Proposal Draft for Comment CQAL: Collaborative for Quality in Alternative Learning

A Strada Education Network Grant Project
Led by the Presidents' Forum at Excelsior College
and the Distance Education Accrediting Commission

Written by Tina Goodyear, March 2017

Sent Comments by April 15, 2017 to tgoodyear@excelsior.edu

<p style="text-align:center; color:#a8301a;">Proposal Draft for Comment</p>

CQAL: Collaborative for Quality in Alternative Learning

Introduction

If they have not done so already, alternative non-institutional based education providers arguably hold the potential of disrupting higher education by offering students a cost- and time-saving pathway to a degree or credential. A recent recognition of this emerging sector via the United States Department of Education's (USDE) Educational Quality through Innovative Partnerships (EQUIP) program has brought national attention to these innovative providers. At the same time, the EQUIP program has highlighted the various Quality Assurance Entities (QAEs) that seek to serve alternative providers and institutions. Missing from the conversation, however, is an agreed upon definition of quality in the sector, as well as baseline standards to guide the work of both the providers and the QAEs. Assuming that traditional accreditation lacks the breadth to serve the interests of innovators in the sector, how, then, can quality be defined and assigned in the alternative sector, and who is qualified or authorized to make such a determination?

Amidst myriad proposals for alternative accreditation models, a more collaborative approach among established and experienced organizations in higher education has the potential to create a better way to serve the alternative providers, QAEs, institutions, employers, and ultimately, students. In late 2015 and over the course of 2016, a group of established, recognized organizations and institutions well-versed in quality assurance,

alternative learning, assessment of student learning, accreditation and online access, convened to discuss the critical issue of balancing quality assurance with innovation in this emerging sector.

The Collaborative for Quality in Alternative Learning (CQAL), an effort spearheaded by the Presidents' Forum and the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC), with participation from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), Quality Matters (QM), Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS), American Council on Education (ACE), Consortium for College Equivalency (CACE), MarylandOnline (MOL), Online Learning Consortium (OLC), and the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA) has formed to provide guidance and thought-leadership for the higher education community. With continued input from all stakeholders – students, providers, institutions, accreditors, and quality assurance entities – CQAL has the collective experience to create a viable model for quality assurance in this emergent sector.

<div style="border:1px solid">

The Current Landscape

Alternative or innovative providers are a growing sector of post-secondary education composed of companies and organizations that offer structured learning experiences or proficiency examinations untethered from the traditional college and university setting. In general, these providers offer certificates, badges, certifications and/or credit recommendations for the successful completion of courses, modules, or time-limited programs. They are fairly recent entrants to the field of non-collegiate educational offerings, joining the ranks of large corporations, the military, municipalities (e.g. fire and police training), and other workplace-based programs in providing what many now consider college-level learning outside of the traditional classroom setting.

</div>

Alternative providers may be focused on career development, such as programs offered by IT coding bootcamps, or general education, such as courses provided by StraighterLine or SOPHIA Learning. They are varied in their approach, focus, delivery modality, and cost. Khan Academy, for example, provides free online content to enhance students' understanding of key concepts in a variety of subjects. The Saylor Academy offers hundreds of free, online, self-paced courses with a fee-based proctored exam option that provides access to college credit recommendations while others, like StraighterLine, follow a fee-based subscription model for their online, instructor-guided general education courses allowing students to work at their own pace.

More and more, alternative providers are finding ways to link their learning experiences directly to colleges and universities affording their students a self-paced, cost-saving pathway to degree completion. StraighterLine, for example, boasts partnerships with just over 100 institutions, and purports to have saved students and taxpayers over $123 million dollars[1]. StraighterLine, SOPHIA Learning, Study.com, Coursera, and Saylor Academy have also secured routes to academic credit for their offerings by undergoing third-party academic credit equivalency reviews by the American Council on Education (ACE)[2] and/or the National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS)[3]. More recently, bootcamps such as Flatiron, created to fast-track students to jobs in IT, have aligned themselves with an academic institution under EQUIP[4].

Quality Assurance Entities (QAE) include agencies and organizations, outside of regional or program level accreditation, that provide course or program level evaluations of nontraditional learning experiences resulting in an assignment of quality in the form of an academic credit recommendation, a formal sanctioning, an award, or recognition by a national or trade association. For example, among the oldest of such organizations, the American Council on Education (ACE) and the National Program for Noncollegiate Sponsored Instruction (NPONSI, now NCCRS), have been evaluating non-collegiate courses and training programs and awarding college credit recommendations beginning with military training in 1942 and later, corporate training, in 1973[5].

Other established organizations have adapted their proven quality assurance models to serve alternative providers. Quality Matters, launched in 2003 with a Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grant to provide reviews of online courses offered by both traditional and nontraditional colleges and universities, later added K-12, and has recently expanded its services to include reviews of non-credit continuing education courses and MOOCs through modification and adaptation of its original evaluation rubric[6]. Yet other organizations and companies have created successful pilot programs to embrace the nontraditional or alternative provider, such as the Distance Education Accrediting Commission's (DEAC) Approved Quality Curriculum (AQC)[7] model and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation/CHEA International Quality Group's (CHEA/CIQG) Quality Platform[8]. In addition, the Online Learning Consortium (OLC) has moved forward with its Digital Courseware Instructional Practice rubric which is a subset of quality indicators from the QCTIP – Quality Course Teaching and Instructional Practice scorecard[9]. A newer entrant, Entangled Solutions, offers a different approach to quality assurance for innovative providers by tracking student metrics focused on job placement and salary outcomes[10].

Why Now? The Need for Quality Assurance

Despite a rich history, alternative pathways to credential are only recently enjoying national attention. There are several contributing factors likely giving rise to a proliferation in nontraditional providers and a renewed interest in alterative pathways leading to a degree or credential:

■ The US experienced a drastic plummet in its global college completion ranking.[11]

■ A struggling economy in 2008 with high unemployment rates gave rise to the number of nontraditional age students (i.e., above age 25) pursing a credential in order to re-enter the workforce.[12]

■ The rising cost of college tuition and high student loan default rates increased consumer interest in alternatives to higher education.[13]

■ A disconnect between institutions' and employers' perception of career readiness in recent graduates indicated a need for employers to look beyond institutions for skilled workers.[14]

■ The advent of new learning technologies increased access and scalability.[15]

One such technological innovation, however, which garnered national attention by making headlines in the New York Times among other prominent media spots, may have been the catalyst: The Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). If it failed in its threat to disrupt education, the MOOC, with its prestigious beginnings at Harvard and MIT, did amplify the conversation about the recognition of alternative learning as a viable option to increase access and decrease time and cost to completion. The concern about low completion rates and rampant cheating, ultimately, stirred up a national discourse about quality in alternative learning experiences. Even those pioneers in the prior learning field were skeptical about the MOOC's potential for disruption. As the late Dr. John Ebersole, former president of Excelsior College in Albany, NY, remarked, "While few question the quality of the instruction . . . issues of learning outcome assessment and student identification are of concern. When tens of thousands of participants are involved, those

issues are magnified."[16] Despite this controversy, several MOOCs have been awarded credit recommendations by the American Council on Education (ACE)[17], which according to its website, may be recognized by 1,800 institutions. This reach, and the reputation of the early MOOC creators, may be the critical factors that have turned alternative or non-collegiate experiences into a topic of national conversation.

The conversation gained further momentum in 2013 when President Obama urged education leaders to "adopt one or more of these promising practices that we know offer breakthroughs on cost, quality or both: award credits based on learning, not seat time, and recognize prior learning."[18] Then, in October of 2015, the USDE released EQUIP, a still nascent experimental sites initiative. EQUIP extends access to student financial aid to innovative providers partnered with accredited institutions. The program lifts some restrictions on approved provider-institution partnerships and allows access to roughly $5 million in Pell grants and an additional $12 million in the form of subsidized and unsubsidized loans to students participating in these approved partnerships with regionally accredited institutions.[19] In order to qualify, the alternative providers must submit to a quality assurance evaluation by an approved QAE and meet the approval of the respective regional accrediting agency. This controversial initiative is limited to eight approved partnerships; still, the emergence of recognized QAEs establishes a need for inquiry, research and thought-leadership about the idea of quality and the role of quality assurance in the alternative sector.

Framing the Challenge

While it is difficult to provide a succinct definition of alternative education providers because their services, business models and products are varied, *most* providers share several characteristics that will frame the discussion on quality assurance:

- Alternative providers can not offer academic credit or confer degrees;

- Alternative providers are not eligible to access federal or state student aid; and,

- Alternative providers are not held to a third-party quality review process.

In the same way that these providers differ, the quality assurance review processes available to them vary as well. The available QAEs may arguably offer valuable and credible services, but baring any standard definition of quality or baseline standards to assure quality in the sector, they may differ in the outcome or return-on-investment they can offer to students and providers. Thus, if alternative providers find it advantageous to seek partnerships with colleges and universities to benefit their students, they are left to navigate not only a fairly complex system of post-secondary education and accreditation, they must also determine which existing quality review process best fits their model, thus enabling them to facilitate transfer agreements with institutions and create needed pathways for their students. This creates several layered problems:

- Some providers may eschew quality assurance reviews, which can be cost and time prohibitive, and in doing so, can potentially offer a lower priced, quick-to-market, lower quality product that might be more appealing to unwitting students; and,

- Innovation may be stifled if providers, with little information to go on, select quality review processes that are costly and time-consuming yet offer no recognition by institutions and/or employers; and,

- Most importantly, students, institutions, and employers have no reliable way to assess the quality and validity of the provider and the learning experiences being offered.

While it may be counterintuitive to suggest that a lack of oversight in the sector is actually impeding innovation, too often knee-jerk promulgation of regulatory controls to address consumer protection concerns or institutional protectionism result in barriers to the adoption of innovative approaches and hinder access for students. Those students are likely ones who have not been well served in traditional higher education.

National Focus on Alternative Pathways and Quality Assurance

The need for a collaborative effort among higher education entities to determine quality in alternative providers of higher education – beyond the realm of assigning academic credit equivalencies – has already been established. A commission formed in August 2014, *The Commission on Quality Assurance and Alternative Higher Education*, convened by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the Presidents' Forum, recommended three paths to accomplish third-party quality review of "these important new providers." The twenty-six members of the commission – representing regional and program level accreditors, faculty groups, presidents from traditional and nontraditional colleges and universities, higher education associations, credit recommendation services and innovative providers suggested three possible approaches:

- A voluntary cooperative effort among defined members of similar existing organizations;

- A voluntary service offered by an existing external third-party association, or

- A new external third-party created solely for this purpose.[20]

As early as 1974, Morris Keeton, whom many regard as the father of prior learning assessment, addressed the need for an alternative quality assurance approach for nontraditional institutions; his recommendations, however, prophesized the emergent need

for quality assurance in this new sector. He called for the formation "of one or more consortia of nontraditional institutions to facilitate collaborative development of minimum standards." He added, "The technical work of clarification of alternative standards and of their relevance to alternative purposes is a prerequisite to genuine improvement."[21]

More recently, there have been several calls to action from noted educators, policy makers, employers and credentialing entities in regard to quality assurance and alternative accreditation as reauthorization of the Higher Education Act looms. In an August 2016 report, The Information Technology & Innovation Foundation proposed the need for Congress to help push higher education to an alternative accreditation system, thus allowing students to have alternative ways of demonstrating knowledge and skills outside of degree programs. The group proposes the establishment of a process to accredit organizations that provide certifications and encourages federal agencies and the private sector to recognize alternative certifications in hiring decisions as well as to consider extending student funding for alternative providers.[22] David Bergeron and his colleagues at the New America Foundation propose an alternative accreditation system that would encompass different types of educational providers and focus primarily on outcomes (i.e., student results and the provider's financial stability) with oversight by the federal government.[23] Another alternative proposal comes from the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation through its work with the country's largest employers as they struggle to find highly skilled employees to fill critical vacancies. No longer confident in relying on degrees from regionally accredited institutions as a guarantee of a student's knowledge and skill level, the group proposes approaches for expanding the employer role in higher education accreditation and offers a blueprint for developing an independent, employer-driven ranking system, taking into account all providers and credentialing bodies including, but not limited to, degree granting institutions.[24]

Debates about the need for a separate accreditation system for nontraditional providers aside, the need to first establish baselines for quality in the sector is paramount. According to the CHEA/CIQG Quality Platform, all stakeholders will benefit from having

a recognized process for assessing quality in nontraditional offerings: students and the public, federal and state governments, employers, colleges and universities, and quality assurance and accrediting organizations.[25] Despite its obvious benefits, *reliable* information is only possible when there is agreement about the components of an education program that determines its quality. Although accreditation is widely accepted as an arbiter of quality in US higher education, the current model was designed in the later part of the 19th century by and for institutions[26], and therefore, does not easily accommodate alternative offerings nor meet the unique needs of that sector. The scope and focus of accreditation are a combination of institutional inputs and outcomes with an emphasis on infrastructure, whereas most alternative providers do not rely on traditional inputs and costly infrastructure (e.g., libraries, faculty) to provide education and training.

Even within the realm of traditional education and accreditation, quality is notoriously difficult to define. Without an agreed upon definition or shared understanding of quality, however, it will be impossible to define ways to "assure" it.[27] A review of the literature confirms the lack of a shared understanding of quality and indicates the problems this lack of a unified approach can cause as the government has increased its interest in quality assurance and the work of the regional and program level accreditors.[28] The same concern should be shared within the alternative sector of post-secondary providers, particularly amid discussions of attaching federal student aid for student learning certified by alternative providers.

As noted earlier, requiring alternative providers to conform, by extending the accreditation model to them, will be counterproductive to innovation. Yet, just as institutions are under pressure to maintain quality and reputation in order to increase enrollments, innovative providers, as they gain traction particularly with employers, will undoubtedly feel the same pressure and will voluntarily seek some form of self-regulation. This dilemma leads back to the original framing questions: **How can quality be defined and assigned in the alternative sector, and who is qualified or authorized to make such a determination?**

CQAL: Collaborative for Quality in Alternative Learning

Regardless of sector, the crux of a quality assurance process can be framed by three seemingly simple questions:

- Are you doing the right thing and are you doing it right?
- How does one prove that it is being done right?
- Who decides what is right?[29]

It is the last question, perhaps, that highlights the challenge facing the alternative provider sector and provides the impetus for the emergence of CQAL. Rather than propose an alternative accreditation model, the founding members of CQAL determined a need for thought-leadership and a collaborative approach to streamline the quality review process for alternative providers, provide information for institutions and employers seeking partnerships with such providers, and create a more transparent process for all stakeholders, most importantly, for students. Working under the assumption that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to providing quality assurance, the existing quality review processes can be leveraged, by working together, to best serve the sector.

Thus, the founding CQAL members have dedicated themselves to create a framework that will accommodate the varied quality assurance platforms already available rather than create a separate or competing entity to serve this purpose in the sector. The group began its work by comparing current quality review processes resulting in a crosswalk that, while still reliant on inputs, can be used as a starting point for a model that will accommodate but balance a growing focus on employment and salary outcomes as a measure of quality (Appendix B). With ongoing input from stakeholders, CQAL can continue to provide guidance and adopt models of quality assurance review that will accommodate innovation and allow for transparency.

Ultimately, CQAL's overarching goal is to facilitate the acceptance of innovative offerings by institutions and employers by offering a unified "strength in numbers" effort. It is important to note that this strength comes from the decades of collective experience the

founding organizations share in assessing various modes and methodologies for measuring learning outcomes and relevancy to credential.

To begin addressing the critical issue of quality assurance, CQAL members have identified initial activities to include:

- Disseminate information about available quality review approaches to alternative programs or providers;

- Advance the discussion about the need for a set of national principles for quality and for quality review processes and work to create agreed-upon standards;

- Enhance credibility and confidence in alternative learning experiences that have met quality assurance standards;

- Establish shared thought leadership and expertise in the quality assurance field; organize stakeholder convenings;

- Provide support, develop policy initiatives, and acquire and distribute grant monies for member organizations to further quality assurance research and activities.

Although a concrete model is still in the planning phase, it has been discussed that, with adequate funding, a sustainability plan, and input from alternative providers and additional QAEs, CQAL could extend beyond a thought leadership role and provide a valuable service to providers, students, institutions, and the USDE.

Suggested models include:

1. CQAL could serve as a "Better Business Bureau" model for QAEs wishing to have their services recognized as meeting shared quality standards and sustained best practice in the field. This model would also benefit students, regulatory bodies, academic institutions and, by extension, their regional and program level accreditors, by offering a base level of

quality assurance. In addition, this structure facilitates partnership opportunities with alternative providers.

2. In a model similar to one that CHEA employs in serving accrediting agencies, CQAL could serve QAEs and act as a much-needed liaison with the USDE, the higher education community, and perhaps employers, to facilitate wide-spread acceptance of alternative learning experiences that have successfully undergone a quality assurance review.

3. Lastly, CQAL could provide a type of "concierge" service linking alternative providers with available quality review processes that best serve their needs and the needs of their students.

Conclusion

Much like accreditation emerged from institutions voluntarily establishing a mechanism that welcomed peer review and self-assessment, it is time to adopt a similar mechanism to serve the alternative education sector, to assist institutions and employers wishing to recognize and implement innovative pathways, and to protect students. As this sector continues to grow and the role of QAEs evolves, a common definition and approach to quality and quality review must come to the forefront of the national discourse. Organizations and institutions with decades of experience in evaluating alternative education and in recognizing non-collegiate learning hold the collective wisdom to lead the conversation. CQAL provides a viable, collaborative model among organizations experienced in the field of quality assurance and dedicated to promoting innovation in higher education, and it holds the promise of providing guidance and leadership in this emerging sector.

Appendix A

Founding CQAL Members

American Council on Education (ACE)

Founded in 1918, ACE is the major coordinating body for all the nation's higher education institutions, representing nearly1,800 college and university presidents and related associations. It provides leadership on key higher education issues and influences public policy through advocacy.

The American Council on Education's College Credit Recommendation Service (CREDIT®) was established in 1974 to connect workplace learning with colleges and universities by helping students gain access to academic credit for formal training taken outside traditional degree programs. With over 35,000 courses and exams reviewed, CREDIT is the national leader in the evaluation process for education and training obtained outside the classroom including courses, exams, apprenticeships, and other types of nontraditional forms of training. For 40 years, colleges and universities have trusted ACE to provide reliable course equivalency information to facilitate credit award decisions. Participating organizations include corporations, professional and volunteer associations, schools, training suppliers, labor unions and government agencies, with courses from Arabic to Waste Management.

Consortium for College Equivalency (CACE)

The Consortium for College Equivalency (CACE), created in 2015, facilitates degree completion of adult learners by developing new pathways of cooperation among adult-centered colleges and universities regarding reviews of college-equivalent learning from organized, structured learning experiences offered outside of the college setting. The six founding institutions – Thomas Edison State University, SUNY Empire State College, Excelsior College, Granite State College, Charter Oak State College, and the Community College of Vermont - developed a set of standards for the assessment of non-collegiate instruction so that other institutions may benefit from their collective experience in the field.

Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)

As a national leader, CAEL works to ensure that every adult has the opportunity for meaningful learning, credentials and employment. CAEL advocates and innovates on behalf of all adult learners, regardless of their socio-economic circumstances, to increase access to education and economic security and to develop and provide effective services and tools. CAEL works to enhance its thought leadership role through research, policy development, convening and direct work with adult learners, postsecondary education institutions, employers and government.

Council for Higher Education Accreditation/CHEA International Quality Group (CHEA/CIQG)

CHEA/CIQG is a nonprofit institutional membership organization of degree-granting colleges and universities that provides national coordination of accreditation in the United States and, through its International Quality Group, works with colleagues around the world on issues and challenges for quality and quality assurance in higher education. The Quality Platform is outcomes-based external review of alternative providers of higher education to judge their performance and quality. It is designed to equip students and the public with reliable information about the performance and outcomes of a provider's offerings. The platform may be used nationally or internationally. The model involves self-review as well as expert-based review with periodic re-examination of the provider and results in a "Quality Platform Provider" award status. The Platform differs from existing quality review efforts in that is used for reviews of higher education providers other than institutions and holds the provider (organization) accountable for outcomes in contrast to examining individual courses for credit or evaluation of individual student competencies for credit.

Distance Education Accrediting Commission – Accredited Quality Course (DEAC/AQC)

The Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC) is a private, non-profit organization founded in 1926 that operates as an institutional accreditor of distance education institutions. Accreditation by DEAC covers all distance education activities within an institution and it provides accreditation for secondary school level institutions through professional doctoral degree-granting institutions. In additional to institutional accreditation for distance education, DEAC offers an alternative form of quality assessment for individual courses offered via distance education. The DEAC's Approved Quality Curriculum or AQC is designed to accommodate non-institutional offerings of online learning, whether MOOCs, noncredit certificates, badges, or courses with credit

recommendations. AQC engages an extensive network of higher education curriculum and online learning experts. Although AQC is not accreditation, it involves a peer review process that provides meaningful, relevant feedback to distance education course providers in a manner that is consistent with the principles of accreditation.

MarylandOnline

Formed in 1999, MarylandOnline (MOL) is a consortium of 20 colleges and universities in Maryland whose mission is to advance excellence in online education. The consortium emphasizes collaborative activities and services to benefit members. MOL is one of the first consortia in the U.S. created to promote and support online education. Soon after it was established, MOL received a substantial grant from the Maryland Higher Education Commission to build and administer a train-the-trainer program that succeeded in preparing nearly 4,000 faculty throughout the state for online teaching, with a follow-on grant for faculty teams to develop shareable online learning objects. In 2003, MOL was awarded a grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education for a three-year project to create an inter-institutional process for assuring the quality of online courses. Through this grant, Quality Matters, now a nationally recognized organization, was born. MOL also launched the Certificate for Online Adjunct Teaching (COAT) program. MOL operates a Seat Bank enabling its member schools to share seats in online courses and, among its other projects, is underway in designing a leadership institute customized for emerging leaders in online education. MarylandOnline's priorities and activities are continuously refreshed as online education itself and its members' needs evolve.

National College Credit Recommendation Services (NCCRS)

National NCCRS is a nonprofit program whose mission is to increase access to higher education for working adults and nontraditional students. It fulfills this mission by evaluating courses and proficiency examinations sponsored by noncollegiate organizations, then making recommendations on the comparability of the courses and exams to college-level instruction. The NCCRS directory, College Credit Recommendation Service (CCRS) Online (www.nationalccrs.org/ccr/) is available to institutions to use as a guide in granting college credit to individuals who have successfully completed evaluated courses and examinations. Founded in 1973, NCCRS operates under the Board of Regents of The University of the State of New York, in Albany, N.Y.

Online Learning Consortium (OLC)

The Online Learning Consortium (OLC) is the leading professional organization devoted to advancing quality online and blended learning by providing professional development, instruction, research and best practice publications and guidance to educators, online learning professionals and organizations around the world. OLC is a key factor in the transformation of the digital learning field. As the leader in quality digital learning, OLC continues to find new ways to support faculty members, instructional designers, and higher education administrators who are seeking best practices and tools for advancing quality.

In 1997, the then Sloan Consortium (renamed OLC in 2014) developed the Five Pillars of Quality Online Education, the building blocks which provide the support for successful online learning. Building on that early work, OLC in recent years has developed a Suite of Quality Scorecards to support faculty and institutional implementation of quality standards at all levels. Based on a growing demand, OLC has grown its research-based benchmarks and standards of excellence to demonstrate elements of quality within a program, as well as an overall level of quality, to higher education accrediting bodies.

Presidents' Forum

The Presidents' Forum, created in 2002, is a collaborative convening body comprised of accredited institutions and national organizations that have embraced the power and potential of online distance learning to serve contemporary students. The Presidents' Forum advances innovative practice and excellence by convening institutional leaders and stakeholders to share their knowledge, learn from others' best practices, and frame recommendations for national policy. While historically Forum membership has been primarily comprised of institutions serving adult learners, membership increasingly reflects the full spectrum of higher education institutions, especially as technology transforms access and quality of post-secondary education.

Quality Matters (QM)

Quality Matters™ is a nonprofit organization that provides a collaborative and research-centered approach to quality assurance and continuous improvement for online learning. The primary components are sets of standards (Rubrics) for quality, a peer review process for applying these standards, and related professional development for instructors and other academic professionals. Quality Matters (QM) has developed and extensively used five different Rubric versions for online and blended courses including one for the alternative learning domain. In addition to a certification process for course quality, Quality Matters

has developed and is implementing four sets of standards and four distinct certifications for online programs: Online Program Design Certification, Online Teaching Certification, Online Learner Support Certification, and Online Student Success Certification all of which may culminate in an QM Exemplary Program Certification. Of these, the Online Student Success Certification is a differentiated review of outcomes customized to the identified mission and goals of the institution or organization. QM's participation as a QAE in the Department of Education's EQUIP program is centered on an expanded application of its Online Learner Success Certification.

United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA)

The United States Distance Learning Association was founded in 1987 on the premise of creating a powerful alliance to meet the burgeoning education and training needs of learning communities via new concepts of the fusion of communication technologies with learning in broad multidiscipline applications. It was the first nonprofit Distance Learning association in the United States to support Distance Learning research, development and praxis across the complete arena of education, training and communications.

The learning communities that USDLA addresses are: pre K - 12, higher ed, corporate, government, military, telehealth and home schooling. Defining distance learning as the acquisition of knowledge and skills through mediated information and instruction, encompassing all technologies and other forms of learning at a distance is paramount. The association is committed to being the leading voice for distance learning technologies representing all technologies and learning constituencies. Serving the needs of the distance learning community by providing advocacy, information, networking and opportunity is the purpose of the association.

In 2006 USDLA launched its Distance Learning Certification program which addresses 117 standards of practice focused on 3 categorical areas. USDLA/Quality Standards has a threefold goal. First, the program informs and protects the growing number of educational consumers who use distance learning. Second, USDLA/QS provides to providers both a tool and a framework for continuous improvement. Third, effective self-regulation fosters a climate more conducive to public support and continued growth. Finally, on a national and international basis the USDLA, through its mission of …supporting the development and application of distance learning, focuses on all legislation impacting the Distance learning community and its varied constituencies.

Appendix B

Common Quality Assurance Threads Among CQAL organizations

Learning Objectives/Outcomes	Curriculum and Instructional Materials	Assessment	Student Focus
Stated clearly, measurable Are appropriate for content area and delivery method Aligned with industry standards (when applicable) Aligned with college-level learning	Are current and relevant Offer rigor, depth, scope Support learning objectives Follow coherent order, scaffolds learning Prepared by course developers/instructors /mentors with appropriate qualifications	Uses methods appropriate to content area Is linked to learning objectives Offers multiple opportunities (formative, summative) Employs relevant and measurable grading criteria Includes identity verification and academic integrity measures Adheres to psychometric standards (if resulting in certification)	Offers transparent policies and processes Outlines clear expectations and outcomes Offers ease of navigation (technology, communication, resources) Provides learning support services Includes feedback loop/student evaluation Adheres to ADA compliance requirements

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

Notes

[1] http://www.StraighterLine.com

[2] http://www2.acenet.edu/credit/?fuseaction=browse.main

[3] http://www.nationalccrs.org/organizations/saylor-academy

[4] Forging new ground with US department of education to expand access to job skills training. (2016, August 16) *Flatiron News*. Retrieved from http://blog.flatironschool.com/forging-new-ground-with-us-department-of-education-to-expand-access-to-job-skills-training/

[5] http://www.nationalccrs.org/about/history

[6] https://www.qualitymatters.org/why-quality-matters/about-qm

[7] http://www.deac.org/AQC/

[8] http://www.chea.org/pdf/Quality%20Platform%20-%20Summary%20Doc.pdf

[9] https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/consult/olc-quality-course-teaching-instructional-practice/

[10] http://entangled.solutions/docs/quality-assurance-for-higher-education.pdf

[11] Lewin, T., (2010, July 23). Once a leader, U.S. lags in college degrees. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2010/07/23/ education/23college.html.

[12] Fain, P. (2014, November 18). Recession and Completion. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/11/18/enrollment-numbers-grew-   during-recession-graduation-rates-slipped

[13] Lewin, T. (2008, December 3). College may become unaffordable for most in the U.S. The *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/03/education/03college.html

[14] Grasgreen, A. (2014, February 26). Ready or not. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/02/26/provosts-business-leaders-disagree-graduates-career-readiness

[15] College 2.0: Transforming higher education through greater innovation and smarter regulation. (2011). US Chamber of Commerce Institute for a Competitive Workforce. Retrieved from https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/publication/college-20-transforming-higher-education-through-greater-innovation-smarter-regulation

[16] Ebersole, J. (2013, April 24). Toward sustainable MOOCs. The Blog. *The Huffington Post.* Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-john-ebersole/toward-sustainable-moocs_b_3116536.html

[17] Kolowich, S. (2013, February 7). American council on education recommends 5 MOOCs for credit. *The Chronicle of Higher Education.* Retrieved from https://chronicle.com/article/American- Council-on-Education/137155/

[18] https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/22/fact-sheet-president-s-plan-make-college-more-affordable-better-bargain-

[19] McNeal, M. & Wan, T. (2016, August 16). The EQUIP eight: Dept. of Ed selects partners for higher-education experiment. Ed Surge. Retrieved from https://www.edsurge.com/news/2016-08-16-the-equip- eight-dept-of-ed-selects-partners-for-higher-education-experiment

[20] Quality assurance and alternative higher education: A policy perspective. (August 2014). The Commission on Quality Assurance and Alternative Higher Education. Council on Higher Education Accreditation and The Presidents' Forum.

[21] Keeton, M. (1974). An approach to a theory of quality assurance: Remarks to the conference on quality control in nontraditional higher education. Antioch College: Columbia, Maryland, 3-5.

[22] Kennedy, J. Castro, D., & Atkinson, R. (2016, August 1). Why it's time to disrupt higher education by separating learning from credentialing. Information Technology and Innovation Foundation. Retrieved from http://www2.itif.org/2016-disrupting-higher-education.pdf?_ga=1.257619976.2079220697.1481821566

[23] Miller, B., Bergeron, D. & Martin, C. (2016). A quality alternative: A new vision for higher education accreditation. New America Foundation: Washington, DC. Retrieved from https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/reports/2016/10/06/145152/a-quality-alternative-a-new-vision-for-higher-education-accreditation/

[24] Sheets, R. & Tyszko, J. (2016). Changing the debate on quality assurance in higher education. United States Chamber of Commerce Foundation: Washington, DC. Retrieved from https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/reports/changing-debate-quality-assurance-higher-education

[25] http://www.chea.org/pdf/Quality%20Platform%20-%20Summary%20Doc.pdf

[26] Eaton, J. (2015). *An overview of US accreditation*. The Council for Higher Education A ccreditation. Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://www.chea.org/userfiles/uploads/Overview%20of%20US%20Accreditation%202015.pdf

[27] Kinser, K. (2014). Questioning quality assurance. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 168, 55-67.

[28] Schindler, L., Puls-Elvidge, S., Welzant, H., & Crawford, L. (2015). Definitions of quality in higher education: A synthesis of the literature. *Higher Learning Research Communications, 5*(3), 3-13.

[29] Lewis, R., *Principle 6: Quality and Quality Assurance Bodies* in Uvalic-Trumbic, S. (Ed.). (2016). The CIQG international quality principles: Toward a shared understanding of quality. CIQG Publication Series. Council for Higher Education Accreditation and CHEA International Quality Group, 47-54.