Chapter 10
Developing Technology–Centric Best Teaching Practices for Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors present a case study that describes their experiences in identifying and addressing technology-related challenges in higher education. Based on their experiences, they illustrate how higher education institutions can foster and cultivate faculty expertise and skills in order to enhance their online course development programs and improve the quality of courses and the success of students. The authors' work has focused on the following topics: best practices for online teachers, best practices for and the effects of using conditional release in online classes, and strategies for balancing online teaching activities. All of this work takes a technology-centric perspective on online learning in higher education. Using these domains as examples, the authors describe how administrators can encourage faculty cooperation and collaboration as their institutions implement effective technology-centric strategies.

INTRODUCTION

It is common for higher education administration to advocate for technology-centric strategies related to teaching and learning. Institutions frequently advocate for the adoption of new technologies by faculty members, such as learning management systems, alternative modes of course delivery, and a variety of new technology bells and whistles. The promotion of instructional technologies is often met with mixed results. For a variety of reasons, faculty may be hesitant to adopt new tools or actively resist incorporating them into their classes. If administrators promote a technology-centered strategy that lacks tangible support for its implementation or evidence of best practices in the use of that tool, then faculty

will justifiably be wary. An important challenge in this domain is for higher education administrators to make informed decisions about the use of a new technology for teaching and learning.

In this chapter, the authors describe ways for administration to utilize faculty support and expertise to increase the chances of successful implementation of new teaching and learning technologies. They begin with brief overviews of two approaches that have been very successful in facilitating technology-centric higher education decision making: scholarship of teaching and learning projects and faculty learning communities. Then, the authors discuss several projects based on these approaches. Using these projects as case examples, the authors describe how administrators can encourage faculty cooperation and collaboration as their institutions implement effective technology-centric strategies.

BACKGROUND

Overview of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

The concept of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) is variously defined as teaching as scholarly work, evidence-based methods to study effective teaching and student learning, and systematic research and dissemination about teaching and learning (Boyer, 1990; Shulman, 2012). SoTL projects can include reports on particular classes (e.g., something that has worked well at improving student learning); reflective essays, summaries, or integrations of scholarship on teaching; comparisons of courses or student change across time; and more formal research (e.g., experimental designs, meta-analyses). Among the goals of these kinds of projects are to assess the efficacy of instructional techniques, determine the best practices for the use of specific tools (such as instructional technologies), and make recommendations for improvement in higher education teaching and learning.

SoTL projects are combinations of teaching and research. These projects assume that research on teaching and learning activities is as scholarly as the discipline-specific research that faculty conduct in their labs or in the field (Boyer, 1990). The typical SoTL project begins by identifying unique and innovative techniques, tools, and activities that teachers are using (or would like to use) in their classes. Then, the researchers determine the state of the teaching and research literature with respect to the use of these techniques or activities, either within their disciplines or outside them. Finally, they publish their findings and make recommendations to further the study of the particular teaching technique or activity. A crucial component of SoTL work is to assess the effectiveness of these techniques or activities, typically by using objective and faculty/student perception data. There is a large literature on the effectiveness of SoTL, including how this approach can be used to meet challenges and facilitate positive change among institutions of higher education (e.g., Ginsberg & Bernstein, 2012; Hutchings, Huber, & Ciccone, 2011; Mårtensson, Roxå, & Olsson, 2011).

Overview of Faculty Learning Communities

A faculty learning community (FLC) typically entails an active and collaborative group of interdisciplinary faculty who meet for an academic year (Cox, 2004). The program often includes a curriculum about enhancing teaching and learning or professional development. The FLC includes regularly scheduled meetings and activities that provide participants with formal and informal opportunities and community building pertaining to its major focus.

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