

# Sexuality in a Diverse Society: Perspectives on the Quality Matters/Gold Review Process for Online Course Transition

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**Background:** As student demand for online learning grew, Towson University adopted the quality assurance standards based from The Quality Matters Program and developed the Gold Review Process. The process, supported by research and best practices, was used as a professional development rubric for instructors initiating the conversion from classroom-based instruction to an online learning environment. **Purpose:** To evaluate the perspectives of the Course Instructor and of the QM peer gold reviewer during their experience of taking a course through the QM Gold Review redesign process. **Methods:** Peer review data, student course evaluation data and instructor reflections are presented and analyzed as measures to reflect on the transformation and implementation of a selected course to a fully online format via the Gold Review process. **Results and Recommendations for the Field:** As higher education institutions reallocate resources, time, and expertise to online course design and implementation, quality assurance processes like Gold Review and Quality Matters, can facilitate the successful design of courses to reflect sound pedagogy, course alignment and accessibility.

## INTRODUCTION

Towson University ventured into online learning in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The process was organic as professors and instructors with backgrounds in instructional design and an interest in online learning were the first to begin placing course components online. As the Internet and World Wide Web evolved, interest in an online learning grew among select faculty. Blackboard was implemented as an online

learning platform to provide some standardization of online instruction. The University promoted quality assurance measures, but no systemic quality assurance program was implemented in early stages of transforming face-to-face course content to online environments.

As a result, the institution adopted quality assurance standards largely based on the Quality Matters Rubric (Quality Matters Program, 2018b). Grant incentives were provided to convert face-to-face courses to online courses. The grant incentives provided that respective courses would be redesigned by faculty, who had taught the courses, in partnership with a University Instructional Designer. The grant incentives required that the redesigned courses were to be implemented in a minimum of two subsequent/annual summer semester sessions. It is important to note that until recently, Towson University's undergraduate and graduate programs were largely face-to-face programs, but as the market for online education has evolved, the University has been migrating towards producing more blended and online course options for students.

Towson University had been a participating institution in Quality Matters (Quality Program, 2018a) process, and as the need for converting courses to online format intensified, the need for an internal quality assurance process became apparent. Using the tenants of Quality Matters, Towson University's Office of Academic innovation developed the Gold Review Process.

This article outlines the redesign and redevelopment of a course, titled *Sexuality in a Diverse Society*, using the Gold Review process presented from the unique perspectives of the Course Designer/Instructor and a Peer Gold Reviewer. Student course evaluation data and instructor reflections are presented and analyzed as measures to reflect on the transformation and implementation of the *Sexuality in a Diverse Society* course to a fully online format via the Gold Review process.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *FACULTY PREPARATION*

The Towson University faculty who embraced online learning in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century were early adopters (Rogers, 2003). Considerations must be given to the all faculty levels (not just the early adopters) skills and dispositions in adopting online pedagogical and technological approaches to instruction. Koehler, Mishra, Hershey and Peruski (2004) identified challenges and constraints faculty encounter in adopting online course design and instruction. These challenges included:

- Faculty members, who are accustomed to only thinking about teaching and courses in a more traditional face-to-face classroom, are often reluctant to tackle the job of teaching in a technological medium.
- Many faculty do not find value in learning the details of technology, believing that it only takes time (a limited resource) away from thinking about pedagogy and the other responsibilities they have, and that they may care more about.
- Faculty members are often not well versed in technology.
- Many faculty have learned successfully to be students and instructors without the use of technology, and therefore often question its relevance.
- Faculty members often have extremely busy schedules and thus have limited time to devote to learning new technologies.
- Institutions often lack opinion leaders who have taught online and who can act as role models for less experienced faculty.

- Many institutions may not have the time or resources to devote to the time consuming undertaking of changing faculty attitudes about online course design (p. 27).

Faculty are more likely to adopt innovative change when it offers advantage along with observable results (Rogers, 2003). A variety of incentive and motivational frameworks have been developed to tackle these challenges with varying degrees of success. Gautreau (2011) indicated motivational factors in adopting online management systems includes a sense of responsibility/achievement, mandates and pay. Hainline, Gaines, Feather, Padilla, and Terry (2010) noted faculty motivators including “committing funds and faculty release time” (p 5). Alvarez, Blair, Monske, and Wolf (2005) noted that faculty mentoring models that have been successful in the business field, can be utilized in higher education with positive impact.

Variability has been indicated in the success of programs design to incentivize faculty in adopting online learning. Rucker, Edwards and Frass (2015) noted, via an internal University of South Carolina Distributed Learning Quality Review Program study for online course design, that faculty were appreciative of support and standards guidance in online courses, but faculty found effort needed was more than expected and not sufficiently compensated. As of 2013, 70% of non-profit higher institutions offer incentives related to online instruction, but the amount and type of incentive support is variable (Herman, 2013). Barczyk, Buckenmeyer, Feldman and Hixon (2011) examined a Purdue University Calumet program in which teaching faculty could opt to become protégés for the purpose of developing online teaching skills. Protégés indicated that peer faculty member provided greater psychosocial support in relation to career development (Barczyk et al., 2011).

### *QUALITY ASSURANCE EFFORTS IN ONLINE INSTRUCTION*

Since the inception of online instruction, efforts persist in trying to achieve a validation and improvement in online course design. Baldwin, Ching and Hsu (2018) reviewed a multitude of national and state course evaluation instruments and identified six exemplary online course evaluation instruments. These instruments included: the Blackboard Exemplary Course Program Rubric (2012); California Community Colleges’ Online Education Initiative (2016) Course Design Rubric; the Open SUNY Course Quality Review Rubric (Open SUNY Center for Online Teaching Excellence. 2016); Quality Matters (2016) Higher Education Rubric; the Illinois Online Network (2015) Quality Online Course Initiative; and the California State University (2015) Quality Online Learning and Teaching Evaluation Instrument. The Quality Matters and the subsequent Gold Review Processes have guided online course development at Towson University.

### *QUALITY MATTERS*

Quality Matters provides assessment from a student perspective, thereby identifying opportunities for improvement that may otherwise go undetected (Pickens & Witte, 2015). Quality Matters provides a standards-based, economical manner for improved online learning validation and provides opportunities for faculty to focus on course design (Veronis, 2014).

Quality Matters evolved from a small group of participants in an online consortium (circa 2003) to a non-profit organization (in 2014) with over 1300 college and university subscribers. Quality Matters has trained more the 52,000 educators via online design standards, and has certified thousands of online and blended courses (Quality Matters Program, 2018c).

Quality Matters’ mission is grounded in promoting and improving the quality of online instruction 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 Quality Matters standards and processes into organizational 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 (Quality Matters Program, 2018c, ¶10).

Quality Matters is supported by research and best practices (Quality Matters Program, 2015a). The Quality Matters Program and Rubric undergoes a continuous improvement process to retain the Quality Matters Rubric TM and processes are “current, practical, and applicable” across academic disciplines and academic levels (Shattuck, Zimmerman, & Adair, 2014, p. 1). The Quality Matters rubric (Quality Matters Program, 2018b) utilized for review of the *Sexuality in a Diverse Society* course contained the following eight general standards:

- Course Overview and Introduction
- Learning Objectives (Competencies)
- Assessment and Measurement
- Instructional Materials
- Course Activities and Learner Interaction
- Course Technology
- Learner Support
- Accessibility and Usability

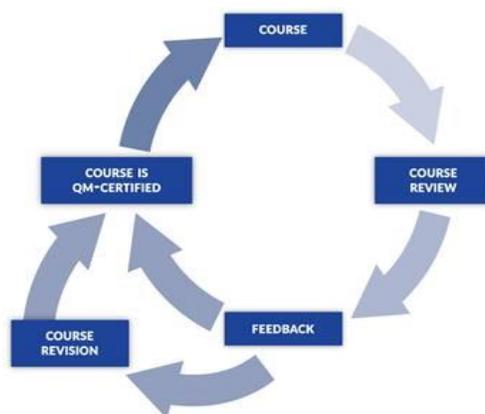


Figure 1. The Quality Matters Course Review Process. Reprinted from *Why QM/Process* (QM Process, 2018c).

Forty-three specific review standards comprised the Quality Matters rubric when the *Sexuality in a Diverse Society* course went through the Gold Review Process (Quality Matters Program, 2018b). The first step in preparation for an official Quality Matters course review is for those seeking the review to develop an understanding of the use of the Quality Matters Rubric, and the process for disseminating the course review. All members of a Quality Matters review team must be Quality Matters certified in the respective reviewer role. In using the Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric, a review team will have a Master Reviewer (also serves as a Team Chair) and two Peer Reviewers. One Peer Reviewer is a designated Subject Matter Expert, and one who is external to the organization

submitting the Review. As visualized in Figure 1, Quality Matters is a cyclical process in which the course undergoes the review, the course designer receives feedback, and the course is revised. Quality Matters members can work together to improve the course to meet Quality Matters Standards at the 85% quality level (i.e. 37 of the 43 standards met) or better. Once the 85% standard has been met, the course is Quality Matters certified for a period of 3-5 years (Quality Matters Process, 2018c).

Quality Matters members can leverage the Quality Matters process to scale for the purpose of meeting individual institutional needs (Quality Matters Process, 2018c). After a period of ten years in working through the progression of Quality Matters stages, Towson University scaled the Quality Matters Process into the Gold Review Process.

### *TOWSON UNIVERSITY GOLD REVIEW PROCESS*

As a result of the accountability movement in online education, the Towson University Office of Academic Innovation (AOI) developed the Gold Review Process. A Gold Review team consists of two Quality Matters certified Peer Reviewers and an Instructional Designer. The Gold Review Process closely approximates the Quality Matters Review Process, but is an abridged process in that peer course reviewers examine 25 of the 43 specific Quality Matters Rubric standards while conducting a course review. The Instructional Designer reviews the additional 18 Quality Matters standards.

Another distinction from the Quality Matters process, is that a subject-matter expert is not required on a Gold Review team. Consistent with Quality Matters, Gold Review courses must meet the 85% “met” criteria for each standard reviewed. The Towson University Office of Academic Innovation facilitates implementing recommendations with the course designers (Towson University, 2018).

### *COURSE EVALUATION FEEDBACK*

One issue in the post Gold Review administration of the *Sexuality in a Diverse Society* course was obtaining substantive feedback via a prescribed University online student evaluation. A low student evaluation response rate has been noted to be indicative in the online administration of course evaluations, in comparison to paper and pencil. Nulty (2008) noted that the response rates of all course evaluations (online or paper and pencil) in a majority of institutions are low and not representative of the larger student population. The issue of a representative response rate has been more acute in higher education institutions utilizing only online course evaluations (Goodman, Anson & Belcheir, 2015). The online evaluation response rate has been 20-30% lower in comparison to paper and pencil; online evaluations have been calculated with response rates between 70-80%, and online evaluations response rates have been 50-60% (Avery, Bryant, Mathios, Kang & Bell, 2006; Dommeyer, Baum, Hanna & Chapman, 2004; Guder & Malliaris 2013). Cone, Viswesh, Gupta, and Unni (2018) cited barriers to completion of student course evaluations including frequency and the length of surveys, length of rating scale, ambiguous questions, and misunderstanding and perceived benefit of completing the evaluation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *GOLD REVIEW PARTICIPANTS*

Prior to reviewing the *Sexuality in a Diverse Society* course via Gold Review, the Peer Reviewer, David Robinson had 23 years-experience teaching in higher education, was a certified Quality Matters Peer Reviewer, and served twice as a course designer using the Quality Matters process before serving as a Peer Reviewer.

Carrie McFadden, the Instructor and Course Designer, had been teaching the *Sexuality in a Diverse Society* course since 2015. Her educational background and degrees in both exercise science and anatomy and physiology qualify her to teach the course offered through the Department of Health Sciences. McFadden was also a doctoral student in instructional technology during the time she was taking the course through the Gold Review process, and has since received her doctorate degree. When she began teaching the *Sexuality in a Diverse Society* course sections, there were several adjunct instructors picking up course sections, comprising approximately 10-15 sections taught per semester. The course uses a textbook written by one of the professors in the department.

### *COURSE BACKGROUND*

*Sexuality in a Diverse Society* is a core course fulfilling Towson University's Diversity and Difference requirement, one of 10 core areas in which all undergraduate students must complete coursework. As a University required core course, all sections use a unified syllabus developed by the coordinator of the course and author of the textbook. Aside from the syllabus and the peer-observation that is required once per semester, instructors have autonomy in the day-to-day classroom setting. There is no additional oversight on how the course is administered online. In fall 2015, it was brought before the department by the course coordinator that she wanted no more than 25% of the course offerings taught online, either fully or in hybrid.

In the fall of 2016, McFadden, who had been teaching two sections of *Sexuality in a Diverse Society* fully online, began the Gold Review process, for the purpose of redesigning the course for fully online offerings. She met with the Gold Review Instructional Designer at her University to map out a plan for course revision under the Gold Review rubric. This process was fully endorsed and supported by the Chairperson of Health Sciences and by the Dean of the College of Health Professions. The process was to be dedicated as service to the department on McFadden's workload agreement, as the main goal was to create an online course template that other instructors of the course, mainly adjuncts, could use. The template would thus help to create continuity of course instruction at the university. McFadden has a background with teaching online, as she has taken several courses from face-to-face to an online format, including *Women's Health* in 2009, *Foundations of Exercise Science* in 2014 and *Nutrition for the Consumer* in 2015. *Sexuality in a Diverse Society* is the first course she has taken through the Gold Review process.

Prior to the review, and in fact a precipitant of the process, McFadden perceived a lack of alignment among her course objectives, assignments and assessments. Another precipitant for the review process was the current course layout and organization. While McFadden had a background in online development, she had no formal training in instructional design and had received little feedback except from student evaluations and their suggestions for improvement. There was a lack of professional development for faculty seeking to transition classroom instruction to an online format.

From her experience teaching online, McFadden was aware that distance learning was becoming more and more popular within the public university system, and that the number of students actually studying on a campus (i.e. those not taking any online courses) was decreasing (Allen & Seaman, 2017). In the fall of 2016, there were over six million students taking at least one online course, representing over 30% of all matriculated university students (Allen & Seaman, 2017). As the demand for online learning continues to increase, McFadden understood the importance of striving to meet the needs of online learners. Yet, while students today can pursue more online programs and degrees than ever before, McFadden's University maintains its mission of being a campus-centered place of instruction. Offering online course alternatives to classroom-based instruction is at the discretion (and responsibility) of academic departments and their instructors.

## CONCEPTUAL CHANGE

Coming into the review process, McFadden reflected on her beliefs about herself as an instructor, first in the classroom setting, and then as an online facilitator of instruction. She then reflected on her online course as a whole, evaluating herself as an online presence in the learning environment, and the structure and atmosphere of the online course. After self-reflection, she realized that she held certain beliefs about herself and about online teaching and learning. For example, McFadden values learning activities that provide opportunities for collaborative learning, and promotes discussions, group presentations, simulations, etc. in her classroom settings. Yet, she found her online course lacked opportunity to elicit differing forms of activities, with discussion board postings as the only way to offer collaboration between and among students. The first step in the Gold Review transitional process of developing an online course is to recognize conceptual change. In part, the idea of conceptual change prompts online instructors to embrace new educational roles where student-centered learning is foundational.

## IDENTIFYING DISSATISFACTION

McFadden received positive feedback on student course evaluations for her online sections prior to the Gold Review. Comments such as the following were common: “The professor was very knowledgeable.” “I really enjoyed the discussions... there was a prompt to guide us, but overall we had freedom to discuss based on the prompt.” “It’s a fun course that challenges you to be open minded and respectful of differing opinions on some subjects that can be difficult to discuss.” “The instructor was good at grading on time, and so she knew where I needed to improve.”

Despite the positive feedback, McFadden had real concerns about her online course, finding it challenging to transfer content delivered the classroom (PowerPoint, lecture, large class discussions) to an online environment. McFadden described herself as a personable, relaxed and humorous educator, struggling with how to convey personality, approachability and a sense of community in a fully online course.

Additionally, McFadden had concerns about loss of instructor presence, inherent in face-to-face courses as a challenge for some students taking online classes, many for the first time. Often students depend on the instructor for motivation, direction, and assignment clarification. She feared a loss of communication and relationship building from instructor to student and from student to student. She also had concerns over “classroom control”, i.e. the ability to direct group discussions or to prevent cheating on exams or assignments.

McFadden also held tight to an educational philosophy, believing that online higher education cannot reflect the same methodology that many of the socially popular online platforms use. She wanted her course to provide engaging, collaborative learning for all students, but not to come off as a Facebook or Reddit-type of educational experience. McFadden believed learning does not occur only within a strong ability to navigate around an online course; students must be afforded the opportunity to actively learn from and through each other. In an effort to meet the perceived need of her students, McFadden found herself spending more time trying to learn the newest technology than focusing on content-area research and teaching strategies in an effort to engage who she perceived as tech-savvy students.

## SOLUTION: THE GOLD REVIEW PROCESS

With any class conversion, something is lost and something is gained. Good educational practices must guide the way to online course transitions. Technology alone is

not the key to successful change. The Gold Review process was initially daunting for McFadden. Essentially, she opened her course for review from a full Gold Review team—two Quality Matters certified faculty Peer Reviewers and one Quality Matters -certified Instructional Designer. Standards set by Quality Matters, such as “learners were introduced to the structure of the course” to “the course learning objectives, or course/program competencies, describe outcomes that are measurable” as Met or Not Yet Met. If a standard was not met, the review team made recommendations for improvement.

Throughout the review process, McFadden become more at ease. The recommendations offered suggestions that directly addressed her stated dissatisfactions with the course, and helped her make improvements. For example, reviewers suggested ways to design more student-centered collaborative methods to assess content leaning. The process also ensured learning objectives matched with course assignments and assessments.

### **GOLD REVIEW COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In reviewing the course as prepared, the immediate impression of the Peer Reviewer (Robinson) was that the course had the essential elements needed in quality course design including objectives, course assessments and a simplistic online structure via the Blackboard Learning Platform. Essential to the Gold Review process is an examination of the course elements via select Quality Matters Standards and Rubric. While each standard is noted in the Gold Review process as “Met” or “Not Yet Met”, recommendations can be presented in either case.

Commendations were numerous in the Gold Review process addressed in this study, in comparison to recommendations. When presented in total, the commendations and recommendations in this reviewed seemed, from the perspective of the Peer Reviewer, to be a significant amount of information to be processed by the Course Designer (McFadden). Fortunately, per the Gold Review Process, a debriefing was held with the Instructional Designer/Review Team Leader, in which the Peer Reviewer and Instructional Designer/Review Team Leader discussed the totality of commendations and recommendations. The outcome of the meeting was to focus on presenting to the Course Designer some focused and short-term obtainable recommendations, some long-term recommendations, and to qualify additional recommendations noting factors/barriers such as the teaching load for the course (160 students per semester) could great inhibit the potential impact of these additional recommendations.

This research report is primary focused on presenting the Gold Review recommendations suggested, addressing the recommendations implemented, and noting the impact of the Gold Review recommendations on the *Sexuality in a Diverse Society* course. Before addressing the recommendations, a summary of the commendations is provided to gain perspective of the Gold Review process. The key commendations listed below are appended with a parenthetical notation of the Quality Matters (QM) standard addressed. The key commendations included:

- An announcement and prior email were present welcoming students to the course. There was a tab titled, Welcome to HLTH 220 – Getting Started. Expectations/policies for exams and assignments were made clear under the TU Course and Assignment Policies tab. Navigation instructions were provided for accessing the first Weekly Folder tab. The directions for the first week were done well! (QM 1.1)
- Protocol’s for contacting the instructor were noted under the TU Course and Assignment Policies tab (QM 1.8).

- The course objectives were stated on the syllabus and were measurable. Measurable action verbs were indicated in the objectives such as: display, explore, integrate, identify, evaluate... (QM 2.1).
- The course and module/unit learning objectives or competencies were stated clearly and prominently in the online classroom (QM 2.3).
- A clear, written statement fully explains how the course grades were calculated. The points, percentages, and weights for each component of the course grade were clearly stated. The relationship(s) between points, percentages, weights, and letter grades were explained. The instructor's policy on late submissions was clearly stated. The following course grading related items were evident:
  - A list of all activities, tests, etc., that will determine the student's final grade
    - An explanation of the relationship between the final course letter grade and the learner's accumulated points
  - An explanation of the relationship between points and percentages, if both are used (exception of points not for exams) (QM 3.2)
- In most instances, learners were provided with guidance regarding how the instructional materials, resources, technologies, and learning activities were used in the course, and how each would help them achieve the stated learning objectives or help them prepare to demonstrate course competencies (QM 4.2).
- The weekly modules (other than those highlighting projects) included the following consistent elements/headings: Introduction, Objectives, Activities, Readings, Discussion (QM 8.1).

With the basic structure of the course noted in the peer review process, the Peer Reviewer focused on providing recommendations per the 25 QM standards reviewed. The Peer Reviewer assumed the role of a prospective student in examining the online structure of the course. The Peer Reviewer first accessed the Blackboard course as a student would in search of where to begin the course, and as the QM standards dictated, looking for key course information such as activities, assignments, and due dates. From a macro perspective, the recommendations focused on alignment issues among the course objectives, modules objectives and some assessments. It is important to note that the course objectives were departmental objectives, and in a fixed-state per the institutional curriculum approval processes. The Peer Reviewer while aware of the fixed-components of the course (e.g. departmental objectives) strictly focused on utilizing the select QM standards as a framework optimizing the course instruction.

Tables 1 and 2 present examples of Quality Matters standards reviewed, and the Peer Reviewer's specific recommendations for each of the standards. Table 1 provides a sampling a "Met" standard; table 2 provides a sampling of a "Not Yet Met" standard.

Table 1. *Peer Reviewer Recommendation (Standard Met)*

Standard	Recommendations
3.1 The assessments measure the stated learning objectives or competencies (Met).	The assessments are aligned with the objectives. Conversely, some objectives are not explicitly aligned with assessments. A substantially majority of the objectives are aligned with the assessments, and this is well-done. The objectives are not written in terms of producing a specific product or assessment, so adding a specific action to each objective might provide further clarity. Here a few objectives that may need reconsideration or realignment:

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 Week 1

1. To define sexuality; to understand the six dimensions of health and to understand sexuality in the realm of overall health and wellness

## Week 2

1. Identify and locate the key structures of the female and male sexual anatomy  
 2. Describe the main functions of the key female and male sexual structures

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*Table 2. Peer Reviewer Recommendation (Standard Not Yet Met)*

Standard	Recommendations
5.2b Learning activities provide opportunities for active learning (Not Yet Met)	<p>The course provides opportunities for active learning via the discussion board postings. The discussion prompts elicit higher order thinking and discourse among the students. It does not appear, per the annotation for standard 5.2b, that the “active learning also entails guiding learners to increasing levels of responsibility for their own learning” within this course”.</p> <p>In addition to the discussion forums, consider some of the following activities noted in the standard 5.2 annotation to elicit other forms of active learning that can guide learners to increasing levels of responsibility for their own learning” within this course.</p> <p>Examples of active learning activities include (from the standard 5.2 annotation):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Concept maps, timelines, or diagrams based on course readings;</li> <li>2. Simulations of actual job-related tasks;</li> <li>3. Field studies;</li> <li>5. Interview videos;</li> <li>6. Portfolios;</li> <li>7. Peer Teaching;</li> <li>8. Presentation;</li> <li>9. Practicing by doing.</li> </ol>

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## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *INSTRUCTOR REFLECTIONS*

Qualitative student data, and instructor reflections form the basis of post course redesign and implementation evaluation. Student course evaluation comments, while not

substantive, were positive in relation to the course organization. During the implementation of the course, student feedback was also positive in relation to the course flow and organization.

In embarking on the Gold Review Process, the Course Instructor acknowledged minimal experience in aligning course objectives, activities and assessments. The Gold Review Process provided guidance in aligning these course components. The reorganization of the course, per the Gold Review Process and Quality Matters standards, facilitated a standard design for the course on a weekly basis. Weekly components (Objectives, Assignments, Reading and Activities) were organized into weekly modules with a consistent design and structure. The realignment of the course pulled all the course components together permitting ease of navigation for the students.

The redesign provided students with easier to follow instructions, and with a consistent flow to the course among modules. Students were no longer bogged down in looking for specific course components; there was little time devoted to re-orientating navigation as the course evolved. As a result of the Gold Review Process, students were provided with a course structure that left little guess work in navigation; students knew exactly where to go to retrieve course components, and materials providing clarification of expectations.

The Instructor noted a decrease in student e-mail and other correspondence as a result of the Gold Review Process. This permitted more time to engage with students in the course discussion board, conferencing and the use of other communication tools. Previously, the Instructor was devoting time to providing students with course clarification, and formative restructuring of the course. Gold Review permitted the Instructor to focus on the course content and to share her expertise in regards to content with the students. While acknowledging that her expertise was not in best practices, the Gold Review process facilitated implementing the QM Standards/best practices.

The Instructor rated her satisfaction with the Gold Review Process at 100%. The impact of the Gold Review Process extended beyond the Sexuality in a Diverse Society course, and had a positive impact on the design and implementation of all of her courses, particularly online components of those courses. The instructor exited the process proud that the course is Gold Review endorsed and reflects best practices. The peer-reviewed collegial aspects of the Gold Review Process and the QM standards enhanced the instructor's sense of academic freedom.

### *COURSE EVALUATIONS QUANTITATIVE DATA*

A primary issue in the collection of course evaluation quantitative data was the low response rate on student course evaluations. Per institutional policy, the students were not required to complete the evaluation and the process was completed online. The course evaluation response rate (see table 3) was higher on average (32%) in four pre-Gold Review course administrations in comparison to two fully online administrations of the course (14.5% response rate), post Gold Review.

The lower student course response rate was consistent with low response rates historically noted with online evaluations (Avery et al. 2006; Dommeyer et al. 2004 ; Guder & Malliaris 2013). The University prescribed online course evaluation utilized for the *Sexuality in a Diverse Society* course was extensive in scope. The length of the instrument (30 quantitative questions, and fourth qualitative open response questions) and a lack of student buy-in to the importance of the evaluation data many have been factors in the low

response rate (Cone et al, 2018). For the purposes of this article, only questions from the online course evaluation related to online instruction are presented in table 3.

Table 3. Mean Data for Pre and Post Course Evaluation Data

	Before Course Redesign			After Course Redesign		
	Spring 2016 Section 1 30 students enrolled n = 6	Spring 2016 Section 2 35 students enrolled n = 15	Fall 2016 35 students enrolled n = 15	Spring 2017 31 students enrolled n = 6	Fall 2017 30 students enrolled n = 4	Winter 2017 25 students enrolled n=4
Student Response Rate	20%	43%	43%	19%	13%	16%
Student Course Criteria Evaluation						
Course was clearly organized	4.33	4.75	4.71	4.17	4.67	4.25
Learning objectives were met	4.60	4.75	4.86	4.0	4.25	4.25
I understood the requirements for course grading	4.33	4.75	4.86	4.3	4.25	4.75
Instructor explained concepts clearly	4.46	5.0	4.71	4.0	3.67	4.25
Instructor assigned grades according to stated criteria	4.67	5.0	4.71	3.5	4.0	4.75
Demonstrated knowledge about course subject matter	4.67	5.0	4.6	4.17	4.33	4.75
Average course medians for academic year (for all <i>Sexuality in a Diverse Society</i> course)	4.51	4.88	4.74	4.02	4.20	4.75

Given the limitations inherent in a low response rate, the *Sexuality in a Diverse Society* course evaluations from the online implementations of the course, present anecdotal (i.e. not generalizable) data. No significant pre-post data can be derived given the low post Gold Review course evaluation completion rate. Anecdotally, it can be observed (see table 3) that on a Likert Scale of 0-5, all but one student evaluative criteria (both pre and post Gold Review) rating was between 4 and 5, with five being the highest and most desired rating. For those students who did complete the evaluation, their overall ratings for the course were very positive per University expectations.

### *COURSE EVALUATIONS: STUDENT REFLECTIONS*

The course evaluation provides prompts for students to address qualitative aspects of the course. When prompted, “what did you like about the course?”, post Gold Review positive student responses included:

- Straight forwards assignments
- Understandable amount of work for an accelerated course.
- It was an online class that was taught very well.
- All of the assignments were explained clearly with reoccurring due dates so you were never guessing what was next.
- This was a new subject for me. I really enjoyed learning about such an important part of the human mind and body.
- This has been one of my favorite courses throughout my college career.
- I learned so much and actually grown in personal life and I never had that experience in a course.
- I love how the course was set up and more about engaging and writing and really learning than just memorizing.

Once student noted liking “nothing” about the course. In addressing what could be improved about the course, one student noted having “no constructive criticism other than the price of text”, while another student commented that the clarity of two required essays could be improved. While this anecdotal data yields positive results, the low student response rate on the student evaluations findings drive the need for securing further course evaluation feedback in potential future implementations of the online course, though several barriers/challenges may prevent the continued implementation of the course in an online format.

### *ONGOING OBSERVATIONS AND CHALLENGES*

Post Gold Review and course implementation, the following challenges were identified in sustaining offering the *Sexuality in a Diverse Society* course online. Maintaining a sense of community was achieved in limiting enrollment in the online sections to 30 or fewer students. Going forward enrollment numbers will closer approximate 40 students. This increase in enrollment may negatively impact maintaining the sense of community. It was noted in the final Gold Review by the Peer Reviewers and the Instructional Designers that course enrollment of 40 students per section would inhibit or prohibited the implementation of the Gold Review recommendations. Maintaining flexibility was key, while keeping the course accessible. Too much standardization of courses may limit academic freedom.

As a teaching institution, faculty are primarily tasked with teaching 7-8 course units per year, while conducting research and performing service. Teaching workload and large class size has deterred online offerings of the course Post-Gold Review. Only two online sections of the course were implemented post Gold Review.

The Gold Review process promoted the flexibility to redesign without limiting academic freedom. The Gold Review team members involved in the redesign of the *Sexuality in a Diverse Society* served as early adopters (Rogers, 2003) in the transformation of Towson University face-to-face courses to online learning environments. Institutional and cultural changes must be addressed to meet the increased consumer demand for online learning. Kohler et al. (2004) identified additional challenges to the adoption and growth of online instruction that have limited the further dissemination of the Gold Review Process and online course offerings. These challenges included:

- Faculty members' reluctance to change their medium of teaching to a technology-based environment, and a discomfort in using technology.
- A lack of institutional resources or time to promote attitudinal change towards online learning.
- Given high teaching loads, faculty have limited time to devote to learning new technologies.
- Limited key opinion leaders have served as online pedagogical role models for less experienced faculty.

The Gold Review and Quality Matters processes function well when time and resources are allocated.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FIELD**

The primary challenges encountered in the Gold Review Process for the *Sexuality in a Diverse Society* course were time dedicated to the Gold Review Process, and incentivizing other faculty to pursue implementation of the Gold Review course. Incentives for further faculty participation are needed. Insight can be provided by examining incentives offered by institutions that provide online learning instruction. Herman (2013) noted that 70% of higher education institutions provided incentives for online instruction, but the support is variable. Successful incentives for motivating faculty to participate in online course design, review and instruction have included:

- Creating a sense of responsibility for involvement (Gautreau, 2011)
- Providing stipends (Gautreau, 2011; Hainline, Gaines, Feather, Padilla & Terry, 2010)
- Providing release time (Hainline, Gaines, Feather, Padilla, & Terry, 2010)
- Creating faculty mentoring models (Alvarez, Blair, Monske & Wolf, 2005; Barczyk, Buckenmeyer, Feldman & Hixon, 2011).

## **CONCLUSION**

Initiating a course redesign is not about challenging or changing one's teaching style or pedagogy. Rather, the Gold Review and Quality Matters processes are about teaching in a manner, through alignment, that generates the strongest learning environment for students. Many university instructors are hired for their content expertise and educational backgrounds. Few instructors in the health sciences and related fields have formal training in course design for online instruction. The Gold Review process is not about evaluating the instructor, but rather about evaluating the course itself. The process ensures that students are offered a rich online educational experience, intended to foster academic success. As higher education institutions reallocate resources, time, and expertise to online course design and implementation, quality assurance processes like Gold Review and Quality Matters, will facilitate the design of courses that reflect sound pedagogy, course alignment and accessibility.

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