

Course Observation Guide for Online Courses at SUNY Niagara

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" measure student satisfaction with a course, the Seven Principles provide a helpful 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 SUNY Niagara . 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 Eval," 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 identifies 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.

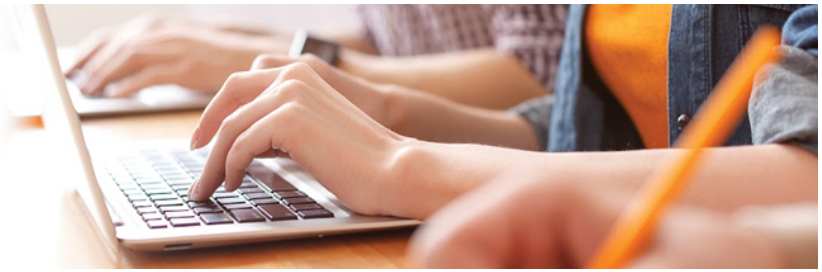
3. The person completing the course observation uses this guide to work through the online course, online portion of a hybrid course, or online portion of a blended course, observing how well the instructor addresses each of the "Seven Principles." The observer notes the instructor's strengths and areas for improvement for each principle in the space provided.

   NOTE: The person conducting the course observation should feel free to ask the instructor questions at any time if clarification is needed

Online Learning & Teaching Advisory Council "OLTAC"

s is located on our SUNY Niagara Online Faculty Support Center Blog: https://nccconlinelearning.com/





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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 may provide a rebuttal or sign off on the observation guide. This guide may be shared with the Online Learning Coordinator to help the instructor implement any recommended revisions to improve the course.

Principle 1: Good practice encourages contact between students and faculty. Frequent and timely student-faculty contact is the most critical factor in student motivation and involvement, particularly in a distance education environment. Evidence of faculty concern helps students overcome 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. **Look for examples of any one or more of the following:** ● Getting Started instructions and Banner with instructor contact info ● Narrate a "welcome message" or course overview that encourages student-to-instructor contact for course-related discussions or concerns. ● Faculty members utilize free text services, such as “Remind,” to send reminders and updates. ● The instructor encourages a healthy exchange of ideas and experiences among course participants. ● The instructor initiates contact with, or responds to, students on a regular basis to establish a consistent online presence in the course (and prior notice is given to students if 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, including reminders about upcoming assignment due dates and scheduled absences. ● Online or F2F Office Hours are provided ● Student inquiries are responded to promptly. **Where to look:** ● “Ask a Question” area ● Course syllabus ● Discussion forums ● E-mail or messages in Brightspace ● Posted announcements ● Text messages in Remind **Resources:** SUNY Niagara “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 Humanizing your online course- https://brocansky.com/humanizing/infographic2 “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 SUNY Otter Institute 2024 - From the Students' Perspective| Recordings	**Feedback for the Instructor** **Evidence Found:** **Strengths:** **Areas for Improvement:**

Principle 2: Good practice develops reciprocity and cooperation among students.	**Feedback for the Instructor**
Learning is enhanced when it is more collaborative than a solo effort. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in the learning process. Sharing one's own ideas and responding to others' reactions sharpens thinking and deepens understanding. **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: o Formal and/or informal discussions of course topics o Collaborative course assignments o 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 tenets of cooperative learning (see Resources below) 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 guide and elicit student participation in class discussions. ● Instructor *facilitation* of class discussions by encouraging, probing, questioning, summarizing, and so on. **Where to look:** ● Assignment submission form ● Course Syllabus ● Discussion forums ● E-mail or messages in Brightspace ● 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://SUNY Niagara elearning.com/teaching-online/975-2/ 10 Fun Icebreakers for College Students to Better Connect - https://tinyurl.com/4zj467bk Emotions in Online Teaching: A Powerful Tool for Helping Students Engage, Persist, and Succeed - https://tinyurl.com/y3z2q26f How to Write a Strong Discussion Post- https://tinyurl.com/y2s356df How to Build a Discussion Board in Brightspace: https://tinyurl.com/yckc4jds SUNY OSCQR 4.0 https://oscqr.suny.edu/ – Substantive Interaction Standards https://oscqr.suny.edu/rsi/rsi-standards/ **Middle States Compliance: Substantive Interaction**	**Evidence Found:** **Strengths:** **Areas for Improvement:**

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 evidence supports the positive impact of active learning on student achievement. **Look for examples of any one or more of the following:** ● Student activities that involve one or more of the following: o Active use of writing, speaking, and other forms of self-expression o Opportunity for information gathering, synthesis, and analysis in solving problems o Engagement in collaborative learning activities ● Examples of student work where they o Think, talk, or write about their learning o Reflect, relate, organize, apply, synthesize, or evaluate information o Perform research, lab or studio work, projects, or physical activities **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 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 Designing Assessments of Student Learning - https://tinyurl.com/yxgyhh3z Best Practices for Reflection Assignments –*Recording, Handouts*	**Evidence Found:** **Strengths:** **Areas for Improvement:**

Principle 4: Good practice gives prompt feedback.

Instructors help students by frequently assessing their knowledge and competence, providing them with opportunities to perform, offering meaningful suggestions, and encouraging them to reflect on their learning.

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

- Information about course feedback methods and standards can be found in the course syllabus.
- Option (or requirement) for students to submit drafts of assignments for instructor feedback.
- Meaningful feedback on student assignments is provided within a publicized and reasonable timeframe.
- Assignment feedback that is clear, positive, specific, and focused on observable behavior that can be changed.
- Clearly communicated course and individual assignment grading criteria.
- Up-to-date, student-accessible course gradebook.
- An open discussion forum where students can ask questions and receive instructor feedback about course content and activities, such as the “Ask a Question” discussion forum.
- Student surveys provide instructors with valuable feedback for course improvement.
- Faculty members showcase examples of the expected work from previous student assignments and discussions. The faculty gains permission from earlier students to showcase their work.

Where to look:

- Assignment submissions form
- Course Syllabus
- Course grade book
- Discussion forums
- Graded feedback and/or rubrics
- Instructional materials/Assignment directions
- Survey instruments

Resources:

SUNY Otter Institute 2024 - From the Students' Perspective| Recordings
Item Analysis Using Rubrics in Brightspace – SUNY OTTER http://tinyurl.com/hk64o95
Using Zoom to Interact with Your Students - https://www.niagaracc.suny.edu/frcae/
Feedback as Formative Assessment - http://tinyurl.com/nbn6nhj
Effective Online Teaching with Screen Casting Videos -https://tinyurl.com/y3hgzby6
Mid Semester Reflection Example - https://tinyurl.com/yy98clj2
Humanizing your online course- https://brocansky.com/humanizing/infographic2

Feedback for the Instructor

Evidence Found:

Strengths:

Areas for Improvement:

Principle 5: Good education emphasizes time on task.

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.

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 be available in the Course Information Module in Brightspace as both a PDF and a 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 standards and includes all required information for students. The syllabus should be available in the Course Information Module in Brightspace as both a PDF and a 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 offer students effective strategies for managing their time effectively.
- Campus-based resources are readily available to the students (e.g., Brightspace Help, SUNY Online support, ISUNY Niagara Online Learning Website, ACE, Library, etc.).
- Assignment feedback that provides students with information on where to focus their studies.
- Assignment due 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" - https://www.rit.edu/teaching/time-task-online-courses

"Five Ways to Help Students Succeed in the Online Classroom" - https://tinyurl.com/yyf33qpv

SUNY Niagara Syllabus Requirements and new Template: https://tinyurl.com/pd3tmjjs

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 these expectations and provide support to their students in their efforts to meet them. **Look for examples of any one or more of the following:** ● Explicit communication of the skills and knowledge every student needs to have to be successful in the course. ● Explanation of course learning goals, student learning outcomes, and how the assignments are designed to help students achieve those goals. Do the Course Learning Outcomes match the master course syllabus? ● Frequent feedback is provided to students through written explanations and narrated screencasts, which offer 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 ● SUNY Otter Institute 2024 - From the Students' Perspective| Recordings **Resources:** Optimizing High-Quality Digital Learning Experiences: A Playbook for Faculty https://tinyurl.com/facplaybook Rubric Resources from SUNY Niagara Online Learning Blog - https://tinyurl.com/jq4lxhw Effective Online Teaching and providing feedback with Screen Casting Videos -https://tinyurl.com/y3hgzby6	**Feedback for the Instructor** **Evidence Found:** **Strengths:** **Areas for Improvement:**

Principle 7: Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

People bring different talents and learning styles 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 learning so that it is relevant to them. It is also important to provide students with opportunities to learn in ways that may be less comfortable, to enhance their learning skills.

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 most 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

Resources:
Optimizing High-Quality Digital Learning Experiences: A Playbook for Faculty
https://tinyurl.com/facplaybook
Creating Accessible Content - http://SUNY Niagara elearning.com/accessibility/
Accessibility Services at SUNY Niagara-https://sunyniagara.edu/access/

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 _____