



## Sharing Responsibility in the E-Learning Process: The Use of Learning Contracts, Service Standards, and Learning Support Agreements

This issue investigates a trio of concepts, none of them really new, but all of them applied to e-learning fairly recently. Their use helps meet the demand for increased accountability, and they formally state the rights and responsibilities of some or all of the players involved in the delivery of online education.

Learning contracts, for example, are written by students themselves, setting forth their goals and duties. In contrast, service standards spell out and guarantee specific services provided for e-students by the institution and its instructors. Standards may also include those of academic and student support departments like registration, technical support, counseling, and the library. Finally, learning support agreements are documents that cover the roles and responsibilities for both those delivering and those receiving the instruction. Still confused? Read on and be enlightened.

### Learning Contracts

*"...it changes the student from being merely reactive...to being proactive in taking the initiative in proposing work to meet the requirements."*

(Source: James Atherton, [Learning Contracts](#), DeMontfort University, 2003)

- ["Creating Powerful Online Courses Using Multiple Instructional Strategies."](#) Presentation by Tina Pitt and Ann Clark, University of Colorado, at the Teaching in the Community College Online Conference, 1997. Not recent, but it includes a scholarly look at learning contract origins.
- [Learning Contract](#). Detailed explanation of the concept and how it works, developed by Henry Merrill, Indiana University, that includes a useful [learning contract template](#).
- [Learning Contracts](#). Document created by James Atherton, DeMontfort University (UK), 2003, that contains a list of the basics that should be included in all learning contracts.
- [Learning Contracts](#). Review of the concept and its effectiveness by the Illinois Online Network.
- [2003-2004 FIPP Guidelines: Learning Contract Ideas](#). Report, with a sample contract, prepared as part of its Faculty in Progress Program (FIPP) by the Maricopa Community College (AZ) Center for Learning and Instruction.

### Service Standards

*"... specific, measurable statements of the level of performance required and promised, containing characteristics associated with excellence...that enable customers to judge whether or not they are receiving the standard of service that was promised."*

(Source: [Batho Pele Handbook](#), Department of Public Service & Administration, Government of South Africa)

- [CIS Service Standards](#). Detailed list of services provided by the Harvey Mudd College (CA) Computing and Information Sciences (CIS) department, e.g., lab, classroom, and media services.
- [Customer Charter](#). Statement of services provided by the University of Liverpool (UK) library.
- [Expect the Best – Service Standards](#). A model by Athabasca University (Canada) for setting up standards for response rates: administrative services (registration, exams, transfer of credits); general information standards (response and inquiry processing); and academic support standards (e.g., instructors, tutors, counselors).
- [Lehigh University Information Resources \(IR\) Service Standards, October 2000](#). Document that details policies for all IR service areas, with response rates for inquiries of all kinds.
- [Service Standards: A Guide to the Initiative](#). An excellent, detailed, and lengthy guide to creating service standards for any organization, produced by the Treasury Board of Canada.

## Learning Support Agreements (LSAs)

***"All parties should sign this document when the final version has been agreed [to], to confirm that it is an accurate record of what all parties have established they will do."***

(Source: LSA, [University of Sheffield](#), UK)

- [The Horticultural Correspondence College Learning Agreement](#). Example of a simple LSA developed at a UK college that offers only distance, including online, courses.
- [Learning Support Agreement](#). Excellent example of an LSA by the University of Sheffield (UK) for its students with disabilities.
- [Learning Support Agreement](#). An LSA in narrative form provided for its netcourse students by The Concord Consortium (MA). It requires an emailed statement of acceptance by the student.
- [Sample Learning Support Agreement](#). Breakdown of what can be expected by all parties involved in an LSA created by [Learning Decisions](#) in April 2000.
- ["What Is Your Learning Support Agreement \(LSA\)?"](#) An annotated list done in 1999 by Elliott Masie of [The MASIE Center](#) of categories and components of an LSA.

## BEEP's Best Bets

### *Administration*

- [America's Online Pursuits: The Changing Picture of Who's Online and What They Do](#). Analysis of three years of data collected by the [Pew Internet & American Life Project](#), December 2003. Provides excellent statistics on the demographics of U. S. Web use.
- ["Are Portals Dead?"](#) Article by Terry Calhoun, in *Syllabus News*, 1/15/04, in which the author states that "portalization" may have peaked, and that many so-called academic portals are not.
- [Handbook of Distance Education for Adult Learners, Second Edition](#). Complete book by Leslie I. Petty, Jerome Johnston and Dehra Shafer, published by the Project IDEAL Support Center, University of Michigan, November 2003, that covers recruitment, orientation, instruction, assessment, and administrative issues related to adult online students.
- [Theory and Practice of Online Learning](#). Another complete and downloadable book, this one edited by Terry Anderson and Fathi Elloumi, Athabasca University (Canada), 2004, that is self-described as a "perceptive and complete guide" revisiting "the great dichotomies that have marked the history of open and distance learning."

### *Free Information Sources*

- [Landmark Citation Machine](#). Web tool by David Warwick of [The Landmark Project](#) that creates bibliographic citations either in APA, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, or MLA format simply by entering information about the source, which may include articles, interviews, Web pages, and more.
- [Open Office](#). Technically not an information source, but well worth inclusion, this is a **free**, downloadable and well-reviewed software suite, similar to and compatible with Microsoft Office.

### *Instructional Resources*

- [The Design and Delivery of Effective Web-Based Instruction: An Analysis of Faculty Concerns](#). Undated paper by R. Nicholas Gerlich and LaVelle Mills, West Texas A & M University, on how online teaching and learning affects how faculty in higher education teach and the way students learned, based on findings from a survey of faculty.
- [Seven Principles of Good Teaching Practice](#). Comprehensive lists of good practices for instructors both in the regular classroom and online by Dr. James W. King, University of Nebraska. Principles include student-faculty contact, active learning, time on task, cooperation among students, prompt feedback, high expectations and respect for learning diversity.

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For a subscription to BEEP, contact the project manager: [lechnerj@spcollege.edu](mailto:lechnerj@spcollege.edu)

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