How to Use the Engaged Online Course Annotated Rubric

The **Engaged Online Course Rubric (EOCR)** contains a set of guidelines that represent research-based best practices in online course design and development. These guidelines and the accompanying criteria can be used by instructional faculty to self-assess the quality of their online courses, or by a peer reviewer to provide valuable feedback to a colleague.

There are seven general standards which cover essential aspects of a quality online course at UTK. **In the annotated rubric, each standard is expanded to include a full annotation with examples.** These details can help determine whether a particular standard has been met, has not been met or is not applicable, due to the course content, curriculum, or discipline.

How the EOCR Supports Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)

The Department of Education (DOE) recognizes the importance of engagement and requires that online courses ensure regular and substantive interaction between student and instructor. RSI is one of the factors the DOE uses to distinguish online education from correspondence education, the latter of which is not eligible for federal financial aid.

Standards that support RSI are noted in the rubric with this icon: 🏁

These standards address specific communication and engagement practices that, when implemented in the design and delivery of an online course, can support RSI. For more detailed information on RSI compliance, review the Course Assessment page or download this quick reference guide.

Additional Resources for Quality Course Design

Online Course Syllabus Template

Maintained by Online Learning, the Online Course Syllabus template includes components that reflect best practices in online course design and delivery, and language in the template can be edited to meet individual instructors' needs.

UTK Canvas Course Template

Maintained by OIT, the UTK Canvas Course template is designed for UTK instructional personnel to encourage a consistent, positive, and quality student learning experience in Canvas. Elements in the template include clear directions, built-in-support and technical guidance, design components that can be reused, and sample language useful for helping students engage with course content, complete assignments, and participate in discussions.

Instructors can import the template into their course shells from the **Canvas Commons by searching for "UTK Canvas Course Template"** and selecting Import/Download.

References:

-Quality Matters. Higher Ed Course Design Rubric. Accessed September 29, 2021. https://www.qualitymatters.org/qa-resources/rubric-standards/higher-ed-rubric

-The State University of New York. The SUNY Online Course Quality Review Rubric – OSCQR. Accessed October 17, 2021. https://oscqr.suny.edu

Standard 1: Course Overview and Information

Overview Statement: The course overview and introduction set the tone for the course, inform students about what to expect, introduce course learning objectives or competencies, and provide guidance for student success.

1.1 Course includes "welcome" content and instructions on how to get started.

Course landing page contains a prominently placed block of "Welcome" content that includes clearly defined instructions for learners on how to get started, a general overview of the course and learning outcomes, and where to find various course components and resources. The course welcome is a critical component in establishing teaching presence and can provide an important and positive first impression of the course and the instructor.

Reviewers can look for:

1. A welcome or getting started module in the course site that contains details about what learners should do first, where to find the syllabus or course orientation section, and how to navigate the course.
2. A welcome video supplemented with an introductory discussion forum where learners can interact with the instructor to ask questions, or get any clarification they may need about the course, expectations, assignments, etc.
3. A detailed instruction sheet or quick reference guide on how to get started and what to do first in the course. Post this on the course home page, or send it out to learners via mail, or course announcements.
4. A course FAQ that addresses important course navigation or participation issues.
5. An optional synchronous session to welcome learners, answer questions, and demonstrate how and where to get started in the course.

1.2 An easily accessible orientation is provided and includes the purpose and structure of the course, the mode of course delivery, assignment schedule, assessment schedule, and a predictable feedback schedule.

Orientation information is provided to help learners understand the scope of work and time commitments expected from them. The orientation includes how the learning process is structured and carried out, including course schedule, delivery modalities (asynchronous, synchronous), modes of communication, types of learning activities, and how learning will be assessed. The overall course and module orientation and/or overview will prepare learners for what, when, where, and why they will be learning and when to expect feedback from the instructor.

Reviewers can look for:

1. A detailed written description of the types of instructional activities learners will engage in, including all content, interaction, and assessment types included in the course. This should include required readings, interaction guidelines and expectations, and due dates.
2. An assignment and assessments schedule that provides details about when assignments are due, when assessments are taking place and when students can expect to receive feedback on a predictable basis
3. Provide expected time required to participate and engage fully in the course each week throughout the term (e.g., "Please expect nine hours per week…").
4. Create a course map or calendar to visualize the sequence of course modules, types of learning activities, anticipated duration of each activity, and indications of when assignments are due.
5. Create a short video introductory overview tour of your course within the LMS using a screen casting tool, (Zoom, Panopto, etc.). This can help learners better navigate the course space, by letting them see the structure of learning modules and how to locate and access all course materials.

1.3 Course provides instructor contact information, availability information, virtual office hours, communication preferences, and response time to messages.

The instructor provides open avenues for communication and provides easy access to those channels by including their contact information, office hours and expectations for response time. In addition to providing this information in the syllabus, it is recommended this information is provided in multiple areas of the course introduction.

Examples:

1. Provide contact information in multiple places for access, (i.e. the Course Welcome page, the Syllabus, stated in an introduction video).
2. Share expectations for being contacted by students including your preferred and/or required modes of contact.
3. Provide details so learners know what to expect in terms of response time to emails, discussion board posts, and other forms of communication.
4. Provide information on regular office hours, how/where to ask questions, or get extra help, where to go for advisement, how to contact or access any department or program information or resources, etc.

1.4 A self-introduction is provided by the instructor and is available in the course site.

The instructor's self-introduction is welcoming and available in a predominate place at the beginning of the course. The initial introduction creates a sense of connection between the instructor and the learners. When students know more about the background of their instructor, the "distance" between instructor/learners is mitigated. It presents the instructor as professional as well as approachable, and includes the essentials, such as the instructor's name, title, field of expertise, email address, phone number, and times when the instructor is typically online or may be reached by phone.

Reviewers can look for:

1. On the Welcome Page in Canvas, a written introduction by the instructor that includes images of personal hobbies or travel.
2. A welcome video supplemented with an introductory discussion forum where learners can interact with the instructor to ask questions, or get any clarification they may need about the course, expectations, etc.
3. Information about the instructor's availability to interact with students and provide regular feedback consistently.

Topics that might be addressed during an introduction:

- Comments on teaching philosophy
- A summary of experience teaching online courses
- Personal information such as hobbies, family, travel experiences, etc.
- A graphic representation, audio message, or video (including alternative formats to ensure accessibility)
- The role of the instructor
- How the instructor prefers to be addressed

1.5 Minimal technology requirements including reliable internet access, required hardware, software, media players, plug-ins, peripherals (microphone, webcam), etc. for the course are clearly stated and information on how to obtain the technologies is provided.

Learners are provided detailed information regarding the minimal technologies they will need throughout the course, including information on where they can be obtained. Having appropriate technology and knowledge of related issues–and their solutions–can limit obstacles to a successful online teaching and learning experience. It is recommended that these minimum technology requirements are presented in the course syllabus. It is also helpful to provide the necessary resource link to connect to OIT technical support.

Examples:

1. If speakers, a microphone, or a headset are necessary, the need for such peripherals is clearly stated.
2. Links to all downloadable resources are provided. These resources include software and online tools, apps, plug-ins such as Acrobat Reader and Java, media players, MP3 players, wikis, social media, interactive multimedia apps, discussion, or messaging board apps, etc.
3. Instructions are provided on accessing materials available through subscription services, including online journals or databases. When available, links are also provided.
4. If publisher materials are required, clearly stated instructions for how to obtain and use any required access codes are provided.

1.6 Computer skills and digital information literacy skills expected of the learner are clearly stated.

Any hardware, software, or technology applications that are required for successful participation in the course need to be introduced along with resources that support a full range of learner mastery. Access issues need to be mitigated early on in order for learners to succeed. Digital information literacy refers to the ability to locate, evaluate, apply, create, and communicate knowledge using technology.

Scaffolding is supported when these expectations are stated at the beginning of the course providing ample time for the learners to practice, have time to build their skills, and troubleshoot any issues that may arise.

Examples:

1. Include low-stakes practice assignments, so that learners can become comfortable and confident in their skill level with technology tools and literacy skills expected to complete a module or the course.
2. A screen-cast video on how to access the tools and find online help and add it to the course along with links to the places explored in the screencast video.
3. Create a technology orientation module that includes how-to videos, documentation, and practice assignments. Require that learners complete this module before moving on in the course.
4. Links to documentation, video tutorials, and quick reference guides.

1.7 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.

Institutional and academic policies and procedures apply to all learners, including those enrolled in online courses and programs. Online learners should be able to access important policies that address areas such as academic honesty, the student code of conduct, acceptable use of information technologies, course grading policies and penalties for late submissions, the process for filing student grievances and grade appeals, withdrawal deadlines, etc.

Reviewers can look for information about and links to the following UTK policies and publications:

- Current undergraduate and graduate catalogs
- Academic Honesty: https://studentconduct.utk.edu/academic-dishonesty-2
- UTK Student Code of Conduct https://studentconduct.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2021/08/2m3k1ac-Fall-StudentCodeOfConduct_WEB.pdf
- Hilltopics Student Handbook: https://hilltopics.utk.edu
- Acceptable Use of Information Technology Resources: https://policy.tennessee.edu/policy/it0110-acceptable-use-of-information-technology-resources
- OneStop: Grades and GPA Information: https://onestop.utk.edu/gpa

1.8 Communication expectations and guidelines for online discussions, email, and other forms of interaction are clearly stated.

Expectations for how learners communicate online and in the virtual classroom – sometimes referred to as netiquette - are clearly stated in the course site and/or syllabus. Students who are new to online learning may not have experience communicating with technology in an academic setting, so it's important that instructors share detailed expectations and guidelines for online engagement and interaction. Reviewers, look in the course site, syllabus, or other course documents for clearly stated communication guidelines.

Examples of etiquette considerations:

- Expectations for the tone and civility used in communicating with fellow learners and the instructor, whether the communication is by electronic means or by telephone or face-to-face
- Expectations for email content, including "speaking style" requirements (e.g., standard English as opposed to popular abbreviations used online and regional colloquialisms)
- Spelling and grammar expectations
- Awareness of and sensitivity to cultural differences

To reinforce etiquette and civility, the instructor may provide a link or reference to the institution's student handbook or code of conduct.

1.9 Learners have an opportunity to introduce themselves at the beginning of the semester.

Learners are given the opportunity to introduce themselves and guidance on where and how they should do so. Learner introductions at the beginning of the class help create a welcoming learning environment. Knowing there are other students on a similar journey helps learners feel they are part of a community, which can reduce feelings of isolation in an online setting and motivate students to participate.

In some situations, such as large-enrollment courses, student introductions may not be feasible. Instructors are asked to indicate in the Course Worksheet if there is a reason for not providing an opportunity for learner introductions.

Examples:

1. A class introduction forum for students to meet and engage with their classmates. Instructors may ask learners to respond to specific questions (such as why they are taking the course, what are their strategies for success, what concerns they have, what they expect to learn, etc.) or may choose to let the learner decide what to include.
2. Students post self-introductions in response to the instructor's introduction statement or video.
3. Instructors may give learners the opportunity to represent themselves by text, audio, or visual means.

1.10 Course objectives / learning outcomes or competencies are clearly defined and measurable.

Measurable course objectives or competencies precisely and clearly describe what learners will be able to do if they successfully complete the course. Course objectives/ learning outcomes describe desired learner mastery using terms that are specific and observable enough to be measured by the instructor. Bloom's Taxonomy action verbs are often used when writing measurable learning objectives or outcomes. Course objectives that include verbs such as learn, know, and realize are very difficult to measure and on their own will not meet the standard.

Reviewers, look for course objectives or learning outcomes in the syllabus, course site or other course documents. Some courses may also have unit or module level outcomes.

Examples of measurable objectives or competencies:

Upon completion of the course (module/unit), learners will be able to:

1. Select appropriate tax strategies for different financial and personal situations.
2. Develop a comprehensive, individualized wellness action program focused on overcoming a sedentary lifestyle.
3. Demonstrate correct use of personal protective equipment.
4. Articulate personal attitudes and values related to the use of artificial intelligence in educational settings.
5. Collaborate on a group project by completing designated tasks and offering feedback to team members on their tasks.

Special situations (check the Course Worksheet for details):

In a course in which learners are expected to demonstrate "core competencies," such as analytical skills and/or ability to express themselves effectively in writing or in other forms of communication, the course should include reference to these foundational, core objectives or competencies in addition to objectives or competencies that relate to course-specific mastery of content.

For instance, if the institution has a writing-across-the-curriculum requirement, the instructor of a course in economics may be expected to evaluate the effectiveness of learners' writing as well as their mastery of principles of economics. Accordingly, objectives or competencies related to writing effectiveness will be included in the course.

In some cases, the course objectives or competencies are institutionally mandated, and the individual instructor does not have the authority to change them. If the institutionally mandated learning objectives or competencies are not measurable, make note of it in your recommendations.

Standard 2: Assessment/Measurement and Feedback

Overview Statement: Assessments and measurement are designed and implemented in alignment with the course learning objectives or competencies and not only allow the instructor a determination of learners' mastery of content, but also allow learners to track their learning progress throughout the course.

2.1 Assessments, including quizzes, assignments, exams, capstone projects, etc., measure the achievement of the stated course learning objectives or competencies.

Regular assessments that involve the meaningful application of knowledge and skills allow students to demonstrate progress while highlighting any gaps in knowledge. As learners move through an online course, they should encounter assignments, activities, and interactions designed to assess how well they are progressing toward the achievement of learning outcomes.

From the types of assessments chosen, learners can complete them if they have met the objectives or competencies stated in the course materials and learning activities.

Alignment: Course assessments (ways of confirming learner mastery) are consistent with the course and module learning objectives or competencies by measuring the achievement of those objectives or competencies.

Examples of alignment between a learning objective or competency and an assessment:

1. Problem analysis demonstrates critical thinking skills.
2. A multiple-choice quiz verifies vocabulary knowledge.
3. A composition shows writing skills.
4. A video of a learner presentation in a foreign language shows mastery of the language.
5. Participation in a game reveals learner skill levels in critical thinking, analytical thinking, or decision-making.

Examples of lack of alignment between a learning objective or competency and an assessment:

1. The objective or competency is to "write a persuasive essay," but the assessment is a multiple-choice test.
2. The objective or competency is to "create a body of work that illustrates your photographic vision," but the assessment is a 25-page thesis about contemporary photographers.

Some assessments may be geared toward meeting outcomes other than those stated in the course; for example, a course may have a writing component as part of a program-wide writing-across-the-curriculum requirement. This information should be noted within the Course Worksheet.

2.2 The course grading policy is clearly stated and available at the beginning of the course.

The course grading policy is clear and available at the beginning of the course. It should be easy for learners to locate in the course site and/or syllabus, and consistent throughout the course site.

A written statement fully details how the course grades are calculated. The points, percentages, and weights for each component of the course grade are included. The relationship(s) between points, percentages, weights, and letter grades are explained. The instructor's policy on late submissions and missed exams (if applicable) is explicit.

Reviewers look for:

- Clarity in the explanation and presentation to the learner, not the not the simplicity or complexity of a given grading system itself
- A list of all activities, projects, tests, etc., that will determine the final grade
- An explanation of the relationship between the final course letter grade and the learner's accumulated points and/or percentages

- An explanation of the relationship between points and percentages if both are used
- A clearly stated policy on point deductions for assignments submitted late

2.3 Learners have easy access to a well-designed and up-to-date gradebook.

Online gradebooks provide instructors with the opportunity to automate, customize, and share grades timely feedback with learners. Linking back to grading policies/evaluation criteria from each graded activity provides opportunities for learners to understand what is expected from them.

Examples:

1. Provide a direct link to the gradebook within the course information, syllabus, or areas referring to grading policies or assignments.
2. Use short titles/headings for assignments to maximize the column views in the Canvas (LMS) gradebook.
3. Encourage learners to check the gradebook after every assignment has been graded to be sure that they can access their grades and any associated feedback.

2.4 The instructor's plan for responding to learner inquiries and providing regular and substantive feedback is clearly stated.

Providing effective, timely feedback to students is essential in establishing and maintaining instructor presence in the online classroom. Regular feedback from the instructor increases learners' sense of engagement in a course. Learners are better able to manage their learning activities when they know upfront when to expect feedback from the instructor. Clear information is provided about when learners will receive instructor responses to emails and posted questions, feedback on assignments, and grades.

Example: Instructor might state that they will reply to emails within 24 hours, and feedback for assignments will be posted within a week after the due date. This information may appear in the course syllabus or in a "Start Here" folder. If it is necessary to alter the response-time plan during the course, how the adjustment will be made is clearly communicated.

Reviewers, you are not evaluating the instructor's plan; you are primarily ensuring the instructor has provided a plan. If you have recommendations for how to improve the plan, you may include them in your suggestions for improvement.

2.5 The course provides learners with opportunities to review their own performance and track their learning progress, e.g., pre-tests, self-tests with feedback, reflective assignments, etc.

Lower-stakes assessments provide learners with opportunities to receive timely feedback that can be used to track learning progress and improve learning achievement. Additionally, learning is enhanced if learners receive frequent, constructive, and timely feedback. The feedback may come from the instructor directly, from assessments that have feedback built into them, or from other learners through peer feedback.

Reviewers, look for self-check quizzes and activities, and other practice opportunities that provide timely feedback. Such assignments may be voluntary and/or allow multiple attempts.

Additional examples:

- Writing assignments that allow for the submission of a draft for instructor comment and suggestions for improvement
- Self-mastery tests that include informative feedback with each answer choice
- Self-scoring practice quizzes
- Practice written assignments
- Peer reviews and critiques
- Model papers or essays provided for learners' viewing
- Sample answers or answer keys provided for learners' viewing
- Portfolios with a self-evaluation component, journals, and reflection papers

- Interactive games and simulations that have feedback built in

Standard 3: Course Content and Activities

Overview Statement: This standard focuses on supporting the course objectives or competencies through various instructional materials and activities, including those that promote active learning and engagement.

3.1 The course content and learning activities promote the achievement of the stated learning objectives or competencies.

The purpose of learning activities is to facilitate the learner's achievement of the stated objectives or competencies. The instructional materials and activities used in the course align with the course and/or module/unit-level learning objectives or competencies by contributing to the achievement of those objectives or competencies.

Examples:

1. The objective or competency requires that learners deliver a persuasive speech. Activities include choosing an appropriate topic for the speech, creating an outline, and recording a practice of the speech delivery.
2. A module objective in a finance class is that students can explain the steps in a home buying process. An activity they must complete is an interaction where they match a scenario to the correct step in this process.

3.2 The course uses various types of instructional materials.

The course presents a variety of relevant instructional materials that may include textbooks and other publications, instructor-created resources, websites, and multimedia. Typically, a course includes multiple sources rather than material from a single author. In some disciplines, it may be appropriate to have all materials from a single author.

Reviewers, look for evidence that learners have options for how they consume content, e.g., reading, viewing a video, listening to a podcast.

Examples:

1. A textbook from a single author, multiple videos, and a selection of websites.
2. Several scholarly journal articles as assigned readings, multiple videos, and a few audio podcasts created by the instructor.
3. A series of topical videos and a textbook.

3.3 Instructional materials used in the course represent various learner identities, experiences, and cultures.

Course materials, including multimedia, provide diverse and non-stereotypical types of representation.

Examples:

- Images and media represent a variety of ethnicities, races, genders, sexualities, family structures, religions, abilities, body types, and ages
- Videos represent diverse voices and perspectives
- Case studies and scenarios describe families and relationships of different structures and types
- Prompts and examples include names and stories from different cultures

3.4 Course activities promote engagement through active, experiential, or collaborative learning.

Active learning is a broad term defined by Bonwell and Elson (1991) "as anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing." Active learning engages students in the learning process

beyond passively sitting and taking notes. Instead, learners participate in activities that might involve reading, writing, creating, discussion, reflection, and analysis. These can range from brief exchanges, activities that may take 10-20 minutes, to strategies spanning multiple weeks. In the online classroom, active learning and engagement are key components in facilitating student satisfaction and success.

Experiential learning is a process whereby students learn by doing or through action or experience, and then engage in focused reflection about their experiences. By engaging in hands-on experiences and reflection, students are better able to connect what they are learning to real-world settings. Experiential learning can occur in numerous forms, including service-learning, undergraduate research, capstone projects, simulations and role-playing.

Collaborative learning involves groups of learners working together to complete a task, solve a problem, or create an artifact. Collaborative learning can occur peer-to-peer or in larger groups and offers students a way to develop teamwork, communication, and self-management skills. The learning management system (LMS) includes tools that support online collaboration and group work.

Reviewers, there is a lot of overlap among these types of instructional approaches, with collaborative learning often presented as an example of active learning.

Examples:

Case studies; problem-based learning; online discussions/debate; creating/utilizing concept maps; online scavenger hunt; reflective writing assignments, e.g., muddies point paper; virtual service-learning opportunities; peer-to-peer instruction; peer review; group learning assignments.

3.5 Course content and activities represent current theory and practice in the discipline.

The instructional materials are current, and course content and activities represent contemporary thinking, practice and application in the discipline.

For example, an introductory computer course might include information on recent trends in data storage; an English writing course might discuss the purpose of Internet research; a chemistry course might include computerized models to demonstrate chemical operations.

Decisions on whether the course meets this standard may be difficult for reviewers whose expertise is not in the course discipline. If a subject matter expert is on the review team, consult with them about assessing this standard. If a subject matter expert is unavailable, reviewers use professional judgment to determine if the standard has been met.

3.6 Course materials and resources provide source references and permissions for use, copyright and licensing status, or permissions to share where applicable.

Sources for materials used in the course are clearly identified with references and permissions (if applicable). This requirement applies to previously published instructor-created materials, journal articles, publisher materials, textbooks, images, graphic materials, tables, videos, audio recordings, websites, slides, and other forms of multimedia.

The format of references in instructional materials follows the style prescribed in a recognized guide, such as APA, MLA, or Chicago. At minimum, a reference includes the author or owner name; date of publication; resource title, if supplied; and URL or source, such as a publisher.

Examples:

1. A course includes a single document that lists the sources of all copyrighted materials.
2. Examples of instructional materials for which references are provided:
    - Images that appear in a module
    - Videos that are linked from a video repository tool
    - Journal articles that are linked from a library portal for download

Standard 4: Learner Interaction

Overview Statement: Rich learning experiences include environments where learners can interact with the instructor, their classmates, and course content. Providing authentic environments for learner interaction creates deep and meaningful (collaborative-constructivist) learner-to-learner and learner-to-instructor experiences.

4.1 Instructor's plan for interacting with students during the course is clearly stated and is easily accessible.

A clear plan for instructor-learner interaction, which includes when learners can expect the instructor's responses to discussion posts and feedback on assignments, helps ensure substantive interaction between instructors and learners during the course. Frequent feedback from the instructor increases learners' sense of engagement in a course. Learners are better able to manage their learning activities when they know upfront when to expect feedback from the instructor. It's critical that the instructor's presence is felt in the online classroom. This presence is supported when an instructor clearly communicates to the learners how and when they will respond to emails and discussion postings and provide feedback on assignments and grades.

This information is recommended to appear early in the course syllabus, "Start Here" folder, and/or within an orientation. If it is necessary to alter the response-time plan during the course, the adjustment is clearly communicated to learners.

Examples:

Instructors might state that they will reply to emails within 24 hours, and feedback for assignments will be posted within a week after the due date. Additional examples that might be included in the instructor's communication about interactions:

1. A statement that learners will receive regular (weekly, daily) announcements that include reminders and information pertinent to the course. Let learners know early in the course what they can expect from you, and what you expect from them.
2. A statement that some assignments will receive summary feedback directed to all learners.
3. Let learners know if you will be traveling, or unavailable at any time during the term.

4.2 The requirements for learner interaction and participation (both learner-learner and learner-instructor) are stated and easily accessible.

Expectations for assignments, class participation, due dates, group work, collaboration, and attendance requirements should be clearly articulated and easy to find. Typically, these expectations are stated in the course information page or syllabus. The more specific the expectations, the easier it is for the learner to meet them.

Policies or expectations for learners interacting with their instructor are stated clearly, including if learner responses to instructor-initiated interactions are required. Information should outline a communication policy or guidelines for contacting the instructor, including communication channels and how the instructor prefers to be addressed.

Examples:

1. In order to receive full credit for class participation, the learner must initiate a discussion and/or respond substantively to classmates' discussion forum comments in a minimum of one post on four different days each week.
2. A discussion forum post is considered substantive if it is at least 250 words in length and presents your original analysis and evaluation, rather than simply a summary, of scholarly perspectives on the discussion topic.
3. More specifically, task-related performance expectations may be included in the individual task description. For example, a group project assignment might include expectations for individual

participation. The instructor may include a policy on reading and responding to the instructor's and classmates' posts or provide rubrics detailing how learner interactions are evaluated.

4.3 Learner interactions intend to build a community and promote collaboration to facilitate learning and engagement (e.g., ice-breaker activities, dedicated discussion forums).

A space has been created by instructors for students to interact with one another. Courses that promote class community help learning occur within a social context. Building a sense of community mitigates the solitude and isolation which is common among online learners. Offer students an opportunity to participate in group activities to help them develop peer-to-peer classroom expectations and take ownership of their learning environment.

Examples:

1. Social or reflective activities which focus on self-expression about academic and professional goals. Ask for a positive and negative reaction and then something they look forward to. An option is to complete the exercise anonymously with a polling tool like Slido or Mentimeter. The instructor can poll everyone and then ask for volunteers to share with the class. This activity can also be done via chat in small groups using breakout rooms.
2. Hold group check-ins for group projects to encourage learner-to-learner interaction.
3. Hold an optional "social hour" before class, giving students the opportunity to join early. Students can use this time to ask questions or talk to each other. Set up breakout rooms for group work to overcome scheduling difficulties in light of different time zones

4.4 Learner is provided regular engagement opportunities with the instructor throughout the length of the course. (e.g., prompted discussion boards, emails, office hours).

Course provides opportunities scheduled throughout the course for learners to interact with the instructor (learner-to-instructor interaction). These opportunities can be established by creating a discussion board which the instructor manages, scheduled open office hours, or a Q&A session for each assignment. These scheduled interactions should be present, communicated, and easily accessible throughout the course.

Examples:

- Create an early, low stakes, assignment in the course to give learners the opportunity to practice using the course communication tools, trouble shoot problems, and create a reliable communication loop.
- Discussion boards that the instructor regularly checks and participates in.

Standard 5: Learner Support and Wellness

Overview Statement: It is important that online learners are aware of and encouraged to access the support resources and services available to them. In the Learner Support and Wellness Standard, five kinds of support services are addressed: academic support, accessibility support, mental health and wellness support, technical support, and program or department level support.

5.1 Course instructions articulate or link to UTK's academic support services and resources that promote learner success.

A description of and access to support services and resources is included in the course instructions and is prominently located as part of the introduction to the course. Academic support services and resources may include an online orientation; access to library resources; tutoring; resources for veterans; writing and/or math centers; tutorials or other forms of guidance.

This standard's purpose is not to evaluate the adequacy of these services and resources but to determine if information and access to academic support is provided for learners.

Reviewers can look for:

1. On the welcome page or syllabus, there is a description of and link to UT's Academic Success Center, with information about the online support available: https://studentsuccess.utk.edu/academicsuccess.
2. Within the course introduction or overview, a mention of the academic support services available to online students and where more information can be found, including a link to the Vols Online Resources page: https://volsonline.utk.edu/student-experience-student-resources.
3. A link to the UT Libraries, including information on accessing library materials and databases, and how to contact a librarian. https://www.lib.utk.edu/info/distance-ed.
4. A link to and information about the services provided by UTK's Veteran's Success Center: https://studentsuccess.utk.edu/veterans.

5.2 Course instructions articulate or link to UTK's mental health and wellness support services.

A description and access to non-academic, wellness support services and resources is included in the course instructions and is prominently located as part of the introduction to the course. Non-academic support services and resources include mental health and wellness support services.

This standard's purpose is not to evaluate the adequacy of these services and resources but to determine if information and access to mental health and wellness support is provided for learners.

Reviewers can look for:

1. In the course overview or syllabus, a statement with details about accessing mental health counseling services free of charge through TELUS Health Student Support: https://volsonline.utk.edu/student-experience-student-resources/#SSP https://www.myssp.app/us/home
2. A link to and information about UT's Center for Care and Resilience: https://studentlife.utk.edu/care.

5.3 Course instructions articulate or link to UTK's accessibility policies and services.

Accessibility policies or accommodation statements state that services and accommodations are available for learners with disabilities and inform the learner how such services may be obtained.

Reviewers can look for:

1. A statement about accommodations and services being available for students that includes a link to and contact information for UTK's Student Disability Services: https://sds.utk.edu.
2. A link to and information about Student Right and Responsibilities: https://sds.utk.edu/policies-and-procedures/student-rights-and-responsibilities.
3. A link to UTK's Accessible Information, Materials, and Technology page: https://accessibility.utk.edu.

5.4 Course instructions articulate or link to UTK's technical support services.

A description of and access to technical support services is included in the course instructions and links to support resources are prominently located in the course site.

The Office of Innovative Technologies (OIT) provides technical support to students, faculty and staff at the university, including support for the LMS and other tools that facilitate online learning.

This standard's purpose is not to evaluate the adequacy of these services and resources but to determine if information and access to OIT's Technical Support is identified and provided for learners.

Examples:

1. A clear description of the technical support provided by the institution, including links to OIT's support pages for Canvas, Zoom, Panopto and any other instructional technologies used in the course.
2. A link is available on each module overview to the OIT help desk: https://oit.utk.edu/help.
3. The course site contains links to tutorials or workshops offered on specific technologies, hardware, or software.

5.5 Department and program level support services are described and easily accessible within the course introduction or syllabus.

Learners have access to services provided by their academic program and/or department, such as program advising or department specific resources.

In some cases, department or program specific resources may not exist, and reviewers can look for links to centrally supported services such as Undergraduate Academic Advising or OneStop.

Standard 6: Course Technology and Tools

Overview Statement: The technologies and various tools used in the course facilitate rather than impede the learning process, are easily accessible, and align with course objectives or student learning outcomes.

6.1 The tools used in the course support the course objectives, competencies, or student learning outcomes.

The technologies and tools selected for the course align with the course objectives or learning outcomes by effectively supporting the course's assessments, learning activities and instructional materials.

Tools are types of software and applications that enable student interaction and may be used for content delivery or providing feedback in the course; they may be included in or external to Canvas. Examples of tools include automated self-check exercises, discussion boards, social media, games, whiteboards, blogs, virtual/augmented reality, web conferencing, assessment tools, and collaboration tools. These tools can include third-party platforms such as Pearson or Great River Learning.

Clear instructions are provided regarding how the tools support the learning objectives. For example, a course that requires posting to a discussion forum makes it clear how the tools used for discussions support a learning objective. Tools serve a purpose and are not introduced into the course simply because they can be.

Examples of alignment between tools and objectives:

1. Learners use an interactive museum floorplan map as an activity to explore the Smithsonian American Art Museum in support of the objective, students will be able to able to navigate an art museum to research American Impressionism.
2. A course objective is that learners will be able to compare and contrast two different periods in European history. A diagramming tool is used to illustrate the comparison and contrast.
3. A course objective is that learners will be able to demonstrate the steps of assessing a patient's injury. Learners use simulation software to demonstrate the steps on a virtual patient.

6.2 The tools used in the course promote learner engagement and active learning.

Tools used in the course help learners actively engage in the learning process rather than passively absorb information. The selected course tools support active learning through learner-instructor, learner-content, and learner-learner interaction. Active learning tools that encourage learning by interacting, retrieving, discussing, investigating, and creating are evident. Reviewers should look for tools such as social media, mobile technologies, games, simulations, blogs, podcasts, polling software, survey tools, and virtual worlds.

In some courses, learners cannot access tools that require high bandwidth. Check the Course Worksheet to determine if the course has such limitations.

Examples of tools that support engagement and active learning:

1. An asynchronous scenario activity using Materia that provides a "choose your adventure" style assignment. Feedback is automatically provided depending on the students' choices.
2. A lecture recorded in Panopto and posted for students. Throughout the lecture, the video automatically pauses for the student to answer a question.
3. Software that facilitates asynchronous collaboration, such as shared documents and spreadsheets.

4. Software that facilitates synchronous interaction, such as live chat tools, web conferencing and virtual worlds.
5. Games and simulations that require input from students and allow for automated feedback from the instructor.

6.3 Frequently used technology tools are easily accessed and unused tools are hidden from the main menu.

In an online course, learners need to be able to quickly locate tools and resources they are required to use on a regular basis. Tools that learners will be using most frequently are placed, noted, and linked either in the established course navigation menu and/or a variety of prominent areas in the course site.

Learners rely on consistent navigation cues (established menus, etc.), however a link to a tool that they no longer need can be considered a distraction in the course. Links to tools, software or resources not being used are not available to learners on navigation menus or content pages.

Example:

Learners must record videos to document a capstone project's progress using Panopto. A link to Panopto is available on the established course menu and in each assignment description applicable to the capstone.

Reviewers:

- Look to see if frequently used tools are available in the course's main menu and linked in other areas of the course, including but not limited to the syllabus, module overviews, and content pages
- Determine if tools not being used are hidden or otherwise unavailable to learners

6.4 Students practice required technical skills through orientation, practice and application.

If learners are required to use technology (hardware or software) they need ample time to orient themselves to the tools and features that they will be expected to use, and to practice using those features before there is a graded assignment or assessment incorporating those tools. Scaffolding is necessary when supporting learners' attainment of technical skills as they move toward expert levels. Orientation, practice, and application support this process.

Examples:

1. Low-stakes quizzes during the beginning of the course such as a short quiz on the syllabus.
2. An ungraded discussion forum or other ungraded activity that allows students to practice using a tool or application.
3. An infographic that details out the specific skills and associated mastery levels that learners will have to demonstrate using that technology.
4. A video orientation posted the course welcome area, along with several practice assignments for learners to complete for extra credit.
5. Posted "tips and tricks" related to the required technology in each module, building on the skills and features shared in previous modules.

6.5 Course provides learners with information on protecting their data and privacy.

Tools used in the course, whether included in the learning management system (LMS) or external to the LMS, include links to the privacy policies provided by the tool's creator.

If the learner is required to create an account with a username and password to access a tool, the privacy policy is available for learners to read and use to safeguard their accounts. Steps students can take to protect their privacy with course activities, tool usage, and interactions with others are provided. If the course uses proctoring software, students are provided with specific information regarding how their privacy will be protected.

Tools and applications integrated into UTK's learning management system (LMS) are vetted by the Office of Innovative Technologies (OIT) before being added. OIT maintains a list of tools they have worked with to ensure that no FERPA protected data is exposed to unsecured systems. More information and a list of learning tools that

have been approved can be found on the **UTK Approved Online@UT (Canvas) Learning Tools** page. https://oit.utk.edu/instructional/structuring-your-canvas-course/utk-approved-onlineut-canvas-learning-tools

Examples of privacy provisions reviewers may look for in the course:

1. A single statement about institutionally supported tools being vetted by OIT and a link to the UTK Approved Online@UT (Canvas Learning Tools) page
2. Links to university policies related to student privacy
3. Links to the privacy policies of social media and third-party sites being used
4. Privacy policies for publisher resources and integrations
5. Links to the privacy policies of external tools integrated into Canvas
6. Statements noting that a privacy policy does not exist for a specific tool

Links to UTK policies related to student privacy:

- UTK Privacy Policy: https://www.utk.edu/about/privacy
- Data Privacy: https://dataprivacy.utk.edu
- FERPA and Student Privacy: https://ferpa.utk.edu
- FERPA FAQs: https://ferpa.utk.edu/frequently-asked-questions

Standard 7: Accessibility and Usability

Overview Statement: The course design reflects a commitment to accessibility, ensuring all learners can access all course content and activities, and a commitment to usability, ensuring all learners can easily navigate and interact with course components.

7.1 Course navigation facilitates ease of use.

Navigation refers to the process of planning, controlling, and recording the movement of a learner from one place to another in the online course. Navigation throughout the course is consistent and logical, and the navigation strategies facilitate ease of movement through the course and course activities.

As a reviewer, also consider the extent to which the design of certain course navigation features can be changed. Some navigation devices—"next" and "previous" links, for example—are in the learning management system and cannot be modified. The Course Worksheet provides information about navigation features that cannot be changed. Other navigation devices, such as hypertext links, icons, and window functions, may be within the instructor's control.

Examples of strategies that facilitate ease of use:

1. Consistent layout and design are employed throughout, making content, instructional materials, tools, and media easy to locate from anywhere in the course. Design elements are used repetitively, increasing predictability and intuitiveness.
2. Course pages have links, files, and icons that are labeled with easy-to-understand, self-describing, and meaningful names. Icons used as links also have HTML tags or an accompanying text link.
3. The course design enables learners to easily locate where they are within the course and to easily return to the home page from any location.
4. Tables are used to organize data and have appropriate table headers. Data cells are associated with their appropriate headers, making it easy for learners to navigate and understand the data.
5. The hierarchy of material in a page or document is clearly indicated through heading styles (Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.). A table of contents can be included that allows learners to move easily throughout documents.

7.2 Information is provided about the accessibility of all technologies required in the course.

Learners have access to information about the accessibility of technologies used in the class.

For this standard to be met, the course includes links to the vendor accessibility statements for technologies used in the class. If an accessibility statement does not exist for a particular technology, it is noted in the syllabus or course site.

Tools and applications integrated into the university's learning management system (LMS) are vetted by the Office of Innovative Technologies (OIT) to verify they meet accessibility standards before being added into Canvas. Instructors can provide a statement to this effect in their syllabus or course site. Links to accessibility statements for any additional third-party technologies not integrated into Canvas should be included.

Examples of technologies that might be required in an online course:

- The learning management system, including integrated third-party software
- Presentation software
- Lecture-capture software
- A web-conferencing tool
- One or more media players
- Social media tools

Examples of where the accessibility statements may be located within the course:

- Course syllabus
- Content page or document on required technologies
- Content page or document on resources

7.3 The course provides alternative means of access to multimedia content in formats that meet the needs of diverse learners.

Multimedia, such as audio and video, are accessible to all learners. Consider the abilities or access of all learners when reviewing the course. For example, if the learner had no vision or no hearing, would the learner have access to all meaning and the ability to complete all activities in the course?

The course provides alternatives to audio so that all learners have access to equivalent information. In instances in which alternative formats are provided, the general accuracy of the alternate content is verified. Captions should be available for the entire length of video and/or downloadable transcript available.

- Videos in the course should be accurately closed captioned for the entire length of the video and/or a downloadable transcript included. If videos cannot be captioned, they should be for optional viewing or learners are provided with an alternative captioned video content that accomplishes the same instructional goal.
- Transcripts for audio-only materials should be included. Audio-only materials without transcripts should be optional or learners are provided with alternative audio-only materials with transcripts that accomplishes the same instructional goal.

Examples of alternative means of access:

1. An anthropology course requires a 3D simulation activity within a module, there is an alternative scenario activity that is text and image based providing the same information. This removes a bandwidth barrier for learners.
2. If there is a "drag and drop" interaction use, there is also a fill in the blank option. This provides an alternative activity for learners using screen readers.

7.4 Text content is available in an easily accessed format, preferably HTML. Text content in all documents, including PDF and text in/within images, is readable by assistive technology.

Any text available to students for content delivery is accessible by a screen reader. Text content is easier for screen readers to process, assuming it is available in HTML. Instead of displaying as visual content, screen readers convert course text to speech so that learners can listen to the course content. Screen readers insert pauses for periods, semi-colons, commas, question marks, exclamation points, and ends of paragraphs.

Reviewers check for the following in Canvas pages and documents:

- Use of logical headings (H1 > H2 > H3)
- Use of ordered and unordered lists as appropriate to demonstrate multiple items
- URLs are converted to text-based hyperlinks that use informative phrases or action verbs that explain where they are taking users
- Tables are used wisely, and header rows are labeled
- Use of appropriate font size and styles (sanserif font and min. 12pt for documents and no smaller than 24pt for PowerPoint)
- Use of appropriate color contrast (light on dark or dark on light)
- Text colors alone are not relied on to convey meaning
- No use of flashing video or graphics that could induce a seizure
- PDF text is selectable and searchable (no scanned images)
- Unique titles are used on each slide (ppt)
- Use of underlined text is reserved for hyperlinks

7.5 For every image a text equivalent ("alt" tag) is provided.

The course provides alternatives to each image so that all learners have access to equivalent information. In instances in which alternative formats are provided, the general accuracy of the alternate content is verified. Reviewers look for "alt tags" on images, graphics, SmartArt, charts, and Excel tables or that images are marked as decorative.

Recommendations for meeting the standard:

- When using images with complex information, such as a chart, diagram, or illustration, consider how to convey the information contained in the image using both the alt-text and the adjacent page text.
- Add alt text all non-decorative images
- Keep it short and descriptive, like a tweet
- Don't include "image of" or "photo of"
- Mark decorative images, such as icons and logos as decorative
- Images as links or buttons: If the image is being used to link to another page, the alt text should describe what will happen when the image is clicked (rather than what it looks like). For example, the alt text for an image of a question mark links to a help page should be "Contact Support" rather than "question mark."