

Catawba College Online Course Policy

(Faculty Approval: Jan 16, 2007)

Rationale

Online courses can offer special advantages to institutions of higher learning. By incorporating technology into the learning experience, they encourage students to develop greater facility with the fastest-growing communication medium. Not only do such courses provide learning opportunities for students who, because of other life or academic commitments, might be unable to participate in a traditional classroom venue, but these courses also appeal to different learning styles. By enhancing students' competency in information systems, by addressing varying learning styles, and by providing access to substantive academic content, online courses fulfill Catawba College's commitment to providing students personal attention and an education that blends the knowledge and competencies of liberal education.

Nevertheless, the education most consistent with Catawba College's primary identity as a residential liberal arts college, is the education that takes place in community, when students meet face-to-face to discuss the course's subject matter. Therefore, online courses in the day program should truly be the exception rather than the rule, justified only when the content of the course virtually requires an online format. However, the College's Summer School and the School of Evening and Graduate Studies sustain differently types of learning communities in which direct dialogue may not be necessary, or is not as crucial to the program's identity. In these cases online courses may be more warranted. Nevertheless, online courses should still be rare, used sparingly and with considerable attention to academic integrity.

Provided below is the policy which is to guide all online courses offered by Catawba College. It is understood that "online course" means any academic course in which the online facets are used to supplant rather than supplement instructional contact. Furthermore, to the extent that classroom courses employ online media, they too should comply with the spirit, if not the letter, of this policy.

Policy

Faculty Responsibilities

1. Faculty wishing to teach online courses must complete an online training course on teaching through online courses.
2. All online courses (including existing courses) must be approved by the Curriculum Committee to determine the appropriateness of the course for an online format. Proposals for online course offerings will follow the same procedures as proposals for other courses. The Curriculum Committee will pay particular attention to the principles that the proposed online course
 - (a) must require approximately the same number of instructional hours as are normally required in a traditional course carrying the same number of credit hours as the online course, and
 - (b) must provide for **substantial interaction** between students and instructor -- *such interactivity should be at the heart of the course.*
3. Every instructor of an online course offering **during the academic year** will hold an on-campus meeting with members of the class no later than the last day on which a course may be added in a given semester/block. The purpose of this meeting will be
 - (a) to distribute a hard copy of the syllabus,
 - (b) to acquaint students with the technical requirements of the course,

- (c) to orient students in the use of such tools as Blackboard, etc.,
- (d) to ensure that the student has access to a computer capable of handling the workload of the course, and
- (e) to emphasize that the student is responsible for ensuring that work is received by the instructor in a timely fashion.

Courses taught during the summer must require students to accept an "online contract" in which they acknowledge receipt and understanding of all course requirements and processes.

4. It is the instructor's responsibility to develop a coherent plan addressing the security of online testing. Some means of doing this might include off-campus proctored examinations, or on-line exams which are timed and conducted only during a specified time period. the course syllabus must also specify a coherent plan addressing alternative means of testing should the College internet connection fail, or if a student's access to the internet is interrupted.

5. The syllabus must set firm deadlines for the submission of work and these deadlines must be strictly observed. Students must understand that they are responsible for ascertaining that the instructor has received their work in a timely fashion. Furthermore, the syllabus must clearly indicate the minimum technological requirements necessary for the student to participate in the online course.

6. Students must be *regularly accountable*, i.e., course syllabi must demonstrate the means through which students regularly communicate their learning of the course material to their instructors.

College Responsibilities

1. All online courses will be designated as such by means of standard indicators, i.e., in the "descriptions/restrictions" information always provided in all course schedules.

2. The College will offer online training courses at intervals sufficient to support the faculty need.

3. Regarding faculty teaching load:

(a) No faculty will be required to teach an online course unless it is part of their contractual agreement with the College.

(b) Minimum and maximum¹ enrollment limits in online courses will be the same as for the corresponding course when taught in a classroom venue.

(c) Online courses will count the same as classroom courses for faculty teaching load.

4. In the day program, an online course will not be offered during the same semester as an otherwise identical traditional course. In the evening program, an online course will not be offered during the same block as an otherwise identical traditional course.

Note:

1. *Minimum and maximum* were added during the faculty meeting discussion.