Quality Assurance Strategies for Online Delivery Program Delivery

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Abstract: Emerging Internet technology is enabling universities to offer courses in an anywhere, anytime environment. This new teaching modality finds students viewing their universities as more responsive to their lifestyle needs, actively involved in their learning and empowered to assume the role of life long learners. Faculty find themselves cast into an altered teaching environment that requires them to be much more facilitative by individually supporting their students. The purpose of the article is to discuss several Quality Assurance Strategies (QAS) for ensuring quality online teaching and learning. These strategies are organized around five program areas: administrative leadership and support, ongoing program concerns, course development, student concerns and needs, and faculty development.

Introduction

As institutions of higher education work toward developing online programs, issues of quality assurance strategies surface. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (1998) defines “… ‘quality assurance in distance learning as the means by which institutions or providers set their program goals and measure results against these goals’ (p. viii). This article will discuss several Quality Assurance Strategies (QAS) for ensuring quality online teaching and learning.

Administrative Leadership and Support

The administrative QAS involves establishing an organizational infrastructure for online learning. This structure provides technical assistance, opportunities for research and evaluation, and external and internal funding opportunities. These administrative mechanisms help instructors understand how their online activities correspond to strategic initiatives of the university. Clearly, the primary QAS for online programs is an administrative and technological infrastructure that is well understood and embraced by those who will be delivering the online program.

Ongoing Program Concerns and Needs

The decision to put a program online involves discussion, planning and evaluation at several levels. The QAS at this point include approval and support of the College and Department administrators and developing and presenting a plan defining the direction the online program will take. The Program Coordinator should plan and develop the online program needs based on standards and guidelines established by accrediting associations as well as National and State professional organizations. Key support personnel such as instructional designers, programmers and technicians should be identified and contacted. Ongoing evaluation of individual courses as they relate to the overall program is needed in order to maintain continuity across the curriculum. QAS to considered for evaluative purposes include comments from outside reviewers, student input and evaluations, current online research, and professional journals.

Course Development

Course development is a team process that consists of subject matter experts (faculty), instructional designers, web programmers, and graphic artists working together. Courses are originated by
the faculty offering the courses and reflect the content, interaction, assessment, and other functional aspects determined by the faculty member. QAS are paramount in the development of pedagogically sound online courses. A comprehensive analysis of an online course as it relates to the program should be conducted. Issues such as course prerequisites, sequencing of courses within the program, assessment instruments, and pedagogical methodologies and strategies are considered.

Student Concerns and Needs

An important QAS for online instructors is understanding the motivating factors that prompted the student to enroll in an online course. Another QAS is to quickly establish a line of communication between the instructor and the online students once the course has started. Hearing from the instructor is reassuring for students taking an online course for the first time.

Faculty Concerns and Needs

Several QAS should be available for online faculty to ensure a successful online experience. These include faculty development opportunities that provide training and resources as well as funding for student assistants, multimedia computers and course release time.

Conclusion

Successful delivery of Web-based programs depends on developing and integrating Quality Assurance Strategies into the total online process. These strategies provide the framework for the design, development, implementation and management stages and ensure a successful experience for faculty and students.

Reference