FRAMEWORKS FOR BLENDED AND ONLINE COURSE DESIGN
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Overview and Definition

Many academic librarians actively support blended and online courses. However, active librarian participation in course design, development, and review processes has been more limited. Learning technologists have been developing frameworks for course design, development, delivery, and evaluation. A framework, typically in the form of a rubric or checklist, describes the characteristics of a successful online course. These course design frameworks provide entry points for collaboration and input into the course design process, and open the door into greater librarian participation in blended and online learning.

Why do you need to know?

Librarians make a significant investment in supporting blended and online courses and in developing digital learning objects and services for use in a variety of learning environments. It can be difficult to make the shift from blended and online course support – e.g., providing links to library services and content – toward deeper collaborations with faculty to enhance student learning. Frameworks for course design are in use on many campuses and provide a tool for librarians who would like to develop greater roles in course design, development, delivery, and evaluation.

Current awareness of course design frameworks, such as Quality Matters (QM), can provide clear standards, shared language, and platforms for collaboration. Where successful, this engagement can result in a range of collaborations: on course design teams, in course review and evaluation, in faculty development, and toward other innovative outcomes. There are a number of institutional, consortial, and national frameworks to explore. Librarians could also advocate for greater roles in the development of these frameworks to foster closer alignment with our aspirations.

Current Applications in Academic Libraries and Higher Education

Even as the scale and scope of online and blended learning has increased across higher education, concerns about the effectiveness of these modalities has persisted. For example, in a 2017 survey that Gallup conducted for Inside Higher Ed, 2,360 faculty members across institution types "divided about evenly as to whether online courses can achieve the same learning outcomes as in-person courses at any institution." The 743 faculty members who had taught online were more likely than those who had not "to believe online instruction can achieve equivalent outcomes to in-person instruction" (Jaschik and Lederman 2017, 6).

Course design frameworks (or checklists or rubrics) provide shared tools for quality assurance for blended and online courses, for course design and review, and professional development.

A review of the most commonly used checklists provides a range of models. The following are described in order of prominence:

- Quality Matters (QM) is a subscription-based, inter-institutional program with 1,084 membership institutions in 2017 (EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative 2017). QM can be used to evaluate course design using evidence-based standards. The QM rubric addresses areas related to course design and accessibility, with specific standards under each broad area.
- The Cal State System created a suite of evaluation instruments to answer the question: "what does high-quality online instruction look like?" The Quality of Learning and Teaching (QLT) program

provides an evaluation instrument to assist faculty, instructional designers and others in developing effective online, blended and flipped courses.

- The Online Learning Consortium (OLC) Quality Scorecard addresses course design and delivery, adding dimensions such as institutional and technology support, social and student engagement, and evaluation and assessment.
- Some institutions, such as California State University Chico, have developed homegrown checklists to align with local needs and values, such as ease-of-updating. To develop effective homegrown instruments, institutions should communicate plans for intended use to faculty and other stakeholders as part of the development process.

Institutions may also elect to use course design frameworks for more formal peer review of online and blended course design. QM, for example, provides a certification structure for faculty-centered peer review that provides constructive feedback to the course developer. Online peer reviews should be based upon measurable standards, provide ongoing processes for curricular improvement, and be confidential and decoupled from faculty evaluation processes. National peer-review processes can be used to certify a level of prestige to quality courses, but many institutions have also designed internal peer-review processes to certify minimum standards.

Newby, Eagleson, and Pfander (2014) described their work using the Quality Matters framework at the University of Arizona and gathered examples from other institutions. They saw librarians engaged in applying frameworks for blended and online courses in the following ways:

- Partnering with departmental faculty to create online courses
- Applying course rubrics to the development of their own credit courses
- Creating course materials and online modules for use across multiple courses
- Serving as information literacy consultants for course redesign projects
- Becoming certified as course reviewers on their own campuses or externally

The authors saw a number of benefits for librarians: deeper collaborations with faculty and

graduate students, finding a niche in campus learning technologist communities, and creating more rigorously designed courses.

Librarians at other institutions have also advanced their own applications, for example:

- In the California State system, librarians are contributing to course support and best practices in the context of the Quality of Learning and Teaching (QLT) initiative.
- At the University of Wisconsin–Madison, librarians are participating as instructional designers for a faculty development program built around QM standards: TeachOnline@UW. In the coming year, they also intend to contribute to the development of institutional course design checklists.

Potential Hurdles

The primary hurdle libraries may encounter in participating in these initiatives is high demand on resources. Because the scope of librarians' engagement – as consultants, designers, reviewers, developers, and/or faculty developers–is potentially broad, it is important to articulate clear priorities. Librarians should also pay close attention to institutional culture around frameworks for blended and online learning to assure that their efforts are well-matched to their institutional culture. For example, if an institution's faculty are reluctant to engage in peer review, librarians should offer frameworks primarily as discussion tools and be explicit about that purpose.

Conclusion

It is clear that a number of libraries are engaged in the use of these frameworks. Awareness of how other libraries are proceeding can provide useful examples for discussions with faculty and administrators on our own campuses regarding libraries' potential engagement or even potential leadership roles. While it is critical for libraries to be engaged in these conversations early, there is a potential for huge demands on resources as campuses seek staffing for a range of development and support needs. Therefore, it is critical to set clear goals, scope, and plans for engagement.

Tools Discussed

- Online Learning Consortium Quality Scorecard: http://onlinelearningconsortium.org/consult/olc-quality-scorecard-suite/
- Quality Matters: http://www.qualitymatters.org/
- Quality of Learning and Teaching: http://courseredesign.csuprojects.org/wp/qualityassurance/qlt/

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