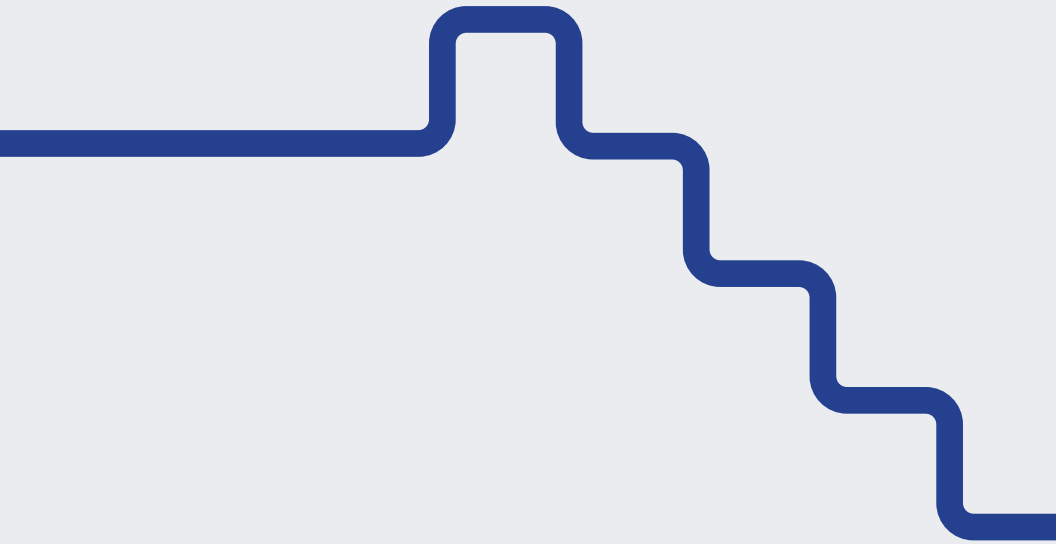
SHSU Online

*Guidelines for Creating a*

# *Blended Course*



**Sam Houston State University**

online.shsu.edu | **936.294.2780** | online@shsu.edu

This document is a guide to blended course development. Even though blended courses share much of the same pedagogical best practices as fully online courses, their main distinction is that the technological component in blended courses can be adapted as a complement to face-to-face instruction, versus a complete replacement of it.

If you are developing a blended course, please contact the Instructional Designer appointed to work in your College/Department.

# Contents


## 1. Course Organization: Creating a Framework for Development 1

Syllabus & Course Schedule 2
Course Description 4
Navigation 6
Navigation-Cont.—Unit-to-Unit 8
Navigation-Cont.—Within the Units 10
Elements of Design 12

## 2. Student Learning Objectives: Design with the End in Mind 15

Student Learning Objectives (SLO's) 16

## 3. Multimedia 19

Multimedia Elements 20

## 4. Collaboration & Communication 23

Collaboration & Communication 24

## 5. Assignments & Assessments 27

Assessment Measures 28
Academic Integrity 30

# 1. Course Organization:

## *Creating a Framework for Development*

# Syllabus & Course Schedule

The syllabus should clearly indicate that a course uses a blended delivery method and explain what is required of students for that method. Before creating the syllabus, consider what "hybrid" means for this course:

- Does the course have some online meetings and some face-to-face meetings? If so, are those on a regular schedule each week, or is the course heavily weighted one way or the other?
- Are all course meetings in person with some prep work outside of class through lecture videos and other content? (This is more of the traditional blended format before the shift to online education)

Once it is clear what the instructor envisions their blended course to be, you can decide what needs to be included in the syllabus and schedule. Consider including the following:

- If synchronous online meetings are required, which tool(s) will be used for those meetings?
- What is the “attendance policy” for assigned online activities?
- Information on whether assignments are submitted online or in-person
- Information on whether students will take tests online or in-person
- Communication preferences
- Office hours – online or face-to-face?

The course schedule needs to be specific about meeting dates and whether they are online or face-to-face. This is especially important if the meetings are not on a regular week-to-week basis so that students can plan ahead to be available when required.

## *Notes*

# Course Description

In addition to developing a more expansive description of the course beyond what is traditionally included in the course catalog, the course description needs to include clear information about whether the course is entirely online or whether students will be required to attend face-to-face sessions as well. Also, consider including a description or definition of what "blended" means for your course.

For Example: "*This course follows a blended format in which most of the lectures are covered outside of class time. Class time is used to review the more complex concepts and solve homework exercises and case studies.*"

Mention of Start Here (including first-day info), Welcome/Course Introduction video.

# Notes

# Navigation



Online courses should be organized in such a way that students can easily find what they need. Structuring your course content into manageable chunks and focusing on the key points will help students ingest information more easily.

- Begin by planning outside of Blackboard. Create a course outline dividing content into units by topic, project, or weeks.
- Minimize clicking and scrolling required to access course content. If there are more than eight items on a page, or some of the course items are lengthy and require quite a bit of scrolling, considering creating a folder to house some of the items.
- Place content at the point of need by linking or attaching a handout to an assignment, rather than referring students to another folder in the course.

# Notes

# Navigation-Cont.
## *Unit-to-Unit*

Distinct units/modules should be easy to identify and should be organized logically. Depending on the structure of your blended course, the unit organization should be set up so that students can easily discern between online and face-to-face units and content. Online and face-to-face components should complement and build from each other; they should not feel disjointed. The true benefit of blended learning is in integrating face-to-face verbal and online text-based exchanges and matching each to appropriate learning tasks.

# Notes

# Navigation-Cont. *Within the Units*

In the lesson plan for each unit, be sure to indicate whether an item is intended to be addressed online or face-to-face. Consider having a unit/week task schedule in addition to your overall course schedule. For example, if you list a discussion that will take place face-to-face, be clear about that so the students do not try to find a discussion link online.  For example (this outline can look different depending on your hybrid model):

### *Before each in-class meeting, you are expected to:*

- Complete your readings
- View the online lectures
- Complete assignment one

### *During class, we will:*

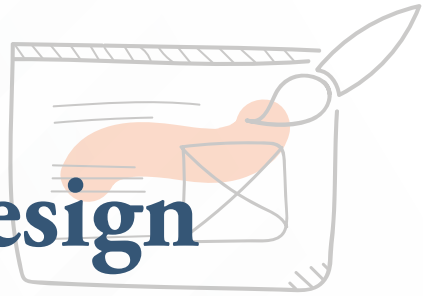
- Discuss the readings
- Complete In-class activity one

### *After class, you are expected to:*

- Complete assignment two

# Notes

# Elements of Design



Universal Design is the process of designing for people with a wide range of abilities. The SHSU Online Rubric is created with Universal Design for Learning principles in mind, but Elements of Design, in particular, focuses on ensuring course content accessible for all students.

### *Links*

- Use descriptive text for links that inform the student of where or what the link leads to. For example, “SHSU Online Course Rubric” rather than “click here” or a long URL.
- Have links open in a new window/tab, so you do not force students to leave the page they are on.

### *Text*

- Most of the text in Blackboard should be the default font and size. Users can increase the font size through their browser settings.
- If you use color, be sure to have sufficient color contrast between font color and background. You can test your color contrast with WebAIMS’s Contrast Checker.
- Do not emphasize text by color alone, as it may be misinterpreted by screen readers or someone who is color-blind. Bold or italicize the text as well.

- Do not underline text for emphasis, as people and screen readers can mistake the text as a link.

- Reserve all caps for acronyms.

- Use the text editor tools when creating ordered and unordered lists (numbered and bulleted lists).

### *Images*

- Provide alternative text for images. If the alt text is lengthy, provide a description of the image next to the image. Imagine you have a blind student using a screen reader. The student would hear "image of" and then the text you include in the description box. What do you need the student to take away from that image? Adding alt text is relatively straightforward, but creating meaningful alt text can be difficult. WebAim has a handy page on writing alt text. This article from Medium recommends using mood or concept when writing alt-text.

- Images should be sized so that they do not overwhelm the screen.

### *Videos*

- Upload videos to your My Media/Kaltura so that SHSU Online can easily apply captions when requested by Services for Students with Disabilities.

- When possible, choose videos that have already been professionally captioned or transcribed.

### *Documents*

- Use Web Aim's guidelines for creating accessible documents. In addition to many of the items listed above, documents should always have nested heading styles (tags in PDFs). Tables should include a repeat row header when appropriate, and generally, formatting should be achieved with Word's tools.

- Always use the Microsoft Office accessibility checker for Word, PowerPoint, and Excel files. If creating a PDF, use the accessibility checker in Microsoft Office before converting your file, and run the accessibility checker in Adobe Acrobat Pro DC.

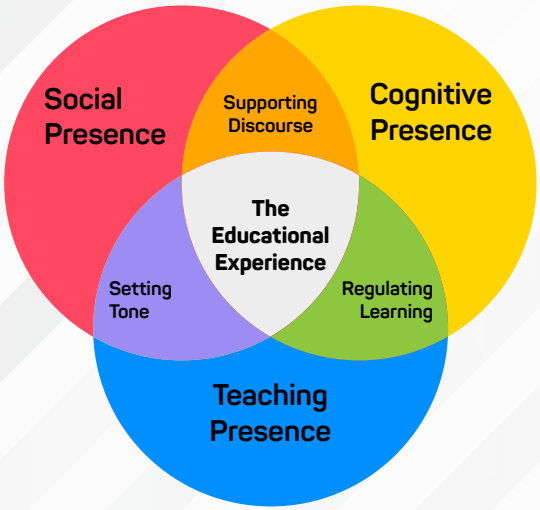
# 2. Student Learning Objectives:

*Design with the End in Mind*

# Student Learning Objectives (SLO's)

A student learning objective (SLO) is a description of what the learners will be able to do when they complete a unit of instruction.

Student learning objectives can be used to increase student engagement with the course content and reduce assessment anxiety.




According to the Community of Inquiry Model for educational experience, SLOs should be employed to ensure that the Regulating Learning area successfully connects Cognitive Presence and Teaching Presence for the students.

### *A. Identify Instructional Goals:*

- Who is the learner?
- In what context will they use the skills?
- What tools will be available?

### *B. Conduct a goal analysis, identify the skills needed to complete the terminal objective.*

- Verbal information
- Intellectual skills
- Psychomotor skills
- Attitudes
- Cognitive strategies

### *C. Use a Learning Taxonomy to analyze the cognitive processes by which users encounter and work with knowledge.*

Level I - Remember - Recalling or recognizing facts and basic concepts

Level II - Understand - Explaining ideas and concepts

Level III - Apply - Using information in a new situation

Level IV - Analyze - Breaking down a topic or idea into its components and identifying relationships

Level V - Evaluate - Examining information and making judgments

Level VI - Create - Using information to create something new

Example: After instruction (condition), business majors (audience) will be able to create (behavior) performance reports (context-skills) using Microsoft Excel (tools).

# 3. *Multimedia*

# Multimedia Elements

## *Guidelines for Creating a Blended Course*

The term “multimedia elements” can be applied to a wide range of audio and image elements, including, but not limited to, video, pictures, simulations, and narrated animations. As the instructor, you should consider pairing your content with multimedia that is engaging and that supports your content. This can either be done using multimedia that is already created, or creating multimedia yourself! Should you wish to create your own multimedia, the following best practices may prove helpful in guiding you through the process.

### *Best Practices for Multimedia*

- Script: Use a storyboard to organize your presentation (sync up visually).
- Time: Keep videos concise and provide cognitive breaks as needed.
- Mood: Be enthusiastic about the material that you are presenting.
- Environment: Optimize light, use images and visuals.
- Tools: Use a headset or a professional microphone.
- Voice: Modulate your voice, but keep a quick pace.
- Use Recommended image sizing and file sizes.
- Uploading Videos:  Uploading videos to Kaltura is recommended.

## *Notes*

# 4. Collaboration & Communication

# Collaboration and Communication

Clear and consistent communication is vital in any course, but is especially crucial in online and blended models. Instructor communication sets the tone for the course, fosters students' motivation, creates expectations, and creates continuity between face-to-face and online elements, promoting engagement. Meaningful student-to-student interaction promotes better learning, better engagement, and an overall more impactful experience for the student.

### *Instructor to Student*

- The instructor should regularly communicate with students via announcements, grade center feedback, streaming media, discussion board responses, and email.
- The flow between face-to-face and online sessions should be seamless and easy to follow.
- Students will likely have clear expectations for grading, office hours, and communication response times, for both regular email and in person. The instructor should also provide scheduled times of availability for office hours.

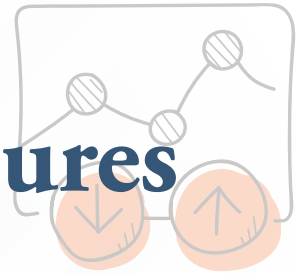
### *Student to Student*

- Students have meaningful opportunities to communicate and interact with peers; the instructor should encourage them to do so both face-to-face and online using tools such as discussion threads, blogs, wikis, or similar technologies.
- Consider flipping your classroom and utilizing face-to-face time for activities and online time for recorded lectures and reflection activities.

## *Notes*

# 5. Assignments & Assessments

# Assessment Measures



In blended learning, the authenticity of assignments should be at the forefront. Allowing for both in-person and online elements, a variety of tools and assessment styles are available and should be considered. Best practices for academic integrity of those assignments will help ensure the student is getting the most out of the assessment, and allow the instructor to best evaluate learning.

### *Assessment Measures*

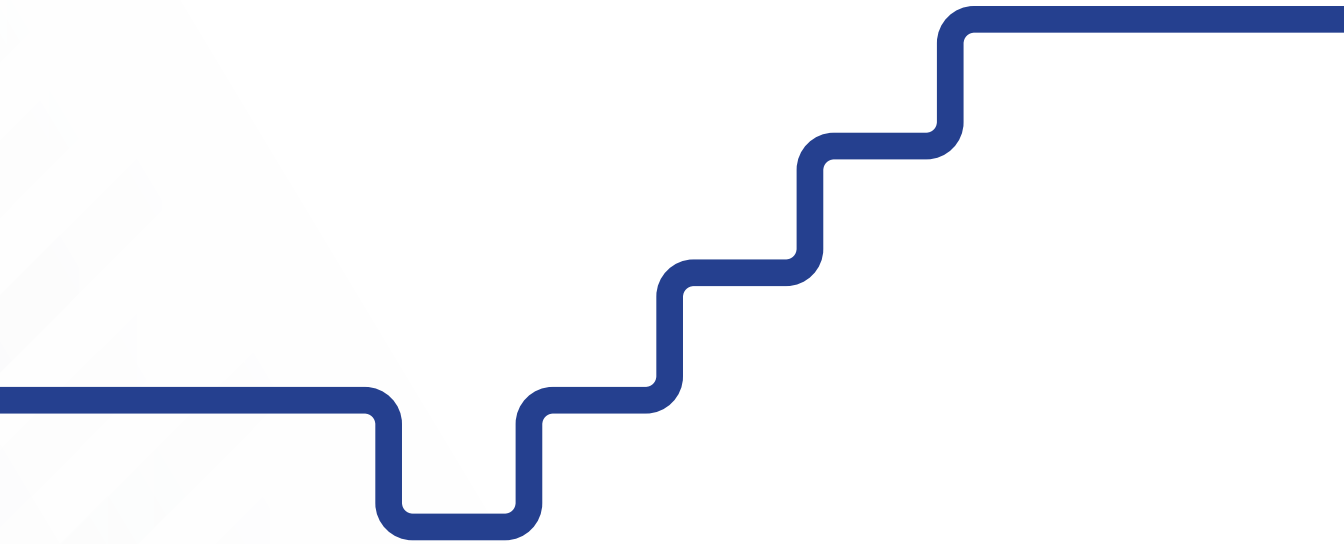
- Instructors may consider authentic assessment, such as  Project-Based Learning (PBL), in hybrid courses to assess student learning and engagement.
- How are the assessments being delivered? What type of assessments will you use? Would project-based learning or a flipped classroom be a good fit for your course?
- When you develop assessments, keep in mind that they should be authentic and reinforce student understanding.
- Learn about authentic assessment
- There are a few approaches that can assist in authentic assessment. One is PBL. Interested in PBL? Here are some links below to help you start the discussion with your instructional designer.
- What is PBL?
- Using PBL in a Classroom

## *Notes*

# Academic Integrity

- The instructor uses combined security measures, including usage-restricted browsers for online versions, exams, and quizzes drawn from large question/data pools that are refreshed on a rotating basis. Online exams and quizzes are secured with video proctoring as appropriate.
- What types of anti-plagiarism/anti-cheating methods are you incorporating in the course? Are assessments more authentic in nature, or are they more uniform and thus easier to plagiarize/copy?
- Not sure about your options? Click the links below to learn about some of the anti-cheating methods offered at Sam Houston State University.
- Turnitin
- Respondus Lockdown Browser/Monitor
- Safe Assign

# Notes



Sam Houston State University

MEMBER THE TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM