



Professional Policy and Practices for Assessing Distance Education Courses

Amanda E. Major (amanda_major@live.com) and Tricia J. Stewart (Alabama State University)
S. Raj Chaudhury and Betsy A. Gilbertson (Auburn University)

Distance education courses encompass a variety of delivery modes and technological advancements that often encroach on new territory for many Universities. In a review of the literature, researchers and practitioners have developed various ways to assess the quality of distance education courses (Bangert, 2008; Berridge, Penney, & Wells, 2012; Dittmar & McCracken, 2012). A professionalism approach ensures that key stakeholders have a voice in the way distance education courses evolve for enhanced student learning. Professionalism (or accountability standards upheld by an academic professional community) can guide quality assurance in distance education courses (Schuck, Gordon, & Buchanan, 2008). Below are our recommendations from a literature review and a case of adopting assessments.

- Align the mission of the university, accreditation standards, departmental key standards, and curriculum with course components (Ives, McAlpine, & Gandall, 2009; Singh, 2012).
- Establish a community of practice involving peer assessments (such as Quick checks or peer assessments using Quality Matters) (Parietti & Turi, 2011; Shulte, 2009), in which peers use predefined criteria, perhaps a rubric, which are aligned with the faculty members' professional development plan or assessment plan of the course.
- Motivate students to complete course assessments 2-3 weeks in advance, with a few, pertinent questions, in at least two locations, and multiple reminders (Henckell, 2007; Norris & Conn, 2005).
- Use a team approach (between faculty members and peers or the teaching and learning specialists) to assess the evaluability of course syllabi (Singh, 2012). This involves cross-referencing standards with course objectives, creating a logic model of the course, mapping outcomes to course components and grading, enabling research question creation and an assessment study design.
- Using a team approach co-assess outcomes of distance courses (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006) early and after the course ends (Henckell, 2007) for publication or winning grants (Singh, 2012).

Course assessments can align institutional, professional, and faculty members' autonomous goals to enhance student learning, among other benefits.

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