

# Penn State Quality Assurance e-Learning Design Standards

## PURPOSE

The **Quality Assurance e-Learning Design Standards** are intended to provide a measure of quality assurance for online courses in order to serve the e-learning needs of Penn State students. These standards are directed to departments and colleges that wish to share online courses with other campuses or with students external to a Penn State geographic location via Penn State's World Campus or e-Learning Cooperative.

## SUMMARY

This document specifies 12 quality assurance standards for Penn State WEB courses.

### 1. Navigation

The course has a consistent and intuitive navigation system enabling students to quickly locate course information and materials.

### 2. Student Orientation

A course orientation is used to familiarize the students with the course.

### 3. Syllabus

Students have easy access to a course syllabus which contains crucial course information and requirements they need to know about the course prior to starting.

### 4. Instructor Response and Availability

Instructor response time and availability is clearly communicated to the student.

### 5. Course Resource Requirements

Hardware, software, or specialized resources required are clearly communicated to the students.

### 6. Technical Support

Information regarding access to technical support is clearly communicated to the students.

### 7. Accessibility Requirements

The course adheres to University policies and guidelines regarding accessibility.

### 8. Learning Objectives

The course contains learning goals and objectives.

### 9. Learning Activities and Assessment

The course learning activities and assessment serve to stimulate student interactions with the course content and determine how well student performance achieves the course goals and learning objectives.

### 10. Copyright Requirements

The online course adheres to the current University policies for the use of third-party copyrighted material or is able to provide evidence of appropriate copyright clearance.

### 11. Course Functionality

All aspects of the course perform properly and support student progress.

### 12. Student Input for Course Improvements

Opportunities are provided to gather input from students on an on-going basis in order to inform course improvements.

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Each standard is described in detail, including required evidence of how a standard is met. Suggested best practices and resources for additional information are also included.

### DEFINITIONS

- **Accessibility** – The practice of making Web sites usable by people of all abilities and disabilities. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web\\_accessibility](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_accessibility)
- **Copyright** – A set of exclusive rights that regulate the use of a particular expression of an idea or information. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copyright>
- **eLearning** – A general term used to refer to computer-enhanced learning. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electronic\\_learning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electronic_learning)
- **eLearning Advocate** – Penn State Online has been established as an internal collaborative to coordinate the growth of online learning within the University and to ensure quality and effectiveness in the use of e-learning within academic units, across locations through the e-Learning Cooperative, and at a distance through the World Campus. To ensure an effective voice for the Commonwealth Campuses in this rapidly evolving arena, every academic unit, including each campus, has been asked to identify a senior person to serve as an advocate for e-learning. This individual is referred to as an “e-Learning Advocate.”
- **Navigation** – Web site navigation is the science and skill applied to a Web site that enables visitors to change location or orientation relative to that site. See [http://www.webdevelopersnotes.com/tips/webdesign/web\\_site\\_navigation.php3](http://www.webdevelopersnotes.com/tips/webdesign/web_site_navigation.php3)
- **WEB Course** – Penn State courses that do not meet in traditional classrooms, with the possible exception of scheduled exams. See <http://www.psu.edu/dus/handbook/webcourses.html>

### ASSUMPTIONS

1. The standards outlined in this document were designed for those courses that have a WEB classification. These standards may also apply to courses delivered via face-to-face format with e-learning components.
2. Although students may connect to the online course via a variety of bandwidths the minimum technology-connection considered for these standards is cable modem or high speed LAN connection.
3. Students participating in online courses may be geographically dispersed and may not have access to a local Penn State campus.

### PROCEDURES

At a minimum, the **Penn State Quality Assurance e-Learning Design Standards** are to be used to review WEB courses that are to be delivered via the World Campus or the Penn State e-Learning Cooperative. The e-Learning Advocate for each academic unit will be responsible for assuring that an e-Learning course meets all 12 standards. The academic unit approval will then be indicated through the advocate's signature on "Form

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A: e-Learning Cooperative Course Offering Request Form" for the e-Learning Cooperative and the Course Approval Form for the World Campus.

It is up to the local academic unit as to how they wish to implement these standards for WEB courses that are taught locally.

These standards will be reviewed and adjusted annually.

### THE STANDARDS

#### STANDARD 1: NAVIGATION

**The course has a consistent and intuitive navigation system enabling students to quickly locate course information and materials.**

A site's navigation system should answer three fundamental questions:

- Where am I?
- Where have I been?
- Where can I go?

Required evidence that this standard has been met includes:

- Site navigation menu is placed in a consistent location on each page.
- Breadcrumb trail, site map, or other navigation is available on each page to let students know where they are relative to the rest of the site.
- Intuitive labels are used in navigation menus so students can easily guess where each link will take them.

#### Suggested Best Practices:

- The text of each hyperlink describes the location of the new page. Generic "Click Here" links are avoided.
- "Standard" hyperlink colors are used (blue for new links, purple for visited links) so students will be able to tell where they have been. Standard Web convention of underlining hyperlinks is followed.

#### Resources:

- A Guide for Penn State Web Developers  
<http://css.its.psu.edu/publish/webdev/visual.html>

#### STANDARD 2: STUDENT ORIENTATION

**A course orientation is used to familiarize the students with the course.**

Information from the instructor at the beginning of the course should give the new student an idea of how the learning process is structured, including a schedule of topics and assignments, communications modes, and the types of activities and assessments required in the course. This information is often found in the course syllabus and reviewed in more detail in the introductory materials of the course.

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Required evidence that this standard has been met includes:

- A detailed course syllabus (see Standard 3)
- A course orientation section or introductory lesson in the course
- For new students, an e-mail and/or printed letter is sent at the beginning of the course to explain how to get to the course Web site and what to do first once there.

Suggested Best Practices:

- Post a welcome message on the first screen of the course that students will see that tells them where to go in the site first.
- Provide an introductory lesson similar to what is covered on the first day of a face-to-face course, including:
  - an introduction to the instructor(s) and TA(s)
  - an overview of the course structure
  - an overview of the course requirements including technical requirements
  - list of help resources (e.g., the ANGEL Help Desk, the World Campus Help Desk, vendor Web sites or campus contacts for specialized software or media) that includes a “testing” area containing samples of all media types used in the course, and links to any plug-ins they may need to download, so that students can test their connections and computers
  - an overview of the course communications system, including how one should best ask questions.
- Include a "course information" quiz at the beginning of the course to test students' knowledge of important course information.
- Include a “Scavenger hunt” assignment at the beginning of the course that leads students through an exploration of the different areas of the course.
- Publish a course schedule so students can easily see due dates and other important milestones.
- Post a weekly message to students to remind them of what they should be working on at a given point in time.

### **STANDARD 3: SYLLABUS**

**Students have easy access to a course syllabus which contains crucial course information and requirements they need to know about the course prior to starting.**

The syllabus for an online course is typically more detailed than that provided for a resident instruction course, as it serves as an important vehicle for communicating course policies and procedures that might have traditionally been stated verbally in a face-to-face classroom.

Required evidence that this standard has been met includes:

- The syllabus is easily accessible from within the online course.
- The syllabus must adhere to Penn State Policy 43-00, Syllabus <http://www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/43-00.html>.

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### Suggested Best Practices:

- The syllabus should include the Penn State "Statement of Nondiscrimination" (including contact information for the Affirmative Action Director)  
<http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods/faculty/nondiscrim.asp>
- The syllabus should include a note to students with disabilities  
<http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods/faculty/overview.asp>
- Tips for an Effective Syllabus  
<http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/syllabus/>

### Resources:

- Tools for Teaching and Learning  
<http://www.schreyerinstitution.psu.edu/Tools/>
- Penn State Policy 43-00, Syllabus  
<http://www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/43-00.html>
- Syllabus Examples  
<http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/syllabus/syllabusexamples.html>
- Academic Integrity Information  
<http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/cyberplag/>
- Disability Statement Example  
<http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods/>

### **STANDARD 4: INSTRUCTOR RESPONSE AND AVAILABILITY**

#### **Instructor response time and availability is clearly communicated to the student.**

This standard does not prescribe what the response time and availability ought to be, but rather examines whether this information is conveyed to the students.

Required evidence that this standard has been met includes notifying students of the following:

- e-mail and discussion forum posting turnaround time
- time required for grade postings
- degree of instructor participation in specific discussions
- instructor availability via other media (phone, IM)
- exceptions to normal standards

### Suggested Best Practices:

- Response time and availability are included in syllabus or other course orientation information and in specific assignments where students will be expecting an instructor response. Examples:
  - "I will respond to course e-mails within 24 hours."
  - "Quiz assignment grades will be posted within one week of the due date."
  - "I will be monitoring your class discussion and will be posting summary comments after your discussion period ends."
  - "When I am available by instant messenger, my screen name is InstructorJoe."
  - "I will be out of town at a conference this week, so may not be able to respond to your emails within 24 hours. I will reply as quickly as

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possible or within 24 hours after I return on Wednesday."

Resources:

- Online Response Time  
[http://www.ion.illinois.edu/resources/pointersclickers/2000\\_08.html](http://www.ion.illinois.edu/resources/pointersclickers/2000_08.html)

### STANDARD 5: COURSE RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

**Hardware, software, or specialized resources required are clearly communicated to the students.**

Many courses have specialized technical requirements or include resources outside the learning management system. These specific requirements and/or access to these resources must be communicated to students.

Required evidence that this standard has been met includes:

- Technical standards meet Penn State's minimal requirements:
  - Courses in Penn State's Course Management System, ANGEL  
<http://angelkb.ais.psu.edu/article.asp?article=1457&p=2>
  - World Campus courses  
[http://www.worldcampus.psu.edu/TechReq\\_General.shtml](http://www.worldcampus.psu.edu/TechReq_General.shtml)
  - Courses using Adobe Acrobat Connect Pro  
<http://meeting.psu.edu/requirements>
- Technical and media requirements that exceed minimum technical or University recommendations are clearly communicated to the students by listing them in the course syllabus and other appropriate means.
- Access to course resources, including textbooks, videos, CD/DVDs, etc. which may not be available online is clearly communicated to the students in the course syllabus and by other appropriate means.

Suggested Best Practices:

- Post the specific technical requirements in a publicly-accessible Web site well in advance of the start of the course.
- Send the specific technical requirements to your students via email well in advance of the start of the course.
- List the specific technical requirements in your course syllabus.
- Consider alternatives/substitutes to media that have high technical requirements.
- Textbooks and/or CDs, if used, include titles, authors, publishers, ISBN numbers, copyright dates, and information as to where copies can be obtained.

Resources:

- ANGEL Technical Requirements  
<http://angelkb.ais.psu.edu/article.asp?article=1457&p=2>
- World Campus Technical Requirements  
[http://www.worldcampus.psu.edu/TechReq\\_General.shtml](http://www.worldcampus.psu.edu/TechReq_General.shtml)
- Adobe Acrobat Connect Pro Technical Requirements  
<http://meeting.psu.edu/requirements>

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### STANDARD 6: TECHNICAL SUPPORT

**Information regarding access to technical support is clearly communicated to the students.**

Technical support includes information about topics such as how to log in, how to retrieve passwords, how to use the software, and how to report software failures. Technical support does not include help with course content, questions about assignments, exam dates or academic issues. Information regarding help for these topics should be included elsewhere.

Required evidence that this standard has been met includes:

- Information regarding access to technical support is clearly communicated to the students.

#### Suggested Best Practices:

- Instructions for contacting technical support are provided in the introduction or home page for the course, including
  - An email address, phone number, and IM name to contact the appropriate help desk.
  - An email address and phone number for third party software
  - A description of what is NOT considered "technical support" and instructions on seeking assistance for non-technical support questions.
- In cases where no technical support is available, the student is informed that technical support is limited or not available.
- Easy access to "Tech Help" resources specific to the page activity or function is provided.
- A "Technical Support FAQ" is included prominently in the course materials.

#### Resources:

- ANGEL Support  
<https://cms.psu.edu/psad/psad20/index.asp>
- ITS Help Desk  
<http://kb.its.psu.edu/psu-all/hd>
- World Campus Help Desk  
<http://tech.worldcampus.psu.edu/>

### STANDARD 7: ACCESSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

**The course adheres to University policies and guidelines regarding accessibility.**

University policy establishes guidelines for course accessibility.

Required evidence that this standard has been met includes:

- The course adheres to the following University guidelines and policies:
  - Penn State Policy AD-54, Web Page Design and Image  
<http://guru.psu.edu/policies/AD54.html>

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- Creating Accessible Web Sites  
<http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/accessibility/index.html>
- Section 508 Summary  
<http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/accessibility/section508.html>

Suggested Best Practices:

- All online courses should include the Penn State "Statement of Nondiscrimination" (including contact information for the Affirmative Action Director) on the syllabus, on the course home page, in the footer of course Web pages, or in some other prominent location.  
<http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods/faculty/nondiscrim.asp>

Resources:

- Quick Accessibility Checklist  
<http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/accessibility/check.html>
- Penn State's Office of Disabilities Services  
<http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods/index.html>

### **STANDARD 8: LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

**The course contains learning goals and objectives.**

Students should be provided with a clear, measurable description of what they will be able to do, know, and/or experience as a result of having successfully completed the course.

Required evidence that this standard has been met includes:

- The course contains learning goals and objectives
- Learning objectives are measurable

Suggested Best Practices:

- Course level objectives are included in the course syllabus.
- Lesson level objectives are included at the beginning of each course lesson.

Resources:

- Tools for Teaching and Learning  
<http://www.schreyerinstitution.psu.edu/Tools/>
- Writing Effective Learning Objectives  
<http://www.personal.psu.edu/bxb11/Objectives/index.htm>

### **STANDARD 9: LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND ASSESSMENT**

**The course learning activities and assessment serve to stimulate student interactions with the course content and determine how well student performance achieves the course goals and learning objectives.**

A learning activity consists of one or more tasks to be completed by the learner, should have one or more learning objectives associated with it and may or may not be assessed.

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For example, a self-check quiz or non-graded reflection may be an effective non-assessed learning activity.

Frequently assessments are used to provide evidence of how well the student performance on these activities achieves the course goals and learning objectives. Assessment strategies used to evaluate student performance on a learning activity should be consistent and congruent with the stated learning objectives.

Required evidence that this standard has been met includes:

- The learning activities are clearly derived from the learning objectives.
- The learning activities enable students who have completed the activities to master the related learning objective(s).
- Analysis of related assessments indicates that the students have mastered the related learning objective(s).
- Activities are planned so that students will be engaged in multiple ways with the course material, the instructor, and each other to reach course goals and objectives.
- Specific and descriptive criteria are provided for the evaluation of students' work and participation in the learning activities.

### Suggested Best Practices:

- Throughout the course, students are expected to complete learning activities that engage them with the course subject matter in order to help them achieve the course goals and objectives.
- Learning activities engage students in various ways, including class discussions, team projects, research assignments, case studies, simulation exercises, practice quizzes, written exercises, etc.

### Resources:

- Assessing Student Learning At Penn State  
<http://assess.psu.edu/>
- Tools for Teaching and Learning  
<http://www.schreyerinstitution.psu.edu/Tools/>
- Learning Strategy Resources  
<https://www.e-education.psu.edu/facdev/learning>
- Multiple Intelligences Primer  
<http://www.personal.psu.edu/bxb11/MI/index.htm>
- Assessment Resources  
<https://www.e-education.psu.edu/facdev/assessment>
- *Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment* (Jossey Bass Higher and Adult Education Series) (Paperback), Barbara E. Walvoord and Virginia Johnson Anderson.
- Best Practices in Assessment  
[http://www.apa.org/ed/best\\_practices.html](http://www.apa.org/ed/best_practices.html)

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### STANDARD 10: COPYRIGHT REQUIREMENTS

**The online course adheres to the current University policies for the use of third-party copyrighted material or is able to provide evidence of appropriate copyright clearance.**

Some courses make use of media and/or technology developed by a third party who holds copyright on the use of these materials. It is the responsibility of the course developers to ensure that use of these materials follows University policy.

Required evidence that this standard has been met includes adherence to the following:

- Penn State Policy AD-17, Royalty Payment for Course Materials  
<http://guru.psu.edu/policies/ad17.html>
- Penn State Policy RA-17, Courseware  
<http://guru.psu.edu/policies/ra17.html>
- Penn State Policy AD-20, Computer and Network Security  
<http://guru.psu.edu/policies/AD20.html>
- TEACH Act  
<http://tlt.its.psu.edu/dmd/teachact/>

Suggested Best Practices:

- The standard statement of University policy on copyright compliance is provided on the course splash screen or in another easily accessible location.
- Proper citation for copyrighted material is provided where appropriate.

Resources:

- Copyright and Intellectual Property Resources  
<https://www.e-education.psu.edu/facdev/copyright>

### STANDARD 11: COURSE FUNCTIONALITY

**All aspects of the course perform properly and support student progress.**

Required evidence that this standard has been met includes:

- URLs work
- Media works
- Graphics display
- Grammar and spelling are correct
- Interactive technologies (e.g. blogs, wiki, flash animations) work correctly
- Semester-specific course data are correct (e.g. instructor information, due dates)

Suggested Best Practices:

- Use of a copy editor
- Multiple browser and operating system testing
- Procedure for students to report errors or issues, such as an online suggestion box
- Development and use of a course offering checklist

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Resources:

- W3C Link Checker  
<http://validator.w3.org/checklink>
- University Editorial Style Manual  
[http://publications.psu.edu/editorial\\_style/](http://publications.psu.edu/editorial_style/)

### **STANDARD 12: STUDENT INPUT FOR COURSE IMPROVEMENT**

**Opportunities are provided to gather input from students on an on-going basis in order to inform course improvements.**

Student input/feedback on how to improve the course learning design or delivery provides valuable information necessary to increase the course effectiveness.

Required evidence that this standard has been met includes:

- Evidence of a course evaluation plan built-in to ensure continuous quality improvement.

Suggested Best Practices:

- One-minute paper
- Muddiest Point Survey
- Mid-semester Evaluation (SEEQ)
- ANGEL survey
- End-of-course survey
- Online SRTE (when available)
- “Suggestion Box” discussion forum

Resources:

- Tools for Teaching and Learning  
<http://www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/Tools/>
- SEEQ (Students’ Evaluation of Educational Quality)  
<http://www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/Tools/SEEQ>
- SRTE (Student Rating of Teaching Effectiveness) Question Bank  
[http://srte.site.psu.edu/SRTE\\_items.aspx](http://srte.site.psu.edu/SRTE_items.aspx)