ONLINE COURSE
BEST PRACTICES CHECKLIST

(VALIDATION OF PREPAREDNESS TO TEACH ONLINE)

PALOMAR COLLEGE
Spring 2012

SUBMITTED BY
ACADEMIC TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

Introduction

Following the 2009 Accreditation process, Palomar College was advised to develop a means of validating the quality of its Distance Education program. The Senate Academic Technology Committee was charged with this task which resulted in the development of the checklist rating instrument presented below. A committee of dedicated instructors, some of whom teach online, identified the important elements of a high quality (Accomplished) online course. The process the committee took was the familiar one of reviewing the relevant literature, examining what other institutions had done in this regard (see reference section) and then developing our own checklist document based partly upon the best practices of other institutions.

The Senate Academic Technology Committee (ATC) developed a checklist instrument, the *Online Course Best Practices Checklist* that was designed to identify the necessary and desirable attributes and best practices that an accomplished online course would have. A pilot-test of the checklist was conducted during the Spring, 2009 semester by arrangement with the instructors-of-record for several online courses. Based on the pilot-test, some modifications to the checklist were made.

It is suggested that the *Online Course Best Practices Checklist* may serve as a series of benchmarks that can be used to provide formative assessments of online courses. The instructor may use the checklist with any online course being developed or offered as a self-assessment, or with another faculty member, such as the Department Chair or Academic Technology Coordinator. Note that this assessment rating instrument is not intended to be used in any TERB-related evaluation. Further, ATC recommends that the online instructor whose course is being assessed should be consulted during the assessment process and provided a means to question and discuss any negative assessment of his/her online course.

Online Course Best Practices Checklist

How to use the Best Practices Checklist

This checklist provides a roadmap to developing a high quality course beginning with the online syllabus and continuing with course design/organization, aesthetic design, interaction and collaboration, effective use of technology and assessments. In addition, the course design shows a good faith effort to ensure universal access for all students and meets Section 508 standards of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Use the columns to the right of each statement to assess whether or not the course contains that particular element. Place a ✓ next to the item if the statement has been met. Not applicable (N/A) is marked when the element does not apply to a particular course. A space for comments is provided next to each checkbox.

Course Title   _____   Section#   _____

Instructor   _____   Date   _____

Section 1: Course Information

This section refers to the online course syllabus and course information including objectives, student learning outcomes, course requirements and academic integrity.	✓	N/A	COMMENTS
Syllabus is easily located.			
Syllabus is available in a printer-friendly format.			
Course catalog information is provided: Description, units, prerequisites.			
Instructor contact information is available.			
Instructor office hours are available (online/on-campus).			
Required and supplemental textbooks, readings lists and course materials are listed.			
Learning objectives are clearly stated.			
Course Student Learning Outcomes are stated.			
Course communication instructions/guidelines are stated (i.e. Instructor email guidelines).			
Grading policy is clearly stated.			
Directions are CLEAR and easy to understand for tasks/assignments.			
Academic integrity policy is clearly presented.			
Specific technology requirements are stated (if needed).			
Late and make-up work policy is clearly stated.			
Student support: Course contains extensive information about being an online learner and links to campus resources.			
An orientation for the course is offered, online or on campus.			

Section 2: Course Design and Organization

Course Design and Organization refers to elements of instructional design in an online course. This includes: the structure, instructional strategies, and the overall course set-up or course classroom.	✓	N/A	COMMENTS
Course is well-organized and easy to navigate.			
Course structure is clear and understandable.			
Content is made available to students in manageable segments or "chunks" (e.g. organized by weeks, units, chapters).			
Content is appropriate for student learning of course objectives.			
Course schedule (calendar) is summarized in one place and clearly identifies overall plan of the course.			
Accessibility issues are addressed: color compliance and screen readability.			
All links used in the course are accurate and up-to-date.			
A timeframe is stated for modules, activities, and assessment.			

Section 3: Aesthetic design

Aesthetic design refers to the overall appearance of the course and includes visual aspects such as color, typeface, images and other elements key to presenting the course material.	✓	N/A	COMMENTS
A course banner is used to identify the course.			
Color and texture do not overpower the course information.			
Sufficient contrast between text and background makes information easy to read.			
Design keeps course pages to a comfortable length with white space.			
Images are used in course design to support course content.			
Images are accompanied by text descriptions (Alt text) or captions for images that require a more complex description.			
Typeface is easy to read. Documents are created using Sans Serif fonts (e.g. Calibri, Arial or Tahoma) with a size of 12 point or higher.			
Styles such as titles and headings are used to format the document.			
Data organized in rows and columns are put in a table.			
Spelling and grammar are accurate.			

Section 4: Interaction and Collaboration

Interaction and Collaboration refers to the extent to which there is student-instructor, student-student, and student-content interaction. Exemplary courses should integrate many different ways to interact and collaborate in the online environment.	✓	N/A	COMMENTS
Student participation requirements/expectations are clearly stated.			
Instructor provides announcements/reminders.			
Instructor email response time is clearly stated.			
Regular feedback about student performance is provided in a timely manner throughout the course (example: discussion board posts, assignments, quizzes, etc.).			
Course promotes an active discussion area which encourages students to reply to each other.			
Contact is initiated with students in a variety of ways: (Select all that apply.) ☐Announcements　　☐Phone conversations ☐Participation in discussion board　　☐ Chat sessions or virtual meetings ☐Email　　☐ Voice enabled messages ☐ Participation in online group collaboration projects ☐ Face-to-face meetings (review sessions, scheduled meetings)			
Communication/collaboration tools used in the course: ☐ Email　　☐ Chat room　　☐Discussion board ☐ Whiteboard　　☐ other　　☐Student presentations			

Section 5: Effective use of Technology

Effective Use of Course Technology refers to the successful integration of technology into the online course and its use in a variety of formats that help students to achieve course goals and objectives.	✓	N/A	COMMENTS
Course makes effective use of online instructional tools.			
Course materials are presented using appropriate formats compatible across computer platform (pdf, rtf, mp3, etc.).			
Audio materials (mp3, wav, etc.) are accompanied by a transcript.			
Videos and screencasts are closed-captioned.			
Presentations are created using design templates found in the software and incorporate the above practices.			
Computer-simulated demonstrations are used to convey information.			
Social media tools (such as, Twitter, Facebook, Flickr) are used.			

What tools are used in the course? (Select all that apply)

☐Email	☐Chat	☐Journals
☐Calendar	☐Gradebook	☐Video/DVD
☐Graphics/Images	☐Wikis	☐Image Database
☐Blogs	☐Animations	☐Whiteboard
☐Audio	☐Survey	☐Podcasts
☐Quiz tool	☐Glossary	☐presentations/portfolios

Section 6: Assessment /Evaluation

The assessment category focuses on the ways in which the student is evaluated toward achieving the student learning outcomes and the quality, type, structure, and security of the assessments used.	✓	N/A	COMMENTS
Assessments are used throughout the course (e.g. not just one final exam).			
Anti-plagiarism software is used for written assignments.			
Sample assignments are provided to illustrate instructor expectations.			
Detailed instructions and tips for completing assignments are provided.			
Appropriate security measures are enabled when computer testing, such as:			
Time limitations are placed on exams given online.			
Exams are password protected.			
Exams are proctored in a supervised environment if exams are given face to face.			
Exams are composed of question pools where possible to ensure online students have equivalent but different online tests.			
Questions on exams are seen one at a time.			
Students cannot backtrack.			

References Consulted

- California State University – Chico's influential *Rubric for Online Instruction* was developed to "develop and evaluate online courses" http://www.csuchico.edu/celt/roi/ This rating system is now used throughout the California State University system as well as in other colleges and universities.

- The North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL) produced a document "designed to provide states, districts, online programs, and other organizations with a set of quality guidelines for online teaching." That document, *The National Standards for Quality Online Teaching* consists of a rating guide intended to identify high quality online courses (http://www.inacol.org/research/nationalstandards/NACOL%20Standards%20Quality%20Online%20Teaching.pdf).

- The seminal article by Chickering and Gamson, *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* has been used as a guide to good practice in thousands of college classrooms. Chickering and Ehrmann, in *Implementing The Seven Principles: Technology as Lever* showed how the seven principles could be implemented in a technology-rich environment (http://www.tltgroup.org/programs/seven.html).

- The University of Miami's *Good Practices in Teaching with Technology* (http://www6.miami.edu/UMH/CDA/UMH_Main/0,1770,2666-1;3212-3,00.html).

- Quality Matters (QM) is a faculty-centered, peer review process designed to certify the quality of online courses and online components. (http://qminstitute.org/home/Public%20Library/About%20QM/RubricStandards2008-2010.pdf)

- Ensuring The Appropriate use Of Educational Technology: An Update For Local Academic Senates. The Academic Senate For California Community Colleges. ATC educational tech asccc.pdf

- Georgia Southern University Center For Online Learning. http://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/col/id/

- 2010 Blackboard Exemplary Course Program Rubric. http://kb.blackboard.com/display/EXEMPLARY/Exemplary+Course+Program

- Sunal, D.W., Sunal, C.S., Odell, M.R., Sundberg, C.A. *Research-Supported Best Practices for Developing Online Learning*. Journal of Interactive Online Learning. http://www.ncolr.org/jiol/issues/pdf/2.1.1.pdf