



**NOVA SOUTHEASTERN  
UNIVERSITY**

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**Abraham S. Fischler  
College of Education**

## **FCE Online Course Design Guidelines**

Adapted October 2017 from the 2012 *Online Course Guidelines*  
Revised January 2018

### **FCE Online Teaching Task Force**

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## Introduction to the FCE Online Course Design Guidelines

The members of the Online Teaching Task Force at the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education (FCE OTT) have produced these *FCE Online Course Design Guidelines* to help determine to what extent online courses are displaying quality design criteria. It is expected that the guidelines provide a comprehensive framework for faculty and designers to use in the design, development, and revision of online courses.

This initiative to produce the guidelines aligned with the charge of the Provost's 2015 university-wide Online Task Force of assessing strengths and weaknesses of NSU online programs. The members of the FCE OTT understand that FCE can commit to the strengthening of NSU's online learning by improving the quality of the college's online programs and/or courses as well as the quality of teaching practices. Hence, the initiative would directly address NSU's strategic goal for online learning.

It is expected that when faculty engage in the process of reviewing courses that they teach, they would be cognizant and exposed to effective practices, as well as have the opportunity to reflect on their own instructional practice. Faculty would also have the opportunity to implement research-based exemplary practices and be able to lead others by example.

The first version of the guidelines, *Online Course Guidelines* (Online Course Guidelines Task Force, 2012), was developed by a group of 11 Fischler faculty and an instructional designer. These guidelines derived their foundational components from the standards of the *Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric*, the *Blackboard Exemplary Course Program Rubric*, and resources related to accepted and documented practices in the design and delivery of online courses.

In 2017, the members of the FCE OTT revised and adapted the 2012 guidelines to produce the second version, the 2017 *FCE Online Course Design Guidelines*. To produce the adapted version of the guidelines, the members of the FCE OTT reviewed literature related to online course design, the standards from the *Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric, 5th Edition (Quality Matters, 2014)*, the *Quality Course Teaching & Instructional Practice Scorecard (Online Learning Consortium, 2016)* the *Blackboard Exemplary Course Program 2017 Rubric (Blackboard Inc., 2017)*, and the *Open SUNY Course Quality Review Rubric (Open SUNY Center for Online Teaching Excellence, n.d.)*.

### Purpose

The purpose of the guidelines is to provide a comprehensive framework for faculty and designers to use in the design, development, and revision of online courses.

There are 37 guidelines grouped into four distinct, yet interrelated aspects of online course design: Course Introduction (8 guidelines), Course Organization and Accessibility (6 guidelines), Learning Activities and Interaction (6 guidelines), and Assessment (8 guidelines).

For the purpose of the guidelines, an online course is defined as one that is delivered at least 80% of the time using telecommunication systems. It requires no physical attendance on a university campus to receive instruction or course materials, but there could be some face-to-face sessions.

The guidelines do not address the specific content of a course or specific teaching strategies. The guidelines provide suggestions for presenting and organizing the course content and expectations of well-designed learning activities. Additionally, the guidelines are independent of the learning management system, technologies, or platforms used to deliver the course.

Faculty are encouraged to use these guidelines when designing and developing new courses, for peer-review revision of courses, and as a self-reflection tool to improve their existing courses as they prepare to deliver them.

The guidelines will be reviewed periodically and revised as needed.

## 1.0 Course Introduction

Online courses should provide some form of course introduction that goes beyond information contained in the course syllabus. Course introductory information should be easily located in the online course and can be provided by means of a video, audio, text, or multimedia clip. This initial introduction creates a sense of connection between the instructor and the student, and among students.

1. On entering the course the first time, students can easily access instructions on how to get started in the course and where to locate various course components.
2. There is information about course instructor availability (e.g., contact information, means of communication, office hours).
3. There is information about course instructor responsiveness (e.g., turn-around time for responding to email messages, posting grades).
4. A welcome message by the instructor is available.
5. The endorsed course syllabus is available via a link in the main Course Menu.
6. Students are clearly asked to briefly introduce themselves to the class either asynchronously or synchronously.
7. There is a course calendar that clearly identifies sequencing of course content, activities, scheduled synchronous meeting dates and times, and due dates to submit work.
8. Minimal technical skills and hardware/software requirements needed to be successful in the course are stated.

## 2.0 Course Organization & Accessibility

*Course Organization & Accessibility* addresses the structure of the course, content organization, accessibility, and usability aspects of the course in the learning management system.

1. Content is “chunked” and organized in manageable units of study (e.g., by weeks or units/topics/modules).
2. Course content is easily navigated (e.g., linked resources outside of the course open in a new window, it is easy to exit interactive activities when the student needs to stop, there is an easy way to navigate deeper into content as well as to return to previous content).
3. The course displays a consistent logic (e.g., content that is related is organized together, there is an organized sequence of units of study, titles of folders and files are self-evident, relationship between user actions and effects on course elements is consistent and logical).
4. The course displays a consistent presentation pattern within and among the units of study (e.g., there is consistency in color scheme, icons, fonts, nomenclature in titles, and elements within each unit of study).
5. Course content/material functions appropriately (e.g., links are not broken, document files are downloadable, folders contain relevant material to the course, media files open/execute).
6. Content is delivered in a variety of delivery media and technologies (e.g., content pages, links to external resources, audio, video, multimedia).
7. Course content is free from typing, spelling, and grammatical errors.
8. Recordings of live online class sessions are available to students.
9. Course content and materials follow NSU Web Accessibility Standards and Guidelines (i.e., headings, alternate text for images, descriptive link text, lists, tables, colors, and document). Description of NSU accessibility guidelines is available at <https://www.nova.edu/portal/oiit/policies/secure/forms/web-accessibility-standards-and-guidelines.pdf>  
  
To check PDF's accessibility, refer to <https://helpx.adobe.com/acrobat/using/create-verify-pdf-accessibility.html>
10. The course provides links to information related to institutional support and services (e.g., technology support services, library resources, academic policies, support for learners with disabilities, and others as determined by the institution).

### 3.0 Learning Activities & Interaction

It is expected that asynchronous and synchronous interactive activities support active learning, engage the students in the learning experience in meaningful and purposeful ways, and promote the development of a learning community. Activities should be designed to promote student-student, instructor-student, and student-content interaction; and aligned with the course learning outcomes or objectives.

1. It is clear that the learning activities align with the course outcomes or objectives.
2. Students are encouraged to initiate and maintain communication with the instructor.
3. There are learning activities that require instructor-students and student-to-student interactions that enable students to reach course outcomes or objectives (e.g., discussion forums, team work, etc.).
4. Collaborative activities (if included) reinforce course content and learning outcomes, while building workplace-useful skills such as teamwork, cooperation, negotiation, and consensus-building.
5. There are asynchronous or synchronous interactive activities designed to help build a sense of community among learners (e.g., student lounge, Frequently Asked Questions, student introductions).
6. Learning activities require that the learners interact with course content and the required/mandatory course materials (e.g., discussions require students to read the required course material, students are asked to watch/listen/read instructional multimedia to complete work, etc.)
7. Learning activities provide students with opportunities for gaining the course content knowledge.
8. Learning activities provide students with opportunities that promote higher-order thinking (e.g., in-depth understanding, analysis, problem solving, or critical reflection).
9. Learning activities provide students with opportunities to apply theory to practical or real-world contexts.
10. Expectations for participation in student-student interactive activities are clearly stated (e.g., netiquette, timing, and frequency and quality of participation).

## 4.0 Assessment

Assessment focuses on activities to measure progress toward or attainment of learning outcomes or objectives. An important element in the assessment of course learning objectives is providing constructive feedback to students.

1. Assessment occurs regularly during the course in accordance with the course learning outcomes or objectives (e.g., formative and summative assessments).
2. Grading criteria (e.g., rubrics, checklists) are clearly articulated for all student work that contributes to the final grade of the course.
3. Grading criteria (e.g., rubrics, checklists) are clearly aligned with the expectations/requirements of the activity, assignment, or course participation.
4. Course grading policies (e.g., acceptance of late work, resubmissions) are stated and easily located in the online course.
5. Multiple types of assessments are used (e.g., written papers, quizzes and tests, discussions, media production, peer reviews, etc.).
6. Students have the opportunity to assess their own learning, individually and with peers.
7. Students have online access to up-to-date grades by means of a course gradebook.
8. Students have access to instructor's constructive and timely feedback that promotes learning.
9. Students have opportunities to provide feedback on the design and content of the course.

## References

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