

Chapter 4

Institutional Effectiveness: How an Integrative Approach Drives Achievement

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ABSTRACT

Private online institutions have bridged the gap between contemporary student needs and the offerings of traditional institutions. These institutions are attuned to student needs and focus on alignment with current and future trends for employer and societal needs through innovation, entrepreneurship, and commitment to continuous improvement. This focus on improvement begins with an integrative approach to institutional effectiveness. This chapter provides practical examples and evidence for participatory engagement models for institutional effectiveness that empower distance education institutions to deliver adaptive, innovative, engaging, and supportive education for today's diverse learners. The integrative model presented encompasses five primary pillars of institutional effectiveness: strategic planning, assessment and program review, institutional research, external feedback, and accreditation and regulatory requirements. The authors provide sample methodologies that can be implemented at various institutions to avoid silos and foster continuous input and innovation.

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INTRODUCTION

As higher education adapts to align with the needs of today's college students and continues to react to the global pandemic, it is time to reimagine what's possible in educational delivery and learn from for-profit institutions that have bridged the divide between contemporary student needs and the offerings of traditional institutions. Achieving the agility and focus on improvement seen at the most successful for-profit institutions requires an integrative approach to institutional effectiveness. These institutions thrive because they are nimble organizations attuned to student needs and focused on alignment with current and forward-looking employer and societal demands through innovation, entrepreneurship, and commitment to continuous improvement informed by best practices.

In 2020, the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) conducted a national survey of campus stakeholders, including seven hundred higher education professionals across a range of campus roles and institution. 37% of respondents reported capacity-building for institutional change and transformation as a top campus challenge. Unsurprisingly, 60% of respondents also indicated they are very concerned about the overall financial stability of their institution (Finley, 2020).

Driven by limited resources, institutions are re-thinking their approach to strategic planning, institutional effectiveness, and resource allocation evidenced by emerging case studies at institutions across the country. The result is integrative institutional effectiveness models that are not one-size-fits-all. They can take many shapes and sizes and may include internal and external teams as well as the integration of technology.

BACKGROUND

This chapter presents five pillars of an integrative approach to institutional effectiveness: strategic planning, assessment and program review, institutional research, external feedback, and accreditation and regulatory requirements. This chapter explores how each pillar may differ in a distance education model; provides innovative new approaches for programs and services; and demonstrates how to make mission-driven and data-informed decisions more effectively. It offers several specific examples and sample methodologies that can be implemented at a wide range of institutions to avoid silos and foster continuous feedback and innovation.

Specifically, this chapter outlines and provides evidence for a key participatory engagement model for institutional effectiveness that empowers distance education institutions to deliver adaptive, innovative, engaging, and supportive education and services for today's diverse learners. It examines how mission, vision, and institutional

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