

# **Best Practices for Online Course Design**

## **Bristol Community College**

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## BCC Teaching and Learning Models

The college offers a variety of course models designed to accommodate a diverse array of learning styles:

### **Traditional**

Classes that meet face-to-face in a traditional educational setting at one of our campuses.

### **Supplemental**

Classes that meet in a traditional face-to-face format but which utilize online or internet based resources and learning tools.

### **Hybrid**

These courses blend traditional face-to-face with online learning. They meet in a traditional format and simultaneously use the online learning environment for coursework and extended interaction. Because of the hybrid model, students do not physically meet as a class as many times during a semester as a traditional course. Instead, hybrid classes meet virtually throughout the semester using the online classroom.

### **Web**

These courses do not physically meet on campus during the semester. All instruction and interaction occur through the online course environment. This type of course is designed for students who are self-motivated, self-directed and highly computer literate. Students are encouraged to complete the online self-evaluation test prior to enrolling in a 100% online course.

### **Student Option Enrollment**

Students can opt to take the course as a traditional lecture course, 100% online or as a hybrid course (student creates combination of lecture and Web based instruction in consultation with the instructor).

Instructors who teach classes which utilize an online component typically use **eLearningBCC** as a way to manage their course content. Currently, eLearningBCC runs off the **WebCT CE 6** platform and provides instructors with a centralized online location to post syllabi, course notes, PowerPoint presentations and solutions files, conduct quizzes, tests and surveys, host online discussions and provide feedback to students.

While it is exciting to see so many instructors adopting eLearningBCC as a learning tool it is important to remember that the technology in and of itself is not going to automatically make a course “better.”

“...studies on media research have shown that students gain significant learning benefits when learning from audio-visual or computer media, as opposed to conventional instruction; however, the same studies suggest that **the reason for those benefits is not the medium of instruction, but the instructional strategies built into the learning materials.**”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Foundations of Educational Theory for Online Education, p. 1

This document has been designed to provide instructors with ideas, best practices, tips and tricks, pedagogical models and instructional strategies for the successful adoption and integration of eLearningBCC as a teaching tool. Instructors who are teaching hybrid, student option enrollment or web courses should also refer to the following documents for additional information and resources:

- **Sample Online Syllabus**  
Provides a template of recommended information hybrid and online instructors should include in their syllabi.
- **Netiquette Policy**  
BCC's guidelines for appropriate behavior in the online environment.

## What makes a successful online course?

A variety of factors need to be taken into consideration when teaching online:

- **Course Architecture and Navigation**  
Is your course site easy to use? Can students find what they are looking for? Is the content well organized and structured?
- **Online Course Design**  
How information is presented can have a huge impact on the usability and accessibility of the course. Is the choice of colors appropriate? Can students read the text that is presented? Does the course site suffer from information overload? Is the course designed with accessibility and disability issues in mind?
- **Course Content**  
There are many tools available that enable instructors to create engaging and interactive course sites. Instructors can easily add graphics, presentations, audio and video content to their course sites to accommodate diverse learning styles and bring active learning techniques into the online classroom.
- **Building an Online Community**  
A key factor in student success in online courses is the level of student-to-student and student-to-instructor interaction. Instructors need to design a high degree of interactive activities into their courses that provide for ongoing and timely communication and feedback and collaborative and cooperative learning opportunities.

In addition to the information and techniques presented in this document, the following online references are indispensable resources:

[Quality Matters](#) has an excellent interactive rubric that provides instructors with best practices for high-quality online course development. Once you develop your online course test it against the rubric. How does your course rate? You can also ask a colleague to review your course using the rubric – this is great way to get external feedback on your course development.

[The Rubric for Online Instruction](#) is another resource that provides exemplary guidelines for online course and content development.

## Course Architecture and Navigation

When designing your course site it is important to not overwhelm your users with too much information at one time. Think about the way students will navigate through your course. Does it make sense to group certain items together? What items are most important and should be accessible in just a few mouse clicks and what items can be located further down in the site navigation? In what ways can you simplify your navigation structure so that information is easy to find?

### Structuring the Course Home Page

The homepage is the very first page that students see when they access the course site. It serves as the launching point for accessing all of the content in the class. Think about how you want to structure your course content. Do you want to group content by week, topic or type?

*Example 1:*

### Welcome to eLearning 101!

This course site will introduce you to Bristol Community College's eLearning system. You'll learn how to navigate through the site, download course files, post to the discussion board and gain answers to frequently asked questions.

To begin your exploration of eLearning, please click on the "Start Here" button below!



[Start Here!](#)



[Introduction to eLearning](#)



[Learn How To...](#)



[Need Help?](#)

*Example 2:*

### CIS125 Introduction to Animation Spring 2007



#### **Week 1**

Introduction to animation - types, history, process



#### **Week 2**

Animation in theory and practice



#### **Week 3**

Animation concepts, principles and applications



#### **Week 4**

Creating and Animating Characters

Every course will be designed differently – the trick is to figure out what will work best for your class!

## ***Start Here***

Many faculty members like to include a “Start Here” or “Course Overview” or “Read Me First” icon on their homepage (*see Example 1 on the previous page*). This helps students identify what they are supposed to do first upon logging into the course site. This can be a place for you to provide information on your course structure and/or have “getting started” activities to ensure that all enrolled students have access to the course site and to begin building a community of learners in your course.

Getting started activities may include the following:

- Posting introductions to the discussion board
- Going on a scavenger hunt through the course site to locate specific information
- Filling out informational surveys
- Sending emails with attachments
- Uploading sample Assignment files
- Establishing group/class norms

Below is an example of content that could be included in a “Start Here” area. *Note: You are welcome to use any of the text in this document as you see fit!*

*Example:*

Hello everyone and welcome to **CIS112 Programming Logic!**

To get started in this class, please do the following:

1. Read through the **Syllabus** and the **Course Schedule**. If you cannot access these documents your browser may be blocking the files from being downloaded. Please visit the [BCC Wiki](#) to learn how to tell your browser to download the files. This is an important skill that you’ll need for the class so be sure you understand how to access the course files before the first assignment is due!
2. Go to the **Discussion Board** and post to the **Introductions Forum**.
3. Complete the **Informational Survey** located under the **Assessments** button.
4. Write a short paper (2-3 paragraphs) that explains your interest in programming. Address why you are taking this course, what you want to learn and any initial questions or thoughts you have about taking this class online. **Save the paper in .RTF format** (rich text format) file and send it to me via the **Mail** feature as an attachment. Once I receive it I will send you back a response.

Please complete all of the above no later than next **Monday, September 8 at 8am**. If I do not hear from you by that time I will drop you from the class for non-attendance. Make sure you review the attendance policy in the syllabus so you fully understand the course expectations. If you do have any questions you can post them to the **General Course Questions** forum on the Discussion Board.

If you’ve never taken an online course before and have questions you should:

1. Visit the [BCC Wiki](#). There are excellent resources available to help you if you experience technical questions or problems. Information on how to contact the distance learning help desk can also be found here.
2. Attend an **eLearning Orientation Session**. The college does hold “live” orientation sessions at the campus where students can drop in for help. Information on when and where these sessions will be held can be located on the [Wiki](#).

It's a good idea to use the "Create File" option in eLearningBCC or insert this "start here" text as a header on the page rather than uploading a Word document that students will need to click on and download. Because some browsers initially block files from being downloaded students who are not internet savvy may not be able to initially access your welcome note if you upload it as a Word file. This is one of the most frequent problems that students have and can severely impact their ability to get started in a timely fashion on the course assignments.

For help on how to easily create files in eLearningBCC you can visit the BCC wiki yourself [http://dl.bristol.mass.edu/wiki/index.php/Faculty\\_Resources](http://dl.bristol.mass.edu/wiki/index.php/Faculty_Resources) or you can contact the CITE lab and we'll walk you through the process.

### ***Need Help?***

It is highly recommended that you provide a link directly to the **BCC wiki** from your homepage. It will make your life much easier if you give students a quick and easy way to obtain help if they get stuck!

### **Developing a Navigation Structure**

Keep in mind that you do not need to put everything on your home page. eLearningBCC allows you to create folders and subfolders to clearly manage and organize information. For example, in one nicely architected course, students were presented with an Assignments folder on the homepage. When they navigated inside that folder they were presented with two subfolders:



#### **Weekly Assignments**

In this section, you will find your weekly assignments. Think of this section as the classroom. This is where you will attend class weekly. I have posted due dates for each assignment. **ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE BY MIDNIGHT** on the dates listed. **NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED.** It is essential that you do not fall behind on the assignments. Think of completing the assignments as coming to class for the week. Failure to complete an assignment can be related to not coming to class for that week. A grade of AD will be given if you fail to complete work 2 weeks in a row (See course syllabus for more information). There are no specific designated times to be online. I will make every effort to respond to your thoughts & questions within 48 hours of posting. Also, my goal is to have graded assignments back to you by Tuesday of the following week.



#### **Course Assignments**

In addition to weekly assignments, there are also specific course assignments due. Compare this work to the homework that is usually done when taking a class on campus and your weekly assignments are similar to class attendance and participation. Course assignments can also be found in the syllabus under *Course Requirements* and *Course Schedule*.

The instructor clearly articulates what students will find in each of these folders and also defines her expectations. When students click on the folder name they are presented with files dealing specifically with either Weekly or Course Assignments. Depending on the type and number of weekly assignments this instructor could have set up subfolders so that when students clicked on Weekly Assignments they were presented with a folder for each week.

### **The Course Tools Menu**



A large part of successful course architecture and navigation is your course tools menu. The menu appears on the left-hand side of the page and will be visible to students no matter where they navigate to in the course.

The WebCT 6 platform does not give you a lot of flexibility in customizing the menu (in terms of adding custom buttons or text) but it does allow you to select the tools that you want to see. It's important to distill down to only the course tools you need. If you're not using a tool, don't have it visible on the course menu!

Remember that you can adjust which tools display. For more information on how to do this visit the Faculty Resources Page on the [BCC Wiki](#) and check out the **eLearningBCC Quick Start Guide**.

You do have the ability to change the way the course menu looks. But, before you begin changing the colors, be sure to read the next section on color and accessibility!

## Usability Testing

Once you set up your site structure have a colleague navigate through the site. Ask them to locate specific information. Can they find it? If not, your structure may not be as clear as you originally thought. You can also ask for feedback from the students in your course – especially if you are teaching the class for the first time. If you do get feedback that your navigation isn't as easy to use as you had hoped do not reconfigure your course navigation in the middle of the semester. Drastic changes to a course site in the middle of a term will likely cause confusion among your students. Instead, take any suggestions and incorporate them when you teach future sections of the class.

## Online Course Design

### Color

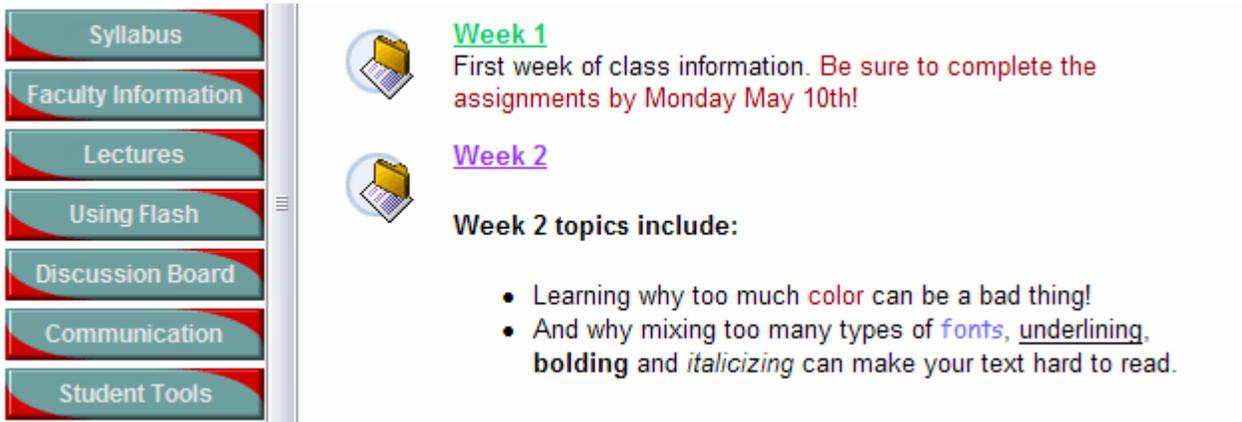
The colors you choose for your course menu and also for text/accent throughout the course site can have a big impact on the accessibility of the class and also how it/you may be perceived. The principles of color theory that are applied to marketing consumer products can also be applied to course design:

- **Green** used for an accounting or finance course may connote money or wealth.
- Natural colors such as **greens** and **browns** used for an earth science class could provide a holistic feeling about the course and its connection with the environment. Conversely, using colors like **yellow**, **red** or **blue** (food dye colors) could imply that the course is “artificial” and disconnected from the natural world.
- **Royal blues** connote continuity, stability, and strength while **dark blues** (in conjunction often with **gray** or **silver**) give feelings of dependability, reliability and authority. Many companies use blue in their corporate logos (Microsoft, IBM, Ford) because of these perceptions. Blue would be a good choice for a business or marketing course because of its prevalence in the corporate world.
- Pale colors and lighter shades are often used in medical offices to provide a “calming” feeling. If you’re teaching a subject that is typically associated with a high level of student learning anxiety (such as math) you may want to stick with a light color scheme.
- Bright colors like **yellow**, **red** and **orange** connote energy, happiness, warmth, excitement and openness. These are colors that are used for fast food restaurants and for many consumer products. (Go into the detergent aisle at the grocery store and see how many bottles are red). Children are drawn to bright colors and so these may be good choices for early childhood, K-8 education classes, animation courses, or any class where you want students to be excited about the content. Again, since these colors are considered energetic they may not be the best choices for courses where there is a high degree of anxiety or distress about the course content.

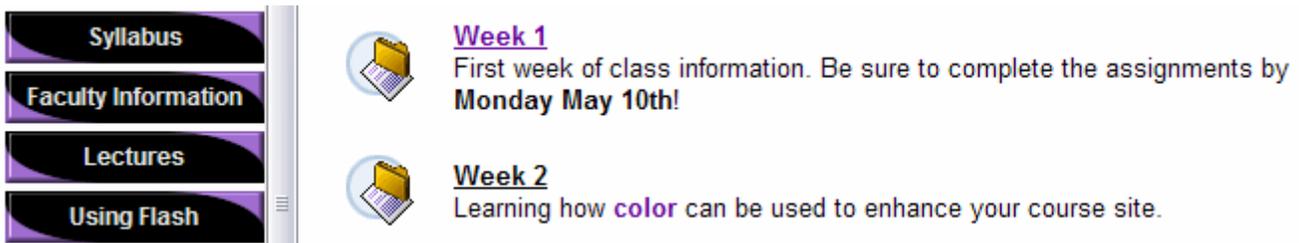
Always keep in mind that:

- Combinations of red and green should be avoided due to issues of color-blindness.
- Use **high contrast colors** when selecting background and foreground colors – this includes colors for your course tools menu.

**Be mindful of your color choices – do not go overboard!** Too many colors can be distracting and overwhelm the user!



Instead, try to stick with only one or two complementary colors:



## Text

- As with color, try not to go overboard with your use of different fonts, sizes, colors and styles. Keep it simple and readable!
- Sans-serif fonts like **Arial** and **Verdana** are typically used for displaying text on the web as it is easier for users to read sans-serif fonts on their monitor.
- Serif fonts like Times New Roman are generally used for printed materials. Documents created in word processing software like Microsoft Word are almost always created using a serif font (Times is the default for the application).
- **Always check your spelling!!!** eLearningBCC has a built-in spell checker and/or you can type text in a word processing program, spell check it there and then cut and paste into your online course.

Usability studies have shown that internet users scan for information – rather than reading each word individually. Because of this trend it is important that you write for scannability<sup>2</sup>:

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9703b.html>

- Use the "inverse pyramid" principle when writing text for the web. Start with a short conclusion so that users can get the gist of the text even if they don't read all of it.

“Journalists have long adhered to the inverse approach: start the article by telling the reader the conclusion ("After long debate, the Assembly voted to increase state taxes by 10 percent"), follow by the most important supporting information, and end by giving the background. This style is known as the inverted pyramid for the simple reason that it turns the traditional pyramid style around. Inverted-pyramid writing is useful for newspapers because readers can stop at any time and will still get the most important parts of the article”<sup>3</sup>

- Be generous with your use of white space. Extra space between and around lines and content can make text much more readable online.
- Use bulleted and numbered lists to break up large blocks of text.
- Use headings and subheadings to structure page content. If you are creating text in Microsoft Word be sure to use Styles to define heading types. Headings and subheadings make it visually easier for students to locate important information on the page. They also make pages accessible for disabled users who utilize screen readers.
- Use **text formatting** or the addition of **color** to make *important words* and phrases stand out to the reader.
  - However, do not underline text unless it is a clickable link!
  - And, avoid using the same color **blue** as used for hyperlinks. This can also cause confusion among users
- Left align large blocks of text. Centered text (apart from short headings) is much more difficult to scan/read than left-aligned text.
- Use humor with caution!

“Because users scan the text, they may not realize when you are being humorous or sarcastic, and they may take statements at face value.”<sup>4</sup>

- Avoid the use of all caps!

“USERS READ TEXT LIKE THIS PARAGRAPH ABOUT 10 PERCENT SLOWER THAN THEY READ IN MIXED CASES, BECAUSE IT IS HARDER FOR THE EYE TO RECOGNIZE THE SHAPE OF WORDS AND CHARACTERS IN THE MORE UNIFORM AND BLOCKY APPEARANCE CAUSED BY UPPERCASE TEXT.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9606.html>

<sup>4</sup> Nielsen, p. 111

<sup>5</sup> Nielsen, p. 126

## Example of Using Text Formatting

This may not be "pretty" but this is readable. And that's the goal! I am using the sans-serif font **Arial**.

Notice that I'm using lots of white space and am using styles to highlight certain words and phrases that I deem important.

### Reminder!

The following are important things to keep in mind when writing for the web:

- Left align large blocks of text
- Avoid the use of all caps
- Write for "Scannability"
- Always check your spelling!

## Another Example Where No Text Formatting is Used

This time I'm going to use Times New Roman and I'm not going to worry about white space or styles.

I'm just going to write one long paragraph and I may not even check my spelling! Ha ha!

You'll notice that the longer this gets, the harder it is to figure out what is important in this paragraph.

The fact that this is center aligned makes it even harder to read. Imagine a student trying to wade through a 6 page syllabus that is just one solid block of text... So, what does this mean if you already have a syllabus created for your class in Microsoft Word? Can you reuse it? Well, yes, but you will likely have to revise it so it is more readable by incorporating the suggestions made in this presentation about writing for the web and for formatting text for readability.

Example of how to restructure text for scannability:<sup>6</sup>

<b>Version</b>	<b>Sample Paragraph</b>	<b>Usability Improvement (relative to control condition)</b>
<b>Promotional writing</b> <i>(control condition)</i>	Nebraska is filled with internationally recognized attractions that draw large crowds of people every year, without fail. In 1996, some of the most popular places were Fort Robinson State Park (355,000 visitors), Scotts Bluff National Monument (132,166), Arbor Lodge State Historical Park & Museum (100,000), Carhenge (86,598), Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer (60,002), and Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park (28,446).	0% (by definition)
<b>Concise text</b> with about half the word count as the control condition	In 1996, six of the best-attended attractions in Nebraska were Fort Robinson State Park, Scotts Bluff National Monument, Arbor Lodge State Historical Park & Museum, Carhenge, Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer, and Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park.	58%
<b>Scannable layout</b> using the same text as the control condition in a layout that facilitated scanning	Nebraska is filled with internationally recognized attractions that draw large crowds of people every year, without fail. In 1996, some of the most popular places were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fort Robinson State Park (355,000 visitors)</li> <li>• Scotts Bluff National Monument (132,166)</li> <li>• Arbor Lodge State Historical Park &amp; Museum (100,000)</li> <li>• Carhenge (86,598)</li> <li>• Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer (60,002)</li> <li>• Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park (28,446).</li> </ul>	47%
<b>Objective language</b> using neutral rather than subjective, boastful, or exaggerated language (otherwise the same as the control condition)	Nebraska has several attractions. In 1996, some of the most-visited places were Fort Robinson State Park (355,000 visitors), Scotts Bluff National Monument (132,166), Arbor Lodge State Historical Park & Museum (100,000), Carhenge (86,598), Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer (60,002), and Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park (28,446).	27%
<b>Combined version</b> using all three improvements in writing style together: concise, scannable, and objective	In 1996, six of the most-visited places in Nebraska were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fort Robinson State Park</li> <li>• Scotts Bluff National Monument</li> <li>• Arbor Lodge State Historical Park &amp; Museum</li> <li>• Carhenge</li> <li>• Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer</li> <li>• Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park</li> </ul>	124%

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9710a.html>

If it was important for you to also include the visitor numbers you could also structure the content using a table:

<b>Most-visited places in Nebraska in 1996</b>	<b>Number of Yearly Visitors</b>
Fort Robinson State Park	355,000
Scotts Bluff National Monument	132,166
Arbor Lodge State Historical Park & Museum	100,000
Carhenge	86,598
Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer	60,002
Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park	28,446
<b>Total Visitors</b>	<b>762,212</b>

## Developing Course Content

It is important to keep in mind that teaching online does not have to be a purely textual experience (though it often is). As you develop your course content make sure that it is appropriate for your course and is accessible to your students. Consider student learning styles and, just like you would in a traditional classroom environment, provide multiple modes of instruction, assessment and access.

As you consider what kinds of activities, files and resources you want to provide to your students keep in mind that the Center for Instructional Technology Expertise (CITE Lab) is available to assist you with integrating technology into the classroom – regardless of whether that classroom is a traditional “live” setting or an online “virtual” one.

Types of content you could include in your online class:

### Documents

This includes all text files that you may upload for your students to access. Examples include your syllabus, course notes and class schedule. It is important to consider how you are saving document files (in what format). **Although all computer systems on campus have Microsoft Office installed many students do not have it on their own personal systems. Most new computers come with either Microsoft Works or Word Perfect and these three applications have difficulty reading each other’s files.**

The college encourages students who have Works or Word Perfect to [save their files in a format that you as the instructor can access](#).

You should also be mindful of this same principle when you are preparing your course content and make sure that you are uploading documents in formats that your students can access.

### *Saving as RTF Files*

[Saving files in Rich Text Format \(RTF\)](#) will ensure that your students will be able to access your documents – no matter what word processing application they are using.

### *Saving as PDF Files*

You can also [create Portable Document Files \(PDF\)](#) from your documents. These files are not editable by the students but can be viewed, read and printed using a free plug-in (which most computers do have

already installed). If you do not have Adobe Acrobat you can use a free plug-in tool called PDF Creator to save as PDF files. To learn more about this application visit the [Software Tools](#) portion of the BCC Wiki.

### ***Saving as HTML***

Microsoft Word also allows you to save Word documents as HTML files. These are treated “natively” within the eLearning system and do not require students to download or open anything in order to access them. The downside of using HTML files is that it sometimes makes it difficult for students to print documents (if they want to view them in paper format) so you may want to provide the content in two formats – HTML and PDF or Word.

### ***Why can't I just save as a Microsoft Word document?***

Well, you can of course, but again, not all students have Microsoft Word and so may not be able to open and view your course files. And, there are issues with **Office 2007**...

### ***Office 2007***

When you save files in Office 2007 format they are NOT backwards compatible with earlier versions of Office. If you have Office 2007 installed on your work or home computer you will [need to save your files in a format that is backwards compatible with earlier versions of office.](#)

### **Articles and Library Resources**

Rather than photocopying or scanning newspaper or magazine articles you can provide students with access to the content you want them to have right through the BCC library! The library has hundreds of journals, magazines and books available in electronic format that all students can access. For information on how to include these resources into your course space contact the Library or the CITE lab.

### **Images**

You can certainly upload image files into your course site. If you do so, be sure that you:

1. Include alternate text/captions so that the images are accessible to students with disabilities
2. Include copyright information (If you want to make sure that your students don't plagiarize you should model the behavior – i.e. citing all sources – that you expect from your students.)

The CITE lab is available to assist you with scanning, locating and including images in your course site. We can also assist you with obtaining copyrights (if necessary) and can direct you to a variety of free/open source image options that are available online.

### **PowerPoint Presentations**

PowerPoint presentations are an excellent way to meet the needs of students who are visual learners and are great supplements to text documents, lectures and course textbooks. You can easily create your own presentations or you can modify existing ones that may come as part of instructor supplemental materials.

A few things to keep in mind when developing/using PowerPoint:

- Students do not need to have PowerPoint installed to view presentations. They can obtain a [free PowerPoint viewer](#) from Microsoft.

- Presentations can get fairly large – especially when you add graphics and interactive content. Try to keep the file size of each presentation to less than 1Mb – especially if your students are accessing course content using a dial-up connection.
- You can record a narration track to go along with the slides. If you use this feature this means that students can “listen along” as they watch the presentation. This is an excellent way to address students who are auditory learners and it also enables you to provide more information to students than just bullet points.
- You can also embed audio and video files into the presentation. The CITE Lab can assist you with questions on how to use and incorporate audio, video and interactive features in PowerPoint.
- Just because you can do something doesn’t mean you should! PowerPoint allows you to incorporate a lot of “wiz-bang” features and add “pizzazz” with transitions and animations. While these options may be fun, they usually end up causing problems for students. If students are trying to view the presentation through eLearningBCC, transitions and animations may take the presentation longer to load and move between slides.

The CITE Lab does have a software package called **Impatica** that will compress your PowerPoints into extremely small files that don’t require a special viewer to see. If you are interested in learning more please stop by A201 or call 508-678-2811 x2081.

### ***Printing from PowerPoint***

If you upload your presentations to your eLearning course space we highly recommend also making a PDF version available for easy printing. Many (ok, most) students are not aware of the difference between printing slides and printing handouts and so will go to print the presentation and out will come 30 full-page slides. And, if they don’t have PowerPoint and are only using the viewer they don’t have the option to print as handouts.

Saving your PowerPoint slides as PDF handouts is very easy! We have instructions posted to the Faculty Resources area of the Wiki or you can call the CITE lab and we can assist you!

### **Audio and Video Files**

Although generally large in size, audio and video files are a wonderful method of addressing diverse learning styles in the online classroom. They can also be a way of capturing course content that would otherwise be difficult to explain in a purely textual format. The CITE Lab has a variety of digital audio recorders that you can use. We also have headsets with microphones that you can use to record lectures directly onto your computer with the use of free audio software packages. For more information on how to include audio and video files contact the CITE Lab! We also have software that will allow you to create a text transcript from an audio or video file for accessibility!

When you think of using audio and video you don’t have to create your own from scratch. There are wonderful resources available where you can direct your students to listen to speeches, view news clips or watch demonstrations. Part of our role in the CITE lab is to help you find these resources so do be sure to ask us if you have questions or want to know what’s out there!

## SmartBoard Content

The college has a variety of “smart whiteboards” which allow instructors to capture information that they’ve written on the board. Once captured, the information can be saved as a .PDF, PowerPoint presentation or as HTML files and uploaded to eLearningBCC. This is a great way to share class notes or provide a step-by-step handwritten example to students. You can also add audio content so that you’re able to walk students through what they’re seeing. Karl Schnapp, Technical Specialist for Instructional Support and Innovation, is available in the Center for Teaching and Learning and can assist you in working with the SmartBoards and TEC room technology.

## Accessibility

Many of the suggestions provided throughout this document are geared towards assisting you in developing accessible course content.

For additional information on accessibility or on the principles of universal design contact the Office of Disability Services or visit these online resources:

Introduction to Web Accessibility

<http://www.webaim.org/intro/>

Raising the Awareness of Online Accessibility

[http://thejournal.com/articles/17291\\_5](http://thejournal.com/articles/17291_5)

Equity and Excellence in Higher Education

<http://www.eeonline.org/index.htm>

## Copyright

As you determine what types of content to include into your course space, please remember that appropriate Fair Use and TEACH Act guidelines do apply.

Copyright and Fair Use Guidelines for Teachers

<http://www.mediafestival.org/copyrightchart.html>

The TEACH Act

<http://www.utsystem.edu/OGC/intellectualProperty/teachact.htm>

If you have questions please contact the CITE Lab. We would be happy to provide additional information and guidance.

## **Building an Online Community**

A key factor in student success in online courses is the level of student-to-student and student-to-instructor interaction. Instructors need to design a high degree of interactive activities into their courses that provide for ongoing and timely communication and feedback and collaborative and cooperative learning opportunities.

### **Communicating with Students**

The Director of Distance Learning will send an email out to all registered students taking online courses approximately two weeks before the start of the semester. This email provides students with important information regarding the online program, log-on information, technology requirements and student support services.

It is also recommended that you as the instructor email your class directly to connect with them. Your introductory email will set the tone for the course so it is important that you model the type of discourse that you would like to see from students. The use of sarcasm and humor is not recommended in initial communications as students have no reference to know whether you are kidding or not. Once you establish a relationship with your students you may be able to use less formal and more “fun” language and phrases. However, until that relationship is created it is important to stick with a professional tone.

If you have questions on how to email your class, please contact the CITE lab.

### ***Interaction Plan***

As part of your syllabus you should have an Interaction Plan defined. This plan will inform students how you will communicate with them and how you expect them to communicate with you.

#### ***Example:***

Please feel free to email me directly with questions of a personal nature, grading questions, advising help or with any other issues that are not appropriate for the rest of the class to read. I check my email regularly and will respond to all emails within 24 hours during the work week. Please note that I am not available on weekends but will respond to weekend email messages on Monday.

All class related questions must be posted to the proper forum on the Discussion Board. I will check the Discussion Board on a daily basis and will answer questions as needed. I also highly encourage students to read and respond to postings from their classmates. Part of the nature of this class is for students to help each other troubleshoot problems and develop critical-thinking skills and working through questions on the forum is an excellent method to develop proficiency in these areas.

It is important that you stick with your plan. If your plan changes or if you are going to be offline or unavailable for any length of time you should inform your students. An easy way to do this is to post an announcement to the course site:

Hello everyone,  
I'll be offline until Wednesday as I'll be attending a conference in Boston. If you have questions please make sure you post them to the Discussion Board. Help each other by reading/responding to your classmates' postings.

### *What if students stop communicating?*

It is much easier for students to “disappear” from an online course than a traditional face-to-face class. Because students never need to physically attend class on campus it’s unlikely that you’d see them in the hall and be able to ask “What happened?” If a student does “disappear” from your online course it is up to you as the instructor to reach out and try to reestablish communication. If a student misses class (meaning that they didn’t access the course site, failed to submit homework, didn’t post to the discussion board, etc... as specified in your attendance policy) then you should email them. If you do not get a response it is recommended that you call the student. It’s not a requirement to do so but, making the effort to connect with them can make a real difference in student retention and engagement in your class.

### **Course Introductions**

In order to build an engaging online environment, students need to feel comfortable interacting both with the instructor and with other students in the class. One method of establishing trust and confidence among course participants is to provide students a forum on the Discussion Board where they can learn more about their peers. Having students post introductions to the Discussion Board is a great pre-class activity and can be customized to fit individual course needs. An example of an introductions forum follows:

#### Introductions

I'd like you to "digitally" introduce yourselves to your classmates. It's easy for some people to put names to faces but it's often harder in the digital world to associate comments to the person who has posted them. Take a few minutes to introduce yourself to your fellow classmates by telling us 1) a little bit about yourself, 2) why you are taking this course, 3) what your area of study is at NHCTC and 4) what about computers or technology interests you and 5) an interest or hobby, or something unique about you. **Your post should be no longer than 2 paragraphs but no shorter than 4 sentences!**

Then, please respond to at least one other classmate's post - with something more substantial than "cool" or "that's neat." Ask the person a question or comment on something that they posted. For example:

"April, I saw that you like to x-country ski. Where do you go around here? I usually hit the trails at Kingman Farm in Dover but I'm looking for other places to go."

Students should be encouraged to review the course netiquette guidelines (which should be covered in your syllabus) prior to posting to the discussion board for the first time.

A reminder that as the instructor you also serve as the course moderator. This means that you do need to oversee the Discussion Board and ensure that students are adhering to netiquette guidelines.

If students do not practice proper netiquette it is important that the course instructor address the issue quickly. BCC does have a netiquette policy and an acceptable computer use policy that students are expected to abide by. Questions surrounding what to do if students violate netiquette can be addressed to your Department Chair, Program Coordinator or Divisional Dean. Just like in the “live” classroom, disruptive behavior needs to be addressed quickly. Please be sure to ask if you’re unsure what to do or if you have questions!

Netiquette can be seen through a behaviorist lens: There are certain modes of online interaction which are “good” (following netiquette guidelines) and thus are “rewarded” (student is allowed to continue to post) and certain behaviors which are “bad” (flaming, using inappropriate language) and which have “punishments” (student prohibited from posting or dismissed from the class).

## Class Norms

In addition to learning from their own individual consequences, student behavior will be reinforced by observing and interacting with others in the classroom. Thus, it may be helpful for you to engage the class in the creation of group/class norms. These can address issues such as:

- Discussion Board postings
- General course communication
- Netiquette
- Confidentiality
- Diversity
- Decision making process
- Group work

In some courses students may be able to create their own norms. In others it may be necessary for you to create some norms and put them out for students to discuss, modify and adopt. Either way, a discussion board forum would be a good place to have this conversation.

## Instructor Profile

In addition to having students introduce themselves it is also important that you provide an overview of who you are. Setting up an online profile is one way to provide students with this information. Your personal profile will also demonstrate the kind of information that should be shared – as the instructor your profile should model the type of discourse that you would like to see students engage in and it will also model appropriate self-disclosure (what is ok to share and not to share with others).

*Example:*

<b>April Bellafiore</b>	
<b>Email</b>	<a href="mailto:abellafiore@nhctc.edu">abellafiore@nhctc.edu</a>
<b>Work Phone</b>	603-559-1523
<b>Office Location</b>	Pease Campus
<b>Office Hours</b>	Tuesday 12-2:30 Thursday 12-2:30



### Notes

Even though this is a 100% online course it does not mean that you cannot visit with me during my office hours. Please feel free to drop by or make an appointment if you have any questions regarding the course content! You can also call during my office hours and I'd be happy to speak with you over the phone.

### A bit about me:

I have been with the college for over 6 years teaching in the Computer Technologies department as a full-time faculty member. My background is in multimedia and web development and over the past few years I've been focusing on XML as an application development language. However, this year I have been going back to my roots in multimedia by teaching introduction to animation and Macromedia Flash.

I enjoy teaching Programming Logic because it is such an essential skill. No matter what path you follow in computer technologies you'll almost always need a background in programming logic. As an example, Macromedia Flash is an application that allows you to create user interfaces, animations and games. In order to control your components you need to use ActionScript - and in order to use ActionScript you need to understand what variables, arrays, loops and control statements are and how to use them. Since I am teaching both Flash and the Programming Logic course simultaneously I'll provide some examples to you of how ActionScript is used so you can see how the theory we'll be learning translates into use.

## Using the Discussion Board to Facilitate Course Interaction

As previously mentioned, an excellent way to get students to interact with each other is to utilize the Discussion Board to set up forums for online discussion. From a pedagogical perspective, Discussion Boards follow the **Active Learning** model of participatory learning. Forums can be used for the following types of activities:

- Group/Team work
- Questioning
- Reflective dialog
- Brainstorming
- Read and Respond

Some examples of Discussion Board use include:

### *Question of the Week*

Have students respond to a question or discuss a particular topic on a weekly basis. This type of activity provides a place for student reflection, critical thinking, problem solving, analysis and feedback.

#### Computers in the classroom

What is your view on computers in the classroom? Do they enhance learning? Are the programs offered appropriate for children? How are they managed by the teacher? Share your observations and thoughts on what role, if any, computers do and should play in early childhood classrooms. Post your own thoughts and reply to at least two of your classmates by Sunday.

#### Book sharing with children

An assignment due this week related to sharing books with children. How well do children respond to books being read to them? How tolerant are teachers of children's differences in listening style? How do you think teachers can improve their story book sharing techniques? How helpful is it to you as a professional to watch someone else share books with children? Do you get ideas for yourself on what works and what does not? Post your own thoughts on sharing books with children and respond to at least two of your classmates by March 26.

Note: In the online environment it is important to clearly articulate your expectations. What questions/topics do you specifically want students to focus on? Do not “assume” that students will include the information you are expecting. Make sure you provide clear directions – especially at the beginning of the course.

### *That..and...*

Every student has to add on to another student’s post.

#### Week 3 Discussion Question

**When you are animating you should keep the following in mind...**

For this assignment we'll be using a technique called "that and." What this means is that you'll build on each other's answers by posting new information. Each person must post at least one new piece of information. Feel free to add to another student's posting to clarify a concept or to add additional reference information.

*For example:*

Question: When developing computer animations versus hand-drawn animations you should keep the following in mind...

Response 1: Keyframes in traditional hand-drawn animation are different from computer animation because the computer interprets the inbetweens and will interpolate the motion...

Response 2: ...that and... in hand-drawn animation the motion can come to a complete stop but in computer animation you should always keep at least one part of your character moving...

## ***Peer Editing***

The Discussion Board can also be used for specific collaborative learning activities such as peer-editing, review and feedback.

### **Peer Editing Research Paper**

This forum will be for posting and peer editing your research papers. I will be posting guidelines for giving feedback (the ways in which you can help each other - what you should be looking for).

### ***Small Group Discussions***

When you have a large number of students posting on a regular basis it is possible for the quieter ones to get drowned out – just like in a regular classroom. One way to handle this is to set up forums on the discussion board for small group work.

Having students work in groups is an example of **collaborative learning**. Groups can vary in size depending on the task and pairing students is a very effective method for sharing and transferring information. However, it is important to keep in mind the size of the groups. Richard Felder, who is one of the leading advocates of the active learning movement recommends:

“...where they’re working in teams outside class, I form teams of three or four. Pairs are not good for two reasons: you don’t get enough diversity of ideas, which is one of the things you’re looking for in group work, and there is no built-in mechanism for conflict resolution, so the dominant member of a pair will win every argument, whether they are right or wrong. Once you get up to five, unless you’re doing a project that really requires five people, somebody in the group will probably be off in a corner somewhere not fully participating. I’ll tend to have more teams of four in the beginning so if anyone drops the course I’m left with a viable group.”<sup>7</sup>

Group work in a purely online environment can be challenging as it may prove difficult for students to initially connect with each other. If you are going to have students work on projects as a group make sure you give them plenty of lead time to connect with each other and provide them with direction as to how to make initial contact. You may want to provide each group with a specific forum on the discussion board or you can suggest other options for connecting:

#### ***Example:***

Because everyone has high-speed internet access you can choose to take advantage of the virtual classroom capability in eLearningBCC. I’ve set up a collaboration chat room for each group. Click on the Chat button and select the proper room. You and your partner/teammates can work together to determine what time is best for you to use the chatting feature. As an alternative you can also click on each other’s names in the Discussion Board to send an email to your partner(s). If you do not make contact with your partner(s) by the end of the week (meaning by Friday at 5pm) please contact me!

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<sup>7</sup> Transcript of an Interview with Dr. Richard Felder. <http://www.ncsu.edu/felder-public/>

## Surveys

Surveys are an excellent mechanism for getting feedback from students and/or learning more about their capabilities. Below are some questions that were included on an informational survey that students were asked to fill out as part of their pre-class activities. This allowed the instructor to gauge students' understanding of technology, assess their computer capabilities and gain feedback regarding future class activities.

*Example of a pre-class informational survey:*

Where will you be using a computer to do most of your course work for this class?  
 Home     Work     CAPS     Local Library

What type of internet access do you have?  
 Dial-up     Broadband     DSL

Have you taken an online course before?  
 Yes     No

If we were going to schedule a phone conference when would be the best time for you? Select all that apply:

Monday evening 6-8pm  
 Tuesday evening 7-9pm  
 Thursday evening any time  
 Sunday evening any time

Surveys also allow students to anonymously share their thoughts or opinions about the course. On the next page is an example of a survey that was created and used by an online instructor in week 5 of a 16 week course. The feedback this instructor received enabled her to make real-time adjustments and enhancements to her course.

*Example of a mid-course survey:*

How does the coursework compare with your expectations?  
 Spending less time on coursework than thought  
 What I expected  
 More than expected

How much time per week do you spend on this course?  
 1-2 hours     3-4 hours     5-6 hours     7-8 hours     9 or above hours

Is the online course content organized well enough for you to find what you need?  
 Yes     No

Is the layout of the course attractive and enhancing to your learning?  
 Yes     No

Are the learning materials appropriate for the course?  
 Yes     No

Have you had difficulty accessing or viewing PowerPoint presentations posted on eLearningBCC?  
 Yes     No

Have you had difficulty accessing video clips posted on eLearningBCC?  
 Yes     No

Are your questions answered in a timely and comprehensive manner?

Yes  No

Is the work corrected in a timely manner?

Yes  No

How important is feedback to you on your assignments?

Very important     Important     Neutral     Not Important

Are you given enough feedback on your homework?

Yes  No

Comments about this online course and how it could be improved:

You can also use surveys to implement **Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs)** after specific lessons or assignments:

#### The Minute Paper

Instructions: Please answer each question in one or two sentences.

1. What was the most useful or meaningful thing you learned during this session?
2. What questions remain uppermost in your mind as we end this session?

#### The Muddiest Point

What was the "muddiest" point in this session? (In other words, what was least clear to you?)

For more information on CATs contact the college's **Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL)**. There are also a variety of CAT references available [online](#).

### **Other Communication Mechanisms**

Apart from email and the discussion board there are other communication pathways available which you may want to utilize in your online course:

#### ***Chat***

eLearningBCC has a built-in chat application that can be used for real-time communication. The major issue with using this application is that it is pretty slow and will not work well on a dial-up connection. It is recommended that you only use the virtual classroom if your students have a high speed internet connection. You can determine if this is the case through an informational survey at the beginning of the semester and then decide whether or not to use it as a course tool.

#### ***Example:***

I reviewed the survey results and learned that you all have some sort of high-speed connection. In addition it appears that most of you are generally available on Sunday or Monday evenings. So, I'd like to schedule 3 class "meetings" on the following dates:

Monday Feb 6  
Sunday Feb 26  
Monday March 6

We'll set the time for all meetings from 6-8pm - they may not be that long depending on the topic and questions.

We'll meet in the virtual classroom. Go to the Chat button and select the Virtual Office Hours room.

I would like you to participate in at least ONE of the sessions. You can certainly join all of them but please plan on attending at least one.

### ***Phone Conference***

While you can certainly talk one-on-one with students over the phone you may also want to schedule a time to have a small group discussion via a phone conference. Students may also want a way to talk with each other if they are working together in small groups. Unfortunately the college does not have phone conferencing capabilities. However, there is a free service - [Mr. Conference](#) – that you can use if you want to set up a phone conference.

You can also use [Skype](#) – a free internet based calling application.

### ***Online Collaboration Tools***

There are a number of social networking tools and online collaboration tools that can be utilized to develop a true online learning community. [Google Docs and Spreadsheets](#) allows you to create documents that are editable by numerous individuals. This is an excellent tool for group work and peer editing assignments. [WebHuddle](#) is a free application that enables you to hold on-line meetings and is similar to commercial products like WebEx.

The CITE Lab is always available to discuss how these tools can be used in your online course and to discuss other options that were not covered here!

## Additional Resources

As you plan for and develop your course site keep in mind that there are a variety of resources available that can assist you!

- **Center for Instructional Technology Expertise (CITE Lab)**

The CITE Lab is available to assist you with integrating technology into the classroom – regardless of whether that classroom is a traditional “live” setting or an online “virtual” one. The CITE Lab can help with everything from setting up your online course space to including audio and video files to developing interactive content! CITE lab staff can assist you with the entire course development process and is happy to discuss ideas with you to determine how to make them a reality.

*Fall River Campus A201 (508) 678-2811 x2081 or [distancelearning@bristolcc.edu](mailto:distancelearning@bristolcc.edu)*

- **Center for Teaching and Learning**

The CTL offers a variety of workshops, seminars and programs focused on teaching and learning. Thinking about using the Goals feature in eLearningBCC to develop a comprehensive outcomes model? Want to learn more about rubrics and their place in the online environment? Have other pedagogical questions or need ideas? Then contact Karl Schnapp [kschnapp@bristolcc.edu](mailto:kschnapp@bristolcc.edu) .

The CTL also offers a formal Mentoring Program. If you would like to partner with an experienced online educator contact the CTL to find out how the process works. Informal mentoring and partnership opportunities are also available through the office of distance learning.

*Fall River Campus, Library (508) 678-2811 x2292*

- **Library Resources**

The library can assist you in [developing a course guide](#), locating and including articles from the library databases and/or setting up eReserves. Do your courses involve research assignments? You can always ask/invite a research librarian to participate in your course. Contact the Library and/or the CITE lab to discuss innovative ways to utilize library resources in your course.

- **Accessibility**

Interested in learning more about how to design courses and materials that are accessible to all students? Want to learn what assistive technologies are available for students with disabilities? Contact Cindy Poore-Pariseau at x2470 or [cpoore@bristolcc.edu](mailto:cpoore@bristolcc.edu)

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