Chapter 20
Evidencing Quality:
Using the Sloan–C Quality Scorecard

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In an era of tightening institutional budgets, ever increasing online enrollments and greater calls for accountability from multiple directions, the need for online program administrators to continually assess the quality of their overall operations has never been greater. But even vigilant administrators have had difficulty defining "quality" and were unable to benchmark to other programs, as standards for quality varied. To address this daunting task, a research-based standard assessment tool known as the Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Education Programs was developed. The primary goals of this case are to provide a brief overview of the scorecard highlighting the key areas of the quality indicators and the scoring protocol and present practical applications for this research-based assessment tool as evidenced through the administration of the scorecard by three online administrators at four institutions. By focusing on the ways in which different administrators at diverse institutions (public and private, large and small) used the Sloan C Quality Scorecard to benchmark their online operations against a standard, we are able to illustrate how continuous improvement opportunities, impacting on both learning effectiveness and program improvement, can be implemented at the program or institutional level.

SETTING THE STAGE

What is the Quality Scorecard?

In an effort to fill a gap in the literature and provide a practical tool for the evaluation of quality of online education programs in higher education, *The Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Education Programs* was developed through a systematic research process in 2010. Adopted by the Sloan Consortium (Sloan-C), an organization dedicated to quality online education, as their recommended framework for program assessment, the Sloan-C Quality Scorecard offers a process for determining areas of quality and improvement needs from an administrator's perspective and may also be used for strategic planning and online program development. The Sloan-C Quality Scorecard has also been used as a tool to support accreditation requirements.

The Sloan-C Quality Scorecard was the result of a six-month Delphi Study conducted by Dr. Kaye Shelton using experts throughout the U.S. The Delphi method of research, developed by the Rand Corporation in the early 1950s by Norman Dalkey and Olaf Helmer (1963), was used to gain statistical consensus from experts in online education administration as "it replaces direct confrontation and debate by a carefully planned, anonymous, orderly program of sequential individual interrogations usually conducted by questionnaires" (Brown, Cochran, & Dalkey, 1969, p. 1). In fact, the Delphi method is often used for consensus on topics or decisions considered to be subjective and that usually do not have a single correct solution. It also prevents groupthink since the topic experts are never together at one time, and are usually anonymous.

Because the strength of a Delphi study is related to the qualifications of the experts selected to participate (Rossman & Eldredge, 1982), the sampling frame of online education administrators in higher education was identified by Sloan-C through a gatekeeper process. For the study, 43 panel members participated out of the 76 invited experts. Table 1 shows the institutional classification for the panel members. More than 83% of the panel members had nine or more years of experience in the administration of online education programs. Of the 43 panel members, 56% were from large public institutions.

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