



## **Implementing Foundations of Quality through Online and Hybrid Course Design: A Study-Away Course Case Study**

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### ***Abstract***

*The far reaching social, political, and economic COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted students, leading to significant changes in the online learning landscape. Disengagement in e-classrooms due to external distractions prompted educators, even those experienced in diverse course formats, to seek innovative ways to foster engagement. In this case-based qualitative research on course design quality, a student-facing higher education instructor and a faculty-assisting instructional designer employed qualitative methods to explore quality components and transform a study-away course. Key steps included effective instruction, intentional design, inclusive environments, learner-centred approaches, engaging activities, and community focus. The findings revealed that the recursive ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation) process facilitated reflection and meaningful change within these foundations of quality. We propose a learner-centric model where students are architects of their development, and faculty function as facilitators. These adaptable methods span disciplines and formats, informing future education research and practice.*

**Keywords:** *study-away course, course improvement, higher education, instructional design, quality*

## **Introduction**

Online and mixed mode instruction have increased dramatically post-COVID-19 with more students accessing their education in these formats. This transition has been rocky for some, as online/hybrid instruction and learning happen very differently than traditional in-person courses. Even for those seasoned online instructors and learners, the heightened disruptions of our pandemic and post-pandemic society have affected the ways in which information is disseminated and consumed (Neuwirth, Jović, & Mukherji, 2021; Devkota, 2021). For example, stress, anxiety, and other factors have infiltrated the online classroom with the learners who experience it (Quan, Lu, Zhen, & Zhou, 2023). Students became disengaged (Devkota, 2021; Wang, Zhang, Pu, Li, Chen, & Li, 2022), and outside factors such as job loss and changes in the economy detracted student's learning (Bird, Castleman, & Lohner, 2022). In turn, many educators have had to find new ways to share knowledge virtually and create engaging e-learning spaces that motivate learners.

## **Purpose and Scope**

The study away is a research course that encourages students to travel throughout the United States and immerse in the diverse cultures offered within the country. The authors of this work have found that multiple strategies work best while developing an online and hybrid study-away course (Williams, 2021). This paper shares some of the practices that were implemented to create a quality online and hybrid study-away course. The paper also uses theoretical and empirical research to support the findings and identify their usefulness across the domains of quality. The available works helped guide us in practices and pedagogies suggested by practitioners in the field of education.

Rather than espousing a preferential approach that may clash with institutional policies and external factors, the authors invite an eclectic strategy for the course design process that builds on the recursive nature of the Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation (ADDIE) model of instructional design (Castro & Tumibay, 2021). This model was applied in this course design by setting clear goals (Analysis), planning learner-focused activities and content (Design), creating the course materials (Development), delivering the course to students (Implementation), and then assessing the effectiveness of the course and making necessary improvements (Evaluation). The decision derives from the principle that there is no perfect solution for meeting instructional design needs. This nonlinear approach with recursive steps and integration practices supports

philosophical, cognitive, and conceptual design needs with targeted learner success. The overarching goal is to foster a satisfying collaboration that maintains excitement and curiosity for practitioners at each step of the quality design process.

While online learning is not new, its exponential growth in the past three years has elicited questions about the quality of online courses and programmes. Paudel (2021) and Allen (2023) highlight that online education, accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, has become a viable alternative. Paudel finds success in hybrid models, while Allen views the pandemic as a catalyst that propels online programmes to prominence. Industry-specific quality design rubrics have been developed to help practitioners and institutions identify and designate quality courses. Several universities have developed home-grown criteria to guide the quality process. For example, within the University of Central Florida's Centre for Distributed Learning, quality course design examines four distinct measures as part of its quality initiative: (1) course overview and introduction, (2) course content, (3) assessment and interaction, and (4) accessibility and universal design (University of Central Florida Quality Rubric (2017)). These criteria align with established course design instruments such as Quality Matters and should be consistently included to improve the quality of online courses. These elements, which encompass course design, student engagement, and alignment with educational principles, play a crucial role during course delivery. This study investigates how design features impact online course quality and, consequently, student success based on existing literature.

Many different activities fit into the definition of quality learning design. The ideas that make an online course quality can be incorporated into hybrid delivery especially when the bulk of the context is delivered online asynchronously. The online content sets the tone for the hybrid section and thus drives the decision for engagement in the hybrid section. The literature is replete with examples of how faculty and instructional designers may work together to design high-quality courses that are recognized and respected while giving students agency over their learning (Kelly & Zakrajsek, 2023; Jaggars and Xu, 2016; Martin et al., 2019). Students' engagement in online and mixed-mode courses allows them to be co-creators of the curriculum (Hajian, 2019; McDonald et al., 2020; Morrison et al., 2019) having a say in how learning is developed through foundations of quality practices. The key to fulfilling the requirements outlined in the quality rubric resides in the development of a course that responds to learner needs (O'Keefe et

al., 2020; Riggs, 2020; Sanga, 2020; Sneed, 2016). This could happen by leveraging foundations of quality design including:

1. effective instruction,
2. intentional design,
3. inclusive and accessible content,
4. curricular steered by the learner,
5. active, interactive, and engaging coursework, and
6. projects that are focused on community.

Taken together, these components of design support the notion that quality online and hybrid courses are (1) designed with the learner in mind (Moore et al., 2021) and (2) require instructor guidance and learner engagement (Poort et al., 2022; O’Keefe et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020). Course design that models the alignment with course elements such as measurable goals, appropriate content, and authentic assessment using Bloom’s revised taxonomy (Sneed, 2016) facilitates instructional clarity and students’ ability to connect with the content and get added information (Kelly & Zakrajasek, 2023; Martin et al. 2029; Jaggars& Xu, 2016). Sneed (2016) proposes that designers connect the characteristics of Bloom’s revised taxonomy for creating online learning activities that are in accordance with students’ needs. These suggestions support the selection of the theoretical course design model discussed in this paper.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In keeping with the idea of design, the authors also identify the role of theory in course design and instructional technology, emphasizing the active and social nature of learning and the instructor’s facilitative role. The conceptual model for quality design pulls ideas from several foundational principles and best design practices that guide learning. This paper aligns with the Constructivist Learning Theory, in providing a theoretical framework for course design and instructional technology proposed by Williams (2021). Gaines (2024) believes constructivism emphasizes the active and constructive nature of learning, the importance of social and cultural factors, and the role of the instructor in facilitating the learning process. Taken together, the option of knowledge construction helped focus the design to satisfy the research’s focus. Sanga (2020) posits that by applying the key concepts of active learning, meaningful learning, social and cultural context, and reflection and metacognition, educators can create engaging and effective learning

environments. In support of this theoretical frame, Hajian (2019) suggests that these intersections promote student success and lifelong learning.

## **Methods**

### ***Strengthening the Course using Quality Principles: Purpose and Questions***

Current thinking over the years has caused some instructional design researchers to develop their own terminology to reflect the nature and distinction of quality more effectively. Whereas others still borrow terminology from face-to-face teaching practice and in-person delivery, in this paper, the authors share how they have used the foundations of quality to transform an online and hybrid study-away course. Specifically, the authors used a small case-based design with flexible hypothesis-generating questions and a process-tracing approach postulated by Alpi & Evans, (2019) that uses observations for data collection. This means that the research is bound within one course that has online and hybrid components and characteristics that allow the foundations of quality to be implemented. The case-based method was used to facilitate self-directed online learning and validate the foundations of quality within the course context. The authors analysed the data by describing and synthesizing the existing evidence and highlighting the value of the online and hybrid modes so practitioners can make informed choices on principles they wish to implement.

Discussing this process, the authors answered the following questions:

1. What are the most essential items for course design quality?
2. How were aspects of quality design implemented in a hybrid and online course?
3. How can instructors design/redesign courses for quality using the ADDIE model as a lens?

As a student-facing classroom instructor, the second author attempts to strengthen the courses semesterly. One way, in which this was accomplished was to have the courses reviewed by a designated instructional designer, the first author of this work, who assesses courses for quality organization and delivery. A quality rubric is used to evaluate the courses against a set of established standards to ensure effective course design, delivery, and learner engagement. Specifically, the first author has been instrumental in helping to strengthen the second author's study-away course, which is offered in both hybrid and online modalities, and is available to undergraduate students enrolled at a Central Florida Research I institution. The

course being the bounded case, yielded the purposive sample for this study. This sampling technique helped to deepen the understanding of the studied phenomena. Most of the students who enrol in the course are Interdisciplinary Studies majors and are interested in high impact learning practices, conducting research, and learning about the histories, cultures, and experiences of diverse communities. With the multiple sections of this study-away course, the second author has led students to St. Augustine, Florida; New Orleans, Louisiana; and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

The study-away course is offered in a hybrid format, combining asynchronous online work throughout the semester with an optional one-week in-person component during the study-away period. This period involves a series of site visits, which are integral to the course content. For students unable to physically travel, these site visits are video recorded and made available online, ensuring all students can fully participate in the study-away experience. The data collected over these visits is analysed using identified patterns, categories, and relationships. The unique and flexible modality of this course requires a thoughtful approach to course delivery. The authors aim to ensure this through a combination of strategies, including the use of technology to facilitate remote learning and the provision of alternative learning experiences for those unable to attend in-person.

### ***The ADDIE Model and Foundations of Quality***

The ADDIE model was used as a guide to evaluate and prepare the upper-division interdisciplinary study-away online/hybrid course. ADDIE provided an outline to design the online/hybrid course for student motivation and preparation for conducting research in the course. Relying on a constructivist theoretical frame of student-centred discovery (Amineh and Asl, 2015), social learning through collaboration (Gweon, 2021), and constructionism to provide learners with meaningful challenges. The authors selected a combination of relevant principles for designing the course. Using the iterative steps of ADDIE, they guided students' learning and cognitive development through collaboration, construction, and discovery. The authors discuss the results of the approach and their implications for student engagement in subsequent sections.

### **Results and Discussion**

In this section, the authors explicate the study's outcomes, focusing on the essential components that contribute to course design quality. The investigation addresses three key research questions, which are inherently interconnected. The quality design foundations exhibit significant overlap in the existing literature. By

examining these foundational aspects, the study reveals effective strategies for enhancing course quality and improving students' learning experiences. Each subsection will identify and define a specific quality foundation which forms the base of the research. Additionally, the authors utilize the process-tracing approach to indicate how the second author applied these quality foundations in their online and hybrid study-away course.

### ***Components of a Quality Online Course***

**RQ 1:** What are the most crucial elements for course design quality?

To respond to research question one, the authors examined how the foundations of quality might encourage learner engagement and motivation. The steps of this approach include: effective instruction (for example, frequent contact between the teacher and the learner); intentional design (for example, active learning or collaboration opportunities and learner-focused content); inclusivity and accessibility (for example, the design and content recognize learner diversity and address variable accessibility requirements); learner steered (for example, learner's choice for engagement or content co-creation); engaging (for example, multiple opportunities to engage with course content and to self-assess); and, community focused (for example, the content provides meaningful challenges and real-world connections). The authors found that the foundations of quality facilitate practical application by showing learners how their research skills apply to everyday life through meaningful retrieval and application.

The foundations of quality play a pivotal role in shaping effective course design. Educators should design courses that encourage regular communication between instructors and learners. Frequent contact fosters engagement and provides personalized support based on the needs of the learner. For this to happen, instructors should also ensure that instructions, expectations, and learning objectives are communicated clearly. Clarity in the course design enhances learner understanding and motivation. It is also valuable to incorporate activities that require learners to actively engage with the content. This could include discussions, problem-solving tasks, or group projects. This content should be created to meet the prior learning needs and interests of the learner and pique their curiosity.

A comprehensive framework for implementing the foundations of quality in course design are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1*****Foundations of Quality: Design Thinking and Application***

<b>Foundation</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Engagement</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
<b>Effective Instruction</b>	Instructor outline	Active participation	Regular feedback
<b>Intentional Design</b>	Scenarios	Group projects	Case based learning
<b>Inclusivity &amp; Accessibility</b>	Inclusive language	Accommodations	Assessment variability
<b>Learner Steered</b>	Content co-creation	Group selection	Choice of research areas
<b>Active, Interactive, &amp; Engaging</b>	Multiple content review options	Opportunities for practice	Self-assessment <sup>a</sup>
<b>Community Focused</b>	Meaningful challenges	Real-world connections	Problem solving based on concepts

*Note.* The table presents the findings based on foundations of quality through design thinking and application and summarizes design and facilitation concepts.

<sup>a</sup> Assessment refers to the process of evaluating student's self-analysis or their level of understanding on a specific topic or content.

A summary of the key findings from observing the foundations of quality across three curricula elements: content, engagement, and assessment, are presented in Table 1. These serve as a quick reference guide for instructors and instructional designers who are looking to improve the quality of their courses and promote student success. By applying the design principles of content, engagement, and assessment strategies in their courses, educators can enhance the learning experience and create effective learning environments that meet the needs of diverse learners.

**RQ 2:** How were aspects of quality design implemented in a hybrid and online course?



To answer research question 2, the authors reviewed how the quality foundations of effective instruction and, inclusive and accessible design principles were implemented in an online and hybrid course. Their primary objective was to identify effective instructional techniques by reviewing relevant research. By doing so, they aimed to assist faculty in adopting strategies they might not otherwise consider independently. For example, Morrison et al., (2019) suggest that strategies such as active learning and changes in teaching techniques to problem-based learning can improve student outcomes. They contend that working together, instructional designers and faculty identify learning problems and determine how instruction can solve them. Similarly, Williams (2024) postulates that such “...accessibility refers to acknowledging the importance of cultural and social identity, removing barriers to ensure equal access, and adapting teaching strategies for effective virtual engagement (p.144). Hajian (2019) puts forward the principle of relying on reflexive behaviours or automatic responses for consideration. Morrison et al (2019) and Hajian (2019) suggest that faculty consider the instructional strategies that result in optimal knowledge transfer and experiential connections for the learner. This selection process encourages higher-order thinking and problem-solving that applies to the completion of similar activities.

### ***Effective Instruction***

Effective instructional design is the process of solving skill and knowledge competency gaps that result in improvements in course quality and greater learning gains (Morrison et al., 2019). In online and hybrid courses, effective design offers content that is relevant to the participants and meets stated learning benchmarks. Effective instruction aligns with design decisions that involve learner and content considerations. Effective instruction incorporates meaningful strategies that encourage deep learning and motivates engagement. O’Keefe et al. (2020) suggest that high-quality online and hybrid courses are “designed to provide immersive, adaptive, and other innovative learning experiences” (p. 7).

Effective instruction can be implemented through modelling or providing opportunities for practice. When students first enrol in the study-away course, the second author models exactly what a research project for the course looks like. This is done by providing examples of past student submissions, and published research papers. Students can view the examples as illustrations of what would be expected of them. This is especially perfect for students who have never conducted research or completed a research project. Also, it is likely that students could make some mistakes with their submissions, and a bit of grace should be provided to them such

as allowing students to resubmit assignments (Jarvie-Eggart, et al., 2022; Tila & Levy, 2020). One example of this is providing students the opportunity to revise and resubmit their research questions. Often, students will submit a research question(s) that is not appropriate or unable to be answered within the span of the semester. Appropriate feedback and instruction are provided to the student to better draft research questions that can be resubmitted for full credit. Their new research question(s) will then reflect the changes made, and their grade will be updated.

### ***Inclusive and Accessible***

To address learner's variability and support, the use of assistive technology online courses should be inclusive and accessible using the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework (Coombs, 2015; Gronseth, 2018). To be inclusive and accessible the design should promote an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment for the students. The UDL component makes the content accessible for students who need accommodations while improving its use for all learners. Kelly and Zakrajsek (2023), encourage faculty to include content that has meaning for students from multiple backgrounds, ensuring that diverse ideas and perspectives are included. Williams (2024) recommends that instructors acknowledge and celebrate diverse cultural practices by incorporating universal learning design. They contend that educators should develop and apply innovative strategies to promote inclusivity and eliminate cultural rigidity within academic environments. These approaches ensure that all students benefit from intentional instructional design while respecting their unique backgrounds and perspectives. While the content aligns with curriculum goals, learners must be able to steer their engagement with the content in such a way as to align with effective factors such as attention and motivation. Students must desire to manage their learning and autonomy (Wong, 2023).

Oleson (2023) issues a challenge to educators to put themselves into the place of the learner as they consider designing learning principles. Oleson believes that a social justice position of reflection and self-assessment will help content designers to be more humane in their design considerations and decisions. Oleson poses questions for faculty and designers to help in their reflection on their course design: "How do you design the course? What materials do you use? What are your methods of instruction?" (p. 2004). Kelly and Zakrajsek (2023) insist that we must be mindful of the psychological and social needs of the learner as they might differ in how they want to interact with others and connect with the content. Student's experiences and background impact their learning, motivation, and overall course

satisfaction and experience. It is important to design a course that intentionally integrates inclusive practices and strategies. Case-based or problem-based learning may provide a structure for experience sharing. Students of all backgrounds should feel welcome in the class and have autonomy over their learning.

The second author ensures that the study-away course is designed to be inclusive and accessible in multiple ways. The goal is to enable all students to engage with the course's pedagogical practices and benefit from inclusive education, as recommended by Wakuru, Kisanga, and Vuzo (2022). To manage this process reliably, the second author support students who are unable to travel. When they led the course to St. Augustine and New Orleans, they had some students who were unable to physically travel with the class. Fakunle, (2021) and Whatley, & Stitch, (2021) believe that inability to travel for study-away opportunities could be due to financial costs, familial or work responsibilities, or other issues. To accommodate those students, the second author video recorded every site visit and made those recordings available on the Canvas Instructure online learning management system for all students to view (Kazi, 2019). This ensured all students would be involved in every aspect of their study away, not only those who could physically travel.

Also, the second author provided access to virtual sessions for students who did not physically travel away. When Wi-Fi permitted, the second author would encourage students to join the class via the Zoom online video conference platform. This was especially true for museum visits, where the museum offered Wi-Fi and allowed the second author to invite students to join the tour virtually. The virtual sessions provided space for all students to enjoy site visits simultaneously, regardless of their locations. Last, the second author linked all resources to the Canvas learning management system, where all students could access them. During the study away portion of the course, the students who travelled would be provided with many resources and information from tour guides, curators, and other locals. The second author would then link these resources to the learning management system, to facilitate student's access.

**RQ 3:** How can instructors design/redesign courses for quality using the ADDIE model as a lens?

In response to research question 3, the study found that the recursive ADDIE process—comprising analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation—supports reflection and facilitates change. Leveraging a set of best practices, which includes effective instruction, learner-steered, and active, interactive, engaging activities, significantly improves students' research skills

while maintaining their focus. These quality foundations, combined with a community-focused approach, allow students to recognize how their research abilities translate into practical real-life scenarios. The success of these techniques is evident through student practice and continuous improvement within the quality foundations framework.

### ***Intentional Design***

Kelly and Zakrajsek (2023) describe intentional design as applying evidenced-based strategies and promoting practices that facilitate student's learning. They contend that instructional design and faculty collaboration should provide learning strategies that can be implemented or adapted quickly to augment learning innovations. Martin et al. (2019) hypothesizes that adopting best practices and standards for online courses helps to create a culture of intentionality. While no single approach or model seems superior for all online learning situations, based on the guidelines provided by Kelly and Zakrajsek (2023) the authors believe the use of intentional design processes to guide the design and development of online courses is an effective practice.

Jaggars and Xu (2016) suggest that "...the effectiveness of online learning may vary according to how the online course is designed and taught" (p. 280). Martin et al. (2019) posits that the larger purpose of a course within a programme and for the profession are important considerations for the design. They further found that "following a systematic approach to content, backwards design, course organization, meeting learner's needs, and student's interaction" (p. 42) was highly recommended by faculty. Overall intentional design creates pathways for all students to achieve educational goals through authentic learning practices, accessible content, and thoughtfully designed experiences.

Some of the ways that intentional design has been implemented in the online study-away course include analysing the students' learning, creating content that aligns with the discipline, and incorporating collaborative engagement opportunities. To analyse the students' learning, the second author meets each student where they are to get them to the goals and learning outcomes of the course which align with the dictates of Willoughby, (2005). For example, the second author's study-away course is a research-intensive high impact course. This designation is given to courses that provide research and professional development opportunities. Some undergraduate students come to the course with no prior research experience, while others come to the course having done research already. The second author supports students by better understanding students' level of comfort with the research

process, and intentionally shapes assignments based on where the students are in their research journey.

The second author also creates content that aligns with the discipline of Interdisciplinary Studies. The research requirements encourage students to create common ground between the perspectives and insights of two or more disciplines (Repko, Szostak, & Buchberger, 2019). If a student is interested in studying the impacts of environmental racism on Afro Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico, in this interdisciplinary course, the student would be able to answer their research questions using both the insights of Environmental Studies and Africana Studies. In other words, the second author leaves space for students to navigate their research through the lens of multiple disciplines and integrate the insights of those disciplines to solve complex problems. Lastly, collaborative engagement opportunities are created using student research groups. In the course, students can conduct research alone or in a group of up to three of their peers. In the groups, they work as a team with similar research interests where they collaborate through the research process for the entire semester.

### ***Steered by the Learner***

Online environments provide unique ways for engagement to be steered by the learner as they engage with content, peers, and instructors. “The importance of learner engagement does not change when students move from in-person to online learning environments, but the online environment changes the ways that students need to engage in learning activities and how others support them” (Moore et al., 2021, p. 162). Positive student outcomes are primarily influenced by the student's motivation to engage with the content, the instructor, and their peers.

To allow the students to steer their learning the second author invited the undergraduates to apply their areas of interest to the course as advised by (Dabrowski & Marshall, 2018). While all the students researched the histories, cultures, and/or experiences of a specific group of people (for example, Black communities in New Orleans), each student chose an aspect of that group that matched their strengths. For example, one student, who was knowledgeable about Haiti, decided to research Haitian influences in New Orleans culture and history. Another student in the same class, who had a background in art researched African American art in New Orleans. Both students' ideas were appropriate to the course and encouraged each student to drive their learning in the class.

Hanewicz, Platt, and Arendt, (2017). believe that assessment variability also provides space for students to steer their own learning. In doing so, students choose how they submit assignments. The students can submit some assignment responses in a video format, a written response, or graphically (such as a flowchart). This allows students to display their strengths and abilities while motivating them to complete the assignments in ways they are most comfortable with.

### ***Active, Interactive, and Engaging***

Student-engagement, motivation, and trust are three pillars of learning that are critical considerations for online course delivery (Poort et al. 2022). Effective course design encourages learner participation, fosters authenticity, and promotes trust within the learning community. O’Keefe et al. (2020) consider it important to provide students multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning. They believe real-world applications, within course tasks, add value for both teachers and students since they encourage content application and maintain the learner’s curiosity. With learner-engagement and choice, students can adapt their management of the content concomitant with a greater emphasis on personalization of instruction.

The community of inquiry framework supports learner’s engagement by creating opportunities for task selection and feedback based on the affordances of the learning management system and strategies for interaction (Li et al. 2020; Martin et al., 2019). Engagement is one of the most critical elements for online teaching and learning success. Kelly and Zakrajsek (2023) believe that effective online environments should encourage regular and effective contact, not just to meet policy requirements but to support better learning outcomes. Faculty and subject matter experts are well-qualified and often trained in both teaching methods and the use of technology for teaching. To maintain consistent engagement, students should know the appropriate methods of working (teamwork, project management) and how their engagement will align with the assessment methods. Instruction that focuses more on active learner engagement and interactive content promotes deep thinking and reflection. It is important to consider how low-stakes and high-stakes assessments connect to course objectives (O’Keefe et.al, 2020). Systematic evaluation can lead to continuous improvement and is a great part of the quality process. Williams (2021) suggests that teacher’s readiness plays a significant role in classroom success based on the strategic selection and engagement processes. Williams believes that students engage readily with interactive course materials when they have clear guidelines and expectations.

The second author has encouraged students to be active, interactive, and engaged through walking tours, guest speakers, and discussion through a mobile app (GroupMe). The in-person walking tours allowed students to move around and get direct experience while learning. Some examples include walking tours during the study-away in New Orleans with outings to Congo Square, Louis Armstrong Park, and the historic Tremé Neighbourhood. The students could see the sites they were learning about and walk in the spaces they had read about. Because these walking tours were recorded and placed on Canvas for all to access, students who could not attend the tours were also able to engage with the video. Similarly engaging, guest speakers who specialize in a specific area can share their knowledge with the class (Leor, 2015). Students could interact with the speakers by asking questions, inquiring about additional readings, and learning about folklore and life study resources from the places they visit. For example, the second author had a historian who specialized in New Orleans history and culture speaks with the students about Black history in Tremé, and Black Mardi Gras. Students in person and online could engage with the guest speaker's lectures and discussions as part of the assessment process. Last, the second author incorporated engagement with students via a mobile application (GroupMe) for social group messaging. The students used their devices as endorsed by Mariki (2018) to speak in an e-language in which they were most comfortable. This includes the use of emojis, hearting or liking comments, and receiving speedy responses from their peers.

### ***Focused on Community***

Learning is a social activity in which a sense of community facilitates student interaction and satisfaction. Berry (2019) defines community as "... feelings of membership and closeness within a social group" (p. 164). Berry considers shared goals and collaboration as critical to maintaining the community with academic and social support. In other words, whether students perform well in a course or are more likely to stay enrolled could be influenced by the social aspects of that course. Turk et al. (2022) re-examines the community of inquiry model made popular by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer in 2000. They believe the creation of a learning community and engagement are strong predictors of relatedness and autonomy. In facilitating online discourse, faculty must, therefore, help students to understand the importance of their role in the process.

Williams (2015) examines the effects on learning investment through a practice-oriented perspective of quality amidst changes occurring within institutions. The study also contemplates how the process of increased monitoring and

accountability works towards quality improvement. Sanga (2020) makes the case for the three pillars method of design that supports the development of deep learning, intellectual skills, and professional skills in a community environment. The idea behind the three pillars design method is that for it to be successful, learners must be engaged in the process through active learning strategies. Hajian (2019) introduces the idea of the situated learning environment where knowledge is constructed with learners as active participants of a highly connected community in which knowledge and culture are integrated. Li et al. (2020) also found that students who are motivated to learn will be more active in the online discussion boards and will feel more connected to the learning community. Instructor's guidance and a framework for interaction with students as partners in the process can lead to improved learner's interaction and outcomes.

The study-away course to Puerto Rico focused on Afro Puerto Rican people, cultures, histories, and experiences. To create a sense of community among students and immerse them in Afro-Puerto Rican communities, the authors integrated various activities into the course syllabus. It was crucial for students to learn about this group from their perspectives and engage directly with them (Gaines, 2024; Sims & Stephens, 2011). In doing so, students attended an interactive group lecture provided by an Afro-Puerto Rican community leader who heads a cultural centre in the historically Black neighbourhood of Loíza. At this cultural institution, the students collectively learned the Afro-Puerto group dance of Bomba. As a class, the students worked together to learn cultural dance. They did not only learn from the community, but they also volunteered with the community. Thus, advancing the notion that experiential learning through mandatory volunteering enhances students' understanding and skills as they apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts. (Ng'umbi, 2022). By immersing themselves in the community they were studying, students learned directly from it, genuinely highlighting Afro-Puerto Rican culture. Additionally, this approach fostered community building among the students.

The results and discussion explain how the Foundations of Quality (effective instruction, intentional design, inclusive and accessible content, curricular steered by the learner, active, interactive, and engaging coursework, and projects that are focused on community) are used to improve students' research skills and track their progress. These foundations are carefully woven into the course design and delivery to promote learner engagement and motivation. When used in focused design, the foundations of quality help to facilitate a positive learning atmosphere. The detailed



explanation of each foundation emphasizes its specific role in enhancing the student's overall learning experience. These quality foundations help to present the conclusions that can be made from the paper as a whole and prepare practitioners to apply the principles in their practice.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

There is much to be drawn from this work. The larger meaning here is to partner and collaborate for successful classes that will best benefit the students. The overarching goal is to foster partnerships and collaborations that lead to successful classes, benefiting the students. While a multitude of suggestions are presented here, it is not necessary—or even advisable—to implement them all at once. Instead, consider your specific context: the subject matter, the learning environment, and the unique needs of your students. Prioritize recommendations that align closely with these factors. You might start by implementing one or two suggestions each semester, carefully observing their impact, and adjusting, as necessary. This approach allows for gradual, meaningful improvement tailored to your unique teaching context. We hope that this work will be beneficial for faculty across the disciplines and those who instruct in-person, online, and hybrid courses. As such, the implications of our research will be explored further in later sections and future research.

The elements and suggestions provided throughout this work are interdisciplinary in nature and are applicable in many settings. Regardless of the area of study, the coursework can incorporate effective instruction, centre intentional design, be inclusive and accessible, steered by the learner, community-focused and active, interactive, and engaging. These practices can be implemented in various methods, such as synchronously and asynchronously online, and inside the classroom or during travel.

This paper shares case-based qualitative research methodology, limited to one study-away course. The resulting research explored the process that two faculty members used to shape an online/hybrid course. While the data may be positive, future studies could consider the process of multiple faculty members, at the same or different institutions, and how the application of the quality principles may work in different environments or using quantitative research methodology.

Because of the qualitative nature of the research, only specific variables were considered for quality. Future studies could explore additional quality items from the literature. For example, learner demographics, motivation, and blended learning

modalities. This exploration into online and hybrid education underscores the importance of an integrated approach, which understands online and hybrid instruction as an interconnected landscape. This environment prioritizes the relationships between learners, content, instructors, peers, and the community. The outlined foundations of quality serve as a bridge between traditional and innovative strategies, fostering an engaging narrative that facilitates meaningful learning experiences.

The proposed roadmap, enriched by the foundations of quality provides a comprehensive guide for educators across disciplines. It encourages faculty, especially those new to online/hybrid learning, to engage in practices that contribute to the growing body of research on course quality. This can include modelling, making use of universal design, and including community partners.

The study's findings suggest that using effective teaching methods and student-focused activities can make learning more engaging and useful for students. It also shows that these methods can be continuously improved based on feedback and performance. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment. These implications provide insights into potential challenges for implementing these methods and how to overcome them. These findings could lead to more effective and engaging experiences for both the faculty and the learners. This work, therefore, serves as a testament to the potential of online and blended education when implemented with intentionality, inclusivity, and a focus on learner engagement. The study focuses on qualitative contexts and experiences that are not generalizable. However, we believe the findings can be replicated in other settings as the insights gained can inform understanding of similar situations or phenomena. For example, future studies might explore specific metrics or assessment methods to measure the impact of applying and evaluating foundations of quality. It is our hope that these insights will inspire continued innovation and exploration in online and blended learning. That is, faculty will make use of foundations of quality across the disciplines.

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