WHAT WORKS WELL

In Online Teaching

Minnesota State

What Works Well In Online Teaching

The colleges and universities of Minnesota State have provided online learning experiences for students through online and hybrid/blended courses since the 1990s. Much has changed about how online courses or course components are delivered online as technology has evolved. One thing that has remained constant is what students report they like about well-taught online classes. When students describe a successful, positive online experience, they refer to a well-organized course, frequent interactions with their instructor and classmates, timely and quality feedback from their instructor, and a strong instructor presence in the class.

Minnesota State strives to support student success in all online courses and to foster a shared understanding of effective online teaching practices for course delivery. The intent of this document is to promote reflection and dialogue about online teaching at Minnesota State institutions in order to create opportunities to improve teaching practices.

This document provides:

- A description of effective practices specific to instruction delivered online (online or blended/hybrid courses).

- Guidance for new and experienced online or hybrid/blended instructors.

- An opportunity for reflection and dialogue about online teaching.

- An opportunity to align online courses or course components with shared standards of best practice and instructional design principles.

25% of credit students take courses online through your 37 Minnesota State colleges and universities.

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Overview

1 | INSTRUCTOR PREPARATION   **Pg. 4**

Instructors are prepared with the technical skills, online teaching pedagogy, and course design strategies needed to develop and deliver an online course.

2 | COURSE DESIGN   **Pg. 4**

Online courses follow nationally recognized best practices of online course design.

3 | INSTITUTIONAL PROCEDURES   **Pg. 5**

Instructors and courses comply with institutional policies and practices.

4 | DELIVERY OF COURSE   **Pg. 6**

Instructors deliver courses that incorporate active learning that provides opportunities for students to engage with each other, with the course content, and with the instructor.

5 | INSTRUCTOR PRESENCE   **Pg. 7**

Instructors are present in the course and communicate with students every week.

6 | COURSE MONITORING   **Pg. 8**

Instructors closely monitor student and course activity and communicate, as needed, about the status of their courses and course materials.

7 | TECHNOLOGY USE & SUPPORT   **Pg. 9**

Instructors have appropriate technical skills to manage online teaching, can access and use the learning management system effectively, and can direct students to appropriate technical support and resources that support their success.

8 | CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT   **Pg. 9**

Instructors continuously improve their online delivery knowledge, skills, and course components.

1. INSTRUCTOR PREPARATION

Instructors are prepared with the technical skills, online teaching pedagogy, and course design strategies needed to develop and deliver an online course.

Practices:

- Instructors are selected to teach online who have subject matter expertise and an appropriate level of knowledge of online pedagogy to create effective learning experiences for their students.

- Instructors participate in professional development activities to learn best practices of online instruction before teaching an online class for the first time.

- Instructors have an appropriate level of instructional design knowledge to be able to design easy-to-use course components and navigation.

2. COURSE DESIGN

Online courses follow best practice of online course design, which may include a peer review process.

Practices:

- Align materials, activities, assignments, and assessments with course outcomes.

- Use consistent navigation and terminology to make it easy for students to find materials and tools.

- Provide a course calendar that follows a consistent pattern for assignments and due dates.

- Use the principles of Universal Design for Learning to create a course that is inclusive of differences in physical as well as learning needs and preferences.

- Create all course materials to be accessible using available tools (i.e. styles in Word, PDFs, HTML editor, etc.), including materials taken from outside sources such as YouTube or publisher resources.

- Provide interactive content and course components.

- Include discussion topics for student introductions and general questions about the course.

3. INSTITUTIONAL PROCEDURES

Instructors and courses comply with institutional policies and practices.

Practices:

- Follow your institution's accessibility guidelines to comply with requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) regarding accessibility.

- Comply with Minnesota State's policies and practices on copyright.

- Meet institutional expectations for syllabi.

- Participate in regular course assessment consistent with institutional or department practices.

- Achieve the same student learning outcomes as face-to-face campus-based courses.

- Provide students with information about required activities, including on-campus, in-person, or synchronous virtual meetings; technology requirements; lab activities; and course materials.

- If proctored exams are required for a class, provide the following information:

  ◊ The number of proctored exams.

  ◊ When and where the exams will be offered.

  ◊ Alternative arrangements for students who cannot come to a Minnesota State campus for proctored exams.

4. DELIVERY OF COURSE

Instructors deliver courses that incorporate student-instructor interaction and instructor communication.

Practices:

- Deliver announcements and/or updates regularly.

- Facilitate discussions or other forms of interaction effectively. This includes providing clear expectations for student participation in discussion boards, such as length of posts and requirements for response to classmates' posts.

- Intervene to redirect inappropriate behavior.

- Assess student learning frequently.

- Give timely, detailed, and personalized feedback.

- Provide feedback early enough for students to adjust their performance.

5. INSTRUCTOR PRESENCE

Instructors are present in the course and communicate with students every week.

Practices:

- Develop a sense of community in the course through small group discussions, feedback and class announcements, and collaborative activities.

- Engage with students using large and small group discussions, chat, video conference, or other tools to deepen understanding of content.

- Communicate intended schedule for course participation to students.

- Introduce yourself to the students in a video or discussion post.

- Provide multiple ways for students to contact you.

    ◊ Discussion forum for questions about the course.

    ◊ Email for personal or private questions. To comply with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, do not use personal email to conduct business with students.

    ◊ Institutional phone with voicemail (if available) or video conference (e.g. Skype) for complex or sensitive topics.

- Communicate normal response times to students, preferably within the syllabus.

    ◊ Response time Monday-Friday should be within 48 hours (within 24 hours is optimal).

    ◊ Response time during weekends and holidays are at the discretion of the instructor.

- Alert your academic department chair and students if you are unable to deliver online instruction due to illness or extended absence away from a computer. Arrange for a substitute instructor for extended absences.

6. COURSE MONITORING

Instructors closely monitor student and course activity and communicate, as needed, about the status of courses and course materials.

Practices:

- Adopt strategies for maximizing student retention, such as real-world projects that are relevant to student life experiences and work or career choices.

- Contact inactive students no later than the last day of the first week to reinforce the need to participate.

- Engage in heightened monitoring of student progress throughout the first few weeks and actively communicate with students when they get behind.

- Use learning management system communication tools (i.e. intelligent agents) to remind students of assignments or missed deadlines.

- Use institutional early alert systems (if available) to notify advisors about concerns regarding performance or absences.

- Fix courseware glitches, such as broken links, typos, and mistakes, as needed.

7. TECHNOLOGY USE & SUPPORT

Instructors have appropriate technical skills to manage online teaching, can access and use the learning management system effectively, can provide basic technical support to students, and can direct students to resources that support their success.

Practices:

- Use the Minnesota State-adopted learning management system when teaching online courses.

- Use supported tools and materials and instruct students on how to seek assistance. Support may be provided by the institution, a vendor, or instructor.

- Monitor communication from the institution in the event of an unplanned outage.

- In the event of an outage, direct students where to look for updates on D2L Brightspace status and communicate with students as soon as possible about the completion of coursework, due dates, or other schedule changes.

- Use a development course (aka course shell or sandbox) to build courses. Backup the course shell and content after making significant changes to a live course.

- Test publisher provided materials and homework platforms for accessibility prior to adoption.

- Provide instructions, support, and contact information when using external instructional resources, such as publisher content.

8. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Instructors continuously improve their online delivery knowledge, skills, and course components.

Practices:

- Explore new teaching strategies through professional development programs, webinars, conferences, research, and academic publications.

- Use assessment information, student performance, course evaluation, and feedback from peers and colleagues to improve courses and teaching.

DEFINITIONS

Course Delivery: Parts of an online course that teach students via instructor presence and student-instructor interaction; delivery can involve use of asynchronous or synchronous tools.

Delivery Modes as defined by the Minnesota State system:

Asynchronous Course: 100% of instruction is online with no in-person or synchronous online meetings and no proctored exams; includes regular interaction with the instructor.

Synchronous Course: 100% of instruction is online with no in-person meetings or in-person proctored exams. Course has some required synchronous meetings and activities using chat, internet telephony, or video conference.

Mostly Online Course: >75% of instruction is online with up to two possible in-person meetings. Up to four required proctored exams, two of which may be administered during the in-person meetings. For proctored exams not included in the in-person meetings, students must have the option to arrange them locally. Course may have online synchronous components.

Blended/Hybrid Course: 25%-75% of instruction is asynchronous online with regularly scheduled in-person meetings.

Face to Face (F2F) Course: The main instructional component features meetings in person, either in a classroom or using video conference technology like Telepresence. The learning management system may be used to organize course materials, submit assignments, and complement F2F instruction.

Course Design: Parts of an online course that teach students via navigation, static content, interactive content, and opportunities for student-instructor and student-student interaction that promote, guide, or direct student learning behaviors.

Course Monitoring: Instructor behaviors related to maximizing student participation and completion of the course. Monitoring also includes communicating about system outages and fixing courseware glitches such as broken links, typos, mistakes, ideally before they are discovered by students.

Instructor Presence: Instructor behaviors characterized by being communicative, actively engaged, and present with students in the course. Instructor presence is enhanced by high levels of student-instructor interaction and regular instructor communication.

Interactive Content: Content objects, such as programmed simulations, computer-adaptive activities, or scored quizzes that change or adapt while students experience them. Students learn from interactive content by actively engaging with it. Content objects that are programmed to teach content via two-way communication; see also Student-Content Interaction.

Static Content: A content object, such as instructor communications, articles, photographs, or videos that stay the same for every user. Students engage with static content in self-directed learning activities.

Student-Content Interaction: Mutually coherent exchanges between a student and interactive content object. Interaction occurs when communication sent by a student receives a response from the content. Interaction can involve use of asynchronous or synchronous tools.

Student-Instructor Interaction: Mutually coherent exchanges between a student and instructor. Interaction occurs when communication sent by a student receives a response from the instructor. Interaction can involve use of asynchronous or synchronous tools. Exchanges between people should not be supplanted by responses from interactive content.

Student-Student Interaction: Mutually coherent exchanges between students enrolled in an online course. Interaction occurs when students give and receive responses from other students through asynchronous or synchronous tools.

Credits

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For additional information and upcoming professional development related to What Works Well, please visit the Faculty Development site: tinyurl.com/minnstatefacdev.