

**Beyond the Organizational Chart: Portfolio Fit and Seam Ownership
in Digital Learning Governance**

Witt Salley, Ed.D.

Carroll Community College

Mailing address: Carroll Community College, 1601 Washington Road, Westminster, MD 21157

E-mail: wsalley@carrollcc.edu | Telephone: 443-469-1660

ORCID: 0009-0006-7850-2221

Abstract

Digital learning responsibilities span academic, administrative, technology, and learner service units. An organizational chart may identify where functions are housed while leaving decision authority, resources, and cross-unit handoffs unspecified. To examine public descriptions of these arrangements, the study used comparative documentary analysis of 32 official or institution-authored records covering 12 U.S. digital learning or teaching support cases and one adjacent information technology governance analog. The records specified administrative home and portfolio scope more consistently than decision authority, ongoing process ownership, or reported results and responses. A supplementary appendix makes the 156 case-level classifications, codebook, source locators, and reconciliation decisions available for inspection. The article proposes two applied concepts for internal review. *Portfolio fit* examines whether responsibilities correspond to administrative home, authority, resources, dependencies, and constituency. *Seam ownership* assigns responsibility for cross-unit processes while preserving faculty academic authority. The diagnostic translates these concepts into planning decisions about delegated authority, resources, handoffs, and successor responsibility. A hypothetical certificate launch and a documentary application to the University of Delaware illustrate the information the diagnostic organizes and the internal evidence still needed. The diagnostic is designed to produce documented assignments and unresolved decisions for internal review; implementation testing remains pending.

Keywords: digital learning governance, online learning administration, organizational structure, chief online learning officer, portfolio fit, seam ownership

Introduction

Institutions combine the academic, administrative, technology, and learner service functions of digital learning in different ways. The 2026 Benchmarking Online Enterprises Survey reports that 57% of responding online enterprises were located in a provost's office, compared with 51% in 2025 and 41% in 2024. The same survey found that 84% of respondents described their enterprises as academically decentralized and 37% as administratively decentralized (Uranis et al., 2026). Among 2026 respondents, provost-level placement coexisted with different distributions of academic and administrative responsibilities.

Two applied concepts clarify the difference between administrative location and operational responsibility. *Portfolio fit* asks whether a unit's administrative home, assigned responsibilities, primary constituency or product, delegated authority, dependencies, and resources correspond. *Seam ownership* identifies the actor responsible for maintaining a decision, workflow, record, or service handoff that crosses units. Faculty bodies may retain academic authority while an administrative actor maintains the process that carries an authorized decision forward, records the handoff, and escalates an unresolved matter.

Consider a hypothetical online certificate. Faculty approve the curriculum, a central digital learning office manages course development, an information technology office controls a required software integration, and enrollment services configures the application and registration routes. If the software integration delays the launch, the organizational chart locates each office, but responsibility for maintaining the launch record, coordinating the response, and escalating the delay remains unclear. The same ownership question applies when a handoff involving financial aid, accessibility, contracting, or student records carries compliance, cost, or service

implications. Seam ownership assigns responsibility for the cross-unit process without transferring curriculum authority.

The University of Delaware consolidated four teaching and learning units; the University of Texas at Austin announced a center closure (University of Texas at Austin, n.d., 2026; Washington, 2025). Both actions raise questions about authority, capacity, and cross-unit process ownership.

Research on organizational structure, digital learning leadership and authority, planning, and boundary work identifies distinctions needed to analyze these organizational changes (Drysdale, 2021; Fredericksen, 2017; Fredericksen et al., 2025; Hoey et al., 2014; Laws, 2021; Paolucci & Gambescia, 2007; Prysor & Henley, 2018; Watson et al., 2024; Watts, 2019; Whitchurch, 2008). The present analysis asks which formal configurations, organizational changes, and capacity directions appear in selected official records and what the records specify about administrative and faculty authority, cross-unit responsibility, resources, continuity, and outcomes.

The object of analysis is *public specification*: what an institution formally assigns or states in the selected records. Faculty, learners, staff, and partners may consult these records to locate a responsible office after a reorganization. Likewise, leaders comparing peer arrangements need to distinguish a shared reporting line from shared responsibilities. When public descriptions identify a unit but omit its service routes or authority, readers must seek additional information before using the description for navigation or benchmarking. The documentary gap warrants clearer public routes and targeted internal inquiry; it does not establish an internal governance failure.

Literature Review

Research on digital learning governance distinguishes organizational placement from the authority and boundary work required to carry out assigned responsibilities. Historical and normative guidance provides additional context for the functions an internal review may examine.

Structure, Scope, and Administrative Authority

Paolucci and Gambescia (2007) examined 239 universities with fully online graduate degrees and identified six administrative structures, most internally based. The categories established several organizational homes without resolving how institutions divided authority, services, or resources within them. Hoey et al. (2014) examined associations among administrative structure, dedicated online administration, enrollment, program counts, and perceived efficiency at nonprofit private colleges; findings varied by outcome and statistical specification. The sector and period limit comparison.

Research on the leaders of these arrangements provides a second view of formal authority. Fredericksen (2017) identified the highest-level leader focused on online learning; Fredericksen et al. (2025) updated the profile of more than 500 leaders and examined their assessments of UPCEA competencies for chief online learning officers; and Laws (2021) examined formal authority through a correlational survey of 20 self-selected chief online education officers. Reported legitimate power and self-assessed online program quality were positively correlated, and title hierarchy, number of units reporting to the officer, and portfolio breadth correlated with some power measures. However, the low response rate prevented predictive analysis, and the same respondents reported both legitimate power and online program

quality, limiting the quality measure. The study supports attention to delegated authority without establishing that a reporting line or broad portfolio causes program quality.

Studies of instructional design teams extend the analysis from executive authority to operational roles. In a three-university qualitative study, Drysdale (2021) found that centralized instructional design teams with academic reporting provided the strongest support for designers' leadership. The comparison linked structure with role clarity, advocacy, and faculty relationships; its limited case set does not establish a universally preferable reporting line. Similarly, Watson et al. (2024) place structure within a planning system that connects mission and demand to capacity, delivery, personnel, learner services, and evaluation.

The 2026 Benchmarking Online Enterprises Survey reinforces the difference between location and scope. UPCEA distributed the survey nationally to online learning leaders. Of 169 participants, 151 qualified and 62 completed the full survey; denominators vary by question (Uranis et al., 2026). Among the 79 respondents to the portfolio question, 87% assigned instructional design to the online enterprise, 72% accessibility or captioning, 72% faculty development, 70% marketing, and 70% recruitment or enrollment. The reported portfolio variation requires separate examination of reporting line and scope.

Integration, Boundary Work, and Faculty Jurisdiction

Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) treat integration as the counterpart to organizational differentiation. Specialized units preserve expertise, while integration mechanisms coordinate activities across them. This distinction directs attention to how differentiated functions work together rather than merely where units are placed.

Business process management provides an operational foundation. Nesheim (2011) describes process owners as integrating managers who coordinate horizontal work across

hierarchical units. Service ownership similarly assigns accountability for an ongoing service, as illustrated by the North Carolina State University governance model (Carraway & Hoit, 2019). Seam ownership draws on these established approaches as an applied synthesis for digital learning governance. Its focus is the interface at which administrative work crosses units while academic jurisdiction remains with the authorized faculty or academic body.

Research on boundary-spanning professionals shows how institutions integrate differentiated functions. Whitchurch's (2008) qualitative study of 54 professional managers described bounded, cross-boundary, unbounded, and blended identities and examined roles between professional and academic domains. The sample excluded academic managers, staff in academic practice or professional development roles, and staff in library and information management roles; governance performance fell outside the study's scope. For this article, Whitchurch supports a narrower premise: formal charts can underdescribe cross-boundary responsibilities that depend on relationships and translation. Pryor and Henley (2018) extend the analysis to practices that allow higher education leaders to operate across organizational boundaries. Watts (2019) found that seven participants working in teaching and learning centers at small private colleges often mediated between faculty and the administrative owners of online initiatives. Mediating between participants does not by itself assign authority or responsibility for the shared process.

Because boundary work can blur roles, faculty jurisdiction requires separate treatment. Ciabocchi et al. (2016) document faculty governance leaders' concerns about academic oversight and the review of online and blended programs. Instructional designers, technology leaders, enrollment staff, and online administrators may maintain processes without holding authority over curriculum or faculty academic judgment. A governance account should identify the faculty

body or academic actor that approves and the administrative actor that maintains the resulting workflow.

Seam ownership applies process and service ownership to cross-unit handoffs in digital learning, with attention to faculty academic authority and continuing responsibility when functions move or a unit closes. Boundary-spanning work concerns the relationships needed to coordinate across units; a responsibility-assignment matrix can record participation and accountability. The proposed review asks whether the recorded assignments cover the handoff itself, its record, unresolved exceptions, and successor responsibility. An existing process or service ownership framework that covers these requirements may perform the same work; seam ownership names a focused application rather than a separate general theory.

Historical and Normative Context

The 2016 UPCEA *Hallmarks of Excellence in Online Leadership* framed online learning leadership through institutional commitment, support, technology, advocacy, and professional practice (UPCEA, 2016). The 2026 *Hallmarks of Excellence in Digital Learning Enterprises* broaden the focus to enterprise leadership and stewardship for learner mobility, compliance, technology, and workload sustainability while acknowledging institutional variation (Uranis & Cook, 2026). Read together, the two editions identify responsibilities that an internal governance review may examine as a digital learning portfolio changes.

The Hallmarks provide historical and normative context, while institutional documents supply the evidence for individual cases. The author participated in the national taskforce that developed the 2016 Hallmarks and led the original Professionalism hallmark. His participation informed only the research question; the analysis attributes no reorganization to the Hallmarks.

Public Specification Across Digital Learning Reorganizations

The review used comparative documentary analysis to examine institutional accounts of formal arrangements and changes (Bowen, 2009). The unit of comparison was the arrangement or change documented for the named functions rather than the institution as a whole. Sources included official webpages, organizational charts, announcements, strategic and governance documents, and budget notices; the adjacent information technology case included an institution-authored account in *EDUCAUSE Review*.

The 12 focal U.S. institutions were purposively selected for variation in placement, portfolio scope, organizational action, and capacity direction. Candidate cases required official or institution-authored public evidence of a relevant digital learning, teaching support, or related academic service arrangement. Retention required identifiable placement, scope, or organizational change and a contribution to the comparison; documented success was unnecessary. North Carolina State University was retained separately as an information technology (IT) governance analog because its records distinguish advisory roles, service ownership, operations, and executive accountability. The selected Western Oregon University records test the limits of inferring supervision from portfolio proximity; the originally reviewed University of Texas at Austin records document closure with limited disposition detail. Cases involving the author's prior operational responsibility or relying on internal material without publicly verifiable provenance were excluded.

The project record places source review in July and August 2026, with availability checks recorded on August 1. It documents selected institutions and sources but does not preserve how institution names first entered consideration or a complete search and screening history. Of 35 logged records, 30 were fully retrievable and two University of Texas at Austin records were

partly retrievable through official listings or redirects. Three unavailable records were excluded from claim support, leaving a 32-record corpus. The Supplementary Appendix identifies each record, its availability, and retained claim locations.

First-cycle coding used 12 dimensions: formal home (location or reporting line); operative scope (named functions); constituency or product (whom or what the unit serves); change (dated organizational action); decision rights (express noncurricular administrative or operational authority within the arrangement); curriculum authority (academic jurisdiction); cross-unit responsibility (an assigned workflow, handoff, or successor); resources (specified capacity); continuity (services continued, transferred, or stopped); labor effects (position or role changes); institutional rationale (stated reasons); and outcomes (reported results or responses associated with the arrangement). The Supplementary Appendix provides definitions and exclusions. *Directly documented* (D) denotes an expressly stated coded point, not complete coverage of a dimension. *Partially documented* (P) denotes a material ambiguity or incomplete assignment. *Not publicly specified* (NP) denotes insufficient information in the selected corpus. *Inference* (I) identifies interpretation, excluded from descriptive counts.

The author completed 156 dimension entries and 13 pattern entries under instructions not to consult the populated working matrices, followed by reconciliation with those matrices. Each entry retained a coded statement, source identifiers, a passage locator, and an uncertainty note. Revision-stage review corrected inconsistent documentation thresholds across the dimensions. The appendix presents the corrected record and a log of superseded classifications. For example, instructor approval of examination rescheduling establishes a bounded operational right at the University of Delaware, not umbrella-wide managerial authority. Named resources qualify without a numerical allocation, and reported outcomes qualify without causal proof. Exclusive

organizational categories concealed overlap in seven cases, identified in the appendix. The revised synthesis separates formal configuration, reorganization action, capacity direction, and governance documentation.

An explicit rule clarifies the narrower interpretation of a documented workflow or service model: a record must identify a continuing administrative activity, an accountable actor or role, and the division of action or approval among participants. Named partners, broad coordination, or successor assignment alone are insufficient. This revision-stage clarification distinguishes the two detailed operating examples from the broader directly documented cross-unit responsibility count.

Revision-stage source checks also corrected metadata and qualified claims affected by later retrieval. The October 2026 Western Oregon University chart and additional University of Texas at Austin news text remain separate from the original corpus. The corrected matrix is authoritative; historical coding and supplemental evidence are identified separately.

Cross-Case Patterns

Comparison along the four axes found more explicit documentation of placement and scope than of authority or ongoing process ownership. Table 1 summarizes the findings, and the Supplementary Appendix displays every case classification and its supporting locations. Counts refer to the 12 focal cases; the IT analog is reported separately.

Table 1*Cross-Case Results by Analytical Axis*

Analytical axis	Cross-case result	Illustrative cases	Interpretation limit
Formal configuration	Formal home was directly documented in 9 of 12 focal cases and operative scope in 11. The IT analog documented both.	American University and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley document nested units; the University of Florida describes a bounded product and distributed delivery.	Placement does not establish delegated authority or resource adequacy.
Reorganization action	Records distinguish consolidation, modality convergence, redistribution, and closure.	The University of Delaware consolidated four units; D'Youville University integrated online staff into an all-modality institute; Duke University redistributed functions.	Action labels do not establish changes in capacity or performance.
Capacity direction	Institutions announced additions, redeployment, redistribution, reduction, or an unspecified disposition.	Kansas State University announced added resources; the University of Alaska Fairbanks announced position eliminations; originally reviewed University of Texas at Austin records leave staffing and budget disposition unspecified.	Projected savings and stated continuity remain announcements.
Governance documentation	Decision rights were direct in 1 focal case; curriculum authority in 3; and cross-unit responsibility in 5. The analog directly documented decision rights and cross-unit responsibility.	The University of Delaware supplied a bounded workflow; North Carolina State University supplied a service-accountability model. The Supplementary Appendix identifies all cases contributing to each count.	Direct successor assignment differs from a documented operating workflow. Reported results and responses do not establish that structure caused improvement.

Note. Counts describe the corrected analysis of the selected corpus and exclude North Carolina State University, the adjacent information technology (IT) governance analog. D identifies an explicit coded point, not complete institutional documentation. The Supplementary Appendix supplies classifications, sources, and corrections. Organizational labels are analytical summaries. **Placement, Change, and Capacity**

The cases document several relationships between administrative home and operative scope. The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley places two adjacent centers in Student

Success; the records leave their division of labor unspecified. American University places Digital Learning and Strategy under the dean of Graduate and Professional Studies and describes university-wide oversight and school-based instructional designers. At the University of Florida, UF Online specifies a bounded product, assigns curriculum stewardship to colleges, and names central and college service partners. The records establish different combinations of home and scope but leave fit and misfit unresolved (American University, n.d.-a, n.d.-b; University of Florida, n.d.-a, n.d.-b, n.d.-c; University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, n.d.-a, n.d.-b, n.d.-c).

Library linkage also appears as a placement attribute in several operating arrangements. Duke University assigns a new teaching center to the university librarian and distributes lifelong learning and technology functions elsewhere. At George Washington University, a 2016 record documents the consolidation of online education and teaching support. Current pages identify a common portfolio encompassing libraries, academic innovation, and instructional services, but the former online office's disposition remains unreported (Duke University, 2025; Gallimore, 2025; George Washington University, n.d.-a, n.d.-b; Irwin, 2016; Tyrone, 2026).

The originally selected Western Oregon University records identify Library and Academic Innovation and a teaching center without specifying their reporting relationship (Western Oregon University, n.d.-a, n.d.-b, n.d.-c). The university's October 2026 organizational chart places the Center for Teaching and Learning under the dean of Library and Academic Innovation (Western Oregon University, 2026).

Beyond placement, the records document several forms of structural action. The University of Delaware consolidated four units and stated that their core functions would continue. D'Youville University moved online learning staff and responsibilities into an all-modality teaching institute. Kansas State University, Duke University, Georgetown University,

and the University of Alaska Fairbanks announced redistribution of functions among successor units (Colbert & Beauchamp, 2025; Duke University, 2025; D'Youville University, 2025; Gallimore, 2025; Georgetown University, 2025, 2026; Kansas State University, n.d.; Linton & Taber, 2023; University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2025a, 2025b; University of Delaware, n.d.; Washington, 2025).

Structural actions corresponded to several capacity directions. Kansas State University announced added resources, the University of Delaware announced redeployment, and Duke University stated that some programs would wind down; its records omit broad staff or budget reductions. The University of Alaska Fairbanks announced that 17 positions would transition and 14 would be eliminated, with projected savings of \$1.2 million against an operating budget of about \$3.5 million. The originally reviewed University of Texas at Austin records document an announced permanent closure but provide only partial disposition evidence (Duke University, 2025; Gallimore, 2025; Kansas State University, n.d.; Linton & Taber, 2023; University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2025a, 2025b; University of Delaware, n.d.; University of Texas at Austin, n.d., 2026; Washington, 2025).

During revision, the University of Texas at Austin's news index specified that consultation services, grants, on-demand workshops, and major events had been discontinued; it did not establish subsequent staffing or budget arrangements (University of Texas at Austin, n.d.).

Authority, Faculty Jurisdiction, and Process Ownership

Formal placement appeared more often than explicit decision rights. The University of Delaware requires instructor approval for examination rescheduling, a bounded operational decision rather than central-unit authority. Kansas State University and George Washington

University describe oversight and leadership without specifying approval, allocation, policy-setting, or dispute-resolution rights; both receive P. The North Carolina State University analog distinguishes committee recommendations, service owner accountability, service operations, and final chief information officer accountability (Carraway & Hoit, 2019; Irwin, 2016; Kansas State University, n.d.; Linton & Taber, 2023; North Carolina State University, n.d.-a, n.d.-b; University of Delaware, n.d.).

Curriculum authority was direct in three focal cases. The University of Florida assigns course and program content decisions to college faculty. Western Oregon University assigns curriculum assessment and program updating to faculty and departments. Georgetown University documents faculty curriculum development and a school's MBA curriculum revision; these establish bounded curricular responsibility without a complete approval chain. Duke University locates program development in schools but leaves final approval partly specified. The corpus supports separate decision-rights and curriculum-authority fields (Colbert & Beauchamp, 2025; Duke University, 2025; Gallimore, 2025; Georgetown University, 2026; University of Florida, n.d.-c; Western Oregon University, n.d.-b, n.d.-c).

Five focal cases—Kansas State University, the University of Delaware, Duke University, Georgetown University, and the University of Alaska Fairbanks—and the North Carolina State University analog directly assign a cross-unit responsibility. A separate interpretation identifies a bounded examination workflow at the University of Delaware and an ongoing service-accountability model at North Carolina State University. The distinction rests on a continuing activity, an accountable actor or role, and a specified division of action or approval among participants. The other direct assignments identify successors or coordination responsibilities

without comparable operating detail (Carraway & Hoit, 2019; North Carolina State University, n.d.-a, n.d.-b; University of Delaware, n.d.).

Therefore, a direct cross-unit responsibility code does not imply a complete operating model. Nor does the interpretation of a documented workflow or service model require every field in the proposed diagnostic to be publicly documented. The University of Florida, George Washington University, and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley identify partners or common placement without specifying a complete handoff (George Washington University, n.d.-a, n.d.-b; University of Florida, n.d.-a, n.d.-c; University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, n.d.-a, n.d.-b, n.d.-c).

Outcome Evidence

Reported results and stakeholder responses do not establish that structure caused better outcomes. The University of Florida reports program measures and attributes its ranking to its overall model. North Carolina State University reports favorable reception of its governance redesign. A published audience question at the University of Alaska Fairbanks documents concern about consultation, not its prevalence or factual premises. These directly documented reports differ in kind and quality. Projected savings and anticipated service benefits are not evaluated in these records (Carraway & Hoit, 2019; University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2025a, 2025b; University of Florida, n.d.-a).

From Public Specification to Internal Review

Two planning questions follow: does the assigned portfolio have sufficient authority and capacity, and who maintains each cross-unit handoff? Portfolio fit organizes the first inquiry; seam ownership organizes the second.

Portfolio Fit

Unit labels may describe a modality, constituency, product, or change agenda, and identical labels may cover different responsibilities. Research on online learning leadership and instructional design teams connects placement with scope, delegated authority, capacity, and professional relationships (Drysedale, 2021; Fredericksen et al., 2025; Laws, 2021). A portfolio fit review brings those relationships into the planning discussion before leaders select or reproduce a reporting arrangement.

American University's university-wide support remit within a graduate and professional studies portfolio raises questions about undergraduate access, priorities, and budget. The adjacent centers at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley instead prompt examination of their division of labor. Internal delegations, workload records, and service commitments can guide a documented choice about scope, authority, or capacity.

Seam Ownership and Faculty Authority

Digital learning involves faculty, colleges, support units, and technology offices with different responsibilities. Boundary-spanning work helps them coordinate across units (Prysor & Henley, 2018; Watts, 2019; Whitchurch, 2008). The diagnostic asks participants to name an administrative owner who maintains the handoff and record and refers unresolved decisions to the authorized actor.

Successor assignment identifies a function's destination; ongoing ownership identifies who maintains its operation. The diagnostic asks who receives open cases, records, and commitments. These assignments can be inspected after the transition while faculty retain jurisdiction over academic decisions.

Continuity, Operations, and Financial Review

A transition record can identify work in progress, successors, affected resources, user routes, and review dates. Kansas State University and Duke University name successors; the University of Alaska Fairbanks announces position eliminations and function reassignments. The 2026 Hallmarks identify learner support, technology, compliance, and workload sustainability as stewardship responsibilities for such planning (Uranis & Cook, 2026).

The University of Alaska Fairbanks projected \$1.2 million in savings (University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2025b). Assessing the realized financial result would require comparable cost records before and after implementation, including costs absorbed by successor units. Projected savings alone provide a planning target rather than evidence of return on investment.

Dalal and Kondri's (2026) case identifies operating conditions leaders can measure. Their division described duplicated effort, stalled projects, undocumented knowledge, and unclear ownership before producing more than 60 standard operating procedures. They reported qualitative improvements without quantitative outcome data. The case supports pairing process mapping with evaluation of efficiency claims.

Before reorganization, leaders can record cycle time, unresolved handoffs, staff effort, costs, and service or compliance exceptions. Repeating those measures after an operating cycle, alongside stakeholder feedback, documents implementation and change. A before-and-after comparison alone cannot isolate structural effects.

Applying the Portfolio Fit and Seam Ownership Diagnostic

Table 2 organizes internal review of responsibilities left unspecified in public records. For each item, record an agreed assignment and supporting evidence or an unresolved decision with a responsible actor and review date. Add baseline measures for later comparison.

Table 2*Portfolio Fit and Seam Ownership Diagnostic*

Dimension	Questions	Evidence to examine	Warning sign
Administrative home, scope, and dependencies	Where does the portfolio report, and how does that placement correspond to its remit? Which functions, credentials, modalities, constituencies, and dependencies belong to it?	Charter; service catalog; program inventory; organization chart; position descriptions	No agreed record defines the unit's reporting relationship, remit, exclusions, and dependencies.
Administrative authority and accountability	For which results is the leader accountable? Who decides, recommends, allocates resources, signs contracts, accesses data, grants exceptions, and may stop action?	Delegations; decision rights matrix; committee charges; budget, contract, and data access records	Accountability sits in one unit while controlling authority or resources sit elsewhere without an agreed route.
Faculty academic jurisdiction	Which faculty bodies or academic officers approve curriculum, standards, programs, and faculty matters? How does the administrative process carry the approved decisions forward?	Faculty handbook; senate and curriculum committee charges; program approval map	Course design or program administration obscures who holds academic authority.
Cross-unit process ownership	Which decisions have singular, shared, or sequential authority? Who owns and maintains the record, completes the administrative handoff, and escalates an unresolved matter?	Process map; responsibility matrix; service owner register; escalation protocol	Several offices participate, but no actor maintains the complete record or escalates unresolved cases.
Resources and capacity	Do staffing, expertise, budget, systems, data access, leadership standing, and workload correspond to assigned responsibilities?	Staffing and budget plan; workload analysis; role descriptions; coverage and succession plan	Responsibilities move without resources, access, or removal of prior work.
Transition and successor ownership	What moves, remains, winds down, or ends? Who receives programs in progress, records, contracts, and open cases?	Transition plan; successor register; backlog and pipeline report; communication plan	A unit moves or closes before successor responsibilities and user routes are recorded.
Public routes and documentation	Do webpages, directories, intake forms, and contact routes reflect the current arrangement? Which contact or intake route should faculty, learners, staff, and partners use?	Updated directory; service catalog; intake routing; communication plan	The chart changes while service routes remain tied to the former structure.

Dimension	Questions	Evidence to examine	Warning sign
Operational and financial review	Which delays, backlogs, repeated tasks, service interruptions, compliance exceptions, staff time, direct costs, or application and registration delays will be measured? What baseline permits comparison after the change?	Cycle time; rework; unresolved cases; service tickets; staff time; budget variance; application and registration delays; compliance records	Leaders report projected efficiency as a result or attribute change to structure without a baseline or comparator.

For the hypothetical certificate introduced earlier, suppose a curriculum committee retains academic approval and the sponsoring dean controls the launch decision. The digital learning director serves as administrative process owner, coordinating the program chair, instructional designer, IT integration lead, and enrollment manager. The project coordinator owns and maintains a shared launch register containing approvals, dependencies, deadlines, and unresolved issues. The team escalates an integration delay to the IT lead and refers an unresolved launch-date conflict to the sponsoring dean, returning any curricular change to the committee. The sponsoring dean allocates coordinator time, scheduled instructional design and integration time, enrollment configuration capacity, and funding from the program development budget. These illustrative assignments specify academic authority, administrative ownership, contributing roles, record ownership, escalation, and resources for the launch.

Here, portfolio fit asks whether the director has the authority, staff time, and resources to coordinate the launch. Seam ownership identifies who tracks and escalates delays. The team could compare unresolved dependencies and approval times before launch and after an operating cycle.

A Documentary Application at the University of Delaware

Table 3 applies the diagnostic to the University of Delaware's published examination procedures, showing assignments and questions for internal confirmation.

Table 3*University of Delaware Examination Workflow*

Diagnostic field	Documented assignment and source	Internal confirmation or proposed action
Approval authority	Instructor approval and a completion deadline are required by email (Rescheduling policy).	Who may act when the instructor is unavailable?
Scheduling and distribution	UD Online collects dates, schedules examinations, and receives exams for distribution (Scheduling; Submitting your exam).	Confirm coverage and handoff timing across testing locations.
Handoff record	Faculty information form and approval email carry exam details (Scheduling; Rescheduling policy).	Identify the authoritative record, its owner, and retention arrangements.
Escalation	Exam-staff contact is provided; escalation authority is unspecified (Exam guidelines).	Who handles unresolved date or approval disputes, and when?
Resources	Testing locations and an exam-staff contact are named; allocations are unspecified (Exam locations; Submitting your exam).	Confirm staff coverage, workload, technology, and budget.
Review measures	No workflow performance results or review cycle are specified.	Proposed: rescheduling turnaround and unresolved requests; agree baseline, owner, and review date.

Note. Source: University of Delaware (n.d.), *Faculty Resources*, examination guidelines.

Confirmation questions and proposed measures are the author's application; unspecified fields refer only to these procedures.

Evidence Boundaries and Future Testing

The purposive corpus supports comparison of documented variation, not estimates of prevalence or rankings of structures. Records vary in genre, depth, and coverage; public silence may reflect source selection, publication practices, webpage changes, or unavailable material. The North Carolina State University analog concerns administrative service ownership rather than faculty curriculum jurisdiction. Western Oregon University illustrates the limits of the selected record set: later organizational documentation clarified a reporting relationship the

original records did not specify. The originally reviewed University of Texas at Austin records likewise limit the original analysis of capacity disposition. Internal evidence would be needed to assess enacted authority, resource adequacy, workforce experience, service quality, or learner outcomes.

One author completed source verification; the analysis has not been independently replicated. The codebook, locators, uncertainty notes, and correction log support inspection, not agreement among independent coders. The appendix distinguishes the original verification record, corrective review, and supplemental evidence. Initial candidate discovery and a complete screening history were not retained, and current webpages may differ from reviewed versions. The worked examples illustrate the proposed diagnostic; implementation effects remain untested.

Researchers could interview online learning leaders, faculty governance representatives, and affected staff to compare public specification with internal decision processes. Longitudinal studies could track decision time, service access, workload and retention, stakeholder experience, and program or learner outcomes before and after reorganization. A cross-institutional comparison using consistent document genres could test whether the diagnostic captures material governance relationships.

Conclusion

The selected records specified placement and scope more consistently than authority or ongoing process ownership. Before approving a reorganization, executives, faculty governance representatives, and service owners can record scope, authority, handoffs, successors, and resources, assigning unresolved decisions an owner and review date. Subsequent review can check whether commitments were implemented, faculty jurisdiction was preserved, and operating measures changed from baseline.

References

- American University. (n.d.-a). *Office of Digital Learning and Strategy*. Retrieved August 1, 2026, from <https://www.american.edu/provost/ogps/odls/index.cfm>
- American University. (n.d.-b). *Provost organizational chart*. Retrieved August 1, 2026, from <https://www.american.edu/provost/org.cfm>
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>
- Carraway, D., & Hoit, M. (2019, March 25). Redesigning IT governance for digital transformation at North Carolina State University. *EDUCAUSE Review*. <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2019/3/redesigning-it-governance-for-digital-transformation-at-north-carolina-state-university>
- Ciabocchi, E., Ginsberg, A. P., & Picciano, A. G. (2016). A study of faculty governance leaders' perceptions of online and blended learning. *Online Learning*, 20(3), 52–73. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v20i3.974>
- Colbert, S. D., & Beauchamp, N. J., Jr. (2025, June 23). *Announcing Dr. Alexander Sens as interim vice president for graduate studies*. Georgetown University. <https://www.georgetown.edu/news/announcing-dr-alexander-sens-as-interim-vice-president-for-graduate-studies/>
- Dalal, A., & Kondri, R. (2026). Centralizing standard operating procedures in a large online education division. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 29(2). <https://ojdla.com/articles/centralizing-standard-operating-procedures-in-a-large-online-education-division>

- Drysdale, J. (2021). The story is in the structure: A multi-case study of instructional design teams. *Online Learning*, 25(3), 57–80. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v25i3.2877>
- Duke University. (2025, December 10). *From LILE to CTL: Announcing the Duke Center for Teaching and Learning*. <https://ctl.duke.edu/blog/2025/12/from-lile-to-ctl-announcing-the-duke-center-for-teaching-and-learning/>
- D'Youville University. (2025, August 4). *D'Youville University expands Institute for Teaching Innovation*. <https://www.dyu.edu/news/2025/08/04/dyouville-university-expands-institute-teaching-innovation>
- Fredericksen, E. E. (2017). A national study of online learning leaders in US higher education. *Online Learning*, 21(2). <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v21i2.1164>
- Fredericksen, E. E., Simunich, B., & Uranis, J. (2025). COLO profiles & competencies 2024: A national research project about chief online learning officers. *Online Learning*, 29(3), 1–38. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v29i3.5017>
- Gallimore, A. D. (2025, November 7). *Supporting teaching and learning at Duke*. Duke University, Office of the Provost. <https://provost.duke.edu/news/supporting-teaching-and-learning-duke/>
- Georgetown University. (2025, September 2). *Redefining learning for the AI age: Dewey Murdick to help launch Georgetown's Academic Innovation Network*. <https://provost.georgetown.edu/news/dewey-murdick-to-lead-georgetown-universitys-work-in-human-ai-interaction/>
- Georgetown University. (2026, June 8). *How Georgetown is preparing students to be leaders in AI*. <https://www.georgetown.edu/news/georgetown-preparing-ai-leaders/>

- George Washington University. (n.d.-a). *Geneva Henry*. Retrieved October 6, 2026, from <https://provost.gwu.edu/geneva-henry>
- George Washington University. (n.d.-b). *Professional development & faculty support*. Retrieved August 1, 2026, from <https://facultyaffairs.gwu.edu/professional-development-faculty-support>
- Hoey, R., McCracken, F., Gehrett, M., & Snoeyink, R. (2014). Evaluating the impact of the administrator and administrative structure of online programs at nonprofit private colleges. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 17(3).
https://ojdla.com/archive/fall173/hoey_mccracken_gehrett_snoeyink173.pdf
- Irwin, J. (2016, January 27). *Provost's office to be reorganized*. GW Today.
<https://gwtoday.gwu.edu/provosts-office-be-reorganized>
- Kansas State University. (n.d.). *Center for Academic Innovation*. Retrieved August 1, 2026, from <https://www.k-state.edu/academic-affairs/academic-innovation-center/>
- Lawrence, P. R., & Lorsch, J. W. (1967). *Organization and environment: Managing differentiation and integration*. Division of Research, Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University.
- Laws, G. (2021). Powerful or powerless? Chief online education officers' legitimate power over online program quality in U.S. higher education institutions. *Online Learning*, 25(2), 120–139. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v25i2.2101>
- Linton, R., & Taber, C. (2023, December 14). *New operational excellence framework for academic innovation and Office of the Provost*. K-State Today. <https://www.k-state.edu/today/announcement/?id=93865>

- Nesheim, T. (2011). Balancing process ownership and line management in a matrix-like organization. *Knowledge and Process Management*, 18(2), 109–119.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/kpm.377>
- North Carolina State University. (n.d.-a). *Educational Technology Committee*. Retrieved August 1, 2026, from <https://oit.ncsu.edu/governance-and-strategy/it-governance/educational-technology-committee/>
- North Carolina State University. (n.d.-b). *IT governance*. Retrieved August 1, 2026, from <https://oit.ncsu.edu/governance-and-strategy/it-governance/>
- Paolucci, R., & Gambescia, S. F. (2007). Current administrative structures used for online degree program offerings in higher education. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 10(3). <https://ojdla.com/archive/fall103/gambescia103.pdf>
- Pryor, D., & Henley, A. (2018). Boundary spanning in higher education leadership: Identifying boundaries and practices in a British university. *Studies in Higher Education*, 43(12), 2210–2225. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1318364>
- Tyrone, B. (2026, March 3). *Call for applications: Faculty director of the Duke Center for Teaching and Learning*. Duke Center for Teaching and Learning.
<https://ctl.duke.edu/blog/2026/03/call-for-applications-faculty-director-of-the-duke-center-for-teaching-and-learning/>
- University of Alaska Fairbanks. (2025a, November 12). *Center for Teaching and Learning to be reorganized*. <https://www.uaf.edu/news/center-for-teaching-and-learning-to-be-reorganized.php>
- University of Alaska Fairbanks. (2025b, December 10). *Budget forum Q&A follow-up*.
<https://www.uaf.edu/news/budget-forum-qa-followup.php>

University of Delaware. (n.d.). *Faculty resources*. Retrieved August 1, 2026, from
<https://www.udel.edu/academics/online/faculty-resources/>

University of Florida. (n.d.-a). *About UF Online*. Retrieved August 1, 2026, from
<https://ufonline.ufl.edu/about-us/>

University of Florida. (n.d.-b). *Admissions FAQs*. Retrieved August 1, 2026, from
<https://ufonline.ufl.edu/apply/admissions-faqs/>

University of Florida. (n.d.-c). *How we work*. Retrieved August 1, 2026, from
<https://ufonline.ufl.edu/about-us/how-we-work/>

University of Texas at Austin. (n.d.). *News from CTL*. Retrieved October 6, 2026, from
<https://fisd.utexas.edu/news>

University of Texas at Austin. (2026, February 1). *CTL update*. <https://fisd.utexas.edu/news/ctl-update>

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. (n.d.-a). *About us*. Retrieved August 1, 2026, from
<https://www.utrgv.edu/online/about-us/index.htm>

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. (n.d.-b). *Administration*. Retrieved August 1, 2026, from
<https://www.utrgv.edu/about/administration/index.htm>

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. (n.d.-c). *Center for Teaching Excellence*. Retrieved August 1, 2026, from <https://www.utrgv.edu/cte/>

UPCEA. (2016). *Hallmarks of excellence in online leadership*. <https://upcea.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/UPCEA-Hallmarks-of-Excellence-in-Online-Leadership.pdf>

Uranis, J., & Cook, V. (Eds.). (2026). *Hallmarks of excellence in digital learning enterprises*. UPCEA. <https://upcea.edu/hallmarks-digital/>

Uranis, J., Etter, B., & Sullberg, D. (2026). *Benchmarking online enterprises: Insights into structures, strategies, and financial models in higher education*. UPCEA.

<https://upcea.edu/2026-benchmarking-online-enterprises-survey/>

Washington, J. (2025, October 15). *New academic structure supports faculty and bolsters innovation*. UDaily. <https://www.udel.edu/udaily/2025/october/new-academic-structure-supports-faculty-and-bolsters-innovation/>

Watson, F. F., Piña, A. A., & Small, J. (2024). A strategic framework for developing a master plan for online learning at your institution. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 27(3). <https://ojdla.com/articles/a-strategic-framework-for-developing-a-master-plan-for-online-learning-at-your-institution>

Watts, T. (2019). Enabling online initiatives: The role of teaching and learning center leaders at small, private colleges. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 22(4). <https://ojdla.com/archive/winter224/watts224.pdf>

Western Oregon University. (n.d.-a). *Strategic plan*. Retrieved August 1, 2026, from <https://library.wou.edu/home/about/strategic-plan/>

Western Oregon University. (n.d.-b). *Strategic scorecard: I. Student success*. Retrieved August 1, 2026, from <https://wou.edu/planning/strategic-scorecard/i-student-success/>

Western Oregon University. (n.d.-c). *Who we are*. Retrieved August 1, 2026, from <https://wou.edu/ctl/who-we-are/>

Western Oregon University. (2026, October). *Organizational chart*. <https://cdn.wou.edu/president/files/2025/10/WOU-Organization-Chart.pdf>

Whitchurch, C. (2008). Shifting identities and blurring boundaries: The emergence of third space professionals in UK higher education. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 62(4), 377–396.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2008.00387.x>