

Review of McKinney School of Law Online Programs

**PRAC GRANT PROPOSAL
Spring Semester 2015**

Cover Sheet

I. Summary Information

Name and rank/title of Project Director(s)	Margaret Ryznar, Associate Professor of Law Yvonne Dutton, Associate Professor of Law Max Huffman, Professor of Law
Department/Division and School	Robert H. McKinney School of Law
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Project Title	Review of McKinney School of Law Online Programs
Project Dates (all projects must be completed within one year of award)	July 1, 2015-June 30, 2016

II. Budget

Grant requested: \$2500

Justification:

1. Professors Ryznar, Dutton, and Huffman are on 10-month contracts. The project will require work during uncompensated months of July 2015 and June 2016
2. Professors Ryznar, Dutton, and Huffman will be devoting between 1 and 5 percent of their work time during Academic Year 2015-2016
3. McKinney School of Law resources, including faculty assistant time, computer hardware and software, and office supplies will be committed to this project

SUBMITTED FEBRUARY 23, 2015:



Margaret Ryznar
Associate Professor of Law

/S/ Yvonne Dutton

Yvonne Dutton
Associate Professor of Law

/S/ MRH

Max Huffman
Professor of Law

Proposal

**Creating a Peer Review Model for Online Courses to Ensure
Program Effectiveness**

I. Abstract (100 words):

In Spring 2015, the Indiana University McKinney School of Law launched its new Online Education Program with the delivery of three fully-asynchronous online courses. McKinney plans to increase this number of online courses over the coming years based on the lessons learned from these initial three courses. However, there is currently no model in place to guide the review of online course offerings, although the school and faculty have a longstanding practice of, and significant experience in, reviewing live courses to ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning. This project aims to develop by December 2015 a peer review model that can be institutionalized to aid faculty in assessing teacher effectiveness and student learning in the school's online courses.

II. Description of the Project (3-5 pages):

Purpose:

The purpose of this project is to create a peer review model for IU McKinney's newly-launched Online Education Program by December 2015 that can be institutionalized to aid faculty in assessing teacher effectiveness and student learning in the school's online courses. While a peer review currently exists for live courses, it cannot be effectively applied to the online environment given its uniqueness.

The project directors are the three faculty members—Margaret Ryznar, Yvonne Dutton, and Max Huffman—who launched McKinney's Online Education Program with three different fully-asynchronous online courses in Spring 2015. Each of these faculty members received a

Curriculum Enhancement Grant and course design assistance from the Center for Teaching and Learning to aid them in creating those online offerings. From that process, they learned a lot about how to create a course that delivers quality content in a way that engages students and ensures student learning.

However, there is not yet a method to institutionalize peer review of these and future online courses to assess teacher effectiveness and student learning. This project therefore aims to ensure that McKinney's online offerings receive the rigorous and informed review that is a hallmark of the school's practice as regards to live classroom courses.

Indeed, the school and faculty have a longstanding practice of, and significant experience in, reviewing live courses in order to ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning in the classroom. Among other things, senior faculty conduct peer reviews of all junior faculty courses every semester by sitting in on their courses and reviewing course materials. When faculty members review live courses, they are able to attend the course, observe the teacher and the students, and evaluate indicators of teacher effectiveness and student learning. Moreover, having taught for many years, senior faculty are quite familiar with a large-range of classroom teaching techniques, as well as the law school's student population, and have developed a keen sense of whether content is being conveyed effectively in live courses.

However, because distance learning in the law school is new, the faculty often has minimal familiarity with what content and activities best enhance student learning in this new environment. In fact, although all faculty members might be required at some point to review an online course, not all will be required to teach an online course. This project aims to ensure that all faculty members—including those professors who have had the benefit of extensive course design assistance—are well-equipped to assess the effectiveness of the law school's online

courses and contribute to increasing the effectiveness of each of those courses in the years to come.

Intended Outcomes of the Project:

The project directors will create a peer review model for McKinney’s online courses that will consist of a manual to guide faculty in assessing the effectiveness of those courses in enhancing student learning. The project directors have already discussed the idea of a peer review model with Sally Jamerson—a consultant with the Indiana University Columbus Center for Teaching and Learning—who has recommended using the 8 Quality Matters standards to guide the process.¹ Those 8 standards focus on: (1) Overview and Introductions; (2) Learning Objectives; (3) Assessment; (4) Materials; (5) Interaction and Engagement; (6) Technology; (7) Learner Support; (8) Accessibility and Usability.

Specific elements of the manual to guide McKinney law faculty in assessing the effectiveness of IU McKinney Online courses will include:

- An overview of the literature related to designing and delivering online courses so that they enhance student learning;
- A checklist of questions that faculty reviewing online courses should answer to guide their assessment of the quality of those courses;
- Suggestions of matters to consider in answering each of the questions posed; and
- An appendix containing exemplars of quality course content relative to the eight Quality Matters standards that inform the questions.

Assessment Methods and Data Analysis Approach:

The approach to this project is multi-faceted and will occur in several stages:

¹ See Quality Matters, available at <https://www.qualitymatters.org/rubric> (last accessed Feb. 15, 2015). “The Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric, Fifth Edition, 2014 is a set of 8 General Standards and 43 Specific Review Standards used to evaluate the design of online and blended courses.” *Id.*

- First, the project directors will conduct a review of the literature relating to assessing the quality of online distance education courses and the quality matters standards.
- Second, the project directors will seek out the expertise and guidance of colleagues at the Center for Teaching and Learning to aid them in creating specific questions for the peer review manual that are consistent with the Quality Matters standards.
- Third, the project directors will conduct self-, peer-, and student-assessments of their own course content in their three spring course offerings:
 - Self- and peer-assessments will require the project directors to assess their own courses using questions developed according to the Quality Matters standards, tailored to ensure that they best serve the purposes of assessing course quality in light of a particular course and its learning outcomes.
 - Student assessments will involve asking students to answer questions on an anonymous survey developed by the project directors seeking input on course content as it relates to student learning. The project directors will not use any anonymous student data in written materials, but it will serve as a useful check on the project directors' own conclusions about what course content is the most effective in enhancing student learning in particular kinds of courses. The project directors will further discuss the results of these surveys together upon receiving them, drawing lessons from the data.

Using all of these resources, the manual for the McKinney law faculty on online course evaluation will reflect the latest state of knowledge as it relates to quality online course offerings. Additionally, the assessments of the project directors' own courses will allow them to create a

manual that can provide faculty concrete examples of the type of course content will satisfy the Quality Matters standards.

The project directors' three courses are very different in terms of topic and design content—for example, one is a large black-letter law Trusts and Estates class and one is smaller international course that follows a seminar-like format with students writing papers for their final class project. The manual will address the different methods of online teaching in each of these contexts.

Methods of Evaluation and Dissemination of Results:

A final report will be submitted to PRAC in Spring 2016. The peer review manual that results from this project by December 2015 will be submitted to the Dean of IU McKinney and law faculty through a written report. The project directors will also share the findings—and describe the underlying process of creating the peer review manual—to the faculty at a lunchtime brown bag session. In addition, the project directors will share their findings with the Indiana University Center for Teaching and Learning.

The project directors also intend to seek to present the findings from this project at a legal conference that focuses on teaching methods. Indeed, the project directors understand from their own outreach efforts that colleagues at other law schools are similarly in the early days of offering online courses. Thus, their experience in creating a peer review model for online courses should be of particular interest.

Intended Use of Findings for Program Improvement:

The findings from this project are essential to Indiana University McKinney's ability to develop and maintain an Online Education Program that delivers quality programs to students that both engage and enhance their learning. The proposed peer review manual will be the first

step in ensuring that all faculty at the law school are well-equipped with the background, knowledge, and specific program content examples to enable them to assess and aid in improving McKinney's online courses. The project directors expect that this initial peer review manual can be updated over time as the scholarship on and data about distance education learning increases—and as the law school's online course offerings increase as well. We also expect that the findings from this study could serve as a model for other schools and departments within the University.

Budget:

The project directors seek a \$2500 faculty stipend to be shared among them to aid in recompensing them for the substantial amount of time they expect to devote to developing this peer review model. The three project directors are on a 10-month salary, and these additional funds will allow them to devote a portion of the summer months as well as part of Fall 2015 to conduct and complete this project.