Chapter 12
Using Technology to Enhance Student and Faculty Success in Online Courses

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors present a case study that describes how their campus supports distance learning and teaching. They illustrate how higher education institutions can enhance student and faculty success in online courses through the strategic use of technology. Specifically, the authors describe programs that provide support for distance education students, employ faculty mentors to promote the quality of online courses under development, and utilize electronic portfolios (e-portfolios) to assess student learning outcomes. All of this work takes a technology-centric perspective on online learning in higher education. Using these projects as examples, the authors describe how administrators can provide support for both students and faculty as their institutions implement effective technology-centric strategies.

INTRODUCTION

There are multiple challenges for higher education administrators as they deal with a rapidly changing institutional landscape. Among the facets of this landscape are diverse student characteristics, the need for faculty development and support, and new modes of course delivery and assessment of student learning outcomes. Distance education presents several challenges and opportunities (many of them technology-based) that differ from traditional face-to-face education. For example, technology use is inherently more likely when a course is completely online and the students must access all content, activities, and

assessments through a learning management system (LMS). The authors have extensive experience in the administration of online teaching and learning in higher education. They have focused on (1) ways by which institutions can provide support for distance students with minimal imposition on the faculty teaching those students, (2) ways by which institutions can ensure the development of high quality online courses through the use of faculty mentors, and (3) the use of e-portfolios for the assessment of student learning outcomes. In this chapter, the authors describe each of these projects and discuss the implications of this work for technology-centric institutional strategies and decision-making.

These projects illustrate how institutions can leverage campus tools and expertise in ways that are time- and cost-effective. The authors emphasize the challenges and barriers associated with online teaching and learning that need to be navigated by teachers and administrators. They also examine how higher education administrations can optimize their student and faculty support, while also developing and maintaining quality standards for online courses and the assessment of student learning outcomes. In this chapter, they extend their previous work and determine ways by which it can inform administrative leadership and decision-making.

BACKGROUND

The authors' team has been working together since 2008. During this time, they have focused on a variety of program development initiatives related to online teaching, learning, and administration. The team is comprised of faculty and staff who have extensive teaching and administrative experience. One of the team served as associate dean for their campus's distance learning division from 2008 to 2013. She now serves as associate professor in the university studies department. Among her faculty responsibilities in this position are the program coordinator for the online degree programs in liberal studies and professional studies and teaching the online capstone course for these majors. Another member of the team serves as the director of faculty development for their campus's teaching and learning center, is a professor in the psychology department, and is an experienced online teacher and mentor of online faculty. The third member of the team has served as the institution's manager of distance education faculty services since 2001 and teaches the online capstone course in the liberal studies degree.

The authors have utilized a strong assessment and evaluation approach with all of their work, including collecting data on student and faculty perceptions of and experiences with the programs. The campus uses these data to improve processes, address technology issues, and identify training needs and opportunities. Distance education includes both faculty and student services units that report to the dean of the university college.

The distance education faculty services (DEFS) unit is comprised of three staff, including a manager, a coordinator, and a technical clerk. The unit manages the university's online course development program and provides support to online faculty. It facilitates the approval, collection, and maintenance of course proposal, training confirmation, contract, peer review, and delivery approval documents for online course development and redesign. The DEFS also annually surveys faculty course designers to collect feedback regarding the services and development resources provided by the office.

The DEFS manager works with departments to develop fully online programs and seeks governing board and accreditation body approvals for those programs. This position serves as a point of contact for the university's participation in the state system's educational collaborative. This collaborative provides a central resource for exploration of online undergraduate and graduate courses and programs devel-

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