Chapter 1

Garnering Faculty Buy-In to Improve Online Program Quality:
Implementation of the Online Learning Consortium Scorecard to Encourage Shared Governance

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ABSTRACT

This case study details the implementation of the Online Learning Consortium's Scorecard for the Administration of Online Programs to assess quality and standards adherence within an allied health sciences school at a research university. The scorecard is comprised of seventy-five standards. Twenty-four faculty comprised the scoring committees. Artifacts were identified and collected by the director of distance learning. Programs involved include dental hygiene, health sciences, radiologic sciences, health informatics and information management, and health administration. These online programs, which lead to baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral degrees, are taught primarily by full-time clinical faculty, approximately 90% of whom hold the terminal degree in their field.

BACKGROUND

Evaluation of online programs has its origins in The Distance Education Accrediting Commission, organized in 1926 under a different name for the purposes of correspondence course evaluation. In the past twenty-five years, with the proliferation of online programs across the educational sector, many different evaluation standards have been developed. In fact, Southard and Mooney (2015) discovered twelve unique sets of standards, stemming from both public and proprietary sources across both regional and national entities. Examples include the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications

(see Krauth, 1996), the American Federation of Teachers in 2000, the Institute for Higher Education Policy in 2000, the eight regional accrediting organizations through the Middle States Commission in 2001, and the Southern Regional Education Board in 2006.

With so many different measurement instruments, several researchers have recently sought to uncover differences and commonalities (Irele, 2013; Shelton, 2011; Southard & Mooney, 2015). Irele (2013) found similar standards when comparing five sets of guidelines, and Southard and Mooney (2015), discovered 358 total standards across 12 sets, with common themes among them. All twelve sets identified by Southard and Mooney comprised the following overarching topics: 1) online curriculum policies and infrastructure, 2) faculty support, 3) student support, 4) course design, 5) course delivery, and 6) assessment and evaluation. Feng Zhao (2003) found similar standards in his review of online education in Australia and Europe, although in Europe, there is disagreement about evaluation measures for distance learning programs due to the differences in type, classification, and function of the university, as discussed by Kocdar and Aydin (2012).

Programmatic accreditors have also begun developing their own sets of guidelines or are adopting those already established. Documents of best practice and guidelines for distance learning programs have been adopted by the American Bar Association (Southard & Mooney, 2015), as well as the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission and the Commission on Dental Accreditation of the American Dental Association (O'Brien, 2012. For a review of another academic health science center's online program assessment using the Sloan-C Five Pillars Model of Quality, see Stube et al., 2013).

How institutions go about conducting self-studies using these standards is a new area of research. Institutions embarking on an online program self-study might find the work of H. R. Kells useful (1995). The author addresses a myriad of topics pertaining to institutional self-study outside the typical realm of process discussion, including principles of management and organizational culture. Leadership studies involving distance education is also new (Moore, 2012), although a recent dissertation may be helpful (Gopalakrishnan, 2011). For readers interested in the role of leadership in ongoing assessment practices, the work of Ewell and Ikenberry (2015) might be consulted. Lastly, the work of James and Karen Nichols (2005) may illuminate how new accreditation processes integrate into existing institutional effectiveness procedures.

METHODOLOGY

An exploratory, qualitative case study approach was employed because case studies are best for when the researchers asks "how" or "why" using an in-depth investigation of a phenomenon within real-life context (Yin, 2009); in other words, a descriptive question is needing to be answered. In addition, a case study is the preferred approach when there are multiple sources of information to be collected (Yin, 2009). The multiple sources are then triangulated in a convergent manner; Creswell (2013) suggested that the purpose of such data triangulation is important to the creation of a detailed, multifaceted, and in-depth description of the case.

For the institution of this case study, the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC), the adoption of the Online Learning Consortium's *Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Programs* was selected as the instrument for data collection. The Scorecard, developed in 2010, contains 75 standards vetted by 43 experts in online education (Shelton, 2010), and is the only comprehensive, holistic

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