Transitioning Graduate Courses From Synchronous to Hybrid While Meeting Quality Matters Standards for On-Line Education

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**Background:** Delivery methods for doctoral courses in nursing include face to face (F2F) and online synchronous (S), asynchronous (AS), and hybrid (S + AS). It was reported over 10 years ago that the effectiveness and quality of online instruction is what matters most to graduate nursing students (Huckstadt & Hayes, 2005). It has more recently been reported that hybrid course formats are linked to positive student learning outcomes with clinical graduate students and health professionals. These outcomes have included higher course grades, higher favorable course ratings, and enhanced knowledge for special topics like genetics (Kumrow, 2007; Wallen et al., 2011). In addition, it has been reported that student learning outcomes can be optimized by changing methods for content delivery (Simpson & Richards, 2015), incorporating new online learning activities (Guhde, 2010), giving opportunities for frequent student engagement, and effectively evaluating student knowledge. Hybrid designs blend synchronous sessions with asynchronous content to maximize achievement of learning outcomes. In seeking evidence for best practices for online learning, one method that can be used is Quality Matters (Newhouse, Buckley, Grant, & Idzik, 2013) which provides a structure for enhanced online teaching and learning. In Quality Matters, it is recommended that hybrid courses include; approximately 25-75% of face to face course, varied learning experiences during face to face sessions, portions of the course being mediated by technology, and learner ability to gain an understanding of the overall structure of the course and requirements online.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this presentation is to describe the process of using 8 general Quality Matters (QM) standards for expertise in online education, quality assurance, and evaluation to transform three doctoral courses from synchronous to hybrid. In addition, evaluation of the change in course delivery method will be presented using course evaluation data from students and faculty.

**Methods:** To achieve adherence to QM, which details strategies for excellence in online learning, the course faculty worked to achieve competence in the following 8 QM areas: overall course design must be evident when the course begins, objectives and competencies must be measurable and mapped to weekly content, assessments must appropriately evaluate student progress, activities must facilitate student engagement, technology must enable student success, materials must include links to student support services, and overall course design must reflect a commitment to accessibility and usability for all learners. Two doctoral level DNP courses, Evidence-based
Research Methods and Nursing Informatics, and one PhD course, Quantitative Methods were being delivered in a synchronous format using a live classroom platform. The courses were redesigned with a focus on volume restricted recorded lectures, online student self-learning activities which included formative assessments of understanding of course material, increased time for students to receive meaningful feedback, and multiple attempts for completion of summative assessments.

**Findings:** In all three courses, student evaluations of instruction (SEI) demonstrated overall positive student experience with highest evaluation scores (mean > 4.4) in overall course quality, overall teaching effectiveness, emphasis of conceptual understanding, critical thinking and fair grading. For the Evidence-Based Research Course, evaluations included comments that recordings were helpful to learning, multiple attempts at testing alleviated student stress, use of online materials was engaging and informative, and that the class was very well organized. In the Nursing Informatics Course, comments on the SEI recognized excellence in recorded lectures, timeliness of feedback from professors, and effective integration of readings, lectures, and discussions. The SEI scores for the course on Quantitative methods, achieved a mean of 5 in all areas which is the highest overall ranking. In this course, students commented on the frequent and constructive feedback, and on methods for applying course materials to enhance learning. Changes in the PhD course resulted in student comments stating that enhanced flexibility for student time resulted in higher productivity in course assignments which is important as the assignments were designed to be specific to student research interests, and foundational to new scholarly programs of research. Faculty favored the hybrid format and recommended that the hybrid format be continued.

**Recommendations:** Graduate nursing faculty who are working to transition a synchronous course to hybrid should consider the use of QM standards. While synchronous courses have been viewed as not flexible for graduate professionals who are students, hybrid courses offer an alternative and still provide necessary student engagement with faculty. Incorporating evidence about what works for specific student populations in specific academic programs provides a more student-centered approach and can lead to improved course outcomes for learners and faculty. As graduate nursing programs continue to develop, it is key that faculty disseminate outcomes associated with novel teaching strategies to fill the gaps in the knowledge base for evidence-based teaching.

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**Keywords:**
Course Design, Online Teaching Excellence and Student-Centered Learning

**References:**
Abstract Summary:
This presentation includes information about strategies to transform synchronous courses to hybrid courses which blend synchronous and asynchronous content. Information will include suggestions for meeting the 8 general Quality Matters (QM) standards for expertise in online education, quality assurance, and evaluation.

Content Outline:
1. Synchronous versus Hybrid Design
   1. Definitions of Synchronous and Hybrid Design
2. Brief overview of Learning outcomes associated with synchronous versus hybrid designs
3. Description of how Student Centered Learning can be optimized by examining and/or changing course delivery methods
2. Three Course Examples
   1. Changes in Evidence-Based Research Methods in Nursing
      1. Recorded asynchronous lectures
      2. Weekly Synchronous Discussions
      3. Test Myself Activities online
   2. Changes in Nursing Informatics
      1. Volume restricted recorded lectures
      2. Online learning activities
      3. Frequency of Student Engagement
   3. Changes in Quantitative Methods
      1. Use of asynchronous activities
      2. Structured synchronous discussions
      3. Use of Writing to Evaluate Student Learning
3. Impact on Student Evaluations
   1. Overall course quality
   2. Emphasis on Conceptual understanding
   3. Comments on Critical Thinking
4. Fair grading
4. Recommendations
1. Use of QM standards enhanced course quality and ease of transition
2. Enhanced student-centered approach led to improved peer and student evaluations
3. Use of Pedagogical evidence to transition a course leads to a course structure valued by learners

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expertise in online course design, in particular to asynchronous course delivery methods.