

Implementing Quality Matters at Montgomery College

Introduction

Online learning has been an integral part of most higher education institutions since the late 1990s; blended courses soon followed. Colleges and universities began offering these alternative delivery methods as a means of providing educational accessibility to students whose work and family schedules did not allow them to take traditional courses. Montgomery College sought to meet the increase demand and, as a result, continues to witness enrollment growth in online education each year. Enrollments in online and blended courses for Spring 2010 totaled 5,692, compared to the previous spring enrollments of 4,735, while the number of sections offered increased from 258 to 315.

The data demonstrate that students want courses offered in an online format. As a result, it is imperative that the courses offered by Montgomery College are of the highest quality, complete with meaningful learner engagement, comprehensive instructional materials, and measurable assessments.

Many early adopters of online education across the country did not necessarily understand the components of a good online course; many simply transferred their in-class content to an online environment and created self-paced courses. A lack of standards created inconsistency from one course to the next, forcing students to guess as to what was expected. Quality Matters (QM), a nationally-recognized, standards-based program, offers faculty quality assurance in online course design while also focusing on continuous improvement.

Quality Matters has slowly been integrated into the online education training offered at Montgomery College. The QM Rubric, which consists of 8 general standards and 40 specific standards, is introduced to faculty who are developing an online or blended course. The proposed plan, however, goes a few steps further and discusses how and why Montgomery College should embrace QM; it outlines a plan to develop peer reviewers and to have courses reviewed for QM recognition. Currently, the College has had three courses QM certified and has 15 peer reviewers, including one Master Peer Reviewer.

Vision

The Office of Distance Education at Montgomery College is committed to offering online and blended learning courses that exemplify the standards set forth in Quality Matters. Through the Office of Distance Education, the College will be:

- An institution that provides dynamic and interactive online and blended learning courses.
- An institution that provides quality professional development opportunities so faculty can enhance their distance learning experiences and continually improve their courses.

Overview of Quality Matters

What is Quality Matters?

Quality Matters (QM) is a faculty-driven but student-centric, peer review process designed to recognize the quality of online course design and online components. Sponsored by MarylandOnline, Inc., of which Montgomery College is a member, Quality Matters has generated widespread interest and received national recognition for its peer-based approach to quality assurance and continuous improvement in online education. Originating from a FIPSE grant, Quality Matters is now a self-supporting organization offering institutional subscriptions and a range of fee-based services including Quality Matters-managed course reviews and an array of trainings.

The Quality Matters program is a process of peer review of online courses. The reviews are centered on a rubric. A QM Review may be external (provided by the QM organization) or Internal (offered through and with existing institutional resources). Review teams consist of three faculty members and the faculty/developer. An important component of the QM process is "Continuous Quality Improvement," a resolve on the part of QM and its subscribing institutions to continue working with faculty/designers to achieve a level of meeting expectations in online course design.

Identification of Standards

The focus of the Quality Matters program is on assessing, through the lens of a student, the quality of online course design along eight general standards, each of which has specific standards of practice. The general standards of Quality Matters (The Rubric) are:

- Course Overview and Introduction
- Learning Objectives (Competencies)
- Assessment and Measurement
- Resources and Materials
- Learner Engagement
- Course Technology
- Learner Support
- Accessibility

Benefits to Montgomery College

Montgomery College has been a "subscriber" to Quality Matters since its inception. Benefits of using the review process are numerous. All benefits are directed at making online courses better for the online student, specifically the design of the courses. QM does not address issues that involve the delivery of online courses.

Faculty Benefits

When a faculty member offers his or her course for QM Review, the goal is to have a course that promotes student learning. Going through the QM process and ending up with a course that "meets standards" provides the faculty member with a course whose parts are in "alignment" and which is supported by best practices as identified in the literature. Identification of courses which meet QM

standards is a goal of Montgomery College; courses that fall into this category will be highlighted, promoted, and celebrated by Montgomery College through its Office of Distance Education.

Student Benefits

The main beneficiaries of QM are the online students who take a QM-reviewed course. By taking a certified QM course, students should encounter a course where all the principal components are in “alignment” with each other, e.g. objectives, activities, resources, assessments. Taking courses that are QM-reviewed reveals to the students that their course has been assessed along elements of quality as identified in the field. QM certification should provide an inducement to students to enroll in that course.

Goals and Objectives

The following are goals and objectives for Montgomery College’s implementation of Quality Matters for FY 11-FY 13:

1. The Office of Distance Education will promote (and may provide) a variety of professional development opportunities for faculty to promote QM and allow for the continuous improvement of online courses. Annually Montgomery College will:
 1. offer a six-week online course that focuses on Quality Matters and prepares faculty to align their current course with the QM Rubric.
 2. promote to the distance education faculty any MarylandOnline workshops dealing with Quality Matters.
 3. offer at least one Applying the QM Rubric workshop on-site each semester to prepare faculty to complete Peer Reviewer Certification and provide links to the QM-hosted online version.
2. The Office of Distance Education will promote the concept and assist faculty who are interested in becoming QM peer reviewers.

FY11

- 2.1 At the end of FY11, Montgomery College will have funded training for at least 10 QM peer reviewers.
- 2.2 During the Fall semester, roundtable sessions will be held at each campus to discuss Quality Matters with interested faculty.

FY12

- 2.3 At the end of FY12, Montgomery College will have a QM peer reviewer in every major academic division, e.g., Humanities, Arts and Sciences.
- 2.4 At the end of FY12, Montgomery College will have at least two master peer reviewers.

FY13

- 2.5 At the end of FY13, Montgomery College will have 25 peer reviewers college-wide.
- 2.6 At the end of FY13, Montgomery College will have at least four master peer reviewers.

- 3. Faculty who complete the Quality Matters peer review certification will be in a position to have their course(s) successfully reviewed for QM recognition.

FY11

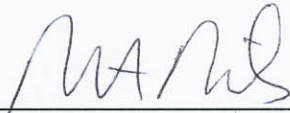
- 3.1 At the end of FY11, Montgomery College will have had 7 online courses reviewed for QM certification, using internal and external review teams.

FY12

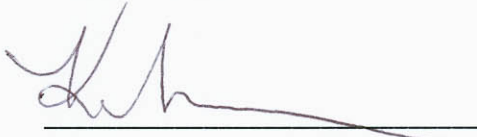
- 3.2 At the end of FY12, Montgomery College will have had 10 additional online courses reviewed for QM certification, using internal review teams.

FY13

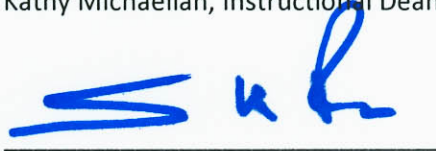
- 3.3 At the end of FY13, Montgomery College will have had 10 additional online courses reviewed for QM certification, using internal review teams.



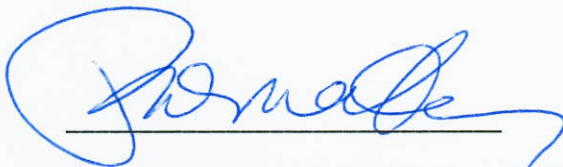
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