

University of Wisconsin-Madison Digital Education Principles for High-Quality Online Courses and Programs

UW-Madison has a strong reputation for high-quality residential (face-to-face) education, and we expect to emphasize this approach for the foreseeable future. The university has also been a pioneer in technology-enhanced education since the early days of public radio and TV, and has a long and distinguished record in the development of high-quality post-baccalaureate online programs. We have historically fulfilled the Wisconsin Idea through a multimodal approach to education. Our success results from a longstanding commitment to holding online courses and programs to the same standards as any other UW-Madison offering.

Online education in this document refers to courses and programs which are fully online and can be taken at a distance. This definition provides distinction with blended, flipped and other course pedagogies that may use aspects of online delivery but still rely on residential experiences.

While online education continues to expand at UW-Madison, the current total footprint (especially during the academic year) is small, and we expect online courses to remain a relative minority for the near term. We expect growth to accelerate, but we do not envision the online offerings of the University replacing or predominating over our current residential model. Online courses will complement our existing residential model by expanding access for new students and enhancing flexibility for current students. New online offerings will continue to exemplify our core academic values of rigor, integrity, and excellence.

The following online education principles, updated from the Educational Innovation Distance Principles of 2012, complement existing UW-Madison Academic Policies for courses and programs. They support the Higher Learning Commission accreditation criteria for Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support by ensuring that “the institution’s program quality and learning goals are consistent across all modes of delivery.” These principles also commit campus to continuing what is best about residential education and supporting educational innovation, transformative learning, new pedagogies, and new audiences.

Recommended principles to guide online education:

UW-Madison will advance excellence in teaching and learning in online education. We will relentlessly seek to provide rich and personalized learning experiences that embody the principles of the [Wisconsin Experience](#).

- a. **UW-Madison’s online offerings are intended to increase access to a UW-Madison degree with initial focus on place-bound, non-traditional students, and provide new course-by-course options for residential students to achieve timely and flexible degree progress.** We recognize that online learning offers a different student learning experience compared to our traditional face-to-face instruction. We will strive to promote academic student success by ensuring that all online offerings meet campus accessibility expectations, appropriately preparing students for online learning, and removing barriers related to student access required by online courses and programs. We will

promote academic student success by also providing the student services best-suited for the student audiences enrolled in online degree programs and courses.

- b. The online environment is evolving rapidly and these principles including the intentions expressed in a) will be revisited from time to time to ensure relevancy and the need to adapt.
- c. **Online courses and programs will contribute to UW-Madison’s goal of preparing students to thrive in a digitally connected global and ever-changing economy.** Evaluating, synthesizing, and making meaning of vast amounts of data and information, and collaborating, communicating, and working in a digital environment, are critical for participants in the global information economy.
- d. **UW-Madison’s focus for online development crosses academic offerings, including the course, certificate, baccalaureate, and post-baccalaureate levels.** Technology can help overcome the barriers between the academy and industries and professions. We are seeking to create academic offerings with the appropriate credentials for the lifelong learner.
- e. **Courses and programs will be intentionally and strategically selected for online offering in accord with the objectives expressed in this document and with input from stakeholders and departmental course providers.**
- f. **The university will support academic departments and their instructors in developing, assessing and maintaining high quality online offerings.** Under UW-Madison and UW-System policies, UW-Madison owns the online version of a course as offered through the university’s online course delivery platform, including the rights to use, modify, and distribute the online version of the course on a continual basis. Faculty retain ownership of the underlying content they develop for an online course and may use the content as they wish subject to UW-Madison’s rights in the online version of the course. Consistent with applicable laws and policies, course syllabi will be made broadly available to prospective and current students and should be developed following UW-Madison’s guidelines and syllabus templates.
- g. **With teaching and learning at the center, the design principles for online courses and programs will be evidence-based and student-centered.** Research makes clear that the most important factors in student learning are the skills of the instructor and their structuring of the learning experience, no matter the technology. . Program and course design will have clearly identified learning outcomes, student engagement, instructor development, and effective methods of assessment. Our online offerings will incorporate substantive and regular interaction between students and the instructor.
- h. **UW-Madison’s online courses and programs will preserve academic rigor, integrity, and excellence.** They will use technology to facilitate, broaden, and enhance the intellectual encounters among instructors and students, recognizing the difference between access to data, knowledge, and experience. School/college and university curriculum committees will directly assess the rigor of such courses or programs, as they do with residential programs.

- i. Online degree programs will use University of Wisconsin-Madison admissions standards. Admission processes will be appropriate to the online environment. Our goal is to ensure that those enrolling in an online degree have the requisite interest, experience, and qualifications to be successful. **We will carefully monitor every program for evidence of student progress and longer-term student success as we do with students learning in residential courses and programs.**
- j. The digital learning environment will continue to evolve. **We will be proponents of research and learning as new pedagogy, technologies, and tools emerge.**
- k. **We will develop online courses in the campus-supported learning management system and use institutionally-adopted tools in compliance with UW-Madison’s web accessibility policy.** We will design them to easily adapt to any term offering or any instructor, and to align with instructional design standards.