

## Standards, Benchmarks, and Guidelines for Online Courses

Online courses include many components with varied structure and content. The intended result of the combined design of the components, structure, and content is student learning. Instructors of these online courses are concerned with two aspects of online courses: (1) the quality or effectiveness of the components, structure, and content; and (2) the quality of the learning that takes place.

Benchmarks, guidelines, and standards for online course quality or effectiveness are available in a myriad of sources. According to Marshall (2004), "standards represent a significant investment of resources and are consequently driven by a desire to solve problems in a particular context that are relevant to those providing the resources" (p. 599). Oliver and Liber (2003) share that the use of e-learning standards assists in assuring quality online pedagogic and andragogic strategies in online course instruction.

The six United States regional accrediting bodies have completed a set of recommendations, standards, or guidelines. Most regional commissions emphasize standards that are broad and flexible in order to meet the varied online learning experiences, needs, instructional traditions, values, and principles. Higher education organizations have also developed guidelines or benchmarks for online learning. The guidelines and/or benchmarks are intended to assist in developing an effective online learning experience and in assessing and evaluating the effectiveness of the online learning products and courses. (Seok, 2007).

In this issue and subsequent issues of the *Instructional Design Online Learning InfoCast*, we provide a checklist of some recommended standards, guidelines, and benchmarks for your reference when first developing your online or web-enhanced course, or when working to further enhance your existing course(s). The list included in this issue of the newsletter focuses on the "online organization and design" of an online course.

### Course Navigability or Organization

#### Syllabus Includes

- Course objectives
- Course completion requirements
- Expectations of students' participation, honesty, etc
- Timeline for student participation is clear
- Faculty member's introductory information
- Expectations of availability of and turnaround time for contact with instructor
- Course schedule is summarized in one place

#### Aesthetic Design

- Typeface is easy to read
- Sufficient contrast between text and background makes information easy to read
- Appropriate images supporting course content add visual interest
- Design keeps course pages to a comfortable length with white space

#### Consistency in Course

- Layout of course is visually and functionally consistent
- Navigability is clean, simple, and user friendly
- Spelling and grammar are consistent and accurate
- Written material is concise
- Language of written material is friendly and supportive
- Clear directions are given for each task or assignment
- Sentences and paragraphs are brief

#### Universal Accessibility

- Universal accessibility concerns are addressed throughout the course
- Images are optimized for speedy display and include alternative text
- Alternative formats of materials provided, when possible
- Use of color adds interest, but does not disadvantage those with color blindness

- Syllabus is easily located
- Links to other parts of the course or external sources are accurate and up-to-date
- Instructional materials required are easily located
- Numbers identify sequenced steps
- Course content is organized in a logical format
- Topics are clearly identified and sub-topics are related to topics
- Sequential (vs. concurrent) topics are annotated with dates
- Course schedule is available in a printer-friendly format for student convenience
- Organization and sequencing of the course content is logical and clear
- Resources are separated into "required" and "optional" categories.

Marshall, S. (2004). E-learning standards: Open enablers of learning or compliance strait jackets? In R. Atkinson, C. McBeath, D. Jonas-Swyer, & R. Phillips (Eds.), *Beyond the comfort zone: Proceedings of the 21st ASCILITE Conference* (pp. 596-605). Perth, West Australia. Retrieved May 20, 2008, from <http://www.ascilite.org/au/conferences/perth04/procs/marshall.html>

Oliver, B., & Liber, O. (2003). Learning technology interoperability standards. In A. Littlejohn (Ed.), *Re-using online resources: A sustainable approach to e-Learning* (pp. 146-155). London: Kogan Page.

Seok, S. (2007). Standards, accreditation, benchmarks, and guidelines in distance education. In M. Simonson, & C. Schlosser (Eds.) *Quarterly Review of Distance Education: Research that guides practice*, 8(4), pp.387-398.

## New ClassLive Pro Features

**Instructors can now pause a session recording.** When opening a ClassLive Pro session, the recording feature automatically turns on creating an archive for the session. Instructors now have the ability to pause the recording and restart it at anytime within an active session by clicking on the stop and start buttons,



found at the bottom left corner of the session Interface. This feature allows for the elimination of gaps or dead time in a recording along with the ability to turn off the recording altogether for a session that does not require to be recorded.

### **Here is an example of how this feature may be used:**

In many ClassLive Pro sessions, instructors will activate the session early so they can set up their lecture. When a student views the archive they have to fast forward through the setup time to find the actual session start. With the new pause feature an instructor can pause the recording while they setup and then restart the recording when they are ready to begin their session.

### **Availability:**

The pause feature is only available to instructors using ClassLive Pro  
Only one archive will be created for each session even if the recording has been paused a number of times

An additional feature, which has been added as part of this release, is the **ability for an instructor to erase the beginning of the recording within a live session**. This is a great feature for instructors that are recording their lecture for students to view later. An instructor may begin the lecture but for some reason decides that they want to start over. Instead of ending the session, waiting several minutes, and then logging into a new session, they can simply click on Tools (in the menu bar), Recorder, and Erase Recording. This will erase everything that has been recorded up to that point.

## Formative Surveys (Online Courses)

Students in online courses (01W, 02W...) are required to complete a formative survey approximately two weeks after the beginning of the term. These surveys serve to inform the instructors as to the experience of students regarding the start-up of the course(s). Survey administration dates and delivery of the survey results to fac-

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Term	Dates Surveys are Administered to Students	Results to Faculty/ Department Heads
Summer I 2008	June 12 — June 16	June 18— August 18
Summer II 2008	July 17— July 21	July 23 — August 18

### Summative Surveys (Online Courses)

Students in online courses (01W, 02W...) are also required to complete a summative survey approximately two weeks prior to the close of the term. These surveys inform the faculty assigned to the course and the department head of how the students evaluated the course. Survey administration dates and delivery of the survey results to faculty and department heads is provided in table below:

Term	Dates Surveys are Administered to Students	Results to Faculty/ Department Heads
Summer I 2008	June 25 — June 30	July 11 — August 18
Summer II 2008	July 25 — July 29	August 18 — November 18

## Announcements

### Summer II 2008 Populated

Summer II 2008 courses are scheduled to be populated with students on June 25th.

### Ready to Develop or Modify Your Fall 2008 Course(s)?

If you are ready to begin developing or enhancing your Fall 2008 course(s), feel free to request that your Fall 2008 course shall be created by completing the online course copy request form found at [www.tamu-commerce.edu/itde/copyrequest.asp](http://www.tamu-commerce.edu/itde/copyrequest.asp).

## IDU Staff

Julie A. McElhany, Ed.D.  
Coordinator for Instructional Design

Dean Aslinia, M.S.  
eLearning Support Specialist

Alan Francis, M.B.A.  
eLearning Administrative Specialist

Jess Lamphere, B.S.  
eLearning Support Specialist

\*\*\*\* A PDF version of this newsletter is available at [www.tamu-commerce.edu/itde/newslettersArchive.asp](http://www.tamu-commerce.edu/itde/newslettersArchive.asp).