Chapter X

Delivering Online Expertise, Online

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Abstract

This chapter describes two strategies for delivering educational design expertise and online professional development via the Internet. The issues and difficulties pertaining to the design and application of online staff development are examined in terms of the factors and needs that were observed during the implementation phases. The professional development initiative focuses on staff development Web sites which aim to inspire instructional design staff to understand the implicit teaching and learning goals used by lecturers and to assist lecturing staff to increase their awareness of instructional design methodologies. This approach allows participants engaged in online developments to share a common pool of understanding and expertise. The chapter concludes by identifying the potential advantages of the Web-based professional development strategies.

Introduction

It is generally accepted that learning management systems (LMS) are useful for online teaching. However, there are many aspects of online learning that need to be learned before teaching in this new environment. For instance, there are lecturers who are reticent to engage in online learning delivery because they do not have the appropriate skills, are too busy or do not have sufficient time. On the other hand, some lecturers possess the skills and competencies to teach online but lack access to suitable teaching resources appropriate for their teaching area. Given the diversity of needs and skill levels, it is argued that university staff require convenient, on-demand access to start-up advice, high quality Web resources, and ongoing, up-to-date online professional development support.

Online delivery platforms such as WebCT and BlackBoard offer a well-integrated, consistent approach to the development and distribution of electronic learning materials. A useful analogy is to think of these technologies as a workbench comprised of tools for combining text, graphics, video, and audio files in ways that allow lecturers to adapt selected teaching content to the online environment. Most LMS Web development tools include "wizards" that guide the user in the creation of online teaching materials. For the novice, this means that the task of designing Web material can be accomplished with little or no expertise in writing HTML code. However, regardless of the sophistication of the available tools and facilities, leveraging this technology for teaching and learning purposes requires practitioners to develop a range of skills and competencies that extend beyond the capacity of many LMS platforms and enable the transfer of sound teaching practices to the online environment.

If academic staff are to succeed in the transition to online teaching, then support for any related shift in educational practice should be holistic in scope, responsive in nature, and sensitive to changes in academic roles and responsibilities. This chapter details two staff development programmes currently available to staff at Curtin University of Technology. It describes the complex task of delivering online educational design expertise and flexible learning strategies to academic staff. The issues and difficulties of Web-based online staff development are discussed in relation to just-in-time access to guidelines and procedures and the practical examples that assist staff to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in the online environment. The chapter concludes with an overview of future refinements and a summary of the key factors that may assist other institutions in establishing similar approaches to online staff development.

Background

University staff are currently facing an enormous challenge to provide high quality learning experiences to their on-campus and off-campus students due to declining resources and an increasing demand for greater flexibility in teaching delivery options. At the same time, academic teaching practices are under considerable pressure to keep pace with rapid developments in information and communication technologies (ICT) that are shaping students' expectations of what they believe is a university education. These emerging pressures in-

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