

St. Cloud Technical & Community College's Quality Assurances for Online Teaching & Learning

The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Strategic Plan: *Designing the Future*, Goal 2:3 guide institutions to “provide multiple efficient and effective delivery options for educational programs and student services.” With that goal in mind, Minnesota Online has created a framework for all 32 institutions to “ensure the quality of online courses” and to “ensure that all faculty interested in teaching online are prepared and supported to teach online. Reference to the Online Learning Action Plan can be found at [MnScu Academic Project Site](#).

System wide targets are also set by the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board of Trustees in relationship to *Designing the Future*. In order to achieve high-quality learning through a commitment to academic excellence and accountability, a system wide target to provide 25% of all courses online was set. St. Cloud Technical and Community College acknowledges the required goal in the FY2011 SCTCC Institutional Work Plan. As an Action Plan initiative, SCTCC states that it will implement the Quality Matters Process by using a tiered approach to Quality Matters (Goal 2:3). The work plan can be found in the eSystems Portfolio document repository at [SCTCC Systems eFolio](#).

SCTCC promotes learner engagement and success through quality online course development and instruction by providing faculty resources and the Quality Matters guidelines. Support from [Minnesota Online](#) and a grant from Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (CTL) in 2010 provided St. Cloud Technical and Community College the opportunity to engage online faculty in national staff development activities and training to expand quality assurances for online learning for SCTCC's students. This project set the stage to support a campus wide approach to quality assurance for online learning. The following opportunities & benefits for sustainability include:

- Approved course/faculty retention at SCTCC
- Faculty expertise shared throughout the institution, system, and nation
- Faculty work showcased through CTL brown bag lunches, In Service presentations, etc.
- Created “testimonials” regarding the professional value of completing the QM process
- Improved student learning outcomes and retention
- Adoption of a systematic and comprehensive continuous quality assurance process that includes faculty training, course development, and course revisions that are aligned with accreditation standards
- Incorporation of new technologies and research findings
- Opportunity to engage in benchmarking activities with peer institutions
- Ongoing faculty professional development
- Increased flexibility, creativity, and divergent thinking
- Increased efficiency in using institutional resources

Sustainability & Institutional Support for Online Teaching & Learning

In every opportunity the Office for Institutional Sustainability will look for ways to embrace serving faculty & staff in accessing training, support, and resources to enhance online teaching and learning. The need for funding includes such items as; subscription costs & conference fees, faculty and staff training, national peer review fees, etc. The following are *only suggested options* for obtaining funding:

1. Professional Development Funds
2. Institutional funding set aside for special initiatives tied to College Work Plan
3. Department or Division funds set aside for QM work
4. Use of the Online Differential funds
6. Perkins funds for technical courses
7. Center of Excellence grant in energy program funds
8. Health grant dollars for health program faculty
9. Minnesota Online (Seats available FY2011)

Best Practice Resources, Training & Support

SCTCC has identified and has made available to faculty the following resources and best practices in preparation for teaching and learning online.

- ✓ ***Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Offers an Online Training Course - Elements for Quality Online Teaching & Learning***

The *Elements for Quality Online Teaching & Learning* course is a collaborative effort between faculty and administrators from the Center for Teaching & Learning, Minnesota Online, and institutions within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system. Teaching online requires mastery of a course management system; an understanding of online teaching skills, strategies, and best practices; and skill in using any additional software or Web-based tools.

The course is self-paced and includes many activities and resources that you are encouraged to complete and apply as you develop competencies that are effective in online education. This collaborative course is built around seven (7) modules that are aligned with a set of five (5) competency role categories adapted from the University of Illinois Network's Online Teacher Competencies and adopted by the Minnesota Online Council.

Faculty are strongly encouraged to complete this course prior to developing online courses or teaching online.

✓ **Online Tutorials, Videos, and Templates**

Knowing where to locate helpful resources and understanding current practices on SCTCC's campus is essential to the success of faculty teaching online courses. Such common SCTCC tools, such as; videos, tutorials, the Welcome Template and the Syllabus template can be located on the SCTCC web site. Resources to enable the faculty to design a quality course is available at [eTeaching at SCTCC - Course Design](#).

✓ ***Regional/Local Quality Matters Training***

To ensure quality of online courses and teaching, collaborative opportunities with Minnesota Online, Regional Centers, and various local entities will enable faculty and staff the opportunity of accessing training and resources to support teaching and learning.

✓ ***Preparation Time & Training Support for Creating a Course***

The college supports training and development with dedicated staff. A list of staff and trainers can be contacted for support at [eTeaching at SCTCC site](#).

Quality Matters: A National Perspective

SCTCC is a member of Quality Matters (QM) a nationally recognized, faculty-centered, peer review process since the Online Committee adopted the model in 2010. QM is designed to certify the quality of online courses and online components. [Colleges and universities across the country](#) use the tools in developing, maintaining and reviewing their online courses and in training their faculty.

The Quality Matters™ program (www.qmprogram.org) is a faculty-centered peer course review Quality Assurance process. Review criteria are linked to external standards; criteria and process are supported through instructional design principles; and the process is vetted by faculty experts. The goals of the program are to increase student retention, learning and satisfaction in online courses by implementing better course design. Quality Matters is sponsored by MarylandOnline and has been adopted by hundreds of higher education institutions across forty-two states, Canada, Australia and Bermuda. Quality Matters™ is:

Continuous

- The Quality Matters process is designed to ensure that all reviewed courses will eventually meet expectations.
- The process is integral to a continuous quality improvement process.

Centered

- On research - the development of the rubric is based in national standards of best practice, the research literature, and instructional design principles.
- On student learning - the rubric and process are designed to promote student learning.

- On quality - the review sets a quality goal at the 85% level or better (courses do not have to be perfect but better than good enough).

Collegial

- A Quality Matters review is part of a faculty-driven, peer review process.
- The review process is intended to be diagnostic and collegial, not evaluative and judgmental.

Collaborative

- ✓ The review team consists of three experienced online instructors as reviewers along with the course faculty developer.

SCTCC Quality Matters Process

Recommended by the Online Committee, SCTCC endorses the Quality Matters Process. Unique to St. Cloud Technical and Community College the process follows a three tiered approach for assuring quality for online courses.

Tier 1: Online Course Readiness Self Assessment Tool

SCTCC provides an Online Course Readiness Self Assessment Tool. (Attachment A) Recommended by the Online Committee, it provides all faculty a checklist of specific elements to ensure quality in the design of online courses and will be seen, used, and retained only by the instructor. This checklist is for online course preparation and self-evaluation and evaluates only organization and structures, not course content, as courses already comply with curriculum, department, and institutional quality standards.

The model is based upon several sources including the Maryland Online Quality Matters rubric designed under a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) through the U.S. Department of Education, Metropolitan State University, MnSCU Office of the Chancellor, and instructors and online learning staff at the St. Cloud Technical and Community College. An asterisk (*) means that the language has been changed from the Quality Matters standard.

The Online Course Readiness Tool is located at [SCTCC Tools and Templates for eTeaching](#).

At every opportunity, SCTCC will provide Quality Matters training; such as “Build Your Own Course” & “Improving Your Online Course” for faculty through various means; state wide, regional, and locally offered workshops and courses. These workshops/courses provide a framework to improve the quality of online courses and work toward developing a course improvement plan.

Tier 2: Preparing for a Course Review

SCTCC online faculty may explore various frameworks to improve the quality of their online courses through an internal “*collegial review process*”. Course reviews are designed for mature online or hybrid courses that have been taught at least one semester

previous to the review. The internal/institutional peer review process may include three team members (3 faculty or 2 faculty and 1 design expert) and it usually takes a three week timeframe.

The internal review process is supported by enrolling in a QM *Applying the QM Rubric* course where faculty employ best practices in online courses. Online faculty who are interested in taking a course should contact the Director of Online Learning for an available “seat”.

Tier 3: Quality Matters National Reviews & Beyond

Faculty who complete Tier 2 and would like to have their courses reviewed on a national level should contact the Director of Online Learning or Vice President for Institutional Sustainability to get the course in queue for a QM review. The process includes the following steps that are completed sequentially (Appendix B: Quality Matters Framework)

Pre-Review

- Submit a QM Course Review application. Quality Matters will review the application, will ask the course instructor to go online to fill out the Instructor Worksheet, and will then identify appropriate reviews for the review team.
- The instructor or institution representative must provide the review team with appropriate access to the course. (Please note that this information is not provided to Quality Matters). A SCTCC IT staff member sets up as “intern view” using QM ID and password. QM student is also enrolled for review purposes.

Review Period

- The review is scheduled for a 4-6 week review period, which includes approximately 3 weeks of actual review time in addition to pre- and post-review conference calls.
- Once the final report is drafted, the team chair will submit the final report and notify the instructor of the outcome.

Post-Review

- The instructor notifies QM of his intentions - to have the course recognized if it meets standards or to submit an amendment if it did not. The instructor is notified of the date the amendment is due (within 20 weeks of the start date of the course).
- The team chair reviews and approves the changes to the course.
- Once standards are met, Quality Matters recognition is provided to course developer and course is listed in the QM online registry.

The courses are promoted on the Quality Matters website. Each instructor may use the “QM Recognized” logo” to identify that their course met the Quality Matters review standards by placing the QM logo on their course syllabus and/or other course documents.

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The Quality Matters recognition is for the course that is developed by the faculty member and that the course has met specific national quality standards.

Respectively submitted by,

SCTCC Online Committee and
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