

Expectations for Online Course Delivery and Instruction

Department of Social Sciences
Kennebec Valley Community College

Mark Kavanaugh
Department Chair

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to define for all Faculty the expectations for Course Design, Delivery, and Instruction across all offerings within the department. Courses within the department are offered in both face-to-face and online formats. Emerging technologies such as video conferencing will be addressed later.

Faculty should utilize this document to ensure compliance with the expectations of the Department in regard to their performance.

A note on the use of language in this document:

Blackboard is the Course Management System (CMS) that is utilized by KVCC to deliver all aspects of online course content. Blackboard utilizes terminology to describe its tools and you need to become familiar with these tools to effectively use them.

In this document I use the term “Assessments” in two ways. At times I am describing the general process of evaluating Learning Outcomes. There is a wide variety of ways in which instructors can do this including class discussion, tests, papers, projects, group work, presentations, etc. etc.

“Assessments” is also the term that Blackboard uses to describe the Exam or Quiz tool.

Blackboard uses the term “Assignments” to describe written work or “Drop Boxes” through which students may submit documents or other files to you.

Expectations for Online Course Delivery

Specific to the delivery of online course work is the assurance that students develop a sense of being part of a social learning community and that they are provided with clear guidance as to what is expected of them through the entire course.

To this end, clear communication of expectations, assignments, content, and resources is essential from the first day of class. We, as Faculty, are called upon to be MORE prepared for our online classes than we may be accustomed to in our face-to-face classes. Since communication is mediated through technology it is that much more important to have a defined course structure from the onsite of the class.

Essential Course Design

The essential model of course design is that you will be providing your students with content, activities, and assessments on a weekly basis. It is recommended that work be organized such that assignments are completed within a given week during the course.

It is recommended that longer assignments such as papers and group projects be divided up into distinct stages and organized as individual assignments that can be made due during specific weeks in the course.

The basic unit of learning in the course is the **Lesson Plan**. The course can contain any number of Lesson Plans (within reason) and these define the bulk of activity within the course.

Lesson Plans should have the following components organized on a single page:

- Title of Lesson Plan
- Introduction (often including a captivating, attention-getting image or statement to capture your audience)
- Outline of the specific Learning Outcomes for the Lesson Plan in accordance with Bloom's Taxonomy
- A section that asks students to recall previous learning (if applicable) in preparation for learning new material
- A presentation of the new content. This can be done in the form of notes, audio files, video, slide presentations, etc.
- Descriptions of any and all activities that you will be asking students to complete in order to assess their comprehension
- Detailed grading rubrics and/or expectations for each activity

In online classes it is essential that effort be made to encourage the development of a "community of practice" where students sense they are part of a group and are aware of the actions and activity of other students and the teacher.

No tool within the Blackboard LMS is more effective than **Discussion Boards** in facilitating this connection.

Here are some requirements and guidelines regarding the use of **Discussion Boards** in online classes:

- **At least 80% of all Lesson Plans must incorporate the use of one or more Discussion Boards.**
- Discussion Board topics must be connected to achieving specific learning outcomes either directly, through the process of constructing shared meaning or an artifact (paper or project), or indirectly as students engage in discourse to process information and practice cognitive skills that will be used in other assessments.

- Not all learning objectives are appropriate for Discussions. Discussions should be utilized as a tool for higher order learning outcomes where there is no single set of answers or points of view. Learning outcomes that are narrowly defined are better assessed through quizzes and writing assignments.
- Faculty may choose to structure the nature of student posting very precisely or loosely, depending on which style best suits the accomplishment of the learning outcomes.
- If Discussions are going to be graded the criteria for such grading needs to be explicit.
- Beginning and end dates/times for the Discussions must be explicit.
- Faculty participation in the Discussion boards should happen and should be to the degree that facilitates deeper processing and learning on the part of the student.
- Policies regarding timing of participation, use of language, netiquette, and professional communication must be explicit either as a part of the instructions for each Discussion or as a general policy within the course.
- It is recommended that Discussion topics last no more than one week. (The exception to this would be Discussion topics that are project based, entail long-term group process, or the Discussion topics related to course-wide issues and concerns, such as the Technical Questions discussion topic)

Development Timeline

In order to ensure that students enter the online class and are presented with a clear structure the following guidelines should be followed:

Two Weeks Prior to Class Start

- Complete course syllabus with entire semester Content Outline (see template) is submitted to the Department Chair
- Faculty begin to develop the class utilizing the Standard Online Course Template

One Week Prior to Class Start

- Start Here, Course Syllabus, and Course Calendar resources are in place and reviewed by the Department Chair (see Appendix A for details on the content of these folders)
- Outline of all Lesson Plans are prepared and include the following in the Syllabus “Content Outline”:
 - Title
 - Learning Outcomes (in accordance with Bloom’s Taxonomy)
 - Assessment Strategy (Assessments must enable Faculty to demonstrate the extent to which students have met the above mentioned Learning Outcomes. The Assessments themselves do not need to be all completed)
 - Project Outlines (if applicable) are included in the Course Syllabus section (This includes descriptions of the projects, grading rubrics, and any other related information)

Class Start

- Course Title graphic is complete and includes a welcome statement and the text identifying that the course is currently in Week 1
- Start Here, Course Syllabus, and Course Calendar are complete
- Official Course Syllabus is posted as a PDF file in the Course Syllabus section
- Course Calendar document contains all relevant due dates for all assignments for the course
- Weekly Pages include:
 - Introduction to the content, expectations, and other relevant information
 - Lesson Plans (at least one Lesson Plan for each week of the course)
 - Gain attention
 - Learning Outcomes
 - Recall of Previous Learning (if applicable)
 - Presentation of Content
 - Descriptions of Learning Activities and Assessments
- Students are provided with direct links to at least Mail, Discussions, Assessments, and Assignments

- Within the Discussions section you should create three specific, un-graded discussion topics (these are a part of the standard department Course Template):
 - Course Questions
 - Technical Questions
 - Student Lounge
- Other Blackboard Course Tools may be used but they should not be made available unless they are actually being used within Lesson Plans


Each Week in the Class

- Each week you must update the graphic at the top of the page to reflect which week the course is in (Week 1, Week 2, Week 3, etc.).
- Any changes to the course calendar or expectations should be communicated via a group email and should be reflected on the Course Calendar document.
- Announcements via group email regarding any change to the structure of the class, expectations, availability of faculty must be made in a timely fashion.
- Announcements via group email should be made when specific assignments have been graded.


Standard Online Course Templates

Faculty can choose between two template formats (Template A and Template B) if they are teaching a face-to-face class. If the course is being taught online, or is a hybrid course, Faculty must utilize the Template A. The images below represent what you will find on the main page of the course. The folders are designed to contain ALL information pertaining to that week and may also include direct links to all Discussions, Assessments, and Assignments.


Course #: Course Title
Kennebec Valley Community College--Semester Year
Instructor Name
We are currently in Week XX, beginning Date

[Start Here!](#)


No kidding...START HERE! In this section I introduce the class, provide you guidance on navigation, class policies, and orient you to the class and how I teach it.

[Course Syllabus](#)


In this section I provide you with an orientation to the course syllabus and details on specific assignments.

[Course Calendar](#)

In this section you will find information related to due dates, class activities, meeting times, etc.

[Week 1](#)


Beginning (insert date)

[Week 2](#)


Beginning (insert date)

Template A


Course #: Course Title
Kennebec Valley Community College--Semester Year
Instructor Name
We are currently in Week XX, beginning Date

[Start Here!](#)


No kidding...START HERE! In this section I introduce the class, provide you guidance on navigation, class policies, and orient you to the class and how I teach it.

[Course Syllabus](#)

In this section I provide you with an orientation to the course syllabus and details on specific assignments

[Course Calendar](#)

In this section you will find information related to due dates, class activities, meeting times, etc.

[Course Content](#)

In this section you will find copies of documents, handouts, and other information useful and necessary for this class.

Template B

Expectations Regarding Communication

Consistent and reliable communication with your students is very important in all course work. Since there is no actual class meetings associated with online learning (at least not usually) it is important that you stay in close contact with your students.

Within Blackboard the primary tools of communication are Email and Discussions. (Some faculty also use the Announcements function, but a Group Email is often more effective and more personal).

It is required that you use the Email tool within Blackboard for ALL class related communication. Do not use your KVCC email or personal email except as a back-up communication tool.

Your task is to create, in your students, a habit of checking in on the classroom often. I tell my own students to check in on the class daily...and I expect the same of myself. **You are expected to log into Blackboard and “check in” on your class at least 4 times per week.**

The following are the minimum expectations for using the communication tools within Blackboard.

Email

- **Send a group email to all your students at the beginning of each week** introducing them to the expectations for the coming week (this includes a Welcome Email at the start of class)
- **You must respond to all student emails within 48 hours.** This excludes any “off days” that you may have delineated in your Start Here documents. Set your own policy, but stick to it.
- **Save all emails** that you receive from students by creating another “Mailbox” within the Email client of Blackboard. This provides for effective documentation of interactions that you have with your students
- If you check into the class often then you will not be overwhelmed by the number of emails that can sometimes accrue

Discussions

- **Participate actively in the Discussions** by posting questions and asking students to clarify or expand upon their postings. Be a PART of the Discussions, not just an observer.
- If you check into the class often then you will not be overwhelmed by the number of postings that can sometimes accrue

Expectations Regarding Grading

Timely feedback and grading is vital in an online environment. Turn-around time on assignments should be taken into consideration when designing your course.

Online learning provides unique challenges to testing and assessment. Many online assessments cannot be proctored easily and KVCC lacks the resources to support having many students come in to campus to take exams. Having students come in to take exams also defeats part of the purpose of having online classes to begin with!

It might be advisable to design your assessments in such a way as to allow students to utilize the resources they have available to them (internet, books, other students). While more accurately reflecting the real-world problem solving scenarios that students will find themselves in, it also allows you to have higher expectations as to the quality and quantity of work.

For writing assignments it is advisable that you inform your students about plagiarism and develop clear policies on how to deal with it should it occur.

Assessments:

- **Self grading assessments** (multiple choice and such) should be set to grade automatically and provide instant feedback to students
- **Assessments that require manual grading** should be graded within **one week** of the due date for the Assessment

Assignments:

- The nature and number of written assignments should be conducive to meeting acceptable feedback timelines. **Do not assign so much that you cannot keep up with the grading!**
- **Short written assignments** should be graded within **two weeks** of the due date
- **Longer written assignments should include a date** by which they will be graded so that students will anticipate when they will get their feedback.

Discussions:

- In online courses, the discussions are often graded components of the class (similar to attendance and class participation in face-to-face classes)
- Individual Discussions, linked to specific Learning Outcomes and Activities should not last for more than one week. At that point they should be closed (no more new postings) and graded.
- Discussions may be graded quantitatively, qualitatively, or both
- **Discussions should be graded within 24 hours after the Discussion has closed**
- Explanations of the grading of Discussions should be included in the syllabus if the same standard is going to be used across the course.

- If the standards for grading a particular Discussion differ, the grading criteria and performance expectations need to be included in the associated Lesson Plan

Example of a Quantitative Grading Scheme for a Discussion

“Students must participate in all online discussions. Participation will be graded based on a minimum of two postings to the discussion board. One posting must be in response to the Discussion Topic and the other posting must be a response to another students’ posting. Postings should be substantive to the discussion and contribute either more information, challenge a point of view, or ask questions. A simple “I agree” will not be sufficient”

Example of a Qualitative Grading Scheme for a Discussion

“In this discussion board I’m going to ask each of you to post an example of the application of this theory to a real world situation. The example must clearly exhibit the nature of the theory and you must use the terminology of the theory in your post. In your response post to another student I want you to evaluate the degree to which you feel another model or theory may better explain the situation. In your response posting you must use the terminology of the theory and demonstrate an understanding of its application”

Appendix A

Required Course Documents

The first three icons on the main page of the Course Template are the “Start Here”, “Course Syllabus”, and “Course Calendar” folders. You are required to place specific types of documents and information in each of these folders prior to the start of the course. Below I have outlined the specific content that must be included, in some form, in each of these folders.

You should consult with your Chair as to how to organize these documents in these folders as it is going to be vital that you provide your students with a clear introduction to the course structure and policies right at the start.

Start Here

Documents that must be included in the Start Here folder include the following:

- A Welcome Letter with a basic introduction to the course
 - Course number and name
 - Course start date
 - Course end date
- Course Navigation
 - Describe what is contained in each of the folders on the main page. This should include the Start Here, Course Syllabus, Course Calendar, and Weekly folders
 - Describe how you are going to use the tools of Blackboard to conduct your course
 - Describe how you are going to instruct your students utilizing the Lesson Plans included in the Weekly folders
- A document about you, your credentials, experience, and teaching style
- Course Policies
 - Policies regarding communication expectations (your expectations of their participation and what they can expect from you)
 - Policies regarding communication expectations (netiquette, privacy, and respect in all areas of communication)
 - Policies regarding late work
 - Policies regarding grading
 - Policies regarding plagiarism and cheating
 - Policies on submitting work (including acceptable file types)

Course Syllabus

Documents that must be included in the Course Syllabus folder include the following:

- A PDF copy of the official formatted Course Syllabus
- Documents regarding specific assignments and tasks in the class

- Grading rubrics for major course projects and/or papers
- Any additional information needed for students to understand specific assignments and expectations

Course Calendar

Rather than utilize the Calendar tool within Blackboard it is recommended that you create a single document, posted as a PDF or an HTML file, that outlines the specific topics, expectations, readings, assignments, etc for each week in the class.

The document must be organized by weeks in the class and each week outlined on this document should be dated as to when the week begins and when the week ends. The end of the week often corresponds to when all assignments and activities will need to be completed.

Appendix B

File Types for both Course Documents and for Student Submissions

Document files include those like your syllabus, instructions, outlines, handouts, and grading rubrics that you might want your students to have. If you create these yourself you can use any software that you feel comfortable using but there are only a few file types that meet the criteria above, Portable Document Files (PDF), Rich Text Format (RTF), and Web Pages (HTML). By using these types of files you maximize the ability for your students to view the documents from anywhere they may be. Let's take a look at each of these.

Portable Document Files

PDF is a file type that was developed by Adobe, the same company that gives us Photoshop. The origins of the PDF file type is in the print industry at the birth of desktop publishing. Designers and layout experts wanted to be sure that what they did on their computer actually got printed when they sent the file to the print shop. This included fonts, pictures, colors, and the layout of the document.

PDFs store all this information so that just about any computer, with the right software, can open the file and see it exactly like you designed it! This is great for forms and documents with complex layouts.

To view PDF files you need software that can open PDF documents! Adobe, of course, has the Adobe Acrobat Reader. This is a free program that is included with most computers already. Adobe Acrobat (not the reader) is a program that can be purchased that allows the user to create complex PDF files directly and can include audio, video, and forms to fill out.

Other programs can view PDF files as well, including Apple's Preview software that comes with every Mac. In addition, when you download the software it automatically updates your web browser software so that you can view PDF files right in your web browser!

In order to create a PDF file you need to have Adobe Acrobat. However, many modern operating systems, such as Windows Vista and beyond, and any version of the Mac OS has PDF creation built in. If you have your document in the program that you created it in you can often simply go to the Print menu and select PDF to "print" the file into a PDF format. It will not send it to a printer, it will ask you to select a location on your computer to save the file and will add a .pdf extension to it. Uploading this type of file will enable your students to view and print them from nearly any computer in the world.

Rich Text Format

RTF files are also fairly universal file formats for text documents. RTF was developed as a standard file format for all word processors on all platforms so that individuals can

share files. As the name implies, the RTF format enables you to format a file with headings, bold face type, bullet points, and other important layout features. RTF files can be created, opened, and edited by nearly every word processing program in the world.

There are some limitations to the RTF format. Tables, images, and any “macros” that are part of an original document may not translate well when it is converted to RTF. The advantage of RTF over PDF is that the RTF can be edited by the person who receives it. Unless a student has Adobe Acrobat, or another PDF editing program, they cannot change the PDF file.

To create an RTF file from your word processor is equally simple. You select the “Save As...” option and click to view the various file formats you can create. Select RTF or Rich Text Format and the program will ask you to save the file somewhere on your hard drive. It will save the file with the .rtf extension on it. If you send these files to your students they will be able to open and edit the files with their word processor regardless of what program they have.

RTF is also a useful format for your students to use to send files to you! If you are assigning written work without much more than the basic layout features you can have your students send RTF files to you and avoid the headache of having to deal with different word processing programs and their file formats among all your students.

HTML Documents

These files comprise the last category I’ll discuss here. These are, by far, the best for viewing on the web because they are, in fact, web pages. But they are tricky and they require special considerations when you are using them. I’ll explain.

HTML stands for “Hypertext Markup Language” and was developed by Tim Berners-Lee in 1992, the same guy who REALLY invented the Web! Revolutionary at the time, the term “hypertext” refers to the ability to create a document that would have special tags that would allow a reader to click a word and jump to another part of the same page or to another page all together. Today this is commonplace and it is the essence of what we experience on the web.

Visit this website for a full, and actually very interesting history of the web and HTML
<http://www.w3.org/People/Raggett/book4/ch02.html>

Many word processing programs can create HTML documents, but the best way to create an HTML file is to use a program that is designed to do just that!

At the beginning of all this editing HTML was like programming code on a computer. You had to use special language to define where text would appear on a page. As the code evolved we started to be able to include images, links to other sites, and even media in the pages. (Today with advanced HTML code our pages can be interactive and can be programmed to respond to the reader...very cool stuff!)

However, not many people want to learn the HTML language so they can post some instructions or a story online...so, there arose a demand for programs that made it easy to design web pages (HTML documents). There are lots of them, some are free, some can cost a lot of money. Most have features you will never use, but all try to make the design of web pages easier by incorporating a technology called WYSIWYG (pronounced Why-See-Wig)! This literally stands for What-You-See-Is-What-You-Get!

These programs allow you to type text, insert pictures, create tables, and other layout elements just like you would in a word processor. There are some differences between word processing and HTML editing, but the programs are so varied it is really something that you need to explore in your HTML editing program.

There is, however, one important difference between HTML and, let's say, PDF, when it comes to images and other elements that you have inserted into your document. I'll give you an example:

Let's say you want to post a document that provides a picture of the anatomical structure of the eye and a list of anatomical parts with definitions as a study guide.

You can create this in a word processor, insert the picture of the eye in the right spot, "print" the file to PDF and upload the file to your website...no problem (and likely the best way to deliver a document like this!)

If you create the file in an HTML editor it is a different story.

When you use a WYSIWYG editor it "looks" like you have added an image to your document, but you really haven't. Underneath what you see is programming code (the HTML stuff) and the way that works is that the CODE tells your WEB BROWSER to insert a FILE (the image) in that spot. So, your web browser has to also be able to find the image file of the eye!

When you create an HTML file with images in it you actually have to keep all the original image files and load those to your website as well...AND, you need to be sure that the underlying code that tells your web browser where to find the image file remains consistent or the link will be "broken"...we all know what a broken link looks like on a web page!

There are VERY clear advantages for using HTML documents in your courses...they can be viewed from anywhere in the world, they can contain images, movies, sound, etc, and they can hypertext your students to other resources on the web such as websites, online media, and other technologies.

But...it takes some expertise to make sure that they work great and contribute to a positive experience for your students.

That said, I have a recommendation. As a web designer for over 10 years I use a product called Dreamweaver from Adobe. Dreamweaver is a highly advanced professional level HTML editor but it is also intuitive and relatively easy to use. It may take some time for you to become proficient at designing web pages, but the payoffs can be great for your students and for you!