

Recommended Guidelines For UH Online Courses

2014

This set of guidelines provides clarification of State of Texas regulations concerning the delivery of Distance Education courses, University of Houston policy and definitions regarding online delivered courses, and guidelines for determination of standards for quality. This document also provides resource information for faculty and students in support of quality.

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ONLINE COURSE STANDARDS GUIDELINE for UH DISTANCE EDUCATION

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RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES FOR UH ONLINE COURSES

Courses taught through Distance Education at the University of Houston are strongly encouraged to follow the quality standard guidelines provided through Faculty Design and Instructional Support (FDIS), Distance Education (DE), and with support of Academic Affairs.

This set of guidelines provides clarification of State of Texas regulations concerning the delivery of Distance Education courses, University of Houston policy and definitions regarding distance delivered courses, determination of quality, and resources available to support both students and faculty.

SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) policy statement regarding Distance Education provides the underlying concepts for the implementation of quality delivery of all University of Houston programs and courses. The best practices statement can be found on the SACS website at the following URL: <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/commadap.pdf>

This document describes guidelines and recommendations needed to implement quality online courses.

DEFINITION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION:

At the University of Houston, a course delivered through Distance Education is defined according to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board definition.

Chapter 4 §4.103 (9) Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) rules define a Distance Education course as:

“...a course which the majority of the instruction occurs when the students and the instructor are not in the same physical setting. A course is considered to be offered by DE if students receive more than ½ of the instruction (51%) at a different location than the instructor. A DE course can be delivered synchronously or asynchronously to any single or multiple location(s) through electronic, correspondence, or other means. The course may be formula funded or offered through extension, and it may be delivered to on-campus students and those who do not take courses on the main campus.”

The University of Houston defines distance education classes as follows:

Online classes have the bulk of the material delivered online (Blackboard, etc). Face-to-face sessions are discouraged but acceptable up to 15% of instructional time (maximum of four 1 ½ hour meetings during a long semester). All required meeting days, times, and locations should be included in the class footnotes so students are aware of this requirement prior to registration.

Hybrid classes at the University of Houston combine traditional classroom instruction with a significant amount (over 50%) of instruction delivered through educational technology. Hybrid courses meet approximately half of the time in a traditional face-to-face classroom environment

with the remainder of the course presentation, interaction, activities, and exercises delivered through various electronic means (online).

COURSE SCHEDULING PROCESS:

Distance Education courses are “owned” and scheduled by the college and academic departments, but are to be taught using distance learning technology delivered through Blackboard or other campus supported technology.

Courses developed for electronic delivery, either hybrid or fully online, must be scheduled University of Houston classes and must meet all the same course content requirements.

Faculty wishing to offer Distance Education classes must contact their Department Chair for permission to deliver a class through Distance Education.

Distance Education classes are scheduled by the colleges, using the appropriate coding to identify the mode of delivery and location of the class. The office of University Outreach (Distance Education) will review the schedule for accuracy.

College and Departmental schedulers are aware of the coding needed to schedule distance classes appropriately, but the instructor should confirm that their classes have been coded properly. Any special information about the course, mandatory meeting dates, alternative delivery modes, i.e. different LMS other than Blackboard, should be listed in the footnote.

Information on Blackboard is generally not available to students until the first day of class. Instructors may request early log on for their students by sending an email to blackboard@uh.edu. Distance Education provides student access to course syllabi and other documents prior to the start of the semester through the Pathway to Distance Education. Any instructor not using Blackboard needs to notify students seven days before the start of the academic semester. Any instructor teaching a distance course may post documents to the Pathway site to better prepare their students for the start of the class. Faculty with courses listed as an online format will be contacted a few weeks prior to the semester beginning to upload their information to the Pathway to Distance Education. More information is available on the DE website at <http://distance.uh.edu/pathway.html>.

QUALITY CONTENT CREATION AND DELIVERY GUIDELINES:

A quality distance education course should include all elements found in the Course Guideline Evaluation document (**Appendix A**). This document is used by the Faculty Design and Instructional Support (FDIS) team to review online course delivered through Distance Education. The review focuses strictly on course logistics and design, not content. UH adheres to the quality principles established by SACS, the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, and endorsed by the THECB.

FDIS staff members are available to provide feedback to every instructor teaching an online course. This feedback will help the instructor to develop their online course to meet the minimum recommendations of quality. These recommended guidelines are provided in this document in **Appendix A**.

CONTEXT

Each course offered through Distance Education adheres to the following assumptions:

1. Online (electronic delivery, distance delivery) programs or courses meet the same requirements and rigor as those delivered by other means at the university.
2. Instructors should serve as the subject matter expert and work with the Instructional Designers who will assist with the navigation, design, and logistics of their course. This service will provide feedback to certify alignment with this UH guideline for online delivery.
3. Any specific information including dates and meeting times should be included in the Course Notes in PeopleSoft so that students are informed of class attendance expectations prior to registering for the course.
4. Faculty teaching online and scheduled through Distance Education are provided support services related directly toward the technology used for developing, designing, and teaching the course through the Instructional Designer teams located either in colleges or from the Central Design team. (Appendix D)
5. Students enrolled in Distance Education courses are provided reasonable and adequate student services (including technology services) in support of their distance courses.
6. All online courses will be evaluated using the University protocol and procedures for measurement and administered as an end of term student evaluation. These evaluations will be administered through the Learning Assessment group on campus and delivered through the instructors course in Blackboard.
7. Based on Sloan C and SACS guidelines, a course requires a minimum of three hours of student work a week, per unit including class time and/or demonstrated competency prorated for short-term, laboratory, and activity courses.
8. Course announcement and electronic catalog scheduling provide complete and appropriate information regarding all aspects of the course.
9. Faculty and students participating in DE work have at least minimum technology skills as outlined in **Appendix B.**

APPENDIX A

Minimum Requirements for Online Courses:

Each Online course delivered through DE should include the following information:

___ A syllabus is provided in the course and includes all information required by the University.
(Appendix F)

___ Learning outcomes and objectives are obvious and available to the student in the online course.

___ The course provides a means of interaction between faculty and student; and students with other students when appropriate for the course.

___ If a TA is the instructor for the online section, students are given communication guidelines and an opportunity to communicate with the instructor-of-record as well as the TA.

___ Students are provided complete information regarding the nature of the faculty/student interaction, the technology competencies required of the students, and the technology needed to adequately complete the course (computer access).

___ Information regarding support services available on campus is provided. This includes links to the library, to tutoring, and technology support.

___ Policies and procedures for class attendance and participation are clearly identified.

___ Assignments and assessments are clearly provided.

___ Grading procedures are clearly identified.

___ Minimum ADA compliance is adhered to in the online course.
(Guidelines provided in Appendix E)

___ Expectations for feedback on assignments and questions are clearly outlined for the student.

___ Any copyrighted material meets "fair use" guidelines. (Guidelines provided in Appendix C)

___ Instructions for using the course are easy to understand and follow.

___ Etiquette expectations are provided in the course with consequences assigned for not adhering.

___ University of Houston Student Code of Conduct is provided and clearly identified.

___ University of Houston Academic Dishonesty Policy is provided and clearly identified.

APPENDIX B

MINIMUM TECHNOLOGY SKILLS FOR FACULTY AND STUDENTS

These skills are the minimum skills needed for anyone to be successful while participating in an online course environment. Both Faculty and Students have support available to them to troubleshoot issues that arise with the technology, but a successful experience requires the following skills:

1. Capable of sending and receiving email;
2. Capable of attaching files to an email message;
3. Capable of finding information regarding browser, operating system, tool versions for troubleshooting
4. Recognize and be able to use hyperlinks;
5. A working knowledge of Microsoft Office;
6. Can download new software when necessary including utilities and plug-ins;
7. Can copy and paste text using a computer;
8. Scan for and remove computer viruses;
9. Capable of using discussion board or chat online;
10. Capable of typing in a URL in the address bar of a browser;
11. Capable of doing an internet search.

MINIMUM HARDWARE REQUIREMENTS FOR TEACHING AN ONLINE COURSE

Faculty teaching an online course must have access to the following requirements before teaching an online course:

1. Browser used on computer must be a browser compatible with current version of the appropriate LMS (Learning Management System).
2. Pop-up blockers must be disabled.
3. Must have a reliable DSL, cable or better Internet connection. Dial-up modems are no longer acceptable as a means of accessing the course content reliably.
4. Must have access to a regular email account (personal or University) for updates and information regarding the course maintenance.
5. Java Plug-in must be compatible with current version of the appropriate LMS.
6. Cookies must be enabled.
7. Currently supported operating systems: Windows 2000, XP, Vista or Windows 7; Mac OS X

COPYRIGHT AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Every instructor of an online course is responsible for obtaining permission to use copyrighted material as appropriate for the situation. Copyright and Fair use policies are very tedious and difficult for everyone to understand and dissect. If you are not sure, your best resource is your librarian. If there is a question about copyright use, you should not use the material. Be responsible and use common sense in knowing what should be used online.

The following are some common examples:

- If there is a textbook available to students, for sale by the author, you should not copy the text and put it online for the students. If you want the students to have access to an electronic version to purchase, then talk to the publisher.
- If there is music that you think your students need to hear for a teaching objective, or a movie – do they need to have the song and film in entirety to make the point? Would you spend an entire face-to-face class period listening to either? Use the classroom as your guideline for online. More than likely you would have students listen to only a portion of something. The same logic applies to online learning.
- It is not permissible to copy an entire movie that is on the market for students to rent and distribute this to your students online.
- It is not legal to copy from the same chapter, book, or journal every week during a semester.

The UH Library website gives very good information and support for Fair Use of Electronic and Print Reserves. The URL for this is:

<http://guides.lib.uh.edu/content.php?pid=174527&sid=1470758>

Fair Use defined by the Copyright Law of the United States of America, Title 17, Sec. 107.

“Notwithstanding the provisions of section 106, the fair use of a copyrighted work, including such use by reproduction in copies or phonorecords or by any other means specified by that section, for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship, or research, is not an infringement of copyright.”

TEACH ACT -- Technology, Education and Copyright Harmonization Act of 2002

This ACT was created to amend some of the inequities between what has been allowed and legal to use in a traditional classroom, and what is allowed for display and use of students in an online class.

The concept of “reasonable portions of video and audio clips” is accepted as the guideline for both online and classroom use. What constitutes “reasonable” is not entirely clear, but most universities operate under the guideline of the law allowing “an amount comparable to that

typically displayed in the course of a live classroom setting". This is generally interpreted to mean that if the course is available *only* to registered students online (i.e.... behind a password protected site) then whatever is needed to teach an objective face-to-face and used as related to the teaching of the content is accepted to be appropriate to provide to an online student.

If you use copyrighted material, you are not allowed to keep using it semester after semester. Once the semester is complete, the material should be removed from a course and not used the very next semester without permission from the author.

Keep in mind the spirit of this Act. It does not intend for faculty to copy (digitize) entire books, or literary works to be used online. Portions of books, portions of a performance are acceptable. A general guideline is the 10% rule – 10% of a passage, 10% of a chapter, and 10% of an audio. This is not specific, but a general guideline. If you have questions, the best resource is either your subject Librarian, or Faculty Design and Instructional Support (FDIS).

APPENDIX D

CONTACT INFORMATION

FACULTY DESIGN AND INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT (FDIS)

- <http://uh.edu/fdis>
- http://twitter.com/fdis_etuo
- fdis@uh.edu
- 832 842-2147
- Contact:

Tammy Hoskings, Director FDIS	832-842-2141	(thoskings@uh.edu)
Dr. Teresa Acosta,	832-842-2142	(tyacosta@uh.edu)
Dr. Jackie Hsu	832-842-2143	(jhsu@central.uh.edu)
Marsha P. Joseph	832-842-2144	(mpjoseph@uh.edu)
Anjana Singhal	713 743-3730	(asinghal@uh.edu)
Sal Solaris	832-842-2126	(sisolaris@uh.edu)
FDIS	832-842-2147	(fdis@uh.edu)

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN SUPPORT BY COLLEGE: (ANY COLLEGE NOT LISTED IS SUPPORTED BY THE FDIS GROUP LISTED ABOVE)

- **College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences**
 - <http://www.class.uh.edu/edtech.html>
 - Contact: Linda Davis, Director CLASS Educational Technology
713-743-3688 [\(ldavis2@uh.edu\)](mailto:ldavis2@uh.edu)
 - Contact: Fang Fang
713-743-3685 [\(ffang@uh.edu\)](mailto:ffang@uh.edu)
 - Contact: Taylor Fayle
713-743-4347 [\(tmfayle@uh.edu\)](mailto:tmfayle@uh.edu)
 - Contact: Venitra Hollingsworth
713-743-4330 [\(vhollingsworth@uh.edu\)](mailto:vhollingsworth@uh.edu)

- **Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture**
 - Contact: FDIS
832-842-2147 [\(fdis@uh.edu\)](mailto:fdis@uh.edu)

- **C. T. Bauer School of Business**
 - Contact: FDIS
832-842-2147 [\(fdis@uh.edu\)](mailto:fdis@uh.edu)

- **College of Technology**
 - Contact: Bouchra Bakach
713-743-5294 [\(bbakach@uh.edu\)](mailto:bbakach@uh.edu)

- **College of Engineering**
 - <http://eerc.egr.uh.edu/>
 - Contact: Debbie Boyer 713-743-1347 (dboyer@uh.edu)
 - Contact: Joseph McDonough 713-743-9972 (jcmcdonough@uh.edu)

- **College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics**
 - Contact: FDIS 832-842-2147 (fdis@uh.edu)

- **College of Optometry**
 - Contact: FDIS 832-842-2147 (fdis@uh.edu)

- **College of Pharmacy**
 - <http://pharmacy.uh.edu/copit/index.php>
 - Contact: Shari Mauthner 713-743-4252 (smauthne@uh.edu)

- **College of Education**
 - Contact: Velvette Laurence 713-743-5918 (vlaurance@uh.edu)

- **Conrad Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management**
 - Contact: Michael Scott 713-743-2431 (msscott@uh.edu)

- **Graduate College of Social Work**
 - Contact: FDIS 832-842-2147 (fdis@uh.edu)

BLACKBOARD FACULTY SUPPORT

- **Georgette Michko** – Project Manager for Blackboard System (gmichko@uh.edu)
- **Administrative Support for Faculty** – course creation, accounts, course request forms
 - Stephen Perez - Technical Support team (sperez@uh.edu)
 - Dana Ribble - Technical Support team (dribble@uh.edu)
 - Teresa Eason - Technical Support team (teason@uh.edu)
 - <http://uh.edusupportcenter.com> or call 844-570-6763

- **Academic Support for Faculty – troubleshooting content and tool problems**
 - Tammy Hoskings, Director FDIS 832-842-2141 thoskings@uh.edu
 - Dr. Teresa Acosta 832-842-2142 tyacosta@uh.edu
 - Dr. Jackie Hsu 832-842-2143 jhsu@central.uh.edu
 - Marsha P. Joseph 832-842-2144 mpjoseph@uh.edu
 - Anjana Singhal 713 743-3730 asinghal@uh.edu
 - Sal Solaris 832-842-2126 sisolaris@uh.edu
 - FDIS 832-842-2147 fdis@uh.edu

- **FACULTY HELP WEBSITE** <http://www.uh.edu/blackboard/faculty/>

- **Faculty Support Blackboard Online Support Services** <http://uh.edusupportcenter.com>

BLACKBOARD STUDENT SUPPORT

UH Support for Students:

- **Online Support Form** - <http://www.uh.edu/blackboard/help/form/>
- **Email** - support@uh.edu
- **Phone - 713-743-1411**
 - Mon-Fri 8 am to 10 pm, Sat-Sun 8 am to 8 pm (except University holidays)
- **In person at Main Campus**
 - **58 MD Anderson Library - Technology Commons**
 - Mon-Fri 8 am to 10 pm, Sat-Sun 8 am to 8 pm (except University holidays)
- **Live chat:** <http://www.uh.edu/infotech/livechat>
 - Monday – Friday 8 am – 8 pm (except during University holidays)
 - Saturday-Sunday Closed

- **STUDENT HELP WEBSITE** <http://www.uh.edu/blackboard/help/>
- For more Blackboard resources, see, <http://www.uh.edu/blackboard/help/>

Faculty are encouraged make sure students are aware of the Blackboard support website and the Phone support number in the course syllabus. It is important for students to know the expectation of getting technical help from the help desk, and not the course instructor.

CASA NSM TESTING LAB SUPPORT

- <http://www.casa.uh.edu/casa/>
- **Contact** <http://www.casa.uh.edu/casa/>

APPENDIX E

ACCESSIBILITY GUIDELINES

The Center for disabilities is an excellent resource for faculty when students need accommodations for any course, face-to-face or online. Information on the Center can be found on the following website: <http://www.uh.edu/csd/>

Even in an online course, a student must go through the Center for disabilities to provide proof of need for accommodations. A student may not simply tell an instructor “I have a disability and need more time to finish my assignments or assessments”. The student must have the Center approval before it is necessary to provide any special provisions to the online course.

If in doubt what provisions are needed and how the provisions can be accommodated, please contact the center for help.

There are a few minimal guidelines for a successful online experience. Keep in mind there are many types of disabilities, and some can easily be provided if kept in mind when the course is being created:

- 1) What is referred to as an ALT Tag needs to be added to every graphic in an online course. This is simply a way to read a description of the graphic for those who cannot view it. Any of the instructional designers will be able to assist faculty to learn how to apply an ALT TAG to an online graphic.
- 2) Color-blind students cannot differentiate colors in a figure. Do not use color to indicate a distinction. If you must use a color for setting information apart from other information, be sure to describe what is being done in text format. For example, “pay careful attention to the next sentence” placed before colored text would help the student understand there is a difference.
- 3) If there is audio which is important to the learning for the student, then a text version of the audio should be made available. If an instructor has a script of the audio lecture, this can be used. Faculty should check with the Center for disAbilities for help with captioning.
- 4) It is always better to avoid any flickering on the screen and to be sure that any moving, blinking, scrolling, or auto updating objects may be paused or frozen. Certain disabilities find movement on the web page distracting.
- 5) The standard white or light colored background is very important for students with visions problems. Colored or dark backgrounds are almost never acceptable in an online course and do not meet ADA compliance.

APPENDIX F

As part of maintaining SACS accreditation and to comply with HB2504, faculty members are required to provide a class syllabus to their students and to post it in electronic form.

For purposes of complying with HB2504, each syllabus is required to be posted on the UH website through the [UH System web portal](#). Faculty can log in using their PeopleSoft account number and password. After logging into your PS account, navigate to “Self Service” then to “Faculty Center”. The syllabus upload link is located on the right hand column of your teaching schedule. This is required only for undergraduate courses and these syllabi must include:

- a. Course and instructor identifiers.
- b. Major assignments/exams: *Minimally, you must list all major course assignments and their weight in the final grade for any assignments worth 10% or more.*
- c. Required readings: *List the Title, Author, and Year of all required readings for the course.*
- d. Recommended readings and list of discussion/lecture topics: *List the Title, Author, and Year of all recommended readings for the course.*
- e. List of discussion/lecture topics: *Include here all main lecture topics for the semester (dates optional).*

The following items are *recommended* to be included on your syllabus.

1. Semester and year of course.
2. Course number, title, and location.
3. Instructor’s Information: Contact information, office hours and location and TA information if applicable.
4. Course Description and prerequisite information.
5. Learning Objectives with aligned outcomes.
6. Required and recommended materials:
 - a. Textbook information: title, author, edition, ISBN, and available electronic version.
 - b. Additional materials included with-textbook (i.e. web site access codes).
 - c. Other reading or software materials that are accessible online or through the Interlibrary Loan.
7. Schedule of Assignments, Exams and Deadlines.
8. Examples and consequences concerning student ethics and code of conduct (especially plagiarism).
9. Course grading system including final grading scale information.
10. Attendance/tardiness policies/conduct policies.

11. Participation expectations and policies that is consistent with the University of Houston DE definition.
12. Description of all assignments: including grading and late work acceptance policies.
13. Test and quiz procedure/grading/attendance/late arrival/makeup policies.
14. Final Exam information.
15. UH policy information such as accommodations for students with disabilities, religious holidays, and absence due to UH sponsored activities and academic honesty.
16. A statement to the fact that you reserve the right to adjust schedule as needed.
17. Student expectations and etiquette how students should conduct themselves in a DE course.