

March 2014

## Editorial: The Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric

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### Recommended Citation

Legon, Ron (2014) "Editorial: The Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric," *Internet Learning*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 2.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.apus.edu/internetlearning/vol3/iss1/2>

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This issue of *ILJ* consists of a selection of papers concerning different aspects of online teaching, learning, and quality assurance, stimulated by interaction with *The Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric* and course review process. It captures a small, but significant, sample of the kind of detailed analysis of online education toward which engagement with QM typically leads. This kind of work is advancing incrementally toward a better understanding of the most effective course design elements to promote learner persistence, performance, and satisfaction, as well as the most effective strategies to persuade faculty to adopt best practices and become part of the growing community of effective and committed online instructors and facilitators.

Why has the study of effective standards for online education grown steadily, beyond the usual confines of departments and colleges of education, in contrast to the level of interest in the higher education classroom? Of course, the Quality Matters™ Program would like to take credit for this trend, together with other organizations like ITC, WCET, MERLOT, and the Sloan Consortium, through our conferences, sponsored research projects, and activities to engage both faculty and instructional design and technology specialists. But something deeper is at work.

The process for online and blended course creation and improvement at the postsecondary level has engaged individuals and institutions in ways seldom experienced in face-to-face education. This work increasingly involves teams of individuals who need to share and collaborate in order to succeed. And the successful course, or even the well designed learning object, is itself an artifact that begs to be shared, analyzed and improved. This sharing begins locally, but spreads quickly to become regional, national, and even international. The collaborations that result from this phenomenon and the courses that are thereby strengthened, term by term, hold promise for the continual improvement of online education, year-by-year and version-by-version.

In historical terms, we are only at the beginning of this process. I suspect, however, that it will be a permanent feature of online education, leading to new strategies and tools, and, ultimately, a re-conception of advanced learning, individualized to the learner. It will also inevitably impact classroom-based education as well. We may be taking baby steps at present with studies such as these, but the baby (online education) is growing rapidly.

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