ONLINE LEARNING CONSORTIUM

Quality Scorecard 2014

CRITERIA FOR EXCELLENCE
IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF ONLINE PROGRAMS

ONLINE LEARNING CONSORTIUM
Quality Scorecard 2014 Handbook: Criteria for Excellence in the Administration of Online Programs

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The Online Learning Consortium
The purpose of the Online Learning Consortium is to help learning organizations continually improve the quality, scale, and breadth of their online programs according to their own distinctive missions, so that education will become a part of everyday life, accessible and affordable for anyone, anywhere, at any time, in a wide variety of disciplines.

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This book is dedicated in loving memory of Dr. Bruce Chaloux, former Executive Director of the Online Learning Consortium.

May his passion for quality online education continue to live on in our work.
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George Saltsman - Prof. George Saltsman serves as associate research professor for Lamar University. Previously at Abilene Christian University, he was the founder and leader of ACU’s Connected mobile learning initiative and online program administrator. George works closely with faculty and administrators who deploy and research mobile learning across the globe. George is an Apple Distinguished Educator, policy advisor to UNESCO and winner of the Campus Technology Innovator of the Year and The New Media Consortium's Center of Excellence award. As a researcher; George has overseen over 35 empirical investigations into mobile learning and worked with partners that include Cambridge University Press and Bell Labs France. George is co-author of An Administrator’s Guide to Online Education and multiple other works focused on the integration on technology in education.

Lisa Holstrom - Dr. Lisa Holstrom directed online programs for almost 15 years at the University of Cincinnati. Beginning in 1999 with an online associate’s degree in early childhood education, Dr. Holstrom has supported the entrepreneurial efforts of faculty to launch successful online programs. Her support included business planning, budgeting, enrollment and revenue management, faculty support, and extensive student support services for online learners. She won the university’s Established Entrepreneur Award in 2008 for her academic entrepreneurship. In 2013, Dr. Holstrom left University of Cincinnati to become a Managing Director with Academic Partnerships. She now lends her expertise to partner universities across the Midwest. She has also been an active participant in the Online Learning Consortium’s Quality Scorecard as part of the development and review teams.

Karen Pedersen - Dr. Karen Pedersen currently serves as the Associate Vice President for Extended Campuses at Northern Arizona University. She is responsible for enrollment management and retention at over 30 locations in Arizona; developing new market opportunities; actively collaborating with community college partners; promoting online learning programs statewide, regionally, nationally, and globally. Prior to joining NAU, Pedersen served as the Vice President for Professional Studies at Southwestern College (Kansas) where she was responsible for engaging in scalable infrastructure projects; expanding military partnerships; building and launching innovative online programs; as well as positioning Professional Studies on a national stage by becoming a charter member of Transparency by Design. Her 25 years of experience in higher education spans teaching full-time at the University of Nebraska at Kearney to administrative positions in distance education at both public and private higher education institutions as well as being part of the Quality Scorecard review team for the Online Learning Consortium.
Proving that quality exists within in online education programs can be a daunting and complex task. Nevertheless, we as educators must continue the quest to achieve the ideal learning environment and share effective practices for advancing quality for our students, as they are the leaders of tomorrow. At the same time, we need to demonstrate to all stakeholders that online education works, and works well, if guidelines and standards are followed like the Online Learning Consortium's Quality Scorecard (QSC).

This handbook was developed for online program administrators who want to apply the quality metrics to their own online programs. The writers explain each of the 75 quality indicators in the Quality Scorecard 2014: Criteria for Excellence in the Administration of Online Programs, make recommendations and provide best practices for implementing them. We want to thank the 43 seasoned online administrators who participated in the original Delphi study that led to the Quality Scorecard. When we reached out for help, every administrator we spoke with acknowledged there was a great need for this tool. Thanks also to Janet Moore for many hours of edits and rewrites and sleepless nights, and to those who assisted with writing this guide in 2010 and now, 2014. Our associate editors, Karen Pedersen and Lisa Holstrom, have been indispensable; they have willingly volunteered many hours to help forward the work of the QSC and the newly developed rubric. We are so grateful!

Everyone who helped on this project is a testament to the need for this collaborative effort to advance our emerging field. In fact, we have had large response to the use of the QSC and the formal review process the Online Learning Consortium provides in order for programs to earn a quality seal.

In the 14 years since the Institute for Higher Education Policy published its seminal work Benchmarks for Success in Internet-Based Distance Education by Jamie P. Merisotis and Ronald A. Phipps, online education has certainly moved into the mainstream of higher education. With it comes innovations in design and delivery that offers us a world of any time, any place, access to quality learning.

Kaye Shelton
George Saltsman

The Online Learning Consortium is dedicated to improving the quality, scale and breadth of education through online and blended teaching and learning.
The Online Learning Consortium’s Quality Scorecard for Online Programs (QSC) is an easy-to-use process for measuring and quantifying elements of quality within online programs in higher education. By evaluating each of the respective quality indicators within the established nine categories, an administrator of online programs can determine strengths and weaknesses of their program. The results of this tool identify program weaknesses that can be used to support program improvement and strategic planning initiatives. The Quality Scorecard could also be used to demonstrate to accrediting bodies, elements of quality within the program as well as an overall level of quality.

The Quality Scorecard 2014 contains 75 unique quality indicators--each indicator is worth up to three points. The 75 quality indicators are within nine different categories: Institutional Support; Technology Support; Course Development and Instructional Design; Course Structure; Teaching and Learning; Social and Student Engagement; Faculty Support; Student Support; and Evaluation and Assessment.

The administrator will first determine at what level their program meets the intent of each of the quality indicators after examining all procedures and processes. The next step is to determine how that score can be substantiated or demonstrated to others. The following describes each point value.

0 points = Deficient. The administrator does not observe any indications of the quality standard in place.

1 point = Developing. The administrator has found a slight existence of the quality standard but difficult to substantiate. Much improvement is still needed in this area.

2 points = Accomplished. The administrator has found there to be moderate use and can substantiate the quality standard. Some improvement is still needed in this area.

3 points = Exemplary. The administrator has found that the quality standard is being fully implemented, can be fully substantiated, and there is little to no need for improvement in this area.

The Quality Scorecard is versatile enough to be used to demonstrate the overall quality of online programs, no matter what size or type of institution. The Quality Scorecard (version 1, 2010) was originally developed through a 6-month Delphi study involving 43 experts in online education administration (83% had more than nine years of experience). The Quality Scorecard (version 2, 2014) was modified using a portion of the expert panelists, three years of feedback, and adaptation with use in the field. The following range of scores should be applied after scoring, developing justifications, and providing artifacts for substantiation:

90-100% (202—225 points) = Exemplary
80-89% (180—201 points) = Acceptable
70-79% (157—179 points) = Marginal
60-69% (134—156 points) = Inadequate
< 59% (< 133 points) = Unacceptable

Contact the Online Learning Consortium at (781) 583-756 if interested in a formal program review of online programs.

Note: The Quality Scorecard contains adaptations of the 24 quality standards identified by the Institute for Higher Education Policy report, Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education (2000).
1. The institution has a governance structure to enable clear, effective, and comprehensive decision making related to online education.

2. The institution has policy and guidelines that confirm a student who registers in an online course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives academic credit. This is done by verifying the identity of a student by using methods such as (a) a secure login and pass code, (b) proctored examinations, or (c) other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identity.

3. The institution has a policy for intellectual property of course materials; it specifically addresses online course materials, and is publicly visible online.

4. The institution has defined the strategic value of online learning to its enterprise and stakeholders.

5. The organizational structure of the online program supports the institution’s mission, values, and strategic plan.

6. The online program’s strategic plan is reviewed for its continuing relevance, and periodically improved and updated.

7. The institution has a process for planning and allocating resources for the online program, including financial resources, in accordance with strategic planning.

8. The institution demonstrates sufficient resource allocation, including financial resources, in order to effectively support the mission of online education.

9. The institution has a governance structure to enable systematic and continuous improvement related to the administration of online education.
1. The institution has a governance structure to enable clear, effective, and comprehensive decision making related to online education.

Academic governance is a regulatory term that clarifies how institutions are organized and how responsibilities are divided and assessed. Common across both public and private institutions, governance structures ensure orderly and continuous operation. This quality indicator examines the governance of online education to ensure its orderly and continuous operation and clear decision making process.

During the emergence of online education in higher education, institutions often structured online education as an auxiliary service or temporary entity. These early programs were often seen as tangential, rather than as integral parts of the institution’s mission and strategic plan. As a result, governance structures for online education were haphazard and institutional decision making regarding online education was neither effective nor comprehensive. However, with rapid growth and acceptance, online education quickly became a core educational service. Continued growth over the past two decades has demonstrated that online education has entered the mainstream (Allen & Seaman, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014). Consequently, online programs require attentive planning and structuring that reflects the core educational role online education now plays in higher education.

Accreditors have also increased scrutiny of institutional governance structures of online education. For example, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) specifically addresses distance education governance in several areas, most notably in Comprehensive Standard 3.2.7, which lists the following expectation: Administrative responsibility for all educational programs, including the offering of distance education courses and programs should be reflected in the organizational structure of the institution.

This quality indicator makes no prescription about the nature of the governance structure. Institutions enjoy the liberty to organize online education governance structures differently based on size, mission, and role; however an institution must demonstrate that strategic decision making regarding online education is appropriately made at the institution level.

Recommendations

- Adopt an institutional approach toward the governance and organization of online and blended education programs.
- Include all institutional divisions that are likely to be involved in and/or affected by the decision making process for online education in the governance framework.
- Clarify responsibilities for all authorities over online education programs and communicate that clearly to stakeholders.
- Develop policies and practices for governance via a steering committee with representatives from all divisions impacted by the delivery of online education.
2. The institution has policy and guidelines that confirm a student who registers in an online course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives academic credit. This is done by verifying the identity of a student by using methods such as (a) a secure login and pass code, (b) proctored examinations, or (c) other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identity.

Regarding student authentication and online education programs, the US Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA) mandated that accrediting agencies must require:

An institution that offers distance education or correspondence education to have processes through which the institution establishes that the student who registers in a distance education or correspondence education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the program and receives the academic credit. (H.R. 4137--110th Congress, 2008)

In May 2009, the Negotiated Rule Making Committee on Accreditation clarified the requirement by instructing regional accreditors to require that institutions which offer distance education programs have processes in place for student authentication. The accrediting agency is in compliance if it:

1. Requires institutions to verify the identity of a student who participates in class or coursework by using, at the option of the institution, methods such as-
   a. A secure login and pass code;
   b. Proctored examinations; and
   c. Identification technologies that are effective in verifying student identification;

2. Makes clear in writing that institutions must use processes that protect student privacy and notify students of any projected additional charges associated with the verification of student identity at the time of registration or enrollment (20 U.S.C. 1099b).

Authentication is analogous to taking attendance in a face-to-face course. The sophistication with which students are authenticated is largely a function of the effort of the instructor and institution (Bailie & Jortberg, 2009). For example, for all classes, institutions normally produce class rosters listing students who have registered and paid for courses. This roster is provided to the instructor, who in turn, has the responsibility of making sure the students on the roster are who they say they are, and that they are the ones performing the academic work throughout the course. These same principles apply to online education; however, the methods of authentication are different according to whether students are physically or virtually present.

Technology plays a more important role in the authentication of online students. As identification technology evolves and becomes more sophisticated, the ability to check student identity will become easier in both virtual and physical environments. On the other hand, the technological sophistication of students determined to commit academic fraud will also increase (Bedford, Gregg, & Clinton, 2009). Consequently, all institutions should regularly examine their student authentication process and be cognizant of technological advancements that make student authentication more accurate, affordable, and easy to use.

Recommendations

- Employ a secure student login and password process for students to access online course materials, student information, financial aid processing, and so on.

- Adopt a proctoring system for student examinations. This may include both off-line and/or online authentication. Online methods may include webcams, typing heuristics, or other biometric identification.

- Authenticate students upon login with secondary authentication, up to and including biometric authentication.
3. **The institution has a policy for intellectual property of course materials; it specifically addresses online course materials, and is publicly visible online.**

When an institution chooses to create course materials internally, a policy for ownership should be in place. The policy should clearly address who owns the course materials, whether royalties will be paid, or how any income derived from secondary sale or lease of course materials is distributed. Similarly, the ownership of student-produced work within online courses should also be identified.

Some institutions have chosen to compensate the course developer (knowledge expert) on a royalty basis. For example, the knowledge expert is paid each time the online course materials are used. Other institutions pay a flat-fee for development of materials with no ongoing payment. Institutions may also require that the construction of materials takes place as work-for-hire and is compensated as part of course load reductions or included in the core job requirements. Most institutions use one of the following policies: single ownership by the author(s); single ownership by the institution; or shared ownership, often as a perpetual, non-exclusive license agreement to the institution with ownership residing with the original author(s).

This policy can be a delicate issue as the exclusive ownership intellectual property of traditional class materials frequently stayed with the creating faculty member. However, as opposed to traditional courses, online programs often reuse materials in courses taught by multiple instructors, not just the original creator. Therefore, many institutions enter into a contract for the development of online course materials, just as they may pay instructional designers, graphic artists, and digital media development specialists.

To avoid overlap or confusion, ownership of course materials is ideally governed under the institutional intellectual property policy, rather than relying on secondary policies within online education structures. This institutional intellectual property policy should be amended to include the creation of course materials for online education and works created in online courses by students. This policy should be reviewed regularly to ensure compliance with current compensation structures and amended as needed.

**Recommendations**

- Amend the institutional intellectual property policy to address the ownership of online course materials.
- Ensure the intellectual property policy clearly addresses the ownership of student produced work in online courses.
- Require content authors to read and sign the policy before beginning the development of online course materials, either as a stand alone document, or as references in a formal contract for services.
- Ensure the intellectual property policy is published publicly on the institutional website.
4. The institution has defined the strategic value of distance learning to its enterprise and stakeholders.

The extent to which quality may be achieved in online learning programs depends on many factors; chief among them is the degree to which the organization’s strategic plan, mission, and vision define and successfully communicate to the stakeholders. Systematic planning focuses on expressing the online education strategic objectives within the institutional vision, developing guidelines and operational procedures for programmatic oversight, committing to the quality delivery of services, and establishing budgetary and financial protocols that address the unique aspects of online education. These actions provide a framework for the relationships among program development, strategy and growth, and operational objectives as well as help to establish the institution or program’s commitment to quality.

There is a tendency among colleges and universities to focus solely on the mode of delivery for online learning. Such a limited approach does not convey the value of online education to the institution as a whole. The extent to which the institution’s vision for and operational approach to online education is articulated to all stakeholders is critical for the quality of online education programs. Clear strategic direction and planning allow for an organizational approach to distance education based on a model of choice, ranging from centralized units to decentralized units or a combination of both types supporting the distance education endeavor (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005). Regardless of the operational model, the system can mirror the campus virtually. Strategic development of online programs that leverage the expertise of multiple stakeholders across the college or university provides the necessary collective efforts that contribute to quality in online education. Clarity of vision, buy-in, oversight, services, and cost are key areas for consideration with respect to defining the institution-wide strategic value of online programs.

Recommendations

- Affirm the value of online education within the institutional vision by linking operational activities to strategic objectives. Also emphasize the institution’s commitment to the value of online education by announcing it in prominent places such as the institution’s and program’s home pages on the website, the president’s welcome page, and student and faculty development centers on campus.

- Establish senior positions to guide strategic and operational objectives and create accountability measures for all designated staff to ensure the organization’s ability to achieve objectives for online programs.
5. The organizational structure of the online program supports the institution’s mission, values, and strategic plan.

In any organization, it is important to maintain an open organizational culture, and for its members to show commitment and act responsibly, thereby, enabling the organization to achieve excellence and success. Typically, when we speak of organizational culture, we are referring to specific patterns of behavior that may be recognized, transmitted, and learned (Schein, 1984). Likewise, Mintzberg (1979) defined the organizational structure as the sum of all the ways in which work is divided into different activities and coordinated. It is the sum of the values that define the relationships between its members.

It is essential for every organization to develop a strategic plan that outlines the principal activities, implementation, and time frames, including online education programs. In addition, it is important for the functions carried out by the members of an institution to be clearly defined, so that together, they can meet the institutional goals; i.e. each person should know his or her rights, duties and activities, so that optimal results may be achieved. Without a strategic plan, every member of the organization would be working in isolation, and unaware of the results that the organization is aiming to achieve.

The policies of the institution should clearly reflect the institution’s values and the part played by its personnel. If the institutional policies are clear and coherent, they will be key to achieving educational quality and, moreover, enable all processes to be carried out in an effective and efficient manner. For all these reasons, it is essential for the online program structure to support the policies, the strategic plan, the values and the culture of the organization.

Recommendations

- Provide informative opportunities to ensure all members of the organization become familiar with the strategic plan, supporting policies, and the values and culture of the organization in which they work.

- Survey members of the organization to find out how clearly the communication regarding the strategic plan has been and how it supports online education.

- Create an organizational structure chart that is visually supported by the mission and vision of the institution. Develop justifications as to why the organizational structure is appropriately aligned.
6. The online program's strategic plan is reviewed for its continuing relevance, and periodically improved and updated.

To provide a vigorous quality distance education program, an institution begins with policy that values distance education as an endeavor that integrates seamlessly with the institution's mission and goals. With such a policy in place, understood by administration and staff, the institution is positioned to create a strategic plan for delivering distance education to students (Cavanaugh, 2003, p. 175).

A strategic plan directs how operations function and resources are allocated in accordance with the goals and objectives established. In fact, the strategic plan provides information on the results that the organization is trying to achieve. Because of this, it is important for the strategic plan to remain current and relevant. Some institutions will develop a five or ten year strategic plan; however, that does not mean that it is left unchanged for that time period. Each year, it should be reviewed for relevancy and current application.

When developing a strategic plan for the online education program, it is necessary to consider both the present and the past activities of the organization in order to reach its goals; in other words, it is vital to know the location of the destination in order to get there. Because the strategic plan should outline principal activities, implementation, and time frames, these should be identified to review for completion and continued relevance. Performance functions and duties identified for the institutional members should be periodically reviewed in order to identify potential weaknesses or barriers for completion of the functions and activities.

The strategic plan should include specific activities that support the identified goals and objectives. It is helpful to take the starting and ending dates of activities and to evaluate them periodically to see if they are being fully implemented, or whether it is necessary to make changes to achieve what was planned and/or to update the strategic plan in order to achieve continuous improvement.

**Recommendations**

- Include specific activities within the strategic plan that should be evaluated periodically. These activities should be scheduled on a timeline for evaluation and updates.

- Evaluate the strategic plan at least once a year and propose necessary improvements to maintain relevancy.

- Within this conceptual framework, it is understood that the leadership of any institution is based on applying management techniques to implement its activities and achieve its objectives. Develop a reporting cycle that reports measured goals and improvement strategies for meeting those goals annually.

- Choose one area of the program and focus on its improvement for a one-year period. Once the goals are achieved, select another area to improve.
7. The institution has a process for planning and allocating resources for the online program, including financial resources, in accordance with strategic planning.

Planning involves a process for determining the goals of an organization, resources that are to be utilized, and general policies that will guide the acquisition and administration of such resources, supporting the organization as a whole. Within this process, various actions are taken, one of which is that the organization as a whole analyzes and evaluates the financial resources needed to develop its activities and satisfy the needs of its stakeholders, using different strategies according to the particular structure of each program. The strategic plan for the online program should support the need for resource allocation.

Each online education program should have its own budget, so that the origin and application of economic, material, and endowment resources may be identified. The online program cannot be successful without an adequate budget and other necessary resources such as personnel. In the early days of online education, many programs tried to operate with whatever funds could be generated from grants or extra funding. While seeking outside funding is still an option, we now understand that an online education program will not have long-term viability without its own long term funding sources.

Recommendations

- Engage all members involved in the online education program in the process, so that a financial plan is developed by individuals throughout the organization at different levels affected by the online program and in different support units so their specific needs may be budgeted.

- Develop clear budgetary guidelines for units, taking into account cost and the extent to which budgeting and accounting practices can clearly delineate a true return on investment. Distinguish between benefits of online education and how each may or may not impact the overall unit cost in terms of delivering services, infrastructure, and staffing.

- Estimate the resources assigned to each of the main activities described in the online program's strategic plan. Check halfway through the budget year to be sure adequate resources still exist for all activities identified in the strategic plan for that year.
8. The institution demonstrates sufficient resource allocation, including financial resources, in order to effectively support the mission of online education.

Human and financial resources are required to provide for the many operational and academic elements of the program. In fact, Berge and Schrum (1998) suggested that budget-funded programs should be able to demonstrate their importance to the institution. Building on the program’s financial plan, resource allocation should reflect a sufficient allocation to achieve stated goals for the program. When online programs are expanding, increases in funding are frequently required beyond basic sustainment of operational levels. While no institution can provide unlimited resources, the resources provided should reflect the institution’s commitment to establishing and maintaining a quality online program by funding all elements in the financial plan and human resource commitments.

**Recommendations**

- Enable the online program administrator to fully participate in the institution’s annual budgeting process.

- Regularly update the financial plan in order to reflect the actual allocations provided and remove unfunded goals as required.

- Develop clear budgetary guidelines for functioning units, taking into account cost and the extent to which budgeting and accounting practices can clearly delineate a true return on investment.

- Seek out peer-schools to establish comparative resource allocations and adjust as required.
9. **The institution has a governance structure to enable systematic and continuous improvement related to the administration of online education.**

Relevant to quality indicator 1 in this same category, this quality indicator examines the assessment of the administration of online education within the governance structure to ensure continuous improvement. Quality of administration should be evaluated annually, and not just a one time examination. Working towards continuous improvement should be a focus throughout all areas of the online education program. Within this conceptual framework, it is understood that the leadership of any institution is based on applying management techniques to implement its activities and achieve its objectives.

Program administration requires a strong commitment by all those involved (faculty, staff, technicians, and students) guaranteeing the efficacy and efficiency of actions implemented for program development are effective. Because goals and objectives are part of the overall institutional strategic plan, these activities and strategies for achieving those goals should be measured within the institutional governance structure on a periodic basis. For goals not being met, an improvement plan should be developed in order to meet the goal the next time measurement will occur.

**Recommendations**

- Establish senior positions to guide strategic and operational objectives and create accountability measures for all designated staff to ensure the organization's ability to achieve objectives for online programs.

- Commit to developing and offering necessary services and resources in support of the myriad of technical, social, and learning issues (both internal and external) encountered by students, faculty, and staff engaged in online education.

- Distinguish how program goals and objectives are part of the overall strategic plan and develop strategies for measuring those goals within the institutional governance structure. Keep accurate records of when goals are met; if they are not achieved, develop an improvement strategy in order to reach the goals for the next measurement period.

- Develop a reporting cycle that reports measured goals and improvement strategies for meeting those goals annually.

- Choose one area of the program and focus on its improvement for a one-year period. Once the goals are achieved, select another area to improve the next year.
References for Institutional Support


1. A documented technology plan that includes electronic security measures (e.g., password protection, encryption, secure online or proctored exams, etc.) is in place and operational to ensure quality, in accordance with established standards and regulatory requirements.*

2. The technology delivery systems are highly reliable and operable with measurable standards being utilized such as system downtime tracking and task benchmarking.*

3. A centralized system provides support for building and maintaining the online education infrastructure.*

4. The course delivery technology is considered a mission critical enterprise system and supported as such.

5. The institution has established a contingency plan for the continuance of data centers and support services in the event of prolonged service disruption.

6. Faculty, staff, and students are supported in the development and use of new technologies and skills.

7. Whether the institution maintains local data centers (servers), and/or contracts for outsourced, hosted services or cloud services, those systems are administered in compliance with established data management practices such as the Information Technology Service Management (ITSM) standards which include appropriate power protection, backup solutions, and disaster recovery plans, etc.

* Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education (2000).
1. A documented technology plan that includes electronic security measures (e.g., password protection, encryption, secure online or proctored exams, etc.) is in place and operational to ensure quality, in accordance with established standards and regulatory requirements.*

A technology plan should ensure that the online program’s technological infrastructure adequately supports the academic environment. The technology plan should encompass all technological infrastructure required by the program, including systems hosted locally and off site, or through contracted services. At a minimum, such systems include the learning management system, user authentication systems, collaboration software, and testing software. As consumer expectations coincide with continuously emerging technology applications, technology plans should reflect virtually every business and academic process (National Association of College and University Business Officers, 2011) and thus must be flexible to adapt to fiscal and environmental contexts. Therefore, the hallmarks of effective technology plans include explicitly linking the plan to the institution’s mission and vision; engaging stakeholders in identifying current conditions and assumptions; prioritizing stakeholder needs and desires; and publicizing timelines and benchmarks via clear communications channels (Geer, 2006; November, Staudt, Costello, & Huske, 1996; White & Weight, 2000).

US Federal guidelines in the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 require that if an institution offers online education courses or programs, the institution must have “in place effective procedures through which to ensure that the student who registers in a online education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. The institution makes clear in writing that these processes protect student privacy” (Middle States, 2011, p. 14).

WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET) (2009) recommended that institutions provide “secure student logins and passwords to access online courses and related resources, discussions, assignments and assessments” (p. 1). Currently, with the ubiquity of commercial learning management systems, much of the responsibility for establishing login credentials and encryption can be appropriately managed by these vendors. However, according to the HEO Act of 2008, as the technology for authentication becomes more prevalent, institutions will be required to do more than just provide a secure login process (H.R. 4137--110th Congress, 2008).

The HEO Act of 2008 requirement spurred numerous hardware and software options to authenticate students and the electronic proctoring of exams. These include options for using biometric data, secondary authentication with challenge questions, keystroke heuristics, use of webcams, and browser lockdown software (Foster, 2008).

**Recommendations**

- Demonstrate full online program compliance with requirements outlined by the HEOA of 2008.
- Provide students secure login credentials to online course materials using current authentication standards.
- Develop and disseminate to all students and faculty policies that clearly indicate expectations for Acceptable Use, including access to courses, assignments, and related materials.
- Establish and enforce penalties for students and faculty violating Acceptable Use policy.
- Provide faculty training in how to use technology and instructional methods that support academic integrity.
- Monitor innovations in authentication technologies and proctoring and evaluate their fit for the program.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education (2000).
2. The technology delivery systems are highly reliable and operable with measurable standards being utilized such as system downtime tracking and task benchmarking.*

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education (2000).

If the lights go out in a traditional classroom, it may be an inconvenience. If the system crashes, it’s a calamity! (Phipps & Merisotis, 2000, p. 15).

When students are enrolled in online courses, the importance of reliable technical delivery systems is as critical to the quality of education as physical classrooms have been to traditional education. In fact, for an Internet-delivered classroom to be offline, it is analogous to locking the classroom door to students before they arrive for class. Technology delivery systems should be responsive and operational during peak load times so that students are able to focus on academic content and be minimally disrupted by unresponsive technology. Providing a stable and reliable technical infrastructure is essential as it influences learning (Gibbons & Wentworth, 2002), student satisfaction (O’Brien & Renner, 2002), and student retention (Fetzner, 2003). Online education programs require a strong technical infrastructure to provide the foundational structures for how students and faculty interact with each other and with course content.

In the early days of online education, it was common for institutions to host the learning management software and other critical infrastructure on site using institutionally owned hardware and staff. It is now more common to encounter online programs that have contracted with external services providers that offer hosted or cloud-based services external of the institutional network. Regardless of the service method selected, online programs should be aware of the quality of service and work to ensure the least disruptive learning environment is provided.

No technology can be expected to provide 100% uptime. All systems will need to be taken down for updates, upgrades, and repair. Larger programs may be able to establish redundant server systems that allow for continuous uptime, or programs of any size may contract for such with an external data center. At a minimum, expected downtime should be scheduled well in advance, completed during times of least disruption, and communicated to students, faculty, and online program staff with sufficient prior notice.

Recommendations

- Provide students and faculty 24x7x365 access (aside from pre-scheduled maintenance periods) for all necessary technical systems such as the learning management system, media servers, etc. that support the online education program.

- Carefully monitor system downtime and develop data measures to ensure future reliability with a goal of 100% up time.

- Establish standard metrics for system performance such as webpage load times and include consistent measurements for monitoring goal achievement.

- Monitor system utilization during peak usage times in order to ensure that system stability is maintained.

- Track and document program growth and technology usage in order to project and scale future technology needs.

- Determine lowest use periods and use them for necessary maintenance periods if redundant systems are not financially possible. Publish the downtime schedule on the LMS, institutional website, via email, tweets, and through other applicable communication methods so that students and faculty are fully aware and can plan accordingly.
3. **A centralized system provides support for building and maintaining the online education infrastructure.**

Commitment from the institutional chief technical officer (or similar) ensures the online program is aligned with overall college or university priorities and demonstrates technology commitment at the highest level regardless whether the services are ultimately provided in-house, via a consortium, or by out-sourcing. For this quality indicator, a centralized system means that the technology that supports the online program is overseen by an institutional technology decision making and support structure. Having a centralized system for the infrastructure can be effective in several ways: it reduces complexity and misunderstanding between technical staff, it standardizes support (single helpdesk support) and user experience. Centralized support enables a "focus on faculty, student, and local process issues" (Fetzner, 2003, p. 240).

This does not mean that all technology services need to reside in one space or that they be directly managed by institutional staff. In fact, there may be a mixture of out-sourced and in-house technology solutions that support an online program. The quality indicator expects that the institutional technology support has knowledge of the technology and necessary support to build and sustain the program and actively advises to ensure continued reliability.

**Recommendations**

- Design the centralized system to parallel the best aspects of online learning; make it “team-based, collaborative, comprehensive, action-oriented, and non-hierarchical” (Fetzner, 2003, p. 232).

- Include the following in the centralized system: “academic support, training coordination, instructional design and support, library support, technical support, and student services” (Fetzner, 2003, p. 234).

- Collect and review the perspectives of program stakeholders in order to continuously improve the technology systems.

- Utilize the centralized system as an information exchange and for benchmarking service calls, response times, and problem resolution.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy's report *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000).
4. The course delivery technology is considered a mission critical enterprise system and supported as such.

The institution must consider the online program’s technological infrastructure as mission critical in that there is a commitment of resources, continuous improvement processes in place, and a commitment to near 100% up time. Students and faculty have very little patience when they cannot access the online course materials. Course delivery, in whatever format, must be an institutional priority. There must also be a 24x7x365 commitment for dedicated technology support personnel to be available for solving issues as typical online students do not log on as much during Monday-Friday daytime hours. Typically, students are using the technology during the evenings and on weekends.

Recommendations

- Seek collaboration between online program administrators and institutional technology services in order to be involved with the development and updating of the technology support plan.

- Establish and clearly communicate to all personnel involved emergency response procedures for unexpected downtime.

- Budget and plan in order to maintain the technological infrastructure for course delivery.

- Utilize metrics and benchmarking for upgrading and improving technologies used to support the online education program.
5. **The institution has established a contingency plan for the continuance of data centers and support services in the event of prolonged service disruption.**

Because the technology infrastructure is mission critical to the online education program, the institution should have in place a technology system that ensures the integrity of program data and protects against catastrophic loss. Similarly, the institution should have a contingency plan in place in the event of major systems disruption. Institutional services that provide for constant availability, backup, archival, data security, and business continuance in the event of catastrophic failures demonstrate institutional commitment to the program.

**Recommendations**

- Provide budget support for a system backup solution with off-site vaulting (physical, electronic, or both).
- Develop, maintain, and periodically review and update a disaster recovery and business continuity plan.
- Conduct disaster recovery or mock disaster drills periodically to verify system data back-up and that restoration process is viable and maintains data integrity.
- Establish goals for how quickly system data is recovered in case of system failure.
6. **Faculty, staff, and students are supported in the development and use of new technologies and skills.**

The increasing changes in workforce requirements and students’ need for flexible learning options will continue to drive higher education in the use of new technologies to better serve its students. In fact, “students expect their education to be personalized to their individual wants and needs; they expect their education to be easily achieved and focused on the skills they will require in their future profession. In other words, most students are not learning for learning’s sake or for getting a degree; instead, they want the skills needed to enter the workforce” (Tamarkin, 2010, ¶11). Because of this need for student preparation, an institution should support new technology initiatives that will better support learning and prepare students for the current workforce.

When new technologies are adopted and implemented, all those involved (students, faculty, and institutional staff members who will be supporting all those involved) will most likely need some form of training. Dalziel (2003) pointed out that “faculty need to know how to use technology to incorporate different types of learning media to create a complete educational package that makes sense to their students” (p. 669). Students will benefit from help desk support, tutorials, and demonstrations, and access to a knowledge base for self-help. Staff will need training in how best to support both the faculty and students with the new technology.

**Recommendations**

- Provide ongoing training for faculty and other relevant personnel. The times and days should be varied so that all stakeholders can be reached.

- Encourage faculty to embrace new technologies for teaching and learning and show them how it can better serve or better engage their students.

- Provide students with technical support, opportunities for self-training modules, and tutorials on new technologies that are implemented for teaching and learning.
7. Whether the institution maintains local data centers (servers), and/or contracts for outsourced, hosted services or cloud services, those systems are administered in compliance with established data management practices such as the Information Technology Service Management (ITSM) standards which include appropriate power protection, backup solutions, and disaster recovery plans, etc.

Maintaining the myriad of technological infrastructure systems required for the delivery and support of online education programs requires enterprise-level commitment to ensure system availability, response time, data integrity, student privacy, and system security. Such practices change quickly as technology advances and services evolve. The Information Technology Service Management (ITSM) standards (or similar), maintain established and evolving best practices for the management of quality information technology services. This quality indicator recognizes that online program technological support is best provided by technologists who subscribe to and adhere to established technology industry quality standards.

Recommendations

- Base current technological support operations on established information technology industry standards that ensure quality information technology services.

- Provide sufficient budget support in order to ensure technology support staff personnel are able to participate in ongoing professional development.

- Monitor regularly and adhere to best practices in information technology in order to update and expand services as needed.
References for Technology Support


1. Guidelines regarding minimum requirements for course development, design, and delivery of online instruction (such as course syllabus elements, course materials, assessment strategies, faculty feedback) are followed.*

2. Course embedded technology actively supports the achievement of learning outcomes and delivery of course content and superfluous use of technology is minimized.*

3. Instructional materials and course syllabi are reviewed periodically to ensure they meet online course and program learning outcomes.*

4. A course development process is followed that ensures courses are designed so that students develop the necessary knowledge and skills to meet measurable learning outcomes at the course and program level.*

5. A process is followed that ensures that permissions (Creative Commons, Copyright, Fair Use, Public Domain, etc.) are in place for appropriate use of online course materials.

6. Course assignments and activities are reviewed periodically to ensure they meet online course and program learning outcomes.*

7. Student-centered instruction is considered during the course development process.

8. There is consistency in course development for student retention and quality.

9. Course design promotes both faculty and student engagement.

10. A process is followed for evaluating the effectiveness of current and emerging technologies to support the achievement of learning outcomes and delivery of course content.

11. Usability tests are conducted and applied, and recommendations based upon Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAGs) are incorporated.

12. Curriculum development is a core responsibility for faculty (i.e., faculty should be involved in either the development or the decision making for the online curriculum choices).

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy's report Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education (2000).
1. Guidelines regarding minimum requirements for course development, design, and delivery of online instruction (such as course syllabus elements, course materials, assessment strategies, faculty feedback) are followed.*

Although faculty members are considered experts in their disciplines, they cannot be expected to be experts at developing online course materials (although certainly there are those who are very good). For consistency, the institution (or college) should provide guidelines and minimum standards for online course development and delivery. Before the process for online course development begins, it's important to develop a vision of quality and a course design standard derived from that vision (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008). From the institution's vision of quality, the framework for course quality should emerge to guide development of course materials that are specifically effective for online teaching and learning. Providing standards or a course development rubric does not mean that all courses have to be identical. It simply means there are basic components that are standard to all courses.

Institutions can create their own standards, or select and/or adapt a variety of standards and online course rubrics that evaluate quality. For example, here are just a few of the many available which provide standards for course development: the Community of Inquiry rubric, the Quality Matters rubric, the California State University-Chico rubric, and Blackboard’s Exemplary Course rubric. The standards should also address teaching the course and using good pedagogical strategies for engaging online students.

**Recommendations**

- Provide clear guidelines and recommendations for minimum standards that should be closely followed in the course development process before course development begins.

- Include in the standards, effective practices for teaching online and expectations for faculty obligations, including expectations for faculty presence in the course and communication response time.

- Provide effective best practices and models of exemplary courses before the course development begins.

- Develop and implement a process that compares developed online courses to established standards and guidelines on a regular basis.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy's report *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000).
2. Course embedded technology actively supports the achievement of learning outcomes and delivery of course content and superfluous use of technology is minimized.*

The rapidly changing landscape of learning technologies requires institutional agility and adaptation. Managing the use of technology in the online classroom becomes more challenging each day with the continuous introduction of new applications and functionality. Because of this, we must think both strategically and tactically about the best use of technology to support learning outcomes for the delivery of course content.

Technology use abounds not only to support learning, but also to support student information systems, student financial services, library, faculty recruitment and development, as well as outcomes assessment. Strategically, best practices are needed for these areas to appropriately assimilate technology use across the entire institution and to be as reliably available as possible. However, special emphasis needs to be on integrating best practices into the use of technology for teaching and learning while developing and delivering course content to students. The emphasis should include tools that support learning outcomes and will produce sustained results once the student completes the course and program.

We face many new technologies in the areas of web-based materials, cloud computing, video conferencing, virtual laboratories, e-books, virtual worlds, social networking, mobile applications, open education resources, and of course, the nucleus of online course delivery, the learning management system. However, not all tools are necessarily applicable to learning outcomes, so academics must first identify learning-related issues and then apply technologies that address the learning issues. Integrating these technologies requires updated perspectives about their use. While tools may increase flexibility, they may also be difficult to deploy due to issues of scalability, policy, and technology adoption variations. Technology should not be the driver in the delivery of courses; instructional designers should seek the best mix of technologies to achieve learning (Palloff & Pratt, 1999).

The institution must align technologies with both program outcomes and teaching and learning goals. The learning management system should be user friendly. For flexibility, technology advances already provide the potential delivery of content anytime, anywhere. For diversity, institutions must make decisions about approaches to external content acquisition, learning management system activities, intelligent tutoring implications, adaptive assessments, etc. For consistency, technology must support course creation in a centralized fashion in the design, development, and maintenance of online courses that are enhanced with academic content, sophisticated tools, and innovative technologies.

Recommendations

- Develop institutional guidelines and standards for investigating technologies, not just for the sake of integrating new tools but to better support learning outcomes and the needs of learners.
- Develop standards and policies for appropriately acquiring and integrating open source materials and learning objects, audio, video, and other multimedia.
- Provide best practices of where to locate quality open source materials, audio, video, and other multimedia.
- Provide guidance for using new technologies in the form of reports, presentations, demonstrations or on-demand training materials.
- Use selection criteria for evaluating new technologies, such as accessibility and affordability, usability, privacy and intellectual property affordance, workload and time management, and interactivity (Bovard, n.d.).

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education (2000).
3. **Instructional materials and course syllabi are reviewed periodically to ensure they meet online course and program learning outcomes.**

According to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Core Requirement 2.5 (SACS, 2011), institutions should engage “in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of ... outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.” Furthermore, Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1 prescribes that the institution will identify “expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results ... in educational programs, to include student learning outcomes.” (Each of the regional accreditors has similar recommendations.) For continuous improvement, the institution should have a periodic review of learning outcomes, analyze the student achievement data, and develop improvements based on that data. This should include online courses as well as traditional and hybrid courses.

Once online course materials are developed, the course development process should not end at that point. In fact, rarely should online course materials remain completely unaltered. Likewise, instructional design models recommend an evaluation process should be implemented after the course is first taught (and in subsequent offerings) and possible revisions addressed for continuous improvement, with the ultimate goal being the achievement of learning outcomes. All online courses should be reviewed on a periodic basis.

**Recommendations**

- Engage in a systematic review of learning outcomes to determine currency, relevance, and measurability.
- Implement a process where all courses are reviewed on a recurring basis.
- Systematically review and refine online instructional materials, to be sure they support the course syllabus and current learning outcomes.
- Systematically review online course materials and course syllabi to ensure relevance of educational technology and assessment activities.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000).
4. A course development process is followed that ensures courses are designed so that students develop the necessary knowledge and skills to meet measurable learning outcomes at the course and program level.*

At first glance, this indicator may seem like it should not have to be specified since that is what accreditation requires. However, not all courses are instructionally designed so the learning outcomes are clearly measured. Learning outcomes must be measured in order to know if students are meeting course goals and program goals. This can be done so that “individual courses within the curriculum help learners progress from basic, introductory levels of knowledge and skills to higher-level objectives for critical thinking, mastery of skills, and demonstration of knowledge common to a discipline,” (Porter, 2004, p. 31). In order to accomplish this, Puzziferro and Shelton (2008) recommended courses be developed with the following goals for learning:

- mastering information, such as key concepts, terms and ideas through exposure to the information and recall,
- progressively grasping the information by practicing learning activities that focus on recall, trial- and-error, and building the vocabulary and comprehension of the information,
- applying the information to a problem-based situation that can be collaborative,
- analyzing the problem further by deconstructing the information and reconstructing it into a solution by
- applying and analyzing the information, begin to recognize the patterns or relationships between the information and the problem, and
- creating new knowledge and the ability to reason about the information and apply it practically to situations.

Thus, courses should be designed to reinforce the interactive stages of learning towards the mastery of objectives in the overall program and discipline.

**Recommendations**

- Clearly demonstrate that online course learning outcomes are measured each term and compared to learning outcome goals.
- Clearly demonstrate that online course outcomes contribute to the program learning outcomes within which the course occurs.
- Use formative and normative assessment criteria in courses and programs to support the learning outcome being measured and to help students to gauge progress towards mastery.
- Build practice activities into online course design that encourage students to check understanding, refine understanding by applying it, and test understanding with feedback from peers and experts.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000).
5. **A process is followed that ensures that permissions (Creative Commons, Copyright, Fair Use, Public Domain, etc.) are in place for appropriate use of online course materials.**

Navigating issues surrounding acquisition of appropriate permissions for the use of online course materials can be daunting for faculty members. It is incumbent upon online program administrators to provide the tools, resources, and training necessary to assist faculty and other course development personnel in understanding issues surrounding Creative Commons, Copyright, Fair Use and Public Domain as well as developing processes for ensuring necessary permissions are acquired.

As higher education institutions grapple with the best ways to accomplish this within their institutional business processes and organizational culture, various online resource guides and other tools have been developed to serve faculty and students. Below are just three examples:

- Stony Brook University Libraries
  http://guides.library.stonybrook.edu/copyright

- North Dakota State University
  http://www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/vpag/Policies/FairUseWithChart120924.pdf

- University of Texas Libraries.
  http://copyright.lib.utexas.edu/copypol2.html

**Recommendations**

- Provide guides, tools, and training to support online faculty and course development personnel in better understanding their responsibilities with regard to Creative Commons, Copyright, Fair Use, Public Domain, etc.

- Develop internal checks within the online course development process to ensure appropriate permissions have been secured before online courses go live.

- Keep records on each course that required permission for use of materials.
6. Course assignments and activities are reviewed periodically to ensure they meet online course and program learning outcomes.*

As students progress through an online course, assessments must be developed that measure the level of student success and mastery of the materials. These assessments may take many forms; however, it is critical that assessments map exactly to the course content, and that they are defined early in the course design process. Assessments for the online environment do not necessarily need to match assessments given in face-to-face courses, although for comparison purposes, the faculty may choose to administer the same assessment. Assessments should be mapped early in the design process. Assessments that work well for online coursework include papers/essays, case studies, problem-based activities, quizzes and tests, and in some cases, group projects. Papers and other written assessments are often effective evaluation tools for online learning, as they can indicate a student’s critical thinking and direct mastery of the material.

New forms of online assessment are constantly evolving that allow a more student-centered approach. Properly designed and implemented assessments should provide the instructor with evidence of the students’ learning, the efficacy of the course materials, and provide input for future enhancements of the course materials. Achtemeier, Morris, and Finnegan (2003) provided guiding principles for assessment:

- Assessment should be preceded by explicitly stated outcomes.
- Assessment should distinguish between formative and summative uses.
- Assessment should have strong faculty buy-in.
- Multiple methods of assessment should be used.
- Assessment results should be shared and used.
- The assessment itself should be assessed.

**Recommendations**

- Map course assessments early in the course design process.
- Recognize that a single assessment can measure several learning objectives.
- Encourage the use of rubrics for assessment that guide students and provide feedback.
- Provide self-assessment tools (that provide automatic feedback) to students as they progress through the class.
- If issues of academic dishonesty arise in parallel with conversations about assessments, consider the practice of requiring that final assessments be proctored, either via the use of proctored test centers, or other means.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000).
7. Student-centered instruction is considered during the course development process.

Student-centered instruction acknowledges the shifting roles in the classroom (Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1963; Vygotsky, 1978) so that students learn best when they are personally motivated to obtain new skills, behaviors, and knowledge to solve an authentic challenge. Thus, online education is particularly well-suited for this shift in roles because of its capacity to draw on individual perspectives and compare them with multiple perspectives. Figure 1 is Shea, Pickett, and Pelz’s (2005) depiction of the principles that define an ideal learning environment that is learner-, knowledge-, and assessment-centered.

![A Conceptual Framework for High Quality Online Learning](image)

**The Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education** (Chickering & Gamson, 1987)

- Encourage contact between students and faculty
- Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students
- Encourage active learning
- Give prompt feedback
- Emphasize time on task
- Communicate high expectations
- Respect diverse talents and ways of learning.

1 How People Learn (Bransford, et al. 2002)
2 The Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987)
3 Critical inquiry in a text-based environment (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2002)
4 Adapted from Shea, Pickett, and Pelz (2003)

**Figure 1. A Conceptual Framework for High Quality Online Learning**
In learner-centered design, the teacher shifts to the facilitator of learning and a model of expert learning, rather than a dispenser of knowledge (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, n.d.), and thus promotes interaction among learners to solve authentic, real-world problems, and collaborate on solutions and learning paths. In fact, “the literature continues to point to online course design that centers around constructivist methods that encourage transference of learning such as mastery learning, problem-based and project-based learning, authentic learning and assessment, and collaboration (Shelton, Cummings, & Mason, 2014).

**Recommendations**

- When designing the online course, identify challenge questions that trigger individual responses and motivate interaction among learners.

- Connect assignments with learner’s lives and previous experiences.

- Design activities and assignments that engage students in learning how they learn.
8. There is consistency in course development for student retention and quality.

It is possible that for some, the course development process may be unstructured where anyone who decides to offer a course online does so without the benefit of instructional design assistance, technology support, or knowledge of effective pedagogical practice. However, consistency in course development contributes to retention when quality standards are systematically observed in the course development process (Shelton, Cummings, & Mason, 2014). A consistent process rigorously evaluates courses from inception, through delivery and redesign. The process known as Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation (ADDIE) describes the phases of course development, beginning with a formal proposal and an institutional or programmatic examination of the factors that determine whether or not a course should be offered online, via an organized needs analysis.

On a larger scale, the course development process itself is a highly orchestrated endeavor that involves the best efforts and consensus of stakeholders in the institution or program, to build a program that represents the best quality of its collected expertise in teaching and learning. Students appreciate quality in their courses and systematic course development results in greater student satisfaction (Fredericksen, Pickett, Shea, Pelz, & Swan, 2000).

“Model-Driven Design: Systematically Building Integrated Blended Learning Experiences” describes the system thinking that created a consistent course development process that seeks to:

- Arrive at a design that achieves the learning, teaching, quality, and cost objectives of the institution.
- Develop an approach to design and development that is less resource intensive than prior design experiences.
- Develop a learning environment where students can quickly understand how to use the technology platform and can focus on learning the curriculum content (Laster, 2010).

In an issue of the Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks (13:3), case studies of institutions who have online programs with high retention rates, describe a similarly consistent course development process.

**Recommendations**

- Develop courses and programs based on specific learning objectives that are made known across the curriculum.
- Apply program and institutional standards consistently in course development.
- Subject courses to peer review, before and after delivery.
- Conduct course level assessments for individual students so that they can measure their learning progress so that interventions can occur as soon as students appear to be at risk.
- Use feedback from faculty and students, and other metrics such as student interaction statistics, persistence rates, and standardized test scores to compare learning achievement in courses and to refine course design and delivery.
9. Course design promotes both faculty and student engagement.

Asynchronous online learning offers the opportunity to engage learners with each other and with the course content. Both students and faculty can have a rich and rewarding experience. However, there are many barriers to success. “Learners can be demotivated by online courses that are impersonal, irrelevant, boring, one-size-fits-all page-turners. Just as learners in face-to-face courses, online learners can be under-prepared, under-motivated, and discouraged by a lack of immediate payoff” (Moore, Fetzner, & Sener, 2009, p. 87). In addition, the lack of social interaction has been identified as an important barrier to address (Moore, et al., 2009). Because of this, many online instructors try to actively engage students; in fact, according to the National Survey of Student Engagement (2008), it was reported that in comparison to classroom students, online students were significantly more likely to report that they:

- Very often participate in course activities that challenged them intellectually.
- Very often participate in discussions that enhanced their understanding of different cultures.
- Very often discuss topics of importance to their major.

Online delivery offers a wide array of opportunities for engagement through course design and delivery. Course design that allows students to interact with content, faculty, and classmates helps maintain a highly engaged environment (Swan, 2004). In fact, several of Chickering and Ehrmann’s (1996) Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education center on all levels of interaction and indicate how technology can be used effectively for interaction.

Today, faculty and students are utilizing more engaging and collaborative activities that expand engagement, such as immersive environments, blogs, wikis, audio and video productions, and collaborative projects. The Online Learning Consortium’s Effective Practices provide excellent examples of interactive collaboration that engages students (Sloan-C, n.d.).

Recommendations

- Provide instructional design support for faculty to transition from a classroom-based (possibly lecture-based) course to an interactive online course that emphasizes active learning. This should include examples and models of best practices.

- Provide faculty with the appropriate training required to use technology to increase interaction.

- Encourage faculty to provide students with clearly defined expectations regarding methods and frequency of engagement with other students, faculty, and content.

- Provide the means for students to provide feedback regarding the level of engagement offered by the design of the course.
10. **A process is followed for evaluating the effectiveness of current and emerging technologies to support the achievement of learning outcomes and delivery of course content.**

Evaluating and recommending the use of new technology for the online classroom becomes more challenging each day with the rapid introduction of new applications and functionality. Thus, an institution should plan for the appropriate measures needed to systematically analyze technologies that will support online teaching and learning.

New technologies emerge at such a rapid pace that instructional designers and academic technologists need to continuously monitor and examine issues surrounding evaluating and integrating emerging technology for teaching and learning, with a focus on achieving learning outcomes. Today’s toolkit of academic technology and innovative tools include cloud computing, video conferencing, virtual laboratories, e-books, virtual worlds, social networking, mobile applications, open education resources and advanced learning management systems. What is now innovative, changes quickly; moreover, what’s innovative for one institution may be old technology for another or even too “bleeding-edge” for yet another.

Not all tools "out of the box" are necessarily useful for improving learning outcomes, so it is important for educators to first identify learning outcomes and methods for achievement and then apply the appropriate technology. Integrating new technologies also requires updated perspectives about their use. While providing flexibility, they may be difficult to deploy because of issues related to scalability, policy, and technology adoption variations. Armed with this knowledge, only then can the educator evaluate and recommend the deployment or appropriate rejection of the technology.

**Recommendations**

- Support the use of emerging technologies by explaining their value for improving teaching and learning. For example, Odom (2010) explained how Web 2.0 technologies support constructivism.

- Ask what the institution needs before investing in new technologies, for example:
  - What emerging technologies are needed for this institution at this time?
  - What are the problems associated with integrating them?
  - What standard evaluative tools will be used to assess and recommend the emerging technologies?

- Encourage and enable faculty and content experts to be familiar with innovative technologies.

- Minimize skepticism towards new technology by using well-trained, knowledgeable academics, technologists, and analysts in the evaluation process.
11. Usability tests are conducted and applied, and recommendations based upon Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAGs) are incorporated.

According to the Web Accessibility Initiative (2012), the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) were developed through a cooperative process with individuals and organizations around the world. The goal is to provide a single shared standard for web content accessibility that meets the needs of individuals, organizations, and governments internationally.

The Web Accessibility Initiative (2012) provides many resources in the following areas:

- Getting Started
- Designing for Inclusion
- Guidelines and Techniques
- Planning and Implementing
- Evaluating Accessibility
- Presentations and Tutorials
- Getting Involved with the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI).

WCAG is a technical standard (Web Accessibility Initiative, 2012) and is not intended to serve as an introduction to accessibility issues. As an online education administrator, it may be necessary for training and development activities to begin with an introduction and graduate to WCAG depending on the audience. However, as more and more online courses transcend geographic boundaries, developing online courses that meet the WCAG technical standard should be considered best practice.

**Recommendations**

- Stay abreast of advances within the Web Content and Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) initiative.
- Provide training opportunities for faculty and course development/instructional design personnel which highlight the importance of designing for inclusion and showcase relevant guidelines and techniques.
- Plan and implement online courses that are designed using the WCAG from the initial foundations.
- Use a checklist for best practices for online course development according to WCAG.
- Identify and deploy internal usability testing processes that underscore the importance of and incorporate the WCAG.
12. Curriculum development is a core responsibility for faculty (i.e., faculty should be involved in either the development or the decision making for the online curriculum choices).

The curriculum is the major statement any institution makes about itself, about what it can contribute to the intellectual development of students, about what it thinks is important in its teaching service to society (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1977, p. 18).

The responsibility for curriculum development or decision making and selection should reside with faculty because of their professional credentials and commitment to teaching, research, and service. This core responsibility typically includes developing curricula and keeping it current; reviewing and evaluating courses and programs, maintaining grading standards, selecting instructional resources and media, and developing new programs. Because of the prolific amount of online resources for online courses, faculty should be involved if the program or institution chooses to use resources such as purchasing ready-made online course materials.

The following all put pressure on traditional governance and decision making processes, including curriculum development:

- the proliferation of learning media and channels;
- competency-based learning initiatives;
- regulatory demands for greater accountability;
- federal, corporate and foundation calls for better workforce development;
- the availability of open educational resources and commercial content and course providers;
- standardization of courses;
- the growth of part-time faculty and non-traditional learners; and
- fiscal shortfalls.

Recommendations

- Ensure faculty lead in the online curricula process including decisions to adopt content experts, and open resources.
- Ensure faculty lead or are heavily involved in decisions to change curricula, courses, and programs.
- Provide faculty with data about learning outcomes, persistence, graduation rates, default rates, cost efficiencies, and graduate employability.
- Engage in national efforts to determine and compare success rates and quality standards.
References for Course Development and Instructional Design


Course Structure

1. The online course includes a syllabus outlining course objectives, learning outcomes, evaluation methods, books and supplies, technical and proctoring requirements, and other related course information, making course requirements transparent.*

2. The course structure ensures that all online students, regardless of location, have access to library/learning resources that adequately support online courses.*

3. Expectations for student assignment completion, grade policy, and faculty response are clearly provided in the course syllabus.*

4. Links or explanations of technical support are available in the course (i.e., each course provides suggested solutions to potential technical issues and/or links for technical assistance).

5. Instructional materials are accessible to the student, easy to use, and may be accessed by multiple operating systems and applications.

6. Instructional materials are easily accessed by students with disabilities via alternative instructional strategies and/or referral to special institutional resources.

7. Opportunities/tools are provided to encourage student-student collaboration (i.e., web conferencing, instant messaging, etc.) if appropriate.

8. Rules or standards for appropriate online student behavior are provided within the course.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy's report Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education (2000).
1. The online course includes a syllabus outlining course objectives, learning outcomes, evaluation methods, books and supplies, technical and proctoring requirements, and other related course information, making course requirements transparent.*

The sooner students know the course requirements, the easier their transition will be into the online classroom. The more detailed the syllabus, the fewer questions an instructor will have to respond to in the early stage of participants getting to know and trust each other and become comfortable in the online course environment.

At a minimum, a detailed course syllabus will include course objectives, learning outcomes, evaluation methods, information about the textbook(s) and other required materials, as well as technical and proctoring requirements (if proctoring is required as an outcome of the course design). At a minimum, the textbook and required course material information should be available well before a student enrolls in the course. This allows advance preparation on the part of the student, time for accessibility support services to help with input-output issues for students with disabilities, and can also serve as a nice recruiting tool for the program.

Weekly modules/units should indicate a more granular set of learning outcomes that are clearly linked back to the course objectives. To enhance transparency, term-specific dates (first day of class, last day to drop, finals week, grades due) and local dates (campus, state, and national holidays) should be indicated. In addition, a statement in the syllabus for students in other countries outside North America that some flexibility with due dates may be negotiated for students in other countries, will make them feel much more welcome and at ease.

**Recommendations**

- Provide, at a minimum, the textbook and required materials or resources to students in advance of their course registration.

- Create a user-friendly syllabus that is easily accessible online. Separate the syllabus into sections to allow for easy downloading and printing as needed.

- Develop a well-designed syllabus including answers to common questions, provide links to popular campus websites (e.g., library) and include all institutional policy requirements. Include a Q&A discussion thread in the online forum.

- Utilize a set of consistent standards for syllabus development such as a best practices rubric.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy's report *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000).
2. The course structure ensures that all online students, regardless of location, have access to library/learning resources that adequately support online courses.*

One of the main advantages of an online course is that issues of time, distance, and geography are minimized; therefore, some online students may live far away from the institution and its locally provided learning resources, or are otherwise time-and place-bound. All students are entitled to the same learning resources provided by the institution. This means any learning resource support that is provided on campus should also be provided or at least offered to online students. Access should include the institution’s library for book checkout and online research capabilities and all other institutional learning resources such as a writing center, tutoring support, counseling, etc.

In addition to a link to the library website, a links page for resources within the course can list recommended journals obtainable through the campus library, links to relevant how to use online resources, information about plagiarism, how to get help, and links to external websites that have required or recommended materials (which must be accessible or available in alternate formats). Instant messaging or chat programs may be used to provide “just in time” service through the institutional website because online students may need additional personal assistance.

Recommendations

- Offer quick links to the library website, writing center, tutoring, and other applicable learning resources within the online course materials.

- Ensure all library and academic support services are available to all types of students, regardless of geographic location.

- Dedicate at least one librarian to serve online students or provide this dedicated support in a way that is feasible given the institution’s organizational structure and resources.

- Communicate with online students using a variety of methods to remind them of all resources available to them.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education (2000).
3. Expectations for student assignment completion, grade policy, and faculty response are clearly provided in the course syllabus.*

Clearly posted expectations, instructions, due dates, point assignments/rubrics, and instructor response times are very important for students who might not otherwise be organized enough to keep up over time, and are particularly important for students with executive function disorders. Grading policies should be designated in the course syllabus, including links to assignment rubrics.

Instructor response times could differentiate among discussion boards, email, holidays, and days “off” and should clearly show that the instructor will not be available 24x7. However, there should be guidelines that help with student expectations of when to anticipate a response from the instructor. Online office hours can be helpful for most students, though synchronous requirements will disadvantage some. Synchronous methods include instant messaging, web conferencing, and chat. Other meetings could include a one-on-one session with a student who needs extra time to input text or process questions/answers.

“Head’s up” reminders of upcoming events are useful for all students, and can generally be linked to the email system of the LMS so that the information will simultaneously become an announcement within the course and an email to each student.

**Recommendations**

- Provide clear online instructor office hours as well as expected response time to emails, discussion board postings, and text messages (if encouraged by instructor) in the course syllabus.

- Designate in the course schedule when course sessions begin, and include topics, reading assignments, and student deliverables with due date and time, including time zone.

- Ensure institutional, program, and/or specific course grading policies are included in the syllabus.

- Encourage faculty to provide grading rubrics for each assignment.

- Develop and provide a late policy that clearly communicates what the penalty will be (if accepted at all) when assignments are submitted late.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000).
4. **Links or explanations of technical support are available in the course** (i.e., each course provides suggested solutions to potential technical issues and/or links for technical assistance).

All of the technical aspects of an online course are not always obvious to students, who just want to quickly get into the course materials and start the course. Instructors should not have to spend valuable online class time trying to troubleshoot technical issues for students who need help. The institution should, at a minimum, provide a help page or tutorial for the learning management system and the campus email website. A campus policy on “safe computing” is beneficial. Students (and instructors) are often not sure if a problem is with their Internet browser, their online Internet provider, the learning management system, the institution’s server, or the Internet itself. Instructors should not be the primary resource for resolving these issues, especially for their students.

Access to specific technology support can be linked within the course materials. For example, if a .m4v file is to be played, a link to the corresponding player software should be provided with instructions on how to download it, install it, and play the file.

**Recommendations**

- Provide a course discussion thread focused on technical issues where students are encouraged to post and answer questions to help each other.

- Provide a frequently asked questions area in the course that addresses typical technical support issues.

- Include basic support links in the course syllabus and also include a link to the student accessibility center/resources (along with a friendly statement on requesting help for disability accommodations).

- Remind students to store copies of their electronic files in more than one place and have an updated virus checker installed on their computer.
5. **Instructional materials are accessible to the student, easy to use, and may be accessed by multiple operating systems and applications.**

Inclusive design should be the foundation for online course design and course structure. While students with documented disabilities present the most obvious design challenges, it’s useful to expand the definition of “at-risk” beyond that. Problems with vision, mobility, hearing, and cognition can affect anyone at any time (and nearly everyone as they age), as can illness and the side effects of medication and fatigue. Other barriers include having to read and write using an unfamiliar language, having to decipher newly encountered academic writing and subject area terminology, and balancing many demands on time and energy.

Usable design includes presenting course materials with “writing for the web” rules such as chunking, plenty of white space, simple and obvious navigation (with as few clicks as possible), clearly labeled buttons and menu items, judicious use of color with an emphasis on good contrast, and not using color alone to provide information for those who are color-blind (for example, a display with a red bar showing females, the green bar showing males is indecipherable to some students).

According to the Usability.gov (2014) website "UX is a growing field that is very much still being defined." The User Experience Professional Association defines user experience design as “a discipline concerned with all the elements that together make up that interface, including layout, visual design, text, brand, sound, and interaction.” Gube (2010) asserted that the “user experience is how a person feels when interfacing with a system. The system could be a website, a web application or desktop software and, in modern contexts, is generally denoted by some form of human-computer interaction (HCI)”. For online administrators, focusing resources on the UX as it relates to course structure is increasingly becoming a best practice.

**Recommendations**

- Write the course syllabus, instructions, and weekly objectives in easy to understand language.
- Use file formats that students are most likely to use, i.e. pdf or html files.
- Provide links within the online course to Internet browser plug-ins when using less common file formats. For example, pdf files need the Adobe Reader plug-in to allow the file to be read within the browser.
- Consider how UX design principles become inherently embedded within the course structure.
6. **Instructional materials are easily accessed by students with disabilities via alternative instructional strategies and/or referral to special institutional resources.**

A disability can occur suddenly and unexpectedly to anyone. Planning ahead by designing accessible course materials not only serves all students and instructors, it also creates possibilities for classes continuing even under conditions of natural or other disasters. In fact, there are many people who don’t quite meet the threshold for “disability” but who, nonetheless, face challenges. Learning styles, preferences, and abilities also vary widely among students and instructors, so a well-designed course should have multiple modes of course material formats and alternative ways to submit work.

Research is clear—brains and bodies differ greatly, and a one-size-fits-all approach to course design benefits relatively few students. If, on the other hand, the course is designed to be as inclusive as possible, all students (and instructors) benefit.

**Recommendations**

- Provide accessible course design by ensuring that required course materials can be used with assistive technology such as closed-captioned videos and sound files that have text scripts provided.

- Ensure that faculty/professional development offices, in conjunction with library and other relevant units provide ongoing “best practices” in course design training and support services to address students who require accommodations and students who are online-only.

- Welcome students with disabilities; invite them to discuss their needs with advisors, and provide links to additional relevant resources.
7. **Opportunities/tools are provided to encourage student-student collaboration** (i.e., web conferencing, instant messaging, etc.) if appropriate.

One of the major benefits of online classes is the flexibility of time and place. Course activities should be designed around that benefit as much as possible. However, small groups can more easily find ways to interact. That said, there should be plenty of opportunities for students to interact in a variety of ways for discussions, projects, assignments, studying for exams, and just “hanging out” in a social environment.

Another major benefit is freedom from the de facto disclosure of stigmatizing conditions. Students, some of whom might be sensitive about their weight, height, facial appearance, skin color, or anything else that’s visible, should not be required to post a personal photo or to use a web cam if it makes them feel uncomfortable. Those who need time to think before they speak (English Language Learners; cognitive, or learning disabilities), or who prefer not to speak (speech impairments, extremely shy), or can't speak at all or without great effort, should not be required to post a sound file. In addition, those with upper body mobility impairments should not be required to do synchronous texting or instant messaging.

**Recommendations**

- Ensure that interactions—whether student-instructor, student-student, student-content, student-learning management system—are facilitated by understanding how/why/when to use specific technology.
- Encourage, but don’t require, the use of social media tools as are appropriate to the course material.
- Offer online office hours in a virtual classroom with archival capability for students to retrieve recordings or transcripts when convenient.
- Provide an area in the course where students can interact in a casual setting (such as a discussion thread). Palloff and Pratt (1999) call this a sandbox where students can talk in a relaxed setting.
8. **Rules or standards for appropriate online student behavior are provided within the course.**

Because of the ubiquity of technology-mediated interactions that online students face, it’s really important to be aware of, and provide support for, each aspect of these interactions. From the time a student first logs into the course and finds the syllabus, throughout all the assignment submissions, discussions, and until the last exam or paper is handed in, technology is ever present and can possibly to create barriers or be a source of student frustration. This in turn, can lead to student misbehavior in the course and while faculty are more accustomed to dealing with that face-to-face, the online classroom can be intimidating. Faculty need a framework of classroom rules to reference and receive guidance.

Some institutions are developing resources guides to assist faculty in managing student behavior online. Examples of some of these guides or codes of conduct specifically aligned with online courses include:

- Foothill College (n.d.).
  http://www.foothill.edu/services/honordpt.php
- Virginia Commonwealth University (2009).
  https://www.vcu.edu/cte/resources/OTLRG/04_12_Behavior.html
- Westchester Community College (n.d.).
  http://www.sunywcc.edu/academics/online-education/student-resources/online-student-policies-and-procedures-manual/#conduct

**Recommendations**

- Develop rules, standards, or codes of conduct focusing on appropriate student behavior for online students.
- Train faculty to be prepared for potential student misbehavior with recommendations for how to address it. This could include practices such as online role playing for how an instructor should respond when a student verbally (via text) attacks another student in the online discussion forums.
References for Course Structure


Teaching and Learning

1. Student-to-student and faculty-to-student interaction are essential characteristics and are encouraged and facilitated.*

2. Feedback on student assignments and questions is constructive and provided in a timely manner.*

3. Students learn appropriate methods for effective research, including assessment of the validity of resources and the ability to master resources in an online environment.*

4. Students are provided access to library professionals and resources to help locate, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use a variety of information resources.

5. Instructors use specific strategies to create a presence in the course.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy's report *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000).
1. **Student-to-student and faculty-to-student interaction are essential characteristics and are encouraged and facilitated.**

Both student-to-student and faculty-to-student interactions are recommended for a richer, more engaging online environment. In fact, Boettcher (2006) recommended both as best practices for teaching online, in order to alleviate students from feeling alone or abandoned and to create a positive learning community. Both types of interactions can be accomplished with a variety of asynchronous and synchronous activities.

Faculty-to-student interaction serves two primary purposes: supportive and instructional. Faculty teaching online can create a supportive classroom environment by ensuring that they are active in the course website early and often. In addition, a supportive environment may be created through introductory, welcoming, and continued messages and announcements to individual students and the whole class throughout the course term. These messages can be delivered through a variety of forms, including text, social media, audio, and video. Providing multiple options for each interaction allows students to select the accessible and/or the most personal level of engagement.

Faculty can provide an engaging instructional environment by providing faculty-to-student interaction in class discussions, emails, phone calls, and through directions within the class content such as lectures, PowerPoint presentations, articles, podcasts, etc. These interactions may also be of a more individual nature such as providing feedback on individual assignments, providing guidance on the development of a paper, providing feedback to students’ postings in threaded discussions, etc. Course content may lend itself to group work in which students collaborate to complete assignments. In these situations, faculty oversight and input are often required for a meaningful outcome for the students such as helping to form the groups, facilitating collaboration, and requiring individual participation.

The level of student-to-student interaction may depend on the nature and outcomes of the course. Care should be taken to ensure that the interactions are a means to either provide a supportive/social environment or allow students to achieve the learning outcomes. It is easy for students in a face-to-face environment to have interactions before or after class to discuss either social or academic work. Providing this same environment in an online class can reduce the psychological distance online learners may feel. However, it may require faculty to assist with introductions the first week of class. Faculty can also require student-to-student interaction through the types of assignments and assessments developed for the course. Additionally, faculty can create assignments that require peer review and group work.

Modern learning management systems provide a structure for both faculty-to-student and student-to-student interactions. These include, but are not limited to, threaded discussions, chat rooms, group tools and pages, and video. As technologies are developed, it is important for the faculty members to decide if and how the technology can be used in their courses. However, choosing the appropriate technology for a particular activity is not as important as the design of the activity itself.

**Recommendations**

- Create and implement policy regarding faculty interaction in online classes such as participating in the discussion boards, offering online office hours, and providing feedback on assignments.
- Monitor course evaluations for student comments on lack of faculty interaction.
- Provide faculty tips for how to encourage student-to-student interactions online.
- Provide faculty best practices for group work and recommended activities for online teaching and learning.
- Provide students with requirements for interaction and monitor student interaction.
- Provide support for faculty to evaluate and adopt new technologies that enhance interaction.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education (2000).*
2. Feedback on student assignments and questions is constructive and provided in a timely manner.*

For this quality indicator, the definition of feedback is the constructive information the instructor provides to students regarding course assignments and activities and should include direct instruction so that students can correct and improve understanding. Faculty play a critical role in this process as “effective feedback moves students beyond reflection on what they have accomplished; it moves them forward by helping them to identify gaps in knowledge and goals and strategies for future learning, both in the course and in non-course activities in their lives” (Getzlaf, Perry, Toffner, Lamarche, & Edward, 2009). In fact in their study, Getzlaf et al. (2009) found five themes for effective instructor feedback:

- there should be student involvement to create a feedback process with individualized feedback; it should be gentle guidance;
- it should be positive and constructive;
- it should be timely; and
- it should help students to identify gaps in knowledge and goals and strategies for future learning.

The institution can play an important part in this process by providing tools such as feedback forms and rubrics, as well as professional development on strategies and processes for good feedback. The feedback provided by the instructor must be within a relevant time frame as to provide constructive correction because it is easy for students to become frustrated and disengaged if they don't receive feedback in time to apply it to the next assignment.

Recommendations

- Encourage or require if possible that faculty provide constructive feedback on course assignments within a stated time frame. For example: including the statement that all graded assignments will be returned within one week after submission will help with student expectations and may prevent multiple student emails asking when to expect the return.
- Provide faculty resources such as models of good feedback, feedback forms, and rubrics to help formulate constructive feedback.
- When training faculty to teach online, emphasize the importance and use of constructive feedback.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy's report Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education (2000).
3. Students learn appropriate methods for effective research, including assessment of the validity of resources and the ability to master resources in an online environment.*

Students in online courses are often asked to conduct research, ranging from a class research paper to a theses or dissertation for an online graduate program. Because they do not have access to a face-to-face instructor, mentor, or university librarian, resources must be provided within the online course for all necessary information on this process including the instructor's expectations regarding research. Students must know how to find, organize, evaluate, and cite the information used in their research.

Students in online environments must understand that they are accountable for the information they use in completing course assignments. Online instructors must emphasize that the standards for student research are no less rigorous in an online course than they would be in a face-to-face course. Maintaining consistency and integrity in research expectations will help maintain course integrity and program integrity. It will also prepare students to effectively use online information beyond the scope of the course. Within an online course, the instructor can embed or link to adequate, clear instruction on how to conduct effective research of the professional literature through searches of the Web, library holdings, or library databases. Once information has been located, students must also understand how to evaluate that information. With the ease of online searches and the plethora of information available, students must learn to be critical consumers of information and recognize the criteria for reliable sources. They must know how to discern the difference between credible information from peer-reviewed articles and biased information from subjective sources such as blogs, wikis, and commercial sites (Naufel et al., 2010).

**Recommendations**

- State expectations and research requirements, clearly and in great detail, in the online course syllabus and learning management system.

- Provide students information:
  - on how to use Boolean search terms to find abstracts,
  - information on citation, and full-text articles in library databases
  - about the various library databases related to the course topics about Google Scholar (or others) as a useful source for information
  - about the most reliable and credible journals (by discipline)
  - on how to correctly cite Internet-based sources, including the DOI
  - on how to evaluate the information found online by students for source, accuracy, credibility, focus, bias and relevance
  - about methods and ethics of research, including proper citation and acknowledgement of sources, plagiarism, and academic integrity.

- Consider using a form to help students evaluate online resources.

- Create an online tutorial on research techniques using a recorded presentation including voice and video if possible, so that students can access and revisit as needed.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy's report *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000).
4. **Students are provided access to library professionals and resources to help locate, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use a variety of information resources.**

Students should be encouraged to contact librarians for assistance with their research. A librarian has expertise in information retrieval, knowledge management, information organization, information architecture and presentation, and information resource location and retrieval (Craig, Federici, & Buehler, 2010) and is usually quite willing to assist students.

As students complete assignments for online courses, they frequently must locate information beyond what is provided in the textbook. This usually requires the use of library resources. Accessing library resources and other scholarly materials can be daunting to any student, but particularly to those at a distance. Attempting to sort productively through a sea of online information, some of it relevant and much of it irrelevant, can easily lead to despair. And even if students successfully locate appropriate resources, finding full-text versions or arranging for e-document delivery can often be a challenge. Students might not have a local librarian to assist them, so access to library professionals and library resources must be built into the online course or program.

Library services and resources include (Bertot, 2003, pp. 210, 212, 217):

- Searching library holdings
- Placing a hold or recalling library material
- Interlibrary loan requests
- Licensed online databases, e-journals, and e-books
- Organized web pages that lead customers to additional content
- Real-time and asynchronous digital reference services
- Special, rare, or unique collections and archives
- Collaborative digital reference services
- Gateways to content that reside with, and are owned by, external entities.

It is easy to see that online students need access to library professionals who can navigate complex digital information. Bertot (2003) recommended that librarians in the networked environment are information experts, communicators, instructors, managers, technologists, negotiators, strategists/planners, and evaluators.

This role extends far beyond the common notion of a librarian, and online students will benefit greatly from understanding how a library professional can assist them and how to contact one.

**Recommendations**

- Embed links to library resources into the online course template.
- Place university library resource links within individual courses, if they are not in the course template.
- Provide contact information for discipline-based librarians at the institution.
- Provide links to library databases or statewide library collections such as TexShare.
- Suggest electronic databases that are best-suited for each discipline.
- Provide information on how to use an internet-based interlibrary loan and electronic document delivery service.
- Ensure that the library’s e-reserve system for required readings in the course is available. Teach students to use it by either providing a link to library instructions, or via a written or recorded tutorial.
- Provide information about research tools used to assist in organizing sources and formatting citations.
5. **Instructors use specific strategies to create a presence in the course.**

While there is a great emphasis on ‘social presence’ in online courses, this criterion refers specifically to instructor presence rather than a collective presence of instructor and students. Students in online courses must know that their instructor is paying attention, scaffolding, challenging, assessing, communicating, monitoring, and enhancing their learning experience. They need to feel a connection to their online instructor and know that he or she is accessible and interested in their success. By using specific strategies to establish a presence, online instructors can provide motivation, improve learning outcomes, avoid misunderstandings and feelings of isolation, and maximize student satisfaction. Instructors can help students become effective online learners as well as can also experience a more rewarding teaching experience.

Without instructor presence in an online course, students often feel isolated, unsupported, unmotivated, unrecognized, and unsuccessful. In addition, their only way of knowing if they adequately comprehend the material and are completing assignments as expected is the grades they receive, when it’s too late. Formative feedback from an active instructor is a critical support for the learning process. The learning experience is enriched further when instructors participate in and help guide online discussions and collaborative projects. Students can be challenged to think more deeply, critically, and creatively if the instructor is observant, responsive, and engaged. Teaching online should include many of the same interactive pedagogical strategies of teaching face-to-face, but perhaps utilized differently to optimize the possibilities of the online environment (Roybler & Wiencke, 2004).

Students often report that instructor presence is a highly-valued characteristic of an online course. In a study by Gayton and McEwen (2007), both faculty and students perceived the following as important strategies for ensuring online instructional quality: maintaining open communication with students, requiring students to interact with the instructor (and each other) to foster group cohesiveness, and building a strong learning community. Timely and detailed feedback regarding the quality of student work and building good rapport and collaboration with students were also considered important.

Online discussion boards can be an effective way to maintain ongoing instructor presence. However, the communication instructors provide through threaded discussions must go beyond strictly instructional support. Hammond (2001) advises that instructors must show evidence of their presence in online discussions by providing administrative and affective or “pastoral” support. They also must deepen the learning experience by encouraging divergent thinking, suggesting roles, and providing introductory and closure activities. Hammond (2001) recommends that instructors “take responsibility for monitoring the nature and scope of discussions and group processes” (p. 18). Administrative support might include providing how-to assistance, keeping discussions organized and on topic, and redirecting when necessary. Pastoral or affective support might include creating a risk-free discussion environment, encouraging respect for each other’s opinions, thanking students for their honest comments and dialogue, making positive replies to individual student postings, or posting a pop-up announcement congratulating all students on an invigorating and thoughtful discussion.

Instructor presence can be accomplished in many ways, and is best accomplished by using a combination of strategies. Some are built into the course, but many are dynamic activities that require that the instructor be fully engaged with the course delivery and student involvement. Students need to feel that there is always someone in the pilot’s seat. Instructor presence is an extremely important element in the online classroom and not an afterthought, thus SUNY Learning Network (2010) provides an instructor self-assessment survey with which instructors can compare their own assessment with their students.
Recommendations

- Establish a welcoming class environment with personal touches, such as these:
  - Send a welcome message before the course begins
  - Post an introductory text, audio, or video message, and invite students to do the same
  - Continue to use audio/video in messages to individuals to convey presence
  - Use a conversational, plain English style
  - Address students by name
  - Be sensitive to cultures, genders, religions, nationalities, learner confidence levels, and differing abilities in all communications
  - Call each student during the class to convey personal interest

- Use learning management system features regularly to convey instructor presence, interest, and consideration to announce progress and events, to post office hours and contact information including methods and times, and to encourage, motivate, and challenge students.

- Suggest that instructors may want to keep a restrained presence in discussions so students will lead discussion.

- Use affordable tools like VOIP/video calls to hold virtual office hours, communicate with students, and hold synchronous class meetings.

- Encourage instructors to use (but don’t require) social networking media to communicate with students.

- Encourage faculty to always provide students timely, individual feedback on assignments.
References for Teaching and Learning


Social and Student Engagement

1. Students should be provided a way to interact with other students in an online community (outside the course).
1. **Students should be provided a way to interact with other students in an online community (outside the course).**

   “Establishing community and a sense of belonging among online students is an important factor in increasing engagement, involvement, and consequently, student success” (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005, p. 100).

Regardless of their proximity to the campus, students should be able to meet and get to know other students and interact outside the actual online classroom. In addition, accrediting associations are placing increased importance on the development of community for online students. More importantly, “the overarching goal is to communicate to online students that they are equally important...and that they are equally valued” (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005, p. 100).

The Community of Inquiry framework was developed from the thesis that learning benefits when social, cognitive, and teaching presence are cultivated within the classroom itself as well as beyond it; in fact, a study of 28,000 students by Boston et al. (2010) found that students’ enrollment persistence was strongly associated with their feeling part of the online community:

- Online or web-based communication is an excellent medium for social interaction.
- I was able to form distinct impressions of some course participants.

Institutions report success when students mentor students through the learning system, and some courses engage students in collaborative community building in the classroom via shared note-taking, group study, peer review, and examination questions. One of the most notable successes of student interaction reduced drop-out by 50% (Sax, 2001).

**Recommendations**

- Offer opportunities for students to engage outside of the confines of the online classroom to provide a social environment for those who wish to participate.
- Establish a virtual student commons area to promote social networking among students where potential study partners may be found or chat with other students.
- Encourage social media tools (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) where online students can interact and have access to current institutional information (i.e., sports updates).
- Build online community by encouraging experienced online students to mentor new students.
References for Social and Student Engagement


1. Technical assistance is provided for faculty during online course development and online teaching.*

2. The institution ensures faculty receive training, assistance, and support to prepare for course development and teaching online.*

3. Faculty receive training and materials related to Fair Use, plagiarism, and other relevant legal and ethical concepts.*

4. Faculty are provided on-going professional development related to online teaching and learning.

5. Clear standards are established for faculty engagement and expectations around online teaching (e.g. response time, contact information, etc.).

6. Faculty are informed about emerging technologies and the selection and use of new tools.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education (2000).
1. Technical assistance is provided for faculty during online course development and online teaching.*

As online education continues its rapid growth in higher education, it is more important than ever that institutions provide faculty with technical assistance and ongoing support for transitioning to the online classroom. As online education becomes embedded into the traditional academy, it has become more mainstream and no longer limited to nontraditional students. Today, even traditional students expect some level of online delivery through either fully online classes or hybrid or blended courses and programs.

Institutions are challenged not only to provide an adequate level of technical support and assistance for faculty, but also appropriate support and assistance. Institutions must think strategically about how to staff, promote, structure, and deliver the technical assistance faculty need for teaching online and creating online community. Often, institutions associate “technical” with “information technology,” and the technical assistance for course development and online teaching is housed within IT departments. Technical support should be provided for the learning management system, web page development, social media tools, audio and video recordings, graphic development, and new emerging technologies. Support must also be contextual, pedagogy-based, and easily accessible, and fit within the overall organizational structure to maximize efficiencies and resources. The support should continue through the time of teaching online, and not solely focus on course development.

Recommendations

- Embed technical support practices for online education within the institutional mission and culture to encourage faculty acceptance. Support should be allocated to assist faculty in online course development so they will become more familiar with online education and its role in the context of their own department.

- Carefully consider where to locate technical support services. Think about existing organizational structures and decide whether to centralize or decentralize services. Keep in mind accessibility, approachability, consistency, maintaining educational context, and ensuring expertise is available.

- Technical support will be needed, at times, for faculty and their home computers. Provide a resource in order for faculty to be able to troubleshoot home computers with the online teaching environment.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education (2000).
2. The institution ensures faculty receive training, assistance, and support to prepare for course development and teaching online.*

Although the reality of online education's admission to the mainstream academic culture presents obvious challenges, the benefits are many, and can include better alignment between campus and online curriculum. In addition, more effective integration of “online” and “campus” faculty into a single faculty culture may develop along with the culture of online education merging with the context of the overall institutional mission. Whereas instructors in many online programs traditionally are “online faculty,” and frequently adjuncts, today’s “online instructors” include all types of faculty members. Online course development and teaching are no longer optional for higher education in the US, and many regular college and university faculty find themselves faced with “putting their course online.” While putting one’s course online sounds deceptively simple, we have seen over the last decade there is a need for special attention to learning theory, technical expertise, and pedagogical shifts.

Instructors need preparation to teach online. In fact, “training is not only necessary for the creation and teaching of online courses, but in all aspects in which faculty interact with the online program” (Shelton & saltsman, 2005, p. 73). Faculty cannot be expected to automatically know the “ins and outs” of teaching online and developing online course materials. They may have many years of experience in the traditional classroom but that does not mean they are prepared for a move to the online classroom. This paradigm shift will be significant for many faculty. Training and support should be provided for the development (and redevelop) of course materials, the change in pedagogy and course facilitation, and ongoing assistance throughout the entire teaching period.

Instructional designers are immensely helpful to faculty and to helping institutions scale online programs. Part editor, part technical support, instructional designers are primarily experts in online pedagogy and course design. They also may be experts in learning management software, educational technology, and institutional or program protocols for course development. They can guide the faculty to the most effective and efficient ways to achieve their instructional objectives. Ongoing faculty development activities help faculty obtain assistance as they need it. For a helpful example, review the following models:

- SUNY Learning Networks’ faculty development model
  http://wiki.sln.suny.edu/display/SLNED/SLN+Faculty+Development+Program+illustration
- SUNY course design process
  http://wiki.sln.suny.edu/display/SLNED/SLN+Online+Course+Models

**Recommendations**

- Provide comprehensive course development support, training, and assistance for online instructors. The faculty development opportunities should be frequent and ongoing.
- Examine different models of delivery (virtual modules, handouts, live training, self-paced, etc.) and provide a variety of resources for professional development.
- Adopt a variety of faculty training and support strategies, e.g. faculty mentoring programs, web-based knowledge bases, collaborative wikis, training workshops, online support materials, and others.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education (2000).
3. **Faculty receive training and materials related to Fair Use, plagiarism, and other relevant legal and ethical concepts.*

The online environment, by its open and vast nature, presents educators with considerable legal and ethical challenges. Understanding of issues related to ownership, privacy, identity, and copyright law are critical to anyone navigating the online world. Copyright law and Fair Use are essential concepts for all faculty members to understand. Faculty generally approach these issues from two distinct perspectives: as consumer and creator. Their concerns and perceptions about copyright law may differ depending on the scenario being considered. One common copyright issue related to online learning is faculty ownership of material created for online courses. Each institution must be proactive in setting a core intellectual property policy, and providing guidelines for compliance.

Fair use is perhaps the least understood aspect of online course development and teaching among faculty. In a recent study, Sweeney (2006) found that faculty members were generally unclear about copyright law and were uncertain of where and how to locate university policies. In addition, faculty noted that they were concerned about their online course content, but continued to use material for which they did not seek copyright release. The consequences of copyright infringement can be dire for an individual and an institution, and can include disciplinary action, termination, legal fees, and an assortment of criminal penalties. Institutions must support faculty with the needed information and training about copyright law in order to avoid a breach. In addition to the risk of infringement, a lack of knowledge about Fair Use can result in faculty avoidance of incorporation of diverse content into an online course.

Another major ethical issue for faculty is plagiarism. Faculty must understand the nature of plagiarism in the online environment, and learn to recognize it in order to deter frustrating and challenging incidents. Faculty must understand their role is not to “catch” students; rather, faculty should have the knowledge and tools to educate students about academic integrity, ethical issues, and appropriate conduct.

**Recommendations**

- Create checklists, tip sheets, examples, workshops, and chunked information to make copyright compliance easier for faculty to apply. See for example, Copyright Compliance Made Simple – Six Rules for Course Design (Enghagen, 2001).

- Ensure faculty receive copyright information within relevant contexts. For example, copyright information in relation to course development should be included in online course development support materials.

- Ensure that copyright law doesn’t become one department’s responsibility, but rather, universal and integrated throughout the institution.

- Provide faculty with workshops, discussions, roundtables, and other opportunities to collaboratively discuss ethical issues in online education.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000).
4. Faculty are provided on-going professional development related to online teaching and learning.

Online education has evolved quickly over the last decade. The frequency with which new technologies become available is staggering. In addition, as more and more research is conducted on electronically mediated educational practice and outcomes, further evidence emerges that compels us to change our educational methods and pedagogical approaches. In fact, Puzziferro and Shelton (2009, ¶13) urged us to:

> think about creative ways to engage online faculty in a community of practice within the context of their disciplines, as well as in interdisciplinary contexts. Online faculty need professional development to foster excellence, recognition and reward, and an outlet to share and mentor other faculty in meaningful and professionally fulfilling ways related to their areas of interest and expertise. This presents higher education with a tremendous opportunity to develop professional online faculty and to leverage their experience to further enhance the quality of online learning for students.

An on-going program of professional development is a necessary part of supporting quality in online education. Staying current with the body of research and the availability of new technologies is critical to success in the online environment. In addition, focus on additional areas for faculty development can enhance an instructor's effectiveness, such as generational studies, learning theory, time management, and retention strategies. Professional development can also help to avoid instructor burnout, and give instructors important time for reflection, learning, and personal development.

The traditional definition of professional development encompasses activities such as sabbaticals, grant funding, conference attendance, and activities directly related to development as a professional or researcher. However, a more student-centered definition is emerging, and this is especially true of professional development for faculty. Professional development is not simply a series of workshops or classes to hone skills, though those are certainly a part of professional development. Rather, professional development is a holistic process that should include faculty's long-term goals for improving teaching and learning.

It is a myth that professional development for faculty is cost-prohibitive. Although professional development requires some institutional investment for staff, materials, and programs, the essence of professional development thrives within a culture of continuous improvement, student learning, and quality focus.

**Recommendations**

- Define and communicate the importance of professional development for faculty.
- Approach professional development as a process of individual goal setting or self-improvement with a focus on improving teaching for improving learning.
- Ensure that staff selected to lead professional development efforts have buy-in and support from faculty and that all initiatives and departments work collaboratively on the programs.
- Proactively engage faculty by ensuring their awareness of development opportunities through various communication channels.
- Provide flexible and diverse professional development strategies to meet the demands of the diverse faculty population. Engage remote adjunct faculty in the teaching culture of the institution.
5. **Clear standards are established for faculty engagement and expectations around online teaching (e.g. response time, contact information, etc.).**

In an age of accountability, the establishment and implementation of instructional standards provides institutions a way to measure performance and effect student learning outcomes. However, a potential pitfall of standards is that they sometimes inhibit innovation and creativity and become codified as rules.

Institutions should establish standards that are directly and positively tied to student learning outcomes. The only way to truly know whether certain educational methods contribute positively to student outcomes is through the collection and analysis of data. Thus, individuals who are developing standards should ask themselves what they want to accomplish through each standard and use evidence to justify the standard.

Sometimes, supervisors of online faculty experience a sense of disconnection from the online classroom as well as a sense of mystery as to what the faculty member is doing, how often, and how effectively. Often, quantitative standards are put in place to indicate and measure engagement, participation and overall effectiveness, such as a minimum number of required logins per week or a minimum number of discussion postings.

Analysis of data derived from such standards, when not combined with other measures, is impractical. A culture of quality is built on shared values about good practice. Often, institutions spend too little time building the culture, and too much time codifying and enforcing standards.

In the online environment, this is especially true, as often there is a focus on monitoring faculty performance for adherence to response time and engagement indicators.

Once standards are established and understood, there must be a process and staff in place to communicate standards and enforce them. Online faculty must be made aware of the performance expectations and standards of teaching performance. The communication must be clear, consistent, and precise.

**Recommendations**

- Document standards for faculty expectations and always include them in teaching contracts and faculty policy handbooks. Support standards by including informal messages about specific standards in a diverse selection of materials (websites, collateral material, meeting agendas, and so forth).

- Ensure that appropriate personnel and systems are in place to communicate standards and monitor faculty performance. Inculcate the benefits of assessment and performance evaluation in the institutional culture so that methods are embraced rather than condemned.

- Create and implement online faculty certification courses that impart the essential components of online teaching standards, and provide the necessary tools and skills to achieve quality online teaching.

- Create a consistent performance review process with detailed documentation. Provide faculty with performance feedback, in writing, as well as specific information on how to rectify any noted issues.

- Establish measures for standards that come from various sources so that performance assessments can be improved. For example, measure faculty engagement in a class by administrative observation, peer review, student reports, and login activity.

- Assess competence in the online classroom through combined measures, including written skills, technical skills, pedagogical awareness, compliance with administrative duties and more.
6. **Faculty are informed about emerging technologies and the selection and use of new tools.**

One important aspect of professional development is the availability of opportunities for faculty to learn about new tools and emerging technologies for improving teaching and learning. Workshops are an effective vehicle for developing understanding and confidence and can be delivered in various formats, including face-to-face sessions, or online through asynchronous or synchronous methods. For many faculty, taking the time for a workshop is a luxury because they are so busy. However, workshops can provide faculty with an enhanced base of knowledge, additional online teaching skills, and fluency in current technologies and emerging teaching strategies.

Two common challenges in organizing workshops are scheduling and participation. Even asynchronous online workshops can present scheduling issues for busy faculty. Some institutions require a certain number of workshops per year as part of their professional development plan, and others offer them on a more recreational and informational basis.

Participation can be hindered by busy schedules and a lack of incentive. Adjunct online faculty, in particular, are often offered little or no incentive for participating in workshops. Institutions should endeavor to encourage and maximize participation by making workshops relevant, convenient, and worthwhile.

**Recommendations**

- Create a schedule of workshops tied directly to specific online teaching standards and current issues and ensure they are offered to both full time and adjunct faculty.
- Ensure workshops are concise, convenient, and directly applicable to faculty work and practice.
- Maximize delivery formats and experience with a variety of delivery methods; including roundtables, self-paced online, asynchronous online, on-campus, and outsourced/third party opportunities.
- Offer incentives to faculty for participation in workshops to encourage those who are otherwise engaged. Try establishing an online teaching certificate program requiring ongoing participation.
- Offer workshops that are relevant and instructional while also making them fun, engaging, and cutting edge.
- Offer workshops provide faculty hands on experience utilizing the tools and technologies required online teaching.
- Consider peer-run workshop programs, where faculty are able to share with their peers new strategies, technologies, and online teaching perspectives.
References for Faculty Support


1. Before starting an online program, students are advised about the program to determine if they possess the self-motivation and commitment to learn online.*

2. Before starting an online program, students are advised about the program to determine if they have access to the minimum technology skills and equipment required by the course design.*

3. Before starting an online program, students receive (or have access to) information about the program, including admission requirements, tuition and fees, books and supplies, technical and proctoring requirements, and student support services.*

4. Throughout the duration of the course/program, students have access to training and information they will need to secure required materials through electronic databases, interlibrary loans, government archives, news services and other sources.*

5. Throughout the duration of the course/program, students have access to appropriate technical assistance and technical support staff.*

6. Support personnel are available to address student questions, problems, bug reporting, and complaints.*

7. Students have access to effective academic, personal, and career counseling.

8. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are provided in order to respond to students’ most common questions regarding online education.

9. Students are provided non-instructional support services such as admission, financial assistance, registration/enrollment, etc.

10. Policy, processes, and resources are in place to support students with disabilities.

11. Students have access to required course materials in print and/or digital format, such as ISBN numbers for textbooks, book suppliers, and delivery modes prior to course enrollment.

12. Program demonstrates a student-centered focus rather than trying to fit existing on-campus services to the online student.

13. Efforts are made to engage students with the program and institution in order to minimize feelings of isolation and alienation.

14. The institution provides guidance/tutorials for students in the use of all forms of technologies used for course delivery.

15. Tutoring is available as a learning resource.

16. Students are provided clear information for enlisting help from the institution.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy's report Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education (2000).
1. **Before starting an online program, students are advised about the program to determine if they possess the self-motivation and commitment to learn online.***

As online education matures, online student success has been linked to certain motivations and skill sets. To support student retention, institutions should take action to ensure students are both capable and equipped to succeed. Online students sometimes neglect their courses because of personal or professional circumstances. Having a compelling reason for taking the course helps motivate the student to stick with the course. Some students prefer the independence of online education; others find the independence uncomfortable and miss being part of the classroom experience. Students should be made aware of the following:

- Online courses give students greater freedom of scheduling, but they can require more self-discipline than on-campus classes.
- Some people learn best by interacting with other students and instructors. Others learn better by listening, reading, and reviewing on their own. Some online courses provide less opportunity for group interaction than most on-campus courses.
- Online learning requires students to work from written directions on course assignments.
- It may take as little as a few hours or as much as several days to get comments back from the instructor.
- Print materials are often the primary source of directions and information in online courses.
- Students should feel comfortable contacting the instructor as soon as they need help with the course.

**Recommendations**

- Develop processes to measure student success and motivation (i.e. using a “dropped student” survey to determine commonalities).
- Encourage students to assess their motivation and commitment to online classes (example self-assessment activity below).

**Self-Assessment Checklist (Palloff & Pratt, 2003)**

- I have access to a computer or the equipment required for an online class.
- I am not intimidated by using technology for learning.
- I feel comfortable using the computer for basic word processing, email, and to access the Internet.
- I am a good time manager, can meet deadlines, and can keep track of assignments.
- I am an independent learner.
- I am self-disciplined.
- I can express my ideas, comments, questions, and emotions in writing.
- I am generally flexible and can adjust to changing schedules.
- I have some time available to go to campus, if required, for exams and meetings.
- I am a self-starter.
- I easily understand what I read.
- I am goal-directed and often achieve my goals.
- I am realistic and confident about my academic ability.
- I am persistent and obstacles don’t stop me.
- I believe in taking responsibility for my own learning.
- I am open to trying something new.
- I am open to working in an unstructured setting.
- I enjoy working in teams, doing collaborative projects, etc.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000).
2. **Before starting an online program, students are advised about the program to determine if they have access to the minimum technology skills and equipment required by the course design.**

Online students rely on technology to interact with instructors, classmates, and institutional support staff in an online environment. Therefore, it is important to advise students of the need to have basic computer and technology skills and equipment before taking online classes. This advice can come from the admissions office, via the institutional website, and marketing media. Many colleges have implemented online self-assessment activities that allow students to ascertain if they possess the technical skills needed to succeed in an online course.

To assess if a student has access to an adequate computer system, institutions need to disseminate technology requirements. "Students need to understand the expectations for the types of hardware and software resources they will need to supply. A detailed list of requirements should be provided such as minimum computer processor speed and memory requirement and hard drive space. Many institutions prefer specific Internet browsers and require the use of an anti-virus program. For example, if the online program heavily uses streaming video, it may be necessary for students to acquire additional memory for their computers (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2009, p. 202)." 

Simonson et al. (2009) reminded us that “communication with students prior to beginning the course is valuable to ensure they can prepare their technology for the learning experience” (p. 202). All technology requirements needed for online courses must be clearly available and articulated before the student registers for the course, including the requirements for Internet browsers, browser settings, and browser add-ons. The technology requirements should also include any special equipment that is specific to the course requirements such as cameras, microphones, CD-Rom/DVD drives, special software, or the need to be able to download additional software programs. All specific online course technology requirements need to be included in the course syllabus, course schedule, and other appropriate places within the course site and be easily accessed on the web site so students clearly know what is needed before signing up for a course.

**Recommendations**

- Provide information on the program website, through email, social media, etc. concerning all required online technologies needed for the online course before students enroll.

- Provide web links to help students locate the resources they need (i.e. bookstore, vendors, websites, software, downloads).

- Provide a list of troubleshooting tips and frequently asked questions for students to access online.

- Provide information on technical skills and standards specific to the institution. For example, “Students should have basic skills using word processing software.” Disseminate the information to students via several channels of communication.

- Address specific technologies required by the institution such as email and online learning management systems.

- Provide a demo in video or a tutorial for students that explains the technologies needed for success.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000).
3. Before starting an online program, students receive (or have access to) information about the program, including admission requirements, tuition and fees, books and supplies, technical and proctoring requirements, and student support services.*

Students need access to relevant information regarding the online program before making a decision to apply to a degree program or enroll in an online course. Communication of available support services and necessary information is an important element in effective online program administration. In fact, Cavanaugh (2002) suggested that the quality of a program is actually dependent upon accurate communication to the students.

The more options the student has to access relevant information and support services, the better. Telephone, live chat, web pages, and email are established ways of providing information for online students. Since many online students wish to conduct business with the institution during nonstandard hours, providing answers to the most commonly asked questions that can be accessed anytime has proven helpful for students. Furthermore, each question clearly answered may reduce the number of responses needed from support staff or instructors.

**Recommendations**

- Provide online information related to program admission, enrollment, cost and financial aid, books, policies, and student support services. Keep the website updated, organized, and easily accessible.

- Consider the following questions when developing the informational website:

  - What requirements must be satisfied for students to gain admittance to a course?
  - How should students communicate (phone, email, fax, etc.) with the school to acquire information/support?
  - What procedures should students follow to access services, such as the library (identification, login, URL)?
  - How do students communicate with advisors and other faculty members?
  - What kinds of barriers might students encounter in successfully completing their program and how will the institution remove these barriers? (Adapted from Ananthanarayanan, 2002)

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000).
4. Throughout the duration of the course/program, students have access to training and information they will need to secure required materials through electronic databases, interlibrary loans, government archives, new services, and other sources.*

Learning to use online library databases for the first time without expert help can be intimidating. And even if students successfully locate appropriate resources, finding full-text versions of journal articles or arranging for e-document delivery can often be a challenge. Library professionals should provide training and educational opportunities for students and faculty, and may want to view teaching information literacy as part of their job. Instructors should make use of the expert help that library professionals can provide, rather than trying to tackle it themselves, or worse yet, leaving students in the dark.

**Recommendations**

- Provide access to information on accessing library databases (i.e. a link to library resources, an online tutorial, or at a minimum, the librarian’s contact information).

- Provide services that help students locate relevant information such as a self-paced tutorial or library orientation module.

- Designate a librarian for online learning and provide students with the designated librarian’s contact information, so students have a primary point of contact for questions and troubleshooting.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000).*
5. Throughout the duration of the course/program, students have access to appropriate technical assistance and technical support staff.*

For students to experience technical difficulties while enrolled in an online course is a very real possibility because of the nature of technology (Palloff & Pratt, 2003). Students should be confident they are able to successfully function online and must be able to complete the requirements of the course without undue stress. When developing online course materials, access to resources such as technical support services should be addressed (Simonson et al., 2009).

Both online students and online instructors will need technical support from time to time. If an online student is unable to resolve technical problems, frustration and isolation will occur, which, in turn, may impact student retention and learning (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005). However, “instructors cannot be responsible for other than cursory training of their students in the use of technology” (Miller & King, 2003, p. 292). Therefore, the institution should provide online support for the students. Ideally, the support should be 24x7 when combining self-help and access to a person for support. As much information as possible should be available in a self-help format so students can access help at any time. However, there must be a process for contacting support a person if additional help is needed. Some institutions provide a direct telephone number (often toll-free); others have an online ticketing system or chat room. The support should include everything from how to reset a password to what to do if a student gets locked out of an examination.

Recommendations

- Provide accessible information on how to get technical support on the website and/or the LMS, a toll free phone number, and chat.
- Provide technical support services as close to 24 hours, 7 days a week as possible.
- Clearly specify when various support services are available if they are not offered 24x7.
- Create a technical support request form that is web-based with details about expected turnaround time, evening/weekend availability and telephone and/or chat availability for “live” help.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000).
6. Support personnel are available to address student questions, problems, bug reporting, and complaints.*

Student frustration with technology in online courses has been documented by several researchers. In earlier studies, frustration with technology was cited as a key factor in student failure (Moore & Kearsley, 1996). A system needs to be in place for addressing questions related to taking online courses. In the learning management system or student portal, it should be clear whom to contact if a student forgets his/her password, if the LMS is not working properly, if an instructor is not responding to the students, or if the complaint is not getting addressed in a timely manner. Students “need to understand where the responsibility of the institution lies regarding reliability. Policies need to be articulated so that all parties are clear about responsibilities” (Simonson et al., 2009, p. 201).

**Recommendations**

- Provide support staff to address specific questions about online courses and programs.
- Present a clear process for students to report problems and make complaints, preferably online.
- Create a self-help website that addresses current issues that might affect students online.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy's report Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education (2000).
7. **Students have access to effective academic, personal, and career counseling.**

Institutions must make available all student support services to online students just as they do traditional on campus students. This should include access to academic advising, and personal and career counseling.

According to Crockett (1987),

> academic advising is a developmental process, which assists students in the clarification of their life/career goals and in the development of educational plans for the realization of these goals. It is a decision making process by which students realize their maximum educational potential through communication and information exchanges with an advisor; it is ongoing, multifaceted, and the responsibility of both student and advisor. The advisor serves as a facilitator of communication, a coordinator of learning experiences through course and career planning and academic progress review, and an agent of referral to other campus agencies as necessary. (p. 3)

Numerous studies have shown the importance of quality academic advising and its impact on student retention in the traditional classroom (Crockett, 1978, 1987; Habley, 1981; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978; Tinto, 2000; Wilder, 1981). In the online classroom, advising has also been identified as a key service in student satisfaction and retention (Cain & Lockee, 2002). Academic advising plays a crucial role with students and should be considered a mandatory service for those students that elect to use it. (Many institutions have a required advising process in place so that students may not enroll in classes until they have communicated with their advisor).

Personal counseling may be made available to students not close enough to campus to meet in person, and can be in the form of telephone, email, or virtual web conferencing. At the minimum, if there is suicide prevention support on campus, that same phone number could be provided to online students. A website could be created that provided informational handouts on typical situations that could benefit from personal counseling, such as students feeling overwhelmed by their classes.

For traditional students, career counseling and job placement services are provided to assist students with career planning and with finding gainful employment (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005). The career counseling website can provide a multitude of resources such as handouts for how to design an effective resume and links to job searches. In addition, the services that are offered to online students should be clearly described and students should be made aware who is eligible. Many career centers have worked to place educational materials online (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005). Students may find online modules, or mini-courses that help in résumé writing, interviewing, and job seeking (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005).

**Recommendations**

- Provide various means in which students can receive advising and personal counseling (i.e. in person, telephone, email, or web conferencing).

- Offer career counseling for online students and provide resources such as links to job search sites, posts for interview opportunities, and documents outlining useful information on job searching, résumé creation, cover letter creation, or interview techniques.
8. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are provided in order to respond to students' most common questions regarding online education.

A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) area should be provided as a resource to answer questions from visitors to the online program website. The FAQ’s should be derived from previously asked questions or information that the user will most often need to know. In the individual course pages, an FAQ area can also be a great resource. If the instructor is asked the same question multiple times in teaching a particular subject, the FAQ area can be very helpful when instructors remind students to check there first before emailing a question. It saves time from having to provide the same answer many times over. It helps if questions and answers are clearly written, realistic, and in language that is easy to understand. This resource should not be considered a tool for publicity but as a resource for current and potential students.

Recommendations

- Use a FAQ area on the program website to answer common questions that participants have or that they may have in the future about an online course.

- Use the FAQ area to answer common questions that students or prospective students have had or that they may have about the online program.

- Update the FAQ area often and date the revisions so that students know that content is still relevant.
9. **Students are provided non-instructional support services such as admission, financial assistance, registration/enrollment, etc.**

Access to student support services such as admissions, financial assistance, registration, student academic and financial records, paying for fees and tuition, library, and tutoring and peer support should be available online, via the web and telephone, so that online students have equal access to and receive the same support services as on-ground students. Online students should not have to travel to campus to receive support services. “In practice, the quality of student support services available and easily accessible to a distant learner will play a major role in determining whether that student learns about the program, enrolls, and remains through to completion” (Simonson et al., p. 324). In addition, regional accreditors require that institutions provide student services to all students equally.

According to Shelton and Saltsman (2005), “One of the greatest advantages of online education for students is the ‘anytime-anywhere’ approach to learning. A common misconception made by campus administrators is to assume that online students can utilize the institution's support services during normal business hours” (p. 84). However, many online students will assume these support services are available 24x7 and expect to receive service on evenings and weekends unless the available hours of service are clearly communicated.

**Recommendations**

- Provide access to all student support services via the Internet, on campus, and in person.
- Regularly remind students about services.
- Continuously evaluate online student support services for student satisfaction.
- Stay abreast of emerging technologies in student services and carefully evaluate possible solutions.
10. Policy, processes, and resources are in place to support students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities are often attracted to the increased access offered by online education. While it may be physically challenging to attend or participate in traditional courses, students with disabilities are often able to participate in online classes without the hassles of travel to campus. In fact, Kinash, Crichton, and Kim-Rupnow (2004) found the time and location independent format that exemplifies the pedagogy of online education may be best suited for physically challenged students wishing to participate in formal higher education. However, they found that persons with disabilities are “among the least considered in the educational context of online learning” (p. 5).

Although students with disabilities have a legal and fundamental right to be able to enroll in online classes and programs, they will need a way to procure assistance from the institution when necessary. The institution should designate support personnel (often in the area of student affairs) who document students’ needs, provide guidance in allocating resources, and help determine how best to meet those needs.

Recommendations

- Assure that the process for documenting a disability is accessible to online learners.
- Provide dedicated support staff for serving the needs of disabled students.
- Put in place a policy and process that determines the types of services that should be available for disabled students in online classes.
- Assure that faculty and staff are aware of student support services and understand the best methods for referral.
11. **Students have access to required course materials in print and/or digital format, such as ISBN numbers for textbooks, book suppliers, and delivery modes prior to course enrollment.**

Information on the materials needed for each course should be made available to students online at the time of registration or before so that students can “shop” for the course materials.

To be in compliance with federal Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA) regulations:

To the maximum extent practicable, an institution must include on its Internet course schedule for required and recommended textbooks and supplemental material the International Standard Book Number (ISBN) and retail price; if the ISBN is not available, the author, title, publisher, and copyright date; or if such disclosure is not practicable, the designation "To Be Determined."

If applicable, the institution must include on its written course schedule a reference to the textbook information available on its Internet schedule and the Internet address for that schedule.

Institutions disclosing the information to be included on their online course schedules for required and recommended textbooks, and supplemental material are encouraged to provide information on:

- renting textbooks;
- purchasing used textbooks;
- textbook buy-back programs; and
- alternative content delivery formats such as ebooks.

The HEOA also requires the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to study the implementation of this section and report to Congress.

**Recommendations**

- Develop and continuously update a website that provides information on course schedules and all relevant textbooks and supplementary materials.

- Provide easy access to online bookstores that students can search for the best prices. (Many institutions will not want to do this since they are often business partners with the campus bookstore. In that case, provide links to the books on the campus bookstore website.)
12. **Program demonstrates a student-centered focus rather than trying to fit existing on-campus services to the online student.**

The Internet and online education are interrelated works in progress, growing rapidly and changing dramatically. The overarching need is to integrate systems, services, resources, and instruction to create a seamless web and removing all obstacles to focus the learner’s attention on knowledge to be acquired and applied. Services offered to online students must be at a level equivalent to those received by the traditional on-campus student.

Because online students may never have the opportunity to visit the campus from which they are taking courses or receiving their degree, it is essential that they enjoy the same access as traditional students to services such as admissions, registration, financial aid, career counseling, and academic course requirements. In fact, because they often have limited, if any, opportunities for face-to-face exchange with student service personnel, extraordinary methods need to be developed to ensure that online students do not feel abandoned.

While technology provides an extremely efficient mechanism for delivering services and learning materials on demand, every effort should be made to provide human interaction as well. Support services may be the significant factor in helping students differentiate one online course or program from the next.

The institution should provide advertising, recruiting, and admissions information to students that adequately and accurately represents the programs, requirements, and services available. There should be a set of written policies, procedures, and guidelines pertaining to degree-related online education courses and programs which includes information on admissions, curriculum, requirements for completion of the online courses or programs, costs and payment policies, financial aid, and any other pertinent information. In the case of electronically-mediated online education, institutions should provide information about the nature of faculty/student interaction, assumptions about students’ technological competence and skills, technical equipment and software requirements, and availability of academic and student support services.

**Recommendations**

- Provide equal access to student services appropriate to support the programs, including financial aid, academic advising, registration, delivery of course materials, proctoring requirements, placement and counseling, and career support.

- Ensure that students have access to and can effectively use appropriate library resources including the ability to check out books from a distance.

- Commit to the continuation of a program or certificate for its publicized time frame to allow all admitted students to complete.

- Ensure that student service personnel can accurately and quickly answer online student questions and have a structured system for addressing student complaints.

- Provide prospective students with a realistic preview of the online learning experience through a course demonstration.

- Design a communication plan to ensure intentionality and accountability in communicating with online learners so they are not forgotten through various offices on-campus.

- Ensure student policies are focused on the student and not the location of the student. There should be very little policy that only applies to online students.
13. Efforts are made to engage students with the program and institution in order to minimize feelings of isolation and alienation.

Because of the nature of online education, feelings of isolation and alienation are possible for online students. However, over the years, technology has changed with advances and innovation in educational delivery. Learning technologies can provide access to tutorials and peer support as well as relief from the inevitable feelings of isolation and alienation for online learners. The lone learner is now brought into contact with colleagues, classmates, and mentors from around the globe.

To address the problem of alienation and disconnection, institutions must offer opportunities for students to interact academically and socially to connect with the institution. Suggested methods to promote connection include providing opportunities, which clarify guidelines and regulations, build self-esteem, improve campus identity, create opportunities for interpersonal contacts and provide access to learning support services. The provision of such connections will increase the probability of academic success.

Recommendations

- Assign and make available advisors and/or mentors for online students.
- Use facilitators familiar with equipment and other course materials to develop a personal rapport with students and increase students’ satisfaction.
- Provide students access to orientations which include an assessment of their online learning ability, familiarity with online course delivery and LMS, and general expectations of the program.
- Provide and advertise opportunities for internships, practicums, awards, and scholarships to support online students.
- Make use of online campuses and portals to involve online students in the academic community.
- Develop small groups such as personal learning communities or organize them by location so they have something in common. Encourage them to use these groups as additional support and community.
- Provide online access to student groups such as professional and student organizations as well as encourage the fostering of networking and learning communities that extend beyond the online classroom.
- Include online students in university-wide assessment programs administered to on-campus students (e.g. evaluations, senior and alumni surveys, etc) as well as other on-campus activities (e.g. graduation, videotaping guest speakers, etc).
14. The institution provides guidance/tutorials for students in the use of all forms of technologies used for course delivery.

Faculty and students will often need some training and guidance in all technologies utilized for online education delivery. The institution's learning management system is the core delivery mechanism for today's teaching and learning. "The complexity of a modern [learning] management system (LMS) and the related infrastructure can be daunting, yet providing a stable and functional learning environment is absolutely necessary" (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005, p. 117). At the heart of the system are the classroom administrative functions like student authentication, discussion threads, chat, grade-books, and in-class messaging and announcements. All of the systems available today contain these core capabilities. However, optional web tools such as blogs and wikis, group calendaring, personal learning spaces, mobile components, virtual worlds and adaptive learning tools may also be utilized for online teaching and learning. Because the technologies can be numerous, additional training may be needed for students and faculty.

**Recommendations**

- Provide information and training opportunities for students and faculty when technologies improve or change.

- Recommend appropriate versions of technical tools for online teaching and learning.

- Offer incentives for those completing training modules. For example, if students complete the trainings, they could be entered into a drawing for a gift certificate to an online book store.
15. Tutoring is available as a learning resource.

Online students that have access to and utilize tutoring have a better chance of success: “A tutoring service, in concept, would only enhance student learning, support, and satisfaction while mitigating demands on faculty time, particularly when it comes to providing more meaningful student-to-instructor/tutor interaction” (Williams, Howell, Laws, & Metheny, 2006, ¶2). Moreover, “tutoring services could also minimize student complaints as distance education programs anticipate—rather than react to—student support needs. Another program benefit could be a marketing and competitive one as students shop for those programs with value-added services” (Williams et al., para 2). Moreover, a study found that “the gains in content knowledge of students who used the tutoring services were greater than those who did not use it and that students with access to tutoring services persisted in the course when compared with those who do not” (Kersaint, Dogbey, Barber, & Kephart, 2011, p. 38).

Tutoring services for online students may be outsourced or provided at a cost to the student from third-party resources. The institution may also choose to use technologies within the learning management system (LMS) such as virtual chat and discussion boards. Online collaborative software products that provide Web-based collaboration are also used to facilitate student and tutor communication. For example, a virtual classroom solution could allow a writing tutor to share the desktop with the student and go through a paper, line by line. In fact, Shelton and Saltsman (2005) recommended:

Most approaches are web-based, seeking to emulate the Web-based learning environment. This is an efficient approach for many situations but support departments shouldn’t limit themselves solely to Web-based approaches. Sometimes using fax, email, or telephone are inexpensive and highly effective alternatives. Shared desktop applications can also provide for collaborative synchronous support environments and allow multiple users to interact with a single document in real time, much like working in a group around a single computer. (p. 90)

Recommendations

- Make academic tutoring services available to online students, using various forms of technologies such as chat, telephone, electronic whiteboard, conferencing software, self-help modules, etc.

- Provide tutoring services for online students in the same subjects provided for traditional on campus students.
16. **Students are provided clear information for enlisting help from the institution.**

For institutions to be successful with online education programs, they must provide a full range of academic and administrative support. However, these support services can only be beneficial to the students if they know how to access them. Therefore, efficient mechanisms need to be in place to assist students with obtaining access. Links to various academic and administrative support services of the institution can be placed in the course and on the web pages for online campuses and portals. All relevant contact information should be listed, including hours of operation. Careful attention must be made to ensure that the information on these pages is as accurate as possible at all times.

**Recommendations**

- Ensure that admitted students possess the knowledge and equipment needed to use the technology employed in the program and provide assistance to those who experience difficulty in its use.

- Provide links in course instructions, online campuses, and portals to clear descriptions of available technical support and tutorials/resources that answer basic questions concerning research, writing, technology, etc.

- Remind students via email or learning management system announcements that there is a distinct process for students to use to contact the administration team of the online program.


References for Student Support


1. The program is assessed through an evaluation process that applies specific established standards.*

2. A variety of data (academic and administrative information) are used to regularly and frequently evaluate program effectiveness and to guide changes toward continual improvement.*

3. Intended learning outcomes at the course and program level are reviewed regularly to ensure alignment, clarity, utility, appropriateness, and effectiveness.*

4. A process is in place and followed for the assessment of support services for faculty and students.

5. A process is in place and followed for the assessment of student retention in online courses and programs.

6. A process is in place and followed for the assessment of recruitment practices.

7. Program demonstrates compliance and review of accessibility standards (Section 508, etc.).

8. Course evaluations collect feedback on the effectiveness of instruction in relation to faculty performance evaluations.

9. A process is in place and followed for the institutional assessment of faculty online teaching performance.

10. A process is in place and followed for the assessment of stakeholder (e.g., learners, faculty, staff) satisfaction with the online program.

11. Course evaluations collect student feedback on quality of online course materials.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s report *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000).
1. The program is assessed through an evaluation process that applies specific established standards.*

The online program evaluation may be defined as “the means by which the institutions or providers set their program goals and measure results against those goals” (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 1998, p. 1). A common perception has been that an online education program is “often poorly designed and/or underfunded; it is more of an afterthought rather than an integral part of planning and implementation” (Thompson & Irele, 2007, p. 419). But as online education continues to grow, as students are attracted to the promise of convenience and flexibility, and as we learn more about the pedagogical and learning advantages of online education, online programs must be able to demonstrate that they are guided by and accountable to the highest standards. Demonstrating evidence of accountability means implementing “evaluation activities that assess alignment of pedagogy, educational activities, and desired learning outcomes, plus address specific issues of usability and benchmark achievement, [which] provide valuable information for continual improvement” (Balanko, 2002, p. 7). These suggested activities for evaluation are a good starting point for any online education program. In addition, any regional or discipline specific accrediting group will have standards that will need to be adhered to and can support an established evaluation process.

**Recommendations**

- Use an evaluation process that is aligned to established standards to assess online programs, and use evaluation results to improve programs. The evaluation should be completed with multiple assessments and a variety of data collected and analyzed.

- Document evidence of program evaluation and improvement to use for support. This should be done at least annually.

- Use applicable accrediting standards and demonstrate adherence to these standards for online program with artifacts and data analysis. For example, using the institution's regional accreditor standards, show compliance for those that apply to the online education program and how program improvements are developed and implemented after data collection and analysis.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy's report *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000).
2. A variety of data (academic and administrative information) are used to regularly and frequently evaluate program effectiveness and to guide changes toward continual improvement.*

A single evaluation process (student course surveys, for example) cannot effectively or fully evaluate an online education program. Quality program evaluation will require multiple processes, instruments, evidence and analysis. In addition, inputs and outputs should be periodically reviewed. In fact, “effective program evaluation is the best way to achieve continuous program improvement” (Chapman, 2006, ¶33).

A holistic, 360-degree approach to program evaluation that supports continuous improvement includes data collection and evidence of analysis in the following areas:

- Perception of department commitment to the program;
- Effectiveness of the administrator/coordinator;
- Extent and quality of support services;
- Quality of technical support;
- Perspective on student learning;
- Quality of students and comparison with on-campus students;
- Rigor of courses and programs;
- Effective use of faculty time;
- Personal and professional satisfaction with involvement in the program.

(Lesht, Montague, Page, Shaik, & Smith, 2006, pp. 98-99)

Other data may be used; however, these are the primary areas that should be focused upon.

**Recommendations**

- Use more than a single review process to evaluate quality. The following areas should be combined for use in the evaluation process:
  - Student satisfaction and student complaints (program and support services);
  - Student success/persistence/withdrawal/drop rates including feedback received;
  - Course evaluations;
  - Faculty satisfaction;
  - Online course materials and methods reviews;
  - Learning outcomes achievement (at the course and program level);
  - Evidence of institutional support for online education.
- Establish goals for each of the evaluation processes and develop improvement plans when results fall short of intended goals. Recognize and share positive results with all those involved.
- Engage in efforts to determine and compare success rates and quality standards with other programs of like size with similar institutions.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy's report *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000).
3. Intended learning outcomes at the course and program level are reviewed regularly to ensure alignment, clarity, utility, appropriateness, and effectiveness.*

Learning outcomes should be the foundation for both courses and programs. A learning outcome is "a general statement of what learners will be able to do after the instruction is completed" (Davidson-Shivers & Rasmussen, 2006, p. 84). Likewise, learning outcomes should describe explicit student behavior. They should be current, relevant, appropriate for supporting the program goals, and clearly stated — these characteristics help with developing student assessment activities. Learning outcomes should be reviewed for relevance and course activities and assessments should be updated accordingly.

Effective assessment depends on standards and clear objectives (Holtz & Radner, 2006). Because clarity is so important to student understanding, there should be a periodic recurrent review to determine if learning outcomes are clearly defined and still applicable and relevant to the learning goals.

Recommendations

- Map course learning outcomes to demonstrate how they support academic program goals and objectives.

- Update learning outcomes during regular curriculum review to ensure they are clear, current, and relevant.

- Regularly review learning outcomes in online courses and programs (include peer review in the process) and ensure learning outcomes in each course support overall program goals, objectives, and expected student proficiencies.

- Demonstrate a learning outcome review process with documented changes or notes of review process.

*Adapted from the Institute for Higher Education Policy's report Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education (2000).
4. **A process is in place and followed for the assessment of support services for faculty and students.**

Evaluating the quality of an online education program should include an examination of all support services for both student and faculty. The review process should include annual goals for improved services and satisfaction levels. In addition, the institution should demonstrate a commitment to a process for continuous improvement. For example, a goal for the technology support services could be to offer 24x7 support to students with 90% of those students believing their needs were met after the first phone call or email. If only 70% of students reported that their needs were met, then a strategy should be developed to improve the service being provided to students. All results of surveys and improvement strategies should be documented for evidence. Support services would include library services, tutoring, bookstore, counseling, advising, online student orientations, financial aid, and cashier services. Faculty support services would include technical support, course development support, professional development activities, and ongoing support during the teaching process.

**Recommendations**

- Survey faculty teaching online and annually assess all faculty support services for teaching and creating online course materials, such as course development support, training, and ongoing teaching support for possible improvement and faculty satisfaction. Establish a goal for faculty satisfaction. If the goal is not met, develop a strategy for improvement.

- At the least, annually survey online students to review student satisfaction with online support services to determine how well students' needs are met, and use data from the review process for continuous improvements. For example, find out from students if they use the campus bookstore for textbook purchases and how they feel about the service provided.
5. A process is in place and followed for the assessment of student retention in online courses and programs.

Program retention can be defined as “the number of learners or students who progress from one part of an educational program to the next. In higher education, student retention is normally measured as enrollment from academic year to academic year” (Martinez, 2003, p. 3). Retention may be measured by online course completion rates which should also be closely monitored; however, retention involves returning back each semester and being successfully enrolled in courses.

It has been said that some online programs suffer alarmingly low retention rates (Diaz & Cartnal, 2006; Lynch, 2001; Rovai, 2003; Willging & Johnson, 2009). However, online students give the same reasons for dropping an online course or program as those in traditional face-to-face programs (Willging & Johnson, 2009). In spite of this, the validity of online education has often been questioned especially if program quality is measured primarily based upon these rates. While retention rates do vary from program to program, there are many programs that experience normal or even better retention rates. Program leaders and instructors can take proactive steps to increase student retention. For example, Simpson (2003, p. 150) proposed the following strategies for improving student retention:

- Define retention terms and prioritize actions
- Set targets for retention
- Identify the vulnerable students
- Design a system of early integrative contacts from the institution
- Design a system of retention contacts to retain students on course
- Design a system of retrieval and reclamation contacts
- Restructure courses for retention
- Restructure the institution for retention.

It is clear that data must be collected from a variety of areas to formulate a strategy for improving retention. Students who drop out of the program should be surveyed and feedback collected on their reasons for not finishing a course or program.

Recommendations

- Examine and document student retention in courses and programs from semester to semester and year to year. Compare the resulting data to the feedback collected on prior course evaluations.
- Develop, implement, and assess strategies to continuously improve student retention.
- Provide faculty and advisors with strategies and techniques for improving student retention.
- Survey students for feedback regarding why they dropped courses and review feedback for possible improvement in processes.
6. **A process is in place and followed for the assessment of recruitment practices.**

For this quality indicator, the key emphasis is on recruitment practices. Evaluating program quality should also include reviewing recruitment practices that could be altered to improve student success. Practices for recruiting online students should be regularly evaluated in order to improve recruiting and adhere to federal guidelines issued by the Department of Education. Information for prospective students must be provided on the website with “a simple and explicit path for prospective online students to access accurate and detailed information about studying online” (Simpson, 2003, ¶17).

**Recommendations**

- Examine online student retention and compare it to the types of students being recruited. For example, are students being recruited for computer programming courses that do not have basic level computer skills?

- Monitor demographic information of students being recruited and compare to retention rates to determine if a trend exists.

- Assess recruiting practices periodically (every recruiting term if possible) for student satisfaction regarding the recruiting process and collect suggestions for improvement from student applicants.

- Make information for prospective students easily found on the institutional website and review it frequently for accuracy and accessibility.

- Provide a guide on the website to assist prospective students in carefully navigating through each step of the recruiting and enrollment process.
7. Program demonstrates compliance and review of accessibility standards (Section 508, etc.).

Students with disabilities have a legal and fundamental right to access higher education, which includes online courses and degree programs. In the United States, legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973), and the 1998 Amendment to Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act provide foundation requirements for making online education accessible to all students. However, in spite of technological improvements in online education, there are still reports that students with disabilities are not very well-served (Kinash & Crichton, 2007). Yet, the number of students with disabilities that pursue a postsecondary education continues to increase (Simoncelli & Hinson, 2010). Because of legislation, students’ rights, and the increasing number of disabled students enrolling in online programs, institutions must be able to demonstrate compliance with accessibility standards. Compliance includes providing student support services and developing website and online course materials that are accessible by adaptive technologies such as screen readers and other technologies for assisting students.

**Recommendations**

- Provide clear information on the website to students with disabilities who are interested in or enrolled in online classes and links to special support pages in the online course materials.

- Designate support personnel that are knowledgeable of ADA compliance issues in online education programs.

- Provide continuous training for all those involved with serving students with disabilities.

- Publish compliance with accessibility standards on the online education program’s website.

- Apply universal design standards in online course development and course materials.
8. **Course evaluations collect feedback on the effectiveness of instruction in relation to faculty performance evaluations.**

While faculty should never be evaluated solely on data collected from course evaluations, the feedback from students should be carefully examined because it may provide specific information that could improve policy development and point to potential faculty behaviors that will need correction or additional training. Course evaluation results may also suggest levels of instructor activity, course engagement, and timeliness of response to students’ questions. In fact, “by using online evaluations to guarantee rapid turnaround times, provide custom questions that focus on current or even planned activities, and address the innovative teaching strategies and individual characteristics that distinguish different courses, faculty and students can come to reflect more easily upon those unique aspects of instruction that matter to them” (Anderson, Brown, & Spaeth, 2006, ¶20).

**Recommendations**

- Determine if current course evaluations for online courses collect student feedback on instructor performance in the online classroom. If not, modify the instruments in order to collect feedback specific to instructor performance.

- Carefully review online course evaluation results as a part of the overall performance evaluation process for faculty teaching online. Look for trends or similar comments about individual instructors’ online teaching performance.

- Based upon the course evaluation results, go over the feedback with the faculty member and develop a plan to minimize similar negative feedback the next time the course is taught.
9. **A process is in place and followed for the institutional assessment of faculty online teaching performance.**

The success of an online education program can often depend largely upon faculty involved as they can directly affect student retention, student satisfaction, and student success. In fact, Tinto (1999) found in the traditional classroom, that the frequency and quality of faculty and student contact is directly related to student persistence. This also applies to the online classroom. Because of the impact faculty can have on the online classroom and students, faculty performance should be assessed and the results should be provided to the faculty member after each course they teach online. This should include a variety of measurements, including student evaluations and direct performance review in the online classroom.

**Recommendations**

- Create policies to guide expectations for faculty performance in online classes (how frequently they should log on, how quickly emails and grades should be returned, and so on).

- Assess faculty performance each time they teach online. This may mean a dean or program director will need to access the online learning management system to verify instructor activity.

- Provide performance standards for faculty. Develop an improvement plan and follow-up evaluation for those who do not meet the established standards.
10. A process is in place and followed for the assessment of stakeholder (e.g., learners, faculty, staff) satisfaction with the online program.

Every education program exists to meet the needs of external constituents such as students and future employers and to advance society's needs overall. Online education programs use internal constituencies such as administrators, technologists, faculty, and staff to achieve the goals defined for the program. Each of these groups of constituents is a stakeholder of the online program.

Establishing a process that collects feedback from stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the online program gathers the data needed to establish a program of continuous improvement. The solicitation of feedback from multiple perspectives allows the program to implement multi-rater feedback, or 360-degree evaluation. Ideally, this evaluation should include a variety of measurements and cover most or all services offered by the program, in addition to the overall satisfaction. Once feedback is collected, corrective action can be taken to ensure the program continues to be effective in serving stakeholders needs.

**Recommendations**

- Establish a regular time frame in which to apply questionnaires/surveys to discover the students’ and all external clients’ level of satisfaction with the online program. For example, every fall and spring, survey online students to determine their satisfaction level with the program.

- Solicit informal feedback from all stakeholders.
11. Course evaluations collect student feedback on quality of online course materials.

Evaluation is "the formal determination of the quality, effectiveness or value of a program, product, project, process, objective, or curriculum" (Worthen & Sanders, 1987, p. 23). Online course evaluations help determine the effectiveness and value of a course as well as provide feedback regarding instructor performance. Thus, Cavanaugh (2002) recommended, "students should be asked to explain their satisfaction with their experience, including likes and dislikes" (p. 184). The data collected from course evaluations, if reviewed, analyzed, and reflected upon, supports better awareness of the instructional practice (Huba & Freed, 2000).

**Recommendations**

- Gather information beyond how much the student liked the course. Use evaluations to collect information about the specific online course materials and textbooks, as well as how the instructor performed as the mentor and facilitator of the course.

- Periodically review the questions in the course evaluations for relevance and effectiveness.

- In online course evaluations, ask students how they feel about the effectiveness of the online instruction.

- Collect student feedback about technology supporting the course delivery and course activities.

- Consider the following questions for evaluations (Achtemeier, Morris, & Finnegan, 2003, p. 8):
  - Were the course goals, learning objectives and outcomes made clear to you at the beginning of the course?
  - Did you have the necessary technological equipment and skills required for this course?
  - Was there adequate technical support if you encountered difficulties?
  - Was the format and page design of the online course easy to use?
  - Were there sufficient instructions given for you to complete all assignments?
  - Did you feel hindered in your online course experience in any way? Please describe.
  - Were standards for evaluation of assignments made clear?
  - Did you receive prompt feedback on your completed assignments?
  - Did you participate in online conversations with your instructor during the course?
  - Did you participate in online conversations with your classmates during the course?
  - What learning activities most influenced your learning in this course?
References for Evaluation and Assessment


Appendix
Because the first step in using the Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Programs 2014 Criteria for Excellence is to self-evaluate the current condition of the online education program, we have provided a rubric for assistance. The Scorecard allows a score of 0-3 points. The following is a broad description for each of the points:

0 points = Deficient. The administrator does not observe any indications of the quality standard in place.

1 point = Developing. The administrator has found a slight existence of the quality standard but difficult to substantiate. Much improvement is still needed in this area.

2 points = Accomplished. The administrator has found there to be moderate use and can substantiate the quality standard. Some improvement is still needed in this area.

3 points = Exemplary. The administrator has found that the quality standard is being fully implemented, can be fully substantiated, and there is little to no need for improvement in this area.

Based upon the feedback received on the version one Scorecard, we understand that it may be difficult at times to truly know whether to score the program a 1, 2, or 3. Therefore, we have provided an itemized rubric for each of the 75 standards for a total of 225 points. This is the same rubric the reviewers will use if programs/institutions choose to have an Online Learning Consortium formal review of the online program(s).
# Quality Scorecard 2014
Criteria for Excellence in the Administration of Online Programs

## Institutional Support (27 points)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0 = Deficient</th>
<th>1 = Developing</th>
<th>2 = Accomplished</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The institution has a governance structure to enable clear, effective, and comprehensive decision making related to online education.</td>
<td>The institution has had no discussions about the online governance structure and decision making authority.</td>
<td>Governance, responsibilities, decision making authority and organization of online operations is haphazard and it is not always clear which unit is taking the lead.</td>
<td>Governance, responsibilities, decision making authority and organization of online operations is deliberate and clear; lines of authority for supporting units are delineated (e.g., in a shared services agreement).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The institution has policy and guidelines that confirm a student who registers in an online course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives academic credit. This is done by verifying the identity of a student by using methods such as (a) a secure login and pass code, (b) proctored examinations, or (c) other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identity.</td>
<td>The institution is in the process of developing policies and guidelines that support learner authentication.</td>
<td>The institution has clearly stated policies and guidelines that support learner authentication; the institution minimally supports one or more student identification methods.</td>
<td>The institution has clearly stated policies and guidelines that support learner authentication; the institution supports and consistently deploys one or more student identification methods; the institution continually assesses future options based on emerging technologies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3 The institution has a policy for intellectual property of course materials; it specifically addresses online course materials, and is publicly visible online.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>No institutional policy has been established that addresses the ownership of online course materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A policy for intellectual property of course materials has been established but does not specifically include online course materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A policy for intellectual property of course materials has been established; it specifically addresses online course materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A policy for intellectual property of course materials has been established; it specifically addresses online course materials; is publicly visible online; and a process is in place to ensure faculty members or other ‘knowledge experts’ are aware of the policy before course development begins.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4 The institution has defined the strategic value of online learning to its enterprise and stakeholders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>The institution understands what is needed to engage an online initiative and is in the process of building a viability case.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The institution is working to build capabilities (e.g., leadership, budgetary support, support services) in order to realize the strategic value of online learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The institution establishes senior leadership positions to steward the online initiative with clear budgetary support guidelines; there is a commitment to develop the necessary services to support students and faculty members; but online learning has yet to become a clear part of the institution’s mission/vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Online learning is part of the institution’s mission/vision; the institution has established senior leadership positions to steward the work with clear budgetary support guidelines; there is a commitment to develop the necessary services to support students and faculty members.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5 The organizational structure of the online program supports the institution’s mission, values, and strategic plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>The institution is engaging in exploratory conversations about online education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The institution is in the beginning stages of realizing how an online program supports the institution’s mission, values, and strategic plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The online program is clearly tied to the institution’s mission, values, and strategic plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The online program is positioned within the organizational structure to ensure success; it is clearly tied to the institution’s mission, values, and strategic plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality Scorecard Scoring Rubric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The online program's strategic plan is reviewed for its continuing relevance, and periodically improved and updated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No evidence exists which supports the indicator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The institution has a process for planning and resource allocation for the online program, including financial resources, in accordance with strategic planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The institution demonstrates sufficient resource allocation, including financial resources, in order to effectively support the mission of online education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The institution has a governance structure to enable systematic and continuous improvement related to the administration of online education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Technology Support (21 points)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0 = Deficient</th>
<th>1 = Developing</th>
<th>2 = Accomplished</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A documented technology plan that includes electronic security measures (e.g., password protection, encryption, secure online or proctored exams, etc.) is in place and operational to ensure quality, in accordance with established standards and regulatory requirements.*</td>
<td>No evidence is provided which illuminates that the program/institution has discussed or is engaging in a technology planning process.</td>
<td>The program/institution has developed and disseminated a technology plan to students and faculty which includes electronic security measures; the technology plan is developed in accordance with established standards and regulatory requirements.</td>
<td>The program/institution has developed and disseminated a technology plan to students and faculty which includes electronic security measures; the technology plan is developed in accordance with established standards and regulatory requirements; faculty members are trained on strategies used to ensure quality and adherence to standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The technology delivery systems are highly reliable and operable with measurable standards being utilized such as system downtime tracking or task benchmarking.*</td>
<td>To date, the technology system performance is not continually monitored, tracked, and reported.</td>
<td>Technology delivery system performance is continually monitored, tracked, and reported.</td>
<td>The program/institution views its technology delivery systems as 'mission critical'; system performance is continually monitored, tracked, and reported; system backups are in place for all necessary technical systems (preferably with off-site backups in case of a closure due to disaster).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Quality Scorecard Scoring Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0 = Deficient</th>
<th>1 = Developing</th>
<th>2 = Accomplished</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A centralized system provides support for building and maintaining the online education infrastructure.*</td>
<td>The online program is in ‘start-up’ and has yet to develop a system for building and supporting the online infrastructure.</td>
<td>The program/institution has invested in a centralized system for building and supporting the online infrastructure.</td>
<td>The program/institution has invested in a centralized system for building and maintaining the online infrastructure; it is team-based, collaborative, comprehensive, action-oriented and non-hierarchical; perspectives of key stakeholders are continually assessed to improve the system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The course delivery technology is considered a mission critical enterprise system and supported as such.</td>
<td>The course delivery technology is not considered important; it is more like an after-thought than a planned service.</td>
<td>The course delivery technology is considered important, but not yet viewed as ‘mission critical’ and is supported as such.</td>
<td>The course delivery technology is considered ‘mission critical’ and is supported as such; the program/institution uses metrics and benchmarking for upgrading and improving technologies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The institution has established a contingency plan for the continuance of data centers and support services in the event of prolonged service disruption.</td>
<td>The institution has yet to explore developing a contingency plan in the event of a prolonged service disruption.</td>
<td>The institution is in the process of establishing a contingency plan in the event of a prolonged service disruption.</td>
<td>The institution has established a contingency plan in the event of a prolonged service disruption; mock disaster drills are conducted periodically to ensure back-up and restoration processes are viable and maintain data integrity; goals have been established for timely system recovery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Faculty, staff, and students are supported in the development and use of new technologies and skills.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 = Deficient</td>
<td>No evidence is provided that faculty, staff or student use new technologies and how they are supported.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 = Developing</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial faculty members are exploring new technologies and developing their individual skills with limited institutional support.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 = Accomplished</td>
<td>The program/institution provides sufficient services to support faculty, staff and students in the use of new technologies.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 = Exemplary</td>
<td>The program/institution provides sufficient services to support faculty, staff and students in the use of new technologies; guides, information sheets, or tutorials are developed; help-desk support staff are knowledgeable; faculty workshops or other inservice training is conducted to ensure faculty have the necessary skills to use new technologies.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7</th>
<th>Whether the institution maintains local data centers (servers), and/or contracts for outsourced, hosted services or cloud services, those systems are administered in compliance with established data management practices such as the Information Technology Service Management (ITSM) standards which includes appropriate power protection, backup solutions, and disaster recovery plans, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 = Deficient</td>
<td>The institution has yet to establish parameters or a plan with regard to data management standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 = Developing</td>
<td>No documentation is provided to know whether data centers (local or outsourced, hosted or cloud services) are administered in compliance with established data management practices such as ITSM standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 = Accomplished</td>
<td>Data centers (local or outsourced, hosted or cloud services) are administered in compliance with established data management practices such as ITSM standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 = Exemplary</td>
<td>Data centers (local or outsourced, hosted or cloud services) are administered in compliance with established data management practices such as ITSM standards; the online program administration documents continual compliance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Course Development and Instructional Design (36 points)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0 = Deficient</th>
<th>1 = Developing</th>
<th>2 = Accomplished</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Guidelines regarding minimum requirements for course development, design, and delivery of online instruction (such as course syllabus elements, course materials, assessment strategies, faculty feedback) are followed.*</td>
<td>No evidence is provided which indicates guidelines regarding minimum standards exist.</td>
<td>The program/institution has begun the process of developing guidelines concerning minimum standards.</td>
<td>Guidelines exist, but the program/institution has yet to fully deploy them across all courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Course embedded technology actively supports the achievement of learning outcomes and delivering course content and superfluous use of technology is minimized.*</td>
<td>No evidence is provided which supports the use of technology to achieve the course learning outcomes.</td>
<td>Limited evidence is provided which supports the use of technology to achieve learning outcomes; there is widespread use of superfluous technology.</td>
<td>Evidence exists which showcase that the institution is making progress toward the use of technology to achieve learning outcomes and is limiting the superfluous use of technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Instructional materials and course syllabi are reviewed periodically to ensure they meet the online course's and program's learning outcomes.*</td>
<td>No periodic review process of instructional materials and course syllabi exists.</td>
<td>The program/institution has developed a plan to periodically review course syllabi but few reviews have occurred.</td>
<td>Periodic review of instructional materials and course syllabi occurs, but on an ad hoc basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A course development process is followed that ensures courses are designed so that students develop the necessary knowledge and skills to meet measurable learning outcomes at the course and program level. *</td>
<td>There is no indication courses are designed to ensure learning outcomes are met.</td>
<td>Online courses are designed to meet learning outcomes, but no consistent mechanism exists to ensure course and program learning outcomes are met.</td>
<td>Online courses are designed to meet learning outcomes and a mechanism exists to ensure course and program learning outcomes are met; however, adherence varies across courses and programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0 = Deficient</td>
<td>1 = Developing</td>
<td>2 = Accomplished</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A process is followed that ensures that permissions (Creative Commons, Copyright, Fair Use, Public Domain, etc.) are in place for appropriate use of online course materials.</td>
<td>The process for ensuring permissions is not in place and cannot be substantiated.</td>
<td>The program/institution has developed a plan to provide training, guides and/or tools to ensure that permissions are in place.</td>
<td>Training, guides, tools are provided and a process is in place that ensures permissions are sought; however, adherence varies across courses and programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Course assignments and activities are reviewed periodically to ensure they meet the online course’s and program’s learning outcomes.*</td>
<td>No periodic review process of course assignments and activities exists.</td>
<td>The program/institution has developed a plan to periodically review course assignments and activities to ensure they meet the course learning outcomes.</td>
<td>Periodic review of course assignments and activities occurs, but on an ad hoc basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Student-centered instruction is considered during the course development process.</td>
<td>No evidence exists that courses are developed with a student-centered focus.</td>
<td>No formal training exists, but some courses are designed with a student-centered focus (use of student-centered assignments and constructivist activities).</td>
<td>Training is provided and the program/institution is making an effort to ensure courses are developed with a student-centered focus (use of student-centered assignments and constructivist activities).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>There is consistency in course development for student retention and quality.</td>
<td>No courses are developed with consistency in order to support student retention and quality.</td>
<td>Some courses are developed with consistency but just a few courses are consistent.</td>
<td>Most courses are developed with consistency which supports student retention and quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Course design promotes both faculty and student engagement.</td>
<td>0 = Deficient</td>
<td>1 = Developing</td>
<td>2 = Accomplished</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No evidence exists that courses are designed to promote faculty and student engagement.</td>
<td></td>
<td>The program/institution includes faculty-student engagement in the course design process. Faculty receive little to no training for course design.</td>
<td>The program/institution includes faculty-student engagement in the course design process. Training is provided, but no evaluation occurs for levels of faculty and student engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>A process is followed for evaluating the effectiveness of current and emerging technologies to support the achievement of learning outcomes and delivering course content.</td>
<td>There is no evidence that the program/institution has a process in place for evaluating the effectiveness of current and emerging technologies.</td>
<td>A plan is in place to evaluate the effectiveness of current and emerging technologies, but it is yet to be deployed.</td>
<td>A process is in place to evaluate current and emerging technologies, but it is not followed consistently across all courses and programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Usability tests are conducted and applied and recommendations based upon Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAGs) are incorporated.</td>
<td>No evidence exists that usability tests are being considered or conducted.</td>
<td>Discussions are underway and plans are being developed concerning how to conduct usability testing, but no action has been taken to date.</td>
<td>The program/institution is conducting usability tests, but the recommendations have yet to be included in all courses and programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Curriculum development is a core responsibility for faculty (i.e., faculty should be involved in either the development or the decision making for the online curriculum choices).</td>
<td>Faculty members have no involvement in curriculum development.</td>
<td>Administrative personnel have an active role in the development and decision making for online curricula, but are supported by faculty members.</td>
<td>Faculty members have an active role in the development and decision making for online curricula, but are supported by administrative personnel.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Course Structure (24 points)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Objective</th>
<th>0 = Deficient</th>
<th>1 = Developing</th>
<th>2 = Accomplished</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The online course includes a syllabus outlining course objectives, learning outcomes, evaluation methods, books and supplies, technical and proctoring requirements, and other related course information, making course requirements transparent.*</td>
<td>No evidence exists that the program/institution has syllabi requirements or standards.</td>
<td>Textbook and any required material/resources are made available to students in advance of their course registration; the use of syllabi requirements or standards vary across the courses or program.</td>
<td>Syllabi parameters/standards are provided to all faculty members and all online courses include a syllabus; textbook and any required material/resources are made available to students in advance of their course registration.</td>
<td>Training and syllabi parameters/standards (based on program/institution requirements) are provided to all faculty members; all online courses include a syllabus; textbook and any required material/resources are made available to students in advance of their course registration; the program/institution ensures consistency in syllabi placement in the LMS for all online courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The course structure ensures that all online students, regardless of location, have access to library/learning resources that adequately support online courses.*</td>
<td>The program/institution has no plan to ensure online students have access to the necessary library/learning resources.</td>
<td>The program/institution has a plan and is in the process of gaining the necessary access to library/learning resources (e.g., tutoring, writing center) for online learners.</td>
<td>The program/institution is building out its access to ensure online students have access to library/learning resources (e.g., tutoring, writing center).</td>
<td>The program/institution ensures all online students have access to all library/learning resources (e.g., tutoring, writing center) no matter their geographic location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expectations for student assignment completion, grade policy, and faculty response are clearly provided in the course syllabus.*</td>
<td>0 = Deficient</td>
<td>1 = Developing</td>
<td>2 = Accomplished</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The program/institution has no plan to ensure required elements for syllabi and faculty response time is not addressed.</td>
<td>Information is provided for all faculty members so course syllabi include key expectations and grading policies but faculty response time is not addressed.</td>
<td>Faculty members are provided information concerning key expectations for syllabi and grading policies; the program/institution has a recommended faculty response time.</td>
<td>Information/training is provided for all faculty members so course syllabi include key expectations and grading policies; the program/institution has a required faculty response time; the response time is regularly evaluated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Links or explanations of technical support are available in the course (i.e., each course provides suggested solutions to potential technical issues and/or links for technical assistance).</td>
<td>No evidence exists which illustrates that providing links or explanations of technical support are used in online classes.</td>
<td>Some online courses provide links or explanations of technical support.</td>
<td>The majority of online course provide links or explanations of technical support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Instructional materials are easily accessible to the student, easy to use, with an ability to be accessed by multiple operating systems and applications.</td>
<td>At the present time, no attention has been given to the accessibility of instructional materials.</td>
<td>The program/institution has a plan to ensure instructional materials for all courses are easily accessible; easy to use; can be accessed by multiple operating systems.</td>
<td>The program/institution has a process to ensure instructional materials for all courses are easily accessible; easy to use; can be accessed by multiple operating systems; however, it is not used consistently deployed across all courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional materials are easily accessed by students with disabilities via alternative instructional strategies and/or referral to special institutional resources.</td>
<td>0 = Deficient</td>
<td>1 = Developing</td>
<td>2 = Accomplished</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>No evidence exists which illustrates that the program/institution is prepared to offer instructional materials that are easily accessible by students with disabilities.</td>
<td>The program/institution has ad-hoc business processes to ensure instructional materials for all courses are easily accessible by students with disabilities.</td>
<td>The program/institution has consistent business processes to ensure instructional materials for all courses are easily accessible by students with disabilities.</td>
<td>Training is provided to faculty and the program/institution has consistent business processes to ensure instructional materials for all courses are easily accessible by students with disabilities; provide links to relevant resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>No evidence is provided which supports the use of opportunities/tools to encourage student-student collaboration.</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial faculty members are exploring various opportunities/tools to encourage student-student collaboration on a class-by-class basis but it is not consistent throughout the program/institution.</td>
<td>Information is provided to faculty to highlight opportunities/tools available to encourage student-student collaboration and technical support is provided as needed. In addition, resources are provided.</td>
<td>Training is provided to faculty to showcase opportunities/tools available to encourage student-student collaboration; the program/institution encourages collaboration where appropriate; and technical support is provided as needed. In addition, resources are provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>No evidence is provided which supports a focus on rules or standards of behavior within the program/institution.</td>
<td>While rules or standards exist within the program/institution, they are broad with limited application to online courses.</td>
<td>The program/institution has developed rules, standards, or codes of conduct focusing on appropriate student behavior for online students.</td>
<td>The program/institution has developed rules, standards, or codes of conduct focusing on appropriate student behavior for online students and makes those consistently available (through the LMS or other means) for all courses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Teaching and Learning (15 points)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th><strong>Student-to-Student and Faculty-to-Student interaction are essential characteristics and are encouraged and facilitated.</strong>*</th>
<th><strong>0 = Deficient</strong> No evidence is provided which supports the use of opportunities/tools to encourage student-student and/or student-faculty collaboration.</th>
<th><strong>1 = Developing</strong> Entrepreneurial faculty members are exploring various opportunities/tools to encourage student-student and student-faculty interaction on a class-by-class basis.</th>
<th><strong>2 = Accomplished</strong> Training is provided to faculty to showcase opportunities/tools available to encourage student-student and student-faculty interaction and the program/institution encourages and facilitates interaction.</th>
<th><strong>3 = Exemplary</strong> Training is provided to faculty to showcase opportunities/tools available to encourage student-student and student-faculty interaction; the program/institution encourages and facilitates interaction; students are provided requirements or standards for interaction; interaction is assessed; support is provided as needed to assist faculty members in evaluating and adopting new technologies.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Feedback on student assignments and questions is constructive and provided in a timely manner.</strong>*</td>
<td>The program/institution provides no policy or recommendation to faculty members concerning providing online students constructive and timely feedback.</td>
<td>Faculty members work independently to ensure feedback is constructive and provided in a timely manner.</td>
<td>Faculty members receive training concerning providing timely (what are the recommended timeframes) and constructive feedback (use of rubrics, etc.); most course syllabi provide an overview of feedback timelines.</td>
<td>Faculty members receive training concerning providing timely (what are the recommended timeframes) and constructive feedback (use of rubrics, etc.); all course syllabi provide an overview of feedback timelines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria</td>
<td>0 = Deficient</td>
<td>1 = Developing</td>
<td>2 = Accomplished</td>
<td>3 = Exemplary</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Students learn appropriate methods for effective research, including assessment of the validity of resources and the ability to master resources in an online environment.*</td>
<td>The program/institution provides no support to faculty with regard to helping students learn appropriate methods for effective research.</td>
<td>The program/institution has a plan to provide tutorials, web resources, or other forms to help student learn appropriate methods for effective research; however, they are yet to deploy the plan.</td>
<td>The program/institution creates various tutorials, web resources, or forms to help students learn appropriate methods for effective research and faculty are offered training.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Students are provided access to library professionals and resources to help locate, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use a variety of information resources.</td>
<td>The library has no tutorials, web resources, or forms to support online students.</td>
<td>Some online courses share information on how to access library professionals whether they are generalists or specialists; limited tutorials, web resources, or forms are provided for online students.</td>
<td>The library creates various tutorials, web resources, or forms to help students learn how to use all of the library resources (e.g., interlibrary loan, electronic document delivery, e-reserve system); all online courses share information on how to access library professionals whether they are generalists or specialists.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Instructors use specific strategies to create a presence in the course.</td>
<td>The program/institution provides no support, training, resources, or policy for to faculty members concerning strategies for creating course presence.</td>
<td>The program/institution has communicated to faculty the importance of instructor presence but has not provided training, guidelines, or resources.</td>
<td>The program/institution has communicated to faculty the importance of instructor presence, provided models and resources, and training and guidelines. Instructor course presence is considered highly important.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Social and Student Engagement (3 points)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0 = Deficient</th>
<th>1 = Developing</th>
<th>2 = Accomplished</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Students should be provided a way to interact with other students in an online community (outside the course).</td>
<td>There is no evidence that the institution makes efforts to engage students outside the online classroom.</td>
<td>Efforts are made to develop an online community but efforts are sporadic and inconsistent.</td>
<td>The program or the institution provides an online community with more than one consistent method such as a Facebook group page that is regularly updated and used to create student community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Faculty Support (18 points)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Technical assistance is provided for faculty during online course development and online teaching.*</th>
<th>0 = Deficient</th>
<th>1 = Developing</th>
<th>2 = Accomplished</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The program/institution has limited technical resources and can provide very little technical support.</td>
<td></td>
<td>The program/institution has minimal technical support resources to assist faculty members during both course development and teaching.</td>
<td>The program/institution has adequate technical support resources to assist faculty members during both course development and teaching.</td>
<td>The program/institution has adequate technical support resources to assist faculty members during both course development and teaching; tutorials and web resources have been created to augment faculty needs; the technical support resources are considered 'mission critical'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The institution ensures faculty receive training, assistance, and support to prepare faculty for course development and teaching online.*</td>
<td>No evidence is provided concerning faculty training.</td>
<td>A faculty development plan is in place and some ad hoc training occurs.</td>
<td>The program/institution provides regular training based on specific course or program needs.</td>
<td>The program/institution provides regular, comprehensive and consistent course development support, training and ongoing assistance (e.g., mentoring programs) and the training is provided using different models of delivery (e.g., virtual modules, handouts, live training).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Faculty receive training and materials related to Fair Use, plagiarism, and other relevant legal and ethical concepts.*</td>
<td>No evidence exists that faculty members are provided training or other materials related to Fair Use, plagiarism, etc.</td>
<td>Some limited training exists for faculty members.</td>
<td>Faculty members are provided training, checklists, tip sheets and engage in discussions concerning Fair Use, plagiarism and other relevant legal and ethical concepts.</td>
<td>Faculty members are provided training, checklists, tip sheets and engage in discussions concerning Fair Use, plagiarism and other relevant legal and ethical concepts; the program/institution has a business process in place to assess compliance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Faculty are provided on-going professional development related to online teaching and learning.</td>
<td>0 = Deficient</td>
<td>1 = Developing</td>
<td>2 = Accomplished</td>
<td>3 = Exemplary</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No evidence is provided which supports a commitment to ongoing professional development for online faculty members.</td>
<td>The program/institution provides professional development for faculty members on an ad hoc basis.</td>
<td>The program/institution provides ongoing professional development for faculty members focused on teaching and learning.</td>
<td>The program/institution provides ongoing professional development for faculty members focused on teaching and learning; development opportunities are provided through various delivery formats; the needs of faculty members are considered when developing a training schedule of topics.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 5 | Clear standards are established for faculty engagement and expectations around online teaching (e.g., response time, contact information, etc.). | To date, no discussions or planning was evident with regard to establishing clear standards. | The program/institution is in the process of establishing clear standards for faculty engagement and expectations. | The program/institution has established clear standards for faculty engagement and expectations; ensure appropriate personnel and systems are in place to communicate standards and monitor faculty performance; create and implement online faculty certification courses; engage a consistent performance review process. |

<p>| 6 | Faculty are informed about emerging technologies and the selection and use of new tools. | No evidence is provided which illustrates how emerging technologies are selected or used. | Entrepreneurial faculty members are identifying, selecting, and using emerging technologies and new tools with limited program/institutional support or engagement. | Faculty members are consistently informed about emerging technologies, their selection and use; the program/institution clearly supports emerging technologies (e.g., incentives, stipends, software acquisition); workshops, guides, tutorials are created to assist faculty in integrating technology in support of learning outcomes. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Student Support (48 points)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>0 = Deficient</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1 = Developing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 = Accomplished</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 = Exemplary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Before starting an online program, students are advised about the program to determine if they possess the self-motivation and commitment to learn online. *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is no evidence to suggest students are advised about online program readiness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A defined advising process is in place and embedded into business processes before a learner starts online classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A defined advising process is in place and embedded into business processes before a learner starts online classes; develop processes for learners to self-assess their motivation and commitment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A defined advising process is in place and embedded into business processes before a learner starts online classes; processes are developed for learners to self-assess motivation and commitment; tutorials and checklists are provided; 'test drives' or other decision support tools are offered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Before starting an online program, students are advised about the program to determine if they have access to the minimum technology skills and equipment required by the course design.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is no evidence that students are advised about minimum technology skills or equipment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information available to prospective students is incomplete and/or not available before enrolling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information available to prospective students is complete, but not available prior to enrolling and starting an online program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prospective students are provided information concerning required online tools so they can make informed decisions; necessary information is easy to find on the website and made available before enrolling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Before starting an online program, students receive (or have access to) information about programs, including admission requirements, tuition and fees, books and supplies, technical and proctoring requirements, and student support services.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is no evidence that students receive important information before starting an online program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information available to prospective students is incomplete and/or not available before enrolling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information available to prospective students is complete, but not always available prior to enrolling and starting an online program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prospective students are provided program information so they can make informed decisions before enrolling; necessary information is easy to find on the website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Throughout the duration of the course/program, students have access to training and information they will need to secure required materials through electronic databases, interlibrary loans, government archives, new services, and other sources.*</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The library has no tutorials, web resources or forms to support online students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Throughout the duration of the course/program, students have access to appropriate technical assistance and technical support staff.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Support personnel are available to address student questions, problems, bug reporting, and complaints.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Students have access to effective academic, personal, and career counseling.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No evidence is provided to demonstrate how students access any counseling services.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>8</th>
<th>Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are provided in order to respond to students' most common questions regarding online education.</th>
<th>0 = Deficient</th>
<th>1 = Developing</th>
<th>2 = Accomplished</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No evidence is provided to demonstrate FAQs are available.</td>
<td>FAQs are incomplete or out-of-date or difficult to find.</td>
<td>FAQs cover a wide variety of commonly asked questions and are easy for students to locate and are up-to-date.</td>
<td>FAQs cover a wide variety of commonly asked questions and are easy for students to locate and are up-to-date; FAQ's are continually updated based on student needs; FAQ's may be supported by tutorials, checksheets, infographics or other support tools to assist students.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>9</th>
<th>Students are provided noninstructional support services such as admission, financial assistance, registration/enrollment, etc.</th>
<th>0 = Deficient</th>
<th>1 = Developing</th>
<th>2 = Accomplished</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is no evidence that students are provided non-instructional support throughout their program.</td>
<td>There is evidence that students are provided partial services during their online program. Access to services may be unclear or limited.</td>
<td>There is evidence that students are provided many non-instructional services during their online program. Access to services is unclear or limited.</td>
<td>Students are provided non-instructional support for all enrolled courses and access is clearly demonstrated through multiple channels (e.g., in-person, phone, e-mail, web conferencing); support services are continually evaluated and updated based on student needs.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Policy, processes, and resources are in place to support students with disabilities.</td>
<td>0 = Deficient</td>
<td>1 = Developing</td>
<td>2 = Accomplished</td>
<td>3 = Exemplary</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is no evidence that students with disabilities are supported.</td>
<td>There is evidence of support for students with disabilities, but policies and processes are not evident.</td>
<td>The program/institution has policies, processes and resources to support students with disabilities; however students with disabilities receive inconsistent support or instructions for access are unclear.</td>
<td>The program/institution has consistent policies, processes, and resources to support students with disabilities; it is clear that the institution is working to incorporate the relevant standards and/or best practices; documentation includes specific course information as well as how students access relevant services.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>11</th>
<th>Students have access to required course materials in print and/or digital format, such as ISBN numbers for textbooks, book suppliers, and delivery modes prior to course enrollment.</th>
<th>0 = Deficient</th>
<th>1 = Developing</th>
<th>2 = Accomplished</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is no evidence that students have access to required materials prior to enrollment.</td>
<td>Access to required course materials varies by course and is inconsistent.</td>
<td>Access to required course materials is consistent across the program, but students must be enrolled for access.</td>
<td>Access to required course materials is consistent and students have access prior to enrollment.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12</th>
<th>Program demonstrates a student-centered focus rather than trying to fit existing on-campus services to the online student.</th>
<th>0 = Deficient</th>
<th>1 = Developing</th>
<th>2 = Accomplished</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is no evidence presented.</td>
<td>Services appear to be primarily for on-campus students.</td>
<td>Evidence is written for online students but is incomplete.</td>
<td>The program demonstrates a focus on the online student and the online services available.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>13</th>
<th>Efforts are made to engage students with the program and institution in order to minimize feelings of isolation and alienation.</th>
<th>0 = Deficient</th>
<th>1 = Developing</th>
<th>2 = Accomplished</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is no evidence that the institution makes efforts to engage students outside the classroom.</td>
<td>Efforts are made to engage students but efforts are sporadic and inconsistent.</td>
<td>The program or the institution engage students.</td>
<td>Both the institution and the program engage students; engagement is integrated into all activities and is intentional.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>14</th>
<th>The institution provides guidance/tutorials for students in the use of all forms of technologies used for course delivery.</th>
<th>0 = Deficient</th>
<th>1 = Developing</th>
<th>2 = Accomplished</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is no evidence that students are provided with guidance concerning use of technology.</td>
<td>There is evidence that guidance is available for students but guidance provided is confusing or unclear. Instructions for access may be needed.</td>
<td>Guidance is provided for only the primary technology used for course delivery. Instructions for access are clear.</td>
<td>Guidance, fact sheets, infographics are provided for all types of technologies used in coursework and may include video tutorials. Instructions for access are clear and consistent across all courses.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tutoring is available as a learning resource.</td>
<td>0 = Deficient</td>
<td>1 = Developing</td>
<td>2 = Accomplished</td>
<td>3 = Exemplary</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>There is no evidence that students can access tutoring services.</td>
<td>Tutoring access is inconsistent and instructions for access may be unclear.</td>
<td>Tutoring is available and accessible; the program/institution demonstrates how tutoring is made available as a learning resource.</td>
<td>Tutoring is available and accessible; the program/institution demonstrates how tutoring is made available as a learning resource; multiple channels are provided (e.g., e-mail, phone, chat, web conferencing); tutoring services are available when learners need them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>There is no evidence that students are provided instructions for enlisting help.</td>
<td>Students are provided information to enlist help but services are limited, access is unclear and/or minimal channels are available.</td>
<td>Students have access to both one-time services and repeated services, but information is not clear and/or channels are limited.</td>
<td>Students have clear information in order to access to both one-time and repeated services; multiple channels (e.g., e-mail, phone, chat, web conferencing) are provided for enlisting assistance; service standards are monitored over time and improvements made.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students are provided clear information for enlisting help from the institution.
### Evaluation and Assessment (33 points)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>The program is assessed through an evaluation process that applies specific established standards. *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>0</strong> = Deficient</td>
<td>The program/institution does not have a plan or process to evaluate the online program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> = Developing</td>
<td>The program/institution has developed a program evaluation plan to periodically assess the program. Mostly performed on ad hoc basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong> = Accomplished</td>
<td>The program/institution has developed or follow specific standards which are consistently and periodically used to assess/evaluate the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong> = Exemplary</td>
<td>The program/institution has developed or follow specific standards which are consistently and periodically used to assess/evaluate the program; evaluation results are used to improve online program(s).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2</th>
<th>A variety of data (academic and administrative information) are used to regularly and frequently evaluate program effectiveness and to guide changes toward continual improvement. *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No evidence exists that the program/institution evaluates its online program using a variety of data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Online program evaluation is just beginning and limited academic or administrative measures are used to assess program effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Online program evaluation includes some academic (e.g., course evaluations, learning outcomes achievement) and administrative (e.g., satisfaction surveys, student success/persistence rates) measures to assess effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Online program evaluation includes a wide variety of academic (e.g., course evaluations, learning outcomes achievement) and administrative (e.g., satisfaction surveys, student success/persistence rates) measures to assess effectiveness; the evaluation occurs regularly and frequently; and is used to guide changes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>Intended learning outcomes at the course and program level are reviewed regularly to ensure alignment, clarity, utility, appropriateness, and effectiveness.*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The program/institution does not have a review process to assess learning outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning outcomes are assessed on an ad hoc basis to ensure alignment, clarity, utility, appropriateness and effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning outcomes are assessed on a regular basis to ensure alignment, clarity, utility, appropriateness and effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning outcomes are assessed on a regular basis to ensure alignment, clarity, utility, appropriateness and effectiveness; a peer review process is used; outcomes from the process drive updates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A process is in place and followed for the assessment of support services for faculty and students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>No process is in place to assess support services for faculty and students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A process is in place and engaged on an ad hoc basis to assess support services for faculty and students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A process is in place and followed on a regular basis (e.g., annually) to assess support services for faculty and students; outcomes serve as a foundation for improvements.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A process is in place and followed for the assessment of student retention in online courses and programs.</th>
<th>0 = Deficient</th>
<th>1 = Developing</th>
<th>2 = Accomplished</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No process is in place to assess student retention.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A process is in place and engaged on an ad hoc basis to assess student retention.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A process is in place and followed on a regular basis (e.g., annually) to assess student retention; outcomes serve as a foundation for improvements.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A process is in place and followed for the assessment of recruitment practices.</th>
<th>0 = Deficient</th>
<th>1 = Developing</th>
<th>2 = Accomplished</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>No process is in place to assess recruitment practices.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A process is in place and engaged on an ad hoc basis to assess recruitment practices.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A process is in place and followed on a regular basis (e.g., annually) to assess recruitment practices; outcomes serve as a foundation for improvements.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Program demonstrates compliance and review of accessibility standards (Section 508, etc.).</th>
<th>0 = Deficient</th>
<th>1 = Developing</th>
<th>2 = Accomplished</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>No process is in place to regularly review accessibility standards.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program/institution has designated personnel to support accessibility needs; a process is in place and followed on an ad hoc basis to assess accessibility standards.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program/institution has designated personnel to support accessibility needs; a process is in place and followed on a regular basis (e.g., annually) to assess accessibility standards; outcomes published on the program’s website; outcomes also serve as a foundation for improvement.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Scorecard Scoring Rubric</td>
<td>0 = Deficient</td>
<td>1 = Developing</td>
<td>2 = Accomplished</td>
<td>3 = Exemplary</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Course evaluations collect feedback on the effectiveness of instruction in relation to faculty performance evaluations.</td>
<td>Course evaluations are not regularly reviewed.</td>
<td>Course evaluations are reviewed on an ad hoc basis to assess effectiveness of instruction; feedback gleaned from the review is used to shape faculty performance evaluations.</td>
<td>Course evaluations and other feedback (e.g., peer review results) are reviewed regularly to assess effectiveness of instruction; feedback gleaned from the review is used to shape faculty performance evaluations; also used as outline for future faculty development topics or other improvements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 A process is in place and followed for the institutional assessment of faculty online teaching performance.</td>
<td>No program/institutional policies have been developed to guide expectations for faculty performance.</td>
<td>The program/institution has developed policies to guide expectations for faculty performance and the policy standards are shared with faculty members.</td>
<td>The program/institution has developed policies to guide expectations for faculty performance; policy/standards are shared with faculty; these standards are used to evaluate a faculty member’s performance each time they teach online.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 A process is in place and followed for the assessment of stakeholder (e.g., learners, faculty, staff) satisfaction with the online program.</td>
<td>No process is in place to assess stakeholder satisfaction.</td>
<td>A process is in place and engaged on an ad hoc basis to assess stakeholder satisfaction.</td>
<td>A process is in place and followed on a regular basis (e.g., annually) to assess stakeholder satisfaction; outcomes serve as a foundation for improvements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 Course evaluations collect student feedback on quality of online course materials.</td>
<td>Course evaluations are not collected and used to assess the quality of online course materials.</td>
<td>A comprehensive course evaluation is deployed periodically to collect student feedback; outcomes serve as a foundation for improvements.</td>
<td>A comprehensive course evaluation is deployed for each online course to collect student feedback; outcomes serve as a foundation for improvements; the evaluation tool is periodically reviewed for effectiveness and relevance.</td>
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</table>

* Adapted from Institute for Higher Education Policy's *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education* (2000)
In 1997, Frank Mayadas, the founding President of Sloan Consortium, affirmed that any learner who engages in online education should have, at a minimum, an education that represents the quality of the provider's overall institutional quality. Any institution, he maintained, demonstrates its quality in five inter-related areas—learning effectiveness, access, scale (capacity enrollment achieved through cost-effectiveness and institutional commitment), and faculty and student satisfaction. As the fundamental values that motivate successful online education, these five are known as the five pillars of quality in online education. The intent of the quality framework that measures progress in each of the pillar areas is to help institutions identify goals and measure progress towards them. There are multiple ways to measure progress in each of these areas; some of these are provided with each corresponding pillar online at http://onlinelearningconsortium.org/5pillars.

The pillar quality framework measures progress in many facets of online education, from course design to inter-institutional and international partnerships. It also complements the indicators of the Quality Scorecard 2014. Thus, the next few pages provide the Quality Scorecard indicators categorized by each of the five quality pillars. When using the Online Learning Consortium's online interactive tool, the Scorecard displays the indicators with two views, by the nine categories of the scorecard and by the five pillars.
### ACCESS

The institution has defined the strategic value of online learning to its enterprise and stakeholders. (IS4)

A documented technology plan that includes electronic security measures (e.g., password protection, encryption, secure online or proctored exams, etc.) is in place and operational to ensure quality, in accordance with established standards and regulatory requirements. (TS1)

The technology delivery systems are highly reliable and operable with measurable standards being utilized such as system downtime tracking or task benchmarking. (TS2)

A centralized system provides support for building and maintaining the online education infrastructure. (TS3)

The institution has established a contingency plan for the continuance of data centers and support services in the event of prolonged service disruption. (TS5)

Whether the institution maintains local data centers (servers), and/or contracts for outsourced, hosted services or cloud services, those systems are administered in compliance with established data management practices such as the Information Technology Service Management (ITSM) standards which include appropriate power protection, backup solutions, and disaster recovery plans, etc. (TS7)

Usability tests are conducted and applied and recommendations based upon Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAGs) are incorporated. (CD/ID11)

The course structure ensures that all online students, regardless of location, have access to library/learning resources that adequately support online courses. (CS2)

Students are provided access to library professionals and resources to help locate, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use a variety of information resources. (TL4)

Before starting an online program, students are advised about the program to determine if they possess the self-motivation and commitment to learn online. (SS1)

Before starting an online program, students are advised about the program to determine if they have access to the minimum technology skills and equipment required by the course design. (SS2)

Before starting an online program, students receive (or have access to) information about programs, including admission requirements, tuition and fees, books and supplies, technical and proctoring requirements, and student support services. (SS3)

Throughout the duration of the course/program, students have access to training and information they will need to secure required materials through electronic databases, interlibrary loans, government archives, news services, and other sources. (SS4)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Throughout the duration of the course/program, students have access to appropriate technical assistance and technical support staff. (SS5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students are provided noninstructional support services such as admission, financial assistance, registration/enrollment, etc. (SS9)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy, processes, and resources are in place to support students with disabilities. (SS10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students have access to required course materials in print and/or digital format, such as ISBN numbers for textbooks, book suppliers, and delivery modes prior to course enrollment. (SS11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The institution provides guidance/tutorials for students in the use of all forms of technologies used for course delivery. (SS14)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students are provided clear information for enlisting help from the institution. (SS16)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A process is in place and followed for the assessment of student retention in online courses and programs. (EA5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program demonstrates compliance and review of accessibility standards (Section 508, etc.). (EA7)</td>
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</table>
## LEARNING EFFECTIVENESS

The institution has policy and guidelines that confirm a student who registers in an online course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives academic credit. This is done by verifying the identity of a student by using methods such as (a) a secure login and pass code, (b) proctored examinations, or (c) other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identity. (IS2)

Faculty, staff, and students are supported in the development and use of new technologies and skills. (TS6)

Guidelines regarding minimum requirements for course development, design, and delivery of online instruction (such as course syllabus elements, course materials, assessment strategies, faculty feedback) are followed. (CD/ID1)

Course embedded technology actively supports the achievement of learning outcomes and delivery of course content, and superfluous use of technology is minimized. (CD/ID2)

Instructional materials and course syllabi are reviewed periodically to ensure they meet the online course and program learning outcomes. (CD/ID3)

A process is followed that ensures that permissions (Creative Commons, Copyright, Fair Use, Public Domain, etc.) are in place for appropriate use of online course materials. (CD/ID5)

Course assignments and activities are reviewed periodically to ensure they meet the online course and program learning outcomes. (CD/ID6)

Student-centered instruction is considered during the course development process. (CD/ID7)

Course design promotes both faculty and student engagement. (CD/ID9)

A process is followed for evaluating the effectiveness of current and emerging technologies to support the achievement of learning outcomes and delivery of course content. (CD/ID10)

Curriculum development is a core responsibility for faculty (i.e., faculty should be involved in either the development or the decision making for the online curriculum choices). (CD/ID12)

The online course includes a syllabus outlining course objectives, learning outcomes, evaluation methods, books and supplies, technical and proctoring. (CS1)

Rules or standards for appropriate online student behavior are provided within the course. (CS8)

Feedback on student assignments and questions is constructive and provided in a timely manner. (TL2)
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Students learn appropriate methods for effective research, including assessment of the validity of resources and the ability to master resources in an online environment. (TL3)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructors use specific strategies to create a presence in the course. (TL5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear standards are established for faculty engagement and expectations around online teaching (e.g. response time, contact information, etc.). (FS5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efforts are made to engage students with the program and institution in order to minimize feelings of isolation and alienation. (SS13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring is available as a learning resource. (SS15)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The program is assessed through an evaluation process that applies specific established standards. (EA1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A variety of data (academic and administrative information) are used to regularly and frequently evaluate program effectiveness and to guide changes toward continual improvement. (EA2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course evaluations collect student feedback on quality of online course materials. (EA8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCALE</td>
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<tr>
<td>The institution has a governance structure to enable clear, effective, and comprehensive decision making related to online education. (IS1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The institution has a policy for intellectual property of course materials; it specifically addresses online course materials, and is publicly visible online. (IS3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organizational structure of the online program supports the institution's mission, values, and strategic plan. (IS5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The online program's strategic plan is reviewed for its continuing relevance, and periodically improved and updated. (IS6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The institution has a process for planning and allocating resources for the online program, including financial resources, in accordance with strategic planning. (IS7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The institution demonstrates sufficient resource allocation, including financial resources in order to effectively support the mission of online education. (IS8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The institution has a governance structure to enable systematic and continuous improvement related to the administration of online education. (IS9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The course delivery technology is considered a mission critical enterprise system and supported as such. (TS4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intended learning outcomes at the course and program level are reviewed regularly to ensure alignment, clarity, utility, appropriateness, and effectiveness. (EA3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A process is in place and followed for the assessment of recruitment practices. (EA6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A process is in place and followed for the assessment of stakeholder (e.g., learners, faculty, staff) satisfaction with the online program. (EA10)</td>
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## FACULTY SATISFACTION

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Code</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical assistance is provided for faculty during online course development and online teaching.</td>
<td>FS1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The institution ensures faculty receive training, assistance, and support to prepare faculty for course development and teaching online.</td>
<td>FS2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty receive training and materials related to Fair Use, plagiarism, and other relevant legal and ethical concepts.</td>
<td>FS3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty are provided on-going professional development related to online teaching and learning.</td>
<td>FS4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty are informed about emerging technologies and the selection and use of new tools.</td>
<td>FS6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A process is in place and followed for the assessment of support services for faculty and students.</td>
<td>EA4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A process is in place and followed for the institutional assessment of faculty online teaching performance.</td>
<td>EA9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### STUDENT SATISFACTION

A course development process is followed that ensures courses are designed so that students develop the necessary knowledge and skills to meet measurable learning outcomes at the course and program level. (CD/ID4)

There is consistency in course development for student retention and quality. (CD/ID8)

Expectations for student assignment completion, grade policy, and faculty response are clearly provided in the course syllabus. (CS3)

Links or explanations of technical support are available in the course (i.e., each course provides suggested solutions to potential technical issues and/or links for technical assistance). (CS4)

Instructional materials are accessible to the student, easy to use, and may be accessed by multiple operating systems and applications. (CS5)

Instructional materials are accessible by students with disabilities via alternative instructional strategies and/or referral to special institutional resources. (CS6)

Opportunities/tools are provided to encourage student-student collaboration (i.e., web conferencing, instant messaging, etc.) if appropriate. (CS7)

Student-to-student and faculty-to-student interaction are essential characteristics and are encouraged and facilitated. (TL1)

Students should be provided a way to interact with other students in an online community (outside the course). (SSE1)

Support personnel are available to address student questions, problems, bug reporting, and complaints. (SS6)

Students have access to effective academic, personal, and career counseling. (SS7)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are provided in order to respond to students’ most common questions regarding online education. (SS8)

Program demonstrates a student-centered focus rather than trying to fit existing on-campus services to the online student. (SS12)

A process is in place and followed for the assessment of support services for faculty and students. (EA4) (also under Faculty Satisfaction)

Course evaluations collect student feedback on quality of online course materials. (EA11)