



WCET Online Learning Quality Rubric

| Overview

The **WCET Online Learning Quality Rubric** is an institutional self-assessment tool focused on four domains. The four domains represent the broad areas of focus that shape an institution's capacity for online learning: Institutional Readiness, Faculty and Staff Readiness, Learner Centeredness, and Community Engagement. Each of those domains includes a number of criteria that successful programs need to address.

If you are interested in a more detailed version of the rubric, including descriptions of what maturity looks like for each criterion, please consider becoming a WCET member. WCET members can access the full **WCET Online Learning Quality Rubric and Toolkit**, which contains a more detailed rubric as well as exercises and case studies created to help facilitate institutional discussion about online learning maturity. More information on WCET membership can be found at wcet.wiche.edu/join-us/, or you can contact WCET at wcetinfo@wiche.edu.

Criteria Descriptions

Below you will find broad descriptions of each criterion. The first line (in italics) is the highest level view of that criterion. A more in-depth criterion overview is included in the member-only **WCET Online Learning Quality Rubric and Toolkit**.

Domain 1: Institutional

The *institutional domain* reflects the systems, policies, leadership, and infrastructure that establish online learning as a core part of the institution's mission. It includes planning, leadership, funding, compliance, technology, policies, and processes for review and improvement. Institutions that demonstrate maturity in this domain treat online learning not as an add-on but as a fully integrated element of institutional strategy and operations.

- **Planning:** How online learning is reflected in the institution's mission, vision, goals, and the degree to which planning for online learning is linked to institutional strategy.
- **Needs Assessment:** The methods used to determine demand for new or existing online courses and programs, including use of labor-market and learner-demand data.
- **Institutional Leadership:** The engagement and advocacy of senior leaders in supporting, communicating about, and integrating online learning into institutional success.
- **Online Learning Leadership:** The structure, roles, and accountability mechanisms that guide quality, coordination, and growth of online learning.
- **Cross-Campus Engagement:** The collaboration among academic, administrative, and support units to plan, deliver, and sustain online learning.
- **Financial Sustainability:** The stability and predictability of funding to maintain and grow online learning, including staffing, technology, and program development.
- **Student Learning Outcomes Assessment:** The processes used to define, measure, and apply evidence of learner achievement to strengthen programs and teaching.
- **Course and Program Health Assessment:** The systematic review of enrollment, quality, and outcomes for online courses and programs and the responsible management of program teach-outs.

- **Technology Adoption:** How the institution evaluates, implements, and supports adoption of learning technologies across departments and user groups.
- **Technology Use and Support:** The reliability, integration, and scalability of the institution's technical infrastructure supporting online learning.
- **Clear Modes of Delivery:** How clearly the institution defines, communicates, and reviews course and program delivery formats such as online, hybrid, or distance.
- **Federal Policy and Leadership:** The institution's awareness of and engagement with federal policies and regulations affecting online learning.
- **State and Local Legal and Regulatory Compliance:** The institution's ability to meet and maintain compliance with all state and local authorization requirements for online learning.
- **Institutional and Programmatic Accreditation:** The systems and processes ensuring online learning meets institutional and program-level accreditation standards.
- **Data Privacy and Security:** Policies, practices, and training that safeguard learner and employee data and ensure secure use of digital systems.
- **Intellectual Property Use and Ownership:** The clarity, fairness, and enforcement of policies governing ownership and use of online course materials and learner-created content.
- **Accessibility:** The institution's commitment to designing and maintaining online courses and services that meet accessibility standards and use principles of universal design.
- **Data-Informed Decision Making:** *The collection, analysis, and application of data to guide decisions about online learning quality and performance.*
- **Continuous Improvement:** The institution's ongoing, systematic processes for reviewing and enhancing online learning quality and effectiveness.

Domain 2: Faculty and Staff

The *faculty and staff domain* addresses the employees who create, deliver, and support online learning. It includes preparation, professional development, instructional design capacity, governance, workload recognition, support services, technology adoption, and the culture of innovation. Institutions that demonstrate maturity in this domain empower employees at all levels to contribute to high-quality online learning and ensure that those contributions are valued and supported.

- **Faculty Preparation and Support:** The professional development, training, and ongoing resources provided to faculty who design and teach online.
- **Staff Preparation and Support:** The training and guidance provided to staff who advise, tutor, or otherwise support online learners.
- **Online Course and Program Design:** The standards, processes, and collaborations that ensure consistent, evidence-based design of online courses and programs.
- **Instructional Design Capacity:** The availability and expertise of instructional design professionals who partner with faculty to support quality online instruction.
- **Workload and Recognition:** How online teaching, course development, and learner support are recognized and integrated into workload, compensation, and evaluation systems.
- **Course Delivery:** The predictability and clarity of online course and program schedules that enable learners to plan and progress effectively.
- **Curiosity and Innovation:** The institutional culture that encourages experimentation, pilots, and the scaling of innovative teaching practices and tools.
- **Collaboration and Communication:** The systems and communities that foster cross-institutional sharing of effective online learning practices.

- **Instructional Governance and Decision Making:** The inclusion of online learning in academic governance processes, such as curriculum design and quality review.
- **Non-Instructional Governance and Decision Making:** *The inclusion of online learning considerations in operational governance areas such as technology, advising, and learner services.*

Domain 3: Learner-Centered

The aim of the *learner-centered domain* is to support institutions in focusing on how well learners are included in the institution's planning processes.

Additionally, this criterion considers how learners are supported to succeed in online learning environments. The assumption of this rubric is that institutions offering online learning have adopted a learner-ready institution mindset rather than a mindset that focuses the readiness responsibility on the shoulders of the learner. It includes access to technology, digital literacy, onboarding, academic and non-academic supports, wellness and belonging, feedback mechanisms, and persistence supports. Institutions that demonstrate maturity in this domain anticipate learner needs, build inclusive pathways, and design supports that are proactive, personalized, and integrated into the online learning experience.

- **Access to Technology:** Learners' ability to obtain and maintain the hardware, software, and connectivity required for participation in online learning, and the institution's support for these needs.
- **Learner-Centered Design:** The extent to which online courses and services are designed using universal design principles that remove barriers and create inclusive experiences.
- **Learner Data Privacy, Security, and Intellectual Property:** How clearly the institution communicates and upholds policies that protect learner data, ensure security, and define ownership of learner-created work.

- **Orientation and Onboarding:** The preparation learners receive before beginning online courses or programs, including expectations, tools, and support.
- **Academic Support for Online Learners:** The availability and quality of advising, tutoring, library, and related academic supports available to online learners.
- **Non-Academic Support for Online Learners:** The availability and responsiveness of non-academic services—such as financial aid, career services, and wellness—adapted for online learners.
- **Belonging:** The degree to which online learners feel connected to peers, faculty, staff, and the broader institution through intentional community-building and inclusion efforts.
- **Feedback and Engagement:** The structures that give learners multiple, meaningful ways to share their experiences and influence improvements beyond course evaluations.
- **Persistence and Completion Support:** The systems that help online learners stay enrolled, overcome challenges, and successfully complete their programs.

Domain 4: Community Engagement

A flourishing online learning program meets the needs of its community. The *community engagement* domain emphasizes the institution's relationships with the broader community—employers, alumni, partners, and decision makers. It includes defining whom the institution serves, responding to the needs of its defined community, expanding access to new populations, and building partnerships that create opportunity. Institutions that are mature in this domain are seen as trusted partners, aligning online learning with workforce and community priorities while maintaining a reputation for quality and credibility.

- **Defining the Online Learning Community:** How the institution identifies the populations it intends to serve through online learning.

- **Community Needs:** The processes used to understand community and workforce needs and align online offerings accordingly.
- **Broad Access for Underserved Populations:** The strategies and outcomes related to expanding participation among groups historically underrepresented in higher education.
- **Alumni and Lifelong Learning:** The extent to which alumni and community members have ongoing access to online continuing education and professional development.
- **Employer Partnerships:** The depth and quality of collaboration with employers to align online programs with workforce needs.
- **Engagement with Decision Makers:** The institution's relationships with policymakers, accreditors, and regional leaders that support and advance online learning.
- **Public Trust and Reputation:** The level of confidence held by the public, employers, and policymakers in the institution's online learning quality and outcomes.