

Chapter 100

A Qualitative Study of Student Expectations of Online Faculty Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Institutions offering online courses and degrees often develop requirements for faculty-to-student interactions; yet, these requirements may not align student preferences for faculty engagement. This chapter expanded the work on an earlier study by Shaw, Clowes, and Burrus, “A Comparative Typology of Student and Institutional Expectations of Online Faculty.” The current study included a new sampling of 57 students across two institutions focused on their experiences in online courses. Using the original typology as a lens, results were grouped into themes including substantive feedback, timeliness, and course expectations. Recommendations for further study include conducting a quantitative study of the relationship between faculty outcomes and student satisfaction after implementing student performance expectations.

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF STUDENT EXPECTATIONS OF ONLINE FACULTY ENGAGEMENT

Higher education institutions across the country have expanded to meet student demand for online programs and courses (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Institutional leaders are challenged develop expectations for faculty around student engagement to ensure best practices and student needs are fulfilled. With student retention closely tied to student satisfaction, studying strategies enhance student experience, engagement, and enjoyment in the online academic setting can have important consequences for institutions. This research study was an expansion of a previous study, *A Comparative Typology of Student and Institutional Expectations of Online Faculty* (Shaw, Clowes, & Burrus, 2017). The original study arose after numerous discussions with online faculty who shared institutional expectations of performance, which often differed from the literature on student perceptions of quality faculty performance. Student satisfaction is an essential element that should drive faculty mentoring approaches (Izadina, 2016); yet, there was a gap in the literature relative to the role of student experience as a driver of faculty expectations. The initial study included an exploration of a expectations from a sample of institutions and then experiences of online students without any institution specific data. This study allowed the researchers to sample a specific group of online students in courses to further validate the original findings.

The research questions that drove this study where:

1. What are student expectations for online faculty engagement relative to substantive feedback, timeliness, and course expectations?
2. What are student expectations of the requirements institutions should have for online faculty in terms of student engagement?

Theoretical Framework

Engagement theory was used as the theoretical lens through which the data were evaluated. Engagement Theory was developed as a framework for technology enhanced teaching and learning (Kearsley & Schneiderman, 1998). Engagement was conceived as a way that students participate in learning activities that are collaborative and interactive. Engagement Theory often requires relational components such as communication and social skills (Miliszewska & Horwood, 2004). As such, it is particularly relevant to the online setting. For meaningful learning to occur, students must be engaged in activities and interaction with others throughout the learning event. Our view of Engagement Theory relies on the experience of students interacting online through technology as a means of engaging in learning (O'Brien & Toms, 2008). While we did not specifically engage students around the definition of engagement, we recognized that there was value in gathering data from students about engagement knowing their interpretations of this term might vary.

Literature Review

To ensure standards of faculty performance, many institutions dictate expectations that faculty must meet on a regular basis such as grading timelines, online course engagement, and student communication practices via course expectations. Online faculty members are often expected to comply with these expectations as a condition of continued employment. In the original study by Shaw, Clowes, and Burrus

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