

Chapter 58

Faculty Participation in Online Higher Education: What Factors Motivate or Inhibit Their Participation?

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ABSTRACT

In the past decade, enrollments in distance education, and specifically online education, have grown dramatically in the United States. According to the 2009 Sloan Report (Allen & Seaman, 2010), enrollments in online courses increased from 9.6% of total postsecondary enrollments in 2002 to 25.3% in 2009. Unfortunately, a number of barriers exist that may result in an inability of higher education institutions to provide quality online education programming in sufficient scale to meet the expected student demand. The Managing Online Education report (Green, 2010) identifies the resistance of faculty towards teaching in an online environment as foremost among ten factors that “impede institutional efforts to expand online education programs” (p. 1). An understanding of the factors that both motivate and discourage faculty member participation in online education programs is critical if institutions are to leverage their existing faculty to meet the current and future demand for online education. This case study first presents a number of motivating and inhibiting factors and then discusses how St. Bonaventure University leveraged these factors in an attempt to boost faculty participation in online education.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

While there is little expressly technical language used in this case study, it is important that several important terms be defined.

1. Online education refers to education delivered via the Internet. Fully online instruction is defined as “a course where most or all of the content is delivered online” with “typically no face-to-face” meeting (Allen & Seaman, 2011, p. 7).

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2. Asynchronous online education refers to online education conducted in a manner whereby students and instructors interact at different times (Olson & Hale, 2007). Asynchronous online education is often facilitated by the use of a learning management system and incorporates technologies such as discussion boards, online assignments, and multi-media content delivery.
3. Synchronous online education refers to online education conducted in a manner whereby students and instructors interact at the same time (Olson & Hale, 2007). Synchronous online education is often delivered by means of real-time, web-based collaboration software such as Adobe Connect or WebEx.
4. A learning management system is a web-based computer system that enables online instruction through facilitation of such activities as online discussions, assignments, and content delivery. Both Blackboard and Moodle are examples of commonly used learning management systems.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

St. Bonaventure University, founded in 1858, is a liberal arts university located in a rural portion of the northeastern United States. St. Bonaventure University enrolls approximately 2,000 undergraduate and 500 graduate students in its approximately 50 undergraduate and 20 graduate degree programs from the schools of Arts & Sciences, Business, Education, Journalism & Mass Communications, and Franciscan Studies. The St. Bonaventure University faculty is comprised of 154 full-time and 101 part-time faculty members. Roughly 54.5% of the faculty holds a terminal degree. Females make up almost 45% of the faculty population. Full-time faculty at St. Bonaventure are on a 4/4 teaching load. Approximately 92% of the faculty identified their race as “white,” with the remaining 8% identified as “Nonresident alien,” “Hispanic/Latino,” “American Indian or Alaska Native,” “Asian,” or “Black or African American.” St. Bonaventure University currently offers only a limited number of fully online courses during the summer term. The University does, however, have plans to offer fully online degree programs beginning in the fall of 2013.

SETTING THE STAGE

The Importance of Online Learning to Higher Education

Higher education institutions often seek to implement online education initiatives as a means to increase student enrollments (Schiffman, Vignare, & Geith, 2007). Higher education online enrollments continue to surge in the United States, as evidenced by the finding from the most recent Sloan Consortium report (Allen & Seaman, 2011) indicating that the number of students taking at least one online course grew by an annualized rate of 18.3 percent between fall 2002 and fall 2010. This is compared to an approximate two percent annualized growth rate for enrollments in all of higher education during the same time period (Allen & Seaman, 2011). This promise of increased enrollments has elevated online education to a position of great strategic importance for higher education institutions. Indeed, 65.5% of chief academic officers at higher education institutions reported that online education is “critical to the long-term strategy of my institution” (Allen & Seaman, 2011, p. 7). Research (Chau, 2010; Hoskins,

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