Evaluating Online Programs: Challenges and Strategies

Presenters:
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1. **Learning Objective(s) of the presentation:** Participants will:
    a) understand what technological tools and research methods are available to evaluate an online program,
    b) understand the challenges of increasing the scientific rigor of online evaluation techniques,
    c) understand and apply strategies of what to evaluate and how to evaluate the results of an online program evaluation,
    d) explore strategies to address barriers in online evaluations through both examining novel qualitative and quantitative methods.

Abstract for program and website:
Evaluation of online programs is an elusive blend of art and science. The science is based on a mix of technological opportunities and sound research techniques. This session explores how online education can be evaluated and how the results of the evaluation can be used to guide the growth of improvement of a program.

Description of the session:

Ongoing success of an academic programs requires careful evaluation. While the evaluation process of traditional programs is well documented in the books and journal articles, the evaluation process of online programs is evolving as the programs themselves evolve. Increased scrutiny from the Department of Education as well as the need for regional academic and professional accreditation has increased value of a meaningful and efficient evaluation process for online colleges, schools, and programs. Building evaluations in online academia has evolved from strict counting of participation rates to methods which now include program mapping, development of competencies, and checking alignment.

Evaluation of online programs is an important blend of art and science. The science is derived from a mix of technological opportunities and sound research techniques. To make the science work, the evaluator must understand what online education is, the tools which are used to reach this end, and how to evaluate the success of these tools. This session explores how online education can be evaluated and how the results of the evaluation can be used to guide the growth of a program. We will look at the challenges of evaluating online programs and some strategies and tools to address those unique challenges. Including data collection, faculty buy-in, data driven decisions, documentation, and closing the loop.

From this session, chairs will have increased awareness of the additional opportunities available to assess the efficiency and outcomes of an online program. They will understand the tools available and the research methods used to evaluate programs. Time will be used during the

session to apply some of the tools shared, as well as to discuss the best practices from other Chairs. Attendees will be asked to provide personal insights into what has worked and what has not worked for them in the evaluation of their online programs.