



POLICY ON QUALITY ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING

This document is taken directly from the equivalent policy developed by Deakin University and approved by its Academic Board on 25 July 2003. Australian Catholic University gratefully acknowledges Deakin University's preparedness to allow ACU National to leverage off that work.

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POLICY ON QUALITY ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING

This document complements and is to be read in conjunction with Australian Catholic University's (ACU National's) Policy on Quality Teaching and Learning.

1. The University will use online technologies for the purpose of enriching teaching and learning experiences where value can be added for students and cost effectiveness is demonstrated.
2. The University will substitute online for other methods under specific conditions where there are demonstrable benefits to the learning experience.
3. The University will develop courses in primarily or wholly online mode where this is consistent with its Strategic Plan, is pedagogically appropriate and cost effective.
4. The University will progressively introduce basic online elements into its award courses and more extensive online elements into selected courses.

SCOPE

5. This Policy applies to all award and non-award courses offered by ACU National.

PRINCIPLES

6. Good practice in online learning is realised through a combination of collaborative environments and interactive resources that engage the learner.
7. The achievement of appropriate learning outcomes should be the primary consideration in any redesign of courses or units to incorporate online elements.
8. The use of online technologies will not be uniform across the University and each Faculty will determine the appropriate mix of media and methods to meet the educational objectives of their units and courses, to make best use of available resources, and to consider cost and pedagogical appropriateness when making choices among alternatives.
9. Courses, or disciplines or major sequences where this is more appropriate, should reflect a coordinated approach to design and implementation of online teaching and learning. This should be based on a planned strategy for each unit offered to move from traditional or current practices and resources to delivery that integrates online components, using the capabilities of ACUonline.
10. Resources deployed as paper-based documents should also be deployed electronically, where appropriate and feasible, in order to maximise student access to course materials and resources.
11. Increasingly, all units in award courses (Categories of Online Activity defined in Appendix A) should have at least a basic and current online component comprising unit information, a noticeboard, a resource repository and a means of communication between students and their lecturers, and the student cohort that will be presented using a purpose-designed, standard ACUonline template.
12. To ensure that there is a social dimension to students' learning experiences, they should have the opportunity for structured online discussion, facilitated by a member of academic staff in each unit where they do not have at least weekly face-to-face contact, unless the Faculty Board approves an exception on the grounds that it is inappropriate or unnecessary in that unit.

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- 13.** Strategic priorities and educational need will guide the determination of the extent of the use of online teaching in courses, major sequences or units within courses.
- 14.** In view of the cost of developing wholly online courses, such development will normally be considered only for courses aimed at corporate, professional, national and international markets.
- 15.** In all cases, support services (e.g. Academic Skills Unit, ACUonline, Institute for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, ITCS and Library) should also progressively be available online and integrated into the online teaching and learning environment, where practicable.
- 16.** Proposals for development of online components of courses and units must include plans for monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance, including an explanation of how information about student performance and feedback and staff self-evaluation of units and courses will inform University-wide practice.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Chair of the Academic Board is the officer responsible for this policy and any related procedures.

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APPENDIX A: GUIDELINES FOR ACU NATIONAL CATEGORIES OF ONLINE ACTIVITY

A1. Basic Online Unit (For most units: to be implemented by 1 January 2007)

Most units offered by ACU National will have an ACUonline site which will include, where appropriate and feasible:

- the unit outline;
- a 'resources area' where an electronic version of the readings (where appropriate) and other resources might be placed;
- the opportunity for the lecturing staff to communicate with students through a noticeboard (one to many communication, e.g. announcements);
- a facility for staff and students to communicate with each other. This may include complementary use of email in the first instance. Student expectations about communication should be managed (i.e. they should be told how they should communicate with lecturing staff, and how soon they should expect a reply); and
- a facility for structured online interaction between the lecturer(s) and students available for use at the choice of the lecturer(s) involved in the unit. This facility should be made available for students in all units but is particularly important for these units that do not meet face-to-face at least once a week.

A2. Extended Online Unit

These units will have all of the components of a Basic Online Unit, plus:

- the study guide for that unit online;
- additional ACUonline options included in the unit and available for students;
- additional resources available to students (e.g. additional electronic content, CD ROMs with additional material, video and audio streaming, etc.)
- additional and/or compulsory use of advanced communication and instruction facilities; and
- more advanced and diverse pedagogies embedded.

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A3. A Wholly Online Unit

These units will have all teaching resources online and all teaching will be undertaken online, including:

- all content – either commercial print-based textbooks or commercial e-texts may be used as supplementary material;
- all communication and interaction with students;
- assignment submission and feedback – examinations may move online when the University is administratively ready;
- at least ONE session of interactive communication between lecturer(s) and students online weekly or as established at the beginning of the course – such interactive sessions will have an assessable component, where appropriate; and
- to ensure access for all students until bandwidth issues in Australia are addressed, additional resources such as video and audio provided on CD-ROMs for off-campus students, where appropriate – this will be reviewed annually.

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APPENDIX B: ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING DEFINITIONS		
Term	Definition	Notes
Asynchronous online communication	Use of online technologies for teaching and learning that do not require immediate and simultaneous interaction. Such teaching and learning may be collaborative (e.g. email and computer conferencing) or one-way (e.g. audio and video streaming)	
Basic online course or unit	A course or unit in which online teaching and learning provide a repository of selected information and course materials and facility for communication among academic staff and students, and support other forms of delivery	
Computer conferencing	An online system for sending messages, real time discussion and posting documents among a group of registered participants	WebCT is ACU National's corporate application
ACUonline	ACU National's online learning platform	
Digital object management system (DOMS)	A facility for cataloguing and storing learning resources in digital form	
Extended online course or unit	A course or unit meeting the requirements of a basic online course or unit and which has additional ACUonline options available but where the unit is not wholly online	
Home campus	A student's primary campus of attendance	This should reflect self-identification and should be where the student normally attends any classes, where relevant
Learning management system (LMS)	The online system that manages coursework, assessment, evaluation and collaboration among staff and students	WebCT is ACU National's corporate application
On-campus student	A student who normally attends one of the University's campuses	An on-campus student can be expected to make considerable use of the online platform and sometimes take online units, just as off-campus students are able to make use of the campuses
Online	Anything that is available from or linked to a network server or occurs on an electronic network	
Online application and enrolment	Application to the University, and enrolment in a course or unit, including the payment of any fees, through an electronic network, with automatic entry in a database	StudentConnect is ACU's corporate application
Online assessment	Tests that are accessed, completed and submitted online, with the options of different versions generated from an item bank, automatic scoring of objective items and automatic feedback of results in the assessment task	Validating student ID and security are issues in online assessment

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Online assessment processing	Use of online technologies for assessment submission and processing, including recording and posting of results in the assessment task	
Online portal	A single, integrated, dynamic web entry point for all online student activities, including teaching and learning, support and administration	
Online student	A student whose normal mode of attendance is through ACUonline	
Online environment	An online space or place encompassing specific facilities, activities and participants, which may be part of a defined wider environment and which has links to other spaces, places and participants	<p>These may mirror provisions at physical campuses but not necessarily (e.g. the library catalogue is not available in physical form)</p> <p>ACU National's online platform is supported by corporate technologies, such as StudentConnect, WebCT, audio and video streaming, email and the web.</p>
Online learning resources	Text-based materials and resources in other media that are available on a network server to support teaching and learning	These can include audio, video, multimedia, library resources, etc.
Online service	A service that is provided through an electronic network (e.g. using email, computer conferencing or the web), including self-administered programs	An online service, or access to it, may also be provided electronically on a CD-ROM
Synchronous online communication	Use of online technologies for interactive teaching and learning activities that take place in real time and enable two-way communication between the lecturer and students	
Wholly online course or unit	A course or unit with no face-to-face component and in which all interactions among staff and students, education content, learning activities, assessment and support services are integrated and delivered online	

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APPENDIX C: AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY CODE OF GOOD ONLINE PRACTICE

Introduction

This Code of Good Online Practice elaborates on the principles and values that govern ACU National's online activities. It is intended to provide guidance for organisational units, staff and students to ensure that programs and services reflect good practice, resulting in a high standard of quality for the online teaching and learning environment.

ACU National recognises that rapid technological change and its adoption by the community present both opportunities and challenges for good practice. General principles of good practice in higher education require interpretation and adaptation if these new technologies are to make a positive contribution to the university experience of today's diverse cohorts of students. Learning from experience and modifying practice as a result of experience are cornerstones of success.

University Good Practice

The University, through the Executive Director, University Services, has responsibility for:

C1. *Information and communication*

- C1.1** Maintaining a communication program to solicit input from student and staff stakeholders, report on how issues are being addressed, and keep stakeholders informed of online plans and developments.
- C1.2** Providing advice to students and staff about University policies and procedures pertaining to appropriate behaviour in the online environment and information about sanctions for misuse of computing facilities and services.
- C1.3** Informing students of the University's policies on use of computers and the internet, including policy on internet access.
- C1.4** Providing advice to students and staff on health and safety matters in the use of computers.
- C1.5** Informing students and staff about the extent to which online activities and communication are tracked and monitored by the system, what information may subsequently be retrieved and reviewed by the University, and what rights of access they have to information so retrieved.
- C1.6** Ensuring, in the promotion of the online platform and courses that make use of the online platform, that information presented is accurate and comprehensive.
- C1.7** Ensuring that international promotion of ACU National's courses includes appropriate information about online activities and complies with Australian national standards for international recruitment of students.

C2. *Quality assurance*

- C2.1** Publishing information about the availability of and standards for online student support and administrative services, including communication, responsiveness and the system for handling student complaints. Monitoring compliance and improving it, where appropriate.
- C2.2** Ensuring that University systems and software supporting the online platform comply with international standards.

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- C2.3** Specifying standards for, and monitoring, infrastructure reliability, including system redundancy, availability, scalability and rules for downtime and service schedules, and for operations, including authorisation and security.

Joint University and Faculty/Directorate Good Practice

The University, jointly through Faculties and Directorates, has responsibility for:

C3. *Student and staff training and support*

- C3.1** Collating and analysing the results of evaluations of online teaching and learning for the broader improvement of practices across the University.
- C3.2** Providing to all staff who work and participate in the online environment, and to all students expected to use the online environment, appropriate printed and online information about the system and online resources, and timely and ongoing training in their use.
- C3.3** Providing staff and student access to ongoing technical assistance in the use of the online system on a schedule appropriate to their needs.
- C3.4** Providing staff access, as needed, to appropriate advice and support for teaching and learning in online environments and developing online resources.
- C3.5** Providing academic professional learning programs and resources to assist staff to work in the online environment, including how to design appropriate online assessment, take advantage of the collaborative opportunities available in the online environment, and manage assessment and records efficiently.
- C3.6** Providing staff with printed and online resources, as appropriate, on issues arising in online teaching and learning.
- C3.7** Ensuring that expectations for student use of the online platform are guided by reasonable assumptions of access, experience and skill appropriate to the particular student group.

C4. *Information management*

- C4.1** Ensuring that online information is up-to-date and making provision for routine removal of outdated information.

C5. *Prospective students*

- C5.1** Before enrolling students who will reside in other countries while studying at ACU National, ensuring that the laws of their country and accessibility of online facilities will not prevent full participation in the course or adequate access to learning resources.
- C5.2** Providing students with pre-enrolment advice and information about:
- online teaching and learning, including advice about required motivation and commitment and strategies to use when learning online;
 - technology requirements;
 - the amount of time required to be spent online and using a computer; and
 - equity provisions for disadvantaged students.

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Faculty Good Practice

Faculties have responsibility for:

C6. *Supporting staff*

- C6.1** Ensuring workload practices are appropriate to the alternative learning environments required to engage in online activities. Reviewing and evaluating existing work practices in terms of probation and promotions policies and other incentives for academic staff.
- C6.2** Ensuring that all staff, including sessional lecturers, have appropriate access to online facilities, training in their use and technical support.

C7. *Supporting students*

- C7.1** Having in place strategies to accommodate students that ensure fairness and equity when there is technical breakdown in the online environment, including provision for extension of assignment deadlines.
- C7.2** Making appropriate provision for higher degree by research students to form and engage with learning communities using the online environment.

C8. *Information and communication*

- C8.1** Approving and publishing University expectations for student participation in online activities and policies on handling suspected plagiarism, submission of assignment drafts, the form and style of feedback on assessment, and the time students should expect to wait for responses to questions and return of assignments.
- C8.2** Clearly stating expectations for electronic communication activities to reduce misunderstanding, cultural intolerance and insensitive communication.
- C8.3** Including in unit descriptions and in unit outlines information about the mix of media and methods employed in the unit.

C9. *Teaching and learning*

- C9.1** Where new online resources are required, assessing the costs and benefits of acquiring existing resources developed externally before deciding to proceed with local development.
- C9.2** Ensuring that online resources and activities adhere to the W3C¹ accessibility guidelines and that appropriate provision is made for students with a disability.
- C9.3** Ensuring that assessment strategies in courses and units using the online environment accommodate students' learning preferences and reflect stated learning outcomes.
- C9.4** Incorporating into courses and units that make use of online environments the development of students' online research skills, including assessment of the validity of sources.

¹ The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) develops interoperable technologies (specifications, guidelines, software and tools) to lead use of the web to its full potential. W3C is a forum for information, commerce, communication and collective understanding.

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C9.5 Ensuring that online resources and activities adhere to ACU National's Policy on Cultural Diversity and that appropriate provision is made for international students and those from culturally diverse backgrounds.

C10. *Quality assurance*

C10.1 Evaluating the quality of online activities and resources, including evaluation by both students and staff against intended learning outcomes, as part of course accreditation and the evaluation of teaching and units.

C10.2 Monitoring innovations and performance and modifying practice as necessary.

Staff Good Practice

Staff, as appropriate to their work roles, are responsible for:

C11. *Participation in the online environment*

C11.1 Participation in online activities in accordance with teaching and learning strategies, service strategies and policy standards that have been specified for the course or unit, as well as in accordance with the operational Policy on Quality Online Teaching and Learning and this Code.

C11.2 Participation in professional learning for work in the online environment and the transition to and evaluation of online teaching and learning, appropriate to the range of roles they undertake.

C12. *Teaching and learning*

C12.1 In courses and units with online components, making appropriate provision for moderated and informal interaction among students and between students and staff in the online environment.

C12.2 Assisting students studying a course primarily in the online environment to develop the same specified attributes, in the form of skills and knowledge, as their counterparts studying on campuses.

C12.3 Providing students with information in advance about what to do if the online system fails, and ensuring that no student is unfairly penalised by system failure.

C12.4 Taking responsibility for all online assessment.

C13. *Quality assurance*

C13.1 Reviewing personal experiences reported by participants working in the online environment in order to improve personal practice and providing feedback towards the improvement of the online platform.

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Student Good Practice

Students are responsible for:

C14. Participating in the online environment.

C14.1 Informing themselves of expectations for their use of the online platform, including the requirements of their courses and appropriate online behaviour.

C14.2 Ensuring that they have appropriate computer and network access in compliance with ACU National's Policy on Computer and Internet Acceptable Use.

C14.3 Participating in prescribed online activities.

C14.4 Adhering to the University's Information Technology Conditions of Use.

C15. *Quality assurance*

C15.1 Providing feedback and recommendations based on their experience using the online learning platform.

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Officer Responsible: Pro-Vice-Chancellor
(Academic Affairs)

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