Quality in distance education

The cycle of e-learning development

1. Lone Rangers
2. central project grants
3. rapid unco-ordinated expansion
4. focus/policies/regular funding
5. quality and sustainability

Overview

Different perspectives on quality
Quality from the learner’s perspective
Quality from the provider’s perspective
Quality from the ‘sponsors’ perspective
Why is this an issue?

Quality from learner’s perspective

Meets learners’ needs:
• acceptance of qualification (brand name?) - get jobs
• clear what program gives and delivers on it
• good service: learner focused, convenient, flexible
But: students don’t know what they don’t know
Quality from provider’s perspective

added value of professional DE: high quality at reasonable cost
• clear academic goals
• instructional design
• project management
• accurate budgeting
• evaluation and maintenance

1. Content
2. Instructional design
3. Media production
4. Delivery of teaching
5. Student administration
6. Cost-effective management

Clear academic goals

who is your target group? what learning outcomes?
academic goals for agricultural, industrial or knowledge-based society?

Academic goals

e.g. supporting goals of knowledge-based society
• critical thinking,
• knowledge management,
• personal responsibility
• collaborative learning
+ discipline-based content
Best practices

Vision of how to teach
Curriculum re-design to exploit benefits of technology
Instructional design
Team approach: SMEs, instructional designers, Web programmers
Project management: set resources (time, money)

Best practices

Instructional design:
• identify learning outcomes/competencies
• assign competencies to media (classroom, lab, online)
• control student workload
• activities (self-tests, discussion, web searches, group assignments)

Project management

establish projects
work in a team
• professor + course developer + web designer
schedules/budgets/product funding linked to project management

Course developers

• instructional design
• scheduling/tracking/commissioning work
• managing budgets
• course maintenance
• course meetings and minutes
What is a course developer?

A new knowledge worker
project manager
instructional designer
B.Sc. in informatics
Masters of Education
taking Ph.D., specializing in
learning objects

media production

Professionals in media production:
• print design
• A/V media
• web design
Quicker and better than students or professors

Student support

If e-learning for teaching, then
administrative services must
become web-based too
Administration managers must
be involved

Student administration

recruitment/marketing/fund-raising/alumni
admission/registration/book
sales/online fee payments
student records, class lists, grades
an integrated e-strategy
(www.estrategy.ubc.ca)
Integrating teaching and administration

the seamless Web:
• class-lists/grades/e-mail addresses
portals:
• student self-management
• e-portfolios

Quality management of distance education

Priorities and new developments
Liaison with academics
Choice of platform/standards (learning objects)
HR policies (faculty/support staff)
Intellectual property
Co-ordination and communication

Why is quality an issue in DE?

Seen by academics as second best
Attempt to control the unknown
But what about quality of face-to-face teaching?
Need to apply same quality standards to ALL teaching

Why is quality an issue in DE?

Attempts by government for greater accountability
In the end: quality needs to be assessed by measuring what students have learned
May be many different ways to get to quality learning