Roles, Responsibilities and Expectations for Developing and Teaching Online Courses in Continuing and Distance Studies

A. Introduction to Continuing and Distance Studies

Continuing and Distance Studies (CDS) is the unit that administers online studies in the Faculty of Arts and Science. In partnership with academic departments, CDS plans course and program offerings and funds the development and teaching of online courses. Courses are offered for university credit in the standard Fall, Winter and Summer terms. Enrolments come from current on-campus Queen's students seeking scheduling flexibility, from degree and non-degree students studying at a distance, and from visiting students from other universities.

Although about 85% of CDS enrolments have come from current on-campus Queen's students in the past, part of the Faculty's strategic plan to achieve sustainability is to increase distance enrolments, thereby making a Queen's education more accessible, and increasing tuition revenues without building new infrastructure. Current efforts for enrolment growth are focused on attracting new distance students by developing and marketing new online courses and degree, diploma and certificate programs. Our goal is to meet the needs of distance students through the development of online offerings that follow best practices in online learning and preserve the high quality of education associated with Queen's University.

Traditionally, distance education was provided through a correspondence-based program. In CDS, this was characterized by independent study guided by a printed course manual, textbooks, and instructor and teaching assistant feedback on written assignments. The rapid development of teaching technology and research in online teaching and learning over the last ten years, however, has transformed distance education.

Today online learning means students can get to know their instructors and teaching assistants through real-time, synchronous online tutorials and webinars. Course materials can be developed using best practices for online learning, incorporating multi-media features like videos and podcasts, as well as interactive components such as problem sets and self-assessment quizzes to help students direct their own learning. Through online group work and discussion forums students can interact with peers from across the world in a virtual community of learners. This transformation has redefined quality in a distance course. Now, quality means providing students with a learning experience that challenges and stimulates, while meeting students' needs in an environment that's supportive, accessible and flexible.

In Arts and Science, the online program offered through CDS upholds the level of educational quality associated with Queen's University by using best practices in online learning to guide the development and teaching of online courses, by working collaboratively with academic departments to plan course and program offerings and to identify the best qualified faculty member to develop and teach courses, and by maintaining the academic standards of the Faculty.

While the educational goals of an online course and the face-to-face course are the same, there are significant differences in the ways in which the goals are achieved in the online environment. Firstly, more time is required in the development phase: to plan the course, design the activities and assessments, prepare the materials, and set up and test the complete course in the Learning Management System (LMS). Secondly, it is more challenging to communicate effectively in an online environment where there is less opportunity for spontaneous feedback. Facilitating discussion and engendering enthusiasm need to occur in the absence

of verbal and visual cues and other informal means of communication that occur naturally in the face-to-face environment.

As with teaching face-to-face in a classroom, teaching online involves engaging students individually and collectively, guiding their learning, and assessing their achievements. Students can expect instructors to set clear academic standards, to provide constructive feedback throughout the course and to provoke critical thinking. Instructors help students to challenge their own thinking and to form connections between theory and practice across disparate areas of knowledge, in diverse settings, and among divergent points of view. However, the online environment also requires instructors to develop different strategies (from the face-to-face environment) in order to teach effectively online. Through CDS, the Faculty facilitates teaching and learning in the online environment by providing instructors with support in online course design, in online pedagogy, and in the use of technology.

Distance students in turn are supported in their learning by being provided with online access to many of the same resources as on-campus students, particularly the University Library, the Writing Centre, Learning Strategies, Disability Services, and Instructional Technology Services (ITS).

B. Overview of Online Courses

Online courses offered through CDS are designed to meet the academic standards of the home department and faculty, and to share the same learning outcomes as the equivalent face-to-face classroom courses. Courses that are developed for online delivery need to meet the quality standards outlined below. New courses need to go through the Faculty's full curricular approval process before being developed for online delivery. Existing on-campus courses being considered for development into supplemental online versions are approved by the relevant Department and reported to the Faculty's Curriculum Committee.

In order to meet the quality standards expected for online learning, course design needs be learner centred and needs to include the following active learning features:

- opportunities for students to interact with their instructors and teaching assistants through real-time, synchronous online tutorials and webinars
- multi-media features like videos and podcasts, interactive components such as problem sets and self-assessment quizzes, and reflective exercises to help students direct their own learning
- peer-interactive components such as online group work and discussion forums.

In addition, the design of assessments and activities should facilitate regular and timely feedback to students by the instructor and teaching assistants, in order to compensate for the special communication challenges of the online environment.

Technology

Online courses the Faculty of Arts and Science are delivered using the Learning Management System (LMS) supported by the University. This is a password-protected environment to which only students enrolled in the course can gain access. The LMS provides many features to enhance learning and to administer the course: news and discussion forums, quizzing tools for instructor assessment of students and for student self-assessment, an assignment submission and return system, a repository for grades, etc. The LMS has the ability for the course content to include links to external online resources, and can host video-streamed content.

CDS also provides web conferencing software tools to run office hours or group tutorials in real time.

C. Course Design and Development

Role of faculty member: course developer and discipline expert

CDS consults with Heads of Departments in the selection of faculty members with the appropriate qualities to develop online courses. In addition to expertise in the relevant academic subject, as a course developer the faculty member needs to:

- be open to working in partnership with an instructional designer and CDS staff
- take an active learning approach to the design of the course using best practices in online learning to meet the quality standards
- be comfortable with technology, interested in how technology can enhance teaching and learning, and open to learning and using new technologies
- be prepared to meet project timelines that are determined collaboratively at the start of the project
- be willing to teach the first offering of the course.

Faculty members are assigned by the Head of Department to develop online courses. The commitment to undertake the development and offering of the online course is articulated in a Memorandum of Agreement between the Department, the faculty member and the Faculty Office (through CDS). Course development takes place over many months, and ranges from reviewing the course expected learning outcomes and course content to developing activities that will facilitate learning and assessments to measure it.

Working in collaboration with an instructional designer, the course developer:
- provides the subject expertise and ensures the course reflects the highest levels of scholarship in the discipline and subject area
- identifies what learners need to know and establishes achievable, measurable and pedagogically sound learning outcomes
- determines the type of activities and interactive components to be included in the course and suggests how these could best be structured
- develops appropriate assessments to measure learning
- prepares and reviews drafts of course materials; and recommends other resources for reference
- ensures that the course content is accurate and has an appropriate level of rigor.

Once developed, it is expected that the course will require only minor revisions for the next three years, at which time CDS and the department review the course for major revisions (as explained in the document *Quality Assurance for Online Courses*). The faculty member and Queen's University will jointly own the course. The faculty member will own the intellectual property in the course content and structured activities that he or she created. (If others contribute, they will retain ownership of their contribution.) The University will own the course design and the online format. Queen's University has a non-exclusive, non-royalty bearing license to use the course content for the purpose of teaching Queen's students. Queen's University also has the right to modify and update the online course content, in collaboration with the department, for the purpose of teaching Queen's students.

Normally the course developer also teaches the first offering of the course, making small adjustments as needed throughout the offering and at the end of course. In subsequent offerings, it is preferable for the course developer to continue to offer the course. If unavailable to continue in this role, it is beneficial both for the new instructor and in terms of continuity in the course design to have the original course developer available for consultation.

Supportive role of instructional designer

As a course developer and discipline expert, the faculty member works in collaboration with an online instructional design specialist, appointed by CDS. The instructional designer:

- provides the course developer with expertise in online course design and best practices
- ensures that a systematic design process is followed
- helps the course developer establish strong learning objectives, engaging learning activities, and learner assessments that are closely tied to objectives
- assists the course developer to design assessments and activities that will facilitate regular and timely feedback to students by the instructor and teaching assistants
- advises the course developer on how materials should be designed to meet the needs of the learners
- ensures the course is laid out with clear, logical sequencing and reasonable pacing

- coordinates with other CDS staff who will be assisting with the development of materials, the technology and the configuration of the course in the LMS
- acts as a project manager, maintaining established schedules and deadlines, and reporting on progress.

Supportive role of CDS

The role of CDS is to support the development of online courses on behalf of the Faculty Office. CDS provides guidelines for the development of online courses, and clearly articulates the expectations and responsibilities for everyone involved concerning both the development process and the course design. CDS oversees progress, provides faculty members and instructional designers with support and advice as needed, and takes an active role in resolving any issues that may arise in the development process, in consultation with the Head of Department where appropriate.

Once the development phase is complete, CDS staff collaborate with the instructional designer and the course developer to mount the course into the LMS, ensuring all the required components are in place and functional.

CDS provides the faculty member with a course development stipend, either directly to the member or to the home department, depending on the preference of the faculty member and Head of Department. CDS also appoints and compensates the instructional designer working with the course developer.

D. Teaching Online Courses

In the online environment, it is important that the existing design and framework of the course is maintained in order to preserve the integrity of the course. The role of the instructor is to facilitate student learning within this framework. In the absence of the face-to-face environment and the feedback loop that occurs naturally within that environment, online communication and learner support are key. Communication takes place through feedback on assignments, facilitated online discussions, moderated videoconferences, regular progress reports and real-time chats. A significant investment of time from both students and instructor is required to sustain a vibrant and effective online learning community. CDS

supports instructors by providing orientations to online teaching, teaching support for marking and facilitation, and administrative support.