

PROJECT EMIT EPISODE 37

Introducing Quality Matters (Part 2)

Welcome to episode 37 of Project EMIT. I'm Dan Greenwood of the Teaching and Learning Center and I'd like to use this episode to continue the introduction of Quality Matters.

In our last episode I introduced what Quality Matters is about, listed the eight core standards that make up the QM rubric and also explained the review process. The goal of QM is to improve the design of online and hybrid courses. That word design is essential to understanding how to relate the QM standards to a course under review. For example, one aspect of a well-designed course is that the course objectives are being met by the students. One way to accomplish this is by making sure that assessments such as homework and tests challenge the student's knowledge of these course objectives.

A QM review uses the rubric to ensure that key course standards reinforce each other. This is known as alignment. In future episodes I'll provide more details on this concept and its influence on the QM standards.

Before getting into that level of detail though, I want to take some time in this episode to describe what types of things are NOT covered in a QM review. Both as a potential reviewer and as a course developer, it's important to understand that QM isn't about items such as the teaching techniques or course content. It's about the design of the course.

I think a good way to expand on this is with a few examples.

Let's begin with the instructor's teaching approach. This is not something that is reviewed in Quality Matters. Obviously different people have different ways of teaching; both in face-to-face and online courses. Teaching approaches also often vary widely from one course subject to another. QM in no way dictates how a course should be taught. If you feel it is best to have students follow a well defined sequence of learning activities before moving onto a new topic then QM neither encourages nor discourages that approach. Conversely if your teaching style has students proceed at their own pace or more independently learn QM supports that approach. Your teaching pedagogy is completely yours to follow. Since quality matters is concerned with the design of courses, a QM review focuses on if your course meets the concept of alignment. So for example if your approach is to pace student progress as they proceed to new topics, QM is concerned that you have some means of ensuring that each student has met the unit objectives. QM does not review your approach to ensuring this alignment.

Another item that is not part of a Quality Matters review is the actual course content. As the course developer or instructor, you can choose the content that works best for your course. While the review committee is required to have one subject matter expert, that individual's role is not to critique the course content itself. They are there to verify that the subject matter represented in the course helps meet the QM standards. This means that a course using a lot of multimedia content that doesn't help the student achieve the stated goals for the course may not pass a QM review while a more text-based course may.

Most schools use a learning management system (LMS) to deliver their online materials. Brookdale uses the ANGEL system at this time. The QM review does not include an analysis of which LMS is used. This means that courses can be QM certified regardless of the LMS. As long as the course meets the QM rubric any system can be used. Likewise the school's institutional infrastructure is not relevant to a QM review. Both of these aspects make sure that both large and small schools can attain QM certified courses. Obviously though the reviewers need access to any systems are used for the course during the review process.

My last two examples have to do with the faculty and students who are potentially involved with the reviewed course. Neither faculty nor student readiness is part of the QM standard. The reviewers do not investigate whether everyone involved in the actual course has taken either technical training or prerequisite courses for example. In fact the QM reviews typically occur on courses that do not have student information or work. The QM review is all about the course not the instructor's capabilities to use the LMS or even teach the subject. Another example is that the review doesn't check to see if students can use the LMS or need specific skills to take the course. Remember though that the QM review does look at the design of the course. An example of this is the course navigation. It should be clear and easy to follow. Compare that example to a something like "Does the student know how to use a web browser to navigate within the class?" That's not part of the QM review process.

I hope these examples of what isn't part of a Quality Matter's review are useful and also help alleviate some concerns about having a course reviewed. In my next episode I'll start explaining the QM standards and their alignment in more detail.

Thanks for listening to this episode of Project EMIT.