OCEP Overview

The Online Course Evaluation Project (OCEP) identifies and evaluates existing online courses in higher education, Advanced Placement©, and high school. The goal of OCEP is to provide the academic community with a criteria-based evaluation tool to assess and compare the quality of online courses.

The focus of the evaluation is on the presentation of the content and the pedagogical aspects of online courses, yet OCEP also considers the instructional and communication methods so vital in a successful online learning experience. The latest version of the course evaluation categories and their definitions is attached.

Existing online courses are identified and measured against a set of objective evaluation categories. These criteria were developed through extensive research and review of instructional design guidelines from nationally recognized course developers, best practices from leading online consultants, and from numerous academic course evaluations.

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OCEP employs a team approach in evaluating courses. Subject matter experts evaluate the scholarship, scope, and instructional design aspects of courses, while online multimedia professionals are used to consider the course production values. Technical consultants are employed to establish and evaluate the interoperability and sustainability of the courses.

The ongoing results of the OCEP study are available publicly in a web-enabled comparison tool developed in partnership with the EduTools project from WCET (www.edutools.info).

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OCEP is a project of the **Monterey Institute for Technology and Education** (MITE), an educational non-profit organization committed to helping meet society's need for access to effective, high-quality educational opportunities in an era of rapid economic, social, and personal change. The Monterey Institute for Technology and Education was founded as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization in 2003. Learn more at: http://www.montereyinstitute.org.

	Evaluation Category	Definition and Goal
	Course Developer and Distribution Models	This section notes the type and status of the course developer, the major methods for distribution of the courses to the organization's constituents, and any licensing models employed by the developer in making the course content available to students and faculty outside their own institution. Breadth of coverage refers to the completeness of the course content and the degree to which the curriculum adheres to standard curriculum requirements as defined by AP standards from the College Board, the national high school curriculum standards or generally accepted higher education curriculum (based on textbook and instructional materials for college courses).
1	Developer organizational status	Developer organizational status refers to the commercial or non-profit status of the course developer and whether the organization must be self-sustaining based on the distribution of online courses, or whether the courses are developed and distributed as part of its mission and not for financial gain.
2	Distribution of the course	Distribution of the course refers to the model used to make the course available to its intended course participants. Courses can be distributed for use on campus or through a single institution, through open public websites, and through broker web sites.
3	Licensing models	Licensing models refers to how courses owned by an institution are made available to other institutions or organizations. Licensing models define how and when a licensing institution must pay for a course and any other stipulations for access and distribution.

	Scope and Scholarship	This section focuses on the intended audience for the course, as well as the breadth and depth of the content presentation. It also looks at the quality and accuracy of the writing and how the course concepts are presented to the learner. This section is always addressed by a subject matter expert in the discipline.
4	Audience and grade level	Audience and grade level refers to the specific group of learners for whom the course curriculum has been designed. Lower division college curriculum generally refers to courses developed for freshman and sophomore students. Upper division college curriculum generally refers to courses developed for junior and senior students. Graduate level refers to courses for masters and doctoral level students. Non-credit courses are a broad classification that can include any online course used for personal enrichment.
5	Breadth of coverage	Breadth of coverage refers to the completeness of the course content and the degree to which the curriculum adheres to standard curriculum requirements as defined by AP standards from the College Board, the national high school curriculum standards or generally accepted higher education curriculum (based on textbook and instructional materials for college courses) standards.
6	Writing style and accuracy	Writing style refers to the level of diction and engagement and the choice of words used to present the course concepts. Accuracy refers to correct punctuation, grammar and sentence structure used in a written piece, as well as the absence of typographical errors.
7	Course orientation and syllabus	This category refers to the course information, student training and support materials, syllabus and other resources available to the student as they enter the course.

8	Learning objectives clearly stated	Learning objectives are the goals that the learner should achieve in the course. Learning objectives can be laid out for any level of instruction, such as course learning objectives, unit objectives, and topic objectives.
9	Exercises, projects, and activities	Exercises, projects, and activities are content items that enhance the primary content presentation. These assignments may ask students to work independently or in a group.
10	Additional text material required or optional	Additional text material required or optional refers to whether a textbook or text material beyond the content presented online is required for a student to complete the course of study.
11	Instructional philosophy	Instructional philosophy refers to the theories of learning that underlie the presentation of content, the kinds of activities and assessments created for the course, and the role of the instructor and the learner in the process of learning. Varying instructional philosophies include 1) linear presentation, a progressive, step by step approach to teaching and learning which is fixed in how students can move through the curriculum; 2) drill and practice, in which content and assessment is fixed in a simple repeated cycle of presentation, memorization and testing, and typically focuses on lower levels of thinking from Bloom's taxonomy; and 3) constructivist learning in which learners construct new learning based on prior learning.

	User Interface	The User Interface section includes evaluation categories that address the instructional design principles used in the access, navigation and display of the course that allow the user to interact with the content. This includes aspects of a computer system or program which can be seen or heard by the user and the commands and mechanisms provided for the user to control its operation and data input.
12	Navigation	Navigation is a mixture of graphic and editorial organizational cues supplied by the graphic design of the course. Specifically, navigation is the consistent and predictable set of navigation methods, buttons and headings that allow learners to move logically and easily between areas of the course and topics.
13	Course progress indicator for the student	Course progress indicator refers to any tool the learner is given in the course to track his or her progress through the course and his/her mastery of content. This can include a grade book or other features that allow students to check off the content, activities, and assessments they have completed. This indicator can be built into the course or created as part of the content to be used on or off line.
14	Placement of elements and presentation consistency	Placement of elements and presentation consistency refers to the design of the course and the pages in the course that contain instructional elements (e.g. chapter, unit, and lesson). Elements should be consistently organized and identified throughout the course. Presentation consistency refers to the format used to organize and display the content of each element.
15	Playback control of media and elements	Playback control of media and elements refers to the ability of learners to manipulate the playback of media through clearly labeled controls, allowing learners to move at their own pace and direction.

	Course Features and Media Values	The Course Features and Media Values section addresses the types of media used to convey the course content and to demonstrate how the user interacts with the content presentation. The evaluation looks at the effectiveness and relevance of the content presentation, the level of engagement for the user, and the instructional design value of the multimedia content.
16	Pedagogical features	The Pedagogical features category lists the key instructional elements, or pedagogical features, provided by the course.
17	Media presentation effectively presents course concepts	Media Presentation refers to content presentation that utilizes video, audio, text, animation, graphics and simulations. Media presentations should complement, enhance, and/or extend the learning experience.
18	Text	Text refers to the written material provided online for a course and the presentation of that textual material. Text should be used effectively, be topic-related, and complement the multimedia.
19	Video	Video refers to the types of video that might be included in a course and the effectiveness of that video as related to the topic. Video types include commercial video recordings (e.g. news clips), video lectures of an instructor explaining a concept, footage of experiments or processes in action, or videos that use animation and graphics to illustrate key ideas and principles.

20	Animation	Animation is a sequence of individually created phases (or frames) of imagined action presented to achieve the illusion of motion. When played in order at a sufficient and predetermined speed, a smoothly moving image is presented. An animation can be computer-generated graphics, a form of digitized video, or a combination. For example, an animation of cell division might include a succession of cell drawings progressively altered to imitate the division process.
21	Graphics	Graphics are static visual representations that can include text, computer-generated images, drawings, and photos. The graphics are most effective when tied to content elements and/or provide content themselves.
22	Audio	Audio is voice and sound reproduction used as a specific pedagogical element within a course. Audio can be used as narrative clarification for still images, to introduce instructional elements in the course, or to create more interactive ways to learn word pronunciations in foreign language or science courses. In this case, audio does not refer to voiceover that accompanies video or animation.
23	Simulations and games	Simulations and games refer to software applications that provide a representation of course concepts through access to a model of a theoretical or physical system. A simulation is usually reactive, by changing an input variable the behavior and output of the simulation is changed. An educational simulation is one used to teach about the system modeled by the simulation rather than about the process of modeling itself.
24	Accommodates variety of media types and learning styles	This category refers to the inclusion in the course of various types of multimedia and activities, used in a variety of methodologies that provide the learner with multiple perspectives when accessing the course content.
25	Student interaction with the content	Student interaction with content refers to the activities, supplements, exercises, and assignments that students are required to complete and perhaps submit for instructor review, comment, or grading.

	Assessments and Support Materials	The Assessments and Support Materials section addresses the availability and types of assessments (complete tests or other activities used to assess student comprehension) and support materials that accompany the course as a resource for the instructor and the student.
26	Assessment availability	Assessment availability refers to the presence of pre-developed student assessments for the course as a resource for instructors. Types of assessment include prepared tests, exams, or other pre-assembled or authored testing activities, projects, and assignments.
27	Assessment methods	Assessment methods refer to the intended purpose, design functionality, and outcome of course assessments. Examples include pre-assessments, post-assessments, continuous assessment models, and self-study assessments.
28	Assessment grading	Assessment grading refers to the method used to provide students with feedback on their assessments. Manual-graded assessments are those submitted to and assessed by the instructor, while auto-graded assessments provide instant feedback to the students and automatically register the grade in the CMS grade book.
29	Grading rubrics provided	Grading rubrics are the specified criteria for assignments and course performance that describe the characteristics of quality expected for a particular grade level.
30	Test item types	Test item types refer to the types of test questions included to support the course. Types include multiple choice, true/false, matching, short answer, essay, problems, and multimedia-based items such as drag and drop.

31	Feedback loop for test items	Feedback loop refers to the ability of the test-takers to receive feedback on their test answers and then access the course content for review purposes on missed questions, including both content that explains the error or references back to the content presentation. This refers only to content and feedback provided as part of the course, and not to CMS functionality that may allow the instructor to add such feedback content and references.
32	Support materials for the instructor	Support materials for the instructor may include prepared teacher notes, optional simulated lab materials, extra credit assignments not included in the body of the course content, etc.
33	Support materials for the student	Support materials for the student may include optional tutorials, third-party problem sets, lab simulations, AP test preparation materials, graphing or math equation software, etc.

	Communication Tools and Interaction	The Communication Tools and Interaction section addresses the course management environment, how communications take place between instructors, students and their peers, and what course content exists to effectively utilize the communication tools provided by the CMS. Since most course management environments include the functionality noted in the evaluation categories, the emphasis for this review is placed on the course content designed to drive the use of the communication tools (threaded discussion, chat, group or bulletin board activities, etc.).
34	Course environment	Course environment refers to the course management system or distribution mechanism through which a course is taken by a student or administered by an instructor. Occasionally the course requires not only a local CMS supported by the school, but sometimes links out to a media server, or another CMS where some files are stored.
35	Communication tool access	Communication tools are those tools and features that reside in the course environment that allow students and faculty to interact with one another in either a synchronous or asynchronous method. This section refers to where these communication tools reside (e.g. within the presentation of the course, in the course management system, or a combination of both).
36	Content to utilize communication tools	Course content that utilizes the communication tools within a CMS environment are noted here. This category assesses the availability of ready-to-use exercises, activities and assignments that drive collaboration and interaction among students and instructors. This category is not intended to supply a list of the tools provided by the CMS.

	Technology Requirements and Interoperability	The Technology Requirements and Interoperability section addresses the technology and distribution issues related to the course, as well as the system and software requirements, operating systems, servers, browsers and applications or plug-ins. The section also includes an evaluation of the accessibility and interoperability standards applied to the course and course content.
37	Course format	Course format refers to the delivery method for the course content and how it is accessed by the students. A course can be delivered exclusively online, on CD-ROM or DVD, or as a hybrid of online access and CD/DVDs. Course formats can also include hybrid courses that utilize the classroom and online delivery.
38	Operating systems and platforms supported	Operating systems and platforms supported refers to the operating system requirements necessary to effectively access and interact with the course content software that controls the execution of computer programs. Windows and Macintosh OS are examples of operating systems. The recommended operating system for a course can be very specific, such as only allowing access to those using Windows XP, or may support a variety of systems.
39	Browsers supported	This category refers to the browser software and software version required to effectively access the course content. Browsers are software that allows the user to find and see information on the Internet and allows the user to travel from website to website. Two common browsers are Internet Explorer and Netscape.
40	Server-side requirements	Server-side requirements refer to the server hardware and software necessary to host the course environment and multimedia access for the user.

41	Required applications or plug-ins	This category notes the minimum and/or recommended plug-in software required to effectively access and interact with the course content. Applications and plug-ins are additional software programs required to display the more advanced multimedia elements in a course. Common plug-ins include Flash, Shockwave, QuickTime, Adobe Acrobat and RealAudio.
42	Learning object architecture or modular course elements	Learning objects are defined as a collection of resources combined with a learning design to meet a small and well-specified set of learning objectives. Learning object architecture is a course designed around learning objects. Modular course elements are standardized units of content that are developed as discrete files for easy distribution and access.
43	Interoperability standards	Interoperability standards refers to the conformity of the course content to one or more of the open standards specifications, such as SCORM, IMS, or AICC.
44	Accessibility	The Accessibility category notes the level of accessibility for students with disabilities, particularly as outlined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) that requires online courses to be reasonably accessible to disabled students. ADA conformant courses provide text scripts for media files, alt tags for images, printable versions of documents, tables formatted for screen readers, as well as other features. W3C is the World Wide Web Consortium created to develop and promote web standards that allow greater accessibility for all students.
45	Rights of use and copyright associated with course content	Rights of use and copyright associated with course content refers to the legal ownership of course content by individuals or groups. Copyright denies reproduction of copyrighted materials by others unless given specific written permission by the legal owner. Rights of use defines how a user of the course content may make the material available to its students and instructors, and how that content might be integrated with existing courses developed by the educational institution.

	Developer Comments	This section gives the course developer an opportunity to highlight unique features of the course, provide a summary of course outcomes per available information, and clarify other course resources.
46	General comments and differentiating features	The general comments and differentiating features category gives the developer of the course an opportunity to note any special features or outstanding instructional components not covered by the evaluation categories of this review.
47	Course outcomes	Course outcomes are typically the knowledge, skills, and values/attitudes that students are expected to acquire in a particular course. Developers will provide specifics regarding the actual outcomes of the course being evaluated.
48	Course structure	This category refers to the enrollment and structural models for the course.
49	Additional services	Course developers sometimes offer hosting and instructor training services, content development support, and even supply instructors to teach the course if qualified instructors are not available through the licensing institution.
50	Test item availability	Test item availability refers to the existence of test questions and assignments that support the course as a resource for the instructor. Test items external to the course can be provided as an additional assessment resource.
51	Hours of student work and study	Hours of student work and study estimates the total number of hours calculated for a student to complete the coursework. This calculation applies to the total number of hours expected for the student to study all of the content provided online, to complete specific tasks and group assignments, and to complete all reading assignments if outside reading is required.

52	Content authoring environment	Content authoring environment refers to the software used to develop the content elements of the course. Course authoring software includes Flash, DreamWeaver, Java, Director, Authorware and proprietary development software.

Contributors and Reviewers

Many dedicated educators and instructional design experts contributed their ideas and expertise to the current set of evaluation categories for the Online Course Evaluation Project. We would like to thank those who have contributed through formal reviews and all the others who have participated in this project informally.

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References

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