

Peer Review Guide for Online Teaching

Background

This peer review guide is rooted in comprehensive research on effective higher education teaching and learning practices, particularly within the online education sphere. It's designed around five pivotal categories that not only streamline the peer review process for online teaching at both undergraduate and graduate levels but also align with key principles of online education including Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and humanizing online learning.

By focusing on these areas, the guide ensures that online courses are developed and delivered in ways that are engaging, accessible, and supportive of all students, thereby fostering a more inclusive and personalized learning environment. The examples of evidence and recommended resources provided under each category serve to guide peer reviewers in identifying teaching strengths and pinpointing areas for enhancement.

Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)

The principles outlined in this guide promote RSI by encouraging proactive outreach, responsive communication, and structured group work, among other strategies. These practices ensure that students regularly engage in meaningful interactions with both instructors and peers, which is a cornerstone of effective online education.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

The guide emphasizes the importance of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) by advocating for flexible formats, interactive content, and diverse assessment methods. These approaches cater to the varied learning preferences and needs of students, thereby removing barriers to learning and ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to succeed.

Humanizing Online Learning

Humanizing online learning is integral to the principles discussed in this guide. By fostering personalized support, creating a sense of community, and encouraging reflective practices, the guide helps instructors to develop courses that not only prioritize academic rigor but also support the emotional and social well-being of students. This human-centric approach to online education helps to build trust, empathy, and a sense of connectedness among students and between students and faculty.

Through the implementation of these guiding principles, this peer review guide aims to support instructors in creating online courses that are not only academically rigorous but also deeply engaging, inclusive, and supportive of students' diverse needs and learning journeys. By doing so, it contributes to the advancement of online education that is equitable, accessible, and human-centered.

Recommended Peer Review Process

To help facilitate the peer review of online teaching, the following peer review process is suggested:

1. **Before the Observation:** The course instructor completes the “Instructor Input Form” to provide the peer reviewer with contextual information about the course.
2. **During the Observation:** The peer reviewer assesses how the instructor addresses each of the five categories using the “Peer Review Guide for Online Courses,” noting strengths and areas for improvement.
3. **After the Observation:** The reviewer and instructor debrief the experience to discuss observations and how they can inform teaching enhancements.

PRINCIPLE 1: Engaging and Supporting Students

This category underscores the importance of fostering meaningful connections between students and faculty, which is especially vital in the online learning environment where physical cues and face-to-face interactions are absent.

Key Aspects

- **Proactive Outreach:** Instructors should initiate contact with students to build rapport, provide encouragement, and offer guidance.
- **Responsive Communication:** Timeliness in responding to student inquiries is crucial (e.g., email, discussion forums, or virtual office hours).
- **Personalized Support:** Tailoring support to individual student needs, considering their backgrounds, experiences, and learning preferences.

Evidence of Implementation

- A "welcome message" is provided at the beginning of the course that encourages contact for course-related discussions or concerns.
- Structured "get to know you" activities or discussion boards that encourage students to share about themselves and their learning goals.
- Regular, personalized feedback on assignments that not only assesses performance but also encourages reflection and growth.
- Instructor fosters a healthy exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences among course participants.
- Instructor initiates contact with, or respond to, students on a regular basis to establish a consistent online presence in the course.
- Announcements are used to communicate course information (e.g., reminder of assignment due dates, changes, scheduled absences, etc.)
- Instructor holds office hours, and by appointment, that are mediated by technology (e.g., phone, chat, zoom) to accommodate students.
- Instructor provides students with interaction space for study groups, "hallway conversations," etc.

Feedback for Instructor**Evidence Found:****Strengths:****Areas for Improvement:**

PRINCIPLE 2: Collaboration and Community Building

Emphasizes the creation of a collaborative learning environment where students can learn from one another, share diverse perspectives, and build a sense of community.

Key Aspects

- **Structured Group Work:** Designing collaborative assignments that require interdependence, individual accountability, and group processing.
- **Community Engagement:** Facilitating forums or spaces where students can discuss course materials informally, share resources, and support each other.
- **Peer Learning:** Encouraging peer review and feedback to deepen understanding and broaden perspectives.

Evidence of Implementation

- Group projects that include roles for each member, ensuring active participation and shared responsibility.
- Creation of a "virtual cafe" or similar online space where students can have informal discussions unrelated to specific assignments.
- Peer assessment activities where students provide constructive feedback on each other's work, guided by clear criteria.
- Structures discussions of material based on feedback on students' understanding, encouraging deeper engagement with the content.
- Asks student teams to read each other's homework and critique, fostering a sense of community and collaborative learning.
- A published course schedule outlines topics and assignment due dates so students can plan their workload, enhancing time management and collaborative planning.

Feedback for Instructor**Evidence Found:****Strengths:****Areas for Improvement:**

PRINCIPLE 3: Active Learning and Engagement

Focuses on involving students directly in the learning process, encouraging them to actively engage with the material, apply what they learn, and reflect on their knowledge.

Key Aspects

- Interactive Content: Utilizing multimedia, simulations, and interactive activities that require student engagement.
- Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving: Encouraging students to apply concepts to real-world scenarios, analyze case studies, and engage in problem-solving exercises.
- Reflection and Self-Assessment: Incorporating reflective journals, self-assessment quizzes, and other activities that allow students to consider their learning progress.

Evidence of Implementation

- Use of virtual labs or simulations where students can manipulate variables and see the outcomes in real-time.
- Case-based discussions in forums or during live sessions where students analyze and debate different approaches to problem-solving.
- End-of-module reflection prompts that encourage students to articulate what they've learned and identify areas for further exploration.
- Provides meaningful feedback on student assignments within a publicized and reasonable time frame, encouraging active engagement with the learning material.
- Shares examples of student work that demonstrate advancement toward learning goals, inspiring others and showcasing diverse approaches to problem-solving.
- Provides opportunities for practice with feedback, such as interactive self-assessments or narrated demonstrations of how to solve mathematical problems, promoting active engagement.

Feedback for Instructor**Evidence Found:****Strengths:****Areas for Improvement:**

PRINCIPLE 4: High Expectations and Academic Rigor

Ensures that courses are challenging and intellectually stimulating, setting high expectations for all students to achieve their best.

Key Aspects

- **Clear Learning Outcomes:** Articulating what students are expected to learn and achieve by the end of the course or module.
- **Challenging Assignments:** Designing tasks that push students beyond mere recall of information to analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Encouraging a growth mindset where students view challenges as opportunities for learning and development.

Evidence of Implementation

- Detailed rubrics that communicate the criteria for excellence in assignments and discussions.
- Projects that require students to conduct independent research, integrate various sources of information, and present their findings.
- Incorporation of iterative assignments where students refine and improve their work based on feedback.
- Explicit communication of the skills and knowledge every student needs to be successful in the course, setting clear expectations.
- Frequent feedback is provided to students through written explanations and detailed feedback on assignments, maintaining high academic standards.
- Motivation and encouragement inspire students to move past the easy answers to more complex solutions, fostering a culture of high expectations and academic rigor.

Feedback for the Instructor

Evidence Found:

Strengths:

Areas for Improvement:

PRINCIPLE 5: Adaptability and Accessibility

Prioritizes the creation of an inclusive learning environment that accommodates students' diverse needs, backgrounds, and abilities.

Key Aspects

- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** Implementing UDL principles to provide multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression.
- **Cultural Competency:** Ensuring course content and examples are inclusive and representative of a diverse student population.
- **Flexible Formats:** Offering materials and assessments in various formats to cater to different learning preferences and needs.

Evidence of Implementation

- Multimedia resources that cater to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners, such as videos, podcasts, and interactive quizzes.
- Course content that includes global perspectives and examples from various cultures and backgrounds.
- Options for students to demonstrate their learning in different ways, such as through written assignments, presentations, or visual projects.
- Use of a variety of assessment tools gauges student progress, accommodating diverse learning styles and needs.
- Alternative assignment options allow students to demonstrate their progress in a manner that is best conducive to their talents, such as allowing a podcast as learning evidence instead of a written paper.
- Accommodations are proactively offered for students with disabilities, ensuring the course is accessible to all.

Feedback for Instructor

Evidence Found:

Strengths:

Areas for Improvement:

