

The Changing Role of Faculty

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INTRODUCTION

The role of faculty within traditional teaching institutions worldwide has always been multidimensional, involving administrative duties, research responsibilities, and a commitment to community service in addition to teaching. In the majority of institutions, this teaching role of faculty has remained unchanged for decades. In fact, most faculty teach the way they themselves were taught using the tried and trusted Socratic transmission paradigm in which sections of academic content are divided into 50 minute lectures and delivered to often large groups of passive recipients. There is simply very little incentive to make alterations to a teaching model that has been in place for hundreds of years (Buckley, 2002). Present day faculty culture often values research, productivity, and quality over high quality teaching and student evaluations tend not to reward faculty prepared to experiment and take risks with models of learning that differ from the students' previous learning experiences.

Things are changing and the use of "chalk and talk" as the primary means of content delivery is being replaced at some institutions by more collaborative, interactive approaches to learning that are supported by course management systems and the numerous recent innovations in e-learning technologies, such as electronic books, text messages, podcasting, wikis and blogs (Kim and Bonk, 2006).

BACKGROUND

The growth in distance education, online courses and computer-based learning promises to add a new dimension to the role of faculty and serve as a catalyst for a change in learning paradigm. This explosion in computer-supported education is being driven in part by the increasing demand from the expanding number of "tech-savvy" students in the education system. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 56% of all 2-year and 4-year Title IV-eligible degree-granting

institutions offered distance education courses in the academic year 2000 – 2001. A 2003 survey of online learning (Allen & Seaman, 2003) revealed that over 1.6 million students took at least one online course during Fall, 2002. A subsequent survey, the fourth reporting on the nature and extent of online education (Allen & Seaman, 2006) revealed that enrollment to online courses continues to increase. In fact, almost 3.2 million students took at least one online course in the Fall of 2005. These students are largely undergraduates studying at Associates institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2006) and are part of the computer-gaming generation, continually "on the move", often only finding time for study between social and sporting activities. For this generation, to be out of touch, to be disconnected from their community of friends and families is simply uncool. Not surprisingly, these students have high technological expectations of their faculty. Furthermore, in the new millennium the number of nontraditional students returning to education either full-time or part-time is increasing as distance education programs become more successful at marketing their product (Carnevale & Olsen 2003). These nontraditional students return to education after raising a family or seeking additional qualifications and professional development opportunities whilst holding down a permanent job lured by the increased flexibility that online programs have to offer. Having more life-experience these students are often more mature, more demanding, more focused and more highly motivated than students on a more traditional, linear educational path (observations confirmed by Dutton, Dutton, & Perry, 2002). They benefit most from a learning model that is increasingly flexible and can accommodate outside commitments. The expansion of computer-based learning may also be driven by institutional pressure to increase students' educational opportunities and, at the same time, bring in more revenue by removing the limitations of bricks and mortar, thereby allowing for unlimited class sizes. However, the thinking that online learning is cheaper for the institution than the traditional paradigm is a widespread misconception and seriously flawed. Institutions may even embark on a computer-based learning adventure for no other reason

than not to be left behind by others. In fact, today the education market place is becoming increasingly congested with private institutions, for-profit universities, and corporate giants competing with public institutions for market share.

MAIN FOCUS: GROWTH OF COMPUTER-BASED LEARNING

In this era of “borderless higher education” (Cunningham, Ryan, Stedman, Tapsall, Bagdon, Flew, & Coaldrake, 2000) 96% of the very largest institutions (over 15,000 enrollments) of higher education in the United States currently offer at least one online course and 58.4 % of all Chief Academic Officers envisage that online learning is critical to their long term institutional strategy (Allen & Seaman, 2006). There is, however, an uneven distribution of online course and program offerings by type of institution and typically it is the smaller, private four-year institutions that offer fewer online opportunities and are most negative regarding this teaching paradigm (Allen & Seaman, 2006). Not all ventures into the highly volatile international computer-based learning arena have been successful. In fact, there are many high profile failures as a result of inadequate support systems or poor planning. However, a number of institutions are currently attracting international recognition for the high quality of their online provision. These include the Open University of Great Britain, DeVry Inc., the University of Central Florida, the University of Phoenix (currently the largest accredited private university in the U.S. and now with campuses throughout Europe), Motorola’s Motorola University, the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, and Sylvan Learning Systems, Inc. (incorporating The Universidad Europa of Madrid, Spain). Nova Southeastern University was recently ranked in the top 20 cyber-universities by Forbes Magazine and the Nova Southeastern Graduate School of Computer and Information Sciences was recently listed in the Princeton Review’s *The Best Distance Learning Graduate Schools* offering over 300 online classes annually to students in almost every state in the United States and in 20 foreign countries. PC Magazine, a leading technology publication, has recently (12.20.06) published a list of the top 10 wired colleges in the U.S. that included Villanova University, M.I.T., Indiana University Bloomington, Swarthmore College and Creighton

University. Cardean University, a for-profit institution, is building a reputation for offering high quality business courses online, and has established links with a number of internationally respected institutions such as the London School of Economics. The number of courses offered online by the State University of New York has grown from eight in 1995-1996 to over 3,200 in 2002 – 2003 with enrollment in online courses increasing from 119 to over 50,000 students over the same time frame (Shea, Pickett, & Pelz, 2003a). In 2006, the State University of New York now offers 4,300 courses online with enrollment in these online courses reaching over 100,000 students.

Penn State World Campus offered four programs and enrolled 41 students at inception in 1998. In 2003 annual enrollments reached 10,000 students in 300 courses (Kusch, 2001). At the close of the 2005-2006 academic year, Penn State World Campus offered over 50 online degree and certificate programs generating 13,750 credit enrollments in over 330 courses.

Government supported ventures into the higher education market are also occurring. These include the e-universities worldwide project in the United Kingdom and in Israel, the Israeli Council for Higher Education provided approximately \$US 3.8 million to be used for the integration of IT into the curriculum (Guri-Rosenblit, 2002). Closer inspection of some of the courses offered by institutions that are leading the computer-based distance education field reveals that simply transporting course content to the Internet without appropriate pedagogic review is unlikely to be successful. In general, the computer-based online course offerings at these leading institutions are characterized by an approach to learning that adheres to the seven principles of good practice advocated by Chickering and Gamson (1987). These principles, originally advocated for the traditional learning model, have been subsequently revisited to accommodate the advances in computer-based learning technologies (Chickering & Ehrmann, 1996). Furthermore, online course design at the leading institutions reflects an appreciation for how students learn in this lean environment (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

THE ROLE OF FACULTY

In this rapidly evolving educational climate a new breed of faculty is beginning to emerge that is ready

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