

Aligning QM Standards and Accreditation Hallmarks to Foster Quality

By Mary Nicholson, Mindi Miller, and Chaya Merrell

Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania

1 Background

During the self-study process to attain reaffirmation of accreditation, the Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (DE) were used as a template for performing a DE gap analysis.

At the same time, faculty members actively pursued Quality Matters @ sessions and certifications to better understand guiding principles for quality course improvements.

Complementing these DE efforts was the change of the university's Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) action plans to advance DE offerings of courses and programs.

2 Building DE Quality

Based on the university's mission and the SEM activities, a DE campus committee created a unique DE mission statement, organizational structure, and several recommendations for growing quality DE courses and programs.

At the heart of this work is the juxtaposition of QM standards and the Hallmarks associated with accreditation guidelines. Strategic enrollment action plans are evolving from self-study recommendations that foster student success of distant learners.

5 Conclusion

The self-study process provides a framework for the juxtaposition of DE standards with campus-wide evaluation. QM standards and higher education hallmarks outline guidelines that can foster student-centered online designs and infrastructures support for quality programs. By conducting a gap analysis, areas of DE growth are identified so that initiatives can be developed and pursued.

Alignment is a theme that runs within course components and between rubrics and hallmarks. Subsequent recommendations and action plans become centered on student perspectives, as well as campus initiatives when such standards are followed.

4 Academic Rigor

Evaluation of syllabi depict consistency of courses elements. Excerpts from Master Course Syllabus address alignments:

"The objectives, content, resources, activities, and assignments are the same for both the Distance Education and on site versions of the course."

"Teaching methods for this course (F2F or DE) can include presentations, demonstrations, and guided practice."

3 Evidence-driven Initiatives

Based on a gap analysis and further evaluation during the university self-study for reaffirmed accreditation, areas of DE improvement were identified, such as:

Mission: New DE mission and vision statements were created to align with the university's mission

Sustainability: A Center for Online Learner was proposed to provide services and online growth

Faculty: Professional development opportunities expanded, including F2F APPQMR workshops

Students: Additional online and accessibility support occurred as DE designs improved

Resources: Policies are under development that address academic integrity and DE procedures

Reference

Standards from the Quality Matters Higher Education

Rubric, 6th Edition Retrieved from

<https://qualitymatters.org/sites/default/files/PDFs/Standards>

Reference

Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of

Distance Education Programs from C-RAC

