Chapter 8.11
A New Model for Online Doctoral Course Development with Faculty Quality Assessment

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INTRODUCTION

The University of Phoenix (UoPhx) is the largest for-profit university in the United States. The institution is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and offers degree programs at the associate's, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels. The university's central office is located in Phoenix, Arizona. Its mission, as stated on its student home page, is "to provide access to higher education opportunities that enable students to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve their professional goals, improve the productivity of their organizations, and provide leadership and service to their communities" (University of Phoenix, 2006).

A pioneer in adult education, the institution has broken new ground in electronic course delivery, originally using a fax system and now delivering course content and library materials over the World Wide Web (the Web). With more than half of its 200,000 students enrolled in online programs, its materials must be geared to work effectively in an e-learning context, and must remain current and topical.

The university created the School of Advanced Studies (SAS) in 1998 to address the needs of students desiring to pursue studies beyond the level of a Master's degree. As part of this effort, several doctoral-level degree programs were created, including the Doctor of Business Administration, Doctor of Health Administration, Doctor of Management, and Doctor of Education, each with several specializations including Curriculum and Instruction, and Information Systems and Technology.

This article will document the model around which online courses have been developed at

UoPhx and discuss supporting literature This study will conclude with results obtained through Student End of Course Surveys and faculty feedback as well as a discussion focused on improving the model to better suit doctoral learners.

THE DOCTORAL COURSE MODEL

The Original Model

Moskal, et al. (2006) investigated online student satisfaction. The authors found that 83% of learners indicated they were satisfied with their program of study, citing convenience and flexibility as the major reasons. Eighty percent of students polled attributed their ability to complete their respective courses of study to the online modality. Universities around the world are increasingly turning to this mode of education, making it necessary to review common approaches and practices.

The online environment possesses several advantages and some disadvantages over a classroom environment. Tallent-Runnels, et al. (2005) discussed best practices related to online instruction. They focused on five enabling factors for successful online courses, including organization of the platform, pace of learning, support for learning, resources available to students, and maintaining a welcoming environment.

The platform is the substructure that supports the online course. The methods used to organize the platform significantly affect learning outcomes. Ideally, the platform is logically organized into folders containing resources that meet the needs of both faculty and students. According to the Tallent-Runnels, et al. (2005) review, online courses should organize electronic resources and materials in weekly folders.

Pacing is another significant element of online instruction. Tallent-Runnels, et al.'s (2005) findings indicate that students appreciate the ability to move at their own pace. Not surprisingly, their evidence strongly supports asynchronous discus-

sions and faculty feedback. Asynchronous discussions allow students to research and debate ideas, and create a virtual community. To further this fostering of community, faculty should provide timely feedback. Without feedback, students tend to withdraw from discussion.

Platform

The School of Advanced Studies programs are essentially hybrid in nature. Courses are delivered partially on location in Phoenix, Arizona, in the form of *residencies*, and partially in the Online Learning System 3 (OLS3). Shifting away from reliance upon locally-installed, computer-based software (e.g., Outlook Express), OLS3 allows learners and faculty to use browser-based classroom software to engage in classroom discussions, submit assignments, and meet with team members from any Web-connected computer (i.e., not just their personal computer), allowing access from a range of locations.

Class discussions are held asynchronously, allowing learners and faculty the convenience of participating at times that best match their schedules. Althaus (1997) found that asynchronous learning environments allowed students more time to read and respond to messages. In addition, the author found a positive relationship between discussion involvement and student grades. Rovai (2001) noted that asynchronous learning environments promote synthesis of knowledge and contribute to better-informed critical discussion. Furthermore, Heckman and Annabi (2003) found that asynchronous environments allow for more formal and careful responses.

While it provides a platform that encourages student involvement, OLS3 lacks the immediate interpersonal contact of the classroom setting. According to Pappas and Jerman (2004), future online courses will use a blended approach that incorporates both face-to-face and online instruction. Lim, et al. (2006) conducted a comparative analysis of online and blended courses in

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