My Department of Education Review Experience – A DE Perspective

The notification from the Department of Education review provided an extensive list of items that were to be reviewed during their visit to our campus. Our Academic VP identified specific employees who were responsible for pulling specific information/documentation to prepare for the onsite review.

Also, we received a terminology list – to make sure that we could differentiate between Policy, Procedure, and Process/Practice. Some folks use these interchangeably, but we were told that required approval of written (and at times board approval) policies of the college. Procedures required written steps and had to be made widely available (often via links from the Policy manual. Otherwise, you were told to use the word "process" or "practices"

This document will focus ONLY on what distance education had to provide for the review – included items such as distance learning programs, faculty interactions with student, and student participation in online courses.

Preparing for the onsite visit

- List of programs that include courses offered via distance education.
  - This list included all programs that had at least one course that was offered via a blended (web-assisted), hybrid, or online format.
  - In the list, only a couple programs were not listed. For example, BLET is a fully traditional program by design.
  - The list or programs were for 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 academic years (in the process, we had to identify our definition of the academic year).
  - The list included Degrees, Diploma, and Certificates.
- Faculty interaction with students in distance education courses
  - Define the college-level expectations of faculty interaction with distance ed course and cite specific policies on this topic. Here are pieces we used to document the expectations:
    - Faculty job description – provide explicit sections of the documents and use the actual verbiage, such as required active learning methodologies, professional development requirements, and interpersonal skills expectations.
    - Faculty contract – cite the section that specified that the faculty member agrees to perform all duties and responsibilities. We also pulled the required professional development requirements in the contract.
    - Policies
      - Employee (specifically faculty) onboarding and professional development.
      - Annual performance appraisal.
      - Classroom evaluations/peer review
      - Course/program review

- - - Training materials that outline required training on pedagogy, instructional design, and teaching online.
- Student participation in online courses
    - Provide instructions or materials to introduce/guide students to participation in online courses. Here are the pieces we used to document what is provided:
        - New students
            - Welcome letter upon admission
            - Help Desk information
            - Login process for technologies such as Moodle, Aviso, Email, and Self Service
        - New student orientation
            - We offer this in 2 methods (Face-to-face and online) – provided details on how each method occurs.
            - Topics covered in the orientation (we have the same topics in both methods.
            - Tracking methodology of new student orientation within Colleague (a flag on the students account)
        - Student Bridge – a course in Moodle that provides on-demand information and tutorials for technologies used in courses. Topics include:
            - Contact information for key employees at the college (Help Desk, ADA compliance, etc.)
            - Online learning readiness
            - Intro to Moodle tutorials
                - Tour of a Course
                - Course Layouts
                - Navigating Course Objects
                - Assignments
                - Forums
            - Intro to Outlook tutorials
                - Logging into Outlook
                - Sending & Receiving Emails
                - Using Outlook Calendar
            - How to Create PDF files – a series of pages that show how to convert files such as Word or Pages to a PDF.
            - How to Convert to MS Formats – a series of pages that show how to convert files such as Pages to Word.

The onsite visit

The reviewers were welcomed by the President and Vice-Presidents and then sequestered with the supporting documentation (this was their request). As the review progressed, they met with key employees if they needed clarification or wanted a face-to-face meet with a representative. The timeline for their visit was one full week, but the review was completed in 4 days.

I was not required to meet with the reviewers. Instead, I was given a list of students in specific courses. The list was lengthy, but I did not have to pull documentation for all of the students. I was instructed to print a specific number of examples (I think it about 25 – but I've blocked out the number). I was requested to provide the documentation to the Registrar by the end of the day, but preferably within 2 hours. I was able to meet the 2-hour timeline but do admit it was a challenge.

The courses were a variety of delivery formats (blended, hybrid, and online). For the list, I was to pull a learning activity that was both substantive in the course and demonstrated academic engagement.

We keep only 4 terms in our Production site in Moodle. Once I received the list of courses, I restored the course in our Production site and then began searching for the required documentation. The restoration process was the most time-consuming portion of this process.

In addition to the learning activity, I had to pull the course syllabus. I was told by the Registrar that they were specifically looking for Title IX documentation within the syllabus (we have this as a mandatory section for all course syllabi).

The information was sent as PDF's to the Registrar. She acted as liaison with the reviewer, but I was on call in case of any questions or necessary clarifications. No follow up was needed with the reviewers, the documentation provided met and/or exceeded their expectations.