

Teaching Excellence Guide

Excellent teachers approach their teaching as a practice. They reflect on their teaching from term to term, and class to class. They experiment with new methods of presenting material. They adjust, make changes. They update their content. They discuss their teaching practice and craft with others. To be an excellent teacher is to never arrive at an end goal of knowledge or skill: it is to engage with the work fluidly and constantly.

The Teaching Excellence Guide is designed to help faculty practice the act of teaching. The guide is organized into four areas which build upon one another. The standards in each area represent the core teaching beliefs at SPSCC: that the best teaching is tailored to meet the unique needs of the SPSCC student population, and that all courses, regardless of modality, can be taught well.

This guide is also designed to give all faculty, regardless of teaching experience, a way to have conversations with their deans, and with each other, about their practice.

The Standards at a Glance

I. Course Content Standards

- Course content is clear, welcoming, and well-organized.
- Course content is relevant.
- Course technology is appropriate and accessible.

II. Instruction Standards

- Course includes community-building interactions.
- Course offers multiple opportunities for students to engage actively with content.
- Course activities contribute to meaningful learning.
- Course uses principles of Universal Design for Learning.

III. Assessment Standards

- Course uses a variety of both formative and summative assessments that are clearly connected to the course outcomes, CWAs, and/or relevant skills needed outside of the course.
- Students are given multiple ways to understand how to be successful in an assessment and to demonstrate their learning.
- Instructor provides timely and relevant feedback.

IV. Professional Development and Growth Standards

- Instructor participates in, and applies learning from, professional development opportunities.
- Instructor regularly reflects, assesses, and revises teaching practice.

I. Course Content Standards

Course content includes course materials, technologies, documents, and assignments. It also includes ensuring content is culturally relevant and aligns with learning outcomes.

Because this area largely consists of material that is created before a term starts, it is likely most helpful to facilitate conversations when a faculty member is new to teaching or teaching at SPSCC. It can also be helpful before or after a term when the faculty member has time to implement changes.

Standard 1: Course content is clear, welcoming, and well-organized.

Standard 2: Course content is relevant.

Standard 3: Course technology is appropriate and accessible.

Best Practices for Course Content:

Standard 1: Course content is clear, welcoming, and well-organized.

- Ensure syllabus is available on the first day of the term and meets all requirements according to the [college syllabus policy](#).
- Include clear instructions about getting started in the course.
- Include a welcome message.
- Ensure course materials are accessible.
- Provide schedule of all major activities at the beginning of the course.
- Design online content so that it follows a logical structure that is easy for students to navigate.
- Refer to course outcomes within the course when it makes sense (e.g. in assignment guidelines, in a related lecture video, etc.).
- Share and support expectations for classroom and online behavior and communication that build community through respect and a safe learning environment.

Standard 2: Course content is relevant.

- Ensure course content (videos, documents, links, course materials, etc.) is current.
- Align course content with the knowledge, skills, and abilities relevant to the field as appropriate to the course.
- Provide opportunities for students to connect learning with their lives, interests, communities, and goals.
- Use culturally relevant materials including positive representations reflecting multiple identities, communities, and perspectives.

Standard 3: Course technology is appropriate and accessible.

- Use appropriate and accessible technologies to enhance student learning.
- Ensure any application or technology used has been vetted by IT or CTOL for accessibility.
- Identify any course-specific technology at the beginning of the class and include information on how to acquire and use it.

II. Instruction Standards

Instruction includes culturally inclusive practices and strategies that help faculty members successfully deliver course content to students (regardless of modality) in an inclusive and equitable learning environment.

Because this area largely consists of pedagogical practices that happen during the term, it is likely most helpful to facilitate conversations and reflections after an observation, when reviewing student evaluations, or when a faculty member has a desire or need to make changes in their instruction.

Standard 1: Course includes community-building interactions.

Standard 2: Course offers multiple opportunities for students to engage actively with content.

Standard 3: Course activities contribute to meaningful learning.

Standard 4: Course uses principles of Universal Design for Learning.

Best Practices for Instruction:

Standard 1: Course includes community-building interactions.

- Multiple opportunities for student-student interaction such as student-organized work or study groups; low-stakes peer review feedback; formal/structured group work (small group discussions, group projects or presentations); etc.
- Multiple opportunities for student-teacher or student-staff interaction such as a “Getting to Know You Assignment,” regular class discussions, presentations from other campus areas (such as the Library, Learning Support Services, Advising), etc.
- Faculty and staff mentorship (informal or formal) to help facilitate student learning, retention, completion, career exploration, and/or transfer options.

Standard 2: Course offers multiple opportunities for students to engage actively with content.

- Ongoing engagement opportunities such as discussions where both students and instructor actively participate; group activities; extension activities such as student observations in their home, workplace, or other location; options for students to provide feedback on content; etc.
- Course activities include ways for students to connect their cultural identities and perspectives with learning.
- Quarterly engagement opportunities such as formal written assignments like essays or reports; student presentations or videos; culminating or group projects; etc.

Standard 3: Course activities contribute to meaningful learning.

- Clearly connect and explain how course content and activities will help students in their life and future career (e.g. applying TILT principles, using “real-life” scenarios or problems in course work, connecting an assignment with a specific learning goal, etc.).
- Design and use activities to help students identify their progress in the course (e.g. formative assessments, conferences, peer mentoring, reflection assignments, etc.).
- Provide diverse options for students to show their learning in the course (e.g. summative assessments, tests, formal writing, projects, presentations, case studies, etc.).

Standard 4: Course uses principles of Universal Design for Learning.

- Provide students with multiple means of perceiving and comprehending course content (e.g. a recorded lecture, written and verbal instructions, transcripts or captions, etc.).
- Provide students with multiple means of expressing their learning or demonstrating their skill (e.g. a final with an option to write an essay, give a presentation, or create another artifact).
- Make all course content accessible before an accommodation is requested (e.g. ensure all documents are screen-reader accessible and all videos are captioned or have transcripts).

III. Assessment Standards

Assessment includes strategies and practices in measuring student success, especially when considering equity gaps. The best assessment practices are those that help faculty resist the urge to “check the box,” and instead help them understand how to best facilitate student learning.

Because this area focuses on assessment practices, it is likely most helpful for conversations before a term starts when the faculty member has time to implement new assessment practices. It should also be a regular part of conversations with newly hired faculty.

Standard 1: Course uses a variety of both formative and summative assessments that are clearly connected to the course outcomes, CWAs, and/or relevant skills needed outside of the course.

Standard 2: Students are given multiple ways to understand how to be successful in an assessment and to demonstrate their learning.

Standard 3: Instructor provides timely and relevant feedback.

Best Practices for Assessment:

Standard 1: Course uses a variety of both formative and summative assessments that are clearly connected to the course outcomes, CWAs, and/or relevant skills needed outside of the course.

- Clearly and explicitly connect assessments to course outcomes and CWAs (where appropriate)
- Use formative assessments to scaffold student learning and connect them to appropriate summative assessments (including CWA assessments).
- Make assessments relevant for students by connecting them to skills, knowledge, and/or abilities they will need outside of the course.
- Create and provide students with the opportunity to practice meta-cognition in formative assessments or in reflection to summative assessments (e.g. self-reflection or evaluation; post-activity or post-assessment polls, surveys, or exam wrappers; journaling; etc.).

Standard 2: Students are given multiple ways to understand how to be successful in an assessment and to demonstrate their learning.

- Create assignment descriptions, rubrics, and guidelines/criteria in a TILT framework, or in formats and language that are understandable and accessible for students.
- Provide examples of high-quality submissions, or annotated examples of a typical submission (i.e. instructor comments on example submission).
- Provide opportunities to engage in structured peer feedback.
- Allow and encourage multiple drafts/attempts with instructor feedback.
- Allow and encourage options for revision/resubmission.

Standard 3: Instructor provides timely and relevant feedback.

- Focus feedback primarily on the learning outcomes connected to that assessment.
- Frame feedback on formative assessments so that students can understand and identify changes they need to make in order to successfully learn the content.
- Provide feedback on formative assessments so that students have sufficient time to address their gaps in knowledge or skill attainment.
- Frame feedback on summative assessments so that students understand and identify their gaps in knowledge or skill attainment.
- Provide feedback on early summative assessments before drop dates in the term.
- Provide students with more feedback on assessments that are more involved, complex, and/or heavily weighted.

IV. Professional Development and Growth Standards

Professional development and growth include practices to help faculty members deepen and strengthen their teaching skills.

This area is most helpful in supporting conversations about professional development plans (which can include the “action plan” portion of the Data Analysis and Action Plan process) and at times when faculty can devote their energy to gaining new skills.

Standard 1: Instructor participates in, and applies learning from, professional development opportunities.

Standard 2: Instructor regularly reflects, assesses, and revises teaching practice.

Best Practices for Professional Development and Growth:

Standard 1: Instructor participates in, and applies learning from, professional development opportunities.

- Participate regularly in professional development opportunities to support instruction and student learning.
- Attend workshops and presentations specifically focused on accessibility, open education resources, social justice, or equity and inclusion to enhance the development of course content and design.
- Collaborate with peers across the college and beyond.
- Pursue opportunities to improve expertise in content and pedagogy (e.g. attend workshops and conferences, read books and recent publications on content and pedagogy, or participate in on-campus professional development related to instruction, etc.).
- Communicate participation in these growth activities to students.

Standard 2: Instructor regularly reflects, assesses, and revises teaching practice.

- Seek out student input (formally or informally) to inform own teaching practice (e.g. provide options for students to voice their learning needs and preferences, or invite feedback on assignments and the course at multiple checkpoints throughout the quarter, etc.).
- Regularly reflect on one’s teaching practice in an effort to continually remove potential barriers in the classroom for students.
- Review and reflect on relevant student success data to identify strengths and to make changes in one’s teaching practice in an effort to address equity gaps.
- Engage in conversations with colleagues and peers about teaching practices.

Resources and Support

Notes and Next Steps:

Policies and Tools

- [Accessibility Checklist](#)
- [Data Dashboards](#)
- [Distance Education Policy](#)
- [Digital Instructional Resources](#)
- [Faculty Reflection Tool](#)
- [Faculty Self-Evaluation](#)
- [Syllabus Policy](#)
- [WA Course Design Checklist \(V4\)](#)

Training Resources

- [CTOL Professional Development Opportunities](#)
- [CTOL Training Calendar](#)
- [SBCTC Training and Courses](#)

About this Document

The Teaching Excellence Guide was created in partnership between the Quality Teaching and Learning Work Group and the [Center for Teaching and Online Learning \(CTOL\)](#).

CTOL provides support to faculty at South Puget Sound Community College. Please contact us at ctol@spsc.edu with questions or to set up an appointment to discuss your courses, accessibility, assessment, and more.