

Online Education Initiative Online Course Review Rubric (Revised, March 2015)

From October 2014 through February 2015, almost seventy online courses were evaluated using the newly developed Online Course Review Rubric. Each course was evaluated by two peer reviewers, and then the results of their reviews were integrated by a third lead reviewer. All reviewers participated in an intensive review training, with application of the rubric as the focus of the training.

After completing the first round of reviews (three reviews each for all 67 courses), the lead reviewers met to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the rubric. In addition to this meeting, the lead reviewers participated in the OEI Spring Summit, where they spoke with over 40 of the faculty whose courses had been reviewed. The following suggestions for revisions to the rubric stem from the conversations at the Summit, and the meetings between the lead reviewers.

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Overarching feedback

Overwhelmingly, faculty who had their course reviewed reported that the comprehensive feedback included with the rubric was helpful, collegial, and comprehensive. That said, multiple sections of the rubric were murky for the faculty. Negative feedback about the rubric followed three basic themes: sections seemed redundant, certain sections were unclear, and some language was either contradictory or not standardized.

Feedback from both reviewers and faculty also indicated that the scoring systems—both the scores on the rubric and the weighted score sheet—were confusing. We would like to offer two solutions. First, the headings for Exemplary (5-6) and Accomplished (3-4) should be revised to illustrate the range. We suggest the headings, instead, read “Distinguished to Exemplary (5-6)”, and “Satisfactory to Accomplished (3-4)”. This change will more clearly explain why reviewers scored a course a 3 rather than a 4, especially. In addition, we suggest each Section of the rubric be weighted equally.

If the revisions we have noted are accepted, the highest possible score would be 72 (12 sections with a possible maximum score of 6 points each). In order for a course to qualify as aligned, a score of at least 3 would be required on all sections, with a minimum overall score of 51 (so the overall required score is consistent with a passing grade that reflects earning at least a 70% of all possible points and at least some sections would score in the accomplished range).

Section A

Comments on this section centered on redundancy and the vague language of goals and objectives. Faculty overwhelmingly felt the combine terms of “goals and objectives” was unclear or misleading. In addition many wondered about the difference between the items in A4 and similar items in A1-3, fearing they were ‘dinged’ twice for some issues.

A consistent area that needed clarification was the use of multimedia/multimedia tools in A2. After careful discussion, reviewers noted that the “if present” language created a grey area where multimedia was concerned. Thus, multimedia was folded into other areas where the appropriateness of the method of delivery is better gauged.

A.1 Objectives

Distinguished to Exemplary (5-6)	Satisfactory to Accomplished (3-4)	Promising (2)	Incomplete (1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Objectives are made available in a variety of areas in the course (within the syllabus and each individual learning unit or module)• Objectives are clearly written at the appropriate level and reflect desired outcomes• Objectives are written in measurable outcomes (students know what they are expected to be able to do)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Objectives are located within the course syllabus or the individual learning units• Objectives are written to reflect desired learning outcomes, although not all are written as measurable outcomes• Students understand of what is expected of them	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Objectives are not easily located within the course• Objectives are not written at the appropriate level to match the desired outcomes• Objectives are not clearly written in measurable learning outcomes• Students may be unsure of what they are expected to be able to do	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Objectives are not easily located within the course• Some are missing and others poorly written• The level does not match the desired learning outcomes

A.2 Content Presentation

Distinguished to Exemplary (5-6)	Satisfactory to Accomplished (3-4)	Promising (2)	Incomplete (1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content is made available or “chunked” in manageable segments (i.e., presented in distinct learning units or modules) • Navigation is intuitive and content flows in a logical progression • Content is presented using a variety of appropriate mechanisms (content modules, single pages, links to external resources, and/or multimedia, etc.) • CMS tools are used to reduce the labor-intensity of learning (e.g., providing links to needed resources where they will be used in the course, integrating publisher resources that are tailored to the course materials, and providing streamlined access to supplementary materials) • Clearly labeled tutorial materials that explain how to navigate the CMS and the specific course are included 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content is made available or “chunked” in manageable segments (i.e., presented in distinct learning units or modules) • Navigation is somewhat intuitive, but some “exploring” is required to determine the flow of content • Content is presented using a variety of mechanisms (content modules, single pages, links to external resources, RSS Feeds, print material) • CMS tools are made available to assist students, but could be organized or arranged for even greater usefulness • Clearly labeled tutorial materials that explain how to navigate the CMS and the specific course are included 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some content segments are overly large (or possibly too small) for the specified objectives • Navigation is only occasionally intuitive, thus the flow of content is sometimes not easily determined • The design does not avail of the content presentation tools (content modules, single pages, links) • Only a few tools (of those available within the CMS) are used in a way that streamlines access to materials and activities for students • Tutorial materials that explain how to navigate the CMS and/or the specific course may be evident, but not easily found 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content is not “chunked” into manageable segments; • Navigation is not intuitive and the flow of content is unclear • The design does not avail of the content presentation tools (content modules, single pages, links) • Tools that could reduce the labor- intensity of online instruction are not utilized • Tutorial materials explaining how to navigate the CMS or the specific course may be included but are difficult to find, lack detail, are not well organized, or are incomplete

A.3 Learner Engagement

Distinguished to Exemplary (5-6)	Satisfactory to Accomplished (3-4)	Promising (2)	Incomplete (1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is clear how the instructional strategies will enable students to reach course objectives • Course design includes guidance for learners to work with content in meaningful ways • Individualized learning opportunities, remedial activities, or resources for advanced learning activities are provided • Tools available within the course management system (CMS) are used to facilitate learning by engaging students with course content • Technologies are used creatively in ways that transcend traditional, teacher-centered instruction • Learners have the opportunity to give anonymous feedback to the instructor regarding course design and course content both during course delivery and after course completion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional strategies are designed to help students to reach course objectives, although this relationship may not be obvious to learners • Guidance is provided, but could be improved with greater detail or depth • Individualized learning opportunities (such as remediation) may be available on a limited basis • Tools available within the CMS could be utilized more (or more creatively) to engage learners with course content • Technologies within the course are used in many cases merely to replicate traditional face-to-face instruction • Learners have the opportunity to give anonymous feedback to the instructor regarding course design and/or course content, but only after course completion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is not clear how the instructional strategies will help learners achieve course objectives • Guidance in using content materials may only be provided on a limited basis • Individualized learning opportunities are not provided, although there may be supplementary content resources available • Tools available within the CMS are not used to their full extent or not used when it would be appropriate to do so • Technologies within the CMS are used primarily by instructors and not students (“students as recipients of content” model) • Learners have the opportunity to give feedback to the instructor regarding course design or course content, but only after course completion, or the feedback is not anonymous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional strategies do not provide students with skills needed to achieve course objectives • Content is provided but it is not clear what students are expected to do with it • No supplementary resources or activities are provided for remediation or advanced study • Technologies used within the CMS do not engage students with learning • Students are not expected to use technologies available within the CMS • Learners do not have the opportunity to give feedback to the instructor regarding course design or course content

Section B

As with Section A, many faculty and reviewers felt there were redundancies in the sections, and that these led to confusion about what was being evaluated. Some faculty felt they received a point reduction for the same issue in more than one section. Revisions aim to limit redundancy and clarify ambiguous areas. For instance, the inclusion of synchronous and/or asynchronous led many faculty to believe they needed both to satisfy this section of the rubric.

In addition to clarifying the language of existing sections B, sections from D3, Instructor Role, were moved to B1, Communication Strategies. Within the text moved to this section, the wording for Accomplished, which used to include language such as “may not be easy to find” or “may not be included” has been changed to indicate all Accomplished course should have easy to find communication information.

B.1 Communication Strategies

Distinguished to Exemplary (5-6)	Satisfactory to Accomplished (3-4)	Promising (2)	Incomplete (1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact information for the instructor is easy to find and includes multiple forms of communication (for example, e-mail, phone, chat, etc.) • Expected response time for email replies (or other communication tool) is included • The instructor's role within the course is explained (for example, instructor participation in discussions and activities, role—if any—in tech support, etc.) • The instructor's methods of collecting and returning work are clearly explained • There are plentiful opportunities for interaction, as appropriate. Communication strategies promote critical thinking or other higher order thinking aligned with learning objectives • Communication activities benefit from timely interactions and facilitate "rapid response" communication (i.e., students gain practice discussing course content extemporaneously without looking up basic, declarative information) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact information for the instructor is included and contact information includes more than one type of communication tool • Expected response time for email replies is included • Instructor's role within the course is clearly spelled out to students • The instructor's methods of collecting and returning work are clearly explained • Several communication are included to reinforce the desired learning outcomes • Communications sometimes require reflection or other higher order thinking • Interactions are meaningful but may not take full advantage of the real-time presence of instructor and/or peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact information for the instructor is provided but not easy to find and includes only one way to reach the instructor • Information concerning response time for email replies is not included • Little or no information is given regarding the instructor's role in the course • The instructor's methods of collecting and returning work are evident but not clearly explained. • Communication strategies are included, however, they may not consistently reinforce desired learning outcomes • Communications are focused primarily on lower levels of thinking (e.g., summarizing, describing, interpreting, etc.) • Interactions are used mostly for instructor explanation or clarification of content, or other instructor-focused activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact information for the instructor is sketchy, at best • Information concerning response time for email replies is not included • Information regarding the instructor's role in the course is not included • Instructor's methods of collecting and returning work are confusing or non-existent. • Little to no attention has been devoted to communication strategies • Interaction activities that are included do not invoke critical thinking, reinforce learning, or take advantage of the specific strengths of the communication tools used

B.2 Development of Learning Community

Distinguished to Exemplary (5-6)	Satisfactory to Accomplished (3-4)	Promising (2)	Incomplete (1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instructors have a plan for initiating contact prior to or at the beginning of class and at regular intervals during the course• Communication activities are designed to help build a sense of community among learners• Student-to-student interactions are required as part of the course. Students are encouraged to initiate communication with the instructor• Collaboration activities (if included) reinforce course content and learning outcomes, while building workplace-useful skills such as teamwork, cooperation, negotiation, and consensus-building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication activities may help learners build a sense of community, but do not appear to be designed with this in mind• Some student-to-student interaction is built into the course• Students interact with the instructor, although primarily as a result of instructor-initiated contact• Collaboration activities (if included) support some team-building skills, but may not purposefully integrate these elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effort has been devoted to fostering a sense of community in the course, but only minimally.• More focus is needed on designing activities and a course climate that foster student-to-student interactions as well as student-to-instructor interactions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Little to no attention has been devoted to building a sense of community in this course.

B.3 Interaction Logistics

Distinguished to Exemplary (5-6)	Satisfactory to Accomplished (3-4)	Promising (2)	Incomplete (1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidelines explaining required levels of participation (i.e., quantity of interactions) are provided • Expectations regarding the quality of communications (e.g., what constitutes a “good” answer) are clearly defined • A rubric or equivalent grading document is included to explain how participation will be evaluated • The instructor plans to participate actively in communication activities, including providing feedback to students • The instructor plans to use communication tools effectively to provide course updates, reminders, special announcements, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations of student participation in communication activities are given, but would benefit from more detail • Expectations regarding the quality of communications are included, but may lack detail or illustrative examples • Minimal information may be provided regarding grading criteria for communications activities • The instructor is occasionally involved in communication activities • The instructor sometimes takes advantage of LMS tools to post announcements, reminders, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor expectations of student interactions are not made clear • Little information is provided regarding what constitutes a “good” response or post • Students are not given a clear set of criteria for how communications activities will be graded • The instructor appears to be largely absent from communication activities • Few announcements, reminders, or other updates are provided 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few or no guidelines are provided to students regarding the desired quantity or quality of communications/ interactions within the course • The instructor does not participate in communications activities with students • The instructor does not provide announcements, reminders, or other updates.

Section C

Section C contained one of the lowest scoring sections within the rubric—Self Assessment. Unsurprisingly, this section received many comments from both faculty and reviewers. Because feedback in this section raised so many questions, our suggestion is to combine self-assessment with assessment design, while also clarifying the role and goal of student opportunities for self-assessment.

C.1 Expectations

Distinguished to Exemplary (5-6)	Satisfactory to Accomplished (3-4)	Promising (2)	Incomplete (1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assessments match the objectives• Learners are directed to the appropriate objective(s) for each assessment• Rubrics and/or descriptive criteria for desired outcomes are provided (models of “good work” may be shown, for example)• Instructions are written clearly and with exemplary detail to ensure understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assessments match the objectives• Rubrics or descriptive criteria for desired outcomes are included for some assessment activities• Instructions are written clearly, with sufficient detail included	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students are assessed on the topics described in the objectives• There may be some explanation of how assessments will be scored/graded, however, instructions lack detail that would help students understand how to successfully complete the assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assessments bear little resemblance to objectives• Expectations or grading criteria are not provided• Instructions are limited or absent

C.2 Assessment Design

Distinguished to Exemplary (5-6)	Satisfactory to Accomplished (3-4)	Promising (2)	Incomplete (1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment activities have “face validity” (i.e., they appear to match the curriculum and are explained using appropriate reading level and vocabulary) • Higher order thinking is required (e.g., analysis, problem-solving, etc.) • Assessments are designed to mimic authentic environments to facilitate transfer • Assessment activities occur frequently throughout the duration of the course, and the instructor provides meaningful feedback in a timely manner • Multiple types of assessments are used (research project, objective test, discussions, etc.) • Opportunities for student self-assessment are plentiful, and provide feedback that allows students to seek additional help when necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment activities have “face validity” (i.e., they appear to match the curriculum) • Some activities involve higher order thinking • Assessment activities may focus on tasks similar to real-world application of skills • Multiple assessments are included; at least three different types of assessments are used • Opportunities for student self-assessment are present, and provide feedback that allows students to seek additional help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is not clear whether the assessment activities actually measure the desired skill • The majority of assessments require only low-level thinking (memorization, for example) • Assessment activities typically do not include tasks that are relevant beyond the scope of this course • Two types of assessments are included, at a minimum. • Opportunities for student self-assessment are present, but it may not be evident to the student how they should use the results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment activities appear to lack validity due to bias, lack of clarity in questions or tasks, or because students are evaluated on performance unrelated to the stated objectives • No higher-order thinking skills are required to complete assessment activities • There is little or no evidence of authenticity built into assessments • Assessments are too few and far apart for the course content • Students are not provided activities or resources for self-assessment.

Section D

This section was perhaps the most fraught for both reviewers and faculty. The overwhelming demands of accessibility and the technical experience required to test for accessibility make deeply evaluating the courses very difficult. The reviewers recommend doing an initial accessibility review, including checking for alt text and closed captions, but suggest all courses then receive a detailed “Technical” accessibility review.

Sections D1, Orientation to Course, and Section D7, Feedback, of the initial rubric have been folded into A1, Course Design, and A3 Learner Engagement, respectively. In addition, we have moved the material from Section D3, Instructor Role, to B1, Communication (as previously mentioned).

D.1 Supplemental Software

(if required - it is permissible to award this criterion a 6 if the course does not require software beyond the CMS and browser)

Distinguished to Exemplary (5-6)	Satisfactory to Accomplished (3-4)	Promising (2)	Incomplete (1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear explanations of optional and/or required software including any additional costs are provided within the course• Software required to use course materials is listed with links to where it can be captured and installed• Links are located within the course where learners will use the software (i.e., near the materials requiring its use)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear explanations of optional and/or required software (in addition to the CMS) are provided within the course• Software required to use course materials is listed but links to where it can be captured and installed are not found near where it will be used	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Software (in addition to the CMS) required to use course materials is mentioned, but not explained• Links to where it can be captured and installed are provided, although they may not be conveniently located	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The need for additional software required to use course materials may be mentioned• Links to software may be missing or incomplete

D.2 Course/ Institutional Policies & Support

Distinguished to Exemplary (5-6)	Satisfactory to Accomplished (3-4)	Promising (2)	Incomplete (1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Software used for the course is adequately supported by the institution, including information for students on where they can obtain help • All activities that might create educational records (as defined by the Family Educational Records Privacy Act) or that involve regular effective contact are conducted within district- or college-supported systems • Institutional policies, materials, and forms relevant for learner success (for example, plagiarism policies) are clearly labeled and easy to find; links (if present) allow easy navigation from the course to the information and back. • Course/instructor policies regarding decorum, behavior, and netiquette are easy to find and written clearly to avoid confusion • Links to institutional services such as the library, or writing center, are clearly labeled and easy to find 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional policies, materials, and forms relevant for learner success (for example, plagiarism policies) are included but may require searching to find; links allow easy navigation from the course to the information and back • Course/instructor policies regarding decorum, behavior, and netiquette are included and are written clearly to avoid confusion • Links to institutional services such as the library, writing center, or financial aid office may be included but require searching to find 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some institutional policies, materials, and forms relevant for learner success (for example, plagiarism policies) are included but are difficult to find • Course/instructor policies regarding decorum, behavior, and netiquette are included but are not clearly written or would benefit from more detail • A few links to institutional services such as the library, writing center, or financial aid office may be included but require searching to find 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some institutional policies, materials, and forms relevant for learner success (for example, plagiarism policies) are not included • Some course/instructor policies regarding decorum, behavior, and netiquette may be included but are not clearly written or would benefit from more detail • Links to institutional services such as the library, writing center, or financial aid office are not include

D.3 Technical Accessibility

This section **will not** be reviewed by the POCRs; it will instead be reviewed by accessibility specialists as part of the initial review process.

Distinguished to Exemplary (5-6)	Satisfactory to Accomplished (3-4)	Promising (2)	Incomplete (1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course materials are compliant with Section 508 and WCAG 2.0 (AA) and can be effectively used with equal ease by all students • All non-text communications technologies support multiple digital channels with automatic provision of alternate media accommodations in real time • Course materials are HTML-based and employ formatting styles to create semantic structure that facilitates consistent meaning and sequencing across all digital media types • All instructional materials can be opened via free and accessible programs or applications, and links are provided for students to download the application with supporting information on how to use the program or application • Quiz and assessment activities can be completed with equal ease via the keyboard and assistive technologies without adding cognitive load, and provide individual student-based parameters for time, number of attempts, feedback, and completion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course materials are compliant with Section 508 and WCAG 2.0 (AA). • All non-text communications technologies support multiple digital channels for the provision of alternate media accommodations in real time. • Course materials employ formatting styles to create semantic structure that allows for consistent meaning and sequencing across all digital media types • All instructional materials can be opened via free and accessible programs or applications • Quiz and assessment activities can be completed with equal ease via the keyboard and assistive technologies without adding cognitive load 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course materials fail to meet all Section 508 and WCAG 2.0 (AA) criteria completely • Some non-text communications technologies support limited means for the provision of alternate media accommodations • Course materials employ some formatting styles to create semantic structure but fail to provide reliable and consistent meaning and sequencing across all digital media types • Most instructional materials can be opened via free and accessible programs or applications • Most quiz and assessment activities can be completed with equal ease via the keyboard and assistive technologies without adding cognitive load 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course materials are significantly non-compliant with Section 508 and WCAG or add cognitive load via inadequate accessibility supports • Non-text communications technologies do not support multiple digital channels for the provision of alternate media accommodations • Course materials do not employ formatting styles to create semantic structure, nor consistent meaning and sequencing across digital media types • Instructional materials use proprietary and inaccessible media formats • Quiz and assessment activities cannot be completed with the keyboard or assistive technologies, and/or extra cognitive load is introduced through inadequate accessibility supports

D.4 Accommodations for Disabilities

This section **will not be reviewed by the POCRs**; it will instead be reviewed by accessibility specialists as part of the initial review process.

Distinguished to Exemplary (5-6)	Satisfactory to Accomplished (3-4)	Promising (2)	Incomplete (1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no pedagogically-essential learning activities or instructional media that are inherently inaccessible, or in the presence of such inaccessible materials, a DSPS approved plan for accommodation is in place and ready to be provided as necessary for each inaccessible learning activity or instructional media. • Course CMS settings are configurable by faculty to allow individual student-based accommodations to be provided within the CMS. • Links to CMS technical support and contact information for DSPS support are consistently provided and easy to find, and accompanied by a module within the CMS explaining how to request services or report a problem • An instructional material inventory of any inherently inaccessible learning objects is provided, and referenced to the accompanying course outline with plans for accommodating students with disabilities for each inaccessible learning object or activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no pedagogically-essential learning activities or instructional media that are inherently inaccessible, or in the presence of such inaccessible materials, faculty and DSPS have agreed to work with OEI to formulate an acceptable plan of accommodation for each inaccessible learning activity or instructional media. • Course CMS settings can be configured in a timely manner (24 hours) by faculty and/or the CMS System Administrator to allow student accommodations to be provided within the CMS, or alternate plans for accommodation have been created and approved by DSPS. • Links to CMS technical support and DSPS support are provided, and easy to find • An instructional material inventory of any inherently inaccessible learning objects is provided, along with some potential accommodations for each learning object or activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are pedagogically-essential learning activities or instructional media that might be inherently inaccessible, but a deeper assessment of the course and institutional resources is required to determine the ability to support accommodations. • Some of the CMS settings can be configured by faculty or CMS System Administrator to allow student accommodations to be provided within the CMS. • CMS technical support is provided, or a link to DSPS department web page, but not always easy to find • An instructional material inventory of any inherently inaccessible learning objects is provided 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There may be learning activities or instructional media that are inherently inaccessible, or there is no DSPS approved plan for accommodation. • CMS settings cannot be configured to allow student accommodations to be provided within the CMS. • CMS settings are not configurable to allow for student accommodations • No link to technical support or DSPS department is provided • Inherently inaccessible learning objects have not been identified, and no accommodations have been conceived or approved