

# Analysis of Peer Review Comments: QM Recommendations and Feedback Intervention Theory

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Because feedback is a critical component of the continuous improvement cycle of the Quality Matters (QM) peer review process, the present research analyzed the feedback that peer reviewers provided to course developers after a voluntary, nonofficial QM peer review of online courses. Previous research reveals that the effects of feedback on performance are not consistently positive; however, these findings are frequently ignored by those who assume that all feedback improves performance. Feedback Intervention Theory (FIT) organizes the wide variability in this body of research by outlining conditions when feedback can be expected to improve or impair performance. In the present research, peer review comments were analyzed in comparison to the QM guidelines for writing effective recommendations and FIT to evaluate the feedback from the peer review process. Results of this study are applied to inform future training and peer review implementation.

At the heart of the continuous improvement goals of Quality Matters (QM) is a peer review process for online and blended courses. To participate in this process, online courses are submitted by a course representative for internal, nonofficial reviews managed by the subscribing institution with locally determined procedures or for official QM reviews either managed by QM or managed by the subscribing institution. The official reviews require at least one of the QM trained and certified reviewers on the team of three to be external to the institution and at least one be a subject matter expert. All must be active, experienced online instructors and are led by a Certified Master Reviewer (see [Figure 1](#)).

The course representative is responsible for preparing the course for review by a team of trained peer reviewers (Quality Matters 2015). The peer reviewers compare the course design with the QM Rubric<sup>TM</sup> Standards and detailing annotations and provide feedback to the course representative to enable revisions to the course with the goal that the design eventually meets QM expectations for quality. This continuous improvement model is one of ongoing peer review, feedback, and course revision.

Central to the process is the feedback that peer reviewers provide to course representatives. According to QM, course representatives are those responsible for designing the course and may include faculty members and instructional designers working individually or in teams. Reviewer feedback comprises the substantive content that course representatives use to make revisions to the course to align it with quality standards. In several of its professional development training



FIGURE 1 Experience and Training Required for QM Certified Peer Reviewers Who Perform Official Peer Reviews. In Official QM Reviews, All Peer Reviewers Must Be Certified, and Each Review Team Is Led by a Certified Master Reviewer. © MarylandOnline, Inc. Reproduced by permission of Deborah Adair. Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightsholder.

courses, QM provides guidelines for writing helpful recommendations. Drafting helpful recommendations for course improvement is a primary learning objective for QM's flagship workshop on using the Rubric to review course design, *Applying the QM Rubric™ (APPQMR)* (Quality Matters 2014b), and a helpful recommendation equation is provided in the *Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric Workbook* (Quality Matters 2014a). Included in these guidelines for writing helpful recommendations are instructions to reference the QM Rubric's Standards and Annotations; note specific content from the course under review; and state course revisions in such a way that they are constructive, specific, measurable, sensitive, and balanced. Constructive comments provide suggestions for improvement that the course representative can implement and include a specific example of what is being recommended. Comments are measurable if the recommendation includes content that can be observed in the course if it is implemented. Comments should be stated in a manner that is sensitive to the feelings of the course representative by avoiding negative language and pointing out a balance of both strengths and weaknesses in the course. Adhering to these guidelines is the responsibility of each peer reviewer, and providing feedback that falls short of these expectations may hamper efforts to revise the course.

## THE PROBLEM

Despite the central role of peer reviewers' feedback to course revision, no attempts to analyze the content of comments provided by peer reviewers are found in the empirical literature. The omission of a critical examination of reviewer feedback may stem from the common assumption that any feedback will improve performance (Kluger and DeNisi 1996). Kluger and DeNisi (1996) reviewed the empirical evidence and pointed out that the effects of feedback on performance are not consistently positive; however, these research findings are frequently ignored. Guided by previous research on the effects of feedback on performance, Kluger and DeNisi developed a model of feedback interventions that consist of "actions taken by external agents to provide information regarding some aspect of one's task performance" (255). This scope is consistent with the QM peer review process in which peer reviewers provide information regarding course design to a course representative, and the feedback intervention model Kluger and DeNisi proposed may suggest implications regarding the effects of peer reviewers' comments on course revision.

Kluger and DeNisi (1996) reviewed various lines of research, which concluded that feedback improves performance in some situations, impairs performance in some situations, and has no effect on performance in some situations. Their feedback intervention theory (FIT) attempted to reconcile these contradictory outcomes by specifying the focus of attention prompted by feedback and its implications for action. FIT assumes that behavior is regulated by a comparison of the feedback one receives to relevant standards or goals that are organized in a hierarchy. Higher in the hierarchy are goals related to the self, and feedback that directs attention toward these goals leads to actions that consider implications for the self. Lower in the hierarchy are goals related to details of the task, and feedback that directs attention toward these goals leads to actions that consider implications for task performance.

FIT predicts that feedback that directs attention to the self distracts the recipient from the task and brings focus instead to the implications of the task for the self. This shift increases cognitive load by providing additional, unrelated-to-the-task information that depletes cognitive resources for performing the task. Such a shift may trigger affective reactions to the feedback as its implications for the self are considered. Attempts to resolve discrepancies between the feedback and self-goals (i.e., self-esteem, control, impression management) are not expected to be those that improve performance on the task. Given conditions when cognitive resources for task performance are depleted, affective reactions must be managed, and non-task-related issues capture attention, task performance is likely to be impaired. Even in circumstances when the feedback receiver is able to revert attention to the task and away from the self, subsequent performance on the task may be influenced, and potentially debilitated, by the previously salient self-goals (e.g., framing effects).

Most likely to lead to performance improvements is feedback that directs attention to the focal task and its task details. Feedback that indicates failure to meet a standard may trigger the recipient to work harder to achieve the goal (i.e., increase effort, time, and focus on the task) or work smarter by generating alternative work strategies to achieve the goal (i.e., develop task specific plans instead of applying a more general strategy with more zeal). Feedback that prompts these processes keeps attention focused on the task and is more likely to lead to improved performance though several variables moderate this relationship (see Kluger and DeNisi 1996).

## Applying the FIT Model to QM Reviewer Feedback

When applied to feedback provided in the context of a QM peer review, the FIT model would predict that peer reviewers' feedback that makes the self-related goals of the course representative salient would negatively affect his or her ability to focus on the course improvement task. Although neither explicitly articulated in this manner nor linked to feedback intervention research, QM's professional development materials teach participants the distinction between course design and course delivery (i.e., teaching behaviors), assisting peer reviewers in generating feedback focused on the task of course design revision. QM materials explicitly state that the course review process is focused solely on course design, not course delivery. Course design elements include the structural components of the course (e.g., behavioral learning objectives; course navigation; interaction opportunities, such as instructor and student introductions; available learning materials that contribute to achievement of learning objectives; appropriate course technologies; assessment measures that are clearly stated, such as grading policy) that are described in the QM Rubric<sup>TM</sup> and detailing annotations. Course delivery elements include the presentation of the course to students, personal interactions, and idiosyncrasies that are unique to each individual faculty member. Highlighting the design-delivery distinction and training peer reviewers to write comments regarding design improvements facilitates the ability of peer reviewers' feedback to improve performance in online and blended course design. Reviewers who blur this distinction by directing attention to elements of course delivery may impair the ability of the course representative to implement revisions to the course that the reviewers are attempting to improve.

The purpose of the present research was to systematically examine the content of the course review feedback elicited in the first round of voluntary nonofficial QM peer reviews to design future continuous improvement programs for online courses. The QM guidelines for writing helpful recommendations and implications derived from FIT provided comparison standards for evaluating the utility of peer reviewers' feedback provided to course representatives (i.e., faculty members who developed and submitted the course under review). The current research sought to address the following questions: Do the peer reviewers' comments meet the QM guidelines of being constructive, specific, measurable, sensitive, and balanced? Do the comments cite content or information from the course under review? Is information from the QM Standards quoted or referenced in reviewers' comments to the faculty course developer? Do the comments include information that is not related to the peer review process that diverts attention away from the task of ongoing course improvement, which is detrimental to performance according to FIT? To address these questions, the peer reviewers' written comments to the faculty course developers were coded according to how well they conformed to the QM recommendations for writing effective comments and to standards derived from FIT regarding content cited, feedback-standard discrepancies noted and utility of alternatives provided.

## METHOD

Our institution initiated a nonofficial internal peer review process based on the QM framework in the summer of 2012 as a second phase of QM implementation after faculty teaching online received initial QM Rubric<sup>TM</sup> training. When first introduced, the process was met with

skepticism by faculty. To improve their understanding of the process, faculty were trained on the distinction between course design and course delivery, misunderstandings that confused peer review with administrative review were clarified, and the process was incentivized by offering faculty course developers one thousand dollars for each course successfully meeting QM Standards based on the peer review.

To increase familiarity with the review process, faculty course developers self-reviewed their own courses prior to participation in peer review, gaining experience applying the Rubric to their courses. While the faculty developer reviewed his or her own course, the College Online Coordinator (OC), a fellow faculty member in the college who served as a facilitator and mentor for teaching online and was a QM Certified Peer Reviewer,<sup>1</sup> also reviewed the course and met to discuss potential course revisions with the faculty course developer. To reduce faculty resistance and maintain a supportive, collaborative context, faculty developers were under no obligation to implement the OC's suggestions.

After discussion, the course was sent to the peer review team. All peer reviewers were required to have taught a fully online course on the recently adopted learning management system (LMS) and were required to successfully complete the QM course APPQMR. In the majority of cases, the Chair of the review team was a QM Certified Peer Reviewer.<sup>2</sup> Each Review Committee included a Subject Matter Expert, a parallel requirement for official QM reviews. For every three courses reviewed, each peer reviewer was offered a stipend of \$250.<sup>3</sup> Over the course of four semesters, thirty-seven courses from nineteen different faculty course developers were peer reviewed. At the end of the fourth semester of reviews, a subcommittee of the University Distance Learning Advisory Council along with faculty members who participated in the peer review examined the process to consider implementation efficiency and possible revisions. Committee discussion revealed wide variation in the content of comments that the peer reviewers provided to faculty course developers. Although the majority of the faculty members enjoyed the process and felt it was valuable, they also complained that they received little constructive feedback from reviewers. Although some reported high levels of helpful comments that led to substantial course revision, others reported receiving very few comments at all. This wide variability in anecdotal descriptions of comments provided the impetus for the current study to clarify the nature and utility of the comments and inform continuous improvement plans.

To empirically examine the peer reviewers' comments after the peer review process had closed, the comments that had been entered into the QM Course Review Management System (CRMS) were deidentified by removing the names of the courses being reviewed and by dissociating them from the names of the peer reviewers who provided comments and the names of the faculty developers who submitted courses. The research was approved as an exempt study by the Institutional Review Board of Texas A&M University–Central Texas.

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<sup>1</sup>Certified Peer Reviewers are required to take QM's Applying the Quality Matters Rubric (APPQMR) course and one additional course (see Figure 1). These individuals are qualified to participate in official, external QM reviews. A full list of available QM courses can be found at <https://www.qualitymatters.org/professional-development/courses>

<sup>2</sup>In official QM reviews the Committee Chair is a Master Reviewer who is a Certified Peer Reviewer and has completed at least two external reviews and received additional training on managing course reviews.

<sup>3</sup>Additional details on the process and research on faculty perceptions regarding participating in peer review are provided in Schwegler, Altman and Bunkowski (2014).

Two research assistants who had previous experience as students in fully online courses on the current LMS provided independent codes of the peer reviewers' comments for the QM recommendations, and a third coder reviewed all codes and resolved discrepancies. The manuscript authors provided independent codes for the FIT categories and resolved discrepancies through discussion.

## MATERIALS

### QM Criteria Coding

In completing the course reviews, all peer reviewers used the 2011–2013 version of the QM Rubric<sup>TM</sup>, the current version of the Rubric at the time.<sup>4</sup> All peer reviewers' feedback was coded based on how well it adhered to QM's training on writing effective comments. In the APPQMR course, reviewers are taught that comments should include content from the QM Rubric Standards or Annotations, content from the course under review, and a recommendation that is constructive, specific, measurable, sensitive, and balanced. These recommendations for writing effective comments were translated into a coding Rubric for evaluating the comments provided by peer reviewers.

### FIT Coding

In addition, comments were coded based on elements of FIT proposed by Kluger and DeNisi (1996). Specifically, the comments provided by peer reviewers were categorized regarding whether the content of the comment focused attention on (1) self-related information or effort of the faculty course developer or (2) task-related information regarding peer reviewing the content of a course. After categorization, comments were coded based on whether the peer reviewer rated the course as having met the standard under review (0 = met the standard, 1 = did not meet the standard). Finally, comments were coded regarding whether the reviewer provided an alternative recommendation (i.e., a hypothesis to test) for course design revision that the faculty course developer could implement. Comments were coded as containing no recommendation, a recommendation provided as an alternative to content in the course, or a recommendation that provided an alternative that was subsequently undermined (e.g., by making the recommendation appear optional or unnecessary; see Appendix).

## RESULTS

A total of 3,034 comments could have been provided by peer reviewers had each one provided feedback on every standard reviewed in every course. However, peer reviewers provided only a total of 927 (30.55%) comments, leaving 2,107 potential course improvement comments unstated.

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<sup>4</sup>An overview of most recent edition of the QM Rubric can be found at <https://www.qualitymatters.org/rubric>

Missing comments were distributed throughout the courses, although one course developer received absolutely no comments from any reviewer on his/her course, another received only one comment from the reviewers, and two received only two comments total from the reviewers. Conversely, some faculty course developers received copious feedback with comments on virtually every standard. Specifically, one faculty course developer received 75 comments, one received 67 comments with one reviewer commenting on every Rubric Standard, one received 59 comments, and one received 55 comments. This wide range of comment frequency from 0 to 75 comments on a given course confirmed the widely discrepant anecdotal reports that prompted the research. On average, reviewers provided 12.53 ( $SD = 19.85$ ) comments per course. Of the comments provided, the majority were stated for standards that were deemed as having been met by the peer reviewer who made the comment. Only 193 standards were rated as having not been met by peer reviewers in the final data set. All of the standards that were rated as not met were accompanied by a reviewer comment. Comments entered into the QM CRMS reflect an iterative process of comment and revision. Several comments were updated with additional remarks after the faculty course developer made revisions to the course, and the points awarded for each standard were revised to reflect the updates. Given the iterative nature of the comments, the content of all comments was analyzed regardless of whether the standard was marked as met or not met.

### Analyzing by QM Guidelines

Analyzing the content of the comments provided by peer reviewers based on the QM guidelines, the majority of the comments referenced the Rubric Standard (666 out of 927 comments, 71.84%) and a content item from the course under review (816, 88.03%). However, recommendations for course improvement were not present in the majority of comments provided by the reviewers. Only 313 (33.76%) comments included information the coders identified as a potential recommendation or suggestion or a thought-provoking question (i.e., constructive). Many of these recommendations were neither specific nor measureable. Only 222 (23.95%) recommendations were coded as including at least one example of the recommendation being offered (i.e., specific), and 202 (21.79%) recommendations were coded as including content that could be observed in the course had the recommendation been implemented (i.e., measureable). Overall, faculty course developers were provided with few recommendations to improve their courses.

Sensitivity in the written recommendations was coded according to the positive, neutral, or negative tone of the comment. When the overall comment was considered (regardless of the presence of a constructive recommendation), the feedback provided by peer reviewers was generally lacking in any affective or emotional tone (804, 86.73%), containing only neutral words with no emotion-provoking words. Only 4 (.004%) comments were rated as including more negatively valenced words than positively valenced words. A minority of comments (119, 12.84%) were coded as including more positively valenced words than negatively valenced words. Although the peer reviewers did not follow QM recommendations for writing sensitive comments by keeping them on a positive note, the reviewers did avoid using negative language in their comments to the faculty course developer.

Regarding a balanced presentation of positive and negative comments as recommended in the QM suggestions for writing effective comments, a quarter of the comments (236, 25.46%) pointed out only weaknesses or revisions needed in the course, half of the comments (482, 52.00%) pointed out only strengths or assets of the course, and a quarter of the comments (209, 22.55%)

were balanced by pointing out at least one strength and one weakness. Again, peer reviewers did not follow the recommendations for writing balanced comments but erred on the side of noting content present in the course (i.e., strengths) instead of absent from it (i.e., weaknesses). In addition to the QM recommendations for writing effective comments, the coders also rated whether the comment was a complete sentence, assuming that faculty course developers could more effectively interpret complete sentences than sentence fragments. The majority of the comments provided by peer reviewers were stated as complete sentences, including “you understood” statements and ignoring punctuation mistakes (748, 80.69%).

### Analyzing Feedback by FIT Criteria

Analyzing the content of the comments provided by peer reviewers based on FIT, the majority of the comments directed attention to the task of peer reviewing a course or to a specific element of the course under review (862, 92.99%). These findings were similar to the course evidence codes that compared comment content with the QM recommendations for writing effective comments. Extending the findings, the FIT analysis revealed that some comments diverted attention away from the task of peer review and course revision by directing attention to the faculty course developer. Specifically, 65 (7%) comments mentioned the faculty course developer (e.g., for Standard 4.5, “One of Dr. X’s strengths as a teacher is that he values quality of argument over rigid agreement with his own point of view—something I consider essential in academia”) or credited the course developer for an element in the course (e.g., for Standard 6.1, “You have an impressive spread of music samples in this course. Very impressive indeed,” and for Standard 1.1, “I am impressed with the clarity of what Dr. X does to meet this standard”) instead of providing a critical analysis of a course element. Focusing attention on the faculty course developer may support the perception that the faculty member is under review instead of the course design, a perception that is not consistent with QM’s focus on reviewing course design not course delivery.

Based on FIT codes, some comments (279, 30.10%) helped the faculty course developer generate alternative hypotheses about course design (i.e., stated suggestions for revision). Unfortunately, 52 (5.61%) additional comments included information that undermined the recommendation or the Rubric Standard under review. Examples of undermining included statements that called into question a QM Rubric Standard (e.g., for Standard 3.4, “I’m not sure how the sequencing works in this course. But I’m not sure it is needed either,” and for Standard 1.8, “I agree with Dr. X’s approach. Introductions are not needed”); contained content that pointed out that the recommendation was not achievable due to lack of university action or resources, giving the impression that the faculty course developer was absolved of responsibility (e.g., for Standard 7.2, “Links are present and active, the university needs to improve their support pages to more clearly lead to accessibility accommodation materials”); or implied that the action was not necessary (e.g., for Standard 2.2, “I think that the overall course objectives are satisfied by the course requirements as well as the podcasts which I think are really cool. But one thing that can be added is to make this link visible to the student. For example, after listing each course objective, also include how that objective will be measured through readings, assignments, papers etc. You can also make this information visible in blackboard under the unit/weeks/module tab. Just a suggestion though since it’s just more busy work!”).



## DISCUSSION

The results of the analysis of the peer reviewers' comments to faculty course developers informed the study's research questions. The first question addressed whether the peer reviewers' comments met QM Standards of being constructive, specific, measurable, sensitive, and balanced. The data revealed that the peer reviewers provided few comments to course developers, and when they did comment, they provided few recommendations in their comments. When recommendations were made, they were not consistently specific or measurable.

If the QM qualities are most useful for course developers, questions arise regarding the utility of the comments that course developers received and their ability to effectively revise their courses from them. Interestingly, this concern contrasts with anecdotal observations that course developers reported enjoying participation in the peer review process and thought it was valuable. Such reports lead to questions regarding which aspects of the peer review process course developers were evaluating. Perhaps instead of considering the extent of revisions deemed necessary and implemented in the course as an indicator of success for the review, course developers may have considered the extent that reviewers noted existing strengths of the course and failed to note revisions (i.e., the high number of strengths as indicated by the balanced code and the high number of missing comments which imply that the standard is met and no revisions are necessary). When this internal, nonofficial peer review process was designed and implemented, QM was still new to the institution, and the initial round of peer reviews were regarded as both a continuous improvement process and as an avenue to gain greater buy-in of the QM process and Rubric. Given the somewhat conflicting goals of increasing rigor in online course design and gaining acceptance of the process, peer reviewers may have received mixed messages about how hard to press on full implementation of all QM guidelines. When implementing internal reviews, both course developers and peer reviewers may need assistance in redefining a successful peer review as one that involves course revision and continuous improvement instead of one in which existing design and assumptions regarding the course are merely confirmed.

The second research question in the study considered whether reviewers' comments cited content or information from the course under review. The results from both the QM codes and the FIT codes indicated that when peer reviewers provided comments, they generally identified an element from the course in their feedback. A related question considered whether specific information from the Rubric Standard under review is quoted or referenced in reviewers' comments. Although the overall number of comments was low, when peer reviewers provided comments, they typically referenced some element of the QM Rubric or annotations in their text. The inclusion of these types of information in the peer reviewers' comments clarifies the link between the Rubric Standard and the course content that addresses the standard for the course developer. Such comments also keep the faculty course developer's attention focused on the course revision task at hand. However, although the comments integrated course content and Rubric Standards, the majority of the comments did not include recommendations to improve the alignment of the course with the standards.

According to QM recommendations, and FIT more generally, feedback that provides new ways of approaching a task are critical for improvement. QM refers to such feedback as constructive, specific, and measurable recommendations, and FIT refers to these task details as providing hypotheses that are tested regarding their fit with reality. According to FIT, when hypotheses are

judged to match reality and are objectively correct, learning can occur. However, when hypotheses do not fit reality and task motivation is low, learning is not possible. In the context of peer review, when reviewers undermine their own recommendations, the hypotheses they provide are phrased in a manner to indicate a poor fit with reality, potentially reducing the likelihood that the course developer will act on them. Reviewers who phrase their recommendation with statements that make the suggestion appear unnecessary (e.g., perhaps as an attempt to make the recommendation appear more sensitive) may thwart their own attempts at course revision.

Similarly, comments that focus attention on the faculty course developer divert attention away from the task of course revision and are likely to impair subsequent performance. Although such comments may be an attempt to praise the course developer by keeping comments on a positive note to meet the QM guideline of writing a balanced recommendation, such feedback can be problematic. According to Kluger and DeNisi (1996), feedback that references one's self triggers self-related goals, which lead to improved performance only for easy tasks when one can manage to maintain focus on the task (265). The more likely outcome is for such feedback to impair performance through diverted attention and increased cognitive demands. A growing body of research indicates that feedback targeting the person instead of the process hampers persistence in the face of difficulty (e.g., Kamins and Dweck 1999) and triggers downward comparisons to repair self-esteem instead of working to improve performance (e.g., Nussbaum and Dweck 2008). Potentially contributing to writing comments that reference the faculty course developer is the confusion by some peer reviewers regarding the distinction between design and delivery. Although this distinction is introduced and reviewed in the QM trainings, continued reminders to focus on design and not the faculty course developer may help alleviate some of these issues.

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of the peer reviewers' comments provided information to guide future training and continuous improvement plans within the institution. In addition to participation in the peer review process, mechanisms to implement QM recommendations into online course design can be expanded. For example, QM design elements can be added to existing course development processes when the course is created and updated so that peer review is one of many ongoing quality checks. Potential revisions to this internal peer review process included consideration of the trade-offs between nonofficial, internal peer reviews and official QM reviews. Opting for official reviews would require an assigned team of three certified QM reviewers, at least one external to the institution and one a subject matter expert. The team of three would be led by an experienced "Master Reviewer." The Master Reviewer provides guidance and peer coaching to those who are less experienced with the QM peer review process (for a summary of their experience and training, see Figure 1). An experienced reviewer could also clarify the distinction between design and delivery and ensure that comments keep the focus on course revision instead of on the course developer. Such coaching would be expected to lead to improved feedback for the faculty course developer, but it would preclude many faculty members from participating in the peer review process as part of a nonofficial institution-based endeavor. Providing the opportunity for faculty members to engage in peer review allows them to practice applying the Rubric to course content, which provides task-related feedback through direct experience with the process. According to Kluger and DeNisi (1996), such learning through discovery may be more beneficial to learning than receiving feedback from an external agent (265). In making decisions regarding

ongoing continuous improvement, both the utility of the feedback course developers receive in the form of peer reviewer comments and the lessons peer reviewers learn from direct participation in the process deserve consideration.

The present research was limited by the archival nature of the data. Because the peer reviews described in this study were the first ever undertaken at this institution, concerns with reviewer comments were not anticipated given the training that peer reviewers received just prior to participation. However, after the initial reviews were discussed, it became evident that a systematic examination of the comments was needed. To do so, an archival data set was obtained, and additional measures could not be collected and linked back to this data set. For example, faculty course developers, peer reviewers, or students could not be surveyed on subsequent course revisions or satisfaction with the process. Based on the limitations of the current research, it is recommended that plans to conduct research on reviewers' comments be included when implementing a nonofficial internal peer review process. The inclusion of such an analysis will allow for an identified data set that can be examined longitudinally.

To the authors' knowledge, this research provides the first study in the empirical literature on QM peer review comments and, as such, can provide a baseline for additional research in this area. Given the goals of continuous improvement in online and blended courses, this study provides a methodology to inform this critical process. Additional research on peer review feedback will reveal whether the results of this study are unique to this institution or are more generally experienced. Anecdotal data gathered at a recent QM conference suggest that the types of reviewer comments described here are also found at other institutions that are conducting nonofficial QM reviews. Future research using the coding guides regarding consistency with QM recommendations and FIT could be conducted across institutions conducting nonofficial internal reviews to ascertain whether trends found in this study are generalizable. In addition, a second phase of research can determine whether official QM reviews are plagued with the same issues. Once trends are identified, revisions to existing training programs can be implemented to determine their effects on the comments provided by reviewers to ameliorate the concerns. Further, the effects of comments on subsequent course revision can be examined, and information regarding the most effective comments can be fed back into training programs and revisions to the process. When revised, follow-up research can examine the efficacy of nonofficial versus official reviews, which may provide direction to institutions deciding between these options. Although an initial step, this systematic investigation of the products of the peer review process improved our understanding of how faculty members are communicating with each other about online course design. Because the comments faculty make to each other in the context of peer review are the substance for course improvement, examining this feedback is important for ongoing continuous improvement.

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## APPENDIX

### Coding Rules for Evaluating Comments: Feedback Intervention Theory

1. Does the content in the comment direct attention to the task/task details or the self?
  - a. . = missing data, no comment is provided
  - b. 0 = Task/Task Details—The content in the comment directs attention to specific course elements or to the task of performing a review of a course. To do so, the comment may note the fit between an element of the course and the standard (e.g., an element included in the course or an element missing from/not found in the course). Or, it may do so by mentioning elements of the course under review (e.g., “in the syllabus” or “no statement of skills is included”) or the Rubric (e.g., “standard is met”).
  - c. 1 = Self—The content in the comment directs attention to the faculty course developer. It may do so by mentioning the faculty course developer or by crediting the faculty member with good work. The focus is placed on crediting or highlighting the faculty course developer and not on crediting or highlighting an element of the course design.
2. Is a feedback-standard discrepancy indicated by points assigned for the QM review (i.e., the comment is paired with a “not met” for the standard)?
  - a. . = missing data, no comment is provided
  - b. 0 = No discrepancy is identified by the points assigned. The reviewer awarded full points (3, 2, or 1) for the standard.
  - c. 1 = A discrepancy is identified by the points assigned. The reviewer awarded 0 points for the standard.
3. Does the comment provide a viable alternative to the way the faculty course developer has designed the course, or does the comment undermine the alternative if one is provided?
  - a. . = missing data, no comment is provided
  - b. 0 = The comment does not provide an alternative recommendation/hypothesis for the faculty course developer to implement.
  - c. 1 = The comment provides an alternative recommendation/hypothesis for the faculty course developer to implement, but it contains additional information that undermines the recommendation/hypothesis. Or, the comment does not provide a recommendation/hypothesis for the course developer to implement, but it contains additional information that undermines the Rubric Standard.
  - d. 2 = The comment provides an alternative recommendation/hypothesis for the faculty course developer to implement.