

Online/Blended Teaching Handbook

The University of Texas at Dallas
eLearning Team

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Introduction

Online/Blended education is becoming commonplace in colleges and universities throughout the world. It is the goal of this manual to facilitate a smooth entrance into online/blended teaching by outlining processes and procedures for creating and teaching your course. Topics covered include: Organizational Information, Philosophy, Course Development, Technology, Faculty, Staff, Students, and Legal Issues.

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Organizational Information

Programs. The fully online degree programs at the University of Texas at Dallas are extensions of campus programs. Internet-based programs have been available since 1999.

Administration. The programs are managed by the program heads.

Course Development. Courses are developed by faculty with support from the UTD eLearning Team.

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Philosophy

Definition of Distance Education. Distance education is defined as planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching and as a result requires special techniques of course design, special instructional techniques, special methods of communication by electronic and other technology, as well as special organizational and administrative arrangements (Moore & Kearsley, 1996).

Title 19, Texas Administrative Code, Part 1, Chapter 2, Subchapter J, Rule §2.202, states that a 100-percent online course is “A distance education course in which 100 percent of instructional activity takes place when the student(s) and instructor(s) are in separate physical locations. Requirements for on-campus or in-person orientation, testing, academic support services, internships/fieldwork, or other non-instructional activities do not exclude a course from this category.” Generally speaking, online courses at UT Dallas are 100% online and do not require face-to-face sessions. A “hybrid” or “blended” course is “A distance education course in which more than 50 percent but less than 100 percent of instructional activity takes place when the student(s) and instructor(s) are in separate physical locations.”

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Effectiveness of Online Instruction. Many have questioned if distance education is as effective as traditional education. A compilation of research findings entitled *The No Significant Difference Phenomenon* (NSDP) explores the effective use of technology, chiefly distance learning, compared to alternative methods or techniques of teaching. The annotated studies in the original article are arranged chronologically. There are 355 research reports, summaries, and papers cited in which no significant difference was reported between the variables compared (Russell, 1999).

The US Department of Education conducted a [meta-analysis](#) comparing online, blended, and face-to-face effectiveness. It was found that "...blended instruction has been more effective, providing a rationale for the effort required to design and implement blended approaches. When used by itself, online learning appears to be as effective as conventional classroom instruction, but not more so." (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, Jones, 2010).

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Mission of Online/Blended Learning Programs. The mission of online/blended programs at The University of Texas at Dallas is to provide high quality educational opportunities to students who may be at a geographic disadvantage, have employer travel and other conflicts which prevent on-campus class attendance, have course conflicts, or have personal circumstances that require scheduling flexibility.

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Online/Blended Course Standards. The University of Texas at Dallas' standards for online/blended courses are as follows.

Online/Blended courses will:

- adhere to the same rigorous standards as traditional courses.
- result in learning outcomes appropriate to the credit awarded.
- comply with the "Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Distance Education Advisory Committee Guide for Incorporating The Principles of Good Practice into Electronically-Based Courses."
- utilize the best available technology and pedagogy to create and provide a high quality educational experience to students.
- be taught by academically qualified faculty.
- include regular communication and feedback to students.
- be regularly updated.

Online/Blended courses follow the same academic calendar as face-to-face sections. The faculty member responsible for conducting each course is required to develop all content and a corresponding syllabus which will include assignments, texts, due dates, grading rubrics, and other relevant information.

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Course Development

The instructor is responsible for designing and building the course, but is encouraged to contact instructional designers as needed for training, technical support, and pedagogical assistance. Services such as the recording studio are available on a first-come, first-served basis. The instructor should review and follow the [Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's Principles of Good Practice \(PGP\) \(Approved Oct 2023\)](#) and will need to complete the [UT Dallas Principle of Good Practice Form](#).

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Online Teaching Certification. The eLearning Team offers [Online Teaching Certifications](#) to faculty (full-time and adjunct) and Graduate Teaching Assistants (including Post-Doctoral associates) who have instructional responsibilities.

The program is online, self-paced, and allows instructors to experience the online tools and educational environment as students prior to teaching. The learning materials focus on pedagogy, University policies and processes, eLearning LMS functionality, and other educational technology tools.

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Procedures. The following procedures should be followed for the preparation of materials.

The instructor should:

- schedule a course design consultation with an instructional designer as needed.
- make arrangements with instructional designers to receive technology training as needed.

The development of course materials is time consuming. Sufficient time must be allocated to this process to ensure the course is complete prior to the start of the semester. Examples of course materials used in distance education courses include text-based lectures, multimedia presentations, interactive web-based exercises, case studies, and instructor videos. The instructional design staff is committed to supporting faculty, but content and the creation of course materials is ultimately the responsibility of the instructor. 60 hours is a good estimate of how much time you will spend preparing a course.

Additionally, professors are encouraged to seek advice and assistance from the UT Dallas eLearning team for face-to-face courses that utilize the university's learning management system or other educational technologies.

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Syllabus. The syllabus is the roadmap to the course. A rough draft of this document should be created very early in the course development process. This document will ultimately contain all of the information students will need for the course including

textbook information, due dates, special instructions, etc. An Online/Blended Course Syllabus Template can be found on the [Office of the Provost's Syllabus Templates website](#).

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Learning Objectives. Like courses taught in the traditional classroom, distance education courses should be based on objectives. The instructor should develop a list of objectives for the course as a whole, as well as for each section (or module/unit)*. Here is an example of course/module objectives:

Course Objectives:

- After completing Strategic Management 101, the student will explain core concepts and provide examples of their relevance and use by actual companies.
- After completing Strategic Management 101, the student will present explanations of analytical tools used in the managerial process of crafting and executing strategy.

Module Objectives:

- After completing Module 1, the student will list the components of Porter's Five Forces.
- After completing Module 1, the student will define key success factors (KSF's).

*Instructional designers are available should the instructor need assistance writing objectives.

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Textbook Selection. The instructor should select textbooks/case studies and communicate this information to the area administrative assistant (who will pass it on to the bookstore at least four weeks prior to the start of each semester to provide ample time for ordering and shipment). Please contact the bookstore and the publisher if you are interested in creating a custom textbook or an eBook. Many textbooks come with supplemental online course material. Please contact an instructional designer if you would like assistance importing this material into your course.

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Course Activities/Assessments. Activities for assessing students in an online course can be as dynamic as in traditional face-to-face classes. Instructors have the options of incorporating graded activities such as discussions (threaded, blogs, journals), group presentations, papers, and online or proctored exams.

A common question is, "How much recorded lecture should go into an online course?" Credit hour calculation in online courses is not necessarily as clear cut as in the face-to-face setting. For instance, in a class taught in the traditional format, a three-credit course might require 45 hours of classroom time, plus two hours of homework time per each hour of classroom time, totaling 135 hours.

It is recommended that instructors **DO NOT** record 45 hours of lecture, but instead meet the 135 total hours in the online environment by calculating the student's time on task. There are many academic activities in which students can participate to achieve this. An example week might include a student viewing a recorded lecture (1 hour), working on a discussion board assignment (2 hours), reading (2 hours), taking an online quiz (1 hour), contributing to group work (2 hours), and participating in a team web conference (1 hour). Instructional designers are available for assistance/consultation on course design and best practices to help transition a course from the traditional classroom to the online environment.

Communication.

- **Announcement:** Post reminders, news and updates to the entire class.
- **Discussion:** Questions or discussion topics are posted on the discussion board in threaded, blog or journal format. The amount and quality of student interaction can be graded.
- **Email:** Instructor and students can use Course Messages or UTD email tool to exchange information and address any issues and concerns.
- **Web conference:** Web conferences provide various methods of synchronous communication, including audio, voice-chat, text chat, and desktop and application sharing. These can be recorded and viewed asynchronously as well.
- **Group tools:** Groups can use group communication and collaboration tools for group assignments.

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Group Presentations.

- **Student presentations:** In the Group Discussion area in eLearning, students may be given a private venue to post discussions and files (such as Word documents, PowerPoint presentations and Excel spreadsheets). The instructor has the option to make these files available when the work is complete. The work can be graded by the instructor and critiqued by students.
- **Class Discussion Forum:** Groups can present in the designated class discussion forum for feedback and comments.
- **Group presentations via web conference:** Student presenters can upload PowerPoints (or any other type of document) and conduct a web-based presentation using audio, text chat, and desktop/application sharing. Content, delivery, and attendance can be recorded.

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Assignments. Assignments may be submitted electronically via the eLearning Assignment tool. Notes can be made on the submission and returned electronically if desired. As in the traditional classroom, plagiarism is a concern. [Turn-it-in](#) is a software program that can scan a student's paper and compare it to millions of previously submitted papers and literary works in a database. A report is then displayed that flags potentially plagiarized sections. This tool is available for use in all eLearning courses.

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Online Tests. A test can be created within eLearning that can be automatically scored and entered into the Grade Book. At the instructor’s discretion, results can be made available to the student. It is recommended that the instructor write questions that test higher levels of learning as opposed to rote knowledge. For background on this, please see [Bloom’s Taxonomy](#).

To address the issue of test security, the instructor should set up the test as follows:

- Randomize questions from the test bank to ensure that students do not receive identical tests.
- Randomize the answers so that if students do receive the same question, the answer order will not coincide between tests. *Do not do this with questions that have answer options such as “all of the above, none of the above, etc.” as when answers are randomized it will cause confusion.
- Adjust settings so one question appears at a time to discourage students from printing test questions.
- Set a time limit on the test to minimize the possibility of students looking up several answers in the textbook.
- Shorten the test availability time window.
- The Testing Center can host [proctored exams](#). Students at a distance can make arrangements to take proctored exams at an [approved testing facility](#).
- The online proctored exam service [Honorlock](#) can be used.
- Limit the amount of time and details when test results are released.

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Uploading Course Materials. Once the course materials are created, they must be uploaded to eLearning. The instructor with assistance from an instructional designer should develop an intuitive course structure to ensure ease of navigation for the student.

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Course Review. The instructor is responsible for reviewing all aspects of the course for accuracy. Once the course meets the instructor’s approval, the instructor must sign off on the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Distance Education Advisory Committee’s Guide for Incorporating The Principles of Good Practice into Electronically Based Courses by submitting the [UT Dallas Principle of Good Practice Form](#). The course will also be reviewed by a faculty peer review. Finally, the course is to be approved by the program head.

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Technology

Getting Started. To ensure access and proper functioning of course materials, the following steps should be taken:

Access

- Ensure there are no issues with the instructor's NetID or password. If issues exist, contact the UTD Helpdesk at 972-883-2911 or assist@utdallas.edu.

Browsers and Operating Systems

- [View Blackboard's Browser and OS Requirements.](#)

Software

- Microsoft Office (install the latest supported version). Contact the help desk at 972-883-2911 to install this at no charge.
- Virus detection/protection software.
- Plug-ins may be required to view media in or your eLearning class, such as [Adobe Acrobat Reader](#).
- [Login](#) to your eLearning account.
Note: If you have problems logging in, see a wrong course listed, or do not see a course listed, contact the [eLearning Help Desk](#) or 1-866-588-3192.
- To customize your eLearning course, contact the eLearning Team at elarning@utdallas.edu.

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Course Development Tools. In an Internet-based course, the teacher and learner can be in different places at different times. Just as in the traditional classroom, communication is essential for a course to be successful. The instructor and students may maintain constant contact via announcements, discussion boards, web conferences, and emails. By using a combination of asynchronous and synchronous tools, the barriers of space and time are eliminated. In addition to the communication tools mentioned, information may be conveyed to students in several ways such as text, audio, multimedia, synchronized slide presentations with audio, and simulations.

Listed below are brief descriptions of some technologies used in distance education courses:

- eLearning: A course management tool (or container) where all materials/communication tools, grade book, etc. reside.
- Streaming video: Allows students to access video clips via the Internet without any files being downloaded to their computers.
- PowerPoint: A component of Microsoft Office that facilitates computer-based slide presentations.
- Camtasia: Allows the creation of multimedia presentations for viewing via computer. Translates presentations into streaming multimedia presentations.

- Respondus: Enhances the functionality and usability of eLearning's quiz, survey, and self-test tools. This tool saves considerable time developing tests by allowing the creation of all questions in a single text file and importing them directly into the eLearning test bank. This can be downloaded for free.
- Adobe Acrobat: A cross-platform (any computer can open it) program that can convert Word Documents, Excel Spreadsheets, and PowerPoint Presentations into a file that is very difficult to alter. PDF files tend to be much smaller, therefore taking less time to download.
- Microsoft Word: A program for generating text documents.
- Microsoft Excel: A program used to generate spreadsheets.
- Tablet PC recording: Allows graphic illustration of any computer application.
- Library for Distance Students: Distance students may access UTD Library resources including a chat-based reference service, a document delivery service (books, articles, and media are sent via mail), and connection to the UTD Catalog.
- Web conferencing: A tool used for synchronous class meetings and small group discussions. Capabilities include file sharing, audio/voice chat, video, desktop/application sharing, and interactive features.
- Recording studio: This facility may be scheduled to record and edit audio/video material. The material can then be produced and uploaded into the learning management system for students to access.

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Training/Tech Support: In order to get help as quickly as possible, please direct your question to the proper contact.

- NetID issues: assist@utdallas.edu or 972-883-2911.
- eLearning course issues: [eLearning Help Desk](#) or 1-866-588-3192.
- Assistance developing/uploading materials, creating tests, general eLearning questions: elearning@utdallas.edu.
- Training Requests: [eLearning Faculty Training Site](#).

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Faculty

Once the course is complete, the instructor is responsible for managing it throughout the semester. This management includes monitoring the course, communicating regularly with students, grading assignments and assessments in a timely manner, updating the grade book, etc. A breakdown of the responsibilities of faculty, staff, and teaching assistants follows.

Responsibilities.

<p>Prior to Course Offering</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend a course development meeting with an instructional designer if needed. • Request training as needed. • Schedule studio recording time if needed. • Ensure course is available in eLearning. • Ensure all course materials are in compliance with accessibility standards. • Prepare course materials (syllabus, lectures, quizzes, etc.) in accordance to the course development timeline. • Communicate textbook/case studies to be used with bookstore. • Keep course materials up to date. • Obtain clearance for copyrighted materials. • Review course in its entirety at least two weeks prior to course offering. • Make needed corrections/updates. • Ensure the course is complete prior to the start of the semester.
<p>During Course Offering</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to student questions within 48 hours. • Regular communication with students (announcement, discussion board, email, web conference, etc.). • Schedule and communicate times for synchronous communication (web conference/chat) with students if needed. • Maintain online course throughout the semester (discussions, group formation, grade book, assignment submissions, calendar, course material uploads after course release).
<p>After Course Offering</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review course evaluations. • Reflect on experiences in the course. • Determine necessary changes for the next offering.

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Staff

Instructional designers will:

- conduct workshops for faculty and TAs.
- conduct individualized training sessions for faculty and TAs.
- assist with media selection, design, and development.
- provide guidance on copyright clearance.
- provide guidance on accessibility issues.
- provide technical assistance.
- evaluate and offer suggestions for course revisions.

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Students

Admission requirements and tuition are the same as for traditional students. The fees are comparable to traditional classes (there is a distance learning fee, but students are exempt from fees such as student union, recreational facility and medical service). Students can take online courses and traditional classroom courses simultaneously.

Requirements.

Students will:

- have regular access to a computer that meets the specifications outlined.
- have regular access to a reliable Internet connection.
- access eLearning three times per week (minimum).

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Knowledge/Attitude/Skills.

The online student must be:

- proficient using a computer.
- disciplined to complete projects by deadlines.
- a self-starter with intrinsic motivation to read, write, and participate fully in class activities.
- able to manage time effectively.
- able/willing to work independently and in virtual teams.
- willing to devote approximately 9-10 hours a week to a 3-credit course.
- committed to academic honesty.
- willing to contact the instructor immediately should course content issues arise.
- willing to contact technical support immediately should a technical issue arise.

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Legal Issues

Copyrighted Material. The instructor may not use copyrighted material without proper clearance. Obtaining clearance to use copyrighted material is the responsibility of the instructor. To determine if clearance needs to be obtained, the following four factors should be considered:

1. The purpose and character of the use, including whether use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes.
2. The nature of the copyrighted work.
3. The amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole.
4. The effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work.

It is recommended that the instructor reviews the [UT System's Crash Course in Copyright](#).

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Accessibility. Course materials should be accessible to students, regardless of disability. A text equivalent for every non-text element should be included for all course materials. This includes images, graphics, video, and audio files. A detailed set of guidelines can be found at the [World Wide Web Consortium \(W3C\) website](#).

A student identifying him/herself as having a disability should be directed to the UTD AccessAbility Resource Center. Phone: 972-883-2098.

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