

# WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

Online Instruction Task Force

Final Report and Recommendations:

Guidelines and Standards of Practice for  
Online Programs and Courses at  
Wayne State University

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## I. Introduction

Wayne State University is committed to providing quality learning experiences for its students regardless of the delivery format. This document describes the institutional standards and guidelines that apply to the design, teaching, and support of online programs and courses. The following standards of practice affirm and advance the [WSU Mission<sup>1</sup>](#) and [Strategic Plan<sup>2</sup>](#) and conform to the *Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education*<sup>3</sup> published by its accrediting agency, the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The University's "Standards of Practice for Online Programs and Courses" is based on widely accepted principles of effective practice for online instructional design, delivery, and teaching and has been drafted to ensure consistency with standards endorsed by a consensus of the nation's leading educational policy organizations, the best available research, and sound educational practice. Together these authoritative sources constitute a body of evidence-based practices that serve as reliable benchmarks for guiding the University's online practices and policies and for providing a framework for conducting ongoing institutional assessments of the quality and effectiveness of its online offerings.

To ensure the University's commitment to the highest standards of quality, it endorses the following core values and guidelines based on accepted standards of quality for program and course design, instruction, and associated support services at the institutional level. Each of the following is an area of institutional operation that defines the core values and standards that underlie the University's commitment to providing and ensuring the quality of its online programs and courses:

- **Institutional Mission**  
Online offerings are aligned with the mission of the University.
- **Organizational Structure**  
Institutional structures are effectively organized to support online courses and programs.
- **Institutional Resources**  
Online instruction has sufficient financial and technical resources to ensure its quality.
- **Curriculum and Instruction**  
Online programs and courses offered by the University are based on sound principles of

instructional design that ensure the quality of their curricula and the effectiveness of student learning.

- **Faculty Support**

The Faculty receives adequate institutional resources, instruction, facilities, and equipment to develop and continually improve their online teaching skills and competencies.

- **Student Support**

Students have online access to academic and administrative resources and services necessary for the successful completion of their online studies.

- **Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes**

The University continuously reviews and evaluates the effectiveness of online instruction by regularly collecting and using data measuring student learning outcomes to improve the quality of its online offerings.

## II. Definition of Online Learning

Consistent with the North Central Association Higher Learning Commission's definition of online learning, Wayne State University defines an "online" course as one in which 100% of the instruction occurs in a non-face-to-face setting. Instructional activities between the instructor and students and student-student interaction take place synchronously and/or asynchronously through regular and substantive interaction via Web-based technologies. Face-to-face class meetings, if any are required, consist of non-instructional activities (e.g., a class or program orientation, presentation, or exams).

As a form of distance learning, online learning uses the Web:

- a. to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor, and
- b. to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, synchronously and/or asynchronously.

## III. Guidelines for the Implementation and Evaluation of Online Learning

### 1. Online learning is appropriate to the University's mission and purposes.

#### Examples of evidence:

- a. The mission statement explains the role of online learning within the range of the institution's programs and services.
- b. Institutional and program statements of vision and values inform how the online learning environment(s) is created and supported.
- c. As appropriate, the institution incorporates into its online learning programs methods of meeting the stated institutional goals for the student experience at the institution.
- d. The recruitment and admissions programs supporting online learning courses and programs appropriately target the student populations to be served.
- e. Students enrolled in online learning courses and programs fit the profile of students the institution intends to serve.

- f. Senior administrators and staff can articulate how online learning is consonant with the institution's mission and goals.

## **2. The University's plans for developing, sustaining and, if appropriate, expanding online learning offerings are integrated into its regular planning and evaluation processes.**

### **Examples of evidence:**

- a. Development and ownership of plans for online learning extend beyond the administrators directly responsible for it and the programs directly using it.
- b. Planning documents are explicit about any goals to increase numbers of programs provided through online learning courses and programs and/or numbers of students to be enrolled in them.
- c. Plans for online learning are linked effectively to budget and technology planning to ensure adequate support for current and future offerings.
- d. Plans for expanding online learning demonstrate the institution's capacity to assure an appropriate level of quality.
- e. The University's online learning programs have a track record of conducting needs analysis and of supporting programs.
- f. A program's governance structure is clearly defined and adequately staffed to ensure the effective operation of the program.

## **3. Online learning is incorporated into the University's systems of governance and academic oversight.**

### **Examples of evidence:**

- a. The Faculty has a designated role in the design and implementation of online learning offerings.
- b. The University's faculty governance structure ensures the rigor of the offerings and the quality of the instruction.
- c. Approval of online learning courses and programs follows standard processes used by colleges and schools.
- d. Online learning courses and programs are evaluated on a periodic basis.
- e. Contractual relationships and arrangements with consortium partners, if any, are clear and guarantee that the University can exercise appropriate responsibility for the academic quality of all online learning offerings provided under its name.

- f. The institution prepares a multi-year budget for online learning that includes resources for assessment of program demand, marketing, appropriate levels of faculty and staff support, faculty and staff development, library and information resources, and technology infrastructure and support.

#### **4. Curricula for the University's online learning offerings are coherent, cohesive, and comparable in academic rigor to programs offered in traditional instructional formats.**

##### **Examples of evidence:**

- a. The quality of curriculum and instruction for an online course or program is comparable to the curriculum and instruction for the same course or program taught face-to-face.
- b. Curricula delivered through online learning are benchmarked for effective practices against face-to-face courses and programs, if offered by the University.
- c. The curriculum is coherent in its content and sequencing of courses and is effectively defined in easily available documents including course syllabi and program descriptions.
- d. Scheduling of online learning courses and programs provides students with a dependable pathway to ensure timely completion of degrees.
- e. Colleges, Schools, Departments, and Programs have established and enforce a policy on online learning course enrollments to ensure faculty capacity to work appropriately with students.
- f. Expectations for any required face-to-face work (e.g., synchronous sessions, internships, exams, practicums, clinical work, laboratory work, etc.) are stated clearly and made available to students at the time of registration and in the course syllabus.
- g. Course design and delivery support student-student and faculty-student interaction.
- h. Curriculum design and teaching and learning technologies enable faculty and students to participate actively in the learning environment.
- i. Courses and programs provide a clear schedule and effective support structures to help online learning students persist and succeed.
- j. All of the above are reevaluated and revised on a regular basis.

**5. The University evaluates the effectiveness of its online learning offerings, including the extent to which the online learning goals are achieved, and uses the results of its evaluations to assist instructors in meeting those goals.**

**Examples of evidence:**

- a. The University regularly evaluates institutional support for the online initiative. In this process, feedback is obtained by other stakeholders in online education, including the library system, academic success center, writing center and student support services.
- b. The University develops and adopts a formalized program of evaluation and learning assessment for online programs and courses, which is routinely implemented on the level of individual colleges, schools and/or programs. The objective of course evaluation is to ensure that a course or program meets the curriculum and instruction standards set out in **Section III: Guidelines for the Implementation and Evaluation of Online Learning** of this document. Individual academic units analyze evaluation results and use these recursively to improve online teaching, learning and support.
- c. The Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) reflects online methods and principles in form, content and distribution. That is, the process of administering SETs is automatic (i.e., faculty do not have to request forms); SET forms are easily accessible to students; and SET questions are relevant to the online format. In addition to questions of instructor and course quality, the SET should include questions specific to the technologies used in the course and to University academic and support services. Each unit is responsible for adding additional questions beyond the University's core questions.
- d. In order to maintain high standards of instructional quality, the evaluation process employs methods such as:
  - i. A well-defined timeline of regular peer review;
  - ii. A clear rubric for evaluation;
  - iii. The establishment of faculty online communities within individual units to monitor course effectiveness, including course design, course delivery and student outcomes, to ensure the inclusion of best practices; and
  - iv. A formal remediation process for courses that are deemed by the peer review process to be not yet effective.
- e. The University documents the implementation of changes informed by its programs of assessment and evaluation.



## 6. Faculty responsible for teaching online and evaluating students' success in achieving online learning goals are appropriately qualified and effectively supported.

### Examples of evidence:

- a. Faculty take responsibility for effective instruction for an online course or program, ensuring that outcomes are equivalent to those taught face-to-face.
- b. Faculty implement online strategies that:
  - Recognize and incorporate the similarities and differences between online and face-to-face instruction
  - Recognize the amount of work involved in preparing and teaching an online course
  - Build a learning environment that includes:
    - Regular communication with students
    - Prompt feedback
    - Student interaction and collaboration
    - Active learning
    - Student-centered learning
    - Effective assessment of student learning
- c. Faculty consider a broad range of technologies to determine the most effective balance between synchronous or asynchronous modes of instruction within online courses. In choosing appropriate learning technologies, the following factors are taken into consideration:
  - The technologies used in online courses are selected not only on the basis of their pedagogical appropriateness in promoting student learning but also with an understanding of their impact on the capacity of the WSU computing infrastructure to support them.
  - Faculty regularly evaluate the learning technologies they use to determine their effectiveness in supporting their online learning objectives.
  - Decisions concerning the suitability of instructional technologies rest with the instructor, after consultation with Office of Online Programs and other support units, and with their academic department or college.
- d. The University provides initial and ongoing support to assure faculty are appropriately trained to teach online courses including:
  - Training to support the development of online courses that use effective practices
  - Incorporation of tested effective practices in online learning pedagogy and assessment
  - Development of competency with the range of teaching and learning applications and technology used by the University
  - Ongoing professional development on the use of evolving effective practices
  - Ongoing access to expertise in the instructional design and development of online courses

- Standards for academic integrity
- e. Courses taught online demonstrate continuity and consistency in faculty staffing.
- f. Faculty are encouraged to participate in training programs provided by the University and in University sponsored programs that encourage faculty to conduct research in the scholarship of teaching and learning.
- g. Faculty teaching online courses receive the same credit toward their teaching load as do faculty who teach face-to-face courses.
- h. Faculty use appropriate student ratings of teaching as one source of data for revisions to courses and instructional strategies.

## 7. Effective services are provided to support students enrolled in online learning offerings.

### Examples of evidence:

- a. Publications and advertising for online classes and programs are accurate and contain necessary information such as program goals, requirements, academic calendar, and faculty information.
- b. Before starting an online class or program, students are provided with self-assessment tools and advised about the program to determine if they possess the self-motivation, skill and commitment to learn online.
- c. The institution provides an online learning orientation program.
- d. Before starting an online program, students are advised about the program to determine if they have access to the minimum technology equipment and if they possess the requisite technology skills.
- e. Students receive (or have access to) information about programs, including admission requirements, tuition and fees, books and supplies, technical and proctoring requirements, including library, information resources, virtual laboratories and other equipment – and are provided with adequate training on their use and student support services prior to admission and course registration.
- f. The institution provides support services to students in formats appropriate to the delivery of the online learning program, and students are instructed in the appropriate ways of enlisting that help. Examples of these services include, but are not limited to: academic advising, financial aid, course registration, career and placement counseling, tutoring, business services and enrollment services in modalities appropriate for distance education.
- g. Students are provided easy access to required course materials in print and/or digital format, such as ISBN numbers for textbooks, book suppliers, and delivery modes.

- h. Students are provided with reasonable and cost-effective ways to participate in the institution's system of student authentication. A plan that includes electronic security measures (e.g., password protection, encryption, secure online or proctored exams, etc.) is in place and operational to ensure quality standards, adherence to FERPA, and the integrity and validity of information.
- i. The institution operates enterprise class technology delivery systems for online learning as appropriate for a mission-critical application.
- j. Throughout the duration of the course/program, students have access to appropriate technical assistance and technical support.
- k. Efforts are made to engage students in the University and learning communities.
- l. Policy and process is in place to support ADA requirements.
- m. Student complaint processes are clearly defined and can be used electronically.

## IV. Online Instruction Task Force – Recommendations

- Endorse the Online Instruction Taskforce guidelines as institutional standards of best practices to inform and guide online course instruction campus-wide
- Ensure that faculty who are teaching online are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to do so. This can be accomplished through participation in training and development programs for online course development and delivery or in other ways determined by the School/College/Department.
- Provide technical support and other incentives for faculty and programs to develop and deliver online courses after careful analysis of viability and feasibility with the Office of Online Programs.
- Ensure that students enrolled in online classes and programs have access to appropriate information for successful engagement in online classes.
- Provide sufficient resources to support online faculty development programs conducted by the Office of Teaching and Learning and the Office of Online Programs
- Institute processes to measure the quality of instruction in online courses that is consistent with quality assessment of face to face courses
  - Review and revise as necessary the current processes of conducting student and departmental evaluation of teaching online courses
- Provide online/virtual support services for all student services, particularly for students enrolled in online courses and programs
- Develop a process for identifying, recommending and maintaining a centrally-supported standardized technology infrastructure (identifying a set of technology software and hardware that is supported by the University).
- Create a regular/yearly forum on best practices for online teaching
- Designate the Office of Online Programs as the primary institutional contact for online course and program development.
- Create an Online Instruction Faculty Advisory Committee to advise on the implementation of the Online Instruction Task Force recommendations

## V. References

- 1 *WSU Mission Statement*. Retrieved from <http://wayne.edu/mission.php>
- 2 *WSU Strategic Action Plan for 2006-2011*. Retrieved from [http://bog.wayne.edu/meetings/2006/10-18/board10\\_18\\_06\\_itemii.pdf](http://bog.wayne.edu/meetings/2006/10-18/board10_18_06_itemii.pdf)
- 3 *Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (Online Learning)*, July 2009. Retrieved from <https://content.springcm.com/content/DownloadDocuments.ashx?Selection=Document,c00c3f32-56e5-e011-adf4-0025b3af184e;&accountId=5968>  
  
(These guidelines were developed by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC). The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is a member of C-RAC.)
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *Going the Distance, Online Education in the United States, 2010*. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman. Babson Survey Research Group. Retrieved from [http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/going\\_distance\\_2011](http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/going_distance_2011)
- 6 *Online Learning as a Strategic Asset, Vol. II, The Paradox of Faculty Voices: Views and Experiences with Online Learning*. Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities/Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, Babson Survey Research Group, August 2009. Retrieved from <http://www.aplu.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=1879>

## **VI. APPENDICES**

## Appendix A - Online Instruction Task Force - Goals and Charge

Online instruction provides a wide range of learning options for students both on campus and off. Wayne State University is committed to developing high quality courses and programs for online instruction that meet the diverse educational needs of our students and extend our reach to students who have not traditionally had access to a Wayne State education. To that end, the University is committed to providing faculty and departments with excellent support for course and program development, business planning and marketing, and course and program delivery, and to providing students with quality online learning experiences.

The world of online instruction is changing rapidly and is highly competitive. To be successful in this environment, Wayne State University needs to expand its existing base of online courses and programs and provide a coordinated set of instructional support services for both faculty and students. The Task Force is charged with recommending and facilitating guidelines for implementing an effective infrastructure that effectively supports faculty and colleges/schools in the development and delivery of online courses and programs by providing a comprehensive set of complementary academic and administrative services that support the University's online offerings.

### Objectives

Specifically, the Task Force is charged with identifying areas of institutional support necessary for the successful development, delivery, and review of online courses and programs. Toward that end, the Task Force will:

1. Draft guidelines and standards that serve to define institutional best practices for developing and teaching online courses and programs.
2. Identify the support mechanisms and assistance that faculty, staff, and students require in order to succeed in an online teaching and learning environment.
3. Recommend procedures for establishing a formal process of faculty development based on institutional best practices.
4. Recommend processes for ensuring that standards are being met in a way that promotes high standards of instructional quality.
5. Recommend academic and administrative structures that may serve to provide ongoing institutional input and advice to the strategic planning process for the University's online initiatives.
6. Recommend a process to evaluate, develop, and maintain the appropriate infrastructure for development and delivery of online programs
7. Develop the structure for an ongoing Advisory Committee for the Office of Online Program

## Appendix B - Online Taskforce Membership

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