

MPHEC
Maritime Provinces
Higher Education Commission

CESPM
Commission de l'enseignement supérieur des
Provinces maritimes



GUIDELINES FOR INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR ONLINE AND TECHNOLOGY-SUPPORTED LEARNING

Please visit our website for updated information:
<https://www.mphec.ca/quality/onlinelearning.aspx>

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INTRODUCTION

ONLINE LEARNING VS. EMERGENCY REMOTE TEACHING

“Of utmost importance as we discuss teaching and learning online in the pandemic context is the misuse of the term *online learning* to describe the nature of instruction at the onset of the pandemic. **Throughout 2020, scholars in the field of digital learning called for use of the term emergency remote teaching instead, suggesting that online learning is more than a mode of delivery.**”

CDLRA, *Digital Learning in Canadian Higher Education in 2020*

Post-secondary education has been significantly changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, many institutions had to close or restrict access to their physical campuses and move programs and courses online. This rapid shift to “emergency remote” or “alternate delivery” teaching, as it is now termed, happened without the careful design process and preparation that typically occurs in planning a course or program for online delivery, and largely without the extensive training that most institutions either require or offer to online instructors (DePaul 4). Over the two years that followed, **online learning and teaching was a necessity, rather than a choice, for many students and faculty alike.**

Now that Maritime universities have re-opened their campuses and transitioned back to mostly in-person learning, they are undoubtedly reconsidering their performance during the pandemic and determining what online options they wish to retain or further develop. The Canadian Digital Learning Research Association (CDLRA) has described the pandemic as “a watershed moment for digital learning in Canadian

higher education” (Special Topics Report, 9). Institutions invested in infrastructure, technology, and instructional support; faculty broadened their knowledge of digital tools, took part in significant training, and adapted their teaching and course design; and students were able to take courses at a distance and accommodate competing educational and personal priorities. Surveys of institutions across Canada and conversations with institutions in the Maritimes confirm that “online learning and digital resources will likely play a much greater role at Canadian post-secondary institutions going forward” (CDLRA, Special Topics Report, 9), although that role will likely vary depending on the student, the program, and the institution. As the use of technology grows and diversifies, becoming more integrated with all modes of delivery, so too does the need to fully consider new approaches to program design and delivery and to mitigate concerns regarding the quality of online and technology-supported learning in higher education.

The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC or Commission) recognizes that the changing post-secondary environment is virtual as well as physical. As online tools become an integrated feature of higher education in general, regular review and improvement will be necessary to build institutional reputation, attract students, and ensure the achievement of student learning outcomes. To this end, the Commission has developed the following ***Guidelines for Institutional Frameworks for Online and Technology-Supported Learning***, including standard definitions for delivery modes recommended by the Canadian Digital Learning Research Association (CDLRA).

DEFINITIONS OF DELIVERY MODES

The Commission has adopted the definitions for delivery modes recommended by the Canadian Digital Learning Research Association (CDLRA) in its national report, *Digital Learning in Canada in 2022: A Changing Landscape*. The CDLRA conducts applied research to advance knowledge about digital learning strategies, policies, and practices in close collaboration with Canadian post-secondary institutions and affiliated organizations. In 2021, the CDLRA collected commonly used terms for delivery modes in their survey of post-secondary institutions. In 2022, the CDLRA updated the list and recommended that Canadian institutions adopt the definitions, noting that the lack of common terms is a critical barrier to measuring delivery modes across the country. The Commission agrees and recognizes that shared definitions would allow for common understanding and consistency across the region and across the country. To this end, the following are the definitions adopted by the Commission and that ought to be incorporated into universities' institutional frameworks:

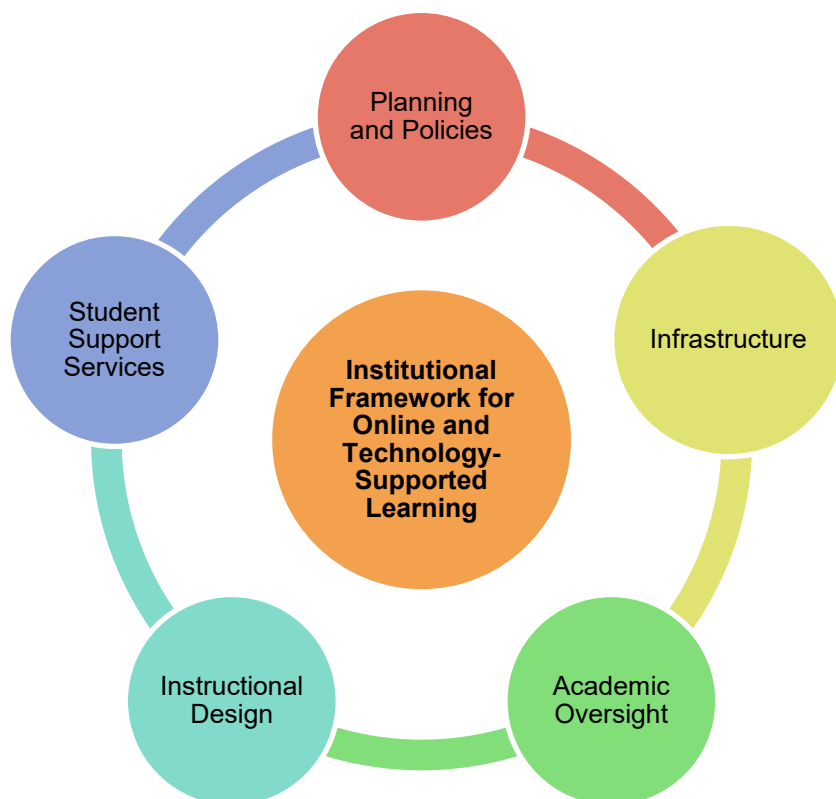
ONLINE LEARNING means all instruction and interaction is fully online (synchronous or asynchronous)
HYBRID LEARNING means a blend of online and in-person instruction (online instruction is synchronous or asynchronous)
HYFLEX LEARNING means instruction is available online and in-person, and students can move between online and in-person
IN-PERSON LEARNING means all instruction takes place in an in-person setting
SYNCHRONOUS LEARNING means instruction takes place in real-time and requires student presence
ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING means instruction is available for students to access at a time that works best for them

From the Canadian Digital Learning Research Association (CDLRA), *Digital Learning in Canada in 2022: A Changing Landscape*, http://www.cdlnra-acrfi.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2022_national_report_en.pdf.

THE MPHEC GUIDELINES FOR INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR ONLINE AND TECHNOLOGY-SUPPORTED LEARNING

The *Guidelines for Institutional Frameworks for Online and Technology-Supported Learning* are designed to foster an intentional approach to teaching and learning with built-in continuous improvement through **five non-hierarchical dimensions: Planning and Policies, Infrastructure, Academic Oversight, Instructional Design, and Student Support Services.**

The *Guidelines* are broad enough to encompass the range and variability of online and technology-supported offerings from whole programs to individual course components, within and across institutions in the region. At the macro level of the institution, the *Guidelines* can help identify strengths and weaknesses and develop a plan for improvement. At the micro level of the academic unit, they can guide decisions about specific programs, courses, or modules. Each dimension includes a broad minimum standard that is a general principle or indicator of quality, as well as a set of criteria that further define expectations related to the standard and specify the parameters institutions must meet. Taken together, the standards and criteria ensure the institution has the necessary resources and procedures in place for faculty to teach and students to learn in a virtual environment.



1. Planning and Policies	
Standard	Criteria
Quality online and technology-supported learning is realized through institutional planning and policies that safeguard privacy and identity, govern academic integrity, and support regular development, review and improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Internal policies and processes are aligned to the institution's framework and incorporate the MPHEC definitions for various delivery modes (i.e., online learning, hybrid learning, hyflex learning, in-person learning, synchronous learning, and asynchronous learning). b) An organizational unit(s) or position(s) has been identified as responsible for the quality and management of online and technology-supported learning. c) Appropriate safeguards are in place to protect privacy, identity, and confidentiality (e.g., to assure security of personal information is protected in conducting assessments and evaluations and in the dissemination of results, and personal data no longer needed for authentication purposes is destroyed). d) Data on student engagement and performance monitors student retention in programs with online and technology-supported learning. e) Policies, procedures, and practices foster academic honesty and integrity.
2. Infrastructure	
Standard	Criteria
The technical and physical infrastructure supports the changing post-secondary environment and enables the accessible, reliable, and compatible provision of programs for students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Mechanisms are in place to identify when to update any technologies employed, to evaluate emerging technologies, and to ensure access for students and faculty. b) Appropriate risk management provisions are in place (e.g., to ensure technological infrastructure and course management systems are stable, reliable, well maintained, secure, and scalable; a disaster recovery plan is available in the event that services or technologies fail; faculty and students are not adversely affected should an agreement with a partner or contractor be repealed; and faculty and students are provided with timely updates about impending changes). c) The institutional, departmental, or unit budgets account for investment, as needed, in appropriate technical and physical infrastructure (e.g., library services, laptop loan programs, computer labs and printing services, subscriptions and licenses to online educational resources and software, and on-campus spaces that support the use of online technology).
3. Academic Oversight	
Standard	Criteria
Faculty and staff involved in the teaching, management, and support of online and technology-supported learning have the appropriate qualifications, knowledge, and skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Program development committees or equivalent have members who are able to effectively assess the design of online and technology-supported programs, or are required to consult with appropriate professionals who can do so. b) A position has been identified to oversee each program (e.g., department chair or program coordinator), which includes regularly reviewing the appropriateness of the mode of delivery and its impact upon the pathways for students, and ensuring the curriculum overall continues to be aligned with articulated learning outcomes. c) Faculty and staff are provided with ongoing professional development and training opportunities that include both technical and pedagogical aspects of online and technology-supported learning. d) Faculty are assisted in making the transition between different delivery modes.
4. Instructional Design	
Standard	Criteria
Curriculum design for online and technology-supported learning is	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The development of new and modified programs with online or other technology-supported learning is based on quality standards and sound educational principles,

<p>based on sound educational principles and provides a coherent, balanced, and interactive series of learning experiences that develop knowledge and skills aligned to learning outcomes. Learning outcomes for programs and courses are independent of delivery mode.</p>	<p>and ensures that faculty and staff understand that program outcomes are independent of delivery mode.</p> <p>b) Online and technology-supported learning is coherently designed to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. incorporate inclusive assessment design to meet the needs of diverse learners; ii. develop disciplinary skills progressively; iii. map knowledge, skills, and assessment tasks to learning outcomes; iv. consider the implications of cohort models and other team, collaborative, and networked learning environments; and v. facilitate interaction between support staff, faculty, and students. <p>c) Student feedback about the quality of online and technology-supported learning is regularly sought, and course and program updates incorporate this feedback.</p>
5. Student Support Services	
Standard	Criteria
<p>Students are supported by an overall ecosystem of resources, including technical, educational, and personal support services, and students are aware of and able to access the support systems in place. Clear information about online and technology-supported learning is reliable, accessible, and regularly updated for students.</p>	<p>a) Clear and consistent communication about the delivery mode for a program is provided to students in program materials and for each course in a program at the point of registration.</p> <p>b) Student orientation is provided for programs and courses with online and technology-supported learning, which includes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. the required or available technology and materials to participate (e.g., clarification on library access, and tools, equipment, or software to be purchased or provided); ii. the level of preparation (e.g., technical knowledge and skills); iii. expectations of compliance with institutional policies; iv. any additional costs associated with the mode of delivery; v. the kinds of support and protection available to them (e.g., intellectual property and privacy); and vi. staff and faculty availability. <p>c) A range of support services are accessible, especially for students who study fully or mostly online (e.g., accessibility services; academic advising, library services; technical support and training; career services; health services).</p> <p>d) Online and technology-supported learning includes provisions designed to meet the needs of learners with disabilities (e.g., closed captioning, compatibility with screen readers).</p> <p>e) Students provide feedback on support mechanisms and services provided fully or partially online.</p> <p>f) Guidelines for online student behaviour and etiquette foster positive interaction, and chat rooms and other interactive features are moderated by staff/faculty.</p> <p>g) Policies determine when educational interventions are needed to support students at risk of failure or discontinuation of studies.</p>

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