Approval Criteria: Online Course Provider

Contents

Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Getting Started

As preparation begins on the application, review the criteria to be scored below and take note of this guidance. It is intended to provide the best possible opportunity obtaining for online course provider approval.

- Evidence must be submitted for each criterion. Read Submitting Supporting Evidence [insert link] to understand important information on the types of evidence to provide.
- Each approval reviewer will score if a criterion is met as "**Not Evident (0)**," "**Partially Evident (.5**)," or "**Evident (1)"** based on the evidence provided by the applicant. Read the Approval Criteria Rubric [insert link] to understand more about the reviewers' expectations and the specifics of how each criterion will be scored.
- A criterion marked with an **asterisk (*)** means it is **demo-reliant**. This means evidence within course demos must be provided as part of the submitted evidence, and the reviewers must be able to access the demo in the roles of both a student and a teacher. Any demos that are not accessible will result in the corresponding criterion receiving a score of 0 from reviewers. Read Submitting Supporting Evidence [insert link] for more information.

A. COURSE CONTENT AND INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

Courses and instruction incorporate the following to ensure a quality academic experience:

Course Goals and Outcomes

A1.* **Stated course goals and objectives:** Clearly stated and measurable objectives and course goals describe the student's knowledge at the end of the course.

Course-level goals and objectives are present, explicitly stated, and can be easily found by students. After reading the list of goals and objectives, students will understand what they will be learning throughout the course.

- **Note:** This criterion refers to goals and objectives at the *course* level, not the *unit* level.

A2.* **Relevant course assignments:** Course assignments are clearly stated, reflect course goals, and are representative of the scope of the course. The scope and sequence of the course is appropriately designed for the subject area and grade level. Concepts and skills are accurately presented, built on one another logically, and connections between concepts and subjects are explicit and relevant.

A3.* **Cognitive complexity:** The course is structured to engage students in higher-order thinking, critical-reasoning activities, and thinking in increasingly complex ways.

Assignments, activities, and assessments require students to elevate their thinking beyond memorization into the realm of analyzing, evaluating and creating. This may include work such as categorizing and explaining information, responding to open-ended questions, producing an outcome in group projects, making decision, or drawing conclusions.

A4.* **Assignment expectations:** Students are provided guiding materials that include rationale, desired characteristics and clear expectations for graded assignments. This may include materials such as multimedia instructions, examples, models of completed work, detailed rubrics, etc.

Course Content and Organization

A5.* **Easily accessed course materials:** Instructional materials, including supporting materials, such as instructional text, textbooks, manuals, and videos, are easily accessed by students.

Instructional materials are found online with few, if any, additional logins or technology requirements. Offline materials (e.g., physical copies of textbooks or other course materials) are sent to the student in a timely fashion at the beginning of the course or are obtained locally with little effort.

A6. Readability of course content and materials: Readability levels, written language assignments, and mathematical requirements are appropriate for the course content.

Evidence shows that in the course design process, all course content, including instructional content and explanations, is written at appropriate readability levels for the grade level of the student audience, and readability formulas are used to identify the readability level.

For math courses, the evidence shows that mathematical language is written at the appropriate level for the intended audience.

A7.* **Course organization:** Course content is organized in a consistent format (such as units and lessons, and includes overviews describing objectives, activities, and resources.

A8. Consistent workflow: Course work, including assignments, reading, assessments, and activities are structured to promote consistent effort throughout the term.

Evidence includes documentation which describes an estimate of the expected amount of time spent by the student, per unit or activity, within each course.

A9. Unbiased content and instruction: The course content is accurate and free of any bias. Evidence shows that in the course design process, a procedure is used to eliminate bias.

Student Engagement

A10.* **Variety of instructional methods:** A variety of instructional methods are used within the course structure and content for acquiring knowledge or skill.

Evidence shows the various instructional methods and learning experiences create a student-centered learning environment that addresses different learning styles.

A11. Collaborative instructional activities: The course includes appropriate teacher-student and student-student interaction to foster mastery and application of the material.

Collaborative learning is evident in online activities where students work together to exchange ideas, solve problems, and produce outcomes. The teacher fosters interaction through activities such as discussions, synchronous meetings, simulations, lab activities, and group projects.

Guidelines defining student participation and expectations are identified within the grading policy for the course or activity.

A12.* **Participatory learning:** The course includes activities that engage students in active participation and use of newly learned concepts.

Students are given the means for an increased level of participation through discovering, processing, and applying information they learn throughout the course. Less emphasis is placed on the teacher giving information and more on the student discussing, listening, writing, reading, reflecting, and/or creating.

A13. Interactive feedback: The course uses appropriate learning activities which foster teacher-student interaction (synchronously and/or asynchronously) and timely and frequent feedback about student progress.

Students receive timely and frequent feedback on their progress that emphasizes the intended learner outcomes. The feedback is highly individualized, detailed, and recommends specific improvement and strategies to encourage continued progress toward mastery.

A14.* **Modes of communication:** The teacher provides opportunities for students to develop communication skills in teacher and peer interaction using various modes.

The various communication modes may include email, discussions, forums, chats, or other messaging tools within the platform, presentations, peer review and feedback, etc.

Evidence shows that the communication features are integrated into the activities and monitored by the teacher.

B. STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Assessment evidence is not limited to tests or quizzes and may include other assessed work such as essays, projects, and presentations, etc.

Courses and teachers use the following to ensure effective assessment of student performance:

B1.* **Appropriate assessment:** Appropriate assessment methods for the subject matter are used throughout the course to assess students' mastery of content and achievement of learning outcomes as stated in the course goals and objectives.

These methods may be framed in the context of diagnostic, formative, interim, and summative.

B2.* **Variety of assessments:**

The course uses a wide variety of assessment techniques to measure ongoing student progress on clearly identified learner outcomes.

A variety of traditional and authentic assessments reach a broad and deep array of skill sets and learning models. These allow students to demonstrate understanding and apply skills in different contexts.

Assessment types may include pre-tests, post-tests, objective and subjective questioning, self-assessments, essays, demonstrations, group projects, peer review, portfolios, and teacher- and/or computer-graded assessments and activities.

B3.* **Frequency of assessment:** Frequent and ongoing assessments ensure each student has mastered the content and is prepared to move forward in the coursework.

B4.* **Effective use of technology in assessments:** Selected assessments and the methods used for submitting assessments are an effective use of the technology provided in the courseware platform.

B5.* **Assessment rubrics:** Assessment rubrics, answers and/or explanations are provided to the student.

Assessment rubrics are disclosed in preparation materials for assessments; correct answers and/or explanations are available at the end of assessments.

C. ACADEMIC POLICIES

C1.* Grading policies: Grading policies and practices are explicitly stated and presented to the student.

The policies include a grading scale that defines letter grades and/or weights, as applicable. If there are grading expectations involving student participation and/or regular teacher contact beyond the Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) requirements, they are clearly defined as part of the grading policy. Any penalties that may be assessed to grades and/or extra credit opportunities are also identified within the policy.

If all or part of the contracting district's grading policies are used, the online course provider is responsible for determining if the criterion requirements are addressed by the district. If not, the online course provider will resolve any omissions with the district or develop a coordinated grading policy. The student will clearly understand the coordinated grading policies and practices.

C2. Academic integrity expectations: Clearly stated academic integrity (plagiarism and netiquette) expectations regarding participation in online lesson activities, discussions, and communications are presented to the student. Consequences for noncompliance are included.

C3. Ensuring academic integrity: The teacher ensures that authentic work has been produced by the student via various measures which may include tests administered by proctors, password-protected tests, limited test-time windows, synchronous contact with the teacher, plagiarism checks, etc.

C4. Acceptable Use Policy: A clearly stated technology Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) is posted on the program website, in the learning management system, or in the student handbook. The policy is explicitly presented to the student.

C5. Discipline policies: A clearly defined discipline policy and procedure is posted on the program website, in the learning management system, or in the student handbook to identify and deal with inappropriate student behavior and issues of discipline.

Discipline policy and procedures are relevant to the online environment and are beyond plagiarism and netiquette specified in (C2) Academic integrity expectations. This conduct may include behaviors such as online harassment, bullying, and lack of participation (truancy). The policies are explicitly presented to the student.

D. COURSE EVALUATION AND MANAGEMENT

The following are used to ensure the delivery of a high-quality program:

D1. Course development quality assurance: The course is developed using an internal review process verifying course reliability, completeness, and effectiveness.

Courses are developed and assessed by a standardized quality assurance protocol which addresses aspects such as course reliability, completeness, and effectiveness, prior to student participation; ongoing review and revision are managed by staff who process feedback about courses.

D2. Course maintenance: Planned, scheduled course maintenance (updates, revisions, etc.) is conducted to ensure course content timeliness and accuracy, as well as functionality.

D3. Feedback gathering and implementation: Feedback is solicited from a variety of sources about various aspects of the program, including the quality of the course design, content, instruction, support systems, and/or infrastructure; findings are used as basis for improvement.

Course evaluations are regularly conducted which gather input from students and other various constituents who may include teachers, staff, content experts, instructional designers, and outside reviewers.

D4. Provider transparency: Results of regularly conducted evaluations of courses are posted or otherwise noted as available upon request.

Applicants outsourcing curricula or course content may refer to the approved course provider's results of regularly conducted evaluations and/or to their own program evaluations.

If any aspect of the course is contracted to another course provider, the applicant is responsible for providing evidence of regularly conducted evaluations of the services provided by the contracted party.

E. STUDENT SUPPORT

The following are used to enhance the student learning experience and success:

E1. Technology skills: Expected technology skills are disclosed prior to enrollment in a course.

Technology skills include any skills necessary to be successful in any online course (web navigation, online meeting, presentation software, etc.) and any skills (coding, photo editing, etc.) necessary for the specific class.

E2. Student-facing course demonstrations: Course and program demonstrations are offered to prospective students that are designed to provide an understanding of the student experience and participation expectations.

E3. Student orientations: A required orientation is provided to students to aid them in navigating the online environment.

The orientation leaves students with an understanding of how to efficiently use the courseware system and complete all the technical aspects of participating in the online course/program (i.e., communicating with the online teacher, submitting assignments and assessments, participating in group work and/or discussions, etc.). The orientation may be embedded in the courseware, or it may be delivered directly to students by teachers or student support staff.

In an optimal implementation, students must complete the orientation before progressing into the academic portion of the course. Various means may be used to implement the requirement such as stating the expectation in a student participation policy, loss of points from the student's overall course grade, utilizing settings within the courseware that require completion of the orientation, etc.

E4. Communicating with the teacher: Students are provided information about protocols for communicating with the teacher.

Teacher information, including contact, availability, and biographical information is provided. Information on how to contact the teacher via phone, email, and/or online messaging tools is provided within the contact information.

E5. Monitoring and pacing: A protocol is used for monitoring student progress and helping students keep up with the pace of their course.

Students clearly understand how their progress and pace in the course will be monitored. Progress monitoring may be facilitated by system monitoring tools. Pacing assistance may occur via course calendars, schedule-driven syllabi, system-driven reminders, and/or prompts.

E6. Nontechnical issue resolution: Policies and systems are used to resolve nontechnical student, and family questions, complaints, and appeals.

Nontechnical issues may include but are not limited to questions on grading policies, student performance, teacher communication, content and assessment clarification, etc.

Nontechnical issue resolution procedures and protocols are clearly explained and easily accessible to students and families in advance of need.

F. SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT

Local school-based support roles and systems help students succeed in the online learning environment. The following are used to facilitate support of student success:

F1. School-based support role: A school-based support role is recognized within systems and frameworks as a local/online adult point of contact who is not the course teacher but is available to the student and teacher and as a responsible agent of support to the student's success.

Instructional practices and student support policies clearly identify and engage the school-based online/local support staff who may be recognized as a mentor, advisor, advocate, counselor, proctor, coordinator, or other school-based support.

F2. School-based support systems: The school-based support staff is provided various means to support student success which may include the ability to view course content from the student or teacher point of view, technology troubleshooting information, online participation and communication tracking and grading systems, staff online handbook and policies, and teacher contact information.

F3. School-based support training: The school-based support staff receives training on the support role and on the available student support systems and resources.

Training may include exposure to the student and/or staff versions of the courseware, effective student support techniques, and technology troubleshooting guidelines.

G. TECHNOLOGY

The following are used to facilitate successful use of the online systems:

G1.* Ease of navigation: The navigation of courses and supporting systems is presented in a logical order allowing students to efficiently get from one place to another.

G2. System technology requirements: Disclosure of program- and course-specific hardware, web browser, and software requirements is made prior to enrollment.

G3. Technology support: Technology support is offered via various disclosed means including phone, email, and/or online help pages.

G4. Technical issue resolution: Monitoring protocols and mechanisms are used which assure the user is contacted within 24 hours to resolve technical problems in a timely manner.

Technical issues may include but are not limited to logon issues, frozen screens, assignment submission issues, system response time, etc.

G5. Platform flexibility: Course architecture permits the addition of content, activities, and assessments to extend learning opportunities, as needed.

The teacher for the course can make additions to the content within the learning management system.

H. STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

The following are used to ensure the online teachers' ability to challenge and meet the needs of online students.

Supporting evidence may include outlines, presentations, agendas, and/or schedules of professional development activities.

H1. Teacher training – LMS: Teachers are trained in the online course delivery system on which they teach to effectively use the courseware, use various instructional media, and assist students.

H2. Teacher training – social aspects of online learning: Teacher training addresses the emotional and social aspects of online learning, particularly about communicating with students.

Online teachers are trained to identify and mitigate the ways in which the online environment can enhance or hinder the learning experience.

Note that this is about teacher training to improve their online instructional practice in communicating with students, not information about social emotional learning content or curriculum.

H3. Teacher training – student perspective: Teacher training addresses the experience of online learning from the perspective of a student.

Teacher training includes exposure to the student version of the courseware system to understand the technical and logistical requirements of, and to be equipped to help the student function effectively in, the online learning environment.

H4. New teacher support: New teachers are given extra support in their first year of instruction.

New teachers receive various supports and resources such as formal connections to other teachers, new teacher meetings, and the exchange of best practices to ensure their effectiveness and success.

H5. Teacher performance reviews: Teacher performance reviews are conducted on a regularly scheduled basis.

I. PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

The following are used to ensure effective program management:

I1. Monitoring of teacher communications: A program administrator (i.e., director, lead teacher, or instructional lead) uses established protocols to monitor and intervene as necessary in the quality and timeliness of teachers' responses to students.

I2. Monitoring of student performance: A program administrator (i.e., director, lead teacher, or instructional lead) uses established protocols to monitor student records to ensure students are progressing through their courses at an acceptable rate, to identify any program or instructional issues, and to intervene when necessary.

I3. Student outcomes: Student performance and outcome data is used to directly inform program improvements and modifications.

I4. Academic schedule: An academic schedule clearly identifies enrollment deadlines, course/program start and end dates, and expected duration of the course/coursework as relevant to the enrollment policy of the program (i.e. rolling enrollment or not).

The information is easily accessible by students and families and may be presented in forms such as an academic calendar or enrollment procedures posted on the program website.

I5. System-driven non-instructional tasks: Non-instructional tasks (enrollments, login information dissemination, and course materials delivery, etc.) are system-driven and performed via established protocols. **I6. Financial procedures:** It is evident established protocols and proper procedures are used for handling enrollments and fees or payments as applicable.

I7. Special Services: It is evident an identified procedure and secure transfer method are used for confidentially receiving and implementing IEP and 504 plans for students.