

Distance Education Course Quality Rubric

When we teach, we engage in two closely related, but distinct, activities. First, we design the course by gathering information and making a number of decisions about the way the course will be taught. Second, we engage in teacher-student interactions as we implement the course we have designed...In order to teach well, one must be competent in both course design and teacher-student interactions. (Fink, 2004)

As an essential part of our commitment to student success in all areas of learning, distance education courses at Pasadena City College should provide high quality, innovative courses that maintain the highest standards and best practices in online teaching and learning. The recognition that effective online course construction differs from face-to-face instruction is dependent upon ensuring that faculty is properly trained supported, and willing to adopt a student-centered (constructivist) teaching paradigm (PCC DE Recommendation:106, 2009).

Title 5: 55202. Course Quality Standards

The same standards of course quality shall be applied to any portion of a course conducted through distance education as are applied to traditional classroom courses, in regard to the course quality judgment made pursuant to the requirements of section 55002, and in regard to any local course quality determination or review process. Determinations and judgments about the quality of distance education under the course quality standards shall be made with the full involvement of faculty in accordance with the provisions of subchapter 2 (commencing with section 53200) of chapter 2.

TITLE 5. EDUCATION - DIVISION 6. CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES - CHAPTER 6. CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION - SUBCHAPTER 3. - ALTERNATIVE INSTRUCTIONAL METHODOLOGIES - ARTICLE 1. DISTANCE EDUCATION - 5 CA ADC § 55202

Components of Course Quality include:

- Course Development Standards
- Continuous Improvement

WASC Red Flags:

- The use of only a single method of assessment in a course might indicate that the course does not adequately link assessments and outcomes.
- Students express dissatisfaction with the quality of their distance education courses.
- Courses lack objectives.
- Courses are all very much alike, indicating a “cookie-cutter” approach to course development. While the use of the same platform will provide some consistency in online courses, a reviewer expects courses to make use of different instructional strategies and tools to fulfill their individual objectives.
- The discussion board in an online course shows little or no activity.
- The majority of student postings lack substance and show little evidence of reflection or critical thinking.
- Course materials have not been updated in over five years. For certain curricula, the updating should be done more frequently.

- Comments from faculty indicate that they have directly translated their traditional course to a distance education course. This may indicate inadequate consideration of distance education pedagogy.
- Students don't know whom to contact if they have questions or problems.

(U. S. Department of Education. Office of Post Secondary Ed. (2006). *Evidence of Quality in DE Programs Drawn from Interviews with the Accreditation Community*. Pp 8-11).

Accreditation evaluators look for:

- Consistency in course formats
- Use of a common platform
- Syllabi that contain course descriptions and clearly stated learning and assignments and other assessment strategies are mapped, or connected to, the learning objectives.
- Course structure is critical. Courses that are designed with benchmarks and clear deadlines or recommended schedules provide evidence that the institution is aware of some of the time management challenges, and risk of attrition, of distance learning students, who are typically juggling a variety of roles including work, family and study.
- Course syllabi with evidence of the degree of interaction between faculty and student and among students such as requirements for student to: participate in discussions, evaluate drafts of other students' work, work in small groups on projects, and inclusion in the grading rubrics of "quality of participation" in discussions and group work.
- Use of the same interface (in online courses)...lessens confusion for students and is an indicator of good course design and institutional oversight. For online courses, the use of the same course management system will result in a common interface and basic course structure.
- Evidence of the extent to which faculty add value beyond what a student would read in a textbook. For example, faculty provide additional information or resources to assist students in understanding difficult concepts; pose questions and facilitate and summarize group discussions; be available to answer individual questions about course material and assignments; and give detailed feedback on assignments.
- Providing prospective distance education students with a self-assessment of their skills and aptitude for distance learning is good evidence that the institution is attempting to enroll students with the appropriate characteristics in their distance education programs.
- At the course level, it is a good practice for reviewers to look at course evaluations, and to interview faculty about how they have used the course evaluations to improve their courses and about how these changes have affected student performance and outcomes.
- Quality standards that include no "grandparenting" language

(U. S. Department of Education. Office of Post Secondary Ed. (2006). *Evidence of Quality in DE Programs Drawn from Interviews with the Accreditation Community*. Pp 6-13).

Course Quality Best Practices

All seven of the often-cited Chickering and Gamson's *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* relate to course quality standards that

1. encourage contact between students and faculty,
2. develop reciprocity and cooperation among students,
3. encourage active learning,
4. give prompt feedback,
5. emphasize time on task,
6. communicate high expectations, and
7. respect diverse talents and ways of learning.

California State University Chico has developed a rubric for online instruction that is a model for what a high quality distance education course should aspire to. The *Rubric for Online Instruction (ROI)* is a primary resource for determining course quality. A companion document (created for the PCC campus) based on *Instructional Design Tips for Online Instruction* can be used in conjunction with the ROI to help an instructor assess course quality standards.

Overview

The ROI describes what elements make for exemplary online instruction based on six rubric categories:

1. Learner support and resources
2. Online organization and design
3. Instructional design and delivery
4. Assessment and evaluation of student learning
5. Innovative teaching with technology
6. Faculty use of student feedback.

Evidence of Effectiveness

The ROI supplies clear faculty guidelines to assist in making distance education courses exemplary by helping to:

- Improve existing online courses or course components.
- Develop/design new online courses. (Sederberg, 2003)

Student Satisfaction

The ROI solicits constant student feedback about the online course in each of the six rubric categories. This feedback provides the faculty with valuable comments on which to base course changes and improvements that also contribute to student satisfaction. (Sederberg, 2003)

Instructional Design Tips for Online Learning

Instructional Design Tips for Online Learning can be used in conjunction with the six corresponding categories of the ROI. (Van Duzer, 2004)

Recommendation

In support of Title 5 regulations and guidelines in Section 55202 regarding Course Quality Standards, the Distance Education Committee recommends that:

- Faculty developing distance education courses use the *Rubric for Online Instruction* developed by CSU Chico as a primary resource and guide to the recognized elements and criteria needed for exemplary □ online course design.
- Faculty developing distance education courses work with the Division/Department Dean, other faculty teaching online at PCC, and the Office of Academic Support □ prior to the initial offering of the course to determine whether the □ course meets the *Rubric for Online Instruction* course □ quality performance indicators for an effective or exemplary course. The □ determination on fulfillment of course quality standards based on the □ Rubric should be completed before the course is initially taught □ online to provide time for modification if needed
- Faculty teaching online courses use the *Rubric for Online Instruction* □ as a guide for subsequent review (at least every 5 years) to determine □ course quality strengths and areas for improvement in conjunction with □ *Quality Online Course Design Elements*.

References

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