

Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Online and Blended Courses

Transparency

The instructor's expectations are clear and easily accessible.

- The syllabus is the most important document for conveying instructor expectations, and must include course learning outcomes, a course grading scheme, and other information as required by your academic department, school, or college.
- It is good practice to remind students how each activity or assignment supports the course learning outcomes and fits within the grading scheme.
- The grading scheme to be used for any assessment should be transparent to the students. Rubrics or other grading schemes should be shared with students whenever possible.

Alignment

Course materials and learning outcomes are internally consistent.

- The learning outcomes for the class are primary to all activities (readings, lectures, assignments, and so forth). The connection of all activities and assessments to the learning outcomes should be clear to students (or will become so as the course progresses).

Responsibility

The course should be designed to encourage students to take control of their own learning.

- Learning activities should set high expectations and require higher order thinking skills.
- Assessments should be designed to provide effective feedback to students.

Co-presence

The course should be designed so that students do not feel alone in the online environment.

- Students should feel welcome in the online environment. The first thing students should see upon entry into the class is a message that welcomes them to the class, and provides instructions to get started (e.g., “look at the syllabus, which is located ...”).

- The course must include a Faculty Information section that provides contact information and virtual or in-person office hours (as appropriate).
- Students should also have the opportunity to interact with each other via the course discussion board, group projects, or any other method appropriate to the course.

Support

The online environment should not be a barrier to student learning. Online students can easily access services designed to help them succeed.

- Clear technical instructions should appear on all pages that require a student response or submission. Alternative submission methods should be provided in case of technical or other difficulties.
- All course elements must function within FDU's current minimum technology standards.
- All course elements (links, attachments, media, etc.) must work, with no error messages.
- Each course includes a Resources section with links to tutoring services, the University Libraries, technical help information, or other resources appropriate to the course.

Adaptability

The course should be designed so that it will be easy to update.

- Due dates, page numbers, and other information that may change from semester to semester should be located in a single place (e.g. on the syllabus). If a course runs more than once, it will be time-consuming to edit information scattered throughout a course.

Accountability

The course complies with all relevant laws.

- Online courses and course materials have been subject to considerable scrutiny in recent years. Course designers need to take care that:
 - Students should submit a variety of work samples over the course duration to minimize the possibility of identity fraud.
 - Social media should be used only with care, and never to convey feedback to students (grades, comments, etc.). Please see the [FDU Social Media Policy](#).
 - Course designers must be able to identify how the Four Factors of Fair Use apply to any non-original materials and obtain copyright clearance if appropriate.

- A description of the Four Factors can be obtained from the [U.S. Copyright Office](#).
- A good, short introduction to application of the Four Factors is available from the [Columbia University Copyright Advisory Office](#).
- Course designers should keep abreast of the many developments in this area, as new guidelines emerge every year.

Universal Design

The course should be designed to support all learners. High-quality design is universal and inclusive and avoids creating barriers for any individuals. Universal Design principles also support learners without identified disabilities.

- Course designers should consult with OERA early in the design process, as retrofitting a course will take much longer than incorporating universal design from the start.
- All classes must meet standards established by the Americans with Disabilities Act, with particular attention to the following issues.
 - Students who are blind or visually disabled use screen readers to interact with course materials. All course materials should be accessible to this technology.
 - Text should be re-sizable whenever possible, and there should be good contrast between the page background and the text color.
 - Avoid the use of color to convey meaning. Color is not meaningful to students who are blind or color vision deficient (approximately 8% of all males).
 - Students who are deaf or hard of hearing rely on printed text. Anything with an audio track should have a text equivalent.
 - It is helpful to many students with learning disabilities for the course to be broken into meaningful, consistently paced chunks of content.
 - Many students with visual or learning disabilities will have problems with text overlaid on an image. Use plain backgrounds whenever possible.
 - Flashing, moving, shimmering, or very bright page elements can trigger seizures or migraines in vulnerable individuals and are distracting to some students with learning disabilities.