



Evaluating Course-Equivalent Online Learning Products

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Evaluating Course-Equivalent Online Learning Products

Reviewing course-equivalent online learning products presents a major challenge to school districts. Dozens of content providers exist, some providers limit access to materials, and reviewers sometimes have difficulty seeing past the glitz and hype that can accompany online course materials. Many types of products, with a wide range in quality, are available.

The following rubric is intended to assist districts in their attempts to choose online course materials for their students. The rubric includes many familiar elements, such as alignment with Minnesota's Graduation Standards, and also some less familiar elements, such as student interaction with the online learning environment.

To use this rubric effectively, the reviewers must have open access to complete course materials. Only then can they make their own judgments regarding graduation standards alignment, curriculum structure, the quality of assessments, or other critical elements. Glossy brochures and marketers' claims of alignment or quality should be verified by a district's own scrutiny.

The quality of courses from a given provider can be inconsistent, so districts should apply this rubric to each course from a content provider that they wish to offer their students. Just as a district committee typically researches and reviews each textbook separately, the curriculum committees should insist on reviewing each course they intend to purchase for their students and view similar courses from a variety of providers. A district may find that one provider's algebra course meets their needs, while another provider supplies a better history course.

This rubric can also provide guidance for any schools, curriculum teams or teachers interested in creating their own courses. By using the rubric both as initial guidance and for peer review, the teachers will be able to create a product more likely to meet the needs of whatever learners the course is designed to serve.

Evaluating Course-Equivalent Online Learning Products

This evaluation tool is best used with online learning products, with or without a local teacher, that are designed to be equivalent to classroom-based courses. This is not intended for evaluation of online supplemental classroom materials, online instructors, learning platforms, or effectiveness of online learning program implementation.

Title of course equivalent product _____

Producer/developer _____

Copyright _____ Costs _____
Per-student? Site license? By school or by district?

Subject area _____ Targeted grade level _____

Primary purpose of course (e.g., remediation course, enrichment course, regular curriculum) _____

Minnesota High, Preparatory, or Basic Standard(s) intended to address

What supplemental materials, if any, are included with the course? _____

Technical requirements:

What are the minimum system requirements? _____

Does the product function fully across platforms? _____

Are special plug-ins required (e.g., Macromedia® Flash™, Adobe®, media players, or specific proprietary tools)? Which ones? _____

Other technical requirements _____

Name of evaluator _____ Phone/e-mail _____

Summative Evaluation Score from rubric item #12 _____

Rubric for Evaluating Course-Equivalent Online Learning Products

by David Glick, based on research by Dr. Robert Blomeyer, NCREL

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
1. Addressing student characteristics and course intent	The course addresses some of its intended purpose, but with language and/or content that is not appropriate for its intended audience. Little flexibility exists to meet the needs of Special Education and other special needs students.	The course addresses most of its intended purpose with language and content that is usually appropriate for the intended audience. A small amount of flexibility and tools are provided to meet the needs of Special Education and other special needs students.	The course is clearly focused on its intended purpose. The language and content are appropriate for the intended audience. Flexibility and tools (not including adaptive technology) are provided to meet the needs of Special Education and other special needs students. Web pages meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.	The course is clearly focused on its intended and explicitly stated purpose. The language and content are flexible and appropriate for the intended audience. Flexibility and tools (not including adaptive technology) are provided to meet the needs of Special Education and other special needs students. Web pages meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and are certified ADA compliant by an accepted certification tool (e.g., "Bobby").
2. Alignment with Minnesota Graduation Standards—In the case of more than one standard addressed, separate evaluations should be done for each standard. Standard _____ Level _____ Evaluation _____ Standard _____ Level _____ Evaluation _____	The course content addresses the main intent of the indicated Minnesota High, Preparatory, or Basic Standard. Some specifications of the content standards are instructed and/or assessed, but not explicitly. The course uses few constructivist, inquiry-based, or performance assessment methods. All instruction occurs through reading, lecture, or other direct method, and assessment is mainly through short answer or objective testing. The Minnesota scoring criteria are not represented.	The course content is largely aligned with the indicated Minnesota High, Preparatory, or Basic Standard. Most specifications of the content standard are instructed and assessed. The course uses some constructivist and inquiry-based instruction and performance assessment. The Minnesota scoring criteria are weakly represented and used superficially to evaluate student work on the indicated standard.	The course content is thoroughly aligned with the indicated Minnesota High, Preparatory, or Basic Standard. All specifications of the content standard are instructed and assessed. The course includes constructivist and inquiry-based instruction and performance assessment. The Minnesota scoring criteria are represented and used to score student work on the indicated standard.	The course content is explicitly and thoroughly aligned with the indicated Minnesota High, Preparatory, or Basic Standard. The specifications of the content standard provide the focus of nearly all instruction and assessment. The course emphasizes constructivist and inquiry-based instruction and performance assessment. The Minnesota scoring criteria are explicitly represented and used to score student work on the indicated standard.

3. Curriculum structure	The course is somewhat random with little obvious structure or is excessively rigid. Concepts and skills build on one another randomly or rigidly. Students cannot review or repeat sections of the course, and remediation and enrichment opportunities do not exist. The course takes a “one-size-fits-all” approach.	The course follows a scope and sequence that is somewhat questionable for the subject area and/or grade level. Concepts and skills are accurately presented and build on one another, but sometimes connections are not made. Students can easily review and repeat sections of the course to enhance their understanding and grades/scores in appropriate ways. Limited remediation and enrichment opportunities are available.	The course follows a scope and sequence appropriate for the subject area and grade level. Concepts and skills are accurately presented, build on one another logically, and connections between concepts and subject areas are clear. Students can easily review and repeat sections of the course to enhance their understanding and grades/scores in appropriate ways. Remediation and enrichment opportunities are built into the course.	The scope and sequence of the course is artfully designed for the subject area and grade level. Concepts and skills are accurately presented, build on one another logically, and connections between and among concepts and subjects are explicit and relevant. Both understanding and grades/scores can be improved in a variety of appropriate ways. Students have exceptional flexibility in approaching the material, including through repetition, remediation, and enrichment.
4. Measuring student learning	The course uses primarily objective tests focused on terminology and lower-level thinking skills (e.g., memorization). Student data are treated as discrete numbers and are not explicitly tied to ongoing learning or individualization.	The course uses several assessment techniques, including a limited amount of performance assessment, to measure ongoing student progress. Cumulative data on student achievement is developed, but not used to individualize the curriculum.	The course uses several assessment techniques, including performance assessment, to measure ongoing student progress on clearly identified learner outcomes. Cumulative data on student achievement is developed and used to individualize remediation or enrichment opportunities, in a timely and appropriate manner.	The course uses a wide variety of assessment techniques, with an emphasis on performance assessment, to measure ongoing student progress on clearly identified learner outcomes. Norm- and criterion-referenced tests are used to gauge student progress. Cumulative data on student achievement is developed and used regularly to individualize curriculum, including remediation or enrichment opportunities, in a timely and appropriate manner.

5. Student interaction with online learning environment (online learning materials and, if applicable, online instructor)*	The learning materials require little interaction between the student and learning environment. The few interactions present require only simple recognition and recall with a small chance of engaging the student or provoking interest.	The learning materials require some interaction between the student and the learning environment. These interactions require mostly simple recognition and recall (e.g., true/false, yes/no, matching, fill-in-the-blank), with occasional use of comprehension level questions (e.g., short answer). Interactions will be engaging to some students but will not reach a wide variety of students.	The learning materials require frequent interactions between the student and the learning environment. These interactions include problem solving and constructivist approaches (e.g., simulations, modeling, project-based learning, research), as well as lower-level interactions. Interactions are designed to engage the student, enhance learning, and ensure success.	The learning materials require frequent interactions between the student and the learning environment. These interactions emphasize problem solving and constructivist approaches (e.g., simulations, modeling, project-based learning, research) but may include some lower-level interactions. Interactions are creative and particularly well-designed for engaging a wide variety of students. The interactions effectively enhance learning and ensure success.
6. Feedback on student work**	Students receive little feedback or feedback that is exclusively a report of correct or incorrect responses. There are few suggestions for improvement or continued learning.	Students receive occasional feedback that is loosely based on learner outcomes and standards. Most of the feedback indicates correctness or incorrectness of the student answers, but may include some general suggestions for improvement.	Students receive regular feedback on their progress based on the learner outcomes and standards. The feedback is diagnostic, recommends relevant improvement strategies, and encourages continued learning.	Students receive frequent feedback on their progress that emphasizes the intended learner outcomes and standards. The feedback is highly individualized and diagnostic, and recommends specific, individualized improvement strategies to encourage continued progress toward mastery.

* It should be noted that some course-equivalent programs are entirely delivered from the remote site and by a teacher from the provider. Others require significant assistance or customization from a local supervising teacher, while still others are developed by a local teacher on a standard platform. This will cause great variation in the type of interaction expected. It is important to remember that the purpose of this evaluation tool is for course-equivalent programs, not platforms or supplemental resources. This rubric is primarily for those courses where a local supervising teacher is used.

** Evidence required to effectively evaluate feedback may come from course/provider promotional materials, discussions with the provider, or past experience with the provider or teacher. Rarely will an examination of the online instructional materials offer evidence in this area.

7. On-screen information	On-screen information is solid, but cluttered with unnecessary graphics or distracting elements. Information is not presented in a form or language appropriate for the intended audience. Graphics and organizational tools are present but do not effectively enhance the learning and may detract from it.	Most of the on-screen information is useful and free of excessive distraction. Some of the information is either simplistic or overly confusing. Graphics and organization tools are present but add a minimal amount of information.	On-screen information is useful and free of distraction. It is engaging and includes a balanced amount of information that is neither weak and simplistic nor overly dense and confusing. Interpretation of the information is enhanced by graphics and organizational tools.	On-screen information is useful, well-organized, and free of distraction. It is thought-provoking, engaging, and includes a balanced amount of information that is neither weak and simplistic nor overly dense and confusing. The on-screen elements that contain the information can be customized by the student. Text, graphics, and organizational tools are interwoven creatively to facilitate interpretation of the information.
8. Online technical help and support available from the provider	Online technical help and support are available on an occasional basis and address only basic questions and problems.	Online technical help and support are available within 12-24 hours and can address most common questions and problems.	Online technical help and support are readily available and thorough enough to address a variety of common technical questions and problems. Phone support is available in case of online problems.	Online technical help and support are immediately available any time and are exceptionally thorough. Alternate methods of providing support are also readily available.
9. Supplemental tools and resources for students—Supplemental materials are defined as print materials, CD-ROMs, peripheral devices, library resources, and other tools and materials not available online.	Some supplemental tools and resources are identified. The student is responsible for locating and accessing the materials with little support from the online program.	Many of the necessary supplemental tools and resources are identified and some are available. Library resources are mentioned.	All necessary supplemental tools and resources are clearly identified and readily available. The online program assists with identification of necessary library resources.	A wide variety of supplemental tools and resources are clearly identified and readily available. The online program assists with identification and location of a variety of library resources.

10. Teacher materials for a local supervising teacher*	Teacher materials are limited and basic. Customization is difficult or not possible.	Teacher materials are reasonably complete. Some limited customization of the course is possible either by the teacher or by the provider at the teacher's request.	Teacher materials are comprehensive and clear. The course is easily customizable for particular situations, students, and standards.	Teacher materials are exceptionally clear and comprehensive. Customization of the course is inherent to its design.
11. Preparation time and support for a local supervising teacher*	An excessive amount of time is necessary for a local teacher to become familiar with the course mechanics, and to do the necessary planning and customization. Few supports exist to facilitate these processes. Frequent use of special facilities, tools, or techniques requires significant additional preparation time.	A significant amount of time is required for a local teacher to become familiar with the course mechanics, and to do the necessary planning and customization of the course. Some supports exist to facilitate these processes, but they are somewhat cumbersome. Special facilities, tools, or techniques are used and require additional preparation time.	The amount of time necessary for a local teacher to become familiar with the course mechanics, and to do the necessary planning and customization, is reasonable. These processes are streamlined by the design of the program and teacher materials. Special facilities, tools, or techniques rarely require additional preparation time.	The amount of time necessary for a local teacher to become familiar with the course mechanics, and to do the necessary planning and customization, is very reasonable. These processes are made exceptionally efficient by the design of the program and teacher materials. Special facilities, tools, or techniques rarely require additional preparation time.

* It should be noted that some course-equivalent programs are entirely delivered from the remote site and by a teacher from the provider. Others require significant assistance or customization from an on-site teacher, while still others are developed by a local teacher on a standard platform. This will cause great variation in the type of teacher materials necessary and available and the teacher preparation time involved. It is important to remember that the purpose of this evaluation tool is for course-equivalent programs, not platforms or supplemental resources. This rubric is primarily for those courses where an on-site teacher is used.

<p>12. Summative evaluation</p>	<p>Other significant resources will be needed to supplement this online course in order to ensure a learning experience that is roughly equivalent to face-to-face courses. This course should not be considered a “course-equivalent” program.</p>	<p>Gaps or problems are apparent in the design or delivery of this course. These problems should be addressed and the materials enhanced locally through carefully selected additional materials and instruction. This course, by itself, should not be considered a “course-equivalent” program.</p>	<p>This online course is acceptable as a substitute for an equivalent classroom-based course currently offered by schools. It is structured so that a variety of students, properly supported, should be able to complete it successfully and demonstrate learning on the intended learner outcomes, including the specified Minnesota standard(s).</p>	<p>This course is exceptionally well-designed and well-run. It is fully acceptable as a substitute for an equivalent classroom-based course currently offered by schools and may offer opportunities not available in a traditional setting. A wide variety of students should be able to complete the course successfully and demonstrate learning on the intended learner outcomes, including the specified Minnesota standard(s).</p>
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Additional Comments: