MCC Course Design Guidelines

These guidelines provide a research-informed framework to support the design, review, and continuous improvement of high-quality online and hybrid courses at MCC. They may be used as a **course design roadmap**, a **self-evaluation tool**, or a **peer review reference**. The guidelines are grounded in established best practices from Quality Matters (QM), Online Student Course Quality Review (OSQR), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, and reflect current federal expectations related to accessibility and Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI).

1. Course Learning Objectives

- Course learning objectives are **clearly stated, measurable, and written using observable action verbs** (e.g., analyze, apply, evaluate).
- Module- or unit-level learning objectives **align directly with course learning objectives** and scaffold student learning across the term.
- The course is designed using **backward design**, beginning with learning objectives and aligning assessments, learning activities, instructional materials, and technologies to those objectives.
- Every graded assessment and major learning activity is **intentionally aligned** with one or more stated learning objectives.

2. Orientation and Syllabus

- The course includes a clearly identified **Start Here or Orientation module** that guides students through course navigation, expectations, technology requirements, and support resources.
- A welcome message or announcement introduces the course, explains immediate next steps, and establishes instructor presence.
- The course provides clear information about the instructor, including contact methods, availability, response-time expectations, and relevant background or qualifications.
- The syllabus follows the MCC Instructor Plan template and clearly communicates:
    - Course learning objectives
    - Required materials and technologies
    - Participation and interaction expectations
    - Grading policies and feedback timelines
    - Academic integrity and responsible use of AI and other learning tools
- Students are directed to **academic, technical, accessibility, and student support services** within the syllabus and/or orientation module.

3. Instructional Content and Navigation

- Course content is **clearly aligned** with course and module learning objectives.
- Content is **chunked into manageable segments** and organized into modules or units with a

consistent, predictable structure (e.g., overview → objectives → content → activities → assessments).

- Navigation throughout the course is logical, consistent, and minimizes unnecessary clicks or cognitive load.
- The purpose of each instructional material or activity is clearly explained, including how it supports learning outcomes.
- Instructional content reflects **diverse perspectives**, is current, and is appropriately cited in compliance with copyright and fair use standards.
- Content is presented in **multiple formats** (e.g., text, video, audio) to support varied learning preferences and needs, consistent with UDL principles.
- Course tools, media, and technologies are selected based on pedagogical purpose and are used to promote **active engagement with content**, not passive consumption.
- The content is represented in multiple formats, providing students with options for engagement and comprehension. See UDL Principle of Multiple Means of Representation.
- Course tools and media foster student engagement with content through active learning.

4. Instructor Presence, Regular & Substantive Interaction (RSI)

- The course design intentionally incorporates **planned, instructor-initiated opportunities for regular and substantive interaction** in alignment with federal distance education requirements.
- Instructor presence is established early and sustained through predictable, course-related interactions such as:
    - Instructional announcements
    - Feedback on assignments
    - Facilitation of academic discussions
    - Clarification of concepts and misconceptions
- Expectations for instructor response time, feedback turnaround, and communication channels are clearly stated.
- Learning activities are designed to promote **meaningful interaction** among students and between students and the instructor.
- The course structure supports instructor monitoring of student engagement and proactive outreach to students who may be struggling.

5. Universal Design for Learning and Accessibility

- Course design applies **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** principles to reduce barriers and provide flexible pathways for engagement, representation, and expression.
- All digital course materials are designed to be **born accessible** and meet **WCAG 2.1 Level AA** accessibility standards.
- Equivalent alternatives are provided for auditory and visual content, including accurate captions, transcripts, and descriptive text.
- Documents, LMS pages, and media follow accessibility best practices for structure, readability, color contrast, and navigation.

- Accessibility is addressed proactively during course design rather than retroactively through individual accommodation whenever possible.
- MCC's Procedures for ADA and Digital Accessibility can be found here.

6. Assessment of Learning and Feedback

- Assessments are **aligned with stated learning objectives** and consistent with course activities and instructional materials.
- The course uses a **variety of assessment types**, including authentic and applied assessments, to allow students multiple ways to demonstrate learning.
- Assignment instructions are clear, thorough, and written in student-centered language.
- Students are provided explicit guidance on **where, how, and when** to submit assignments, including technical and academic expectations.
- Clear and descriptive evaluation criteria (e.g., rubrics) are provided and aligned with grading policies.
- **Formative assessments and timely, substantive feedback** are used regularly to support student learning and improvement.
- Assessment design and instructions clearly communicate expectations regarding **academic integrity and responsible AI use**.

7. Student Support, Equity, and Success

- The course design supports student success by clearly communicating expectations, workload pacing, and weekly time commitments.
- Guidance is provided on how and when students should seek help, including academic, technical, and accessibility support.
- Course policies and learning activities reflect a commitment to **equity, inclusion, and respect for diverse learners**.

8. Continuous Improvement and Course Review

- Courses are reviewed regularly using institutional quality standards and student feedback to support **continuous improvement**.
- Course content, accessibility, instructional strategies, and assessments are updated as needed to maintain effectiveness, relevance, and compliance.

Specific and descriptive criteria are provided for both the evaluation of students' work and participation, and are aligned with the grading policy.

Formative assessment techniques are used, providing students with frequent feedback on their learning.

Based with permission on the Online Course Design Guidelines from the University of Toronto and the Online Course Guidelines from the University of Vermont.