Chapter 16

Designing Innovative Faculty Development Initiatives Through the Lens of the Adult Learner

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ABSTRACT

As adult learners, faculty bring a range of experiences, content knowledge, and motivations with regard to the learning environment. With the continued growth of online enrollment, colleges and universities are focusing on learning theory, course design, and pedagogical shifts for teaching in today's classroom. Faculty development staff can use adult learning theories to guide the creation of alternative ways to deliver professional development. The authors highlight instructional design and program assessment as critical areas in supporting quality faculty development programs. This chapter will discuss trends in online education, adult learning theory research, the role of the instructional designer, and assessment of faculty development programs.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is currently undergoing several key changes including the shifting demographics of students and an increased demand for courses offered in flexible delivery formats. These changes are leading to a need for innovative faculty development options. Providing quality programs for today's students while working in a budget-conscious environment is challenging for many institutions. The authors explore these trends, to put the need for innovative faculty development offerings into perspec-

tive. Supporting faculty development is an important initiative that aligns with institutions' overall goal of providing students with a quality education in the twenty-first century.

This chapter illustrates how designing faculty development initiatives through the lens of the adult learner can support faculty in remaining current and competitive with the changing demands of students and society. Current course delivery trends will be discussed, identifying the continued growth in demand for flexible learning options in higher education. The authors translate each of Knowles' (1980) six assumptions of adult learners into practical applications and strategies for designing faculty development programs. Instructional designers play an important role in the design and facilitation of dynamic and engaging training opportunities for faculty. The authors discuss the variety of competencies required of skilled instructional designers in today's higher educational ecosystem. The chapter then examines the importance of assessing faculty development programs and identifies simple cost-effective strategies to assess such programs. Finally, the authors provide insight into future research considerations.

BACKGROUND

Online enrollment continues to outpace overall enrollment in U.S. higher education. This has sparked continued interest by faculty and administration in offering quality online programs (Legon & Garrett, 2018). Whether it be online course enrollments or online program enrollments, many educational institutions are looking at delivering flexible course formats while planning innovative ways to support students and faculty at a distance.

During the Fall 2016 semester, online students comprised over two million of the total number of higher education undergraduate enrollees, resulting in a 9% increase from Fall 2012 to Fall 2016. Online graduate students made up over 800,000 of the total number of higher education enrollees, resulting in a 28% growth rate from Fall 2012 to Fall 2016 (Legon & Garrett, 2018). Figure 1 illustrates the continued growth in online undergraduate and graduate enrollment in U.S. higher education (Legon & Garrett, 2018). In response to this trend, colleges and universities are integrating online learning as part of their overall strategic mission. According to Magda and Aslanian (2018), 85% of today's online students perceive online learning experiences as being the same or better than traditional classroom experiences.

Many factors contribute to this continued upward trend in online learning. One such factor includes the changing demographics of college students—specifically, there being an increase in the number of post-traditional or adult learners. While the term *adult learner* implies a population of students who are older than the traditional 18- to 24-year-old, higher education is seeing an increase in what is called post-traditional students. Aslanian (2017, p. 4) defined post-traditional students as students of any age who meet one or more of the following characteristics:

- Online and Distance Learners
- Older Adults
- Single Parents
- Part-Time Students
- Continuing Education Students
- Mid-Career Professionals
- Delayed Enrollees, and
- Occupational Certification Program Students.

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