

2025 QM Research Online Conference Notes

Data-Driven Insights into LMS Template Effectiveness: A Quality Matters and D2L Study

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Brief Description:

This presentation highlights the role of LMS templates in promoting student success by focusing on research-backed benefits. We will share data from a survey of 306 respondents, showing how templates can enhance student engagement, self-efficacy, and motivation. Additionally, we will explore how templates impact faculty, making online teaching more efficient. The survey data also reveals insights into institutional practices around templates, quality standards, and the flexibility to modify templates

Travis Hincey - Summary & Reflection:

I chose this session as I am constantly trying to tweak our course template in Canvas LMS and was seeking some ideas for improvement. Right off the bat, it became clear that CSC is keeping pace with template design features and motivations: consistency, embedding support resources, and providing structure for new faculty. We've spent enough time and energy iterating our template, that CSC looked ahead of the curve in terms of template adoption when looking at the survey data presented in this session.

Based on a survey, 43% of institutions reported faculty resistance as a reason for not using a template; this resistance is largely informed by concerns about academic freedom. However, templates that provide a loose structure with room for academic freedom, involving faculty in the design process, are usually seen as useful and effective, buying greater adoption. I think our large adoption of the template suggests we are doing the right things. We still have some expressed concerns about academic freedom regarding the template and I think these could be further alleviated with continued effort to make the template less clunky during the course copy process. If it "rolls" easier, it might stand out less as a constraint.

In the survey data, I found it interesting that most templates are designed by instructional designers with some faculty feedback in the review, but very few involve students in the process at all. This is true of CSC too. If we are to be a learner-centered institution, I think we should involve the student perspective more in the design of our content.

Another avenue we might expand into is program-level templates. Currently, we just have one template that fits all CSC Online offerings. The data presented in the session suggests that program-level templates can do all the good things of an institutional template while adding a “cohort feel” and a greater sense of belonging. For instance, all the pre-med courses might have the same look & feel vs. the art courses. Through this, students might feel the courses are tailored to their program’s specific needs and ways of operating. Sometimes a one-size-fits-all approach can feel like a one-size-fits-none.