Quality Assurance for Online Courses in the Faculty of Arts and Science

Overview

This document presents the current processes for selecting, developing, and offering online courses in the Faculty of Arts and Science, as well for assuring that quality standards are met. The processes are based on existing Faculty practices, which have remained consistent even though traditional paper-based correspondence courses have been replaced by web-based online courses in recent years. Aspects of quality assurance have evolved more recently because of advances in educational technology and pedagogical research. The Senate Academic Planning Task Force reviewed online learning at Queen's in 2012/13 and its April 2013 report advocates for the enhancement of quality through evidence-based practices such as active learning, regardless of delivery method. The report's statement that "the quality of a course has much less to do with the technology than the course design" is consistent with the approach taken to quality standards in online courses in the Faculty Arts and Science.

As part of a primarily residential university, the Faculty of Arts and Science is committed to providing on-campus students with courses offered in a face-to-face environment. Many on-campus courses include supplementary online components and some on-campus courses combine online learning and face-to-face learning in a blended model. Fully online courses are intended to supplement offerings for on-campus students and to provide them with flexibility and choice. Online courses also serve distance students, and offer access to other students for whom there is no space on campus (e.g. visiting students from other institutions).

Currently, all fully online versions of Arts and Science courses are offered through Continuing and Distance Studies (CDS), which has the necessary resources and expertise for development and delivery in the online environment. All decisions about which courses will be offered online and who will develop and teach them are taken in partnership with the relevant academic Departments. CDS strives to balance

the enrolment management needs of the Faculty for on-campus students with the needs of distance students.

CDS is responsible for ensuring that best practices for online course design and delivery are being followed in the courses it offers, so that the quality of student learning is equivalent to that in the face-to-face version of the course. The Department is responsible for ensuring that the content and learning outcomes of an online course correspond to the on-campus version of the course, and that Departmental and disciplinary academic standards are being upheld. At the December 1st, 2011 meeting of the Arts and Science Curriculum Committee, the Committee discussed its role vis-à-vis online courses. Recognizing that CDS has the necessary expertise in online course development and delivery, and that the current process preserves Departmental academic oversight, the Committee decided that, "CDS should maintain control of development and redesigning of these courses."

Curriculum

CDS offers online versions of university-credit courses from the Arts and Science Calendar. All new university-credit courses offered through CDS (i.e. those not already in the Arts and Science Calendar) go through the standard Departmental and Faculty curricular approval processes. New Plans and Programs follow the University's standard approval processes. Existing on-campus courses being considered for development into supplemental online versions are approved by the relevant Department and reported to the Faculty's Curriculum Committee.

All courses offered online are available to on-campus students in all faculties, as well as to distance students.

Programming

CDS plans and prioritizes which Arts and Science courses will be offered online in order to meet the needs of both distance and on-campus students. Decisions about course offerings are taken jointly by CDS and the relevant academic Departments, subject to CDS budget constraints concerning the number of course being offered and their enrolment capacities. Both the development and the delivery of online courses are funded by CDS.

Development of Online Courses

Once the decision has been made to offer a course online, and if a course has not previously been offered online (or needs significant revisions), the academic Department recommends a faculty member to develop the course for online delivery.

CDS sets the quality standards for online course design, and provides support in the development phase.

As course developer, the faculty member provides the disciplinary knowledge and subject expertise. CDS compensates the faculty member, or the Department, for development (depending on the Department's preference), in accordance with Collective Agreement rates.

CDS also assigns and compensates an instructional design team to work in partnership with the faculty member. The instructional designer provides expertise in online course development and pedagogy, and acts as the project manager during the development phase. Details about the instructional designer's role are provided in the document *Support and Process for Developing Online and Blended Courses*. Other team members support the development of materials, the technology, and configuration of the course in the learning management system.

The development of an online course involves collaboration between the faculty member, the instructional designer and CDS. Details about roles and responsibilities of each party are provided in the document *Roles, Responsibilities and Expectations for Developing and Teaching Online Courses in Continuing and Distance Studies*.

Before the course is delivered, the Department reviews and approves the content of the online course to ensure it meets disciplinary and Departmental standards.

Delivery of Online Courses

Once the decision has been made to offer a course online, the Department recommends a faculty member to teach the course.

CDS compensates the faculty member for teaching the online course, in accordance with Collective Agreement rates, and provides appropriate teaching and marking support, in consultation with the relevant Department.

CDS provides support in the delivery phase and helps to ensure that quality standards for online learning are being met.

The delivery of an online course involves collaboration between the faculty member, and CDS and, if the course is newly designed, the instructional designer. Details about roles and responsibilities of each party are provided in the document *Roles, Responsibilities and Expectations for Developing and Teaching Online Courses in Continuing and Distance Studies.*

Review of Online Courses

All existing courses are reviewed prior to being offered, by both CDS and the instructor assigned by the Department to teach the course. It is expected that only minor revisions will be made to the content. Every three years courses undergo a comprehensive review process to determine whether the course continues to be a valuable online offering, and whether major revisions are needed to the content, activities, assessment or format. The instructor, a Department delegate and an instructional designer in CDS review the course using the Quality Matters Rubric, as detailed in the document *Roles, Responsibilities and Expectations for Developing and Teaching Online Courses in Continuing and Distance Studies.* CDS provides the necessary support for this review and revision process.

This document is current as of February 2015.