



Course Observation Guide for Online Courses at Niagara County Community College

Course to be Observed _____ **Term** _____ **Faculty Name** _____ **Instructional Method** _____
Background

In 1987, Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson published “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education”, a summary of 50 years of higher education research that addressed good teaching and learning practices. Their findings, and faculty and institutional evaluation instruments based on the findings, have been widely used to guide and improve college teaching.

While instruments such as “Smart Evals” provide a measure of student satisfaction with a course, the Seven Principles provide a useful framework to evaluate the effectiveness of online teaching and learning. Therefore, this *Course Observation Guide* adapts the Seven Principles to facilitate the observation of online courses and can also be used to observe the online portion of a blended or hybrid course at NCCC. Each principle is described in detail, including evidence of how a principle may be met. Examples of evidence to look for and resources for additional information are also included.

The Seven Principles	
Good practice:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourages contact between students and faculty; Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students; Encourages active learning; Gives prompt feedback; Emphasizes time on task; Communicates high expectations; and Respects diverse talents and ways of learning.
Chickering, A., & Gamson, Z. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. <i>AAHE Bulletin</i> (39)7.	

While ideally good practice would suggest that all seven principles would be supported in some way in an online, hybrid, or blended course, variations in course format, size, and faculty teaching experience can make reaching that ideal difficult. Similar to the “Smart Evals” where achieving an overall score of 5 is rare, it is assumed that the observer will discover room for improvement when examining a course through the lens of the Seven Principles. This course observation guide provides space for the observer to note teaching and learning strengths, as well as areas for improvement.

Recommended Course Observation Process

To help facilitate the course observation process of online courses, we recommend the following process:

1. The Office of Academic Affairs or Program Coordinators identify those courses that will have a course observation completed.
2. Observers will reach out to the instructor to schedule a time to tour the course via Zoom with the instructor and identify the course to be observed.
3. The person completing the course observation uses this guide to work through the online course, online portion of a hybrid course, or online portion of a blended course, observing how well the instructor addresses each of the “Seven Principles.” The observer notes the instructor’s strengths and areas for improvement for each principle in the space provided.

NOTE: The person conducting the course observation should feel free to ask questions of the instructor at any time there is a need for clarification during the process. The observer may request access to the course from OIT or record the Zoom session to complete the observation guide.
4. The completed course observation document is then shared with the instructor who can either provide a rebuttal or sign off on the completed observation guide. This guide may be shared with the Online Learning Coordinator to help the instructor make any recommended revisions for course improvements.

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<p>Principle 1: Good practice encourages contact between students and faculty.</p> <p>Frequent and timely student-faculty contact is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement, particularly in a distance education environment. Evidence of faculty concern helps students get through challenging situations and inspires them to persevere. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students' intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans.</p> <p>Look for examples of any one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Getting Started instructions and Banner with instructor contact info● Narrated "welcome message" or course overview that encourages student-to-instructor contact for course-related discussions or concerns.● Faculty makes use of free text service like "Remind" to send reminders and updates.● The instructor encourages and fosters a healthy exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences among course participants.● The instructor initiates contact with, or responds to, students on a regular basis in order to establish a consistent online presence in the course (and prior notice is given to students in the event that the instructor will be unavailable for more than a few days, such as might be the case during professional travel).● A prominent announcement area is used to communicate important up-to-date course information to students, such as reminders of impending assignment due dates, scheduled absences, etc.● Online or F2F Office Hours are provided● Student inquiries are responded in a timely manner. <p>Where to look:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● "Ask a Question" area● Course syllabus● Discussion forums● E-mail messages● Posted announcements● Text messages in remind● Starfish <p>Resources:</p> <p>NCCC "Quality in Online Learning" Course Design Standards- SUNY Online (OSCQR) https://oscqr.suny.edu/ Optimizing High-Quality Digital Learning Experiences; A Playbook for Faculty https://tinyurl.com/facplaybook Caring for Students Playbook: https://tinyurl.com/2s3kptzr "Managing Your Online Class" - http://tinyurl.com/k6cxfyu Effective Online Teaching with Screen Casting Videos Recording, Handouts 10 Tips for Teaching Online https://tinyurl.com/v2rz963r Creating Screencast Videos with Screencast-O-Matic Recording, Handouts</p>	<p>Feedback for the Instructor</p> <p>Evidence Found:</p> <p>Strengths:</p> <p>Areas for Improvement:</p>
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<p>Principle 2: Good practice develops reciprocity and cooperation among students.</p> <p>Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one's own ideas and responding to others' reactions sharpens thinking and deepens understanding.</p> <p>Look for examples of any one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Regular opportunities for students to engage in one or more of the following activities:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Formal and/or informal discussions of course topics○ Collaborative course assignments○ Study groups● An "Introduce Yourself or Meet your Classmates" type of activity at the beginning of the course so students can begin to make personal connections. (Included as part of the Online, Hybrid, or Blended course templates)● Group assignments that follow the basic tenants of cooperative learning (see Resources below) in order to avoid the common pitfalls of "group work."● An explanation of the criteria for "good" discussion participation.● Modeling of good discussion participation practices by the instructor.● Discussion prompts that help to guide and elicit student participation in class discussion activities.● Instructor <i>facilitation</i> of class discussions by encouraging, probing, questioning, summarizing, and so on. <p>Where to look:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Assignment submission form● Course syllabus● Discussion forums● E-mail messages● Instructional materials/Assignment instructions <p>Resources:</p> <p>How to Communicate with Your Students - http://tinyurl.com/jvgrmze</p> <p>Caring for Students Playbook: https://tinyurl.com/2s3kptzr</p> <p>Building Engaging Discussions in Your Online Course - https://ncccelearning.com/teaching-online/975-2/</p> <p>10 Fun Icebreakers for College Students to Better Connect - https://tinyurl.com/4zj467bk</p> <p>Emotions in Online Teaching: A Powerful Tool for Helping Students Engage, Persist, and Succeed - https://tinyurl.com/y3z2q26f</p> <p>How to Write a Strong Discussion Post- https://tinyurl.com/y2s356df</p> <p>How to Build a Discussion Board in Brightspace: https://tinyurl.com/yckc4jds</p> <p>SUNY OSCQR 4.0 https://oscqr.suny.edu/ – Substantive Interaction Standards https://oscqr.suny.edu/rsi/rsi-standards/</p> <p>Middle States Compliance: Substantive Interaction - https://www.msche.org/policies/faqs-for-covid-related-distance-education/</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Feedback for the Instructor</p> <p>Evidence Found:</p> <p>Strengths:</p> <p>Areas for Improvement:</p>
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<p>Principle 3: Good practice encourages active learning.</p> <p>Active learning methods engage students in the learning process by encouraging them to discover, process, and apply information. Empirical support for the positive impact of active learning on student achievement is extensive.</p> <p>Look for examples of any one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Student activities that involve one or more of the following:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Active use of writing, speaking, and other forms of self-expression○ Opportunity for information gathering, synthesis, and analysis in solving problems○ Engagement in collaborative learning activities● Examples of student work where they<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Think, talk, or write about their learning○ Reflect, relate, organize, apply, synthesize, or evaluate information○ Perform research, lab or studio work, projects or physical activities <p>Where to look:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Assignment submission form● Course syllabus● Discussion forums● Instructional materials● Reflection journals & Assignments <p>Resources: Optimizing High-Quality Digital Learning Experiences; A Playbook for Faculty https://tinyurl.com/facplaybook Defining Active Learning - https://cei.umn.edu/active-learning How to Build a Discussion Board in Brightspace: https://tinyurl.com/yckc4jds Engage Your Students in Your Online Course: 20 Proven Ways! https://tinyurl.com/y5oonk8x Designing Assessments of Student Learning - https://tinyurl.com/yxqyhh3z Best Practices for Reflection Assignments –Recording, Handouts</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Feedback for the Instructor</p> <p>Evidence Found:</p> <p>Strengths:</p> <p>Areas for Improvement:</p>
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Principle 6: Good practice communicates high expectations.

As the saying goes, “if you don’t know where you are going, how will you know when you get there?” Effective instructors have high, but reasonable, expectations for their students. They clearly communicate those expectations and provide support to their students in their efforts to meet those expectations.

Look for examples of any one or more of the following:

- Explicit communication of the skills and knowledge every student needs to have in order to be successful in the course.
- Explanation of course learning goals and student learning outcomes, and how the assignments are designed to help students achieve those goals. Do the SLO’s match the master course syllabus?
- Frequent feedback provided to students through written explanations or narrated screencasts that provide detailed feedback on assignments and other course activities.
- Motivation and encouragement that inspires students to move past the easy answers to more complex solutions.
- Routine use of critical and probing questions when communicating with students about course assignments and activities.
- Examples of high and low quality work, along with a discussion of the differences between these.
- Examples of student work that demonstrate advancement toward learning goals.

Where to look:

- Assignment submission form/Rubrics attached to assignments
- Course syllabus
- Instructional materials/Assignment directions

Resources:

Optimizing High-Quality Digital Learning Experiences; A Playbook for Faculty

<https://tinyurl.com/facplaybook>

Exploring the Advantages of Rubric - <https://tinyurl.com/plmu2ky>

Rubric Resources from NCCC Online Learning Blog - <https://tinyurl.com/jq4lxhw>

5 Ways to Help Students Succeed in Online Courses - <https://tinyurl.com/gtrj8e6>

Effective Online Teaching and providing feedback with Screen Casting Videos -

<https://tinyurl.com/y3hgzy6>

Feedback for the Instructor

Evidence Found:

Strengths:

Areas for Improvement:

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Instructor Name _____

Observer Name: _____

Course Code, Title, Instructional Method _____

Date: _____

Principle	Agree/Disagree	Rebuttal
Principle 1: Encourages contact between students and faculty		
Principle 2: Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students		
Principle 3: Encourages active learning;		
Principle 4: Gives prompt feedback		
Principle 5: Emphasizes time on task		
Principle 6: Communicates high expectations		
Principle 7: Respects diverse talents and ways of learning		

Faculty Signature _____

Observer Signature _____

Date _____

Date _____