Proposal: Quality Assurance Framework for Online and Hybrid Course Design at UMass Amherst

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Executive Summary

As UMass Amherst continues to expand its online and hybrid offerings, the need for a sustainable, scalable quality assurance (QA) framework has become urgent. This proposal outlines a comprehensive QA system designed to promote academic integrity, accessibility, and pedagogical innovation in digital course delivery.

Initially offered as an **opt-in service**, this QA model supports faculty who wish to elevate their course design. Long-term, I propose establishing a **dedicated QA team** to scale this initiative toward the goal of universal course review across the university's digital learning ecosystem.

Framework Overview

This QA framework integrates best practices from:

- Quality Matters (QM): Focus on design standards and student experience.
- UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF): Emphasis on educator development.
- Ofsted ITE criteria: Structured evaluation, stakeholder engagement, and continuous improvement.

It is built around five pillars of course quality:

1. Alignment & Learning Outcomes

Objective: Ensure course content, activities, and assessments clearly support intended learning outcomes.

Standard	Design Feature	Instructor Prompt
Measurable outcomes	Learning outcomes begin with action verbs (Bloom's Taxonomy)	"What will students be able to do after this module?"
Backward design	Assessments designed before content creation	"Does the assessment reflect your outcomes?"
Checklist:		
☐ Outcomes are observable and measurable		
☐ Outcomes align with assessments and content		
☐ Learning modules clearly map to outcomes		

2. Inclusive & Accessible Design

Objective: Promote universal access and usability for all students, including neurodiverse and multilingual learners.

Standard	Design Feature	Instructor Prompt
NA C A C A A		
WCAG 2.1 AA	Color contrast, alt text, keyboard navigation	"Is your content perceivable and operable for all?"
UDL principles	Multiple means of representation, action, and engagement	"Can learners access and express understanding in different ways?"

Checklist:

All media includes alt text or captions
Reading order and structure are logical
Course uses inclusive language and examples

3. Engagement & Interaction

Objective: Foster robust learning communities through interaction and presence.

Standard	Design Feature	Instructor Prompt
Community of Inquiry	Social, cognitive, and teaching presence evident	"Where do students see you and each other in the course?"
Interaction mapping	Engagement planned at all course levels	"How do students interact with content, peers, and you?"
Checklist:		
☐ Welcome v	ideo or instructor introduction	
☐ Regular announcements or updates		
☐ Peer interaction built into discussions or activities		

4. Assessment & Feedback

Objective: Use authentic assessments to evaluate learning and guide improvement.

Standard	Design Feature	Instructor Prompt
Authenticity	Assessments reflect real-world application	"Does this mirror how knowledge is used outside the classroom?"
Feedback loops	Feedback opportunities built into every unit	"Do students know how they're doing throughout?"



Rubrics are transparent and accessible
Feedback is timely and formative
Students have self- or peer-review opportunities

5. Course Evaluation & Improvement

Objective: Embed continuous improvement via feedback and performance data.

Standard	Design Feature	Instructor Prompt
Mid-course feedback	Opportunity to adjust in real time	"Do you ask students what's working mid-semester?"
Post-course data use	Design revision based on feedback, analytics	"How do you close the loop after each course?"
Checklist:		
☐ Mid-course f	feedback survey deployed	
☐ Student analytics reviewed after term		
☐ Course updated based on evaluation data		

Implementation Plan

Phase 1: Pilot (Year 1)

Opt-in QA Review Program

- Instructors apply each semester to have their online or hybrid course reviewed before relaunch.
- Course is evaluated using the QA checklist; feedback is returned in a structured report.

Reviews are confidential and advisory.

Scope:

- Target 3 departments with high online activity or pedagogical innovation
- 15–20 courses per semester

Staffing:

- Led by existing instructional design team
- QA reviews supported by trained graduate assistants or peer instructional designers

Phase 2: Capacity Building (Year 2–3)

Train-the-Trainer Model

- Develop QA certification for departmental instructional leads
- Share resources and frameworks through IDEAS hub

Institutional Buy-In

- Share success stories and metrics with faculty senate and deans
- Align QA participation with Teaching Excellence recognition

Phase 3: Scaling & Integration (Year 3+)

Create a QA Team

- Proposal to fund 2–3 full-time staff dedicated to QA reviews and analytics
- Integrate QA into course redesign, instructional innovation, and LMS administration

Long-Term Goal:

- All UMass online/hybrid courses undergo a QA review every three years
- QA framework becomes part of faculty onboarding and development

Conclusion

This proposal positions Quality Assurance not as a compliance mechanism, but as a **catalyst for innovation and student success**. It honors faculty expertise, supports evidence-based improvement, and aligns UMass Amherst with national and global standards in digital education. With a phased, scalable model, we can move from opt-in excellence to institution-wide transformation—one course at a time.