

Assessing Online and Hybrid Courses

While online and hybrid courses have become very popular in higher education, there has always been some concern about how to guarantee the quality and effectiveness of such teaching formats. This *CTL Bulletin* shares some resources to help ensure that this quality issue is properly addressed.

Technology use for teaching spans a very broad range. When categorized simply by the amount of tech use (rather than the types and variety of tools or, more significantly, the learning methods used), you will typically see the following:

- Web-enhanced (using some tech tools within a primarily face-to-face course)
- Hybrid (AKA blended; according to NEIU's official definition, "At least 20% of class sessions in hybrid courses will take place online")
- Fully online courses

Because the latter two categories are significantly different from classroom-based courses, alternative assessment criteria and methods are of use. For those faculty already teaching online and/or hybrid courses, as well as for those who are interested in learning more about what it takes to do so, the following resources may be of interest.

Blackboard provides its own assessment instrument, called the Greenhouse Exemplary Course Evaluation. This rubric is designed primarily for online courses, but has some sections that discuss blended course offerings. Faculty can submit their own online or hybrid courses to the program's annual review. The rubric assesses a course based on four main categories. The descriptions below give some examples of the elements of an exemplary course:

1. Course Design – Clear objectives, reflecting student learning outcomes, are integrated into the course, from syllabus through content modules and assignments. Visual and auditory tools are used to enhance content and support learning. Additional resources are included for both remedial and more in-depth work.
2. Interaction & Collaboration – Expectations about student participation are plainly delineated, including communication protocols. The instructor has incorporated efforts to develop a community of learners through the use of e-mail, discussions, chat, and/or other communication tools to facilitate student-to-student, instructor-to-student(s), and student-to-instructor interaction.
3. Assessment – Expectations for assignments are understandable and complete, and are directly connected to learning outcomes. Constructive feedback and self-assessment opportunities are also included.

4. Learner Support – The instructor has provided clear instructions, contact information, links to university resources (library, tech support, tutorials on required software applications), and content files in multiple formats (taking student access and connectivity issues into consideration).

More information about the Greenhouse Program, including information about exemplary courses, can be found at <http://www.blackboard.com/ecp>. (Take a look at the Freshman Composition course demo.)

Texas A&M University (TAMU) has created an online course assessment that can be accessed through a simple registration process at <https://elearningtools.tamu.edu/checklist/login.do>. They break out their reviews into a number of interrelated areas including:

- Content
- Navigation & Organization
- Learning Outcomes & Activities
- Communication & Collaboration
- Consistency & Accessibility
- Assessment & Evaluation

This tool is intended for self- or peer-assessment, and provides feedback through an assessment report once the form is completed and submitted. Noticeably, TAMU includes a full category on course content, while Blackboard only specifies in the Course Design category that content be easy to access, navigate, and manage. Not as much emphasis is put on connecting a student to support resources, though that may be handled through another internal resource at TAMU.

While not an assessment, University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee (UWM) offers online resources specifically in support of hybrid course developers. One faculty member is quoted as saying, "My students have done better than I've ever seen; they are motivated, enthused, and doing their best work." Comments and ideas from several faculty members are featured, as well as a discussion of the advantages and challenges of this teaching method.

UWM's Learning Technologies website provides ten questions to consider when developing a hybrid course, as well as some tips for faculty beginning the process. Our favorite tips include concentrating on the design of the course rather than the technology used, and making use of existing resources, such as:

- The "peer reviewed online teaching and learning materials" available from MERLOT (<http://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm>) and other sources
- textbook cartridges from publishers
- experienced colleagues and university support staff (in this case, the CTL)

See more information at http://www4.uwm.edu/ltc/hybrid/faculty_resources/questions.cfm.

Interested faculty can find a listing of NEIU's online and hybrid course offerings in the printed schedule under the heading Distance Education. These courses can also be found online using the Search Course Schedule link on the Faculty tab in *NEUport* (select Hybrid and/or Online in the Schedule Type field). Those who are interested in learning more about teaching with technology at any level are encouraged to contact the CTL staff at x4467.