

Atlantic Cape Community College

Observation Guidelines of Online Courses

Periodically, faculty will be formally observed by an administrator or a teaching colleague. The observation process for online courses occurs over a one-week period to allow the observer time to review the Blackboard course site. Online learning and instruction pertain to courses that were developed specifically for the online modality. There is not a specified "class time" or other real-time, synchronous requirement typically associated with online courses. Although instructors are required to initiate and engage in substantive interactions with students on a predictable and scheduled basis, a mandatory class meeting time should not be expected or enforced through grading. Observation of the course site will focus on course navigation/organization, presentation of content, clarity of expectations, variety of assignments and assessments, and communication and engagement between the instructor and students. Observations may be announced or unannounced.

In the event of an announced observation, the observer and faculty member are expected to do the following:

1. The faculty member and observer decide on an observation period.

The observation should take place over the course of one week. The observer will be enrolled as either a Teaching Assistant, or as a Dean in the course. Observation should occur during a week in which student learning is planned. Examples in an online course would be posted course content, discussions, or other activities. Observation should not occur during a week in which tests are scheduled.

2. The faculty member and observer have a pre-observation meeting.

Prior to the meeting, the faculty member will provide to the observer:

- A copy of the syllabus and schedule of assignments for the course/section being observed.
- A copy of the required reading material(s) or handouts for the observation period that are not directly accessible within the Blackboard course site.
- A written response to the questions outlined in the following pages.
- An up-to-date online instructional equivalency audit for this course/section. *See the "Questions for Pre-Observation Conference" section on page 2.*

Topics to be addressed during the pre-observation meeting:

- The purpose of the observation
- The course syllabus and schedule of assignments
- Expectations of any planned activities during the observation period.
- A review of the form being used to document the observation.

3. After the observation, the instructor and the observer have a post-observation meeting.

The meeting provides the observer with an opportunity to ask questions, seek clarification and discuss strengths and areas for improvement. The faculty member may further explain practice and theory, seek advice, ask questions, and generally discuss the experience of online teaching.

4. Following the post-observation meeting, the observer provides the faculty member with a final draft of the observation report.

Both the observer and the faculty member must sign the observation report. This signature does not necessarily indicate agreement; it confirms the faculty member has received and read the document. The faculty member may add a written response to the observation document. Once the observer has

finalized the document and secured the signature from the faculty member, the signed document and faculty member response (if applicable) is forwarded by the observer to the dean for review and signature along with a copy of the written responses to the pre-observation conference questions and a completed Observer Payment Form. (Please note, requests for payment must be submitted within thirty (30) days of the observation to ensure payment.) A copy of the finished observation report and written responses will be included in the faculty member's personnel file.

Questions for Pre-Observation Conference

Please be sure to provide your answers in writing to the observer at least twenty-four hours prior to the pre-observation meeting. Please also provide a copy of your syllabus, schedule of assignments, assigned reading(s), and any materials that are not available to the observer through the Blackboard course site.

Pertaining to the Observation Period:

1. What topic(s) will be addressed during the observation period? How and where does the topic(s) fit into the overall course syllabus and schedule?
2. What objectives have you set for the observation period? In other words, what do you expect students to be able to do as a result of the week's learning experience? Please state these objectives in measurable terms, using Bloom's Taxonomy. How do the objectives of the observation period tie into the outcomes and objectives outlined in the syllabus?
3. What have the students done in the course prior to the observation period that may add context for the observer?
4. What instructional strategies/learning activities will be used during the observation period to present content and facilitate learning? Why have these strategies been selected?
5. How is learner engagement incorporated into the observation period through Blackboard?
6. How and when will you evaluate whether students reached the objectives of topic(s) covered during the observation period?
7. Please mention anything else you think the observer needs to know in preparation for observing your online course.

Pertaining to the Overall Course:

1. Does the course have any special characteristics that might affect an outsider's understanding of the group dynamics? (prior/recent technology issues, the return of a recent test, first time doing a particular activity, students requiring accommodations, etc.)
2. What steps have you taken to make your Blackboard course appealing to a group of students with diverse learning preferences (visual, aural, kinesthetic)?
3. Verify with the department chair or dean if there is a current online instructional equivalency audit completed for this course. If it reflects how your section is designed and managed, simply include a copy with your pre-observation materials. If it does not represent your section(s), submit an updated audit to your chair or dean and include a copy with your pre-observation materials.
4. Instructors are required to initiate and engage in substantive interactions with students on a predictable and scheduled basis (see Faculty Handbook, Appendix 1 for definition/examples). Describe your approach to ensuring regular and substantive interaction.