DLS Quality Standards
Course Development Guidelines

I. General Overview and Introduction

The overall design of the course, navigational information, as well as course, instructor and student information are made transparent to the student at the beginning of the course.

I.1 **The introduction by the instructor is appropriate** - The initial introduction creates a sense of connection between the instructor and the students. An "appropriate" introduction would direct students to specific elements in the course. This could be achieved using an 'Ice Breaker Activity' in the Discussions area. Information about the instructor teaching the course will be provided in the 'Instructor's Bio.'

I.2 **Students are asked to introduce themselves to the class, and a discussion forum is set up for this purpose** - The student introduction helps to create a supportive learning environment and a sense of community. Students are asked to introduce themselves and are given guidance on where and how they should do so. A good quality course should include some sort of 'Meet and Greet Activity.'

I.3 **A sample course schedule is included and properly formatted (15 week semester, evaluation, due dates, etc.)** - A well-organized course with clearly defined/communicated timelines will help the learner feel that he or she is getting off to a good start (D. Conrad, "Engagement, Excitement, Anxiety and Fear: Learners' Experiences of Starting an Online Course," *American Journal of Distance Education* 16.4 [2002]: 205-226).

I.4 **The Course Information page is included and properly** formatted - A well-organized course with a well-written overview and introduction, including a clear statement of expectations, will give a good first impression about the quality of the learning experience (D. Conrad, "Engagement, Excitement, Anxiety and Fear: Learners' Experiences of Starting an Online Course" *American Journal of Distance Education* 16.4 [2002]: 205-226).

I.5 **Expectations with regard to discussion postings and email are clearly stated** - Clear guidelines should be given as to what constitutes a quality discussion posting, the average number of postings and responses expected per student, etc. A good tool for communicating this is a 'Discussion Rubric.'

I.6 **Navigational instructions make the organization of the course easy to understand** - Most of the instructions for navigating the course are provided in the DL Learner's Guide. This item refers to additional instructions, such as informing students about how to find extra

resources that you provide in your course. It also refers to stated protocols, such as instructions on how to properly name files or the procedure for submitting assignments, etc.

II. Learning Objectives (Competencies, PIRS)

Learning objectives are clearly defined and explained. They assist the student to focus learning activities.

II.1 **The learning objectives for the course describe outcomes that are measurable** - Measurable learning objectives are necessary for accurate assessment. A learning objective should describe precisely what the student should gain from the instruction, as well as state precisely how you will determine when that objective has been achieved.

II.2 **The learning objectives for the course address content mastery, critical thinking skills and core learning skills** - It is important that all the domains are covered (where possible): (1) *Affective* — learning of beliefs, attitudes and values; (2) *Psychomotor* — learning of physical movements, such as how to sharpen a pencil; and (3) *Cognitive* — learning information and the process of dealing with that information.

II.3 **Learning objectives for the course adhere to provincial course guidelines (PIRS)** - The course goals and topics outlined in PIRS must be covered. A developer may add to the outline, but he or she is not permitted to omit anything (including methods of assessment). This does not mean, however, that developers are bond to follow the order of the outline. The order in which material is presented in the course is entirely the developer's prerogative.

II.4 **Learning objectives for the course are clearly stated and students are given clear instructions on how to meet these objectives (i.e., Learning Activities page is included for each unit)** - It is important that the learning objectives be worded so that the student can understand clearly what is expected of him or her. A good learning environment will have clear and achievable objectives.

II.5 **Learning objectives for each module/unit are present, and are consistent with the content and activities for that module/unit** - Ensure that the content in a given unit/module covers the stated learning objectives.

III. Instructional Materials and Resources

Instructional materials are sufficiently comprehensive to achieve learning objectives

III.1 A rubric is included for each assessment tool - A rubric is an excellent way to communicate to students how well they've achieved a given learning objective.

III.2 Instructional materials are presented in a format appropriate to the online environment, and are easily accessible to and usable by the student

III.3 The instructional materials are presented to the student in manageable segments (e.g., no more than 3 continuous screens of content) - Students should not have to scroll through more than 3 continuous screens of content. Research suggests that most people can understand and remember no more than seven (plus or minus two) items of information at a time. This phenomenon is called the "chunking limit." As the complexity of the information increases, the items of information we can recall decreases.

III.4 The instructional materials are presented to the student in a logical progression - Each unit should attempt to build on knowledge/skills gained from previous unit(s). That is, there should be a logical progression.

III.5 Supporting graphics are of good quality - Images should be a maximum of 600px wide, but usually much smaller. Images should be clear and easy to read. The file format should be jpg, png or gif. (Note: If at all possible, avoid reproducing text as an image. For example, a table with text must be typed out and not be inserted as an image.)

III.6 The instructional materials are free from typographical and grammatical errors - Research has shown that learners judge instructors based on how clearly and competently course materials are presented (Conrad D. "Engagement, Excitement, Anxiety and Fear: Learners' Experiences Starting an Online Course." *American Journal of Distance Education* 16.4 (2002): 205-226.). Remember, how well (or not so well) the course content is written directly reflects on the instructor and the College. Run a spellchecker and have someone proofread your content.

III.7 All resources and materials used in the online course are appropriately cited (i.e., respectful of copyright laws) - It is the developer's responsibility to obtain permission when using copyrighted materials.

III.8 Web pages have links that are self-describing and meaningful, and they open in a separate window - Avoid using the URL as the hypertext for a web page link. It is best to

name it something meaningful. For example, use "Desire2Learn Homepage" rather than "https://d2l.cna.nl.ca/index.asp." Web pages should open in a new window, so the learner does not become confused with navigating the course.

IV. Assessment and Measurement

The assessment strategies are designed to measure student progress by reference to stated learning objectives.

IV.1 **The methods/tools of assessment used are consistent with the content and activities of the course module/unit** - Ensure that the assignment or questions being asked match the material covered in the content. Students should see a connection between the activities they are completing and the overall objective.

IV.2 **The methods/tools of assessment used are appropriate for measuring how well the student has achieved the stated learning objectives** - Determine whether the assessment method/tool used is the best one for measuring a student's success. For example, in a course on grammar the best way to assess what a student has learned about sentence structure may be to have him or her write an essay; rather than do a multiple choice quiz.

IV.3 **The grading policy is transparent and easy to understand** - The Course Information page should include a section on the grading scheme, penalty for late assignments, etc.

IV.4 **Assessment and measurement strategies provide feedback to the student** - For example, the developer could include feedback for each question in a quiz. If there is a participation mark, the developer could provide feedback using a rubric.

IV.5 **The assessment/evaluation methods used in the course complies with the PIRS outline** - It is essential that all assessment/evaluation complies with the PIRS outline.

IV.6 **Self-assessment tools are provided for quick student feedback** - Self assessment tools, such as self-quizzes, should be used to encourage students to reflect on the course content and evaluate their progress. Such tools make the course more interactive. Practice exercises should be aligned with the final evaluation tests in terms of both content (i.e., similar questions) and style.

V. Learner Interaction

The effective design of instructor-to-student, student-to- student and student-to-content interaction is essential to student motivation, intellectual commitment and personal development.

V.1   Learning activities foster instructor-to-student interaction - Instructors are expected to create a friendly social environment and help foster a learning community by encouraging responsible collaboration and cooperation. Online courses should be designed with this goal in mind. For example, self-introduction; discussion postings and responses; feedback on project assignments; evidence of one-to-one e-mail communication, etc. Research has shown that instructor-student interaction was the most significant contributor to perceived learning. (See Fredericksen et al. "Student Satisfaction and Perceived Learning with On-line Courses," in *Online Education Vol. I: Learning Effectiveness and Faculty Satisfaction.* Nashville, TN: Center for Asynchronous Learning Networks, 2000.)

V.2   Learning activities foster student-to-student interaction - Research shows that there is a direct correlation between perceptions of interaction (i.e., the degree to which a person is perceived as a real person) and the quality/quantity of learning in an online course (Gunawardena and Zittle, "Social Presence as a Predictor of Satisfaction within a Computer-Mediated Conferencing Environment." *American Journal of Distance Education* 11.3 [1997]:8-26). Well-written discussion topics can help foster a sense of community among students.

V.3   Learning activities foster student-to-content interaction - A well designed course will have content that students perceive as "a set of stimulations that support discovery-based learning." (N. Sonwalkar, "The Sharp Edge of the Cube: Pedagogically Driven Instructional Design for Online Education." *Syllabus Retrieved* Nov. 30, 2007 http://campustechnology.com/ articles/38922/. One means of achieving this, for example, is to include some interactive 'Viewlets' with "clickable" regions that allow students to interact the course material. This promotes active learning.

V.4   Clear standards are set for instructor response and availability (turn-around time for email, grade posting, etc.) - Instructors are expected to create a friendly social environment and help foster a learning community by encouraging responsible collaboration and cooperation. Research has shown that students who felt they were receiving timely feedback and interaction with instructors were among the strongest predictors of student satisfaction (V. Thurmond et al. "Evaluation of Student Satisfaction: Determining the Impact of a Web-based Environment by Controlling for Student Characteristics," *American Journal of Distance Education* 16.3 [2002]:169-189). There

should be a clear statement on the Course Information page about what students can expect regarding timely feedback, turn-around time for emails, posting grades, etc., as well as a statement about the instructor's "virtual office hours."

V.5 The requirements for course interaction are clearly articulated - For example, students required to participate in discussions are told how many times each week they must post original comments, how many times they must post responses to other's comments, what the quality of the comments must be, how the comments will be evaluated, what grade credit they can expect for various levels of performance, and whether the interaction is required or optional. Research has shown that students enrolled in online courses where expectations on how to succeed are clearly communicated have reported high levels of satisfaction and perceived learning (See P. Shea et al. "Measures of Learning Effectiveness in the SUNY Learning Network". In Borne J. and J. Moore, eds. *On-Line Education, Vol. II: Learning Effectiveness, Faculty Satisfaction and Cost Effectiveness.* Needham, MA: Solar Center for OnLine Education, 2002. pp. 31-54). Accordingly, students should be informed about what is expected of them. This can be done, for example, on the Course Information page and/or on the Learning Activities pages for each unit/module. Rubrics can also be used for this purpose.

VI. Course Technology

To enhance student learning, course technology enriches instruction and fosters student interactivity

VI.1 The tools and media support the learning objectives of the course and are integrated with texts and lesson assignments - Ensure that the multimedia (images, audio files, Viewlets, etc.) enrich the learning experiences of the student by helping him or her achieve the learning objectives. That is, such items must have a recognizable purpose/reason for being part of the course content.

VI.2 Technologies required for this course are either provided or easily downloadable - All of the standard extra technologies (plug-ins, software, etc.) required for DL courses are available to the student via the Toolbox widget on the course home page. If additional tools are required that are not listed in the DL Toolbox, ensure that they are made available. This could be in the form of a link somewhere in the course content (usually on the Course Information page). In cases where students are required to purchase additional resources, arrangements must be with the DLS Bookstore to have these available before semester startup.

VI.3 Instructions on how to access resources at a distance are sufficient and easy to understand - For this standard, the term "technologies" may cover a range of plug-ins such as Acrobat Reader, media players, etc. In addition, courses may require special software packages (spreadsheets, math calculators etc.). Clear instructions tell students how to obtain needed plug-ins and software packages. All of the standard "technologies" required for DL courses are made available to the student via the Toolbox widget on the course home page. This is communicated to the student in the DL Learner's Guide and the Student Orientation course. The developer may provide further instructions if deemed necessary (e.g., for Olympus, DSS files, Illuminate Live, VMWare, etc.). In cases where students are required to purchase additional resources, these are made available through the DLS Bookstore. Information on obtaining such resources is communicated to the student during registration and purchase of textbooks. All additional required and optional resources should be listed on the Course Information page.

VI.4 Low bandwidth considerations are taken into account - Please keep in mind that some of our students are still on dial-up. We recommend that in most cases image files should be no more than 100kb; of course, there will be some exceptions. If video files are used they should be made available through the DLS streaming server, with a link in the course. Using compressed files will reduce file downloading time.

VII. Course Components

The standard course components are included.

VII.1 The course files are well organized (i.e., use of appropriate directory structure) - Ensure that the directory structure reflects the design of the course. It is recommended that the course information files be kept in the course information folder, image files be kept in the images folder, etc. The content files for each unit/module should have its own folder.

VII.2 Files and folders are properly named - Avoid using spaces or special characters in file names (e.g., !, #, $, %, &). Use an underscore instead of a space (e.g., "course file.html" should be named "course_file.html")