



Calhoun: The NPS Institutional Archive
DSpace Repository

News Center

News Articles Collection

2022-02-02

NPS Office of Teaching and Learning Pilots Distance Learning Quality Initiative

Schehl, Matthew

Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey California

<http://hdl.handle.net/10945/68670>

This publication is a work of the U.S. Government as defined in Title 17, United States Code, Section 101. Copyright protection is not available for this work in the United States.

Downloaded from NPS Archive: Calhoun



Calhoun is the Naval Postgraduate School's public access digital repository for research materials and institutional publications created by the NPS community. Calhoun is named for Professor of Mathematics Guy K. Calhoun, NPS's first appointed -- and published -- scholarly author.

Dudley Knox Library / Naval Postgraduate School
411 Dyer Road / 1 University Circle
Monterey, California USA 93943

<http://www.nps.edu/library>

NPS Office of Teaching and Learning Pilots Distance Learning Quality Initiative

nps.edu/-/nps-office-of-teaching-and-learning-pilots-distance-learning-quality-initiative

Matthew Schehl | February 2, 2022



Participants in phase one of the Distance Learning Quality Initiative (DLQI) discuss best practices and continuous improvements during weekly Zoom sessions. Led by the NPS Office of Teaching and Learning, DLQI introduced modular standards of best practices for course development, instruction and application of technology to enhance DL programs across campus.

This Fall, the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) successfully completed a two-year collaborative effort to take Distance Learning (DL) to the next level of quality in meeting students' emerging needs.

The **Teaching and Learning Commons'** (TLC) **Distance Learning Quality Initiative** (DLQI), led by the Office of Teaching and Learning (OTL), introduced modular standards of best practices for course development, instruction and the application of technologies to enhance DL programs throughout the NPS campus.

“What I like about these quality standards is that they enable those engaged in online instruction to better communicate, interact and engage with students,” said Ali Rodgers, Director of Faculty Development and the Office of Teaching and Learning. “How do you monitor learning and instruction in terms of collaboration, communication and feedback in a web-based environment? Do you have the correct technological resources and funding? Do you have sufficient support staff?”

“DLQI provides that,” Rodgers added.

NPS has a solid history of providing DL education stretching back more than two decades. Yet even the most experienced of educators often find it challenging and time-consuming to create effective and engaging learning experiences for their students.

“We’re looking to expand our DL presence to offer more online, and that entails how we develop and design cohesive learning experiences across a set of courses,” Rodgers observed. “Quality standards provide a really good framework to support quality learning experiences.”

Supported by the **Graduate Education Advancement Center**, the OTL set out in September 2019 to begin formulating DLQI.

The project was conceived in two phases. The first phase would introduce best practices for course development, instruction and the application of presentation, communication and collaborative technologies to enhance DL programs. Phase two, designed for program managers and academic associates, would introduce a systematic needs assessment and program review process.

“The impetus for DLQI was really our desire for continuous improvement of the faculty here,” noted Dennis Lester, Director of Graduate Education Advancement and Associate Provost for Graduate Education at NPS. “We recognized that this was an area the TLC could enhance and improve upon to meet the growing emphasis on DL and the anticipated future of NPS in a more flexible way.”

Then COVID hit. Overnight, the project became an absolute exigency and the TLC **swung into action**.

“In response to the rapid switch from resident to DL, the TLC is supporting learning-focused communities of practice and is providing leadership and resources as NPS goes fully all-in and online,” Ralucca Gera, then TLC director and Associate Provost for Graduate Education, commented at the time.

In consultation with NPS faculty and staff, the GEAC researched exemplary, research-based DL practices used at leading educational institutions throughout the world to meet standards for evaluation and accreditation as well as legal requirements for accessibility. It grouped the

most important elements into a **quality standards checklist** of eight categories faculty could reference.

This included course preparation, content organization, learning outcomes and assessment, student engagement, course website design and navigation, teaching and learning technology, use of media and accessibility. The group also compiled these in a **DLQI handbook** for reference.

“Our goal was to create a set of guidelines that would be comprehensive enough to include the features that most contribute to student success, but flexible enough to accommodate a wide variety of learner needs, program goals, technology tools and teaching styles,” Lester recalled. “We had to do an immediate transition, and I was particularly impressed that people just rolled up their sleeves to figure out how to make this happen.”

The group enlisted a nominated cadre of faculty to formally test the guidelines out for the **first phase** of the project.

From March through September of 2020, seven faculty members from a broad swath of academic disciplines utilized the checklist as they swung into mandatory DL instruction, designed, and taught their courses. They then provided frank feedback on what worked, and what didn't.

“The pilot allowed faculty to assess their courses using quality standards and to identify next steps to enhance learning and instruction,” Rodgers said. “Everybody had a common experience using the standards, which was the intention of the program.”

“As I look back on the experience, I think we got some really good data from our faculty,” she continued. “I think the faculty recognized the value and felt good knowing that these quality standards exist and that they're doable.”

Armed with this input, the OTL then implemented the **second phase** of the project.

From May through September 2021, phase two piloted a standards-based and systematic needs assessment and review of degree and certificate programs by select academic teams. In doing so, it looked at integrating and embedding educational technologies to achieve learner outcomes and leveraged some of the aggregate principles of adult learners to allow for choice and self-pacing as a student moves throughout a curriculum.

“This provided opportunities for people to talk about learner needs and to share ideas about what we could and should be doing with our students ... Specifically, what our students are capable of doing on their own versus things that need a lot of guidance and informal coaching,” Rodgers said.

“When I think back, the standards introduced in DLQI represented different tiles in a course mosaic that we were able to apply to create a nice template and advance discussions about the effectiveness of our course design and the best use of instructional time,” she continued. “That’s definitely a silver lining of the storm cloud [of COVID] that we were operating under.”

As in-person classes resume, Rodgers and Lester hope to continue to roll out the DLQI program and expose more faculty to it, enabling them to consider how offering some or all of their coursework as a DL component might most benefit their students.

“I’ve got a feeling that with these standards and best practices we’ve come up with, real outcomes will show the merit in implementing them,” Lester said. “I think that’s where we’ll see the TLC moving soon.”

For more information about NPS’ Teaching and Learning Commons, and to review the **2021 TLC Annual Year in Review**, visit the **TLC website**.