

Executive Summary for OASIS: Online Academic Success Initiative at Sandhills Sandhills Community College

The purpose of Sandhills Community College's QEP is to improve the academic performance of distance learning (DL) students by ensuring course quality and enhancing online courses. The college will accomplish this through OASIS: Online Academic Success Initiative at Sandhills. OASIS employs two separate, but complementary strategies to accomplish the goal of improving the academic performance and the academic environment in DL.

Strategy One: Online Course Standards is the first and most comprehensive strategy of the QEP. This initiative is built around a set of course standards developed by the QEP Implementation Team. These Online Course Standards include a hierarchy of Basic requirements, Enhanced course standards, and Exceptional standards, all of which are built on best practices supported by a thorough review of the literature. Specifically, course standards focus on good instructional design, consistent and well organized content, and increased interaction among faculty and students (Swan and Matthews 2012, Ragan 2007, Shea, Li, and Pickett 2006).

Over the five-year OASIS initiative, the college will require the review of all DL course sections and will require each section to meet at least the minimum Basic level of course standards. An important component of establishing a formal set of guidelines is that for the first time in the college's history, course quality will not only be monitored by academic department chairs or coordinators, but all online courses will be subject to review by a team. Current campus practice is that individual department chairs and program coordinators are responsible for ensuring quality in their respective online courses. Confirmation that an online course meets these Basic requirements will now be extended, and department chairs and program coordinators will have the support of an Online Course Review team comprised of a certified DL peer reviewer, a department chair or program coordinator, and a content specialist. Baseline data on indirect measures will be compared to data gathered after each course is reviewed and scored by the Online Course Review team to see if consistency among courses impacts student outcomes such as pass and retention rates or course satisfaction. The college will also analyze data to look for differences in outcomes among courses certified at three different levels: Basic, Enhanced, or Exceptional as scored by the review teams.

Strategy Two: Cohort of Exceptional Courses is the second QEP initiative. It focuses on selecting three courses annually during the first three years of the initiative and revises those courses so that each online course section is scored as an Exceptional course in the Online Course Standards developed in Strategy One. Before and after the course is revised to Exceptional standards, student learning outcomes (SLOs) and related assessment criteria will be closely aligned between course sections. Baseline data collected before the course revision and data collected after the revised courses meet Exceptional standards and are taught will indicate whether enriched course standards have a positive impact on student learning.

These two strategies together are expected to have a dynamic and synergistic effect on direct and indirect measures of assessment of student learning and should result in improved quantitative and qualitative outcomes. Together, these strategies support the mission of the college to provide educational opportunities of the highest quality to all the people of the Sandhills and to reinforce the college's commitment to increase access to higher education through the alternate delivery of courses.

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