Quality Standards for Online Courses (QSOC)

Course Overview, Introduction, and Student Resources

1. **Clear guidance is included on how to get started with the course.**

It should be clear how students get started with the course. Consider including a "Getting Started", "Start Here" or similar section in Blackboard that includes pertinent course introduction information. An introductory video that walks students through the course is another way to provide clear guidance on how to get started with the course.
Include how the course is structured. Clearly state your methods of collecting and returning work and where students can find various course components including the syllabus and schedule, student resources, course policies, and procedures.

2. **A detailed syllabus is easily located within the course.**

A detailed syllabus, which includes a schedule of modules, should be easily located within Blackboard. Modules can be organized by chapters, units, weeks, topics, or other organizational structures. A primary purpose of a syllabus is to communicate to your students what the course is about, why it is taught, where it is going, and what will be required for them to complete the course with a passing grade. Because students will view your syllabus as a kind of "contract," it is important to be as clear as possible, and to avoid changing major aspects of the syllabus after the first day of class. View [Steps to a Good Syllabus](#), [Syllabus Best Practices](#), and [Syllabus Templates](#) on the Center for Teaching Excellence's website for additional information on creating a quality syllabus.

3. **The syllabus clearly outlines academic integrity expectations.**

Safeguarding academic integrity in the online environment is essential. It is important to minimize the potential for academic integrity violations. Your syllabus should clearly outline academic integrity expectations. Below are some suggestions:

- The design of assessments should minimize opportunities for academic integrity violations (e.g., by use of date/time restrictions, randomized questions, Respondus Lockdown Browser or Respondus Monitor for timed tests, ProctorU, SafeAssign for graded written work).
- Include a clear policy on acceptable use of social media as it relates to course content.
- Create a clear policy on the dissemination of course materials and assignments external to the course environment.
- Include course requirements for students to demonstrate understanding of Academic Integrity expectations (e.g., complete an academic integrity quiz, sign an Honor Code agreement, etc.)
- Highlight the need for students to report academic integrity violations that are not their own to avoid complicity.

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- Include specific penalties for not adhering to academic integrity expectations.

Additional Resources

Academic Integrity
Student Conduct and Academic Integrity
Grading and Testing Online
Distributed Learning: Exams and Testing
Online Assessment Best Practices for Faculty

4. **Minimum technology requirements are clearly stated.**

Include the technical requirements students will need for the course, such as Internet access, types of Internet connections, software, hardware and if students will need additional technology. Include the minimum technical skills needed and how the technology relates to the course.

Example minimum technology requirements include:

- Reliable Internet access
- Webcams, microphones, Virtual Reality Googles, etc.
- Links to downloadable resources (e.g., Office 365, Adobe Reader, other software)

Example technology skills include:

- Use the Blackboard Learning Management System
- Use Blackboard Collaborate Ultra
- Create documents in Microsoft Word
- Create a PowerPoint presentation
- Download and upload documents
- Check email

Consider including practice opportunities for students to engage with technologies (e.g., Blackboard tests, environment check for proctored tests, microphone, and camera check) at the start of the course or prior to the due date for activities and assignments.

5. **Information on technical support offered and how to obtain the support is included.**

Include necessary information about technology support from the University or 3rd party vendors. The DoIT Service Desk is a single point of contact for computer, technology and IT-related questions and support (including Blackboard).

Assistance can be obtained in any of the following ways:

- Submit a request online through the Self-Service Portal
- Search the online Knowledge Base

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- [Chat](#) online with a Service Desk technician. Available Monday-Friday, 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
- Call the IT Service Desk at 803-777-1800 or submit a service ticket at [sc.edu/ithelp](#) (24/7 Blackboard Support)

6. **Course and institutional policies are clearly stated.**

Include any course or institutional policies that students need to be aware of. This is where expectations are set for student behavior as learners and as people. Decide which policies are included based on your course. It is strongly suggested to include policies regarding academic integrity and late submission. Other policies may include student conduct, incomplete grades, withdrawal without penalty, confidentiality, or course communication.

Additional Resources

[Syllabus Templates](#)
[Example Syllabus Statements](#)

7. **The grading scale and policy are clearly stated.**

Include a grading policy that is clearly stated and includes the grading scale, weights of each graded assignment, and explanation of how grades (A-F) will be assigned.

The Pass-Fail grading option is an option that can be selected by students for a course. If students select this option, performance in the course does not affect their grade point average. If Pass-Fail is an option for your course, your syllabus must indicate the minimum grade (points, percentage) required for a "pass".

Required only for 500-600 level courses: Different requirements for undergraduate versus graduate credit should be clearly identified in two distinct grading scales. According to [ACAF 2.03](#), *"*Course syllabi must specify how the requirements for the course are quantitatively and qualitatively different for undergraduate and graduate credit. Requirements for graduate credit must reflect additional depth and rigor relative to requirements for undergraduate credit. Failure to complete the differential requirements for graduate credit should result in at least one letter grade deficit for the course."

8. **Information on academic and student support resources that are available to students is included.**

Provide instructions to articulate or a link to an explanation of how the University's academic support and student support can assist students in effectively using the resources provided; including how to access:

- [Blackboard](#)
- [Technology Support](#)

- Counseling Services
- Mental Health
- Student Success Center
- Student Disability Resource Center
- University Libraries
- Writing Center

9. **Information on how students obtain disability related accommodations is included.**

Provide students with the contact information for the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC). SDRC empowers students to manage challenges and limitations imposed by disabilities. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact you to discuss the logistics of any accommodations needed to fulfill course requirements within a timely manner. To receive reasonable accommodations, students must be registered with the Student Disability Resource Center (1705 College Street, Close-Hipp Suite 102, Columbia, SC 29208, 803-777-6142).

10. **The self-introduction by the instructor is included.**

An instructor introduction helps create a sense of community between you and your students. The introduction also assists students with getting to know you. Instructor self-introductions can include the following:

- Name and title
- Photo and/or video
- Teaching philosophy
- Personal information
- Research interests

Include a video introduction and/or text introduction in Blackboard.

Additional Resources

Teaching Online? Introduce Yourself with a Video
Course Introductions

11. **Students are asked to introduce themselves to the class.**

Having students introduce themselves to peers at the start of the course helps create a sense of community. Consider including prompts for student to respond or specific questions for students to answer. Ice breaker activities can be used to help create a sense of community.

12. Accessibility policies or statements are included (or linked) for all technologies.

Include the accessibility policies/statements for technologies used in the course. Accessibility policies can be included in the course syllabus or the "Getting Started" section of the course. Example technology accessibility policies include:

- Blackboard
- Pearson
- iClicker
- McGraw Hill Education
- Macmillan Learning
- Zoom

13. Privacy policies or statements are included (or linked) for all technologies.

Include the privacy policies or statements for technologies used in the course. Privacy policies can be included in the course syllabus or the "Getting Started" section of the course. Example technology privacy policies include:

- Blackboard
- Pearson
- iClicker
- McGraw Hill Education
- Macmillan Learning
- Zoom

Course Interactions

14. Expected expectations of student-instructor, student-content, and student-student interactions are clearly stated.

Include an appropriate combination of student-instructor, student-content, and student-student interactions. Clearly state the requirements for student interaction.
Example activities for student-instructor interactions include:

- Discussion boards moderated by you
- Your participation in public or private blogs
- Assignments submitted for feedback from you
- You and your students participating in synchronous sessions on Blackboard Collaborate Ultra
- Hosting virtual office hours

Example activities for student-content interactions include:

- Textbook readings
- Assigned articles
- Simulations
- Videos (instructor created or 3rd party)
- Chapter notes
- PowerPoint Presentations

Example activities for student-student interactions include:

- Group discussions
- Group projects
- Group case studies
- Peer critiques
- Peer instruction
- Peer reviews
- Synchronous debates on Blackboard Collaborate Ultra

Include a netiquette statement that highlights guidelines for communicating online.

Additional Resources

Course Activities and Learner Interaction
Student Interaction Online
Netiquette Statement

15. Communication and feedback turnaround time is clearly specified.

Clearly state the communication and feedback turnaround time to students. Consider creating a communication plan. Plan what and how you will communicate with students. Consider responding to emails within 72 hours. State how long it will take you to provide feedback on assignments.

16. Information on communicating with the instructor is provided to students.

Provide information on how students should communicate with you. Include your office hours in your syllabus. Include the best way to communicate with you (e.g., telephone, Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, instant messaging).

Instructional Design

17. The course is organized in modules.

Structure your course in manageable sections so students can easily locate course content. Include all course content (readings, videos, assignments, assessments, etc.) within the module. Modules can be organized by chapters, units, weeks, topics, or other organizational structures. Course content should be logically sequenced in the order students access the materials.

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18. Course learning outcomes are measurable and clear.

Learning outcomes describe the measurable skills, abilities, knowledge, or values that students should be able to do or demonstrate as a result of a completing your course. Learning outcomes are student-centered rather than instructor-centered, in that they describe what the students will do, not what the instructor will teach.

Course learning outcomes should be SMART:

- Specific: The learning outcome should be well defined and clear. It states exactly what will be accomplished.
- Measurable: The learning outcome should provide a benchmark or target so that the institution can determine when the target has been reached, by how much it has been exceeded or by how much it has fallen short.
- Agreed Upon: Important stakeholders must be in general agreement with the institution's mission, goals and learning outcomes. Stakeholders may include university, school administration, faculty, students, alumni and/or community members.
- Realistic: Learning outcomes should be reasonable given the available resources. Learning outcomes should neither be easy nor impossible to attain, but somewhere in between.
- Time-Framed: A learning outcome should include a specific date by which it will be completed. It is important to allow enough time to successfully implement the steps needed to achieve the objective, but not so much as to elicit procrastination.

Carolina Core courses are required to have uniformed learning outcomes. You should not modify Carolina Core learning outcomes – even if they are not measurable or clear. If the learning outcomes for your Carolina Core course are not measurable, be sure to create measurable and clear module learning objectives.

Additional Resources

Learning Outcomes
Revised Bloom's Taxonomy Action Verbs
Carolina Core – Learning Outcomes and Syllabus Guides

19. Module learning objectives are measurable, clear, and consistent with the course learning outcomes.

Similar to course learning outcomes, module learning objectives describe the measurable skills, abilities, knowledge, or values that students should be able to do or demonstrate as a result of completing a module. The objectives should align with course learning outcomes. Module learning objectives describe specific skills students should learn within the module.

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Additional Resources

[Writing Module Learning Objectives](#)
[Writing Module-Based Learning Objectives](#)

20. Instructional materials, assessments, and activities contribute to the achievement of learning outcomes and objectives.

Instructional materials, assessments, activities, and activities should align with and be consistent with the course learning outcomes and the module learning objectives. Instructional materials include content within a course. Instructional materials may include, but are not limited to, textbook readings, articles, videos, podcasts, Open Educational Resources (OERs), publisher resources, and lecture notes.

Assessments determine how well students are learning course content and meeting the goals of the course. It should be clear that assessments measure the achievement of learning outcomes/objectives. Assessments may include, but are not limited to, annotated bibliographies, blogs, critical reviews, digital storytelling, ePortfolios, essays, exams, field work, journals, online labs, literature reviews, peer reviews, presentations, projects, quizzes, reports, role play, self-assessments, and wikis. Consider including a variety of formative assessments to gauge student progress throughout the course.

Learning activities facilitate students' achievement of course learning outcomes and module learning objectives. Course activities should be suited to the level of the course. Learning activities may include, but are not limited to, case studies, class discussions, concept maps, simulations, student presentations, creating outlines, debates, free writing, interviewing, journaling, musical composition, service learning, practicing a speech, simulations, solving a problem, virtual field trips, virtual labs, and writing reflections.

Additional Resources

[Alignment](#)
[Technology Tools and Resources](#)
[Plan and Design Your Course](#)
[Best Practices for Synchronous Online Courses](#)
[Online Course Development](#)
[Online Assessment Best Practices for Faculty](#)

21. Assignments include instructions and grading criteria (e.g., detailed checklist, rubric, other evaluation instrument).

Include detailed instructions and how students will be assessed for each assignment in the syllabus and/or Blackboard. Provide the grading criteria that will be used to evaluate student work. The criteria should provide students with your expectations and how work will be evaluated. Grading criteria can be in the form of a detailed checklist, rubric, or other instrument.

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Additional Resources

[Creating Grading Criteria](#)
[Grading Student Work](#)
[Creating and Using Rubrics](#)

22. Course modules include introductory information (e.g., module overview, to-do list) on how students navigate through the module.

Provide students with guidance on how to navigate through modules. Include module learning objectives within modules. Consider including an overview to introduce modules. Include a to-do list, task list, or assignment list for students to follow.

23. An appropriate range of active learning techniques is included.

Active learning is a student-centered approach in which you use instructional strategies that engage students as active participants throughout the learning process. Consider including a variety of active learning techniques within your course.

Your role is very important in an active learning environment. You have a more passive role, which includes:

- Guiding students in the learning process
- Creating a welcoming and supportive learning environment
- Designing meaningful course activities
- Facilitating reflections
- Providing constructive feedback
- Using assessment data to create new learning experiences

Active learning can:

- Provide insight into students' prior knowledge
- Help students gauge their own understanding of course concepts
- Increase student motivation and engagement
- Promote the application of problem-solving skills
- Improve critical thinking skills
- Re-energize and refocus a lesson
- Assist students with creating personal connections
- Create a sense of community in the learning environment
- Promote student-student and student-instructor interactions

Additional Resource

[Active Learning in Online Teaching](#)

24. Appropriate technology tools are used to facilitate learning.

Select appropriate technology tools to facilitate learning. Select tools that allow students to actively engage in your course. Example tools include simulations, blogs, wikis, discussion boards, virtual reality headsets, Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, self-check quizzes, podcasts, and games.

Additional Resource

Teaching Resources: Technology

Instructional Materials

25. Posted resources and materials are appropriately cited and comply with copyright laws.

Include references for all posted resources and materials. Resources include, but are not limited to, images, journal articles, textbook publisher materials, websites, PowerPoint presentations, audio, and videos.

Copyright infringement should be avoided. Resources and materials should be either Open Educational Resources (OERs), paid for, offered through University Libraries, or appropriately linked. Staff in University Libraries can help you find materials that can embed directly into Blackboard. These materials can also save your students money. Visit the University Libraries website for details on how they can help you.

Additional Resources

University Libraries: Copyright
University Libraries: Open Educational Resources

26. Instructional videos are viewable and organized in short segments.

Create high quality videos in an appropriate setting. Be sure that audio can easily be heard. Consider breaking down content into smaller, more manageable pieces to ensure student success. Provide short lecture segments (no more than 20 minutes), separated by other activities to allow students to master course material. Include captions for your videos.

Additional Resources

Best Practices for Recording Lectures for Online Courses

6 Tips for Creating Engaging Video Lectures That Students Will Actually Watch
Digital Accessibility: Captioning and Transcripts

27. Resources and materials used are relevant and current.

Include a variety of relevant instructional materials. Review and update your course content periodically to ensure it is up-to-date and current.

Accessibility and Usability

28. The course structure is consistent, intuitive, and easy to navigate.

Students should be able to easily navigate through your course. It should be easy for students to locate all course materials. Use a similar sequence for all modules for consistency.

29. Optical Character Recognition (OCR) is performed on scanned PDF files.

Documents scanned and saved as PDFs are impossible for those using screen readers to access without taking a few extra steps to make them accessible. As a minimal level of PDF accessibility, Optical Character Recognition (OCR) should be performed on all scanned PDF files.

Once OCR has been performed, documents can be read by text-to-speech programs and text can be copied and pasted. The text will also be searchable.

Additional Resources

Digital Accessibility: Documents & PDFs
WebAIM: PDF Accessibility
Checking PDFs for Accessibility

30. Posted files (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.) are accessible and usable by screen readers.

Many documents are not accessible, which makes it difficult or impossible for screen readers to read the content to users. Below are tips for creating accessible course content outlined by the Office of Digital Accessibility.

- Only share content as a document when absolutely necessary.
- Provide a content hierarchy with headings and subheadings.
- Use the list option provided by your software toolbar.
- Consider alternative text for all images.
- Identify the document's language.
- Use tables correctly.
- Make text easy to read.
- Check your accessibility before uploading.

Check out the guides and tutorials on making files accessible on the Digital Accessibility website.

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Additional Resources

Word Document Accessibility Guide
PowerPoint Accessibility Guide
Digital Accessibility: Spreadsheets & Tables
Keynote Accessibility Guide
Google Slides Accessibility Guide
Contrast Checker

31. Videos are accurately captioned and/or accompanied by a transcript (if the video cannot be captioned).

As noted in the guide for captioning on the Digital Accessibility website, creating captions and transcripts for your videos is an important step to ensure everyone has the opportunity to engage with your content and that you're complying with legally required digital accessibility guidelines. Every time you create a video to be shared with others, you will need to ensure the video is properly captioned. This will make your content more usable for all viewers, including people who:

- Are trying to listen in a noisy environment.
- Have hearing loss or impairments.
- Prefer to read captions due to the way they learn and absorb content.
- Are non-native speakers.
- Are having trouble understanding the speaker for any reason.

Staff in the Office of Distributed Learning (ODL) will caption videos for you. Contact ODL for more information or submit a request.

Additional Resources

Digital Accessibility: Captions & Transcripts
Editing YouTube Captions
Paid Captioning Services

32. Audio files are accompanied by an accurate transcript.

As noted in the guide for captioning on the Digital Accessibility website, creating transcripts for your audio files is an important step to ensure everyone has the opportunity to engage with your content and that you're complying with legally required digital accessibility guidelines. Every time you create an audio file to be shared with others, you will need to provide a transcript. The link to your transcript should be readily available from the screen where you are sharing the audio file. This will make your content more usable for all viewers, including people who:

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- Are trying to listen in a noisy environment.
- Have hearing loss or impairments.
- Prefer to read captions due to the way they learn and absorb content.
- Are non-native speakers.
- Are having trouble understanding the speaker for any reason.

Additional Resources

Office of Digital Accessibility: Transcripts

Contact the Office of Distributed Learning for assistance with transcripts.

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