

Ensuring Quality in Online Graduate Education Using the Quality Matters Rubric

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES

To ensure quality online graduate education at the University of Maryland Baltimore(UMB).

METHOD

The Masters of Science(MS) in Regulatory Science at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy adopted the Quality Matters(QM) self-review and official QM Course Design Review process to ensure consistent course quality throughout the program's curriculum. The Regulatory Science program worked with the UMSOP Office of Academic Affairs and QM Coordinator(s) at the University of Maryland School of Nursing to complete QM training and course design/redesign consultations to meet the rubric's quality standards and achieve certification. The subsequent creation of the UMB Office of Academic Innovation and Distance Education provided an opportunity to adopt QM as a common quality metric.

RESULTS

Incorporating QM into the program's course design process and committing to certify all graduate courses (60% certified by 2016), the Regulatory Science has ensured consistent course quality. Coupled with the UMB adoption of QM as a consistent quality measure for all new online graduate courses a common language and expectation for online education and faculty development. This has ensured UMB is positioned to meet emerging University System of Maryland(USM) guidelines on online accessibility based in part on QM standards.

IMPLICATIONS

Programmatic use of the QM rubric provides a method to align courses with current practices in educational theory, assessment, instructional materials/ technology, student-centered learning, and accessibility/usability. As national emphasis focuses on online education's ability to meet the needs of diverse populations, the QM standards provide a mechanism to situate educational statutes in a practical framework.

What is Quality Matters?

Quality Matters (QM) is a Maryland-based nonprofit organization, internationally recognized as a leader in quality assurance for online education¹. Their mission is to promote quality assurance and continuous quality improvement of online education and student learning using evidence-based standards for course design and delivery and a faculty-centered peer-based review process for the certification of course quality¹.

Course Design Rubric

The QM course review process is centered on the Quality Matters Course Design Rubric for Higher Education². Incorporating evidence-based practices in education research, the 8 general and 43 specific review standards provide a benchmark for quality in online and blended courses designed to support online learners³. Courses participating in the QM review process are scored on their achievement of standards within the rubric. To achieve certification, courses must achieve at score of least 85% and successfully meet all alignment standards (****)².

GENERAL STANDARDS

The eight general standards that define the QM course rubric are^{2,4}:

1) Course Overview and Introduction

ensures that student expectations for the course are set upfront and that they are provided the necessary support to be successful learners

2) Learning Objectives (Competencies)***

ensures that measurable learning objectives for the course and units are set up front and there is a relationship between learning objectives and course activities

3) Assessment and Measurement***

ensures that learning objectives are assessed, allowing instructors and students to evaluate student learning progress as the course progresses

4) Instructional Materials***

ensures that instructional materials support course outcomes and learning objectives (not an assessment of the appropriateness of selected materials based on subject-matter or topic).

5) Course Activities and Learner Interaction ***

ensures the promotion of active learning and student engagement in a way that encourages learner persistence throughout the learning process

6) Course Technology***

ensures that selected technologies support the learning process and learning outcomes

7) Learner Support

ensures that online learners are provided appropriate support and institutional services to be successful

8) Accessibility and Usability Principles

ensures that a course's design shows a commitment to accessibility and usability to allow all learners the opportunity to engage in online learning

Applying Quality Matters

SCHOOL OF PHARMACY

The Masters of Science in Regulatory Science is pursuing official Quality Matters certification for all program courses. To date, the program has officially certified 18 of program's 30 required credits.

REGS603 (6 credits)

Drug, Biologic, and Device Regulation

REGS614 (6 credits)

Drug and Biologics Discovery

REGS631 (6 credits)

Drug and Biologics Development

Course faculty have utilized the QM Course Design Rubric for Higher Education during the design and development of Regulatory Science courses. Courses have been submitted for official Quality Matters review after 2-4 iterations of a course. The program's two remaining courses are currenting in the submission process.

SCHOOL OF NURSING

The Learning Technologies Office, a faculty liaison and course faculty used the QM Course Design Rubric for Higher Education to reconceptualize Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP) Post Master's courses. The courses were then submitted for external QM review. The degree program uses a blended approach with students spending time in class, asynchronous online, and synchronous web-conferencing.

The DNP program has recently completed extensive curricular revisions to include all DNP with specialties and the Post Master's. The core courses in the curriculum have been taught for 3 semesters and are being scheduled for external QM review.

UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF MARYLAND

The University System of Maryland (USM) has made a commitment to improving online learning opportunities for Maryland students in their strategic plan⁴. Quality Matters has been adopted as method for system institutions to improve the overall quality of their course offerings⁴, a part of an initiative to improve the quality of online courses within the system, the University System of Maryland (USM) has partnered with Quality Matters to provide



Benefits

The student-centered focus of the QM process was particularly helpful to faculty in the Regulatory Science program. The three immediate benefits to the program were:

COURSE NAVIGATION

Firstly, is helped each course with regard to navigation. QM assessment includes easy of web page navigation. One QM team member has some level of content expertise (e.g. science expertise, rather than humanities expertise). However, evaluation of ease of navigation by all team members was valuable.

ASSESSMENT & OBJECTIVE ALIGNMENT

Secondly, QM has an emphasis on the alignment between course objectives and student assessment. Assessment by QM resulted in even great level of alignment between course objectives and how students are assessment.

CONSISTENCY

Thirdly, evaluation of program courses allowed for an elevation in consistency in web navigation and student expectations across courses. We had always placed an emphasis in similarity/consistency in BlackBoard course websites and grading rubrics across courses. We do not want these working professionals at a distance to expend large energy to determine what is required in each successive course. Nevertheless, QM assessment resulted in even greater consistency across courses from student perspective.

References

¹ MarylandOnline. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.qualitymatters.org/why-quality-matters/about-qm>

² MarylandOnline. (2014). Course Design Rubric Standards. Retrieved from <https://www.qualitymatters.org/qa-resources/rubric-standards/higher-ed-rubric>

³ MarylandOnline. (n.d.). Why QM? Retrieved from <https://www.qualitymatters.org/why-quality-matters>

⁴ University System of Maryland. (n.d.). Online Learning. Retrieved from <http://www.usmd.edu/usm/onlinelearning/>