The University of Rio Grande seeks to clarify and assess distance and online learning quality and process. Efforts will include, but are not limited to: Facilitating and training instructors, course design and development incorporating Quality Matters standards for best practice, and assessing and evaluating courses and course instructors including requiring a plan for accountability.

There has been no formal, established process for distance learning or online learning at the University of Rio Grande for several years. In the past, a distance learning committee reviewed and approved courses for distance education. With the need to develop several new programs for the distance learning market by the fall of 2012, several opportunities for management of these programs have surfaced. There is currently no formal approval process for courses that are developed for distance or online learning. There is no required training or certification for instructors to be qualified to develop and teach these courses, and there is no formal evaluation/assessment process for these courses. As a result, it is evident that there needs to be research into how to best administer and implement these distance and online programs.

The College of Health and Behavioral Sciences is currently using distance learning for courses in several Nursing degrees. The School of Business within the College of Professional and Applied Studies, has an adult degree completion (adult studies) program designed for adult learners and will be taught evenings in hybrid format beginning fall 2012. Additionally, the School of Business is working with a large corporate partner to develop an adult studies program in hospitality management specific to the restaurant industry beginning fall of 2012. The hospitality program will require specific general education courses be converted to the adult learner, distance learning format. As a result, this program could impact many programs across campus requiring a better process for implementation and training.

This Action Project will conduct research, make recommendations, and implement solutions regarding improvements to the following key processes in respect to distance and online programs:

1. Online course design and development – Rio needs to develop a specific process for the design and development of new online/distance courses, as well as revisions / updates of existing courses, according to a set of measurable quality standards. In addition, a process for review and preapproval of such online/distance courses is necessary.
2. Faculty qualifications; training and evaluation – the project will establish experience and/or certification criteria for faculty who design and develop courses, training opportunities/requirements, and periodic measurement of effectiveness.
3. Course satisfaction and effectiveness evaluation – the project will incorporate a subsequent satisfaction review process intended to back-test learning effectiveness and student satisfaction with content and delivery.

The kickoff for this project is January 1, 2012. After faculty return from winter break, the action plan team will meet to determine specific areas of focus, develop training needs/qualifications for faculty, and to evaluate process to achieve the action plan goals.
Once training needs have been identified, training will take place March through June, 2012. Once trained, faculty will review/revise courses (June to August, 2012) so the courses will be available for fall start (August 2012). During the fall semester, students and peers will evaluate the courses using the processes developed to assess the course and faculty. In January, 2013, the Action Project team will assess the process and make recommendations for additional changes including strategies for continuous improvement.

### Project Success Monitoring

**A:** A team has been established to monitor the progress for this action project. According to the timeline above, check points are in place to monitor success. Additionally, the promise of having these courses developed by fall 2012 is also a checkpoint for progress. The team will meet regularly (probably bi-monthly) to monitor progress throughout the action project. The Action Project team will meet twice a semester with the Quality Assurance Council, a subcommittee of the AQIP Steering Team, to supply updates and receive feedback on the progress.

### Project Outcome Measures

**A:** Outcome measures will include: the establishment of best practice standards and expectations for instructors at Rio Grande, the establishment of a required course of training for instructors teaching in the distance/online learning environment, the training tools to develop and design distance/online courses, the actual course development, and the means to evaluate the instructor and online/hybrid courses by the administration and students. The standards and processes developed by this action project will continue to be used by a review committee on an ongoing basis.