clearly support one or more Course Student Learning Outcome or Course Objective.				
3. The course includes frequent and appropriate methods to assess students' mastery of learning objectives. Where applicable and appropriate, students are provided multiple ways to demonstrate learning.				
4. If the course is a Key Assessment Course, there is a Via Assessment Activity that properly maps the Course Student Learning Outcomes. The Course Student Learning Outcomes must be mapped to Program Learning Outcomes. This item can be confirmed through the IE Officer.				

5. Criteria for the assessment of all graded assignments are clearly articulated in the assignment or through other means such as rubrics, exemplary work, etc. All assessments and/or assignments are fully developed and ready to use. For example, none of the assignments say: "Your instructor will provide an assignment here."				
6. Course materials are appropriate and up-to-date with the field and support student mastery of Course Student Learning Outcomes and Course Objectives.				

Reviewer Comments:

C. Best Practices in Course Design

Instructions: Indicate below whether each guideline is acceptable, exemplary, or needs improvement. Provide suggestions for all guidelines marked as "needs improvement" and elsewhere as needed.

Guideline	Needs Improvement	Acceptable	Exemplary	Not Applicable
7. The course offers access to a variety of engaging course content and resources (e.g., readings, videos, podcasts, interactive websites).				
8. Unit, module, or weekly overviews are found throughout the course, not just in the orientation or getting started module, and contain at least two fully developed paragraphs written by the developer.				
9. The course structure provides students with opportunities to review and regulate their learning and performance (e.g., formative feedback, pre-tests, self-tests, reflective assignments, etc.).				
10. Clear and consistent assignment and activity names are used in the content, syllabus, and grade book.				
11. The course grade book is organized, matches the grading requirements listed in the syllabus, and is correctly configured.				
12. The course contains activities intended to build a supportive learning community among students and with the instructor (e.g., Icebreaker, Bulletin Board, Meet Your Classmates, and Ask a Question discussion forums).				
13. The course offers opportunities for student-to-student learning about course-related content (e.g., subject-specific discussions, peer review/feedback, class blogs, or group assignments).				

Reviewer Comments:

Concluding Part II

Note that the part II course review should be collaborative and collegial. The developer will have the opportunity to respond to feedback and make adjustments to the course based on the recommendations. If two of the three review team members agree that improvement is needed, the course goes to remediation. Multiple iterations of reviewing and remediation may be necessary before the parties reach a consensus about guidelines being met. Concerns with the part II review may be escalated to the Dean of Academic Support for mediation.

By signing below, each of the parties listed agree that effective collaboration has transpired throughout the process and that the course has passed the review.

Team Lead Comments:

- Team Lead (e-sign, date)

Course Developer Comments:

- Course Developer (e-sign, date)

Appeal Process

Should the review team and course developer disagree upon the review's outcome, the course developer may appeal the decision to the dean of their academic division.