Accreditation Issues in Online Education Programs: How to Use Electronic Delivery Methods to Meet Traditional Standards

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Abstract: This presentation will demonstrate how the programmatic model, developed by the University of Arkansas at Little Rock’s (UALR) online Master of Rehabilitation Counseling program, can be adapted by other online programs to meet traditional accreditation standards in their field. The Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) accredits Masters programs in Rehabilitation Counseling. Usually these programs are traditional on-campus programs. The UALR program began as a new, completely online program in 2000. Utilizing an approach, which combines established methodologies and technical innovations, the program was able to achieve Full Accreditation by CORE in the shortest time possible. This presentation will focus on the creative techniques developed by the UALR program that has allowed them to deliver required services at a distance that have conventionally been delivered on-campus and in-person.

Overview

This presentation will demonstrate how the programmatic model, developed by the University of Arkansas at Little Rock’s (UALR) online Master of Rehabilitation Counseling program, can be adapted by other online academic programs to meet traditional accreditation standards in their field. The Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) accredits Masters programs in Rehabilitation Counseling. The vast majority of these programs are traditional on-campus programs. Any online program seeking accreditation must meet the same standards as an on-campus program. The UALR program began as a brand new, completely online program in June 2000. Utilizing an approach, which combines established methodologies and technical innovations, the program was able to achieve Full Accreditation by CORE in the shortest time possible. In 2004, the program earned the maximum Full Accreditation time of eight years from CORE with no conditions or restrictions. This is unusual even for a new traditional on-campus program; much less for a completely online program. This presentation will focus on the creative techniques developed by the UALR program that has allowed them to deliver required services at a distance that have conventionally been delivered on-campus and in-person.

The model uses: 1) Videostreaming technology and chromakey equipment to allow presentation of online curriculum that, while being in an asynchronous video format, give students gives students the basic knowledge needed to be effective counselors; and 2) Webcams and web-based videoconferencing technology to facilitate face-to-face individual and group interaction and feedback with students at distant field sites that gives them a chance to refine their counseling skills in a safe environment. This distance-learning model has allowed the program to meet or exceed all CORE standards including some that were obviously written before online education existed, e.g., standards that require a fixed time of face-to-face interaction between faculty and students. The goals are for the attendees to understand the instructional strategies, procedures, and evaluation process issues involved in meeting accreditation standards and to understand the techniques and new technologies available that make achieving Full Accreditation it possible. Feedback from our rehabilitation educator colleagues around the USA indicates that our methodology truly represents one of the “Best Practices” in our discipline.