

**The University Senate of Michigan Technological University**  
**Proposal 28-18**  
**Establish a Policy on the Quality of Online Courses**

Submitted by: ~~the Office of the~~ Provost's Office & Online Quality Committee

**Rationale:** The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and the federal government have expectations regarding the quality of online courses and programs offered by an institution. The [HLC expects](#) its accredited members who offer distance education to follow guidelines from, or similar to, the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC). [Meeting these standards will also help ensure that our online courses and programs remain eligible for federal financial aid.](#) The Online Quality Committee,<sup>1</sup> working in conjunction with the Provost's Office, believes that meeting these expectations is also in the best interest of students enrolled in online offerings and provides the best opportunity to ensure that we, as a university, present our expertise in the best possible light and demonstrate our commitment to high quality education regardless of delivery method.

**Definitions:**

- Online course (from the HLC): Courses in which at least 75 percent of the instruction and interaction occurs via electronic communication, correspondence or equivalent mechanisms, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other.
- Instructor of Record: the faculty member who is responsible for teaching the course and the course content.
- Facilitator: person working under the supervision of the course instructor of record, helping teach and/or manage the course
- CTL: the William G. Jackson Center for Teaching and Learning at Michigan Technological University
- Peer Reviewer: a faculty or staff member who has been officially certified (as determined by the body supplying the adopted quality standards) to apply the online course quality standards.

**Scope:** The proposed policy ~~establishes concerns itself with~~ minimum qualifications for those engaged in instructing/facilitating online courses and evaluation of course structure.

The proposed review process is in no way intended to review or comment on the discipline-based content, ~~subject matter, or what is covered in a course and pedagogy of a course.~~ Instead the process is intended to ensure that the quality of [the design and delivery of course material and interactions online meets widely accepted and recognized standards for online](#)

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~~course quality~~online instruction is the same as our traditional courses and that it is effectively presented and accessible to online students - which is required by our accreditor.

# Policy Proposal

## 1. Qualifications

In addition to meeting the general faculty qualification requirements, online instructors and facilitators will need to:

- Demonstrate that they have ~~training been trained~~ in the development, delivery, and assessment of online courses. Examples of how this may be demonstrated include, but are not limited to:
  - successful completion of Michigan Tech's "Foundations of Online Teaching" course with the grade of a 'B' or better, OR
  - completion of an equivalent online teaching certification, training class, or program, OR
  - evidence of an equivalent combination of education and experience of teaching quality online courses
    - experience may be demonstrated by evidence such as, but not limited to: showing that previously taught courses meet adopted quality standards, having taught courses certified to meet well known quality standards or at another institution with similar quality policies, having received commendations for online teaching.
- AND, show proficiency in operating the course learning management system. Examples of how this may be demonstrated include, but are not limited to:
  - successful completion of ~~the CTL Learning's~~ Canvas Introductory Workshop series, OR
  - evidence of an equivalent combination of training and experience sufficient to provide adequate skill using the course learning management system as a teacher.

Requests for determining equivalencies will be directed to the provost's office and decisions will be made in consultation with the CTL. The CTL will maintain a list of previously accepted, equivalent, trainings/courses which may be used without further review by the provost's office.

## 2. Quality Standards

All online courses will be peer reviewed by appropriately trained and certified faculty and staff peer reviewers for adherence to currently recognized best-practices for online education. One official set of internationally recognized and widely adopted standards for the assurance of online course quality will be adopted and used university-wide.

Reviews will be limited to aspects such as online course structure and design. Reviews will not consider domain content which remains the purview of the instructor.

At a minimum, the review should address:

- Course design (including general ease of use)
- Clarity of expectations (both of the student and instructor/facilitator)
- Presence and assessment of learning objectives
- Course currency
- Course accessibility
- Availability of student support and resources (either directly articulated in the course or by providing students with directions on how to obtain support if needed)

## 2.1 Faculty Support

Upon request, direct assistance with course development or modification will be available from the CTL and trained peer reviewers. -The CTL can advise, support, and facilitate reviewer training. A rubric outlining the adopted quality standards will also be made available to assist with online course development.

## 2.2 Review Timing

Peer review will occur before an online course is offered for a second time. Reviews will be conducted in cooperation with the course instructor and/or designer by two peer reviewers appointed by the department chair or dean. A list of eligible reviewers will be available on the CTL website.

Online course review will be considered complete when standards have been met as determined by both -peer reviewers.

Reviews may be initiated at any time at the request of the instructor.

## 2.3 Timeline

All instructors and facilitators of existing online courses are expected to be qualified according section 1 of this policy within 12 months of adoption of this policy.

Existing online courses will need to be reviewed as outlined in Ssection 2 of this policy within 18 months of adoption of this policy, or before it is offered a third time, whichever option works best for the instructor.