

Chapter 41

Designing Effective Online Instructor Training and Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

There are many ways to deliver engaging, effective, and efficient online instruction, but most higher education instructors do not know how. So while the demand for online learning has drastically increased, the efficacious training of instructors into how to deliver online courses lags far behind. In this chapter, the authors demonstrate how adult learning and instructional design principles, coupled with known best practices for online teaching, can facilitate the design of effective training and professional development for online instructors. Case study examples are used to illustrate key concepts, and a sample outline for training is offered. Administrators and trainers of online instructors will form the primary audience; other stake holders in online education will benefit as well.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the growing popularity of online learning, there is still a large body of criticism regarding its ability to substitute for the brick and mortar higher education institution. This criticism has long been misdirected and we often find that technology has served as the scapegoat. As early as 1983,

Clark pointed out we are missing an opportunity to improve the quality of education when we do this. In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education mirrored these sentiments. Technology is simply the vehicle by which education is delivered and it is unlikely to affect the quality of learning (Zhang, Zhou, Briggs, & Nunamaker, 2006). McCormick (as cited in Forum, Chronicle of Higher Education, 2010) stated, “The truth is that we know astonishingly little about the ‘quality’ of nearly

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all collegiate programs, whether face-to-face or online. In fact, we don't even have a generally accepted understanding of what quality means in this context" (p. 42).

Despite the criticism, distance education, defined as "planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching" (Moore & Kearsley, 2005, p.2), affords options both to potential students and higher education institutions that otherwise would not be possible. Many of these options benefit society as a whole. For example, distance education can provide developing countries with an opportunity to establish productivity and to compete globally by eliminating disparities related to education (Van Hook, 2006). Via e-learning networks, educational gaps are lessened by bringing the classroom to students who otherwise would go without education or only receive minimal schooling. Providing a different kind of benefit, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology offers free online public access to the learning materials from all of its courses. These materials can and have been downloaded by people throughout the world for self-study. Similarly, but via a different medium, Stanford University offers free Apple Computer iTunes podcasts of many campus lectures both to students as well as the general public (Van Hook, 2006). Such opportunities would not exist without the assistance of technology. (Author note: the terms *distance learning* and *online learning* may be interchanged in this chapter to mean the same thing, particularly when the terms are part of an original quote.)

Kurubacak and Yuzer (2004) approached the benefits of distance education and its associated technologies from a different perspective. More so than an opportunity to bridge educational gaps or a means to offer alternative forms of education, they regarded distance education technology as force that is eliciting an educational paradigm shift. Similarly, Wiley (2000) pointed out, "Technology is an agent of change, and major technological innovations can result in entire paradigm shifts"

(p. 2). For example, McDermon (2005) described the supplemental learning benefits of distance education. Using a video conferencing system, she "transported" her North Carolina elementary school students to locations that would otherwise be a dream field trip. Virtual field trips gave her students access to tours, interactive lessons, and experts offered by Colonial Williamsburg, NASA, the North Carolina Museum of Natural Science and other public institutions across the country. The system also had been used to "attend" professional conferences and to connect with students and teachers from other schools. While there is something to be said about actually attending a conference, a museum, or other locale, it appears that the video conferencing system opened doors to a whole gamut of learning experiences.

And finally, one last example of distance education technologies pushing a paradigm shift was Duke University's iPod program. In 2004, incoming freshman were given iPods at the beginning of the school year. The iPods were preloaded with the freshman orientation schedule, the academic calendar, messages from administration, advice from current students, athletic schedules, and more. Once classes began, students were also able to access classroom lectures, course content, field recordings, study support, and file storage/transfer. In this regard, not only did the iPods enhance and support student learning but also the student campus-living experience (Flanagan & Calandra, 2005). Programs like this demonstrate how distance education technologies can improve the quality of, access to, and face of education, while also meeting the needs of today's learners.

The lifestyles of today's learners demand more readily accessible learning environments and the rate of enrollment into online courses reflects that demand. According to the 2006 Sloan Consortium Survey of Online Learning, enrollment in one or more online courses increased from 1.6 million students in 2002 to 3.2 million in 2005 (Allen & Seaman, 2006). According to the 2010 survey, enrollment hovered at 5.6 million students. This

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