

# **Guidelines on Academic Freedom in Online Teaching**

*These guidelines were created by the Online Learning Advisory Council (OLAC) and will be evaluated regularly and modified as needed. [Last update: March 2023]*

## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of the guidelines on Academic Freedom in Online Teaching are to ensure that Hudson County Community College faculty have independence in their teaching methods in online asynchronous courses, as they currently have when teaching in other modalities. We believe that empowering HCCC instructors to take creative liberties within their online courses will lead to a more personalized learning experience for our students, current and relevant content and instruction, and improved student success and engagement over time.

The guidelines allow for generous instructor flexibility when it comes to selecting materials, instructional activities, and student assessment in online courses, as long as three criteria remain unchanged:

- I. The course and unit learning outcomes are being met.
- II. The number of credit hours remains unchanged.
- III. The overall course grading structure remains intact.

Furthermore, the guidelines consider accreditation standards and national best practices in online course quality, ensuring consistency across course design to ensure a student-centered learning experience. With this in mind, the guidelines note elements of instructional design, user experience, and accessibility that cannot be changed by an instructor.

### **Of important note**

- Instructors are fully responsible for any updates they make to their courses.
- Instructors teaching a particular online course for the first time should teach the course in full before making any major changes to that course.
- Any major changes to the course must be made in the course syllabus, as is standard practice across instructional modalities. Syllabus updates should be forwarded to the Program Coordinator 10 days prior to the course start date, for information purposes.

## 2. Updating Individual Online Course Sections in Canvas

### 2.1 - Content

- **Course and unit learning outcomes** – Unit topics and learning outcomes as shown in the course syllabus cannot be changed.
- **Textbook** – Cannot be changed without the course going through a revision
- **Primary course content** – Faculty can substitute content (readings, videos, slides, etc.) if it still meets learning outcomes. Content should not be removed without a replacement that meets the same learning outcomes and results in the same time requirements for students.
- **Adding new content** – Faculty are welcome to add supplementary content if it is related to the learning outcomes. This is a great way to engage in adaptive/responsive teaching, modifying your instruction to meet your students' learning needs in real-time.
- **Lectures** – Faculty can substitute their own lectures if the new content still meets learning outcomes. There is value in doing this to personalize your course.
- **Synchronous activities** – Synchronous meetings and guest presenters are allowed. However, they must be optional, and must be recorded and posted in the course. Students cannot be required to attend synchronous sessions.

### 2.2 - Assessments

Instructors must review and adhere to the integrity and intent of the “Evaluation Criteria and Methods” section of the approved Division Course Outline.

- **Assignments** – Credit hours need to be preserved. Learning outcomes need to be met. Assessments may be modified or substituted (not removed) at the discretion of the instructor. Examples of this include substituting a multimedia presentation for a written paper, requiring group work, modification of writing prompts, etc.
- **Quizzes** – Quiz banks may be changed if learning outcomes are still met. Quizzes can be substituted with alternate assessment formats.
- **Discussion boards** – Discussion prompts can be modified, but not removed. Updating your discussion prompts is an excellent way to keep your course relevant by incorporating current news. Discussions are also a great way to personalize your instruction and try new techniques to engage your students asynchronously.
- **Rubrics** – Rubrics can be modified if total points remain the same.

### 2.3 - Instructional activities

- **Integrated technologies** – Technologies are integrated into a course to facilitate learning and interaction, and should remain intact in most cases (ex: Flipgrid, Nearpod, publisher integrations, simulations, etc.).

- If you wish to remove technology integration from your course, please discuss with the Center for Online Learning before doing so.
- **New technology** – Faculty can explore new technologies in their online courses, if comprehensive instructions are provided to the students.
  - Note: COL/ITS cannot support technology that is not managed internally.
  - If faculty choose to integrate third-party technologies on their own, they will support any issues that arise or offer alternate accommodations.
  - If students must create an account or share personally identifiable information, then terms and conditions must be reviewed by ITS (a one-month lead time will be necessary). In some cases, security or privacy statements will need to be included.
- **Collaborative activities** – Group work, peer review, social annotation, and other collaborative activities are encouraged.
- **Synchronous activities** – Can be included. Must be optional. Must be recorded.

## 2.4 - Course Design

- **Course navigation menu** – Nothing should be removed or reordered.
- **Homepage** – The homepage can be updated, and information can be added. No information should be removed. The homepage should not be substituted for the syllabus page or any other page.
- **Modules** – Structure and order should not be changed. Links from each module can be added or modified, if doing so falls within the guidelines outlined above.
- **Announcements** – Should be added and updated regularly by the instructor. We encourage weekly announcements at a minimum. This is an excellent way to engage with students in your online course, and to add your personal touch, encouraging and supporting your unique group of students as you would in a traditional classroom.

## 3. Updating the Course Master Shell in Canvas

When an instructor makes changes in a course section that leads to improved student learning or engagement, the instructor may make a recommendation for a permanent change in the course master shell, so that their success can be everyone's success. Once a change is made in a course's master shell, the change will be visible in all future sections of that course.

- Proposed changes should be discussed with faculty teaching the course, and requests will be made with the Program Coordinator's involvement.
- Requests for updates should be made in writing to the Center for Online Learning.
- When possible, the Center for Online Learning will implement smaller update requests prior to loading course content in the following semester.
- Larger update requests (minor/moderate/major revisions) will be escalated to the division's Dean, who will work with the COL Executive Director to prioritize the revision in relation to other course development and revision work.