

Course Observation Guide for Online Courses at Niagara County Community College

Course to be Observed	Term	Faculty Name	Instructional Method
Background		While ideally good	practice would suggest that all seven principles wo

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:

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. *AAHE Bulletin (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.

Principle 1: Good practice encourages contact between students and faculty.	Feedback for the Instructor
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.	Evidence Found:
Look for exemples of any one or more of the following:	Strengths:
Look for examples of any one or more of the following: 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.	
Where to look: • "Ask a Question" area	
 Course syllabus 	
Discussion forums	
 E-mail messages Posted announcements 	Areas for Improvement:
 Text messages in remind 	
Starfish	
Resources: NCCC "Quality in Online Learning" Course Design Standards- SUNY Online (OSCQR) <u>https://oscqr.suny.edu/</u> Optimizing High-Quality Digital Learning Experiences; A Playbook for Faculty <u>https://tinyurl.com/facplaybook</u> Caring for Students Playbook: <u>https://tinyurl.com/2s3kptzr</u> "Managing Your Online Class" - <u>http://tinyurl.com/k6cxfyu</u> Effective Online Teaching with Screen Casting Videos <u>Recording, Handouts</u> 10 Tips for Teaching Online <u>https://tinyurl.com/v2rz963r</u> Creating Screencast Videos with Screencast-O-Matic <u>Recording</u> , <u>Handouts</u>	

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Principle 2: Good practice develops reciprocity and cooperation among students. 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.	Feedback for the Instructor Evidence Found:
 Look for examples of any one or more of the following: Regular opportunities for students to engage in one or more of the following activities: 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. Where to look: Assignment submission form Course syllabus Discussion forums E-mail messages 	Strengths:
 Instructional materials/Assignment instructions Resources: How to Communicate with Your Students - http://tinyurl.com/jygrmze Caring for Students Playbook: https://tinyurl.com/2s3kptzr Building Engaging Discussions in Your Online Course - https://tinyurl.com/2s3kptzr Building Engaging Discussions in Your Online Course - https://tinyurl.com/4zj467bk Emotions in Online Teaching: A Powerful Tool for Helping Students Engage, Persist, and Succeed - https://tinyurl.com/y2s356df How to Write a Strong Discussion Post- https://tinyurl.com/y2s356df How to Build a Discussion Board in Brightspace: https://tinyurl.com/y2s356df How to Build a Discussion Board in Brightspace: https://tinyurl.com/yckc4jds SUNY OSCQR 4.0 https://standards/ Middle States Compliance: Substantive Interaction - https://www.msche.org/policies/faqs-for-covid-related-distance-education/ 	Areas for Improvement:

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Principle 3: Good practice encourages active learning.	Feedback for the Instructor
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.	Evidence Found:
 Look for examples of any one or more of the following: Student activities that involve one or more of the following: 	Strengths:
 Where to look: Assignment submission form Course syllabus Discussion forums Instructional materials Reflection journals & Assignments 	
Resources: Optimizing High-Quality Digital Learning Experiences; A Playbook for Faculty <u>https://tinyurl.com/facplaybook</u> Defining Active Learning - <u>https://cei.umn.edu/active-learning</u> How to Build a Discussion Board in Brightspace: <u>https://tinyurl.com/yckc4jds</u> Engage Your Students in Your Online Course: 20 Proven Ways! <u>https://tinyurl.com/y5oonk8x</u> Designing Assessments of Student Learning - <u>https://tinyurl.com/yxgyhh3z</u> Best Practices for Reflection Assignments – <u>Recording, Handouts</u>	Areas for Improvement:

Evidence Found: Strengths:
Strengths:
Areas for Improvement:

Principle 5: Good education emphasizes time on task.	Feedback for the Instructor
The frequency and duration of study, as well as effective time management skills, are critical for students and professionals alike. Students need help in learning to manage and prioritize their study time.	Evidence Found:
 Look for examples of any one or more of the following: **A published course schedule that outlines topics to be covered and assignment due dates so students can plan their workload accordingly. The course schedule should appear in the Course Information Module in Brightspace as a PDF and Word file. **A course syllabus that includes all of the required sections from AA and key sections if the course is online, hyflex, hybrid, or blended. Use the syllabus template provided by Online Learning and copy/paste your content into it. This syllabus meets ADA compliance and includes all of the required information for students. The syllabus should appear in the Course Information Module in Brightspace as a PDF and Word file. Time-to-completion information on course assignments (e.g., "This assignment should take you approximately 2 hours to complete"). Course-specific study tips that provide students with strategies for utilizing their time well. Campus-based resources are readily available to the students (e.g., Brightspace Help, SUNY Online support, INCCC Online Learning Website, ACE, Library, etc.). Assignment feedback that provides students with information on where to focus their studies. Assignment fue dates and timeframes that take into account the nature of the target audience. ** Required in online, hyflex, blended, and hybrid courses Where to look: Assignment submission form Course Navigation bar and or module tiles Course syllabus Evaluation tools in Brightspace include course reports, Quick Eval, and Class Progress Instructional materials/Assignment directions Resources: "Online Course Design: Time on Task" - <u>https://twww.rit.edu/teaching/time-task-online-courses</u> "Five Ways to Help Students Succeed in the Online Classroom" - <u>https://tinyurl.com/yyf33qpv</u> NCCC Online Course Syllabus Example https://tinyurl.com/pd3tinjis 	Strengths: Areas for Improvement:

Principle 6: Good practice communicates high expectations.	Feedback for the Instructor
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.	Evidence Found:
 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. 	Strengths:
 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/facplaybook Exploring the Advantages of Rubric - https://tinyurl.com/ja4lxhw 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/y3hgzby6 	Areas for Improvement:

Principle 7: Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning.	Feedback for the Instructor
People bring different talents and styles of learning to the learning environment. Some bring a wealth of relevant experience to a course, while others may be new to the topic at hand. Likewise, students who are strong in a discussion situation may be less adept at lab or studio work. Students need the opportunity to demonstrate their talents and to "personalize" their	Evidence Found:
learning so that it is relevant to them. It is also important to give students opportunities to learn in ways that may be less comfortable in order to improve their learning skills.	Strengths:
 Look for examples of any one or more of the following: Use of a variety of assessment tools that gauge student progress. Alternative assignment options that allow students to demonstrate their progress in a manner that is best conducive to their talents. For example, a podcast, website, or other technology might be allowed as learning evidence instead of a written paper. Supplemental online materials are provided to students who lack prerequisite knowledge or who would benefit from having content presented in an alternative manner. Timely, corrective feedback for online activities. A positive online climate where students are encouraged to seek assistance with course content and learning activities if needed. The Accessibility Statement is listed on the course syllabus. (included in the online, hybrid, and blended course syllabus templates) 	
 Where to look: Assignment submission form Course syllabus Discussion forums Instructional materials/Assignment directions 	Areas for Improvement:
Resources: Optimizing High-Quality Digital Learning Experiences; A Playbook for Faculty <u>https://tinyurl.com/facplaybook</u> 53 Ways to Check for Understanding - <u>https://tinyurl.com/2kduzar4</u> Creating Accessible Content - <u>http://ncccelearning.com/accessibility/</u> Accessibility Services at NCCC - <u>https://www.niagaracc.suny.edu/cts/accessibility-services/</u>	

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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	
Date	

Observer Signature	
Date	

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