3-D RUBRIC FOR CREATING & AUDITING ONLINE COURSES.

Criteria and methods to guide course development efforts

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• An urban campus with approximately 28,000 students in undergraduate, masters and doctoral programs
• Partial and fully online courses constitute about 10% of the total courses offered
• The courses are distributed through multiple colleges, departments and programs
• The Online Learning Services (OLS) department provided course building and other services for over 250 partial and fully online courses per term (in a quarter system, four terms per year).
• Services provided ranged from building entire courses to consulting for faculty who build their own courses. At minimum, OLS worked to provide basic configuration and course elements in every supported course.
• Using Desire2Learn (as of Summer 2010)
THE “PROBLEM”

• Like most institutions, Portland State is being pressed to address “quality” and “accessibility” for online courses. We had few guidelines for how to recognize quality courses based on an examination of the course (as opposed to other indications of quality such as retention or learning achievement—things our group couldn’t directly control).

• We had little experience with accessibility and, as a result, little information about the amount of effort needed to address accessibility issues in online courses.

• We needed to find ways to quantify the work required to bring courses up to quality and accessibility standards so we can plan and allocate resources for those upgrades.
WHAT REVIEW PROCESSES DO YOU USE?

How are hybrid or online courses evaluated and supported at your institution?  
(POLL)

1. No Quality Matters (QM) or other course evaluation or review process
2. QM or other course review is informal, faculty are responsible for update
3. QM or other course review is required to release course. Faculty largely responsible for bringing course up to standards
4. Centrally managed course production support is largely responsible for ensuring course content meets review standards.
WHY NOT QUALITY MATTERS?

• I was interested in separating criteria into more or less distinct roles that could be addressed by different people in the course development team.
  • Four (and perhaps five) of the Quality Matters® general categories have to do with teaching and learning. Learning Objectives, Assessment and Measurement, Resources and Materials, and Learner Engagement.
    • Combined into one category in my rubric.
    • Instructor (SME) is primary support by instructional designer (when available)
  • Several of the QM general categories involve navigation, orientation and support. These often can be addressed by course templates and common support materials and processes.
    • Combined into a single category in my rubric
    • Can be addressed by course builders rather than instructional designers
WHY NOT QUALITY MATTERS? (CONTINUED)

• The Accessibility criteria in QM are broad, making them difficult to address in practice. Making online materials accessibility-compliant can be complex and technical. Separating into it’s own category allows specialists in accessibility to be the primary developers.

• The Quality Matters® rubric has 41 criteria in 8 categories making it difficult to apply without a lot of experience. The large number of criteria made it difficult for our group to identify and prioritize the application of additional resources to improve the course.

• QM is based on a faculty professional development model rather than a publishing model. While faculty professional development is a worthy endeavor, we felt we could get more immediate results by applying well-established standards whether or not the instructor understood the value or benefits of those standards.
HOW THE RUBRIC WORKS

The rubric contains 18 items in 3 main categories that represent the key elements and functionality of online courses:

- **Organization, navigation, and user orientation**: How well is the course organized? Is it apparent to students where to start? Will students be able to navigate the course in the way intended by the instructor?

- **Interactivity, media, assessment, and feedback**: How well does the design of the learning activities and materials contribute to engaged student learning and formative assessment?

- **Accessibility**: How well do the materials of the course meet basic standards for accessible content?
WHAT DOES MY RUBRIC DO?

• Provides more specific criteria that suggests what needs to be done to meet the criteria.
• Provides a measure of the amount of work involved to bring the course up to standard.
• Broadens the questions about interactivity in order to expand design considerations into elements that would likely improve the richness of the interaction and feedback amongst students and amongst students and instructors.
• Enhances the criteria with ideas from Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) and Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1999) assists analysis of the course design leading to better learning outcomes.
• Allows different development resources to address updates and enhancements in parallel.
EXAMPLE ONE

Collapse Several QM categories into one:

Quality Matters © 2011-2013:

1.1 Instructions make clear how to get started …
1.2 Students are introduced to the purpose of the course …
6.3 Navigation throughout the course is logical …

Replaced by:

1.1 Instructions or course structure make clear how to get started and where to find various course components. Navigation throughout the online components of the course is logical, consistent, and efficient. For a hybrid course, the introduction clarifies the relationship between the face-to-face and online components.
EXAMPLE TWO

Eliminate categories that “don’t do much work” (and that are not really under the control of faculty or instructional designers):

Quality Matters®:

7.1 Instructions articulate or link to … technical support …
7.2 Instructions articulate or link to … accessibility policies …
7.3 Instructions articulate or link to … academic support services …

Replaced by:

1.6 The course navigation links to available technical, academic or student support materials or systems (incl. disability services).
EXAMPLE THREE

Provide more concrete detail:

Quality Matters®:

8.2 contains equivalent alternatives to auditory and visual content
8.4 The course design accommodates the use of assistive technologies

Replaced by:

3.2 Course materials provide text transcripts for auditory content. Course pages and course materials provide clear descriptions of images and diagrams including those provided in narrated slide presentations. Longer descriptions of complex images and diagrams are provided when "alt" tags or other text fields are too short to adequately describe the item.
EXAMPLE FOUR

Provide more design guidance:

Quality Matters®:

5.2 Learning activities provide opportunities for interaction that support active learning

Replaced by:

2.5 Learning activities foster instructor-student, content-student, and, if appropriate to the course, student-student interaction. Student groupings are used when it would benefit student learning and engagement. The student-to-student and teacher-to-student interactions are representative of the types of interactions likely in the workplace or profession including project work, peer critiques, design evaluations, etc.
EXAMPLE FIVE

Provide more design guidance:

Quality Matters®:

5.3 The instructor’s plan for classroom response time and feedback on assignments is clearly stated.

Replaced by:

2.3 *Learners have sufficient opportunities to rethink, rehearse, revise and refine their work based upon timely feedback and multiple formative assessment opportunities.* For facilitated courses, the course design encourages the instructor(s) to be active and engaged in providing a variety of ongoing formative assessment.
WHO WOULD MOST BENEFIT?

- Departments interested in an audit tool to quantify state of online courses in terms of legal and design standards.
- The rubric provides the most value when there are human resources available to help instructors with course building and content production. It allows multiple people with different skills to contribute to enhancing the course.
- I have assumed that instructors have limited time to develop the skills necessary to address all aspects of good online course design and production, separate from any ability to do so.

*My philosophy is to provide resources to faculty that is not within their core competency in order to allow them to maximize their value as subject content and pedagogy specialists.*
THE RUBRIC IN PRACTICE

As a course or course design is reviewed, a score from 0 to 3 is assigned to each of the individual criteria. Generally, these scores are assigned based on a 4-level rubric as follows:

- **0**: Element missing or inadequate.
- **1**: Element meets minimum requirements.
- **2**: Element is adequate but could be improved.
- **3**: Element is fully compliant and/or exceptional.
RUBRIC LEVELS

Provides a total score in each of the three general categories indicating the state of the course in that area. The scores are translated to three levels in each of the three categories:

- **Level 1**: None or very little of the course has been improved to the standards.
- **Level 2**: Some, but not all, portions of the content and course design have been improved to standards.
- **Level 3**: The course fully meets all the identified standards.
EXAMPLE QUANTIFICATION

Let’s assume, for example, that after analysis with the rubric, we find 50 courses at level 1. Assume that the typical effort to improve a course from level 1 to level 2 takes

- 10 Instructor hours
- 20 course builder hours
- 10 hours of Instructional design
- 20 hours of media editing or production

A rough estimate of the resource commitment to get all level 1 courses to level 2:

- 500 instructor hours
- 1000 course builder hours
- 500 hours of instructional design
- 1000 hours of media editing or production.
THANK YOU

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I have worked within the educational technology field for more than 20 years in various roles including faculty, technical administrator, manager and instructional designer and in multiple organizations including corporations, community colleges and universities.