August 2017

Media Review: Thinking of Rubrics for your Online Course? Consider these Features

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Abstract

Owing to their numerous benefits, rubrics should be included in all classrooms: especially those that are online. Knowing what features to evaluate can streamline the rubric selection process in order to choose the best rubric for program, School/College, university, or external reporting needs. Straightforward use, rapid build, simple collaboration, and uncomplicated reporting are recommended features to consider.

Keywords: *rubric, iRubric, assessment, data reporting*

Introduction

The use of rubrics in higher education has taken shape over the last decade as more faculty members and institutions realize the benefits (Reddy & Andradae, 2010; Swarat et al., 2017). Benefits include consistency when scoring work, improving instruction by making assessment expectations explicit, and overall, supporting best practices. In a traditional brick and mortar teaching and learning environment, rubrics are distributed during class sessions and reviewed face-to-face. Professors can then hand back completed rubrics attached to each student's assignment submission. This process needs to be slightly altered for an online classroom environment. Online rubrics need to be easy for students and faculty members to use, help streamline the grading process, and provide an efficient way to collect data about how students meet course, program, and institutional objectives. This review highlights some of the key features to consider when selecting an online rubric tool or system.

Straightforward Use

The most important element when selecting an online rubric tool is an easy to use system. Although faculties and students have different interactions with a rubric tool, it needs to be intuitive for both. Clarity, efficiency, and accessibility are a few considerations.

For a faculty member, the system needs to be clear-cut in regard to assessing student work, entering com-

doi: 10.18278/il.6.1.7

ments, and posting rubrics to the online classroom and gradebook. Providing a system that has clickable cells is vital because it can allow a faculty member to focus on the feedback and comments that should be provided to the student. A great benefit is being able to click individual cells that reflect the student's level of mastery in an efficient manner that saves both time and paper. Other advantages include having electronically archived records of students' strengths and weaknesses and having at-a-glance data about how students are doing in terms of line-by-line accreditation, program, or university standards. This is the type of system that helps create faculty buy-in.

Furthermore, both the blank and graded rubric versions should be easily accessible to students within the Learning Management System (LMS) assignment area or gradebook to help ensure that students will review them before, during, and after assignments are completed. When rubrics are more visible and accessible in an online course, the expectations are clearer and students have a greater likelihood of being successful. Students deserve to have the ability to see rubrics ahead of time and after submitting assignments in order to have explicit information about what they are to do and how they did it. Then, the grade or evaluation rating from the rubric should be easily passed to the LMS gradebook without requiring the faculty member to download a spreadsheet and manually input the data.

For students, the rubric tool should not be burdensome to read or understand. There should be few questions resulting from using the system. Being able to preview the criteria before beginning the assignment or project is also an important consideration for both students and faculty members. Even given the ability to print the previewed rubric is very helpful to students if they need to work on an assignment offline. Once the assignment has been assessed, a student should be able to easily view what the final evaluation is and quickly see the comments associated with each rubric aspect. Therefore, to accommodate this ease of use, rubric integration in the classroom is essential.

Rapid Build

For faculty members to use the tool, there needs to be a system where rubrics can be built quickly. Traditionally, rubrics are in a grid or spreadsheet style; so, systems that employ these types are user friendly to students and faculties. The ability to use templates, import existing rubrics, and repurpose already created rubrics makes for an ideal system to use because these aspects save time. Providing faculty members access to rubrics built by colleagues or directors within the same program or school/college is a time-saving approach as well.

If the rubrics are to be built from scratch, the interface should be simple to navigate. Faculty members should be able to readily locate where to enter all the information for the rubric. The rubric title, mastery level (or column title), aspect title and description (or

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row), and all the details of each criterion used for evaluation need to be easy to locate, enter, and save. If needed, faculty members should also be able to vary the aspects and columns with the appropriate weights for a given assignment. Another important consideration is the alignment of the rubric to standards that might be needed or required for accreditation, state, or institutional reporting. Linked standards are beneficial when reports are derived from the rubrics.

Simple Collaboration

The strength of using a rubric to evaluate assessments is the ability for multiple faculty members to evaluate a single piece of work by a student. Perhaps, the work is a capstone project or ePortfolio that demonstrates a student's mastery of key skills and abilities within or even across courses in a program. The best online rubric tools provide a way for faculty members to evaluate the student's work, review the ratings by other faculty members, and then share this overall assessment with the student. There is efficiency when various faculty members evaluate similar or different rubric aspects dependent on certain courses or even expertise. For example, one key course assessment might be used as evidence for multiple objectives evaluated by professors with different skill sets.

This type of system is also powerful when considering reliability between evaluators. The collaboration should also extend to the creation of the rubric.

Providing a system that faculty members can share and work together on to create, monitor, and revise rubrics is a vital part of any online rubric system.

Uncomplicated Reporting

The most practical online rubric systems have reporting that is uncomplicated. The reports should be easy to create, store, share, and manipulate. Colleges or Schools, universities, departments, programs, and individuals may have multiple needs for data presentation; so, a system that supports generating quick reports to pinpoint and highlight the data most important to that reporting is crucial. Systems should have practical features that allow for easy data presentation in charts, graphs, or even tables as well as aggregating and disaggregating data. As mentioned earlier, standards applicable to accreditation, state, or institution are very important and the ability to align them to rubrics is vital. Reporting on these standards is a necessity for any online rubric system.

Conclusion

The adoption of an online rubric tool can provide a quick and potentially data-rich avenue in the online classroom space. LMS platforms such as Angel, Blackboard Learn, and D2L Brightspace have their own rubric tools built in; or, can adopt a system like iRubric from RCampus, which is integrated into the LMS. There are oth-

er tools available like ForAllRubrics, which have been designed for K12 spaces; and even Turnitin has rubric capabilities. Every system offers its own robust possibilities to meet the needs of different assessment situations and reporting requirements. Every institution should examine their needs to determine what online rubric system would best serve their requirements.

Resources

http://www.angellearning.com/products/lms/rubrics.html

https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Grade/Rubrics

https://www.forallrubrics.com/

http://www.rcampus.com/

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