

How Does My Online Course & Online Teaching Show Quality?

Darlene A. Smucny, Ph.D. | dsmucny@gmu.edu

Stearns Center for Teaching & Learning | Digital Learning | Provost Office | George Mason University

PURPOSE

To help Mason faculty and departments identify online quality, Stearns Center-Digital Learning has developed a self-assessment tool, *"How Does My Online Course Show Quality?"*

The Stearns Center encourages all Mason faculty who design and/or teach fully-online courses to use our self-assessment tool to identify areas of quality and to explore areas for improvement in their online courses and online teaching.

WHAT IS ONLINE QUALITY?

What does a quality online course look like?

What is quality online teaching?

The Stearns Center for Teaching & Learning is committed to supporting quality & excellence in online courses at Mason to meet (and exceed) research-based quality standards. The quality indicators in our self-assessment tool represent standards that are research-based and recognized by leading organizations for online quality (e.g., Online Learning Consortium and Quality Matters) [Figure 1].

The self-assessment we have developed allows faculty to identify evidence for quality in nine different categories for Online Course Quality (4 categories) and for Online Teaching & Learner Support Quality (5 categories) [Figure 2].

The tool provides a guided reflection for each category, starting with a description of quality indicators and a list of possible ways to demonstrate evidence of quality.

Faculty who currently teach online may use the self-assessment for process of continuous improvement of the quality their online courses and online teaching.

Faculty who are preparing to teach online may use the self-assessment for guidance about how to design, build, and teach quality online courses.

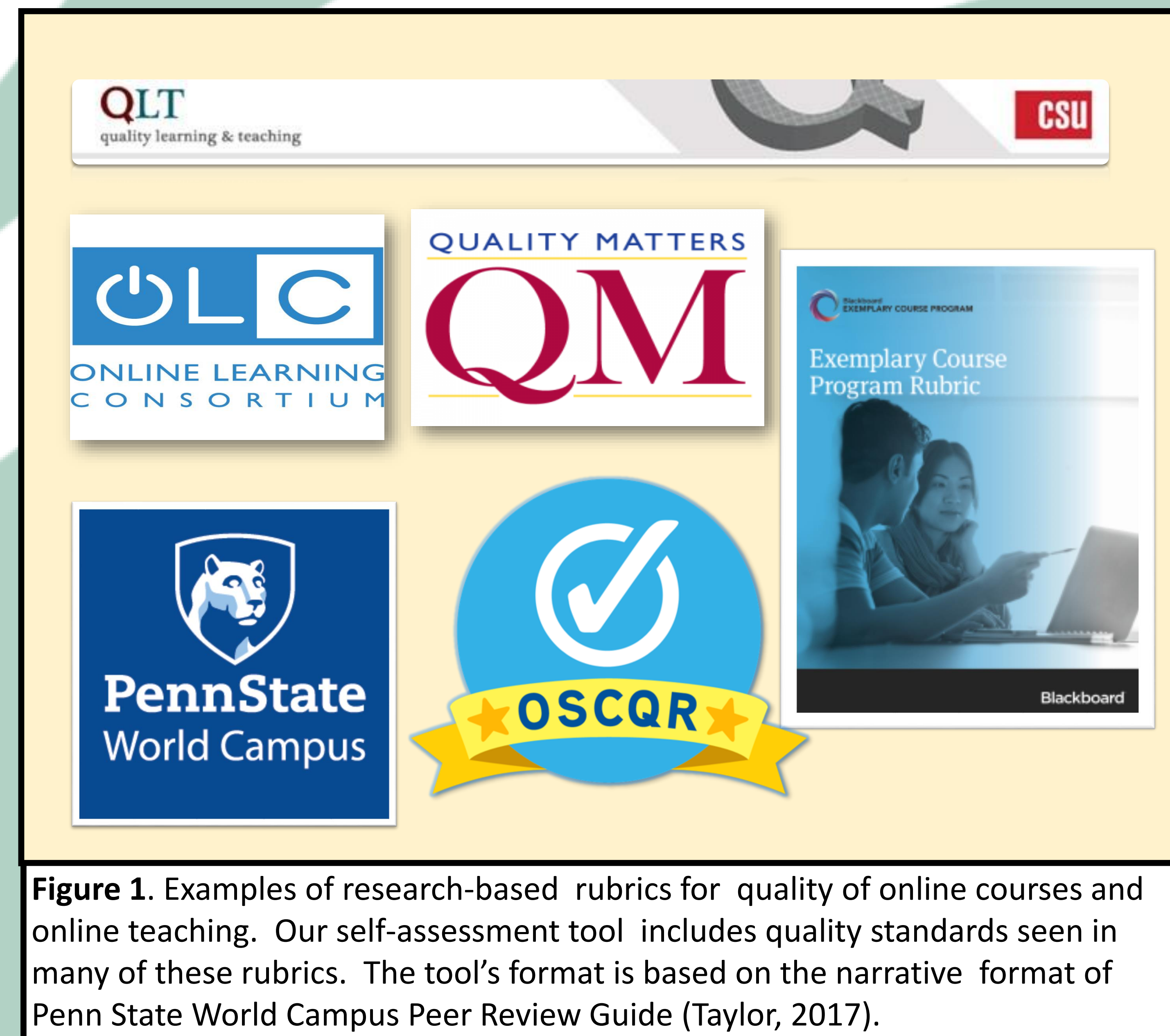


Figure 1. Examples of research-based rubrics for quality of online courses and online teaching. Our self-assessment tool includes quality standards seen in many of these rubrics. The tool's format is based on the narrative format of Penn State World Campus Peer Review Guide (Taylor, 2017).

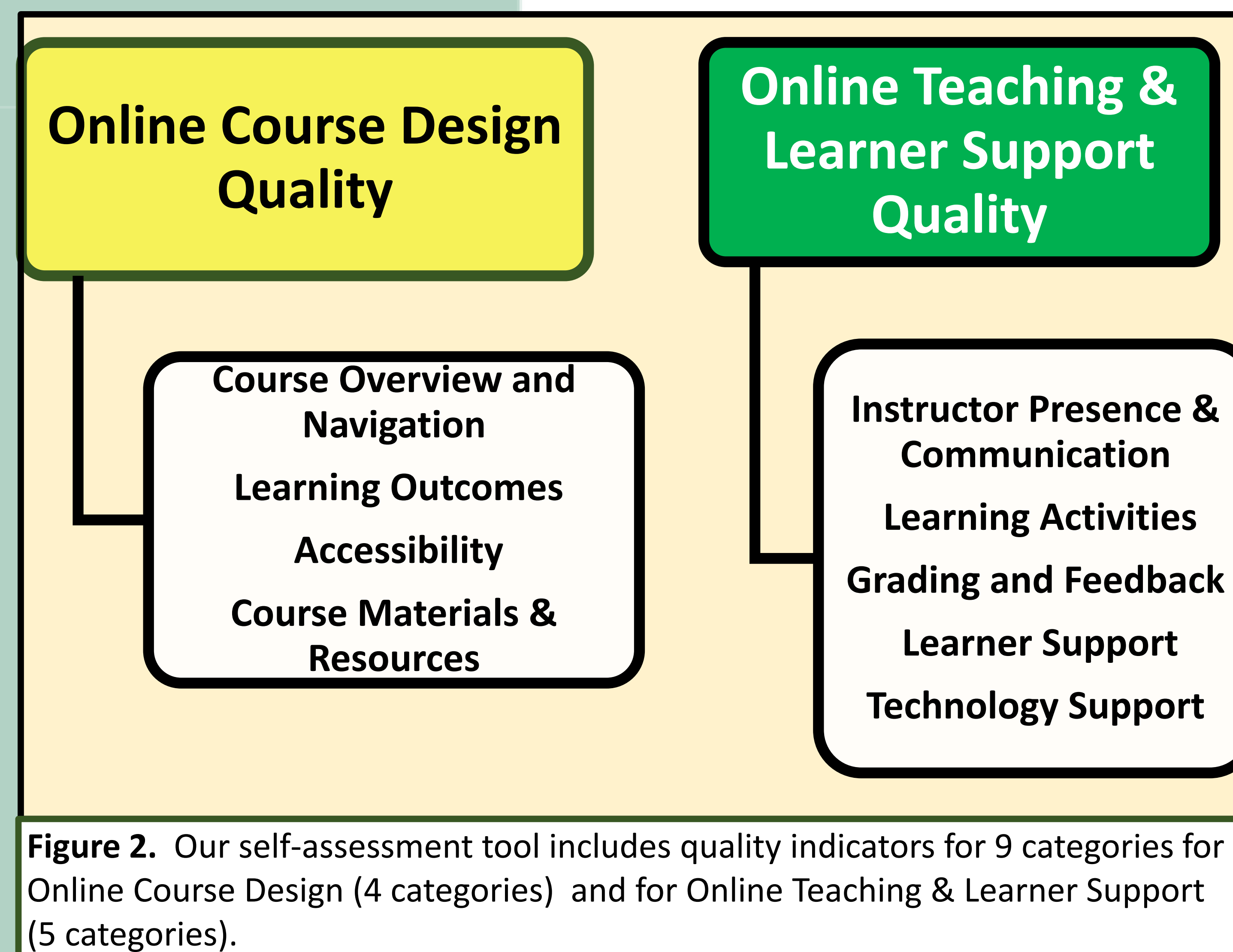


Figure 2. Our self-assessment tool includes quality indicators for 9 categories for Online Course Design (4 categories) and for Online Teaching & Learner Support (5 categories).

USING THE SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

The faculty member uses the tool to reflect on how the online course and teaching demonstrate quality, and how to improve or enhance quality before teaching the online course again.

A brief narrative is prepared for each of the 9 categories, describing the following information about quality:

- **Evidence in My Course:** What is the evidence for this quality indicator in my online course?
- **My Stand-Out Practice:** What is one practice that really stands out for demonstrating quality for this category in my course?
- **What I Would Like to Improve, Enhance, or Explore?:** Is there something that I would like to try to improve or enhance quality for this category for the next time I teach this online course?

ADDITIONAL USES

- **Focus on Specific Components or Categories:** The tool components may be used separately, e.g., Online Teaching & Learner Support may be examined for a faculty member teaching an already-developed online course.
- **Peer Review Tool:** The narrative review framework also is available in a format for use as a peer-review tool (e.g., for departments to review quality of online courses and online teaching).
- **Other Delivery Formats:** Components of the tool may be helpful to assess and reflect on the organization, clarity and teaching practices of any course, regardless of delivery format.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Stearns Center Team (Leadership Team & ID Team) for their comments and feedback on earlier drafts of this tool.

REFERENCES

Our tool is a derivative of "Peer Review Guide for Online Teaching at Penn State" by Ann H. Taylor, Dutton e-Education Institute, College of Earth and Mineral Sciences, The Pennsylvania State University (last revision June 23, 2017) used under Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share-Alike 4.0 International License.