

Welcome to the Distance Education Course Design Rubric

The Center for Distance Education (CDE) is part of the College of Rural Alaska in the University of Alaska Fairbanks. More than 16,000 student credit hours are delivered from CDE each year to students in 50 states and 22 countries. Over the past 40 years most of the distance education in Alaska has concentrated around correspondence and independent student learning.

The advent of the Internet affords many improvements in course delivery modalities, but it also creates confusion around determinations of quality. What are the elements of which features lead to good learning outcomes? Course designers now routinely work with content expert faculty to intentionally design a wide variety of communication features into distance courses. However, these multiple modality delivery shells are not free. CDE staff have to determine which features make sense to include in which circumstances. We need a design rubric.

This Distance Education Course Design Rubric is aimed at the new affordances of electronic communication, but it does not presuppose any specific technology. Any good course design relies on intentional use of discourse features in support of specific student audiences with specific course content. Obviously the instantiation of the discourse feature varies by technology. Web based opportunities reveal intentional design opportunities like never before. We now have more choices and we know we can design purposefully. Yet the basis of the choices remains grounded in the same learning theory.

This course design rubric is meant to be an evaluation device to guide course renewal as well as original course planning. Each row has four columns. The first column states the **Feature** under investigation and its underlying dimension.

The second column describes the look of a course with an **Advanced** application of the feature. Only a few of the CDE courses will fall completely in the Advanced column.

The third column describes the look of a course with **Proficient** application of the row feature. All CDE courses offered to students will attain Proficient status in 95% of the features.

The fourth column describes the look of a **Developing** course either on the way up the development process or about to be dropped from the catalog. These courses will not be open to student enrollment.

What makes a course more advanced?

All the Features share a similar philosophic continuum from Developing to Advanced. In the developing column features may be completely absent, not addressed, or not mentioned in the course syllabus. In the Proficient column the feature is something done to the student, described to the student, in a single mode, or derived from stock resources. In the Advanced column, the feature is done with the student, explained to the student, repeated in multiple modes, or customized to the specific student in the class.

What else will be added to the Course Development Rubric?

CDE is adding two additional features to the current rubric table. First, a glossary of terms is in process of being linked to the lesser known terms in the table. Second, relevant research study results, both quantitative and qualitative, are being compiled into an annotated bibliography with the relevant findings linked directly to the rubric row features.

Our plans include linking outcomes of the evaluation rubric through a database to compare course completion statistics and student evaluations of instruction to the results of the rubric findings. We want to know if the discourse design features described in the rubric actually make a difference in student success.

This rubric has been the a collaborative effort of the Center for Distance Education staff – Carol Gering, Chris Lott, Susan Warner, Heidi Olson, and Curt Madison. In addition, John Monahan, Mark Standley, and Mary Wegner provided much of the original material.

Please make use of this rubric in any way that aides in the elevation of distance education courses. Any use or reproduction of this rubric must contain acknowledgement to the Center for Distance Education, University of Alaska

Curt Madison, PhD
Director
Center for Distance Education
College of Rural Alaska
University of Alaska Fairbanks