FRCC Online Course Quality Guidelines

Effective Summer Semester 2020

At Front Range Community College (FRCC) our mission is to enrich lives through learning. Our online courses provide students with rich, rigorous courses in a format that allows students to earn a degree or enhance their skills with the support of dedicated FRCC faculty and staff – even if they cannot come to campus. To support student success in the online environment, FRCC has developed the following Online Course Quality Guidelines based on best practices adapted from nationally recognized sources such as Quality Matters[i], and the experience of our own faculty and staff.

High Course Standards

FRCC Online courses meet the same learning objectives and standards as courses delivered on campus or in hybrid formats. FRCC Online courses:

- Align with Colorado Community College Course Numbering Standards, including assigned credit hours and related expectations for instructor-led contact hours and outside-of-class student work.
- Incorporate the same college-wide Student Learning Outcomes and discipline-specific standards as courses taught on campus.
- Are taught by qualified FRCC faculty and instructors with additional training and support for teaching effectively in the online environment.

Rich Learning Environment

FRCC Online courses are rich, active learning experiences designed to engage all students and facilitate learning in the online environment.

- Course materials and activities use a wide range of web-accessible media, technology and teaching strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners. Disability services and online staff are available to assist instructors and students requiring specific accommodations.
- Students are able to complete FRCC Online courses without coming to campus, including access to online library resources, tutoring, and the online writing lab.
- Online instructors encourage and maintain academic integrity in ways that support student learning. Use of proctored exams is limited, and must be pre-approved by the online chair.
- Online courses may include participation in relevant events such as a concert, museum, or field trip to enrich the learning experience. Students who are unable to participate at the specified time and/or location may contact their instructor ahead of time to make alternative arrangements for learning the content or completing the assignment.
- FRCC Online students also have access to both online and campus-based support services, including advising and tutoring. For more information, visit www.frontrange.edu.

Engaged Faculty

FRCC Online instructors actively participate in their online courses, engaging students with the course content and helping them achieve their learning goals.

- FRCC Online courses are not self-taught. Instructors help students master the learning objectives by personalizing the course content and providing regular guidance and feedback (e.g. highlighting important concepts, providing alternative explanations and examples, and identifying common misunderstandings).
- In order to provide students with consistent touchpoints from course to course, all instructors post at least one news item each week at the top of their course homepage to engage students and help guide them through the course.

- Instructors are visibly present to all students in the class on at least three different days each week, using methods they determine to be most appropriate to the course content. Examples include communication with the class via news items and class discussions, screencasts of the instructor explaining course content, and personalized feedback on quizzes and assignments.
- Instructors communicate with students in a manner that is approachable, professional, supportive, and timely. Instructors participate in the online discussion board by posting at least one message each week and helping to facilitate discussions. Instructors typically respond to student emails and phone calls at least every 24-48 hours (weekends excluded).
- Instructors may choose certain days of the week not to be online (e.g. weekends), but should state those days clearly in their syllabus. If an instructor is unable to participate in the class for more than two consecutive business days, he/she must notify the online lead as soon as possible to arrange instructor coverage for the course.

Effective Course Design

FRCC Online courses are designed to be customized by our instructors so that they are current, professional, engaging, and relevant. Commonalities in course layout help students know what to expect from each course and how to navigate the course content.

- The first content module in every course is entitled Getting Started, and includes:
  - A welcome message
  - An engaging image relevant to the course content
  - A course syllabus detailing course expectations[ii]
  - An overall course schedule, highlighting key deadlines
  - Tips for succeeding in the course
- Remaining course content is organized into weekly modules to help students stay on track, find materials more easily, and make connections between the course content, activities, assessments, and other resources. Each weekly module includes:
  - Dates in the title for the week
  - A relevant image to pique interest and reinforce content for the week
  - A brief overview of the week, including learning objectives to be met
  - A checklist of all the activities a student needs to accomplish that week
  - Quicklinks to relevant content, discussions, quizzes, assignments, and other resources
- The Getting Started module and the first two weeks of the course are complete and up-to-date (Ready-to-Run) at least one week before the course starts.
- Online courses offer frequent, meaningful assessment with timely feedback so that students stay engaged in the course and are aware of their progress throughout the semester.
  - Online courses include some form of assessment (formal or informal) every week, with clear instructions, including examples of finished work where possible.
  - Feedback is provided to the student as quickly as possible (typically within 2-3 days, but may be longer for complex assignments).
  - Grades on individual assignments and the overall calculated grade are set to display in the online gradebook throughout the semester so that students are aware of their progress at any given time in the course.

---

[i] https://www.qualitymatters.org/
[ii] See FRCC Instructional Guideline IN 2.5