

Course Modality and Digital Learning Standards

Preamble

Reason for Standards: The University of Louisville is committed to providing high-quality and accessible learning opportunities to all students. Central to this effort is a clear communication of expectations for presence of both students and faculty whether on campus or in digital spaces. Online, blended, and other digital learning can be effective and efficient ways to provide education, but it is important to ensure that programs and courses are designed and implemented in a way that assures quality, maximizes student success, and focuses on equitable outcomes for all students.

Scope of Standards: This standards document defines and delineates acceptable course instruction modalities with a particular emphasis on digital learning modalities at the University of Louisville. Guidelines are provided to ensure that students, faculty, and academic unit administration are clear on expectations of each modality. Quality assurance and compliance issues are identified.

Standards Applicability: These standards apply to all University of Louisville employees and units developing, offering, and engaging in instruction of students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels and may be adopted by professional schools as appropriate.

Standards Statements

Section 01: Course Modality Terminology

The university will recognize, offer, and support the following course modalities:

- In-Person
- Online, Asynchronous
- Online, Synchronous
- Blended

The unit dean and Provost will determine the balance of modalities across a unit's entire course offerings for any given academic year or semester. Digital course modalities (i.e., online (asynchronous or synchronous) and blended learning) afford a level of access and/or student schedule flexibility relative to the in-person modality.

Section.02 Definition of modalities:

In-Person:

Instruction whereby both students and faculty are expected to meet in person in an assigned room at assigned times as found in the schedule of classes; final exams are also regulated by the published schedule. This modality is coded in university information systems and the schedule of classes with modality "In-Person" and one of the geographic instructional locations (e.g., "Belknap").

Online Courses (Asynchronous or Synchronous)

Online courses are conducted via the internet and provide educational access by separating learners and instructors by distance and/or time. Online courses will have no required in-person, on-campus activities including no required in-person exam

proctoring. Students who *request* in-person proctoring at a location convenient to the student may be approved by the instructor. A university-licensed and supported learning management system (LMS, e.g., Blackboard) is provided and required for the offering of the university's online courses. Participating faculty must ensure that instructional time is accounted for, meets the SACSCOC minimum contact hour requirements and complies with the U.S. federal regulation on regular and substantive interaction. Online courses of either Asynchronous or Synchronous type are permitted by individual academic units with the understanding that participating faculty are prepared to effectively design and teach online courses.

Online, Asynchronous

100% online instruction where no synchronous activities, including assessments, may be required. Instructors and students are expected to engage in learning activities via the approved university system for delivering online education (Blackboard). This modality is coded in university information systems and the schedule of classes with modality and location of "Online, Asynchronous."

Online, Synchronous

100% online with *any* required synchronous class meetings, including assessment, in addition to any asynchronous expectations. All required synchronous meetings must be published in the schedule of classes before registration. Final exams are regulated by the published schedule. This modality is coded in university information systems and the schedule of classes with modality and location of "Online, Synchronous."

Blended Learning Courses

Blended learning courses combine the affordances of location-based, in-person classroom experiences and online experiences. The meeting pattern of required synchronous sessions (in-person and/or online) must be consistent across the semester and must be published in the schedule of classes. Blended courses have fewer in-person meetings than comparable in-person courses. The in-person class meeting reduction is off-set by designed online learning experiences that support learning objectives and take approximately the same amount of time as the reduced number of in-person class meetings. Relative to a comparable in-person course, blended courses reduce in-person class meetings by a maximum of 75% and a minimum of 25%. (Note: This percentage range is not arbitrary and is intended to support the reduction of one or more full class meetings per week to maximize student clarity about schedule flexibility and to more easily support repurposing of unscheduled classroom space. For instance, if a comparable in-person course were to meet on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, the blended version's in-person class meetings might be reduced by 33% to meet in-person only on Monday and Wednesday while the remaining instructional time in the week is composed of designed online learning experiences.)

These online learning experiences may be:

- completely asynchronous (i.e., no "same time" class meetings),
- completely synchronous (i.e., requiring "same time" class meetings via the internet), or
- primarily asynchronous with some synchronous options or requirements.

Any required synchronous online class meetings for blended learning courses must be clearly identified by date and time in the university's schedule of classes (and the course syllabus) at the time of registration alongside the location-based, in-person class meetings so that students may plan accordingly. Blended courses are coded in university information systems and the schedule of classes with the modality of "Blended" and a location of one of the geographic instructional locations (e.g., "Belknap").

Deviations from the posted class meeting schedule are not permissible and may result in an inability to teach in the blended mode in the future. A university-licensed and supported learning management system (LMS, e.g., Blackboard) is provided and required for the offering of the university's blended learning courses. Participating faculty must ensure that instructional time is accounted for and meets the SACSCOC minimum contact hour requirements. Blended courses are permitted by individual academic units with the understanding that participating faculty are prepared to effectively design and teach blended courses.

Ad Hoc Digital Practices

Faculty may choose to employ any number of university-approved digital tools, platforms, or related practices in the design and teaching of courses regardless of modality. The use of such tools does not equate to determining a course's modality (e.g., in-person, online asynchronous, online synchronous, or blended). Care should be taken when selecting digital tools to ensure that appropriate student and faculty support is available and to guard against placing undue burdens on students (e.g., financial or cognitive load). It is also important to prioritize learners' rights to privacy and accessibility, ensuring that the selected technologies present no barriers to accessibility and are implemented in ways that respect and safeguard students' personal information and data.

Section 03: Institution-Level Quality Assurance Practices

Curricular authority and oversight of instruction resides with academic units and the faculty therein. However, the university has an obligation to ensure that all instruction and learning, especially digital instruction and learning (as described in Section 02 above), is conducted strategically, efficiently, effectively, and consistently across all academic units and in compliance with applicable laws, institutional accreditation requirements, and published effective practices and standards (i.e., "quality assurance"). On behalf of the Office of the Provost and under the purview of the Vice Provost for Online Strategy and Teaching Innovation, central resources and coordination responsibility for digital instruction are invested in the Delphi Center for Teaching and Learning and in cooperation with academic and administrative units to ensure quality of digital learning implementations. The Office of the Provost and the Delphi Center will monitor:

- **University Coding of Digital Modalities**
Course sections offered in digital modalities (i.e., online (asynchronous or synchronous) and blended learning) must be coded accurately in university systems (e.g., the student information system) for the purposes of communication, data collection, university reporting, and quality assurance.

- **Faculty Preparation for Digital Modality Design and Teaching**
Within the context of academic unit oversight, faculty have authority to make design and teaching decisions that affect the quality of the university's digital learning implementations. The university provides through the Delphi Center for Teaching and Learning foundational programs to prepare faculty for successful design and teaching in university-supported digital modalities. Completion of these programs or alternatives is required by the Provost as a quality assurance measure. The Delphi Center for Teaching and Learning will provide a schedule of design and teaching programs on their website.
 - **Exceptions**
Any institutional requirements benefit from exception protocols for rare, unforeseen, or exigent circumstances despite otherwise careful planning. The Provost's Office may address these through systematic processes or as needed on a case-by-case basis.
- **Accountability and Reporting**
On no less than a semesterly basis, the Delphi Center for Teaching and Learning will provide a report to academic unit deans for resolution of any digital course sections being taught by instructors of record without the foundational course design/teaching preparation required by the Provost. A list of any unresolved cases will be provided to the Provost for addressing.