*e*NEWSLINE

Management Education News from AACSB International

Developing an Online Program with the AACSB Participant Standards in Mind

The August/September 2011 *eNEWSLINE* article, "**Developing an Online Program with the AACSB Accreditation Standards in Mind**" was the first part of a series of *eNEWSLINE* articles exploring the eligibility procedures, as well as corresponding strategic management, participant, and assurance of learning (AoL) standards with regard to online program development. To continue on the topic, participant standards 6, 7, and 8 are explored below.

Participant Standards

Standard 6: Student Admission
The policies for admission to business degree programs offered by the school are clear and consistent with the school's mission.

Regardless of the delivery method (whether classroom or online), it is important to ensure that student admissions policies are consistent with the school's mission. In some instances, schools significantly alter admissions processes and requirements specifically for online programs. However, these types of alterations are not always aligned with the school's strategic objectives, thus creating inconsistencies in intent and outcomes. Admission policies for online programs should always reflect a school's strategy and be consistent with its mission. The objective is to have admissions policies and processes that "result in an entering student body that supports the achievement of the school's mission."[1] If online programming is expected to be a significant program delivery model with a different admission profile, a revision of mission and strategy should be considered.

The student admissions policies for online programs also should be clearly stated. For example, if a school has online program admissions policies that differ from classroom-based programs, the variances should be clearly communicated to stakeholders through the school's website and other materials. All policies that are created should be followed. If changes are made to these policies, they also should be clearly communicated to stakeholders—particularly students.

Standard 7: Student Retention
The school has academic standards and retention practices that produce high-quality graduates. The academic standards and retention practices are consistent with the school's mission.

Standard 7 requires that schools have academic standards that are consistent with their missions, as well as processes that evaluate student progress, provide early identification of retention issues, intervene with support where appropriate, and separate students from programs if necessary. This standard also requires that schools have retention-support services available to assist students.

In many instances, online programs are viewed as less challenging than traditional delivery methods. This is why it is particularly important to have established academic standards for your online programs. The academic standards that you create should be consistent with your school's mission and other program standards. The standards also should allow for the creation of high-quality graduates.

So much of a student's success in an online program is determined by their dedication to independent study. Therefore, developing practices that support retention in online environments can be difficult. To assist with this, some schools have created more frequent practices and additional academic standards specifically to help ensure that students stay on track and complete their online programs. Additionally, one of the advantages that online learning platforms provide is an increased ability to individually monitor student progress through electronic methods. Therefore, schools often find that the right platform can be extremely helpful in tracking progress and diagnosing possible retention issues.

Standard 8: Staff Sufficiency-Student Support
The school maintains a staff sufficient to provide stability and ongoing quality improvement for student support activities. Student support activities reflect the school's mission and programs and the students' characteristics.

Since online programs have less face-to-face interaction and often are attended by students that do not live near a campus, student support activities are critical. Student support activities may be provided by faculty, staff, or a combination of the two. The individuals that are chosen to manage such activities should be able to perform the following functions:

- *Academic Assistance:* Students have personalized interactive resources available for out-of-class assistance with course materials and assignments
- *Academic Advising:* Students have personalized interactive resources available for guidance in planning and implementing their academic programs
- *Career Advising:* Students have personalized interactive resources available for guidance in choosing and pursuing career paths

These types of abilities will greatly benefit students of online programs. For example, if an online finance student is having difficulty with valuations or other models, the ability to receive assistance outside of the learning environment by means of telephone, video chat, or a personal meeting will greatly enhance their experience. Standards 6, 7, and 8 can be challenging to meet when developing an online program. The best way to ensure that your new program aligns with these standards is to develop student-related processes and policies that meet these requirements when the program launches. It is much easier to create a program with the standards already built in than to try and change policies and processes after your program has launched.

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[1]AACSB International. Business Accreditation Eligibility Procedures and Standards. Standard 6.