

Appendix B

Online Courses Approval Guidelines

The College has already had several experimental online courses launched through the initiative of both the administration and individual faculty members. The E-Team views these initiatives in a very positive light. As we have stated in our review of pedagogy, there are no cut-and-dried answers concerning what is the best pedagogical approach. Therefore, every one of these initiatives is an opportunity to learn more about how online learning tools can be used to provide a quality educational experience. The more faculty who have had involvement with online learning the more informed dialog we can have about how to use new technology.

We recognize the need to maintain the College's standards of quality in teaching and administrative services even when we are developing new programs and modes of educating. To that end, we offer these guideline questions to evaluate new online courses and programs:

1. What is the rationale for using online tools or a distance learning format:
 - Does it allow additional students to have access to the course?
 - Does it remove a bottleneck to degree completion?
 - Does it take advantage of online tools that have different pedagogical advantages than classroom activities?
2. How will students be able to obtain books and materials for the course?
3. Will students know what to do when the class starts?

This may include a face-to-face session to distribute/discuss the syllabus, walk through the course website. Alternatively, students may receive instructions via email or regular mail in advance of the first of class.
4. Does the course (and its printed materials) tell the students where to find help with technical problems?
5. Do students have access to required library resources? Has the library been consulted to make sure they can support remote students?
6. If an existing Augsburg course is being converted to an online format, has the instructor created learning activities that are appropriate for online tools? These activities may be similar to the existing course or they may be very different. Neither case should be a cause for concern. What is critical is that the instructor has purposely developed activities that are suitable for the online environment.
7. Is the course a completely new course topic? The same standard applies here as in a conversion—the learning activities should be appropriate for an online environment.
8. Does the online course design display consistent organization throughout? This is an important instructional design principle—the idea is that students should not be forced to spend time throughout the term trying to figure out a constantly changing course layout.
9. Do the designed online course assignments give students an opportunity to show the same mastery of course topics as can be observed in the classroom?
10. Do the designed online course assessments assure the same standards of academic honesty as the classroom course?

Our guidance here, based on the research literature and experiences of Augsburg faculty, is that for discussions and written assignments instructors are able to develop the same recognition of students' work that they have in the classroom. Thus, they are able to detect plagiarism to the same extent they can in the classroom. Courses that rely on a timed exam or multiple choice/true-false assessments present a different challenge. Academic honesty is harder to monitor here and the instructor should consider reducing reliance on these assessment methods or organizing the course in a hybrid format that allows for classroom assessment and testing.

11. Does the course have clearly stated expectations and commitments for:
 - How often students should log in to the course?
 - How frequently they are expected to post in discussion areas?
 - How often the instructor will log into the course?
 - How quickly the instructor will respond to questions?
 - How quickly the instructor will return graded work?
12. Does the instructor have a communication plan for giving feedback to students who seem confused or are not participating during the first weeks of the course?
13. Is the instructor using a student course assessment that will return feedback on how the online component of the course can be improved?

It is worth noting that many of these questions are administrative and organizational. These should be asked just as seriously as questions on pedagogy. Teaching and learning cannot happen in a chaotic atmosphere, and good planning can ensure this will not happen.

What are “activities that are suitable for the online environment”? Here are some guidelines:

- An online or hybrid class should be a collaborative environment. That is, there should be an element of peer-teaching in it—students working together to solve problems in a manner that encourages them to learn from each other.

Online learning certainly did not invent this paradigm that is at the core of teaching reform in higher education, but there is a special reason that it needs to be applied here. This has to do with the added workload associated with communicating through the keyboard. If an instructor has to do all the explaining in an online classroom, the amount of time required will become unmanageable. A collaborative activity allows the instructor to spend more time observing the students using concepts and skills in the course, and to correct the group when they wander down the wrong path.
- In a similar spirit, the online environment should not become a self-study course, unless that is specifically desired. Creating an online course by posting lecture materials, reading assignments, and study questions and letting the students work through these in isolation casts learning as a solitary pursuit. Unless this is appropriate to the course, it should be avoided. There are few topics where an elevated dialog cannot improve learning, and this should be a goal in all Augsburg courses.
- Activities should be organized to mesh well with the natural cycles of online communication. How often will students log in? How much will they be able to say in that time? How many back and forth responses will be required to advance discourse on a particular question? Answering these questions will begin to give the instructor a sense of how activities should be organized. It may take more than a week to have an in-depth discussion on a topic. If so, then the instructor would need to be more selective of the

numbers of questions asked, and formulate questions that allow students to explore a broader range of course material. Stated another way, many instructors will report back that they do receive more in-depth responses from some students online than they do in class. If you could only ask one question that drew out many topical themes from a course, what would it be?

- Finally, activities should be well-planned. Many faculty have an intentional style of leaving assignment planning till before class in order to take advantage of shifting topical interests in the class or to force students to develop more sophistication in asking their own questions. The back-and-forth dialog of the classroom allows for this, the online environment does not. Activities should be well planned-out and well written-out—think of how you would write instructions to a group of people telling them how to self-organize to accomplish a task. A more unstructured, reactive approach to formulating assignments may be possible in the online environment with, paradoxically, more planning. This will be required to ensure smooth communications while students work to plan activities themselves.