

The University Senate of Michigan Technological University

Proposal 52-20 (Voting Units: Academic)

Proposal: Revision to Policy and Procedures for “Standards for Online and Remote Courses”

April 7, 2020

Dual proposals were submitted by the Online Teaching Senate ad-hoc Committee and Jason Gregersen (Senior Lecturer in Mathematical Sciences, and an original member of the committee that drafted senate proposal 12-19) to modify Senate Policy 116.1 and Procedure 116.1.1. These proposals were complimentary and combined into a single proposal which establishes a process for requesting extensions for faculty training, modifies the course review timeline, and defines a new category for “remote courses”.

Given the current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic, where all face-to-face courses were moved online to some extent, it is expected that all faculty will meet the stated standards for teaching online or remote courses by Fall 2020. If extenuating circumstances exist for specific faculty that warrant an extension to this timeline, an appeal from the faculty’s chair or dean may be submitted to the Office of the Provost.

Proposal Rationale for Modifications Submitted by the Online Teaching Senate ad-hoc Committee:

Voiced faculty concern following the approval of proposal 12-19 regarding quality standards for online instructors and courses, led to the establishment of an ad-hoc senate committee to evaluate the new policy and procedure.

This committee has determined that the policy is warranted based on external expectations (from the federal government and institutional accreditor) and, more importantly, is also in the best interest of our students.

It is recognized that the peer review of online courses requires more time than initially established in the proposal and that this process will not be applicable to, nor appropriate for, many of the courses that will be offered only temporarily online. As such, modifications are proposed to the procedure to allow more flexibility for units in meeting the review requirement for online courses and review of remote courses is established to be similar to the peer review of face to face courses.

The immediate conversion to remote learning spurred by the Corona virus in March or 2020 points out the need for the entire university to have the ability to teach remotely and with high quality, since this may become the new normal.

Proposal Rationale for Modifications Submitted by Jason Gregersen

It is proposed that courses originally designed to be taught face to face that are being taught remotely for a temporary amount of time be labels as a “Remote Course” rather than an “Online Course”, which the original senate policy and proposal were addressing.

Remote courses will contain a weekly synchronous component and will be listed with a class meeting time to be used at the discretion of the instructor. Instructors preferring to use this synchronous model will be required to complete a shorter, more focused, training for remote instruction that covers current university-supported tools like:

1. Zoom
2. Canvas
3. Huskycast

Faculty who prefer to create an asynchronous “Online course” would go through the process for instructor and course certification as originally outlined in Senate Procedure 116.1.1.

Remote course reviews will be run according to processes and by peers assigned by the departments and in-line with procedures for observing face to face classes.

Distinguishing between “Remote Courses” and “Online Courses” offers benefits to instructors, students, and administrators.

Remote courses with a synchronous component allow instructors to have a fixed meeting time which can improve communication and make managing logistics much easier.

Synchronous online courses have some advantages for students, including providing students the opportunity to ask questions in real time during the lesson, or “stay after class” to ask a few questions. Many students who would ask a question during a class may not feel comfortable going to office hours or emailing faculty. Synchronous instruction also allows for a variety of interactive and engagement opportunities that can be very challenging to organize in an asynchronous course.

Differentiating between these two types of courses also provides administrative advantages, such as support and training can focus on the skills that will most benefit the instructor and the mode they selected for their course. Our CTL is equipped to provide this more targeted information in a fast, efficient way.

Given the uncertainty as to how long the current crisis will last, whether or not there will be future mid-semester disruptions due to flare-ups, or whether, even when allowed to have face to face classes, if certain high-risk faculty will be comfortable returning to the classroom, the option of moving from live in class to live out of class teaching offers the most flexible solution.

The University Senate of Michigan Technological University
Proposal 52-20
Modifications to Procedure 116.1.1
Standards for Online and Remote Courses

Submitted by: the Online Teaching Senate ad-hoc Committee & Jason Gregersen

Definitions:

- Online Distance-delivered course (from the HLC): Courses in which at least 75 percent of the instruction and interaction occurs via electronic communication, correspondence or equivalent mechanisms, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other.
 - Online Course / Instruction: Courses intentionally designed for online delivery.
 - Remote Course / Instruction: Courses containing some synchronous component, initially designed for face to face instruction but moved online due to temporary external factors.
- Course Roles:
 - Instructor of Record: the faculty member who is responsible for teaching the course and the course content.
 - Facilitator: person working under the supervision of the course instructor of record, helping teach and/or manage the course
 - Course Designer: someone who builds an online course. May, or may not, be the same person as the course instructor.
- CTL: the William G. Jackson Center for Teaching and Learning at Michigan Technological University
- Peer Reviewer: a faculty or staff member who has been officially certified (as determined by the body supplying the adopted standards) to apply the online course standards.

Scope: The proposed policy concerns itself with minimum qualifications for those engaged in instructing/facilitating online **and remote** courses and evaluation of course structure.

The proposed review process is in no way intended to review or comment on the discipline-based content of a course. Instead, the process is intended to verify that online **and remote** courses from Michigan Tech meet widely accepted and recognized basic standards that ensure content is effectively presented and accessible to online students - which is required by our accreditor.

Implementation Timeline:

- ~~All instructors and facilitators of existing online courses are expected to be qualified (see procedure: section 1) within 12 months of adoption of this policy and supporting procedure.~~

- ~~● All instructors of remote courses scheduled to teach during the Summer 2020 are expected to complete the remote instruction training or be a qualified online instructor before teaching.~~
- In preparation for future disruptions, all faculty are expected to complete either remote training or be considered qualified for online instruction by the start of Fall 2020
- All online and remote courses will be reviewed as outlined (see policy 116.1 and procedure 116.1.1 section 2) ~~within 18 months of adoption of this policy, or before that course is offered a second time after adoption of this policy.~~

Senate Policy 116.1

All instructors and facilitators of online **and remote** courses will be qualified to teach online.

All Online and Remote courses will be peer reviewed.

All online courses¹ will meet or exceed a set of minimum standards and be peer reviewed by appropriately trained and officially certified faculty and staff peer reviewers for adherence to currently recognized best-practices for online education. One official set of internationally recognized and widely adopted standards for online courses will be adopted and used university-wide.

Reviews will be limited to aspects such as online course structure and design. Reviews will not consider domain content, which remains the purview of the instructor.

Online course reviews will address aspects of course structure and design such as:

- Course navigation facilitates ease of use
- Instructions make clear how to get started and where to find various course components
- Presence and assessment of learning objectives
- Course grading policy is stated clearly at the beginning of the course
- Course meets Michigan Tech's accessibility requirements
- Michigan Tech's student support services and resources are articulated in the course or linked to

Remote course reviews will be run according to processes and by peers assigned by the departments and in-line with procedures for observing face to face classes.

The online **and remote** course review process is a collegial, iterative, peer review process of continuous improvement. Every online **and remote** course review is intended to result in the course meeting, or exceeding, the minimum standards after any necessary course revisions have been made.

Any review conducted under this policy is strictly about the course and is not about assessing faculty. Results of course peer review as outlined in this policy must not be used in an attempt to evaluate teaching effectiveness, nor be used in any part of the promotion and tenure process.

¹ Online sections of graduate research, where graduate students are working under their advisor and no instruction or content is delivered online (listed with a schedule type of "research"), are exempted from this requirement. "All online courses" includes online courses designed and/or marketed in cooperation with outside vendors.

Supporting Procedure

1. Qualifications

For Online Courses

In addition to meeting the general faculty qualification requirements, online instructors and facilitators will need to:

- Demonstrate that they have training in the development, delivery, and assessment of online courses. Examples of how this may be demonstrated include, but are not limited to:
 - successful completion of Michigan Tech's "Foundations of Online Teaching" course with the grade of a 'B' or better, OR
 - completion of an equivalent online teaching certification, training class, or program, OR
 - evidence of an equivalent combination of education and experience of teaching well designed online courses that met similar, or more rigorous, standards
 - experience may be demonstrated by evidence such as, but not limited to: demonstrating that previously taught online courses meet adopted standards, having taught courses certified to meet well known standards at another institution with similar policies, or having received commendations for online teaching.
- AND, show proficiency in operating the course learning management system (LMS). Examples of how this may be demonstrated include, but are not limited to:
 - successful completion of eLearning's Canvas Introductory Workshop series, OR
 - evidence of an equivalent combination of training and/or experience sufficient to provide adequate skill using the course learning management system as a teacher.

For Remote Courses

In addition to meeting the general faculty qualification requirements, remote instructors and facilitators will need to either be a qualified online instructor or complete a training program hosted by the CTL (or otherwise approved equivalent training) focusing on general proficiency with current university-supported:

1. Synchronous conferencing solution
2. LMS
3. Video platform

Alternative Credentials

Instructors who believe they have achieved the qualifications (detailed above) for online **or remote** instruction can submit their credentials to the provost's office. Final determination of qualifications will be completed by the provost's office in consultation with the CTL. A list of approved equivalent trainings/courses that meet the requirements of this policy (no further review required) will be available on the CTL website. The provost's office will maintain a list of instructors approved to teach an online course at Michigan Tech.

2. Review of Online Courses

Online Course review is intended to be an iterative, continuous improvement process. Reviews are intended to help faculty move their courses towards what is considered best practice and the initial review may indicate the course does not meet minimum standards. As long as faculty are engaged in the process and are working towards review completion (see 2.4) initiating the review before the deadlines specified is sufficient to meet the requirements outlined below.

2.1 Faculty Support

Upon request, direct assistance with course development or modification will be available from the CTL and trained peer reviewers. A rubric outlining the adopted standards will also be made available to assist with online course development.

2.2 Review Timing

Peer review for new and existing online courses will occur as outlined below:

- NEW online courses (those developed **or transitioned to online delivery** after the approval of this policy and procedure) **will submit a plan for review to the provost's office as part of the course creation process or as soon as it is known a traditional course will be transitioned to online. Course ~~will~~ review should be initiated-viewed** before the course is offered a second time.
- **For** EXISTING online courses (those where development and initial offering predate the approval of this policy and procedure) **the academic unit will submit a plan for getting all online courses reviewed to the provost's office for approval before the start of Fall Semester 2020. Course review within the unit should be initiated ~~will be reviewed~~ within 18 months of policy approval ~~or before the course is offered for a second time.~~**

~~Thereafter~~ Once a course review is completed (see 2.4 below), the course should be reviewed again every three years or if substantial changes have been made.

Reviews may be initiated at any time at the request of the instructor.

2.3 Peer Reviewer Selection

Reviews will be conducted, in cooperation with the course instructor and/or designer, by two peer reviewers appointed by the department chair or dean with input from the instructor/designer. A list of eligible reviewers will be available on the CTL website.

2.4 Review Completion

Reviews are intended to be iterative with open dialog between the instructor/designer and review team, especially after the initial standards rubric evaluation and as modifications are made.

Online course review will be considered complete when standards have been met as determined by peer reviewers.

In the case where the instructor declines to implement the recommended revisions needed to meet the minimum standards, the review will be considered finished but the course will be determined to have not met minimum standards.

3. Use of Online Course Reviews

Peer reviews are conducted to provide feedback on how course design can be improved for online delivery. Copies of the review rubric, in addition to any written comments from the peer reviewers, will be provided to the instructor/designer (whoever is most directly responsible for course design) of the course being reviewed.

Upon completion of the review (when either the minimum standards have been met or the instructor declines to implement the recommended revisions to meet minimum standards), the review team will report whether the course met, or did not meet, minimum standards to the provost's office and to the department chair or school dean.

In the case that a review finishes and the course does not meet minimum standards, copies of the review rubric and written comments will additionally be provided by the review team to the provost's office so materials can be used to inform the next review. Materials will not be collected nor kept by the provost's office when courses are determined to meet or surpass standards.

Any review conducted under this policy is strictly about the course and is not about assessing faculty. Results of course peer review as outlined in this policy and supporting procedure must not be used in an attempt to evaluate teaching effectiveness, nor be used in any part of the promotion and tenure process.

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Implementation Timeline:

- In preparation for future disruptions, all faculty are expected to complete either remote training or be considered qualified for online instruction by the start of Fall 2020

- All online and remote courses will be reviewed as outlined (see policy 116.1 and procedure 116.1.1 section 2).

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