

Implementing a System of Quality Assurance Checks in a Large-Scale Online Professional Development Course

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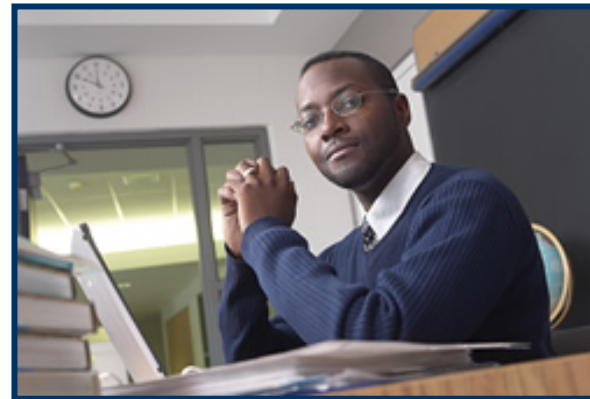
Purpose

- To share an integral part of the process of assuring the quality of an organization's outcomes: **Quality Assurance Checks (QACs)—a situated model.**
- To share findings related to the ongoing investigation regarding the impact of implementing QACs in a large-scale statewide online professional development project.
 - **Zygouris-Coe, V., Swan, B., & Ireland, J. (in press). Quality assurance and online learning. International Journal on E-Learning (IJEL).**

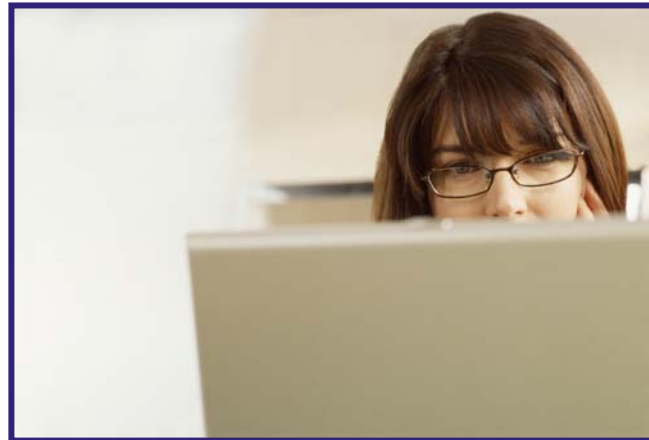


Advanced Organizer

- *FOR-PD Background*
- *Quality Assurance Checks (QACs)*
 - *QACs Defined*
 - *Examples*
 - *The FOR-PD QAC Model*
- *Evaluation Results*
- *Discussion*



FOR-PD Background



Significance & Rationale

- Some of Florida's professional development efforts, that now being undertaken, are SO LARGE, that the more traditional face-to-face format may no longer be the best option. Because of its flexibility, interest continues to grow in the use of the Internet to provide training.
- Online delivery of certification programs and other forms of professional development benefit both pre- and in-service teachers, schools, and the higher education institutions that offer them.



Significance & Rationale, contd.

- Effective evaluation strategies for these online programs is crucial.
- This need may translate to other e-learning situations. For example, K-12 online learning is a new field growing at an estimated annual pace of 25% (Patrick & Thompson, 2006).



Background

- ❑ Was developed originally as a vehicle for about **50,000** of Florida's K-12 teachers to meet Competency 2 of the add-on reading endorsement: *Foundations of Research-Based Practices* see <http://justreadflorida.com/endorsement>
- ❑ Teachers need FOR-PD or its equivalent to be considered highly qualified according to *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*

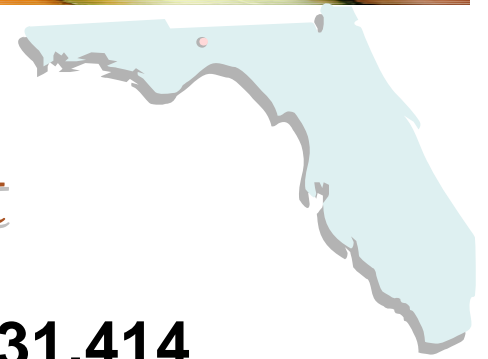


Background

- The project was developed by literacy and technology experts and is housed at the University of Central Florida (UCF)
- Funded by the Florida DOE Just Read, Florida! Initiative and launched in January, 2003.
- The **free** 14-week online course is facilitated by reading specialists and other well-qualified educators.
- The project is a highly-collaborative endeavor. FOR-PD works with **67** Florida districts, **5** universities, and more recently, **6** Community College Educator Preparation Institutes (EPIs).



FOR-PD is Florida's First Large Scale Online PD Project



- To date (5 yrs) FOR-PD has served over **31,414** educators in Florida.
- *Most recently (fall07 FOR-PD enrollment was at 2,300.*
- Fifty-five percent of participants report they are taking an online course for the first time (up from 90% a few years ago)
- Eighty-Eight percent of facilitators--first time teaching an online course (when they started with FOR-PD)



Defining the Role of Quality Assurance Checks (QACs)

Quality Assurance as a Process

- Quality is defined as “**conformance to requirements**” not goodness (Crosby, 1979).
 - QACs help to **create a culture of change** and allow the project to exist in a **continuous loop of improvement**.
 - Requirements are regularly reviewed and do change.
- Thinking, Planning, Implementing, Analyzing***
- **Frequent updates** to course content and ongoing improvements to navigation.
 - The focus of QACs change according to needs.
 - **Prevention** is key (eliminating problems before they happen).
- QACs align with the project goals and help **ensure the quality of outcomes**.
 - Assure **participants needs are met** so they can be satisfied and successful.



Sample Methods-Overview

- The first check begins during weeks 2 or 3 of the course. Two others follow with the last one in week 9 or 10 of the 14-week course.
- An effective series of QACs can provide the following:
 - Increased and enhanced communications between FOR-PD and facilitators and between FOR-PD and participants.
 - Tailored evaluations with regard to student and facilitator progress.
 - Gentle reminders when certain benchmarks should occur.



QAC PROCESS

- completion rates
- survey results
- interview results
- focus groups

REFLECT

PLAN

- facilitator PD
- navigation/content revisions
- new items for instruments
- QAC process is revised

IMPLEMENT

REVIEW

- # lagging
- # dropped
- Communications
 - Discussion board (frequency and quality)
 - Timeliness of assessment, Posting of course calendar and welcome message

- Refining of policies/procedures & course content/framework
- Facilitator PD

QAC Example

QAC #1 (performed in week 2 or 3):

- Check that facilitator posted welcome message.
 - More specifically does it contain: *contact information, when grading will occur, how feedback will be given, specific facilitator expectations i.e. grammar and conventions*)?
 - It should be located in the facilitator announcement area.
- Facilitators are provided data related to participants' progress and asked to respond to the following questions.
 1. What have you done to encourage these participants (ones who are behind or haven't started)?
 2. Are there any participants you would like FOR-PD to contact? ...



QAC Example

QAC #2 (performed within weeks 4 to 6):

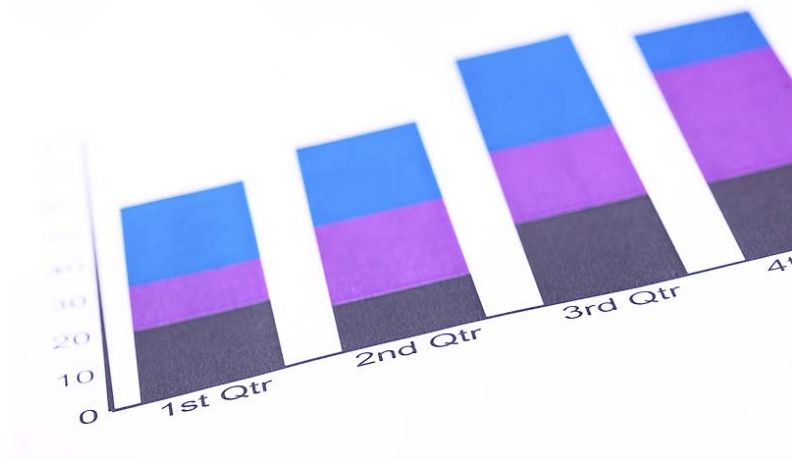
- Check that facilitators are actively participating in discussions (well defined)
- Are they posting grades on a regular basis (about one lesson per week)?

QAC #3 (performed within weeks 9 and 10):

- Same as QAC # 2 but in addition to that facilitators are again provided data related to their participants' progress and asked to respond to two questions (see QAC #1).

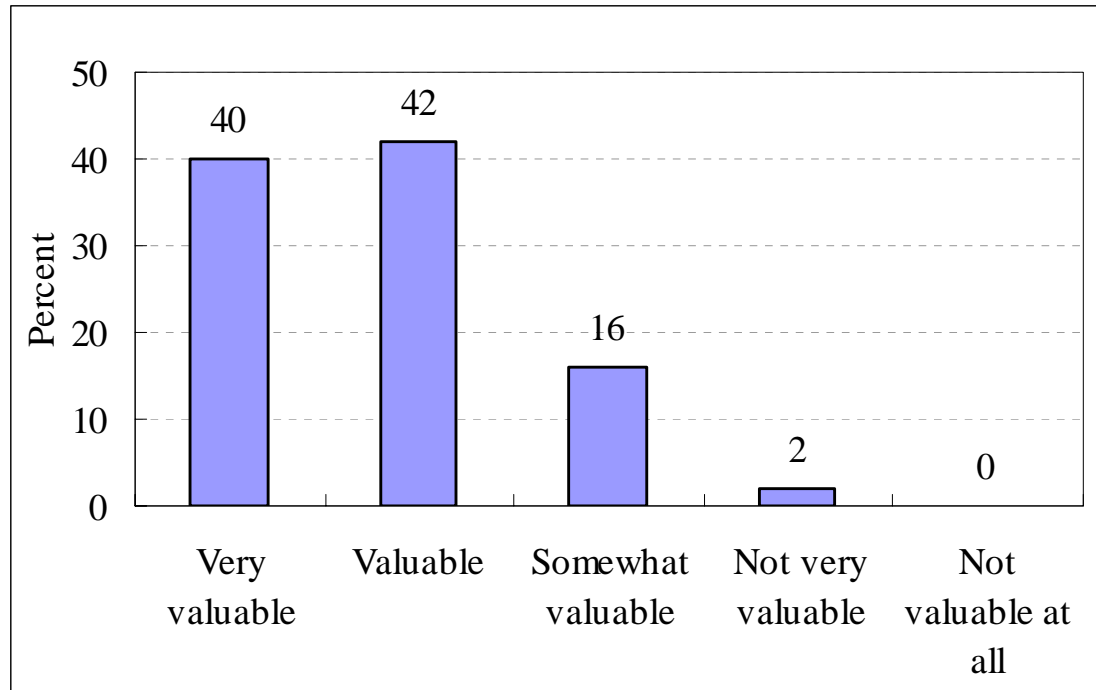


Evaluation Results



Results from QAC Survey

Overall Value of QACs



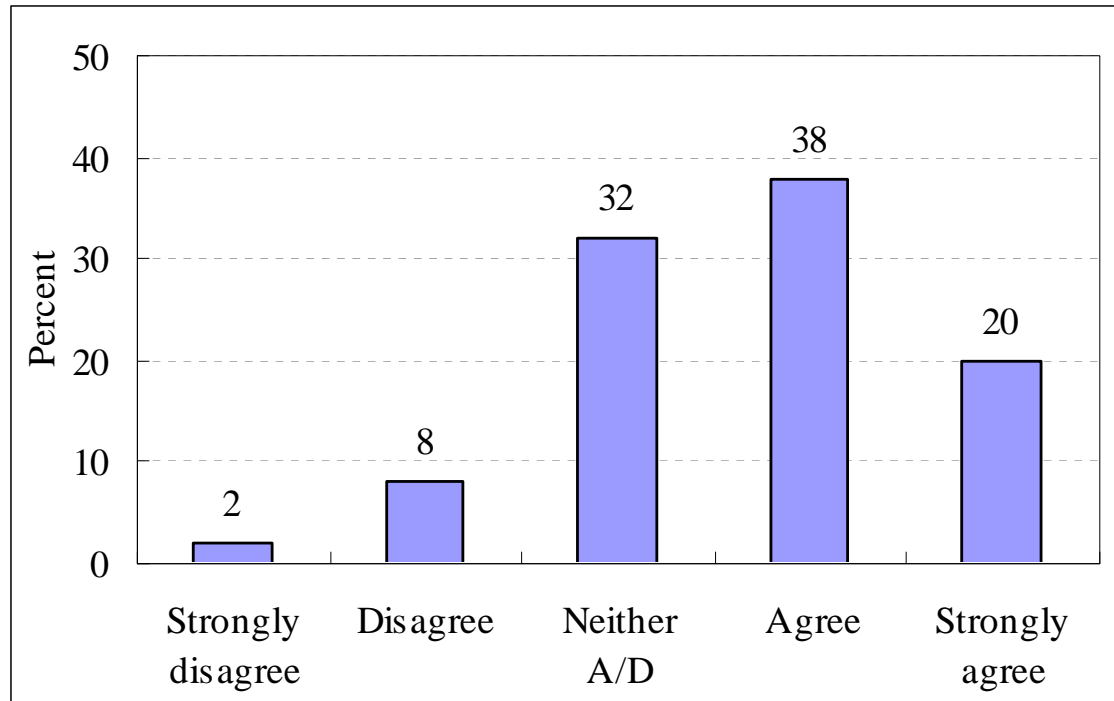
Facilitator Rating of the Overall Value of Quality Assurance Checks

Note. Data were obtained from Phase IV QAC Facilitator Survey where 51% of spring 2006 facilitators responded.

(n = 60).

Results from QAC Survey

Enhancing Facilitator Understanding



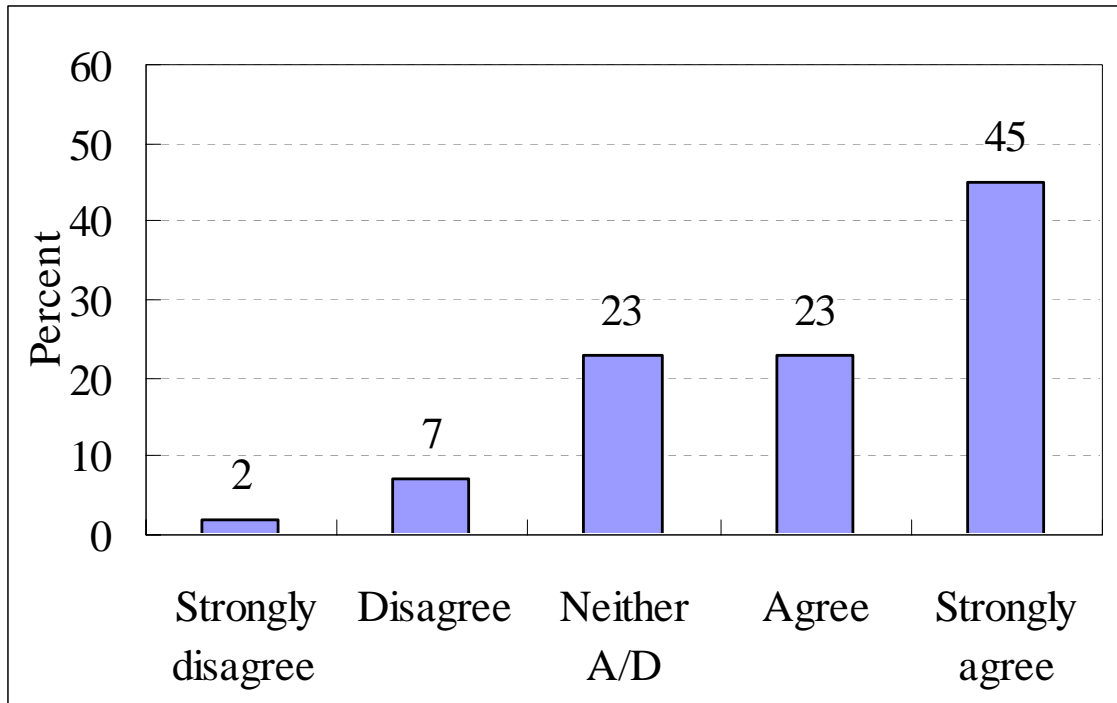
Regarding a Specific Course Section: Facilitator Rating of How Reports Helped Them to Better Understand Participants' Needs

Note. Data were obtained from Phase IV QAC Facilitator Survey where 51% of spring 2006 facilitators responded.

(n = 60).

Results from QAC Survey

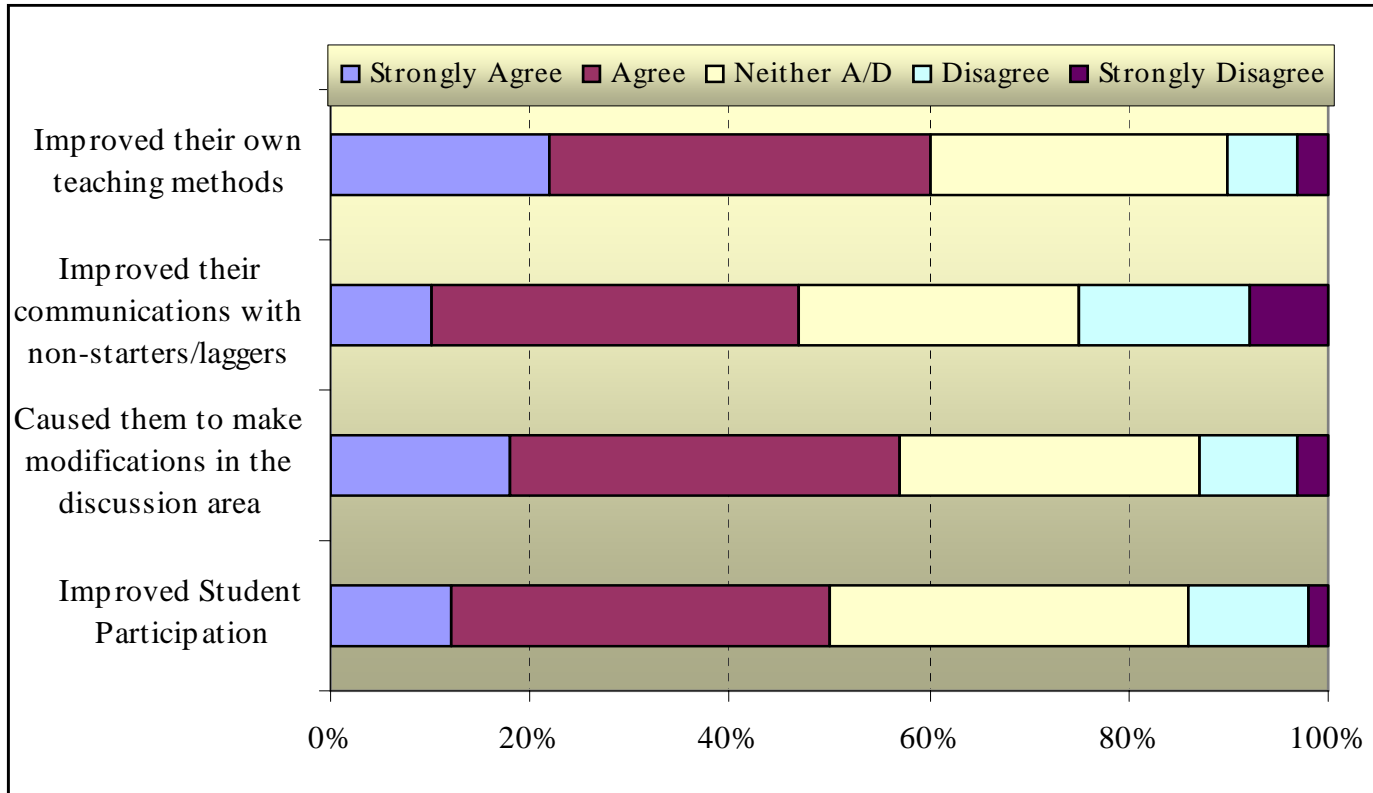
Enhancing Facilitator Understanding



Regarding a Specific Course Section: Facilitator Rating of How QACs Helped Them Better Understand FOR-PD's Roles and Expectations for Facilitators

*Note. Data were obtained from Phase IV QAC Facilitator Survey where 51% of spring 2006 facilitators responded.
(n = 60).*

Facilitators Rate QAC Effectiveness



Regarding a Specific Course Section: Facilitator Responses to Likert-style Items Relating to QAC Effectiveness

Note. Data were obtained from Phase IV QAC Facilitator Survey where 51% of spring 2006 facilitators responded.

(n = 60).

Results from QAC Survey

Why they Value QACs--Open-ended Responses

- Most (53%) facilitators felt that QACs **improved course completion rates**
 - **They were then asked:** *Why do you think the quality assurance checks helped your participants complete the course?* Qualitative analysis revealed two main themes including:
 - 1) QACs **provide extra reinforcement and support for participants** (41% of respondents), and
 - 2) QACs **support and encourage the facilitator** (28% of respondents).



Results from QAC Survey

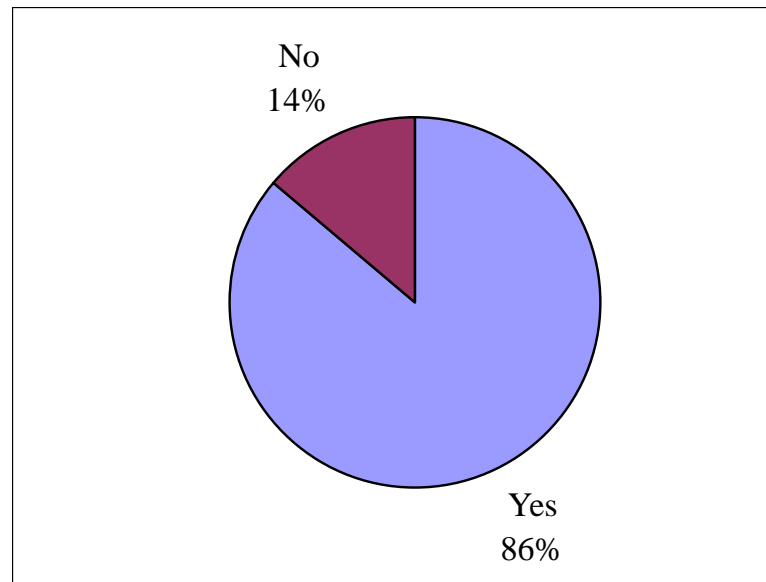
Why they Value QACs--Open-ended Responses

- “I would assume that **accountability is good for everyone**. I know there were problems with participants and it helped.”
- “Communication from FOR-PD helped support my e-mails and communication with participants. More interaction.”
- “[QACs] encouraged me to continue to make attempts with those falling behind—even when I was getting discouraged—I saw the positive things I was doing that someone noticed and that helps me continue.”
- “QACs motivate me to improve my role as facilitator, which in turn directly benefits the participants.”
- “I was pleased that I was commended for my efforts and it reinforced my commitment and that I was doing the right things for my participants.”



Results from QAC Survey

Facilitators Value QACs

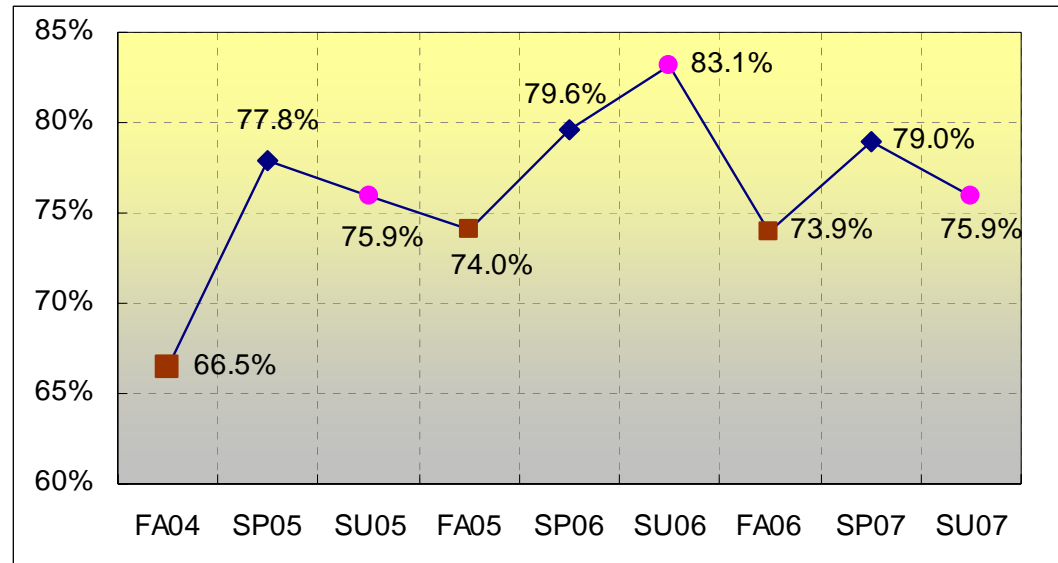


Facilitator Opinion on Whether QACs Should be Continued

Note. Data were obtained from Phase IV QAC Facilitator Survey where 51% of spring 2006 facilitator responded. 98% of respondents answered this item. (n = 59)

FOR-PD Completion Rates

- Completion rates for online professional development are an important issue in evaluating a program's overall effectiveness.
- Average completion rates rose from 66.5% in Fall04 to 75.9% in Summer07).



FOR-PD Average Completion Rates by Semester (Fall04 to Summer06)

Note. Data were obtained from FOR-PD Evaluation Reports. Completion rates are calculated based on the number enrolled who started the course and the number who complete it. (total number of starters for Phase IV and V combined = 9979).

Lessons Learned

- Although implementing an effective system of quality assurance checks in large-scale online professional development can be expensive and time consuming, it can be well worth the effort.
- QACs can.....
 - Help to frequently **reaffirm project goals** and **keep major roles and responsibilities intact**
 - Improve communications and allow for identification of problems early
 - Provide a **mechanism for measuring student progress** on a broad-to-narrow scale
 - Help to **better inform and involve facilitators** in analyzing results and suggesting strategies for change
 - Help facilitators **feel less isolated**
 - Have a **positive impact on overall completion rates.**



Lessons Learned- Facilitators' Perspectives

- QACs provide
 - facilitators with valuable support.
 - positive feedback and encouragement
 - A feeling of connectedness with FOR-PD
 - Improved communications
- Facilitators value them



References

- Crosby, P. B. (1979). *Quality is free*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Patrick, S. & Thompson, M. (2006) *Online K-12: Status, Challenges, and Opportunities*. NACOL presentation at the 12th annual [Sloan-Consortium](#) International Conference on Asynchronous Learning Networks. Orlando, FL.
- Swan, B., Huh, J. & Ramos, R. (August, 2006). *Florida Online Reading Professional Development (FOR-PD) Phase IV Evaluation Results of Surveys*. Orlando FL: University of Central Florida
- Zygouris-Coe, V., Swan, B., & Ireland, J. (in press). Quality assurance and online learning. [International Journal on E-Learning \(IJEL\)](#).





Florida Online Reading Professional Development

Visit the FOR-PD website at:

<http://forpd.ucf.edu>

