

Chapter 1

International Quality Standards Application to Administrative Processes of Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Beyond accreditation of academic programs, higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world are interested in applying international quality-management standards to improve student satisfaction, increase effectiveness and efficiency, and gain competitive advantage. Many universities have benefited from the application of international quality-management standards, particularly ISO 9001, in their processes. Since ISO offers generic standards for organization of any size, this chapter explains how these standards can be applied to administrative processes of HEIs. The definition and indicators of quality in higher education is examined from a global perspective, and a detailed analysis of ISO 9001-2015 standard is provided with examples and explanations for each clause of the standard. The chapter includes evidence for the benefits of adopting ISO standards, comparison with other international standards, and a list of additional readings to provide an evidence-based, up-to-date handbook of quality management for administrative units of HEIs.

INTRODUCTION

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit. -Aristotle

The processes of higher education institutions (HEIs) can be evaluated under two major categories: academic and administrative. The functions such as education, training, research, and development are mostly conducted by academicians, whereas functions such as student services, resource management, maintenance, and operations are conducted by administrative staff. For academic programs, there are regional and global accreditation agencies that set the standards and regulations to ensure quality. Administrative functions, on the other hand, are generally evaluated as business functions of a HEI. While

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there is a great accumulation of knowledge on academic quality such as curriculum development and research procedures, administrative processes are often overlooked. This chapter provides an overview of quality management in administrative processes of universities and similar higher education institutions, and examines them as service organizations. HEIs have regular business processes such as accounting, finance, and facility management, as well as specific processes such as student enrollment, library, and housing services.

The International Standards Organization (ISO) introduced ISO 9001 standards to help organizations achieve excellence through stronger customer focus and improved business performance. The implementation of quality standards in higher education has resulted in increased student and stakeholder satisfaction as well as efficiency, and consistency in operations, credibility, competitiveness, and sustainability for the whole organization (Dumond & Johnson, 2013; Prakash, 2018). Adopting these standards to services and administrative processes requires a systematic and holistic approach to university operations. This chapter provides background information about quality assurance in HEIs and examines the implementation of ISO 9001-2015 standard in administrative process of these institutions. The risk-based approach and continual improvement philosophy of this standard is explained with examples. In addition, the role of leadership in quality management is emphasized and recommendations are provided for university administrators for monitoring and managing risks, and continuously improving the processes of their units as well as the institution. Based on internationally recognized definitions and indicators of quality in higher education, the implementation of ISO 9001-2015 standard is explained to guide university administrators through the process.

BACKGROUND

In the last 50 years, the number of higher education institutions increased rapidly as nations realized the importance of advanced education and training. The growth of public and private universities, as well the changing role of governments from service providers to regulators, resulted in decentralization of higher education (Ryan, 2016). Democratic countries granted autonomy to higher education institutions and allowed independent governing bodies. Governments and central education authorities enable, even encourage, the growth of current HEIs and creation of new universities or community colleges. Instead of centrally imposed quality standards, the liberal system expects that the competition in the free market, as well as the public demand, would eventually lead to rigorous quality assurance systems. Thus, governments generally expect the institutions to implement quality standards and get accreditation or certification by their own efforts. The global dynamics of education in deed are compelling universities to remain competitive and efficient. Consequently, higher education institutions create internal quality assurance units to evaluate and improve the quality of education, and check compliance with accreditation bodies (Dumond & Johnson, 2013).

Quality is an elusive, multi-dimensional and dynamic concept based on an “ever-changing pursuit of excellence” (Schindler, Puls-Elvidge, Welzant, & Crawford, 2015, p. 4). Some researchers categorized quality in higher education in terms of educational quality and administrative quality (Lola, 2013). Educational quality refers to quality in academic processes such as teaching and research. Administrative quality, on the other hand, refers to stakeholder satisfaction about infrastructure, services, and administrative processes. In order to increase satisfaction of stakeholders, HEIs should define, measure, and assure quality in both categories. This chapter focuses on administrative quality and provides a holistic

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