

Rubric Clearly Describes Exemplary Online Instruction

In May 2002 a committee of faculty, staff, administrators, and students at California State University-Chico began meeting to develop a rubric for determining the quality of online instruction.

The committee met once a month in all-day sessions, had some lively discussions, and produced the “Rubric for Online Instruction,” which was approved by a committee of deans involved in online education and the faculty senate.

The rubric is not a checklist. “The committee didn’t want a checklist. They didn’t want something simple. They wanted a rubric that clearly describes what would make exemplary online instruction based on the criteria we came up with for [six] categories,” Sederberg says.

These categories include:

1. learner support and resources
2. online organization and design
3. instructional design and delivery
4. assessment and evaluation of student learning
5. innovative teaching with technology
6. faculty use of student feedback.

The rubric provides baseline, effective, and exemplary practices for each category. For example, in the category of Innovative Teaching with Technology, one of the criteria is as follows:

- Baseline: “Course uses Internet access and engages students in the learning process.”
- Effective: “Course optimizes Internet access and effectively engages students in the learning process.”
- Exemplary: “Course optimizes Internet access and effectively engages students in the learning process in a variety of ways throughout the course.”

Rubric uses

The Rubric for Online Instruction is used in three ways at CSU-Chico:

- evaluating online courses for

Exemplary Online Instruction Awards

- self-evaluation
- course development.

CSU-Chico’s Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) publicly recognizes outstanding instructors and advisers at its annual awards luncheon. This year CELT added a category for exemplary online instruction. The idea is to recognize high-quality instruction rather than encourage competition.

Partially online, blended, or totally online courses can be nominated for the awards. A committee looks at each course from both a designer’s and student’s perspective. The evaluation (using the Rubric) is done category by category rather than as a whole because all the categories may not apply to all courses.

While Sederberg is not sure how these awards will affect faculty rewards, the awards are signed and presented by the provost. “That carries weight, so we’re hoping that that will have a positive impact in each department — but we’re not sure yet.

“We’re hoping that it will now be something that will be worthy of affecting tenure, retention, and promotion. Those were issues for faculty on our campus because those that moved ahead with online education — the early adopters — weren’t necessarily supported and recognized. So we wanted to be sure there was a built-in recognition for the work they do,” Sederberg says.

For each award recipient, CELT produces a poster of screen shots to visibly display the exemplary work being done, with the hope that others can learn from these examples.

Other ways to use the rubric

Another use for the rubric is as a course design tool. Although Sederberg has not yet developed a workshop on using the rubric this way, one instructional technology staff member is using the rubric as she develops fully online

courses. Sederberg says the rubric has been helpful for this person because it provides concrete statements about what is exemplary.

Effects of the rubric

Use of the rubric has provided faculty from across campus with opportunities to share their online instruction ideas. The awards luncheon and the posters that illustrate exemplary online instruction will soon be supplemented by a website that provides screen shots of exemplary instruction in each of the six rubric categories. “I talk to a lot of faculty about the impact this has had on them and it’s kind of amazing because those who see what other folks have done say, ‘Gosh, it’s so nice to see how they did that. I can apply that to my course.

“So I have faculty coming into our lab starting the redesign process of their own courses based on what they’ve seen from others and from looking at the rubric.”

Sederberg is seeking to expand the rubric’s use. She received a grant from the Consortium for Academic Technology Staff to implement the rubric across the CSU system. “[The rubric] is scalable. It is sharable. It crosses platforms. [CSU-Chico] uses WebCT. Humboldt State uses Blackboard, and we’re evaluating some courses done in Blackboard with the same rubric, and there’s no problem with that.”

To view CSU-Chico’s Rubric for Online Instruction and examples of exemplary online instruction, visit www.csuchico.edu/celt/roi.

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