

Chapter 29

Preparing Part-Time Instructors for Success in Online Course Development and Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Part-time instructors are at the heart of each continuing education operation throughout the world. They bring a wealth of industry experience which adds real-life undertones to classes. However, many lack foundational training in areas of instructional strategies and adult education theory, learning management systems (LMS) and their use in online courses, and course design and development. This chapter will provide an overview of how McMaster University's Centre for Continuing Education has addressed all three of the above areas with a view towards better equipping their part-time instructors in providing a better-quality learning experience. Central to the above is the use of online training and a thorough and highly structured approach to online course development.

INTRODUCTION

Post-secondary continuing education typically provides certification and vocational training to the adult learner who is often characterized as a working professional, newly landed immigrant, or a person in a career transition. Programs are typically short in duration, scheduled in a way that leverages technology and enables one to complete programs in 1-2 years. Instructors are typically hired from industry bringing with them an abundance of career and subject matter expertise (Lankard, 1993). They dedicate the majority of their time to their chosen profession while finding time to teach 1-2 classes per academic term. Despite having a wealth of experience in their chosen field, few come into the job with much in the way of training on the art of teaching. Many lack formal education in curriculum design, pedagogical/andragogical theories, instructional strategies, etc. If left to their own devices, most revert back to what they remember in terms of the teaching experience – a hazy image of what they faced in elementary and

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secondary school. To ensure success in teaching, online course development, and the use of a learning management system(LMS), continuing education operations must provide training that is flexible, up-to-date, and hands-on. This chapter outlines McMaster University's Centre for Continuing Education's (CCE) strategy to achieve such success.

BACKGROUND

Despite the importance of professional development, few academic institutions offer much in the way of training for part-time instructors. It is simply something that is complicated by the fact that many of these part-time instructors and course developers do not have much time available during a typical work day. National figures from the United States, indicate that only 48% of academic institutions provide training to part-time faculty (PROCEEDINGS, 1990). The following will review the training and support practices implemented by the Centre for Continuing Education at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. A summary of training and support in three areas will be provided:

- **Instructional Strategies for Adult Learners:** An online course (mandatory for all new instructors as well as those with no previous formal training in adult education/training).
- **Learning Management Systems Training:** Within the actual tool which instructors will employ, Brightspace by Desire2Learn.
- A highly-structured approach to online course development including the availability of various templates and aids for developing course content for online courses.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR ADULT LEARNERS

McMaster University's Centre for Continuing Education is typical of most modern-day adult education or extended learning centres in that most of its programming reflects vocational programs, many of which lead to industry certification. More and more, learners are gravitating to the online or digital sphere choosing the flexibility of online courses over the traditional F2F options. Currently, over 70% of its annual enrolment of just over 10,000 is involved in online courses. Clearly, students are no different than consumers in that they are slowly moving themselves to the virtual domain.

While many part-time instructors bring a wealth of career-related experience and subject matter expertise which adds to the relevancy of their performance, they often lack knowledge of best practices in teaching adults. They may not have embarked on education programs which often provide an introduction to theoretical foundations of good instruction, curriculum development, evaluation of learning, lesson planning, domains of learning, questioning techniques, online tools, and other valuable instructional components. Training in these areas has generally shown to improve instructor performance as well as student satisfaction levels (Ostertag, 1991). McMaster University's Centre for Continuing Education has developed an online course aimed at providing a high-level introduction on many of the above themes while still providing hands-on application of concepts. The course is offered online using Desire2Learn's Brightspace learning management system (LMS) and provides 22 hours of instruction which spanning 11 weeks, available concurrently while instructors teach their own course, thereby allowing them to

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