Chapter 25
Promoting Digital Teaching and Learning:
Faculty Development Options for Distance Learning Instructors

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores various faculty development digital teaching and learning options that higher education institutions can offer distance learning instructors. The chapter explains specific methods of providing professional development opportunities for these educators. Some of these options are connected to promotion and tenure, acquisition of new technology, and personal satisfaction. Recently developed technological rewards such as digital badges and credentials are discussed in this chapter. The author explains how nationally recognized professional development programs can enhance professional development programs by offering new options to faculty. The author recommends that higher education institutions modify their current processes for offering professional development options for faculty who design and develop distance learning courses. The chapter suggests that faculty members need specific digital teaching and learning professional development training options when designing and teaching distance learning courses.

INTRODUCTION

Enrollment in distance learning courses and programs is on the rise. "No matter how much we think that there might be something slowing it down, it hasn't happened," (Seaman, as cited in Friedman, 2018, para. 3). It is estimated that approximately six percent of all undergraduate and graduate students are currently enrolled in at least one distance education course (Radicioni, 2018). Allen and Seaman (2017) reported that 83% of distance learning students are studying at the undergraduate level. Most likely, this number will continue to grow, requiring colleges and universities to amplify their online offerings. In

order to develop these courses and programs, higher education institutions will need to provide instructors with enticing faculty development opportunities. This chapter presents various faculty development options that can act as key factors in developing effective and engaging pedagogy, increasing motivation, expanding learning opportunities, and disseminating skills in higher education.

As is cited in a recent report by the Babson Survey Research Group, "distance education enrollments increased for the fourteenth straight year, growing faster than they have for the past several years" (Seaman, Allen, & Seaman, 2018, p. 3). Julia E. Seaman, the Director of the Babson Research Group, stated, "The growth of distance enrollments has been relentless. They have gone up when the economy was expanding when the economy was shrinking, when overall enrollments were growing, and now when overall enrollments are shrinking," (as cited in Radicioni, 2018, para. 3). In order to offer first-rate higher education online programs or courses, faculty development in digital teaching and learning needs to be a key factor.

This chapter explores various faculty development options offered to distance education instructors to promote digital teaching and learning in today's higher education institutions. Moreover, the chapter examines the basic issues surrounding the development and teaching of distance learning courses as well as the importance of faculty development in digital teaching and learning. The chapter delivers helpful suggestions for faculty who teach in higher education institutions that offer distance learning programs and courses. Finally, the chapter suggests critical areas for future research in this area of study.

BACKGROUND

Distance learning, otherwise known as distance education or online learning, is defined as an institution-based form of education where students are physically separated from professors, and interactive telecommunication systems connect learners and resources (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2014). The National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) defines a distance education course as "a course in which the instructional content is delivered exclusively via distance education. Requirements for coming to campus for orientation, testing, or academic support services do not exclude a course from being classified as distance education" (Allen, Seaman, Poulin, & Straut, 2016, p. 3).

For the purposes of this paper, distance education is defined as a form of education "that uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor synchronously or asynchronously" (Seaman & Allen, 2017, p. 6). There are four main characteristics that distinguish distance learning from traditional face-to-face instruction (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2014). Primarily, distance learning is carried out through an institution; it is not a self-study or non-academic learning activity. Students who succeed in distance learning courses are awarded college or university credit. Second, geographic separation is inherent in distance learning; students and professors are located in different areas. Third, interactive telecommunications connect the learning group with each other and with the instructor. Most often, electronic communications such as electronic mail or web-based tools are used, but traditional forms of communication such as the postal system may also play a role. Finally, distance learning establishes an official learning community, which is composed of students and a professor.

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