

IQRA NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, PESHAWAR

SOPs for ONLINE CLASSES and ASSESSMENTS FOR INU

1. INTRODUCTION:

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Pakistan took the decision to close educational institutions until 31st May, 2020. As per the Higher Education Commission's COVID-19 Policy, Iqra National University, Peshawar took an initiative to make preparations in minimizing the disruption to the teaching schedule. INU started preparing its system to be able to offer effective online teaching as a substitute for regular classes. The objective is to ensure that teaching continues wherever possible, and that the impact of the necessary disruption on the students' learning is minimized.

A second objective is to protect the quality of teaching from being compromised. Faculty members, university administration, and the HEC will coordinate efforts to ensure that students have full and timely access, through virtual and electronic means, to all courses information, reading materials, library resources, audiovisual materials, power point presentations, assignments, lab demonstrations (where relevant), classroom interaction with faculty as well as students, exam and testing schedules, and normal opportunities for off-class interaction with faculty members.

The objective of these guidelines is to ensure the safety and security of faculty and non-faculty employees of the University during the COVID-19 outbreak, while minimizing academic disruption. These guidelines are in addition to any instructions issued by the health agencies of the federal and provincial governments.

Due to the wide variation in the capabilities of different departments of Iqra National University, Peshawar to deliver courses online for the remainder of the semester, a one-size-fits-all solution was not feasible, and a number of options had been considered. The long-term sustainability of the recommended solutions and the ability to implement in a short time-frame (i.e. setup and readily available online system) has been taken into consideration in the development of these SOPs for online classes and evaluation system.

2. ONLINE UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (INU-OMC):

The first and foremost step taken by INU is the establishment of OMC which is designed as an official decision-making body which will authorize online delivery of University current courses and address any issues or disputes arising in relation to these courses. The committee was approved through University Governing Authorities via Video Conferencing and the minutes were shared via email to respective members.

INU established its OMC comprising of the following members:

1. Vice Chancellor
2. Registrar
3. Deans of the Faculties
4. Heads of Teaching Departments

5. Director ORIC
6. Director QEC
7. Director Swat Campus
8. Manager IT & Development

The principal duty of the committee is to plan, organize, implement and control the online academic activities at INU and to address the students' issues. The Committee will also ensure the implementation of all policy guidelines issued by HEC and other Regulatory Authorities during the pandemic period.

- Registrar will be responsible and the focal point for COVID pandemic situation.
- Director ORIC and Director QEC will be looking after the quality of online courses delivery.
- Manager IT & Development will be the focal person for looking after the Technology matters of INU.

3. INU ONLINE LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM/SIC PORTAL:

INU has already developed an online course registration portal by the name of SIC which has been quite effective in faculty exam marks uploading etc. and the same portal has been extended for online courses and teaching materials uploading. The same coaching materials are accessible by the students through their respective assigned User IDs. The teachers are able to upload their assessments and assignments on the same portal and students can upload their solved assessments sheets on the same portal.

INU SIC portal has been able to satisfy the following online criterions:

- Users and Role Management
- Creation of courses and preparation of e-Contents
- Creation of Students Accounts and circulation of credentials to the students
- Preparation of Mid Exams and their Grading by INU Academic staff
- Preparation of Online Sessional Assignments and their contents by the faculty
- Q&A on SIC Discussion Board by the Academic staff
- Online student support regarding subject related queries

The portal was successfully tested, launched and being improved time by time through various suggestions given by faculty in University WhatsApp groups particularly developed during this pandemic situation. University faculty was given online training so that they are well equipped with the working on the portal.

As per HEC criterion, for Universities that have existing systems (LMS and/or SIC), it is critical that they are prepared for the increase in traffic when all students shift to their online platform. To handle the expected increase in concurrent users, the INU IT staff will ensure that:

- The hardware infrastructure is sized appropriately

- There is adequate bandwidth available and extra capacity can be added as / when needed
- Business Continuity / Disaster Recovery plans are in place (including regular backups)

It is important to highlight that only limited support from the HEC will be available as the nature of changes required depends heavily on the architecture of the system deployed by the University; hence INU is fully equipped to cope with the above challenges.

The link of the portal is <http://175.107.63.112/~inudcpkdu/sic/Teachers>

4. GOVERNANCE:

As per HEC guidelines and UMC recommendations, INU has ensured to look upon the following points vigilantly:

a. Iqra National University, Peshawar has made a comprehensive survey and identified students and faculty that have limited access to broadband at home and those who do not have devices (smartphones, tablets, desktop / laptop computers) that can be used to access online learning platforms.

b. INU has setup a helpdesk as well as a complaint management system on University website to answer student and faculty questions and address any issues encountered in the launching of the online learning program.

c. Universities need to circulate the best practices / guidelines to all faculty – see Annexure G – Resources for Best Practices / Guidelines.

d. INU ORIC and QECs offices have developed internal monitoring mechanisms to ensure that the faculty is updating content on the SIC portal and delivering lectures regularly.

e. INU will be identifying staff with experience in virtual instruction that can assist other staff members in adopting the technology solutions used by the University.

5. COMMUNICATION:

For effective communication of faculty with students, OMC ensures that:

a. University should establish channels for communication with faculty and students; and YouTube channel and video lectures are mostly encouraged.

b. Use of social media platforms (e.g. Facebook & Twitter) are recommended.

c. WhatsApp groups should be created at the department level for Faculty.

d. Through these channels, the faculty and students should be kept informed of the Universities' strategies, plans, and timelines for virtual instructions.

6. NEED OF VIDEO CONFERENCING:

Learning Management Systems are typically used in conjunction with in-person instruction. In order to deliver quality virtual instruction, faculty must create highly interactive content to make sure that students are engaged and learning outcomes are achieved. Without proper training, it is difficult to expect that existing faculty will be able to change their teaching methods and quickly adopt the best practices / models that work well in an asynchronous environment (i.e. learning through online channels without real-time interaction).

Students are in a similar situation; they are unfamiliar with a purely asynchronous form of learning. In the long run, both faculty and students can and will adapt; however, it is unlikely that this transition will take place in the short term.

In order to limit the disruption to both faculty and students, it is recommended by INU management that synchronous learning (i.e. online or distance education that happens in real time) be used to complement the material available on the SIC portal. This requirement makes an interactive video conferencing solution necessary. The live lectures can be recorded and will help the faculty create content that can be used for future courses and offline access for those students that are absent at the time of delivery.

7. DEVELOPMENT OF A COURSE:

Just as working in the online environment should not be perceived by the student as a lonely, isolated activity, development of an online course should be a collaborative effort. At a minimum, instructors should meet or otherwise communicate with their department head prior to development of any new course.

Strategic planning of distance learning courses is recommended for all academic departments. With strategic course planning, timelines can be set for development that ensures instructors have adequate training and experience. While some late changes are sometimes unavoidable due to instructor losses, development of distance learning courses should begin no later than one week prior to the first day of classes. The lead time must be sufficient for the Curriculum Committee to review the proposal prior to their last meeting of the fall or spring semester before they are placed on the schedule. Proposals that do not allow sufficient development time will prevent the instructor and/or course from being placed on the schedule.

Exceptions to the normal development timeline are allowed only in special circumstances and only with the academic dean's approval. Department chairs should provide to the dean the reasons the

exceptions are required. Such a rationale could include a necessary late instructor substitution when students are already enrolled due to the unexpected loss of the approved instructor.

The instructor developing the course should meet with the HOD or DEAN or Directors ORIC/QEC to discuss:

- Learning objectives for the entire class.
- Teaching methods used to accomplish the learning objectives.
- Assessment methods used to evaluate student learning.
- Technology tools in the learning management system used to support the teaching methods.
- Timeline to complete the development process.
- Tasks to be completed by the instructor.
- Tasks desired to be completed by the distance learning staff or others.

8. TRAINING FOR EFFECTIVE ONLINE TECHING:

When making decisions for taking physical classrooms to online teaching, faculty should be capable for distance learning courses and programs, in addition to discipline credentials departments should ask faculty to be competent in online course design, online pedagogy, online classroom management, the use of the learning management system, and the use of general computer technology. The Effective Teaching Practices provides a best practices outline for the required training. Local training opportunities should be shared to all instructors by respective HODs. On-campus technology training is made available through the IT and EDP departments. On-campus teaching practice materials and support is also available through SIC portal. Additionally, in-service training may help to improve technology skills.

9. ONLINE READINESS:

In order to create a simplified structure for online education, INU as per HEC guidelines will use the concept of "online readiness". While quality standards apply across the entire spectrum of courses, a set of targeted requirements has been devised solely to cover the particular challenges and opportunities of online education. These standards cover 6 major areas, namely the university, the course, the faculty, the library, the laboratory, and the student. These are discussed below:

(i) The University: The management of educational materials and personnel has become increasingly professional. Three components are of particular importance, namely an explicit policy and

SOPs for approval of courses, a Learning Management System (LMS) called SIC to provide information, track progress, and coordinate activities, and governance system for decision-making and adjudication of complaints. While these have become markers of quality in all modern universities, they are especially essential in case of online education. INU needs to adopt and announce a transparent policy and SOPs that reveals how it decides whether or not a course can be taught through online means. A functional, effective, and operational, SIC is operational to ensure that students are able to find all relevant information about their course. Finally, a governing system UMC is operational to approve online courses and faculty and to rule upon disputes or complaints.

(ii) Course: The best practice for course organization is to provide all of the following information to the students ahead of time: the course introduction, the learning objectives, the evaluation/grading policy, course prerequisites (if any), course requirement or rules, the textbooks or other required readings, the key dates, the time and venue (physical or virtual) of class meetings, the lesson plan (together with the assigned readings for each lecture), the assignments, and PPTs or handouts. All this becomes essential in the case of online teaching. The OMC will ensure that all these conditions have been met before authorizing an online course.

(iii) Library: INU feels its responsibility to enable students to access not only the course material (through the SIC), but also all required readings and associated materials (optional readings, audiovisual materials, or literature or data needed for course-related research) through a library or resource center. In the case of online courses, student access needs to be assured electronically, and INU has developed an e-book learning system and hundreds of electronic books have been uploaded already on the portal. Once again, OMC will certify that the resource bank and library system is online ready.

(iv) Students: The main issue in Pakistan is connectivity. Some students have complained that they live in areas where Internet connectivity as well as electricity supplies are highly intermittent and unreliable, or do not have access because of affordability issues. The university has set up a dedicated office in EDP to address such concerns. In order to do so, INU has obtained full information on the obstacles faced by their students in accessing online materials, including their location, the service quality in their area of residence, and their access to devices and connections.

(v) Evaluations and Assessments: The imperatives for evaluation and assessment for online education are different from those of normal educational processes. In general, universities need robust assessment systems that are communicated to the students at the outset so that they can manage their studies in a prudent manner. These include exams, assignments, in-class activities, self-assessments, evaluations built into the instructional design, and timely and constructive feedback. These are relevant to

online education as well, but their structuring and monitoring creates additional challenges. INU has adopted the mechanism to have an online open-book/open-internet based IQ based mid-exams of 30 marks; sessional assignment/major assignment/home-based technology project of 20 marks; and then a final exam of 50 marks. Duration of the semester will be the same that is 16 weeks excluding mid and final exams. The assignments/mid exams will be uploaded on portal and students will be required to solve their tests within specified time frame allocated by the relevant faculty. The students will upload their tests and faculty will be able to download these tests through their respective IDs.

(vi) Laboratory and Practical Instruction: By definition, practical instruction, including laboratory work, research projects, which require the physical presence of the student and direct supervision by or interaction with their instructors. Such interaction has to be ruled out during the lock down phase. As on other issues, the OMC will certify that the guidelines are being implemented. The lab classes may be postponed by next physical classes semester; or video demonstrations of practicals will be recorded by faculty and uploaded on YouTube channels for the guidelines as per requirement of the subject.