And Then There Was Light: Identifying & Filling Gaps in Online Student Services
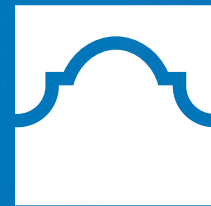
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Achieving the Dream LEADER COLLEGE

Where are we located? Who are we?

Session Outcomes

1. Explain why Alamo Colleges pursued the Quality Matters (QM) Online Learner Support Candidacy+ Certification.
2. Summarize of the QM Online Learner Support Certification.
3. Review the benefits of the QM Candidacy+ Certification for student and college.
4. Develop a Request for Participation for each college
5. Describe New Best Practices: Certification Pathway Tools.
6. Identify solutions found to close the gap of access to online support services.
7. Discuss challenges and lessons learned.

QM Program Certification & Candidacy

Outcome #1

Why Pursue QM Certification?

Persistence Rates

Online only
Some online
No online
Total

Fall-to-Fall

Fall 2014–2015: 39.2%, 52.4%, 53.2%, 51.6%
Fall 2015–2016: 38.4%, 52.2%, 51.8%, 50.4%
Fall 2016–2017: 40.9%, 53.9%, 54.7%, 52.9%

Fall-to-Spring

Fall 2014–Spring 2015: 59.7%, 75.2%, 76.3%, 74.4%
Fall 2015–Spring 2016: 59.5%, 76.2%, 76.0%, 74.2%
Fall 2016–Spring 2017: 60.8%, 77.5%, 78.3%, 76.1%

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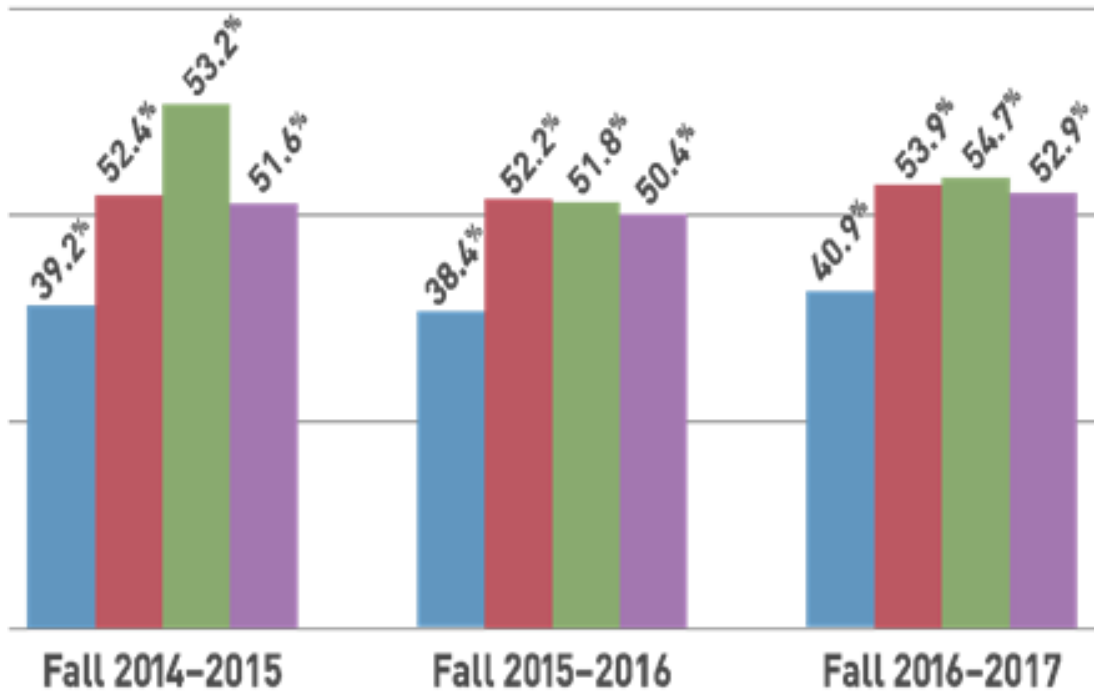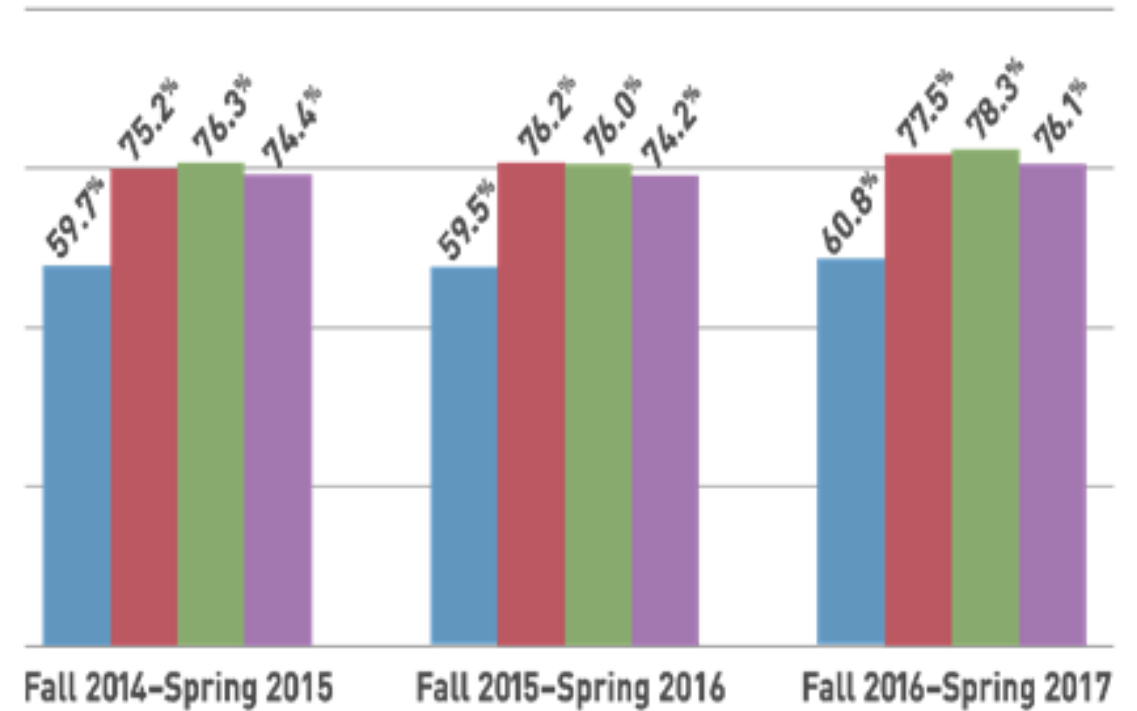
Connection Between Persistence, Student Support Services and Lack of Access

According to LaPadula (2003) students who **engage** in student **support services** tend to be more successful in persisting in and graduating from college than those who do not.

Bailey (2005) found that if institutions are to **improve persistence**, they must focus on the **factors** that distance education student's face.

Britto and Rush (2013) **identified six factors** that negatively influenced student retention & persistence were: a large course load, a lack of experience in higher education, a lack of experience with online courses, busy lives outside of coursework, a young age, and a **lack of access to technology and computers.**

Closing the gap of access to technology

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Outcome #2

Summary of Online Learner Support Certification

Online Learner Support Candidacy+ Certification

Candidacy provides a **structured and guided** way for institutions to prepare for a program review, which leads to a QM Certification in Online Learner Support.

Criterion 1

Criteria	Evidence to Submit	Annotations
1.Direct and indirect support for online learners should include remote access to the following services: • Orientation to online study • Technical support • Academic advising • Proctoring and student authentication • Tutoring • Grade appeals • Remote library access • Accessibility services • Records and registration • Financial Aid services • Billing • Institutional and student policies	Provide 1. A list of links to the listed services (and others that may be relevant), 2. An explanation of how each service supports the online learner and promotes learner success, and 3. A plan to address any identified gaps in service.	An effective response to #2 includes a brief statement from each support service regarding its goals and services for the online learner and how it meets them.

Criterion 2

Criteria	Evidence to Submit	Annotations
2. A robust process to collect, distribute, and use learner feedback to inform and improve learner support efforts.	Provide 1. A description of data collection, distribution, and feedback mechanisms to improve learner support efforts; 2. Representative survey data addressing learner satisfaction with online campus services over the past three years; and 3. Documentation of any changes in policy, organization, and resources that have been influenced by learner feedback.	It should not be assumed that raw data speak for themselves. Analysis and interpretation of the data are necessary to determine the effectiveness of support services and to pinpoint areas for improvement. A *Data Analysis Cover Sheet* is provided for this purpose.

Outcome #3

Benefits of the Program Candidacy+ Certification

Student Benefits

- Program reviews help ensure that students have **access** to **essential academic resources and support services** in an online learning environment.

- These reviews provide further evidence to current students, board members, and accreditors that the Alamo Colleges are **committed** to continuous **quality** improvement for **online learners**.

College Benefits

- The review process will **identify**, **strengths, challenges, and opportunities** in serving online learners.

- The certification would add value to the Distance Learning area of the fifth year accreditation reports.

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QM Program Certification & Candidacy

Outcome #4

Develop an Request for Participation for each college

Invitation for Colleges to Participate

Your Invited!

Identify Stakeholder/Roles

Quality Assurance (QA) Team: Group of college experts from student success and academic success who collect, review and create planning processes to address any identified gaps and solutions to fill the gaps.

Program Liaison: College representative who will upload artifacts to the QM repository, which are collected from QAT and complete any supplemental documents on behalf of their college. **(role reserved for a Dean)**

Certification Coach (CC): An Alamo Colleges Online representative who will assist each college by providing them with clarification on requirements, host round table discussions, deliver deadline reminders, celebrate victories and share learned experiences.

Role of Quality Assurance Team (QAT)

- Collect and review initial data and additional data

- Make recommendations

- Explain rationales

- Offer suggestions for improvements

Role of Program Liaison

- Prepares data reports

- Provides initial data and additional data

- Answers questions during the QM review

- May challenge/decide to accept the initial decisions

- Make amendments, if needed

Role of Certification Coach

- Provides clarification on criterion in each phase

- Submits data reports to QM

- Send reminders to PL regarding deadline(s)

- Proof data reports

- Conducts a internal mock review with PL in preparation for the submission of the comprehensive data report

- Provides guidance in QA Team meeting, if needed

Certification Criteria Documents

Check each criterion to determine the type of evidence required

1. **Annotated Program Criteria** provides

- Description of the Criterion

- Evidence to submit for each Criterion

- Annotation examples

The **Annotated Program Criteria** should be used in conjunction with the **Program Candidacy** chart by phase document.

2. The **Program Candidacy** provides

- A candidacy chart broken into three phases (each phase represents a year).

- Each phase highlights criterion and activities used to collect evidence for required data reports

Annotated Program Criteria

Program Candidacy Chart

Criterion/Criterion Component	Target Activity (TA)	Documentation	Complete ✓ Notes
Phase 1/Year 1	**Concurrent Target Activities**		
Criterion 1 – remote access to services	**TA 1** – Collect and review statements of commitment to serving online learners and any supporting policies and documents explaining how online learners are supported by each of the following units or functions: • Orientation to online study • Technical support • Academic advising • Proctoring and student authentication • Tutoring • Grade appeals • Remote library access • Accessibility services • Records and registration • Financial aid services • Billing • Institutional and student policies **TA 2** – Review statements for thoroughness and consistency and recommend any needed changes. **TA 3** – Develop or describe any existing planning process to address any gaps or deficiencies in learner support services.	Learner Support Improvement Plan	
Criterion 2 – use of learner feedback	**TA 1** – Document the learner feedback data that is collected on the support of online learners for each of the following		

Data Report & Narratives

Alamo Colleges District

Online Learner Support

Criterion Component: Phase 1/ Criterion 1- Remote Access to Services

TA 1 – Collect and review statements of commitment to serving online learners and any supporting policies and documents explaining how online learners are supported by each of the following units or functions:

- Orientation to online study
- Technical support
- Academic advising
- Proctoring and student authentication
- Tutoring
- Grade appeals
- Remote library access
- Accessibility services
- Records and registration
- Financial aid services
- Billing
- Institutional and student policies

Narrative

Evidence

Access Information for Alamo Share to view internal data.
(Login credentials will be provided upon provided by Program Liaison)

TA 2 – Review statements for thoroughness and consistency and recommend any needed changes.

TA 3 – Develop or describe any existing planning process to address any gaps or deficiencies in learner support services.

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QA Team Time Commitments

Based on Best Practices from University of North Carolina at Charlotte

- Bi-weekly one hour meetings during the first semester of the QM Program Candidacy

- Weekly one hour meetings the semester you submit your evidence to QM for the certification

- Offer meeting in two formats: face-to-face & via web-conference

Internal Mock Review

Based on Best Practices from University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Mock reviews are designed to **simulate the process** that represents the actual **QM certification program review** for online learner support.

The purpose is to identify areas for strengthening the aims, evidence, methods, and packaging the final draft to be successful.

Cloud Storage

Based on Best Practices from University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Artifacts associated with the QM Online Learner Candidacy+ Certification will be stored in Microsoft OneDrive organized by:

- College/Phase#/Criteria/Task Activity

Outcome #5

New Best Practices: Certification Pathway Tools

Certification Pathway Tools

1. ***Online Learner Support Swimlane Diagram.*** A visual representation distinguishing each stakeholder's responsibilities of processes and sub-processes.

2. ***Learner Feedback Rubric.*** Determines the level of progress units made in collecting, analyzing, and describing ways learning feedback is used to improve processes, policies, or delivery of services each year.

3. ***Remote Access to Services Rubric.*** Determines the level of progress student support units made to develop and promote statements of commitment to online students that address how remote services are provided and how services are accessed at a distance.

Certification Pathway Tools

4. ***Online Learner Support Pathway Kick-off Orientation****.* A meeting to 1) discuss the Candidacy + Program Review pathway to Program Certification; 2) review the benefits of the pathway to students and the college; 3) develop action steps to meet the pathway timeline.

5. ***College Quality Assurance Team Milestone Chart****.* Provides a snapshot of deliverables tied to each milestone along with a checkmark to recognize the completion of the milestones.

6. ***Remote Access to Services & Learner Feedback Evaluation Form****.* Guides units towards the identification of gaps in access and support of remote student services through salient questions prompt that align to unit goals to support online students.

Certification Pathway Tools

7. ***Mock-Review Team Kick-Off Orientation****. A meeting to 1) discuss the Internal Mock-Review Process; 2) review the benefits of mock-review to the college; 3) develop action steps to meet the mock-review timeline.

8. ***Online Learner Support Candidacy Progress Report.*** A quantitative summary of artifacts produced and works completed at the halfway point of the pathway in the form of an infographic.

9. ***Online Learner Support Candidacy In-Flight Status (Per Phase****). A pictorial that captures the percentage of completion in each of the three phases in addition to the final steps in the certification pathway process.

10. ***Unit Learner Feedback Survey Target Dates****. A semester development timeline for student experience surveys.

12-Month Accelerated Timeline

BEST PRACTICE

Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	Jun.	July

Aug.
- Certification Coach (CC) assists each College in submitting an application for candidacy
- CC discusses proposed timeline and the program liaison and QM team roles with VP's at SAC and SPC
- Colleges will:
  - Select a program liaison
  - Identify quality assurance team

Sept.
- Kick-off meeting hosted at each participating College: Orientation to online learner support quality assurance team at each College.
- Review annotated program criteria
- Review Program Certification Candidacy chart
- Discuss proposed timeline
- Discuss roles of program liaison & QA team
- Complete the QM Program Review workshop online (one rep from each College)
- Next Steps to prep for QA Team Meeting #1:
  - Vote on a 1, 2, or 3 Year Timeline
  - Comb the internet and identify statements of commitments for online learners
  - Choose a date for October meeting

Oct.
- QA Team Meeting #1:
  - Complete phase 1, criterion 1 of Targeted Activity (TA1 | TAPh2 | TA3)
  Criterion 1 – remote access to services
  - **TA 1** - Collect and review statements of commitment to serving online learners and any supporting policies and documents explaining how online learners are supported by each of the following units or functions:
    1. Orientation to online study
    2. Technical support
    3. Academic advising
    4. Proctoring and student authentication
    5. Tutoring
    6. Grade appeals
    7. Remote library access
    8. Accessibility services
    9. Records and registration
    10. Financial aid services
    11. Billing
    12. Institutional and student policies
  - **TA 2** – Review statements for thoroughness and consistency and recommend any needed changes.
  - **TA 3** – Develop or describe any existing planning process to address any gaps or deficiencies in learner support services
- Prepare **Data Report** for Statements of Commitment & Learner Feedback for
  - Phase 1, criterion 1 of Targeted Activity (TA1 | TA2 | TA3)

Nov.
- QA Team Meeting #2:
  - Complete phase 1, criterion 2 of Targeted Activity (TA1)
  Criterion 1 – use of learner feedback
  - **TA 1** – Document the learner feedback data that is collected on the support of online learners for each of the units listed in October:
  - Complete phase 1, criterion 2 of Targeted Activity (TA2)
  - **TA 2** – Document how the feedback informs changes in organization, policy, and practices for the support of learners.
- Prepare **Data Report** for Statements of Commitment & Learner Feedback for
  - Phase 1, criterion 2 of Targeted Activity (TA1 | TA2)
- ❖ College identifies persons to serve on their internal mock-review in April (three person review team). Mock review must meet the following prerequisite:
  1. QM peer reviewer cert

Dec.
- QA Team Meeting #3:
  - Continue the work from November
- ❖ Deadline: December 3rd by 5pm Colleges send a list of persons who will serve on their mock review to the certification coach via Alamo colleges email.

Jan.
- QA Team Meeting #4:
  - Complete phase 2, criterion 1 of Targeted Activity (TA1)
  Criterion 1 – remote access to services
  - **TA 1** – Update unit statements of commitment to serving online learners and any supporting policies and documents with any modifications of online learner support services for each unit or function previously identified.
  - Complete phase 2, criterion 1 of Targeted Activity (TA2)
  Criterion 1 – remote access to services
  - **TA 2**- Report Activity in addressing any gaps in service and closing them.
  Criterion 2 – use of learner feedback
  - **TA 1** – Continue collecting and, if needed, refining the data that are collected on the support of online learners for each unit or function previously identified.
- Prepare **Data Report** for Statements of Commitment & Learner Feedback for
  - Phase 2, criterion 1 of Targeted Activity (TA1)
  AND
  - Phase 2, criterion 1 of Targeted Activity (TA2)
- ❖ College submits names of mock-reviewers to the program liaison and certification coach.

Feb.
- QA Team Meeting #5:
  - Complete phase 2, criterion 2 of Targeted Activity (TA1)
  Criterion 2 – use of learner feedback
  - **TA 1** – Continue collecting and, if needed, refining the data that are collected on the support of online learners for each unit or function previously identified.
  - Complete phase 2, criterion 2 of Targeted Activity (TA2)
  Criterion 2 – use of learner feedback
  - **TA 2** – Record changes in organization, policy, and practices for the support of learners that are informed by learner feedback.

March
- QA Team Meeting #6:
  - Prepare **Data Report** for Statements of Commitment & Learner Feedback for
    - Phase 2, criterion 2 of Targeted Activity (TA1)
    AND
    - Phase 2, criterion 2 of Targeted Activity (TA2)

April
- QA Team Meeting #7:
  - Complete phase 3, criterion 1 of Targeted Activity (TA1)
  Criterion 1 – remote access to services
  - **TA 1** – Update, refine, and finalize with any modifications of statements of commitment to serving online learners and any supporting policies and documents about online learner support services for each unit or function previously identified.
  - Complete phase 3, criterion 1 of Targeted Activity (TA2)
  Criterion 2 – use of learner feedback
  - **TA 2** – Summarize changes in the planning process in place to address gaps in service and close them, and note any organizational changes that have resulted.
- Prepare **Data Report** for Statements of Commitment & Learner Feedback for
  - Phase 3, criterion 1of Targeted Activity (TA1)
  AND
  - Phase 3, criterion 2 of Targeted Activity (TA2)
- ❖ The Program Liaison SUBMITS a **Stage One Narrative and Evidence** form, attaching to it a series of as many documents as necessary to make the case for meeting the criteria and a narrative explaining the meaning and relevance of the documentary evidence for **each** criterion.

May
No QA Team Meeting: Mock Review in Progress

Jun.
No QA Team Meeting: Mock Review in Progress

July
- QA Team Meeting #8:
  - ❖ Structured Reflection Time

Upon receiving the results of the Mock Review, take time to discuss the following:
1. What did we learn?
2. How do we use it to improve our work?
3. What is our plan to improve our final report?

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Outcome #6

Results from Online Learner Support Certification

Solutions to Close Gap of Access

Development of an **online one-stop-shop** of **Academic & Support Services**

Solutions to Close Gap of Access

Development of an **online Support Service Experience** survey

San Antonio College Receives QM Online Learner Support Certification

Outcome #7

Challenges and Lessons Learned

ALAMO COLLEGES DISTRICT
San Antonio College

Program Liaison Perspective

Invest on tacos- it works!

Provide guidance on assessment and data analysis

- We as a group selected the PDCA framework

Build momentum

- The committee will continue to meet once a semester to share information/best practices for online learners

Provide timely feedback on information collected

- This really helped increase the quality of the work

Agree on a chart/tables format

- It takes a lot of time to format/redo charts

Keep team informed about process and progress

Be very open and honest about the gaps in the narrative!!!

- This is a continuous improvement process, it doesn't have to be perfect! The reviewers appreciated this.

Program Liaison Perspective

Challenges #1:
- Two hour QA Team: overkill; too long; certain area monopolized most of the time.

Lessons Learned #1:
- One-on-One (15 min) meeting with each area was beneficial and improved the quality of work.

Challenges #2:
- Our district had oversight over two of the twelve areas. So the ability to make decisions of these two area followed a different process pace then the other ten.

Lessons Learned #2:
- Have the right people seated at the table or the right contact connected to the discussion.

Session Activity

1. Find a group

2. In your group identify
   a) **strengths** and **opportunities** in online learner support areas, at your institution and **ways your institution may support online learners**.

3. Share with the group 1 strength, opportunity and support for online learners

An example of strengths & opportunity identified by Alamo Colleges:

Strengths- we already provided support services but we could not determine if ALL support services were accessible to online learners

Opportunity- closed the gap of lack of access to online learner support services.

How we promoted and supported online learners- created a online one-stop shop of Academic and Support Services.
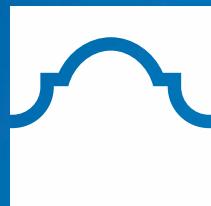
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