Core Principles of Quality

for eLearning Courses in the Montana University System

(First adopted March 2008; Revised September 2021)

Overview

These core principles guide the design and delivery of eLearning courses in the Montana University System. The specific implementations of these principles will vary as technology changes and teaching and learning methodologies evolve, but the principles themselves should persist.

Ultimately, a single principle guiding quality course development and delivery is that all eLearning course elements (objectives, learning activities, interactions, instructional materials, technologies, and assessments) work together to ensure that students achieve the desired learning outcomes.

Bulleted lists of general guidelines follow each core principle and provide criteria to assist campuses in determining if the intent of the principle has been achieved.

While these principles particularly apply to eLearning coursework, they can and should inform quality course development, regardless of modality. Applying these principles can improve the quality of ALL teaching.

Institutions and programs also incorporate additional best practices into their policies and processes. In particular, institutions should incorporate and abide by the requirements of:

- The Consortium for Regional Accrediting Commission's *21st Century Distance Education Guidelines*
- The requirements for student disclosures and regular and substantive interaction as set out in Federal Policy (34 CFR 600.2 and 34 CFR 668.43)

Core Principles

1. Course Design and Introduction:

The course design, navigation, and content, as well as instructor and student expectations are made clear to students from day one and throughout the course. The course materials, interactions, and policies are universally designed to accommodate all students.

- Teacher presence is visible through the design and the facilitation of the course.
- Course has an identified starting place, the organizational system of the course is explained, and uses responsive design.
- The navigation of the course is logical, consistent, and accessible (for example, heading structure, descriptive links, alternative text, appropriate use of color, etc.).

2. Learning Outcomes:

Learning outcomes and objectives describe what learners will be able to do upon completion of the course. They establish a foundation upon which the rest of the course is based.

- Course learning outcomes are clearly defined, measurable, and visible to students.
- Module/unit objectives are measurable and aligned with course-level outcomes.
- Students build mastery of learning outcomes through engagement with the content (such as through activities and assessments), engagement with peers, and engagement with the instructor.

3. Assessment & Measurement:

Assessments use established strategies to measure effective learning, are aligned to the learning objectives, and are designed as essential to the learning process.

- The grading policy includes clearly stated criteria for how work and participation will be evaluated.
- Assessment uses a combination of formative and summative assessment techniques that follow universal design (UDL) principles by involving students in their learning progress, supporting learner variability through flexible assessments, and eliminating unnecessary barriers.
- Students can clearly see how they are building mastery of learning outcomes and objectives through timely feedback and a gradebook aligned with the syllabus.

4. Instructional Materials and Technology:

Instructional materials, including supporting technology, have sufficient breadth, depth, and currency to enable students to achieve course objectives and learning outcomes.

- Instructional materials and technology used in the course enrich instruction and foster learner interactivity.
- Instructional materials and technology are universally designed for learning.
- The instructor uses a variety of instructional materials in the course (such as textbooks and other publications, instructor-created resources, websites, and multimedia) to support and enrich student learning.

5. Learner Engagement & Support:

The course design and delivery includes meaningful engagement designed to enhance student's motivation, intellectual commitment, and personal development. Such engagement should include substantial instructor-to-student, student-to-student, and student-to-content interaction.

- Instructors regularly and substantively interact with students through social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence to support learning throughout the course.
- The design and facilitation of student interaction is responsive to the variety of cultures and communication styles in the learning community.
- The course is effectively supported for the students through fully accessible modes of delivery, resources, and institutional support services essential to learner success.
- The instructor employs evidence-based pedagogical practices to deepen student engagement and enhance learning.

Glossary & Resources

eLearning

"For centuries, educators have provided distance education to learners (McVay & Rocker, 2007). The advent of the Internet transformed distance education into e-Learning, online learning, or any distance education delivered through a web-based system. William Horton provides a succinct working definition of e-learning: "E-learning is the use of information and computer technologies to create learning experiences" (Horton, 2006, p.1).

McVay and Roecker (2007) elaborate on this definition with the following addition, "E-learning is facilitated and supported through the use of information and communication technology, e-learning can cover a spectrum of activities from supported learning, to blended learning (the combination of traditional and e-learning practices), to learning that is entirely online" (p. 6). Learning is the critical element and objective regardless of the technology used."

- https://www.angelo.edu/faculty-and-staff/instructional-design/online-teaching/section_11.php

Responsive Design

Responsive Design allows web content to be easily engaged on many types of internet-connected devices.

- Boston University's Responsive Framework

"Responsive web design is a web design approach aimed at designing sites to provide an optimal viewing experience. The basic idea of designing a responsive website is to fit in the content, based on the size of the device without hiding any content and changing the view of layout. Since the visitors of different websites through handheld devices is increasing day by day, it has become necessary to design the websites with responsive layout. Responsive website designing has reduced the problem of resizing, panning, and scrolling and accessing them from any device. People can now access information easily with responsive websites because they respond to the needs of users and the devices they are using."

- [Designing Responsive Websites Using HTML And CSS](#)

Teaching Presence

"The Community of Inquiry model (Garrison, 2011) offers a framework for thinking about the core dimensions of effective online learning that can help demystify what it means to "teach" online. The model proposes a Venn diagram of three overlapping "presences" – cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence. This teaching tip looks at the dimensions of teaching presence defined in the model.

Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer (2001) begin their foundational article about teaching presence in online learning using an analogy to teaching in a one-room schoolhouse. This comparison makes the point that, far from being an invisible and inactive actor, the online instructor plays a vital and multi-faceted role. This article defines teaching presence as: "the *design*, *facilitation*, and *direction* of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes" (p. 5). Each of these three functions, in turn, includes multiple activities."

- ["Teaching Presence" in the Community of Inquiry Framework | Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning Through Research](#)

- [E-Learning in the 21st Century: A Community of Inquiry Framework for Research and Practice](#)

- [ASSESSING TEACHING PRESENCE IN A COMPUTER CONFERENCING CONTEXT | Anderson | Online Learning](#)

Universal Design for Learning

"Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn."

"The UDL framework is grounded in three principles

1. Multiple means of representation – using a variety of methods to present information, provide a range of means to support
2. Multiple means of action and expression – providing learners with alternative ways to act skillfully and demonstrate what they know
3. Multiple means of engagement – tapping into learners' interests by offering choices of content and tools; motivating learners by offering adjustable levels of challenge."

- [About Universal Design for Learning](#)
- [Universal Design for Learning](#)