Online Course Design Expectations and Learning Management System Standards

Overview

The online course design expectations and learning management standards are designed to meet student and faculty needs to ensure a quality learning experience. The Online Department has developed proven tools from researched best-practices and our accreditor - Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and US Department of Education (DOE) - requirements. Independent of the delivery method, these tools and guidelines will provide a quality learning experience for our students and uphold the integrity of the college and its offerings. Quality courses at DMACC are essential to helping our students achieve success and preparing them for their future while supporting the institution's goals.

HLC requires that all online courses be evaluated and approved for delivery in an asynchronous environment. Similarly, the DOE has expectations related to online courses and students' use of financial aid to pay the tuition for a course.

Purpose

Online course design expectations and Learning Management System (LMS) standards were developed to ensure DMACC Online courses are consistent and that the quality of these courses meet our accreditation requirements and the high standard the college expects of all courses. These expectations were developed to support the Online Course Development Procedure ES4077 and Online Course Oversight procedure ES4076. These procedures are supported by the DMACC Online Course Checklist which is used to evaluate courses that are under development and that need to be reviewed for quality assurance. Utilizing the Online Instructor Expectations and Gradebook Expectations (adopted by DMACC Deans and Provosts) creates a portfolio of tools that, when implemented together, will improve quality course design and the student experience. All of these documents have been reviewed, evaluated, and in some cases created by the Online Advisory Council, which was formed in 2019.

Regular and Substantive Interaction

DMACC requires instructors to initiate regular and substantive interaction in online, virtual, and hybrid courses. “Regular” is defined as “frequent, predictable, and scheduled” throughout the term. “Substantive” refers to academic engagement related to teaching, learning, and assessment.

All online, virtual, and hybrid courses must feature regular and substantive interaction from **at least 2 of the following categories**:

1. Synchronous Meetings. The instructor leads synchronous class sessions or meetings, either face-to-face or virtual.

2. Feedback on Graded Activities. The instructor provides individualized feedback on graded activities (this does not include auto-grading).

3. Providing Information and Responding to Questions. The instructor provides information or updates on the course content and answers questions raised by students.

4. Group Interaction. The instructor initiates and participates in discussion, group work, peer review, or other related group activities.

5. Program Accreditation. Other instructional activities approved by HLC or the program's accrediting agency.

NOTE: DMACC’s expectations for regular and substantive interaction align with the Higher Learning Commission’s definition and help to distinguish our distance education offerings from correspondence education. (Correspondence courses are not eligible for financial aid.)

Four Keys to Regular and Substantive Instructor Interaction

The interaction must be:

1. Initiated by the instructor.
2. Regular and frequent throughout the course term.
3. Substantive in an academic nature.
4. Completed with an instructor who meets our accrediting bodies’ standards.

Online Considerations

For the purpose of these expectations, both online (fully asynchronous) and blended courses (part face-to-face and part asynchronous) contain material for which students are not expected or required to attend any meeting time unless identified in the course schedule. Synchronous events can be offered for online courses, but they must be optional and not punitive.

- Minimum system requirements are outlined by the LMS and require students to have a reliable internet connection and computer, tablet, or smart phone to access the content.
- Students should not be expected to come to a DMACC campus or center to complete their online material or complete exams.
- Faculty may use a proctoring system that utilizes artificial intelligence or live proctoring, depending on department and accreditation requirements.
- Publisher material is supported and available; however, this material cannot serve as the main teaching material.

DMACC Online Tools

DMACC has one LMS platform to be used for delivery of all credit courses. Included with the LMS, DMACC has licensed the following:

- Ally and ReadSpeaker to help with ADA and Universal Design implementation
- Kaltura is a streaming video service to create and store video
- EAC (Blackboard assessment data collection and reporting tool) to support our college-wide assessment initiative
- TurnItIn for plagiarism detection
- Respondus Lockdown Browser and Monitor for exam protection and proctoring
- Collaborate Ultra for virtual, synchronous meetings

LMS Standards

All courses, no matter the delivery method, should include the following:

- The course uses the approved DMACC course menu and template
- A welcome announcement which includes class expectations
- Completed Syllabus and Your Instructor areas
- Consistent due dates which allow for student questions and/or problems
    - Consider a weekday for due dates (example: all assignments are due on Tuesdays)
- A link to the virtual meeting space so students know where to attend synchronous meetings (if applicable)
- Online resources to help with academic issues
    - DOT, AAC, Library, and DMACC Tech Support
    - If the course includes a publisher integration, please share the publisher's tech support information

- Weekly announcements (text or video) to engage students and prepare them for the upcoming week
- Action plan to assist and retain students.
    - If at any time during the semester a student stops attending and submitting work for more than one full week, send an email to the student seeking information
    - If necessary, submit an early alert referral or complete a drop
- Adherence to universal design with all course material utilizing the tools available to ensure consistency and ADA compliance

DMACC Online Course Standards

Navigation and Course Components

1. The class is fully developed and ready to go one day before the Banner course start date to include the following: a welcome announcement, Your Instructor content, uploaded Syllabus, and the first week of material available to students.
2. The instructor uses the most recent DMACC-approved Syllabus template.
3. Instructors should model their expectations for students and demonstrate respect for their discipline and DMACC.
4. Instructors include a welcome announcement and/or video to introduce themselves. This announcement will orient the students to the class and help build a positive learning environment.
5. An initial collaborative event is planned in the first week. An example would be an icebreaker discussion in which the instructor introduces themself to the class and students are required to participate. This is a great opportunity to initiate both student-to-student and student-to-instructor interactions.
6. Textbook requirements are included in the course for the students

Instructor Engagement

1. Instructors should include a statement in the course Syllabus and/or Your Instructor area regarding response time.
    - A minimum expectation is that students receive email responses within 24 hours during the work week. If weekend expectations are different, they must be clearly stated in the Syllabus and Your Instructor areas.
    - Instructors are expected to be reasonably available near assignment deadlines.
2. Online office hours are explained and offered regularly.
    - It is recommended that these hours also coincide with major exams or projects to support students and provide opportunities for them to ask questions and get clarification.
    - A statement is included in the course (Syllabus, Your Instructor, Start Here folder, Calendar, or other appropriate location) indicating the dates and times of these online office hours.

3. All grades are included and accurately totaled in the LMS Grade Center and the DMACC Grade Center Expectations are met.
    - The Grade Center is updated within one week of an assignment due date. Instructors should let students know their academic progress throughout the term in a timely manner.
    - Constructive, individualized feedback should be given in time for students to demonstrate learning in future assignments.
4. Grading criteria and expectations regarding feedback and turnaround time are clearly identified in the Syllabus, Your Instructor area, and on individual assignments.
    - Examples include the use of rubrics, written/recorded feedback on assignments, or one-on-one meetings to discuss opportunities for improvement.

Learning Objectives, Activities and Assessment

1. Exam requirements are clearly identified so students know what is required before they start.
    - Syllabus includes information about whether or not exams will be timed, proctored, require a webcam or other hardware, etc.
        - The same information is included in the test instructions.
2. DMACC desires the use of authentic assessment which allows faculty to evaluate students' current knowledge of the course learning objectives and competencies.
    - Use scenarios and real-world questions to engage students and determine their level of knowledge
    - Authentic assessments can be part of the course scaffolding to allow faculty to validate the student responses and help with test integrity
3. Include a variety of traditional and alternative assessments to accommodate different learning styles.
4. All course objectives and content align with DMACC approved course competencies.
5. Multiple technology tools are used to facilitate communication and learning.
6. There are weekly opportunities for interaction and communication via activities designed for:
    - Student-to-Student interaction
    - Student-to-Instructor interaction
    - Student-to-Content interaction