

## **Self-Assessment of Online Course Facilitation**

As an essential part of Pasadena City College's commitment to student success in all areas of learning, distance education courses shall provide quality, innovative instruction that maintains the highest standards and best practices in online teaching and learning. Effective online course facilitation is dependent upon ensuring that faculty is properly trained, supported, and willing to adopt a student-centered (constructivist) teaching paradigm (DE Recommendation 106: Pedagogical Readiness). Facilitation means helping the student or students to accomplish the learning objectives of the course.

Learning in an online class requires a pedagogical shift (moving from subject matter distribution to learner facilitation). Even the most experienced educators are faced with the following challenges:

- Attention must be paid to sound pedagogical principles driven by learner participation and the social dynamics of the online learning environment.
- Preparation for adjusting to the online course facilitation approach is often time consuming.
- Online classrooms generate challenges of juggling classroom management, community building, curriculum design, and technology guidance responsibilities while recognizing learners' needs during different course intervals.

Three of the seven often-cited Chickering and Gamson's *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* relate to the importance of supporting facilitation of online courses:

1. Encourages contact between students and faculty
2. Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students
3. Gives prompt feedback

All Distance Education courses should support Title 5 "regular effective contact" regulations including guidelines in Section 55204 defined in DE Recommendation 110: Regular Effective Contact:

1. Initiated regular effective contact
2. Frequency and timeliness of regular effective contact
3. Expectations regarding regular effective contact

The nature of online teaching requires instructors to reexamine and move beyond traditional face-to-face pedagogy toward more facilitative practices – student-centered learning. Furthermore, "faculty cannot be expected to know intuitively how to...deliver an effective online course." (Palloff and Pratt, p. 23). Thus, the *Self-Assessment of Online Course Facilitation Instrument* will help faculty to deliver an effective online course.

## **WASC Red Flags**

- Regular effective contact is not obvious.

- Students express dissatisfaction with the quality of their distance education courses.
- Students don't know whom to contact if they have questions or problems.
- Comments from faculty indicate that they have directly translated their traditional course to a distance education course. This may indicate inadequate consideration of distance education pedagogy.
- The use of only a single method of assessment in a course might indicate that the course does not adequately link assessments and outcomes.
- While the use of the same platform will provide some consistency in online courses, a reviewer expects courses to make use of different instructional strategies to fulfill their individual objectives.
- The discussion board in an online course shows little or no activity.
- The majority of student postings lack substance and show little evidence of reflection or critical thinking.

(U. S. Department of Education. Office of Post Secondary Ed. (2006). *Evidence of Quality in DE Programs Drawn from Interviews with the Accreditation Community*. Pp. 8 - 11).

...[A] "self-evaluation" component provides the opportunity for serious reflection and goal setting, and action plans for improvement (Los Angeles Community College District, 2006).

## **Overview: The Assessing Online Facilitation Instrument**

The *Assessing Online Facilitation (AOF) instrument* and accompanying *Facilitation Activity Record* were developed by the California State University Tigers Grant Committee as a primary resource for the following:

- Checklist for self-evaluation in combination with student evaluations to gauge both areas of course strengths and areas of needing improvement.
- Framework for invited peer evaluation.
- Outline for a department's expectations with simple modifications.
- Guide for faculty training.

<http://www.humboldt.edu/~aof/aof>

## **What are the criteria for effective *facilitation* of online courses?**

Online classrooms bring challenges of juggling many responsibilities such as classroom management, community building, and technology "guru" while recognizing learners' needs during different course intervals. Few online educators have the benefit of experienced mentors to help fine tune online facilitation skills (Sloan Survey of Online Learning, 2008).

Best practices reveal:

- Emphasis on multiple "hats", or roles, required of the successful online facilitator.
- Duties and expectations of online facilitators differ depending on the course interval.

While the research shows slight variations in the roles assumed by facilitators, the four roles that were most consistently cited were: Managerial, Pedagogical, Social, and Technical.

1. The **Managerial** role involves completing general procedural and administrative duties. In a face-to-face class, this might be loosely described as “paperwork” or “housekeeping.”
2. The **Pedagogical** role is the one that is probably most expected for online facilitators. As the subject matter expert in the online classroom, the facilitator guides students to understanding the important concepts and skills of the course of study.
3. The **Social** role may be the most often overlooked for facilitators new to the online environment. However, the research is clear that building community in an online class is key to support student learning.
4. When assuming the **Technical** role, the facilitator assists students to become comfortable with the technologies used in course delivery so that the technology becomes as transparent as possible.

Research also led to the recognition of categories or course intervals found in all online classes. Course intervals drive facilitators’ tasks. The intervals are:

1. **Before Class Begins** - includes responsibilities such as inspecting course materials for currency and preparing students for their upcoming online experience.
2. **During The First Week** - expands responsibilities to include important tasks for building community and creating a welcoming environment conducive to learning.
3. **Throughout Class** - the longest interval in the course and has many responsibilities in all roles. However, the pedagogical role takes on special importance.
4. **The Last Week** - the final interval where the course is brought to a close.

The *Assessing Online Facilitation (AOF) Instrument* is essentially a self /peer assessment component of a process representing a cooperative effort to continuously improve online instruction. It is comprised of organized tips and techniques from the literature into an easy-to-use checklist called the *Assessing Online Facilitation Instrument*, or the “AOF”. The document is available at <http://www.humboldt.edu/~aof/aof.htm> but will be made available on the PCC Distance Education website. The first four pages of the checklist represent different facilitation intervals. Each interval has tips sorted into the different facilitator roles.

The AOF can:

1. Serve as a checklist for *self-evaluation* in combination with student feedback to gauge both areas of course strengths and areas needing improvement.
2. Function as a *framework* for invited peer evaluation.
3. Outline a *division/department’s expectations* with simple modifications.
4. Guide for faculty training.

The Facilitation Activity Record is an optional companion document for the *Assessing Online Facilitation (AOF) Instrument*. A blank template is available on the AOF website at <http://www.humboldt.edu/~aof/far.htm> and will be made available on the PCC Distance Education website.

These instruments reflect institutional commitment to online instructional quality based on research and best practices to enhance student learning in online environments. Instruments such as these are intended to be completely voluntary and optional; not to replace existing procedures used for retention, promotion, or tenure at any institution. However, adoption of the AOF review process is a clear demonstration of institutional or programmatic commitment to assessment and continuous improvement.

The following recommendations regarding the *Self-Assessment of Online Course Facilitation Instrument* are not meant to abrogate the established role of the faculty, division, or department in evaluating online instructors, nor should they contravene the evaluation process established through the collective bargaining process. These recommendations are meant to serve as helpful tools in maintaining high quality instruction and promoting ongoing professional development (College of the Canyons, 2006).

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### **Recommendation:**

In the interest of ensuring continued quality of instructional facilitation, promoting innovation, and enhancing student success, the Distance Education Committee supports the adoption and use of the *Assessing Online Facilitation (AOF) Instrument* and the *Facilitation Activity Record* developed by the California State University Tigers Grant Committee as a primary resource for the following:

- Checklist for self-evaluation of online course facilitation, in combination with student feedback, to gauge both areas of course strengths and areas needing improvement.
- Framework for invited peer feedback.
- Outline a department's expectations with simple modifications.
- Guide for faculty training.

### **Resources**

An Instrument to Assess Online Facilitation. (2007). California State University Tigers Grant Project. <http://www.humboldt.edu/~aof/aof>

Chickering, A. & Gamson, Z. (1987). *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*.  
<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/7princip.htm>

College of the Canyons. (2008). *Checklist for Online Instructor Evaluation*.

Facilitation Activity Record. (2007). California State University Tigers Grant Project.  
<http://www.humboldt.edu/~aof/far.htm>

Los Angeles Community College District. Faculty Evaluation Taskforce. *Recommendation for the Incorporation of Student Learning Outcomes in Faculty Evaluations*. (2006).

<http://accred.mentorlounge.net/images/uploads/LACCDFacultyEvaluationTF2006.pdf>

Palloff, R. Pratt, K. (2001). *Lessons from the Cyberspace Classroom: The Realities of Online Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sloan-C. Sloan Survey of Online Learning (2008). *Staying The Course – Online Education in the United States*.

[http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/survey/staying\\_course](http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/survey/staying_course)

U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education. (2006). Evidence of Quality in Distance Education Programs Drawn from Interviews with the Accreditation Community. <http://www.ysu.edu/accreditation/Resources/Accreditation-Evidence-of-Quality-in-DE-Programs.pdf>

Walton, I., James-Hanz, P., North, W., & Pilati, M. (2008). Ensuring the Appropriate Use of Educational Technology: An Update for Local Academic Senates. [http://www.asccc.org/Publications/Papers/Education\\_Technology.htm](http://www.asccc.org/Publications/Papers/Education_Technology.htm)

**Recommendation Approved by the Distance Education Committee – June 1, 2010**

**Recommendation Approved by the Academic Senate – June 7, 2010**