

Some Considerations in Doing Peer Evaluation of an Online Course

(courtesy of CETaL Fellow José Villalobos with CETaL Interim Director Larry Lesser, April 2015)

- **Technical issues beyond an instructor's control**, such as changes of or to the Learning Management System; in that case, it is important to assess how an instructor handles the situation rather than holding him/her responsible for the tech issues themselves.
- **Issues arising from the impersonal nature of online courses**. The lack of face-to-face (F2F) contact can reduce student empathy for the instructor, including: (1) a loss of cordial interaction (especially when instructors are treated differently due to gender or race/ethnicity (or other characteristics assumed from the instructor's name or photo) in ways that may more easily arise absent the F2F environment where any inappropriate behavior would be more obvious and draw a classroom reaction that yields immediate redirection), (2) a loss of quality writing (e.g., when students submit responses in a less formal manner with all lowercase or shortened words as when texting or tweeting), etc.
- **Instructors may employ different techniques/tools for class interactions/discussions**. Find out in advance where to look as some instructors rely on tools for discussion postings or chatrooms while others may rely more on email interactions, and others may use interactive *content* (e.g., lecture notes that allow students to make choices, provide answers, and/or add content that can be assessed) to supplement their efforts.
- **Timeframe for an online course is different**. Unlike a self-contained class meeting of a F2F course, a single day (or time period within a day) may not be fully representative of an online class, where a unit's assignments and interactions may spread out over several days.
- **Students may have expected an online course would have different standards or requirements**. For example, students may express complaints that reflect having had lower expectations for course requirements of UTEP online courses than for F2F courses, especially if they have taken a lower-quality overly-simplified online course outside of UTEP; in that case, it is key to assess how well an instructor's approach fits UTEP's mission with online education rather than holding her/him responsible for inappropriate comparisons
- **Instructors of some online courses (especially larger ones) are required to incorporate learning coaches into the course**; in that case, it is important to assess how an instructor handles the situation rather than assigning undue credit or blame for the parts of the work that are handled by the coaches, who typically come with lower qualifications (and pay) than regular instructors.