Chapter 15

Building Quality Online Courses:
Online Course Development Partnership and Model

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ABSTRACT

The authors have personally experienced the burdens of creating online courses without the assistance of trained instructional designers. Many faculty are employed in conditions where they develop online courses without the proper knowledge and training of many essential aspects that should accompany the development of an online course (e.g., design, development, learning styles, copyright, design principles, accessibility, incorporating technology, and technical skills) (Singleton et al., 2013; Speck, 2000; Wickersham et al., 2007). The authors propose and describe the use of a detailed online course development and delivery model (Outlaw & Rice, 2015) that was created to provide distance education units with a systematic approach to course development. The proposed model nourishes the partnerships between faculty and designers to improve the quality of online courses, while providing the support faculty need to successfully create online courses. The authors discuss a model that provides consistency in efforts to create efficient workflows to develop online courses.

INTRODUCTION

As reported in Babson Survey Research Group by Allen and Seaman (2013), the growth in online enrollments during 2010-2011 increased to 6.7 million (9.3% growth rate). This increase suggests that the rise of hybrid and/or online courses in higher education increases the need for solid distance learning infrastructures in higher education as institutions benefit from the financial gains that can result from

increased online enrollments. In fact, data collected in 2012 indicated that 69.1% of institutions "agreed that online education was critical to the long-term strategy of the institution" (Allen & Seaman, 2013, p. 16). Therefore, it is suggested that in order to maintain and/or increase these benefits, state legislatures, accreditors, research firms, and education service providers should also be aware of the value and benefits that distance learning provides and be supportive of the resources needed to assist faculty in building and delivering quality online courses. It is vital to the competition and sustainability of the distance learning business, faculty preparedness, and student learning success. In support of this, the authors will introduce a model created as a pilot for online course development that addressed the resources and the processes for implementing a quality distance learning infrastructure, specifically the use of an online course development model for building, delivering, and evaluating online courses.

The purpose of this chapter is to inform distance learning stakeholders of the importance of implementing an online course development model in a distance learning infrastructure. The success of an online course relies on the thriving relationship between an instructional designer and faculty to endorse the quality of online courses, promote faculty preparedness for online course development and facilitation, encourage student engagement, and increase student satisfaction, retention, and success in online courses. To obtain these goals, the course development model should incorporate the values stated in the mission of the institution, college, and/or department. A foundation for implementing a course development model in these entities should include consistency in navigation and jargon, logical instructions, ease of use, alignment with objectives, and appropriate use of technology. Adoption of a quality assurance rubric provides standard guidelines that are helpful in creating templates for the syllabus, course schedule, learning modules, and the learning management system course shell. The use of templates (incorporated with best practices, research, and quality assurance standards) provides all stakeholders with a process that can easily and quickly be adapted when building an online course. Such use, however, should not inhibit academic freedom nor dictate faculty's creativity.

BACKGROUND

Why should stakeholders be concerned about the quality of online courses? The quality of online courses could have a significant impact on student satisfaction, retention, and success (Herbert, 2006; Heyman, 2010; Palloff & Pratt, 2011; Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008). According to Allen and Seaman (2013), even though online enrollments are increasing rapidly, there are still concerns with various barriers impeding the institution's long-term strategy for growth (e.g., lack of faculty acceptance, student discipline, and retention rates). Likewise, Sampson et al. (2010) listed additional barriers as: a) building relationships with students; b) poor faculty-student and student-student interactions; and 3) quality of content, delivery, and web-based instructions.

With enrollment growths and benefits of distance education, various stakeholders (e.g., administration, faculty, distance learning personnel, trainers, and technical support) should invest in the resources and best practices needed to remain competitive with other colleges and institutions. The aforementioned barriers are more reasons to implement standard protocols to help define and assess what quality means to a particular entity. In this chapter, the authors share their experiences in reviewing research, quality assurance rubrics, best practices, and existing course development models to create a new model for online course development and delivery (Outlaw & Rice, 2015), which incorporated a method to define and achieve quality, as well as measure and assess quality in online programs and courses.

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