OLC Member Profiles: Focused on Quality

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

"The OLC Quality Scorecard is grounded in research, best practices and expert opinion."

Debbie Thorne,
Associate VP for
Academic Affairs,
Texas State University

Ensuring quality standards and continuous improvement of Texas State University's online programs

Debbie Thorne of Texas State University recognized an ongoing need to assess and advance the quality of their online initiatives. That's just one of the reasons they joined and chose to partner with the Online Learning Consortium (OLC) in 2010.

To address the goals around the quality of their online programs, Texas State took advantage of the OLC Interactive Quality Scorecard, a powerful online benchmarking tool that any university may use to self-assess 75 indicators of quality in online education programs and services.

According to Debbie, Texas State completed this self-assessment and tied the results to expectations of its regional accreditor, SASSCC.

The Quality Scorecard results, coupled with accreditation standards, provide the focal point for the recommendations and decisions made by the University's Distance and Extended Learning Steering Committee. She also noted that the committee has taken action to improve several elements of Texas State's online education program and will continue working through these focal areas for several years.

"The Quality Scorecard is grounded in research, best practices and expert opinion," Debbie said, "so I know the University is well-served by implementing the self-assessment process and demonstrating our continuous improvement processes and outcomes to accreditors."

WSU WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

Mark Porcaro,
Executive Director of
Online Learning,
Wichita State University

"The Scorecard serves as a national baseline to show us how we benchmark against online learning best practices."

Benchmarking online program success and supporting accreditation for Wichita State University

Mark Porcaro joined Wichita State University (WSU) as Executive Director of Online Learning when they only had a handful of online programs. His sole focus was to expand the online learning infrastructure and ensure program success.

Working closely with WSU faculty and staff, this new group created 16 new online undergradute programs in Business, Health, Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Education.

Early in 2007, their accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission, had approved their initial offerings but noted a thin infrastructure to support the online programs and requested a plan to improve.

To ensure full accreditation, and to support a successful roll out of WSU's fully online programs, Mark sought out a 'best practices' tool to benchmark how they were doing and to make sure they were headed in the right direction.

The solution: the OLC Interactive Quality Scorecard, an online tool to help assess, organize and measure quality efforts by category – and store Justification and supporting artifacts/ evidence – to, ultimately, produce a report that can be used to support accreditation.

"The OLC Quality Scorecard gives us a perspective on what areas are on track as well as a framework for where we should focus our efforts," Mark said. "It serves as a national baseline to show us how we benchmark against online learning best practices."

"Having that benchmarking tool really helped us shape our plan and see what we're doing right and where we still need to improve."

OLC ONLINE LEARNING™ CONSORTIUM

For more information about the OLC Quality Scorecard, visit onlinelearning-c.org/scorecard