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An eLearning Partnership: Applying the Quality Matters Rubric to Online Library Instructional Materials

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In Spring of 2017, I had the opportunity to participated in an internship with my campus’ Center for eLearning. The internship was a required component of my Adult Learning & Development degree. Cleveland State University’s (CSU) Center for eLearning is responsible for troubleshooting issues with, and providing support for, use of the campus learning management system, Blackboard. The Center for eLearning also works closely with faculty to ensure, whenever possible, that online courses take advantage of the benefits of a virtual environment to provide powerful, effective instruction to the same extent as a classroom environment. One way this is accomplished is through the Quality Matters program (explained in more detail below).

During my internship, I completed the following projects:

- Created an online orientation course for new faculty using Blackboard.
- Developed a four-module online workshop for students, called “Developing a Research Strategy,” using Adobe Captivate and Blackboard.
- Completed some preliminary Quality Matters training.
- Conducted informational interviews with all of the eLearning staff members, and attended some of their team meetings.

I found the experience working in the Center for eLearning to be very rewarding and productive, but one of the most valuable discoveries I made during my internship was of the existence of a program called Quality Matters (QM).

Quality Matters Program

The QM program was developed by a group of colleagues in the state of Maryland who were attempting to measure the quality of online courses in a more systematic way. With the help of a grant, the QM program was established in the early 2000s and quickly grew to be accepted by many higher education institutions. Now QM is a non-profit organization with paid membership. Membership to QM is at the institution level, and provides the following services:

- Rubrics and standards for evaluating online courses
- An expert peer-review process resulting in course certification
- Professional development opportunities, including training and certifications
- Faculty who agree to undergo training can become peer-reviewers for others’ courses
- Faculty who wish to improve the quality of their online courses can submit their courses for peer-review and, hopefully, certification.

Certified QM courses can use the QM logo to designate their status as peer-reviewed.

Resources to Consult

Below are some resources you might consult to explore Quality Matters and online instructional methods in greater depth.

Quality Matters

- Quality Matters Homepage – https://www.qualitymatters.org/

Instructional Design


- Accessibility

  - WebAIM Color Contrast Checker – https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/
  - WebAIM Creating Accessible Microsoft Word Documents – https://webaim.org/techniques/word/

Applying the QM Rubric to Information Literacy Instruction

The primary way that I used Quality Matters was to improve the online workshops that I had developed in Blackboard. I used the parts of the QM rubric which I found most applicable to my work, as the rubric is meant to assess credit-bearing online courses, not online workshops. I am happy to send the QM rubric, with all the changes I applied, to any librarian affiliated with a QM institution.

The results of these steps to improve the course are below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clarity</th>
<th>Instructional Design</th>
<th>Student-Centered User Experience</th>
<th>Accessibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Associated each module with corresponding learning outcome</td>
<td>• Determined if learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessments were in alignment</td>
<td>• Provided more options for getting help</td>
<td>• Added closed-captioning to videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Indicated time needed to complete module</td>
<td>• Spent time reworking outcomes and assessments</td>
<td>• Made sure students could easily find all necessary help easily</td>
<td>• Updated MS Word Documents to be accessible</td>
</tr>
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General Recommendations for Improving Information Literacy Online Learning Objects Based on the Quality Matters Rubric

While the Quality Matters rubric is designed for full online courses, and my own alterations to the rubric were for application to an online workshop, there are many potential applications of the QM rubric. It could be applied, as appropriate, to library research guides, webpages, online tutorials, and other online instructional platforms. Regardless of the format, I found the following outcomes of applying the QM Rubric to be most useful for creating information literacy online learning objects.

- Help the student realize that the creator of the content is a human being.
- Provide a few details about you and your passions or interests.
- Use a conversational tone as you would in a reference interview.
- Help the student realize that the creator of the content is a human being.
- Make information about the creator easily accessible as students move through your online content.
- Provide obvious help.
- Make Links, Pages, and Documents Accessible.
- Provide obvious help.
- Work with Your eLearning Department.

Please feel free to contact me with questions, comments, or ideas at g.goodsett@csuohio.edu or 216-802-3362.