



James Madison University

Best Practices for Online and
Hybrid Courses

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JMU Best Practices for Online Course Delivery

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JMU Online Best Practices

I. Introduction

James Madison University is committed to providing quality courses regardless of the delivery format. This document focuses specifically on standards and guidelines for online and hybrid learning environments that affirm the JMU [Mission](#) and [Defining Characteristics](#). To ensure the University's commitment to the highest standards of quality, it endorses the following core values and best practices that establish standards for course design, instruction, and associated support services at the institutional level. The core values that guide online instructional practices at JMU are based closely on the research findings of Chickering & Ehrmann, academic literature, and the standards recommended by accrediting agencies and educational policy organizations. The JMU core values for online instruction are:

- Faculty should set clear expectations for their courses.
- All courses should be centered on student learning.
- A personal connection with students is more important than the technology used.
- Courses should engage students in active learning.
- Interactivity and prompt feedback are key to student engagement.
- The diverse ways students learn should be incorporated into the curriculum and individual courses.
- Student retention depends on effective student support.

To support these objectives:

- Library and external resource links should be available.
- Colleges and departments are responsible for making decisions regarding the online courses they offer and for ensuring that they comply with JMU best practices.
- Teacher/student ratios should create optimal learning environments.

James Madison University is committed to upholding the principles of accreditation for distance education courses and programs as articulated in the [Distance Education Policy Statement](#) endorsed by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. JMU also subscribes to best practices in instructional design, delivery, and teaching endorsed by the [Southern Regional Education Board's Principles of Good Practice](#) and the [Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications' Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs](#).

These guidelines are based on a widespread agreement that has emerged in the research literature, educational policy organizations, and institutional practice. Together they constitute a converging set of evidence-based best practices for assessing the quality and effectiveness of online or hybrid courses offered by JMU and for guiding its online and hybrid education practices and policies. For the purposes of this document, "online" is defined as totally replacing physical class meetings and "hybrid" is defined as partial replacement of physical class meetings with distance learning technologies.

II. Curriculum and Instruction

The curriculum and instruction of online and hybrid courses will be fully comparable in rigor to the same curriculum delivered on campus. The following apply:

- Students should receive an orientation that provides information regarding how the course or program works, expectations, assignments, and any required technologies. Before students enroll in an online class, they should assess their readiness for this mode of instruction by completing the ***Student Readiness Self-Assessment*** (Appendix A.) Instructors should provide an orientation to online learning and the technology used for course delivery. Local students may also have access to the CIT Orientation.
- Learning objectives and course goals should be clearly stated. Learning objectives should clearly describe what students are expected to know or should be able to do by the end of the course.
- Course requirements are clearly stated, consistent with course objectives, and representative of the scope of the course.
- Instruction is given to assist students in meeting learning objectives in ways that acknowledge and respect individual differences in student learning styles. The course should provide students with multiple learning paths to allow individuals with different learning styles and preferences to achieve mastery.
- The course content and assignments will be of sufficient rigor, depth and breadth to teach to the objectives of the course. (This may include opportunities to engage in higher-order thinking, critical reasoning, etc.)
- Course design fosters instructional strategies that engage students in self-directed learning activities and participation in interactive, collaborative assignments that create a sense of social learning and community building.
- The method for determining grades is clearly specified on the syllabus.
- Student evaluation strategies are consistent with course goals and objectives and are representative of the scope of the course.
- Graded work is based on appropriately sequenced and instructionally diverse activities that promote the achievement of learning objectives.
- Timely, individualized feedback should be given to students, as well as self-assessment opportunities, to assist them in monitoring their progress towards achieving the course's learning objectives.
- Online courses will promote JMU's information literacy principles as defined in the [Information Literacy Program](#) and the [Information Literacy Rubric](#).
- The course instructor provides students with frequent feedback about their performance, and opportunities for instructor-student interactions.

The authority to determine online course enrollment minima/maxima resides with the Dean of each college. The four most important factors in setting enrollment ranges are listed below.

1. The existing enrollment ranges for a single section size of the same course when offered on campus.
2. Special needs and requirements of the course delivered in an online format.
3. The recommendations from the professor teaching the course.
4. Whether or not the course is taught in a compressed schedule (i.e. summer sessions.)

Courses requiring more student/instructor interaction and student-centered activities may be a candidate for a lower enrollment maximum. Ideally, all online courses will incorporate student-centered learning pedagogy. However, courses that lend themselves to more self-directed learning due to the nature of the material or level of the course may be able to accommodate a higher maximum enrollment number. **At no time should an online learning course have enrollments above the maximum of a single section size of the same course when delivered on campus.**

III. Technology

A broad range of delivery modes should be considered for effective synchronous or asynchronous delivery of online and hybrid courses. Modern technology options include but are not limited to: Web-based, two-way interactive video, interactive TV, streaming video with or without a Web-based platform, CD/DVD, and virtual reality.

- The feasibility of using modern technologies for online and hybrid course delivery is dependent upon the JMU infrastructure and a variety of resources. The technologies used to deliver online or hybrid courses should be selected on the basis of their appropriateness in facilitating the achievement of learning objectives. Before selecting a delivery technology, faculty should consult with the Center for Instructional Technology (CIT) to confirm that the technologies considered for course delivery can be effectively supported within the parameters of existing resources and services.
- Instructors should regularly evaluate learning technologies used to determine if they are pedagogically effective, and whether more effective teaching methods could be employed.
- Given the preceding core values and standards for instruction and course design, certain online and hybrid delivery modes may be inappropriate (e.g., learning by correspondence, whether e-mail or postal-based). Final determinations of the suitability of delivery mode should rest with the instructor, after consultation with CIT, and with the support of the academic department or college offering the course.

IV. Faculty

Workload

Faculty members teaching an online or hybrid learning course typically receive the same credit toward their teaching load as faculty who teach an on-campus course. However, decisions regarding faculty workload and compensation for online and hybrid classes should take into consideration differences in time and effort involved in delivering a high quality online or hybrid course that fosters substantial interaction among students and between faculty, versus that involved in delivering the same or a similar class in a traditional classroom format. Final decisions regarding credit toward the teaching load of faculty in teaching online and hybrid learning courses is at the discretion of the Program Head and/or Academic Unit Head who may choose to provide a reduction of work load or increase in overload compensation. The decision as to how many online and hybrid learning courses a faculty member may teach is left to the discretion of the Academic Unit Head, or College Dean when necessary, and should follow the guidelines listed in the *JMU Summer Workload and Pay Practices* document for summer session courses and the *JMU Faculty Handbook* for fall and spring semester courses.

Faculty Training and Development

The quality of online courses and student success in these courses is dependent upon well-trained, supported faculty. Faculty interested in developing online and hybrid courses should conduct a self-assessment regarding the following areas:

- Competence in using the tools required to teach online.
- An understanding of the difference between online and face-to-face instruction.
- An understanding of the amount of work involved in preparing and teaching an online course.
- An understanding of the need for regular communication with student, prompt feedback, the need for student collaboration in online classes, and so on.
- The identification of areas where there is a need for additional theoretical or practical training in online instruction.

Faculty should contact the Center for Instructional Technology (CIT) to discuss formal training opportunities and to receive information regarding the process of approval to offer a course online.

V. Student Support Services

JMU is committed to providing students taking online and hybrid courses equal access to the University's academic and administrative support services.

- Students will have access to support services such as the Office of the Registrar, the Business office, the University Writing Center, the JMU Bookstore, system tutorials and more through the [Student Support Resource](#) comprehensive web page on the JMU Online Best Practices website.

- Technical support services and help desk resources are provided for students who need assistance in using JMU-standard technologies and online learning technologies. Support for non-standard JMU technology is the responsibility of the instructor.
- Students should evaluate their technological competencies and their access to required technologies **prior to enrollment** to confirm that they are ready to take a course offered in an online format by taking the [JMU Student Self-assessment Survey](#) (Appendix A).
- Disability Services. Students enrolled in online academic programs may request accommodations for disability. It is the student's responsibility to contact the Office of Disability Services and provide documentation to support the need of accommodation. Students are encouraged to initiate requests prior to the start of the program. Review of and implementation of accommodations may require collaboration with the instructor or program faculty. More information about programs and services of ODS is available at <http://www.jmu.edu/ods/>. For appointments, call 540.568.6705. For general questions and after hours, e-mail: disability-svcs@jmu.edu

VI. Library and Learning Resources

Students enrolled in online learning and hybrid courses should have remote access to library learning resources including full-text electronic periodicals, online research databases, subscription services, and streaming media collections. Instructors should provide students with a list of external online library and learning resources, as course appropriate. Subject librarians are available to assist faculty in acquiring online materials, providing library instruction sessions and student research consultations.

VII. Course Evaluation

At James Madison University, the evaluation of online courses is conducted via an online student evaluation application. Evaluations include a set of university core questions, individual departmental questions, and questions related to online delivery (see below). Faculty members may add questions as well.

Acknowledging the importance that technology plays in online courses, the taskforce compiled a small set of common questions for inclusion on course evaluations of online courses. The first block of questions addresses the effectiveness of technology while the second block of questions requests feedback regarding students' perceived access to services. The purpose of the first block of questions is to provide instructors and departments with additional relevant information related to online courses. Departments are encouraged to use and report the information as they do with other course evaluation information. The purpose of the second block is to provide information to service providers regarding students' perception of access to services. While these recommendations are for online courses, the first block of questions proposed would be appropriate for any courses that incorporate online elements. To the extent possible, instructors are encouraged to include questions specific to the technologies used in the course.

Recommended Questions:

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY					
For this on-line course					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The technology used in the course supported the learning objectives and goals of the course	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The technology part of the course was well organized, easy to navigate, and logical	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The technology facilitated my interaction with the instructor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The technology facilitated my interactions with classmates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
For this on-line course, I found accessing the following services to be					
	Easy	Neutral	Difficult	N/A	
Registration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Payment of tuition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Purchasing course materials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Library	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Technical Support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
					<input type="button" value=" >>"/>

VIII. Minimize the Potential for Online Cheating

Teaching in an online environment presents special challenges with regard to testing. Where appropriate, JMU professors are encouraged to use the university supported plagiarism prevention service which helps prevent plagiarism by detecting unoriginal content in student papers. It also has features designed to aid in educating students about plagiarism and importance of proper attribution of any borrowed content.

Non-proctored environments associated with online courses dictate the need for assessment tools that differ from the tools used in the traditional classroom delivery. Effective ways to prevent cheating and plagiarism in the online classroom include the following suggestions as cited in the [Teacher's Aid, Resources and References for Online Teachers](#).

- “Chunk” assignments over the course of a few weeks.
- Use timed tests to mitigate the potential of Internet surfing.
- Be proactive by corresponding directly with students who may be at high risk for cheating (e.g., low grades, lack of participation, and lack of attendance.)
- Address the [JMU Honor Code](#) and the consequences of cheating and plagiarism in your syllabus and first class meeting/material.
- Assign weekly writing assignments.
- Design tests as open book tests.
- Use technology to offset potential cheating (e.g., browser lockdown applications, etc.)

- Use the standard exam formats (e.g., multiple choice, short answer, matching) as ungraded self-assessment tools for students to use in an effort to discover their learning gaps.
- High-stakes exams require the use of a proctored environment such as local colleges/universities, local professional testing centers, online proctoring services, or the coordination of a special exam session on the campus of JMU. All proctored exam environments must require authentication of student identity. Academic units are responsible for determining the method used for proctored exams. Academic units choosing external proctoring services must work through JMU Procurement Services for current and future service agreements. Agreements, at minimum, must address the following issues:
 - Student privacy
 - Fees assessed
 - Notification of online testing requirements/mandates for online courses
 - Guidelines for use
 - Technical issues that might arise during proctored tests taken online (if applicable)
 - Resolution of disputes involving remote proctor services (if applicable)
 - Resolution of accusations of cheating on online tests (if applicable)
 - Accommodations

IX. Copyright Compliance

Faculty are expected to comply with Title 17, United States Code regarding copyright laws and the supplement Technology, Education, and Copyright Harmonization Act (TEACH Act) as it pertains to distance classes. The TEACH Act is a supplement to copyright laws with the purpose of facilitating the resource needs of distance education (within nonprofit educational institutions) with the rights of the copyright holders. It allows distance educators to use materials in a distance-learning environment without requiring the permission of the copyright owner. A good summary resource regarding the TEACH Act is the [Guide to the TEACH Act](#). The official TEACH Act document may be found at [The Copyright Clearance Center, The TEACH Act: New Roles, Rules and Responsibilities for Academic Institutions](#).

IX. Intellectual Property

JMU provides educational resources and services to assist staff and faculty in good faith assessment of their intellectual property and to encourage best practices. JMU policy 1107 and Copyright@JMU address the ownership of intellectual property of online courses.

APPENDIX A – Student Readiness Self-Assessment

The electronic survey for students to take is located at <http://www.jmu.edu/dl/selfassessment.shtml>. Students receive a score at the end of the assessment and the following recommendation based on the score.

Points	Interpretation
51 - 75 points	If you scored between 51 and 75 points, you are well-prepared for an online course.
40 - 50 points	If you scored between 40 and 50 points, you may find an online course to be very challenging. Make certain you have access to the necessary technology and anticipate that you may find an online course is more challenging than an in-class course.
Below 40 points	Based on your responses, you either do not have access to the necessary technology, are not well prepared, or may not have an appropriate learning required for online courses. An online course is not recommended at this time.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. I would classify myself as someone who:
 - Completes assignments ahead of the deadline
 - Needs reminders about deadlines
 - Ignores deadlines until the last minute
2. As a reader, I would classify myself as:
 - Good. I usually understand the material without help.
 - Average. I sometimes need help to understand the material.
 - Slow. I usually need extra time to read material.
3. I would classify my communication skills as:
 - I prefer verbal discussion to writing.
 - I prefer communicating my ideas in writing.
 - I have difficulty expressing myself through writing
4. I am most comfortable with:
 - not receiving feedback, I am fine on my own.
 - receiving feedback eventually so I can review my work.
 - immediate feedback from my instructor or I become frustrated
5. I learn best by:
 - reading the material.
 - listening to a lecture on the material.
 - sharing my knowledge with others.
6. How confident do you feel about installing or updating software?
 - Very comfortable, I can download applications and figure out problems on my own.
 - Comfortable, although I sometimes need help to run programs, install software or manage files.
 - Not comfortable, I need help installing new software.

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7. When I am asked to use new technologies,
 - I look forward to the challenge of learning new skills.
 - I feel apprehensive, but will try them and ask for help when necessary.
 - I avoid it whenever possible.

8. The following best describes my access to the Internet:
 - I have reliable, high-speed Internet access that does not inconvenience others in my household when I am using it.
 - I use a dial-up connection to access the Internet.
 - I do not have access to the Internet from my residence.

9. I have access to basic software (e.g. Microsoft Office, Internet Explorer, Flash Player) and possess the basic skills to use each application.
 - Yes
 - No
 - I do not know

10. I know how to use online communication tools (chat boards, email, discussion boards, etc.) or I can quickly figure them out.
 - Yes
 - No
 - I do not know

APPENDIX B

Student Support Resources

Student support is critical to student success in online learning courses. We have identified the major areas where we feel students need support from the university. This information will be available on a website and will link to the appropriate tools and/or information.

Pre-Enrollment Assistance:

- [General Information – Office of the Registrar](#)
- [Application process for non-degree seeking students](#)
- [Self-assessment/readiness tool](#)
- Listing of available courses with course descriptions to include information regarding the technology used for the course

University Writing Center:

- www.jmu.edu/owc
- Contact Jared Featherstone at <mailto:feathejj@jmu.edu>

Tutorials

- [View tutorials for MyMadison](#)

Technical support:

- General eID/password issues:
 - <mailto:help@jmu.edu>
 - Phone the helpdesk – 540.568.3555
- Email the [Canvas course learning management system support team](#) or phone CIT at 540.568.5312
- Technology specific to individual courses – Instructor

Business Office:

- [Tuition, Billing Information, etc.](#)

Office of the Registrar Support Services:

- [Transcript request](#)
- [Dropping a class](#)
- [Withdrawing from a class](#)
- [Frequently asked questions](#)

Library Services:

- Connect to library resources from off-campus
- Research information

Bookstore:

- [Textbooks](#) - 540.568.3995
- [General Merchandise](#) - 540.568.6960
- [General Books](#) - 540.568.3844
- [Computers, Software and Peripherals](#) - 540.568.3989
- [JMU Bookstore Customer Service](#) - 540.568.6121
- [JMU Bookstore Catalog](#) - 800.280.7543
- JMU Bookstore Fax - 540.568.7029

Complaints/Grievances:

- Degree seeking students should contact the [Dean of Students Office](#)
- Non-degree seeking students should contact the [Outreach & Engagement](#) office.

APPENDIX C

Honor Code Resources

Sample Online Student Pledge

1. I understand the terms of the JMU Honor Code are applicable to the online courses I take and that I shall be subject to the sanctions as outlined in the James Madison University catalog and Student Handbook.
2. I shall not divulge my username or password to other individuals.
3. I pledge that all postings for course assignments, online exams, discussion boards and any other functionality used will be posted by me.

The JMU Honor Code

Students shall observe complete honesty in all academic matters. Violations of the Honor Code include, but are not limited to, taking or attempting to take any of the following actions:

1. Using unauthorized materials or receiving unauthorized assistance during an examination or in connection with any work done for academic credit. Unauthorized materials may include, but are not limited to, notes, textbooks, previous examinations, exhibits, experiments, papers or other supplementary items.
2. Giving false or misleading information regarding an academic matter.
3. Copying information from another student during an examination.
4. Rendering unauthorized assistance to another student by knowingly permitting him or her to see or copy all or a portion of an examination or any work to be submitted for academic credit.
5. Obtaining prior knowledge of examination materials (including by using copies of previously given examinations obtained from files maintained by various groups and organizations) in an unauthorized manner.
6. Selling or giving to another student unauthorized copies of any portion of an examination.
7. Using a commercially prepared paper or research project or submitting for academic credit any work completed by someone else.
8. Falsifying or attempting to falsify class attendance records for oneself, or for someone else, or having another falsify attendance records on your behalf.
9. Falsifying material relating to course registration or grades, either for oneself or for someone else.
10. Falsifying reasons why a student did not attend a required class or take a scheduled examination.
11. Taking an examination in the place of another student.
12. Making unauthorized changes in any reported grade or on an official academic report form.
13. Falsifying scientific or other data submitted for academic credit.
14. Collaborating in an unauthorized manner with one or more other students on an examination or any work submitted for academic credit.
15. Committing the act of plagiarism - the copying, writing or presenting as one's own the information, ideas or phrasing of another person without proper acknowledgment of the true source.
16. Using computing facilities or library resources in an academically dishonest manner.
17. Falsifying evidence, or intimidating or influencing someone in connection with an honor violation investigation, hearing or appeal.

APPENDIX D

Sample Syllabus Information

Minimal System Requirements

- Required Operating System: Windows and/or MAC operating systems
- Supported Internet browsers: Microsoft Internet Explorer, Safari, Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome
- Browser preferences: Java/JavaScript, Pop-up blocker, Cookies
- Screen Resolution requirements: 800x600 minimum
- Additional requirements may be specified by the instructor based on the technology used.

Fundamental Required Skills

1. Download and send files.
2. Navigate the Internet.
3. Participate in chats and threaded discussions.
4. Familiarity with the course learning management system (Canvas).
5. Demonstrate working knowledge of (word processing, spreadsheets, course specific software)
6. Additional skills may be specified by the instructor.

APPENDIX E

Online Best Practices Task Force
Members

Catherine Crummett, Co-Chair, Assistant Dean, University Studies

Jim Mazoué, Co-Chair, Distance Learning Coordinator, Center for Instructional
Technology

Robin Anderson, Associate Director, Center for Assessment and Research Studies

Taz Daughtrey, Department of Computer Science

Wendy Love, Associate Registrar for Systems, Office of the Registrar

Sarah MacDonald, Program Coordinator, Outreach & Engagement

Michael Stoloff, Professor, Head, Department of Psychology

Diane Wilcox, Assistant Professor, Human Resource Management, College of Education

Pavel Zemliansky, Associate Professor and Graduate Coordinator, The School of Writing,
Rhetoric & Technical Communication

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