Online Course Guidelines (Proposed Revisions)

Durham Tech's Online Course Guidelines summarize the best practices of quality online instruction.

The guidelines are intended to provide guidance for instructors who are new to online teaching; to help experienced online instructors identify areas for improvement; to assist supervisors with evaluating online instruction; to guide professional development and training efforts; and to communicate the college's expectations internally (faculty/staff) and externally (accrediting bodies).

The guidelines were originally written for asynchronous online courses but are largely applicable to synchronous online courses as well. More guidance for synchronous instruction is being developed.

Part 1: Course expectations | Basic course information

1. The instructor posts a syllabus in the course Sakai site that clearly communicates course policies and expectations.

   The instructor uses Durham Tech's [Syllabus Template for Online/Hybrid/Blended Courses (DOC)](#) or another template provided by their supervisor and adds details to communicate the instructor's expectations for:
   - Communication between students and the instructor, including response time students can expect when they contact the instructor
   - Communication with classmates, including ground rules that foster a respectful and inclusive learning environment
   - Turnaround time for assignments to be graded and returned to students
   - How attendance in the class will be determined

2. The Overview page of the course Sakai site lists the course title and instructor name(s) and contact information.
   - If applicable, list any class meeting days/times and location (including synchronous online meetings).
   - Full-time instructors, list office hours and location.

Part 2: Course organization and content

3. The Lessons area of the course Sakai site contains a subpage for each week or unit of the class. Each weekly/unit subpage includes clear and complete details for assignments and activities, including due dates.

4. For asynchronous online classes, the instructor provides at least one activity each week for students to complete (submit).

5. Materials, resources, and examples reflect the diversity of the local and global community.

6. Course materials and links are carefully reviewed prior to the start of the course (and regularly during the semester) to minimize errors and broken links.

Part 3: Student engagement

7. The course includes assignments that promote active learning.

8. The course incorporates multimedia elements (such as images, videos, links to external resources) that support learning outcomes.

9. Opportunities are provided for students to interact with and feel connected to their peers.

Part 4: Instructor presence | Communication

10. The instructor maintains regular contact with students in multiple ways throughout the course.

11. The instructor posts an announcement in Sakai at least once a week to provide updates, reminders, or comments related to course content.

12. The instructor responds to student emails and requests for help in a timely way, consistent with the response time stated in the syllabus.

13. The instructor maintains a respectful learning environment so that all students feel included.

Part 5: Assessment | Grading | Feedback

14. Assessment of student learning is aligned with course outcomes, conducted throughout the duration of the course, and uses multiple methods.

15. Assessments are designed and administered to uphold academic integrity. Online tests and quizzes use recommended settings to deter cheating and minimize technical problems.

16. The Sakai Gradebook is set up and consistent with the grading procedures stated in the syllabus. Grades are posted regularly, allowing students to track their progress.

17. The instructor provides timely, specific, actionable feedback to students on their work, consistent with expectations stated in the syllabus or other course documents.

Part 6: Legal obligations

18. The instructor makes a good faith effort to comply with copyright laws and fair use principles.

19. Course design indicates a conscious effort to comply with accessibility standards.

Part 7: Launching the course

20. Prior to the start of the course, the instructor sends a welcome email explaining when and how the course will start, orientation requirements, how to log in, any special tools or materials needed, etc.

21. The instructor publishes the course site by 8:00 AM on the class start date and posts a welcome announcement telling students what to do to begin.

22. An orientation is provided that introduces students to the course.

23. The instructor provides an initial activity in Sakai to capture each student's official entry into the course, in compliance with Durham Tech's Attendance Rules for Online, Hybrid, and Blended Classes (PDF).