Chapter 15

Defining Quality Standards, Guidelines, and Strategies for the Delivery of Successful Online Education in a Changing Society

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a framework for defining quality standards, guidelines, and strategies for the delivery of successful online education in a changing society. Online education is one of the most prevalent outcomes of the influence of technology and economic and competitive pressures. Continued growth in the demand for online education has forced many traditional educational institutions to re-evaluate their historically defined quality standards, guidelines, and strategies relating to the delivery of courses and programs. As the trend toward online education continues, it is imperative to have a framework that will provide guidance to educational institutions when designing the successful delivery of online education. Research over the last two decades has provided information that can be used as a foundation for developing a framework for the strategic planning of online education at the state, institutional, program, and course levels.

INTRODUCTION

There is no question that online education is not just another temporary educational trend or fad. In the tenth annual survey titled, *Changing Course: Ten Years of Tracking Online Education in the United States,* conducted by Allen & Seaman (2013), it was reported that more than 6.7 million students had taken at least one online course in the fall of 2011, an increase over the previous year of over 570,000. Several factors have contributed to the steady increase of online education students and programs, including technology advancement, reduced state funding, increased operational expenses, global competition, and student expectations.

Significant technological advances, as well as economic and competitive pressures have led many institutions to include online education as a major part of their long-term strategic plan. With higher education institutions experiencing reductions in state funding and increases in operational cost, many are viewing online education as a critical component to success and survival in a changing society. In 2002, only 50 percent of all higher education institutions stated that online learning was a critical component in their long-term strategic plan, whereas, by 2012, this had increased to 69.1 percent (Allen & Seaman, 2013). In order for educational institutions to survive and thrive in a changing world, leadership of education programs will need to strategically plan for the future.

Online education is one of the most obvious outcomes of the influence of technology on education. Online education allows the teaching and learning process to happen at any time and any place. It removes physical and time constraints for both faculty and students (The Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2000). Because of technology, brand recognition can extend nationally and globally, and institutions must realize that competing educational programs are just "one click away" (Betts, Hartman, & Oxholm, 2009, p. 4). After

tuition costs, room and board is usually the second largest educational cost for students; online education can greatly reduce this cost.

Continued growth in the demand for online education has forced many traditional educational institutions at all levels to re-evaluate their historically defined quality standards, guidelines, and strategies relating to the delivery of courses and programs. As the trend toward online education continues, it is imperative to have a framework that will provide guidance to educational institutions when designing the successful delivery of quality online education. Opponents of online education insist that courses taught online are not capable of meeting the same quality standards of the traditional brick and mortar classroom (The Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2000). Therefore, this chapter will explore a framework based on quality standards, guidelines, and strategies for successful online education that can be used to support an institutional strategic plan for online education in higher education. Research over the last two decades has provided information that can be used as a foundation for developing this framework.

BACKGROUND

Online education is often considered a method of distance education. Distance education is defined by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (2011) as "a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place" (p.1).

With the continued growth of online education there has been increased discussion regarding the quality of online courses and programs. There have been attempts to develop appropriate standards and assessments for determining quality of online education. Quality standards should be developed

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