

# Online, Hybrid, and HyFlex Course Development Guidelines

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The following is intended to serve as a guide to the development of online and hybrid courses at Cedar Crest College. Substantively, the recommendations have been developed based on existing College policies, requirements established by federal and state law as well as best practices within the field of online education and distance learning.

Given that academic quality -- regardless of delivery method or format -- is principally a faculty responsibility, the guidelines presented below are designed primarily to present information that will assist faculty and departments in the development of exceptional online, hybrid, and HyFlex courses. Hence, while certain elements of this document are prescriptive, the fundamental purpose of the guidelines is to highlight the key issues that faculty should consider as they seek to promote student academic achievement using online, hybrid, and HyFlex courses.

## Basic Definitions and Legal Requirements

1. **Online courses:** Courses in which instruction is conducted solely using computer software in a virtual learning environment. Online courses may be asynchronous or synchronous.
2. **Hybrid courses:** Courses that combine classroom-based face-to-face instruction with computer-based instruction in a virtual learning environment.
3. **HyFlex courses:** Courses that accommodate individual student's preferences for in-person or online learning and replicate an in-person experience for those who opt to participate online.
4. **Asynchronous:** Students may participate in a course on their own time and in their own pace; there is no requirement to be online at a designated time
5. **Synchronous:** Students and the instructor participate in predetermined, scheduled meeting times and dates; there is a requirement to attend at the designated day and time
6. **Contact Hour:** A contact hour is equal to one hour of scheduled instruction provided to students.
7. **Accessibility:** Federal law requires that online and hybrid courses must be capable of providing materials that are accessible to individuals with disabilities via college-supported assistive technology (Dragon Dictate, Kurzweil Screen Reader, etc.).
8. **Privacy:** Federal law requires that if personally identifiable student information is posted or communicated via an online or hybrid course, college-approved software applications must be utilized to protect the privacy rights of students.
9. **Credit Hour:** Cedar Crest College assigns credit hours for all courses according to the following

definition: A “credit hour” is a unit of measure for curricular material that includes at least 45 hours, of which at least 15 are scheduled contact hours of classroom instruction or equivalent instructional activities that have instructor supervision and are assessed for student competency in course learning outcomes. The remaining hours include out-of-class preparatory work by students. A “contact hour” is a period representing the equivalent of one hour (50 minutes) of scheduled instruction.

### **General Institutional Principles and Commitments**

1. **Mission:** Online, hybrid, and HyFlex courses should be designed to serve the academic needs and interests of the various student populations which are central to the College’s mission.
2. **Suitability:** The nature and objectives of courses and academic programs should dictate whether it will be appropriate to utilize online, hybrid, and HyFlex courses as a method of instruction.
3. **Pedagogical Diversity:** Online, hybrid, and HyFlex courses constitute options that may be used to deliver academic content. None is to be regarded as a preferred or required method of instruction.
4. **Professional Development:** The College will support the development of online, hybrid, and HyFlex courses by providing ongoing and predictable professional development opportunities and incentives for faculty and academic departments.
5. **Course Criteria:** Online, hybrid, and HyFlex courses must be developed based on clear and consistent standards, as reflected in the attached check sheet, which apply college-wide.
6. **Academic Standards:** Online, hybrid, and HyFlex courses must reflect the same standards of academic integrity and rigor as classroom-based courses at the College.
7. **Course Syllabi:** The syllabi for online, hybrid, and HyFlex courses must conform to the College’s syllabus policy as stated in Book IV of the Faculty Handbook.
8. **Course Approval Process:** Newly created online, hybrid, and HyFlex courses are subject to the same course approval process which the College’s utilizes for traditional courses. An existing traditional course which is being transformed into either an online, hybrid, or HyFlex course must be approved at the departmental level by a chair and/or program director. The attached check sheet should be utilized as a guide to the approval of online and hybrid courses by department chairs and program directors.
9. **Student Notification:** Class schedules and registration materials for students should clearly indicate which method of instruction will be utilized in a course (i.e. in-person, online, hybrid, HyFlex) and what technological requirements, if any, are required for the course.

10. **Infrastructural Support:** The College will provide instructors and students with the infrastructural resources and technical assistance needed to support both the synchronous and asynchronous features of online, hybrid, and HyFlex courses.
11. **Assessment:** Online, hybrid, and HyFlex courses are subject to the same student course evaluation and institutional assessment procedures which the College utilizes for traditional courses.

### **Online, Hybrid and Traditional Courses**

College policy and state/federal regulations require online, hybrid, and HyFlex courses to be the functional equivalent of traditional courses when it comes to academic quality, student learning outcomes and contact hours. This also holds for accelerated courses, regardless of how they are delivered to students. Given that matters of academic integrity and student learning are best handled through the faculty governance system, the following addresses the issue of student contact hours from the perspective of the Carnegie unit, and the federal government's 2011 definition of academic credit. This discussion is intended to help faculty understand how online, hybrid, HyFlex, and accelerated courses compare with traditional courses regarding contact hours and course credits.

#### 1. The Carnegie Unit

The Carnegie unit serves as the benchmark for awarding course credits to students. The basic formula is as follows:

One credit is equal to 1 hour of class time plus 2 hours of homework.

In the case of a lab, one credit is equal to 3 hours of class time without any homework.

Hence, a 3-credit course should require 3 hours of class time per week along with 6 hours of homework. The Carnegie unit serves as the basis for PDE regulations regarding course credits.

#### 2. Online Learning and the Equivalency Provision

Faculty, Departments, and the College can determine what constitutes equivalency along with the obligation to document such decisions and the justification for them.

Faculty developing online, hybrid, and HyFlex courses should consult with colleagues, department chairs, appropriate faculty committees, the Provost's Office, and accreditors when it comes to establishing equivalencies between online learning activities and the class time requirement.

#### 3. Federal Curricular Credit Policy (34 CFR 600.2)

Effective July 1, 2011, the U.S. Department of Education defines a credit hour as

follows:

An amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is an institutionally established equivalency that reasonably approximates not less than:

One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester...or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or at least an equivalent amount of work...for other academic activities as established by the institution, including laboratory work, internships, practice, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

In a letter sent to educational institutions and accrediting agencies on March 18, 2011, the U.S. DOE sought to clarify the credit requirement by making the following points:

- The institution determines the amount of credit awarded for student work. It is up to institutions to gain the confidence through peer review in the accreditation process that their credit hour policies and practices consistently meet conventional academic expectations.
- A credit hour is expected to be a reasonable approximation of a minimum amount of student work in a Carnegie unit in accordance with commonly accepted practice in higher education. It is important to note that there is no requirement that a credit hour *exactly* duplicate the amount of work in paragraph (1) of the definition, as is highlighted by the provisions of paragraph (2). The requirement is that a credit hour *reasonably approximate* that minimum amount of work in paragraph (1).
- The credit hour definition is a minimum standard that does not restrict an institution from setting a higher standard that requires more student work per credit hour.
- The definition does not dictate amounts of classroom time versus out-of-class student work. In determining the amount of work the institution's learning outcomes will entail, as under current practice, the institution may take into consideration alternative delivery methods, measurements of student work, academic calendars, disciplines, and degree levels.
- To the extent an institution believes that complying with the federal definition of a credit hour would not be appropriate for academic and other institutional needs, it may adopt a separate measure for those purposes.
- The intent of these flexibilities is to recognize the differences across institutions, fields of study, types of coursework, and delivery methods, while providing a consistent measure of student work for purposes of Federal programs.

## Online , Hybrid, and HyFlex Course Development Check Sheet

### **INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN**

#### **1. Course Goals and Structure**

- a. Course-level student learning outcomes are explicitly stated.
- b. Course content and assessment of student competencies is clearly aligned with stated student learning outcomes and objectives
- c. Course content is sequenced in a clear, concise, and logical manner.
- d. In the case of a hybrid course, the relationship between the in-class and online components of the course is clear.
- e. In the case of a HyFlex course, the instructor and student will discuss each student's preference and plan for class participation in the first week of the course.
- f. A clear and concise list of course modules is provided.
- g. A clear and concise list of the activities that must be completed within each module is provided.
- h. The course meets the federal Carnegie hour requirement.

#### **2. Course Information**

- a. A course description is provided, including any prerequisites.
- b. Instructor information is provided, including contact and availability information and a picture
- c. A list of supplies (e.g., textbooks and other materials) needed for the course is provided.
- d. The number of credit hours to be earned in the course is stated.
- e. Grading policy is clearly stated, including grading scale and weights.
- f. A calendar of course due dates, institutional deadlines, and exam schedule is provided.
- g. A list of technical competencies necessary for the course is provided.
- h. A list of hardware and software requirements for the course is provided.
- i. A statement on plagiarism and penalties for plagiarism is provided.
- j. A statement of the College Honor Code is provided.
- k. A statement on netiquette in the course is provided.

#### **3. Instructional Strategies**

- a. A variety of instructional methods, accommodating multiple learning styles, are available throughout the course.
- b. Students have a variety of opportunities to demonstrate academic achievement.
- c. At the beginning of the course, students and the instructor are provided with an opportunity to introduce themselves to each other as a way of promoting a cooperative learning environment.

#### **4. Use of Multimedia**

- a. Audio files utilized in the course clearly support course goals/objectives.
- b. Video files utilized in the course clearly support course goals/objectives.

### **COMMUNICATION, INTERACTION AND COLLABORATION**

#### **1. Activities and Opportunities**

- a. Learning activities and other opportunities are provided to foster student-to-student communication and/or collaboration.
- b. Learning activities and other opportunities are provided to foster student-to-instructor communication and/or collaboration.
- c. Learning activities and other opportunities are provided to foster student-to-content interaction.

#### **2. Organization and Management**

- a. Discussions are organized in clearly defined forums and/or threads.
- b. Access is available to individuals and groups based upon the discussion's purpose (e.g., private conversations between student and instructor, group work and class interactions)
- c. Participation expectations for learners and instructor are clearly defined.

#### **3. Group Work**

- a. A statement of the group's overall task is provided.
- b. Rules for forming groups and assigning roles within the group are provided.
- c. Benchmarks and expectations for group participation are clearly stated.
- d. A statement of how, when, and where the final product will be delivered is provided.

### **ASSESSMENT of STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

#### **1. Student Learning Outcomes**

- a. Assessment and evaluation are aligned with learning objectives and student learning outcomes.
- b. Assessment and evaluation expectations are clearly communicated.

#### **2. Strategies**

- a. Assessments and evaluations use multiple methods (e.g., quizzes, tests, discussions, essays, projects, and survey).
- b. Assessments and evaluations are conducted on an ongoing basis throughout the course.
- c. Assessments and evaluation tools are appropriate to the task of measuring stated learning outcomes.

#### **3. Assessments and evaluations are administered in ways that minimize the likelihood of Honor Code violations.**

#### **4. Grades**

- a. Explicit rubrics, rationales, and/or criteria are provided for each graded assignment.
- b. Procedures for reporting grade information complies with FERPA and institutional regulations.
- c. A grading scale that defines letter grades and/or weights is provided.

- d. Penalties which can be assessed against student grades are listed.
- e. Student participation is defined and the rubric, rational or criteria for evaluating the quality and quantity of student participation is provided.
- f. A statement indicating whether extra credit is available is provided along with a description of how extra credit assignments will be administered and submitted.
- g. A statement explaining when students should receive feedback is provided.
- h. A statement explaining what type of feedback students will receive is provided.
- i. A statement explaining how feedback will be given is provided.
- j. The gradebook in the Learning Management System (LMS) will be used to enable students to view their present grade throughout the semester.

**5. Management**

- a. A statement of the time allocated for each assignment/activity is provided.
- b. A deadline for each assignment/activity is provided.
- c. A date/time when each assignment will be available is provided.
- d. A statement indicating whether assignments can be retaken is provided.
- e. Instructions for completion and submission of assignments is provided.

**LEARNER SUPPORT AND RESOURCES- Found in Canvas Modules**

**1. Institutional/Program Support and Resources**

- a. Links to institutional/program information and/or policies and procedures are provided.
- b. Links, e-mail addresses and/or phone number for technical support are provided.
- c. Statement of ADA compliance and procedure for requesting special services is provided.
- d. Courses developed and delivered online use the institutional LMS and synchronous platforms primarily.

**2. Academic Support and Resources**

- a. Opportunities for program and course orientation are provided.
- b. A list of academic resources with links to library, writing center, and other services is provided.
- c. A grade book is available to students for checking progress.

**3. Accessibility**

- a. Course design indicates a conscious attempt to comply with, or exceed, Level 1 of Section 508(B) accessibility standards.
- b. A text equivalent for every non-text element is provided.
- c. Captioning options are available for audio portions of multimedia presentations.
- d. Redundant text links are provided for links embedded on server-side image maps.
- e. Information conveyed with color is also available without color.
- f. When a web page requires an applet, plug-in or other application, the page provides a link to the needed plug-in or applet.
- g. When a timed response is required, the user is alerted and given time to indicate that more time is needed.
- h. Row and column headers are identified in data tables.

## **COURSE EVALUATION**

- a. Opportunities for students to offer feedback on the web design of the course (e.g. navigation, links) is available throughout the course.
- b. Opportunities for students to offer feedback to the instructor on instructional strategies is available throughout the course.
- c. Opportunities for students to offer feedback on course content is available throughout the course.