

# Course Modification Planning Guide

The overall structure and design of an online course can influence student participation, satisfaction, and learning. To help instructors reflect on their online course proposals, this document was adapted from online course rubrics, evaluation tools, and research (see references/resources list at end of document). Each section prompts instructors to provide specific examples that demonstrate intentional planning and considerations for the proposed online course. It is highly recommended for the faculty to meet with [staff in the Teaching Commons](#) prior to submitting this proposal. A 2-year curriculum plan (4-year preferred) must be included in the proposal as per the [Procedures and Policies for Approval of New and Revised Undergraduate Courses](#).

## Section 1: Design & Planning

**This section addresses course structure, content organization, navigation, learning outcomes, and expectations.**

*Please provide specific examples of...*

- The pedagogical advantages of the proposed modality (percentage of synchronous and/or asynchronous; in-person).
- The [alignment](#) across learning outcomes, [assessment](#), and learning experiences.
- The plan to communicate the purpose, structure, and expectations of the course (e.g., response times, weekend expectations, online and in-class discussions, emails, etc.).
- The [management of cognitive load](#) through a student-friendly organization and navigation within CatCourses (e.g., learning units or modules are consistently structured and sequenced).

## Section 2: Content Presentation and Technology

**This section addresses materials, modalities, and UC Merced-supported instructional tools.**

*Please provide specific examples of...*

- The modalities, tools, and resources for content presentation throughout the semester (live/synchronous or pre-recorded/asynchronous lectures, video/audio, readings, Teaching Commons recording studios, Kaltura, CatCourses, etc.).
- The instructions to complete activities, assessments, how to use appropriate technologies, and expectations for required hardware and software.
- The distinction between required and optional materials/assignments.
- The information that points students towards [institutional services](#) (e.g., counseling and psychological services, library, tutoring centers, etc.).

## Section 3: Community and Engagement

**This section addresses elements pertaining to establishing a community for learning, including active learning, agreements for communications, and engagement with the content.**

*Please provide specific examples of...*

- Learning activities that support opportunities for varied formal interactions:
  - 1) student-to-faculty (e.g., office hours, email, temperature checks and instructor-initiated feedback)
  - 2) student-to-student (e.g., peer review, peer instructions, small group projects, discussion forums)

- Multiple ways for students to individually engage in the course (e.g., chat vs. discussion, etc.) and demonstrate understandings (e.g., podcast vs. paper, etc.).
- The plan to communicate [professional standards of behavior and communication](#) and establish instructor presence ([Garrison et al. 2007](#)) in the course.

#### Section 4: Assessment and Evaluation

**This section addresses monitoring student progress, intervention strategies, course improvement data, and evaluating the effectiveness of course modality.**

*Please provide specific examples of...*

- The grading policies and how student engagement is evaluated in the proposed modality
- [Formative and summative](#) assessments and how their weights are balanced in the grading scheme across the semester.
- The instructor's plan to provide frequent and timely student feedback, as well as identifying intervention strategies for students
- The instructor's plan to communicate what prior knowledge and preparation is necessary for success in the course and how to address insufficiencies or inappropriate prior knowledge ([Ambrose et al. 2010](#)).
- The instructor's plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the modality and for continued course improvement (e.g., DWF rates, early-to-mid semester student survey, end of the semester course evaluation, etc.).
- The instructor's plan to ensure academic integrity and minimize cheating in the course (e.g., stated academic integrity policy in the syllabus, sign a contract agreeing to maintain academic integrity, etc.).

#### Section 5: Accessibility & Inclusion

**This section addresses elements pertaining to equal opportunity for all, diversity, equity and inclusion, accommodations, and assisted technologies (see [Section 504](#) and [Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#)).**

*Please provide specific examples of...*

- The course supports [diversity, equity and inclusion](#) (e.g., fosters respect, sense of value and belonging, personal connections, identity development).
- The communication plan for explaining how students obtain an accommodation (see UC Merced's Student Accessibility [Accommodation Request](#) form).
- How the instructor proactively provides equivalent alternatives to auditory/visual content, readability, and minimizes visual distractions ([transcription, captioning](#), alternative text, color contrast, font size, etc.).
- The course design is formatted to accommodate the use of assistive technologies (screen reader and keyboard-only navigation).
- The instructor's plan to ensure compliance with FERPA (e.g., privacy of students: no student faces in video lectures, etc.)

## References and Resources

1. Ambrose, S. A., Bridges, M. W., DiPietro, M., Lovett, M. C., & Norman, M. K. (2010). How learning works: Seven research-based principles for smart teaching. John Wiley & Sons. [PDF](#)
2. Bowen, J. A. (2017). Teaching Naked: How Moving Technology Out of Your College Classroom Will Improve Student Learning. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.
3. Brame, C. J. (2016). Effective educational videos: Principles and guidelines for maximizing student learning from video content. *CBE Life Sci Educ.*, December 1, 2016 ,15:es6 doi:10.1187/cbe.16-03-0125\
4. California Community Colleges [Course Design Rubric](#)
5. Chen, B., Bastedo, K., & Howard, W. (2018). Exploring design elements for online STEM courses: Active learning, engagement & assessment design. *Online Learning*, 22(2), 59- 75. doi:10.24059/olj.v22i2.1369
6. Darby, F. (2019). How to be a Better Online Teacher Guide. The Chronicle of Higher Education [Guide](#)
7. [Electronic Accessibility Standards & Best Practices](#)
8. Lee, W., & Slantcheva-Durst, S. (2018). 2018-2019 Higher Education Literature Review Summary. Retrieved from <https://www.qualitymatters.org/sites/default/files/research-docs-pdfs/2019-Higher-Education-Literature-Review-Summary-Report.pdf>.
9. Pearce, J. (2004). Etiquette online: From nice to necessary. *Communications of the ACM* 47(4):56-61. DOI: 10.1145/975817.975845
10. [2017 Literature Review Summary Report](#) in preparation for the Higher Education Rubric, Sixth Edition
11. Quality Matters Rubrics & Standards. (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.qualitymatters.org/qa-resources/rubric-standards>.

## Supplemental Questions

The following supplemental questions should be completed for courses proposed to be offered in an online or hybrid format. These questions should accompany a course request form. These questions can be used to accompany a new course proposal or as a modification of instructional modality for an existing course.

*Definitions: For purposes of UC Merced instructional delivery, the following definitions of instructional modality will be used. (Note: Course modalities for which there is no change in in-person seat time for students, do not require special approval under this supplemental form.)*

- **Traditional Face-to-Face (100% to 70% of course contact hours are delivered in person):** content is typically delivered orally or in writing, may use web-based technology for class facilitation (e.g. posting syllabi online, uploading assignments, etc.) but online delivery of content is minimal.
- **Hybrid (Fewer than 70%, but more than 0%, of course contact hours are delivered in person):** blends online and face-to-face delivery, has some in-person meetings but a substantial portion of the content is delivered online (e.g. class lecture meets face-to-face whereas discussion groups are online).
- **Hyflex:** all hyflex courses are considered to be online.
- **Online:** 0% of course contact hours are delivered in person.

Course Title and Number:  
School/Department:  
Course Title and Number:

Instructor:  
Instructional Modality  
Requested: Online  
Hybrid  
Hyflex

*Please provide a response to each of the following questions related to the course being proposed. It is highly recommended that you pair this set of questions with the “**Course Modification Planning Guide**” and meet with a staff member in Teaching Commons.*

**Q1. Design & Planning:** How will the overall design of the course support student learning (i.e., alignment of learning outcomes, learning experiences, and assessments; course structure, content organization, navigation, and expectations)?

**Q2. Content Presentation:** What instructional modalities, materials, and UC Merced supported instructional tools will be used to effectively present content across the course? How will the instructor make students aware of the additional institutional student support services?

**Q3. Technology:** What is the essential hardware and software required for students to access the course material? How will this be communicated to potential students?

**Q4. Community and Engagement:** Research shows that a sense of belonging and value in a community is positively associated with student performance, persistence, and motivation. What strategies will be used to establish and maintain a positive learning community, as well as high levels of professional interaction and student engagement?

**Q5. Assessment:** Research has shown that a balance of low-stakes and high-stakes assessment reduces cognitive load and provides multiple student opportunities to engage with the content. Describe the grading policy/scheme. How will the instructor monitor student progress and provide feedback, address the spectrum of student needs, and ensure academic honesty?

**Q6. Evaluation:** What data will be collected and used to evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional modality and improve future course offerings?

**Q7. Accessibility:** How will the course support usability and equal opportunity for all learners (i.e., American Disabilities Act and Universal Design for Learning)?

**Q8. Inclusion:** How does the course design support equity, diversity, and inclusion? How will the privacy of students be ensured (i.e., FERPA guidelines)?

**Q9. 2 – 4 -year Curriculum Plan:** This curriculum plan should include both academic semesters and summer offerings demonstrating that a student cannot obtain an online degree<sup>1</sup> by an accidental combination of different online/hybrid/hyflex offerings. Please consult with your department chair for your department’s curriculum plan and append the document to this supplemental questionnaire form or upload the document separately into Curriculog.

Reviewed and approved by UGC on September 28, 2023.

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<sup>1</sup> Defined as earning 50% or more of the 120 units required for a baccalaureate degree via online, hybrid and/or hyflex courses. See number 9 of UGC’s Policies and Procedures for Approval of New Undergraduate Courses and Undergraduate Course Changes.