

# Accreditation and Quality in Distance Education

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In March of 2006, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education released an interesting report titled "Evidence of Quality in Distance Education Programs Drawn from Interviews with the Accreditation Community." What is interesting and important about this document is the approach used to collect information: 12 accrediting organizations were asked to identify represen-

tatives who had served on evaluation teams for schools offering distance education programs. These representatives were asked to identify "Good Practices and Red Flags." Their comments make great reading for anyone interested in identifying quality strategies for teaching and learning at a distance.

The report is organized into six sections, each dealing with various indicators of quality. The six are Mission, Curriculum, Faculty, Students, Sustainability, and Evaluation and Assessment. In each category are dozens of indicators of quality and red flags—danger signs that often indicate a weak or ineffective distance education program.

Some of the most interesting positive indicators are:

- The mission statement contains an explicit statement of the purpose of distance education;
- The regular faculty have oversight of the distance education curriculum;
- The regular faculty are actively involved in course design;
- There is a strong and active faculty development process;
- The university provides instructional design support for distance education;

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