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Office of University
Communications

October 23, 2014

GWU Partners with Organization to Review Effectiveness of Internet-Based Classes

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. — Some of Gardner-Webb University's fastest-growing graduate programs are offered on the Internet, and University leaders are seeking ways to ensure that students receive an online education of the highest quality.

Gardner-Webb recently partnered with Quality Matters (QM), an organization that uses a peer-review approach to assure quality in online classes, to provide professional development for faculty members who teach Internet-delivered courses. QM has a reputation nationwide for offering the most widely recognized set of rigorous standards for online program delivery, according to Dr. Ben Leslie, GWU Provost and Executive Vice President.

"Students who enroll in a QM-certified course can be confident that it is designed in accordance with the best practices for online content delivery, ensuring both substance and accessibility," Leslie explained. "We are proud to enter into this voluntary association with Quality Matters and hold ourselves accountable to the highest standards of academic quality and integrity in the academic online environment."

Through a QM subscription that provides training materials to the University, faculty members who teach online courses are invited to participate in a peer-reviewing system that ensures consistency and effectiveness in Internet classes. Several GWU faculty members have already completed a certification process that allows them to review peers' online courses. Leaders plan to begin the evaluation process by next year and identify successful online courses with QM logos.

"The teaching and learning capabilities in technology are astounding," said Dr. Jeff Rogers, dean of the GWU Gayle Bolt Price School of Graduate Studies. "But one of the challenges we face comes with teaching over the Internet, and not simply taking face-to-face content and dumping it online. Quality Matters is a way to help encourage faculty to build a well-rounded and successful online curriculum."

The program shows Gardner-Webb is investing in the quality of its online courses, said Dr. Janet Land, director of the GWU Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). "Students seek affordability and quality in a graduate degree program," Land offered. "We

can certainly address that quality piece. The Quality Matters logo is like a stamp of approval on a course, meaning it is vetted by faculty for high-quality standards.”

Dr. Tracy Arnold, assistant professor of nursing, was among the first GWU faculty members this summer to certify as a reviewer for online courses. She said QM provides an in-depth review of courses for the benefit of students who are trying to get the most out of Internet studies that are just one part of their busy schedules.

“This process is really going to make sure the education they get online is quality and that it replicates the same instruction they would get in a face-to-face environment,” Arnold shared. “It will maintain rigor in courses as higher education moves more online.”

Quality Matters is a leader in quality assurance for online education and has received national recognition for its peer-based approach to continuous improvement in online education and student learning.

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University offers a comprehensive academic experience that introduces students to the diverse world of ideas and to the people who think them, preparing them for professional success and for productive citizenship.