

Chapter 79

Faculty Development Needs for Distance Education

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ABSTRACT

This report presents the results of a review that looked at what college resources are needed to support an online environment and how a small liberal arts college can prepare faculty for a shift in pedagogy is one of today's major issues, when using a Learning Management System (LMS) to teach. A literature review was done to review the ideas of what college resources are needed to support an online learning environment in Higher Education and the implications for faculty development in a small liberal arts college. The main themes surveyed were faculty and the support needed to move a classroom instructor to an online instructor. The research focused on how constructivist learning could support faculty development.

INTRODUCTION

Today small liberal arts colleges must look at: what resources will be needed to support an online learning environment in their school, the pedagogy changes faculty will need to learn to effectively teach in an online classroom, and the cost of choosing to offer entirely online programs. While it is understood that there is a defined cost for installing and maintaining a Learning Management System (LMS), either in the cost of hosting the system or the cost of implementing on site, there are often hidden costs for this implementation. These costs include, but are not limited to: support for library systems, admissions counseling, student support systems, the technology support for the faculty and students, and the development programs needed for training faculty. With an increasing number of schools adding full online classes or hybrid learning environments, more research needs to be centered on the faculty and the necessary development programs that will shape the student's learning environment (Williams & Donnellon, 2014).

The purpose of this literature review is to look at these hidden costs in relation to preparing faculty for teaching in an online classroom. The topics studied, but were not limited to: the concept of shared

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governance, faculty development for distance education, assessments of online learning faculty, hours spent on distance education, and course design. This review also identifies additional ideas, that while not explored in this report, should be investigated in future research. The hope of these studies is to make significant suggestions for improvement in faculty development programs that look to better prepare faculty for an online classroom experience that will ultimately provide students with a cohesive and positive online learning experience.

BACKGROUND

While technology can be used in many forms of teaching, the use of technology in teaching does not imply a distance education class. In comparison, any learning where the teacher and learner are separated by time and distance and must rely on a tool to convey the lesson should be considered distance education (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). Distance education is formal education that occurs between two or more groups of people who are not in the same location. The groups communicate through a common technology such as the Internet, television, letters and other similar communication tools (Simonson et al., 2011). The earliest example of distance education began with mail correspondence courses where students received their learning materials in the mail and returned them the same way. With the advent of radio and satellite television came more instantaneous learning. Distance education continues to develop and evolve as technology progresses. With the computer and Internet, more avenues of communication at a variety of price points have emerged (Moore & Kearsley, 2011). When speaking of distance education, learning can now occur thanks to the Internet as synchronous or asynchronous learning, or even a mixture of both in the same lesson. In this report, synchronous learning is not the main, but may be referenced as a component within an asynchronous classroom. Asynchronous learning refers to information that is shared when the learner and instructor are not able to connect, at the same moment, when there is no real time communication between the parties.

In recent years, distance education has become synonymous with online education and its flexible delivery method. Henceforth, this chapter, when discussing distance education, it refers to the recent distance education technology LMS. When talking about distance education it is equally important to understand the stakeholders and how they may affect the role of the instructor. Stakeholders in the world of distance education are the learner, the instructor, the designers and the administration. While the learner's role is important to the overall distance education field, the learner will only be talked about in relation to the instructor or the course design (For more on the student's feelings and needs in distance education please refer to the additional readings section of this article). The designers' group has the responsibility of establishing appropriate technologies or materials to help build a comfort level for the learner with the course structure. Designers, when available, also help faculty establish the technology needed for a learning environment with a learner-centered focus. The administration, often not talked about as directly relational to the learning, is responsible for providing a higher level of coordination. The administration will provide faculty support and rules and regulations required to create a level of shared governance between the faculty and staff. The instructor's job is to understand the needs of the learners and to design a class that facilitates a constructivist approach to learning (Isman, Altinay & Altinay, 2004). Traditional classrooms also have many similar stakeholders, but it is the lack of face-to-face communication that makes these roles unique.

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