Online Instructor’s Guide
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This guide is intended to provide answers to frequently asked questions and information about procedures specific to the delivery of online courses. First time online instructors may want to read through this guide and refer to it often. Veteran online instructors should review the guide periodically for changes and additional information.
Support Contacts

Blackboard Technical Support
Texas Wesleyan provides 24/7/365 help desk support services to faculty members teaching online. The Service Desk can provide answers to questions about using Blackboard, as well as technical support.

Service Desk
Telephone: (817) 531-4428 ext. 2
Email: servicedesk@txwes.edu

Teaching and Learning Support
The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) at Texas Wesleyan provides services to faculty to improve teaching and learning outcomes. We will work with you to identify learning outcomes you want your students to achieve and how to foster those outcomes in our classroom. Additionally, the CETL offers support for non-technical issues related to Blackboard, syllabus consultations, learning object design and development, course redesign, and numerous professional development opportunities.

To learn more about the certification program or to request a CETL service, visit:

CETL Teaching and Learning Support; Non-technical Blackboard Issues
Phone: 817-531-6563
Email: cetl@txwes.edu
Web: http://www.txwes.edu/cetl
Blackboard training videos: Instructor Videos

Additional University Resources

Service Desk
Telephone: (817) 531-4428
Email: servicedesk@txwes.edu
Web: http://www.txwes.edu/it/

West Library
Telephone: (817) 531-4800
Email: reference@txwes.edu
Web: http://westlibrary.txwes.edu/

Prerequisites for Online Teaching
To teach online, you will need the following:

- Authorization from your department to teach online
- Computer with reliable internet access, preferably high speed
- Complete online course, including a comprehensive syllabus and orientation, as well as required texts and materials
- Complete training in the Blackboard learning management system and online pedagogy
- Library access
- An understanding of your role as the instructor and the CETL’s role in addressing student issues

Review the information below for a more detailed explanation.
Authorization for Online Delivery
Please check with your department or dean for authorization and procedures for requesting an online course.

Computer/Internet Access
If you are teaching an online course, you may want to consider purchasing a home computer or upgrading your existing home computer and acquiring high-speed access (i.e., ADSL, cable, etc.) through an Internet Service Provider (Charter, Dish Network, Sprint, etc.) at home.

Online Course
Your online course development should be fully completed before it is deployed. The very nature of the online learning environment necessitates development prior to deployment. The online environment forces the focus of control to shift from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction. Online, a significant amount of your time is spent communicating with students, not on gathering resources and materials. A complete course then becomes more vital because you are not able to develop as you go.

Syllabus
Every course is required to have a syllabus. The syllabus is a way to put course goals, policies, requirements, grading criteria, and assignments in writing. A syllabus is more than a list; it is an introduction to the course and a contract with the students.

Syllabi for online classes are slightly different than those for residential courses. Specifically, online syllabi are much more detailed than those of their residential counterparts. A syllabus for an online course usually includes the following information:

- Course Number and Title
- Instructor and Program Contact Information
- Course Description
- Course Prerequisites
- Course Goals
- Required Course Materials
- Methods of Communication for the Course
- Methods of Assessment and Grading Scale for the Course
- Course Requirements
- Course Policies (e.g. grading, email, extra credit, make up work, etc.)
- Information for Students with Disabilities
- Detailed Course Schedule
- Contact Information for Technical Support and Library Services
- Contact Information for any Third-party course resources

The course syllabus must be completed several weeks prior to the semester the course is being offered and submitted to the Dean of your School. A downloadable syllabus checklist is available from the Provost’s website.

Orientation
Your online orientation should contain two main pieces; Learning Management System (LMS) orientation and the course orientation. The LMS orientation may include Blackboard tutorial
videos, like the ones provided on this website: Student Videos

If the syllabus sets the parameters of the course for your students, the orientation should serve as a guide to be successful based on those parameters. Your course orientation can be text, audio, video, or a combination. Here are a few pointers:

- **Conversational Tone** - your tone will set the stage for the perception students will have of you. You should strive to present yourself as a helpful and inviting individual who is there to make this course a pleasant and successful learning experience.

- **Give Them a Rundown** - explain how to get started and how you recommend they approach the lessons in general. Here is where your consistent course design pays dividends. Should they read the lesson content or the assigned readings first? What do you recommend as a study schedule? How should they work on group activities?

- **Provide a Self Check or Quiz** - it is good practice and a requirement of the certification program that you assess students’ understanding of your guidelines set out in the syllabus and orientation. The easiest way to accomplish this is in the form of a quiz. You aren’t required to assign a grade to it, but you should make it a required activity.

**Text and Materials**

Be sure to coordinate the ordering of all necessary texts with the Wesleyan Bookstore. If books are not available through the bookstore, students can order them directly from the publisher or an online bookstore (Amazon.com or BarnesandNoble.com).

A Course Materials package containing journal articles or excerpts from books is another way to include supplementary readings. This can be used instead of, or in addition to, the West Library digital collection and/or materials available on the Web. This package is gathered and put together by you, then printed and sold to students by the Wesleyan Bookstore. If you plan to use Course Materials, full publication data for each of your selections is needed so that the Bookstore can obtain advance permission to reproduce material held in copyright.

**Online Teaching Certification**

The CETL offers a Fundamentals of Online Teaching Certification program that examines the key elements of online teaching, including learning management training, course development, and online teaching strategies and methodologies. This program is a 6-weeks program that includes face-to-face and online course work.

**Library Access**

Instructors should obtain a University Identification Card to gain access to library resources and media equipment. You can do this by going directly to the West Library with one form of picture ID (driver’s license or state ID). If you are teaching from a distance and do not come to campus, email West Library circulation desk at EJW_Circulation_Department@txwes.edu.

Online access to the library is available through the library web site at http://westlibrary.txwes.edu/.
Every faculty member is issued a network account upon confirmation of employment. In order to access Blackboard you will need to use your Network ID and Password. If you are new to Wesleyan or have forgotten your Wesleyan ID or password, contact the IT Help Desk at servicedesk@txwes.edu or (817) 531-4428.

**Student Issues**

As students are becoming familiar with the course they may encounter problems such as forgotten or incorrect logins or pages of content that will not display. For technical assistance not related to course content, students should contact the service desk using the Technical Assistance web form found online at https://txwes.edu/it/request-a-service/supporthelp-request-form/ or via phone at (817) 531-4428 ext. 2.

*If a problem is related to your course content, students should address their questions to you as instructor and not the CETL.*
Information for Online Instructors

The following section provides useful information for effective instructional practices, including:

- Establishing a Presence
- Communicating with Your Students
- Establishing a Presence
- Academic Integrity
- Office Hours
- Grading
- Feedback
- Course Evaluations
- Beginning of Term Checklist

Establishing a Presence

Establishing a presence as an instructor is an important step in building an online learning community. This can be accomplished by utilizing one or a combination of the following activities:

- A formal introduction by the instructor
- An informal introduction for students and the instructor
- A course welcome message

A formal introduction constitutes sharing some professional and personal information. This may include information about:

- Your education, background, and experience
- What you expect in terms of your interaction with students
- Something about how you intend to operate within the context of the course
- Information about your online teaching style
- How and when you should be contacted and how promptly you will reply to student emails and postings; whether you will respond to each post or only those where clarification, guidance, or comment are needed.

The formal introduction is quite useful if cited in the syllabus or orientation document/lesson.

An informal introduction may take the form of a discussion forum or a blog entry where you and your students have the opportunity to discuss a preliminary topic. You could ask students to provide a brief statement about their interest in the course or something about you their lives that you want them to share. If you choose a discussion posting, you always want to begin the introduction by posting first. It will provide your students with an example of your expectations for a quality posting and will help “break the ice”.

If you choose to post a blog, share a story or an experience with your students. Doing so will demonstrate to them that you are willing to open the channels of communication.

A welcome message, posted on the home page of the course site during the first week of class, is important in setting the tone for the course. What would you like your students to think about the course, how are you going to grab their attention? In your first message you want to capture the
students’ interest and provide the initial motivation for students to contribute to the course.

To do this, present the course as interesting and challenging. Students should understand that the course will test their abilities and be reassured that the necessary instructional support and guidance will be there to ensure success.

According to the Task Value Expectancy Model (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), two conditions have to be present to engage and motivate students:

1. They must value what they are doing.
2. The perceived cost (time and effort) to be successful at what they are doing should not be greater than the value (knowledge and skills) attained from it.

As an instructor, part of your role is to manage student’s perceptions of these two conditions, beginning with the Welcome message. Other important considerations for setting the tone are in the course description and the course schedule where all course elements are laid out, timelines are attached, and the grading structure is made clear. Below is an example of a welcome message that takes these two elements into account:

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Sample Welcome Message

Welcome to this course. I am looking forward to being your instructor and I do hope that, when the course is over, you (and I as well) will have enjoyed the experience.

This is the first time that [Course], has been offered on the web and so I face, as much as you do, a sharp learning curve. In constructing the course I tried to make its content as good and as effective as I know how, but there are certainly some rough spots - things that need improvement. It is very important that you let me know whenever you encounter problems.

The discussion forum lies at the heart of this course. For the course to be successful, participation in the discussion is required. In that way, we can learn together and build a sense of community and shared achievement. Don’t be afraid to ask questions, ask for clarification, and share your ideas. As instructor, I will be acting as guide to the discussion. I won’t be laying down the law or telling anyone what to think. So don’t be afraid of what I or anyone else shares in the discussion. I will certainly intervene if a discussion goes off course. The subject of this course is a very controversial and complex. It is easy but not very rewarding to be moralistic and condemnatory. Let’s keep the tone of the discussion moderate.

Finally, it is important that contributions to the discussion focus on the subject and that they be as brief and cogent as possible. So, taking my own advice, let me sign off here. Remember, my name is [Name]. I am here to guide you through the course and support your learning as you discuss issues and concepts presented here with your peers and myself.
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A part of your continual communication with students, you may want to consider regular postings of announcements, upcoming events, and assignment due dates. This gives students guidance and keeps them on track.

Although you will have the ability to contact students via email, using tools that address the entire class at once, such as a discussion forum, announcements, or blogs will allow you to be more efficient and effective in resolving issues.
Communicating With Your Students

Contact Information
If a student does not know how to contact you, two-way communication becomes extremely difficult. Be sure that your contact information is visible from the course homepage. You may want to include:

- Your email address
- Your phone number
- A fax number for your department
- A link to your personal web page
- A phone number for the departmental/program administrative assistant

Email
As an online instructor, almost all of your communication will be in writing. As we stated earlier, it is highly recommended that an online instructor use alternative tools besides Email to contact and address the entire class. Email could then become a tool available to students and instructors to resolve more personal issues that may arise. Some helpful tips for the use of Email are:

- Send periodic emails to individuals who are not actively participating in the class. Perhaps you will need to ask if they are having any trouble, or are just being quiet. This establishes that you care that you have not heard from them. Often, one or two emails will clarify any potential problems or issues.
- For major exams or projects, repeat any course announcements via email to the whole group. The second notice will reinforce important announcements and establish you as a good source of course information.
- Email in full sentences, using jargon and abbreviations only after establishing their meaning in the context of the message.
- Use a friendly welcoming tone. Make your sentences open and conversational. Avoid clipped sentences or demand sentences.
- Encourage students to post course-related questions to a discussion forum so that you may respond to the question where the entire class may view the answer. This will help avoid email floods.
- Being polite is critical. Online, our cues come from the writing: how it sounds and how it looks. Sometimes the way we write projects an image or attitude that is unintended. Consider this when composing messages and when reacting to the messages of your students.
- If you find yourself reacting negatively to a student email, write the response and re-read it before sending it. You may even want to wait a day before sending it, especially if your reaction was to the tone and style of the email rather than the content.
- Stick to your established timeframe for email feedback (usually 24-48 hours to respond to a student’s email).

Regardless of how you decide to use Email, it is important that you establish rules regarding how you intend to use Email as a communication tool throughout the course of the term. Clarify these expectations in the syllabus or orientation resources in the form of an email policy. Also, consider clarifying your email standards so that students know how to communicate with you in an appropriate manner.

Synchronous Chats
Chat tools allow you to communicate with a student or students in real time. Blackboard has built-in chat rooms available for use.

Entering at prearranged times, students can use chat rooms to build relationships with their peers, make decisions as part of group work, plan a project, and participate in other group activities. Deeper discussions and more meaningful thinking usually will take place in asynchronous discussion forums (email and discussion boards).

Small groups work better in the chat environment. Try to limit a chat to five people (or less).

Here are a few tips that might facilitate your use of the Blackboard Chat Rooms:

1. Make sure that Enable Java and Enable Java Script are selected in your browser’s preferences.
2. Make sure pop-ups are enabled (this is essential in Blackboard in general).
3. Try to stagger logons in your chat group rather than having everyone logon simultaneously to prevent Java script errors.
4. Do not begin your discussions until you see that everyone in your group has logged on.
5. When you click on the Chat link, wait until the page is fully loaded before clicking on a chat room, even if the chat room icons are visible.
6. Have a well-planned agenda for the discussion but remain flexible enough to pursue relevant student interests.

Online Discussions
The purpose of online discussions is to allow students and instructors to share their experiences, knowledge and interpretations related to the course with one another. It can also be used by the instructor to monitor and facilitate student learning. In this way, you ensure that students learn from each other and that the course becomes a “virtual community of inquiry.” This approach has several important implications for how the online discussions are moderated.

These discussions are not meant to be simple question and answer sessions. Students are expected to contribute their perspective on discussion questions and to follow up with responses to contributions from other students. They are expected to bring their readings, research and other academic materials into the discussion and to tie it to their practical experiences. In order for this to occur, discussions should be left open for at least 10 days.

Unlike chat, online discussion forums are asynchronous in nature. There are four common types of discussion groups:

1. Instructor moderated: This discussion group usually includes the entire class (if the class size is 20 or less) or subgroups (two or more groups of 11-20 students) for large classes and is moderated and facilitated by you.
2. Student moderated: Only students in a group and the instructor post to this group space, allowing for privacy from the rest of the class. Group work proceeds and final products move to the public discussion forums once the group is ready to present their work.
3. Guest moderated: This discussion group may be facilitated by a guest who is an author of course materials such as the text or readings, or who is an acknowledged expert in the field to be studied. It provides a unique opportunity to have the students interact with other experts in their chosen professions.
4. **Social Discussion Forum** (e.g. Student Café): This is a non-moderated discussion forum for social exchange between the students. This discussion area can be the social and networking aspect of this course and provide an opportunity for the students to meet informally outside of the topics generated by the course.

5. **Public Forums**: An area accessible to students and non-students. These can be social or topic specific.

**The First Discussion Forum**
The first discussion forum should be one in which you and the students introduce yourselves. You should start this process by introducing yourself and talking about your background, your interest in the course, and your professional experience. You should then invite the students to do the same. One way to assist students with the process is by asking them to include the answers to a few simple questions in their initial post. For example:

- What do you do?
- Where do you live?
- Why are you taking this course?
- Have you had any previous experience with online courses?
- What are you hoping to get out of this course?
- What are your future plans or career goals?

By asking students to share some professional and personal information, you are providing them with an opportunity to become familiar with the discussion forums and establishing a community of learners.

**The Structure of Discussions**
Most discussions begin with instructor-initiated questions based on readings or assignments. Here are some guidelines for creating effective student discussions:

- When posting a discussion, ask students to keep their quotes from readings or other sources to one or two maximum per post.
- Where possible, ask students to use personal experiences and observations to supplement their academic readings.
- Where possible, ask students to make an effort to not only post their own thoughts but to comment on the discussion contributions of others in the group.
- Where possible, ask students to indicate in their subject line, after the topic, if their posts are: initial contributions, additional comments, follow up comments, or a summary of previous comments.

**Developing and Guiding Discussions**
Your role as a discussion facilitator is critical to ensuring that active and thoughtful discussion develops. In facilitation, the instructor adds to the discussion any necessary comments. As a discussion facilitator, you should:

- Monitor the discussion forums on a daily basis and acknowledge student contributions as quickly as possible.
- Play the role of facilitator or guide rather than the authority figure.
- Weave different student comments together by pointing out similarities and/or differences in the arguments.
• Stimulate discussion by asking two students who have presented different viewpoints to respond to each other.
• Not hesitate to ask students to clarify or elaborate on their positions.
• Keep track of who has contributed and call on students who have not contributed after several days.
• Summarize the main points that have been made.

When you open a discussion, be sure your expectations of students are clear. Specifically identify:

• The beginning and ending dates for the discussion.
• The deadline for making an initial contribution and a follow-up contribution.
• How students are expected to answer the questions (supporting examples or evidence from the course material, their readings or their personal experience, etc.).
• How often students are expected to log in and monitor the discussions and post follow-up responses.
• The quality and quantity of posts expected.

Netiquette
Prior to using the email, chat, or discussion tools, you will want to establish guidelines for acceptable conduct in an online environment. Several resources and suggestions for appropriate online etiquette can be found online. Colorado State University provides useful guidelines for netiquette and online discussions. Visit: [http://teaching.colostate.edu/tips/tip.cfm?tipid=128](http://teaching.colostate.edu/tips/tip.cfm?tipid=128) to learn more.

If you wish to have students participate in the development of Rules of Conduct for your course, you may choose to develop a discussion forum where students post their ideas of what is acceptable and unacceptable conduct in an online course. You can compile and summarize the postings then use the chat tool to have a class meeting where the class decides to adopt, remove, or modify the proposed Rules of Conduct.

Academic Integrity
Higher education institutions who offer courses online have always been concerned with the potential for academic dishonesty given the physical distance between instructor and students. The fact is that academic dishonesty cannot be completely eliminated in either online or face-to-face courses. However, you can foster a greater sense of academic integrity in your course by implementing a few rules and strategies.

When considering how important academic integrity is to any educational institution, one of the most important steps you can take as an instructor is to broach the subject early on with your students beyond the standard paragraphs you post in your syllabus. Make them aware that you and the university value academic integrity in all aspects of research, course work, and communication. Online, communicate with them via a blog post, an announcement, or schedule a live classroom session. Explain to them what exactly academic integrity is and why it is important to them. With the subject out in the open, your students know that you expect them to be responsible online scholars. It will also inform them that you will actually be observing their submitted work.
**Office Hours**

Office hours are as important in online courses as they are in face-to-face courses. Offer virtual office hours, or "fast-back" hours, to your online students to increase their opportunities to communicate with you. Fast-back hours are times when students have guaranteed access to the instructor in a pre-assigned chat room within the course site, via email, or at a telephone number during a certain time of the day, several days each week, for the length of the course. Consider setting up some fast-back hours on some evenings to allow your students who work full-time to access you.

Some instructors will offer students access to their home or personal telephone numbers or respond to student emails on their home computer at night and on weekends. The choice of how to set up your office hours and availability for student contact is up to you.

When making your choice, be sure to remember how important continual, consistent contact is for student success in online courses. Try to never be away from the class and unavailable to students for more than 48 hours at a time.

**Grading**

Be sure that the grading structure is clear to students and they understand how they are being evaluated in the course. The grading structure should be consistent with other courses (online and face-to-face) in the academic department.

The grading structure should be completely outlined in the syllabus. Unclear guidelines for grading may lead to many student questions. This can be avoided by thinking through a number of questions and ensuring those answers are made available on the course site.

Questions to consider (DETC, 2004)

1. Is a passing grade on the final exam a requirement for passing the course?
2. What constitutes a passing grade?
3. Is this consistent with other courses in the department?
4. Is this clearly specified in the course syllabus and on the web site?
5. How many points are awarded for online participation in discussion forums?
6. Are students expected to post weekly?
7. What constitutes an acceptable posting in a discussion forum?
8. Are these expectations made clear on the course site?

**Feedback**

Knowing what has been learned and what has not been learned helps to focus student efforts. Students generally appreciate detailed comments, specifically addressing strengths and weaknesses and clearly defining why the assignment was given a particular grade. It is important to link your comments and grade directly to the stated requirements for successful completion of the assignment.

If students are required to complete their assignments using Microsoft Office and then submit them electronically for grading, it is usually a good idea to use the Comment function found in Microsoft applications to enter detailed feedback and then send a graded copy of the assignment back to the student via Blackboard email or messaging. If you are using rubrics or checklists, be sure to also send an electronic copy of the rubric or checklist used in grading the student.
assignment.

**Course Evaluations**
Student course evaluations are distributed and collected online. All online instructors are sent a link to the survey four weeks prior to the end of the semester. Generally, the instructor posts the link on the course entry page at least two weeks prior to the end of the course and requires students to complete the survey before proceeding to the final exam.

**Beginning of Term Checklist**
Before the class starts, do a final check of the course site to ensure that all updates are in place. Be sure to review:

- The course syllabus for accuracy and completeness
- The course schedule to ensure that assignment dates and deadlines are posted accurately
- The assignment requirements (to ensure that these are clear and relevant to the assignments you are using this term)
- The discussion forums to ensure that the Introduction discussion is available to students and your Introductory post is visible
- The Welcome message is visible to students on the course home page
- Grading structure is clearly stated and visible
- Exam information is accurate and visible
- Only the grade book columns you want to be visible to students are visible
Additional Information

Copyright Issues
As soon as a work is created and fixed into a permanent medium, copyright is bestowed. Materials created while under employment may be subject to ownership or co-ownership with the employer.

The copyright act provides the owner or an authorized user exclusive rights to do the following:

- Reproduce the copyrighted work in copies or recordings
- Prepare derivative works based on the copyrighted work
- Distribute copies or recordings of the copyrighted work to the public by sale or other transfer of ownership, or by rental, lease, or lending
- Perform the copyrighted work publicly

Requirements for a Copyright
Anytime you place an original expression in a fixed medium, then you have a copyright on that work.

- Expression—a fact or idea cannot be covered by copyright, but the expression of that idea can be.
- Original—the work must originate from the author who created it and not someone else; it must be the product of the author's own creative labor.
- Copying or summarizing the works of others is not an original expression.
- Notes created by an instructor summarizing an article or textbook chapter for class use are not considered original expressions.
- Fixed medium—the work must be captured in some permanent medium in order to carry copyright (data on hard drives, web pages, and electronic communications are all covered by copyright)

Fair Use
The fair use provision of the copyright act allows reproduction and other uses of copyrighted works under certain conditions for purposes such as criticisms, comments, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, or research.

Four factors that must be considered when determining whether a specific action is "fair use":

1. The purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes
2. The nature of the copyrighted work
3. The amount and sustainability of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole
4. The effect of the use on the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work

Instructors who create summaries of copyrighted materials (i.e. notes) for use in class are generally protected from the legal action by the original author under fair use. Fair use does apply to materials kept for classes in Blackboard.
Works in the Public Domain
Works in the public domain include those whose copyright has expired, or those whose author has expressly declared to be in the public domain.
- Government documents are generally considered works in the public domain as soon as they are published
- All works created after January 1, 1978 become works in the public domain 50 years after the death of the author

Obtaining Permission for Use
The first contact with the rights holder should be made by telephone to confirm precisely to whom the written request should be addressed. The phone call can also be used to discuss the proposed use of the materials and negotiate fees. Following the phone conversation, a written request outlining the proposed use and agreed upon fee should be sent to the rights holder. The letter should include (at minimum):

- Your name, position, institution, mailing address, and phone
- Identification of the item to be used, including title and author or producer
- Complete description of the intended use, including purpose, course name, number of copies, format, means of distribution, intended dates of use, description of recipients, and precautions anticipated to prevent further reproductions (if applicable)
- Date by which permission is requested (at least six weeks from the mailing of the letter)
- Any applicable details from the phone conversation.

While approval can be granted over the phone, written records are necessary to protect you in the event of a lawsuit.

Creative Commons
Creative Commons is a nonprofit corporation dedicated to making it easier for people to share and build upon the work of others, consistent with the rules of copyright. They provide free licenses and other legal tools to mark creative work with the freedom the creator wants it to carry, so others can share, remix, use commercially, or any combination thereof (http://creativecommons.org).

The Creative Commons concept is thriving in higher education because it allows the world’s teaching and learning community to be more open through communication and collaboration. The Creative Commons licensing has helped facilitate this movement by allowing content developers to express the levels of “rights retained” for any content they produce.
References


UBC Distance Education and Technology. (2004). *Instructor’s guide (2nd edition) [Brochure]*. Vancouver, Canada.