Online Course Design Guide

Requesting, Designing, Developing, and Launching Your New Online Course

This Fully Online Course Design and Development Guide provides critical information for instructors about university procedures and recommended practices for the instructional design, instructional development, and evaluation of new fully online credit courses at UHCL.

OIT Instructional Design and Technology
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Table of Contents

This Fully Online Course Design and Development Guide provides critical information for instructors about university procedures and recommended practices for the instructional design, instructional development, and evaluation of new fully online credit courses at UHCL. Preparing a new online course goes beyond simply modifying materials and activities from the face-to-face version of the course and putting those into LMS. Because asynchronous, fully online delivery often places additional burdens on both faculty and students, online courses must be carefully planned and organized almost as though it was for an entirely new course. Courses haphazardly developed or even created "on the fly" can cause tremendous confusion and frustration, hamper student academic performance, and make the teaching and learning process a struggle for everyone involved. The information in this guide is intended to serve as a guide or "roadmap" to requesting, designing, developing, and evaluating a new online course, ideally leading to an exceptional new online class.

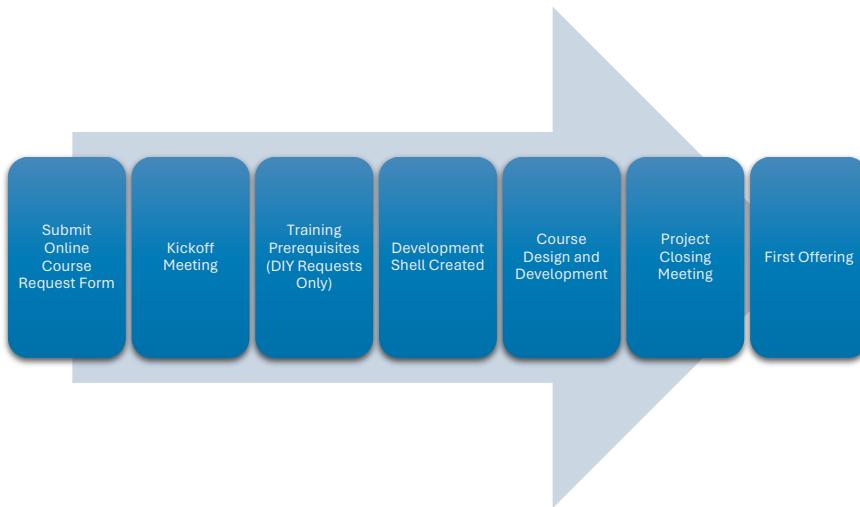## New Course Design/Development Options

UHCL faculty have the option to design/develop new 100% online asynchronous classes either independently or with assistance from the OIT Instructional Design and Technology (IDT) team.

- **Independent/DIY Option Prerequisites** – Faculty must complete introductory training on the university's learning management system (currently Canvas) and the Quality Matters course, Applying the Quality Matters Rubric (APPQMR) Higher Education, 7th Edition. For more information about available APPQMR training formats and dates or to register for the training, please email the IDT team at IDT@uhcl.edu.
- **IDT-Assisted Option** – there are no prerequisites for working on the design/development of your new course with help from the IDT team; however, the scope of IDT assistance may vary depending on when the new course request is submitted and the team's existing workload. Therefore, **we recommend submitting new online course requests as early as possible**.

Online Course Process Overview

The image below represents, in the simplest terms, the process of getting from the course request through teaching the new course for the first time.

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A process flow diagram with seven connected boxes inside a large arrow shape:

Submit Online Course Request Form → **Kickoff Meeting** → **Training Prerequisites (DIY Requests Only)** → **Development Shell Created** → **Course Design and Development** → **Project Closing Meeting** → **First Offering**

A more detailed representation of the process is as follows:

Online Course Request Form

The process begins when the developing instructor uses the [Request Development of New Fully Online Course form](#). That request is automatically routed to OIT's Instructional Design and Technology team and assigned to a member of our instructional design staff.

Course Design/Development Kickoff Meeting

Once an instructional designer (ID) has been assigned to your course design and development project, (s)he will schedule a face-to-face or virtual kickoff meeting to get the process underway. Participants in this meeting will include you and your designated instructional designer (ID). The role of your assigned ID can vary to suit your needs and preferences:

- **Faculty DIY Course Design/Development** – For DIY projects, IDT staff will host the kickoff meeting, assist you in registering for prerequisite training, create your new development shell in the learning management system (after completion of prerequisites), meet with you once you've finished the course to document project completion, and provide you with a courtesy review and report on the course.

- **IDT-Assisted Course Design/Development** – When using the full extent of our services, your ID can also provide the following:
  - o Regular consulting, review, and advising throughout the project,
  - o Assistance in the design/development of activities, assessments, and instructional content,
  - o Review/feedback regarding alignment between learning outcomes and assessment,
  - o Recommendations for appropriate use of technology tools that support the use of LMS,
  - o Resources and recommendations to support learner engagement and active learning throughout the course, and more, and
  - o Coordinate with other campus entities (e.g., Library, Disability Services, Writing Center) regarding embedded services you may need in your course.

Development Shell Created

For DIY projects, your new development shell will be created within two days after you have notified the IDT team that you completed the Applying the Quality Matters Rubric training, and we've verified your completion status with QM. For IDT-assisted projects, your designated ID will create your new development shell in the learning management system (LMS) within two business days of completing the kickoff meeting.

Course Design and Development

DIY instructors design and develop their new course in the provided Canvas development shell. During the design/development period, your designated instructional designer (ID) will check in with you monthly via phone or email to see how the process is going and whether you have any questions/concerns.

For IDT-assisted projects, your designated instructional designer (ID) will manage the design/development effort in accordance with the IDT team's modified agile development model (please refer to Appendix C for more information).

Project Closing Meeting

When you believe your new course to be ready for instructional use, please notify your designated instructional designer (ID). They will host a final short meeting with you to document the project's completion and answer any final questions. They will also perform a courtesy review of the new course, using the Quality Matters Rubric standards, and provide you with the review results.

- **DIY Course Development Projects** – The courtesy review report will be provided to the instructor and the Dean of the college in which the course will be taught. The decision to make any adjustments based on the review results rests with the developing instructor, as there is no "pass/fail" requirement or associated roadblock that prevents teaching the new course. If you elect to modify the course based on the results of the courtesy review, your designated ID will update the review report, and the latest version will be supplied to the appropriate Dean.
- **IDT–Assisted Development Projects** – Your designated instructional designer (ID) will share with you the results of their courtesy review, and they will work with you on any modifications you elect to make in response to the initial report. Once you and your ID complete any updates or adjustments to the development course, your designated ID will update the courtesy review report and only the latest version will be filed with the appropriate Dean.

Upon your request, they will also share information about how you may prepare and submit your new course for Quality Matters certification after it has been taught at least once.

Initial Offering and Evaluation/Revisions

Your designated ID will check in with you 1–2 times during the first semester you teach the new course and again after that semester ends. These informal meetings will provide an opportunity to discuss what aspects of the course work well for you and your students and which areas may need further adjustment. Your ID will work with you throughout this initial offering period to make modifications required for the next time you teach the class.

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[OPTIONAL] Preparation for Course Submission for Quality Matters Certification

The IDT team now supports and promotes Quality Matters professional development and course certification for UHCL faculty. Our updated new course faculty self-review and ID courtesy reviews are based upon the Quality Matters Standards (see Appendix B) for higher education. These internal reviews serve as a "launch pad" from which instructors can opt to prepare their online courses for submission and evaluation to become QM-certified. If you are interested in seeking QM certification for your course, your designated ID will be happy to provide you with additional information.

Accessibility Considerations

UHCL is committed to ensuring that all courses, online and otherwise, reflect universal accessibility in their design and instructional materials, activities, and assessments. Effective Fall 2020, all LMS shells have Anthology Ally activated to inform instructors whether their courses and materials are accessible and, if not, to offer guidance on how to fix those problems. Your instructional designer (ID) can assist you in interpreting and using Ally as you develop your new course. In addition, the staff of UHCL's Accessibility Support Center can provide training and support on creating accessible Word documents, PDF files, PowerPoint slide decks, and audio/video content.

Recommendations for Effective Online Lessons/Units/Modules

There is no "one size fits all" approach to creating the "perfect" online course. However, research indicates that effective online courses share some commonalities, which are discussed below. These factors are also reflected in the Quality Matters Rubric and standards, on which the IDT team's courtesy reviews are based.

Clear and Consistent Organizational Structure

- Course menu should display to students only the LMS tools/features that they will actively use during the course.

- For each instructional section (e.g., Canvas module), there should be prominent and clear information about assignments, activities, and student expectations (e.g., "to do" list, module overview).
- The course content structure should enable students to quickly locate everything they need to complete each course section (week, unit, lesson, etc.).
- Instructional modules, pages, etc., should follow the same layout, design, and flow from one to another.
- All LMS-native items should use a consistent sans-serif font/typeface and size throughout and be free from an abundance of different colors, underlining, and other distractions.

Sense of Instructor "Presence" Throughout the Course

- There should be a prominent instructor welcome and introduction, including an overview of the course design/layout.
- There should be regular, multiple weekly communications throughout the course (e.g., the Announcements tool with email option is a quick and easy way to send reminders, share new information, etc.).
- There should be clear expectations for students about how soon you will reply to emails, provide grades/feedback on activities/assignments, etc.
- There should be feedback that is more than just a numerical or letter grade (the insert audio or video feedback option when grading in LMS is a quick and easy way to provide short, individualized messages to students about their grade).

Learning Objectives and Instructional Alignment

- Don't simply copy/paste from the textbook/PowerPoints; if there are ten objectives listed in the text, but you are only going to assess students over five of them, then post those five.
- Restate objectives from publishers, etc., in terms that make sense to students.
- Explain to students how to use learning outcomes to self-assess their progress as they study and work through each course section.
- Ensure that most activities/assignments/assessments align with the stated objectives for that course section, especially "big ticket" assessments.

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- Commented [NN7]: weekly communication
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Engaging Activities/Assignments

- Provide multiple, shorter activities in each unit, lesson, etc., that enable students to demonstrate their understanding of new concepts, knowledge, and skills in various ways.
- If information is important enough to be required reading/watching in the course, there should be an activity that enables/requires students to use that information and to demonstrate that they have done so.
- Provide timely and meaningful feedback to activities and assignments that informs students about areas of misunderstanding and encourages them to review and correct before moving on to the next lesson.
- When possible, provide students with opportunities to interact with their classmates in activities/assignments and demonstrate understanding in multiple ways (e.g., paper, video, poster).

Regular, Meaningful Feedback on Performance

- Significant assessments (e.g., term paper, project) should include important feedback.
- Feedback on more minor activities can be made in announcements, emails, and videos to the class as an overview of areas of strength/weakness throughout the course with corrective advice for improvement.
- Students should have multiple opportunities to understand how they are performing and about areas of misunderstanding that they can correct BEFORE the first mid-term or significant assignment.

Conclusion

On behalf of OIT's Instructional Design and Technology team, we hope this guide will be helpful to you as you begin planning your new fully online courses. At any time, please feel free to contact your designated instructional designer (ID) with any questions or concerns. If you need help reaching your ID, contact our team at IDT@uhcl.edu or contact our colleagues in the OIT Support Center to have a help ticket created and assigned to our team. You may reach the Support Center by email (supportcenter@uhcl.edu) or by telephone (281.283.2828).

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Appendix A. Sample Instructional Plan

Even when developing a new online course based on existing face-to-face or hybrid/blended LMS course contents, the design/development process should begin with completing an Instructional Plan document for the new course. This step serves the following purposes:

- encourages the faculty member to think through how the fully online version of their course should flow and whether there are delivery-specific adjustments that need to be made to optimize fully online instruction, as opposed to how they have previously taught the course face-to-face/hybrid in the past; and
- provides a scope/sequence for the design/development process so that the instructional designer (ID) can assist in setting a reasonable design/development schedule for the entire project.

Below is a truncated sample Instructional Plan, showing the information for the first few weeks/units of a fully online course being developed.

	Topic	Learning Objectives	Instructional Events
1	Introduction, Overview, Universal Design, and Introduction to Accessibility	- Describe the assistive technology continuum and give examples at each point on the continuum. - Differentiate between assistive technology devices and assistive technology services. - Understand how assistive technology helps students with disabilities gain access to the curriculum. - Access resources that support the use of assistive technology for students with disabilities. - Be able to apply the principles of Universal Design for Learning to the components of a curriculum.	- Review the Introduction to Accessibility resources in the Module 01 folder - Complete the online module, Assistive Technology: An Overview (~ 2 hours) - Complete the online module, Universal Design for Learning: Creating a Learning Environment that Challenges and Engages All Students (~ 2 hours) - Read Chapter 1, Introduction to Assistive Technology - Read Chapter 4, Technology to Support Universal Design for Learning and Differentiated Instruction - Introductions Discussion - Syllabus Quiz - Module 01 Quiz - Module 01 Exit Survey [Optional] Module 01 Web Conference

Appendix B. Specific Review Standards from the QM Higher Education Rubric, 7th Edition

General Standards	Specific Review Standards	Points
Course Overview and Introduction	1.1 Instructions make clear how to get started and where to find various course components.	3
	1.2 Learners are introduced to the purpose and structure of the course.	3
	1.3 Communication guidelines for the course are clearly stated.	2
	1.4 Course and institutional policies with which the learner is expected to comply are clearly stated within the course, or a link to current policies is provided.	2
	1.5 Minimum technology requirements for the course are clearly stated, and information on how to obtain the technologies is provided.	2
	1.6 Technical skills and digital information literacy skills expected of the learner are clearly stated.	1
	1.7 Required prior knowledge in the discipline and/or any specific competencies are clearly stated in the course site.	1
	1.8 The self-introduction by the instructor is welcoming and is available on the course site.	1
	1.9 Learners have the opportunity to introduce themselves.	1
Learning Objectives (Competencies)	2.1 The course-level learning objectives describe outcomes that are measurable.	3
	2.2 The module/unit-level learning objectives describe outcomes that are measurable and consistent with the course-level objectives.	3
	2.3 Learning objectives are clearly stated, are learner-centered, and are prominently located in the course.	3
	2.4 The relationship between learning objectives, learning activities, and assessments is made clear.	3
		3

General Standards	Specific Review Standards	Points
	2.5 The learning objectives are suited to and reflect the level of the course.	
Assessment and Measurement	3.1 The assessments measure the achievement of the stated learning objectives.	3
	3.2 The course grading policy is stated clearly, available at the beginning of the course, and consistent throughout the course site.	3
	3.3 Specific and descriptive criteria are provided for the evaluation of learner's work, and their connection to the course grading policy is clearly explained.	3
	3.4 The course includes multiple types of assessments that are sequenced and suited to the level of the course.	2
	3.5 The types and timing of assessments provide learners with multiple opportunities to track their learning progress with timely feedback.	2
	3.6 The assessments provide guidance to the learner about how to uphold academic integrity.	1
Instructional Materials	4.1 The instructional materials contribute to the achievement of the stated learning objectives.	3
	4.2 The relationship between the use of instructional materials in the course and completion of learning activities and assessment is clearly explained.	3
	4.3 The course models the academic integrity expected of learners by providing both source references and permissions for use of instructional materials.	2
	4.4 The instructional materials represent up-to-date theory and practice in the discipline.	2
	4.5 A variety of instructional materials is used in the course.	2
Learning Activities and	5.1 The learning activities help learners achieve the stated objectives.	3
		3

General Standards	Specific Review Standards	Points
Learner Interaction	5.2 Learning activities provide opportunities for interaction that support active learning.	3
	5.3 The instructor's plan for regular interaction with learners in substantiative ways during the course is clearly stated.	2
	5.4 The requirements for learner interaction are clearly stated.	
Course Technology	6.1 The tools used in the course support the learning objectives.	3
	6.2 Course tools promote learner engagement and active learning.	2
	6.3 A variety of technology is used in the course.	1
	6.4 The course provides learners with information on protecting their data and privacy.	1
Learner Support	7.1 The course instructions articulate or link to a clear description of the technical support offered and how to obtain it.	3
	7.2 Course instructions articulate or link to the institution's accessibility policies and accommodation services.	3
	7.3 Course instructions articulate or link to the institution's academic support services and resources that can help learners succeed in the course.	3
	7.4 Course instructions articulate or link to the institution's student services and resources that can help learners succeed.	1
Accessibility and Usability	8.1 Course navigation facilitates ease of use.	3
	8.2 The course design facilitates readability.	3
	8.3 Text in the course is accessible.	3
	8.4 Images in the course are accessible.	2
	8.5 Video and audio content in the course are accessible.	2
	8.6 Multimedia in the course is easy to use.	2
	8.6 Vendor accessibility statements are provided for all technologies required in the course.	1

Appendix C. IDT Instructional Design Model

Our team uses a modified Agile course design process instead of a traditional ADDIE instructional design model. This approach provides greater flexibility during the design/development process, enabling you to design and develop a portion of the course and then review and modify that section before moving on to the next. You can reevaluate and revise your course at any point during the design/development process.

As shown in the following list, the Agile course design/development process includes several stages, the exact number of which varies depending upon the nature of your course.

- Sprint 1 - After the kickoff meeting (discussed previously), the instructor develops a draft syllabus and schedule and completes the Instructional Plan document (see Appendix A), in which they outline the organizational structure for the course, the learning outcomes for each section of instruction, as well as all readings, other instructional materials, activities, assignments, and assessments for each section of the course. When finalized, the Instructional Plan (IP) will serve as the foundation for the rest of the project.
- Sprints 2+ (number of sprints will vary, depending on the course) - Based on the IP, the instructor and ID will set a tentative schedule for the design/development of the course materials, activities, and assessments. During each sprint, an agreed-upon portion of the course will be completed and deployed in the LMS development shell, with the instructor identifying, creating, and providing materials to the ID. The ID will provide consulting and related support to assist in creating instructional content and deploying materials into LMS.
- Faculty Self-Review/ID Courtesy Review – As your new course nears completion, your designated ID will share a checklist against which we recommend you perform a self-review of your course. Based on the outcome of that self-review, you can address any potential issues or weaknesses and then request a courtesy review by your ID. Your instructional designer (ID) will provide you with a final feedback and

recommendation report and, upon request, assist you in addressing any areas of concern.