Teaching Academy Innovation Award Application

Section 1: Contact information
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Section 2: What is the innovation and how was it applied in class?
I place engagement at the heart of online learning. I applied the Quality Matters Rubric and Conrad & Donaldson's Stages of Engagement (Conrad & Donaldson, 2011) within my online and hybrid classes. Most of the challenges of encouraging active learning and student engagement revolve around online course design and student use (Palloff & Pratt, 2007).

The Quality Matters Rubric recommends that instructors design their course to meet eight standards: 1) course overview and introduction, 2) learning objectives, 3) assessment and measurement, 4) instructional materials, 5) learner interaction and engagement, 6) course technology, 7) learning support, and 8) accessibility. I used the QM Rubric as a tool to design online curricula, aligning student learning outcomes, learning activities, assessment, and use of technology. The Quality Matters Rubric is a useful innovation that helps online faculty like myself avoid potential roadblocks to student learning and retention.

Using the Quality Matters rubric as a foundation, I redesigned my COMM 265G online course. I began applying the Quality Matters Rubric to my course in Spring 2010. In December 2013, my online COMM 265G course officially passed a formal Quality Matters Review and was nationally recognized as a QM Certified course. I have made my COMM 265G online course public. It is a sample QM Course on the OCIP Resources wiki page.

In addition to addressing each of the eight QM standards, I improved student use by redesigning my course following Conrad & Donaldson's Stages of Engagement (Conrad & Donaldson, 2011). Conrad and Donaldson recommend scaffolding online curricula to build student engagement in five phases: 1) connect, 2) communicate, 3) collaborate, 4) co-facilitate, and 5) continue. In order to begin developing an online learning community, I assigned an introduction discussion and icebreaker as part of the course orientation to begin getting to know the students and creating a human presence as soon as the semester starts. To further establish a human presence and encourage student engagement, I addressed each of the stages of engagement by assigning class discussions for each unit, a team-based online group presentation with peer critiques, and a learner-led video research presentation with peer critiques. The Association of American Colleges and Universities identified collaborative, team-based projects and assignments as high impact practices that increase rates of student retention and student engagement (Kuh, 2008). This innovation has helped my online students to feel less isolated and be more engaged with the course material and each other.

I continued to improve student use by incorporating rich channels of communication like Skype, Screen-Cast-O-Matic presentations, and video assignments as part of my online curriculum. I increased opportunities for mediated communication between student-to-student, student-to-instructor, and student-to-content. By the end of the semester, the students not only completed a series of modules developed using the Quality Matters rubric, but they also benefitted from increased student engagement and the creation of an online learning community.

Section 3: Evidence that the innovation positively affected student learning.

When I first began teaching COMM 265G online, the online communication courses were considered to be inferior to the face-to-face version of the same communication courses. This perception of online courses as being less supportive of community college students and their learning needs applied to the majority of online courses offered at DACC. Online courses have the lowest pass rates at DACC. I saw this pattern within my own classes as well as other online sections of COMM 265G. My courses benefitted greatly from my integration of Quality Matters principles and Conrad & Donaldson's Stages of Engagement (2011). COMM 265G online classes became the first online course in the DACC English & Communication Department to match the pass rate for face-to-face courses. My Teaching Academy-inspired course design and curriculum innovations have had a tremendous impact on student success.

My training with the Quality Matters Rubric began in Spring 2010. I participated in the TA Peer Coaching Program for online instruction based on principles of the Quality Matters rubric. I applied the changes from the training immediately to COMM 265G D70 online and left COMM 265G D11 online as I had previously taught and designed the course. As the result of my new course design, my class GPA went from 2.29 to 2.85.

As a result of this initial study, I decided to continue learning about the QM Rubric and methods for improving student use of my online courses by applying for the OCIP 1Y+ Fellowship. I kept my focus on COMM 265G for two reasons. First, COMM 265G is offered online each semester. Second, COMM 265G is required for each of the 37 degrees offered at DACC along with 3 certificate programs. In addition, COMM 265G is one of the New Mexico General Education Common Core courses required for all undergraduate degrees at NMSU and other 4-year universities in the state. The impact of concepts learned in the Teaching Academy on my student learning outcomes for this course has been profound: my class GPA went from 2.39 (136 students) to 2.59 (393 students) as the result of my training.

Grades	% pre	% post
A	21%	28%
B	30%	24%
C	10%	16%
D	7%	7%
F	16%	11%
W	16%	14%
Number of Students	162	455

It is important to note that the improved student performance was seen despite the increased course rigor due to the changes inspired by the QM Rubric and Conrad & Donaldson's Stages of Engagement. Students now participate in over eight class discussions, submit an additional project, complete Learn Smart Study Modules, participate in two peer critiques, and use more advanced technology within their online group presentation assignment. COMM 265G online students participate, problem-solve, and reflect more now than ever before. By designing my online classes using the approaches of team-based learning and active learning, I encourage students to learn at both low and high levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Students must learn, share, and apply their knowledge with their teammates, improving their communication skills and metacognitive skills. The class discussions start as a place to discuss reading techniques and grow into social support and friendships to increase student retention. Establishing an online learning community not only increases retention, it provides an online environment for students to hone their communication skills and develop team building and leadership skills. The student response to the new course design was very positive. Comments included:

- This class has been incredibly interesting and fun - Professor Kozel, you have been absolutely amazing! This has been one of the smoothest, and most thought-out online classes I've taken.
- This is a perfect online communication class, I don't know of anything that the teacher forgot or anything that she could include.

Section 4: Relation between innovation and the Teaching Academy

I have been a distinguished member of the Teaching Academy for two years, attending many helpful workshops. The Spring 2010 "Peer Coaching: A Class Observation Program for Online and Classroom Educators" was instrumental in launching my professional development in online learning and in particular, the Quality Matters Rubric. As part of this experience, I was introduced to specific guidelines for quality online course development and online instruction. It was the first time that I was invited to observe online courses, and it was eye-opening to see how other faculty organized and presented curricula. It was also the first time that I used the Quality Matters Rubric to review online courses and provide feedback to fellow instructors. Participating in the TA Peer Coaching Program showed me how important it is to design online classes with the students in mind. I learned that in order to build an online community that supports engagement and team-based learning, it is essential to first develop a well-planned online course that is easy for students to use.

The following year, I applied and was accepted to the OCIP 1Y+ Fellowship to continue to increase the quality of my online courses. I completed the 16-month program in Spring 2012. The experience of working with a mentor and a cohort of NMSU faculty greatly improved my effectiveness as an online teacher. In fact, it inspired me to enroll in the College of Extended Learning Online Teaching and Learning Master's Certificate program, which I completed in Summer 2013. My online COMM 265G course was officially QM-certified in December 2013. My online course successfully met the QM Rubric standards because of what I learned and implemented from TA workshops, the OCIP Fellowship, and OTL courses.

Giving back

I have attended the NMHEAR Conference annually since 2008. At the 2014 NMHEAR Conference I co-presented a workshop based on curriculum developed as part of the OCIP Fellowship and OTL coursework, entitled "Practical Steps for Encouraging and Assessing the Voice of Your Online Students." In addition, I served on the NMHEAR Planning Committee. I reviewed proposals and created both Twitter and Facebook pages for the NMHEAR Conference to provide a space for participants to socially network and begin building an online community.

In Spring 2013 I became a certified Quality Matters Peer Reviewer and became a Master QM Reviewer in Fall 2013. I look forward to helping to review online courses both at NMSU and DACC. To help train faculty on the Quality Matters Rubric and prepare them for QM course reviews, I began facilitating a series of faculty workshops about the Quality Matters Program and QM rubric at DACC in Fall 2013 with Doug Layer and Sonia White. We are continuing to provide the QM trainings this semester.

In Fall 2013 I began serving as a member of the NMSU system-wide QM Implementation Committee. The committee presented a colloquium at the 2013 Community College Round-Up entitled "Quality Matters at NMSU." We discussed how each campus at NMSU is using the Quality Matters Rubric and resources to serve faculty who teach online courses. In Fall 2012 I was given a course release to serve as the Online Education Coordinator for DACC. I have applied what I learned at the Teaching Academy and College of Extended Learning to assess DACC online courses.

Section 5: Letters of Support From Students