

Chapter 90

Moving Your College Toward Online Programs Including a Quality Matters Implementation Plan

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ABSTRACT

Moving faculty in a direction toward having online programs/courses at their college can be a daunting task, but another college's example may assist in preparing for online programs with quality online courses that include a Quality Matters Implementation Plan that will help define how the college will expand faculty knowledge of online education instructional design. In a college's transition to online education, it is particularly important to "sell" this idea to faculty members. Faculty members at many institutions may be fearful that they will not meet QM standards when going through a course review. Further, faculty members may be fearful of losing the "boundaries" that they currently have teaching in a face-to-face setting. Other concerns revolve around budget constraints, preparing the college for online education, keeping consistency in faculty work duties, training faculty, faculty staying current with technology, keeping the same rigor in the online course as a face-to-face course, including an appropriate level of contact with students, and accreditation needs in order to have online education offered at the college. Management and organizational needs include having an administration team that supports faculty in making the change from a face-to-face class to an online class.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Anoka Technical College ("ATC") is a two-year technical college located in Anoka, Minnesota (Northern suburb of the Minneapolis/St. Paul area) that offers more than 35 technical career certificates, diplomas, and associate degrees in many technical and paraprofessional fields. The college has about 2,000 students a year with 60% female and 40% male. The campus currently serves mainly underrepresented students,

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including students of color, and low-income, non-traditional-aged, and/or first-generation students. The college has a student-to-faculty ratio of 22:1. Some of the unique programs are “broadcast captioning, judicial reporting, occupational therapy assistant, golf course grounds management, health information technology, multimedia and gaming information technology” (“Anoka Technical College - History and Facts,” 2013).

ATC instructors belong to a strong union comprised of faculty from Minnesota’s public, two-year colleges. The union currently has “3,700+ members located at 30 colleges (46 campuses and sites) throughout Minnesota” (“Minnesota State College Faculty – About MSCF,” 2013). I have been with the college since 2002, first teaching face-to-face courses in the Legal Administrative Assistant Program and now teaching online/hybrid courses. I am the department chair of the program and oversee curriculum changes, advising students, marketing the program, and performing program/course assessment. Also, my job entails being the chairperson for the online committee for our college. In the spring of 2012, I became the first Quality Matters’ Master Reviewer for the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities.

SETTING THE STAGE

In a technical college, classes are typically taught in a face-to-face setting. Since the inception of online education, some ATC faculty have contemplated how to teach their classes in an online environment. It is a challenge to take a face-to-face course and transfer it into a quality online course. Challenges included lack of funds to hire instructional designers, time constraints to train faculty that were already stretched for time, and knowledge of what constitutes a quality online course.

Because of the college’s budget constraints, ATC faculty were not afforded trained instructional designers to assist in the design of quality online courses; therefore, our faculty had to learn, mostly by trial and error, how to create successful online courses. Creating the online course is just the first stage in teaching the course online. There are many factors to take into consideration such as course design, course delivery, course content, institutional infrastructure, learning management software, faculty readiness and student readiness. Even though online faculty were working many hours becoming trained on the learning management software and creating online courses, managing their courses and still attending their committee meetings at the college, some faculty skeptics at the college believed that faculty who were teaching online were not holding up their end of the contract or working their full hours per week. Some thought that their peers were creating courses and letting them run by themselves. While it is true that one can create a course and let it run by itself—the “Set it and forget it” method—that would not be a quality online course. There are two components to a quality online course; first, the instructor creates the course based on identified standards that determine quality, and then delivers the course in an active, engaged, and assessment-based manner.

At the Summit 2011 conference that was put on by the Minnesota Learning Commons, eFolio Minnesota, and Northwestern College in Minnesota, the keynote speaker was Dr. Linda Baer. Dr. Baer, at the time, was the Senior Program Officer, Postsecondary Success for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The keynote speech was entitled “As the Future Catches You . . .” Dr. Baer shared Strategic Intelligence for Higher Education which states that for optimization of competitive advantage and degree of intelligence, a college must get past the levels of learning what trends are continually happening next, to the level of “What’s the best that can happen?” (Baer, 2011). Also, she stated that if you did not get on board with online education, your college will “miss the boat” (Baer, 2011).

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