

# Quality Assurance as a Catalyst for Academic Excellence in Higher Education

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**DR. AGNES D. ARELLANO** is a highly respected educator and leader at Batangas State University, the National Engineering. Currently, she serves as an Associate Professor V and the Director of Quality Assurance Management, where she ensures the university maintains high educational standards. Throughout her career, she has held many significant leadership roles, including Faculty Regent, OIC-University librarian, and Director of Instructional Materials and Development Center. Beyond her university duties, Dr. Arellano is a Senior Accreditor for the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines, Inc. (AACUP.), traveling across the Philippines to help other colleges improve their academic programs. She is not only an administrator but also an award-winning teacher and researcher. She has been named Educator of the Year and Outstanding Researcher for her published work on how local governments can better serve their communities.

Her strong educational background includes a PhD in Development Studies and a Master's in Development Management, major in Public Management, from Pangasinan State University; a Master's in Business Administration from Golden Gate Colleges; and a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics from Pablo Borbon Memorial Institute of Technology, now BatStateU-The NEU. As a Licensed Professional Teacher, Dr. Arellano remains deeply committed to raising the bar for education, mentorship, and institutional integrity nationwide.

## Introduction

Higher Education Quality Assurance is the system that provides a systematic process and a valid framework for the institutions of higher education to provide quality education. Quality Assurance consists of actions or activities performed by all involved to promote and ensure improvement in quality education, enhance institutional performance, and foster a positive academic climate. The growing importance of quality assurance stems from the heightened scrutiny of higher education regarding the effectiveness and relevance of the education provided in a rapidly changing society.

The development of Quality Assurance in Higher Education began in response to increased emphasis on accountability and transparency within educational institutions. As governments and other stakeholders began to require more from their educational systems, various frameworks were established to assess and improve the quality of the academic programs offered through educational institutions. The increase in emphasis on educational performance ties directly to society's expectations that education would produce competent graduates who would ultimately contribute to the local economy and community.

Quality Assurance is the means by which institutions of higher education are continually assessed and improved in relation to their existing programs and services. Quality assurance establishes a standard and a benchmark so that institutions can identify areas of growth and areas where an institution needs to adapt to the changing demands of the educational system. These ongoing evaluations will also be of great benefit when developing a curriculum, by making certain that all of the educational offerings at an institution meet the criteria specified by the Quality Assurance standards, which will ensure that the students who participate in quality education are receiving their education from an institution that has established an effective curriculum. One important part of developing academic curricula is implementing quality assurance, which guarantees that educational institutions create curricula that meet defined standards, allowing them to create uniformity in both course content and overall objective quality, and to use quality assurance as a means of improving upon existing curricula over time to better meet the ever-changing needs of the 21st-century workforce.

Involving all people in the curriculum development process also adds value. By involving industry professionals, faculty members, former students, and current students in course development, education providers will gain additional perspectives on how to develop and deliver industry-relevant courses. This collaboration can help identify gaps in both skills and knowledge, enabling the creation of higher-quality course content. For instance, many institutions utilize local industry advisory councils to provide feedback and assist faculty in developing course materials that align with current workforce needs.

The continual improvement model focuses on the ongoing cycle of developing, assessing, evaluating, and improving courses to maintain a current approach to course offerings. Educators will be able to make timely changes to the curriculum through routine evaluations of all courses and students, allowing them to respond promptly to shifts in the education and workforce markets. Implementing systematic review processes allows schools to ensure programs meet quality standards and support innovation and responsiveness to future needs (South et al.).

As institutions work to achieve academic excellence, they will find that quality assurance structures facilitate ongoing improvements and adaptations to their educational offerings.

By also recognizing the systematic alignment of educational frameworks with industry requirements, this will help illustrate the importance of vocational education and training to educational institutions as they continue to inspire the development and implementation of strategies that support the workforce and prepare students to excel in competitive job markets (Rus et al., 2023).

### **The Quality Assurance Mechanisms and Frameworks**

Higher education institutions have various mechanisms and frameworks that are designed to ensure ongoing maintenance and improvements to the quality of higher education. Accreditation is one way for an institution to demonstrate the quality of its programs, and an important aspect of the quality assurance mechanisms and frameworks in higher education. Accreditation typically occurs through a comprehensive evaluation of a program by an external body to determine whether the program meets predetermined educational standards established by national and international benchmarks. Accreditation provides a structured review framework that allows educational institutions to obtain feedback and recognition for their academic programs.

Internal quality audits are also part of a quality assurance framework. Internal quality audits are conducted by institutions to evaluate and improve their educational methods. Institutions can examine their

processes and outcomes systematically to identify areas for improvement and to change how they have a significant positive impact on student learning and on the effectiveness of their institution's programs. Internal audits promote a culture of continuous improvement and accountability among faculty and administrative staff.

External reviews provide an additional level of scrutiny and perspectives through independent experts who analyze institutional practices and outcomes and offer an objective evaluation. They highlight institutional successes and provide recommendations for areas of improvement (or enhancement). External reviews can stimulate discussions regarding exemplary practices and innovative strategies for teaching and learning.

All of these mechanisms together form a powerful combined framework for quality assurance in higher education. They create guidelines for institutions as they strive to maintain their standards and provide for the implementation of educational experiences with a focus on (students') success; therefore, they also establish criteria by which to assess the true benefit of these efforts to improve instruction and overall teaching and learning outcomes.

### **How Quality Assurance Influences Teaching and Learning**

Quality assurance significantly influences teaching effectiveness and student learning by helping institutions develop student-focused approaches and a culture of continuous improvement. When institutions use quality assurance mechanisms, they require their instructional staff to reflect on their teaching methods and develop ways to improve them. This specific activity/strategy of reflection often leads to the adoption of a more interactive and engaging approach to instruction that prioritizes the needs of and the way(s) a student learns. By way of example, if an educator\* utilises peer learning and collaborative activities in their Instructional environment, that educator will create student-empowered environments in which students can take control of their own learning (Shrivastava & Shrivastava, 2023).

Feedback type mechanisms play an important role in this specific relationship process. Regular assessments and evaluations support both students' identification of their strengths and weaknesses and for educators' evaluation of their effectiveness in delivering educational content through the use of constructive feedback to modify their approaches and ultimately meet student learning objectives. The application of various types of assessments, including peer reviews and self-assessments, encourage students to constructively engage with the material, which promotes a more thorough understanding of the subject matter.

As well as, the emphasis on quality assurance in teaching also contributes to faculty professional development; therefore, by assisting faculty in creating a professional development plan, institutions may be able to help educators maintain current knowledge of the most effective teaching methods and educational technologies by providing ongoing training and support that is essential for them to effectively deliver quality education. In turn, the continued commitment to developing faculty ensures that educators possess the skills necessary to deliver quality education, resulting in improved outcomes for students and greater success for graduates in their fields. Thus, the quality assurance framework lays the foundation for faculty development and illustrates the interconnectedness of both components in promoting academic excellence (Shrivastava & Shrivastava, 2023).

### **Faculty Development and Quality Assurance**

Quality assurance and faculty development are closely associated, as both are designed to improve the delivery of quality education in higher education institutions. Faculty development programs are designed to develop faculty's ability to deliver effective teaching and achieve desired educational outcomes. Faculty development programs can target areas that enhance faculty teaching capabilities, as well as research or professional development. Institutions can enable teachers to keep pace with innovation and achievement within a discipline by implementing planned, structured groups of training and professional development opportunities.

An integral part of teacher training is involvement with a mentor. Mentors are established teachers who are paired with teachers who have recently joined the team. This allows for both local support and the sharing of information and knowledge. The connection between a mentored teacher and a mentor can enhance teaching techniques and increase productivity and research efforts, thereby improving student success. Additionally, mentorship may be a component of the faculty evaluation process/faculty performance review process. Collectively, the establishment of mentor-mentee relationships can enable real-time evaluation of the success of newly developed initiatives. This evaluation provides feedback to inform ongoing improvements and/or adjustments to ensure that faculty training is consistent with the institution's objectives (Ofosuhene et al., 2023).

As institutions continue to focus on the quality and satisfaction with their faculty development initiatives, it is imperative that they evaluate how these programs impact student engagement. The process of faculty developing and expanding their skill set directly impacts the student learning experience, thereby affecting a student's overall success. When faculty have the support and training to create a more engaging learning environment, students will feel more engaged and motivated to participate in class, thereby strengthening their in-depth connection to the coursework and ultimately improving academic performance. The relationship between faculty development and student engagement reinforces the greater purpose of ensuring quality in higher education (Ofosuhene et al., 2023).

### **Student Engagement and Quality Assurance**

Student Engagement is one of the foundations of quality assurance in higher education and influences how students experience their education. Students can participate in overseeing the quality assurance process by actively providing feedback, which will create an enriching educational environment as it relates to the quality of the program and the instruction received. The creation of a feedback loop between students and institutions is integral to fostering a culture of continuous improvement and enabling institutions to meet students' expectations and needs.

Additionally, the more that students' contributions/voices are valued and acknowledged, the greater the basis for engagement with the activity/store, and this leads to the establishment of ownership and responsibility for the student's educational process. When students are engaged in the educational process, they are more likely to reflect on feedback and seek out opportunities to improve their performance, thereby leading to higher overall academic success (Adams et al., 2019).

However, the challenge is to create effective mechanisms for providing feedback. Institutions must make an effort to foster an open environment in which students can share their opinions. Additionally, faculty and staff training must be developed and implemented to foster a welcoming, supportive environment for providing constructive feedback. Finally, student opinions/perspectives must be integrated into the development of quality assurance mechanisms used by institutions.

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