COTO starts online course review team

Jason Hancock, Senior Instructor, English, and Aurora Adney, Distance Education Technical Specialist, recently completed their training as Quality Matters Course Reviewers. Patty Weak, Associate Professor and Adjunct Faculty Coordinator, also recently began the training. The three will be COTO’s first internal online course reviewers who will offer peer review for online courses to ensure adherence to Quality Matters (QM) standards.

Quality Matters standards, the base of Title III’s commitment to strengthening COTO’s online courses, calls for design and content quality, consistency, and a high degree of instructor presence. Certification as QM Higher Ed Peer Reviewer includes 5 weeks of intensive training in the QM course review method, which is funded by the Title III grant.

Once an online class is developed or revised by a QM certified instructor, it will undergo evaluation by the College’s peer reviewers. Upon receiving approval from the campus reviewers, the course will be submitted for certification by QM external reviewers. Ultimately, all online courses will meet these standards and earn QM certification.

“The course review process is an important part of COTO’s Title III grant program and keeps with the institution’s focus on students,” said Chris Robbins, Title III Project Director. QM standards call for a unified structure which provides students with a familiar online learning environment from course to course, eliminating time needed to learn different navigation expectations for each course.

LiveChat connects students with answers

LiveChat is a service made available to students and potential students by the Title III grant. Upon visiting the COTO website, visitors may engage LiveChat to ask a question. The service is manned from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. by staff from Admissions, the COTO Library, Financial Aid, Student Affairs, Technical Support, and Distance Education. After hours, LiveChat informs visitors that their question will be answered by email, and the response is sent no later than the next morning. Since starting LiveChat in September 2017, 87 students or potential students have been assisted.
Several COTO faculty and staff members recently participated in training for Read & Write Gold. Those attending the Windows 11.5 version training were **Aurora Adney**, Distance Education Technical Specialist; **Allison Malone**, Director, Learning Resources; **Johnnie Mitchell**, Director, Career Pathways; **Randy Morris**, Director, Adult Education; **Keesha Johnson**, Director, Enrollment Management; **Janet Hunt**, Director of Student Success; **Dr. Kim Armstrong**, Vice President, Student Affairs; and **Ronna Pennington**, Distance Ed Support Specialist. **Tyler Priddy**, TRIO Tutor Coordinator, completed training via video. (If you’re interested in the training video, contact Pennington at ext. 1196.)

IT has made the Read & Write Gold program available on the student-use computers in the G203 computer lab and library. **Carlos Miller**, Director, IT, looked for the best option to make take-home versions of the accessibility program available for student download on home computers. IT’s **Court Nichols** completed the take-home versions which are now available to students. **Dr. Armstrong** notified students by email of the program’s availability.

Distance Ed now has a webpage thanks to IT and **Vickie Walker**, IT Tech Support. Vickie continues working with Title III on revisions to the webpage.

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**8 tips to make your class materials accessible**

Quality Matters Standard 8 deals with the accessibility of online classes, but the principles can easily be applied to the classroom as well, especially for instructors who utilize Blackboard to post handouts and other learning materials for students. “8 Tips for Standard 8.” part of the QM Success Stories series, makes simple recommendations that all instructors can use to make their classes accessible.

1. Present documents in a standard format that students will be able to open from their home computers or tablets. Creating PDF versions is an easy way to accomplish this.

2. When making notes to share, use the built-in header and text styles that Word offers. The headers offer visual appeal to the sighted student reading your handout and provide a readable format for students who use assisted technologies.

3. Use a common font that is easy to read. The sans serif Arial is favored because it is simple and universal. Other common sans serif fonts are Calibri, Verdana, and Tahoma. It’s also important to make sure any background colors you use do not affect the readability of the text.

4. Make sure your scanned documents are clear so document readers will be able to translate them.

5. Use hyperlinks to direct students where they need to go in documents online. If you must print the entire URL for your classroom students, put it in parentheses so screen readers can differentiate it from the rest of the text.

6. Use alt text for all images. The alt text should briefly describe the emotion of the image.

7. Before selecting a textbook for your class, ask the vendor to provide a Voluntary Product Accessibility Template, a document that verifies the book’s conformance to Section 508.

8. Make sure your multi-media elements offer captioning or full transcripts.