

The Creation of a “Healthy” Online Course

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Abstract

This presentation was focused on introducing the Colorado Online@ model, introducing the Colorado Online@ recommended tools and best practices in course design to create a “healthy” course, and sharing a course design review implementation model which could be adapted for individual institutional use. This session introduced how Pikes Peak State College is tackling course review of online course shells over the next 3 – 5 years, using tools such as the newly created Healthy Course Checklist incorporating Quality Matters™ standards, newly created QM+ standards that include diversity, equity, and inclusion, accessibility, learner-centered design, and principles of UDL. The focus is on course design, not instruction, as part of the implementation of Colorado Online@, a new consortium model for online course delivery. PPSC is creating a clear, dynamic plan for implementation of online course review incorporating the tools and processes suggested as well as other tools/processes of our choice utilizing the expertise of our own faculty, learning designers, and others with the intent of creating well-designed course shells and sections that will benefit learners for years to come. Instructional design is a strength, but assistance from a learning designer is not a requirement at Pikes Peak State College. To move PPSC forward in distance education, we need to establish best practices that become the culture. Regular review of course design ensures a healthy course!

Keywords: Quality Assurance, Course Design, Course Review, Quality Matters™, Healthy Course Checklist

The Creation of a “Healthy” Online Course

This paper summarizes the session presentation introducing the Colorado Online@ consortium model, recommended tools and best practices including the Healthy Course Checklist, and how Pikes Peak State College in implementing a strategic plan for course review.

Background

In late 2020, the new Colorado Online@ model was introduced by the Colorado Community College System with plans for full implementation by Fall 2024. It is described as “*an innovative, enterprise-wide online learning model that’s first of its kind in the nation*” (CCCS, 2023). The November 2020 Consortial Model paper indicates priority of designing for equity and accessibility as well as student success. Amongst the benefits that support this move for more DEI, the model provides online class access to students from any of the 13 member colleges. Further students can take classes or complete programs that are not offered by their home colleges, and many functions of student support services are being centralized.

Introduction of Healthy Course Checklist Base Standards

As part of the implementation of the new consortial model related directly to online learning, the Learning Design subcommittee branch of the Project Team was challenged with the task of creating design standards. The Learning Design Team recommended that QM be used as the basis for Colorado Online@ design standards. The challenge then became that while there is system support of Q, there are recognized gaps in the QM Rubric (6th edition) related to DEI, and learner-centered design. The Learning Design subcommittee used QM as the basis focusing on

items like measurable objectives, alignment, structure, policies and resources, accessibility, and usability. They then looked to the DEI checklist focusing on representation of voices and diverse learner characteristics, pathways to equitable outcomes, and the establishment of community and belonging. Finally, using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) focusing on items like learner options, concept connections, resources to support executive functions, and accessibility support.

In response to these gaps, the Learning Design subcommittee collectively filled the gaps to create more salient connections to DEI and UDL from the QM standards. One example of how these were addressed can be found in QM standard 1.9 Learners are asked to introduce themselves to the class. This was supplemented by the creation of QM+ standard 1.9+ Learners are provided with multiple opportunities to self-identify preferred names and pronouns and use them throughout the course (CCCS, *CCCS QM+ Standards Guidebook*, 2023). In all the Colorado Online@ Learning Design subcommittee added or edited 32 QM+ standards. Recognizing how intimidating and cumbersome this is, the Healthy Course Checklist was born.

Healthy Course Checklist Criteria

The Healthy Course Checklist (HCC) is a response to the challenge of expanding the QM standards to 66 with the addition of the QM+ standards and the need for a more usable tool.

The HCC criteria include: 1) Learner Guidance; 2) Measurable Outcomes; 3) Alignment; 4) Accessibility; 5) Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; and 6) Learner-Centered Design. The HCC is a growth-oriented tool and is not yet associated with ranking of points or evaluation of design.

The goal is to provide an entry point for faculty and staff to explore their course design related

to the six key criteria of the HCC. The tool is flexible for individual colleges to implement according to their processes and resources.

As part of this approach, the charge during Summer 2022, Fall 2022, and Spring 2023 was to implement training on the various tools and resources available for colleges to use. All institutions in the system are now QM members as part of a System Membership with a centralized QA/QMC Coordinator and QMCs at each institution. Simultaneously, we are rolling out HCC specific training.

PPSC Online Course Review Plan

Per the directive of the Colorado Online @ consortium plan, online courses are to be reviewed regularly to ensure quality online courses using the Colorado Online @ Learning Design recommended tools including the Healthy Course Checklist, PPSC Best Practices for Online and Hybrid Course Design, and the required Common Course Framework (CCF). One-quarter to one-half of non-Ready-to-Teach (RtT) courses will be checked every term using trained personnel in eLearning and the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. The original estimated total number of Colorado Online @ PPSC course sections for Fall 2023 equals 148; Spring 2024 equals 303; Summer 2024 equals 149; and Fall 2024 equals 323. As Colorado Online @ ramps up in volume, a course section taught by a specific instructor will be reviewed yearly after the initial review. Based on volume estimates and trained reviewers, approximately 50 course reviews can be completed each term at the beginning of the term. The recommendation is that more personnel be trained to complete reviews based on the tools provided.

To that end, Non-RtT sections will be identified by instructional divisions moving forward.

Reviewers will use LMS admin accounts to review assigned course shells using the PPSC Course Design Review Checklist which was developed including recommended resources and best practices.

References

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