

ACE Course Quality Assessment Rubric

The American Council on Education (ACE) recruits faculty reviewers from postsecondary institutions across the country. Faculty reviewers are individuals who are currently teaching at a postsecondary institution recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and have been teaching for a minimum of five years. ACE carefully selects a group of faculty with the appropriate subject matter expertise from a diverse group of institutions to serve as faculty reviewers; this ensures the review process incorporates standards and best practices found in two- and four-year public and private colleges and universities.

The review team evaluates the organization’s course materials to determine whether the quality, content, scope, rigor, and assessments align with the same standards being applied to curricula currently being taught at accredited postsecondary institutions. In deciding whether or not to grant ACE credit recommendation for a course, faculty reviewers consider numerous relevant factors, broken down into five domains:

1. **Online Learner Support & Resources**
2. **Online Organization & Design**
3. **Instructional Design & Delivery**
4. **Student Learning Outcomes, Assessment & Evaluation**
5. **Teaching with Technology**

For each course, the faculty reviewers examine the relevant material provided, which includes, but is not limited to, instructor materials, student materials, and assessments. Each course is reviewed by at least two faculty reviewers using a consensus-based approach as to whether a credit recommendation will be made. When a credit recommendation is made, the faculty reviewers include two key points: 1) the formulation of a credit hour recommendation for each course (e.g., course equivalence to one, two, or three credit hours), and 2) assignment of a subject area for which the course may be transcribed by the receiving institution.

Faculty reviewers measure each course against the key standards identified in the five domains of the quality rubric. For each standard, faculty will identify how a course measures against the benchmark to be considered “Ineffective,” “Effective,” or “Exemplary.” For the Alternative Credit Project, “Effective” is used as the baseline standard for courses to be granted an ACE credit recommendation. There are also three types of standards that may appear in each domain: “Mandatory Minimum Standard,” “Mandatory Standard,” and “Recommended Standard.” Any course assessed as “Ineffective” for any Mandatory Minimum Standard will not receive a credit recommendation; instead, those courses will receive a completed assessment with suggestions on how to improve on the given metric(s) to reach either the “Effective” or “Exemplary” standard. If a course receives an “Effective” or “Exemplary” rating for all Mandatory Minimum Standards (red) and at least an 80 percent “Effective” or “Exemplary” rating for all Mandatory Standards (blue), a credit recommendation is then granted. Recommended standards (yellow) have been provided, but do not count towards determining credit recommendation eligibility. When applicable, providers are encouraged to incorporate recommended “Effective” or “Exemplary” standards as part of their continuous quality improvement processes.

	Ineffective	Effective	Exemplary
Mandatory Minimum Standard		All seven (7) mandatory minimum standards must be rated “Effective” or “Exemplary” to be considered for an ACE credit recommendation.	
Mandatory Standard		At least 9 out of the 11 mandatory standards must be rated “Effective” or “Exemplary” to be considered for an ACE credit recommendation.	
Recommended Standard	Recommended standards do not count towards determining credit recommendation eligibility.		

Domain 1: Online Learner Support & Resources

	Ineffective	Effective	Exemplary
Articulating Student Expectations	<input type="checkbox"/> Course does not adequately state expectations for interaction with the course (netiquette, grade weighting, models/examples, and timing and frequency of contributions).	<input type="checkbox"/> Course adequately states expectations for interaction with the course (netiquette, grade weighting, models/examples, and timing and frequency of contributions).	<input type="checkbox"/> Course clearly states expectations for interaction with the course (netiquette, grade weighting, models/examples, and timing and frequency of contributions).
Student Support Services	<input type="checkbox"/> Course provides limited links to provider resources and learner support services (e.g., technical support, student orientation, navigating the LMS, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/> Course provides adequate links to provider resources and learner support services (e.g., technical support, student orientation, navigating the LMS, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/> Course provides extensive links to provider resources and learner support services (e.g., technical support, student orientation, navigating the LMS, etc.).
Course Provider Policies	<input type="checkbox"/> Course includes limited information on relevant provider policies on plagiarism, computer use, student grievances, accommodating disabilities, course-specific tutoring, etc. Even where relevant, course does not provide appropriate contact information for instructor, department, and/or program.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course includes adequate information on relevant provider policies on plagiarism, computer use, student grievances, accommodating disabilities, course-specific tutoring, etc. Where relevant, course also provides appropriate contact information for instructor, department, and/or program.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course includes extensive information on relevant provider policies on plagiarism, computer use, student grievances, accommodating disabilities, course-specific tutoring, etc. Where relevant, course also provides appropriate contact information for instructor, department, and/or program.
Learner Community Resources	<input type="checkbox"/> *Course contains limited resources or activities intended to build a sense of class community, support open communication, and establish trust (e.g., Ice-breaker, Bulletin Board, Meet Your Classmates, Ask a Question discussion forums).	<input type="checkbox"/> *Course contains adequate resources or activities intended to build a sense of class community, support open communication, and establish trust (e.g., Ice-breaker, Bulletin Board, Meet Your Classmates, Ask a Question discussion forums).	<input type="checkbox"/> *Course contains a variety of resources or activities intended to build a sense of class community, support open communication, and establish trust (e.g., Ice-breaker, Bulletin Board, Meet Your Classmates, Ask a Question discussion forums).

*Note: *Some course designs purposefully do not offer student-to-student or student-to-instructor interactions/community*

Domain 2: Online Organization & Design

	Ineffective	Effective	Exemplary
Course Organization/Navigation	<input type="checkbox"/> Much of the course is under construction, with only some key components, such as the syllabus. Course does not provide adequate overviews at the course and module level to support learner contextualization of course content and associated tasks.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course is organized and navigable. Students can understand the key components and structure of the course. Course also provides adequate overviews at the course and module level to support learner contextualization of course content and associated tasks.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course is well organized in a logical fashion and easy to navigate. Course instructions make it easy for students to clearly understand all components and structure of the course. Course also provides useful overviews at the course and module level to support learner contextualization of course content and associated tasks.
Course Syllabus	<input type="checkbox"/> Course syllabus is not present or is unclear about what is expected of students.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course syllabus is easy to locate and includes the following: course description, expectations, instructor contact information, objectives and outcomes, evaluation methods, minimum passing scores and exam security methods. Course syllabus also adequately identifies and delineates the role the online environment will play in the course.	<input type="checkbox"/> Beyond “effective” criteria, the syllabus contains a grading scale, detailed testing methods, and clearly states whether the course is fully online, blended, or web-enhanced, and if there are any required synchronous activities or proctored exams.
Functional Design	<input type="checkbox"/> Course pages are inconsistent both visually and functionally and aesthetic design does not present and communicate course information clearly.	<input type="checkbox"/> Most course pages are visually and functionally consistent, the aesthetic design is reasonably effective throughout the course, and the design presents and communicates course information reasonably clear.	<input type="checkbox"/> All course pages are visually and functionally consistent throughout the course. Aesthetic design presents and communicates course information clearly throughout the course and clearly links the syllabus to course content.
Grading Standards	<input type="checkbox"/> Course activities do not include standards for grading, such as rubrics for written assignments or explanatory text for grading objective assessments.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course activities generally include standards for grading, such as rubrics for written assignments or explanatory text for grading objective assessments.	<input type="checkbox"/> All course activities include standards for grading, such as rubrics for written assignments or explanatory text for grading objective assessments.

Domain 3: Instructional Design & Delivery

	Ineffective	Effective	Exemplary
Course Objectives	<input type="checkbox"/> Course objectives/outcomes are not clearly defined and measurable and are not aligned with student learning activities and assessments.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course objectives/outcomes are clearly defined and measurable and are clearly aligned with student learning activities and assessments.	
Learning Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/> Course does not use visual, textual, kinesthetic and/or auditory activities to engage students.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course effectively provides a few types of activities to support online student engagement.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course provides students multiple opportunities, through a variety of visual, textual, kinesthetic and/or auditory activities, to effectively support online student engagement.
Active Learning	<input type="checkbox"/> Course does not provide activities for learners to develop higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills, such as critical reflection and analysis (often referred to as “active learning”).	<input type="checkbox"/> Course provides some activities for learners to develop higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills, such as critical reflection and analysis (often referred to as “active learning”).	<input type="checkbox"/> Course provides many activities for learners to develop higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills, such as critical reflection and analysis (often referred to as “active learning”).
References & Resources	<input type="checkbox"/> Course offers limited access to a variety of engaging internal and/or external resources. External resources are not properly cited within the course materials.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course offers adequate access to engaging internal and/or external resources that support learning outcomes. External resources are properly cited within the course, where appropriate.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course offers access to a wide range of engaging internal and/or external resources that support learning outcomes. External resources are properly cited within the course, where appropriate.
Applied Learning	<input type="checkbox"/> *Course does not provide learning activities that emulate real world applications of the discipline, such as experiential learning, case studies, and problem-based activities.	<input type="checkbox"/> *Course provides some learning activities that emulate real world applications of the discipline, such as experiential learning, case studies, and problem-based activities.	<input type="checkbox"/> *Course provides effective opportunities for students to participate in learning activities that emulate real world applications of the discipline, such as experiential learning, case studies, and problem-based activities.
Peer-to-Peer Interaction	<input type="checkbox"/> *Course offers limited opportunities for student-to-student interaction and constructive collaboration.	<input type="checkbox"/> *Course offers adequate opportunities for student-to-student interaction and constructive collaboration.	<input type="checkbox"/> *Course offers ample opportunities for student-to-student interaction and constructive collaboration.
Instructor Interaction	<input type="checkbox"/> *Course design and organization does not facilitate instructor use of tools to communicate or interact with students to create an adequate presence in the course.	<input type="checkbox"/> *Course design and organization adequately facilitate instructor communication and interaction through the use of tools and, consequently, supports an adequate teaching presence in the course.	<input type="checkbox"/> *Course design and organization fully facilitate instructor communication and interaction with students through the use of tools and, consequently, supports a strong teaching presence in the course.
Relevance & Prior Knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/> *Learners are not encouraged to inject knowledge from diverse sources of information in their course interactions.	<input type="checkbox"/> *Learners are sometimes encouraged to inject knowledge from diverse sources of information in their course interactions.	<input type="checkbox"/> *Learners are encouraged to inject knowledge from diverse sources of information in their course interactions.

*Note: *Some course designs purposefully do not offer student-to-student or student-to-instructor interactions/community*

Domain 4: Student Learning Outcomes, Assessment & Evaluation

	Ineffective	Effective	Exemplary
Curriculum Alignment	<input type="checkbox"/> Course curriculum may not be comparable to or aligned with course content found at regionally accredited higher education institutions.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course curriculum is comparable to and aligned with course content found at regionally accredited higher education institutions.	
Mastery of Concepts	<input type="checkbox"/> Course includes limited methods to assess mastery of content (e.g., performance demonstrations under simulated conditions, written or oral examinations, written reports, completion of a project, etc.) compared to regionally accredited higher education institutions.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course includes appropriate methods to assess mastery of content (e.g., performance demonstrations under simulated conditions, written or oral examinations, written reports, completion of a project, etc.) comparable to those of regionally accredited higher education institutions.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course includes frequent and exemplary methods to assess mastery of content (e.g., performance demonstrations under simulated conditions, written or oral examinations, written reports, completion of a project, etc.) comparable to those of regionally accredited higher education institutions.
Assessment Criteria	<input type="checkbox"/> Course does not provide clearly articulated criteria for assessment of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (e.g., rubrics, exemplary work).	<input type="checkbox"/> Course provides acceptable criteria for assessment of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (e.g., rubrics, exemplary work).	<input type="checkbox"/> Course provides clearly articulated criteria for assessment of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (e.g., rubrics, exemplary work).
Student Grades	<input type="checkbox"/> Course provides limited access to an up-to-date grade book.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course provides access to an up-to-date grade book.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course provides easy access to a well-designed and up-to-date grade book.
Student Assessment of Learning	<input type="checkbox"/> Students have few opportunities to review their performance and assess their own learning throughout the course (e.g., pre-tests, automated self-tests, reflective assignments, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/> Students have some opportunities to review their performance and assess their own learning throughout the course (e.g., pre-tests, automated self-tests, reflective assignments, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/> Students have many opportunities to review their performance and assess their own learning throughout the course (e.g., pre-tests, automated self-tests, reflective assignments, etc.).
Instructor Feedback to Students	<input type="checkbox"/> *Course does not clearly state expectations for timely and regular feedback from the instructor (e.g. through questions, email, assignments, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/> *Course adequately states expectations for timely and regular feedback from the instructor (e.g. through questions, email, assignments, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/> *Course clearly states expectations for timely and regular feedback from the instructor (e.g. through questions, email, assignments, etc.).

*Note: *Not all courses will have an active, live instructor.*

Domain 5: Teaching with Technology

	Ineffective	Effective	Exemplary
Learning Technology & Tools	<input type="checkbox"/> Course does not appropriately use technology tools and activities (including multimedia content) to facilitate communication and collaboration, deliver content, and support learning and engagement.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course uses some technology tools and activities (including multimedia content) to facilitate communication and collaboration, deliver content, and support learning and engagement.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course effectively uses a variety of technology tools and activities (including multimedia content) to facilitate communication and collaboration, deliver content, and support learning and engagement.
Technology Requirements & Aptitude	<input type="checkbox"/> Technologies required to participate in the course (e.g., mobile, publisher websites, secure content, pop-ups, browser version, microphone, webcam, etc.) as well as the skills required to use those technologies are not well stated and supported with resources.	<input type="checkbox"/> Technologies required to participate in the course (e.g., mobile, publisher websites, secure content, pop-ups, browser version, microphone, webcam, etc.) as well as the skills required to use those technologies are reasonably well stated and supported with resources.	<input type="checkbox"/> Technologies required to participate in the course (e.g., mobile, publisher websites, secure content, pop-ups, browser version, microphone, webcam, etc.) as well as the skills required to use those technologies are well stated and supported with resources.
Privacy Policies	<input type="checkbox"/> Course does not include appropriate links to privacy policies for internal and external tools.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course includes some appropriate links to privacy policies for internal and external tools.	<input type="checkbox"/> Course includes all appropriate links to privacy policies for internal and external tools.

Design Criteria Advisers Working Group

The American Council on Education (ACE) Alternative Credit Project is a multi-faceted endeavor that includes numerous complex components. Many individuals contributed significant time and effort to ensure its success.

Institutional acceptance of the quality standards by which providers and courses will be measured is important to the success of the Alternative Credit Project. From December 2014 to February 2015, ACE worked with a team of subject matter experts to establish both eligibility criteria and quality standards against which providers and courses in this project would be measured to be considered for inclusion.

ACE recognizes the contribution to this project by these individuals from within the higher education academy.

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