Asbury University Online Campus Course Developer’s Toolkit

School of Education

Getting Started with Best Practices

Purpose

*Getting Started with Best Practices* provides you with an overview of the Asbury University Online Campus (AUOC) Course Design and Development processes and steps, along with *best practices* for online course design. Read this document first, before beginning the design and development processes. Some instructor/facilitator best practices and tips are also embedded in this *Getting Started* Guide. These are signified with the “tip” icon shown below:

Tip Icon

The Asbury University Online Campus Course Developer’s Toolkit

Developing courses for the online environment is quite different than developing for the classroom. In the *classroom*, *instructor presence guides learning and provides structure* for the classroom activities. In the *Online environment, the course developer must design a logical learning structure and opportunities for the instructor to guide the learning activities and assessments*. Learning becomes student-centric to accommodate the characteristics of the online learner and courseware must be carefully designed to avoid becoming *shovelware* (shoveling courses from the classroom to the online learning environment).
Instructional Design and Learning Theory Theory Integration

Instructional Design Theory Integration
The AUOC Course Developer’s Toolkit has theoretical constructs based upon Merrill’s First Principles of Instruction (2002). Merrill argues most effective learning environments are those that are problem based and involve students in four distinct phases of learning:

- Activation of prior experience
- Demonstration of skills
- Application of skills
- Integration of these skills into real-world activities

The instructional design applications that follow these principles include:

- Learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in solving real-world problems.
- Learning is facilitated when existing knowledge is activated as a foundation for new knowledge.
- Learning is facilitated when existing knowledge is demonstrated to the learner.
- Learning is facilitated when applied by the learner.
- Learning is facilitated when integrated into the learner’s world.

Learning Theory Integration
The online learning environment supports multiple learning theories, e.g., behaviorism, social constructivism, and cognitive. Many online courses have constructivist underpinnings because of the intentional integration of social integration with learner activities. These activities share one unifying theme: truly meaningful learning arises from students’ active engagement in shared learning experiences (Brown, et al., as cited in Vivian Rossner-Merrill, 1998). The best practices, interactions, learning activities, and assessments described in this toolkit, support these ideas and relevant learning theories.
How to Use The Tools

The AU Online Course Developer’s Toolkit contains, guidelines, checklists, best practices, and templates for re-designing existing courses or creating new courses in conjunction with the Atheneo LMS. Here’s how to use these tools:

Step 1
- Read Getting Started with Best Practices
- Read & understand the Quality Review Assessment

Step 2
- Plan the course using the AU Online Course Design Guide & Checklist

Step 3
- Complete the AU Online Course Design Input Template

Step 4
- Transfer the content from the AU Online Course Design Input into Atheneo

Step 5
- Submit the course for the AU Quality Review

Plan | Design | Develop | Evaluate

Based on research and best practices in online education, the Asbury University Online Campus requires course developers to follow the guidelines and templates contained in the AUOC Developer’s Toolkit. The guidelines and templates help develop the basic course navigation information, overview, activities, and assessment structure. Using the template speeds up the development process and ensures our students receive an online experience that is:
- consistent across the program,
- engaging,
- rigorous,
- incorporates foundational design and learning theories, and
- designed to meet the course goals and overall academic success for Asbury University Online Campus Students.
Essentials
While no two courses are the same, there are important elements that should be a part of every online course:

- Detailed syllabus
- Learning outcomes
- Content
  - Activities and learning experiences
  - Assessments
- Opportunities for interaction
  - Student to content
  - Student to student
  - Student to instructor
- Opportunities for feedback
- Accessibility

The Essentials: Detailed Syllabus
*School of Education must use approved syllabus template. The template is included in the toolbox file folder.

A syllabus represents a formal academic agreement between an instructor and students. Rather than a schedule of events, a syllabus serves as an academic contract defining how students can successfully meet the objectives of the course. All instructors are required to provide their students a detailed syllabus at the start of each class. Changes to a syllabus after a class has begun are not recommended, and should be made only in unusual circumstances.

The syllabus provides a basis upon which to resolve academic misunderstandings: it is the official document of record regarding all classroom activities and policies. The distribution of a detailed syllabus at the start of the course ensures that each student has received a written statement of policy. Without such a record, misunderstandings between students and faculty can occur.
The Essentials: Learning Outcomes

1. Learning Outcomes should be SMART
   - S – Specific
   - M – Measurable
   - A – Attainable
   - R – Results focused
   - T – Time focused
2. Outcomes should be stated from the learner’s perspective
3. Example of a well-written learning objective: “By the end of this course, the student will be able to discuss educational reform by writing a 7 – 10 page paper describing political and socio-economical history, current reform policies and initiatives, and current issues.” (This is accompanied by a rubric)

The Essentials: Course Content

Technology provides a variety of tools for delivering content to students. Before developing an online course, instructors should consider the following questions?

1. What types of assessments will demonstrate the learner has achieved the desired learning outcomes?
2. What types of activities, learning experiences, and resources will enable the learner to achieve the desired learning outcomes?
Selecting Techniques and Online Tools/Resources

Here’s a guide for selecting techniques and online tools/resources for desired instructional methods. The Online Department can help instructors in selecting effective technologies and instructional strategies also. The matrix below may help with selecting tools, technologies and strategies.

### Guide to Selecting Tools and Techniques for Instructional Methods

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Instructional Method</th>
<th>Techniques</th>
<th>Online Tools/Resources</th>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborative Learning</td>
<td>• Multimedia presentation</td>
<td>iMovie, Moviemaker, PowerPoint, Audacity, Garage Band, Blogs, Wikis, Group pages, Discussion Board, Forum, Web Conferencing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Research project</td>
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<td>• Student-led instruction</td>
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<td>Demonstration</td>
<td>• Video clips</td>
<td>Streaming video, Youtube, Powerpoint presentations</td>
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<td>• Images</td>
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<td>Discovery</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Webquests</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>• Asynchronous discussion</td>
<td>Blogs, Course emails, Discussion board, Chat, Web conferencing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Synchronous discussion</td>
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<td>Drills</td>
<td>• Exercises featuring multiple choice</td>
<td>Quizzes and other assessment functions in the LMS, online websites with interactive drills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Fill in the Blank</td>
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<td>• Crosswords</td>
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<td>• Short answer</td>
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<td>• Jumbled sentences</td>
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<td>• Self-tests</td>
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<td>Presentation or Lecture</td>
<td>• Video recorded</td>
<td>Moviemaker, iMovie, Camtasia, Audacity, YouTube, Big Blue Button</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Audio recorded</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Powerpoint with narration</td>
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<td>• Live presentation with application sharing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Live lecture with video</td>
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Learning Activities
The learning activities are the heart of the online learning experience. Learning activities enable students to make connections with knowledge and information, decipher what is most important, and explain how it matters to everyday life (Smith, 2008). The online course design must contain activities that are relevant, engaging, understandable, memorable, and overall, useful to the students. Here are some guidelines and tips:

1. For each topic or learning outcome, ask yourself critically, “What learning activities in this situation will be most effective and appropriate for helping the student achieve the learning outcome, and support the learning assessment.
2. Include a variety of learning activities.
3. Include collaborative activities.  
   a. Group projects and presentations  
   b. Forum discussions, including instructor post and student responses to other students’ responses  
   c. Guided and facilitated (student and instructor) chat sessions  
   d. Group papers
4. Use a variety of resources. Examples include:  
   a. Textbooks  
   b. Video and images including Asbury Kinlaw Library access to Films on Demand and ArtStor (see Jennifer Walz, Kinlaw Research and Distance Learning Librarian  
   c. YouTube videos  
   d. Mpg4 files  
   e. Audio recordings  
   f. Electronic databases, such as EbscoHost, ERIC, ProQuest, NewsBank, and PsychInfo
5. Be aware of copyright and intellectual property guidelines and usage. Please contact Kinlaw Library Staff if you have questions or need assistance in this area
6. For each unit, make a connection to the learner’s prior experience or knowledge with a subject. This strategy will hook the learner to the instructional content.
7. Include a final project that incorporates the course learner outcomes noted in the course. Examples include papers, presentations, videos, websites, etc.

Instructor Tip: Spiritual values and perspectives are valued within your course. Courses should communicate our Christian values, spirituality, and perspectives. Don’t forget the TEACHING! Provide instructor commentary and guidance for all learner activities. You make the Asbury difference in our online courses.
Learning Assessments

Assessment serves multiple purposes in the online environment. It provides an opportunity to monitor student progress and performance throughout the term, and provides an indicator of progress for students, which enables them to take on greater responsibility for their own learning.

Learning assessments must be aligned to course learning outcomes and learning activities. With this alignment, the task of assessment becomes less cumbersome and student satisfaction with the learning process increases (Morgan and Reilly, 1999 as cited in Palloff and Pratt, 2009). Also, students’ understanding of the purpose of the course in their overall program of learning grows significantly.

Here are some tips and guidelines for creating assessments:

1. Include a variety of learning assessments:
   a. Open & closed ended questions
   b. Projects
   c. Forum posts
   d. Participation in chat sessions
   e. Research papers
   f. Self-reflection
   g. Blogging
   h. Case study discussion/writing
   i. Collaborative writing projects
   j. Electronic portfolios
   k. Reflective journaling
   l. Podcasts or other multimedia
   m. Student-led discussions

2. Make sure all assessments are aligned to the course activities and support the course learning outcomes.

3. Develop assessments that not only measure a student’s progress and understanding, but also transfer skills and knowledge beyond the learning environment.

4. Assessments should be reasonable in terms of workload and time constraints.

5. Provide clear, concise instructions, and provide worked examples or demonstrations when possible and appropriate.

6. Provide flexibility and self-selection when appropriate.
   a. Students may be given alternative forms of assessment that link better to relevancy, learning styles, skills, or personal satisfaction.

7. Use rubrics when appropriate. A rubric must be attached for project assignments.

Instructor Tip: As for and incorporate student input into assessments when appropriate.
Opportunities for Interaction

In online courses, interaction can occur in three ways:

• students interacting with course content,
• students interacting with one another, and
• students interacting with the instructor.

It is a good practice to intentionally design for all three of these types of interactions to occur in online courses. Below are some tips to accomplish this goal.

Interactions with Course Content

Provide students with time and opportunity to learn to use and interact with the resources provided. Think beyond the standard assignments of reading a textbook and writing a paper. The Internet is a rich reservoir from which to draw materials and activities for students. It is easy to find audio and video files, journal articles, news reports, interactive tutorials, and simulations. The Kinlaw Library also has many digital resources, including electronic databases, Films on Demand, and ArtStor. After completing your course syllabus, contact the distance-learning librarian, Jennifer Walz for assistance with locating appropriate digital resources, or assistance with incorporating them into your online course.

Interactions with One Another

The most common way to include interaction in an online course is through the use of online discussions. There are two types of online discussion:

1. Synchronous – discussion occurs when everyone participates at the same time.
2. Asynchronous – participants need not be present at the same time. The discussion occurs in a series of postings (—threads ) that can be read and responded to at any time.

While both formats are appropriate in an online environment, asynchronous discussion occurs most often in online courses, primarily because of the flexibility it provides for everyone!

Remember, most students are taking online courses so that they can obtain a degree while maintaining busy work schedules and life schedules, and prefer flexible, independent learning environments.
If discussion is an important part of assessing student learning and if meaningful contributions are desired, discussions should represent a significant portion of the overall grade. Atheneo allows you to assess the forum post, as well as participation. Forum assessments can be built into the course, as well as inserted as needed. Only forums that are built into the course framework appear in the course gradebook; however, all responses are quantified and appear as a number score for each learner.

**Rubrics for grading online discussions** encourage high-quality postings on the discussion board. Communicate the minimum number of postings required of each student for each discussion and hold students to the criteria listed in the rubric.

**Student-to-student interaction can also be developed in the following ways:**

- Student-to-student interaction can be promoted in the first week of an online class by using an icebreaker activity. An icebreaker establishes individual presence, opens the lines of communication between students, and allows students an opportunity to practice using tools within the course management system (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004). It is during this first exercise that instructors can help students build a learning community in which they feel accepted and supported.
- Offer a variety of communication options for students: email, discussion board, chat, web-conferencing, and telephone are most common.
- Engage students with collaborative learning assignments. Break the larger class into small online groups and have them give and receive feedback on individual papers, projects, or presentations.
- Work through a case study online.
- Debate a topic.
- Discuss ways they would apply theories or concepts to real-world situations.
- Complete a research project and write a paper together.
- Create a “Help” or “Assistance” forum on the discussion board and encourage students to post questions or problems for their classmates to answer. Let students help one another.
- Encourage students to post comments, questions, or reactions to their wall (The wall is similar to Facebook and found in Atheneo).
- Require students to update their profile in Atheneo, including photographs.

**Instructor Tip:** Stagger due dates for primary and secondary postings on the forums so that discussion is deep and meaningful. For example, require that all initial responses by students be posted by Thursday of each week, while all secondary responses and beyond are posted by Saturday. This technique also helps students manage their workload for the class.
Interactions with the Instructor

Many of the techniques used to engage students with the content and with one another will ultimately lead to communication with the instructor. Instructors should make time to periodically communicate with students on an individual basis via email. Some exchanges with students may also take place via telephone.

Instructor Tip: Be explicit with how you expect students to communicate with you and how you will communicate with them. Setting office hours and establishing email protocols is a best practice.
Opportunities for Feedback

One of the challenges associated with teaching and learning online is that the participants lose the physical cues that confirm when someone is following the concepts and materials related to the course (Johnson, 2003). To compensate for the lack of physical cues, instructors must intentionally design online courses to include opportunities for giving and receiving feedback. Feedback can be creative; it does not always have to be in the form of formal, written messages to each student.

Instructor Tips: Using Feedback in Online Courses

- Provide clear feedback to each student periodically using email or in comments attached to digital assignments links in Atheneo.
- Inform students of the method(s) to be used for providing individualized feedback and state how often they can expect to hear from the instructor.
- Track student progress weekly to identify and assist at-risk students promptly.
- Use the Gradebook in Atheneo to record student progress.
- Encourage students to refer to the Gradebook to track their own progress. Respond to students’ emails within 24 hours during weekdays, and within one working day on holidays and weekends.
- Return exams, papers, and assignments within one week of submission, or ASAP.
- Respond to students’ discussion board postings in a timely manner. It is not necessary to respond to every single posting, but it is appropriate to acknowledge when students have posted exemplary work, are headed in the wrong direction, or are having an interesting discussion about course content. Acknowledging students’ posts demonstrates teaching presence.
- Create open book review quizzes in Atheneo that are automatically graded so that students receive immediate feedback.
- Send or post a weekly summary message to the class to clarify any areas perceived as problematic for students and to acknowledge their work in the course for that week.
- Provide options for peer review and feedback. Consider grouping students into dyads or triads to exchange papers/assignments with their group members.
- Instructors need feedback from students as well. Create a discussion forum in Atheneo where students can post questions to the instructor related to course materials, content, or assignments. These questions can pinpoint problem areas or identify where further explanation may be necessary.
Accessibility

Common Obstacles and Solutions to Electronic Accessibility

**Obstacle:** No description (alt-text) provided for embedded image  
**Solution:** Include a description for every image.

**Obstacle:** Missing or poorly used headings  
**Solution:** In Word documents and pdf files, use heading style labels to indicate font size, such as Heading 1 for a page title, Heading 2 for a section heading, and Heading 3 for subsection headings. These are both beneficial to you as the document creator and for people who use screenreaders.

**Obstacle:** Scanned documents incompatible with assistive technologies  
**Solution:** Convert PDFs directly from Word documents and/or provide different formats for the same document to make documents readable by screenreaders and other assistive technology.

**Obstacle:** Poorly labeled links  
**Solution:** Label hyperlinks to describe where the link leads (e.g., *Kinlaw Library Homepage* instead of, *Click here to go to the Kinlaw Library Homepage*, or worse, *just click here.*)

**Obstacle:** Color used to convey information  
**Solution:** Use symbols or explanatory text (with or without color) to convey information (e.g., “Classes in red text and with location HEC meet at the Medford campus.”)
References


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