

Best Practice

**E-Learning Best Practices Comments Form SUNY Plattsburgh 2009**

This SUNY Plattsburgh E-Learning Best Practices is a product of research, experience, and deliberation on the part of members of the E-Learning Advisory Board, but it is by no means a culmination of these efforts. Input from faculty in the way of comments, suggestions, and examples will add to the refinement of this collaborative piece. Faculty should send contributions to the Associate Dean of Library & Information Services (Holly Heller-Ross, Interim: 202A Feinberg Library or email [hellerhb@plattsburgh.edu](mailto:hellerhb@plattsburgh.edu)), using this Comments Form, or any other means preferred.

The SUNY Plattsburgh online instruction goals have been formulated to reflect and support faculty development of characteristics our students associate with excellent teachers. (These characteristics were identified in a year-long student focus group on teaching project conducted by the Offices of Institutional Advancement and Institutional Research, and the Center for Teaching Excellence):

1. Respect and care for the student
2. Knowledge of discipline
3. Enthusiasm for the discipline and for teaching
4. Organization
5. The ability to communicate understanding of complex ideas

The E-Learning Best Practices outline is divided into general course components, its relevant standards (linked to a teaching excellence characteristic), and the specific best practices that can be applied to reach those standards.

**I. Instructional Design**

- **Standard One: Organizing and Arranging Course Materials**
- **Standard Two: Learning Objectives**
- **Standard Three: Course Activities and Assignments**

**II. Course Instruction**

- **Standard One: Communication and Interaction**

- **Standard Two: Assessment**

**III. Learner Support and Resources**

- **Standard One: Integration of Learning Support Resources**

**IV. Course Evaluation**

- **Standard One: Assessing the Course**

This document contains extensive advice on tried and true online teaching practices, but it is important to keep in mind that they are not absolutes. Good teachers use their knowledge and experience to make appropriate judgments about what practices most effectively serve their learning objectives. Lists of best practices are no substitute for instructor awareness of and responsiveness to student learning.

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**I. Instructional Design**

The design of a course for online delivery includes formatting organizing and arranging course materials as well as mapping the learning objectives and creating assignments, exams, and other assessment tools (both formative and summative).

**Standard One: Organizing and arranging course materials**

The design of the ANGEL course is well-organized, course software and hardware requirements are included with books as course materials, and the formatting provides relatively easy access to material and information.

**Teaching Excellence Characteristics:** Our students place a high value on the degree to which an instructor organizes and communicates course design. Having a clear sense of expectations and ready access to course information is a basic step to creating a trusting learning environment.

Best Practice	Comments
1a. The ANGEL course site is well organized	
1b. Course site is easy to navigate.	
2. The course schedule, timeline, and roster are updated for the appropriate semester	

Best Practice	Comments
3. The course is properly saved and archived at the end of the semester.	
4. Calendar provides timely information	

### I. Instructional Design, continued

#### Standard Two: Learning Objectives

General course learning objectives are clearly outlined in the course site, and provide a clear map of measurable student learning outcomes.

#### Teaching Excellence Characteristics:

Well thought-out learning objectives are central to the design and delivery of a successful course. They enable the student to understand how the various technical aspects of the course and teaching skills come together, demonstrate instructor purpose and expertise, and add weight to student responsibility for learning.

Best Practice	Comments
1. Course objectives are stated as true learning objectives and readily available to the students	
2. Learning objectives are measurable	

Best Practice	Comments
3. The course site provides a comprehensible map of how and what learning will be achieved through the semester	
4. All learning activities have an explicitly stated learning objective	

**I. Instructional Design, continued**

**Standard Three: Course Activities and Assignments**

All course activity and assignment requirements are appropriate for the online format, are connected to the course learning objectives, and provide learning opportunities in a variety of formats.

**Teaching Excellence Characteristics:**

In online courses, activities and assignments are the basis for communicating ideas and engaging the students. Special attention to the creation of these pedagogical tools demonstrates concern for diversity in learning styles.

Best Practice	Comments
1. Assignments with special skill requirements are made clear	

Best Practice	Comments
2. Pacing and workload of assignments is appropriate to the online format	
3. Due dates of all assignments are clearly posted	
4. Format requirements for assignment submissions is clear	
5. Discussion forums enliven the course and engage students on a deep level	
6. Discussion forums are cleanly structured and organized	

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**II. Course Instruction**

This standard is concerned with course instruction in its various elements: communication, interaction, assessment, and how the instructor is able to employ strategies and technology to establish and maintain an effective learning environment.

**Standard One: Communication and Interaction**

Technology is utilized in a manner that encourages students to be full participants in the learning process through active exchanges with the instructor and the other students.

**Teaching Excellence Characteristics:**

All communication and interaction that fosters learning is based on mutual respect that is grounded in the tone and attitude set by the instructor. Students learn best when they trust the intentions of the instructor. The best teachers create the conditions for learning by letting their care, concern, and respect for students guide all their interactions with them.

Best Practice	Comments
1. E-mail practices follow the College standards and enhance communication between the instructor and the students	
2a. Instructor-student communication begins early (one week prior to the start of class)	

Best Practice	Comments
2b. Communication is sustained throughout the course	
3. Communication between all the members of the course follow standards of respect and courtesy	

## II. Course Instruction, continued

### Standard Two: Assessment

Instructor assessment of student learning functions as both a means of learning and a summation of student performance.

#### Teaching Excellence Characteristics:

The best practices of the student assessment standard encompass all of the top characteristics of an excellent teacher: respect, expertise in discipline, enthusiasm for the discipline, organization and the ability to communicate complex ideas. If these characteristics drive assessment, then students will be assured of clarity, consistency, fairness. They will also learn from their assessment because their instructor has a passion for teaching his or her discipline that neutralizes the "punitive" quality of "grading."

Best Practice	Comments
1a. Assessment strategies produce measurable outcomes  1b. Assessments are clearly linked to course learning objectives	

Best Practice	Comments
2. Feedback on student work is timely and constructive	
3a. Grading policies are clearly stated and  3b. Grading policies are consistently applied to assignments and assessments	
4. Assessment is done with established norms/rubrics.	
5. Assessment assignments are appropriate for the online format.	

### III. Learner Support and Resources

The learner support standard refers to all the academic support services and offices the College makes available to the student: library research, tutoring, student support services and technical assistance.

#### Standard One: Integration of Learning Support Resources

Students in online courses will have awareness of and access to all those services that can assist them in the learning process.

#### Teaching Excellence Characteristics:

Teaching well requires a holistic sense of the student as a person in context. Instructors send a clear message about how much they value student success when they give students an opportunity to supplement their learning through campus resources.

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Best Practice	Comments
1a. Student Support Services are identified and highlighted  1b. Student Support Services are integrated into courses as appropriate	
2. ADA	
3a. Library Services are identified and highlighted as appropriate  3b. Library Services are integrated into courses as appropriate	
4. Research-based assignments include explicit criteria, planning time and referrals to library research help services	

Best Practice	Comments
5. Library and other Research Sources are identified for expanded knowledge of the course content	
6. Technical Assistance Resources are identified and highlighted as appropriate	
7a. Tutoring and Writing Support Services are highlighted  7b. Tutoring and Writing Support Services are integrated into courses as appropriate.	

#### IV. Course Evaluation

Course evaluation primarily concerns student evaluation of the course and the instructor's teaching effectiveness, but it may extend to evaluation invited by the instructor from a peer consultant, or professional in Instructional Technology or from the Center for Teaching Excellence.

##### **Standard One: Assessing the Course**

The means of assessing the course should be designed in order to obtain information that will be used to make reasonable adjustments to the class that improves student learning.

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**Teaching Excellence Characteristics:**

When students speak of care respect as characteristics of the excellent teacher, it is accompanied by their deep appreciation for faculty who manifest this by demonstrating their own willingness to learn. Course evaluations of any sort are a signal that learning is a personal responsibility that does, in fact, belong to all of us.

Best Practice	Comments
1. Students have ample opportunity to provide input about the course during the semester	

All ANGEL course sites have access to the ANGEL Documents repository (via Lessons | Add Content | Import from Learning Object Repository). This repository include files that can serve as models for communicating course guidelines, as basic customizable help files, and as frameworks for an "Introductions" forum. Faculty can import selected items from the "ANGEL Documents" repository directly into their course sites. For step-by-step instructions on using the repository items, see the "Starting Documents" page in the ANGEL Site Developers' Area.