



ACADEMIC AFFAIRS GUIDELINES

Section 5:	Course Instruction and Delivery	
Title:	Online Course Quality Assurance Guidelines	
Number (Current Format)	Number (Prior Format)	Date Last Revised
5.9	N/A	02/2022
Reference:	AAC Guideline 5.5 – Delivery Method Code Guidelines AAC Guideline 5.8 – System-Wide Quality Assurance Rubric	
Related Form(s):		

1. Policy Overview

1.1. The purpose of this document is to unify various established guidelines and directives—as spelled out in previous guidelines, agenda items, and meeting notes—from AAC, as well as established practices covering the quality assurance (QA) review process for online courses (i.e., those with the method code of 015 or 018, per [AAC Guideline 5.5](#)) delivered by BOR institutions.

1.2. Background

As part of the approval for the BOR to offer courses and programs online without HLC approval for each, HLC recommended that the BOR adopt a QA review process for its online courses¹, per the “Best Practices of Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs,” as established by HLC². To satisfy this recommendation, in 2006 the BOR adopted the Quality Matters Inter-Institutional Quality Assurance in Online Learning rubric and process³.

As part of this adoption, AAC also developed both an institutional and system review process⁴. These are discussed in greater detail in later sections of these guidelines. The BOR ultimately opted to not subscribe to Quality Matters, but continued to use the rubric (a.k.a., the FIPSE rubric, because it was developed as part of a DOE FIPSE grant, and thus free available for institutions to adopt) until 2008. At that point, some BOR institutions felt the rubric needed to be updated, so instructional design representatives from DSU, SDSU, and USD modified and revised the Quality Matters rubric yielding the [2008/2009 rubric](#). In the ensuing years, AAC stopped conducting system-level

¹ pg. 3: https://www.sdbor.edu/administrative-offices/academics/aac/Documents/10-07AAC_minutes_retreat_000.pdf

² pg. 4: https://www.sdbor.edu/administrative-offices/academics/aac/Documents/05-09AAC_5.A_QA_task_force_recommendation.pdf

³ pg. 2: https://www.sdbor.edu/administrative-offices/academics/aac/Documents/2006-02-AAC/02-06AAC_11.E_qa_process_revisions.pdf

⁴ pg. 3: *ibid.*

reviews, but assumed that institutional reviews were still taking place using the 2008/2009 rubric.

In 2015, due to concerns about varying quality of online courses, AAC formed a subcommittee to evaluate and revise the system rubric, and to reestablish a system-level review process targeting courses with the largest enrollments. Once this committee began its work, it became clear that not all of the BOR institutions were conducting regular reviews of their online courses, per the previously established process, and others had developed institution-specific rubrics. Because of this, much of the subcommittee's focus was on bringing all institutions back into the process under a unified system rubric that the subcommittee developed from the 2008/2009 system rubric. Portions of other widely-adopted rubrics, as well as research from EDUCAUSE, IDEA, etc., were also consulted and incorporated in the revised system rubric as part of this process, yielding the [2015 rubric](#).

Two years later, the subcommittee reassembled to further revise the 2015 rubric (see AAC Guideline 5.8 for the most up-to-date version) and to perform system-level reviews for 2018SP courses. The subcommittee also developed a set of baselines to help facilitate this review process. Moving forward, the subcommittee has been tasked by AAC to reassemble on an annual basis to revise the rubric, as needed, and to conduct system level reviews per the process established in this document.

2. Institutional QA Process

- 2.1. Institutions are responsible for reviewing all courses offered online—those with the method code of 015 or 018, per [AAC Guideline 5.5](#)—prior to offering, using the system rubric defined in AAC Guideline 5.8. Faculty will need to comply with this QA process per [BOR Policy 4.1](#), Section 3.3.
- 2.2. Per [AAC Guideline 5.8](#), section 1.2, institutions are free to augment or supplement this rubric with additional standards, and/or increase the rigor for standards (e.g., change “recommended” standards to “required,” add additional expectations for satisfying a standard, etc.) or expand this QA process (e.g., require additional training, review courses outside of the scope of the review types in section 2.3, etc.).
- 2.3. Regarding the institutional online course review process, the system has established three types of reviews:

2.3.1. New Online Course Review⁵

Any course not previously offered online must be reviewed prior to offering.

2.3.2. New Instructor Review⁶

When an instructor, who has not previously taught online for a BOR institution, is assigned to an existing online course, it should be reviewed prior to offering to ensure compliance with the system QA rubric.

⁵ pg. 3, section 6: https://www.sdbor.edu/administrative-offices/academics/aac/Documents/2006-02-AAC/02-06AAC_11.E_qa_process_revisions.pdf

⁶ pg. 3, section 7: *ibid*

2.3.3. Three-year Review^{7,8}

All online courses are assigned a future three-year review date based on the date of initial or repeat review. For example, a course reviewed in 2018SP would be scheduled to be reviewed before the end of the 2021SP term. If the course is on an irregular rotation, or not offered in the term scheduled for the three-year review, it should be reviewed the next time it is offered.

- 2.4. The tracking and coordination of these reviews is the responsibility of the institution, and evidence of these QA reviews shall be maintained and made available to system reviewers when the course is selected for a system level review. It is the institution's responsibility to ensure that suggested improvements from these institutional reviews have been made to the course⁹.
- 2.5. Institutions are also responsible for training all instructors in the QA process prior to instructing online for the first time. The exact nature and content of the training process for instructors is at the discretion of the institutions, but should cover the system rubric and best practices contained therein.

3. System-Level QA Process

- 3.1. Online courses from each institution will be reviewed at the system level on an periodic basis.

The selection of these courses and schedule of the review process will be determined by AAC based on system priorities. In general, though, this review process will involve randomly-selected courses from each institution that will be reviewed against the BOR QA rubric—outlined in AAC Guideline 5.8—by a team of instructional design personnel and/or faculty assembled by AAC.

- 3.2. Once the reviews have been completed, the review team will provide a summary report to AAC for its evaluation.

4. QA Rubric Review and Revision

- 4.1. The QA rubric defined in AAC Guideline 5.8 should be periodically reviewed and revised, if necessary, to ensure that it continues to represent the best practices in delivering online courses, and should incorporate evidence-based best practices implemented by BOR institutions and/or outlined in the pertinent literature.

SOURCE:

May 2018 AAC; November 2018 (Clerical); AAC October 2018; September 2019 (Clerical); AAC November 2020 (Clerical); AAC February 2022.

⁷ pg. 3, section 9: https://www.sdbor.edu/administrative-offices/academics/aac/Documents/2006-02-AAC/02-06AAC_11.E_qa_process_revisions.pdf

⁸ pg. 5: https://www.sdbor.edu/administrative-offices/academics/aac/Documents/2009-02-AAC/02-09AAC_5.D_QA_policy-process.pdf

⁹ pg. 5: *ibid.*