



# GOUCHER COLLEGE

## Welch Center for Graduate and Professional Studies

www.goucher.edu/gps

### 50 Tips for Ensuring Course Quality

Fundamentals			
#	Guideline	Purpose	Suggestions
1	Include a comprehensive syllabus that uses the Goucher template.	To provide in one location all the information students need to be successful in the course.	A comprehensive syllabus includes course description, credit hours, instructor contact info and preferred communication method/s, course prerequisites, learning objectives, main topics, course format and assignment instructions, list of required readings and textbook/s, grading policy with grade scale/weights, explanation of face-to-face or synchronous requirements, and technical requirements beyond GoucherLearn, and course policies. <b>Use the Goucher <a href="#">syllabus template</a> for consistency.</b>
2	Include a detailed course schedule that uses the Goucher template.	To help students stay on track with course requirements.	Create task lists that include start dates and due dates for weekly/unit requirements. <b>Use the <a href="#">schedule template</a> for consistency.</b>
3	Make learning objectives measurable and clear.	To make students aware of how and what they will be expected to learn as a result of the instruction.	Create course and unit/module learning objectives that are measurable, action-oriented, reasonable and time-bound. These can be stated in commentary/lecture narratives, module descriptions, quiz content, assignment and submission instructions, and in discussion prompts. To be effective, include them in more than one place.
4	Align assessments and activities with the learning objectives.	To ensure that what students are doing in class and being evaluated on relate to the learning objectives.	Use a matrix or table in your course planning process that shows how course activities and <a href="#">assessments</a> align with individual learning objectives. Clearly state to your students the objectives being met with each activity and assessment.
5	Clearly articulate expectations for group work.	To have group activities completed in a smooth and effective manner with clear expectations for all group members.	If you choose to use groups in the course, inform students how groups will be determined, clearly define tasks and participation expectations, provide clear expectations for any final products or deliverables, and clearly articulate any peer evaluation that will occur and if individual as well as group grades will be given.
6	Convey detailed instructions for all assessments.	To provide students with adequate information to complete all coursework, to decrease confusion related to these assessments, and to facilitate student success.	Clearly describe the requirements for all <a href="#">assessments</a> in the course (assignments, papers, quizzes, exams, discussions, group work, etc.). Provide students with rubrics that will be used to grade course requirements. Explain why different assessments are included in the course. Write detailed instructions including information about due dates and time limits, quantity and quality of work, responsibilities, standards, structure, requirements, etc.
7	Set up and use an organized grades area that includes all graded activities.	To make it easier to keep student grades up to date and comply with FERPA standards.	Fully set up the grades area prior to the beginning of the course so students can see all the graded items up front. Use "categories" in the grades area to group like-items together (e.g., Quiz 1, 2, and 3 go in the "Quiz" category). Use the grades tool in GoucherLearn to ensure grades are distributed within a secure setting.

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Communication			
#	Guideline	Purpose	Suggestions
8	Prior to class start, send a message to students with course related info.	To provide students with basic information about the course and the course website; to provide access to the syllabus and schedule and course requirements.	Send students an email message letting them know the GoucherLearn site is open and that they can start reviewing course information, particularly the syllabus and schedule. Explain course expectations, and include information about textbook/readings/resources. Give them your contact information should they have questions. Consider hosting a live WebEx meeting to connect further in person.
9	Send a welcome message on the first day of class.	To formally launch the course in a personal and interactive way.	Send an enthusiastic welcome message in GoucherLearn via email or via a screencast video or a VoiceThread. Share tips for student success. Invite and encourage interaction.
10	Be alert to non-participatory students, and reach out to them, without delay, to encourage participation.	To help students who may be unsure of participation expectations to get on track; to help the instructor finalize the class roster.	Promptly contact any students not participating in the course during the first week in a regular semester course, or during the first or second day in a short course. Encourage participation and determine their status. If non-participation is due to a technological issue, direct the student to the <a href="mailto:helpdesk@goucher.edu">helpdesk@goucher.edu</a> or 410-337-6322 or <a href="http://www.goucher.edu/it">www.goucher.edu/it</a> .
11	Include separate discussion forums for general course questions, community building, and course content.	To clearly relay the purpose of the various discussion forums and to decrease confusion between community-based discussions and content-based discussions.	Clearly organize and label the discussion forums and topics. Include several related discussion topics within each forum. For example, a forum for community building could be titled "General Discussions," and the topics within could be "Raise Your Hand" (for students to ask course-related questions) and "Student Lounge" (for socializing).
12	Provide discussion summaries.	To share with students various themes and interesting points that come up during discussion activities.	Students are not always required to read every discussion post, or they may be working in individual discussion groups and hence missing posts from other groups. So consider summarizing and sharing the major discussion themes that emerge during a week, unit or module. Highlight examples of exemplary work.
13	Send prompt responses to student questions.	To show students you are fully engaged with the class; to promptly address questions or concerns students may have; to keep students learning content at a consistent rate.	Response time to questions corresponds with the communication expectations you shared with students. Often instructors will strive to contact students within 24-36 hours during a 14-week semester course, and on the same day (possibly within 8 hours) in a short course. Let students know if you will, or will not, be available for questions on the weekends.
14	Regularly communicate with students to maintain positive rapport.	To help instill in students a sense of trust that the instructor is fully engaged with the class and is concerned about how students are learning course content.	Share applicable and timely information about the course. Post messages and share current events. Summarize discussions. Provide meaningful and regular feedback on student work. Regularly participate in discussion activities. Provide illustrations and examples to explain important concepts. Add examples and stories from your experience as a practitioner. Consider posting in various ways with different tools on a regular basis. Reply to student emails professionally and promptly.
15	Provide a final course wrap-up.	To share any final information regarding the course with the students.	Provide a wrap-up for the purpose of course closure. Consider adding information about how the course will be beneficial in future directions of study or career, and applications in the world. A final course wrap-up can be posted in GoucherLearn—could be video or can be sent in an e-mail to the entire class.

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Engagement			
#	Guideline	Purpose	Suggestions
16	Include an icebreaker discussion activity.	To help students get to know each other and you as the instructor; to establish a sense of community.	This could be an icebreaker activity, or an introduction forum in the discussion area, or a VoiceThread activity. The discussion could be an introductory activity to the student and/or the course material.
17	Encourage and foster student-to-student interaction.	To help students get to know each other and develop a sense of community while collaboratively learning about the course content.	Some ways to design student-to-student interaction and build community in your course: create content-specific discussions, use groups in the class, have students provide peer feedback, have co-facilitation activities, etc. Ask probing questions and provide direction in discussions, as needed. Monitor and support student interaction in group discussions or activities.
18	Encourage and foster student-to-instructor interaction.	To facilitate student and instructor interaction in the course and help students know the instructor is available to aid learning in the online environment.	Create an ongoing discussion of questions and feedback. Describe the instructor's communication plan for timely responses to questions and email, engagement expectations for discussions, and feedback on activities and assessments. Create a biography to include background and contact info. Model consistent and deep interaction in discussions. Offer informal assessments. Host consistent virtual office hours.
19	Include discussion topics that stimulate thought/reflection about course content.	To facilitate meaningful student engagement with course content and each other.	Open-ended questions tend to generate more dialogue. Ask questions that require students to connect content to life experience and prior knowledge, explore examples, reflect on course concepts and theories, provide rationale for a response, explain process for solving problems, etc. Discussions might ask students to view media and reflect, or to complete activities and then share their reactions.
20	Use multimedia and multiple sources of content to provide broad exposure to the material.	To help students develop a better understanding of the subject matter.	Present course content using a combination of journal articles, readings, instructor-created resources (or other available resources) such as videos, podcasts, websites, presentations with audio, tutorials, case studies, etc.
21	Provide your perspectives on course topics and content.	To allow students to understand the instructor's perspectives and feel more connected to the instructor and material.	Add your voice, perspective, impressions, examples, research, stories, etc., to the course. Create original course materials such as short videos, presentations, announcements, and/or written narratives to accompany other course materials.
22	Provide varied and multiple activities and assessments to facilitate and monitor student learning.	To allow students to develop and demonstrate mastery of course material in a variety of ways.	Create a diversified assessment plan executed throughout the term. Use self-assessments, assignments, papers, projects, quizzes, exams, etc. to assess student learning. Use a combination of <a href="#">pre-assessment, formative assessment and summative assessment</a> .
23	Provide opportunities for students to give feedback on the course.	To gather student feedback to use in continually improving the course.	Consider collecting feedback via informal polls and mid-term course evaluations conducting using GoucherLearn's Feedback and Choice tools or others, like SurveyMonkey.
24	Provide students with regular and timely feedback on their performance.	To provide students with formative feedback on their progress that helps them make needed adjustments for upcoming learning and assessments.	Set aside time each week or day to provide quality feedback to your students. Share with students the time frame (e.g., 48 hours) during which they can expect to receive feedback and grades. Strive to provide feedback as promised.
25	Encourage students to investigate, engage with and respond thoughtfully to content.	To facilitate a more nuanced and complex understanding of course material.	This can be accomplished by asking probing questions in discussion activities, and challenging but encouraging students with feedback. Ask students to view content from various perspectives, to compare/contrast issues, and to critically reflect on content. Find ways to connect the material to personal experiences.

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Course Design			
#	Guideline	Purpose	Suggestions
26	Ensure a consistent navigation structure.	To make it easier for students to navigate the course, know where things are located, stay on track with deadlines, etc.	All units/modules should be created in a consistent manner with the same layout, content areas and activity types, structure, etc. Links should be used to easily connect to outside websites or to materials/activities in GoucherLearn (e.g., discussions, quizzes).
27	Provide support materials for complex course concepts.	To provide students with more than written text or narratives as they are exposed to and learn complex course material.	Provide media like charts, graphs, images, audio files, videos, case studies, tutorials, etc., to help students learn complex course concepts. Add examples and stories from your experience as a practitioner/researcher.
28	Create unit or module reviews to transition between units/modules.	To show students how course content is related to or important for material covered in other parts of the course.	Create regular unit or module reviews that could include short introductions and transitions to upcoming course work, and will address the interconnectedness of course content. Course announcements, videos, or lecture narratives are places to provide this transitional information. Customize based on material covered and discussed by students.
29	Provide meaningful integration of technology tools to facilitate learning.	To ensure that technology/media used in the course is integrated with an educational purpose.	Evaluate the reasons for using various forms of technology, like WebEx and VoiceThread, and consider how that technology will enhance learning.
30	Ensure that media materials are adequately prepared and presented.	To make it easier and more effective for students to engage with the media.	Make sure audio and video files are clear, file length is adequate, required media players are compatible with common computer systems, images are optimized for efficient loading, and hyperlinks open in appropriate windows; explain download requirements and/or identify file types.
31	Abide by copyright and fair use laws.	To make sure you are not breaking any copyright or fair use laws as you share materials in your course.	Review the Goucher College <a href="#">copyright and fair use policy</a> , which complies with the United States Copyright Law of 1976.
32	Be attentive to student accessibility.	To ensure that course materials are accessible to all students.	Include <a href="#">captioning</a> and/or transcripts for audio and video files, do not use color as the only way to convey meaning, use alternative text or descriptions for images, and define hyperlinks in writing (not “click here” with no explanation of where “here” is). Creating a more accessible class can benefit the learning of all students.
33	Use time-released or scheduled opening of course materials as needed.	To help focus student attention on current content, to keep students on track with course requirements, to decrease confusion and to optimize learning.	Use time release, as needed or desired, for opening course materials to students to successfully complete course activities for a given week or unit.
34	Uphold academic integrity in the design and administration of assessments and evaluations.	To deter academic dishonesty in your course.	Take advantage of campus and other tools to identify and address discrepant work. Recognize inconsistencies in character or presentation of work.
35	Use rubrics or established grading criteria as the basis for grading and feedback.	To promote consistency when scoring graded assessments, and to let students know what is expected of them for graded assessments.	Develop rubrics or detailed grading criteria for graded assessments in the class. Share these rubrics with students. Use the rubric tool in GoucherLearn. Use defined expectations as basis for feedback and continual improvement.

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Resources for Students			
#	Guideline	Purpose	Suggestions
36	Provide information about being a successful learner in your class.	To help students anticipate and respond effectively to challenges.	Offer information about areas of potential concern (e.g., time management, deadline awareness). Provide opportunities for students to practice a new technology tool before being evaluated.
37	Provide a list of <i>institutional</i> resources with links to appropriate departments.	To help students access the academic support services they may need to be successful in the class.	Provide links to resources such as the library, academic honesty guidelines, the student handbook, the Writing Center, disability resources services, career support services, etc.
38	Provide a list of <i>academic</i> resources with links to appropriate websites.	To encourage student exposure to current research and content in your field.	Provide links to resources such as related articles, books, videos, blogs, professional journals, professional associations, conferences, etc.

Course Management			
#	Guideline	Purpose	Suggestions
39	Model ideal discussion participation, behavior and tone.	To set a good example for students about interacting in discussions, and to encourage community building.	Meet or exceed the requirements you have for your students by participating in discussions. Always communicate in discussions in a respectful manner. Introduce yourself and greet each student in an “icebreaker” discussion.
40	Monitor discussion activities for appropriate student behavior and accurate information.	To make sure student posts in the discussions are respectful and appropriate, and that all information shared is accurate.	Monitor the discussion in your class on a regular basis, and immediately address inappropriate posts and inaccurate information.
41	Establish and maintain effective group work practices.	To facilitate productive groups that contribute to course learning.	Let students see group rosters before they start on a project. Monitor group progress and offer continual feedback and support. Consider assigning students to groups to eliminate the time and difficulty sometimes involved if left to the discretion of students. If groups decide to work in a synchronous way they must meet the needs of all group members. Develop assessments students can use for peer review.
42	Follow a designated schedule.	To help decrease confusion and to minimize disruption among students.	Do your best to follow the published schedule of activities and assessments shared at the beginning of the class. If changes in the schedule cannot be avoided, communicate this clearly and as early as possible with the students.
43	Enforce expectations and guidelines for learner behavior.	To promote fairness and a positive academic culture, and to use defined expectations as basis for feedback and support for improvement, growth, and student success.	Have a late-work policy outlined in the syllabus, and stick to it. Enforce netiquette expectations. Enforce due dates and deadlines. Regularly communicate course expectations with students.
44	Update grades in GoucherLearn “Grades” area in a timely manner so students have appropriate and timely feedback about their performance.	To allow students to monitor their progress in the class, to reduce grade-related questions, and to provide corrective feedback to support student success.	Share with students the time frame they can expect for having their scores updated in the Grades area in GoucherLearn (e.g., 24 hours), and update grades as stated in your expectations. Set a regular schedule to assess work and update grades in GoucherLearn. Encourage students to view their activity and assignment grades in GoucherLearn and contact you with any questions. Be prompt in posting final grades in MyGoucher.

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Updating Your Course			
	Guideline	Purpose	Suggestions
45	Examine student feedback.	To use student feedback to improve the course.	Review data collected in mid-course and final-course feedback surveys, and use this data to devise a plan for revising the course. Review discussion posts, emails, etc., in which students ask clarifying questions about content or assessments, and use this data to make changes to directions, expectations, content, etc. Document updates/improvements made in the course based on student feedback.
46	Reflect on course improvements.	To continuously strive for quality improvement.	Reflect on such elements as instructor presence, response time, involvement in discussion, content delivery, integration of appropriate media, inclusion of instructor voice, collaborative learning techniques, inclusion of useful feedback, etc. Stay up-to-date on features in GoucherLearn, and consider how these features can increase course, student, or instructor efficiency and effectiveness.
47	Review all links and media.	To present all course related materials in a professional manner and ensure student access.	Review all links and media used in the class prior to teaching to make sure links are live and media is working correctly.
48	Review content for spelling and grammar mistakes.	To present course materials professionally.	Review all course materials prior to teaching the class, and check for spelling and grammar mistakes.
49	Examine student performance data in GoucherLearn analytics area.	To use student performance data to improve the course.	Review GoucherLearn analytics in regards to content usage, time on tasks, sequencing of materials, etc. (e.g., Administration column => Reports). Review quiz statistics. Reflect on missing themes in written assignments. Redesign activities that cause concern for academic dishonesty. Identify what ideas or concepts students often struggle with or usually need help with, and consider ways to integrate technology to help students better learn or understand course concepts.
50	Review how the course connects to program standards, other courses in the program and program learning outcomes.	To ensure that course is integrated with the rest of the program and program goals, and students understand the connections.	Discuss course outcomes and objectives with colleagues (e.g., at faculty meetings, meetings with director and instructional designer, etc.). Be able to articulate these connections, and consider embedding them in the syllabus and/or course shell. Use the <a href="#">Student Hours of Instruction</a> document to gauge how the course meets program standards for contact hours and homework; adjust balances as needed. Take advantage of multiple faculty-support materials on the <a href="#">Faculty Best Practices</a> page, e.g., <a href="#">Tips for a Successful Residency</a> .

Guidelines developed based on information from the: Southern Regional Educational Board “Standards for Quality Online Courses”, Middle States Commission on Higher Education “Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education” and UW-La Crosse “Online Course Evaluation Guidelines.”



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## Checklist: 50 Tips for Ensuring Course Quality

STANDARDS			PRESENT
<b>Fundamentals</b>	1	Include a comprehensive syllabus that uses the Goucher template.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	2	Include a detailed course schedule that uses the Goucher template.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	3	Make learning objectives measurable and clear.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	4	Align assessments and activities with the learning objectives.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	5	Clearly articulate expectations for group work.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	6	Convey detailed instructions for all assessments.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	7	Set up and use an organized grades area that includes all graded activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Communication</b>	8	Prior to class start, send a message to students with course related info.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	9	Send a welcome message on the first day of class.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	10	Be alert to non-participatory students, and reach out to them, without delay, to encourage participation.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	11	Include separate discussion forums for general course questions, community building, and course content.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	12	Provide discussion summaries.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	13	Send prompt responses to student questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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	15	Provide a final course wrap-up.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Engagement</b>	16	Include an icebreaker discussion activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	17	Encourage and foster student-to-student interaction.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	18	Encourage and foster student-to-instructor interaction.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	19	Include discussion topics that stimulate thought/reflection about course content.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	20	Use multimedia and multiple sources of content to provide broad exposure to the material.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	21	Provide your perspectives on course topics and content.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	22	Provide varied and multiple activities and assessments to facilitate and monitor student learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	23	Provide opportunities for students to give feedback on the course.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	24	Provide students with regular and timely feedback on their performance.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	25	Encourage students to investigate, engage with and respond thoughtfully to content.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Course Design</b>	26	Ensure a consistent navigation structure.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	27	Provide support materials for complex course concepts.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	28	Create unit or module reviews to transition between units/modules.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	29	Provide meaningful integration of technology tools to facilitate learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	30	Ensure that media materials are adequately prepared and presented.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	31	Abide by copyright and fair use laws.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	32	Be attentive to student accessibility.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	33	Use time-released or scheduled opening of course materials as needed.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	34	Uphold academic integrity in the design and administration of assessments and evaluations.	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Checklist: 50 Tips for Ensuring Course Quality

	35	Use rubrics or established grading criteria as the basis for grading and feedback.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Resources for Students</b>	36	Provide information about being a successful learner in your class.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	37	Provide a list of <i>institutional</i> resources with links to appropriate departments.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	38	Provide a list of <i>academic</i> resources with links to appropriate websites.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Course Management</b>	39	Model ideal discussion participation, behavior and tone.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	40	Monitor discussion activities for appropriate student behavior and accurate information.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	41	Establish and maintain effective group work practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	42	Follow a designated schedule.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	43	Enforce expectations and guidelines for learner behavior.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	44	Update grades in GoucherLearn "Grades" area in a timely manner so students have appropriate and timely feedback about their performance.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Updating Your Course</b>	45	Examine student feedback.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	46	Reflect on course improvements.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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	50	Review how the course connects to program standards, other courses in the program, and program learning outcomes.	<input type="checkbox"/>