Chapter 10
Supporting Online Program Quality Through Online Enterprise–Level Standards

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ABSTRACT

Enterprise-wide efforts to lead online program quality are critical in today’s higher education environment. The authors of this chapter investigate tools available to leaders of higher education institutions which articulate the major components needed to successfully lead an online enterprise and measure success. Through the use of vetted tools such as the UPCEA Hallmarks of Excellence in Online Leadership, Quality Matters Program Rubrics, and the Online Learning Consortium Scorecard for the Administration of Online Programs, institutional leaders can embrace systematic and consistent quality in online learning. Using the appropriate tool at the appropriate level of institutional activity will assist institutions with meeting national standards as described through the Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education Programs (Online Learning) developed by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC).

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INTRODUCTION

The days of launching an online program through ad hoc committees and trailblazing faculty and technical staff are behind us. Today, to be sustainable, an online learning enterprise must be staffed and resourced well, from the tools deployed in the learning management system to senior leadership positions. The goal of this chapter is to provide practitioners with a comprehensive view of the resources necessary to create fully-integrated quality measures. In the past, many leaders believed that online quality began and ended with the course itself. All facets of online course and program quality are supported by quality online enterprises. For the purposes of this discussion, we define an online enterprise as the total operation devoted to providing distance learning through an online modality.

Leadership is an important component to successful online enterprises. Recently, authors have explored the qualities and characteristics of online learning administrators, leaders, and staff (Beaudoin, 2015; Burnette, 2015; Holt, Palmer, Gosper, Sankey, & Allan, 2014; Nworie, Haughton, & Oprandi, 2012; Roberts, 2018). One of the seminal studies investigated qualities and qualifications sought when filling leadership positions in distance learning, examining almost 200 leadership position announcements between 1997 and 2010 (Nworie et al., 2012). Nworie et al. (2012), through their analysis of position announcements, identified the increasing expectation that leaders in distance learning would have broad level skills in the strategic, operational, and instructional aspects of online enterprises.

It is accepted within the field that similar to other areas within higher education, all facets of online program quality are informed by enterprise-focused quality standards and guidelines.

The authors of this chapter have over 30 years of combined experience in the leadership of online learning enterprises. Their work, focused on the strategic, operational, and instructional aspects of online learning have been informed by course, program, and enterprise level quality standards. This chapter details the critical aspects to enterprise-level quality through a leadership lens.

BACKGROUND

One of the characteristics of a distance learning leader is competency in strategic planning. Strategic planning is built on strategic thinking (Bates & Sangrà, 2011). Online learning continues to be a dynamic dimension of institutional enrollment strategies, yet online program strategies often focus on transactions between the student and the instructors, as noted in a recent Enrollment Management Report (Allen & Seaman, 2016; Hope, 2017). Of the ten key strategies suggested by Hope...
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