***How Does My Online Course Show Quality?***

**Directions:** Please review your course using the quality indicators for each of these nine categories of an online course, using the attached table.

**Course Design:**

1. Course Overview, Calendar, and Navigation
2. Learning Outcomes
3. Accessibility
4. Course Materials and Resources

**Online Teaching and Learner Support:**

1. Instructor Presence and Communication
2. Learning Activities
3. Grading and Feedback
4. Learner Support
5. Technology Support

The Stearns Center is committed to supporting excellence in online courses that meet (and exceed) research-based quality standards. The quality indicators in this self-assessment represent online quality standards that are research-based and recognized by prominent online educational organizations, such as [Online Learning Consortium](https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/consult/olc-quality-course-teaching-instructional-practice/) and [Quality Matters](https://www.qualitymatters.org/sites/default/files/PDFs/StandardsfromtheQMHigherEducationRubric.pdf).

**SELF-ASSESSMENT: Please use this self-assessment to reflect on your online course.**

**Quality Indicators:** For each category in the table, the quality indicator(s) indicated **in bold** are considered **ESSENTIAL** for quality in a Mason online course. The **essential indicators** represent the most critical standards for online course quality. At the minimum, you need to show evidence of the **essential quality indicators** in your online course. Indicators *in italics* represent additional (i.e., often more specific or focused) standards for online course quality. Meeting these indicators likely will serve to improve/enhance your online course to an even higher level of quality, exceeding the minimum standards. We encourage you to meet *the italicized quality indicators*, in addition to the essential indicators.

**Examples of Evidence for Quality Indicators:** For each group of quality indicators (online course categories 1-9), we have provided a list of possible examples of evidence that may be found in an online course. This is not a checklist of everything that you need to include; instead, the list provides possible examples. Please use the examples list to help you to identify evidence in your online course. The evidence lists provided are not exhaustive; there also may be other ways to address the online quality indicators in your course. Please make sure that you describe/explain your evidence for the quality indicator.

**Complete the Table, and Describe How the Quality Indicators are demonstrated in Your Online Course:**

* **Evidence in My Course:** Briefly identify/describe the evidence for quality indicator in your online course.
* **My Stand-Out Practice:** If there is **one practice** that really stands out for demonstrating quality for this category in your course, identify and describe it.
* **What I Would Like to Improve, Enhance, or Explore?** Is there something that you would like to try to improve or enhance quality for this category for the next time you teach this online course?

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| 1. **COURSE OVERVIEW, CALENDAR, AND NAVIGATION**   **Quality Indicators for Course Overview and Navigation Include:**   * 1. **The course includes clear instructions on how to get started and where to find various course components.**   2. **Navigation throughout the online components of the course is logical, consistent, and efficient, with a clear layout, consistent color scheme, and self-evident titles.**   3. **Course information, course calendar/schedule (including learning outcomes, assignments, readings, grading policy, due dates) are presented in a downloadable syllabus and/or in a clear and navigable way within the online course.**   4. *Course information states whether the course is fully online, blended, or web-enhanced. Any required synchronous sessions or on-campus meetings are stated.*   **What are Examples of Evidence for these Quality Indicators?**   * “Read Me First” module or “Start Here” module or Module 0. * Welcome video and/or course orientation video; an online course "tour" video. * Clear statements about how to get started in the course. * A "scavenger hunt" or "syllabus quiz" assignment that leads learners through an exploration of the different parts of the course. * Clearly organized course layout with logical, labeled Blackboard course menu and intuitive navigation. * Detailed syllabus that follows Digital Learning’s checklist for minimum standards for a quality online syllabus. (See <http://odl.gmu.edu/resources/syllabus-checklist/>). * Course calendar or schedule that outlines topics to be covered and assignment due dates. * Course and institutional policies that are sufficiently detailed, current and up-to-date. Course policies include late submission of assignments and incomplete grades. University policies include grievance procedure, student conduct, diversity, accommodations. * Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about the course and assignments. | **Self-Assessment** |
| **Evidence in My Course:** |
| **My Stand-Out Practice:** |
| **What I Would Like to Improve, Enhance, or Explore?** |

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| 1. **LEARNING OUTCOMES**   **Quality Indicators for Learning Outcomes Include:**   * 1. **Learning outcomes are clear, measurable, and provide explicit expectations for student learning.**   2. **Course assignments allow students to demonstrate intended course outcomes.**   3. *Course learning outcomes are aligned with program and/or institutional learning outcomes (if applicable).*   **What are Examples of Evidence for these Quality Indicators?**   * Measurable learning outcomes that are specific and observable. * Measurable learning outcomes that are clearly presented in a bulleted or numbered list. * Learning outcomes, assessments, and instructional strategies that are closely aligned, reinforcing each other. * Learning outcomes that are stated clearly and written from the learner’s perspective (i.e., course outcomes focus on what the learner does, not what the teacher does). * There is an explanation of course learning goals and how assessments, activities, and assignments are designed to help learners achieve those goals. * The course also may include module or unit level outcomes that are clearly stated; align with course level outcomes; state and make clear learning goals for the week, unit, or module. | **Self-Assessment** |
| **Evidence in My Course:** |
| **My Stand-Out Practice:** |
| **What I Would Like to Improve, Enhance, or Explore?** |

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| 1. **ACCESSIBILITY**   **Quality Indicators for Accessibility Include:**   * 1. **The course employs accessible technologies or strategies (e.g., alt text, transcripts, close captioning, etc.).**   **What are Examples of Evidence for these Quality Indicators?**   * A link to the institution's accessibility policy and link to Assistive Technology Initiative (<http://ati.gmu.edu>) are provided in the course (e.g., syllabus). * Video and animations are captioned, or text transcripts are readily available. * Visual information, including images, graphs, and tables, are described via an alt-tag, long description, caption, or audio description. * Tables are set up with headings for columns and rows. * Links and files are labeled with easy-to-understand, self-describing, and meaningful names. * Links are descriptive and labels are consistent with the destination headings and content. * PDFs that contain text are not merely image scans; any text contained in PDFs is selectable and searchable. * The hierarchy of material in a page or document is clearly indicated through heading styles (Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.). * Web 2.0 tools and websites used for the course are fully accessible. If not fully accessible, fully-accessible alternatives are available to students needing accommodations. | **Self-Assessment** |
| **Evidence in My Course:** |
| **My Stand-Out Practice:** |
| **What I Would Like to Improve, Enhance or Explore?** |

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| 1. **COURSE MATERIALS AND RESOURCES**   **Quality Indicators for Course Materials and Resources include:**   * 1. **Content is made available, or “chunked,” in manageable segments, to enhance student learning.**   2. **Course materials are appropriate, relevant, and map learning outcomes.**   3. **Course materials and resources are cited appropriately, clearly stating copyright, licensing status, and permission to share, where applicable***.*   4. *It is clearly listed which textbooks and course materials are required and which are optional/recommended.*   **What are Examples of Evidence for these Quality Indicators?**   * Online content that is organized in learning modules or content folders, with a rational flow and progression of information. * Use of adaptive or timed release of content in Blackboard course. * All course resources and materials are identified and properly cited. * Online readings and resources are properly linked. * Students are made aware of which materials are required for a course and which materials are suggested or optional for their course. This information is usually found in the syllabus, class schedule, or in the instructions for class activities. * Course materials and resources that clearly align with the course learning outcomes. * Course content that is interactive, personalized, or gamified. * Course materials and resources that address various learning styles. | **Self-Assessment** |
| **Evidence in My Course:** |
| **My Stand-Out Practice:** |
| **What I Would Like to Improve, Enhance, or Explore?** |

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| 1. **INSTRUCTOR PRESENCE AND COMMUNICATION**   **Quality Indicators for Instruction, Facilitation, and Communication Include:**   * 1. **Instructor information is available to students and includes multiple formats for being contacted by students, availability information, and brief biographical information.**   2. **Online etiquette expectations for various forms of course communication and dialog (e.g., chat, “hangout,” email, and online discussion) are presented and clear to the student.**   3. **Instructor clearly explains what students may expect of his/her role in the online classroom environment***.*   4. *Course contains resources or activities intended to build a sense of community (e.g., Icebreaker, Introductions, Online Café).*   **What are Examples of Evidence for these Quality Indicators?**   * An instructor "welcome message" posted at the beginning of the course that encourages students to contact instructor for course-related discussions or concerns. * Introduction posted by instructor that sets a positive, welcoming tone. Introduction may include instructor’s CV, education, courses taught, etc. * “Ask the Instructor” discussion forum that is posted in the Blackboard course. * Netiquette guidelines that may include expected conduct for participation on a discussion board; expected conduct for email content; expectations for spelling, grammar, language; expectations for the tone and civility used in communications. * Frequent, regular, consistent online presence of instructor throughout the course, evidenced by instructor postings in the course (e.g., in discussions, announcements, etc.). * Announcements that are used to communicate important, up-to-date course information to students, such as reminders of impending assignment due dates. | **Self-Assessment** |
| **Evidence in My Course:** |
| **My Stand-Out Practice:** |
| **What I Would Like to Improve, Enhance, or Explore?** |

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| 1. **LEARNING ACTIVITIES**   **Quality Indicators for Learning Activities Include:**   * 1. **The course provides opportunities for learner interaction (with course content and with the instructor) to foster mastery and application of the material.**   2. **The course provides opportunities for students to engage in active learning, higher-order thinking, critical reasoning, and/or critical thinking, aligning with learning outcomes.**   3. *The course provides opportunities for learner-learner interaction, if relevant and appropriate for the course.*     **What are Examples of Evidence for these Quality Indicators?**   * Learning activities that include: formal and/or informal discussions of course topics; collaborative course assignments; study groups; or group assignments (cooperative learning). * Learning activities that involve information gathering, synthesis, and analysis in solving problems. * Learning activities that provide opportunity for students to use technology (e.g., create videos, use online tools). * Learning activities that allow students to “customize” their learning by tailoring assignments to their personal and professional interests and need (e.g., choice of assignment format, paper topics). * Learning activities in which students reflect, think, and write about their learning in the course (e.g., blogs, journals, discussions). * Opportunities for self-assessment, checking for understanding, and reviewing important concepts, through ungraded or low-stakes learning activities. * Students are able track their own learning throughout the course (e.g., through gradebook, checklists). | **Self-Assessment** |
| **Evidence in My Course:** |
| **My Stand-Out Practice:** |
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| 1. **GRADING AND FEEDBACK**   **Quality Indicators for Grading and Feedback Include:**  **7.1 Grading criteria for assignments are explained and/or rubrics are provided.**  **7.2 Participation expectations for discussions, group work, blogs, wiki, etc. are clearly communicated to students.**  **7.3 Instructor provides clear information as to expectations of academic integrity, including links to university policies.**  **7.4 Instructor posts scores, grades, and feedback on assignments in a timely fashion.**    **What are Examples of Evidence for these Quality Indicators?**   * Clearly communicated course and assignment grading scales and criteria. * Information about course feedback methods, standards, and rubrics that are provided in the syllabus or clearly labeled in the Blackboard course. * Rubrics or contracts provide clear expectations and guidelines for classroom participation in discussions, group work, blogs, wikis, etc. * Links to Mason Academic Integrity Office and Honor Code provided in the syllabus or clearly indicated somewhere in the Blackboard course. * Discussion of academic integrity relative to the course and discipline (e.g., using proper citation style). * Approximate time for instructors to respond to student inquiries and for providing graded feedback to students is clearly stated in the course (e.g., following Departmental or College guidelines). | **Self-Assessment** |
| **Evidence in My Course:** |
| **My Stand-Out Practice:** |
| **What I Would Like to Improve, Enhance, or Explore?** |

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| 1. **LEARNER SUPPORT**   **Quality Indicators for Learner Support Include:**   * 1. **Course contains information list, links for online learner resources, and support for online students (e.g., Library, Writing Center, Disability Services)**   2. **The course provides information on how to obtain accommodation guidance to students with special needs.**   3. **Learning resources (tutorials, models, examples, etc.) are available to students in the online classroom.**   4. **Instructor’s Office Hours (virtual and face-to-face) are clearly stated in the course; instructor is available through variety of asynchronous and/or synchronous formats.**     **What are Examples of Evidence for these Quality Indicators?**   * Links to institutional services, such as library or writing center, are clearly labeled and easy to find. * Information that describes how an online student may access Mason resources from a distance (e.g., Library, Writing Center); links are provided. * Instructor holds virtual office hours or review sessions, using Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, Skype, etc. * Tips and resources geared to learners studying online; skill development for time management, study planning, and prioritizing. * Policy for how to obtain accommodations stated in the course syllabus, with link to Disability Services (<https://ds.gmu.edu/>). * Examples or models of student work are provided as guidance. * Online study guides or checklists. * Supplemental online materials (e.g., online tutorials) are provided to students who lack prerequisite knowledge or who would benefit from having content presented in an alternative manner. | **Self-Assessment** |
| **Evidence in My Course:** |
| **My Stand-Out Practice:** |
| **What I Would Like to Improve, Enhance, or Explore?** |

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| 1. **TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT**   **Quality Indicators for Technology Support Include:**   * 1. **Course specific technology requirements are communicated to students.**   2. **Information about technical support how to obtain it is provided.**   **What are Examples of Evidence for these Quality Indicators?**   * Learners are provided with detailed, clearly worded information regarding the technologies they will need throughout the course (including hardware, software, subscriptions, and plug-ins). * Required peripherals are clearly stated (e.g., speakers, microphone, and headset). * A list of required downloadable resources and associated links is provided. * Instructions for how to access publisher resources (including how to obtain and use any required access codes). * List of required technical skills to be successful in the course. * Description of the technical support services provided by the institution, including a link to a technical support website * An email link and/or phone number to the institution's technical support center or help desk (ITS, Courses Support) * Clearly worded directions for obtaining support for externally provided resources (e.g., publisher-supplied online materials and activities and third-party, vendor-provided software, materials, and activities) * Links to Blackboard tutorials or other resources providing instructions on how to use the tools and features of the learning management system. * Clear instructions for online proctoring tools (Respondus Monitor, Lockdown Browser) are provided (if applicable); students get to practice with these tools before online quizzes or examinations. | **Self-Assessment** |
| **Evidence in My Course:** |
| **My Stand-Out Practice:** |
| **What I Would Like to Improve, Enhance, or Explore?** |

**Questions about this self-assessment?** Please contact [stearns@gmu.edu](mailto:stearns@gmu.edu); 703-993-6200.

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