

BEST PRACTICES

for

WNCC ONLINE FACULTY

Western Nevada Community College supports online education as one method of delivering flexible, high-quality education to students. Online education can reach a diverse population of learners and provide educational access to students that would normally be restricted by distance, schedule, or physical challenges. WNCC's course offerings are designed to combine the rigorous, high-quality instruction of traditional courses with the flexibility of online teaching. Faculty members should ensure the highest standards of academic integrity and performance in online courses. This document is intended as a guidebook of what is expected of online instructors at WNCC.

Course Quality:

All practices of providing quality education apply, such as encouraging faculty/staff contact, developing reciprocity and cooperation among students, encouraging active learning, providing prompt feedback, emphasizing time on task, communicating high expectations, and respecting diverse abilities and learning styles (Chickering and Gamson, 1996). Web classes are required to have the same standards as traditional courses and to require the same amount of work and time.

Faculty Planning and Training:

As professionals, faculty members are responsible for demonstrating adequate skills in the use of the chosen medium of instruction. They may meet these obligations through in-house or outside training, specialized workshops, or demonstrated experience. In any case, faculty members who teach online will demonstrate the skills necessary to manage the delivery system (i.e.: WebCT), communicate effectively online, and an understanding of the special pedagogy of online education before being approved as an online educator at WNCC.

Faculty members should allow extra time for training, program changes, and logistical problems. Ask for assistance from the campus web facilitator or from other web faculty. Consider partnering with other instructors to exchange ideas or to cover classes in case of an emergency. Faculty members are encouraged to pursue active self-assessment by continually considering the skills and ideas students need to learn, how well they are learning them and what can be done to help students learn better. Faculty members are encouraged to expand their own skill set through continued professional development activities.

Course Design:

- **Resources:** Faculty members should design courses based on the same ideas they use for designing traditional courses, while incorporating the benefits of online teaching and minimizing the limitations. For example, take advantage of the myriad of online resources and the world-wide academic community. This

allows students to develop their skills at research and evaluation, exposes them to a wider world of thought and experience, and allows the instructor to focus on mentoring and thinking rather than doing prep work that has already been done elsewhere.

- **Technology:** Technology should add value to a course and directly contribute to desired learning goals. Faculty members should design courses with technology that targets the widest range of students. Most students will have basic computer skills and limited technological access, so provide a learning curve for the technology. Technology should be used to help students build skills and to provide instruction and materials, without overwhelming them.
- **Interaction:** Students should have frequent and meaningful interaction with their course materials, their instructor, and each other. Avoid overemphasizing any one aspect of the learning triad. All interaction should directly contribute to learning goals and enrich the academic environment.
- **Library/Media Services:** Library and research activities are a part of most college classes, and technology only expands access to those services. Instructors are encouraged to design into their classes activities that enable students to discover the wide range of online services available, especially through the WNCC library. A close liaison with the WNCC library is advised.

Course Teaching:

- **Faculty accessibility:** Students should feel that faculty members are an active presence. Keep standard office hours and contact times. Support and encourage students by checking the class regularly and responding to questions immediately. Online instructors are required to teach their courses several days per week, and to respond to student needs in a reasonable amount of time. Experienced online faculty members find that more frequent interaction leads to better learning. Bulletin Boards and Email should be attended to at 24-36 hour intervals except during weekends and holidays. However, students need to realize that because they have 24/7 access to the course materials, the same access does not apply to the instructor. Studies show that in order to prevent burn-out faculty members should keep regular days off and have carefully delineated hours of student access to provide student support, encourage student self-sufficiency, promote active learning, and guarantee appropriate institutional support.
- **Syllabus:** Learning goals must be clearly defined and assignments geared toward attaining these goals. The syllabus for an online course needs to be more specific and detailed than in a traditional course. Be sure to include clear instructions, requirements, and policies. Try to correct common student misconceptions that online courses are self-paced, easier, or less time consuming. Consider defining appropriate online behavior. This is also a good place to address the qualities of a successful online learner as described in www.wncc.edu/online/webtut. Remember that online courses are primarily reading-based and that many students may have only basic reading skills and comprehension, especially in introductory level courses. Instructors should incorporate as many learning styles as possible in their course design.

- **Active Learning:** Successful online courses require students to participate actively in their own knowledge acquisition. Assignments are the primary method of learning in an online course and must be designed to directly contribute to learning goals and to help the student through the process. Assignments should be performance based and provide an intellectual challenge while building toward specifically detailed goals. Assignments that don't directly contribute to learning outcomes should be eliminated or minimized. Online courses should provide a variety of activities to accommodate different learning styles and strengths and to provide ample opportunities for feedback. Students should be helped to assess their own progress, identify areas for improvement or review, and establish their own short-term learning goals. Students should learn to evaluate their own performance within the context of course and college requirements and in standing to other students. Remember that achieving learning outcomes online with active learning takes more time and effort for both the student and the instructor than in a traditional course and providing the necessary time and support is a faculty responsibility.

Course Assessment:

Assessment should be based on the stated learning goals and should demonstrate specific and detailed skills or knowledge. Online learning requires a high level of assessment monitoring by faculty members to ensure academic honesty. Testing techniques vary by discipline, but should include synchronous exams, online ID's, and interactive or random testing software, as needed. Proctored midterm and final exams (with photo ID required to be admitted to the test) are strongly encouraged, especially for transfer courses.

Faculty members should provide access to the same support services and software as is given to on-campus classes, including but not limited to Counseling, Financial Aid, and Library/Media Services. This support can be provided through online links, course activities, inclusion of the support area specialists in online chats, or any other appropriate methodology. Plagiarism can be prevented by the same techniques that work in a traditional class, including original topics, class presentations, process assignments, and annotated bibliographies. Departments should be encouraged to provide access to online plagiarism prevention websites and technologies that facilitate the detection of plagiarism.

Respectfully Submitted:

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