Online Faculty Mentor (OFM) Program
Guidelines and Handbook

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Mission
In accordance with SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation (pg. 23), “The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of its curriculum with its faculty,” the Online Faculty Mentor (OFM) Program’s mission is to retain outstanding online faculty by helping them to maximize their expertise in the development and instruction of MTSU Online courses.

MTSU Online strongly supports and encourages the mentoring mission by:
- Providing training and professional development opportunities related to mentoring and peer review;
- Paying OFM mentor/review fees annually per number of completed assignments;
- Recruiting, preparing, and maintaining a qualified pool of OFMs;
- Providing assistance, guidance and advice as course development problems are identified;
- Providing and maintaining mentor/peer review documentation (self-evaluation and peer reviews using the Online Development and Review Form; Chair Approval Form; annual OFM satisfaction survey; course developer survey; assignment database);
- Providing OFM and MTSU Online program policies, guidelines, forms, and procedures to faculty course developers at the beginning of the design process.
- Assigning mentors (outside of course developer disciplines) to course designers at the beginning of the development process to follow and assist them through the development, peer review and course approval processes.

Vision
The vision of the OFM Program is to promote academic integrity in the development and instruction of online courses.

OFM Program Goals
- The ultimate goal of the OFM program is to retain MTSU students by providing a valuable online learning experience. This goal is accomplished by:
  - successfully mentoring online course developers and instructors by providing best practices, resources and various approaches to building and teaching innovative and interactive online offerings;
  - providing OFM training and continual professional development opportunities;
  - providing financial support for completion of OFM assignments;
  - providing OFM guidelines and processes;
  - maintaining a mentoring database of processes and outcomes to support and evaluate mentoring activities;
  - providing a strong, central structure, resources and leadership to support the OFM Program.
Program Description/History
The Online Faculty Mentor (OFM) Program, created in 2005, serves as a continuous online course development and instruction quality improvement process for the university. It is a faculty driven program that combines a mentoring and peer review process for initial online course development and subsequent course revision (Adams, Rust, Brinthaupt, 2011).

Instructor mentoring was added to the program in the 2018 Fall Semester and pairs OFMs with new online instructors through their first semester of online course delivery. The process and review are based on Chickering and Gamson’s Seven Principles for Best Practice in Undergraduate Education.

OFM Services
Online Course Development
MTSU Online provides an Online Faculty Mentor (OFM) for each new and experienced online course developer making the assignment when a course development or redesign proposal is received in the MTSU Online office. All assignments are made outside course developer disciplines. The course developer also receives the MTSU Peer Review for Online Course Development form to use as a development guide and for a self-evaluation when the course is complete. The OFM also uses the same form for the formal peer review. Since the review process does not evaluate course content, department chairs are responsible for final review and course approval.

Online Course Instruction
New online instructors (whether course developers or not) are assigned an OFM to serve as a peer mentor during the first semester of instruction. A Peer Review Form for Online Instruction is provided to the course developer for use during the semester, and the same form is used by the OFM to review the course three times during the semester. The OFM is available throughout the semester to answer questions and review the course, if needed.

New Online Faculty Mentors
Online course developers who wish to become OFMs must have developed and taught online and must complete the Advanced Online Teaching course through the Online Learning Consortium (OLC). They are then assigned to an experienced OFM for orientation and assistance through the first assignment. MTSU Online funds the OLC Advanced Online Teaching Certificate, which is a three-month, online learning experience.

MTSU maintains a pool of approximately 20 active OFMs which review, on the average, 85 new and redesigned online and hybrid courses a year. Approximately 20-30 new online instructors will use the OFM services annually.

OFM Program Benefits
- It efficiently uses limited resources to accomplish institutional goals.
Faculty course designers, instructors and OFMs mutually benefit from networking and the exchange of knowledge.

- OFMs feel that they make a contribution to the university by improving the quality of MTSU Online courses.
- OFMs state that mentoring helps them to deal more productively with the challenges of online course development.
- OFMs state that it helps them focus on best practices in the development and instruction of their own online courses.
- OFMs state they are staying abreast of new technologies and methodologies.
- Mentoring increases the visibility of online education within their departments.

The Mentoring Process – Online Course Development/Redesign

Even though the OFM Program is faculty-driven program, MTSU Online is responsible for facilitating the program to ensure that established goals are met, to monitor the effectiveness of the program on an ongoing basis, and to ensure that all documentation requirements are met.

Mentoring Assignments

Mentoring assignments are made by MTSU Online based on OFM availability and assignment load. OFMs should not accept assignments when their schedules do not permit their availability throughout the design/review/approval processes. This can be difficult to determine, and depending on the length of time the course developer takes to complete a course, the OFM’s schedule may prevent a timely and thorough review. Reassignments can be made in this case.

Content is not part of the peer review process. Department chairs are responsible for approval of course content and delivery.

Introduce Yourself

When an assignment is made, OFMs should contact the course designer via email or phone to introduce themselves and to offer assistance. It is highly recommended that OFMs meet face-to-face with new online/hybrid course developers at the beginning of the development process.

Examples of introductory emails:

Dear Dr._____ My name is [OFM name], and I will serve as your OFM for the development of your new online course. Please let me know when you are available for a face-to-face meeting to discuss your course plan and design. I am happy to answer questions throughout the process, and I look forward to working with you. Regards,

Hi Dr._____ I hope your semester is going well. I have been assigned to serve as your mentor in the development of online course [name of course]. Please do not hesitate to email me your questions or concerns. As your Online Faculty Mentor, my service also includes a peer review of the course when it is completed. If you have any questions about the review process, please ask. I want to help make the process go as smoothly for you as possible.
Dear Dr. _____ I have been assigned to serve as your mentor and reviewer for your new online course. Please let me know when you are available for a face-to-face meeting to discuss your course plan and design. The deadline for the peer review is [March 1]. How far along are you in the development of your course?

**Be Available**
The OFM serves as a point of contact and as a resource during course design, review and approval. The OFM also should respond to questions in a timely manner and contact the course designer periodically to offer assistance.

**Course Design Assistance**
More assistance may be required by a new course designer than by a veteran developer. Feel free to ask the course designer to describe his/her vision for the course and make design recommendations based on that information. New course designers may especially appreciate this type of help. Showing your assigned course developer one of your online courses will help in the visualization and design of their course.

**Technical Questions**
Questions of a technical nature may be referred to the MTSU Help Desk or via phone at 615/898-5345. ITD’s Faculty Instructional Technology Center (FITC) may also be contacted at 615/904-8189 for D2L questions.

**Self-evaluation and Peer Review Process**
Upon course completion, the course designer conducts and sends a self-evaluation (using the Peer Review of Online Course Development Form) to his/her assigned OFM. Receipt of the self-evaluation from the course designer serves as notification that the course is ready for the peer review. Prior to conducting the peer review, the OFM reviews the course designer’s self-evaluation for information behind the design of the course.

Peer reviews are not conducted on incomplete courses. All course elements noted on the Peer Review Online Course Development Form (including quizzes, exams, discussion boards, etc.) must be complete before the peer review is conducted. If, while conducting a peer review, the OFM finds that the course is lacking vital elements, this information is noted on the peer review form and returned to the course designer explaining that when the course is complete another review will be conducted. OFMs may even want to call the course designer to discuss or email them regarding their findings.

OFMs are expected to complete the peer review within a week (two at the most) after they have received the self-evaluation and have been added to their assigned courses. This is especially important since new courses are not added to the semester schedule until after the reviews are conducted and chair approval is given. Course content is evaluated by the department chair and is not addressed in the peer evaluation form.
When complete, the OFM shares the peer review with the course designer. Since some courses may require more than one peer review, it may be worthwhile to arrange a meeting following the initial review to discuss any issues/problems and to make suggestions for improvement.

The course designer should be given adequate time to make changes based on recommendations noted in the peer review. If the suggested revisions are made, changes in ratings may be warranted and must be noted on the Peer Review Online Course Development Form before submission to MTSU Online.

The completed Peer Review Online Course Development Form is signed (electronic signature preferred) by the OFM and sent via email to carol.hayes@mtsu.edu at MTSU Online.

**Chair Review/Approval**
The completed Peer Review Online Course Development and Course Approval forms are sent by MTSU Online to the course designer’s department chair. The Peer Review Online Course Development Form must not be sent by the course developer or by the OFM to the department chair.

The OFM will be available to assist the course designer if additional changes are required or if the chair has questions pertaining to the peer review.

When the chair signs the Course Approval Form and returns it to MTSU Online, the Scheduling Center is notified by MTSU Online that the course may be added (by the department) to the target semester schedule, and pay documents are submitted to pay the development fee to the course developer.

**The Mentoring Process – Online Course Instruction**
In addition to participation in a week-long, online training course, all new online instructors are assigned an OFM who is given access to their course to review instruction and to suggest ways to improve. Reviews are conducted at least three times during the semester, and constructive feedback provided after each review. A summary is provided to the instructor at the end of the semester. MTSU Online also receives summaries after each review. The final summary is shared with the department chair.

**The Mentoring Process – New Online Faculty Mentors**
Following the completion of the required online training program, new OFMs are paired with experienced OFMs as they are assigned their first peer review assignments by MTSU Online. The OFM mentoring the new OFM should offer to meet with their mentee to discuss the information provided in this document, to review the peer review form, to conduct a mock review of an online course together, and to share appropriate technical and campus resources.

As the new OFM proceeds through their first review, the mentor must be available to assist and to answer questions as needed.
**OFM Review Fees**

**Online Course Development Assignments**
OFMs mentoring new online course developers receive $300 per assignment. Several reviews may be necessary and more assistance provided to new course designers than to experienced course developers. OFM assignments to experienced faculty online course developers receive $150 since these assignments may require less time.

The fees are paid annually in a lump sum at the end of April based on the number of completed assignments. In February or March, each OFM receives an email from MTSU Online to ask for confirmation of the number of assignments completed since the previous April. OFMs should respond to this email as soon as possible in order to make the April 30 pay date.

**Online Instruction Assignments**
Instructor OFMs receive $300 per course assignment which includes at least three reviews and feedback provided to the instructor as often as needed. The fees are paid annually in a lump sum at the end of April based on the number of completed assignments. Each OFM receives an email from MTSU Online to ask for confirmation of the number of assignments completed since the previous April. OFMs should respond to this email as soon as possible in order to make the April 30 pay date.

**Fees for Mentoring New OFMs**
Each OFM who mentors new OFMs receives a $300 fee per assignment. As noted above, these fees are paid annually at the end of April based on assignment confirmation by the OFM.

**OFM Program Roles and Responsibilities**

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<tr>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
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| New OFM (Eligibility and Training) | • Faculty must have developed and taught online to be eligible for OFM service.  
  • Faculty must complete required OLC training, including assignment to an experienced OFM to guide them through their first peer review/mentoring assignment. |
| OFM (Course Developers)       | • Complete required training  
  • Accept mentoring assignments from MTSU Online for online course development when offered and schedule permitting.  
  • Meet face-to-face with new course developers to discuss process and review a completed online course.  
  • Respond to course development questions in a timely manner, offering technical (or refer to the Help Desk and/or FITC) and instructional resources and best practices.  
  • Monitor course development progress periodically to offer assistance. |
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<tr>
<th>OFM (Instructors)</th>
<th>Course Developer</th>
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| • Assist course developer throughout the online development, review and course approval processes, as needed.  
• Complete peer reviews, using the Peer Review for Online Course Development Form, in a timely manner following course completion.  
• Conduct several peer reviews, if needed, to complete the process.  
• Send completed peer reviews to MTSU Online after sharing with course designer.  
• Attend meetings when scheduled by MTSU Online.  
• Attend professional development workshops to enhance mentoring knowledge and skills.  
• Notify MTSU Online Office when busy schedules require periods of inactivity from the OFM Program.  
• Notify MTSU Online Office when schedules change, and mentoring assignments cannot be completed.  
• Complete annual surveys.  |
| • Complete required training  
• Accept online instructor mentoring assignments from MTSU Online when offered and schedule permitting.  
• Reviews the Course and Instructor Information Form completed by the new instructor.  
• Reviews the instructor activity in the course at least three times (beginning, middle and end) during the semester, and more if requested or needed.  
• Constructive feedback is provided to the instructor and to the MTSU Online office after each review and a summary is provided at the end of the semester to MTSU Online.  
• The final summary is shared with the department chair by MTSU Online.  |
| • Complete approval contractual documentation for online course development.  
• Complete required D2L/course development training through FITC.  
• Meet with FITC instructional designer (required of new course designers).  
• Obtain a D2L development shell in which to develop the course.  
• Request development shell/course access for OFM and department chair.  
• Meet with assigned OFM to discuss course design (required of new course designers).  
• Review the Peer Review Form and refer to it as a development guide.  
• Use a generic design to enable others to teach sections of the course per contract.  
• Request OFM assistance when necessary.  
• Request FITC technical assistance as necessary.  |
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<tr>
<th><strong>OFM Program Guidelines and Handbook</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Online Instructor</strong></td>
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<td>• Course instructor completes the Course and Instructor Information Form (received from MTSU Online and forwards to their assigned OFM.</td>
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<td>• Instructor reviews the Peer Review of Online Instruction Form which may be used as a guide during the semester.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Instructor reviews feedback provided by the OFM during the semester and makes improvements as needed.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MTSU Online</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Facilitate the OFM Program.</td>
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<td>• Schedule and attend OFM meetings.</td>
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<td>• Provide faculty and OFMs with updated Peer Review Forms, as needed.</td>
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<td>• Provide OFMs with Guidelines and procedures.</td>
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<td>• Assign OFMs (outside disciplines) to course designers.</td>
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<td>• Assign replacement OFMs when completion of assignments are not possible.</td>
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<td>• Assign experienced OFMs to mentor new OFMs.</td>
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<td>• Direct and advise OFMs during peer reviews and OFM training.</td>
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<td>• Facilitate online course development, review and approval processes.</td>
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<td>• Notify Scheduling of new courses approved for delivery following peer review and chair approval.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Generate and submit the mentoring/review fee pay documents annually each April (OFMs earn $150 for each completed development assignment and $300 for each instructor mentor assignment).</td>
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<td>• Conduct annual OFM and Course Developer surveys.</td>
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<td>• Update and maintain OFM Program website (provide links to mentor and professional development resources).</td>
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OFM Program Challenges

- Course developers not wishing to use OFM services
- Some course developments and redesigns require more than one peer review
- Insufficient course developer LMS tools/knowledge/skills
- Lack of course design planning
- Course designers not using the Peer Review Online Course Development Form as a guide during development
- Course designers requesting peer reviews on incomplete courses
- Faculty requesting the peer review without having first completed the self-evaluation of their completed course
- OFM and course developer schedules change making OFM reassignments necessary
- OFMs not mentoring during course development
- Faculty course designers rushing course development and expecting unrealistic outcomes from the peer review
- Course developers not making the completion deadlines and courses not added to semester schedules until after registration begins.
- Departments lack of notification regarding new online instructors assigned to teach before they can complete training.
- New instructors not wishing to have OFMs in their courses as they teach the first time.
- New instructors not completing online training for which they are registered.

References

A Practical Guide for Developing Online Faculty Mentor Programs. Online Learning Consortium


Faculty Mentoring Program-Guidelines, The University of Vermont, College of Medicine


Mentoring and Faculty Development Handbook for the Department of Preventive Medicine,

SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation