# Principles of Useful Teaching and Assessment of Online Courses/Programs

## Office of Institutional Effectiveness
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This document is aimed at providing essential information relevant to effective and efficient teaching and assessment of online courses/programs (distance education). Key highlights are provided on issues of consideration.

**Before Students Register**

It is helpful to clearly communicate course requirements prior to course registration- issues of interest to cover could include any additional fees, technological requirements (internet access, laptop computer or desktop, any limitation to use of tablets and cell phones for online learning), the need for self-discipline, self-motivation and commitment to online learning considering there is no physical classroom with a specified time to show up for instructions. Further, the need to participate in class discussions and other ancillaries to course-related commitments.

Further, explore the option of screening students using online-related enrollment screening instruments to make a determination on the ability of the student to be successful in an online course before they enrolled. Provide intervention if feasible on students who are likely not to be successful in an online course environment.

**The Online Syllabus**

***Develop comparable learning objectives and outcomes for online and in-class courses/programs and make efforts to assess them comparably***. The goals, objectives and student learning outcomes should be comparable in terms of what students are expected to and able to learn upon completion of the course or program regardless of modality.

***Ensure that your online course/program meets the requirements of the Americans with Disability Act (ADA)*** with regard to resources on online teaching and learning. Provide information in the course syllabus as well as the Learning Management System (LMS) being used so students with ADA related-needs are aware of resources available to them as well as how they are able to access those resources.

***Ensure the availability of other resources such as library and technological resources***. Provide information on how students can access these resources and who or which unit to contact for support if needed. Regularly assess the relevance of these resources to online students and the ease of access through feedback mechanisms such as surveys or feedback through the course at different stages.

**Teaching and Assessing**

*Disaggregate SLO assessment data by online and in-class in the process of SLO assessment.* Compare performance of online students to those in face-to-face setting to examine for any differences. Take measures to address any observed differences for continuous improvement. This ensures that students enrolled in comparable online courses are learning just as those enrolled in face-to-face courses/programs. Also observe for course retention and completion rates by modality and address observed gaps. Strive for equity in student success regardless of modality.

*Embed assessment at all key stages of the course/program for both online and in-class* and compare student performances in both scenarios. This could be a) at the start of the course-- formative assessment (students understanding of expectations); b) middle of course-- students success in the first set of tests and assignments of the semester as well as mid semester assignments, tests, papers (good indicators of success or failure by the end of the semester). Additional formative assessment data to gather could include the following examples: information on how often students log into the chart board, participate in discussions, and timely submission of assignments. Document these common challenges encountered by students. If also teaching a face-to-face class, examine if differences in modality of teaching contributes to variations in student success (online versus in-class). Make use of the formative assessment findings to improve teaching and observe for performance improvement in subsequent courses after changes are effected.

*Develop a rubric to assess student performance in online courses*. Areas to consider include how students perform during online class discussions (it is helpful to students when faculty provide timely feedback on how well they are doing; e.g. kudos, advise to improve on this or that). Also assess how well students understand questions and respond to them. An example of a rubric on class discussions could be structured as follows: high quality discussion, medium quality, poor quality, no participation. Assessment of course content using a rubric could include elements such as good understanding of course material, ability to meaningfully engage with colleagues during discussion (collaboration), ability to apply course material to real world situations, ability to analyze thoughts and situations etc.

*Conduct summative assessment at the end of the semester*. Data points at the start and middle of the semester can inform final grades and success of students in online classes. Thus summative assessment should include aggregate of scores from all the levels of assessment. At the end of the semester, also compare performance in both modalities to determine whether or not any differences in learning exist between in-class and online students.

*Based on assessment findings, document issues or areas that may need to be changed* to ensure that online students are as successful as in-class students in the spirit of continuous improvement. If differences are observed by modality, measures should be taken to address the observed assessment gap for continuous improvement.

It is valuable for an institution to regularly review online education offerings to ensure they are up to standard, are reflective of innovations in distance education, meet the needs and learning styles of students, and are contributing to student success, retention and graduation.

**References Used**

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