Continuing & Professional Education Online Course Standards

FY 16/17

I. COURSE OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

General Review Standard: The overall design of the course, navigational information, as well as course, instructor and student information are made transparent to the student at the beginning of the course.

Specific Review Standards:	Annotation: What's the idea?
I.1 Navigational instructions make the organization of the course easy to understand.	Instructions provide a general course overview, guide the new student to explore the course website, and indicate what to do first, rather than list detailed navigational instructions for the whole course. Instructors may choose to incorporate some of this information in the course syllabus. If so, students should be directed to the syllabus at the beginning of the course. A useful idea is a "Read Me First" or "Start Here" button or icon on the course home page, linking students to start-up information. Examples: • A course "tour" • Clear statements about how to get started in the course • A "Scavenger hunt" assignment that leads students through an exploration of the different areas of the course areas
I.2 A statement introduces the student to the course and to the structure of the student learning.	The instructor's statement gives the new student an idea of how the learning process is structured including schedule, communications modes, types of activities, and assessments. These features are often found in the course syllabus. Look for some or all of the following: • The course schedule (self-paced, following a set calendar, etc.) • Course sequencing, such as a linear or random order • Types of activities the student will be required to complete (written assignments, online self-tests, participation in the discussion board, group work, etc.) • Course calendar with assignment and test due dates • Preferred mode of communication with the instructor (email, discussion board, etc.) • Preferred mode of communication with other students • Testing procedures (online, proctored, etc.) • Procedure for submission of electronic assignments
I.3 Netiquette expectations with regard to discussions and email communication are clearly stated.	Expectations of student conduct online are clearly stated, however brief or elaborate they may be. The expectations themselves are not evaluated.

		Examples: • Rules of conduct for participating in the discussion board • Rules of conduct for email content • "Speaking style" requirements, (i.e. use of correct English required as opposed to net acronyms) • Spelling and grammar expectations, if any
I.4	The self-introduction by the instructor is appropriate.	The initial introduction creates a sense of connection between the instructor and the students. It should present the instructor as professional as well as approachable, and include more than the essentials, such as the instructor's name, title, field of expertise, email address and phone. The self introduction helps students get to know the instructor. It could include: • Information on teaching philosophy • Past experiences with teaching online classes • Personal information such as hobbies, etc. • A photograph
I.5	Students are requested to introduce themselves to the class (if appropriate to the course).	The student introduction helps to create a supportive learning environment and a sense of community. Students are asked to introduce themselves on a welcome page. Student introductions themselves are not evaluated. Instructors may ask students to answer specific questions (such as why they are taking the course, what concerns they have, what they expect to learn, etc.) or may choose to let the student decide. Instructors may provide an example of an introduction and/or start the process by introducing themselves.
I.6	Minimum technology requirements, minimum student skills, and, if applicable, prerequisite knowledge in the discipline, are clearly stated.	Explanations of technical requirements and skills, and prerequisite knowledge and skills may be found within the course, in documents linked to the course, or in supporting material not on the course site. Look for a link to that content and/or a reminder of it for the entering student. Technology requirements may include information on: • Hardware • Software and plug-ins • SP requirements Examples of technology skills may include the capability to: • Use email with attachments • Save file in commonly used word processing program formats (e.g. MS Word) • Use MS Excel or other spreadsheet programs Discipline knowledge prerequisites should include academic course prerequisites.

II. LEARNING OBJECTIVES (COMPETENCIES)

General Review Standard: Learning objectives are clearly defined and explained. They assist the student to focus learning activities.

Specific Review Standards:	Annotation: What's the idea?
II.1 The learning objectives of the course describe outcomes that are measurable.	Measurable learning objectives ensure instructors precisely describe what students are to gain from instruction, and then guide instructors to accurately assess student accomplishment. Objectives should describe student performance in specific, observable terms. If this is not possible, (e.g., internal cognition, affective changes), check for clear indications that the learning objective is meaningfully assessed. Note: Personal enrichment courses should have learning objectives, but are not required to be measurable.
II.2 The learning objectives address content mastery, critical thinking skills, and core learning skills (as appropriate).	Examine the learning objectives (course and unit level) as a whole for all three types of skill. Every single objective may not contain all three components. Content mastery should be appropriate for the type and level of the course. Ask the Subject Matter Expert (SME) for guidance. Critical thinking skills may include the ability to: • Distinguish between fact and opinion • Distinguish between primary and secondary sources • Identify bias and stereotypes • Evaluate information sources for point of view, accuracy, usefulness, timeliness, etc. • Recognize deceptive arguments Core learning skills may include: • Written and oral communication skills • Manipulation and organization of information in various ways or using different tools • Understanding what one knows and how one knows it, and also understanding what one does not know and what one needs to find it out.
II.3 The learning objectives of the course are clearly stated and understandable to the student.	Students can easily grasp the meaning of the learning objectives. Use of jargon, confusing terms, unnecessarily complex language, and puzzling syntax are avoided.
II.4 Instructions to students on how to meet the learning objectives are adequate and easy to understand.	Instructions may take various forms (e.g. narratives, bulleted lists, charts) and may appear at different levels within the course, such as module-based or weekly assignment sheets. Instructions are clear and complete. Examples: • Module-based or weekly assignment pages in narrative, bulleted list, or chart form, indicate a list of steps that guide the student to meet learning objectives for each week • Information indicates which learning activities, resources, assignments, and assessments support the learning objectives
II.5 The learning objectives of the course are articulated and specified on the module/unit level.	Module or unit level objectives may be written by the instructor or come from the textbook.

III. ASSESSMENT AND MEASUREMENT

General Review Standard: Assessment strategies in non-credit use various ways to measure effective learning, assess student progress by reference to stated learning objectives, and are designed as essential to the learning process.

Specific Review Standards:	Annotation: What's the idea?
III.1 The types of assessments selected measure the stated learning objectives and are consistent with course activities and resources.	Assessments, learning objectives, and learning activities align in a clear and direct way. The assessment formats provide a reasonable way to measure the stated learning objectives. Examples of inconsistency: • The objective is to be able to "write a persuasive essay" but the assessment is a multiple choice test. • The objective is to "demonstrate discipline-specific information literacy" and the assessment is a rubric-scored term paper, but students are not given any practice with information literacy skills on smaller assignments. Examples of objective/assessment alignment: • A problem analysis evaluates critical thinking skills • Multiple choice quiz tests vocabulary knowledge • A composition assesses writing skills Some assessments may be geared towards meeting objectives other than those stated in the course; for example, a course may have a writing component as part of a college-wide "Writing Across the Curriculum" requirement. In that case suggest including appropriate objectives in the course. (Note: Learning Objectives may be called Learning Outcomes.)
III.2 Guidelines for assignments and assessments are easy to understand.	Clearly state criteria for assignment and assessment completion. Example: • A list of all activities, quizzes, etc. will be included in the course syllabus or course introduction.
III.3 Assessment and measurement strategies provide feedback to the student.	A variety of assessment or measurement tools can be used to determine content mastery. Examples: • Instructor participation in a discussion assignment • Writing assignments that require submission of a draft for instructor comment and suggestions for improvement • Self-mastery tests and quizzes that include informative feedback with each answer choice • Interactive games and simulation that have feedback built in

| III.4 | The types of assessments selected and the methods used for submitting assessments are appropriate for the distance learning environment and content. | Assessments make use of the technologies and security typically found in an online classroom.

Examples that DO meet the standard:
• Submission of text or media files by email or 'drop box'
• Exams given in a proctored testing center
• Quizzes with time limitations, printing disabled, and other security measures
• Multiple assessments which enable the instructor to become familiar with individual students' work and which discourage "proxy cheating" (someone other than the student completing and submitting work)

Examples that do NOT meet the standard:
• Required assessments that cannot be submitted online, such as a lab practicum in a science course.
• A course in which the entire set of assessments consists of 5 multiple choice tests taken online, with no enforced time limit, the print function enabled, and minimal security features in place. |
| III.5 | "Self-check" or practice types of assignments are provided. | Students have ample opportunity to measure their own learning progress. Look for examples of "self-check" quizzes and activities, as well as other types of practice opportunities.

Examples:
• Practice quizzes
• Games, simulations, and other exercises
• Practice written assignments
• Peer reviews |

IV. RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

General Review Standard: Instructional materials are sufficiently comprehensive to achieve announced objectives and learning outcomes and are prepared by qualified persons competent in their fields. (Materials, other than standard textbooks produced by recognized publishers, are prepared by the instructor or distance educators skilled in preparing materials for distance learning.)

Specific Review Standards:		Annotation: What's the idea?
IV.1	The instructional materials support the stated learning objectives and have sufficient breadth and depth for the student to learn the subject.	Instructions should provide meaningful content in a variety of ways, including the textbook, PowerPoint presentations, websites, lecture notes, outlines, and multimedia. Decisions on this standard may be particularly difficult for individual reviewers whose expertise is not in the course discipline. Reviewers should consult with the SME (subject matter expert) and use common sense to determine if the content is robust enough to support the course.

IV.2	Instructional materials are presented in a format appropriate to the online environment, and are easily accessible to and usable by the student.	Students who have the required technical equipment and software can view the materials online. If some of the course resources, including textbooks, videos, CD-ROMs, etc., are unavailable within the framework of the course website, determine how students would gain access to them and examine their ease of use. Examples: • Textbooks and/or CDs, if used, include titles, authors, publishers, ISBN numbers, copyright dates, and information as to where copies can be obtained A navigation button is devoted to "Resources" and appropriately tied in with the overall course design • Required software plug-ins are listed, along with instructions for obtaining and installing the plug-ins Examples of some visual format problems: • Text size may be too inconsistent for typical View/Text Size setting • Large text files are presented without table of contents or unit numbering • Multimedia files require plug-ins or codecs students do not have
IV.3	The purpose of the course elements (content, instructional methods, technologies, and course materials) is evident.	Students can easily determine the purpose of all materials, technologies and methods used in the course and know which materials are required and which are recommended resources. For example, a course may be richly garnished with external links to Internet resources, but it is not clear whether those resources are for background information, additional personal enrichment, or required for an assignment. Examples: • Links to external web sites indicate the purpose of the links or are completely self-evident. • The functions of animated games or exercises are clearly explained or are completely self-evident.
IV.4	The instructional materials, including supporting materials - such as manuals, videos, CD ROMs, and computer software – are consistent in organization.	Online courses often use multiple types of instructional materials. Students can easily understand how the materials relate to each other. The level of detail in supporting materials is appropriate for the level of the course. For example, a course requires students to use the following materials: a textbook divided into chapters, video segments ordered by topics, a website organized around specific skills, and a tutorial CD-ROM that has an opening menu consisting of "practice quizzes," "images," and "audio examples." Reviewers would need to determine if such diversely formatted course materials are integrated well enough to be useful to the uninitiated student. Decisions on this standard may be particularly difficult for individual reviewers whose expertise is not in the course discipline. Reviewers should consult with the SME (subject matter expert) and use common sense to determine if the materials are appropriate to this course.

IV.5 All resources and materials used in the online course are appropriately cited.	Materials created by the instructor and those borrowed from other sources are distinctly identified. Text, images, graphic materials, tables, videos, audios, websites, and other forms of multimedia are appropriately referenced according to the institution's copyright and intellectual property policy. Courses that use an e-pack or course cartridge may provide a blanket statement acknowledging that a significant portion of the course materials came from the publisher rather than include individual citations for each instance of publisher materials.

V. LEARNER INTERACTION

General Review Standard: The effective design of instructor-student interaction, meaningful student cooperation, and student-content interaction is essential to student motivation, intellectual commitment and personal development.

Specific Review Standards:	Annotation: What's the idea?
V.1 The learning activities promote the achievement of stated objectives and learning outcomes.	Learning activities are various including class discussions, case studies, simulation exercise, practice quizzes, tests, etc. Activities align with and support the learning objectives. Most of the objectives can reasonably be achieved by students completing the learning activities. Examples of mismatches between activities and objectives: • The objective requires students to be able to deliver a persuasive speech, but the activities in the course do not include practice of that skill • The objective is "Prepare each budget within a master budget and explain their importance in the overall budgeting process." The students review information about this in their texts, observe budgets worked out by the instructor, and produce only one of the several budgets
V.2 Learning activities foster instructor-student, content-student, and if appropriate to this course, student-student interaction.	All online courses should include interaction between the instructor and the students and between the students and the content. The degree and type of student-to-student interaction may vary with the discipline and the level of the course. Examples of learning activities that foster the following types of interaction: • Instructor - student (consider for ALL courses): Self-introduction; discussion postings and responses; feedback on project assignments; evidence of one to-one e-mail communication, etc. • Student - content (consider for ALL courses): Assignments, papers, projects, self-assessment exercises; field exercises, etc. • Student - student (if appropriate to this course): Self-introduction exercise; group discussion postings; projects; etc.

V.3	The requirements for course interaction are clearly articulated (if applicable).	A clear statement of requirements should indicate the criteria for interaction.
		For example, students required to participate in discussions are told how many times each week they must post original comments, how many times they must post responses to other's comments, what the quality of the comments must be, how the comments will be evaluated, and whether the interaction is required or optional.
V.4	The course design allows the instructor to be active, and engaged with the students.	Students know that the instructor is approachable and will check on student progress. Opportunities for interaction will vary with the discipline of the course.
		Examples: • An instructor-facilitated discussion board may be used • An invitation for the class to email the instructor with individual concerns • Current announcements via email

VI. COURSE TECHNOLOGY

General Review Standard: To enhance student learning, course technology enriches instruction and fosters student interactivity.

Specific Review Standards:	Annotation: What's the idea?
VI.1 The tools and media support the learning objectives of the course and are integrated with texts and lessons.	Tools and media used in the course support related learning objectives, and are integrated with texts and lessons. Students know how the tools and media support the assignments and how they support the learning objectives. Technology is not used simply for the sake of using technology. For example, a course might require viewing video materials, but it may not be clear how the video materials illustrate or support any learning objective.
VI.2 The tools and media enhance student interactivity and guide the student to become a more active learner.	Tools and media used in the course help students actively engage in the learning process, rather than passively "absorbing" information. Examples: • Automated 'self-check' exercises requiring student response • Animations, simulations, and games that require student input • Software that tracks student interaction and progress • Use of discussion tools with automatic notification or 'read/unread' tracking feature
VI.3 Technologies required for this course are either provided or easily downloadable.	For this standard, the term "technologies" may cover a range of plug-ins such as Acrobat Reader, media players, etc. In addition, courses may require special software packages (spreadsheets, math calculators etc.). Clear instructions tell students how to obtain needed plug-ins and software packages.

VI.4	The tools and media are compatible with existing standards of delivery modes.	Course tools, media, and delivery modes meet current standards for widespread accessibility. For example, if most students have access to DVD players or use streaming media, use of those delivery modes in an online class meets this standard. If the typical student cannot be expected to have access to a technology at his or her out-of-the box home computer, that technology should probably not be used in the course.
VI.5	Instructions on how to access resources at a distance are sufficient and easy to understand.	Online students need to know about and be able to obtain access to educational resources by remote access. Information on these resources is readily visible with clear instructions on how to access these resources. Examples: • The instructor mails to students a custom CD he has prepared for the course • An explanation of how to obtain full text journal articles is provided in the assignment that requires their use
VI.6	Course technologies take advantage of existing economies and efficiencies of delivery.	As innovative technologies appear on the market all the time, online course technology should be current. Courses not recently developed may need to be updated. (Check the Instructor Worksheet). Example: • Using compressed files to reduce file downloading time • Delivering Audio files in a common file type such as Windows Media or RealPlayer

VII. LEARNER SUPPORT

General Review Standard: Courses are effectively supported for students through fully accessible modes of delivery, resources, and student support.

Specific Review Standards:		**Annotation: What's the idea?**
VII.1	The course instructions articulate or link to a clear description of the technical support offered.	Technical support for online students differs from institution to institution. (Non-credit courses adhere to WVU policy regarding student technical support for WebCT Vista courses.) Technical support includes information about such topics as how to log in, how to use the software, and how to upload files. It does not include help with course content, assignments, academic or student support services (see Standards VII.2 and VII.3 below). Look for evidence that students have access to technical support services from within the course. The purpose is not to review the adequacy of those services on an institutional level. Examples: • A clear description of the services, including a link to a technical support website • An email link to an online learning helpdesk • A phone number for an online learning helpdesk

VII.2	Course instructions articulate or link to tutorials and resources that answer basic questions related to research, writing, technology etc. (as appropriate).	Online students' access to tutorials and help files related to writing, technology, research, etc. differs from institution to institution. This item does NOT refer to: • Students getting help from another person • Tutorials and resources specifically related to course content Look for evidence that students taking the course DO have access to those support services from within the course, for example, a clear description of the tutorials available and how to get them.

VIII. AWARENESS OF ACCESSIBILITY

General Review Standard: The course is accessible to all students.

Specific Review Standards:	**Annotation: What's the idea?**
VIII.1 The course acknowledges the importance of ADA requirements.	All online courses should direct students to the institution's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) services on their campus. There should be a statement in the course that tells students how to gain access to ADA services at their institution. To meet this standard a course must have both a statement that tells students how to gain access to an institution's ADA services AND be on an approved Course Management System (Blackboard, WebCT, or WebTycho) or documentation provided by the CMS that it is ADA compliant. Encourage faculty to consult the office on their campus that provides disability services for the wording of an ADA Statement appropriate to their institution.
VIII.2 Web pages provide equivalent alternatives to auditory and visual content.	Alternative means of access to course information are provided for the vision or hearing impaired student, such as, equivalent textual representations of images, audio, animations, and video in the course website. Presenting information in text format is generally acceptable because screen reader software (used by the vision impaired) can read text. Examples: • Audio lecture has a text transcript available • Video clip, image, or animation is accompanied by text transcript
VIII.3 Web pages have links that are self-describing and meaningful.	Instructors provide links to Internet content that includes useful descriptions of what students will find at those sites. These descriptions enable the vision impaired student to use screen reader software to understand links. Examples: • All file names and web hyperlinks have meaningful names. For instance, the link to take a quiz should say "Take Quiz 1", not "click here" • Icons used as links should also have HTML tags or an accompanying text link

| **VIII.4** | The course demonstrates sensitivity to readability issues. | The course employs appropriate font, color, and spacing to facilitate readability and minimize distractions for the student.

Examples:
• Formatting such as bold or italics in addition to color coding text
• Web page provided in an alternate, non-color-coded format
• Formatting and color coding serve instructional purposes. For example, format and color are used purposefully to communicate key points, group like items and emphasize relevant relationships, etc. |