

**Report to the FSU Faculty Senate
From the
FSU Distance Learning Committee
For the Academic Year 2021-2022**

The FSU Distance Learning Committee (DLC) consists of the following members (with their terms):

2013-2022: G. Stacy Sirmans, College of Business, Chair
2014-2023: Charles Hinnant, College of Information
2018-2024: George Williamson, College of Arts and Sciences

Other Members:

Daniel Mears, Criminology and Criminal Justice, UPC Chair
Liz Jakubowski, Education, UCC Chair
David Johnson, Arts & Sciences, GPC Co-Chair
Ulla Sypher, Communication and Information, GPC Co-Chair

Ex officio Members:

Vice President for Academic Affairs or designee (TBA, Associate VP for Academic Affairs)
Vice President for Faculty Development and Advancement or designee
Director, Office of Distance Learning

The Charge of the Distance Learning Committee:

The Distance Learning Committee shall provide policy development, oversight, and academic advice specific to the design and implementation of Distance Learning courses and degree programs. In particular, the committee will have the following responsibilities.

- i. To propose to the Senate procedures and standards for authorization to offer courses and programs by delivery methods other than standard classroom delivery, and for enduring quality control of such course and program offerings.
- ii. To monitor the effectiveness with which the procedures and standards and standards adopted are being implemented.
- iii. To propose to the Senate modifications to existing standards and procedures as appropriate.
This committee will supplement, not supplant, the functions of other existing committees.

Over the academic year 2021-2022 the Distance Learning Committee had no issues that required holding any formal meetings. However, in summer 2021 the DLC was asked by the faculty senate steering committee to review the process of having online courses approved through Quality Matters and Ally. A primary question was “why are we not using our existing course approval process for these courses (department to college to UCC to senate)?” since the BOG indicates that online quality can be met using QM or some other equivalent method. We began our process by seeking clarification from the Office of Distance Learning (ODL) concerning the current approval process and how it came to be established as the norm. These questions were sent to Robbie Fuselier at ODL who responded promptly. Robbie’s responses seem to indicate that, although the QM review process can be time-consuming and sometimes challenging, it has the benefit of applying consistent standards to online courses. As we moved through fall 2021 and course approvals for spring 2022 online offerings were completed, the issues of using Quality Matters or Ally seemed to subside somewhat. Thus, the Distance Learning Committee took no direct action and did not make any recommended changes.

As the focus on the pandemic has now subsided, however, the upcoming 2022-2023 academic year may be a good time to develop approaches to meet the 2025 goal. An expanded report is given below.

In general, the DLC stands ready to meet if the need arises and we will be working with the faculty senate president to set an agenda and determine discussion items for the coming year. If the Faculty Senate Steering Committee, faculty senators, faculty members at large, or others have issues that they feel should be brought before the DLC, please send them to me.

Thanks to all the members of the DLC committee for their willingness to serve.

Respectfully Submitted,

G. Stacy Sirmans

J. Harold and Barbara M. Chastain Eminent Scholar in Real Estate

Full DLC Report of Course Approval through Quality Matters and Ally

In summer 2021 the DLC was asked by the faculty senate steering committee to review the process of having online courses approved through Quality Matters and Ally. A primary question was “why are we not using our existing course approval process for these courses (department to college to UCC to senate)?” since the BOG indicates that online quality can be met using QM or some other equivalent method. We began our process by seeking clarification from the Office of Distance Learning (ODL) concerning the current approval process and how it came to be established as the norm. These questions were sent to Robbie Fuselier at ODL who responded promptly. Robbie’s responses seem to indicate that, although the QM review process can be time-consuming and sometimes challenging, it has the benefit of applying consistent standards to online courses.

The first set of questions had to do with the use of Bb Ally. Robbie responded that, in their experience working with faculty developing online courses, one of the biggest challenges is meeting federal ADA accessibility requirements. Many faculty may not have had the opportunity to participate in accessibility training and those who have may still find the practice of remediating files and documents to be confusing. Finding the files and materials in need of accessibility remediation can be difficult if you are not using a screen reader or other tool that takes advantage of the additional information. Depending on the nature of the course and the amount of content, ensuring materials are accessible can be both intimidating and difficult. In 2018, ODL learned that some peer universities were having success with Bb Ally and it appeared to be a great tool to address many of the challenges FSU’s faculty were sharing. ODL initiated an ITN to learn more about Ally and other competitors in the market. Bb Ally was the only fully developed, LMS-integrated product available, and was determined by Purchasing to be a sole source. ODL submitted a Student Technology Fee proposal to fund a pilot of the software, which was reviewed and approved by an advisory committee comprised of faculty and student leaders. After the completion of a lengthy pilot and based on positive faculty feedback, Bb Ally was made available to all Canvas users in the fall of 2020. The status of the implementation was regularly shared with the Faculty Senate Technology Committee, as well as the IT Governance Council, which includes Faculty Senate representation. Bb Ally is provided as a resource to assist instructors in identifying and updating Canvas course content to meet accessibility standards. ODL’s role is to build awareness and provide training & support for the software. While ODL encourages everyone to take advantage of the tool, decisions made regarding the use of Ally are made by the colleges and faculty.

A second set of questions addressed the Florida Online Course Design Quality Initiative, primarily concerned with the institution of QM and which courses would be held to QM standards. Robbie's response first addressed how QM came to be instituted. In November 2015, the Florida Board of Governors released the 2025 Strategic Plan of Online Education, which established goals in support of *Quality, Access, and Affordability* for distance learning courses. Over the past several years, an emphasis had been placed on building the online catalog, particularly in areas of strategic interest, and increasing student enrollment and retention. Recently, a shift in focus has been made towards the *Quality* element of the strategic plan and universities will begin reporting on progress towards the following goal:

Performance Indicator

Continuing assessment of online courses to provide quality assurance and improvement using the Florida Online Course Design Quality review or an approved institutional process.

2025 Goal

100% of new and substantively revised online courses must meet Florida standards following an approved review process. Existing and continuing courses will be considered for review on no less than a 5-year cycle.

The SUS institutions are still in the early stages of pursuing this goal and some of the requirements to meet the review process are still in development. It has been established that the Quality Matters (QM) standards would be used for the evaluation of asynchronous online courses. There is an option where a university may request an alternative to QM with the following stipulation:

Non-QM Institutions

For institutions that are not QM subscribers, a formal process by which an institution may provide evidence that their quality review practices are equivalent to the Florida Quality Course Review and the Florida High Quality Course Review is being developed. Equivalency will be based upon a documentable set of standards and adherence to a review process of comparable rigor.

This option allows an institution to opt-out of subscribing to QM, but it must go through an approval process which requires a crosswalk between QM standards and the proposed equivalent process. The FL Institutional Equivalency Process was added to accommodate institutions who were not QM subscribers but had previously implemented a comparable set of standards. The FSU UCC approval process provides a syllabus review prior to the development of the course but does not include the QM standards which are implemented during the development of the course and would not be an equivalent process. Because FSU has been long-time QM subscriber and most of our training and resources incorporate the standards, it makes sense to use QM rather than develop a parallel set of standards.

The Florida Online Course Design Quality review process applies to official distance learning courses (where the direct instruction is 80% or more online). As of spring 2021, the aggregate total for the State University System shows that 6% of the online courses have passed a quality review. This low percentage shows that the SUS institutions are just getting started and there is a good deal of opportunity in determining which courses would be well suited for initial participation. At this time, FSU has not developed policy related to the implementation of the quality initiative. To encourage faculty to voluntarily participate, ODL has developed a program which includes QM training, development support, and a \$1000 stipend issued upon the successful completion of the quality review. ODL plans to offer opportunities for faculty to participate each semester.

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Respectively submitted,

G. Stacy Sirmans, Chair
FSU Distance Learning Committee