Learner-Driven Quality:
Insights to Improve Your Course Where It Counts

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PennState



Oregon State University

QM Research Conference, April 10, 2026

Multi-Institutional Research

PennState





BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY



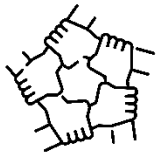
Oregon State University

About the Ecampus Research Unit

ecampus.oregonstate.edu/research



Original Research in Online Higher Education



Support for Online Education Research



Collaborative Studies and Programs

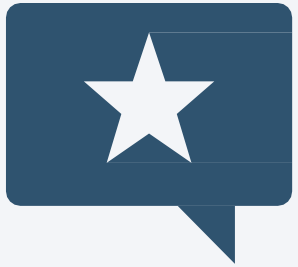


Research Literacy Tools

Key Questions



Do learners agree with the items included in the QM Rubric?



Do they rate QM SRS at the same level of importance?



Do students value RSI?
(Regular and substantive interaction)

Initial Snapshot

124
respondents

6
institutions

Ages 19 to 75

Completed high school to terminal degree
- Majority completed college BA/BS

Majority
- Identify as female
- English as native language
- Enrolled full-time
- Employed full-time



Initial Snapshot

124
respondents

6
institutions

Taken 0 to 9+ courses

- Majority 9+



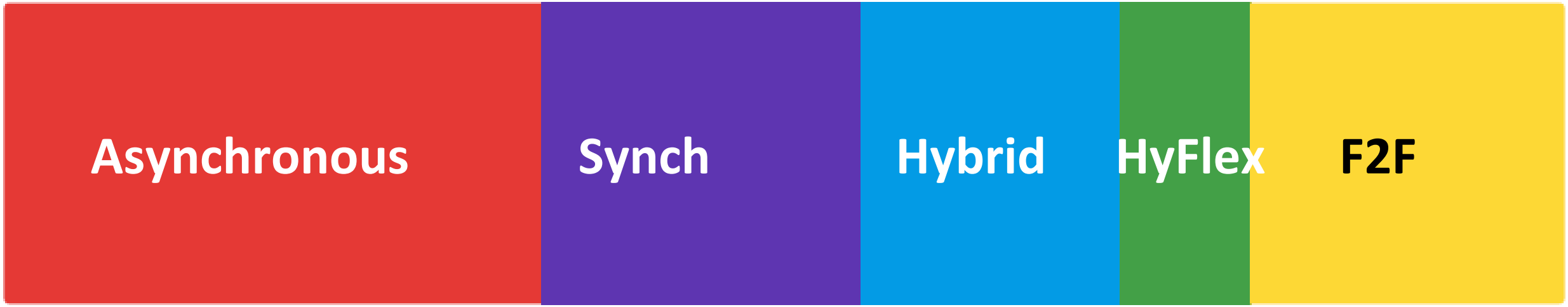
Technology comfort level

- Very uncomfortable to very comfortable

24% identified as a student with a disability

50% first generation college student

Delivery Modes



Experienced a mix of modalities

What do you think?



Learner-Centered Design



Image: OSU Ecampus student

- Clear expectations
- Designed experience
- Relevant content
- Meaningful activities
- Accessible media and tech
- RSI (regular and substantive interaction)

Challenges of Online Learning

- Confusing navigation
- Unrealistic workload
- Lack of clarity
- Learner self-discipline
- Learner time management
- Tech/Internet access
- Feelings of isolation



Image: OSU Ecampus student

The Classics

What debates or issues do you think made a comeback?



Image: DALL-E/ChatGPT

Classic Debates

- Asynchronous vs. Synchronous
- Group work: love vs. hate
- Discussions vs. busy work
- Passive vs. active learning

Methods for QM Standards

Translate QM Rubric

- Learner-centered language
- Qualtrics survey

Add RSI Items

- Regular and substantive interaction
- U.S. federal requirement for distance education courses

Learners Rank Items

- 3-Essential, could not succeed without it
- 2-Very important
- 1-Important
- 0-Not at all important

Initial Results

All QM items important

Some rankings were different:

- Some QM Rank of 3 (highest) were ranked lower
- Some QM Rank of 1 (lowest) were ranked higher

Top 10 SRS Initial Findings

QM SRS	Item	Mean	SD	QM Rank
SRS 1.1	Clear instructions tell me how to get started and where to find different parts of the course.	2.73	0.54	3
SRS 8.1	Navigating through the course is easy and intuitive.	2.64	0.59	3
SRS 8.2	The design of the course makes it easy to read the content.	2.62	0.56	3
SRS 3.3	The rules for grading my work are clear and detailed. It's easy to understand what is expected of me and how it relates to the course grades given.	2.60	0.62	3
SRS 8.3	The text in the course is accessible to everyone, including those with disabilities.	2.60	0.67	3

Top 10 SRS Initial Findings

QM SRS	Item	Mean	SD	QM Rank
SRS 4.1	The instructional materials really help in achieving the expected learning for the course.	2.56	0.67	3
SRS 3.2	The course explains its grading policy clearly, gives it to me at the start, and uses the same policy throughout the course.	2.53	0.67	3
SRS 8.5	All video and audio content in the course is accessible to everyone, with captions or transcripts available.	2.50	0.72	2
SRS 1.3	The communication guidelines for the course are clearly laid out.	2.50	0.69	2
SRS 8.6	The multimedia elements in the course are user-friendly and simple to use.	2.49	0.72	2

Differences with QM Rankings (Lower)

QM SRS	Item	Mean	SD	QM Rank
SRS 5.2b	Learning activities encourage me to interact with my other students.	1.50	1.10	3
SRS 5.2a	These activities encourage me to interact with my instructor.	1.75	0.92	3
SRS 7.3	The course includes information or links about the institution's academic support services and resources.	1.82	0.96	3
SRS 2.2	The learning objectives for each module/unit describe outcomes that I am able to achieve and are consistent with the objectives of the entire course.	1.84	1.06	3
SRS 2.1	The course learning objectives describe outcomes that I am able to achieve.	1.85	1.01	3
SRS 7.2	The course clearly describes or provides a link to the institution's policies on accessibility and services for accommodation.	1.85	0.99	3

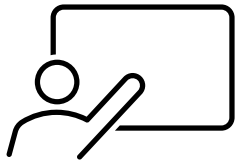
Differences with QM Rankings (Higher)

QM SRS	Item	Mean	SD	QM Rank
SRS 1.7	Any prior knowledge or specific competencies needed for the course are clearly stated.	2.11	0.91	1
SRS 3.6	Instructions include guidance on how to maintain academic integrity, which helps me understand the standards expected.	2.06	0.93	1
SRS 1.8	The instructor's self-introduction is welcoming and accessible on the course site.	1.99	1.02	1
SRS 1.6	The technical skills and digital information literacy skills I am expected to have are clear.	1.89	0.99	1
SRS 7.4	The course includes information or links to the student services and resources available at the institution.	1.81	1.02	1
SRS 8.8	Accessibility statements from vendors are provided for all the technologies used in the course.	1.75	1.08	1

RSI Initial Findings

RSI Survey Item	Mean	SD
The instructor shares weekly announcements through the course or via email.	1.96	1.02
The instructor actively participates in online class discussions by summarizing, guiding, or asking questions.	2.06	1.03
I receive feedback quickly enough to make changes before I finish upcoming assignments.	2.56	0.72
I receive feedback on my work at least once a week during the course.	2.19	0.90
I can ask questions of the instructor.	2.69	0.57
The feedback I receive on my work is detailed, meaningful, and directly related to the content we are studying at the time.	2.56	0.64

Highest Endorsed



	Very Important + Essential
The design of the course makes it easy to read the content.	**96%**
Clear instructions tell me how to get started and where to find different parts of the course.	**96%**
I can ask questions of the instructor.	**96%**

Least Endorsed



	Not Important
I work in small groups with other students.	**46%**
Learning activities encourage me to interact with my other students.	**23%**
I share my ideas, opinions, and findings with my classmates in a public forum.	**24%**

Open Response Questions

Asked at beginning of survey:

What do you feel are the greatest barriers/obstacles to learning online?

Asked at the end:

Please mention any other features you feel are valuable in an online course but were not mentioned in this survey.

Barriers/Obstacles to Learning Online

- Lack of communication from professors
  - Professors not engaged, not caring
- Managing your time
- Unclear expectations
- Outdated course material, poorly designed
- Unrealistic deadlines; interferes with flexibility
- Lack of community connection with peers
- Too much reading to learn
- Group or team projects do not work



Image: OSU Undergraduate Research Assistant

High Quality Characteristics?

None – you covered it!

- Editing; quality of written material
- Ways to report mistakes or bugs
- Online study groups
- Online time with instructor; options for face-to-face
  - Asynchronous as advertised
- Free software and training if required or course
- Video content
- Ability to work at your own pace
- AI tools and how to use them



Image: DALL-E/ChatGPT

Questions?

Observations?

Common themes?

Would you like to participate?

Details and interest form:

https://bit.ly/qm2

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Resources for Learner-Centered Design

Read more about the study:

Student Voices Support Quality Standards in Online Education (blog)

beav.es/xRS

FREE design documents:

hidocmodel.com

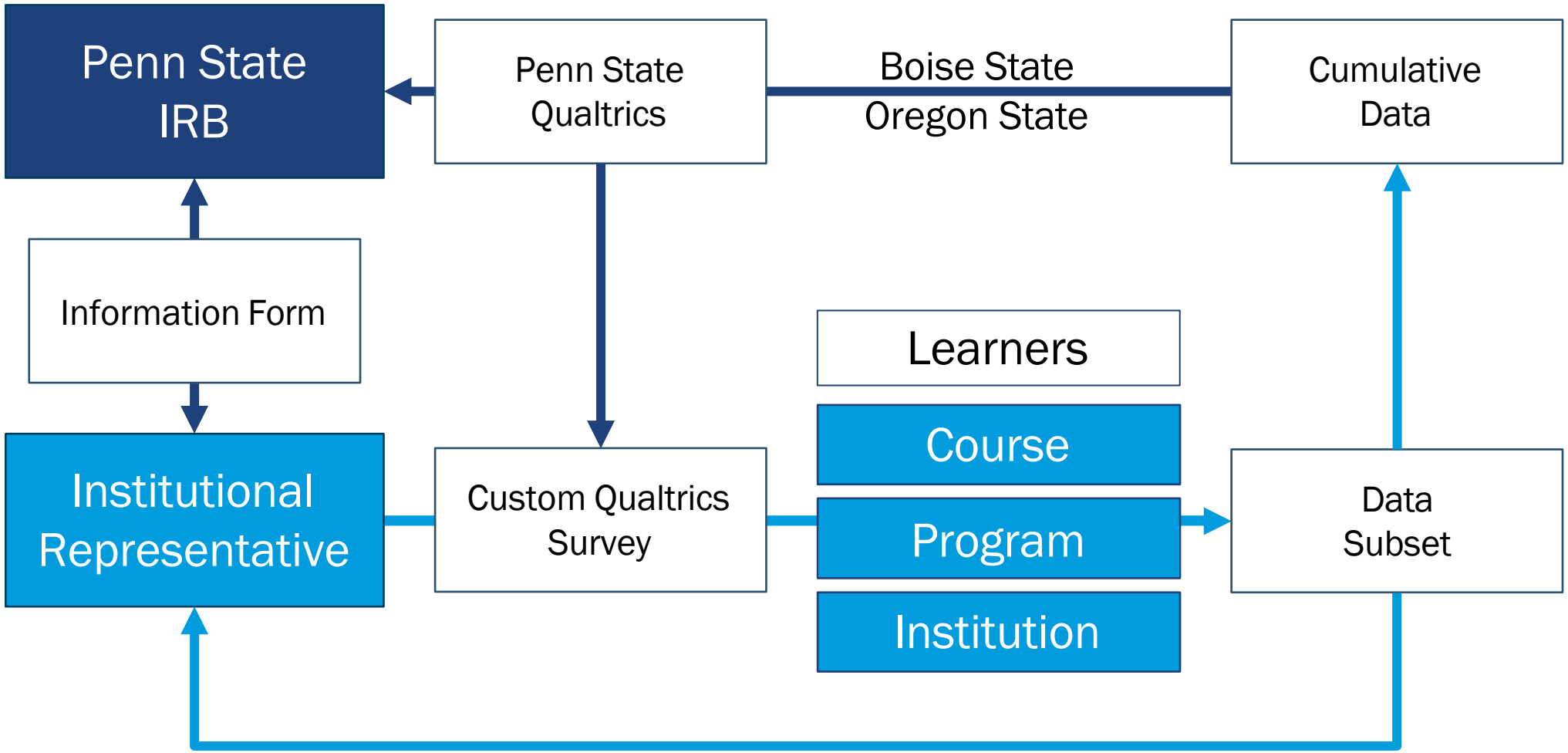


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Delivery


Penn State IRB
Penn State Qualtrics
Boise State
Oregon State
Cumulative Data
Information Form
Learners
Course
Program
Institution
Institutional Representative
Custom Qualtrics Survey
Data Subset

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