Motions Adopted by the Ohio State Department of History Regarding Standards for Online Courses and Instruction

Motion #1:

Based on the experience of the faculty, consultation with our lecturers and graduate students, and current research in the field of online teaching, the following best practices will be encouraged in a training program for online instruction to be created by our department and the Goldberg Center:

To succeed, an online course must do more than place in-person lectures and course materials online. The online format offers both advantages and disadvantages compared to in-person instruction; successful online teaching maximizes these advantages and minimizes these disadvantages.

Despite their differences, online courses should be similar to in-person courses of the same level in terms of the total time commitment asked of students as well as the difficulty of material. They should achieve similar learning outcomes and student engagement as in-person courses. Rates of student completion of each lesson and of the entire course should be similar to those of a large in-person course.

To maintain student engagement, to reduce confusion and procrastination, and to keep track of student progress, it is important that online courses be highly structured, with at least one well-defined lesson for each full week of the course. Lessons should preferably include multiple components such as an introduction to the material, presentations, a quiz, a reflection paper, a writing or audiovisual assignment, and/or discussion. Frequent evaluative devices—at least one per week—are especially important to ensure that students stay involved and complete assigned readings and presentations.

Students tend to learn less and are more likely to encounter problems with assignments if they attempt to complete an online course all at once. Moreover, it is difficult to keep track of student progress and to communicate with the entire class when some students have completed significantly more or different material than others. Online courses should therefore have lessons designed to be completed sequentially, and students should all complete their lessons on a similar schedule—that is, with no students weeks ahead of others in completing their lessons. No student should complete an online course more than a week before the end of the term, except by special accommodation.

Online survey courses (i.e., all 1000- and 2000-level courses except 2800) should incorporate frequent short high-quality presentations to introduce material to students, and should not rely exclusively on reading and/or external video links. On the other hand, online presentations should not simply be recordings of full lectures that would be used in an in-person course. Because online students can watch presentations at their own pace, slowing down or pausing to take notes where necessary, the pace is likely to be faster and the length significantly shorter than would be the case in person. The recommended best practice is for presentations of 10-15 minutes apiece, with multiple presentations as necessary, and no more than 40 minutes of continuous required presentation viewing. Student attention and focus has been found to diminish
after 15 minutes of viewing, and lengthy recordings become more difficult to edit and to host on Ohio State course software. Longer lectures should therefore be broken into multiple segments, and lessons requiring students to watch 40+ minutes of presentations should insert evaluative devices or other videos in between those segments in order to maintain student engagement. Ohio State’s ASC Tech provides several options for producing high-quality presentations, as well the necessary training; therefore, low-quality recordings on a home computer without proper equipment should be avoided. Regardless of format, presentations should be engaging, well-produced, and practiced or scripted in advance.

To encourage interaction, promote critical engagement with the material, and ensure that online students belong to a community of learning, discussions should be present in every online course. These discussions should use formats and requirements that create real dialogue and debate among students, rather than allowing for uncritical (dis)agreement with the first post. Large online courses should use small discussion groups, rather than holding discussions of the entire class. At least some discussions should use multiple steps, such as multiple required postings on a discussion board, a post plus replies to other students, or discussion posts that build on previous assignments. Where possible, discussions should be moderated by an instructor or teaching assistant, who could be assigned as DSLs rather than graders.

Online courses require frequent communication with students. Instructors should observe ODEE best practices in communication and try to answer all student emails within one business day, or two at the latest. Courses that are well-organized and proactively communicate using regular class emails and announcements can reduce the number of student emails seeking information and clarification, saving time in the long run. Online instructors should plan to visit their course site at least once every two business days to ensure that it is running smoothly—e.g., that upcoming lessons are complete and available to students and that assignments are being graded properly and in a timely fashion. Even once all material for the course has been prepared and placed online, the instructor of record remains responsible for the successful operation of the course and should not leave its running entirely to graders or teaching assistants.

Online courses should adopt ODEE and ASC best practices for academic conduct in online instruction. In particular, large online courses should use timed and randomized quiz and exam questions drawn from large question banks, with questions revealed sequentially one at a time.

Before committing to an online course, it is important to bear in mind that developing a new online course requires considerably more time than developing a new in-person course, and that teaching online requires the instructor to stay in daily contact with students. Online instructors should develop a timeline for online course creation and a schedule for regular course maintenance and communication with students. Hybrid courses, combining online material with once-weekly in-person discussions or activities, should also be considered as an option.

Anyone teaching online for the first time should consult with Laura Seeger, with ASC Tech, and with an experienced faculty member as soon as possible.

In view of the time commitment involved in online course creation and the difficulty often experienced in adjusting to the online format, it is not recommended that instructors undertake a 4-week online course unless they have previously taught online or there is already substantial
online teaching material available for the course that can readily be adapted to a 4-week teaching format.

Graduate students should consult with their advisors about the suitability of online teaching, what courses might be most appropriate to teach online, and what their expectations would be as online instructors.

**Motion #2:**

Recognizing that the creation of instructional material for online courses requires more time than for in-person courses, that most instructional material must be prepared in advance, and that few other departments or programs expect individual instructors to each create all of their own online course content, the department will encourage the voluntary preservation and sharing of online instructional material created by faculty, including presentations, assignments, and quiz questions. To this end, the Goldberg Center will create a system for saving instructional material and making it available to faculty, graduate students, and adjunct lecturers teaching courses online. Any faculty member who does not wish to share her/his material may opt out. Graduate students and adjunct instructors who wish to share their material may opt in.

Once this system for saving and sharing material has come into operation, a graduate student may be assigned to teach an online course for which sufficient material is already available. In these cases, the graduate student should contact his or her advisor and the faculty member(s) who has created the course content to discuss expectations regarding the updating of existing content and addition of new content for the course, including presentations, assignments, and question banks for quizzes and exams.