Evaluating the Effectiveness of Distance Education Programs

Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Evaluation
April 2021
“Distance education is a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous.”

- Distance Education Policy Statement (last revised Sept, 2020)

• Thus, for the purpose of the annual assessment process, DE programs are those delivered through distance education technology. Programs delivered face-to-face at an approved off-campus instructional site do not have to submit a separate report.

• DE programs would be those officially approved for DE/online/internet delivery in CARS (either synchronous or asynchronous).

• Majority is defined as over 50% of the curriculum.
“The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its on-line learning offerings, including the extent to which the on-line learning goals are achieved, and uses the results of its evaluations to enhance the attainment of the goals.”

- Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (On-line Learning) (last revised Sept 2020)

- Beyond the annual program assessment plan and report, there is a second report for DE programs specifically focused on the unique mode of delivery and overall learning experience.

- This review has the same overall components – a plan, results, and actions based on results.
1. General Information:
   - Name of the DE Program
   - Anticipated delivery during AY21-22 (synchronous, asynchronous, both)
   - If synchronous, location of students

2. Sources of Data to be Used:
   - *During the upcoming academic year, what data will be used to explicitly exam the effectiveness of the DE program given its unique mode of delivery?*

** Due April 30, 2021 **
“Assessment of student learning follows processes used in onsite courses or programs and/or reflects good practice in assessment methods.”

- Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (On-line Learning), Examples of Evidence (last revised Sept 2020)

- Achievement of identified PLOs is important; comparisons across modes of delivery or with similar programs is key.

- Comparisons of achievement of course-level learning outcomes in online courses/sections v. face-to-face courses/sections could be used here potentially.

* From SACSCOC Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (On-line Learning), point 5 *
“Student course evaluations are routinely taken and an analysis of them contributes to strategies for course improvements.”

- Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (On-line Learning), Examples of Evidence (last revised Sept 2020)

- Comparisons of means for standardized items across face-to-face v. DE courses (i.e., those delivered through technology, either synchronous or asynchronous).
  - This course helped me learn concepts or skills as stated in course objectives/outcomes.
  - Feedback in this course helped me learn.
  - The instructor fostered an effective learning environment.
  - The instructor’s teaching methods contributed to my learning.
  - The instructor encouraged students to take responsibility for their own learning.
Consider adding additional items specifically for DE courses/sections focused on the unique learning environment:

- I felt like a part of the class (not isolated, alone, or cut off from the instructor and other students).
- Sufficient opportunities for interacting with the instructor were available to me.
- Technical support and related resources were available to ensure I had access to the class and course materials.
- Materials provided in [eCampus/Canvas] were consistently available in a timely manner.
- The instructor recognized the unique needs of distance learners and planned accordingly.
- Open-ended questions might ask if students encountered unique challenges given the mode of delivery; recommendations for strengthening the course given the unique mode of delivery.
Graduation surveys are administered to all graduating seniors and master’s students. Compare responses between students graduating in traditional (face-to-face) programs v. DE programs.

- Use and value of academic and student support services.
- Contribution of the program to developing competencies/skills.
- Perceptions of their preparation for the job market.
- Perceptions of climate and inclusion.
- Quality of the curriculum, teaching, opportunities to collaborate, etc.
- Overall program quality.
- Overall academic experience.
- Overall experience at TAMU.
DE students specifically are asked three questions:

- What (if any) online resources or services could TAMU improve upon to augment the experience of distance education students?
- Were there any services or resources that were either not available or easily accessible that you needed to help you succeed in your program? If so, which ones?
- Are there specific services, resources, or activities that you would recommend to help distance education students feel more connected to TAMU?

** Survey items and access to department-specific results available at https://assessment.tamu.edu/Menu/Reports **
Program level outcomes to consider comparing with traditional (face-to-face) programs:

- Persistence* (% of students who continue pursuing the same program or remain in the same department)
- Retention* (% of students who continue pursuing a program at TAMU, but in a different department or college)
- Graduation Rates
- Time to Graduation

Be specific with respect to how these outcomes will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the DE program given its unique mode of delivery. Focus on comparisons.

* If your discipline defines these differently, simply be sure to include the definition being used.
• “DE programs are assessed the same way all programs are assessed.”
  • IF using assessment of PLOs, be sure to identify comparator(s) [similar face-to-face program(s)].
• “Completion of the program.”
  • IF using graduation rates, be sure to identify comparator(s) [similar face-to-face program(s)].
• “Retention.”
  • IF using retention (or persistence) rates, be sure to identify comparator(s) [similar face-to-face program(s)].
• “SCEs or surveys.”
  • IF using SCEs or survey items, be sure to identify which items and how the data will be used.

*REMEMBER – the focus of this report is on evaluating the effectiveness of the program given its unique mode of delivery*
3. Findings & Implications

- Actual mode of delivery during AY21-22 (synchronous, asynchronous, both)
- What are the specific findings derived from the data sources described in the plan?
- Do the findings demonstrate the overall effectiveness of the program given its unique mode of delivery?
- If not, what actions are being taken to improve the overall effectiveness of the program [as a DE program]?

** Due December 16, 2022 **
https://assessment.tamu.edu/Academic-Programs/Distance-Education-Program-Effectiveness

Contact us at assessment@tamu.edu