

Chapter 1

eLearning Pedagogy: The Art of Teaching Online

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The online “classroom” can be a rich learning environment; however, many instructors are inadequately prepared, thereby undermining our students’ educational experiences. The following case study is based on a retrospective of experiences as course designer and instructor, feedback and examples from student online experiences, and an analysis of scholarly research. This chapter contributes to the literature on eLearning theory and practice by providing detailed insights and improvements on methodologies, technology, and practice, thereby promoting critical thinking related to effective online instruction. A qualitative, descriptive analysis of professional development, personal mastery, organization, open communication, assessment, and an overarching element of eLearning pedagogy comprise the vital elements for sound, effective online teaching. In order for online instructors to provide a rich learning experience, these elements must be developed and implemented for effective learning outcomes.

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

As an eLearning adjunct professor for two educational institutions, a community college (average enrollment 10,000+) and a university (average undergrad enrollment 45,000+), my typical teaching load is 5 undergraduate courses – one for the community college and the bulk for the university. I teach fall, spring and summer courses, and have been teaching online since 2009 (face-to-face, since 2005). All courses are taught completely online, no hybrids. The typical class size is 25

students/per section. For each class that I teach, I also designed and developed the curriculum. Prior to teaching online, as a college administrator, I taught part-time, as a lecturer in the traditional, face-to-face classroom for four years.

SETTING THE STAGE

Ever since I began teaching online I have been curious about the student experience. Since 2009, I have amassed student feedback in a continuous catalog of their online experiences. The data was attained through responses from formal student assessments, reflective essays, discussion question posts (often indirect from sidebar conversations amongst classmates) and e-mails. I have found this information to be invaluable; therefore their experiences will be shared with the reader since student voices are often not addressed and incorporated into curriculum conceptualization, design, development and implementation. In this chapter, recommendations are also included based on the aforementioned student feedback, my professional experiences as a course designer and online professor, as well as existing scholarly research and literature. The following description delves into the current challenges that negatively influence online teaching.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Professional Development

According to Palloff and Pratt (2013), “decisions made by administration should be pedagogical, not budgetary” (p. 12). While there is a recognized need for professional development to prepare faculty to teach online, “In terms of the design and delivery of training programs for faculty, support waxes and wanes with budget concerns” (Palloff & Pratt, 2013, p. 10). Although there are many different faculty development models being implemented with differing foci on technology, pedagogy, and course content (McQuiggan, 2012), “19% of over 2,500 colleges and universities surveyed nationwide report having no training or mentoring programs for their online teaching” (Bigatel, Ragan, Kennan, May & Redmond, 2012, p. 63). “Instructor training needs to be a top priority and continuously supported” (Palloff & Pratt, 2013, p. 10). In order to deliver quality online instruction, faculty need to be adequately trained to effectively teach online with critical competencies associated with quality instruction (Bigatel et al., 2012).

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