Annotated EOCR UTK Online Learning

# ENGAGED ONLINE COURSE RUBRIC (EO(R) & ANNOTATIONS



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ONLINE LEARNING

#### How to Use the EOC Annotated Rubric

The **Engaged Online Course Rubric (EOCR)** contains a set of guidelines that represent research-based best practices in online course design and development. These guidelines and the accompanying criteria can be used by instructional faculty to self-assess the quality of their online courses, or by a peer reviewer to provide valuable feedback to a colleague.

There are seven general standards which cover essential aspects of a quality online course at UTK. In the annotated rubric each of the general standards is expanded to include a full annotation with examples. These details can help determine whether a particular standard has been met, has not been met or is not applicable, due to the course content, curriculum, or discipline.

#### How the EOCR Supports Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)

The Department of Education (DOE) recognizes the importance of engagement and requires that online courses ensure regular and substantive interaction between student and instructor. RSI is one of the factors the DOE uses to distinguish online education from correspondence education, the latter of which is not eligible for federal financial aid.

### Standards that support RSI are noted in the rubric with this icon: 🏁

These standards address specific communication and engagement practices that, when implemented in the design and delivery of an online course, can support RSI. For more detailed information on RSI compliance, review the Course Assessment page or download this quick reference guide.

#### Additional Resources for Quality Course Design

#### **Online Course Syllabus Template**

Maintained by the Office of Online Learning, the Online Course Syllabus template includes components that reflect best practices in online course design and delivery, and language in the template can be edited to meet individual instructors' needs.

#### **UTK Canvas Course Template**

Maintained by OIT, the UTK Canvas Course template is designed for UTK instructional personnel to encourage a consistent, positive, and quality student learning experience in Canvas. Elements in the template include clear directions, built-in-support and technical guidance, design components that can be reused, and sample language useful for helping students engage with course content, complete assignments, and participate in discussions.

Instructors can import the template into their course shells from the **Canvas Commons by searching for "UTK Canvas Course Template"** and selecting Import/Download.

#### References:

Quality Matters. Higher Ed Course Design Rubric. Accessed September 29, 2021. https://www.qualitymatters.org/qa-resources/rubric-standards/higher-ed-rubric

The State University of New York. The SUNY Online Course Quality Review Rubric – OSCQR. Accessed October 17, 2021. https://oscqr.suny.edu/

### Standard 1: Course Overview and Information

**Overview Statement:** The course overview and introduction set the tone for the course, inform students about what to expect, introduce course learning objectives or competencies, and guidance for student success.

#### 1.1 Course includes "welcome" content and instructions on how to get started.

Course landing page includes a prominently placed block of "Welcome" content and clearly defined instructions on where to navigate to begin an orientation of the course. The course welcome establishes instructor's presence and provides a positive first impression of the instructor and the course. Learners need to know where to start and how to proceed when they first access the online course. In essence, this is the learners' first impression of the instructor, and the course.

This information should include a general course overview, a schedule of activities, where to start and detailed navigational instructions for the whole course.

#### Examples:

- 1. Add a welcome video supplemented with an introductory discussion forum where learners can interact with the instructor to ask questions, or get any clarification they may need about the course, expectations, etc.
- 2. Provide a detailed instruction sheet, or quick reference guide, on how to get started and what to do first in the course. Post this on the course home page, or send it out to learners via mail, or course announcements.
  - a. Create a course FAQ that addresses important course navigation or participation issues.
- 3. Hold an optional synchronous session to welcome learners, answer questions, and demonstrate how and where to get started in the course.
- 4. Consider options for, and plan regular communications (group and private email, course announcements, etc.) with your students before and after the course begins.
  - a. Leverage the online course announcement tools in Canvas to automatically send weekly check-in announcements.

# 1.2 An easily accessible orientation is provided and includes the purpose and structure of the course, the mode of course delivery, assignment schedule, assessment schedule, and a predictable feedback schedule.

Orientation information is provided to help learners understand the scope of work and time commitments expected from them. The orientation includes how the learning process is structured and carried out, including course schedule, delivery modalities (online or hybrid), modes of communication, types of learning activities, and how learning will be assessed. The overall course and module orientation and/or overview will prepare learners for what, when, where, and why they will be learning. Advanced schedule organizers support learners in planning their schedule as well as provide the expected commitment for learner to instructor and instructor to learner communications.

- 1. Provide a detailed written description of the types of learning activities learners will engage in, including all content, interaction, and assessment types included in the course. This should include required readings, interaction guidelines and expectations, and due dates.
- 2. Provide expected time required to participate and engage fully in the course each week throughout the term (e.g., "Please expect nine hours per week...").

- 3. Create a course map or calendar to visualize the sequence of course modules, types of learning activities, anticipated duration of each activity, and indications of when assignments are due.
- Create a short video introductory overview tour of your course within the LMS using a screen casting tool, (Zoom, Panopto, etc.). This can help learners better navigate the course space, by letting them see the structure of learning modules and how to locate and access all course materials.

### 1.3 Course provides instructor contact information, availability information, virtual office hours, communication preferences, and response time to messages.

The instructor provides open avenues for communication and provides easy access to those channels by including their contact information, office hours and expectations for response time. In addition to providing this information in the syllabus, it is recommended this information is provided in multiple areas of the course introduction.

#### Examples:

- 1. Provide contact information in multiple places for access, (i.e. the Course Welcome page, the Syllabus, stated in an introduction video).
- 2. Share expectations for being contacted by students including your preferred and/or required modes of contact.
- 3. Provide information on regular office hours, how/where to ask questions, or get extra help, where to go for advisement, how to contact or access any department or program information or resources, etc. (Support services also covered in 5.2)
- 4. Make sure your students know specifically what to expect in terms of your response time. (*This might be included in a communication schedule provided in the syllabus standard 2.4*)
- 5. Create a digital business card with your contact information, share it out via course announcements, and recommend learners print so they have access to the information offline.

# 1.4 A self-introduction is provided by the instructor, is professional, and available online.

A self-introduction is welcoming and available in a predominate place at the beginning of the course.

The self-introduction will serve as a model for learners. Social presence relies on establishing a welcoming online learning space. When students learn more about the background of their instructor, the "distance" between instructor/learners is mitigated. It is important that learners feel the instructor is easily accessible, and willing to communicate consistently throughout the course. A personal narrative humanizes the instructor and provides credibility and history to support instructor expertise.

Some tips for an introduction:

- Comments on teaching philosophy
- A summary of past experience with teaching online courses
- Personal information such as hobbies, family, travel experiences, etc.
- A graphic representation, audio message, or video (including alternative formats to ensure accessibility)
- The role of the instructor
- How the instructor prefers to be addressed

#### Examples:

- 1. On the Welcome Page in Canvas, include a written introduction and include images of personal hobbies or travel.
- 2. Add a welcome video supplemented with an introductory discussion forum where learners can interact with the instructor to ask questions, or get any clarification they may need about the course, expectations, etc.

# 1.5 Minimal technology requirements- including reliable internet access, required hardware, software, players, plug-ins, microphone, webcam, etc.- for the course are clearly stated and information on how to obtain the technologies is provided.

Learners are provided detailed information regarding the minimal technologies they will need throughout the course, including information on where they can be obtained. Having appropriate technology and knowledge of related issues—and their solutions—can limit obstacles to a successful online teaching and learning experience It is recommended that these minimum technology requirements are presented in the course syllabus. It is also helpful to provide the necessary resource link to connect to OIT technical support.

#### Examples:

- 1. If speakers, a microphone, or a headset are necessary, the need for such peripherals is clearly stated.
- Links to all downloadable resources are provided. These resources include software and online tools, apps, plug-ins such as Acrobat Reader and Java, media players, MP3 players, wikis, social media, interactive multimedia apps, discussion, or messaging board apps, etc.
- 3. Instructions are provided for how to access materials available through subscription services, including online journals or databases. When available, links are also provided.
- 4. If publisher materials are required, clearly stated instructions for how to obtain and use any required access codes are provided.

## 1.6 Computer skills and digital information literacy skills expected of the learner are clearly stated.

Any hardware, software, or technology applications that are required for successful participation in the course need to be introduced along with resources that support a full range of learner mastery. Access issues need to be mitigated early on in order for learners to succeed. Digital information literacy refers to the ability to locate, evaluate, apply, create, and communicate knowledge using technology.

Scaffolding is supported when these expectations are stated at the beginning of the course providing ample time for the learners to practice, have time to build their skills, and troubleshoot any issues that may arise.

- 1. Include low-stakes practice assignments, so that learners can become comfortable and confident in their skill level with technology tools and literacy skills expected to complete a module or the course.
- 2. A screen-cast video on how to access the tools and find online help and add it to the course along with links to the places explored in the screencast video.
- 3. Create a technology orientation module that includes how-to videos, documentation, and practice assignments. Require that learners complete this module before moving on in the course.
- 4. Links to documentation, video tutorials, and quick reference guides.

## 1.7 Course grading and institutional policies with which the learner is expected to comply are clearly stated within the course, or a link to current policies is provided.

A statement is included about how grades can be viewed and instructions for what students should do if they have questions about grades. Online learners should be able to connect to their campus through the online course including policies and procedural guidelines. The student handbook or other institution-wide policy publications should be made available or easily linked within the beginning of the course. These links may be provided in the Course Worksheet.

Commonly established policies may address such matters as student conduct, academic integrity, late submission of assignments, the grade of "Incomplete," withdrawal without penalty, confidentiality in the classroom, student grievances, electronic communication, proctoring, accessibility. Confirm that the policies are clearly explained.

#### Examples:

A link to more information about students' <u>UT Grades and GPA</u> or other policies related to academic standing provided by <u>OneStop</u> could also be included.

## 1.8 Communication expectations for online discussions, email, and other forms of interaction are clearly stated.

Expectations for how learners communicate online and in the classroom are clearly stated, (such expectations are sometimes referred to as "netiquette"). Types of communication include email, discussion forums, assignments, and other interactions or collaborations.

#### Examples:

- 1. Explain Netiquette; this is also available in the Online Instructors could refer students to the UTK's <u>Principles of Civility and Community</u>.
- 2. A professional and respectful tone and civility are used in communicating with fellow learners and the instructor, whether the communication is by electronic means or by telephone or face-to-face.

### 1.9 Learners have an opportunity to introduce themselves at the beginning of the

#### semester.

Learners are given the opportunity to introduce themselves and guidance on where and how they should do so. Learner introductions at the beginning of the class help to create a welcoming learning environment. Knowing that there are other students in the class that are on this journey experiencing the same things helps students to feel part of a classroom community, which can be a motivating and engaging factor in an online setting.

- 1. Create a class introduction forum for students to "meet" their classmates. Instructors may ask learners to respond to specific questions (such as why they are taking the course, what are their strategies for success, what concerns they have, what they expect to learn, etc.) or may choose to let the learner decide what to include.
- 2. Instructors may ask students to also post a self-introduction in response to the instructor introduction statement or video (Standard 1.10).
- 3. Instructors may give learners the opportunity to represent themselves by text, audio, or visual means.

### 1.10 Course objectives/outcomes, or competencies are clearly defined, measurable, and aligned to learning content, activities, technology, and assessments.

Objectives or competencies are measurable and address the knowledge or mastery learners gain by successfully completing the course. The course objectives are introduced at the beginning of the course either in the syllabus, course overview, or a course map. The activities, assessments, and technology tools showcase how learners have achieved those objectives. All course content, learning activities, interactions and assessments are in alignment with module or course objectives/outcomes. These relationships should be clearly explained to learners to provide relevance to the activities and content.

#### Examples:

- 1. A course map shows how the learning objectives or competencies connect to the learning activities.
  - If using a table, remember to keep accessibility in mind! (From OIT: <u>Best Practices for Accessible</u> <u>Course Materials</u>)
- 2. A module or unit introductory page is provided with a summary or overview of module- or unit-level learning objectives or competencies, related course-level learning objectives or competencies, and course activities (learning activities, assessments, and use of instructional materials).
- **3.** An explanation is provided for how the course-level and module- or unit-level learning objectives or competencies are met through each learning activity.

To verify alignment and/or review relevant standards, refer to following standards: learning content and assessments (2.1), activities (3.1), and technology tools (6.1).

### Standard 2: Assessment/Measurement and Feedback

**Overview Statement:** Assessment and measurement are designed and implemented in alignment with the course learning objectives or competencies and not only allow the instructor a determination of learners' mastery of content, but also allow learners to track their learning progress throughout the course.

### 2.1 Assessments (quizzes, assignments, capstone, etc.) measure the achievement of the stated course learning objectives or competencies.

Course assessments are consistent with the course and module/unit-level learning objectives or competencies (See Standard 1.10 regarding course objectives/outcomes, competencies) by measuring learner progress and mastery of objectives or competencies.

Consistent and regular authentic assessments help learners demonstrate their progress and deficiencies. As learners move through an online course, they should encounter regular assignments, activities, and interactions designed to assess how well they have mastered the learning content, and their progression toward the course or module learning objectives.

#### Examples:

Examples of **alignment** between a learning objective or competency and an assessment:

- 1. An essay or discussion shows learners can "explain" or "describe" something.
- 2. A video of a learner presentation in a foreign language demonstrates that learners can "speak" or "translate" a foreign language.
- 3. Participation in a game reveals learners can "analyze" and "evaluate" complex factors and "make good decisions" that allow progress through the game.

Examples of lack of alignment between a learning objective or competency and an assessment:

- 1. The objective or competency is to "write a persuasive essay," but the assessment is a multiple-choice test.
- 2. The objective or competency is to "create a body of work that illustrates your photographic vision," but the assessment is a 25-page thesis about contemporary photographers.

Some assessments may be geared toward meeting outcomes other than those stated in the course; for example, a course may have a writing component as part of a program-wide writing-across-the-curriculum requirement. This information should be noted within the Course Worksheet.

# 2.2 Course provides opportunities for learners to review their performance and assess their own learning throughout the course (e.g., pre-tests, self-tests with feedback, reflective assignments, peer assessments, etc.)

The course schedule includes opportunities for self-assessment, reflection, peer assessment and feedback opportunities within the course modules, (Refer to Standard 1.2 for course map or assessment schedule).

Self-assessment and reflective assignments play a role in learner self-efficacy and self-regulation, foster learners' abilities to construct meaning, and promote metacognition. Peer-assessment provides learners the opportunity to look at the work of others and apply evaluation criteria to it.

The goal in both these approaches is to improve student work and learning, and also improve skills such analysis, critique, listening, collaboration, problem-solving, metacognition, and more. Both self- and peer-feedback should be viewed as part of a holistic process for supporting students in becoming self-directed learners.

#### Examples:

- 1. Include a non-graded or low stakes Test Your Knowledge quiz at the beginning of each module that learners can use to assess their prior knowledge to help guide and focus their learning efforts.
- 2. Assignments include interactive games and simulations that have feedback built in.
- 3. Practice written assignments that receive feedback, such as journals, reflection papers, or portfolios
- 4. Use rubrics to articulate and provide detailed expectations for assignments and student performance. Rubrics provide a way to set up specific criteria that support course learning outcomes or competencies and are an excellent tool for self or peer evaluations.

#### 2.3 Learners have easy access to a well-designed and up-to-date gradebook.

Online gradebooks provide instructors with the opportunity to automate, customize, and share grades and feedback with learners. Linking back to grading policies from each graded activity will provide more opportunities for learners to understand what is expected from them, the associated guidelines/rubrics, and can help guide their progress through the assignment or graded activity. Including clear course grading policies in both the Course Information and Syllabus materials will also mitigate issues related to learner questions, concerns, or challenges regarding grades received.

#### Examples:

- 1. Provide a direct link to the gradebook within the Course Information, Syllabus, or areas referring to grading policies or assignments.
- 2. Use short titles/headings for assignments to maximize the column views in the Canvas (LMS) gradebook.
- 3. Encourage learners to check the gradebook after every assignment has been graded to be sure that they can access their grades and any associated feedback.

# **2.4** Schedule for providing regular and substantive feedback is shared in the syllabus or course instructions, and consistent with the assessment purpose.

Detailed interaction guidelines are posted and accessible in the Course Information/Syllabus, Course Map, or Course Schedule. These guidelines define course interaction protocols and set expectations on the frequency, response time, and quality of interactions expected from both instructors and learners.

Providing effective, timely feedback is essential to establishing and maintaining instructor presence in online learning environments. Feedback provides engaging interaction while supporting student learning through constructive guidance that builds confidence. Frequent feedback provides students with an indicator of their progress in the course, helping them stay on track to meet instructor expectations and achieve the learning objectives or competencies.

- 1. Provide an initial communications plan including contact information and preferred methods for course communications,
  - a. Provide details regarding how, when, and where instructors will provide extra help, answer questions, respond to emails, and provide feedback on assignments.
  - b. Provide details regarding Virtual Office hours (schedule, calendar, how to book a time).
- 2. Create a schedule for Announcements/Email/Messages to summarize assignments/interactions, explain assignments, and provide reminders/encouragements.
- 3. Send periodic class and individual check-in communications via email or course messages.
- 4. Design and engage in instructor-facilitated discussions and interactions on course concepts, content, activities, assignments, etc.

### Standard 3: Course Content and Activities

**Overview Statement:** Learners benefit more from engaging in instructional activities than from passively receiving content. Standard 3 is a focus on using activities to deliver a variety of content in engaging formats which align module or course objectives.

## 3.1 Course content and activities directly support mastering the learning objectives and/or competencies.

The instructional materials and activities used in the course align with the course and/or module/unit-level learning objectives or competencies (see Standard 1.10) by contributing to the achievement of those objectives or competencies.

The focus of this standard is on the alignment of the instructional materials and activities with the learning objectives and assessments rather than content. Confirming this alignment also ensures the instructional materials are suited to the level of the course.

#### Examples:

- 1. The objective or competency requires that learners deliver a persuasive speech. Activities include choosing an appropriate topic for the speech, creating an outline, and recording a practice of the speech delivery.
- 2. A module objective in a finance class is that students are able to explain the steps in a home buying process. An activity they must complete is an interaction where they match a scenario to the correct step in this process.

## 3.2 Course offers access to multiple engaging resources for presenting content and supporting learning.

The course presents multiple forms of access to relevant instructional materials and activities that may include textbooks and other publications, instructor-created resources, websites, and multimedia. Access may take the form of different types of media used to deliver content such as text, videos, audio recordings, screencast recordings, or interactions. Learners benefit more from activities than from passive presentation of content. When a variety of resources are utilized to present content, learners can connect a relevance to what and why they are learning resulting in a more engaging experience.

#### Examples:

Examples of variety in instructional materials that may meet this Standard:

- 1. A text from a single author, multiple videos, and a selection of websites.
- 2. Several scholarly journal articles as readings, multiple videos, and a few audio podcasts created by the instructor.

### 3.3 Examples, resources, and media across the course reflect the diversity of student identities, experiences, and cultures.

If applicable, meaning if the course uses images of people and environments, the media used supports representation of a variety of student cultures.

#### Examples:

- 1. Images or characters within a scenario activity include a combination of Latino woman, a Caucasian man, and a Black man.
- 2. An intro to supply chain management class uses three video resources. One is a recorded interview with a female small business owner. Another is a Native American man who is a supply chain manager for a large corporation.

## 3.4 Activities promote engagement through the use of active learning (experiential learning, project-based learning, etc.)

Interactive learning activities promote active learning and engagement through three types of interaction: learnercontent, learner-instructor, and learner-learner. Meaningful interactions that promote learners' development of skills are designed as activities to support the course objectives or competencies and may vary with the subject matter, purpose, and level of the course.

Active learning involves learners engaging by "doing" something, such as discovering, processing, or applying concepts and information. Active learning entails guiding learners to increasing levels of responsibility for their own learning.

Activities for learner-instructor interaction might include an assignment or project submitted for instructor feedback; learner-instructor discussion in a synchronous session or an asynchronous discussion board exchange; or a frequently-asked-questions (FAQ) discussion forum moderated by the instructor.

Activities for learner-content interaction might include assigned reading from a textbook, article, or online resource; assigned completion of a workbook or online exercise; or a learning-how-to-learn activity.

Activities for learner-learner interaction might include assigned collaborative activities such as group discussions; small-group projects; group problem-solving assignments; or peer critiques.

Look for opportunities for learner-instructor interaction, learner-content interaction, and, if appropriate to the course, learner-learner interaction.

- 1. Learners are asked to watch examples of effective persuasive speech delivery and identify components of effective delivery, and then receive feedback from the instructor on that assignment.
- 2. Learners are asked to interact with peers by recording a practice of the speech delivery and posting it for peer feedback.

### 3.5 Course content and activities represent current theory, practice, and when applicable, shared in context of current events in the discipline.

The instructional materials are current. Relevance is central to adult learning. When the adult learner can apply a learning activity to practical value beyond the duration of the course, relevance is established between the stated learning objective, the learning activity, and the assessment of that activity.

Decisions on whether the course meets Standard 3.5 may be difficult for reviewers whose expertise is not in the course discipline. Consult with the team Subject Matter Expert and use professional judgment to determine if the materials are current.

#### Examples:

- 1. An introductory computer course might include information on recent trends in data storage and other emerging technologies.
- 2. An English writing course might discuss the purpose of Internet research.
- 3. A chemistry course might include computerized models to demonstrate chemical operations.

# 3.6 Course materials and resources provide source references and permissions for use, copyright and licensing status, or permissions to share where applicable.

Sources for materials used in the course are clearly identified with references and permissions (if applicable). This requirement applies to previously published instructor-created materials, journal articles, publisher materials, textbooks, images, graphic materials, tables, videos, audio recordings, websites, slides, and other forms of multimedia.

The format of references in instructional materials follows the style prescribed in a recognized guide, such as APA, MLA, or Chicago. At minimum, a reference includes the author or owner name; date of publication; resource title, if supplied; and URL or source, such as a publisher.

- 1. A course might include a single document that lists the sources of all materials. Reviewers, examine the course to determine whether materials are referenced.
- 2. Examples of instructional materials for which references are provided:
  - Images that appear in a module
  - Videos that are linked from a video repository tool
  - Journal articles that are linked from a library portal for download

### Standard 4: Learner Interaction

**Overview Statement:** Rich learning experiences include environments where learners can interact with the instructor resulting in a community of inquiry. Providing authentic environments for learner interaction creates deep and meaningful (collaborative-constructivist) learner-to-learner and learner-to-instructor experiences.

# 4.1 Instructor's plan for interacting with students during the course is clearly stated and is easily accessible.

A clear plan for instructor-learner interaction, which includes when learners can expect the instructor's responses to discussion posts and feedback on assignments, helps ensure substantive interaction between instructors and learners during the course.

Frequent feedback from the instructor increases learners' sense of engagement in a course. Learners are better able to manage their learning activities when they know upfront when to expect feedback from the instructor. It's critical that the instructor's presence is felt in the online classroom. This presence is supported when an instructor clearly communicates to the learners how and when he or she will respond to emails and discussion postings and provide feedback on assignments and grades.

This information is recommended to appear early in the course syllabus, "Start Here" folder, and/or within an orientation (Refer to Standard 1.2 Orientation). If it is necessary to alter the response-time plan during the course, the adjustment is clearly communicated to learners.

#### Examples:

Instructors might state that they will reply to emails within 24 hours, and feedback for assignments will be posted within a week after the due date. Additional examples that might be included in the instructor's communication about interactions:

- 1. A statement that learners will receive regular (weekly, daily) announcements that include reminders and information pertinent to the course. Let learners know early in the course what they can expect from you, and what you expect from them.
- 2. A statement that some assignments will receive summary feedback directed to all learners
- 3. Let learners know if you will be traveling, or unavailable at any time during the term.

# 4.2 The requirements for learner interaction and participation (both learner-learner and learner-instructor) are stated and easily accessible.

Expectations for assignments, class participation, due dates, group work, collaboration, and attendance requirements should be clearly articulated and easy to find. Typically, these expectations are stated in the course information page or syllabus. The more specific the expectations, the easier it is for the learner to meet them.

Policies or expectations for learners interacting with their instructor are stated clearly, including if learner responses to instructor-initiated interactions are required. Information should outline a communication policy or guidelines for contacting the instructor, including communication channels and how the instructor prefers to be addressed.

#### Examples:

1. In order to receive full credit for class participation, the learner must initiate a discussion and/or respond substantively to classmates' discussion forum comments in a minimum of one post on four different days each week.

- 2. A discussion forum post is considered substantive if it is at least 250 words in length and presents your original analysis and evaluation, rather than simply a summary, of scholarly perspectives on the discussion topic.
- 3. More specifically, task-related performance expectations may be included in the individual task description. For example, a group project assignment might include expectations for individual participation. The instructor may include a policy on reading and responding to the instructor's and classmates' posts or provide rubrics detailing how learner interactions are evaluated.

# 4.3 Learner interactions intend to build a community of inquiry and promote collaboration to facilitate learning and engagement (e.g., ice-breaking activities, dedicated discussion forums).

A space has been created by instructors for students to interact with one another. Courses that promote class community help learning occur within a social context.

Building a sense of community mitigates the solitude and isolation which is common among online learners. Offer students an opportunity to participate in group activities to help them develop peer-to-peer classroom expectations and take ownership in their learning environment.

#### Examples:

- Social or reflective activities which focus on self-expression about academic and professional goals. Ask for a positive and negative reaction and then something they look forward to. An option is to complete the exercise anonymously with a polling tool like Slido or Mentimeter. The instructor can poll everyone and then ask for volunteers to share with the class. This activity can also be done via chat in small groups using breakout rooms.
- 2. Hold group check-ins for group projects to encourage learner-to-learner interaction.
- 3. Hold an optional "social hour" before class, giving students the opportunity to join early. Students can use this time to ask questions or talk to each other. Set up breakout rooms for group work to overcome scheduling difficulties in light of different time zones

# 4.4 Learner is provided regular engagement opportunities with the instructor throughout the length of the course. (e.g., prompted discussion boards, emails, office hours).

Course provides opportunities scheduled throughout the course for learners to interact with the instructor (learner-to-instructor interaction). These opportunities can be established by creating a discussion board which the instructor manages, scheduled open office hours, or a Q&A session for each assignment. These scheduled interactions should be present, communicated, and easily accessible throughout the course.

- 1. Create an early, low stakes, assignment in the course to give learners the opportunity to practice using the course communication tools, trouble shoot problems, and create a reliable communication loop.
- 2. Discussion boards that the instructor regularly checks and participates in.
- 3. Include an assignment to schedule a 1-on-1 office hour twice per quarter with students to get to know them, check-in, and receive their feedback in the most productive way.

### Standard 5: Learner Support and Wellness

**Overview Statement:** It is important to ensure online learners know they have access to and are encouraged to use the institution, program, and department-level support services. In the *Learner Support and Wellness Standard*, five kinds of support services are addressed: academic support, accessibility and mental support, technical support, and program/department level support.

## 5.1 Course instructions articulate or link to UTK's academic support services and resources that help learners succeed in the course.

A description and access to support services and resources is included in the course instructions (Instructions noted in Standard 1.1) and is prominently located as part of the introduction to the course. Academic support services and resources may include an online orientation; access to library resources; testing services; tutoring; non-native language services; writing and/or math centers; tutorials or other forms of guidance on conducting research, using an online writing lab, etc.

The purpose of this standard is not to evaluate the adequacy of these services and resources on the university level but rather to determine if academic support services and resources are provided for learners and if the course contains information about the services and how to access them.

#### Examples:

- 1. On the Welcome page or Syllabus, include a description about the University of Tennessee's Academic Support Services website, with information and links about the online support available.
- 2. Within the instructor's introduction page or video, mention the support services available to online students and where they can find them on the welcome page, syllabus, and Canvas module.
- 3. A link to the library, including information on how to gain access to library materials and databases, and how to contact a librarian should be added on the welcome page, syllabus, and Canvas module.

## 5.2 Course instructions articulate or link to UTK's accessibility, mental health, wellness, and recreational support services.

A description and access to non-academic, wellness support services and resources is included in the course instructions (Instructions noted in Standard 1.1) and is prominently located as part of the introduction to the course. Non-academic support services and resources include accessibility or accommodation policies, Mental Health Services, and Recreation Services.

The purpose of this standard is not to evaluate the adequacy of these services and resources but rather to determine if information and access to accessibility, mental health, and recreation support is provided for learners.

- 1. In the course welcome page, a statement with contact information informing the learner how to obtain the UTK disability and counseling support services.
- 2. A Module/Unit is created and named "Self-Care!" within Canvas specifically providing descriptions and links to Mental Health, Recreation Support, tips to avoid stress, and other self-care resources for students.

### 5.3 Course instructions articulate or link to UTK's technical support offered and how to obtain it.

A description of and access to technical support services and resources is included in the course instructions (Instructions noted in Standard 1.1) and is prominently located as part of the introduction to the course. The technical support information may also be provided within minimal technology requirements as determined in Standard 1.5. UTK's technical support services and resources are provided by the <u>Office of Innovative</u> <u>Technologies</u>.

The purpose of this standard is not to evaluate the adequacy of these services and resources but rather to determine if information and access to OIT's Technical Support is identified and provided for learners.

#### Examples:

- 1. A clear description of the technical support services provided by the institution, including a link to a technical support website is available in the Syllabus and Welcome Page.
- 1. An email link is available on each module overview to OIT technical support or help desk is available.
- 2. Links to tutorials or other resources providing instructions on how to use the tools and features of Canvas and other course OIT supported technologies.

NOTE: Requirements or skillsets needed in order to use certain technology tools are addressed in Standard 6.4.

### 5.4 Department and program level support services are made available and easily accessible within the course introduction and/or Syllabus.

Learners have access to services provided by their academic program and/or department's such as department office hours, advising, and resources from within the course or the learning management system. The purpose is not to review the adequacy of those services at a department/program level but rather to determine if support services are provided for learners and that the course contains information about the services and how to access them.

#### Examples:

1. There is a link to the program advising and resources webpage from the welcome page and course syllabus.

NOTE: It is possible this standard is not applicable to all courses. This should be indicated in the Course Worksheet.

### Standard 6: Course Technology and Tools

**Overview Statement:** The technologies enabling the various tools used in the course facilitate rather than impede the learning process, are easily accessible, and align with course learning outcomes.

NOTE: Technical Support is addressed in Standard 5.3.

### 6.1 The tools used in the course support the learning objectives, competencies, or course outcomes.

The tools selected for the course align with the course and module/unit-level objectives or competencies (learning objectives or competencies provided in Standard 1.2) by effectively supporting the course's assessments (Standard 2.1), instructional materials and content (Standard 3.1), and learning activities (Standard 3.4).

Tools are types of software and applications that enable learner interaction and may be used for content delivery or providing feedback in the course; they may be included in or external to Canvas.

Clear information and instructions are provided regarding how the tools support the learning objectives or competencies. For example, a course that requires posting to a discussion forum has clear information about how the discussions support a learning objective or competency.

Examples of tools include, but are not limited to, discussion boards, online chat rooms, social media, games, whiteboards, blogs, web conferencing, announcements, interactive activities, plagiarism detection tools, video repositories, online proctoring tools, and collaboration tools. These tools can include **3rd party platforms such as** Cengage, Pearson, etc.

#### **Examples:**

- A course objective requires learners to compare and contrast two different famous Supreme Court cases. The Canvas assignment tool is used for learners to submit a short essay comparing and contrasting the two cases.
- "Students are able to navigate through an art museum to research 18<sup>th</sup> century paintings" is a learning objective in an Art Appreciation course. Learners use an interactive museum floorplan map as an activity to explore the National Gallery of Art.

#### 6.2 The tools used in the course promote learner engagement.

Tools used in the course help learners actively engage in the learning process rather than passively absorb information. The selected course tools help the learner actively engage in the course by facilitating ongoing interactions with the instructor, course materials, and other learners.

While specific tools are not required for this standard to be met, tools that support learner engagement and active learning, such as blogs, simulations, games, podcasts, and virtual worlds should be available.

The Course Worksheet should provide information about whether the course has limitations on using technology tools.

- 1. Tools using software that facilitates interaction in real-time (synchronous), such as collaborative tools, webinars, and virtual worlds.
- 2. An asynchronous scenario activity using Materia provides a "choose your adventure" style assignment. Feedback is automatically provided depending on the students' choices.
- 3. A lecture is recorded and posted for students using Panopto. Throughout the lecture the video automatically pauses for a question to be answered by the student.

### 6.3 Frequently used technology and tools are prominent and easily accessible. (Unused tools are hidden from the main menu.)

Software and tools that learners will be using most frequently are placed, noted, and linked either in the established course navigation menu and/or a variety of prominent areas of the course. These areas could be, but not limited to, in the syllabus, within a module overview if the tool is used in the module/unit, within the assignment description where a software or tool is required.

If resources or tools are no longer being used in the course, be sure to remove associated links from any course navigation menus. Learners rely on consistent navigation cues (established menus, etc.), however a link to a tool that they no longer need can be considered a distraction in the course.

#### Examples:

1. If the student is required to record videos to document the progression of a capstone project, the asset Panopto should be made available on the established Canvas course menu, as well as, in each assignment description applicable to the capstone.

### 6.4 Requisite skills for using technology tools, including websites, software, and hardware are clearly stated and supported with resources.

Any hardware, software, or technology applications that are required for successful participation in the course need to be introduced along with resources that support a full range of learner mastery. Skill levels need to be established and explained so that learners know what level of expertise is required in order to fully participate in the course. This information needs to be communicated to learners in the syllabus and/or module overviews. It is good practice to reinforce these resources and skillsets throughout the term. This information could be aligned and included with Standard 1.5, "Computer skills and digital information literacy skills expected of the learner are clearly stated."

#### Examples:

- 1. Links with descriptions, video tutorials or quick reference guides are available in an activity description where a 3<sup>rd</sup> party tool is used by learners.
- 2. A screen-cast video on how to access the tools and find online help is added within an assignment utilizing a new tool.
- 3. A PDF is available for download with all technology tool instructions and links to more information or technology requirements. This PDF would be best available within the introduction/description of the learning activity.

### 6.5 Students master required technical skills through orientation, practice, and application.

If learners are required to use technology (hardware or software) they need ample time to orient themselves to the tools and features that they will be expected to use. They need time to practice using those features before there is a graded assessment utilizing those tools. In the context of supporting technical skill competency in an online course, scaffolding is necessary to move learners through mastery levels. This is done through a process of orientation, practice, and application.

#### Examples:

- 1. If learners are required to master any technology at the very start of the course, include low-stakes practice assignments, so that they can become comfortable and confident in their skill level.
- 2. Create a technology orientation module that includes how-to videos, documentation, and practice assignments. Require that learners complete this module before moving on in the course.
- 3. Have learners who are highly skilled in the required technology serve as a skills tutor for other learners in the course.

#### 6.6 Course provides learners with information on protecting their data and privacy.

Steps learners can take to protect their privacy with course activities, tool usage, and interactions with others are provided. Tools used in the course (both faculty-selected and institutionally integrated) include links to the privacy policies provided by the creators of the tools. Links to any university level privacy policies are provided.

#### **Examples:**

Policies where learners need information:

- 1. Privacy policies for publisher resources and integrations
- 2. Links to the privacy policies of social media and third-party websites being used
- 3. Links to the privacy policies of external tools integrated into Canvas, such as plagiarism detection tools, messaging tools, collaboration tools, and assistive technology.
- 4. Use of texting tool settings that do not allow learners to see one another's phone numbers (e.g., GroupMe)

## 6.7 Institutionally supported technology and 3rd party tools provide a link or reference to an accessibility policy statement.

The accessibility policies for all technology tools used within the course and supported by UTK are linked to the university's technology accessibility policies. 3<sup>rd</sup> party tools not supported by the university also link to information on accessing the 3<sup>rd</sup> party accessibility policy or VTAP is provided.

This standard is not a review of the accessibility of technology tools but rather that accessibility policies are available and accessible to the students within the course.

#### Examples:

1. A PDF is available for download with all tools listed and links to their accessibility statement. This PDF would be best available within the introduction/description of the learning activity.

### Standard 7: Accessibility and Universal Course Design

**Overview Statement:** The course design utilizes the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and reflects a commitment to accessibility, ensuring all learners can access all course content and activities, and to usability, ensuring all learners can easily navigate and interact with course components.

### 7.1 The course provides alternative means of access to multimedia content in multiple formats (e.g., text and audio) that meet the needs of diverse learners.

Multimedia, such as audio and video, are accessible to all learners. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines regarding multimedia address reducing barriers to access so all learners can interact with course content. The international <u>Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)</u> provide additional guidance for achieving accessibility in multimedia.

Consider the abilities or access of all learners when reviewing the course. For example, if the learner had no vision or no hearing, would the learner have access to all meaning and the ability to complete all activities in the course?

#### Examples:

Alternative means of access for different types of multimedia content can include:

- 1. Video, animations, audio have text transcripts readily available.
- 2. An anthropology course requires a 3D simulation activity within a module, there is an alternative scenario activity that is text and image based providing the same information. This removes a bandwidth barrier for learners.
- 3. If there is a "drag and drop" interaction use, there is also a fill in the blank option. This provides an alternative activity for learners using screen readers.

## 7.2 An organized layout (i.e., logical, consistent, uncluttered) is established for easy navigation on the Canvas (LMS) pages.

Navigation refers to the process of planning, controlling, and recording the movement of a learner from one place to another within the online course. The course is easy to navigate using consistent color and design schemes, related content organized together, and self-evident titles throughout all landing pages, modules/units, and assignments. It is best practice to use chunking and blocking for large amounts of information in order to create a digestible learning experience.

Organization is one of the most important parts of an online course, and complicated course layout and poor navigation links contribute directly to learner confusion and poor learning experience overall (Bristol and Zerwekh, 2011).

- 1. Create sequential modules that include meaningful headings that reflect the subject matter covered.
- Download or create a graphic icon set that you can use to guide learners about learning asset types. Assignments can be depicted by a check-mark icon, for example, and discussions by a conversation icon. Use these consistently throughout the course.
- 3. Create your first module and review it with a campus instructional designer or experienced online instructor. Then use this module as a template to create the other modules in your course.

## 7.3 Content provided is based on accessibility standards. (Includes text, font usage, tables, etc.)

Text, tables, and other documents used in the course are accessible to all learners. The use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines regarding text and images reduces barriers for access so all learners can interact with course content.

If a course or website is fully accessible, most learners will be able to access content, complete activities, and interact with others without the need for accommodations.

If a course or website has barriers to accessibility, learners with disabilities will require accommodations to access content, complete activities, and interact with others.

This standard focuses on evidence of accessible design, not on the availability of accommodations.

#### Text Examples:

- 1. Titles and headings establish visual hierarchy and enhance the learner's experience creating a pattern or sequence through the learning content. This will help learners find their way and visually guide their progress through the course.
- 2. Do not include any flashing or blinking text. If something is critical for learners to grasp, or stop and think about; use graphical elements, such as a stop sign, or question mark.
- 3. A sans-serif font with a standard size of at least 12 pt. is used.
- 4. Text colors alone are not relied on to convey meaning. The meaning is also conveyed in another way that does not require perceiving different colors.
- 5. Underlined text is avoided unless used for navigation.

#### Table Examples:

- 1. All tables are set up as text and not embedded as images. They are not presented as screen captures.
- 2. Tables are set up with headings for columns and rows and are used only for summarizing data, not for formatting. Tables have captions, alt-text, or alt-tags, and are formatted so that headings repeat.

### *NOTE: See course worksheet for applicable or non-applicable course requirements to verify if Standard 7.3 can be met.*

### 7.4 Text content is available in an easily accessed format, preferably HTML. All text content is readable by assistive technology, including a PDF or any text contained in an

#### image.

Any text available to students for content delivery is accessible by a screen reader. Text content is easier for screen readers to process, assuming that it is available in HTML. Instead of displaying as visual content, screen readers convert course text to speech so that learners can listen to the course content. Screen readers insert pauses for periods, semi-colons, commas, question marks, exclamation points, and ends of paragraphs.

- 1. Document or HTML titles, headings, etc., are formatted using styles (Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.) found in the word processing software (such as Word) style gallery; they do not merely utilize a larger or bold or italic font.
- 2. PDFs that contain text are not merely image scans; any text contained in PDFs is selectable and searchable.

#### 7.5 For every image a text equivalent ("alt" tag) is provided.

The course provides alternatives to all images so that all learners have access to equivalent information. In instances in which alternative formats are provided, the general accuracy of the alternate content is verified.

#### Examples:

- 1. When using images with complex information, such as a chart, diagram, or illustration, consider how to convey the information contained in the image using both the alt-text and the adjacent page text.
- 2. Add alt text all non-decorative images.
- 3. Keep it short and descriptive, like a tweet.
- 4. Don't include "image of" or "photo of".
- 5. Leave alt text blank if the image is purely decorative.

#### 7.6 For video-only a text equivalent (caption, transcript) is provided.

The course provides alternatives to audio so that all learners have access to equivalent information. In instances in which alternative formats are provided, the general accuracy of the alternate content is verified. Captions should be available for the entire length of video and/or downloadable transcript available. **Examples:** 

- 1. When a lecture is reordered in Panopto, verify that automatic closed captions are created and correct. Edit if needed.
- 2. A scenario of mediation is used in an introductory law course. Videos of the mock mediation are included. A downloadable transcript is provided for each video for reference.

# 7.7 Text, images, or objects, which contain working hyperlinks, provides a description, and makes sense out of context. Descriptions are easily read by assistive technology (avoid using "click here")

Links clearly explain where they are taking users. Links should be described by using concrete (or proper) nouns or action verbs. Whether it is a text, image, or object hyperlink a description is provided which is accessible to assistive technology screen readers as to where the user will be taken when accessed.

- 1. **Text**: should be informative phrases such as "today's weather", "more about speech therapy", "watch this video on Phytotechnology".
- 2. **Icons:** alt text for icons should be the equivalent to the information intended by the icon, such as "Download PDF" or "Visit our Facebook Page"
- 3. **Images as Links:** If the image is being used to link to another page, the alt text should describe what will happen when the image is clicked (rather than what it looks like). For example, the alt text for an image of a question mark links to a help page should be "Contact Support" rather than "question mark."