The Social Work program at MSU is working on a redesign of their online courses to promote a consistent and positive student learning experience across courses. A master course template was created to aid instructors while designing new and existing courses. The template serves as a model and is not mandatory.
Overall Design Strategy:

Prior to the new design strategy, students had to navigate a different course structure with each course. Course topics had varying labels such as Weeks, Sessions, Modules, or Units. The location of the syllabus and other general information, such as technology assistance, was not consistent.

The Master Course Template was created to serve as a model for the redesign of all existing online courses and is provided when building new courses. The modules generally follow a weekly pattern but can be combined (two modules/week) or lengthened (one module covering two weeks) as needed. A Special Topics module can be included for longer semesters or taken out during shorter semesters.

Many course elements are included in the template to improve the student experience based on Quality Matters standards. Instructors who have used the new design say it makes intuitive sense and students have told them they find it easy to follow.

Purpose of the Master Courses:

1. Master courses are for development, do not contain students, and have general course content to be used across multiple sections and instructors. They also serve as an online backup of content.

2. New instructors can request a copy of the master or work with an individual instructor to copy their previous semester course, keeping in mind they will need to update personal items to their own.

3. Ideally, there will be lead instructors responsible for updating the Master Courses, with feedback and communication from other instructors.

4. The structure of each module starts with a Module Introduction or Module Overview. The general template contains these into pages with placeholders for the description, objectives, and overview.

5. Each module ends with a Checklist. This is kept brief so that students must go to the assignment for details. This item serves as a double-check to ensure no important assignments are missed.

Other Guidelines for the reusability of Master Courses:

1. Personalized communication is not included in the general Master Course but should be added after the course is copied into a semester course with students. Personal instructor information is usually displayed in the Syllabus, Announcements, email, and personal videos (i.e., recorded lectures).

2. Specific dates are not included in titles, descriptions, or content within the masters. Rather, modules, content, and assignments use built-in D2L start/end/due dates. Internal (typed) dates are easily missed when copied to the next semester and can cause confusion. D2L dates can be offset in bulk during or after a course copy.

3. For content items and assignment descriptions, the time due is stated in general terms (i.e., first post by Wednesday and reply by Sunday at 11:59 p.m.). The Syllabus and other communication items (announcements, email, etc.) can refer to specific weeks, dates, and times. Students can also receive automated notifications from built-in D2L dates.