

Social and Student Engagement and Support: The Sloan-C Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Programs

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Abstract

As combinations of place-based, blended and fully online education proliferate, so do options for support and services. Aligning with regional accreditation criteria, the Sloan-C Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Programs is a useful way for institutions to measure and compare the quality of social and student engagement and support. The Scorecard aids quality efforts in institutional strategic planning, compliance reporting, and internal and external evaluation. Focusing on two of the nine categories of quality indicators—Social and Student Engagement and Student Support—this paper illustrates some ways institutions can meet Scorecard indicators while complementing regional accreditation guidelines.

Keywords

Sloan-C Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Programs, regional accreditation, quality indicators, accreditation criteria, social and student engagement, effective practices

I. INTRODUCTION

As higher education encounters profound changes and pressures, student support becomes an increasingly important enterprise-wide focus. Changes—such as massively open online courses (MOOCs); open educational resources; social networking; performance analytics; learning via mobile devices, immersive environments and games; and multinational learning;—have significant implications for the support students expect in all delivery modes. At the same time, regulatory and policy pressures— for better affordability, higher completion rates, gainful employment and transferability of prior and experiential learning credit—compel institutions to be more and more responsive to supporting students' paths to success.

The implications of these changes and pressures are significant because they affect strategic planning for services that better support students in all modes of learning.

This issue of the *Journal of Asynchronous Networks* (JALN) combines case studies and research drawn from feedback from students themselves. From a more administrative perspective, this paper cites the titles in this issue as they relate to indicators in the Sloan-C Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Programs in conjunction with the criteria for regional accreditation.

A. Regional Accreditation Criteria for Student Support

The purpose of accreditation is to help ensure “that education provided by institutions of higher education meets acceptable levels of quality” [1].

Since the late 1800's, regional accreditors have developed measures for guiding quality. The current

standards or criteria and guidelines for student support and services [2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9] are excerpted in Appendix A.

Although accreditors emphasize different aspects of student support, its importance is unanimously recognized, for the reasons articulated by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU):

The support of students toward their educational goals usually requires a well-organized and appropriate program of student services, complemented by good staff leadership and broad-based institutional commitment. Within the scope of the institutional mission, student services can reinforce and extend the college's influence beyond the classroom. These services promote the comprehensive development of the student, and they become an integral part of the educational process, helping to strengthen learning outcomes. Appropriate and comparable student services should support the learning of all students in the context of the institution's mission and chosen educational delivery system. Similarly, the institution should clearly convey to students their roles and responsibilities as partners in the educational process. [6, p. 2]

Encouraging innovation, accreditors support institutions' self-established initiatives to exceed criteria, adapt to the affordances of new media, and demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement strategies.

B. The Quality Scorecard Indicators for Social and Student Engagement and Support

The Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Programs is an interactive instrument [11] for benchmarking improvements that Shelton developed with the consensus of seasoned online administrators [12]. The 70 consensus indicators align directly with accreditation criteria as articulated in the excerpts in Appendix A and provide a guide for developing or improving online education programs.

The handbook that accompanies the Quality Scorecard includes recommendations for each of its 70 quality indicators [13]. To illustrate how institutions can meet indicators, the next section of this paper draws together research and case studies from the January 2013 issue of JALN and points to additional examples of services developed in response to students. For readers who are beginning online programs or courses and wish to use the Quality Scorecard as a guide to development, some of the practices herein have become common practice, and in some cases, the practices are in pilot phase as technology enables new affordances.

II. INDICATORS AND EXAMPLES

A. Create a sense of community for students

- Students should be provided a way to interact with other students in an online community
- The program demonstrates a student-centered focus rather than trying to fit service to the distance education student in on-campus student services.
- Efforts are made to engage students with the program and institution.

Quality Scorecard indicators

In this issue, Fetzner's study "What Do Unsuccessful Online Students Want Us To Know?" [14] points out that most unsuccessful students drop out because they get behind and can't catch up. Creating community helps support people who have competing responsibilities, positively affects motivation, and also improves persistence and success.

Fears that online delivery would be impersonal and create feelings of isolation and disconnectedness that would impede learning [15], early research paid attention to the importance of building supportive community in online programs and courses [16, 17]. And today, large scale studies show that in the right conditions, online students can feel even more engaged with classmates and teachers than they do face to face [18].

When students experience “online or web-based communication [as] an excellent medium for social interaction” and are able to form distinct impressions of people online, they are much more likely to persist in education [19]. Interacting with other students is an effective way to introduce newcomers to the community [16], and to provide peer support for students who might be reluctant to approach staff or faculty directly [20]. In fact, “enrollment intelligence, an algorithm that links social media with predictive modeling” enables institutions to predict who will enroll based on the social networks prospective students make online as they get to know their institution and its community [21].

Establishing community for online learners is so important that it is a primary feature of MOOCs which relay on learner to learner networking for peer feedback and assessment; for example, Coursera[22] enables online students all over the world to arrange get-togethers in their locations or as they travel. Students choose the topic, the time and the venue. Thousands of students in thousands of cities have arranged meetings on the topics and places they decide upon.

Several leading institutions have formally adopted practices associated with the Community of Inquiry (CoI), an open source, constructivist approach to teaching and learning. For example, the American Public University System bases its course design and faculty development on CoI [23]. The State University of New York also emphasizes community, using its Community of Inquiry Survey for faculty to compare their own perceptions of community in their courses with student perceptions of community in the same courses. The survey is open via a creative commons license and has been widely adopted as a way to measure and improve the sense of community among faculty and students [24].

Encouraging community, examples

1. Rio Salado Community College: “We astonish our customers”

Announcing its vision “We astonish our customers,” Rio Salado Community College affirms its student-centered focus in its vision and mission statements. Since 2008, Rio Salado College has used data mining and predictive modeling for proactive outreach to students and “to follow the behavior of students to identify students at risk, and to build interventions to promote online student success” [25].

Focusing on students’ desire for choice, access, flexibility and responsiveness, Rio Salado offers

- weekly course starts every Monday in 48 weeks throughout the year
- options for accelerated 8-week courses
- always open technology and academic hot lines
- easy access to online advising, and
- Progress and Course Engagement (PACE) system for automated tracking of student progress--with intervention as needed.

Rio Salado Community College’s getting started page gives a warm welcome to students:

It's all about you. RioLearn and my.maricopa.edu streamline the college experience, letting you spend more time learning and less time driving around, waiting in line, and filling out mounds of paperwork [26].

On its self-serve pages, students find a full array of academic, financial, student life, and community engagement services [27].

2. City University of New York Academic Commons: Social Network as Hatchery

Serving over half a million students in twenty-three colleges spread throughout the five boroughs of New York, CUNY created the CUNY Academic Commons to respond to challenges posed by rapid enrollment growth and faculty turnover and to promote cohesion and collaboration around academic uses of technology. The guiding philosophy of the hatchery is that “The free exchange of knowledge among colleagues across the university is central to better educating the student body and expanding professional development opportunities for faculty research and teaching” [28]. Launched in December 2009, the Commons has grown to more than 350,000 staff, faculty and students in 400 interest groups.

CUNY’s project has become Commons in a Box (CBOX), a software project for “turning the

infrastructure that successfully powers the CUNY Academic Commons into a free, distributable, easy-to-install package” [29].

B. Introduce students to online learning

- Students receive (or have access to) information about programs, including admission requirements, tuition and fees, books and supplies, technical and proctoring requirements, and student support services prior to admission and course registration.
- Before starting an online program, students are advised about the program to determine if they possess the self-motivation and commitment to learn at a distance.
- Students are instructed in the appropriate ways of enlisting help from the program.
- Students are instructed in the appropriate ways of communicating with faculty and students.

Quality Scorecard indicators

Students enroll in online learning for “convenience, flexible programming, and compatibility with their work schedules” as Britto and Rush point out in this issue’s “Developing and Implementing Comprehensive Student Support Services or Online Students” [30] However, students also need to understand expectations lest they be overwhelmed with the responsibilities that accompany the convenience and flexibility of online education. Thus, Quality Scorecard indicators emphasize providing information, preparation and support.

Many, but by no means all, institutions use online orientations that include information about obtaining services. Orientations may be optional or mandatory, face to face or online, non-credit or for credit, self-paced or time-based. Jones explains in “Developing and Implementing a Mandatory Online Student Orientation,” that “the goals of most orientations are to initially create a sense of welcome, familiarize students with available campus resources, introduce the student to the learning management system that will be used in their course, and increase the student’s comfort level with the technology. Richland Community College found feedback from students very helpful in refining its orientation so that “first time online/hybrid students [are] successful in their online course and increase retention rates” [31]. Other orientation initiatives, as the one described in Nolan’s “Online Advising Pilot at the Community College of Vermont” [32] expand the basic introduction to online learning offered in introductory workshops or courses by assigning personal advisors to students to work with them throughout their courses of study.

As new communications affordances proliferate, institutions, professors and students are devising new protocols for getting help and communicating via multiple channels. Many course and program communication guides observe the classic guides for netiquette [33] as they incorporate formal and informal channels such as blogs, wikis, Twitter and Facebook. Although instructors typically set their own expectations for appropriate communications access beyond course management systems via mobile apps, texting and phone, more and more institutional sites offer multiple means of access for 24/7 help such as FAQs, phone, avatars, and tutorials.

In this issue, two papers make recommendations about orienting students to new roles as digital learners and digital citizens.

- In “Defining the Role Adjustment Profile of Learners and Instructors Online” Burkle and Cleveland-Innes explain that learning online includes socializing students to a new online role in which they become conscious of being responsible for their own learning, in effect creating online identities for behaving, acting and interacting as they “grapple with requirements, looking to their own reasoning, other students, and the instructor for direction about the right things to do.” [34].
- In “Educational Leadership in an Online World: Connecting Students to Technology Responsibly, Safely, and Ethically,” Ribble and Miller make the case for introducing students (and faculty) to the practice of digital citizenship. Because we too often forget that our

conversations and activities can be shared with unknown users without awareness of etiquette or privacy, we need to learn “the constructive, mindful use of social media enabled by digital citizenship and new-media-literacy training.” [35]

Introduction to online learning, examples

1. American Public University: “Ready when you are”

Students want relevant information— including admission requirements, tuition and fees, books and supplies, technical and proctoring requirements, and student support services— that institutions should make easily available to them before they enroll. American Public University provides these details on each program description page. Not only can students see requirements and costs, they can also see completion rates, average time to degree, and links to career services and Department of Labor forecasts for employment in degree areas [36]. The system also invites students to participate “in our community of learning by joining fellow students, faculty, staff and alumni through one of our many social networks.” [37].

2. Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia: Online Readiness Tool

The University System of Georgia shares an online readiness tool for students, open for use by other institutions via a Creative Commons License [38]. The tool helps students assess these aspects of readiness:

- Technology Experience
- Access to Tools
- Study Habits
- My Lifestyle
- Goals and Purposes
- Learning Experience

3. SmarterMeasure™ Learning Readiness Indicator

A commercial tool based on research about student success and adopted by many institutions comes from SmarterMeasure™ [39]. The tool measures readiness and generates an individual report to students and institutions on several weighted indices:

- Individual Attributes - motivation, procrastination, willingness to ask for help
- Life Factors
- Learning styles
- Technical Competency
- Technical Knowledge
- On-screen Reading Rate and Recall
- Typing Speed and Accuracy

Individual reports back to students include free resources for refreshing and developing skills to improve readiness scores.

4. University of Maryland University College: Test Drive

University of Maryland University College offers prospective students insight into the experience of learning online by taking a free introductory course “to help you decide if UMUC is a match for your education goals” [40].

5. S.I.D.E. Road: Long Beach City College

S.I.D.E. Road [41] offers prospective students on-demand access to video orientations and features a scavenger hunt so students can return to refresh their skills.

Step by step instructions for technical "HOW TOs"
Time management tools
Online helpdesk and phone support for LBCC DL students
Types of DL courses available in LBCC
Skills for success: technical and time management

Equipment you need
Choosing the right course for you
Procrastination learn methods to avoid it
Success factors in DL courses
Library resources and tools
LBCC online student services
Tutorials, practices, and interactive simulations

6. Quinnipiac University Online and Learning Center

Quinnipiac University [42] recognizes the online students have multiple commitments and encourages them to overcome commonly encountered roadblocks via short, on-demand videos and activities that help motivate time-management and progress towards goals. The segments include:

Family Interest

Short Writing Assignments

Weekends

Prioritizing Tasks

- Minimum technology standards are established and made available to students.
- The institution provides guidance to both students and faculty in the use of all forms of technologies used for course delivery.
- Before starting an online program, students are advised about the program to determine if they have access to the minimal technology required by the course design.
- Throughout the duration of the course/program, students have access to appropriate technical assistance and technical support staff.
- Student support personnel are available to address student questions, problems, bug reporting, and complaints.

Quality Scorecard indicators

C. Support students' use of technology

Technology support, examples

1. Online Support + Web 2.0 = Access + Availability: SUNY Delhi

At the State University of New York Delhi, students have easy access to technical requirements and support via its always open portal:

A one-stop shop for online instructors and learners to get important information about learning management systems, search for their own answers, drop-in to live walk-in support, make contact to live help via instant messaging or a free phone call, or submit a help ticket. Using mostly freely available Web 2.0 tools and some PHP programming, the portal brings together RSS, Twitter, a documentation wiki, DimDim (for screensharing), GoogleVoice and GoogleCalendar to provide users an easy way to efficiently get help and up-to-date information about systems and available technicians. The help portal is distributed to other institutions in a Creative Commons-licensed package that which they can use as a template to build their own portal. [43]

2. Learning Asset Technology Integration Support Tool (LATIST): George Mason University

Designed to be adaptive, scalable, extensible, and interoperable, LATIST is a flexible and customizable platform for any learning organization that uses technology to support online and distance learning. Faculty and students can use it to choose technologies or learn to use technologies they are required to use. LATIST encourages user interaction by embedding capabilities such as tagging, saving, sharing, and uploading within the tool to create a personal learning environment [44].

3. Information Technology Blog: American Sentinel University

To keep students and faculty abreast of technology advances, American Sentinel University's Information Technology Blog [45] provides career and industry news, tips and information specific to information technology and computer science professionals and students. Students and faculty may share up-to-the-minute news and questions about technology.

4. Learning Ventures: University of Toledo

The University of Toledo [46] posts a detailed complaint process for in-state and out-of-state students that includes links to policies and paths for grievances to the institution and to state agencies. Students may consult by phone, email or in person for guidance about processes on a variety of topics, including:

Final grade appeals	Allegations of misconduct by other students
Appeals of academic integrity sanctions	Appeals of state residency classification for tuition purposes
Complaints regarding discrimination or harassment	Appeals of decisions made by the Graduate School
Appeals of student conduct recommendations and actions	

D. Provide ongoing support for learning, research, resources and guidance

- Students are provided with access to training and information they will need to secure required materials through electronic databases, interlibrary loans, government archives, new services and other sources.
- Students are provided relevant information: ISBN numbers, suppliers, etc. and delivery modes for all required; instructional materials: digital format, e-packs, print format, and so on to ensure easy access.
- Students have access to effective academic, personal, and career counseling.
- Student support services are provided for outside the classroom such as academic advising, financial assistance, peer support, and more.
- Tutoring is available as a learning resource.
- Policy and process are in place to support ADA requirements.

Quality Scorecard indicators

Several papers in this issue examine new modes of support for learning and guidance with special attention to feedback from learners. The papers provide students' views about their experiences and preferences for ebooks, eportfolios, self-paced assisted learning, industry/academic mentoring, and mobile learning.

Kissinger examines "The Social & Mobile Learning Experiences of Students Using Mobile E-books" [47] finding not only do students save on the cost of books but ebooks also are useful for constructivist and collaborative learning.

Denton and Wicks give insights from faculty and students on "Implementing Electronic Portfolios through Social Media Platforms: Steps and Student Perceptions" [48].

Reddy et al. "*U-Pace* Instruction: Improving Student Success by Integrating Content Mastery and Amplified Assistance" [49].

Alden "Accommodating Mobile Learning in College Programs" [50] examines what students want more in mobile applications and recommends institutional strategies for prioritizing implementation of mobile applications.

Khan and Gogos report on "Online Mentoring for Biotechnology Graduate Students: An Industry-Academic Partnership," and describe the arrangement of pairing students with mentors

from the biotechnology industry. The mentoring relationships “bridge the gap between industry and academia, providing a remarkable career development opportunity for students while building a strong community of professionals” [51].

Some institutions provide tutoring services as a contractual agreement with commercial tutoring providers for a number of prepaid hours per student , with additional hours available for additional fees. Others, like the wizards program at Mercy College [20], arrange peer-to-peer tutoring with students who have done well online and understand how to overcome learning barriers. Still others use analytics to track progress and combine automated reports with human intervention and advising.

Ongoing support for learning, research, resources and guidance, examples

1. Online Library: Empire State University

At Empire State University [52], “collections are entirely online and our services are delivered to our users wherever they are by Internet, telephone and even mail and UPS [53]. Students can get help with citation formatting, evaluating web resources, obtaining research materials and access to archives. Links to resources for research and guidance are provided for academic integrity, areas of study, career resources center, peer tutoring, bookstore, math assistance, online tutoring, study skills tutorials and workshops, writing assistance, and writing resource center.

Services are available in person, by phone, chat, email, text, or consultation and include:

- Copyright
- Interlibrary Loan
- Using the Library with Mobile Devices
- @ Home Library Workshops

2. Students’ Union Tutors: University of Calgary

The University of Calgary, through its Student Union, enables students to serve as tutors or to find a tutor who will help students with difficult subject matter or to prepare for exams [54].

3. eAdvisor: Arizona State University

At Arizona State University, eAdvisor monitors student progress, automatically alerts them when they show signs of struggling, provides academic resources including progress audits and degree maps and advising committees, and uses personalized tools to advise students to ensure “they get off to a good start on day one and stay on track towards graduation” [55].

4. Mentors: Western Governors University

At Western Governors University, in addition to an enrollment advisor and course subject matter experts, each student is assigned a personal mentor. The mentor evaluates the student’s educational background and work experiences and meets regularly throughout the duration of program to ensure that the student is successfully developing competencies and directs the student to learning resources the student requires [56].

5. Educational Equity: Fostering Diversity at Penn State

The Pennsylvania State University Commitment to Persons with Disabilities affirms that

Achieving full participation and integration of individuals with disabilities requires the cooperative efforts of all departments, offices and personnel of the University. To this end, the University will continue to strive to achieve excellence in its services and to assure that its services are delivered equitably and efficiently to all of its members.

Its office of disability services [57] provides links to people, policies and support via quick links to:

- Office for Disability Services, Staff Directory categories
- Documentation Guidelines for all disability Services for Students with Temporary

Impairments at Penn State

Disability Information and Resources (DIR) at Penn State

Interpreting and/or Captioning Requests for Penn State University non-academic events and/or courses

Scholarship Information

Penn State's Commitment to Persons With Disabilities

Accessible Map of University Park Campus

Construction Alerts for University Park Campus from the Office of the Physical Plant

III. CONCLUSION

As education enters an era in which students are able to mix and match delivery modes according to their own preferences, social and student engagement and support services must aim for more interactive, personalized, and always available access. As higher education invents new, more responsive systems for students, providers can help each other advance by sharing practices and benchmarking progress through services such as the Quality Scorecard.

IV. ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Kaye Shelton, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership in the College of Education's Center for Doctoral Studies at Lamar University. Previously as the Dean of Online Education for Dallas Baptist University, she led the development and ongoing operations of the online education programs with over 55 majors and degrees offered fully online. She is certified as an online instructor, teaching online since 1999, and she is also an online education consultant. Her education includes an M.S. in Education emphasizing Online Teaching and Learning from California State University-East Bay and a PhD in Educational Leadership (Higher Education) from the University of Nebraska. She has published numerous articles and chapters in the field of online education, including a book entitled *An Administrator's Guide to Online Education*. Winner of two exemplary online course awards, a Sloan-C Effective Practice award for her recent research and the NCPEA Morphet Dissertation award, she has spoken at numerous conferences and workshops, regarding the creation of an online education program and the best practices for teaching online and faculty support. She has also served as an advisor regarding online education programs for several peer institutions.

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VI. APPENDIX: EXCERPTS FROM REGIONAL CRITERIA

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Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC). Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (On-line Learning) [2]

4. Curricula for the institution’s online learning offerings are coherent, cohesive, and comparable in academic rigor to programs offered in traditional instructional formats.

Course and program structures provide schedule and support known to be effective in helping online learning students persist and succeed.

5. The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its online learning offerings, including the extent to which the online learning goals are achieved, and uses the results of its evaluations to enhance the attainment of the goals.

The institution sets appropriate goals for the retention/persistence of students using online learning, assesses its achievement of these goals, and uses the results for improvement.

7. The institution provides effective student and academic services to support students enrolled in online learning offerings.

Analysis/Evidence:

- The institution’s admissions program for online learning provides good web-based information to students about the nature of the online learning environment, and assists them in determining if they possess the skills important to success in online learning;
- The institution provides an online learning orientation program;
- The institution provides support services to students in formats appropriate to the delivery of the online learning program;
- Students in online learning programs have adequate access to student services, including financial aid, course registration, and career and placement counseling;
- Students in online learning programs have ready access to 24/7 tech support;
- Students using online learning have adequate access to learning resources, including library, information resources, laboratories, and equipment and tracking systems;
- Students using online learning demonstrate proficiency in the use of electronic forms of learning resources;
- Student complaint processes are clearly defined and can be used electronically;
- Publications and advertising for online learning programs are accurate and contain necessary information such as program goals, requirements, academic calendar, and faculty;
- Students are provided with reasonable and cost-effective ways to participate in the institution’s system of student authentication.

Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools [3]

Standard 9

Student Support Services

The institution provides student support services reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution's goals for students.

Fundamental Elements of Student Support Services

An accredited institution is expected to possess or demonstrate the following attributes or activities:

- a program of student support services appropriate to student strengths and needs, reflective of institutional mission, consistent with student learning expectations, and available regardless of place or method of delivery;
- qualified professionals to supervise and provide the student support services and programs; procedures to address the varied spectrum of student academic and other needs, in a manner that is equitable, supportive, and sensitive, through direct service or referral;
- appropriate student advisement procedures and processes;
- if offered, athletic programs that are regulated by the same academic, fiscal, and administrative principles, norms, and procedures that govern other institutional programs;
- reasonable procedures, widely disseminated, for equitably addressing student complaints or grievances;
- records of student complaints or grievances;
- policies and procedures, developed and implemented, for safe and secure maintenance of student records ;
- published and implemented policies for the release of student information; and
- ongoing assessment of student support services and the utilization of assessment results for improvement.

Optional Analysis and Evidence

- analysis of the adequacy of the institution's technological infrastructure to support the resource needs of distance education activities, and consideration of how learning outcomes determine the technology being used;
- analysis of the adequacy of technological assistance and support to both student and faculty in distance education;
- evidence of how the institution assures that students and faculty have sufficient technological skills and those information literacy skills that are necessary to access and to use effectively the information resources available at a distance;
- analysis of institutional processes to evaluate the appropriateness, efficiency, and effectiveness of its distance education operations; or review of articulated expectations for and the effectiveness of interaction between faculty and students and among students. analysis of the appropriateness and effectiveness of student services available to students at a distance (admissions, financial aid, registration, advisement, counseling, tutoring, placement, etc.);
- review of published materials, including analysis of the extent to which there is a complete and accurate description of the instructional delivery systems utilized, learning formats, prerequisites for participation, expected learning, and completion and any other requirements;

New England Association of Schools and Colleges

Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (NEASC-CIHE) [4]

4.7 The institution ensures that students use information resources and information technology as an integral part of their education. The institution provides appropriate orientation and training for use of these resources, as well as instruction and support in information literacy and information technology appropriate to the degree level and field of study.

North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

The Higher Learning Commission (NCA-HLC) [5]

Criterion Three. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support

The institution provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

The organization's learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.

3.D. The institution provides support for student learning and effective teaching.

1. The institution provides student support services suited to the needs of its student populations.
2. The institution provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for directing entering students to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.
3. The institution provides academic advising suited to its programs and the needs of its students.
4. The institution provides to students and instructors the infrastructure and resources necessary to support effective teaching and learning (technological infrastructure, scientific laboratories, libraries, performance spaces, clinical practice sites, museum collections, as appropriate to the institution's offerings).
5. The institution provides to students guidance in the effective use of research and information resources.

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) [6]

2.A.12 Academic policies—including those related to teaching, service, scholarship, research, and artistic creation—are clearly communicated to students and faculty and to administrators and staff with responsibilities related to these areas.

2.A.13 Policies regarding access to and use of library and information resources—regardless of format, location, and delivery method—are documented, published, and enforced.

2.A.15 Policies and procedures regarding students' rights and responsibilities—including academic honesty, appeals, grievances, and accommodations for persons with disabilities—are clearly stated, readily available, and administered in a fair and consistent manner.

2.C.2 The institution identifies and publishes expected course, program, and degree learning outcomes. Expected student learning outcomes for courses, wherever offered and however delivered, are provided in written form to enrolled students.

2.D Student Support Resources

2.D.1 Consistent with the nature of its educational programs and methods of delivery, the institution creates effective learning environments with appropriate programs and services to support student learning needs.

2.D.2 The institution makes adequate provision for the safety and security of its students and their property at all locations where it offers programs and services. Crime statistics, campus security policies, and other disclosures required under federal and state regulations are made available in accordance with those regulations.

2.D.3 Consistent with its mission, core themes, and characteristics, the institution recruits and admits students with the potential to benefit from its educational offerings. It orients students to ensure they understand the requirements related to their programs of study and receive timely, useful, and accurate information and advising about relevant academic requirements, including graduation and transfer policies.

2.D.4 In the event of program elimination or significant change in requirements, the institution makes appropriate arrangements to ensure that students enrolled in the program have an opportunity to complete their program in a timely manner with a minimum of disruption.

2.D.5 The institution publishes in a catalog, or provides in a manner reasonably available to students and other stakeholders, current and accurate information that includes:

- a) Institutional mission and core themes;
- b) Entrance requirements and procedures;
- c) Grading policy;
- d) Information on academic programs and courses, including degree and program completion requirements, expected learning outcomes, required course sequences, and projected timelines to completion based on normal student progress and the frequency of course offerings;
- e) Names, titles, degrees held, and conferring institutions for administrators and full-time faculty;
- f) Rules, regulations for conduct, rights, and responsibilities;
- g) Tuition, fees, and other program costs;
- h) Refund policies and procedures for students who withdraw from enrollment;
- i) Opportunities and requirements for financial aid; and
- j) Academic calendar.

2.E Library and Information Resources

2.E.1 Consistent with its mission and core themes, the institution holds or provides access to library and information resources with an appropriate level of currency, depth, and breadth to support the institution's mission, core themes, programs, and services, wherever offered and however delivered.

2.E.2 Planning for library and information resources is guided by data that include feedback from affected users and appropriate library and information resources faculty, staff, and administrators.

2.E.3 Consistent with its mission and core themes, the institution provides appropriate instruction and support for students, faculty, staff, administrators, and others (as appropriate) to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness in obtaining, evaluating, and using library and information resources that support its programs and services, wherever offered and however delivered.

2.E.4 The institution regularly and systematically evaluates the quality, adequacy, utilization, and security of library and information resources and services, including those provided through cooperative arrangements, wherever offered and however delivered.

2.G.6 The institution provides appropriate instruction and support for faculty, staff, students, and administrators in the effective use of technology and technology systems related to its programs, services, and institutional operations.

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)

Commission on Colleges [7]

2.10 The institution provides student support programs, services, and activities consistent with its mission that promote student learning and enhance the development of its students. (Student Support Services)

3.4.9 The institution provides appropriate academic support services. (Academic support services)

3.4.12 The institution's use of technology enhances student learning and is appropriate for meeting the objectives of its programs. Students have access to and training in the use of technology. (Technology use)

3.8 Library and Other Learning Resources

3.8.1 The institution provides facilities and learning/information resources that are appropriate to support its teaching, research, and service mission. (Learning/information resources)

3.8.2 The institution ensures that users have access to regular and timely instruction in the use of the library and other learning/information resources. (Instruction of library use)

3.8.3 The institution provides a sufficient number of qualified staff—with appropriate education or experiences in library and/or other learning/information resources—to accomplish the mission of the institution. (Qualified staff)

Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs [8]

4. Student Support

4a. The institution has a commitment – administrative, financial, and technical – to continuation of the program for a period sufficient to enable all admitted students to complete a degree or certificate in a publicized timeframe.

4b. Prior to admitting a student to the program, the institution:

- Ascertains by a review of pertinent records and/or personal review that the student is qualified by prior education or equivalent experience to be admitted to that program, including in the case of international students, English language skills.
- Informs the prospective student concerning required access to technologies used in the program.
- Informs the prospective student concerning technical competence required of students in the program.
- Informs the prospective student concerning estimated or average program costs (including costs of information access) and associated payment and refund policies.
- Informs the prospective student concerning curriculum design and the time frame in which courses are offered, and assists the student in understanding the nature of the learning objectives.

4c. The institution recognizes that appropriate services must be available for students of electronically offered programs, using the working assumption that these students will not be physically present on campus. With variations for specific situations and programs, these services, which are possibly coordinated, may include:

- Accurate and timely information about the institution, its programs, courses, costs, and related policies and requirements.
- Pre-registration advising.
- Application for admission.
- Placement testing.
- Enrollment/registration in programs and courses.
- Financial aid, including information about policies and limitations, information about available scholarships, processing of applications, and administration of financial aid and scholarship awards.
- Secure payment arrangements.
- Academic advising.
- Timely intervention regarding student progress.
- Tutoring.
- Career counseling and placement.
- Academic progress information, such as degree completion audits.
- Library resources appropriate to the program, including, reference and research assistance; remote access to data bases, online journals and full-text resources; document delivery services; library user and information literacy instruction, reserve materials; and institutional agreements with local libraries.
- Training in information literacy including research techniques.

- Bookstore services: ordering, secure payment, and prompt delivery of books, course packs, course-related supplies and materials, and institutional memorabilia.
- Ongoing technical support, preferably offered during evenings and weekends as well as normal institutional working hours.
- Referrals for student learning differences, physical challenges, and personal counseling.
- Access to grievance procedures.

4d. The institution recognizes that a sense of community is important to the success of many students, and that an ongoing, long-term relationship is beneficial to both student and institution. The design and administration of the program takes this factor into account as appropriate, through such actions as encouraging study groups, providing student directories (with the permission of those listed), including off-campus students in institutional publications and events, including these students in definitions of the academic community through such mechanisms as student government representation, invitations to campus events including graduation ceremonies, and similar strategies of inclusion.

Western Association of Schools and Colleges

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (WASC-ACCJC) [9]

Standard II: Student Learning Programs and Services

B. Student Support Services

The institution recruits and admits diverse students who are able to benefit from its programs, consistent with its mission. Student support services address the identified needs of students and enhance a supportive learning environment. The entire student pathway through the institutional experience is characterized by a concern for student access, progress, learning, and success. The institution systematically assesses student support services using student learning outcomes, faculty and staff input, and other appropriate measures in order to improve the effectiveness of these services.

S2B. The institution recruits and admits diverse students who are able to benefit from its programs, consistent with its mission. Student support services address the identified needs of students and enhance a supportive learning environment. The entire student pathway through the institutional experience is characterized by a concern for student access, progress, learning, and success. The institution systematically assesses student support services using student learning outcomes, faculty and staff input, and other appropriate measures in order to improve the effectiveness of these services.

S2B1. The institution assures the quality of student support services and demonstrates that these services, regardless of location or means of delivery, support student learning and enhance achievement of the mission of the institution.

2.B.2 The institution provides a catalog for its constituencies with precise, accurate, and current information concerning the following:

a. General Information

Official Name, Address(es), Telephone Number(s), and Web Site

Address of the Institution

- Educational Mission
- Course, Program, and Degree Offerings
- Academic Calendar and Program Length
- Academic Freedom Statement
- Available Student Financial Aid
- Available Learning Resources
- Names and Degrees of Administrators and Faculty

- Names of Governing Board Members

b. Requirements

- Admissions
- Student Fees and Other Financial Obligations
- Degree, Certificates, Graduation and Transfer

c. Major Policies Affecting Students

- Academic Regulations, including Academic Honesty
- Nondiscrimination
- Acceptance of Transfer Credits
- Grievance and Complaint Procedures
- Sexual Harassment
- Refund of Fees

d. Locations or Publications Where Other Policies May be Found

S2B3. The institution researches and identifies the learning support needs of its student population and provides appropriate services and programs to address those needs.

S2B3a. The institution assures equitable access to all of its students by providing appropriate, comprehensive, and reliable services to students regardless of service location or delivery method.

S2B3c. The institution designs, maintains, and evaluates counseling and/or academic advising programs to support student development and success and prepares faculty and other personnel responsible for the advising function.

S2B3d. The institution designs and maintains appropriate programs, practices, and services that support and enhance student understanding and appreciation of diversity.

S2B3e. The institution regularly evaluates admissions and placement instruments and practices to validate their effectiveness while minimizing biases.

S2B3f. The institution maintains student records permanently, securely, and confidentially, with provision for secure backup of all files, regardless of the form in which those files are maintained. The institution publishes and follows established policies for release of student records.

S2B4. The institution evaluates student support services to assure their adequacy in meeting identified student needs. Evaluation of these services provides evidence that they contribute to the achievement of student learning outcomes. The institution uses the results of these evaluations as the basis for improvement.

S2C

Library and other learning support services for students are sufficient to support the institution's instructional programs and intellectual, aesthetic and cultural activities in whatever format and wherever they are offered. Such services include library services and collections, tutoring, learning centers, computer laboratories, and technology development and training. The institution systematically assesses these services using student learning outcomes, faculty input, and other appropriate measures in order to improve the effectiveness of the services.

S2C1a. The institution supports the quality of its instructional programs by providing library and other learning support services that are sufficient in quantity, currency, depth, and variety to facilitate educational offerings, regardless of location or means of delivery.

Relying on appropriate expertise of faculty, including librarians and other learning support services professionals, the institution selects and maintains educational equipment and materials to support student learning and enhance the achievement of the mission of the institution.

S2C1b. The institution provides ongoing instruction for users of library and other learning support services so that students are able to develop skills in information competency.

S2C1c. The institution provides students and personnel responsible for student learning programs and services adequate access to the library and other learning support services, regardless of their location or means of delivery.

S2C1d. The institution provides effective maintenance and security for its library and other learning support services.

S2C1e. When the institution relies on or collaborates with other institutions or other sources for library and other learning support services for its instructional programs, it documents that formal agreements exist and that such resources and services are adequate for the institution's intended purposes, are easily accessible, and utilized. The performance of these services is evaluated on a regular basis. The institution takes responsibility for and assures the reliability of all services provided either directly or through contractual arrangement.

S2C2. The institution evaluates library and other learning support services to assure their adequacy in meeting identified student needs. Evaluation of these services provides evidence that they contribute to the achievement of student learning outcomes. The institution uses the results of these evaluations as the basis for improvement.

Western Association of Schools and Colleges

Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (WASC-ACSCU)

2.3 The institution's student learning outcomes and expectations for student attainment are clearly stated at the course, program and, as appropriate, institutional level. These outcomes and expectations are reflected in academic programs and policies, curriculum, advisement, library and information resources, and the wider learning environment.

2.4 The institution's expectations for learning and student attainment are developed and widely shared among its members, including faculty, students, staff, and where appropriate, external stakeholders. The institution's faculty takes collective responsibility for establishing, reviewing, fostering, and demonstrating 2.13 Criteria for Review

2.10 The institution collects and analyzes student data, disaggregated by demographic categories and areas of study. It tracks achievement, satisfaction, and campus climate to support student success. The institution regularly identifies the characteristics of its students and assesses their preparation, needs, and experiences.

2.11 Consistent with its purposes, the institution develops and assesses its co-curricular programs.

2.12 The institution ensures that all students understand the requirements of their academic programs and receive timely, useful, and regular information and advising about relevant academic requirements.

{GUIDELINE: Recruiting and admission practices, academic calendars, publications, and advertising are accurate, current, complete, and are readily available to support student needs.

2.13 Student support services, including financial aid, registration, advising, career counseling, computer labs, and library and information services, are designed to meet the needs of the specific types of students that the institution serves and the curricula it offers.

2.14 Institutions that serve transfer students provide clear and accurate information about transfer requirements, ensure equitable treatment for such students with respect to academic policies, and ensure that such students are not unduly disadvantaged by transfer requirements