

# TIDEWATER COMMUNITY COLLEGE

## DESIGN STRATEGIES FOR ONLINE COURSES

### Effective Online Course Design Elements:

The course syllabus should clearly

- note any Discussion Forum or synchronous chat participation requirements for students.
- state information about any other required collaborative learning activities.
- explain expected faculty response time for email and discussion postings (48 hours or less is recommended – weekends and holidays included or excluded at the instructor’s discretion).
- define the number and type of required assignments.
- explain how the final course grade will be calculated.
- state rules and guidelines for student participation and behavior (netiquette).
- communicate the instructor’s contact information (minimum: email address – full-time faculty should include office location, phone number, and hours).
- list any required materials, including textbooks.
- affirm and explain student conduct policies, especially those relating to academic honesty and misconduct (cheating, plagiarism, forgery, computer security, acceptable use of electronic resources, etc.). References to the following are encouraged: the current *Tidewater Community College Student Handbook*, VCCS Computer Ethics Guidelines, and Virginia State Law – specifically Title 18.2-152 (“Virginia Computer Crimes Act”) including felonies and misdemeanors for Computer fraud (18.2-152.3), Computer invasion of privacy (18.2-152.5), Using a computer to gather identifying information (18.2-152.5:1), and Theft of computer services (18.2-152.6).
- state instructional assessment requirements, especially any required proctored activities or exams, synchronous chat sessions, portfolio or e-portfolio submissions, timed quizzes and tests, writing and research assignments, or required labs or practicums.
- state course objectives, required student competencies, and expected student outcomes. *Each of these must be identical or clearly equivalent to the objectives, competencies, and outcomes of the TCC Official Course Outline for this course.*

### Instructional Integrity Strategies:

Each faculty member is responsible for assuring the instructional integrity of his or her online course. Teaching a course in an online learning environment requires a re-examination or adaptation of student assessment methods to encourage, maintain, and validate academic honesty. Testing and other assignment procedures for an online course should reflect an awareness of unmonitored testing environments, flexible testing and assignment schedules, students’ access to print and electronic resources, and both faculty and student responsibilities related to online learning.

Faculty are encouraged to consider a variety of methods to support instructional integrity. Typical strategies used by faculty include, but are not limited to, proctored assignments and tests, portfolios of student work, timed quizzes and tests, extensive student writing and/or research assignments, synchronous chat sessions, student group assignments or activities, student peer reviews of assignments, required substantive participation in asynchronous discussion forums, tests randomly generated from question pools, tests with randomly ordered questions and/or answers, tests consisting of

more open-ended questions (short answer, essay, fill-in-the-blank, and assignments requiring the practical application of knowledge, such as case studies), and the use of anti-plagiarism services. Any of these methods may be used in combination with others. Course syllabi should have specific, strong statements warning students about academic dishonesty and related activities, with clear explanations of the penalties and consequences for offenders.

The most common strategies for supporting instructional integrity in online courses include the following:

- **Proctored assignments or tests** – The instructor must notify students in the course syllabus and/or outline about required proctored assignments or tests. Typically, students need to know how many activities or tests are required, when they are due, where students can go to take them, what percentage of the course grade the activities or tests constitute, and what the penalties are for not completing them. A *TCC Proctor Form* is available for faculty to use with students too distant to access TCC testing centers. A proctored assignment or assignments should represent a substantial portion of the overall course grade and measure the student's mastery of one or more of the course objectives.
- **Portfolios** – The course syllabus should communicate how students will create and access their portfolios, who else will access their portfolios, and how the portfolios will be assessed. If the portfolios will remain accessible after the end of the semester, that should be clearly noted.
- **Timed quizzes & tests** – Since online students take tests in what is essentially an open-book environment, setting time limits on exams can prevent unprepared students from merely looking up answers to test and quiz questions. Always inform students which assignments will be timed and what the time limits will be. If you are using exams and assignments similar in length and content to those in your face-to-face (F2F) classes, a good rule of thumb is to limit the exams to the average amount of time required for your F2F students to complete them. Sometimes it is also effective to encourage students to use their books and notes – with the warning that the exam has a time limit and they will not have time to look up all of the answers and complete the exam within the allotted time. So forewarned, many students will study more and be better prepared.
- **Writing and research assignments** – Written assignments require substantial time and effort from students and may also require knowledge and skills acquired through other course activities, such as tests, quizzes, reading assignments, and participation in Discussion Forums. Because of the time commitments of such assignments, students are less able to persuade anyone to collude with them in any dishonest efforts. Such subjective assignments can also be more effective tools for assessing student learning than objective assessments consisting entirely or mostly of multiple-choice and true-false questions.
- **Synchronous chat sessions** – Many faculty find that scheduling one or more synchronous chat sessions with their students can foster social networking within the class, better engage students in the course and its materials, provide a faster (real-time) means of managing class discussion and answering students' questions, and provide or acquire more specific feedback from students. Some faculty manage chat sessions with the entire class at once; others conduct chats with small groups of students or individuals. To accommodate widely varying student schedules, it's usually best to conduct multiple chat sessions over the same material, enabling students to choose from among more than one session.
- **Group assignments or activities** – If appropriate for the course, faculty may use collaborative activities as a means of assuring student participation and contributions to assignments. Students who are not participating, who are not contributing adequately to the assignment, or who are not who they say they are can be more easily identified and dealt with accordingly.

- **Student peer reviews** – Peer activities can serve many instructional purposes, but they can also foster an environment where students police themselves – revealing, reporting, or discouraging inappropriate behaviors or activities.
- **Required substantive participation in asynchronous Discussion Forums** – Discussion Forums are the online equivalent of class discussion. They serve to engage students, provide a medium for questions and answers, and can discourage many forms of academic dishonesty. Faculty can communicate information in the forums that will be covered on assignments and exams and also measure student engagement. As with writing and research assignments, participation in Discussion Forums can require substantial time and effort from students, thereby discouraging many casual forms of academic dishonesty. A change in the individual tone and quality of accumulated postings may also reveal counterfeit students posting in place of the real things.
- **Randomly generated tests and randomly ordered questions** – Randomly generated tests can prevent test sharing and related forms of cheating by creating a unique exam for each student from a pool, or bank, of appropriate questions. Likewise, a random order for questions on exams reduces or removes many of the benefits of test copying and sharing. The order of answers on questions can also be randomized, further discouraging dishonest behavior.
- **Test using more open-ended questions** – The use of more open-ended questions (short-answer, essay, fill-in-the-blank, etc.) requires more time and effort from the student, decreasing the likelihood of someone other than the student making such a commitment. Such questions reduce the benefits of guessing for students who are not properly prepared. Open-ended questions can also be easily tailored to address information discussed or disseminated in Discussion Forums and course supplementary materials rather than merely from a textbook page. Additionally, test items such as practical scenarios or case studies can be useful tools for assessing a student's ability to apply knowledge or skills and demonstrate their mastery.
- **Anti-plagiarism services or scans** – Blackboard now includes Safe Assign, an anti-plagiarism feature. Its use can identify students who are inappropriately incorporating someone else's material into their assignments or who are improperly citing material. Warning students of its use in a course syllabus may also serve as a deterrent to academic dishonesty.
- **Anti-printing and anti-copying scripts** – If you are concerned that one student may copy or print an exam or quiz and enable another student to cheat, contact Blackboard Support for assistance. Scripts that will disable printing and copying during tests are available for you to include in each test.