

BSU Online

Organization and Policies for Distance Education

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NOTE: Please see footnotes and references for documentation.

I. Definitions

BSU Online is the system used by BSU instructors and students for supporting instruction and learning through the Internet. This system allows for different modalities of instruction/learning such as web-assisted, hybrid or fully online. These modalities are described further below in this document.

A core component of BSU Online is the learning management system (LMS)¹ or online course platform, which is a software application that allows instructors and students meet in virtual spaces corresponding to a classroom. Each student, instructor and professional member of the BSU community has an account to BSU Online and accesses the system through a virtual portal or entry point that identifies the areas of access of this person and the privileges within the system. All classes are automatically provided with course shells each semester within BSU Online.

II. Organization and Management

The infrastructure for BSU Online is operated by the Division of Information Technology. This unit is tasked with the system implementation, including (but not limited to) overall operating system, server, related hardware, software, plugins, database and network, as well as providing technical support to users. Management of BSU Online applications, including the planning, organization, staffing, development and evaluation of system components, as well as supporting faculty and course development, is provided by Academic Computing under the Division of Academic Affairs.

The University Committee on Information Technology (UCIT) is an advisory body, consisting of instructors, staff and students to BSU Online, and it provides input regarding the overall efforts for online learning in campus, training needs, program priorities and quality feedback.

All academic content within the BSU Online system, including curriculum, instruction and assessment, falls under various Colleges and Departments within the Division of Academic Affairs.

III. Types of Instruction and Learning Supported by BSU Online

The provision of services of BSU Online to BSU programs and courses is essentially determined by the type of instruction and learning activities going on in the courses. To that effect, the delivery methods are classified in three major categories, following the language of the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB):

- *Traditional Instruction:* face-to-face or “web-enhanced” courses in which the bulk of teaching occurs through scheduled meetings. The web component is used for creating a “basic presence” online and some activities can be supplemented with the tools offered by the learning management system.

¹ As of July 2011, Bowie State University is using Blackboard ANGEL 7.4, Service Pack 10.

- *Electronically Delivered*: courses intentionally designed to be offered entirely online, in which the online activities must supply equivalent or better forms of engaging students in learning that their traditional counterparts.
- *Online Hybrid or Hybrid*: includes courses in which 50% or more of the instruction and learning activities are carried out online, while the remainder occurs through scheduled meetings. A criterion for these courses is that the “sit time” of the student is reduced in at least 50% with respect to their traditional instruction counterparts.

BSU Online is the primary mechanism for electronically delivering non-traditional educational opportunities to students. On average, first-time freshmen will complete at least 12 credits required for graduation outside of the traditional classroom experience as part of their undergraduate programs, as determined by University of Maryland System policy.²

IV. BSU Online Processes: Planning & Development

The provision of BSU Online services is conditioned also by the lifecycle of online-supported activities. Initial planning, development of course materials, training and marketing are process components that users must take into account when they are involved in offering online-supported courses.³

- A. The **Planning** stage determines which courses will be offered by academic programs in each one of the defined modalities, the number of sections, the assigned instructors, required resources and other aspects.
 1. This stage should be accomplished at least one semester prior to the development of the course, related instructional content, etc. to ensure review and approval. For optimal instructional design support, instructors/departments should complete an *Intent to Teach Online* form for each course developed for online delivery.⁴
 2. If a course is completely new to the University, approval for the syllabus must be obtained from the Department, College and University curriculum committees. If a sample instructional module is required as a condition of approval as an online course, instructional design staff will assist the department and instructor in preparing that content for web format.
 3. An online or hybrid course should carry the same course number, title, and credit as other traditional sections of that course at BSU. The section number for the online or hybrid course should reflect the appropriate designation (e.g., 171, 181, etc.) and be consistent across all department schedules.
 4. Departments should ensure that online instructors are selected, trained and evaluated by the same standards, review, and approval procedures used by the institution to select and evaluate instructors responsible for traditional instruction.
- B. The **Development** stage involves the instructional design of the courses, including adaptation of appropriate resources or the production of new ones, modular development of the course content, elaboration the assessment plan, pilot testing, revision and correction, or related activities.
 1. Departments and instructors should allow one full semester to develop the course content and related resources as well as obtain any necessary training.

² III- 8.01 - USM Policy On Alternative Means Of Earning Academic Degree Credit

³ SACS (2001). Best practices for electronically offered degree and certificate programs.

⁴ See Appendix A.

2. The course design must reflect student demonstration of appropriate academic skills such as analysis, comprehension, communication and effective research (Middle States Association 8).
3. Only one course per instructor per semester should be taught for online-supported activities, unless the instructor has at least 2 years of experience in online instruction and interaction or demonstrates mastery of the necessary tools needed for classroom management and delivery of course content.⁵
4. At minimum, the instructional design team should consist of the assigned instructor and an instructional designer.⁶ In addition, the department should provide an additional subject matter expert to provide feedback regarding developed course content.⁷
5. Courses must provide a minimum number of hours of work on instructional content and assessment that is commensurate with the assigned credit units. Instructional content and assessments shall result in learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the traditional course.⁸
 - Instructional content is defined as lectures, notes, presentations, guides, interactive exercises, virtual classrooms, demonstrations, multimedia and other digital content as well as laboratories as required.
 - Assessment is defined by exams, quizzes, exercises, essays, case studies, presentations and other appropriate instruments to gauge student learning.
6. All BSU Online course shells will be created using the BSU Online default course template. The template items form the structure and organization of the course using the University's learning management system.⁹
 - a. Online courses should be organized into thematic units called instructional modules. The total number of modules may vary according to the course's needs. Instructional modules organize course content in accordance with best practices in distance education.¹⁰
7. Course content must accommodate students with disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and other federal guidelines. Course design, including transcript for multimedia, must maintain compliance with web accessibility standards.¹¹
8. Courses must undergo an initial review to meet Quality Matters, the designated online standards accepted by the University System of Maryland to ensure quality and consistency in design, organization, presentation and pedagogy.¹² Instructional design staff will ensure that the USM standards about online learning are accessible to instructors at BSU, and will maintain this information up-to-date.

⁵ See Appendix B.

⁶ See Appendix C: COMAR 13B.02.01.21, specifically A.1.a and A.1.f, on team development of online courses.

⁷ See requirements for Quality Matters peer review team.

⁸ See Appendix C: COMAR 13B.02.01.21-A.1.b on appropriate learning outcomes.

⁹ See Appendix D.

¹⁰ SREB (2002). Distance learning policy laboratory: A compilation of executive summaries and recommendations of the seven reports and rankings of the recommendations from the national "town meeting" conference. Retrieved April 15, 2008 from http://www.ecinitiatives.org/policylab/ConferenceOutcomes/DLPL_Summaries_with_Rec_Rankings.pdf

¹¹ Under Section 508 (29 U.S.C. ' 794d), federally funded agencies and organizations must give disabled employees and members of the public access to information that is comparable to the access available to others.

¹² The University System of Maryland's Committee on Pedagogy uses the Quality Matters rubric for course evaluation. See Appendix E.

- a. The purpose of the review is to determine the quality and effectiveness of the online course design in the pre-delivery phase.¹³
- b. The reviewing team consists of the instructor, a content expert from the department and at least one peer instructor. The peer reviewer should meet the following qualifications:
 - Non-departmental
 - Within the College
 - From a complementary discipline

For example, an ENGL course seeking review could request an external peer reviewer from the Department of History or the Department of Communications, which are both within the College of Arts & Sciences. Additionally, the review team should include an instructional designer to address technical issues.¹⁴ In special cases, the corresponding Academic Department may request presence of an external content expert and will pay their review fees.

- c. Existing online and hybrid courses at Bowie State University shall have one semester from date of notification to comply with University System of Maryland accepted standards for online learning. The department will be responsible for notifying the instructor and ensuring the course meets the Quality Matters standards.
- d. If multiple sections of the same online-supported course are offered in parallel by different instructors, the department should coordinate with the instructors prior to the start of the semester to ensure consistency from section to section.
 - The same textbook must be required and comparable assignments should be planned with a comparable grading schedule.
 - Minor changes to the course are allowed under the provisions of these policies, but all major changes to parallel sections must be approved by the department.

C. The **Training** phase consists of online or face-to-face training for instructors in order to promote success in instruction.¹⁵

1. Instructors should obtain online pedagogy and technical training. Training may be delivered in workshops or in online sessions, and will focus on several core areas including basics/advanced tools, content management, assessment, interaction/communication and Quality Matters. Available training opportunities will be posted on the university website.
2. Documentation for training obtained from another organization may be submitted for review. Not all training will be accepted due to specific University requirements.

D. The **Marketing** phase includes any and all internal and external communications and advertisements of availability and general content in order to generate interest in an online-supported course.

¹³ SREB (2006). Standards for quality online courses. Retrieved April 15, 2008 from http://www.sreb.org/programs/EdTech/pubs/2006Pubs/06T05_Standards_quality_online_courses.pdf

¹⁴ SREB (2002). A compilation of executive summaries and recommendations of the seven reports and rankings of the recommendations from the national "town meeting" conference (see p. 13). Retrieved April 15, 2008 from http://www.ecinitiatives.org/policylab/ConferenceOutcomes/DLPL_Summaries_with_Rec_Rankings.pdf.

¹⁵ See Appendix C: COMAR 13B.02.01.21, B(3)c f on instructors training.

1. Each semester, departments must properly identify an online or hybrid course's Mode of Instruction as "Online" or "Hybrid" in Bulldog Connect, the database supporting the University's course schedule. Departments must also identify the instructors for these sections.
2. Departments must use assigned section codes according to the Registrar's chart to ensure consistency in the schedule of courses. Section codes must not be reused when a course is offered twice during shorter terms (e.g., 1st/2nd 8-week semesters, summer semesters) to avoid database conflicts within BSU Online.
3. Departments must identify any specific course requirements for online and hybrid learning, such as descriptions of dates when students and instructors will meet for orientation and major evaluations, in the NOTES section of the database.
4. The BSU Online section of the University website will include information about online and hybrid learning at BSU, including, but not limited to, definitions of both, recommended technology skills, required plugins and user guides.

V. BSU Online Processes: Curriculum & Instruction

According to the University System of Maryland's Online Learning Strategic Plan (2006), pedagogy in an online environment is "significantly different" from classroom pedagogy. As such, the success of any course or program offered online is dependent on quality instruction and assessment. This second phase of the process includes delivery, curriculum and instruction, classroom management and evaluation.

- A. The **Delivery** phase involves the actual process of teaching and learning using a mediated instruction approach and multiple forms of student assessment.
 1. Academic Computing will support all courses that have been designed for online or hybrid delivery modes.¹⁶
 - a. The Division of Information Technology will support the university approved learning management system, keeping it in optimum conditions of operation and maintaining various tools that facilitate academic activities, such as synchronous communication, plagiarism detection, etc.
 - b. The Division of Information Technology will ensure that the learning management system is supported by the regular help desk service.
 2. The course must provide for appropriate real-time or delayed interaction between instructors and students.¹⁷
 - a. This interaction must reflect, at minimum, the asynchronous tools provided in the learning management system, regardless of the discipline or course. Synchronous interaction is highly recommended, especially for office hours.
 - b. Instructors must respond to student inquiry in a timely manner (e.g., within 48 hours) and contact students who are not participating to remind them of their course obligations.
 - c. Per the Faculty Handbook, Section 4-4, instructors must offer at least 120 minutes of office hours weekly per course (150 minutes of offices hours per course with a lab), regardless of face-to-face or online delivery. As such, instructors who teach using online-supported

¹⁶ SACS (2001). Best practices for electronically offered degree and certificate programs. Retrieved April 15, 2008 from <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/commadap.pdf>.

¹⁷ See Appendix C: COMAR 13B.02.01.21, A(1)f on appropriate interaction.

methods must provide students with a complete schedule for office hours, including a virtual schedule for online courses as well as face-to-face opportunities for personal contact. For example, if an instructor is teaching one online course and three traditional courses, the online course enrollment must have the same opportunity for face-to-face office hours with the instructor as the traditional course enrollment.

3. Departments may revise online curriculum, instructional modules or assessments if the author of course content is not available after at least one semester in which a substitute instructor is needed. These major changes must occur at least 30 days in advance of instruction and comply with Quality Matters standards.
4. Online learning activities should be closely aligned with the course's learning objectives, allowing students adequate time to demonstrate competency.¹⁸
 - a. Online instructors should provide opportunities to explore course content beyond the assigned textbook, including relevant course bibliography, library resources and multimedia.
 - b. As often as possible, given the topic for the course, online instructional materials should be kept current according to trends and developments in the corresponding discipline.
 - c. The course schedule should be adequately paced with appropriate activities and clear deadlines to help online students manage their workload. Online instructors should regularly communicate deadlines and reminders to their students.
 - d. Clearly written grading criteria or rubrics should be provided to online students for all assignments, including discussion.
 - e. Adequate feedback should be provided on all assignments, especially the first major one. This feedback should suggest areas of improvement and growth.
 - f. Assessments should be graded in a timely manner (e.g., at minimum, 48 hours; at maximum, 7 days).
 - g. To ensure that students have access to their progress in an online course, instructors must maintain an electronic gradebook using the learning management system tools.
5. Instructors must use the University's approved learning management software for delivery of their online-supported activities to avoid confusion for students. Academic Computing will not support different LMS platforms, including those offered by textbook publishers.
6. The University will ensure the academic integrity of student work, course credits and the credibility of the degrees awarded.
 - a. In addition to using plagiarism checking software, instructors are responsible for ensuring that reasonable safeguards are in place to prevent academic dishonesty.
 - b. In collaboration with Academic Affairs and the Library, Academic Computing will offer instructional content and appropriate software for plagiarism detection.
 - c. In the event of academic dishonesty, the instructor will retain appropriate documentation and refer the student to the academic advisor for counseling.

¹⁸ See Appendix E.

7. During the instructional period, students must be notified within 24 hours (or earlier) of any changes to the online course syllabus, assignments, grading scheme, due dates, meeting locations, exams, etc. and the course site updated accordingly.
8. Per the Faculty Handbook, a course's final grades are due 72 hours after the final exam. Instructors must observe all early deadlines for senior grades.
9. Students who receive an Incomplete must have access to the course materials after the semester ends according to their classification:

Undergraduate: Incompletes must be resolved no later than 6 weeks into the new term

Graduate: Incompletes must be resolved no later than 1 year after the request

B. The **Evaluation** phase addresses formative and summative evaluation of courses supported or offered online, with the purpose of continuous improvement and innovation.¹⁹

1. Online students must be given the opportunity to complete course and instructor evaluations before the end of the semester. These instruments, developed by the appropriate offices in accordance with institutional policies and procedures, will be delivered electronically and anonymously. The data will be provided to the instructor and department as well as all relevant institutional parties.
2. Per the Faculty Handbook, peer review of instructors instruction must occur annually. For the purposes of online courses, this electronic instrument should reflect the established document with consideration for online components. These instruments, developed by the appropriate offices in accordance with institutional policies and procedures, will be delivered electronically. The data will be provided to the instructor and department as well as all relevant institutional parties.
3. Online faculty should complete a personal instructional inventory after each semester to ensure both the rigor of the course and the quality of instruction.
4. Major revisions to the online course should occur when major changes to the curriculum occur. Minor revisions may occur as necessary.

VI. Administrative Provisions

The administrative provisions address issues related to compensation and course revision as well as long-term planning.

- A. Compensation for developing and revising an online course will be offered.²⁰
 - a. Compensation will be paid after the first semester of instruction following the successful completion of the Quality Matters review process. A one-time revision of the course is required after the first semester of instruction to accommodate unanticipated technical errors or curricular/instructional needs that present themselves after the course begins.
 - a. Revision of the online course is required at least every other year to accommodate changes in curriculum, textbook, technology, among other influential factors. On a case by case basis, a department and/or course author may opt to revise every year, depending on the discipline.

¹⁹ See Appendix C: COMAR 13B.02.01.21, B(7)f on evaluation and assessment.

²⁰ II-1.25-3.V-1 USM Policy On Instructors Workload And Responsibilities: "Exceptions from standard instructional load may be based on class size, development of new courses, modality of instruction, including distance education..."

- b. The Department, College or University may ask for significant revisions based on student and peer feedback gathered about the course reflect a critical issue related to content, instruction or assessment.
- B. No more than 30 students should be enrolled in an online class. This recommendation is due to 1) the increased demands of instruction and assessment in an online course; and 2) the impact of a large enrollment on system resources within the learning management system. Teaching assistants are strongly recommended when the enrollment exceeds 45 students per section.
- C. Academic Computing will distribute to students in each online course a technical evaluation of usability relevant to distance-education courses; questions will only address technological difficulties students might have experienced while taking the online course.
- D. Unless otherwise expressly stated in this document, Intellectual Property & Copyright issues fall under the University System of Maryland policy on intellectual property (IV - 3.20).²¹
1. Copyright of the instructional content in an online-supported course belongs to the author(s) who created the materials.^{22 23 24}
 - This includes instructional content such as lectures, notes, presentations, guides, multimedia and other digital content.
 2. If a course is adapted completely from a textbook publisher or another institution's course without substantive changes, the instructor must include an appropriate reference on the course site.
 - This procedure must be applied even when there was a partial copy of materials or reorganization of the same for the course structure. No compensation is provided by the University for development when this modality of adaptation is used.
 - Materials taken from publisher websites without express written permission or provided course package installation may not be used. If such materials are needed, Academic Computing will work with the publisher to obtain an appropriate usage agreement.
 3. Per USM policy on intellectual property (IV-3.20-IV.F.1 and IV-3.20-V.A.2), the University co-owns all rights in copyright for work produced under:
 - Work-for-hire contracts and/or memorandums of understanding;
 - Sponsored Research Agreements; and/or
 - Work produced by non-Instructors staff.
 4. Unless otherwise specified in the contract, the author of work-for-hire content may reserve the right to make agreements with a publisher or another institution for displaying the course totally or partially, provided such agreement does not prevent Bowie State University's use of the content for five years after date of creation.

²¹ See <http://www.usmd.edu/regents/bylaws/SectionIV/IV320.html>.

²² See <http://www.usmd.edu/regents/bylaws/SectionIV/IV320.html>. IV - 3.20 - USM Policy On Intellectual Property: Personnel and Students shall have all rights in copyrights of their work, subject to section V.B. with the exception of by non-instructors Personnel within the Scope of Employment.

²³ SREB (2002). Distance learning policy laboratory: A compilation of executive summaries and recommendations of the seven reports and rankings of the recommendations from the national "town meeting" conference (see page 16). Retrieved April 15, 2008 from http://www.ecinitiatives.org/policylab/ConferenceOutcomes/DLPL_Summaries_with_Rec_Rankings.pdf

²⁴ American Association of University Professors (1999). Sample Distance Education Policy & Contract Language. Retrieved April 13, 2008 from <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/issues/DE/sampleDE.htm>.

- If the author receives payment from the University for course revision, then the joint ownership of the content is extended by two years.
 - If either party severs the relationship, then the joint ownership of the course continues for the duration of the contracted period.
5. Per USM policy on intellectual property, instructors, staff, students and departments are responsible for complying with System and University guidelines on the fair use of copyrighted material and for complying with the requirements of copyright law, including obtaining required permissions to use copyrighted materials, educational fair use as well as fair use exceptions for research and scholarly work. The University shall develop and disseminate guidelines for the use of copyrighted materials. These guidelines should address library and educational fair use as well as fair use exceptions for research and scholarly work.
 6. Per USM policy on Intellectual Property, instructors may not (1) sign agreements or take any action on behalf of the University unless they are authorized agents of the University, or (2) make unauthorized use of the name of the University. In cases where instructors take such actions, the University is not bound to honor those actions or agreements.

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