

# ANNUAL REPORT

## ACADEMIC YEAR 2023-24



Center for Distance Education

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON | CENTER FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

# Center for Distance Education

## Annual Report

2023-24

### Introduction

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The Center for Distance Education (CDE) staff are committed to institutional strategic initiatives, including Student Access and Success, A Global University, and Community of Scholars. They collaborate with campus colleagues every day to ensure constant progress, improvement, and support of online education across the University of Texas at Arlington.

### Online Education at UTA

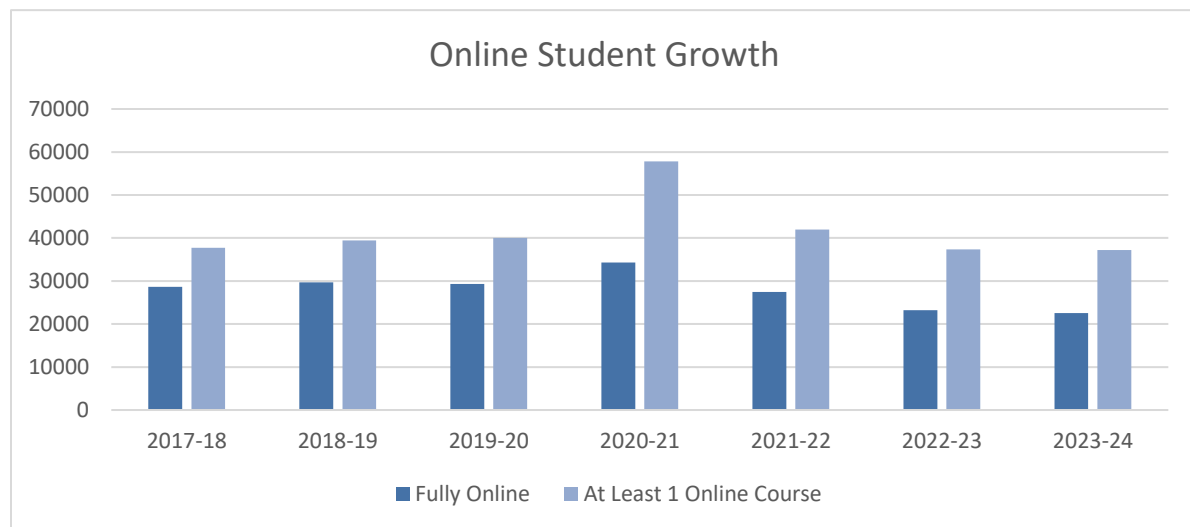
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#### Overview

Online education at UTA is both unique and extensive. Tasked with supporting the development and delivery of high-quality online education, the CDE provides a variety of services (Appendix A), including but not limited to: LMS course shells to supplement and enhance campus courses, courses facilitated completely online, online degree programs offered on a traditional semester-based schedule, accelerated online programs, and online learning consortium courses in partnership with other universities in the University of Texas System.

#### Progress

Online education at UTA has advanced exponentially in the past 25 years earning national honors for developing some of the best online master’s programs for students and military-connected families by U.S. News and World Report. The height of online enrollments in 2020 was largely influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since that time online enrollments have gradually returned to customary levels. In the 2023-2024 academic year, UTA offered 6,615 online courses with 22,515 students fully online. Moreover, a total of 37,216 students took at least one online course during the academic year; this represents 68% of the overall student enrollment of 54,242 for the academic year. In these metrics, “online course” accounts for



courses intentionally planned as fully online. The entire core curriculum at UTA is available online, and the institution offers undergraduate and graduate programs in specified disciplines in a completely online format.

## **UTA's Center for Distance Education**

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The CDE was founded in 1997 with a staff of three half-time employees and has since grown to meet the increasing demand for online offerings. CDE now has fifteen full-time and six part-time positions providing a full range of services to support faculty, staff, and students in online academic programming.

### **Overview**

CDE provides centralized assistance and support for UTA's online education offerings. In coordination with the colleges, and other campus administrative offices CDE helps to ensure online course quality and the best possible online learning experience at UTA. To that end, CDE is comprised of highly trained instructional designers, video media specialists, an experienced trainer, an online programming and policy manager, and instructional technology specialists to support colleges, faculty, and students in their online and hybrid courses.

The Center is a nationally recognized leader of quality online education, as recognized by numerous local and national awards. CDE is grounded in sound pedagogy, centered on service to students and faculty, committed to building effective online learning communities, and delivered through UTA's designated LMS. CDE partners with faculty seeking excellence in teaching online and hybrid courses through assessment and national standards for academic quality online and serves as a catalyst to transitioning traditional teaching and learning methods to the online environment.

### **Awards**

As a leader in production of quality online education, The CDE has facilitated multiple national and international awards and conference invitations.

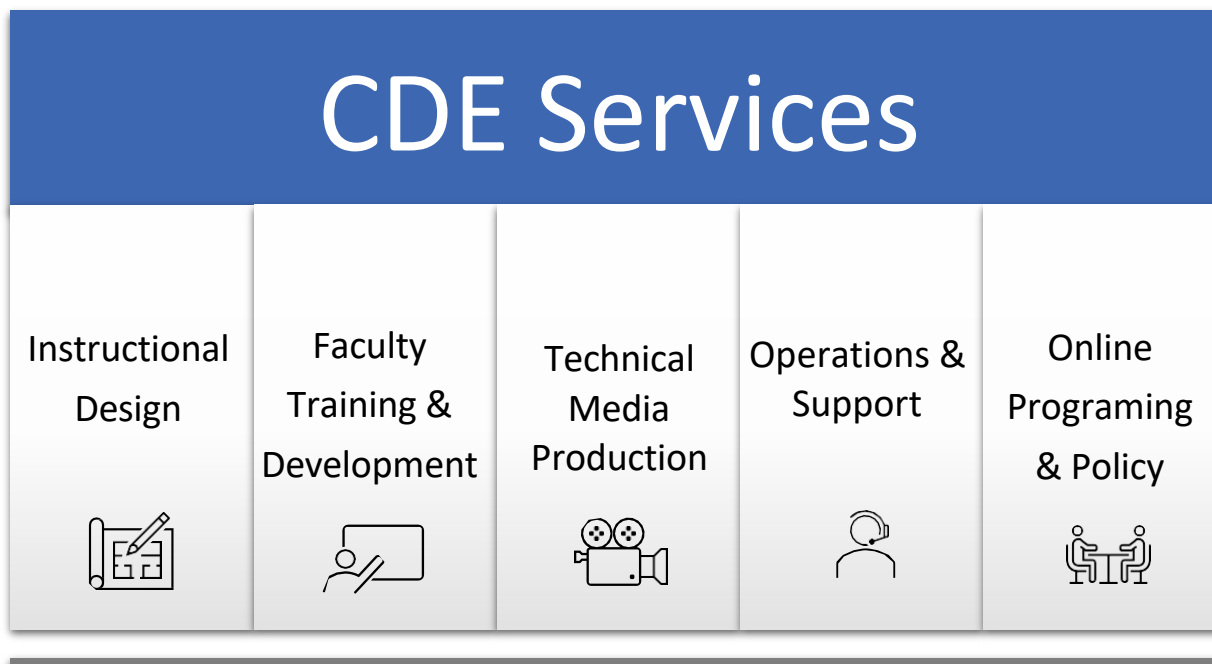
- April 2013, Dr. Peggy Semingson, awarded the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA), Best Practices Award for Excellence in Distance Learning Teaching.
- April 2013, Dr. Samuel H. "Pete" Smith, awarded the USDLA, Outstanding Leadership by an Individual in the Field of Distance Learning.
- April 2015, Dr. Szu-Yen (Neal) Liang, awarded the USDLA, Best Practices Award for Excellence in Distance Learning Teaching.
- April 2020, Dr. Karabi Bezboruah, awarded the USDLA, Excellence in Teaching/Training Award.
- April 2022, Prof. Jeremy Aaron Glass, awarded the USDLA, Excellence in Teaching/Training Award.
- September 2022, Brittany Usman, Global Education Outreach and Extended Studies, awarded the UTA, Staff Outstanding Assessment Practitioner Award.
- April 2023, Dr. Christy Spivey, awarded the TxDLA, Outstanding Commitment to Excellence and Innovation in Distance Education.
- March 2024, CDE Instructional Design Team, Extension and Extended Campus, awarded the TxDLA Outstanding Commitment to Excellence and Innovation in Digital Learning by an Organization.

## **CDE Services**

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To enhance the effectiveness and efficient delivery of engaging quality online education, CDE provides services to faculty, staff, and students in five key areas: Instructional Design, Faculty

Training & Development, Technical Media Production, Operations & Support, and Online Programming & Policy; CDE's key staff (Appendix A) lead the following service teams.



## Instructional Design

CDE assists UTA faculty and staff with developing and delivering quality online courses that enhance access and ensure success. The Instructional Design team encourages faculty to challenge their assumptions about teaching and learning practices to enhance the learning experience with dynamic teaching tools and approaches. Instructional designers collaborate with faculty throughout the course design process with varying scopes of work; scaled to the needs and experience of instructors, students, and the breadth and depth of course content.

The instructional design process aids faculty in:

- Identifying clear and measurable learning objectives.
- Organizing and creating dynamic online instructional content.
- Developing a variety of aligned LMS activities and assessments.
- Selecting and implementing appropriate accessible technologies that meet the needs of all diverse learners.
- Maintaining the UTA Canvas template available to every Canvas course, which ensures students have a consistent course experience from all colleges.

All aspects of the CDE course design process are evaluated through the lens of theory, research, and practical experience. UTA is a member of Quality Matters (QM), a nationally recognized standards-based program that offers faculty quality assurance in online course design with a focus on continuous improvement. QM develops and disseminates rubrics for the effective design of online and blended courses, based on research findings and best practices advocated by leading distance learning organizations. All online courses designed through CDE are evaluated using the QM Rubric (Appendix C). Throughout the instructional design process, CDE designers assess and make recommendations that will allow the course to meet QM standards. During AY 23-24, the CDE contributed to the Summer Microcredential Institute, which supports faculty in embedding industry-developed microcredentials into their UTA course and programs.



## Faculty Training & Development

CDE's faculty and staff Training Manager provides quality instruction to all UTA employees; regardless of modality (online or in classroom settings). Employees are trained in the understanding and use of online instructional technology tools available to help create a better learning environment for their students. Faculty and staff are guided through integrated LMS features and other integrated tools including:

- Discussions
- Assignments and Assessments
- Plagiarism Review
- Grade Center
- Retention Center
- Microsoft Teams Conferencing
- Grade Extract
- Canvas Studio (video recording tool)
- Respondus Lockdown Browser/Monitor and Honorlock (exam proctoring tools)
- Ally (document accessibility)

This training portfolio is modified and expanded as new tools are incorporated into the online learning environment and made available to UTA faculty and staff. Training and development formats include:

- Open enrollment workshops
- Live webinars
- Open labs for advanced questions
- One-on-one meetings
- Custom workshops for department specific topics

## Technical Media Production

Online courses at UTA are developed with the intention of facilitating a student learning experience that surpasses mundane text on a screen. CDE's Technical Media Production professional works with instructional designers and faculty to develop and incorporate multimedia assets into online courses. CDE can record and edit audio and video to include course introductions, interviews, lectures, and instructional videos. CDE can also generate graphic assets, such as diagrams, flowcharts, slides, and short animations to help illustrate concepts.

A 3-hour online course might include a 5-minute recorded HD video introduction, where the instructor welcomes the students, gives a brief course overview, lists learning goals, and highlights any special course requirements. Additionally, each course module may have its own 3-to-5-minute filmed segment introducing the topics contained within that section. It may also include a short, filmed presentation or interview with a guest speaker, and instructional videos incorporating graphics generated to illustrate concepts or procedures. In an online course, incorporating the face and voice of the course instructor can help overcome the detachment some might feel by not sharing a physical classroom environment on a regular basis. The goal of the Technical Media Production team is to assist the instructor in bringing content and learning to life. In academic year 23-24, the CDE Studios produced a total of 152 high quality videos.

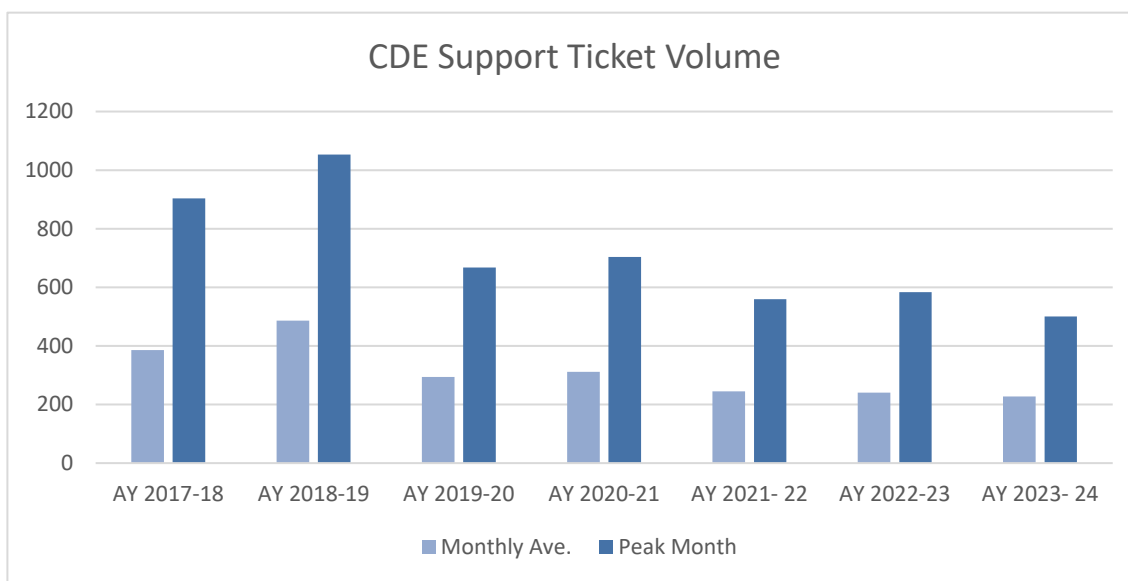
## Operations & Support

Instructional technology specialists troubleshoot technical issues encountered by faculty and students and provide answers to both technical and procedural questions. Beyond faculty and

student support, the Operations & Support team works closely with LMS Vendor Operations to address LMS enhancements and software errors. The team manages UTA's LMS, configures its settings, and installs and tests other integrated software tools and data integrations. Much of this effort is facilitated discreetly so that faculty and students encounter minimal interruptions to teaching and learning.

Additionally, the Operations & Support team manages integrations with large textbook publishers allowing access to online publisher materials through the LMS course shells. Grades earned while engaging with the online content are transmitted back to the LMS course grade center, facilitating ease of management for the instructor. CDE currently manages integrations with Cengage, McGraw-Hill, Pearson, Wiley Plus and MacMillan.

During the 2023-2024 academic year, 58,279 unique\* users accessed the Canvas LMS. Throughout the year the CDE Support team addressed 2,727 support tickets with a peak monthly volume in August 2024 of 501 tickets.



As an extension of CDE Operations & Support, LMS Vendor Support Services provides technical support to faculty and students 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, via phone, live chat, and web tickets. This support includes basic LMS assistance and internet connectivity troubleshooting. In the 23-24 academic year, an additional 4,906 tickets were handled through LMS Vendor Support Services.

*\*A unique user is defined as any individual with a UTA email account and at least one course enrollment during the specified term.*

## Online Programming and Policy

As an integral partner in the success of online education, the Manager of Digital Programs and Policy coordinates several special projects focused on compliance, quality, services, resources, and programming.

To ensure UTA is legally authorized to enroll students in programs and operate outside of the state of Texas, CDE has been designated as UTA's central resource for State Authorization federal regulatory updates and manager of UTA's national reciprocity agreement membership. State Authorization is the process by which UTA seeks permission to offer its programs to students located outside of Texas, as required by the U.S. Department of Education.

Participation in The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement, NC-SARA, provides UTA state-level authorization for each state that belongs to NC-SARA. This means

that UTA is currently authorized at the state level in 49 states, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and California (where non-profit public institutions offering online programming is not regulated). Additionally, UTA also holds a seat on the NC-SARA Data Advisory Committee to collaborate with and advise NC-SARA leadership on a variety of topics including data collection, data reporting, and research needs.

NC-SARA authorizes an institution for state-level authority but is not binding on professional boards such as nursing and education. Institutions must also satisfy regulatory disclosure requirements for programs leading to licensure as well as the requirements of professional licensing boards to provide their programs to students. Coordination with the Office of the Provost and individual colleges offering their online programs outside the State of Texas is an ongoing CDE service that works to ensure these programs maintain federal compliance. During academic year 23-24 notable accomplishments to support Title IV eligible professional licensure/certification programs offered in non-Texas states include:

- Automated disclosure language in student applications.
- Attestation option for applicants prior to enrollment.
- Automated enrollment holds for adherence to US ED regulation 34 CFR 668.43.

## **Summary**

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Online education at UTA is a constant priority. The growing market demand for online education has required the CDE to develop a modern technical infrastructure (LMS and related tools); with dedicated and experienced core staff for faculty training, instructional design, operations and support, and program coordination; to support the many Colleges' endeavoring to grow in fully online programs.

With the clear and fresh vision of the institutional Strategic Plan, how UTA's online programming evolves in the future will be determined by:

- **Investment (including personnel)**
- **Identified key target market areas (subjects, programs)**
- **Partnerships**
- **Data, systems, and processes to “enhance student access and ensure student success.”**

In addition to the day-to-day activities supporting the delivery of online education, the CDE stands ready to work with UTA leaders and Colleges to develop strategic goals that align with the Guiding Aspirations, Operational Priorities, and Maverick Imperatives. As stated in the UTA Mission, “The University is committed to providing access and ensuring student success, and to a culture of innovation, entrepreneurship, and commercialization of discoveries by our community of scholars.”

# Appendix A

## Center for Distance Education Services

The **Center for Distance Education** provides services to faculty, staff, and students in five key areas:

### Instructional Design

- Designers work with faculty and staff to develop and deliver online courses.
- Designers collaborate with faculty throughout the course design process, with varying scopes of work scaled to the needs and experience of instructors and students and breadth and depth of course content.
- UTA is a member of Quality Matters (QM), a nationally recognized, standards-based program that offers faculty quality assurance in online course design with a focus on continuous improvement. All online courses designed through CDE are evaluated using the QM Rubric.
- Throughout the instructional design process, CDE designers assess and make recommendations that will allow the course to meet QM standards.

### Faculty Training & Development

- CDE provides quality instructional technology training to faculty and staff.
- Trainers assist faculty and staff in the understanding and use of digital technology tools available and guide participants through integrated LMS features and other integrated tools.
- Training is offered in a variety of formats, including traditional workshops, webinars, and one-on-one.

### Technical Media Production

- Works with designers and faculty to develop and incorporate multimedia assets into online courses.
- Has the ability to record and edit audio and video and can generate graphic assets, such as diagrams, flowcharts, slides, and short animations.

### Operations & Support

- Instructional technology specialists troubleshoot technical issues encountered by users and answer technical and procedural questions.
- Work closely with vendors to address LMS enhancements and software errors.
- The team manages the LMS, configures its settings, schedules software upgrades, and installs and tests other integrated software tools and data integrations.

### Program Development & Coordination

- Assists academic and operational units through coordination and collaboration efforts.
- Manages several special projects and programs.
- Manages the University's membership in and compliance with the SARA network for authorization to operate in states other than Texas.



## Appendix B

### Online Student Enrollment\*

#### Student taking at least one online course:

2017-18: 37,711

2018-19: 39,418

2019-20: 40,048

2020-21: 57,845

2021-22: 41,963

2022-23: 37,316

2023-24: 37,216

#### Fully online students\*\*:

2017-18: 28,657

2018-19: 29,690

2019-20: 29,303

2020-21: 34,276

2021-22: 27,429

2022-23: 23,204

2023-24: 22,515

#### Overall UTA Enrollment:

2017-18: 59,835

2018-19: 60,549

2019-20: 60,930

2020-21: 60,745

2021-22: 57,120

2022-23: 54,605

2023-24: 54,242

\*Data files and/or statistics generated in this report include all in-state, out-of-state, and international student registrations in sessions that began any time within the specified period. Counts may be higher than those reported to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, due to CB rules about reporting enrollments of out-of-state students taking only online classes, and rules about the timing of reporting classes that begin after census day of a particular semester. In addition, only approved data sets from the Office of Business Affairs may be used for budgetary needs.

\*\*Fully Online means students had at least one semester with fully online courses in that year.

# Appendix C

## Quality Matters Rubric



### Specific Review Standards from the QM Higher Education Rubric, Seventh Edition

General Standards	Specific Review Standards	Points
Course Overview and Introduction	1.1: Instructions make clear how to get started and where to find various course components.	3
	1.2: Learners are introduced to the purpose and structure of the course.	3
	1.3: Communication guidelines for the course are clearly stated.	2
	1.4: Course and institutional policies with which the learner is expected to comply are clearly stated within the course, or a link to current policies is provided.	2
	1.5: Minimum technology requirements for the course are clearly stated, and information on how to obtain the technologies is provided.	2
	1.6: Technical skills and digital information literacy skills expected of the learner are clearly stated.	1
	1.7: Required prior knowledge in the discipline and/or any specific competencies are clearly stated in the course site.	1
	1.8: The self-introduction by the instructor is welcoming and is available in the course site.	1
	1.9: Learners have the opportunity to introduce themselves.	1
Learning Objectives (Competencies)	2.1: The course-level learning objectives describe outcomes that are measurable.	3
	2.2: The module/unit-level learning objectives describe outcomes that are measurable and consistent with the course-level objectives.	3
	2.3: Learning objectives are clearly stated, are learner-centered, and are prominently located in the course.	3
	2.4: The relationship between learning objectives, learning activities, and assessments is made clear.	3
	2.5: The learning objectives are suited to and reflect the level of the course.	3
Assessment and Measurement	3.1: The assessments measure the achievement of the stated learning objectives.	3
	3.2: The course grading policy is stated clearly, available at the beginning of the course, and consistent throughout the course site.	3
	3.3: Specific and descriptive criteria are provided for the evaluation of learners' work, and their connection to the course grading policy is clearly explained.	3
	3.4: The course includes multiple types of assessments that are sequenced and suited to the level of the course.	2
	3.5: The types and timing of assessments provide learners with multiple opportunities to track their learning progress with timely feedback.	2
	3.6: The assessments provide guidance to the learner about how to uphold academic integrity.	1
Instructional Materials	4.1: The instructional materials contribute to the achievement of the stated learning objectives.	3
	4.2: The relationship between the use of instructional materials in the course and completion of learning activities and assessments is clearly explained.	3
	4.3: The course models the academic integrity expected of learners by providing both source references and permissions for use of instructional materials.	2
	4.4: The instructional materials represent up-to-date theory and practice in the discipline.	2
	4.5: A variety of instructional materials is used in the course.	2
Learning Activities and Learner Interaction	5.1: The learning activities help learners achieve the stated objectives.	3
	5.2: Learning activities provide opportunities for interactions that support active learning.	3
	5.3: The instructor's plan for regular interaction with learners in substantive ways during the course is clearly stated.	3
	5.4: The requirements for learner interaction are clearly stated.	2
Course Technology	6.1: The tools used in the course support the learning objectives.	3
	6.2: Course tools promote learner engagement and active learning.	2
	6.3: A variety of technology is used in the course.	1
	6.4: The course provides learners with information on protecting their data and privacy.	1
Learner Support	7.1: The course instructions articulate or link to a clear description of the technical support offered and how to obtain it.	3
	7.2: Course instructions articulate or link to the institution's accessibility policies and accommodation services.	3
	7.3: Course instructions articulate or link to the institution's academic support services and resources that can help learners succeed in the course.	3
	7.4: Course instructions articulate or link to the institution's student services and resources that can help learners succeed.	1
Accessibility and Usability	8.1: Course navigation facilitates ease of use.	3
	8.2: The course design facilitates readability.	3
	8.3: Text in the course is accessible.	3
	8.4: Images in the course are accessible.	2
	8.5: Video and audio content in the course is accessible.	2
	8.6: Multimedia in the course is easy to use.	2
	8.7: Vendor accessibility statements are provided for the technologies used in the course.	1

\* Meeting QM Specific Review Standards does not guarantee or imply that specific laws, regulations, or policies of any country are met.  
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