Rubric Worksheet for Online Instruction

The goal of the UM Dearborn Rubric for Online Instruction is to assist faculty in online course development, mentoring, and self-assessment. The rubric is based on universal best practices that apply equally to on-line, hybrid, and face-to-face courses. Faculty are encouraged to embrace these standards for all courses, regardless of delivery method. Underlying the rubric descriptions is the assumption that all courses at UM Dearborn — whether delivered face-to-face or online — should be equivalent in rigor, objectives, and outcomes.

How to use this rubric

This rubric can be useful as an evaluation tool for an established course or as a design tool for a new course. Look through each of the categories and criteria and use the 'Faculty Notes' section to reflect on how your course aligns with these criteria and to plan improvements. Items listed under the “Examples” column are not requirements but rather evidence that you might find of meeting that particular criteria.

Starting Check-List:

Does your Canvas course have the essential building blocks?
(Most of these are included in the Syllabus Template, be sure and start with the most recent edition)

- Required elements (syllabus, assignments with due dates, and grades)

- Title of course, modality and meeting time if appropriate
- Contact information for the instructor, department, and program
- Learning outcomes of the course
- Access to course content (textbook, readings, lectures, etc.)
- Grade distribution
- Anticipated schedule and assignments
- Required university policies

A. Structuring the Course Environment

	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Exemplary	Examples	*Faculty Notes*
1. Course Syllabus	The course syllabus is missing or unclear, failing to communicate expectations, requirements, and instructor contact details	Course syllabus is easy to locate and includes the following: course description, expectations, instructor contact information, objectives and outcomes, evaluation methods, minimum passing scores and exam security methods.	The syllabus extends beyond effective by offering strategies for success in the course, such as study tips or learning resources, and integrating links to institutional supports like tutoring or library services. It provides a detailed weekly schedule with tasks and deadlines, helping students manage their time effectively.	Objectives and assignments are aligned clearly; a comprehensive timeline for student participation is provided; all course schedules and key dates are consolidated into one easily accessible location.	
2. Course Objectives	Course objectives/expected outcomes are not clearly defined and measurable; and are not aligned with activities and assessments.	Course objectives/expected outcomes are appropriately defined and measurable; but may not be aligned with activities and assessments.	Course objectives/expected outcomes are clearly defined and measurable; and are well-aligned with activities and assessments.	Objective/activity/assessment clearly articulated in the course syllabus/module intro pages/activity and assessment instruction pages.	
3. Articulating student expectations	Course does not state expectations for students' interaction with the course.	Course adequately states expectations for students' interaction with the course.	Course clearly states expectations for students' interaction with the course.	Student orientation including digital citizenship, netiquette, grade weighting, navigation of LMS, and timing and frequency of contributions, guidelines for using AI tools, and critical evaluation of AI-generated information..	

4. Course content	Missing critical information about how to obtain course readings such as full title, edition, author, or publisher.	Course materials are listed clearly in the syllabus as well as in ways that help students see the course structure (for example, in weekly pages or modules)	All materials are available from the first day, context for why some readings were chosen over others is provided, and content is selected with an eye towards representing a wide range of identities and experiences relevant to the course and to students.	Links to course files learning objects/external resources (Open/library materials); glossary of terms.	
5. Canvas/ Course Organization	The navigation structure in Canvas is confusing, incomplete, or illogical. Menu items, modules, and/or pages are poorly named or link to empty areas. A lack of overviews/agendas.	The Canvas site has a logical structure using an organizational strategy like modules or linking pages together. Basic overviews/agendas at the course and module levels help students contextualize content and tasks. Navigation is generally straightforward.	The Canvas site is exceptionally well-organized, making navigation intuitive. A clear, logical structure is supported by comprehensive overviews. Unused menu items are hidden or removed. The organization of the course is explained.	One of the navigation techniques in Canvas are used (usually either modules or pages). A course tour video explains the layout; Content is organized in a logical sequence (e.g., by week or theme).	
6. Canvas/ Course Consistency	Course suffers from visual and functional inconsistency. An icon or emoji means one thing in one part of the course but something different in another. Due dates are unclear.	The course maintains visual and functional consistency. There are simple recognizable visuals. Dates are communicated using the same approach every week (ie. using due date settings vs. writing the due date on the page).	The course seamlessly integrates a coherent aesthetic design. Exemplary status for Canvas/course consistency may be subjective as it involves aesthetic choices and disciplinary differences.	Key elements include consistent font sizes and styles, a uniform color scheme and iconography, clear due dates and student todo items.	

B. Engaging Through Instructional Strategies

	Unsatisfactory	**Satisfactory**	**Exemplary**	**Examples**	***Faculty Notes***
1. Multi-Modal & Active Learning Engagement	The course relies on passive content delivery, long lectures and extensive reading, with minimal active participation. There is little instructional design planning for diverse learning preferences or consistent adherence to accessibility standards for multi modal materials.	The course provides some multi modal activities (visual, textual, kinesthetic, auditory) that encourage student engagement. There is an effort to integrate varied instructional strategies that prompt students to	The course uses diverse, accessible, and active learning methods including visual, textual, kinesthetic, and auditory approaches to engage students. Instructors support learning through tools like audio and video mini lectures, fostering	Inclusion of video lectures, games, audio podcasts etc. as course content. All multimodal content meets accessibility standards	

		do more than just listen or read.	participation, reflection, and ongoing interaction.		
2. Instructor Presence and Communication	Instructor provides limited communication and feedback, resulting in minimal presence and support for students.	Instructor communicates regularly, responds to students, and provides timely, comprehensive feedback.	Instructor clearly communicates availability, builds personal connections, leads dynamic discussions, and offers individualized support and feedback.	Clear communication on instructor availability and response time; personalized feedback on assignments; announcements for course updates, encouragement, and clarification; instructor self-introduction.	
3. Collaborative Learning and Community	Course offers minimal opportunities for student-to-student interaction or constructive collaboration, potentially leading to student isolation.	Course offers adequate opportunities for student-to-student interaction and collaboration, though these might not consistently foster deep engagement or a strong sense of community	Course design provides ample and varied opportunities for students to interact, collaborate constructively, and build a vibrant learning community that enhances shared understanding and peer support through active participation.	Structured discussion forums with clear expectations for peer interaction; collaborative group projects or activities; peer review assignments; student-led discussions or presentations; ice-breaker activities or introductions.	
4. Authentic & Applied Learning	Course activities are primarily theoretical and offer limited connection to real-world applications of the discipline. Students are rarely required to actively apply knowledge.	Course provides some learning activities that attempt to emulate real-world applications, though their integration or impact on practical skill development and active problem-solving may be inconsistent.	The course provides diverse, real-world activities that build practical skills and deeper understanding. These experiences require students to apply, analyze, and evaluate information in authentic contexts.	Case studies and scenario-based problem-solving; simulations or virtual labs; data analysis using real-world datasets; activities involving role-playing professional situations.	

C. Integrating Technology in Teaching

	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Exemplary	Examples	*Faculty Notes*

1. Canvas Use	The instructor is not using Canvas. The Canvas site is unorganized. The instructor does not keep the Canvas site current.	Course materials including the syllabus are available in Canvas. Course gradebook is set up to reflect the course's requirements. Course uses some kind of navigation strategy (ie. modules or pages). The Canvas site is kept current and up to date. All accessibility concerns are met.	Canvas site is not just organized and accessible but is visually appealing. There is not too much or too little information. Exemplary status for Canvas Use may be subjective as it involves aesthetic choices and disciplinary differences.	There are modules and pages to guide students. Each assignment has the instructions and the due date. A rubric is used for important assignments. Grades are posted to Canvas. Announcements are sent every week. Peer review is set up for research papers.	
2. Technology Tools	The technology tools incorporated in the course have no clear purpose or relevance to benefit student learning.	The technology tools integrated into the course are aligned to course goals. There is a plan for using technology tools.	The technology tools are clearly aligned to course goals (and learning objectives) to engage students in the learning process in a variety of ways throughout the course. There are clear instructions about technology requirements.	Video discussion boards, social annotation tools, collaborative communication tools, and other approved software packages	
3. Digital Literacy & Privacy	There is no emphasis on the implications to find, use, evaluate, and create digital information, such as evaluating online sources. There is no transparency with students about privacy issues. There are FERPA issues, such as sending grades by email.	There are course activities to consider implications to find, use, evaluate, and create digital information incorporated in the class. The instructor is transparent about privacy and the course complies with FERPA.	Topics of digital literacy are aligned to course goals, such as understanding digital safety, ethical considerations and evaluating digital information critically. There is transparency with students in the role technology plays. Student privacy is protected and incorporated in the course from the planning.	An assignment, discussion or other is incorporated into the class aligned to the course goals and learning objectives. Grades are posted in Canvas even if the instructor uses a different LMS or a course website to upload the course content.	
4. Teaching and GenAI	There is no mention of AI anywhere in the course	Appropriate AI use is clearly described to the student. The instructor is clear about how they use AI in the creation of the course and in other areas of their work.	Students are asked to engage with the topic of AI in the course or in that academic discipline.	An assignment, discussion, or interactive game is implemented into the course that covers how AI will be used/not used in the course.	

D. Building an Accessible Course

	Unsatisfactory	**Satisfactory**	**Exemplary**	**Examples**	***Faculty Notes***

1. Color Contrast	Text and background color do not meet WCAG AA standards. Low contrast impairs readability. *(Yuja Panorama Accessibility Checker score: below 91%)*	Sufficient contrast between text and background is used in most content. *(Yuja Panorama Accessibility Checker score: 91% or above)*	All text and meaningful non-text content consistently meet or exceed WCAG AA/AAA contrast ratio requirements across the course. *(Yuja Panorama Accessibility Checker score: approaching 100%)*	Black text on a white background or dark blue on light gray, ensures a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1.	
2. Accessible Headings	No or incorrect use of headings. Content structure is unclear or inaccessible to screen readers. *(Yuja Panorama Accessibility Checker score: below 91%)*	Heading tags (e.g., H1, H2, H3, etc.) are used to structure and organize content logically. *(Yuja Panorama Accessibility Checker score: 91% or above)*	Full, consistent use of semantic headings (H1-H6) to create a clear, hierarchical structure. *(Yuja Panorama Accessibility Checker score: approaching 100%)*	Module/document uses H1 for titles, H2 for sections, H3 for sub-sections consistently.	
3. Image Descriptions (Alt Text)	Images lack alternative text, or alt text is generic/vague/redundant (e.g., “image of,” “picture of”). *(Yuja Panorama Accessibility Checker score: below 91%)*	Relevant images include meaningful and accurate alternative text. *(Yuja Panorama Accessibility Checker score: 91% or above)*	All images, including decorative, functional, and complex graphics, have appropriate alt text or are marked as decorative when needed. *(Yuja Panorama Accessibility Checker score: approaching 100%)*	A diagram includes alt text like “A cycle showing the 4 stages of project-based learning.”	
4. Video and Audio Accessibility	No captions or transcripts available for video/audio materials. *(Yuja Panorama Accessibility Checker score: below 91%)*	Captions or transcripts are provided for most video/audio resources. *(Yuja Panorama Accessibility Checker score: 91% or above)*	Accurate, synchronized captions and transcripts are provided for all media, including auto-generated edits. *(Yuja Panorama Accessibility Checker score: approaching 100%)*	A lecture video has auto-generated captions that are mostly accurate and manually edited for critical terms. An audio podcast has a transcript of the spoken words.	
5. Descriptive Links	Links use non-informative text like “click here” or “read more.” *(Yuja Panorama Accessibility Checker score: below 91%)*	Link text is descriptive enough to inform users of the links’ destination or purpose when read out of context. *(Yuja Panorama Accessibility Checker score: 91% or above)*	All links are concise, highly descriptive, and clearly indicate the destination or function of the link. *(Yuja Panorama Accessibility Checker score: approaching 100%)*	Instead of “Click here,” the link reads "Download the Course Syllabus Document (Word)" or "Read more about APA Style."	

E. Assessing Learning and Providing Feedback

	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Exemplary	Examples	*Faculty Notes*
1. Learning Objective and Assessment Alignment	Learning objectives, instructional activities and assessments are not in agreement or have no clear alignment.	Learning objectives, instructional activities and assessments are adequately aligned. Assessments have a clear purpose to make student's learning visible.	Learning objectives, instructional activities and assessments are closely aligned.	Matching verbs from learning objectives with the appropriate assessment activitiesFor example, if the objective is to apply knowledge the assessment should go beyond assessing recall.	
2. Student Performance Feedback	Instructor does not provide prompt feedback after students turn in assessments. Syllabus does not state expectations for feedback from the instructor.	Instructor provides frequent and timely feedback after students turn in assignments. Syllabus adequately states expectations for regular feedback from the instructor.	Instructor provides frequent, timely, actionable and meaningful feedback that allows students to improve their performance. Syllabus clearly states expectations for timely and regular feedback from the instructor.	Instructor provides prompt actionable and meaningful feedback throughout the course in. Providing sample assignments; due dates clearly stated; rubrics for all assignments and grading scale clearly explained .	
3. Multiple and Varied Assessment	Assessment strategies are limited in number and variety throughout the course to measure content knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Course is high-stakes.	Ongoing strategies are used to measure content knowledge, attitudes, and skills.	Multiple assessment types are incorporated throughout the course to measure content knowledge, attitudes, and skills.	NOT assessed solely on one type of assessments: test/quiz/exam; discussions; written assignments; projects; interactive game/simulation; other options available.	
4.Transparency of Grading Scale	Course grading policy is not clearly stated on syllabus, Canvas or any other course information that students can read by themselves without emailing the instructor.	Course grading policy is explained in the syllabus or Canvas.	Course grading policy is transparent and clear for students to understand, and it can be found in Canvas and the syllabus.	Summary table including all assessments, activities and exams in multiple locations with specific information for each one, such as due dates, points and percentages of the final grade.	

5. Student Readiness for Online Learning	Course has limited activities to assess student learning readiness for course content and mode of delivery.	Course has adequate activities to assess student readiness for course content and mode of delivery.	Course has multiple timely and appropriate activities to assess student readiness for course content and mode of delivery.	Prerequisites defined; self-assessment survey; tutorials and supports provided depending on readiness level.	
6. Self-assessment and Peer Feedback	Students' self-assessments or peer feedback opportunities are limited or non existent.	Students' self-assessments and/or peer feedback opportunities exist.	Students' self-assessments and/or peer feedback opportunities exist throughout the course.	Self-tests similar to the final evaluation instrument; rubrics provided; clear guideline for peer reviews.	
7. Academic Integrity and GenAI	Course provides no guidance or inconsistent policies regarding the appropriate use of GenAI tools in assignments and assessments, leading to potential confusion or misuse.	Course provides general statements about academic integrity that may not explicitly address GenAI tools. Some basic guidance on GenAI use may be present, but comprehensive policies are lacking.	Course clearly articulates comprehensive and transparent policies for the ethical and responsible use of GenAI tools in all assignments and assessments. This includes clear guidelines on permitted uses, attribution requirements, and consequences for misuse.	Clear GenAI Use Policies; attribution requirements; GenAI literacy & ethics related assignments	

F. Improving Through Reflection

	Unsatisfactory	**Satisfactory**	**Exemplary**	**Examples**	***Faculty Notes***
1. Self reflection	No evidence of using past teaching experience to shape current	Identifies one to two assignments or instructional strategies that could be improved.	Systematic collection of reflections on course before, during, and after the semester, with a plan to revise as needed.	Using this rubric; writing weekly teaching reflections; watching recording of lecture	

2. Student feedback	Instructor offers limited opportunities for students to give feedback on their experience of the course.	Instructor offers adequate opportunities for students to give feedback on course.	Instructor offers multiple opportunities for students to give feedback on course.	Mid-term/final student surveys; focus group interviews	
3. Peer feedback	No interactions with peers about teaching during the semester	Participates in minimum required peer engagement about teaching for renewal and T&P purposes	Asks for additional feedback from peers before, during, and after semester.	Discussing this rubric with colleagues, peer faculty observations	

Contact the Hub for Teaching & Learning Resources!

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