

Chapter 4

Evaluating and Implementing Teaching Standards: Providing Quality Online Teaching Strategies and Techniques Standards

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ABSTRACT

As of the end of 2006, 38 states in the United States have established state-led online learning programs, policies regulating online learning, or both. Also, 25 states have state-led online learning programs, and 18 states are home to a total of 147 virtual charter schools serving over 65,000 students (<http://www.nacol.org>). This chapter will survey current online teacher training standards and trends, in terms of what is required of new online instructors. It will also focus on the use of the online learning environment as a vehicle to help instructors to prepare for online teaching in terms of current teaching strategies used – both from the live (on-ground) and online learning environments. This chapter will focus on several universities in terms of their approaches to online teacher training for experienced instructors, as well as new teaching recruits as they prepare to transition from traditional classrooms over to virtual classes.

INTRODUCTION

As of the end of 2006, 38 states in the United States have established state-led online learning programs, policies regulating online learning, or both. Also, 25 states have state-led online learning programs, and 18 states are home to a total of 147 virtual charter schools serving over 65,000 students (<http://www.nacol.org>). In 2001, 56% of traditional learning institutions offered distance

learning programs. An additional 12% of the schools stated they planned on adding distance learning programs to their curriculum within the next three years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). Thus, more secondary- and post-secondary level teachers will need to seek additional education in order to obtain and master quality online teaching skills and strategies. As a result, more universities are offering online education courses and teacher training in order to help recruit and hire more online instructors. Thus, there is a growing need to increase the number

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of online instructors to teach at many educational institutions.

Online Student Enrollments

As more technology has become available in many parts of the globe, a new type of student population has emerged. The traditional student image of higher learning has been somewhat limited in many countries, but given the impact of the Internet, this traditional “student body” has changed to online communities. According to Preece (2000), these online communities “consists of people who interact socially as they strive to satisfy their own needs or perform special roles; a shared purpose that provides a reason for the community; policies that guide people’s interactions; and computer systems to support and mediate social interaction and facilitate a sense of togetherness” (p. 10). In the field of business and management, educators have recognized the demographical changes of the student population. In a virtual environment, the student is not the same traditional student seen in classrooms in previous years, but rather one that reflects a vast array of cultural differences and needs that require educators to help build “new learning paths” towards the creation of virtual learning communities.

The number of students taking at least one online course continues to expand at a rate far in excess of the growth of overall higher education enrollments. The most recent estimate, for fall 2007, places this number at 3.94 million online students, an increase of 12.9 percent over fall 2006. The number of online students has more than doubled in the five years since the first Sloan survey on online learning. The growth from 1.6 million students taking at least one online course in fall 2002 to the 3.94 million for fall 2007 represents a compound annual growth rate of 19.7 percent. The overall higher education student body has grown at an annual rate of around 1.6 percent during this same period (from 16.6 million in Fall 2002 to 18.0 million for fall 2007 - Projections

of Education Statistics to 2017, National Center for Education Statistics). As the following table illustrates, over one-fifth of all higher education students are now taking at least one online course.

Who are these 3.9 million students? The overwhelmingly majority (over 80 percent) are studying at the undergraduate level with only 14 percent taking graduate level courses and the remainder in some other for-credit course. Using survey results and figures from the most recent federal data (Digest of Education Statistics: 2007, National Center for Education Statistics) to compare enrollment patterns shows only slight variations in the proportions of students by education type. The proportion of undergraduates in online education (83.9 percent) is slightly below that of the total population of higher education students (85.6 percent). (Allen & Seaman, 2008)

While technology has provided a powerful infrastructure, the emerging technologies have allowed educational institutions, educators, and students to provide education on a much higher playing field – in a virtual learning environment. Consequently, the business world has also worked with technology in this venture to help assist educational institutions in becoming more modern and adaptive for change. As a result, these changes only signify to the educational and learning communities that technology recognizes a need for change – but do we, as educators, recognize the need for change completely? Finally, many educational institutions, as well as the business world, are focusing on the learning process and its impact on their organizational structure and employees.

Online Learning and the Learning Organization

While many people consider online learning to be a new academic endeavor, one must also consider the next step for college graduates – the world of work. In this regard, the corporate environment may differ from the academic setting; however,

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