Guidance for Online Courses

(Current as of July 2023)

Federal guidance on student interaction in online courses

Guidelines issued from the U.S. Department of Education went into effect on July 1, 2021. These guidelines require that both synchronous and asynchronous online courses include *substantive and regular interaction* between instructors and students. Courses must be delivered in a way that adequately engages students through teaching, learning, and assessment and facilitates two-way engagement with students.

Online courses should aim to contain at least 1 hour of active faculty-student interaction per credit hour, per week - ideally spread out during multiple sessions. This interaction should include at least two of the following:

- Interactive feedback regarding a student's coursework (examples below)
- Responses to student questions about course content
- Facilitated group discussions about course content or competencies
- Virtual or in-person office hours
- Other instructional techniques that provide similar engagement to an in-class setting
- Direct instruction (synchronous interactive sessions)

What are some ways in which faculty can meet these requirements?

- Hold online office hours during different, regularly scheduled time periods. You can designate time spots using Canvas Scheduler or the Office Hours functionality of Webex within Canvas.
- Enable Canvas Chat for immediate feedback. Use it to provide quick, text-based consultations and engage students.
- Post course-wide Announcements to give feedback on cumulative test results, explain a confusing concept, share tips to succeed on upcoming assignments, notify of project extensions, and generally employ a variety of communication strategies to keep students informed.
- Create peer-review assignments and monitor the quality of peer feedback.
- Provide synchronous opportunities for class interaction, such as use of Zoom or Webex breakout rooms for small group discussion.
- Create multiple practice quizzes and example problem sets that students can complete in their own time, then spend part of your synchronous time demonstrating problems students had the most difficulties solving, as determined by the Canvas Quiz Statistics.

Do simple adjustments to traditional teaching methods qualify as "substantive interaction" between the student and instructor?

- No. Posting a video of pre-recorded lectures or providing lecture materials online does not count as substantive interaction. To be considered as such, the instructor might:
  - Require students to watch the lecture ahead of time and then participate in a live text or video chat
  - Include self-assessment questions for a set of pre-recorded lectures. Use student performance on the questions to guide content covered in an office hour session.
- Simply assigning a grade to an assignment does not constitute interactive feedback. The instructor should also do one or more of the following:
  - Provide each student with comments unique to their submission;
  - Utilize mastery paths in Canvas to help students explore additional materials related to the topic;
  - Summarize common issues students are experiencing using a video, announcement, email, or discussion, and distribute to the whole class.

Best Practices for Online Course Design

- Use the ISU course template in Canvas. It provides a course design framework based on best practices in online teaching.
- Ensure that your course layout contains clear and consistent navigation.
- Structure your course content in a 'module format' and ensure that each module starts by introducing students to the module learning objectives and ends with an assessment to help students gauge their understanding of concepts covered.
- Ensure that your course is designed for accessibility.
- In an online course, students lack the structure of "going to class." You can help structure the student learning process by ensuring that your course learning objectives, content delivery, and assignments are aligned and all assignment due dates are posted at the start of the semester.
- CELT has detailed a number of online instructional strategies and engagement strategies to help you involve students in the learning process.
- Use a variety of methods to deliver course content including: mixing short discussions, collaboration exercises, video clips, and hands-on exercises with text or brief video lectures.
- Be mindful of the amount of work you assign to students. Sometimes, efforts to increase engagement inadvertently significantly add to students' workload.
- Schedule multiple assessments including several low stakes assessments throughout the semester. Link assessments to course learning outcomes (video) in CANVAS.
- Create a feeling of community through acknowledging student contributions, providing positive reinforcement, sharing personal experiences, helping students share ideas with peers, and encouraging networking.

For questions or more information, contact: **Academic-Programs@iastate.edu**.