



Faculty Handbook for Online Education

**Prairie State College
2016-17**

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Welcome

***Welcome to all Prairie State College faculty who teach online
..... and to those who are considering online teaching!***

The primary goal of this ***PSC Faculty Handbook for Online Education*** is to support faculty in their design and development of high-quality online learning experiences for Prairie State College students.

For the past three years, PSC faculty and staff have examined the state of online education at PSC. Research was carried out on the quantity and breadth of online course offerings over the past decade. Course success rates of students in online courses were compared with their face-to-face counterparts. Online students were surveyed in order to better understand their learning experiences, both good and bad. Focus groups of PSC faculty who teach online shed light on their experiences and the unmet needs that they share. Online programs at other community colleges were reviewed with an eye toward borrowing ideas to apply here at PSC. Although the College has dedicated institutional resources to online education since the first online PSC courses were offered, the findings of this multi-year research project suggest we need to do much more. This ***Handbook*** is part of that effort.

The major goals of the ***PSC Faculty Handbook for Online Education*** are:

1. To share with faculty and the College community a vision and set of core principles for online education at PSC;
2. To clarify and communicate a set of policies and processes for online education at PSC; and
3. To provide information and resources to PSC faculty concerning best practices for online course design and online pedagogy.

Whether you are a veteran of online teaching or new to online education, we think you will find this resource to be valuable in answering many of your questions. Please note that this ***Handbook for Online Education*** is a supplement to the broader [PSC Faculty Resource Book](#), the latter which includes important information applicable to all PSC courses—whether online or face-to-face—including classroom policies and procedures and academic support services for students. In addition, please consult the D2L Faculty Resource Center course (online) for information on how to navigate our learning management system—Desire2Learn (D2L). As you identify further questions linked to online teaching and learning, or have suggestions to improve future iterations of this ***Handbook***, please send them along.

On behalf of the Online Education Steering Committee,

Craig Mulling, Ph.D., Professor, Social Sciences
Chair, Online Education Steering Committee

Prairie State College Vision Statement for Online Education

Prairie State College is dedicated to providing access to quality education and support services that empower students to achieve their education and career goals.

We offer online courses and programs as a means to facilitate and expand student access to our faculty and curriculum, in recognition of the increasing need and demand from current and prospective students for enhanced flexibility in course offerings.

Prairie State College faculty who teach online are entrusted to maintain high-academic standards for their courses, follow best practices for teaching online, and ensure a rigorous and rewarding learning experience for our online students.

The College administration is entrusted with the responsibility of providing high-quality professional development for online faculty, effective support services for online students, and support for faculty in their assessment of student learning outcomes within online courses and programs.

Whether curriculum is provided via traditional face-to-face classes or online, Prairie State College embraces its core values of learning, excellence, accessibility, respect and integrity in our collective commitment to student success.

(Endorsed in Fall 2015 by Instructional Technology Committee and PSC Cabinet.)

Core Principles for Online Education at Prairie State College

Although a more extensive discussion of best practices is provided later in this Handbook, the following three core principles of online teaching and learning are highlighted here:

Principle #1: Faculty Engagement Promotes Student Engagement

The online learning environment poses both rewards and challenges to student success. One key to success is student engagement, and the level of student engagement is linked to the quality of faculty engagement. In short, each online faculty member needs to be present and engaged as an effective facilitator of student learning in the course. Moreover, to be in compliance with federal law and regulations regarding online education, faculty are required to design and facilitate “regular and substantive interaction.” The “distance” inherent to online education invites faculty to implement multiple strategies to make real and meaningful connections with and among students.

Principle #2: Clear Communication is Crucial

A clear communication of course expectations is important to any course and especially crucial in the online learning context. Considerations include: 1) designing a detailed course syllabus and course calendar; 2) establishing a structured pattern of course-related activities as part of weekly or unit modules; 3) providing prompt feedback to student questions and student progress in the course; and 4) using multiple forms of communication—email, D2L Announcements, office appointments, phone, Skype, etc.—to inform and remind students of course expectations.

Principle #3: Quality Counts

Faculty engagement and clear communication must be supported by high-quality course content that meets Universal Design standards for accessibility. Whenever possible, faculty should follow best practices in conjunction with online course design and effective pedagogical approaches to facilitating online learning. For example, seeking constructive feedback from an experienced online instructional designer can be invaluable in the planning stages and in ensuring ADA compliance. In addition, sharing ideas about course design and effective online pedagogy with online faculty peers always makes good sense. Finally, asking a colleague, student, or even family member to check on the basic functionality of embedded links and navigation buttons will help to ensure overall system performance. In sum, be mindful of how technology is used; allow student learning to drive the choice of technology and ensure that ease of use and equity of access to the technology are embedded within the online course design.

General Information

Online Education Committee and Other Contact Information

2016-2017 Online Education Steering Committee

Sister Ida Green, Professor Emeritus, Nursing

Grace McGinnis, Director, Financial Aid

Thane Montaner, Associate Professor/Collection Management Librarian, Library

Thomas Nicholas, Associate Professor/Dept. Chair, English

Bonnie Rajchel, D2L Administrator/IT Training and Technical Support Specialist, Information Technology Resources

Craig Mulling, Professor, Social Sciences, Committee Chair

Antonia Koslow, Manager of Online Learning

Contact Information

Bonnie Rajchel, D2L Administrator, braichel@prairiestate.edu, 709-7929

Dr. Antonia (Toni) Koslow, Manager of Online Learning, akoslow@prairiestate.edu, 709-2950

Course Definitions

- (1) **Online Courses:** Those courses in which all of the contact hours and work are completed online, outside the classroom. A student taking an online course should not need to come to campus for any portion of the course.
 - ✓ **Asynchronous Online Course:** An online course in which *all* of the contact hours and work can be completed at any point by a given due date.
 - ✓ **Synchronous Online Course:** An online course in which *any* portion of the contact hours or work must be completed at a given time. Any required synchronous online meeting times must be clearly listed in the Master Schedule.
- (2) **Hybrid Courses:** Those courses in which any portion of the contact hours must be completed online, outside the classroom, and traditional seat time has been reduced accordingly. Face-to-face meeting times must be clearly stated in the Master Schedule. Hybrid courses include those where faculty require students to complete proctored exams, either in the Student Success Center at PSC or at an alternative site. If proctored exams are required, this information needs to be clearly communicated in the Master Schedule, the course syllabus, and posted prominently as Announcement within D2L.
- (3) **Web-Enhanced Courses:** Those courses in which the instructor uses online activities to complement class sessions, but traditional seat time is not reduced (contact hours = credit hours).

Important Policies

This section of the Handbook explains several important policies and processes linked to online education, including: 1) the minimum qualifications to teach online; 2) the use of Desire2Learn (D2L), our learning management system; 3) the online course approval process; 4) the review process for existing online courses; 5) Title IV considerations; and 6) Higher Learning Commission standards for online education.

Minimum Qualifications to Teach Online

Beginning in Fall 2017, faculty members who choose to teach online courses must have completed the following before the course is scheduled to begin:

1. **Online Learning: An Overview (OO)**, a course offered through the Illinois Online Network at the University of Illinois.
2. **D2L Training**, provided by PSC's Instructional Technologist or his/her designee.

However, there are alternative pathways to meet these minimum qualifications:

1. Regarding qualification #1, faculty who have taken **Introduction to Online Teaching (ONTL6101)**, a course offered at Governor's State University, may submit evidence of successful completion to the Vice President of Academic Affairs or his/her designee.
2. Also regarding qualification #1, faculty who have taken neither **Online Learning, an Overview** or **Introduction to Online Teaching**, but who have taken another course or training may submit evidence of successful completion to the Vice President of Academic Affairs or his/her designee. If choosing this option, faculty must also submit evidence that the completed course or training includes the following topics:
 - a. The online student's role and responsibilities in the virtual classroom.
 - b. The facilitator's role in the virtual classroom, and characteristics of a successful online instructor.
 - c. Strategies to promote communication and collaboration in the virtual classroom.
 - d. Curriculum conversion for the online environment.
 - e. Copyright compliance in the online environment.
3. Regarding requirement #2, all faculty who have taught a fully online course since Fall 2010 are regarded as having adequate training in the mechanics of D2L.

Faculty are encouraged to read more about the [Illinois Online Network](#) and its curriculum.

Desire2Learn (D2L) Use

All faculty members who teach online must use the College's approved Learning Management System, Desire2Learn (D2L). At a minimum, all online courses should launch from the assigned D2L course with a link to the relevant publisher sites and outside learning resources. Examples of these could be Pearson MyLab, Cengage Mind-Link, McGraw-Hill Connect, etc. In addition, the D2L Gradebook should be used to inform students of their progress in the course.

Course Approval Process for New Courses

Online courses to be taught for the first time need to follow the official Online Course Approval process ([Appendix A](#)). This process applies to courses that have already been approved for the traditional classroom but are being offered online for the first time. For any course that has never been offered at the College—either in an online format or as a face-to-face course—the course must first be approved by the Curriculum Committee, following their normal policies and procedures, and then, if online, goes through this review process.

The deadlines for submitting the Online Course Approval Form take into account the time necessary for the Online Education Steering Committee (OESC) to complete its review prior to the course being approved by the dean and placed on the Master Schedule. In addition to consulting this *Handbook*, faculty are strongly encouraged to review the PSC Online Course Design Checklist as they design their online course ([Appendix B](#)). The checklist serves as an evaluation rubric for the OESC and frames the constructive feedback that will be provided to the faculty member prior to final approval by the relevant academic dean. In brief, here are the five steps in the process:

- ✓ Step 1: Gain preliminary approval from your academic dean
- ✓ Step 2: Design syllabus and representative sample of course content modules
- ✓ Step 3: Submit online course for review by OESC (prior to deadline)
- ✓ Step 4: Revise online course based on feedback from OESC
- ✓ Step 5: Secure final approval from academic dean

Please note that the online course syllabus and several course content modules must be completed for the OESC to fulfill its role in the process. Ideally, all course content modules are completed prior to the OESC review but a representative sample will suffice, i.e., a “Getting Started” or “Course Information” module and several weekly modules. In addition, make sure to allow time for incorporating recommendations from the OESC before requesting final approval from the dean.

Course Review Process for Existing Online Courses

The review process for existing online courses is carried out on a voluntary basis with faculty submitting their course for review by the Online Education Steering Committee ([Appendix B](#)). Written and verbal feedback is then provided to the online faculty member for their consideration. The intent of the review process for existing online courses is to offer faculty constructive feedback for course improvement. All faculty who teach online are invited to take advantage of this opportunity. In particular, those faculty teaching online who are in the tenure process or in their review year for post-tenure are strongly encouraged to participate in the online course review process. Faculty feedback on the review process has been very positive. Contact the Chair of the OESC or the Manager of Online Learning if you would like constructive feedback on your online or hybrid course or have further questions about the review process.

Title IV Considerations

Title IV refers to a section within federal law—the Higher Education Act of 1965 (since amended)—that addresses institutional eligibility for federal student financial aid. In order for higher education institutions such as Prairie State College to be approved to offer this aid, we must be in compliance with Title IV requirements and applications of that law by the U.S. Department of Education. Distance education and online programs have attracted increasing scrutiny from the federal government in recent years. Their efforts are focused on reining in practices leading to financial aid fraud, both at the student level and institutional level (e.g., for-profit, online institutions). Moreover, higher education accreditation bodies across the country—including the Higher Learning Commission, PSC’s regional accreditor—are being tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that distance learning courses and programs are comparable in quality to traditional academic courses and programs.

What does this mean for us, with regards to online courses and programs at Prairie State College? According to a 2014 report from the Office of Inspector General within the U.S. Department of Education, *“Title IV of the Higher Education Act Programs: Additional Safeguards Are Needed to Help Mitigate the Risks That Are Unique to the Distance Education Environment,”* the most important issue is “determining student attendance at an academically related activity,” also referred to as “academic attendance.” Initial student logins to an online course are no longer deemed sufficient as evidence of student engagement ... recent financial aid fraud schemes have included students registering for an online course, logging in, and then dropping or not completing the course after financial aid funds have been dispersed. Consequently, all online courses offered at PSC must be able to provide evidence that students have completed a documented academic assignment prior to the dispersal of Title IV financial aid. As with all PSC courses, this means paying attention to our “Attendance Verification” process, which most of us refer to as the “10th day report” (although it can fall a day or two before or after the 10th day of a term). **In short, online faculty need to require students to complete an academic assignment, such as a syllabus quiz or a post to a Student Introductions forum, prior to the deadline for Attendance Verification declared by the College.** Students failing to complete this assignment should then be identified as not attending when faculty submit their Attendance Verification report via WebAdvisor.

Higher Learning Commission Standards

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is a regional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. The HLC last accredited Prairie State College in 2008 and the next reaffirmation of accreditation will take place in 2018. Currently, PSC is approved by the HLC to offer online courses, and we plan to apply for HLC approval of online degree programs in January, 2017. This will trigger a Change Visit, most likely in fall of 2017. Two major areas of focus from the HLC are: 1) student authentication, i.e., ensuring that PSC has processes in place for verifying that the person who registers in a distance education course or program is the same person who participates in and completes the program and receives academic credit; and 2) the quality of PSC’s distance learning program.

The first area of focus requires evidence of “academic attendance” and is directly linked to the Title IV considerations discussed in the preceding section. In addition, PSC is expected to adopt policies that verify a student’s identity as the course progresses. At present, the secure login and password-protected D2L

learning management system addresses this issue; however, it may be determined in the future that additional practices be put in place to ensure academic integrity (see [Academic Integrity](#) discussion).

The second area of focus—quality in distance education programs—is primarily concerned with the strength of PSC’s online education infrastructure, such as how online courses are approved and reviewed, whether online students have access to support services, and whether online faculty receive adequate training and professional development with regards to online course design and online pedagogy. Both the HLC and the Illinois Community College Board have oversight responsibilities regarding the quality of PSC’s online courses and programs. The publication of this *Handbook* is intended to fill a gap and strengthen our online education infrastructure. Faculty are also encouraged to read, “*Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (On-line Learning)*,” to gain a better understanding of HLC’s “nine hallmarks of quality for distance education” ([Appendix C](#)).

In particular, four of the nine hallmarks of high-quality online education are important to emphasize. First, PSC’s online courses must be comparable in academic rigor to traditional, face-to-face courses (hallmark #4). The federal government’s definition of what constitutes a credit hour, coupled with the issue of credit hour equivalency for online courses, are both relevant here. As explained by the HLC, one credit hour is equivalent to “one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class work each week for approximately fifteen weeks.” Therefore, the ratio of learning time to credit hours is 3:1; for every credit hour there should be three hours of student-dedicated learning time. In a 3-credit hour course, for example, every student should be spending nine hours each week meeting the learning objectives of the course (approximately 135 hours for the semester). In a traditional face-to-face course, one-third of the learning time is in the classroom. Since asynchronous online courses do not have class meeting times, the academic rigor of the course activities in a 3-credit course should translate to nine hours/week of learning time for each online student (135 hours/semester). Hybrid courses would vary accordingly, depending upon how much classroom time was required.

A second HLC standard reminds us that our online courses need to be integrated with the broader student learning outcomes assessment work being carried out across the PSC curriculum (hallmark #5). Some outcomes assessment work has focused on a range of online courses, but it is also important that course-level outcomes assessment include the respective online sections of the course. Third, links to student support services should be included in all online courses (hallmark #7). Finally, online courses need to include links to PSC’s academic integrity policies and online students should be asked to consult those policies (hallmark #9). The next section of this Handbook—Designing Your Online Course—incorporates these hallmarks of quality endorsed by the HLC.

Designing Your Online Course

This section of the Handbook examines online course design. For most faculty members who teach online, the experience of preparing a course for the online format entails considerable time and energy spent upfront, long before the semester begins. The following discussion includes valuable information on several interrelated components of high-quality online course design.

Requesting D2L Course Shell for Design and Development

Given that the work involved in preparing an online course typically begins months in advance of when the course is offered, online faculty will not yet have the actual Desire2Learn (D2L) course available when beginning that work. Therefore, as a first step, request a “development and design” course, which is an empty D2L course shell that you have access to in order to design and build the online course content. No students are enrolled in this “development and design” course. In your request to [Bonnie Rajchel](#), IT Training and Tech Support Specialist, make clear the name you would like your course to have (e.g., “PSYCH 101 Online Development Course”). Use the course shell to design your online course, then after the actual course is created and made available—normally 3-4 weeks prior to the beginning of the semester—simply copy your design work from the “development and design” course into the actual course (with enrolled students). Instructions for doing so can be found inside the D2L Faculty Resource Center course inside D2L and on PSC’s website: [D2L Tutorials page](#).

Adding Details to Online Syllabus

In addition to the standard syllabus requirements for all PSC courses explained in the [Faculty Resource Book](#), an online course syllabus normally incorporates much more detail so that students better understand the particular challenges of online courses and how best to navigate the online learning environment for success in your course. Make sure to include detailed information regarding: 1) Online learning context, 2) hardware/software requirements; 3) technical competencies; 4) netiquette standards; 5) course calendar; and 6) student resources.

Helpful Hints



- ✓ Your syllabus should be in a PDF or HTML file type so that any links in the syllabus will work when it is posted in D2L.
- ✓ A short statement informing students that their official final grade will be located in WebAdvisor is stated in the syllabus.

Online Learning Context

Offer students a brief overview of how they can be successful in your online course. Either within the course syllabus or as part of a Getting Started course module, provide students a link to [“Keys to Success”](#) information on the PSC web site and also the [OASIS survey](#) (online course readiness) from the Illinois Community Colleges Online web site. An important part of communicating the distinctiveness of the online learning environment is to let students know your preferred method of communication and the expected response time to their questions (e.g., 24-48 hours) and to the grading of their assignments. If you are using a publisher web site, make sure to explain to students how that will be used. Finally, emphasize to students the importance of meeting deadlines, checking their PSC email account, participating on a regular basis, and asking questions when they have them.

Hardware and Software Requirements

When teaching an online course it is essential that you and your students have some basic levels of access to technology and technological know-how to avoid unnecessary roadblocks. You may want to copy the statement below to your syllabus, then add any additional technology requirements that are unique to your course:

Hardware and Software Requirements

Our course requires some basic technology for you to be successful. Make sure that you have access to, at the very least, the following technology requirements and are comfortable using it:

Hardware: Windows 7 or higher or Mac OSX 10.6 or higher with high speed Internet access

Note: Make sure you have access to a Windows PC or Mac computer. Smartphones are not an acceptable substitute. Some course features may not be compatible with smartphones.

Software: MSOffice 2013 or Office365, Adobe Reader, Adobe Flash

Note: Google Docs and Microsoft Works files are **not** readable by your instructor.

Browsers: Mozilla Firefox (recommended), Microsoft Edge, Internet Explorer 10/11, Google Chrome, or Apple Safari.

Note: Pop-up blockers need to be disabled for D2L.

Audio: Computer speakers or headphones

Technical Competencies

In addition to the hardware and software requirements listed above, your students should be able to comfortably use the technology needed for your course. You may want to copy the statement below to your syllabus and add any additional technical competencies that are course-specific:

Technical Competencies

Once you have met the hardware and software requirements, make sure that you are comfortable doing the following:

- ✓ Opening a browser and locating the website you need.
- ✓ Successfully logging into your PSC email, WebAdvisor and D2L accounts.
- ✓ Successfully opening, creating and saving a Word document.
- ✓ Successfully opening a PDF file.
- ✓ Successfully opening, creating and sending an email.
- ✓ Successfully attaching a file to an email or Assignment folder in D2L.
- ✓ Successfully saving your files to accepted file types.

Acceptable file types: .doc, .docx, .xls, .xlsx, .ppt, .pptx, .pdf, .rtf

Note: Google Docs and Microsoft Works files are ***not*** readable by your instructor.

Netiquette

When teaching an online course, explain to students that online communication should reflect netiquette standards. It is all too easy to misunderstand what is being said online with the absence of facial expressions and vocal intonations. A statement on acceptable netiquette standards should be included in the syllabus. This is especially important for those online courses that make significant use of discussion boards. Here is sample language that you may want to copy and include in your syllabus:

Netiquette

Netiquette refers to online etiquette, or rules of courtesy for online communication, which should be followed when posting online. It is all too easy to misunderstand someone's message with just text so following some basic netiquette rules will go a long way to helping us all have lively and respectful discussions. Here are a few important ones followed by a link to a longer list:

- ✓ Use complete sentences and proper grammar. Remember, you are taking part in an academic-based class discussion, not talking with your close friends. Slang and texting abbreviations should be avoided.
- ✓ Do not use ALL CAPS. This is considered shouting in an online discussion.
- ✓ Respect the opinions of others; disagreement is fine but do so respectfully.
- ✓ For more on netiquette, see [Touro College's Rules of Netiquette](#). You may also want to use this You Tube video clip on [Discussion Board Netiquette](#).

Detailed Course Calendar

The course calendar (weekly course outline) provides a concise overview of the work involved in your course, whether online or face-to-face. Creating a detailed calendar is especially important for online students and helps faculty from having to respond to excessive email questions from confused students. This also allows students to plan ahead in case of known issues at work or home that would make completing work on time difficult. The course calendar can be added to the end of the syllabus, posted as a stand-alone document, or both (recommended). Make sure your course calendar is consistent with the Weekly (or Unit) modules in your online course. An effective course calendar will make clear to students the course topic and readings for the Week/Unit, and provide access dates and due dates for assignments, quizzes, exams, discussion topics, and any major projects in the course. (See [Appendix D](#) for a sample course calendar.)

Student Resources

Students who need help inside or outside your course may not know the resources that are available to them as PSC students. Plan to let them know early in the semester where to find the help they may need. Faculty are encouraged to post links to the more commonly used student resources within their syllabus and/or Course Information module.

- ✓ PSC Library: The Prairie State College Library is available to help students locate the research information they may need for your class. Information about available resources can be found on the [Library](#) webpage.
- ✓ ITR Learning Center: The Information Technology Resources (ITR) department hosts the [ITR Learning Center](#) webpage, where students can find information and tutorials for D2L, Microsoft Office products, and WebAdvisor.
- ✓ ITR Help Desk: The ITR Help Desk provides Prairie State College students, faculty, and staff with a single point of contact for PSC computer related problems or questions with PSC equipment or software. If students have D2L or WebAdvisor password or login issues, have them contact the [Help Desk](#).
- ✓ Writing Center and Student Success Center (SSC): The Writing Center is located in Room 2637, as part of the broader Student Success Center (SSC) located on the second floor in the 2600 wing. Writing Center instructors are available to meet with students for 30 minute sessions to discuss any writing that they need to do. The SSC provides tutoring and an open computer lab for current students to use. For faculty who would like to offer proctored exams, the Make-up Testing Center in the SSC offers those services. Students can visit the SSC or their [webpage](#) to get more information.
- ✓ Office of Disability Services: Prairie State College is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for enrolled or admitted students with documented disabilities. The office seeks to maintain academic standards while providing equal access and support services to students who are able to benefit from college-level course work, have the commitment to succeed, and have a documented disability. Reasonable accommodations are determined on an individual case by case basis to meet the needs presented by the student's disability. Students must submit current documentation before accommodations can be provided. Students can visit the Office of Disability Services, located in the Counseling and Advising area next to the Library, or visit their [webpage](#) to get more information.
- ✓ Counseling and Academic Advising Center: Prairie State College has licensed professional counselors available to listen to students' personal concerns and to provide confidential assistance for resolving personal problems. Academic advisors specializing in career programs and transfer information support students in clarifying and reaching their academic goals. For more information, students can visit the Center—Room 1190, adjacent to the Library—or visit their [webpage](#).

Building Course Content

The substance of your online course is communicated within the Content sector of Desire2Learn (D2L). This is where faculty create modules and provide links to course content and course activities that get students engaged, preferably early and often.

Organizing Course Modules

As with the online course syllabus, when building course content remember that including more information is generally better than less. In addition, the information for students should be organized into easily readable chunks. For example, content organized into Weekly modules is consistent with this “chunking” approach.

Begin by creating a “Getting Started” or “Course Information” module, where you will want to include:

- ✓ Course syllabus (see earlier discussion on adding details to syllabus)
- ✓ Instructor bio (upload picture or maybe short Welcome Video)
- ✓ Course Calendar, with details on due dates (also include in syllabus)
- ✓ Link to PSC info on “Keys to Success” for online students, which includes link to online readiness survey from Illinois Community Colleges Online.
- ✓ Links to relevant campus resources (Disability Services, Writing Center, Student Success Center, Veterans Services, Academic Honesty Statement, etc.)
- ✓ Netiquette guidelines
- ✓ Link to the publisher web site (if used)
- ✓ Links to software program downloads (as necessary)
- ✓ Statement indicating that final grades are posted in WebAdvisor

After completing the introductory module, create weekly modules for the duration of the semester, e.g., Week 1: January 16-22; Week 2: January 23-29, etc. Some faculty prefer multi-weekly Unit modules, which is fine, but keep in mind the “chunking” advantage of weekly modules. Also, avoid organizing modules by file types. For example, creating a module for all of your PowerPoint presentations is not recommended; instead, link the presentations within the respective Weekly modules. For Content modules (Weekly or Unit modules), include:

- ✓ Module Overview
- ✓ Learning objectives
- ✓ Task list with due dates
- ✓ Resources (readings, Prezi/Power Point presentation, multimedia content)
- ✓ Discussion, Assignment, Quiz and/or other assessment
- ✓ Module Wrap up

In order to ensure clear communication, strive to organize each module using a similar pattern in the presentation of content. For example, if each of your course content modules includes an overview of the

week's activities, a PowerPoint presentation, an online discussion, and a chapter quiz, be consistent from module-to-module as to the order in which those links are posted. D2L also allows you to create sub-modules. Some faculty use sub-modules to separate work to be completed by Chapters when a weekly module includes two or more chapters. Again, try to be as consistent as possible in how you use sub-modules and how content is ordered within sub-modules. Please refer to the D2L Faculty Resource Center course for more details on setting up your weekly modules and linking course activities.

Creating Course Activities: Getting Students Engaged, Early and Often

Online course assignments should match as closely as possible those assigned in a face-to-face course. Clearly, the online course format provides unique opportunities for alternative and more appropriate methodology when determining assignments. One very important consideration in the design and development of your online course and student assignments is how best to establish and maintain **“regular and substantive interaction”** between faculty and students. This is an emergent national standard for all online courses and programs, and has become a crucial area of focus for accreditation bodies like the Higher Learning Commission in their review of online education programs. In short, all institutions of higher education must be able to demonstrate that this standard is met within their online course offerings in order to be compliant with federal guidelines and therefore eligible for financial aid from the federal government (see earlier discussion on [Title IV Considerations](#)).

Although pedagogical approaches fall within the purview of academic freedom, the PSC faculty commitment to high academic standards and student success underscores the importance of employing best practices for online teaching and learning. (See [Appendix G](#) for more lengthy discussion on suggested best practices.) The online environment, coupled with a learning management system such as D2L, can provide a variety of ways for you to promote student-student interaction, student-instructor interaction, and student-content interaction. Explore and implement the various tools within D2L, and others that are available via open educational resources at [OER Commons](#), [Merlot](#), and [Wisc-Online](#), so that these interactions can be as substantive and meaningful as possible for you and your students. For example:

- ✓ Create a graded assignment that students must complete in the first week of course, e.g., posting to Student Introductions forum or completing course syllabus quiz. (We need all online faculty to do this in order to be compliant with federal regulations.)
- ✓ Organize discussion boards to engage with topics related to course content (see detailed discussion below).
- ✓ Use multimedia content or interactive websites to provide your students with alternatives to PowerPoint presentations or text-only documents.
- ✓ Design a WebQuest to advance inquiry-based learning and student collaboration.
- ✓ Invite student groups to build a Wiki around relevant course content.
- ✓ Ask students to keep an E-Learning Journal shared within small student groups.
- ✓ Identify and incorporate discipline-specific online Simulations.
- ✓ Assign student groups the task of creating a Prezi or PowerPoint presentation and ask other groups to provide feedback.
- ✓ Organize learning tasks that have real-world relevance and focus on problem-solving skills within a collaborative learning context.

Special Note on Threaded Discussions: One of the most common ways that faculty can ensure regular and substantive interaction is through the use of discussion boards, also referred to as **threaded discussions**. This course design and pedagogical strategy is especially well-suited for content-based courses, although skill-based courses can also make productive use of the approach through peer feedback discussions and metacognitive writing prompts. Threaded discussions typically involve three phases: 1) a faculty-initiated writing prompt linked to course content or student learning (either text-based or aligned with video clip); 2) student responses to the writing prompt (with firm deadline); and 3) student replies to their classmates' initial responses (with firm deadline). The last phase is important to ensuring student-student interaction and inviting a genuine discussion. Here are some considerations when organizing and implementing asynchronous threaded discussions:

- ✓ Assign points to student participation, i.e., make it required.
- ✓ Align discussions with weekly modules; avoid more than one discussion/week
- ✓ Attach deadlines to each phase of the discussion (e.g., mid-week deadline(s) for initial student responses and Sunday or Monday deadline for student-to-student replies).
- ✓ Divide class into smaller groups, preferably 4-6 students per group.
- ✓ Clarify what a substantive student post looks like; call attention to high-quality posts.
- ✓ Create effective writing prompts that produce interesting and meaningful discussion.
- ✓ Monitor discussion; tactfully correct misunderstandings, facilitate conversation with probing questions and comments, and promptly intervene if netiquette is broken.
- ✓ Make your presence known without dominating discussion; it is not necessary to respond to every post and doing so may undermine effectiveness of discussion.
- ✓ Consider using student-led discussions or guest-led discussions to add variety.
- ✓ Use a discussion rubric to evaluate student participation or make clear the criteria you will use when assigning points.

The range of course activities that online faculty can choose from is wide and growing rapidly with technological advances. As you are making final decisions on what online course activities you want to include, be sure to ground those activities in your course learning objectives and avoid adding unnecessary activities or content. For example, just because a publisher or website has a cool, flashy presentation or activity does not mean it is a good fit for your course. In addition, add some variety to the type of course activities in order to accommodate different learning styles and issues linked to accessibility. Finally, as emphasized in the academic literature on best practices in online education, design activities that advance students' critical thinking skills via "authentic learning" (see [Educause](#) article).

Evaluating Student Learning

Although threaded discussions are commonly a distinctive component of online courses, faculty will find that many of the strategies they use within in a face-to-face learning environment can also be used in an online course, including quizzes, exams, papers, and projects. In the design of your course activities, always keep in mind that "chunking" the information and course activities is a good idea. Best practices

strongly suggest that there should be at least one graded assignment for each week of the semester. Also, remember that the rigor of the course needs to be in alignment with the credit hour equivalency, e.g., in a three credit-hour course, each student should average nine hours of learning time.

When thinking through how you will evaluate your students, make sure to familiarize yourself with the evaluation tools in D2L, including: Quizzes, Assignments, Rubrics and Grades. Please refer to the section below on [academic integrity](#) for more details on how the Quizzes and Assignments tools can be used to diminish the likelihood of student cheating.

Quizzes

The Quizzes tool allows you to give your students quizzes or exams electronically. Many faculty make use of the Question Library to build a pool of quiz/exam questions, often organized by chapter within the textbook. Chapter Quizzes provided on a weekly basis are a good way to support the “chunking” principle of online learning. Although establishing the Question Library can be a time-intensive task, doing so allows you to randomize the questions selected for any particular quiz. Many publishers offer a test bank of questions aligned with the textbook; however, faculty feedback on the quality of these test banks has been mixed, so make sure you are comfortable with the quality of the questions before using them in your course. In addition, most publisher test banks have been compromised, i.e., test bank questions and answers are often available on the Internet to students who are seeking a path of least resistance. Tutorial information on using Quizzes in D2L can be found on the [ITR Learning Center](#) page.

Assignments

The Assignments tool in D2L allows faculty to create Folders where students can submit their assignments electronically. Although many learning activities can be embedded within threaded discussions, thereby enhancing student-student interaction, most faculty find that some assignments are best completed on an individual basis. Keep the “chunking” principle in mind by splitting up semester-long projects into multiple phases, with feedback provided at each stage of the process. Tutorial information on using the Assignments tool can be found on the [ITR Learning Center](#) page.

Note: If you taught a course in D2L prior to Spring 2016, double check your course for references to “Dropbox” and replace with “Assignments”.

Rubrics

Many faculty use rubrics to assess student learning and communicate to students what constitutes high-quality student performance on a particular course assignment, such as the quality of participation within a threaded discussion or completion of a critical thinking paper. The use of rubrics can also support efficiency of time when gathering data for student learning outcomes assessment. The Rubric tool in D2L allows you to use either Analytic or Holistic rubrics in your courses. Tutorial information on using Rubrics in D2L can be found on the [ITR Learning Center](#) page. (See [Appendix E](#) for Sample Rubric.) Numerous resources exist for creating and modifying rubrics for online courses. You may want to check out the

following two resources: [RubiStar](#) and [How to Create a Grading Rubric](#). Whether you use a rubric or not, clear communication of how your students will be evaluated is very important.


Grades

Finally, the Grades tool in D2L allows you to input students' grades so that they can follow their progress in the course. The D2L Gradebook can be organized using either Points or Weighted Grades. Grade items should be organized by categories so that assignments are easy to track. Tutorial information on using Grades in D2L can be found on the [ITR Learning Center](#) page.

Maintaining Accessibility

It is very important to be aware of accessibility issues and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles as you are building your online course. Ensuring access for all students can be challenging, especially given the wide range of disabilities that exist, but it is federal law that we do our best to accommodate all students' accessibility needs. Therefore, it is good practice to build accessibility into your course as you design it so that you are ahead of the game when students with special needs take your course. Here are a few basic recommendations:

- ✓ Make sure to use videos that have closed captioning or a transcript.
- ✓ When adding pictures, fill out the Alternative Text box with a good description of the picture.
- ✓ Make sure that any text is not contained within pictures. **Note:** Screen-reading software cannot read text that is part of a picture.
- ✓ Make sure that information conveyed with color is also available without color.
- ✓ Make sure your color combinations contrast enough that text can be read. Use a color checker to verify your color combination choices: [WebAIM WCAG Color Contrast Checker](#)
- ✓ Learn more about [Universal Design for Learning](#) principles applied to online courses.



Principle #3 – Quality Counts

This section provides ideas on how to incorporate Universal Design into your online course, a key component of Core Principle #3.

Upholding Copyright Standards

Whether teaching face-to-face or online courses, faculty members have a responsibility to understand what copyright is, why it exists, and how to effectively apply “fair use” guidelines for copyrighted materials. A summary of guidelines compliant with the TEACH Act—the Technology, Education, and Copyright Harmonization Act (2002)—can be found at [Copyright and Fair Use for Teachers](#). In addition, the [Association of Research Libraries](#) provides very helpful resources on copyright issues. If you have further questions, contact the PSC Library or Manager of Online Learning for assistance.

Addressing Academic Integrity Issues

Academic integrity issues present challenges in both face-to-face and online courses, but as discussed earlier in this Handbook online courses and programs have come under increasing scrutiny by the federal government and regional accreditation bodies with regards to student authentication. Faculty teaching online are strongly encouraged to read, “[Best Practice Strategies to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education](#).” This article provides many helpful suggestions and is recognized by the Higher Learning Commission and its fellow regional accreditors as the gold standard.

As a first step, within the Course Information module of your online or hybrid course, create a link to PSC’s “[Academic Honesty: Statement for Students](#)” document, developed by the Prairie State College Faculty Senate. In addition, our wonderful colleagues in the PSC Library have put together an informative video on, “[Plagiarism: How to Avoid It](#),” which could be used in conjunction with an orientation activity for students. If your course has a research paper component, consider linking to [Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab \(OWL\)](#), where questions on proper citations for both MLA and APA formats are explained.

D2L has several tools to help you monitor whether or not students are attempting to cheat or present another person’s work as their own.

Randomized and Timed Quizzes

The Quizzes tool, used in conjunction with the Question Library, allows you to randomize answer choices for multiple choice/multi-select questions as well as create Random Sections within the quiz. When answer choices are randomized, students may receive the same question but the order of the choices is different for different students. When Random Sections are created, faculty can program D2L to randomly draw questions from the Question Library so that students do not all receive the same questions. For example, if you have created 40 questions for the Chapter 1 portion of the Questions Library, and you program D2L through the Random Sections function to pull 10 questions from the pool of 40 questions for a student quiz, each student will receive 10 questions from the pool but not the same ten.

Another consideration for online quizzes and exams that are not proctored is the issue of time limits. The online environment makes it likely that the test will be taken in an open textbook context. Do you want your students to consult their textbooks or do you want your students to refrain from using their textbooks? The answer, of course, depends on your pedagogical strategy and the nature of the quiz or exam. However, for those quizzes which include basic recall and comprehension questions, common

practice is to allow no more than 60-90 seconds per question. For a 10-question chapter quiz, a time limit of 10-15 minutes is within that range. Other types of questions, such as short essay responses, would likely translate to a longer time period for completion. Each faculty member needs to make their own judgments to ensure the testing outcomes are reflective of student learning.

Proctored Exams

Currently, there are very few online faculty who use proctored exams. Given PSC's definition of online courses, using proctored exams makes the course a hybrid course and, as such, the information on proctored exams would need to be clearly presented to students as part of the Master Schedule. However, the use of proctored exams is clearly an option for faculty and may become more important to consider given the increasing attention on student authentication.

The Student Success Center's make-up testing services (Room 2639) provide faculty with the option of conducting proctored exams for students living within the region. For students living outside the region—e.g., University of Illinois student taking PSC online course—it would be the student's responsibility to locate a proctored testing environment and pay any fees that may be incurred. Many community colleges and higher education institutions have comparable testing facilities that could be used for proctored exams. As with other information concerning online courses, clearly conveying this information to students would be a high priority.

LockDown Browser

Faculty may want to consider using LockDown Browser, which is a custom browser that locks down the testing environment within D2L. When this is deployed, students are unable to copy, print, access other applications, or visit other websites during the online quiz or exam. LockDown Browser can be installed on a student's personal computer or is available in the computer labs on campus. In addition, Respondus Monitor can be used in conjunction with LockDown Browser to monitor a student's activities during an exam via a webcam. Irregularities are flagged and these videos can be reviewed later by the instructor. If this feature is used, students should be informed before beginning the course that they need access to a webcam. If their computer does not have a built-in camera, an attachable webcam can be purchased at most electronic stores for a nominal price. Cameras are currently not available on campus computers.

Note: LockDown Browser is not supported on Chromebooks or smartphones.

Turnitin

The Assignments tool in D2L has the ability to take uploaded student documents and run them through Turnitin's plagiarism detection services. By enabling the Originality Check option in Assignments, you can get a report showing how much of an assignment a student may have plagiarized. If faculty plan to use this software, make sure to clearly state that in the course syllabus and in the assignment instructions.

Starting a New Semester

As the beginning of each new semester approaches, there are some steps that will automatically happen and some steps that you will need to take to complete the process of preparing for the new semester. This section of the Handbook provides information on the steps during the two weeks leading up to the official beginning of the semester.

Accessing Your D2L Courses

All credit courses automatically get empty courses in D2L so there is no need to request that your courses be created. About 3-4 weeks before a term begins, the new semester courses will be created in D2L. Once you are assigned to your courses in WebAdvisor, you will be automatically enrolled with Instructor status and links to all your courses will appear in the My Home section of D2L the following day.

If you teach multiple online sections of the same course, you can request that your course sections be combined in D2L. This can help you save time by only needing to check one course for new student work or to add your announcements or content. When a course is combined, you see all the students; however, the students will only see the students enrolled in their own section. If you would like your course sections combined, contact [Bonnie Raichel](#), IT Training and Tech Support Specialist, with a list of your courses.

Note: Do *not* add any content to your courses before they are combined – it will be lost when the courses are combined.

Enrolling Students in Your D2L Courses

Students are automatically enrolled, or unenrolled, from your D2L courses based on their enrollment status in WebAdvisor. Enrollments are updated every night in D2L so a student that enrolls today will be in your course tomorrow (within 24 hours).

Adding and Copying Content


Once you are enrolled in your new semester courses in D2L you will need to add your content to your courses. Your new courses will always be blank – content from previous semesters or “design and development” courses never gets copied over automatically. If you taught the same course a previous semester or have a design and development course, you can quickly and easily copy the content to the new semester course. Copying Content information in D2L can be found on the [ITR Learning Center](#) page.

Activating Your D2L Courses

When your new semester courses are created they are set as “inactive.” In order for your students to see your courses once the start date is reached, ***you need to activate your courses***. In addition, when courses are created, the start dates and end dates are tied to the official start/end dates in the course catalog. However, you do have the ability to change these if you would like your students to have access earlier or later than the default dates. As suggested in the next section, you may want to consider activating your course prior to the semester’s official starting date and allow student access to your course at the time you electronically send your Welcome Letter. Steps for activating your courses and changing the start/end dates can be found on the [ITR Learning Center](#) page.

Sending Welcome Letter

In addition to the detailed course description included within the syllabus, some faculty have found it valuable to send a Welcome Letter to students several days before the course begins. The purpose of the Welcome Letter, which is typically more informal in tone than the course syllabus, is to encourage students to orient themselves to the course expectations. Make sure to include a friendly welcome and short introduction to the class, textbook information, your name and email address, when and where they can find the syllabus, where to access D2L, when the class starts, and how to complete the [Online Course Readiness](#) survey. Faculty are encouraged to “activate” their course in alignment with the sending of the Welcome Letter. This helps to inform and alert students, prior to the first week of the semester, of the time commitment and self-discipline necessary to be successful in your online course, and whether or not your online course is a good fit for them. Of course, the hope here is that the clear communication of course expectations will have a positive effect on student success. Faculty can easily design and program the sending of a Welcome Letter using D2L’s [Intelligent Agents](#) tool. (See [Appendix F](#) for a sample Welcome Letter.)



Helpful Hint

If you are going to open your class early, don't forget to ***activate*** the course and change the start date.

Teaching Your Online Course

By the time Day 1 of Week 1 rolls around, the online course design work is complete (or nearly so), students are logging on and gearing up for the course, and the learning begins. Like all courses, getting off to a good start is important, and this is especially so for online courses. As discussed above, getting students engaged with the course, early and often, is crucial for student success. This section of the Handbook underscores the importance of the first two weeks of the semester and the ongoing effort to promote substantive and meaningful interaction.

Orienting Your Students in Week 1

In addition to sending a Welcome Letter to your students, you should plan a few first week activities that help orient your students to your course format and D2L. Having students check for required software, post an introduction message on the Discussion forum, read the PSC Academic Honesty statement, or participate in a scavenger hunt that takes students to different areas in D2L—and also your publisher’s content, if used—are all good ways to help orient and familiarize your students to the online environment. Many online faculty advocate for dedicating the entire first week of the course to these orientation-type activities, and holding off on content-based course assignments until the second week. This is more feasible in a 16- or 14-week semester than a 12- or 8-week course, but the importance of building an effective foundation for student engagement and course success should be a high priority. It is strongly recommended that any first week assignments be graded so as to ensure student participation.

Completing the Attendance Verification Process

During the first week of the semester, you will receive an electronic memo from the Vice President of Academic Affairs that explains the Attendance Verification process and delineates the deadline for completing the process on WebAdvisor. The deadline is on or about the 10th day of the semester but the actual date can fluctuate a day or two. As discussed earlier in this Handbook, to be compliant with federal law concerning Title IV financial aid rules, students who have not been active in your courses need to be identified as “not attending” so that the College can take the appropriate action prior to the dispersal of financial aid funds. Students who just log into the course do not count as being active. Students must perform some action during the first week, such as a discussion board posting or completion of an assignment (preferably graded), to be counted for “academic attendance” purposes.

Interacting with Students ... Regular and Substantive Interaction

Establishing and maintaining contact with your students is a fundamental part of online courses. It is all too easy for your students to feel isolated, or even get lost, when there is little or no contact from their instructor. Online faculty need to be proactive in their communication with students. For ideas on designing course assignments, please refer to the earlier discussion on threaded discussions and other assignments that invite student engagement. The following suggestions will help to ensure that “regular and substantive interaction” is a key characteristic of your course throughout the semester:

- ✓ Consciously foster a sense of community among students, respecting the likelihood of some student anxiety and creating a positive learning-centered environment.
- ✓ Respond to student email within 24-48 hours. Clarify the expected faculty response time to students in the syllabus and inform them when circumstances do not allow you to meet that commitment. Remind students that they need to go to their PSC email to read instructor replies to student emails sent either through PSC Student email or through D2L.
- ✓ Make clear to students when they can expect course assignments to be graded, e.g., “threaded discussions will be graded within 48 hours after deadline for final posts” or “student papers will be graded within 7 days after deadline.”
- ✓ Be active in threaded discussions; let students know you are present and engaged without dominating the discussion.
- ✓ Post weekly Announcements and/or send weekly email updates to students.
- ✓ Supplement weekly communication with short, “nag notes,” via email, which remind students of approaching deadlines.
- ✓ Send individual emails providing brief progress report on student performance; this is especially helpful early in the course, perhaps after the first exam or major assignment.
- ✓ Use the feedback function in D2L to inform students on their progress and performance; encourage students to read the feedback.
- ✓ Create a Mid-Semester Course Feedback survey for students to provide constructive feedback on the course and some metacognitive reflection on their learning experience.
- ✓ As necessary, make use of modes of communication other than email, such as the D2L chat tool for synchronous discussion, Skype, phone, or office appointments.
- ✓ Use the Intelligent Agents tool inside D2L to program an email alert to students who have not logged into the course for a set period of time, e.g., the past 7 days.
- ✓ Invite students to alert you to any broken links or typos they come across in the course.

The above suggestions reinforce the three Core Principles introduced earlier in the Handbook: 1) Faculty Engagement Promotes Student Engagement; 2) Clear Communication is Crucial; and 3) Quality Counts.

Ending a Semester

Here are a few final tasks to successfully complete the semester.

Outcomes Assessment

For those faculty members incorporating a student learning outcomes assessment project, make sure to collect the relevant data, examine the results, and complete your report. Several online faculty members have been exploring the student learning outcomes for their online students compared with the student performance in the equivalent face-to-face courses. Others have experimented with different online pedagogical approaches to measure potential student learning improvements following the pedagogical intervention. One important thing to remember is that the emphasis of outcomes assessment is on the patterns of student learning and how that student performance aligns with learning objectives and goals; whereas grades are assigned to individual student performance as part of traditional evaluation techniques, student learning outcomes assessment projects—often using embedded course assignments as a means to collect data—measure the collective student performance on an assignment or in a course or program. Online faculty are encouraged to read the [Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning](#).

Course Evaluations

In alignment with the respective faculty union contracts or upon request, faculty members will receive a link to be posted inside your online D2L courses so that students can complete a course evaluation form near the end of the semester. As with all student evaluations of course and instruction, you will not be able to view the student feedback until after final grades have been posted. Please work with your Academic Dean to ensure the effective implementation of this process.

Posting Final Grades

Official final grades are recorded in WebAdvisor. You will need to make sure you have your final grades submitted to WebAdvisor by the date provided to you by your Academic Dean. Instructions on how to post final grades to WebAdvisor will be emailed to you before the end of the semester.

D2L Archival Process

After the semester is over, your courses will be moved to an Archive role in D2L, which means you still have access to them but they are out of your way. Courses will stay in the Archive role for 2 years, after which faculty are unenrolled from the course. The courses will stay in D2L for an additional year and then be completely removed from D2L. You can back up your gradebook and content using the information available on the [ITR Learning Center](#) page or inside the D2L Faculty Resource Center course inside D2L. If you have questions about this process, contact [Bonnie Rajchel](#), IT Training and Tech Support Specialist.

Appendices

[Appendix A: Online Course Approval Form](#)

[Appendix B: Online Course Design Review Checklist](#)

[Appendix C: Quality Standards for Distance Education](#)

[Appendix D: Sample Course Calendar](#)

[Appendix E: Sample Rubric](#)

[Appendix F: Sample Welcome Letter](#)

[Appendix G: Suggested Best Practices for Online Teaching](#)

Appendix A – Online Course Approval Form

Online Faculty Member: _____

Name of Course: _____

Step 1: Request preliminary approval from academic dean. Consult with department chair and discipline coordinator, as necessary. Provide evidence of satisfying the Minimum Qualifications to Teach Online, or plan for doing so.

Preliminary Academic Dean Approval:

_____ (Dean's signature) _____ (date)

Step 2: Design online course syllabus and representative sample of course content modules.

- ✓ Contact Bonnie Rajchel and request a Desire2Learn (D2L) course shell ("sandbox" course) so you can begin building your course content.
- ✓ In completing representative sample of course content modules, include both a "Getting Started" (or "Course Information") module and several weekly modules.
- ✓ Consult our *Faculty Handbook for Online Education* and review the *Online Course Design Review Checklist* as you are completing your work.
- ✓ Include required student course assignment for Week 1 (or early in Week 2) in order to meet expectations of Attendance Verification process.
- ✓ Provide clear evidence of "regular and substantive interaction" between instructor and students throughout course.

Step 3: Submit online course for review by Online Education Steering Committee (OESC), prior to deadline.

- For fall semester, deadline is January 15
- For spring semester, deadline is August 10
- For summer term, deadline is November 15

OESC Review Completed:

_____ (Committee Chair signature) _____ (date)

Step 4: Revise online course based on OESC feedback and complete online course development.

_____ (faculty signature) _____ (date)

Step 5: Request final approval from academic dean. Upon approval, course is placed on Master Schedule.

Final Academic Dean Approval

_____ (Dean's signature) _____ (date)

Appendix B – Online Course Design Review Checklist

1. Course Information Module (Getting Started Module)

- a. Syllabus
 - Course has posted syllabus that meets PSC standards and provides students with clear understanding of the online learning environment, including netiquette guidelines and the importance of checking PSC student email.
 - A list of technical competencies necessary for course completion is provided. (E.g. Can use Word to create documents, can navigate an Internet browser)
 - A list of minimum technical requirements is provided. (E.g. Access to Word 2010, Speakers/Headset, Adobe Reader)
 - A list of minimum technical requirements is provided. (E.g. Access to Word 2010, Speakers/Headset, Adobe Reader).
 - A statement informing students that their official final grade will be located in WebAdvisor is present.
- b. Calendar
 - Course Calendar/Schedule is posted in the course. Includes topics, assignments and due dates by week.
- c. Instructor Contact/Bio
 - Instructor's Information is posted, preferably in the Course Information module, and contains contact information, availability information, biographical information, and a picture or welcome video.
- d. Evaluation Strategies
 - General evaluation strategies or course rubrics (E.g. for all discussions, all weekly papers, research papers, etc.) are detailed and listed in the Course Information module.
- e. Program information/policies
 - Links to institution policies and/or procedures to academic honesty, code of conduct and disability services are provided.
- f. Academic Resources & Support
 - Student links are provided to important PSC resources within the Course Information/Getting Started module.

2. Course Layout

- a. Module Organization
 - Content is organized by easily understood modules (E.g. units, chapters, weeks, themes ***not*** content types, such as PowerPoints, Handouts, Assignments, etc.) and is consistently ordered in a way that enables students to achieve the module objectives.
 - Module Objectives or Goals are clearly presented to the student and are aligned with the larger course objectives.
 - Course orientation overview or introduction is provided.
 - Course content is free of grammatical, spelling and typographical errors, and contains readable san-serif font type (E.g. Arial, Calibri), and size throughout. Colored text meets WCAG contrast standards.
 - Course content abides by copyright and fair use laws.
 - If used, optional resources are marked as such.

- b. Attendance Verification
 - Students are required to provide an academic assignment within the first week of class. (E.g. Posting to Introduction Discussion board or Syllabus Quiz)
- c. Accurate Dates
 - All modules, topics, assignments, discussions, quizzes and announcements have the correct date.
- d. Tools used properly
 - The D2L tools selected for use are used for the correct purpose. (E.g. Discussion board used for discussions, Content delivered through Content Area.)
 - Course launches from inside D2L and use of publisher sites is limited to what is necessary.
- e. Variety of Delivery Methods
 - Multiple methods of instruction are used to present content to students, such as text, video, audio, interactive websites, discussions, group projects, etc.
 - Instructional materials and technologies are current.
- f. Release Conditions
 - Release conditions are set correctly so there are no infinite loops preventing the release of content.
- g. Gradebook
 - Gradebook is used to provide students with access to current grades.
 - Gradebook is organized in a structured format. (E.g. appropriate categories are used)
 - For Weighted Gradebooks, appropriate weights are assigned to categories and items; weights are made clear to students.

3. Communication & Interaction

- a. Instructor response time & type
 - A statement explaining the time frame for receiving responses to email inquiries is posted. (e.g. 48hr response time to emails)
 - Students are informed when and how course activity feedback will be provided.
- b. Discussions
 - Discussions are organized in clearly defined forums and topics with separate discussion forums for Class Café (Community, Course Questions, and Tech Q&A), general content discussions and group discussions.
 - Access to discussion topics is appropriate based upon the discussion's purpose (private conversations, groups, and class interactions).
 - The instructor's role in discussion activities is clearly defined.
 - Students are asked to introduce themselves to the rest of the class during the first week.
- c. Evidence of "Regular and Substantive Interaction"
 - Learning activities and other opportunities are developed to foster Student-Student communication and/or collaboration.
 - Learning activities and other opportunities are developed to foster Student-Instructor communication and/or collaboration.
 - Learning activities and other opportunities are developed to foster Student-Content interaction.

4. Evaluation

a. Assignments

- The submission of coursework via email or non-electronic means is discouraged in usual circumstances. Some assignments, depending upon the course, may be submitted via other methods – such as assignments that include portfolios or non-electronic items.
- Assignments may be sent to Turnitin Originality Checker. If applicable, a statement notifying students of this should be in the syllabus.

b. Assessment

- Multiple methods (quizzes, tests, discussions, essays, projects, etc.) for learners to demonstrate knowledge are provided and are aligned with learning objectives.
- The purpose of assignments is clearly communicated to students.
- Assessments are conducted on an ongoing basis throughout the course using appropriate tools for measuring stated outcomes.
- Assessments are designed and administered to uphold academic integrity.
- Explicit rubric, rationale, and/or feedback is provided for each graded assignment.
- Expectations for student participation in discussion boards are defined and a mechanism for measuring quality and quantity is provided.
- Instructions for completion and submission are provided, including delivery method, time allotted, deadline, available dates/times, and if it can be retaken.

c. Student Feedback

- Opportunities for students to provide feedback on spelling errors, navigation, broken links, content, assignments and other issues encountered are provided.

5. Groups

- Rules for forming groups and assigning roles within each are clearly stated.
- A statement of the group's overall task is provided with clear and concise outcomes that are appropriate, reasonable, and achievable.
- Benchmarks and expectations of group participation are clearly stated.
- A statement of how, when, and where the final product will be delivered is provided.

6. Multimedia

a. Images

- Images are clear and sized for fast loading.
- Use of animated GIFs is limited to only those that contribute to the learning experience by supporting the course content.
- Images do not contain chunks of text or text-based alternatives are provided.

b. Video

- Video files have a specific purpose that does not distract from module objectives.
- Video requirements do not extend beyond basic sound cards, speakers and video players unless appropriately needed to meet module objectives.
- Video files are clear, necessary, and accommodate slower Internet connections.
- A written transcript and/or Closed Captioning is provided with all video files.

c. Audio

- Audio files have a specific purpose that does not distract from module objectives.
- Audio requirements do not extend beyond basic sound cards, speakers and audio players unless appropriately needed to meet module objectives.

- Audio files are clear, necessary, and accommodate slower Internet connections.
- A written transcript/description is provided with all audio files.
- d. Hyperlinks
 - Course has no broken links.
- e. Accessibility
 - Links to plug-ins or needed software (E.g. Java, Flash, Adobe Reader) is provided.
 - Information conveyed with color is also available without color.
 - Tables contain row and column headers for screen reader accessibility.

Appendix C -- Quality Standards for Distance Education

The Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC), of which the Higher Learning Commission is a member, developed a document—*Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (On-line Learning)*—to assist institutions like PSC in the planning and assessment of their online education programs. The *Guidelines* include nine hallmarks of quality for distance education and examples of evidence that institutions meet these quality standards. The nine hallmarks are:

1. On-line learning is appropriate to the institution's mission and purposes.
2. The institution's plans for developing, sustaining and, if appropriate, expanding on-line offerings are integrated into its regular planning and evaluation processes.
3. On-line learning is incorporated into the institution's systems of governance and academic oversight.
4. Curricula for the institution's on-line learning offerings are coherent, cohesive, and comparable in academic rigor to programs offered in traditional instructional formats.
5. The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its on-line learning offerings, including the extent to which the on-line learning goals are achieved, and uses the results of its evaluations to enhance the attainment of the goals.
6. Faculty responsible for delivering the on-line learning curricula and evaluating the students' success in achieving the on-line learning goals are appropriately qualified and effectively supported.
7. The institution provides effective student and academic services to support students enrolled in on-line learning offerings.
8. The institution provides sufficient resources to support and, if appropriate, expand its on-line learning offerings.
9. The institution assures the integrity of its online offerings.

The last hallmark includes the following example of evidence, verbatim from the *Guidelines* document:

The institution has in place effective procedures through which to ensure that the student who registers in a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives academic credit. The institution makes clear in writing that these processes protect student privacy and notifies students at the time of registration or enrollment of any projected additional costs associated with the verification procedures. **(Note: This is a federal requirement. All institutions that offer distance education programming must demonstrate compliance with this requirement.)**

Appendix D – Sample Course Calendar

Introduction to Automotive Basics

Class Calendar

Class Date	Topic	Readings/ Assignments Due
Week 1	Introduction and How Cars Work	Read Ch. 1 Ch. 1 Discussion Topics (DT)
Week 2	How Cars Work <i>Lab: Car Identification Activity</i>	Ch. 1 Quiz Ch. 1 Study Questions (SQ) Due
Week 3	Automotive Expenses <i>Lab: Automotive Expenses</i>	Read Ch. 3 Ch. 3 DT
Week 4	Safety Around the Automobile <i>Lab: Automotive Safety Activity</i>	Ch. 3 Quiz Due Ch. 3 SQ Due Read Ch. 5 Ch. 5 DT
Week 5	Safety Around the Automobile <i>Lab: Automotive Safety Activity continued</i>	Ch. 5 Quiz Due Ch. 5 SQ Due
Week 6	Midterm Exam <i>Lab: Makeup Missed Labs</i>	
Week 7	Auto Care and Cleaning <i>Lab: Interior Activity</i>	Read Ch. 7 Ch. 7 DT
Week 8	Auto Care and Cleaning <i>Lab: Exterior and Waxing Activities</i>	Ch. 7 Quiz Due Ch. 7 SQ Due
Week 9	Fluid Level Check <i>Lab: Fluid Level Check Activity</i>	Read Ch. 8 Ch. 8 DT
Week 10	Common Problems and Roadside Emergencies <i>Lab: Changing a Flat Tire and Jump-Starting Activity</i>	Ch. 8 Quiz Due Ch. 8 SQ Due Read Ch. 20 Ch. 20 DT
Week 11	Common Problems and Roadside Emergencies <i>Lab: Lighting and Replacing Wipers Activities</i>	Ch. 20 Quiz Due Ch. 20 SQ Due
Week 12	Final Exam	

Appendix E – Sample Rubric

SAMPLE RESEARCH PAPER RUBRIC

Student Name: _____

Category	15 Points	11 Points	7 Points	3 Points	Total Points
Thesis	Well-written thesis and is thought provoking. Thesis is apparent throughout the paper.	Adequate thesis, but not thought-provoking. Doesn't make the reader want to know more about the subject.	Thesis is vague and difficult to follow throughout the paper.	Thesis is not apparent or vaguely mentioned in introduction.	
Quality of Information	Information clearly relates to the thesis. It includes adequate supporting details and/or examples.	Information mainly relates to thesis, containing some supporting details and or examples.	Information is loosely related to the thesis and the details and/or examples are vague and/or non-existent.	Information is off-topic, with few, if any supporting details or examples.	
Format	APA format is used properly throughout the paper. This includes running head, title page, citations and bibliography.	One of the following is not according to the APA format: running head, title page, citations or bibliography.	Two of the following are not according to the APA format: running head, title page, citations or bibliography.	APA format is not used at all in the paper.	
Sources	At least 3 different sources are cited in the body of the research paper.	Two different resources are cited in the body of the research paper.	One resource is cited in the body of the research paper.	No resources are cited.	
Grammar & Spelling	There are less than 2 errors in spelling or grammar.	There are 3-4 errors in spelling or grammar.	There are 5-6 errors in spelling or grammar.	There are 7 or more errors in spelling or grammar.	

NOTE: ANY PAPER THAT IS 20% OR MORE PLAGIARIZED WILL RECEIVE A "0 POINTS".

Appendix F – Sample Welcome Letter

Hi {InitiatingUserFirstName}

My name is ____ and I am your professor for our online course, _____. As a ____ professor in the ____ department at Prairie State College since ____ I have enjoyed working with PSC students over the years. I look forward to working with you this semester.

To log into the course, go to the Prairie State College home page and click on the Desire2Learn (D2L) icon located at the right side of the PSC home page. Follow the directions for logging on. Once inside our course, in order to navigate the course simply use the links located at the top of the course home page. If you are unfamiliar with D2L, please take some time to go through the Student D2L Learning Center. You should see the course link when you first log in to D2L. There, explanations on how to use the various tools in D2L will be helpful.

Begin the course by reading the entire course syllabus, which is accessed by clicking on Content then on Course Information. After you click on Content, you will see a set of modules on the left hand side of the page. The first one is called Course Information, where the syllabus and textbook information are located. The next module is called Week 1; clicking on that will take you to a set of course activities that need to be completed the first week of the semester.

Please note that this is not a correspondence course in which you complete course requirements on your own time/pace; there are clear deadlines and meeting those deadlines is typically experienced by students as a challenging aspect of the course. As you know, workplaces have deadlines and, in parallel, this course also has deadlines. I will give you plenty of reminders but you need to read my periodic updates that I send to your PSC email account. Occasionally, I will also post Announcements inside our D2L course (viewed on the Course Home page).

I do allow students to work ahead on chapter quizzes, and some of the discussion posts can be completed the week prior to the deadline, but no work will be accepted after the deadlines. In addition, exams must be completed during the week in which they are assigned; e.g., Exam #1, covering Chapters 1-4, will be the primary focus of the first three days of Week 3 course activities but will not be available until a couple of days prior to the beginning of Week 3, then will remain available until the deadline on Wednesday of Week 3. There is considerable flexibility on the front end but deadlines are firm and quizzes/exams are not available after the deadline.

I hope the semester will be a good one for all of you. I am excited to get our course started. We do have a lot of work ahead of us but I think you will enjoy the course and learning more about _____.

Best regards,

Appendix G – Suggested Best Practices for Online Teaching

The following discussion provides some thoughts and recommendations for ensuring a rigorous and rewarding learning experience for our online students at Prairie State College. Faculty will find this list of “best practices” to be helpful in the design of online courses and their work with students. These recommendations represent an effort to define the qualities and expectations associated with successful online teaching.¹ As you will note, many of these recommendations overlap one another and reinforce the Core Principles for Online Education articulated earlier in this Handbook.

Best Practice #1: Let Students Know You Are Engaged and Present

This is first in the list for an important reason: faculty engagement and student engagement go hand-in-hand. If we want students to be engaged, meeting deadlines, and successfully completing the course, thereby improving the student success and completion rate in online courses, then online faculty need to be engaged and present.

Feedback from a survey of online students in the spring of 2015 underscores the importance of students having “access” to their professors. Prompt responses to student emails or posts within an Ask the Professor online forum (discussion board) are part of this, but also important is the faculty commitment to be visibly involved with online classroom discussions or activities. One way this visibility can be communicated is one-on-one via the private comments posted as part of the grading process, again with some consideration given to the promptness of the feedback. Faculty visibility can also be demonstrated through the professor’s direct involvement in the classroom discussion forums or activities, either participating as another voice in the course content-driven conversation or identifying high-quality student posts as a way of modeling the type of posts the faculty member is wanting and expecting.

Best Practice #2: Be Proactive in Course Management

This best practice focuses on active participation by the faculty member throughout the course. Proactive course management strategies include, for example, monitoring assignment submissions, communicating and reminding students of missed and/or upcoming deadlines, and making course adjustments when necessary. The degree of course management must be balanced with the time and energy available and demands of the course structure. Here, the challenge for us as online instructors is to find the degree of interaction and intervention that works with the dynamic of the online classroom. With experience, online faculty will be able to determine the excessive “time drains” of classroom management that detract from the primary role of providing instruction.

¹Much of this discussion relies on the following source: Ragan, L. C. 2009. *Faculty Focus Special Report: “10 Principles of Effective Online Teaching: Best Practices in Distance Education.”* www.FacultyFocus.com

One important key to successful course management is the clear communication of course expectations to students as part of weekly or thematic modules. As stressed elsewhere in this Handbook, each module should include clear, concise information and links to course components such as: learning objectives, course content, assignments and due dates. In addition, weekly Announcements can be opportunities to summarize the past week's work and preview the upcoming week. This summary provides general feedback to students on the collective student performance, and can be the basis for more detailed, private feedback to individual students, especially for those falling behind.

Another proactive course management strategy used by faculty is to send students regular email updates, as a way of supplementing the weekly News/Announcements posts inside D2L. Email blasts to the whole class are very easy to send from inside D2L. For faculty using this strategy, students of course need to understand the importance of checking email. The information on how students can have their PSC email "pop" to the email address that they most frequently access is explained on the PSC Student Email page. Although the supplementary emails may seem to be unnecessary—it is, after all, the student's responsibility to keep up with the course and meet the deadlines—if the email updates enhance faculty visibility and improve student performance, especially students meeting course deadlines, then it may be worth the few minutes a week it takes to send the emails. The strategy of sending email reminders may be especially helpful at the beginning of the semester.

The goal of proactive course management is to empower the online student to take responsibility for managing their own learning experience and free the instructor to concentrate their time and energy on crafting a truly engaged learning experience.

Best Practice #3: Establish Pattern of Course Activities

Establishing a pattern of course activity and communicating this sequence to students enables each student to develop a plan of study to address the course requirements, while balancing work and life responsibilities. The absence of such a pattern of course activities can cause stress and frustration on the part of students and, by extension, cause stress for faculty members. A predictable pattern of course activities also helps the online faculty member to schedule their time and commitment to the course, at a level that reflects an appropriate workload. Again, as emphasized in the previous best practice, the use of weekly or thematic modules that include learning objectives, course content (readings), assignments, and due dates can provide a rhythm and predictable structure to the course activities.

One of the most challenging aspects of designing an online classroom is working without the traditional constraints of time and location. Many PSC faculty find it helpful to set same-day deadlines for online coursework. For example, students may need to complete some work by a Wednesday deadline and additional work by a Sunday deadline. In this instance, using Wednesday and Sunday deadlines on a regular basis throughout the semester provides some predictability to the students and faculty member. Weekly or semi-weekly deadlines for assignments also work in support of student engagement and course-level persistence. For a Wednesday deadline, students have flexibility as to which day or days they complete the work—Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday—but the deadline is firm. The contrast between online courses and correspondence courses is important and students need to understand this. If they are unable to meet the deadlines the instructor sets, then that online course is not a good fit for them.

The establishment of a predictable pattern of course-related activities is also beneficial to the online faculty member. Many faculty will set deadlines that mesh well with the rest of their teaching load and life responsibilities. For example, the pattern of setting deadlines for Wednesday and Sunday would work well with faculty who plan to dedicate time on Thursdays and Mondays to grading student work. Whatever

pattern an instructor decides on, it is crucial to clearly communicate the schedule of course-related activities to students. The intent of this best practice is not to stifle creativity, or to suggest every week of online course activities must follow the same pattern, but it can be very helpful in providing some structure of expectations to a learning context that may otherwise be unmanageable for both students and instructor.

Best Practice #4: Plan for the Unplanned

In the previous best practice, emphasis was placed on how established patterns of course-related activities can reduce stress and frustration for online students. Life, however, happens and the unplanned may become the reality. This best practice anticipates the possibility of an unplanned departure from the planned activities, and prepares students for how the faculty member will inform them of changes to the course activities should this occur.

One area where the unplanned may occur is technology. When technological problems rest with the College, or with the course management system (e.g., D2L), then faculty are apt to extend the deadline for work that was to be completed on a day that the technology broke down. Such a tech breakdown can be confirmed with College officials. However, when the tech problems lie on the student end, the faculty member needs to have a plan. Most PSC faculty insist that students enrolled have a back-up plan should their computer or internet connection malfunction. Of course, this common approach to the problem is shaped by long experience with the “dog ate my homework” rationale from students. That approach is fine, and probably makes the most sense in terms of course management, but it needs to be made crystal clear in the syllabus and course communications. Other faculty may be open to extending the deadline but always keep in mind the negative unintended consequences that can occur, e.g., setting up a double standard if “tech” problem is really a procrastination issue. Course management is best upheld with firm deadlines and clear communication of student responsibilities, including a back-up plan for technology.

Another relevant area would be when faculty are unable to fulfill their expectations, due to illness, professional development opportunities, or unplanned personal situations. Again, clear communication is crucial. For example, if a faculty member typically provides feedback to students on a Monday, and this is part of the established pattern that students rely on, it’s important for the faculty member who will be unable to complete that work on a particular Monday, whatever the reason, to inform the students as to when they can expect feedback. Depending on the nature of the feedback, subsequent course assignments may be affected and, if so, clearly explaining the revised deadline to students would be consistent with this best practice. In addition, to the extent possible, making sure students know ahead of time how they will receive communication on any changes due to the unplanned is a good idea. For example, will this information be communicated by email, or by Announcements post, or both? Making this clear in the syllabus—planning for the unplanned—will be helpful.

Suggestions: Develop and plan a communications strategy for managing interruptions to the established pattern of course activities. Communicate to students how course interruption information will be communicated. Clearly explain to students the nature of the interruption, the expected duration of the interruption, any adjustments to course deadlines, and when you expect to resume course participation.

Best Practice #5: Response Requested and Expected

Timely feedback to students requesting faculty feedback, e.g., email communication, is extremely important to online students. This is even more crucial when that feedback is instrumental to the students who need to finish one activity before starting another. Ideally, faculty feedback is provided to students within one business day, and certainly no longer than 2-3 business days. If the nature of the feedback requires more time for an adequate faculty response, a brief response to the students making that clear is consistent with this best practice.

PSC faculty take different approaches to this expectation. Some faculty state in the syllabus that they are not available in the evenings or weekends but will reply to email within 1-2 business days, which is a reasonable approach. This prevents students from presuming 24/7 response time and allows online faculty to balance life and work demands. Other faculty are online every day and come closer to that 24/7 model. If that's the established pattern of faculty responses, it may be helpful to let students know when faculty members know they will be deviating from that pattern. For example, faculty who typically provide feedback on the weekends, but who will be traveling screen-free on a particular weekend, may want to let students know that they will be resuming their online faculty work on Monday after their return. Like all of the best practices, clear communication from faculty to online students, both in the course syllabus and throughout the semester, is important and helps to alleviate frustrations from students who need to know they have faculty support in their online learning experience.

Suggestions: Establish and communicate a plan for responding to student questions, sent via email or via "Ask the Professor" forum within D2L. This should include the expected response time. Monitor student questions carefully and when similar ones emerge, consider responding to the class as whole by email or Announcements post.

Best Practice #6: Communicate Clearly

This best practice underscores the importance of clear, concise communication with students in an online environment that typically relies on text-based communication for the majority of dialog. Text-based communication is unable to take advantage of the messages we send and receive in the context of f2f communication, such as voice intonations, facial expressions or body language. Therefore, the likelihood of misinterpretation and misunderstanding increases when the communication is text-based.

For text-based communication, one recommendation for faculty, when students experience difficulty with assignments or course activities, is to take this as an opportunity to improve communications ... work toward "clear and concise" in your Announcements posts, email communications, and other forms of text-based communications. Faculty may find that putting together a "frequently asked questions" document that addresses potential areas of student confusion or inquiries will save time for the faculty to concentrate on other aspects of the online course. This FAQ document can be posted as a link inside a Course Documents module or made part of a more extensive course syllabus. Should student confusion or difficulty persist, some PSC faculty have found it helpful to set up a phone appointment with the student. Others have used Skype or other video chat tools as a communications strategy.

A second recommendation is to establish and communicate the etiquette expectations for the course exchanges and make sure to hold students accountable for adhering to those expectations. Faculty may want to use existing netiquette documents available online or they may want to put together their own set of standards and expectations. Elsewhere in this Handbook is some sample language that faculty may use as part of their course syllabus.

Another recommendation is to establish a database of responses that may be used as feedback to student work, which can then be refined based on the experience of what works. Here, the use of the database responses can save time for the faculty member when it makes sense to share similar responses to different students; of course, so as to avoid seeming to merely post “canned” responses, it is helpful to supplement the database response with a short, individualized response to the student post. Some PSC faculty prefer to spend the extra time to individualize each faculty response to a student post, which is fine, but having and using such a database of responses is consistent with this best practice.

Best Practice #7: Help Maintain Forward Progress

This best practice takes into account the online format where it is especially important for faculty members to provide timely feedback to students on their progress in the course. Although this is undoubtedly an important consideration for f2f learning environments, the formal and informal communication between faculty and students in f2f courses often provides students more opportunities to monitor class progress and individual student progress. In the online environment, timely feedback from faculty can make the difference between a student completing the course or fading away.

Prompt feedback to students is especially important when satisfactory completion of one piece of the course is a prerequisite to making further progress. As with f2f courses, online faculty need to review and grade student work within a reasonable period of time. Some institutions set that standard as two business days; e.g., work submitted by a Monday deadline should be graded by Wednesday, whereas work submitted on a Friday deadline should be graded by Tuesday. Currently, there is no absolute standard at PSC for grading online student work. However, to be consistent with this best practice, it is important to clearly communicate to students what that timeframe will be and then to meet that standard, e.g., “Papers submitted by the deadline will be graded within five business days (or seven calendar days).”

One key issue that is relevant to this best practice is in the pacing and nature of the evaluation and assessment strategies. Faculty should address this as part of the online course design process. In short, be careful not to schedule course activities in such a way that the proximity of course assignments does not allow sufficient time for you to provide the necessary feedback so as to keep students moving in the right direction. Effective use of weekly modules within an established pattern of course activities, coupled with a consistent communications strategy with students throughout the course, will address this issue.

Best Practice #8: Ensure Safe and Secure Communications

This best practice is linked to the role of the learning management system, i.e., Desire2Learn (D2L), in the course-related communication between the instructor and the students. It is strongly recommended that all such communication occur within institutionally supported and maintained communication systems. Many faculty use third party publishing web sites as a key vehicle for delivering the curriculum, and that’s fine; however, care needs to be given to ensuring secure communications. For example, PSC faculty should be using, whenever possible, the email function embedded within D2L and integrated with PSC Student email. In addition, faculty should make clear to students that when they are using the email system within the D2L course shell, when faculty receive the student email the sender address is the student’s PSC email account. Students often do not realize that they need to check their PSC email account in order to hear our response to their inquiry.

Using D2L, or a comparable system, also provides a time/date stamped reference to when assignments were completed and posted. The student has a record of validation for submitted assignments and email correspondence, and the faculty member also has those records and, moreover, is able to consolidate course-related information into one location. All data is stored on an institutionally managed system, ensuring confidentiality and security. When third party systems are used—e.g., My Sociology Lab, from Pearson—the communications may be less secure.

Best Practice #9: Quality Counts

This best practice emphasizes that high-quality course content is essential for a successful learning experience. Quality assurance for online courses should encompass the three parts of the online learning context: content accuracy, instructional design, and overall systems performance. Content accuracy can be addressed prior to the new online course being offered, whereas instructional design will improve as the course is offered multiple times.

With respect to content accuracy, much of this needs to be assured prior to the course being offered. Faculty will obviously do much of this on their own. However, employing a second set of eyes makes sense, so having a colleague or advanced student review the materials for accuracy is a good idea. Also, asking students currently taking the course to send you observations of possible errors is also helpful. Invite students to be part of improving the course, and the online student learning experience. Let students know that their input is welcome on errors or inconsistencies they may encounter. Then, after correcting the error, alert the students to the issue. Although most errors can be caught up front, it may be a good idea to recognize that errors are inevitable and, over time, those become few and far between.

With regards to instructional design, quality assurance is an ongoing process. Clearly, all online faculty members want to make sure that they follow best practices for online course design in order to establish a strong foundation to the integrity of their course. However, just as we continue to tweak our f2f courses year after year, changes and improvements to the instructional design of our online courses are part of the rewards and challenges of teaching online. Asking for a pedagogical review of your online course by an experienced online instructional designer or veteran online instructor can be very helpful. Moreover, asking students for feedback, during the course and after the course, can provide valuable information for instructional design. For those online courses taught by other colleagues, they can also be important sources of information.

Finally, in conjunction with overall systems performance, make sure the navigation buttons and embedded links that you are using are in working order. Again, having a colleague or student check the functionality of the course links is a good idea.

Best Practice #10: (Double) Click a Mile on My Connection

This best practice follows from the previous one, especially the emphasis on overall systems performance. Here, it is important for faculty members to make sure that they, like students, have the technology platform necessary to access the online course components. Be clear with students the tech requirements for successful navigation of the course and which devices will or will not work in terms of course success. For example, more students are accessing the course via their cell phones, so if the technical elements of the course do not mesh well with that device, that should be made clear to the students. There is sample

language regarding technology that you may want to use as part of your course syllabus (provided elsewhere in Handbook).

One key point in following this best practice is that technical issues should not interfere with the learning process. Technology should be a means to deliver a high-quality learning experience; ease of use and equity of access are important. If the technical requirements exceed the institutional recommendations for taking online courses, that needs to be communicated to prospective students. Good online course design is often associated with the use of multimedia elements to enrich the student learning experience. However, this design quality needs to also take into account the persistent “digital divide” that remains relevant for our PSC students. Large files, for instance, that entail long download times may work against a positive learning experience.

In order to ensure effective systems performance, faculty should “pilot test” their course prior to launching the course. Some of this can be accomplished by using the “student view” mode inside D2L. In addition, ask colleagues, students or family members to access and use the various system features, preferably from different technology platforms. Once the course begins, monitor student feedback and make adjustments as necessary. As with all the best practices, clear communication between instructor and student is the most important key to success.