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Intersection of ACOTE Accreditation Standards and Quality Matters Rubric Standards for Best Practice in Distance Education



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Purpose of the paper

Paper examines the intersection of exemplar accreditation standards from the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) of the American Occupational Therapy Association and Quality Matters™ Rubric Standards for best practice in distance education.



Objectives

1. differentiate between accrediting body standards and quality improvement standards for distance education.
2. apply new information within your educational institution as an opportunity for collaboration regarding distance education standards
3. seek additional resources for information about distance education standards.



What is accreditation?

... a systematic review through which the public may be assured that an institution provides quality education.

Distance education may or may not be included in accreditation assessment depending on who is looking.



Accreditation by organization

USDE Recognizes accrediting bodies. Does not accredit.
Focus on financial and administrative practices.

CHEA Recognizes specialized accrediting organizations.
Focus on academic quality in institutions, degrees, programs, curricula, *not* course design.

QM Focus on course design *not* institutions, degrees, programs, curricula.



What is distance education?

Application of electronic technology to teaching and learning (Eaton, 2001 p3). Technologies may include

1. The Internet;
2. One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;
3. Audio conferencing; or
4. Video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs, or CD-ROMs are used in conjunction w technologies listed in 1-3 (CHEA, 2014).




Exemplar standards comparison

Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy (ACOTE) standards an exemplar for professional standards

Professional standards typically address:


- academic and student resources
- fiscal management
- operational and admission policies
- strategic planning
- program evaluation
- (curricular frameworks and content)

Comparison for congruity, gaps, opportunities




Congruent Standards

ACOTE Standard (Examples)	QM Standard	Commentary
General Admission/Policies/Publications		
Standard A.3.1. Admission criteria re technology and distance educ requirements	Standard 1.5 Pertains to technology requirements	Institutional practices and QM technological course requirements.
Student Services		
Standard A.2.18. Classrooms, labs, technology, and resources support distance education	Standard 6.1 (Essential) Pertains to course tools Standard 7.1 (Essential) Pertains to course instructions	Institution and QM verify technology and support provided.



Congruent Standards

ACOTE Standard (Examples)	QM Standard	Commentary
Evaluation and assessment		
Standard A.3.6. Evaluation content and methods must be consistent across program. Outcomes of distance education same quality as resident courses.	Standard 3.2 (Essential) Pertains to grading policy Standard 3.3 (Essential) Pertains to evaluation criteria Standard 3.4 Pertains to assessment instruments	Institution and QM require clarity in means of assessment, grading criteria, and feedback for individual courses. QM does not address curriculum design or programmatic outcomes.




Congruent Standards		
ACOTE Standard (Examples)	QM Standard	Commentary
Evaluation and assessment		
Standard A.6.8. Have methods of measuring outcomes been adapted to distance education	Standard 3.5 Pertains to self-assessment Standard 6.1 (Essential) Pertains to course tools Standard 6.2 (Essential) Pertains to course tools	Institutional and QM concern for regular evaluation. QM supports learning objectives & competency at the course level, with technologic tools. QM does not examine across courses.

Incongruent Standards		
ACOTE Standard (Examples)	QM Standard	Commentary
Faculty Services		
Standard A.2.6. Faculty have experience with distance education	Not addressed	Recognized QM courses may suggest the qualifications of faculty.
Budget		
Standard A.2.17. Budget of regular institutional funds reflects distance education	Not addressed	Adoption of the QM rubric or institutional membership may indicate fiscal planning including course quality.

Incongruent Standards		
ACOTE Standard (Examples)	QM Standard	Commentary
Student Services		
Standard A.2.19. Program has a process to establish student identity distance education	Not addressed.	QM course review does not address security in testing or assignment submission.

Incongruent Standards		
ACOTE Standard (Examples)	QM Standard	Commentary
Curriculum and instruction Standard A.6.7. Curriculum design must reflect the mission and philosophy of both the occupational therapy program and the institution	Standard 2.2 (Essential) Pertains to learning objectives	QM addresses consistency between module and course learning objectives at course level only. QM does not address curriculum design or relationship to mission.




Results of comparison

Comparison confirms the unique nature of each.
Areas of congruity and incongruity.

Currently no connections between QM course design and larger issues addressed by professional standards of mission, vision, curricular design, programmatic outcomes, or faculty development.

It is possible for professional programs to be accredited without meeting quality distance education measures.



What is the tension?

Standards have disparate focus.



Standards perpetuate fragmented system.

Implications/Recommendations

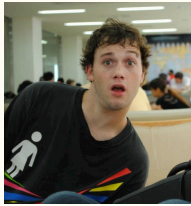
Collaborate for best practice in distance education.
Communal evolution of standards. Communal research.

Professional standards could identify essential components of quality distance course design:
course overview, learner-centered objectives, instructional materials and methods, course activities

QM could identify essential connections between courses and larger programmatic concerns:
mission, vision, curricular design, consistency across courses, faculty development



Future Research



Instructional/course design
Curricular design
Instructional delivery
Outcomes assessment
Content expertise
Course management
Teaching and learning



Conclusion

- Individual course design and structure cannot be examined in isolation from curricula, programs, degrees, or organizations.
- Individual course design and structure should be integral to the program or organization accreditation.
- Integration across accrediting body standards and quality improvement standards will promote best practice for distance education.

It is time to start talking.



Resources

Arreola, R. (2000). *Developing a comprehensive faculty evaluation system: A handbook for college faculty and administrators on designing and operating a comprehensive faculty evaluation system, 2nd Ed.*, Boulton, MA: Anker Publishing.

Eaton, Judith S. (2001). *CHEA Monograph Series 2001, Number 1, Distance learning: Academic and political challenges for higher education accreditation*. CHEA Council for Higher Education Accreditation. p3.

Eaton, Judith S. (2009). *An overview of U.S. accreditation*. Council for Higher Education Accreditation. From http://www.chea.org/pdf/2009.06_overview_of_us_accreditation.pdf

Quality Matters. (2014). *Quality Matters Rubric Standards Fifth Edition, 2014 with assigned point values*. MarylandOnline. Retrieved from <https://www.qualitymatters.org/node/2305>

[/download/QM%20Standards%20with%20Point%20Values%20Fifth%20Edition.pdf](https://www.qualitymatters.org/node/2305/download/QM%20Standards%20with%20Point%20Values%20Fifth%20Edition.pdf)



Comments? Questions?

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