



CONTINUING AND DISTANCE STUDIES

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCE

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Support and Process for Developing Online and Blended Courses

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A. Introduction to Continuing and Distance Studies

Continuing and Distance Studies (CDS) is the unit within the Faculty of Arts and Science responsible for developing and offering fully online courses. All online courses are developed and offered in partnership with academic departments, who are responsible for disciplinary and subject content and quality. CDS also supports the development of blended courses.

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 fully online courses, by working collaboratively with academic departments to plan online course and program offerings and identify the best qualified faculty members to develop and teach courses, and by working with departments to maintain the academic standards of the Faculty. The Faculty's current goal to attract new distance students to online courses and certificate and degree programs means that new online courses need to be developed to meet the needs of students studying at a distance.

The development of both fully online and blended courses is guided by instructional designers (IDs) on staff in CDS and on contract from outside the university, who provide faculty members with expertise in pedagogy, course design, online teaching and learning, and in the use of technology. Other team members support the development of materials, the technology, and configuration of the course in the

learning management system. The role of the ID is to inform, advise, support, and manage the course development process, and to coordinate the support team, which also includes a liaison librarian and technical staff in CDS.

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 on-campus courses. (Details about how online courses are selected, developed and offered are provided in the document *Quality Assurance for Online Courses in the Faculty of Arts and Science*.)

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

- opportunities for students to interact with their instructors and teaching assistants (TAs) through real-time, synchronous online tutorials and webinars;
- multi-media features, such as 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
- course design supported by research in online teaching and learning.

Online courses are delivered using the Queen's supported Learning Management System (LMS). CDS also provides web conferencing software tools to run office hours or group tutorials in real time, and encourages the use of other freely available software, where appropriate, to facilitate or enhance student learning.

C. Overview of Blended Courses

Blended learning integrates in-class, face-to-face learning with online learning in purposeful, thoughtful, and complementary ways to enhance student engagement. Improved student engagement and learning is achieved by focusing on in-class interaction to promote active and collaborative learning, and minimizing or eliminating the passive transmission of information.

The online components of blended courses are delivered using the LMS. In order to meet the quality standards expected for blended learning, course design needs to be learner-centred and include the following:

- active learning and small-group activities in the classroom, the design of which is informed by pedagogical research;
- interactive online materials to deliver enriched content, to guide students through the textbook, and to verify comprehension, in order to devote classroom time to applying, integrating, and synthesizing the knowledge;
- fewer classroom hours (to balance the additional student workload taking place online).

D. Role of Instructional Designer

In all fully online and blended course developments, a departmental faculty member acts as the subject and disciplinary expert (“course developer” in this document), and works in collaboration with an instructional designer appointed by CDS. The ID may be contracted from outside the university and working from a distance. The ID assures quality by:

- stimulating and guiding the course developer to use evidence-based practices drawn from the relevant pedagogical scholarly literature;
- providing the course developer with expertise in online course design and in current best practices in online learning;
- providing the course developer with advice on creating and maintaining an active learning environment both in the classroom (for blended courses) and online (for fully online courses);
- advising on the use of small-group activities to achieve specific learning outcomes both in the classroom (for blended courses) and online (for fully online courses), based on current pedagogical research;
- ensuring that a systematic design process is followed;
- helping the course developer establish strong learning outcomes, engaging learning activities, and learner assessments that are closely tied to outcomes;
- advising the course developer on designing the materials to meet the needs of the learners;
- ensuring the course is laid out with clear, logical sequencing and reasonable pacing;

- acting as a project manager, maintaining established schedules and deadlines, coordinating the design team, and reporting on progress;
- ensuring best practices are employed throughout the development process from concept to production to feedback and revision.

E. Role of Continuing and Distance Studies

On behalf of the Faculty Office, the role of CDS is to provide guidelines for the development of online and blended courses, and to clearly articulate the expectations and responsibilities for everyone involved concerning both the development process and the course design.

- CDS prepares contracts for development after an initial consultation between the ID and the course developer to decide on the scope and shape of the project and to determine a reasonable timeline for milestones that will meet CDS needs (fully online courses) and Faculty needs (blended courses).
- CDS oversees progress, provides IDs 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 Department Head and Associate Dean, where appropriate.
- CDS provides or arranges training and support to course developers in the technologies that will be used in the course, including the LMS, Adobe Connect, etc.
- Once the development phase is complete, CDS staff collaborate with the ID and the course developer to mount the course into LMS, review it for completeness following the *CDS Quality Assurance Checklist*, and test the technical features.
- CDS staff, along with the ID, will work with the instructor to identify and address problems throughout the first course offering.

F. The Development Process

Before a project is formally underway, the course developer (or course development team) and the ID consult to identify the scope of the project and a specific timeline to be followed. The ID reports the scope and agreed-upon timeline in writing to the Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) for a blended course, or to CDS for a fully online course. This report becomes the basis for a Memorandum of Agreement between the course developer, the Department, and the Faculty of Arts and Science.

Its acceptance by the parties marks the beginning of the formal four-stage design and development process.

Stage 1: Conceptual

The course developer works collaboratively with the ID to develop broad course level learning outcomes as well as module/unit level learning outcomes and select the appropriate teaching and learning strategies to achieve these outcomes. During this stage, they identify the types of learning resources to be used and make a preliminary selection of appropriate technologies. For a blended course, these initial discussions assist the course developer in determining how the learning hours will be distributed among in-class activities and out-of-class online activities and private study.

Key tasks involved in the conceptual design stage include:

- carrying out a learner needs analysis;
- identifying key skills and competencies to be developed and demonstrated;
- identifying key learning outcomes (using action verbs, e.g. By the end of this course, you will be able to...);
- identifying appropriate teaching and learning strategies for the blended environment or for the fully online environment;
- identifying key learning resources and technologies to be used in the online environment;
- helping the course developer prepare the appropriate curriculum submission(s) required for both blended and fully online versions of courses;
- creating a detailed course outline based using a standard template.

Stage 2: Development

The ID works with the course developer to create a comprehensive framework for the course. Developing a framework involves sequencing course content with appropriate learning activities (whether these activities are to take place online or in a classroom). A learner feedback plan is also put in place, as appropriate for a blended or fully online course.

Key tasks in Stage 2 include:

- developing the learning framework;
- identifying engaging learning activities;
- determining interaction, feedback, and assessment plans that are closely tied to learning outcomes;
- preparing online course materials including rubrics, scripting learning activities, case studies, scenarios, etc.

Stage 3: Production

The production phase focuses on organization of the course content. The ID and CDS staff perform the technical work of building the online course site.

Key tasks in Stage 3 include:

- gathering and producing all course materials (e.g., copy, images, audio files, video clips) and posting to the LMS;
- creating an intuitive, accessible and graphically appealing user interface;
- doing any required programming;
- checking for quality assurance, including testing all online course elements based upon the CDS template.

Stage 4: Feedback and Revision

The ID and CDS staff work closely with instructors in the weeks leading up to the start of term, assisting with the training of TAs, including guidance in facilitating active learning in the classroom for a blended course and in the online environment for a fully online course. Throughout the first few weeks of term, the instructor may need to adapt and adjust instructions in response to feedback from students and TAs. The ID and CDS staff advise and assist when needed.

Key tasks in Stage 4 include:

- introducing TAs to teaching, learning, and facilitating for a blended course or a fully online course;
- introducing instructor and TAs to the LMS, and using effective strategies to interact with students in a fully online course;
- adjusting and tweaking instructions and activities as needed, based on feedback from students and TAs;
- addressing unanticipated problems.

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