

Course Quality: Best Practices and Resources

University of Michigan-Dearborn

Fundamentally, quality of instruction matters regardless of the modality of the course. What we value – faculty presence, regular interaction, a rich experience, and a sense of community – must be encouraged and enhanced in all course modalities. Improvements in course quality following best practices in teaching have the potential for a big impact on learning experiences and success – an important strategic focus for the campus.

Because of common perceptions about differences between in-person and online/hybrid teaching and learning, this strategy and its implementation represents a challenge and an opportunity for our faculty to uphold quality standards and pedagogical expectations in order to maintain our high academic rigor. Almost all of our faculty have now taught online (at least emergency remote during the pandemic; see the [Data Appendix to the Strategic Priorities for Course Scheduling and Modalities Report](#)) and many of our faculty are familiar with best practices in teaching.

We now understand that the key elements of quality teaching have converged across modalities, not only because we have identified core teaching practices (like faculty presence and regular interaction), but also because new teaching tools make it possible to implement them regardless of modality. The campus-wide adoption of a single learning management system (Canvas) set the stage for one seamless experience for all students no matter the modality. With that in mind, the Office of the Provost and Digital Education created [campus-wide expectations for Canvas use](#) for faculty.

We encourage the enhancement of faculty teaching supports and the fostering of innovative teaching practices to continuously improve course quality across campus. Teaching is demanding both in the upfront time investment for faculty, but also for keeping up with current trends and innovations, which can take time and may require frequent skill upgrades. The following includes a list of recommended initiatives, and faculty resources, aimed at improving course quality.

- **Baseline expectations for course design:** As part of the 2016 Digital Education Strategic Priorities, the Hub for Teaching and Learning Resources integrated separate college-level standards into [a Rubric for Online Instruction](#), which consists of the following categories:
 - Learner support and resources
 - Course organization and design
 - Instructional design and delivery
 - Student outcome assessment
 - Online pedagogy

- o Faculty use of student feedback

This rubric was constructed to guide course design using learner-centered instructional design principles; as well as to recognize instructors who have developed expertise in online/hybrid instruction as part of our commitment to high quality learning environments. The rubric was approved for campus use by the University Curriculum and Degree Committee - Digital Education Subcommittee.

Several tools intended to support faculty in creating or redesigning their online/hybrid courses have been built using this rubric as a foundation. While many of the characteristics in the above rubric apply to learning in any modality, our campus does not yet have a rubric for quality teaching across all modalities like [this example from the University of Colorado](#). Instructional Designers from The Hub for Teaching and Learning will work along with faculty to modify the existing Rubric for Online Instruction to develop a new universal course quality rubric which can be used for all courses regardless of modality.

- **Encourage use of instructional design:** Instructional design aims to create an effective learning environment by organizing content and activities to engage and facilitate learning. When partnered with subject matter experts, instructional designers can help design environments conducive to student engagement and effective faculty presence with impactful learning experiences. Instructional designers can support faculty in the following ways:
 - o Design, develop, and refresh in-person, [hybrid, and online courses](#) in a way that is aligned with learning goals and learner needs
 - o Encourage use of [course blueprints](#), which are a best practice to design courses that clearly and meaningfully connect activities and assessments to learning outcomes
 - o Provide regular [consultations](#) as well as annual training opportunities, such as the [Course Improvement Studio](#)
 - o Create resource guides for campus initiatives such as
 - [Digital Education](#)
 - [3-to-4 Credit Conversion](#)
 - [High Impact Practices](#)
 - o Recommend technologies that meet learning and instructional goals in all modalities

Faculty members should be encouraged to collaborate with the campus instructional designers along with other support and expertise through:

- o The Hub for Teaching and Learning including [Faculty Partners](#)

- o The embedded librarians team – integrated information experts who offer direct research assistance over the course of a semester and can help with assignment design based on scaffolding of skills
- o Communities of practice and faculty mentors – those deeply engaged in thinking about and implementing various pedagogies
- o Unit digital education support staff
- o Collaboration or consultation with expert discipline colleagues
- o The [Open Education Campus Committee](#) which supports use of Open Educational Resources (OER) and content created collaboratively by teams of faculty

Additional supports will continue to be provided via the following mechanisms:

- o Workshops, including [recordings of past sessions](#)
 - o [The Hub Blog](#)
 - o Weekly teaching tips delivered via [The Hub Cap emails](#)
 - o [High-Impact Practices College Teaching Tips](#)
 - o Template - [Course Blueprint](#)
 - o [Online Course Building ToolKit](#)
 - o Academic technology orientation for all new faculty
 - o Self-help tools: such as the self-paced Canvas Module, [Basics of Online Teaching](#)
 - o Regular training sessions on design related LMS tools
- **Course evaluation:** The campus [Rubric for Online Instruction](#) can be used by faculty to evaluate the quality of their courses in a way that is both useful and non-intrusive. As mentioned above, a new universal rubric applying to courses of all modalities will be developed in the near future.
 - **Formative evaluation of teaching:** The Hub offers a wide range of ways to collect meaningful feedback on faculty teaching and their students' learning during their course (e.g., small group online interview, whole-class survey, LMS course analytics). After evaluation, a *confidential* report of the anonymous results with suggested action items is shared with the instructor.
 - **Showcase exemplar pedagogy, innovations, and scholarship:** A few avenues for promoting best practices include:
 - o The Distinguished Teaching Awards
 - o Faculty exemplars in teaching and learning
 - o Blog posts from Hub Affiliates
 - o Creative Teaching Fund grants via the Hub
 - o Digital Education Learning Community (e.g., DigPed learning community)
 - o Sessions at the annual Digital Education Day(s) event

- **Survey students** to inform the university about changing preferences for course modalities and what may or may not be working well in current courses. Survey instrument options include:
 - [2022 Educause student survey](#)
 - Homegrown survey(s): [2016](#), [2022](#)
- **Video production facilities and support** enhance another dimension of course quality. The Office of Digital Education has a video recording studio and associated Video Production Assistant to serve the entire campus with filming course material, recording audio lectures, and editing audio/video content.

In addition, the College of Engineering and Computer Science provides lecture capture services in all CECS classrooms, as well as a Video Production Studio. CECS Online staff support these recording options, including pre and post production services.