

Integrating Quality Matters in the Course Development Process

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Abstract

Building quality assurance into the online course development process assists in the efficient creation of high quality courses. Quality Matters (QM) was originally developed by MarylandOnline as a standards-based rubric to review online courses. At Miami University we have adapted the research based QM standards to build quality into new online courses and course undergoing revision. Using a team approach to course development, the QM standards are integrated throughout the course development process through the use of a variety of resources.

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As online learning becomes more mainstream, institutions are increasingly looking to assure “quality” in their online courses. The research based Quality Matters (QM) program has received national recognition for their approach to this issue. However, Quality Matters is primarily a review tool and was not initially designed to be used in course creation.

Because online learning is relatively new to Miami University, we adapted Quality Matters to guide our course creation process. Rather than developing courses and reviewing quality after the fact, we develop online courses from the start using Quality Matters standards. Our focus is on providing a quality learning experience for students and teaching experience for faculty. We recognize that faculty are not only subject matter experts, but experts on the students they teach. Consequently, faculty are highly involved in the course creation process.

Faculty are typically introduced to the QM at the beginning of the course creation process. In effort to guarantee alignment and encourage innovation in the course, faculty are asked to approach the course creation as if they are developing a “new” course. From the course objectives, faculty determine themes or modules and then specific topics of study within those themes. Measureable, topic-level (or unit level) objectives are then written.

At this point, we introduce faculty to our course planning grid (see Planning Grid with sample content below). The design of the planning grid helps reinforce key QM ideas such as unit level objectives, alignment and learner interaction. The planning grid also helps faculty identify “busy work” or activities not directly related to objectives and eliminate or revise them so they do align with objectives. Faculty then work with an instructional designer to create the course modules. Faculty are expected to generate and post most of their own materials. This allows designers to work with several faculty at once and guarantees that faculty can revise their course as needed.

In an effort to provide a familiar and welcoming online environment for students, we ask faculty to follow a general outline for course structure. This outline also includes required QM statements such as information for students with disabilities or how to access resources. Rather than

expecting each faculty member to create these statements from scratch, we offer to import a “template” into their course site that they can customize (examples available upon request). This template offers writing suggestions from experienced online teachers, examples and pre-created links to resources.

Once faculty feel a course is ready to be offered online, we provide them with a course checklist (see Course Checklist below) based on QM standards (standards are referenced on the checklist). This checklist was designed for faculty to evaluate their own courses and is not meant to bar a course from being offered. Like the formal QM review, it is meant to provide the faculty member with guidance on how to improve their course.

Evidence

At this point, anecdotal evidence indicates that faculty are very satisfied with the course development and self-assessment processes. Faculty new to online teaching report that these tools help them feel more equipped to create an online course, and better prepared and “less nervous” about teaching online. Faculty using the checklist to revise existing online courses report decreases in student questions about course expectations. We are experiencing very low dropout rates in courses created following the Quality Matters standards. Several of these courses are experiencing large enough enrollments that additional online sections have been added. Student grades in online courses developed following the Quality Matters standards are consistent with student grades in the face-to-face versions of these courses. We are currently developing formalized assessment tools to assess student satisfaction with the online courses and faculty satisfaction with the development process.

Relation to SLOAN-C Pillars

Learning effectiveness – Our course development process keep content and pedagogy at the forefront: from the “conceptualization” stage through the delivery of the course. The QM focus ensures that all learner interaction is aligned with both unit and course goals and that communication is an integral part of the course.

Cost effectiveness – Combining the QM standards and support materials with a learning community environment allows for the development of high quality online courses without the expense of purchasing pre-packaged courses or hiring a dedicated course developer.

Student satisfaction – Following QM standards ensures that our online courses clearly communicate expectations, content and resources to the students. We have seen a decrease in students claiming to be “confused” about what to do or how to access online resources.

Faculty satisfaction – Faculty appreciate the scaffolding provided by the QM standards and support materials. This combined with the assistance of a course designer allows them to create a high quality course that reflects their personality and teaching style (bringing their “presence” to the online classroom). Furthermore, because faculty do much of the course development work themselves, they are adept at making changes as necessary when the course is being offered.

Access – Because QM standards address access, this become an integral part of the course and not an afterthought.



CoOL Online Course Planning Grid



Course Title: Computer Skills: Using the Internet _____

Course Number: CIT 101.I _____

Module Topic: Finding and Evaluating Online Resources _____

Module Number: 3 _____

Objective(s) and/or Competencies	Resources and Materials		Learner Interaction		Assessment and Measurement	
	Readings (Textbook and Supplemental Readings)	Additional Resources and Materials	Learner Interaction w/ Peers and Instructor	Learner Interaction w/ Content (Activities & Short Term Projects)	Long Term Projects (Broken into Components)	Other Measures of Assessment (Quizzes, Tests & Exams)
Explain how a search engine database is constructed.	p. 52-63	Chapter 3 Articulate presentation		Review questions from p.78&79 (as Bb "test")		
Create a search expression that locates multiple web sites addressing a research topic.	p. 64-77	Screen capture of Process using various search engines.	Share research topic, search expression and results on discussion board. Respond to at least 2 other postings	Search engine worksheet – submit answers via email.	Choose research topic and begin to find resources using search engine.	20 questions assessment - 5 T/F, 5 MC and 10 matching (as Bb "Test")
Find 3 full text articles related to topic using Academic Search Premiere.	None	Screen capture of process with audio description.	Share resources from online databases. Discuss experience (successes and problems). Respond to at least 2 other postings		Find resources for project using online databases.	
Apply the 5 Question System for evaluating web sites.	5 Question System article posted to Bb as PDF	"Evaluating Web Sites" Articulate presentation with active link examples.	Respond to at least 2 other postings. From activity to right →	Choose web sites from list and post to discussion board evaluation using 5 Question system.	Begin applying 5 point method to resources found with search engine and online data-	

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					base.	
Cite a web site or other online resource using either APA or MLA format.	None	MLA, APA web sites. Citation web page. Citation Machine web page. Maybe screen capture???		Write citation for given web sites. Submit to instructor.	Write citations for research project resources.	
Synthesize the knowledge from this module.	None				Research project – list topic, 3 web site resources, 3 database resources, 1 page evaluation of each addressing 5 questions, complete citation using APA or MLA. Submit project using Blackboard Assignment tool.	

CoOL Course Check

This checklist is based on Quality Matters standards. Quality Matters is a research-based initiative founded by Maryland Online. Quality Matters was devised to assess and assure course quality by assessing components determined through research as necessary in the design of a high-quality online course. This extensive checklist was designed to assist instructors in developing courses that lead to student success.

There are two parts to this assessment. The first section lists required components. The second section lists recommended components. For your course to meet the expectations of Miami's internal peer review, you must meet all components in section one and approximately 2/3 of the components in section two. For additional information on any of the components, check the QM annotated rubric available at

<http://www.qualitymatters.org/documents/Rubric%20Annotated%20FY0506.doc>

Section One – Essential Components

- There is an obvious indication of where students need to click to “start” the course. (1.1)
- A statement provides navigational instructions to students regarding the overall organization of the course. (1.1)
- A welcome statement from the instructor introduces students to the course. (1.2)
- A statement describes the structure of the units or modules within the course. (1.2)
- Course level learning objectives are clearly articulated in terminology understandable by the student and describe student performance in specific, measurable terms. (2.1)
- Unit/module level learning objectives are clearly articulated in terminology understandable by the student and describe student performance in specific, measurable terms. (2.5)
- Course level learning objectives address content mastery, critical thinking skills, and core learning skills. (2.2)
- Unit/module level learning objectives address content mastery, critical thinking skills, and core learning skills. (2.2)
- Assessments measure and are consistent with the stated learning objectives. (3.1)
- The grading policy is clearly explained and easy to understand. (3.2)
- The instructional materials support the stated learning objectives and have sufficient breadth and depth for the student to learn the subject. (4.1)
- Instructional materials are presented in a format appropriate to the online environment, and are easily accessible to and usable by the student. (4.2)
- Instructional materials requiring the installation of software, plug-ins, codecs or other controls have been tested for ease of use. (4.2)

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- Instructional materials requiring download have been tested on LAN, cable and dial-up connections. (4.2)
- The learning activities promote the achievement of stated objectives and learning outcomes. (5.1)
- A variety of learning activities that foster instructor-student, content-student and student-student interaction are included. (5.2)
- A statement lists clear standards for instructor response and availability (turn-around time for email, grade posting, etc.). (5.3)
- The course design prompts the instructor to be present, active, and engaged with the students. (5.5)
- It is clearly stated how tools and multimedia relate to the course learning objectives. (6.1)
- Statement in course explains to students how to gain access to ADA services on all three campuses. (8.1)
- Course is within Blackboard (an ADA approved Course Management System). If the course is not within Blackboard, Disability Services has reviewed the course for accessibility. (8.1)

Section Two – Recommended Components

- Netiquette expectations with regard to discussions and email communication are clearly stated. (1.3)
- The self-introduction by the instructor creates a sense of connection between the instructor and the students. It presents the instructor as professional as well as approachable. (1.4)
- Students are requested to introduce themselves to the class. (1.5)
- Minimum technology requirements, minimum student skills, and, if applicable, prerequisite knowledge in the discipline, are clearly stated. (1.6)
- Instructions to students on how to meet the learning objectives (what to do) are adequate and easy to understand. (2.4)
- The methods used for submitting assessments are appropriate for the distance learning environment. (3.4)
- “Self-check” or practice types of assignments are provided for quick student feedback. (3.5)
- The purpose of the course elements (content, instructional methods, technologies, and course materials) is evident. (4.3)
- The instructional materials, including supporting materials - such as manuals, videos, CD ROMs, and computer software – are consistent in organization. (4.4)

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- ❑ All resources and materials used in the online course are appropriately cited. (4.5)
- ❑ The requirements for course interaction are clearly articulated. (5.4)
- ❑ The tools and media enhance student interactivity and guide the student to become a more active learner. (6.2)
- ❑ Technologies required for this course (including software, plug-ins or other controls) are either provided or easily downloadable. (6.3)
- ❑ The tools and media are compatible with existing standards of delivery modes. (6.4)
- ❑ Instructions on how to access resources at a distance are sufficient and easy for students to understand. (6.5)
- ❑ The course takes advantage of current course technologies. (6.6)
- ❑ The course instructions articulate or link to a clear description of the technical support offered. (7.1)
- ❑ Course instructions articulate or link to an explanation of how the institution's academic support system can assist the student in effectively using the resources provided. (7.2)
- ❑ Course instructions articulate or link to an explanation of how the institution's student support services can assist the student in effectively using the resources provided. (7.3)
- ❑ Course instructions articulate or link to tutorials and resources that answer basic questions related to research, writing, technology etc. (7.4)
- ❑ Web pages provide equivalent alternatives to auditory and visual content. (8.2)
- ❑ Web pages have links that are self-describing and meaningful. (8.3)
- ❑ The course demonstrates sensitivity to readability issues for students with disabilities. (8.4)

References

Quality Matters - <http://www.qualitymatters.org/>

Original article –

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