

Chapter 47

Helping Faculty Design Online Courses in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The steady growth of online education has created increasing demands for faculty to design and teach online courses. At issue is the limited pedagogical preparation of higher education faculty hindering motivation to participate or the quality of their online teaching experiences. To address this issue faculty development supports are needed to help faculty transition into online teaching. This article provides an overview of related issues and a sample of emerging faculty development models followed with a description of a promising model integrating design, pedagogical, use of technology, and assessment considerations and adult development, learning, and planning principles. Emerging trends stemming from the review of related issues are also highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past twenty five years, the dramatic growth of technology applications has catalyzed a boom in online education. By all accounts, at the onset of the 21st Century, online education has become more popular among students who view the Internet as a viable alternative for the acquisition of information and education (Allen & Seaman, 2008). The universal appeal of the Internet is primarily associated with convenient

access “anytime/anywhere” and the opportunity to experience engaging interfaces and media (Motiwalla & Tello, 2000; National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). For institutions, the appeal is even greater in light of rising demands for flexible instructional formats—especially from adult learners, increasing cost of instruction, and institutional competition for students (Havice & Havice, 2005). To this end, the relatively quick development and maintenance of web-based resources prompted institutions to enter into online learning to keep up with the emerging digital world (Bower, 2001; Kim & Bonk, 2006). The result has

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been a push for institutional participation in online education to meet the steady increase in student enrollments (Allen & Seaman, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, 1999).

As the popularity of online education increased over the years, critics have noted the uneven quality of online courses and questioned the underlying merits of this delivery mode. The problem is that some institutions have standardized procedures for course development treating all courses the same way regardless of their nature and implicit requirements for delivery mode (Hernandez, Kirby, & McGee, 2004; Kim & Bonk, 2006). Worse yet, some institutions have simply demanded faculty to convert their traditional courses into online format. However, even when training and related supports are available, quite often the emphasis is on using development templates and selected technologies rather than on appropriate online instructional and assessment strategies (Bower, 2001; Maguire, 2005; Palloff & Pratt, 2001; Schmidt & Gallegos, 2001). In other cases, the courses are just a collection of documents including lecture notes and presentations with little teacher-student or student-student interaction and low intellectual stimulation (Noble, 2002; Partlow & Gibbs, 2003).

As the growth of online education continues to rise the calls for quality assurances have become more prominent as institutions compete for students in the online education market. Part of the problem is the tendency to emphasize the use of information technology, while neglecting appropriate training and supports to help faculty understand instructional principles for designing and teaching online courses (Bowers, 2001; Noble, 2002). This trend runs counter to the fact that higher education faculty, in general, join academia with limited—if any—formal teaching training. Thus, many faculty are reluctant to participate in online education as it requires learning new ways of teaching, using new technologies, and juggling added time demands. To ease the transition to and participation in online education,

university teaching centers have become commonplace. Nevertheless, reports on professional development supports for faculty participating in online education continue to show the need for coherent professional development strategies to help faculty in higher education design and teach online courses (Barker, 2003; Gardiner, 2000; Hiser, 2008; Maguire, 2005).

This chapter provides an overview of the growth of online learning as the backdrop for a description of issues related to higher education faculty participation in online education. Next, a description of emerging professional development models is introduced, followed by a discussion of an online model specifically designed to help faculty design and teach online courses. The chapter concludes with an outline of implications for professional development in higher education and emerging trends on this important contemporary issue.

BACKGROUND

Online education is quickly becoming a staple in higher education and its popularity has brought about many variations leading to the use of different terms, which sometimes are used interchangeably. Similarly, professional development can mean many things for different people making necessary to establish a shared definition of terms. It is also important to highlight the growth of online education to set the context for the relevance of needed professional development supports designed to meet the needs of faculty involved in online instruction.

Online Education: Need for Clarification

Distance education, online education, virtual education, web-based education, and other variations are often used interchangeably in the literature and in practice. To clarify, distance education is

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