Procedures and Guidelines for Online Education

Richard Bland College

2017-2018

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Contents

Preamble

The primary purpose of this document, *Procedures and Guidelines for Online Education* at Richard Bland College, is to support instructors in the design and development of high-quality online learning experiences for Richard Bland College (RBC) students. Its adoption as an official resource represents the desire by faculty, administrators, and staff to provide rigorous, high-quality online learning experiences that make use of best practices in online education as they develop and as they conform to the mission and goals of RBC. The procedures and guidelines involving chairs, faculty, staff, instructors, and administrators described in this document are meant to provide uniformity and to safeguard and support the best possible educational experiences for students.

The major goals of this guidebook are:

- To share with instructors and the college community a vision and set of core principles for online education at RBC;
- To clarify and communicate a set of procedures and guidelines for online education at RBC; and
- To provide information and resources to RBC instructors concerning best practices for online course design and digital pedagogy.

This document and its appendices are not intended to be and should not be used as tools for evaluating faculty, a responsibility that rests solely with chairs of departments. Similarly, the procedures and guidelines described here cannot and should not be interpreted to apply to an instructor's selection of content or materials for online courses, selection to which accepted principles of academic freedom dictate instructors are entitled. Rather, such procedures and guidelines should be interpreted to apply to challenges and practices concerning the online *mode* of delivery of such content.

Welcome

Welcome RBC instructors who teach online

…and to those who are considering teaching online!

The primary goal of the **Procedures and Guidelines for Online Education** is to support instructors in the design and development of high-quality online learning experiences for Richard Bland College (RBC) students. This guidebook is to be used in conjunction with the college catalog, program standards, program guides, and all appropriate agency and college procedural guides.

Offering online education courses allows RBC to serve a group of citizens beyond the confines of regularly scheduled on-campus classes. The option of taking an online course is particularly effective in promoting lifelong learning, developing needed career skills, acquiring stackable credentials, and continuing one's education.

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- To clarify and communicate a set of procedures and guidelines for online education at RBC; and
- To provide information and resources to RBC instructors concerning best practices for online course design and digital pedagogy.

Whether you are a veteran of online teaching or new to online education, we think you will find this resource to be valuable in answering many of your questions. Please note that the *Procedures and Guidelines for Online Education* is a supplement to the broader RBC Faculty Handbook; the latter includes important information applicable to all RBC courses—whether online or face-to-face—including classroom policies and procedures and academic support services for students. In addition, please consult the Canvas Resources for Faculty course for information on how to navigate our LMS—Canvas. If you identify questions linked to online teaching and learning, or have suggestions to improve future iterations of this guidebook, please send them to CanvasHelp@rbc.edu.

Vision and Goals for Online Education at RBC

RBC is dedicated to providing access to quality education and support services that empower students to achieve their education and career goals.

We offer online courses and programs as a means to facilitate and expand student access to our instructors and curriculum and to meet the increasing needs and demands from current and prospective students for enhanced flexibility in course offerings.

RBC instructors who teach online are required to maintain high-academic standards for their courses, follow best practices for teaching online, and ensure a rigorous and rewarding learning experience for all students.

The college administration is committed to providing high-quality professional development for online instructors, effective support services for online students, and support for instructors in their assessment of student learning outcomes within online courses and programs.

Whether curriculum is provided via traditional face-to-face classes or online, RBC embraces its core values of integrity and honesty, student and instructor engagement, innovation, exploration and discovery, and diversity and openness in our collective commitment to student success.

The goals of online education at RBC are:

- To create an online program that allows students to complete the Associate of Science degree online;
- To increase the number and variety of online education courses;
- To effectively market online education courses to the community; and
- To maintain hardware and software updates in support of instructors and students in online education.

Core Principles for Online Education at RBC

Although a more extensive discussion of best practices is provided later in this guidebook, the following three core principles of online teaching and learning are highlighted here:

Instructor Engagement Promotes Student Engagement

The online learning environment poses both rewards and challenges to student success. One key to success is student engagement, and the level of student engagement is directly linked to the quality of instructor engagement. In short, each online instructor needs to be present and engaged as an effective facilitator of student learning. Moreover, to comply with federal law and regulations regarding online education, instructors are required to design and facilitate "regular and substantive interaction." The "distance" inherent in online education invites instructors to implement multiple strategies to make real and meaningful connections with and among students.

Clear Communication is Crucial

Clear communication of course expectations is important in any course and especially crucial in the online learning context. Special considerations include: 1) designing a detailed course syllabus and course calendar; 2) establishing a structured pattern of course-related activities as part of weekly or unit modules; 3) providing prompt feedback to student questions and student progress in the course; and 4) using multiple forms of communication—email, Canvas Announcements, office appointments, phone, video conferencing, etc.—to inform and remind students of course expectations and to assist with issues associated with course work.

Quality Counts

Instructor engagement and clear communication must be supported by high-quality course content that meets [Universal Design Standards](). Whenever possible, instructors should follow best practices in conjunction with online course design and effective pedagogical approaches to facilitating online learning. Sharing ideas about course design and effective online pedagogy with peer instructors always makes sense, and asking a colleague, student, or even family member to check on the basic functionality of embedded links and navigation buttons will help to ensure overall system performance. In sum, be mindful of how technology is used; allow student learning to drive the choice of technology and ensure that ease of use and equity of access to the technology are embedded within the online course design.

General Information
Online Education Committee

The Richard Bland College Online Education Committee (OEC) will be comprised of one faculty member from each Academic Division (Languages and Humanities; Math and Natural Sciences; Business, Social and Behavioral Sciences), one representative from Information Technology, one representative from Instructional Design staff, and one optional, non-voting student member. Members should consist of staff members and faculty with experience/expertise in online modes of delivery. Departments nominate members for an annual term. The chair of the OEC will be elected by members and serve for an annual term.

The OEC is responsible for reviewing the practices and effectiveness of online education as described in this guidebook on a regular basis and for sharing their recommendations for changes to these *Procedures and Guidelines* to the appropriate college committees.

The OEC is responsible for determining whether or not a new online course is ready to be offered based on its fulfillment of all Richard Bland College (RBC), American Disabilities Act (ADA), and Financial Aid (FA) standards, and its achievement of "aligned" status on at least eighty-five percent (85%) of the criteria on the Online Course Review Checklist.* If any checklist criteria are not applicable to the course, the OEC will still calculate alignment based on the total number of criteria with the inapplicable criterion counting as "aligned."

It is understood that instructors continuously work to augment courses, often as they are being offered. Instructors whose past online courses have demonstrated over 85% alignment with the college's standards will be expected to offer a representative sample of material from the beginning of their new online course for review, but may not, at the discretion of the committee, be required to submit a significant sample of their online course for review before the term in which it is to be offered. The committee is always justified in asking for more information in order to determine a course's alignment status.

Chairs of departments, with whom all responsibility for evaluating instructors rests, may direct instructors to consult with committee members in order to create, improve, and/or review their online delivery modes. To assist department chairs with the review of online courses, data collected from instructor consultations with OEC members may be made available to chairs of departments.

*Note: The Online Course Review Checklist is not to be used as part of the evaluation of faculty performance in Faculty Development Reports, nor is it to pertain to selection of course content; it is to guide the development and maintenance of accessible and compliant online modes of content delivery. In other words, the OEC is responsible for *formative* aspects of online delivery and assigning a final alignment status after instructor revision, whereas chairs are responsible for *summative* evaluation of course content and instruction.

Course Definitions

1. *Online Courses*: Those courses in which all of the contact hours and work are completed online, outside the classroom. A student taking an online course should not need to come to campus for any portion of the course.

   a. Asynchronous Online Course: An online course in which all of the contact hours are delivered online and can be completed at the students' own pace. Students periodically complete assignments by specified due dates through message boards, modules, quizzes, and/or other online delivery methods.

   b. Synchronous Online Course: An online course in which all of the contact hours are delivered through real-time chat and/or videoconferencing in a virtual classroom allowing for instant interaction between instructors and students. Synchronous online courses deliver assignments to be completed by students by specified due dates through message boards, modules, quizzes, and/or other online delivery methods.

2. *Hybrid Courses*: Those courses in which any portion of the contact hours must be completed online, outside the classroom, and traditional seat time has been reduced accordingly. Face-to-face meeting times must be clearly stated in the Banner Schedule.

Important Procedures and Guidelines

This section of the guidebook explains several important guidelines and processes linked to online education, including: 1) the online course approval process; 2) the review process for existing online courses; 3) the use of Canvas, our LMS; 4) Title IV considerations; and 5) Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges standards for online education.

Course Approval Process for New Courses

Online courses to be taught for the first time need to follow the official Online Course Approval process (Appendix A). This process applies to courses that have already been approved for the traditional classroom but are being offered online for the first time. For any course that has never been offered at the college—either in an online format or as a face-to-face course—the course must first be approved by the Instructional Programs Committee, following their normal policies and procedures. Then, if online, new courses must go through an additional review according to the standards for online education established by the faculty in this guidebook.

The deadlines for submitting the Online Course Approval Form take into account the time necessary for the Online Education Committee to complete its review prior to the course being approved by the Chief Academic Officer and placed on the Banner Schedule. In brief, here are the six steps in the process:

1. Gain preliminary approval from the Chief Academic Officer
2. Test your connection speed if teaching synchronously
3. Design a syllabus and representative sample of course content modules
4. Submit online course for review by the OEC by deadline
5. Revise course based on feedback to obtain OEC recommendation to CAO
6. Secure final approval from Chief Academic Officer

Please note that the online course syllabus and examples of course content modules must be completed for the course to be reviewed.

Ideally, all course content modules would be completed prior to the review but a representative sample will suffice, i.e., a "Getting Started" or "Course Information" module and several weekly modules. In addition, instructors should allow time for incorporating recommendations from the online course review before requesting final approval from the Chief Academic Officer.

Course Review Process for Existing Online Courses

The review process for existing online courses is completed on an annual basis, as determined by the Chief Academic Officer. The Chief Academic Officer may direct OEC members to collect data from online courses regarding the delivery of content. The intent of the review process for existing online courses is to offer instructors constructive feedback related to best practices of online and distance education. All instructors who teach online will be reviewed annually for online courses (this is in addition to their assessment for face-to-face courses). If you would like constructive feedback on the construction of your online course prior to the official review or have further questions about the review process, please contact the Chief Academic Officer.

Canvas Use

All instructors who teach online must use the college's approved LMS, Canvas. All online courses must launch from the assigned Canvas course with a link to the relevant publisher sites and outside learning resources. Examples of these could be Pearson MyLab, Cengage Mind-Link, McGraw-Hill Connect, etc. In addition, the Canvas Gradebook must be used to inform students of their progress in the course. AppendixB

Title IV Considerations

Title IV refers to a section within federal law—the Higher Education Act of 1965 (since amended)—that addresses institutional eligibility for federal student financial aid. In order for higher education institutions such as RBC to be approved to offer this aid, we must be in compliance with Title IV requirements and applications of that law by the U.S. Department of Education. Distance education and online programs have attracted increasing scrutiny from the federal government in recent years. Their efforts are focused on reining in practices leading to financial aid fraud, both at the student level and institutional level (e.g., for-profit, online institutions). Moreover, higher education accreditation bodies across the country—including the Southern Association of College and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), RBC's regional accreditor—are being tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that distance learning courses and programs are comparable in quality to traditional academic courses and programs.

What does this mean for us, with regards to online courses and programs at RBC? According to a 2014 report from the Office of Inspector General within the U.S. Department of Education, [“Title IV of the Higher Education Act Programs: Additional Safeguards Are Needed to Help Mitigate the Risks That Are Unique to the Distance Education Environment,”](#) the most important issue is "determining student attendance at an academically related activity," also referred to as "academic attendance." Initial student logins to an online course are no longer deemed sufficient as evidence of student engagement. Recent financial aid fraud schemes have included students registering for an online course, logging in, and then dropping or not completing the course after financial aid funds have been dispersed.

Consequently, all online courses offered at RBC must be able to provide evidence that students have completed a documented academic assignment within the first two weeks of the class (prior to the dispersal of Title IV financial aid). **In short, online instructors need to require students to complete an academic assignment prior to the deadline for Attendance Verification declared by the college.** Again, the type of assignment is important in terms of the D.O.E. interpretation; make sure the assignment demands engagement with course content. Acceptable assignments include submission of an academic assignment (such as a quiz or discussion post about course content), an email from the student, or other documentation showing that the student initiated contact with the instructor to ask a question about the academic subject studied in the course. **Students failing to complete this assignment should then be identified as not attending when instructors submit their Attendance Verification report via Banner.**

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges Standards

The [Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)](#) is a regional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. Currently, RBC is approved by the SACSCOC to offer online courses. All guidelines and procedures recommended in this guide are based off the SACSCOC [Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement](#).

Designing Your Online Course

This section of the guidebook examines online course design. For most instructors who teach online, the experience of preparing a course for the online format entails considerable time and energy spent upfront, long before the semester begins. The following discussion includes valuable information on several interrelated components of high-quality online course design.

Requesting a Canvas Sandbox Course Shell for Design and Development

Given that the work involved in preparing an online course typically begins months in advance of when the course is offered, online instructors will not yet have the actual Canvas course available when beginning that work. Therefore, we encourage you to work ahead by requesting a "Sandbox" course, which is an empty Canvas course shell that you have access to in order to design and build the online course content. No students are enrolled in this "Sandbox" course. Send your request for a Sandbox course to CanvasHelp@rbc.edu. Use the course shell to design your online course, then after the actual course is created and made available—this date is determined by the completion of the Banner schedule—simply copy your design work from the "Sandbox" course into the actual course (with enrolled students). Instructions for this copying procedure can be found in the Canvas Resources for Faculty course in Canvas and on Canvas's help website: Canvas Community.

Adding Details to Online Syllabus

In addition to the standard syllabus requirements and template for all RBC courses found on the Faculty Resources page, an online course syllabus necessarily incorporates much more detail so that students better understand the particular challenges of online courses and how best to navigate the online learning environment for success in your course. Make sure to include detailed information regarding: 1) Online learning expectations; 2) hardware/software requirements; 3) technical competencies; 4) netiquette standards; 5) course calendar; and 6) student resources. (Appendix B)

Helpful Hints

- Your syllabus should be in a PDF or Word file format so that any links in the syllabus will work when it is posted in Canvas.
- A short statement informing students that their official final grade will be located in Banner as stated in the syllabus.

Online Learning Expectations

Offer students a brief overview of how they can be successful in your online course. Either within the course syllabus or as part of a "Getting Started" course module, provide students with a few resources that will help them throughout the course. An important part of communicating the distinctiveness of the online learning environment is to let students know your preferred method of communication and the expected response time to their questions (e.g., 24-48 hours) and to the grading of their assignments. If you are using a publisher web site, make sure to explain to students how that will be used. Finally, emphasize to students the importance of meeting deadlines, checking their RBC email, participating on a regular basis, and asking questions when they have them.

Hardware and Software Requirements

When teaching an online course it is essential that you and your students have some basic levels of access to technology and technological know-how to avoid unnecessary roadblocks. You may want to copy the statement below to your syllabus, and then add any additional technology requirements that are unique to your course:

Hardware and Software Requirements

Our course requires some basic technology for you to be successful. Make sure that you have access to, at the very least, the following technology and are comfortable using it:

- Hardware: Windows 7 or higher, Mac OSX 10.6 or higher with Internet access that passes the speed test requirements necessary to take the class. Please contact CanvasHelp@rbc.edu if you have questions or would like to test your connection speed.
    - Note: Make sure you have access to a Windows PC or Mac computer. Smartphones and tablets are not an acceptable substitute. Some course features may not be compatible with smartphones and tablets.
- Software: MSOffice 2016 or Office365, Adobe Reader, Adobe Flash
    - Note: Google Docs and Microsoft Works files are not readable by your instructor.
- Browsers: Mozilla Firefox (preferred) or Google Chrome (preferred)
    - Note: Pop-up blockers need to be disabled for Canvas.
- Audio: Computer speakers or headphones

Technical Competencies

In addition to the hardware and software requirements listed above, your students should be able to comfortably use the technology needed for your course. You may want to copy the statement below to your syllabus and add any additional technical competencies that are course-specific:

Technical Competencies

Once you have met the hardware and software requirements, make sure that you are comfortable doing the following:

- Opening a browser and locating the website you need.
- Logging into your RBC email, Canvas and Banner accounts.
- Opening, creating and saving a Word document.
- Opening a PDF file.
- Opening, creating and sending an email.
- Attaching a file to an email or Assignment in Canvas.
- Saving your files to accepted file types.
- NOTE: Acceptable file types: .doc, .docx, .xls, .xlsx, .ppt, .pptx, .pdf, .rtf
  - **If you have specific file types you prefer for assignments—clearly communicate that criteria.**

Netiquette

When teaching an online course, explain to students that online communication should reflect netiquette standards. It is easy to misunderstand what is being said online with the absence of facial expressions and vocal intonations. A statement on acceptable netiquette standards should be included in the syllabus. This is especially important for those online courses that make significant use of discussion boards. Here is sample language that you may want to copy and include in your syllabus:

Netiquette

Netiquette refers to online etiquette, or rules of courtesy for online communication, which should be followed when posting online. It is all too easy to misunderstand someone's message with just text, so following some basic netiquette rules will go a long way to helping us all have lively and respectful discussions. Here are a few important ones:

- Use complete sentences and proper grammar. Remember, you are taking part in an academic-based class discussion, not talking with your close friends. Slang and texting abbreviations should be avoided.
- Do not use ALL CAPS. This is considered shouting in an online discussion.
- Respect the opinions of others; disagreement is fine, but disagree respectfully.

Detailed Course Calendar

The course calendar (weekly course outline) provides a concise overview of the work involved in your course, whether online or face-to-face. Creating a detailed calendar is

especially important for online students and helps to keep instructors from having to respond to excessive email questions from confused students. A course calendar also allows students to plan ahead in case of previously scheduled issues at work or home that would make completing work on time difficult. The course calendar can be added to the end of the syllabus, posted as a stand-alone document, or both (recommended). Make sure your course calendar is consistent with the posted due dates in your online course. An effective course calendar will make clear to students the course topic and readings for the Week/Unit clear to students, and will provide access dates and due dates for assignments, quizzes, exams, discussion topics, and any major projects in the course.

Student Resources

Students who need help inside or outside your course may not know the resources that are available to them at RBC. Plan to let them know early in the semester where to find the help they may need. Instructors are encouraged to post links to the more commonly used student resources within their syllabus and/or course modules.

- RBC Library: The RBC Library is available to help students locate the research information they may need for your class, give consultations on course research papers and projects, and more. Information about available resources can be found on the Library webpage.
- Statesman Technical Assistance Center (STAC): STAC hosts a webpage where students can find information for Security Awareness, Statesman Account Management (SAM), Canvas, and Statesman Mail. In addition to the webpage, STAC is also available to students via phone (804.862.6100 x 6401) or email (STAC@rbc.edu) for RBC computer related problems, account issues, or questions about RBC equipment or software. If students are having password or login issues, have them contact STAC.
- Tutoring: With on-line tutoring services through SmarThinking, students get on-demand individual instruction from expert tutors across a variety of subjects. Students can access this service through any of their courses in Canvas.
- Academic Advising: Each student is assigned a Learner Mentor at RBC. The Learner Mentor acts as their advocate throughout their education at RBC. The RBC advising page provides information on next steps.
  - Learner Mentors for the on-line learner:
    - Assist the learner's journey as a single point of contact
    - Guide students through academic advising and career coaching
    - Help students navigate the transfer process
    - Connect students to supplemental support for classwork or life-skill development
  - With technology and early alerts, Learner Mentors can:
    - Identify the best intervention in support of student success

- Reach out to students within 24 hours of an academic or behavioral alert to schedule meetings (meetings for online learners can be conducted through the phone or Skype)
- Connect students with instructors
- Assist with scheduling students for tutoring through our on-line tutoring platform SmarThinking which is available to our students 24/7

- Counseling: Students may seek counseling for many reasons, including personal concerns that might interrupt their learning and therefore hinder their progress. Students who are off-campus can email the Director of Counseling, Dr. Evanda Watts-Martinez (ewatts@rbc.edu), to schedule a session via phone or Skype. Students can also utilize any of RBC's off-campus mental health services listed on the Counseling website. The information shared between students and counselors is confidential. Exceptions are made for safety and if a concern for a student's wellbeing is in question.
- ADA Services: The Student Success Team welcomes the opportunity to meet with students to discuss any disability-related accommodations and support services needed at RBC. RBC of William & Mary is committed to providing equal opportunity and full participation for persons with disabilities. Click here for more information.
- Student Complaints: Students who have complaints about academic issues should follow the established procedures outlined in the student handbook and first attempt to contact their instructor. Should the issue not be resolved, they can then contact the Chief Academic Officer. Click here for more information.

Building Course Content

The substance of your online course is communicated within the Modules section of Canvas. This is where instructors create modules, design pages, and provide links to course content and course activities that get students engaged, preferably early and often.

Organizing Course Modules

As with the online course syllabus, remember when building course content that including more information is generally better than less. In addition, the information for students should be organized into easily readable chunks. For example, content organized into weekly modules is consistent with this approach.

It is recommended that you begin by creating a "Getting Started" or "Course Information" module, where you will want to include:

- Course syllabus (see earlier discussion on adding details to syllabus)
- Instructor bio (upload a current picture or maybe a short Welcome Video)
- Course Calendar, with details on due dates (also include in syllabus)
- Links to relevant campus resources (Disability Services, Writing Center, Student Success Center, Library, STAC, etc.)
- Netiquette guidelines
- Link to the publisher web site (if applicable)
- Links to software program downloads (as necessary)
- Statement indicating that final grades are posted in Banner

After completing the introductory module, create weekly modules for the duration of the semester, e.g., Week 1: January 16-22; Week 2: January 23-29, etc. Some instructors prefer multi-weekly unit modules, which is fine, but keep in mind the organizational advantage of weekly modules. Also, avoid organizing modules by file types. For example, creating a module for all of your PowerPoint presentations is not recommended; instead, link the presentations within the respective Weekly modules. For content modules (Weekly or Unit modules), it is recommended that you include:

- Module Overview
- Learning objectives
- Task list with due dates
- Resources (readings, Prezi/Power Point presentations, multimedia content)
- Discussion, Assignment, Quiz and/or other assessment

In order to ensure clear communication, strive to organize each module using a similar pattern in the presentation of content. For example, if each of your course content modules includes an overview of the week's activities, a PowerPoint presentation, an online discussion, and a chapter quiz, be consistent from module-to-module as to the

order in which those links are posted. Please refer to the [Canvas Resources for Faculty course](#) for more details on setting up your modules and linking course activities.

Creating Course Activities: Getting Students Engaged, Early and Often

Online course assignments should match as closely as possible those assigned in a face-to-face course. Clearly, the online course format provides unique opportunities for alternative and more appropriate methods when determining assignments. One very important consideration in the design and development of your online course and student assignments is how best to establish and maintain **regular and substantive interaction** between course participants. This emergent national standard for all online courses and programs has become a crucial area of focus for accreditation bodies in their review of online education programs. In short, all institutions of higher education must be able to demonstrate that the standard of regular and substantive interaction is met within their online course offerings in order to be compliant with federal guidelines and therefore eligible for financial aid from the federal government (see earlier discussion on **Title IV Considerations**).

Although pedagogical approaches fall within the purview of academic freedom, the RBC commitment to high academic standards and student success underscores the importance of employing best practices for online teaching and learning. The online environment, coupled with a LMS such as Canvas, can provide a variety of ways to promote student-student interaction, student-instructor interaction, and student-content interaction. Explore and implement the various tools within Canvas, and others that are available via open educational resources, so that these interactions can be as substantive and meaningful as possible for you and your students. For example:

- Create a graded academic-based assignment that students must complete within the first two weeks of the course (e.g., Chapter 1 Quiz or brief reflection on reading passage). **We need all online instructors to do this in order to be compliant with federal regulations.**
- Organize discussion boards to engage with topics related to course content (see detailed discussion below).
- Use multimedia content or interactive websites to provide your students with alternatives to PowerPoint presentations or text-only documents.
- Invite student groups to build a Wiki around relevant course content.
- Assign student groups the task of creating a presentation using a digital platform (e.g., Prezi, PowerPoint, Sway) and ask other groups to provide feedback.
- Organize learning tasks that have real-world relevance and focus on problem-solving skills within a collaborative learning context.

Special Note on Discussion Boards: One of the most common ways that instructors can ensure regular and substantive interaction is through the use of discussion boards. This course design and pedagogical strategy is especially well suited for content-based courses, although skill-based courses can also make productive use of the approach

through peer feedback discussions and metacognitive writing prompts. Discussions typically involve three phases: 1) an instructor-initiated writing prompt linked to course content or student learning (either text-based or aligned with a video clip); 2) student responses to the writing prompt (with firm deadline); and 3) student replies to their classmates' initial responses (with firm deadline). The last phase is important to ensuring student-student interaction and inviting a genuine discussion. Here are some considerations when organizing and implementing asynchronous threaded discussions:

- Assign points to student participation (i.e., make it required).
- Align discussions with weekly modules
- Attach deadlines to each phase of the discussion (e.g., mid-week deadline(s) for initial student responses and Sunday or Monday deadline for student-to-student replies).
- Divide class into smaller groups, preferably 4-6 students per group.
- Clarify what a substantive student post looks like; call attention to high-quality posts.
- Create effective writing prompts that produce interesting and meaningful discussion.
- Monitor discussion; tactfully correct misunderstandings, facilitate conversation with probing questions and comments, and promptly intervene if netiquette is broken.
- Make your presence known without dominating discussion; it is not necessary to respond to every post and doing so may undermine effectiveness of discussion.
- Consider using student-led discussions or guest-led discussions to add variety.
- Use a discussion rubric to evaluate student participation or make clear the criteria you will use when assigning points.

The range of course activities that online instructors can choose from is wide and growing rapidly with technological advances. As you are making final decisions on what online course activities you want to include, be sure to ground those activities in your course learning objectives and avoid adding unnecessary activities or content. For example, just because a publisher or website has a cool, flashy presentation or activity does not mean it is a good fit for your course. In addition, add some variety to the type of course activities in order to accommodate different learning styles and issues linked to accessibility. Finally, as emphasized in the academic literature on best practices in online education, design activities that advance students' critical thinking skills via "authentic learning" (see Educause article).

Student Learning

Although discussions are commonly a distinctive component of online courses, instructors will find that many of the strategies they use in a face-to-face learning environment can also be used in an online course, including quizzes, exams, papers, and projects. Best practices strongly suggest that there should be at least one graded assignment for each week of the semester. Also, remember that the rigor of the course needs to be in alignment with the credit hour equivalency—e.g., in a three credit-hour course, each student should average nine hours of learning time. When thinking through how you will evaluate your students, make sure to familiarize yourself with the evaluation tools in Canvas, including Quizzes, Assignments, Rubrics and Grades.

Quizzes

The Quizzes tool allows you to give your students quizzes or exams electronically. Many instructors make use of the question bank tool to build a pool of quiz/exam questions. Quizzes provided on a weekly basis are a good way to assess progress in learning. Although establishing a question bank can be a time-intensive task, doing so allows you to randomize the questions selected for any particular quiz. Many publishers offer a test bank of questions aligned with the textbook; however, instructor feedback on the quality of these test banks has been mixed, so make sure you are comfortable with the quality of the questions before using them in your course. In addition, most publisher test banks have been compromised, i.e., test bank questions and answers are often available on the Internet to students who are seeking a path of least resistance. Tutorial information on using Quizzes in Canvas can be found in the Canvas Resources for Faculty course.

Assignments

The Assignments tool in Canvas allows instructors to create assignments where students can submit their assignments electronically. Although many learning activities can be embedded within threaded discussions, thereby enhancing student-student interaction, most instructors find that some assignments are best completed on an individual basis. Tutorial information on using the Assignments tool can be found in the Canvas Resources for Faculty course.

Rubrics

Many instructors use rubrics to assess student learning and communicate to students what constitutes high quality student performance on a particular course assignment, such as the quality of participation within a threaded discussion or completion of a critical thinking paper. The use of rubrics can also support efficiency of time when gathering data for student learning outcomes assessment. The Rubric tool in Canvas allows you to attach rubrics to individual assignments. Tutorial information on using Rubrics in Canvas can be found in the Canvas Resources for Faculty course.

Grades

Finally, the Grades tool in Canvas allows you to input students' grades so that they can follow their progress in the course. The Canvas Gradebook can be organized using either

Points or Weighted Grades. Grade items should be organized by categories so that assignments are easy to track. Tutorial information on using Grades in Canvas can be found in the Canvas Resources for Faculty course.

Maintaining Accessibility

It is very important to be aware of accessibility issues and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles as you are building your online course. Ensuring access for all students can be challenging, especially given the wide range of abilities that exist, but it is federal law that we do our best to accommodate all students' accessibility needs. Therefore, it is good practice to build accessibility into your course as you design it so that you are ahead of the game when students with special needs take your course. Here are a few basic recommendations:

- Make sure to use videos that have closed captioning or a transcript.
- When adding pictures, fill out the Alternative Text box with a thorough description of the picture.
- Make sure that any important text to be read is not contained within or as pictures.
- Make sure your color combinations contrast enough so that text can be read. Use a color checker to verify your color combination choices: WebAIM WCAG Color Contrast Checker.
- Learn more about Universal Design for Learning principles applied to online courses.

Upholding Copyright Standards

Whether teaching face-to-face or online, instructors have a responsibility to understand what copyright is, why it exists, and how to effectively apply "fair use" guidelines for copyrighted materials. A summary of guidelines compliant with the TEACH Act—the Technology, Education, and Copyright Harmonization Act (2002)—can be found here. In addition, the Association of Research Libraries provides very helpful resources on copyright issues. If you have further questions, contact the RBC Library.

Addressing Academic Integrity Issues

Academic integrity issues present challenges in both face-to-face and online courses, but as discussed earlier in this guidebook, online courses and programs have come under increasing scrutiny by the federal government and regional accreditation bodies with regards to student authentication. Instructors teaching online are strongly encouraged to read "Best Practice Strategies to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education."

As a first step, it is recommended that within the Course Information module of your online class, you create a link to RBC's Honor Code webpage. In addition, consider adding a link to RBC's Writing & Citation LibGuide where information on proper citations for MLA, APA, and Chicago/Turabian formats are explained.

Canvas has several tools, discussed below, to help you monitor whether or not students are attempting to cheat or present another person's work as their own.

Randomized and Timed Quizzes

The Quizzes tool, used in conjunction with the question bank, allows you to randomize answer choices for multiple choice/multi-select questions. When answer choices are randomized, students may receive the same question, but the order of the choices is different for different students.

Another consideration for online quizzes and exams that are not proctored is the issue of time limits. The online environment makes it likely that the test will be taken in an open textbook context. Do you want your students to consult their textbooks or do you want your students to refrain from using their textbooks? The answer, of course, depends on your pedagogical strategy and the nature of the quiz or exam. However, for those quizzes which include basic recall and comprehension questions, common practice is to allow no more than 60-90 seconds per question. For a 10-question chapter quiz, a time limit of 10-15 minutes is within that range. Other types of questions, such as short essay responses, would likely translate to a longer time period for completion. Each Instructor needs to make their own judgments to ensure the testing outcomes are reflective of student learning.

TurnItIn

The Assignments tool in Canvas has the ability to take uploaded student documents and run them through *TurnItIn*'s plagiarism detection services. By enabling the Originality Check option in Assignments, you can get a report showing how much of an assignment a student may have plagiarized. If instructors plan to use this software, make sure to clearly state this intention in the course syllabus and in the assignment instructions.

Off-Site Proctoring

If you would like your online exams proctored at an off-site location, please refer your online students to the Test Proctoring webpage on the RBC website where they can find a printable copy of the Proctor Agreement form that must be filled out by the proctoring locality and a list of local proctoring locations. If a student is unable to go to one of the

locations on the list, please have the student reach out to the Reference & Instructional Design Librarian to arrange an approved testing location within their area.

Starting a New Semester

This section of the guidebook provides information on the steps to complete leading up to the official beginning of the semester.

Accessing Your Canvas Courses

All credit courses are automatically placed in Canvas, so there is no need to request that your courses be created. Once the Banner schedule is finalized, the new semester courses will be created in Canvas. Once you are assigned to your courses in Banner, you will be automatically enrolled with Teacher status and links to all your courses will appear on the Dashboard in Canvas.

Enrolling Students in Your Canvas Courses

Students are automatically enrolled, or unenrolled, from your Canvas courses based on their enrollment status in Banner. Enrollments are updated hourly in Canvas, so a student who enrolls today will be in your course within a few hours. If a student enrolls in your course in Banner and does not appear in Canvas within 24 hours, please contact CanvasHelp@rbc.edu.

Adding and Copying Content

Once you are enrolled in your new semester courses in Canvas you will need to add your content to your courses. Your new courses will always be blank – content from previous semesters or "Sandbox" is never copied over automatically. If you taught the same course a previous semester or have a Sandbox course, you can quickly and easily copy the content to the new semester course. The procedure for copying content information in Canvas can be found in the Canvas Resources for Faculty course.

Publishing Your Canvas Courses

When your new semester courses are created they are set as "unpublished." In order for your students to see your courses once the start date is reached, you need to publish your courses. In addition, when courses are created, the start dates and end dates are tied to the official start/end dates in the course catalog. As suggested in the next section, you may want to consider publishing your course prior to the semester's official starting date and allow student access to your course at the time you electronically send your welcome message.

Sending Welcome Message

In addition to the detailed course description included within the syllabus, some instructors have found it valuable to send a welcome message to students several days before the course begins. The purpose of the welcome message, which is typically more informal in tone than the course syllabus, is to encourage students to orient themselves to the course expectations. Make sure to include a friendly welcome and short introduction to the class, textbook information, your name and email address, when and where they can find the syllabus, where to access Canvas, whether the course is synchronous or asynchronous, and when the class starts. Instructors are encouraged to "publish" their course in alignment with the sending of the welcome message. This

helps to inform and alert students, prior to the first day of class, of the time commitment and self-discipline necessary to be successful in your online course, and may help them determine whether or not your online course is a good fit for them. The hope is that the clear communication of course expectations will have a positive effect on student success. Instructors can easily send a welcome message via email, Announcements, or Conversations.

Helpful Hint

- If you want students to access your class early, don't forget to publish the course!

Teaching Your Online Course

By the time Day 1 of Week 1 rolls around, the online course design work is complete (or nearly so), students are logging on and gearing up for the course, and the learning begins. Like all courses, getting off to a good start is important, and this is especially so for online courses. As discussed above, getting students engaged with the course, early and often, is crucial for student success. This section of the guidebook underscores the importance of the first two weeks of the semester and the ongoing effort to promote substantive and meaningful interaction.

Orienting Your Students in Week 1

In addition to sending a welcome message to your students, you should plan a few first week activities that help orient your students to your course format and to Canvas. Having students check for required software, post an introduction message on the Discussion forum, or read the RBC Honor Code, are all good ways to help orient and familiarize your students to the online environment. Many online instructors advocate for dedicating the entire first week of the course to these orientation-type activities, and holding off on content-based course assignments until the second week--but keep in mind the importance of including an academic-based assignment within the first two weeks of classes to meet federal financial aid requirements. Spending the full first week with orientation activities is more feasible in a 16- or 14-week semester than a 12- or 8-week course, but the importance of building an effective foundation for student engagement and course success should be a high priority. It is strongly recommended that any first week assignments be graded so as to ensure student participation.

Completing the Attendance Verification Process

The Chief Academic Officer will send a reminder to all instructors to verify their course roster(s) and notify them of any non-attendees. The Registrar's Office will then send an email to those students letting them know to drop their class(es) so they will not be penalized. Any student identified as not attending classes who has not dropped their classes will be dropped/deleted from all classes by the Registrar's Office. **<u>Throughout the semester you are required to take attendance in your online course at least once a week using the Roll Call Attendance tool.</u>** If your online class does not meet synchronously, you can count any type of student interaction within the course (discussion post, message, assignment submission, etc.) as the student attending class. Any questions regarding what qualifies as online course attendance can be directed to the Reference and Instructional Design Librarian.

Interacting with Students: Regular and Substantive Interaction

Establishing and maintaining contact with your students is a fundamental part of online courses. It is very easy for students to feel isolated, or even get lost, when there is little or no contact from their instructor. Online instructors need to be proactive in their communication with students. For ideas on designing course assignments, please refer to the earlier discussion on discussion boards and other assignments that invite student engagement. The following suggestions will help to ensure that "regular and substantive interaction" is a key characteristic of your course throughout the semester:

- Consciously foster a sense of community among students: respect the likelihood that some students will have anxiety, and create a positive learning-centered environment that will help them be more successful.
- Respond to student emails within 24-48 hours. Clarify the expected instructor response time to students in the syllabus and inform them when circumstances do not allow you to meet that commitment. Remind students that they need to go to their RBC email to read instructor replies to student emails sent either through RBC email or through Canvas.
- Make clear to students when they can expect course assignments to be graded (e.g., "discussions will be graded within 48 hours after deadline for final posts" or "student papers will be graded within 7 days after deadline").
- Be active in threaded discussions; let students know you are present and engaged without dominating the discussion.
- Post weekly Announcements and/or send weekly email updates to students.
- Supplement weekly communication with short reminders to students of approaching deadlines.
- Send individual emails providing brief progress reports on student performance; this is especially helpful early in the course, perhaps after the first exam or major assignment.
- As necessary, make use of modes of communication other than email, such as the Canvas conferencing tool or phone calls for synchronous discussion.
- Invite students to alert you to any broken links or typos they come across in the course.

Ending a Semester

Here are a few final tasks to successfully complete the semester.

Outcomes Assessment

For those instructors incorporating a student learning outcomes assessment project, make sure to collect the relevant data, examine the results, and complete your report. One important thing to remember is that the emphasis of outcomes assessment is on the patterns of student learning and how that student performance aligns with learning objectives and goals. Whereas grades are assigned to individual student performance as part of traditional evaluation techniques, student learning outcomes assessment projects—often using embedded course assignments as a means to collect data—measure the collective student performance in a course or program.

Course Evaluations

All RBC students are provided with the opportunity to complete a course evaluation (See Appendix D) near the end of the semester. Students receive an initial email to their Statesman Mail letting them know that course evaluations have commenced. Students receive pop up messages when they sign into Canvas and every time they click to go into their courses – this only comes up if they have not completed their survey for those courses. Then, every two days they receive reminder emails letting them know which course evaluations have not been submitted.   Reminder messages are posted in Canvas every two days (this continues to show to all students even if they have completed their surveys). The option to save and exit the survey is turned off on the last day of the survey at 12pm (this runs until surveys close that night at 11:59pm). This requires the student to have to submit their surveys to continue to work in Canvas and to get into their courses. Instructors will not be able to view the student feedback until after final grades have been posted.

Posting Final Grades

Official final grades are recorded in Banner. You will need to make sure you have your final grades submitted to Banner by the date provided to you by the Chief Academic Officer.

Canvas Archival Process

After the semester is over, your courses will be moved to a concluded state in Canvas. This means that you will still have access to them, but they will be in a read-only mode (read and copy capabilities). You can back up your gradebook and content using the information available on the Canvas Help website or inside the Canvas Resources for Faculty course in Canvas. If you have questions about this process, contact CanvasHelp@rbc.edu.

Appendices

Appendix A: Online Course Approval Form

 Appendix B: Course Syllabus Template

Appendix C: Suggested Best Practices for Online Teaching

Appendix D: Student Course Evaluation Questions

Appendix E: Online Course Review Checklist

Appendix A

Online Course Approval Form

Online Instructor: _____

Name of Course: _____

1. Request preliminary approval from the chief academic officer. Consult with department chair and discipline coordinator, as necessary. Provide evidence of satisfying the Recommended Qualifications to Teach Online, or plan for doing so.

Preliminary Approval by the Chief Academic Officer (CAO):

_____(CAO's signature) _____(date)

2. If teaching a synchronous course, you must conduct a speed test with the hardware you will be using to teach your online classes. Use http://www.speedtest.net/ to test to make sure your connection meets the minimum qualifications. Please contact CanvasHelp@rbc.edu to receive instructions on testing connection speed.
3. Design online course syllabus and representative sample of course content modules.
   - Contact CanvasHelp@rbc.edu and request a Canvas Sandbox course shell so you can begin building your course content.
   - Complete a representative sample of course content modules: include both a "Getting Started" (or "Course Information") module and several weekly modules.
   - Consult our **Procedures and Guidelines for Online Education** as you are completing your work.
   - Include required student course assignment for Week 1 (or early in Week 2) in order to meet expectations of Attendance Verification process.
   - Provide clear evidence of "regular and substantive interaction" between instructor and students throughout the course.
4. Submit online course for review by the Online Education Committee (OEC), prior to deadline.
   - For fall semester and winter inter-session, deadline is: Feb. 8
   - For spring semester, deadline is: Sept. 7
   - For summer term, deadline is: Dec. 7

Department Chair Review Completed:

_____(Dept. Chair's signature) _____(date)

5. Revise online course based on OEC feedback, and complete online course development.

_____(Instructor signature) _____(date)

_____% Alignment with Checklist

6. Request final approval from Chief Academic Officer. Upon approval, course is placed on Banner Schedule.

Final CAO Approval

_____(CAO's signature) _____(date)

Appendix B

Course Syllabus Template

Course Syllabus <insert semester/year>

Course Title   **X Credits**

Prof. John Doe
Office: <location>
Phone: <your campus phone #>
Email: <college email and any alternate emails you want students to have, if any>
Office Hours: <your scheduled office hours for the semester>

Course Description:
<Insert catalog language verbatim.> Prerequisite: <insert language, if any>.

Course Objectives:
<Insert the objectives of the <u>course</u>: what will the course do for the student? How will this take place?>

Learning Outcomes:
At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:
- <List the measurable student learning outcomes here.>
- <List the measurable student learning outcomes here.>

Required Texts and Resources:
<The list of required materials should be inserted here.>

Course Requirements:
This course requires you to <insert language here describing what students will be expected to <u>do</u> in this course.>

<The number, nature, and length of required assignments should be inserted here, including minimum number of assignments.>

Hardware/software requirements:
< >

Technical Competencies:
< >

Online Learning Expectations:
< >

Netiquette Standards:

< >

Attendance Policy:
Regular and punctual class attendance is expected of all students. Each student is allowed absences without penalty for the number of hours equal to the contact hours for a course. For example, a student is allowed three (3) hours of absence from a three (3) credit hour class. It is the responsibility of the student to make up missed work for such absences; and being absent does not excuse a student from the responsibility to complete any work or assignment on time.

<Insert your attendance policy, including how lateness will be handled and how multiple absences will affect the final grade.>

Accommodations:
<Insert here a statement requesting that any accommodations needed for student success in the course be discussed with the professor and with the college's Disability Services Coordinator.>

Grading:
<Insert here the grading scale and percentages of each measurable item that will constitute a student's final grade.>

Late Work:
<Insert here the course policy for accepting late work.>

Final Examination:
<Insert here a description of the final examination or final project for the course.>

Important Dates:
<Insert here a list of important dates for the course, including the last day to drop the class.>

Changes to the Syllabus:
<Insert a disclaimer here if you want to reserve the right to alter the syllabus during the course of the semester; any such alterations need to be documented with the office of the Chief Academic Officer.>

Schedule/Course Calendar:
<Insert here a detailed schedule of class activities, readings, assignments, and due dates.>

Student Resources:
<>

Richard Bland College of William & Mary Mission:
The mission of RBC is: *To prepare students for university transfer through academically rigorous programs grounded in the liberal arts tradition of William & Mary and to expand access to college credentials through strategic partnerships, specialized programming, and scalable innovation.*

Appendix C

Suggested Best Practices for Online Teaching

The following discussion provides some thoughts and recommendations for ensuring a rigorous and rewarding learning experience for our online students at Richard Bland College. Instructors will find this list of "best practices" to be helpful in the design of online courses and their work with students. These recommendations represent an effort to define the qualities and expectations associated with successful online teaching.

Let Students Know You Are Engaged and Present

This is first in the list for an important reason: instructor engagement and student engagement go hand-in- hand. If we want students to be engaged, meeting deadlines, and successfully completing the course, thereby improving the student success and completion rate in online courses, then online instructors need to be engaged and present.

Prompt responses to student emails or posts within discussion boards are similarly important, as is the instructor commitment to be visibly involved with online classroom discussions or activities. One way this visibility can be communicated is one-on-one via the private comments posted as part of the grading process, again with some consideration given to the promptness of the feedback. Instructor visibility can also be demonstrated through the professor's direct involvement in the classroom discussion forums or activities, either by participating as another voice in the course content-driven conversation or by identifying high-quality student posts as a way of modeling the type of posts the instructor wants and expects.

Be Proactive in Course Management

This best practice focuses on active participation by the instructor throughout the course. Proactive course management strategies include, for example, monitoring assignment submissions, communicating and reminding students of missed and/or upcoming deadlines, and making course adjustments when necessary. The degree of course management must be balanced with the time and energy available and demands of the course structure. Here, the challenge for online instructors is to find the degree of interaction and intervention that works with the dynamic of the online classroom. With experience, online instructors will be able to determine the excessive "time drains" of classroom management that detract from the primary role of providing instruction.

One important key to successful course management is the clear communication of course expectations to students as part of weekly or thematic modules. As stressed elsewhere in this guidebook, each module should include clear, concise information and links to course components such as: learning objectives, course content, assignments, and due dates. In addition, weekly Announcements can be opportunities to summarize the past week's work and preview the upcoming week.

This summary provides general feedback to students on collective student performance, and can be the basis for more detailed, private feedback to individual students, especially for those falling behind.

The goal of proactive course management is to empower the online student to take responsibility for managing their own learning experience and free the instructor to concentrate their time and energy on crafting a truly engaged learning experience.

Establish a Pattern of Course Activities

Establishing a pattern of course activity and communicating this sequence to students enables each student to develop a plan of study to address the course requirements, while balancing work and life responsibilities. The absence of such a pattern of course activities can cause stress and frustration on the part of students and, by extension, cause stress for instructors. A predictable pattern of course activities also helps the online instructor to schedule their time and commitment to the course at a level that reflects an appropriate workload. Again, as emphasized in the previous best practice, the use of weekly or thematic modules that include learning objectives, course content (readings), assignments, and due dates can provide a rhythm and predictable structure to the course activities.

The establishment of a predictable pattern of course-related activities is also beneficial to the online instructor. Many instructors will set deadlines that mesh well with the rest of their teaching load and life responsibilities. For example, the pattern of setting deadlines for Wednesday and Sunday would work well with instructors who plan to dedicate time on Thursdays and Mondays to grading student work. Whatever pattern an instructor decides on, it is crucial to clearly communicate the schedule of course-related activities to students. The intent of this best practice is not to stifle creativity, or to suggest every week of online course activities must follow the same pattern, but it can be very helpful in providing some structure of expectations to a learning context that may otherwise be unmanageable for both students and instructor.

Plan for the Unplanned

In the previous best practice, emphasis was placed on how established patterns of course-related activities can reduce stress and frustration for online students. Life, however, happens and the unplanned may become the reality. This best practice anticipates the possibility of an unplanned departure from the planned activities, and prepares students for how the instructor will inform them of changes to the course activities should this occur.

Develop and plan a communications strategy for managing interruptions to the established pattern of course activities. Communicate to students how course interruption information will be communicated. Clearly explain to students the nature of the interruption, the expected duration of the interruption, any

adjustments to course deadlines, and when you expect to resume course participation.

Response Requested and Expected

Timely feedback to students requesting instructor feedback, e.g., email communication, is extremely important to online students. This is even more crucial when that feedback is instrumental to the students who need to finish one activity before starting another. Ideally, instructor feedback is provided to students within one business day, and certainly no longer than 2-3 business days. If the nature of the feedback requires more time for an adequate instructor response, a brief response to the students making that clear is consistent with this best practice.

RBC instructors take different approaches to this expectation. Some instructors state in the syllabus that they are not available in the evenings or weekends but will reply to email within 1-2 business days, which is a reasonable approach. This prevents students from presuming 24/7 response time and allows online instructors to balance life and work demands. Other instructors are online every day and come closer to that 24/7 model. If that's the established pattern of instructor responses, it may be helpful to let students know when instructors know they will be deviating from that pattern. For example, instructors who typically provide feedback on the weekends, but who will be traveling on a particular weekend, may want to let students know that they will be resuming their online work on Monday after their return. Like all of the best practices, clear communication from instructors to online students, both in the course syllabus and throughout the semester, is important and helps to alleviate frustrations from students who need to know they have instructor support in their online learning experience.

Establish and communicate a plan for responding to student questions, sent via email or via Canvas Announcements or Conversations. This should include the expected response time.

Communicate Clearly

This best practice underscores the importance of clear, concise communication with students in an online environment that typically relies on text-based communication for the majority of dialog. Text-based communication is unable to take advantage of the messages we send and receive in the context of face-to-face communication, such as voice intonations, facial expressions or body language. Therefore, the likelihood of misinterpretation and misunderstanding increases when the communication is text-based.

To keep students from experiencing difficulty with assignments or course activities, work toward "clear and concise" in your Announcements posts, email communications, and other forms of text- based communications. Establish and communicate the etiquette expectations for the course exchanges and make sure to hold students

accountable for adhering to those expectations. Instructors may want to use existing netiquette documents available online, or they may want to put together their own set of standards and expectations. Elsewhere in this guidebook is some sample language that instructors may use as part of their course syllabus.

Help Maintain Forward Progress

This best practice takes into account the online format where it is especially important for instructors to provide timely feedback to students on their progress in the course. Although this is undoubtedly an important consideration for face-to-face learning environments, the formal and informal communication between instructors and students in face-to-face courses often provides students more opportunities to monitor class progress and individual student progress. In the online environment, timely feedback from instructors can make the difference between a student completing the course or becoming disengaged and failing to complete.

Ensure Safe and Secure Communications

This best practice is linked to the role of the learning management system, i.e., Canvas, in the course-related communication between the instructor and the students. It is strongly recommended that all such communication occur within institutionally supported and maintained communication systems. Many instructors use third party publishing web sites as a key vehicle for delivering the curriculum, and that's fine; however, care needs to be given to ensuring secure communications. For example, RBC instructors should be using, whenever possible, the Announcements and messaging functions embedded within Canvas and Statesman Mail. In addition, instructors should make clear to students that when they are using the messaging system within the Canvas course shell they are NOT using their Statesman Mail. Students often do not realize that they need to check both their Statesman Mail account AND Canvas in order to hear our responses to their inquiries.

Quality Counts

This best practice emphasizes that high-quality course content is essential for a successful learning experience. Quality assurance for online courses should encompass the three parts of the online learning context: content accuracy, instructional design, and overall systems performance. Content accuracy can be addressed prior to the new online course being offered, whereas instructional design will improve as the course is offered multiple times.

With respect to content accuracy, it needs to be largely assured prior to the course being offered. Instructors will obviously do much of this on their own. However, employing a second set of eyes makes sense, so having a colleague or advanced student review the materials for accuracy is a good idea. Also, asking students currently taking the course to send you observations of possible errors is also helpful. Invite students to be part of improving the course and the online student learning

experience. Let students know that their input is welcome on errors or inconsistencies they may encounter. Then, after correcting the error, alert the students to the issue. Although most errors can be caught up front, it may be a good idea to recognize that errors are inevitable and, over time, those become few and far between.

With regards to instructional design, quality assurance is an ongoing process. Clearly, all online instructors want to make sure that they follow best practices for online course design in order to establish a strong foundation to the integrity of their course. However, just as we continue to tweak our face-to-face courses year after year, changes and improvements to the instructional design of our online courses are part of the rewards and challenges of teaching online. Asking for a review of your online course by a veteran online instructor or one of the online education committee members can be very helpful. Moreover, asking students for feedback, during the course and after the course, can provide valuable information for instructional design. For those online courses taught by other colleagues, they can also be important sources of information.

Technology Matters

Here, it is important for instructors to make sure that they, like students, have the technology platform necessary to access the online course components. Be clear with students the tech requirements for successful navigation of the course and which devices will or will not work in terms of course success. For example, more students are accessing the course via their cell phones, so if the technical elements of the course do not mesh well with that device, that should be made clear to the students. There is sample language regarding technology that you may want to use as part of your course syllabus (provided elsewhere in guidebook).

One key point in following this best practice is that technical issues should not interfere with the learning process. Technology should be a means to deliver a high-quality learning experience; ease of use and equity of access are important. If the technical requirements exceed the institutional recommendations for taking online courses, this needs to be communicated to prospective students. Good online course design is often associated with the use of multimedia elements to enrich the student learning experience. However, this design quality needs to also take into account the persistent "digital divide" that remains relevant for our RBC students. Large files, for instance, that entail long download times may work against a positive learning experience.

In order to ensure effective systems performance, instructors should test their course prior to launching the course. Some of this can be accomplished by using the "student view" mode inside Canvas. In addition, ask colleagues to access and use the various system features, preferably from different technology platforms. Once the course begins, monitor student feedback and make adjustments as necessary.

Appendix D

Student Course Evaluation Questions

Course Ratings

1. How would you rate this course?
   a. Needs considerable improvement
   b. Needs improvement
   c. Average
   d. Above average
   e. Excellent
2. Please comment on the course rating made in the question above:

Content and Evaluation

3. The course was intellectually challenging.
   a. Strongly disagree
   b. Somewhat disagree
   c. Neutral
   d. Somewhat agree
   e. Strongly agree
4. The tests and other assignments were clear.
   a. Strongly disagree
   b. Somewhat disagree
   c. Neutral
   d. Somewhat agree
   e. Strongly agree
5. The grades were determined fairly.
   a. Strongly disagree
   b. Somewhat disagree
   c. Neutral
   d. Somewhat agree
   e. Strongly agree
6. The assigned work aided understanding the course material.
   a. Strongly disagree
   b. Somewhat disagree
   c. Neutral
   d. Somewhat agree
   e. Strongly agree
7. Additional comments:

Learning Management System (LMS) Course Ratings

8. In this course, how easy is it to:

       a. Very Easy

       b. Easy

       c. Difficult

       d. Very Difficult

       e. Never Attempted

9. How do you access this course?

       a. Computer/Laptop

       b. Phone

10. Do you use the LMS Mobile App to access this course?

       a. Yes

       b. No

11. Please list any additional comments about this course in the LMS:

Instructor Ratings

12. How would you rate this instructor?

       a. Needs considerable coverage

       b. Needs improvement

       c. Average

       d. Above average

       e. Excellent

13. Please comment on the instructor rating made in the question above:

Instruction and Assistance

14. The instructor used approaches and techniques that aided learning

       a. Strongly disagree

       b. Somewhat disagree

       c. Neutral

       d. Somewhat agree

       e. Strongly agree

15. The instructor provided feedback and assistance, which enable learning.

       a. Strongly disagree

       b. Somewhat disagree

       c. Neutral

       d. Somewhat agree

       e. Strongly agree

16. Additional comments:

Online Course Review Checklist

Course Name:	Instructor:	Date:
Semester:	OEC Reviewer:	

DIRECTIONS: Review the course using the criteria listed below. Check the box that indicates whether the course meets or does not meet the criteria, or if the criteria is not applicable (if the course is traditional or hybrid). Add comments in the area indicated at the end of the checklist.

NOTE: This checklist is for review purposes only and will not be used for faculty evaluation or appear in Faculty Development Reports.

SCORING: A (Aligned)   D (Developing)   N/A (Not Applicable)

Note: Criteria coded as RBC indicates an institutional mandate, ADA/FA indicates federal requirements, and BP indicates recommendations

CODING: RBC (Richard Bland College)   ADA (American Disabilities Act)   FA (Financial Aid – DOE)   BP (Best Practice)

I. Home: The course Home is literally the "home" page for each course.					
	Code	A	D	N/A	Notes
1. Current syllabus is available (on the home page and/or syllabus link)	RBC				
2. Syllabus is available as plain text and in file format	ADA				
3. There is some type of welcome or introduction to the course and instructor	BP				

II. Calendar: The Calendar should have assigned and/or due dates for assignments as well as other important course dates.					
	Code	A	D	N/A	Notes
1. Calendar has assignment due dates	RBC				
2. Calendar is uncluttered and it is clear when assignments are due	BP				

III. Gradebook: The Assignments link is where the course gradebook set-up is located.					
	Code	A	D	N/A	Notes
1. Gradebook is set-up correctly for points or percentage	RBC				
2. If used, group weights are set up and assignments are grouped accordingly	RBC				
3. All major assignments for the semester are present	RBC				
4. All major assignments have due dates (if not exact, estimated)	RBC				

IV. Content: All course content, assignments, and resources are easily located.					
A. Initial Structure	Code	A	D	N/A	Notes
1. Initial instructions about how to get started in the course are present	BP				
2. Module content is organized logically (e.g., content is separated by Week/Chapter/Module/Unit/etc.)	BP				

	Code	A	D	N/A	Notes
3. Module settings are used correctly (Pre-requisites, open dates, etc.)	BP				
B. Interactive Elements: Discussion Forums/Blogs/Wikis	Code	A	D	N/A	Notes
1. There is a Welcome or Let's get Acquainted discussion forum	BP				
2. There is an interactive element in most (if not all) modules	BP				
3. Instructions, purpose, and expectations are clear and concise	BP				
4. The interactive element contributes to the learning experience	BP				
5. Discussion form settings are used correctly (post first, threaded, etc.)	BP				
C. Non Interactive Assignments: Dropboxes/Journals/e-mail	Code	A	D	N/A	Notes
1. Instructions, purpose, and expectations are clear and concise	BP				
2. The assignments contribute to the learning experience	BP				
3. Assignment settings are used correctly (types of submissions, etc.)	BP				
D. Assessments	Code	A	D	N/A	Notes
1. Instructions, purpose, and expectations are clear and concise	BP				
2. The assessment contributes to the learning experience	BP				
3. Assessment settings are used correctly (question at a time, etc.)	BP				
F. Use of Multimedia	Code	A	D	N/A	Notes
1. Images are uploaded correctly and used to enhance the learning experience	BP				
2. Images have text equivalent (alt text or caption)	ADA*				
3. Audio is uploaded correctly and used to enhance the learning experience	BP				
4. Transcripts or closed captioning is provided and is accurate	ADA*				
5. Videos are uploaded correctly and used to enhance the learning experience	BP				
6. Transcripts or closed captioning is provided and is accurate	ADA*				
G. Overall Activities	Code	A	D	N/A	Notes
1. Multiple methods of content delivery are used. For example, chapter readings, lecture notes, PowerPoint's, Audio, Video, Websites, etc…	BP				
2. Content delivery methods address	BP				

multiple learning styles					
3. Multiple methods of evaluation are used. For example, discussion forums, dropboxes, wikis, group assignments, and/or assessments	BP				
4. There is some form of evaluation/participation every week.	FA/BP				
H. Overall Structure	Code	A	D	N/A	Notes
1. Content is well organized and easy to find/understand	BP				
2. Hyperlinks are functional (links not broken)	BP				

*Note: Where and when text, transcripts, or closed captioning for images, audio, or video resources are unavailable, instructors should be prepared to identify such materials within a reasonable time upon request for accommodations. Notifying students of the availability of such accommodations should occur as part of the syllabus. For Guidance on ADA: See https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/views/2017/05/03/tips-designing-ada-compliant-online-courses