


QUALITY STANDARDS

Research into Quality Standards in Online Learning

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THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Quality Standards in Online Courses

- One of five projects commissioned by the COU
- Funded by the MTCU Shared Online Course Fund
- Project to inform the establishment of the Centre of Excellence
- Co-Leads: Laurier, Guelph and McMaster

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Methodology

- Seven central research questions
- Findings based on:
 1. information from the literature
 2. think-tank/workshop sessions with member of higher education institutions across Ontario
- Consultations with COU, Advisory Committee, Steering Committee

DEFINING QUALITY

- Harvey & Green (1993) define quality as *exceptional*
- Highlights the use of (minimum) standards that must be met or surpassed in order to achieve a degree of quality
- Example: *Quality as transformative*
- Standards must be negotiable and subject to *continuous iterative improvements*
- Challenge: Quality is not a unitary concept and is often relative to the user of the term and context-specific

DEFINING QUALITY

- Many dimensions that determine the assessment of quality in education

For example:

- **Presage:** context *before* learning occurs
- **Process:** context *as* learning occurs
- **Product:** *achieved* learning outcomes

(Gibbs, 2010)

IMPORTANCE OF ONLINE COURSE QUALITY ASSURANCE

Why does QA matter?

- *Institutional*: to advance and protect the reputation of the educational institution in attracting students, qualified faculty members, and collaborations with business and industry.
- *Student*: to assure the student that his/her credential is recognized by prospective employers and is relevant in today's workforce.
- *Faculty*: to provide training, resources and technical support for the development of new online courses and the maintenance of ongoing online courses

(Georgia Virtual Technical Connection, 2011, p. 5)

IMPORTANCE OF ONLINE COURSE QUALITY ASSURANCE

- Documented in the literature that course quality assurance matters:
 - A strong relationship exists between high-quality course design and student success (Tallent-Runnels, Thomas, Lan & Cooper, 2006)
 - Well-designed courses enable better course delivery and instruction (Simonson, Schlosser & Orellana, 2011)
 - Benefits of a well-developed quality standards rubric for online courses, include:
 - consistency in quality assessment
 - availability of a document that can be easily revised and adapted, and
 - provision of clear guidelines for course developers, instructors, administrators and review committees

FRAMEWORKS,
CHECKLISTS &
RUBRICS

HANDOUT 1

Breakdown of Scoring Elements by
Framework/Checklist/Rubric

**MOST COMMONLY
LISTED QUALITY
ELEMENTS**

**Course Design &
Delivery**

HANDOUTS 2 & 3

Most Commonly Listed Quality
Elements Course Design

Most Commonly Listed Quality
Elements Course Delivery

**LESS
FREQUENTLY
MENTIONED OR
MISSING
ELEMENTS**

**Course Design &
Delivery**

HANDOUT 4

Less Frequently Mentioned or Missing Elements
– Course Design and Delivery

ADOPTING QUALITY STANDARDS

Advantages

- Contribute to greater congruence in student learning experiences
- Provide a clear and consistent metric for developers and instructors
- Provide transparent and concrete metrics by which courses are assessed for quality and transfer credit
- Equip students to make informed decisions about courses to take
- Could act as an incentive for recruitment

ADOPTING QUALITY STANDARDS

Disadvantages

- Degree of inconsistency in terms of procedures for developing and approving online course in Ontario universities
- Universal quality standards (rubric) vs. autonomy = less consistency in the quality of courses
- Institutional buy-in – resources may not be available to meet certain quality standards (i.e., financial, personnel, time)
- Institutions with highly developed online course design processes may feel they should be exempt from quality standards



Quality Standards and Class Size

QUALITY STANDARDS & CLASS SIZE

- Few frameworks mentioned class size as a key component of quality
- Concern that as the quantity of students increases, the quality decreases – including opportunities for collaboration and interaction (Vrasidas & Mclsaac, 1999)
- Literature suggests that a maximum course cap should be 30 students
- Challenge: Many institutions have online courses with course caps of 100 students or more
- Key message: Identify anticipated enrolment number and design assessments and activities to accommodate

QUALITY STANDARDS & CLASS SIZE

- It is advised that decisions surrounding class size should be driven by:
 - Course objectives/outcomes
 - Teaching strategies
 - Available tools
 - Student-instructor ratio
 - Teaching assistant support
 - Instructor experience with online teaching
 - Whether or not the course is a degree requirement

QUALITY STANDARDS & CLASS SIZE

Strategies for Interaction

- Researchers based at Columbia University's Community College Research Center suggest the following:
 - Audio recorded assignment feedback rather than written comments
 - Video update each week about what's going on in the course
 - Congratulatory emails to students as they progress through sections of a course to maintain student motivation
 - Providing students with online mentors (people devoted to helping them through the course)
 - Direct mass emails (messages that seem to be personalized, but are in fact sent out to a larger group). Wording in these cases is crucial (Berry, 2009)

QUALITY STANDARDS & CLASS SIZE

Recommendations for Dealing with Large Class Sizes

- Avoid overusing text
- Anticipate student questions and build these into the design
- Use the announcement page to keep in touch with students
- Be realistic about expectations and give yourself a buffer
- Avoid deadline extensions
- Provide regular feedback
- Educate students on how to be successful online learners *first*, then teach them content

QUALITY STANDARDS & CLASS SIZE

Managing Expectations

- Student expectations
- Faculty expectations
- Administrator expectations
- Societal expectations



Quality Standards Frameworks

TOP 3 FRAMEWORKS BY REGION

- Compared top 3 most commonly used / cited frameworks / rubrics for Canada, the USA and Internationally (Australia, New Zealand and UK)
- Frameworks were assessed on 4 criteria
- Findings indicate consistency in the rubrics used in the USA
- Findings indicate variance in frameworks / rubrics used in Canada

TOP 3 FRAMEWORKS

Canada

1. Grant MacEwen: Quality Rubric for Online Courses
2. Quality 2.0 Standards – eCA
3. University of Toronto Online Course Design (based on Chico Rubric)

**TOP 3
FRAMEWORKS**

USA

1. California State – Chico Rubric
2. Quality Matters (2011-2013)
3. Sloan Consortium Scorecard

**TOP 3
FRAMEWORKS**

International

1. E-Learning Maturity Model – New Zealand
2. Open University (OU) Course Design Benchmarks – UK
3. UNSW Design Review Checklist – Australia



Alternative Quality Standards Approaches

MODELS FOR COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Individual-Based Approach

- Many institutions use a faculty-driven approach to designing online courses
- Development of high quality online courses requires a variety of skills
- Acquiring knowledge needed is a substantial investment of time / cost
- Projects often abandoned – lessons learned throughout process lost (Bates, 2000; Oblinger & Hawkins, 2006)
- Changes in faculty; constant course renewal
- Course not in alignment with curriculum / departmental goals
- Model does not benefit from innovative practices diffused through organization (Chao, Saj & Hamilton, 2010)

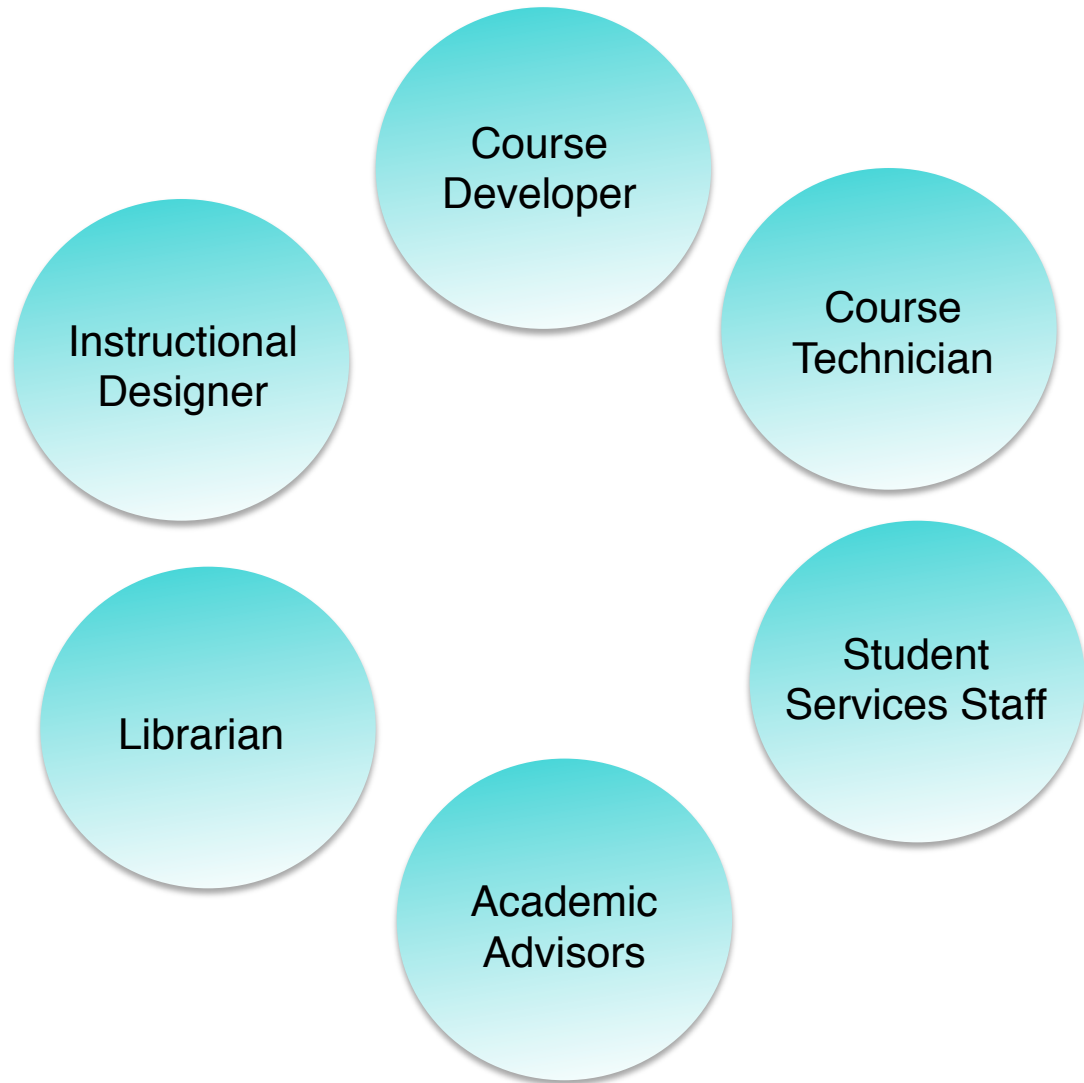
MODELS FOR COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Team-Based Approach

- A collaborative team-based approach resolves the difficulties noted in the lone ranger approach
- Approach that many Ontario universities employ
- Course developer draws on expertise of other specialists
- Quality standards can depend on degree of course development/revision and experience level of faculty member (Chao, Saj & Hamilton, 2010)
- Approach provides faculties and departments with support and efficiencies

MODELS FOR COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Team-Based Approach – Key Players



STUDENT EVALUATIONS

Course Design

- Provide a unique opportunity to document the experience of a large population of students in a systematic way
- Number of different evaluations:
 - Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ)
 - Student Evaluation of Online Teaching Effectiveness
 - Community of Inquiry (CoI) Survey
- Evaluations should distinguish between course design and instructor effectiveness
- Student evaluations should not be the only metric used to assess the quality of online courses, but instead should be triangulated with other indicators of quality

STUDENT EVALUATIONS

Online Teaching

- Marsha and Dunkin (1982, as cited in Richardson, 2010) identified four important reasons for collecting students' evaluations of teaching:
 1. “Diagnostic feedback to teachers about the effectiveness of their teaching.”
 2. “A measure of teaching effectiveness to be used in administrative decision making.”
 3. “Information for students to use in the selection of course units and teachers.”
 4. “An outcome or process description for use in research and teaching.”
- Evaluations of teaching need to be addressed at the departmental, faculty, and/or institutional levels

OTHER WAYS TO IMPACT COURSE QUALITY

Voluntary Quality Assurance Processes

- LMS hosting
- Web development, technical support, etc.
- Instructional design and faculty training
- Online or in-person community/forums
- QM/Peer-reviewed course certification

**VOLUNTARY
QUALITY
ASSURANCE
PROCESSES
AND CREDIT
TRANSFERABILITY**

HANDOUT 5

Implementation of Voluntary
Quality Assurance Processes
and Credit Transferability

LEARNING ANALYTICS

- Defined as the “measurement, collection, analysis, and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for purposes of understanding and optimizing learning and environments in which it occurs” (Siemens & Long, 2011)
- Goal is to assure the quality of online courses and enhance the value of the student learning experience
- Provides insight into how to most effectively tailor online offering / identify areas of improvement

LEARNING ANALYTICS

Student Enrolment and Retention

- Identifying prospective students based on specific criteria who could benefit from the flexibility of taking an online course and/or whose learning style aligns with an online learning environment
- Increasing enrolment yield by identifying and engaging at-risk students
- Assessing the likelihood that students will remain in the course/program
- Increasing completion rates through early-focused interventions

LEARNING ANALYTICS

Caution

Consider:

- what data is being collected
- when it being collected
- for what purposes

Does the data you are collecting actually give the info you are looking for?

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