Quality Matters
Connect Conference 2017

9th Annual Conference on Quality Assurance in Online Learning

September 24-27, 2017
Fort Worth, Texas
Quality Matters

- History
  - Group of colleagues in the Maryland Online consortium created a plan to ensure course quality, enabling students to enroll in courses across institutions but have an equivalent experience.
  - Consortium members applied for a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to develop a rubric of course design standards and a course peer review process.
  - Grant ended in 2006, but QM became self-sustaining, and in 2014, it began operating as a standalone nonprofit organization.

- Vision
  - QM is an international organization that is recognized as a leader in quality assurance in online education.
Quality Matters

• Mission
  ◦ Promote and improve the quality of online education and student learning nationally and internationally through
    • Development of current, research-supported, and practice-based quality standards and appropriate evaluation tools and procedures
    • Recognition of expertise in online education quality assurance and evaluation
    • Fostering a culture of continuous improvement by integrating QM standards and processes into organization plans to improve the quality of online education
    • Providing professional development in the use of rubrics, tools, and practices to improve the quality of online education
    • Peer review and certification of quality in online education
QM Connect Conference 2017

• Conference Tracks
  ◦ Measuring the Impact of Quality
  ◦ Achieving Sustainability
  ◦ The Power of Quality Assurance
  ◦ Leadership Exchange
  ◦ Engagement Strategies
  ◦ Fresh Ideas
  ◦ News You Can Use

• Special Sessions
  ◦ Quality Online Education: What’s Rigor Got to Do with It? Part I and II
Quality Online Education

- What’s Rigor Got to Do with It? Part I
  - Panel Discussion
    - Definition of academic rigor and its role in education
  - Participants
    - Deb Adair
      - Executive Director, Quality Matters
    - Ashley Hazelwood
      - Student, University of North Texas
    - Paul Gaston
      - Senior Fellow Lumina Foundation, Trustees Professor, Provost’s Office, Kent State University
    - Gregory von Lehmen
      - Special Assistant to the President, Cybersecurity, University of Maryland-University College
    - Andria Schwegler
      - Associate Professor, Texas A&M University – Central Texas
Quality Online Education

What’s Rigor Got to Do with It? Part II

Panel Discussion

- Relationship between academic rigor and alternative learning initiatives and open educational resources

Participants

- Deb Adair
  - Executive Director, Quality Matters
- Lisa Mahoney
  - Director, National College Credit Recommendation Service
- Leah Matthews
  - Executive Director and CEO, Distance Education Accrediting Commission
- Kara Gwaltney
  - Director, American Council on Education
- Mary-Celeste Slusser
  - Director of Academic Assessment, LearningCounts
Quality Online Education

- What’s Rigor Got to Do with It? I and II
  - Sessions tie in to the National University Technology Network Colloquium on Alternative Learning in Higher Education
    - Meeting directly followed QM conference
    - Discussed trends in alternative learning, considerations about quality, and how quality is measured
    - Goal was to align form, function, and provider to best serve the learner
What does rigor mean?

• Rigor is...
  ◦ Thorough planning
    • Course Level
    • Program Level
  ◦ Appropriately leveled learning objectives
  ◦ Accountability
    • Teachers
    • Students
  ◦ Active student engagement
  ◦ Connections among information
    • Past & Future
  ◦ Alignment
  ◦ Assessment
  ◦ Art
What does rigor mean?

- Rigor is not...
  - Having lots of assignments
  - Minimized by providing scaffolding to help students meet expectations
What does rigor mean?

• Students’ perceptions of rigor
  ◦ Added items to program evaluation survey
    • Indirect measures
      • Rank ordered items
      • Writing assignments (high impact practice)
      • Participation in research (high impact practice)
    • Direct measures
      • Rigor in courses vs. rigor desired
      • Frequency of activities tapping higher level learning outcomes (e.g., analysis, synthesis)
  ◦ Responses provide insight for continuous improvement planning
How is rigor evaluated?

- **Course level**
  - Course activities requiring active student engagement
  - Variety of assignments reflecting multiple aspects of future work
  - Assessment of coursework
    - Rubrics
    - Feedback for improvement
  - Alignment of assessment with objectives
    - Faculty selected content
    - Required assignments and rubrics for program evaluation

- **Responsible personnel**
  - Instructor of record for the course
How is rigor evaluated?

- **Program level**
  - Syllabi review and alignment with curriculum map
  - Assessment of archived student artifacts
    - Faculty other than instructor of record
    - Program rubrics not course rubrics
  - Students’ behavioral demonstration of profession-based activities
    - Clinical experiential coursework evaluations
    - Thesis project evaluations
  - Students’ performance on external, standardized tests
    - Licensing exams

- **Responsible Personnel**
  - Program Faculty, Program Coordinators, Assessment Committees
How is rigor evaluated?

- **Curriculum Process for Courses**
  - Curriculum review committees
    - Program faculty
    - Department
    - College
    - University Council (Undergraduate / Graduate)
    - University Curriculum Committee
    - Provost
  - **Content reviewed**
    - Program learning outcomes
    - Course learning outcomes
    - Course content examples (readings, activities, assessments)
    - Change justification / data
How is rigor considered in awarding transfer credit?

- **Undergraduate**
  - Freshman and sophomore level
    - Credit only what is evaluated by third parties
      - Accredited academic institutions
      - American Council of Education
      - College Credit for Heroes
      - National Association of Credential Evaluation Services
  - Junior and senior level
    - Program and department faculty review work and third party recommendations
      - Working to establish a standard process across programs
      - Building database of decisions
How is rigor considered in awarding transfer credit?

- **Graduate**
  - Limited hours students can transfer
    - Only from accredited academic institutions
  - Awarding credit requires faculty approval
    - Syllabus comparable in content and scope
    - Comparable course description
    - Mastery grades
  - Will not credit
    - Coursework with no formal grades
    - Correspondence courses with no faculty interaction
    - Grades of C or lower
    - Coursework older than 6 years at graduation
What are challenges in evaluating ALEs?

- **Planning**
  - How does ALE relate to overall program?
  - Will learning in a different context transfer to the program/field?
    - Discrete skills vs. integration of content across courses
  - Connections among information
    - Can students articulate logical relations between ALE and program/field?
  - Appropriately leveled learning objectives
    - What are the ALE learning objectives?
    - What did students do to demonstrate learning in the ALE?
    - Are the learning activities in the ALE aligned with the learning objectives of the coursework?
  - Assessment
    - What type of artifacts can students provide to document learning?
    - How were these artifacts evaluated?
    - How should these artifacts be evaluated?
    - Are the artifacts sufficient evidence to substantiate knowledge?
- **Accountability**
  - Is the instructor credentialed to teach the course?
Who is talking about rigor?

- Source of information
  - Majority of responses came from tenured faculty members
  - Why did few tenure track faculty members participate?

- Conversations about rigor invite everyone to the table
  - Send message that all have a voice
  - Develop norms vetted by all