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A Preliminary Study: Application of Quality Matters Standard 5 (Course Activities and Learner Interaction) to Development of an Online Business Management Course

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Abstract

Quality Matters (Quality Matters [QM] Higher Education Rubric Workbook, 2014) is a national benchmark for online course design, and serves as a continuous improvement model for assuring quality of online courses through a faculty review process. QM is also described as “a faculty-centered, peer review process that is designed to certify the quality of online and blended course” (QM Higher Education Rubric Workbook, para 1). QM has eight research-based rubric areas: “1) Course Overview and Introductions; 2) Learning Objectives or Competencies; 3) Assessment and Measurement; 4) Instructional Materials; 5) Course Activities and Learner Interaction; 6) Courses Technology; 7) Learner Support; 8) Accessibility and Usability” (QM Higher Education Rubric Workbook, p. 1).

The purpose of this preliminary study was to develop a sample model course demonstrating the use of QM General Standard 5, Course Activities and Learner Interaction.

Introduction

Prior to applying the QM Rubric to an online business course, the researcher had to be qualified through a five-day face-to-face training session in the first four QM certifications: 1) Applying the QM Rubric; 2) Improving Your Online Course; 3) Designing Your Online Course; 4) Using Instructional Materials, 5) Technology to Promote Learner Engagement. The final culminating certificate was awarded after completing an approximately 50-hour online course and was then certified as a QM Peer Reviewer in the spring of 2017. The faculty researcher was also assisted by an instructional designer from the same university in the development of the course.

Once the faculty researcher was certified, the problems course was developed through a grant from the Charles Koch Foundation. The course, *Business Communication 673: Management in the Market Economy- Assumptions, Values, and Strategy* and was offered in the spring semester of 2017 at a public university located in a rural, agricultural area of a Midwestern town of approximately 23,000. At the time of study, there were approximately 4400 on-campus students, and nearly 350 full-time faculty members. Additionally, the institution had 3500 students in the international partnership programs, and 6500 students were enrolled in the distance education program.

Fifteen students were enrolled in the course under study including eight-female and seven-male students. All but one were full time working adults pursuing a BBA degree.

This problems course focused on the major principles of the vision, values, principles, and culture of Koch industries, the world’s largest privately held company as presented in the book selected as textbook, *Good Profit: How Creating Values to Others Built one of the World’s Most Successful Companies* (Koch, 2015). To emphasize Koch Industries business philosophy, the faculty researcher developed the Course Activities and Learning Interaction by focusing on the following topics: A description of Market-Based Management; the meaning of a win-win philosophy; how good profit is generated; the impact of family on Charles Koch; the role of experimentation and failure in Koch; the use of creative destruction at Koch; the role of challenge and risk; the role of respect and challenging; the role of mental models; how to learn from adversity; the vision of Koch Industries; the relationship between virtue and talent; effective use of knowledge and processes.

The faculty researcher designed the course bottom up-beginning with the chapters in the textbook, *Good Profit: How Creating Values to Others Built one of the World’s Most Successful Companies* (Koch, 2015) and identified support materials including speeches, interviews, web links, business news articles. Once the business philosophy and materials were identified, QM Higher Education Rubric, the Specific Review Standards of General Standard 5 were applied to develop the course. The questions of the Specific Review Standards (QM Higher Education Rubric, 2014) were as follows: 1) Are activities aligned to promote the achievement of stated learning objectives or competencies? 2) Do the learning activities provide opportunities for interaction that support active learning? 3) Is the instructor’s plan for response time and feedback on assignments clearly stated? 4) Are the requirements for learner interaction clearly stated?

Research Design/Methodology

This preliminary study of developing a sample course model aimed to answer the following question: What are the potential issues designers may encounter regarding developing Course Activities and Learner Interaction in the application of the QM Higher Education Rubric?

The following questions were supported by annotations within the QM Higher Education Rubric. The course was designed to address each of the following four questions:

Question 1. Are activities aligned to promote the achievement of stated learning objectives or competencies? All learning activities had to facilitate the accomplishment of the learning objectives. Confirmation of alignment was achieved by examining alignment to goals as well as to assessments, instructional materials, and course technologies (QM Higher Education Rubric, 2014). An example of alignment was for learners to deliver a persuasive speech-activities include selection of the topic, outlining, practicing. An example of non-alignment was talking about how to deliver a persuasive speech, but not presenting a persuasive speech. (QM Higher Education Rubric).

Question 2. Do the learning activities provide opportunities for interaction that support active learning? Active learning includes learner-learner, learner-instructor, and learner-content (QM Higher Education Rubric, 2014). Active learning requires learners to act- discover, process, apply, for example. Learner-Learner activities might be group discussions, or team projects. A conversation with the instructor is a learner-instructor interaction. Finally, a learner-content interaction is assigning readings, or podcasts, or videos for viewing.

Question 3. Is the instructor’s plan for response time and feedback on assignments clearly stated? Frequent faculty feedback was required for learning to occur. “The course provides clear information about when learners will receive feedback from the instructor” (QM Higher Education Rubric, 2014, p. 23). If response time needed to be altered, it had to be clearly stated. This information was included in the syllabus.

Question 4. Are the requirements for learner interaction clearly stated? This information provided clear understanding of course requirements and assisted learners to plan and manage their own class participation.

Table 1 indicated how each of these QM Higher Education Rubric, General Standard 5, Specific Review Standards were met in one module, Module 6, Chapters 8 (Knowledge Processes) and 9 (Decision Rights), in the sample course.

Table 1
Specific Review Standards of General Standard 5: Course Activities and Learner Interaction as Applied to the Course

QM Specific Review Standards of General Standard 5: Course Activities and Learner Interaction	Application of QM Specific Review Standards of General Standard 5 to the course: BCOM 673 Management in a Market Economy- Assumptions, Values, and Strategy
Are activities aligned to promote the achievement of stated learning objectives or competencies?	<i>This example demonstrates the alignment of objective to the learning activity as indicated below.</i> Objective: Analyze key concepts related to Koch view of spontaneous know sharing to your own business experience. Activity: Select two of the following items concerning knowledge processes and compare and/or contrast to a past or current employer in terms of Charles Koch’s view of knowledge processes: Spontaneous knowledge sharing; external networks; consultants; measures; benchmarking; profit centers; challenges; mental models. Place your comments in the Discussion Board.
Do the learning activities provide opportunities for interaction that support active learning?	<i>This example demonstrates that the learning activity provides interaction that supports active learning by means of VoiceThread (VT) as indicated below.</i> Select one of the questions below and place in VoiceThread (#2 of 4). Respond to one other classmate by further building on his/her comments. (You can’t just say ‘I agree’!) 1. What if Charles Koch did not go to Europe? What happened in Europe that impacted his philosophy? If he didn’t go to Europe, how might Koch Industries have turned out? 2. What would have happened if Fred Koch had not bought Wood River? 3. How might Charles’ life and philosophy have been impacted? 4. Name at least three traits Fred appears to have passed onto his son.

Is the instructor’s plan for the response time and feedback on assignments clearly stated?	<i>The instructor response time for feedback (within seven days) is stated in the course syllabus as indicated below.</i> From the syllabus- All discussion board activities are scored using published rubrics with verbal (via podcasts to you via SoundCloud set on private) or written feedback within 7 class days.
Are the requirements for learner interaction clearly stated?	<i>Requirements for learner interaction are clearly stated in the syllabus as indicated below.</i> From the syllabus- Replying to classmates in the Discussion Board and/or VoiceThread, with meaningful contributions, by Sunday, midnight. Respond to one other classmate by further building on his/her comments. (You can’t just say ‘I agree’!)

Findings

The faculty researcher completed a reflection on the process of developing these Quality Matter activities based on the business philosophy of Koch Industries. The instructor followed the rubric and additionally, focused on the annotations provided by QM Higher Education Rubric (2014).

The faulty researcher intentionally developed interaction activities including learner-instructor, learner-content, learner-learner as guided by the rubric. At all times, the faculty researcher focused on “learners doing something” as defined by QM Higher Education Rubric General Standard 5. Upon reflecting on the process, the instructor found that following the rubric and the annotations was self-explanatory.

Conclusions

QM Higher Education Rubric (2014) serves as a guide for standardization of best practices and no doubt can be extremely beneficial for novice as well as experienced faculty as part of a course improvement plan since learner characteristics continuously change due to technological developments and generational differences.

As stated in the QM Higher Education Course Design Rubric Standards (2017), the rubric “is intended for use with courses that are delivered fully online or have a significant online component (hybrid and blended). Course Designers use the Rubric to aid in the creation of courses designed to meet Standards from the outset” (p. 1). This preliminary study revealed that applying the QM rubric standards will facilitate course development and will ensure that active learning is included in the course. Moreover, the standards will serve as tool for improving existing courses as noted in the QM Higher Education Course Design Rubric Standards website, “the Rubric is also used to assess the level to which a course meets Standards and highlight areas for improvement. A score of 85% (with Essential Standards being met) qualifies a course to receive a QM Certification for quality course design” (p.1).

Recommendations for Further Study

1. A qualitative study of exploration of learner responses to QM Higher Education Rubric.
2. A preliminary study exploring the application of other seven QM Higher Education Rubric standards.

References

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