Distance Learning Administration 2016

A N N U A L

Proceedings of the DLA2016 Conference
Jekyll Island Club Hotel
Jekyll Island, Georgia
June 19 – 22, 2016

Editors:
Melanie N. Clay, PhD
Julie Stone
Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration
University of West Georgia

Published by the University of West Georgia
Distance & Distributed Education Center
Carrollton, Georgia
June 2016
## Table of Contents

**Does Your Organization Want You to Grow**
*Patricia L. Angulo, Globe University & Minnesota School of Business*
*Juliet Fernandez, Globe University & Minnesota School of Business*

Scalable Approach to Course Development: Cohorts and Quality Assurance
*Lujean Baab, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University*

Using LMS-Embedded Analytics to Evaluate an Online Competency-Based Program
*Amanda Barefield, Augusta University*
*Georgianna Laws, Augusta University*

Teaching Multiple Online Sections/Courses: Tactics and Techniques
*Rodger Bates, Clayton State University*
*Bryan LaBrecque, Clayton State University*
*Emily Fortner, Jackson State Community College*

EPIC Online Student and Faculty Preparedness
*Carrie Bartek, Wake Technical Community College*
*Alison Consol, Wake Technical Community College*

Fiscally Responsible Faculty Relationships: How Dual Positions Can Support Change
*Lisa Craft, Kansas State University Polytechnic Campus*

Understanding Where to Find the Answers to Institutional Copyright Issues
*Sher Downing, University of South Carolina*

Teaching and Assessing Ethics Across Disciplines in Online Education
*Russell E. Fail, Kaplan University*
*Michele H. Riley, Kaplan University*

Faculty Development: Preparing for the Transition to Online Teaching
*Lydia R. Frass, University of South Carolina*
*Ryan D. Rucker, Midlands Technical College*
*Gloria Y. Washington, University of South Carolina*

Evaluation of Instructional Design Capabilities of Asynchronous and Synchronous Instruction
*Kristi N. Garrett, Instructional Design & Technology Consultant*
*Angela D. Benson, The University of Alabama*

Characteristics of Successful Online MBA Students: An Empirical Analysis
*G. Ronald Gilbert, Florida International University*
*Walfried M. Lassar, Florida International University*
*Sara Ormaza, Florida International University*
*Clark Wheatley, Florida International University*

Crafting a Culture of Online Instruction
*Marilee Hall, Independence University*
*Pamela A. McCoy, Independence University*

Exploring Support for Online Students: The Cherries and the Pits
*Alan D. Hansen, Independence University*
*Joseph Dunlop, Independence University*
Support Considerations for International Faculty Teaching in an Online Program
Johnna L. Hodges, University of Georgia
David W. Mullis, University of Georgia
Logic, Critical Reasoning, and OER/CC Materials
Christine A. James, Valdosta State University

The Evolution of Faculty and Expertise in Higher Education
Lisa Johnson, Ashford University

Faculty Professional Development and Student Satisfaction in Online Higher Education
Robert Todd Kane, Clemson University
Melanie Shaw, Northcentral University
Sangho Pang, Clemson University
Witt Salley, Clemson University
J. Blake Snider, Clemson University

A Comparative Study of Competency-Based Courses Demonstrating a Potential Measure of Course Quality and Student Success
Jackie Krause, Central Washington University
Laura Portolese Dias, Central Washington University
Chris Schedler, Central Washington University

Using a Cohort Forum Structure to Promote Interaction
Felicia L. Tucker-Lively, Academy for Academic Leadership

Status Tracking and Reporting the Quality Matters Process at UNG
Nina Lamson, University of North Georgia
David Babb, University of North Georgia
Robert Schmidt, University of North Georgia

Web Solution for Communicating with, Supporting, and Training Distance-Learning Faculty
Georgianna Laws, Augusta University

Advantages and Barriers to Using Social Media in Online Education
Laura McNeill, The University of Alabama
Margaret L. Rice, The University of Alabama
Vivian H. Wright, The University of Alabama

Away With Words: Considerations of Online University English Composition Courses
Gregory J. Orme, East Carolina University

Case Study: Using HE-TPACK to Improve Virtual Professional Development Opportunities
Veronica Outlaw, University of South Carolina Aiken
Kristi N. Garrett, Instructional Design & Technology Consultant

Creating Synergy & Best Practices in Online Course Development Partnerships
Veronica Outlaw, University of South Carolina Aiken
Kay M. Sackett Fitzgerald, Formerly with the University of Alabama

Accessibility and the Art of Building Buy-In
Jessica M. Phillips, The Ohio State University

Is Your Online Course a Flat Pancake or a Hot Tamale?
Angie Parker, American College of Education
Storm Proofing Your Online Course Schedule................................................................................................................. 193
Oscar W. Raile, The University of Virginia's College at Wise

Open Educational Resources: A Cost and Copyright Analysis................................................................................................... 199
Tiffani Reardon, Kennesaw State University

Words Do Hurt! Impact of Unprofessional Behavior in Online Classroom ............................................................................. 203
Thomas D. Schneid, Eastern Kentucky University

Winning One Program at a Time: A Systemic Approach ........................................................................................................... 205
Adam Shultz, Verified Studios
Kay Zimmerman, North Carolina State University

Factors that Influence Student Attrition in Online Courses .................................................................................................... 211
Melanie Shaw, Northcentral University
Karen Ferguson, Colorado State University-Global Campus
Scott Burrus, University of Phoenix

Two Radical Shifts in How and Why Higher-Education Distance-Learning Administrators Should Promote Universal Design for Learning........................................................................................................... 219
Thomas J. Tobin, Northeastern Illinois University
Does Your Organization Want You To Grow?

Patricia L. Angulo  
Globe University & Minnesota School of Business

Juliet Fernandez  
Globe University & Minnesota School of Business

Abstract

This article includes a preliminary survey related to organizational support of employee higher educational goals. It provided some thematic data for a future study. Some of the themes showed that organizations offered training and development, tuition reimbursement, certificate programs, career development programs, management track programs, college scholarships, educational training, and rewards programs. 60% of the respondents stated they used the education benefits and 40% did not use them because of lack of time. On the other end of the spectrum, 56.5% of employee organizations in the survey did not offer education support. In addition, the historical overview of challenges facing adult distance learners is also included in a brief literature review. This article is intended to stimulate reflection on understanding the challenges faced by distance learners, the amount of organizational support from their employers they may receive while pursuing higher education goals, and employee/employer perceptions of what a work life balance is for working adult distance learners. It is also intended to stimulate reflection on the importance of creating a vibrant community of practice between organizations, colleges/universities, faculty, students, and entrepreneurs to encourage more organizational support of relevant educational growth for employees.

Introduction

All of us are learners of some sort at any given time; we learn from our environment from the day we are born, and accumulate knowledge over time. Learning is an essential component of living and we do everything in our power to gain more knowledge of the world we live in. We attend school and college with the expectation of learning a skill or trade that will help us earn a living or improve our abilities. Many of us are fortunate to have that opportunity, to learn and to grow; but there are many more that are unable to afford the same luxuries due to many reasons, some beyond their control. Family circumstances, availability of opportunities, and environmental influences all have some bearing to how and how much we learn.

Most human resource professionals and department managers will say they support their employees’ educational goals. They want their employees to be more skilled so they can perform their jobs more effectively in order to reach organizational goals, but do managers truly understand the difference between training, education, and development? Studies have found that it is no longer sufficient to hire, train, and reward individuals for their performance and then forget about it until next quarter. So, given the current focus of human resources professionals and managers’ goals in building their organizations through capable employees, how do they actually support their employees’ educational goals? This study challenges some common misconceptions relating to education support and proposes ways in which these support systems can be improved.

Research Questions

Employees have many challenges in maintaining a work life balance while pursuing educational goals, and employers can play an important role in supporting them in their educational growth process. Through this paper, we try to identify and explore the following research questions:

1. What are some of the challenges faced by distance learners?
2. Are these challenges faced by employees at all levels of the management or are they confined to certain levels? If so, why do such biases occur?
3. What is the difference between stated benefits versus actual implementation and utilization of benefits?
4. What is the employees’ perception of their organization’s learning and higher education policies?
5. What does ‘balance’ in work and education mean to the employee versus the employer?

Hypothesis

For the purpose of this extended literature review and pilot survey, it is hypothesized that “organizations do support their employees’ higher educational goals through various programs and support systems.”

Scope of the Study

This paper is an exploration of current state, primarily through the review of existing literature, of the challenges faced by distance learners and what organizations can do in order to assist them in maintaining work-life balance while pursuing formal educational goals. We attempt to address some of the gaps in learning opportunities for people in the workforce, and identify four ways in which companies currently support employee educational goals and propose new ways to continue to support them, or develop new support strategies. A brief pilot survey was conducted to gauge the workforce and identify potential patterns in the current work environment. The results are widely dispersed, and since it is only a pilot, these results are in no way applicable to the general workforce as yet. It must be seen only as a foundation upon which to build further research. Through this paper we expect to lay the groundwork for future empirical studies and further inquiry.

Review of Literature

Ulrich (2013) in his insightful book states that in order for organizations to have continuous improvement, they must invest in continuous education of their employees in order to maintain competitiveness in the market. Each year, Fortune magazine in their ‘100 Best Companies to Work for’ list identifies organizations that are increasingly expanding and diversifying their work-life benefit programs in an attempt to help employees better manage the work and non-work demands facing them. Evolving “family-friendly” initiatives, “work life” benefits are designed to help employees with the many facets of their lives including personal well-being, professional development, and family responsibilities (McShane & Von Glinow, 2000; Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1996). The most common forms of organizational support for employee higher education goals in the United States are tuition benefits, flexible schedules, child care, and internal professional development opportunities.

Most work-life benefits packages include benefits from six categories: child-related (e.g., child care facilities, financial assistance, and referral, childhood health programs, and maternity/paternity leave), time/schedule (e.g., flextime, compressed workweek, and job sharing), physical health (e.g., health insurance, medical and fitness centers, and wellness programs), psychological well-being (e.g., counseling and employee assistance programs), professional development (e.g., tuition reimbursement and training), and elder care (e.g., assistance and referrals (Muse, Harris, Giles, & Field, 2008, p. 172). The following four work life benefits directly contribute to supporting employees reach their higher education goals:

1. **Tuition benefits:** Current research has shown that while tuition reimbursement is generally associated with employee retention, employees may be more inclined to switch jobs when they earn graduate degrees. Employees working toward degrees unrelated to their current jobs express greater intention to leave the organization, which increases as they near graduation (Pattie, Benson, & Baruch, 2006). At the same time, there are employees who want more education in order to advance in their current organization. Employer provided tuition reimbursement programs are widespread and constitute a large part of non-wage compensation. Many times they are provided in conjunction with other internal training programs and act as a compliment (Flaherty, 2007, p. 3). Tuition reimbursement programs typically consist of three components: a maximum reimbursement amount, an eligibility requirement, and a reimbursement policy based on academic performance. Most firms allow employees to become eligible after the first six months of service. The primary reasons companies give tuition reimbursement programs are for recruitment and retention (Flaherty, 2007, p. 7).

2. **Flexible work schedules:** A common workplace benefit to support educational goals is the option of having a flexible employee work schedules. With many local adult learning programs, both online and face-to-
face, available in most cities, offering more flexibility to employees is not a costly benefit to offer and it is very appreciated (Casper & Buffardi, 2004). Flexible work schedules, compressed workweeks, and job sharing are all benefits that can help employees accomplish their higher education goals. The idea is to help the employee manage their time better while trying to balance work, life and academic learning. It is ironic that with online academic programs, the reality is they take just as much time, if not more, than face to face classes on a university campus (Rao & Guili, 2010, p. 7). The driving time has been eliminated and the flexibility has been increased, but academic study takes time no matter what the delivery format. A flexible work schedule is only part of the equation of a supportive tool for employees to reach higher education goals.

3. **Child care:** One of the larger challenges facing adult learners going back to earn their academic degrees is balancing work, family and school. Child care is a huge challenge so when their employer offers it as one of their work life benefits, it helps support that employee in accomplishing his/her academic goals (Thorpe, 1987; Evans, 1994; Muse, Harris, Giles, & Field, 2008). Although employees can use and value the same benefit differently (Casper & Buffardi, 2004), there are some variables in how to perceive employee views on its value, child care tends to be one of those practical benefits that frees employees up to have time to even consider the benefits.

4. **Internal professional development opportunities:** While pursuing higher education goals still has value, education will only get one so far, according to recent surveys by Glassdoor USA (Glassdoor, 2014). Seventy-two percent of employees believe specialized skill training they could receive at their own company (or outside skill training referred by their company) was more valuable than a formal degree in terms of advancing at their workplace.

Employee perceptions of their organizations supporting them is varied, depending on different employee benefits. With the tuition reimbursement benefit, a strengthened emotional attachment to their organization was discovered (Muse, Harris, Giles, & Field, 2008, p. 186). Even if employees did not use the actual tuition benefit, the fact that it was there helped create positive organizational behavior in the form of positive attitudes. and positive attitudes can be correlated with increased efforts towards job performance. Benefits do not have to be used to be valued (Muse, Harris, Giles, & Field, 2008, p. 187). There are also generational distinctions which correlate to employee perception and satisfaction with tuition reimbursement benefits and training and development opportunity benefits (Scorza, 2011).

Most employees have perceived organizational support if the benefits offered and used are truly useful to them. The more useful the benefit from the employee's point of view, the more they believe their organization actually cares about them (Lambert, 2000, p. 9). As stated earlier, most work-life benefits packages include benefits from six categories: child-related, time/schedule, physical health, psychological well-being, professional development, and elder care. Tuition reimbursement falls into the category of professional development and when companies provide this benefit, an increase in positive organizational behavior (POB) is shown because there is more of a perception of organizational support and commitment to the employees (Muse, Harris, Giles, & Field, 2008, p. 172). In turn, productivity goes up within the organization because employees interpret tuition reimbursement as a signal that the organization cares about the wellbeing of its employees, thereby strengthening the employer-employee bond and creating a desire within employees to reciprocate (Muse, Harris, Giles, & Field, 2008, p. 174).

**Research Methodology**

There is quite a wealth of external secondary data already available to us in this area (Iacobucci & Churchill, Jr., 2010) as evidenced by the following section. For one part of this study, secondary data in the form of research articles, books, and conference proceedings that aligned with the research questions were identified and reviewed. Based on the evidence found in such literature, a questionnaire was developed to collect primary data. Said questionnaire was reviewed, revised, and disseminated online to gather responses. Since this is a pilot study, the goal was to see if patterns and common themes emerged from the responses; therefore, the data analysis method was rudimentary arithmetic mean method.

**Research Findings**

The pilot survey consisted of 35 respondents from various parts of the country. 50% of the respondents being male and 47.2% were female; the other respondents chose not to answer the question. The age groups ranged from 16 to
60 and above. A majority of the respondents were Caucasian at 58.3%, followed by Asians at 27.8%; the remainder of the respondents were African American, Hispanic, and ‘other’ at 8.3%, 2.8%, and 2.8%, respectively. The annual incomes of the respondents were quite varied as well, ranging from less than $10,000 annually to more than $70,000; the highest group at 30.6% were respondents with an annual income greater than $70,000. 25% of the respondents had some Associate or Bachelor’s degree, and 58.3% of them had a Master’s degree. While 47.2% of the respondents stated that they did not wish to pursue further education, but the remainder of the respondents wished to pursue the next level of education, Associate, Bachelor, or Masters level. They work in various industries, typically during the week; they also held various roles in their organization such as staff, technician, IT developer, middle management, supervisor, etc. Over 55% of the respondents stipulated that their organization provided education support to their employees.

Most such support came in the form, from highest percentage to lowest, of training and development, tuition reimbursement, certificate programs, career development programs, management-track programs, college scholarships, educational training, and rewards programs. 60% of the respondents stated that they have utilized the education benefits available through their employer, but the 40% that did not utilize the benefits indicated lack of time, and non-availability of required scholarships and programs as the primary reasons for not availing the benefits available to them. 65% of the respondents said that the programs were useful in their day-to-day work as they developed advanced skills, thus enabling them to perform their jobs better as they were also better equipped to use the available technology. This led to increase in pay and promotions, confidence in their jobs, and an overall satisfaction from their work. Most of these respondents also indicated that their organization encouraged them to use their learning more, which led to better output. They did, however, seem conflicted about the meaning of work-education balance, with almost equal number of respondents saying “yes”, “no”, and “can’t say” to the question about the organization’s understanding of “work-education balance.”

On the other end of the spectrum, 56.5% employees at organizations that did not offer education support did not know why that was the case, and many have never even approached their Human Resources personnel with requests for such support. Some respondents who did approach their organization about education support state that their organization claimed non-availability of funds or time or other resources to support such objectives. Another common reason was that no specialized skill was required to perform the jobs that the employees held. Based on both sets of responses, it was found that employees were more inclined towards staying and continuing to grow with the companies that did offer education support than the ones that did not.

Additionally, review of current literature showed that unfortunately, most of the challenges for adult distance learners had to be discovered through a student going through the struggle or dropping out of distance education programs. By understanding the challenges higher education administrators, faculty, designers, IT department professionals, and employers can work together to help adult distance learners overcome the challenges or avoid them altogether. For every adult distance learner who goes back to college, another decides against it. Some of the obstacles are solvable with information, support and resources. Others are entirely based on the effort given by the adult learner. Some of the known challenges that adult distance learners face can be described as:

1. **Balancing family, work, and life:** As most adult learners discover, whether learning on ground or online, balancing family, work, and life is very challenging. Study will become the lowest priority when work and life get really busy. The irony for adult distance learners who enroll in programs is they are choosing online because they do not have time to spend on campus. But the reality is that students need to find and make time for their online homework just like they would for their face to face classes (Rao & Guiili, 2010).

2. **Financial strain:** When handling the challenges of full or part time academic study, sometimes reduced work hours are necessary, which means reduced income. This fact combined with the cost of education can become really tough, especially in single parent households.

3. **Independence readiness in academic learning:** Being a distance learner is a solitary experience in many ways and is not suited to every type of learner. It is really important for adult learners to know their own learning strengths/weaknesses and choose the type of program and delivery model that enhances their own strengths. Distance learning requires far greater reserves of self-discipline and time management than prior educational experiences (Calder & McCollum, 1998). Not all students are suited to online learning environments. Generally, more mature students are the most likely to find success with distance learning. The successful student needs to have the characteristics of tolerance for ambiguity, a need for autonomy, and an ability to be flexible (Threlkeld & Brezoska, 1994).
4. **Level of motivation and commitment:** Student motivation and commitment are what the student controls. Over the course of an academic program, a distance learner’s motivations may change due to their incremental achievements, shifting perspectives, and family and financial circumstances. Once they overcome their insecurities about if they can accomplish higher level academic study, they may need to seek out more practical forms of outcomes like job promotions (Thorpe, 1987). Many distance learners are different from traditional students in that they already have jobs and have well defined goals, making them more motivated (Dibiase, 2000).

5. **Availability of learning support:** Many students have the capability to succeed but do not have the proper learning support for distance learning programs and end up failing (Morgan, Dingsdag, & Saenger, 1998). Any preparatory programs especially in academic writing and research would be useful to the new adult distance learner.

6. **Good relationships with academic staff:** Distance learners often study at night or over the weekend when academic staff is not available for questions. Not receiving timely information that impacts them can be disruptive and discouraging (Parr, 1996; Brown, 1996). Academic staff are not always consistent in returning emails, phone calls, or text messages. They can be trained to become more attentive of adult distance learners to help retain them in programs.

7. **Ability to comprehend and deal with faculty feedback:** Feedback from faculty is what drives learning and improving along the path of study. Adult students have fears and anxieties about their abilities to succeed. When feedback is confusing, inconsistent, has no clear expectations, and is punitive, it can tear down even a very capable student's confidence. Rather than being a feedback tool to build skills and confidence, it may become a means to confirm feelings of inadequacy (Morgan & O'Reilly, 1999). Distance learners also have a difficult time reading the reactions of their instructors or classmates when in remote locations. They have no visual or verbal cues and can misperceive a dissenting opinion with a verbal attack of some kind. This kind of misunderstanding, which is common, can negatively impact the student and his/her sense of having a supportive virtual community (West, 1994).

8. **Confidence with computers and technology:** Adult distance learners gaining entry into online courses without prerequisite technology skills can be at a big disadvantage and become very overwhelmed. They can feel as though they do not “belong”. Practical technology support is necessary to overcome this (Thorpe, 1987). Technology will keep improving and the price of education will drop as it is so common, so making sure students receive the proper technology training needed to be a successful distance learner will indicate their true satisfaction with their experiences in the future (Ferguson & Wijekumar, 2000).

9. **Language, literacy, or learning challenge issues:** Many students entering distance learning courses will have learning challenges or have a first language other than English. These students face huge hurdles that will leave them vulnerable to having to drop out of programs because the strain is so great. Support inside and outside the university is critical in helping these students succeed.

10. **Impact of previous educational experience:** Negative prior experiences can affect students’ confidence and self-concept, as well as their ability to form new teaching and learning relationships, and develop more appropriate approaches to study (Bird & Morgan, 2003, p. 3).

11. **Support from partners:** A person’s success as a distance learner is dependent on the support of a partner who is prepared to take a greater share of the domestic and/or financial responsibility during the long period of study. Evidence suggests that support is more likely to come from males within the partnership than females, which reflects the specific plight of women returning to study while maintaining a heavy domestic burden (Evans, 1994).

12. **Isolation and the feeling of not belonging in an academic community:** Isolation is a well-documented phenomenon for adult distance learners in both the geographical and psychological construct. The ability of today’s distance learner to become a part of a learning community depends on one’s technological proficiency and ability to engage in certain kinds of academic and social connection offered through online learning. Some older adult learners, whether they study on campus or at a distance, may encounter the generational problem of not getting peer support because they feel they do not belong in the younger person’s world (Bird & Morgan, 2003, p. 3). Distance learners have often expressed the need to be a part of a virtual learning community (Greenberg, 1998), and even though they feel more pressure to perform when in these communities, it helps them feel less isolated. Being involved in a collaborative learning process is an important part of forming the foundation of this type of learning community. When this is not encouraged, participation is generally low and dialog is absent (Palloff & Pratt, 2000).

This study potentially sheds light on the policies that serve as a cultural indicator of the value placed on continued learning, therefore correlating to the value of the employees to the organization. Having education support benefits
shows employees that the organization wants to build a strong workforce which translates to mutual benefits. There are systemic issues in today’s work environment; there is a lack of diversity and fairness in processes where opportunities for advancement are based on biased ideologies. Maybe Higher education support can be a way to help compensate for low wages, but opens up an avenue to gain better paying employment. The goal of further exploration of this paradigm must be to undo the idea that success is defined by “getting and degree, then a job, and then sticking with it”; rather, it must be about continued learning and growth.

**Recommendations**

Managers and human resource professionals must possess the mindset of strategic players, administrative experts, employee champions, and change agents. They must always be answering the following questions:

1. What capabilities currently exist within the organization?
2. What capabilities will be required for the future success of the organization?
3. How can we align capabilities with business strategies?
4. How can we design HR practices to create needed capabilities?
5. How can we measure the accomplishment of the needed capabilities?

Since the four most common work life benefits companies have in place to support employees in reaching their higher education goals are tuition reimbursement, flexible work schedules, childcare, and internal professional development opportunities, the following recommendations would be most useful:

1. Company managers, executives and human resources professionals must be in close connection with local colleges/universities which offer the type of academic programs that could equip their employees in growing their company. When employees, eligible for a particular promotion, can get the specific education which insures the organization has the correct talent in the correct position, the organization reaps the reward of any tuition reimbursement given.
2. Companies must find ways to work with colleges/universities in creating communities of practice, connecting industry, university faculty, students, and startup companies to encourage entrepreneurship and an entrepreneurial thought process. In this process, internship and employment pipelines can be created benefiting all involved in the collaborations.
3. Colleges/Universities designing online programs must allow for a wide variety of adult student learning preferences and challenges in order to create better online course communities with better built in support systems. They must use adult learning theory in practical ways to support the adult distance learner.
4. Company managers who truly want to support their employees could help employees by being generally aware of some of the academic program choices (and delivery models - face to face, hybrid, online, etc.) that might be the best for employees in their specific department. Weaving their higher education goals into their job description and yearly work goals would serve everyone. It builds more employee motivation, while using organizational training and development dollars wisely.

**References**


Kampov-Polevoi, J. (2010). Conversations for supporting faculty in transitioning a course to online format. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 13 (2).


McQuiggan, C. (2007). The role of faculty development in online teaching's potential to question teaching beliefs and assumptions. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 10 (3).


Rao, K., & Guili, C. (2010). Reaching remote learners: successes and challenges for students in an online
graduate degree program in the Pacific Islands. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 11 (1), 141-160.


**Appendix**

1. Survey questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does your organization want you to grow?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hello,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are grateful for your interest in completing this survey!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The purpose of this study titled "Does your organization want you to grow?" is to identify the growth and education opportunities offered by companies in the United States to their employees in terms of:

1. What is currently being done and how?
2. To what extent are the benefits made available?
3. To what extent are the benefits utilized by employees?
4. How does it impact the organization and the employees in the long-term?

This survey is for people who are residents of the United States and working in any level of any organization. The 5 minutes you spend on completing this survey may help us to influence more companies to offer educational and learning benefits to their employees.

Please be assured that all responses will be kept confidential and will be used purely for academic purposes. When the results are published, no personal information will be divulged.

To show you our appreciation for completing this survey, we will be giving away Amazon gift cards to two lucky winners. Just complete the section on the last page to qualify for the drawing.
Click the "continue" button to begin.

Thank you,
Patricia and Juliet

Demographic Information
Help us understand a little bit about yourself in order to substantiate our research.

Gender
[ ] Male
[ ] Female
[ ] Prefer not to answer

Age
[ ] Under 16
[ ] 16 to 20
[ ] 21 to 30
[ ] 31 to 40
[ ] 41 to 50
[ ] 51 to 60
[ ] 61 and above

Ethnicity (Select all that apply)
[ ] Caucasian/ White African American
[ ] Native American
[ ] Asian Hispanic or Latino
[ ] Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
[ ] Other

Annual Income
[ ] Less than $10,000
[ ] $10,000 to $20,000
[ ] $20,000 to $30,000
[ ] $30,000 to $40,000
[ ] $40,000 to $50,000
[ ] $50,000 to $60,000
[ ] $60,000 to $70,000
[ ] More than $70,000
Where do you live? (Please provide your state of residence)

____________

Highest level of education completed
[] Less than High School
[] High School or Equivalent
[] Trade school or certification programs
[] Some Associate or Bachelor degree
[] Masters degree
[] More than Masters level

Next level of education sought (What is your future educational goal?)
[] Complete High School or Equivalent
[] Trade School or certification programs
[] Associate degree
[] Bachelors degree
[] Masters degree
[] More than Masters level
[] Do not wish to pursue further education

Employment Information
In this section, we are trying to understand a little about your company and the industry you work in.

Industry (Please select the industry you work in)
[] Retail
[] Food and Beverage
[] Medical
[] Nursing
[] Information Technology
[] Airlines
[] Construction/ Real Estate
[] Automotive
[] Banking
[] Education
[] Agriculture
[] Legal
[] Manufacturing
Company (Please provide the name of the company you work for (Optional))

What type of hours do you work? (Choose all that apply)
[ ] Weekdays
[ ] Weekends
[ ] Night shifts
[ ] Rotating schedules

Role in the organization
[ ] Staff
[ ] Technician
[ ] IT
[ ] Developer
[ ] Analyst
[ ] Middle Management
[ ] Supervisor
[ ] Executive
[ ] Leadership
[ ] Executive Board
[ ] Business Owner

Years with the company
[ ] Less than 1 year
[ ] 1 to 3 years
[ ] 3 to 5 years
[ ] 5 to 10 years
[ ] More than 10 years

Describe a memorable experience (What has been one of your most memorable experiences working at your current place of employment?)

Does your organization offer education support? (This could be tuition reimbursement, upfront payments,
scholarship programs, Management-track positions, etc.)

[ ] Yes
[ ] No

Educational support at your company
Please tell us about the type of educational support that was available to you and how you utilized it.

What type of educational support does your organization provide? (Select all that apply.)

[ ] Tuition reimbursement
[ ] College scholarships
[ ] Educational track programs
[ ] Training & development programs
[ ] Flex-time benefits for employees in college
[ ] Certificate programs
[ ] Career development programs/ mentoring
[ ] Management trainee programs
[ ] Rewards program for completing programs
[ ] Other

Have you utilized the education benefits available to you?

[ ] Yes
[ ] No

Please describe why/ why not?
____________________________________

How useful was the program? (Select from the scale below. If you selected "No" in the previous question, please select 1)
Not at all useful   1  2  3  4  5  Extremely useful

How did the program benefit you? (Select all that apply.)

[ ] Better job performance
[ ] Increase in pay
[ ] Promotions
[ ] More confidence at day-to-day job
[ ] Confidence for more educational advancement
[ ] Developed advanced skills
[ ] Learning to use more technology
Do you use your learning/education at your job?
[ ] Yes
[ ] No
[ ] I'm not sure

How often do you use your new learning?
[ ] Almost daily
[ ] A few times a week
[ ] A few times a month
[ ] Maybe quarterly
[ ] A couple of times a year
[ ] Almost never

Does your manager or supervisor encourage you to apply your new learning?
[ ] Yes
[ ] No
[ ] I'm not sure

Please explain (Provide an explanation for the above choice in your own words.)
_____________________________________

Do you feel that your organization sufficiently supports your individual higher education goals?
[ ] Yes
[ ] No
[ ] I'm not sure

Please explain Provide an explanation for the above choice in your own words.
_____________________________________

What do you understand "work-education" balance to be? (Explain in 10 words or less)
_____________________________________

Do you think that you are able to find a good "work-education" balance in your day-to-day?
[ ] Yes
[ ] No
[ ] I'm not sure
What are some of the challenges you face in trying to achieve this (Select all that apply.)

[ ] Time management
[ ] Work schedules
[ ] Family
[ ] Children/ child-care
[ ] Finances
[ ] Distance
[ ] Transportation
[ ] Internet/ Library access
[ ] Language proficiency (in any language)
[ ] Anxiety about failure and learning
[ ] Support and motivation
[ ] Other

Do you think that your organization understands your perception of "work-education" balance?

[ ] Yes
[ ] No
[ ] I'm not sure

Please explain (Provide an explanation for the above choice in your own words.)

_______________________________________

Educational support at your company
Please tell us a little about why this benefit is unavailable to you.

Do you know why educational support is unavailable to you?

[ ] Yes
[ ] No

If yes, why do you think that is? (Select all that apply.)

[ ] Budget issues
[ ] Lack of employee interest
[ ] Lack of Management initiative
[ ] Previously failed educational benefits program
[ ] Poor employee performance resulting in canceled tuition
[ ] Organization does not require higher education for job performance
[ ] Other
Have you approached your HR or Manager about education support?
[ ] Yes
[ ] No

Please explain your experience (Provide an explanation about your experience in your own words.)
_______________________________________

**Future plans**
This is the last section, we promise! Also, here is your opportunity to enter the drawing for Amazon gift card.

Given your experience with your company's education policy, how likely are you to continue working with them?
Highly unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 Very likely

Any last comments?
_______________________________________

Complete the information below for a chance to win Amazon gift card

Name
_______________________________________

Email
_______________________________________

By checking the box below, you are agreeing to be contacted via email about the drawing results and survey findings.
[ ] I agree

*Patricia L. Angulo* is an Instructor of Business at Globe University & Minnesota School of Business, Minnetonka, Minnesota. pangulo@msbcollege.edu.

*Juliet Fernandez* is an Instructor of Business at Globe University & Minnesota School of Business, Minnetonka, Minnesota. juliet.27691@gmail.com.
Scalable Approach to Course Development: Cohorts and Quality Assurance

Lujean Baab
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Abstract

Ensuring high quality, media-rich, interactive online courses with limited personnel and resources remains a significant challenge in distance learning. Virginia Tech addresses this challenge with a scalable approach utilizing professional development to structure faculty cohorts and working groups in course development supported by instructional designers, media specialists, and other staff. Managing the course development process is challenging for many reasons but time and project management may top the list. A successful response to those challenges includes a cohort approach structured by professional development and supported by instructional design consultation that includes peer review and final quality assurance review based on Quality Matters (QM) standards (Standards from the Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric). That is not to say that the courses undergo the full review by a certified Quality Matters review but that the QM standards are utilized as the benchmarks for the quality assurance review.

The professional development, course design and development, and the quality assurance review are all completed in one semester in a learning community that extends beyond the project to support others entering and completing the cohort process. With this structure, course development and revision becomes scalable and efficient. Cohorts can be comprised of faculty across disciplines or focused on a specific discipline or program for scaffolding full program development. The process relies heavily upon templates, planning documents, modularized professional development and project management practices segmenting quality assurance review process that incorporates both peer review and review by committee of instructional designers prior to review by Department Heads for approval.

Background

Virginia Tech takes justifiable pride in the on-campus experience for students but recognizes the need for distance learning to provide flexibility and access for both undergraduate and graduate students who need to remain engaged in courses even while participating in the many opportunities for learning that extend beyond campus boundaries. In the past 15 years, there have been more than 35,000 enrollments in undergraduate and graduate online courses at Virginia Tech with 73% of graduating students reporting participation in at least one online course. By 2014, 100% of the university’s academic departments were participating to some level in offering online courses.

The management of online course delivery with regard to design and development of courses as well as requirements for faculty is decentralized at Virginia Tech and can be within the purview of each College, Department or program. With the need for consistency in the academic rigor and experience for students that equals those of online courses so as to meet accreditation and agreement requirements as well as review by external governing bodies for certification within certain programs, it became imperative for the university to adopt a policy that would address all distance learning courses. In March of 2015, the university adopted the Distance Learning Policy that requires all faculty teaching online to be certified through a professional development experience and all online courses to pass a quality assurance review according to Quality Matters standards before that course could be opened to registration for students. This is not to say that the courses must pass the full Quality Matters quality assurance review but that the standards are used as the guidelines and benchmarks for quality assurance review conducted by Virginia Tech.

The policy is being put into effect in stages to allow time for the certification and quality assurance review to be expanded and offered to sufficient number of faculty and courses to make the enforcement possible. Learning Experience Design (formerly Networked Learning and Design Strategies) is named in the policy as the unit
managing the faculty certification and course quality assurance review for the university. This responsibility brings with it the daunting need for a scalable approach to meet the growing needs of online learning at Virginia Tech.

**Approach and Process**

As noted by Puziffero, & Shelton (2014), any model based upon collaborative work within the limitations of faculty time and motivation requires significant institutional support. Learning Experience Design staff currently includes four instructional designers, an instructional technologist, graphics and web developer, assessment specialist, research specialist, video recording studio with a staff of five media specialists and three persons in digital imaging providing 3D scanning, digitization of images, artifacts and documents as well as management of the digital learning objects created. This full staff managed about 30 faculty development projects in a calendar year. With the adoption of the Distance Learning Policy and the continuing growth of online learning, the requirement for development was increased to 75 full course design or redesign and development per year in addition to individual consultation, assistance with new Learning Management System (LMS) conversion and participation in professional development and special initiatives for various administrative and academic programs and units in the university.

To meet this demand, an approach was developed to maximize the staff and be both scalable and flexible to accommodate both the number of faculty and the various levels of skills and experience with online learning as well as the variance in the structure and development of courses and course content for online learning. A full menu of options were developed for those starting, those who had been certified previously through ad hoc professional development, those who had been teaching online for some time, etc. This paper will focus on the option of participation in a cohort-based approach to professional development structuring the course design and development and based upon the quality assurance standards of Quality Matters. The interdisciplinary cohort approach, specifically, is of particular interest as it became a means of continuing faculty involvement in a learning community focused on the improvement of teaching and learning online. As one could imagine, faculty who are chosen to participate in the development of online courses are not always enthusiastic about doing so, particularly those for whom the course is not part of a program but is being developed as a single course to address enrollment or specific needs of students. As stated by Lancaster, Stein, MacLean, Van Amburgh, & Persky (2014) “Cohort-based learning communities address the teaching, learning, and developmental needs of faculty and staff members who have been particularly affected by isolation or stress within the academy (p 8). By all indications, faculty enjoy the experience and support the notion that there are benefits in collaboratively engaging in course design including the advantage of the diverse ideas, expertise, and experiences (Brown, Eaton, Jacobsen, Roy, & Friesen, 2013).

To begin, it was necessary to separate the role of the instructional designer from that of project manager or ‘task master’ attempting to be both manager and guide. By establishing an online course facilitated by a staff person who was not the instructional designer, the role of keeping faculty developers on track and on task falls to the facilitator within the module or lesson structure, allowing the instructional designer to serve as guide and assistant in the course development process. This modularized professional development online course is based upon best practices and proven strategies and is modularized to allow for flexibility to accommodate the previous knowledge and varying interests of individual faculty and programs. The weekly assignments structuring the development rely upon the content in the modules and align with development and submission of evidence or examples of meeting the Quality Matters standard that is the focus of that module. Faculty developers submit evidence and examples in a portfolio assessment structure that allows for peer review and anonymous review by an instructional designer not assigned to the faculty. This process continues throughout a semester (fall, spring and summer) and culminates in a final review by a committee before presentation to the Department Head and all university faculty and administration in a showcase event.

Most of the faculty participating in this process receive some funding either to offset the costs of course release during fall and spring or to provide a stipend for development in summer. Benchmarks and key elements for completion have been established as required for structured release of funds as a means of keeping faculty engaged and maintaining progress. Faculty can participate in this process either through an interdisciplinary cohort for individual courses being developed or faculty working groups focused on specific programs or departments. Templates have been developed in the LMS that can be adapted for specific programs and provide consistency both for individual course offerings and those within fully online programs. Throughout the course development, the assigned instructional designer manages referrals to the various staff of LED providing assistance with content creation, graphics and image selection, scanning and creation of digital learning objects or the selection of those
objects already created and made available to university faculty. The focus is first on establishing the framework of and foundation of a well-designed course (syllabus, measurable objectives, alignment of assessments, etc.) and then on the creation of the media and integration of technology as it serves the learning activities within that strong framework and foundation.

Results and Future Plans

The Distance Learning Policy that identifies the requirement for certified faculty and quality-assured online courses has been incorporated into the reporting to Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS www.sacs.org), State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV www.schev.eu) and the consortium for the National State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (nc-SARA www.nc-sara.org). It is imperative that the process and structure not only be scalable but effective to meet the rigorous requirements of these agencies and support the well-deserved reputation for academic excellence earned by Virginia Tech. The results of the past two years indicate that we have met the both the conditions for scalability and effectiveness. Learning Experience Design will meet the goal of 75 online course designs or redesigns and development for the 2015-2016 academic year. In addition, all faculty participating will complete those course development projects within the one semester time frame with only three faculty requiring a one-semester extension. Course content learning activities (video, other media, interactive learning objects, etc.) continue to be developed after courses are developed and added to the courses throughout the first semester they are offered. Learning Experience Design staff are moving into a pattern of phases with initial phase focusing on strong and quality assured course design and second phase focusing on advanced content and media development. This approach is proving to be both successful and less taxing on faculty time and efforts.

References


The QM Rubrics have been developed and regularly updated through a rigorous process that examines relevant research, data, and practitioner perspectives. They consist of Standards supported by detailed Annotations explaining the application of the Standards and are intended to support the continuous improvement of courses with constructive feedback provided by trained and certified Peer Reviewers using a specific review protocol.

Lujean Baab is the Senior Director of Learning Experience Design (LED) in Technology-enhanced Learning and Online Strategies (TLOS), a Division of Information Technology at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia. lbaab@vt.edu.
Using LMS-Embedded Analytics to Evaluate an Online Competency-Based Program

Amanda Barefield
Augusta University

Georgianna Laws
Augusta University

Abstract

To better prepare the next generation of HIIM professionals and more closely align the HIA curriculum with profession-specific accreditation standards, a design team at Augusta University used LMS embedded analytics tools to track, and analyze over 100 program-level SLOs.

Abbreviation

- **CAHIIM**: Commission on the Accreditation of Health Information and Information Management. CAHIIM publishes curriculum competency standards with which all HIIM programs must comply.
- **HIA**: Health Information Administration. HIA is the name of a program of study at Augusta University.
- **HIIM**: Health Informatics and Information Management. HIIM is the profession in general.
- **LMS**: Learning Management System. As an example, the University System of Georgia uses Brightspace by D2L as its LMS.
- **SLO**: Student Learning Outcomes. "Objectives" and "Outcomes" or "SLOs" are sometimes used interchangeably. In the context of accreditation, (program-level) SLOs refer to what students will be able to do as a result of the learning experience in their program.

Problem

In response to how the rapid growth in technology has drastically reshaped the HIIM profession, CAHIIM recently published a new curriculum that doubles the SLOs graduates need to demonstrate (from 49 to 102) and introduces a variety of new content. With this additional knowledge and more closely defined competencies, HIIM graduates can more successfully integrate into the current and future workforce.

A leader in the HIIM education industry, with graduate first-time pass rates well above the national level, Augusta University endeavors to maintain a high-quality HIA program that prepares its graduates to excel as they enter the workforce.

As the HIA program at Augusta University prepares to implement the new CAHIIM curriculum by August 2017, it has to use its lean resources to:

1. streamline course offerings to meet CAHIIM standards in the most effective way
2. empower faculty to do their work in a way that generates rich, actionable data
3. analyze with ease the vast amount of course- and program-specific data generated for program evaluation and accreditation purposes.

It was imperative that a solution be identified to allow the HIA program to meet all three of these goals.
Process

While the first goal is underway (the streamlined curriculum has been drafted and progresses through the institutional approval process), the project team is focused on the second and third goals: the faculty and the data analytics. The team’s solution involves leveraging Augusta University’s LMS to offer and track the content, learning activities, and corresponding SLOs. The LMS will then allow the team to analyze the data and demonstrate how/where in the program SLOs are met. Led by the faculty project coordinator and the instructional designer/project manager, this endeavor involves multiple stakeholders, spans a two-year time frame, and takes place in several stages, as described below.

Initial Talks

The project began with an initial inquiry meeting between the faculty project coordinator and the instructional designer (soon to become project manager). During these preliminary talks, all necessary stakeholders for the project were identified, as noted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Project Stakeholders

The project proposal was then discussed within various layers of leadership and was approved. Next, the faculty project coordinator and the instructional designer staged the project and created a scaffolded timeline to include all major project milestones.
Timeline

The existing curriculum (based on 49 SLOs) will be phased out within a year and taught in parallel with the new curriculum (based on 102 SLOs), as illustrated in Figure 2. Thus, by Fall 2017, the HIA program will not only be capable of demonstrating compliance with the new CAHIIM curriculum, but it will also benefit from lessons learned during the two-semester pilot.

Figure 2: Existing Curriculum Phase-Out and New Curriculum Rollout

The team further segmented the timeline into seven stages, as follows:

Stage 1: Curricular Mapping

The program previously conducted a gap analysis based on the new CAHIIM curriculum standards. The instructional designer used the gap analysis to map the 102 CAHIIM SLOs to the new curriculum.

In the process of mapping, the team eliminated curricular redundancies and clarified course ownership across the HIA program (most courses are HIA native and a few are taught through other Augusta University programs).

Stage 2: Small Scale Prototyping

The project involves creating LMS competency structures, connecting the objectives within those structures to graded activities throughout the curriculum, and generating LMS reports to capture how/where the objectives (or SLOs) are met.

Stage 2.1: On Paper

The competency structure was first sketched on paper, at a small scale. This initial rendering revealed the need for bridging the gap between:

- CAHIIM's terminology (domain, subdomain, and competency),
- Augusta University's terminology (SLO), and
- The LMS's terminology (competency structures comprised of competencies, objectives, activities, and grade items).

The team chose to adopt the LMS's terminology as a standard in all communications, to maintain a common and consistent language. However, the term "SLO" is preferential over the LMS's "objectives" as it is a conventional term utilized at Augusta University.

Also during this stage, the team generated the questions that the LMS reporting system will answer regarding how SLOs are met by individual learners within a course and across the entire program.
Stage 2.2: In the LMS

Next, the team moved to a small-scale prototype in the LMS test environment. The instructional designer created three test courses to encompass sample graded activities tied to objectives that are then linked to the competencies in the LMS competency structure. Test student accounts were used to simulate various learner proficiency levels ranging from 0 to 100%. The LMS's competency structure analytics tool then portrayed the results in terms of objectives being met (above the set 70% proficiency threshold) or failed.

At this stage, the team learned several important lessons:

- One missing piece of the competency structure linkage resulted in false negative feedback regarding students achieving the SLOs.
- Several tasks anticipated to go by quickly actually took longer due to the availability of the LMS expert to assist with the technical issues encountered (as a matter of fact, the LMS expert with whom the team worked for over a year moved on to different employment, so the team had to identify a new expert in competency structures and LMS analytics).
- As we were troubleshooting technical issues, we found the use of common terminology to be vital in successful team communication.
- Specificity in technical troubleshooting was also paramount. Miscommunication by lack of context arose when using screenshots that only captured a portion of the screen (that looks the same in many of the LMS's tools) and not the full context in which the technical issues occurred.
- The LMS test environment did not have all the necessary analytic tools for the project team to fully execute the prototype (due to additional cost). The project team therefore had to abandon the test environment and move to the live LMS environment.

Stage 3: Initial Course Owner Meetings

Since the small-scale prototyping was successful, the project team moved to the next phase of initial talks with the faculty in both the HIA and non-HIA native courses. This stage was used to provide an overview of the project and its primary purpose to meet accreditation requirements. Faculty were reassured that the course SLO performance reports would be accessible by the HIA program director only.

The crucial role all faculty play in the project’s success was communicated; in order to accurately track SLOs at the program level, every course faculty must use the LMS to deliver activities/grades and attach each activity/grade to the appropriate competency structure in the LMS.

Since this project involves additional workload for the course faculty, the team offered support for these activities before and during the pilot and go-live phases. The project team presented the levels of support available to all faculty (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Instructional-Design Support Levels
Stage 4: Building All Necessary LMS Components

This stage involved building the actual competency structure in the LMS. A Fall 2016 preparation course shell was built for every course in the program used for the new curriculum.

The "HIA Accreditation Project" module (available to faculty teaching HIA courses but invisible to the students) was added to each HIA course in the LMS. This module contains:

- a list of the SLOs that need to be met in the course according to the program's new curriculum
- any materials developed with the instructional designer
- a link to material hosted on the project website, including:
  - custom-made assignment and rubric templates
  - custom-made video tutorials covering the essential skills faculty will need to perform (i.e., create assignments, create rubrics, create a gradebook, link all three with one another and with the corresponding SLO)
  - the contact information of the instructional designer, instructional systems analyst, and 24/7 help desk.

The project website will be used in training the faculty and will also be linked within each HIA course. Maintaining a website to distribute information ensures that all faculty have access to the most current/up-to-date information and allows the project team to communicate updates from one central location.

Stage 5: Faculty/Course Owner Training

Although this stage is not completed at the time of this publication, it includes the offering of individual hands-on training to all HIA native core faculty, HIA native contract faculty, and non-HIA native faculty. The training covers all aspects of the tasks needed before the semester begins (building and linking activities, rubrics, grades, and linking to the existing SLOs) and during the semester (grading and identifying which SLOs are met/not met).

During the training sessions, each faculty chooses the desired level of support. For example, a faculty member choosing to have the designer most involved would choose levels 1, 3, and 5 (refer to Figure 3), whereas a faculty member choosing to have the designer less involved would opt for levels 2, 4, and 5 or less.

Stage 6: Two-Semester Pilot

While still a work in progress, this stage includes building the prep courses, putting the "HIA Program Accreditation" module in place, and training faculty in all the tasks they'll need to complete.
Stage 6.1: Before the Fall 2016 Semester (Pilot 1)

Before the first pilot begins, courses need to be prepared, as follows:
- For those who opt for support levels 1 and/or 3 (have course components built and post-produced in the course), the faculty and designer will choose a timeline for their collaboration, ensuring that the respective work is completed before the start of the Fall 2016 semester.
- The faculty members who opt for support levels 2 and/or 4 (using templates and training videos) are responsible for building their own course components, consulting the templates and videos available, as needed.
- The designer will copy all the prep course shells into the live semester shells before students gain access to their Fall 2016 courses.
- The designer will also assist with support level 5 (helping as needed).

Stage 6.2: During the Fall 2016 Semester (Pilot 1)

During the first pilot, assignments will need to be completed/graded and an SLO-mastery support process initiated whenever students are unable to meet the SLOs.

The instructional designer will continue to troubleshoot on request (support level 5) and will maintain contact with all faculty to offer just-in-time support or training.

By the middle of the semester, the instructional designer will create Spring 2017 prep shells (complete with the "HIA Program Accreditation" module), allowing faculty to start working ahead.

Stage 6.3: After the Fall 2016 Semester (Pilot 1)

At the end of each semester, the program director generates end-of-semester reports and to determine if SLOs are met/not met. If SLOs are identified as not met, the program director will consult with the respective faculty member(s) to determine the need to modify the instructional materials and/or clarify the activity instructions to ensure success on those specific SLOs.

Stage 6.4: Before the Spring 2017 Semester (Pilot 2)

This stage of the pilot will include review of the results from the Fall 2016 pilot phase and courses will be modified based on the formative feedback obtained. The project team will then repeat stages 6.1 – 6.3 of the project for the Spring semester.

Stage 7: Go Live

This phase will begin with the review of all feedback generated during the pilot stages of the project. Modifications to course or processes will be based on the results of the LMS analytics reports and feedback from HIA faculty. Once these modifications are complete, the program will implement the new curriculum in all HIA courses.

Recommendations

The biggest lessons the team learned in taking on this massive project are as follows:
- identify all stakeholders impacted by the project
- gather all team members with a variety of talents (subject matter expertise, pedagogy, instructional design, technology, etc.) that will execute the project
- an experienced project manager is essential in leading the team and meeting deadlines
- use an intuitive project-management system; the more user friendly it is, the more likely the team will make use of it
- start early and expect the unexpected (technical issues, staff turnover, etc.)
• don't skimp on sketching (on paper) and prototyping (in your LMS live environment)
• small scale tests are more effective as full-blown tests (agile design allows immediate remediation of problems encountered and can be scaled to the whole implementation)
• roll out the project in order of importance of tasks (if A fails, than B-Z are not necessary)
• get leadership and faculty buy-in as early as you can
• offer to be as hands-on or hands-off as faculty desire
• always have a plan B for business continuity purposes
• invest time and effort into creating reusable templates, tutorials, etc. and place them in a central place to which you link in all courses
• have an SLO-mastery support process in place during each semester
• go through formative reviews of instruction and activities (not SLOs) in between semesters
• provide plenty of time to pilot your project (as many semesters as you can).

Conclusion

Although preparing the next generation of HIIM professionals by aligning the HIA curriculum with profession-specific accreditation standards is a formidable task, the HIA design team at Augusta University used LMS embedded analytics tools to track and analyze over 100 program-level SLOs.

The team used a comprehensive development and implementation process to succeed in this project. This included the use of technology skills, learning design, leadership, and an existing technology infrastructure. The results of this project supports the case for using LMS analytics to evaluate mastery of your accrediting body’s SLOs.

Amanda Barefield is an Associate Professor in the Health Information Administration Program at Augusta University, Augusta, Georgia. abarefield@augusta.edu.

Georgianna Laws is an Instructional Designer at Augusta University, Augusta, Georgia. glaws@augusta.edu.
Teaching Multiple Online Sections/Courses: Tactics and Techniques

Rodger Bates
Clayton State University

Bryan LaBrecque
Clayton State University

Emily Fortner
Jackson State Community College

Abstract

The challenge of teaching online is increased as the number of sections or courses increase in a semester. The tactics and techniques which enrich online instruction in the tradition of quality matters can be modified and adapted to the demands of multiple instructional needs during a semester. Time management and instructional design strategies are addressed as well as prior planning requirements. The integration and management of multiple online courses within a program or curriculum is reviewed and recommendations discussed.

Introduction

Since the emergence of online instruction as a significant component of higher education, researchers and practitioners have developed numerous tools and techniques to provide quality learning experiences for students. The topics of how to develop, teach and assess online instruction are frequently featured in numerous journals and conferences. For example, Boettcher (2011) and Freeman (2015) discussed articles on the best practices for developing online courses and the time requirements for the various elements associated with the development of online instruction. However, analysis of the Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration indicates that since the inception of the journal in the spring of 1998 not a single article has been published that addresses the issues associated with developing and teaching multiple online courses during a single semester. Obviously, the strategies and tactics of developing, teaching and assessing online courses is a prerequisite for those who teach multiple courses. However, the transition from doing a single course in a semester to doing multiple courses may pose a number of new and more complex issues for those who increasingly teach mostly or completely online.

With the growth of online learning in the past twenty years and the need for quality assurance, faculty are developing and teaching courses in various online formats. As both professors and instructional designers, faculty can take advantage of a number of strategies, tactics and techniques for maintaining academic integrity, enhancing instructional efficiency and improving the planning and delivery of multiple online courses which support engaged student learning and active learning communities.

Teaching multiple online courses can mean a number of things. Multiple online instruction may mean teaching two or more sections of the same online course. It also may mean teaching some courses in a 100% online format, others in a hybrid or blended format and some possibly in an on-demand format (Southard, Meddaugh, and France-Harris, 2015). In addition, teaching lower-division, upper-division or graduate classes in any of the three formats may involve different pedagogical strategies. The faculty member teaching predominantly online may be using a variety of different formats in a given semester. The mix of formats and levels influence strategies and techniques that a faculty member may use. The impact on instructors teaching multiple online courses can vary greatly depending on several key issues but focuses on three areas of emphasis: preparation, delivery and assessment. Each of these areas is impacted by a number of components, specifically, the number of online courses taught simultaneously, the diversity of each course, the method in which these courses are delivered, institutional type and the level of each course. These areas of emphasis and their associated components are discussed below, with particular attention paid to tactics and techniques that can maintain course integrity, while improving planning efficiency and content delivery.
Preparation

Preparation time and effort needed to teach multiple online courses involve several important issues. These include course layouts, textbook selection, syllabi, the number of components or learning modules included and time constraints.

LMS (Learning Management Systems) Course Layout

Preparing to teach multiple online courses is much the same as preparing a single course. In a single course, the instructor selects a topic and identifies the type of information source upon which the course is to be developed. It may be a text, a series of articles, or some other information sources.

Because of the time constraints associated with teaching multiple online courses, access to a quality learning management system (LMS) is a significant asset. Obviously, whether an institution is using Blackboard, D2L or similar systems, learning management systems provide the critical infrastructure necessary for quality online learning. In the case of teaching multiple sections of the same course, instructors can integrate multiple sections into a single course format, with the exception of final grades, so that course communication, feedback, quizzes and examinations can be handled in a singular manner.

A common course template or shell provides consistency in the design and presentation of multiple courses or sections. In most circumstances a Learning Management System acts as a primary shell for the course. There are many available, either commercially or via open source services. Examples of several popular systems include Blackboard™ (with over 50% market share), Moodle™ (with 19% market share), and Desire2Learn™ (with 11% market share) (Hill, 2014). Utilizing a common template or shell facilitates the preparation and delivery of these courses and provides students comfort and confidence that they understand the processes of online instruction. The guidelines provided by a number of “best practices,” such as Boettcher’s (2011) “11 Strategies for Online Instruction” or the Quality Matters™ (2009) rubrics developed by the University of Maryland, are useful tools for populating the templates.

Whether the instructor is teaching multiple online courses with the same delivery method (i.e. hybrid v. 100% online v. on demand) or the same method in a given semester, the use of templates simplifies the process and provides a consistent layout for the students. In other words, the same template/layout can (and should) be used across all three online delivery methods. This is true regardless of the level of each course being taught and provides students with a consistent view and lowers the amount of planning effort expended by the instructor. With a consistent learning management system format in place, the development of course infrastructure is minimized, leaving the instructor with course content as the major focus of course development. This is true in either single or multiple course environments.

In some institutions, and in particular community colleges, specific course content and structure are developed and monitored by a single coordinator or instructor. Since multiple sections of these courses are taught each semester, course preparation is facilitated and consistency and integrity is maintained through the use of these signature courses. Though efficient, however, this approach has not been widely adopted by most senior and graduate level institutions because of the ongoing evolution of more advanced materials and the professional preferences and autonomy of many professors.

Syllabi

Depending upon how robust a teacher is in syllabus development for face-to-face courses, the syllabus for a single online class can vary along a wide spectrum of effort and detail. Since the faculty-student interaction differs from a face-to-face class, best practices dictate that the online syllabus be clear and concise but include very detailed instructions and schedules. This generally results in more time and effort when developing a single online syllabus relative to a face-to-face course.

With the advent of learning management systems, most universities and colleges require that all courses, seated and online, have course syllabi and basic course information available online (Bates, 2013). As a fundamental component of institutional resiliency and disaster preparedness, the efforts to provide the availability of basic course information across an institution facilitate the development of online relevant syllabi for multiple courses.
The impact of teaching multiple online courses in a semester, however, becomes arithmetically larger and results in longer planning time and requires more forethought and effort depending upon the number of online classes taught during an upcoming semester. The complexity of delivery diversity and the level of each course add to both time and effort in developing course syllabi. Of course, if the multiple courses are simply different sections of the same course, the additional time and effort will only be dictated by the difference between the face-to-face course syllabus and not the fact that multiple courses are being taught online (Freeman, 2015).

**Textbooks**

In teaching multiple online courses, the process is simplified by selecting a relevant text book for each course. Obviously, when teaching multiple sections of the same course, the same information source should be used. Regardless, the process of course development is greatly simplified if the text selected comes with available online support materials such as power points, chapter summaries, an instructor manual and a test bank. Providing the power points and chapter summaries for each course taught provides consistency, as well as a significant time savings, in course preparation. Likewise, access to instructor’s manuals and test banks facilitate course development and assessment tools.

A number of textbook companies, like Pearson (MyLab), McGraw Hill (Connect)) and others, have developed robust online learning components for their textbooks. These proprietary course specific learning management systems provide extensive support materials for both online and seated classroom experiences and facilitate the preparation and delivery of multiple online learning experiences. The growth and development of these constructionist learning environments have enhanced online learning resources, especially for multiple course environments. Ranging from minimalist to richer learning environments (Wilson, 1996) today’s textbook companies have developed learning systems which provide experience with the knowledge construction process, appreciation for multiple learning perspectives, and have embedded learning in realistic and relevant contexts (Horebein, 1996). In addition, these enhanced textbook systems encourage student ownership and voice in the learning process based in social experience and promote multiple modes of representation and self-awareness in the knowledge construction process (Horebein, 1996).

**Time Issues**

Freeman’s (2015) research, “Instructor Time Requirements to Develop and Teach Online Courses,” indicates that most instructors prepare online courses almost a full semester (16 weeks) prior to the offering of a course. This pre-semester preparation is essential in developing on-demand courses, and most fully online courses also require substantial prior preparation; hybrid courses may allow for in-semester preparation. However, teaching multiple online courses requires that most be fully prepared prior to the start of a semester to allow sufficient time to keep up with the daily demands required for adequate student engagement, feedback, and assessment. Therefore, preparing multiple courses will usually require a number of semesters of prior preparation and instruction.

Teaching multiple courses becomes slightly more efficient the second or third time that the courses are offered. However, the advantages of prior preparation are limited only to the development of course content and support materials. The actual instruction remains relatively time consuming as the amount of student interaction, grading and responses are unique to each course during the semester (Freeman, 2015).

**Delivery**

With the demands of multiple courses during a semester, the fully engaged faculty member must develop a structured plan for time and course management. For example, a weekly schedule of planned class-list emails, in addition to daily monitoring and responding to individual student questions and concerns, should be established. For example in a lower-division introductory course in which weekly quizzes are used, they should be all scheduled for the same time period in the week. This will allow the instructor to send generic reminders for all classes on the same schedule to be ready for the quizzes and to provide reminders to keep up with assigned readings, videos, discussion posts and other weekly activities. These reminders supplement the calendar schedules in the learning management system and the syllabus.
On another day of the week, the instructor can plan on responding, commenting or assessing discussion posts in all of the courses. Also, time needs to be allocated on a regular basis for working on course materials for the next semester. If weekly quizzes are objective in nature, as is routinely found in lower-division courses, then the automatic grading of these regular items will free the instructor to devote some days to the grading of essay questions in upper-division courses and for working with students on other graded activities, like term papers. By keeping a regular schedule of activities, managing the demands of multiple courses is simplified.

Student Management/Engagement

Managing students and their needs is always an issue for instructors regardless of the forum in which the class is taught. Online courses present a higher challenge in this regard due primarily to their asynchronous delivery. Unlike “seated” classrooms, where students have specific hours in which they can query their instructors, it is more likely that students will attempt to occupy the instructor’s time during nearly all waking hours of the day on weekdays and weekends alike. Students, understandably, assume that since they are participating in a course in an asynchronous manner, the instructor is as well. One strategy to address this issue is to post online office hours. This provides some structure to access and may also provide opportunities to interact in a synchronous manner via email or even other options, such as Skype.

Typically, students in online classes miss a higher percentage of course material such as assignments and assessments because of the lack of consistent communication and various computer and technology issues, often outside the sphere of control of the instructor. This prompts students to request make-ups and late submission opportunities which, if allowed, can overwhelm the instructor with activity. Each change to the course layout (LMS) requires the instructor to review the current standing, assess the reasonability of the request, determine logistics associated with “going backward” into the software and then make adjustments to the shell to account for late or re-submitted work. If not tempered properly, teaching multiple on-line classes can result in activity levels that are simply unmanageable. Hybrid deliveries can reduce a portion of this activity as there is some level of student-instructor interaction on a scheduled basis. Students can often wait until the lecture period to ask a particular question on content or schedule. To reduce the impact of managing students on a daily basis, several techniques can be applied. The first technique is to set expectations early in the semester. Using the communication forum in the LMS or utilizing the syllabus, an instructor can establish available hours similar to face-to-face courses. Doing so will help reduce some of this activity, but students who become desperate are not inclined to wait. Since many, if not most, online instructors recognize the negative impact on student outcomes by “ignoring” posts or email queries from students, a good number of requests will continue to appear “off schedule.” A second technique to reduce the impact of student issues is via the LMS itself. Often, the LMS will provide start dates, stop dates and end dates for activities. By utilizing the end date, students will be allowed to submit an assignment beyond the due date and incur a preset penalty without requiring any additional activity by the instructor. This option is available at any time but is most effective at the start of term with an appropriate message dictating expectations. A third technique for reducing student questions is to utilize the LMS Discussion or Chat function. Instructors can establish Discussion forums for students to assist each other with computer or technology issues. The instructor can utilize the same functionality to present Frequently Asked Questions developed in earlier semesters or during the current semester. By periodically updating the FAQs at a regular time interval, students can refer to that forum prior to asking the instructor for assistance already available. This technique is used widely in the commercial world to reduce workload on customer service. Finally, the development of a thorough generic course introduction section for all the online sections can address many of the frequently asked questions. The development of this introduction, often in the form of a video, provides a personal reinforcement of the materials and can be used in each of the multiple online courses, where appropriate. In addition, the use of syllabus quizzes that address many of the frequently asked questions can reinforce the structure of courses and the protocols for instructor interactions.

Course Content

Perhaps the most significant issue surrounding teaching multiple online courses involves the course content itself. Online teaching guidelines and “best practices” have been studied and assessed and will continue to be adjusted as more faculty and universities move towards online presentation of course material. While these guidelines represent powerful strategies for creating distance learning that is equivalent to traditional classrooms, the impact of simultaneous courses with separate and distinct deliveries represents another evolutionary step. Take, for instance, the instructor who may be teaching three sections of the same course, one in a 100% asynchronous format, one in a hybrid format and one in an on-demand format. Each of these classes should prepare and assess students in each
class and should result in consistent outcomes. Aside from convenience, students in any of these three courses should not be advantaged or disadvantaged over those in the other classes.

Hybrid classes represent a clear advantage for instructors because of the balanced nature of delivery. While asynchronous courses can be challenging in this regard, pre-recorded audio and or video lectures can offset the disadvantage. There is clearly a heavier workload to produce lectures but once done they can be readily revised and updated with new material. A strong technique for providing pre-recorded lectures is to use the record function available in presentation software such as Camtasia. The instructor can utilize the hybrid lecture and record the presentation during a class period - including any questions asked by students – and upload it immediately to the other formats. This allows asynchronous students the benefit of “real-time lectures” and Q & A on specific topics, without the extra instructor course work associated with studio recordings.

Another technique to ensure equitable learning opportunities between delivery formats is to use collaborative learning software such as Blackboard Collaborate or WebEx. These systems provide virtual classrooms whereby students and instructors can interact during a scheduled online meeting with the added advantage of recording capability for those who are unable to attend.

Assessment

Assessment in online classes has been a challenging task. These challenges are increased when multiple sections and courses are being offered. McPhaul (2013) discussed many of the issues and strategies associated with successful online testing. Assuming that all tests will be open book in 100% online and on-demand courses is a given. This influences the level of specificity required for some of the objective measures of assessment. In the case of multiple sections of the same course, different examinations and the randomization of objective questions and essays are useful strategies. In the case of hybrid courses, obviously, monitored in-class examinations are an option. Also, a number of technical course monitoring options are now available through some special online service agencies or through an institution’s academic support services. This may include the verification of student identity through secure pass codes, web cams and key stroke analysis.

Watson and Sottile (2010) note that online students are more likely to cheat in seated rather than in online classes. They suggest that the social interaction and relationships developed in seated or live classes plays a part in this process. They do state, however, that in online classes, students may experience dishonesty through the use of either related online sources or outside assistance during exams. It is for this reason that proctored exams, web cam or the careful construction of testing instruments are an important requirement in the online assessment process. These threats to academic integrity are multiplied when an instructor is teaching a number of online courses in a given semester. Therefore, effective and efficient assessment in a multi-course online environment requires significant prior planning in the development of the testing instruments as well as the process of assessment.

Conclusions

Teaching online courses often results in increased faculty workload. This workload expansion involves preparation, delivery and assessment. Also, work load can be impacted when teaching more than one online course during a semester. The format of the online courses also adds to the complexity of the course and instructor workload. There are several techniques that, while not a panacea, can significantly reduce the added workload of multiple online courses and create a strong learning environment while maintaining course integrity. While several techniques and tactics have been presented, it is clear that to become more attractive to traditional faculty members, additional research and strategies are needed.

References


Southard, S, and Bates R. (2011) “The Evolution of Traditional Faculty through Distance Education Training.” Distance Learning Administration Conference Proceedings. Savannah, Georgia.


Rodger Bates is a Professor of Sociology at Clayton State University, Morrow, Georgia. rodgerbates@clayton.edu.

Bryan LaBrecque is an Assistant Professor of Administrative/Technology Management and Coordinator of the B.A.S. Program at Clayton State University, Morrow, Georgia. bryantlabrecque@clayton.edu.

Emily Fortner is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Jackson State Community College, Jackson, Tennessee. efortner@jscc.edu.
EPIC Online Student and Faculty Preparedness

Carrie Bartek
Wake Technical Community College

Alison Consol
Wake Technical Community College

Abstract

Wake Technical Community College has launched a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) initiative based on best practices in eLearning called EPIC (eLearning Preparedness Initiative across the College). EPIC’s goal is to remove learning barriers and better support online student learning, persistence, and success. A broad cross-functional and multidisciplinary team of faculty and staff developed and implemented eLearning Quality Standards, an online student orientation, and a faculty certification program.

Overview

EPIC directly relates to Wake Tech’s institutional needs to improve outcomes related to eLearning. During 2014-15, Wake Tech had 15,326 students who took at least one online course, making it the largest provider online courses in North Carolina. However, course statistics mirror the national trend: average student success rates (% of grades “A,” “B,” and “C” among all grades including withdrawals) for all online course sections are, on average, lower than success rates of face-to-face course sections. Further, success rates of face-to-face sections of the highest enrollment “gateway” courses (the first courses students take in a program of study) with the lowest online success rates were, on average, 8% to 10% greater than the online sections of the same courses during the fall 2014 (4,631 students enrolled) and spring 2015 (5,009 students enrolled) academic year.

Research on best practices indicates that when students complete orientation programs that assess online learner skills and characteristics, and when faculty design and deliver online courses that promote student success and online learning, student outcomes improve. Further, recent research on course design and pedagogy indicates that while course organization, alignment of learning objectives, and leveraging technology in online courses may enhance the learning experience, student-instructor interaction has the largest influence on student outcomes (Jaggers and Xu, 2016). Therefore, in keeping with Wake Tech’s mission “to promote individual success in the workplace and in higher education,” a broad-based team of faculty and staff developed two key objectives and the associated strategies for implementing them:

1. **Student Preparedness:** The Student Preparedness goal is to help students overcome online learning barriers and gain the skills they need to be successful online learners. Through the eLearning Intro Course, which is a mandatory, interactive student readiness assessment with remediation modules, students gain the skills, tools, and awareness they need to be successful in an online course. The eLearning Intro focuses on the three skills necessary for a successful online student: expectation management, basic computer literacy, and familiarity with the learning management system (LMS), achieved through an LMS “boot camp.” Students have the opportunity to self-assess and remediate within the course prior to registration.

2. **Faculty Preparedness:** The goal of Faculty Preparedness is to help instructor’s better design and deliver quality online courses. Faculty develop the course design and delivery skills they need through an Online Teaching Certification Program that provides instruction in the learning management system (LMS), pedagogy, instructional design, accessibility, and advanced training for teaching online. The program will also offer mentorship during which seasoned online faculty can lead the way for newcomers.

**eLearning Intro: A Student Preparedness Strategy**

Students new to Wake Tech or who have not successfully completed an online course with a grade of “A,” “B,” or “C” at Wake Tech in the past five years must complete our eLearning Intro course before they can register for an online course.

The eLearning Intro is a free orientation that provides a series of modules with quizzes to assess eLearning knowledge and learning modules to remediate differences in:
• Online Learning Expectations: persistence and time management skills for success online
• Using the Computer: for completing assignments and assessments online
• Blackboard Bootcamp: how to navigate, communicate, and collaborate on Blackboard

Each module takes between 20 minutes and 3 hours to complete; most students complete all three modules in 1 to 5 hours. Students must score 90 or higher on each module to move on to the next one. After students have completed all three, they will be able to register for an online course.

Module 1: Expectation Management and Transferable Skills

In the Expectation Management and Transferable Skills Module, students assess, learn, remediate, and acquire the “soft skills” necessary to be successful online students. Content emphasizes skill elements of concepts such as effective time management, planning and prioritizing, goal setting, self-advocacy, professionalism, accountability, and effective communication that is applicable when using electronic media. After students self-assess, the eLearning Intro provides informational videos, testimonials, FAQs with answers, and an interactive platform to apply the skills described above. Module 1 also gives students an overview of what they can expect in the online learning experience, as well as the accountability and responsibility expected of them in online courses. In addition, students are introduced to Growth Mindset Theory (Yeager and Dwek, 2012), which emphasizes the importance of resilience and persistence through challenges.

Module 2: Basic Computer Skills

In Module 2, students assess, learn, remediate, and acquire basic computer skills. Students who are deficient in these skills will go through an accelerated remediation within the eLearning Intro, acquiring the basic computer skills necessary to enroll in and successfully complete an online course. To accommodate all students, Module 2 offers both a PC and a Mac version.

Module 3: Blackboard Boot Camp

In the Blackboard Boot Camp Module, students assess, learn, remediate, or acquire an ability to navigate the LMS successfully. Students who are deficient in these skills will go through an accelerated remediation. Upon successful completion or remediation of the LMS Boot Camp Module, students will be able to navigate the LMS and successfully submit assignments, take assessments, and post discussions.

2015 eLearning Intro Implementation

Statistics for the first launch of the eLearning Intro are provided in Table 1. Students new to the college or current students who had never taken an online course and students who had previously taken an online course at Wake Tech but did not receive an “A,” “B,” or “C” in that online course were required to take the eLearning Intro prior to registering for any online course. As shown in the table, the percentage of students who took the eLearning Intro out of the total number of students taking at least one online course dropped from summer to the fall terms. This drop is likely associated with a change in the student population from the summer to the fall semesters, as there were fewer students who had never taken the eLearning Intro in the fall term compared to the summer term. In addition, the overall completion rate of students who passed the eLearning Intro either by testing out of the pre-test or by completing the modules was above 90% for both terms. This completion rate contributed to the minimum impact the eLearning Intro had on enrollment during the registration period for both semesters.

Table 1. eLearning Intro overall completion rate through Fall 2015. Overall completion rate includes students who passed the eLearning Intro by taking the self-test (pre-test) only, as well as students who did not score at least 90% on the self-test and had to take the modules.
eLearning Intro Overall Completion Rate through Fall 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2015SU</th>
<th>2015FA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of students taking at least one online course in the semester (unduplicated)</td>
<td>4,180</td>
<td>9,128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students taking ELI prior to semester (new students or students who were not previously successful in an online course)</td>
<td>3,294</td>
<td>4,317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of students taking eLearning Intro out of total number of students taking at least one online course</td>
<td>78.80%</td>
<td>47.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students who passed ELI (by self-test or module) in the sessions prior to semester</td>
<td>3,140</td>
<td>4,056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELI Completion Rate</td>
<td>95.32%</td>
<td>93.95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Online Instructor Certification—A Faculty Preparedness Strategy

The EPIC Online Teaching Certification programs will provide faculty with the additional training they want and need in pedagogy and technology. EPIC eLearning Quality Standards (2015) and an associated rubric (2015) for evaluating online courses were developed based on research into best practices, including Quality Matters (2015). These tools provide the framework for the certification program.

The training and certification process was implemented beginning in fall 2015, with all online faculty scheduled to receive their online teaching certification by fall 2017. The following describes EPIC’s three online teaching certification pathways:

Pathway 1—Online Teaching Certification through Professional Development

Certification through Professional Development is one of three ways for instructors to be certified in online teaching. This pathway includes 30 hours of professional development training (referred to as “EPIC30”), which concentrates on online teaching pedagogy and universal design for learning (UDL) principles. Pathway 1 certification is received when a faculty member has obtained training in online teaching aligned with EPIC Quality eLearning Standards. Courses cover best practices in course navigation and design, online communication & collaboration, online assessments, UDL, accessibility, LMS skills training, and culminates with a capstone course that requires mastery-level demonstration of design and delivery skills described in the EPIC Quality eLearning Standards. Table 2 is a snapshot of current online faculty progress through the certification program.

Pathway 2—Certification by Review

Peer review is an available option for experienced online faculty who have completed extensive training in LMS technology and online pedagogy. If experienced online faculty are employing best practices, it will be observable in their existing courses. With supervisor approval, faculty may opt to put a course up for review. Faculty will be certified by a team of three certified Peer Reviewers reviewing each course using the EPIC Quality eLearning Rubric. Certification is awarded when the majority of the peer review team agree that the course reviewed demonstrates that the faculty member is already practicing online teaching aligned with EPIC Quality eLearning Standards.

Using pathway 1 or 2, all current faculty teaching online who wish to continue teaching online will become certified by August 2017. Table 2 provides the percentages of all Wake Tech faculty, full and part-time, who currently teach at least one course online and have completed certification or certification hours.
Table 2. Snapshot of the percentage of total EPIC30 hour training completed by online faculty (those who taught at least one online course 2014-15) and the number of faculty certified by Peer Review as of February 2016.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Total Number All Divisions</th>
<th>% EPIC30 Hours Completed All Divisions through February 2016</th>
<th># Currently Certified by Peer Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online Faculty</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time Online Faculty</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjunct (P/T) Online Faculty</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>Not eligible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjunct (F/T) Online Faculty</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>Not eligible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source WTCC Spring 2016 Data

Pathway 3 – Lateral Entry / Short Notice Hires

In the event instructors are needed to teach online courses on short notice (as determined by supervisors), they will agree to work with a qualified mentor while concurrently completing the Online Teaching Certification during a period of no more than three 16-week semesters. A mentor will be responsible for ensuring adherence to guidelines and standards. The new online faculty member will complete the eLearning Intro course and will agree to work with an EPIC Master Certified Mentor within his or her department/program (or the most relevant discipline area if there are no EPIC Master Certified Mentors within his/her discipline) while concurrently completing Pathway 1 certification courses. New faculty who begin teaching online after August 2017 and are not certified will be required to take Pathway 3.

Summary

Wake Technical Community College’s EPIC Initiative interventions/strategies relate directly to students’ online learning skills and their online learning needs. By reducing learning barriers through the mandatory eLearning Intro readiness assessment, and by ensuring that faculty have the skills they need to intentionally design and deliver courses according to best practices that promote student success, the EPIC Initiative is supporting student learning, persistence, and success in online courses.
References


**Carrie Bartek** is the Director of Planning, Assessment and Quality Improvement/QEP Lead and Executive Director at Wake Technical Community College, Raleigh, North Carolina. cebartek@waketech.edu.

**Alison Consol** is the Associate Professor/Program Director and EPIC Online Certification Coordinator at Wake Technical Community College, Raleigh, North Carolina. ajconsol@waketech.edu.
Fiscally Responsible Faculty Relationships: How Dual Positions Can Support Change

Lisa Craft
Kansas State University Polytechnic Campus

Abstract

With a diminishing budget, the Kansas State University Polytechnic Campus embraced the emerging trend of a blended librarian, a combined position that pairs library services with instructional design and technology (IDT). In the current economic climate, adding positions in higher education is a luxury. Even currently existing positions are not always filled. The creation of a budget friendly combined position was intended to assist K-State Polytechnic to meet the increased research needs brought about by a new university vision, a new graduate program, and the need for onsite IDT support. This led to the search for someone with a combination of library and IDT skills. This paper explores and discusses how this position came to fruition, the research behind creating the position, and how the position has evolved over five years. Furthermore, this paper discusses benefits and challenges witnessed with this combined position.

Why the Position was Needed

In August of 2008, the state of Kansas instituted a state wide hiring freeze. This meant that all positions be heavily justified. Even current positions that had been vacated were not automatically filled without sound reasoning for continuing to pay the salary. This led to all state universities in Kansas to evaluate their personnel needs and work flow processes. At a smaller campus like K-State Polytechnic, this inability to fill positions when vacated or add new personnel led to many services and needs not being met, and a frustrated faculty and staff.

In February of 2010, Kansas State University unveiled a new university mission. *K-State 2025, which introduced seven themes the university community*, would focus upon to become one of the nation’s Top 50 Public Research Universities. The first of those seven themes is Research, Scholarly and Creative Activities and Discovery or RSCAD. This theme states that the university will, “Create a culture of excellence that results in flourishing, sustainable, and widely recognized research, scholarly and creative activities, and discovery in a variety of disciplines and endeavors that benefit society as a whole” (Kansas State University, 2011). In short, this element of the vision denotes that there is an expectation for faculty to increase production of research and scholarly activities, which led to an increased need for support in those endeavors.

The K-State Polytechnic campus started as the School of Technology and Aviation and just recently branched into other degree areas such as Social Work, Gerontology, and Personal Financial Planning. Many faculty are experts in their field and bring real life job and professional experience rather than a portfolio of research. Consequently there is not a large amount of Doctorate degreeed faculty. Research, while required for tenure, is something that faculty at this campus have not widely participated in; making it a possibly new and intimidating task. Therefore the library needed to add staff in order to meet the increased research needs of the faculty.

In the spring of 2011, a new Professional Master of Technology program was approved. This meant a new population of students never seen on the K-State Polytechnic Campus; graduate students. The program was initially designed to incorporate a large research project that would culminate over the whole of the coursework. These students would be doing more advanced research than their undergraduate counterparts pushing the needs for additional library staff even further.

Additionally, this program was designed for most of the new courses to be offered online or in a hybrid format. Many of the faculty teaching this program had never taught online. Participation in the new degree program
made it necessary to not only create graduate level courses, but to also learn a new technology that faculty may not be familiar with using. A faculty needs survey found instructional technology was a pressing need that was extremely important to all faculty, not just those teaching online courses. This demand for more support in both IDT and research led the campus to evaluate how to meet these needs in a cost effective and beneficial way. Therefore a new tenure-track faculty position was added to the library. The position was titled Faculty and Graduate Services Librarian. The Faculty and Graduate Services Librarian would handle faculty and graduate research as well as serve as the campus instructional designer.

Research

The Assistant Dean of Academics conducted research to decide on the feasibility of this position and to find justification to sell it to the administration. Through research, a number of examples combining library and IDT services and skills were found. There are many universities that are combining library and technical assistance services. In Hale Library on the Kansas State University campus in Manhattan, Kansas, the library houses the Information Technology Assistance Center (iTac). The iTac provides centralized information technology support to the students, faculty and staff of that campus. The combination of these services allows for a one-stop shop for all research, information, and technology needs.

Another example is Georgia College, a liberal arts university in Milledgeville, Georgia. This library and instructional technology center not only provides technical assistance to their campus population but also offers items such as video cameras, iPads, and photography cameras for check-out by the patrons. The center boasts PC and Mac labs as well as a state-of-the-art media lab. These services coupled with library research help make this space a valuable university resource.

There are many degree programs throughout the country that have successfully blended library and information science with IDT. Emporia State University, located in Emporia, Kansas, added a defined concentration in Instructional Design Technology to the Library and Information Management Doctoral program. According to Dr. Mirah Dow, Doctoral Program Coordinator at Emporia State University, this blend makes sense as, “IDT is a very relevant topic to future LIS educators in terms of their knowledge-based and skills planning, designing and delivering instruction. Many library schools, or I-school, utilize distance (online) education in delivery of their programs. So, our graduates are likely to need expertise in teaching and learning online.” (M. Dow, personal communication, October 17, 2011)

The idea of combining these two areas of knowledge is nothing new to the University of Missouri. The School of Information Science and Learning has offered Master’s degrees in both Library Science and Educational Technology since 1997. The school also offers an interdisciplinary Doctoral program in Information Science and Learning Technologies. According to their department homepage, since combining these two areas, their, “numbers of faculty and students have more than doubled; our levels of scholarly productivity and grant-funded work are at an all-time high” (University of Missouri, 2010).

Research revealed that many universities offer combined library and technical services, which includes IDT, in one building on campus. The research also pointed to a growing trend of interdisciplinary degree offerings blending the two skill sets. The information gave confidence to the administration that there were individuals in the work force possessing these skill sets. The only hurdle would be finding the right candidate for the small campus community.

Since the initial research was done in 2010, the idea of an instructional design librarian has continued to grow, with many university and college libraries adding such a position. These positions often call for an ALA-accredited MLS with experience in IDT in the required qualifications and a Masters in IDT, or some iteration of, in the required qualifications. These positions tend to focus only on library instruction and generally are not assisting faculty with technical issues or creating learning objects for courses outside of the library. Libraries with an incorporated technology center like those listed above do employ general instructional designers, however they do not require those individuals to also have an MLS making this combined position different from a majority of the blended librarian positions at other institutions.
**Evolution of the Position**

As the campus evolved and changed, so did the position. While scholarly research continues to be important to the institution's 2025 goals, it has not led to a large increase of production on the Polytechnic campus. More Doctorate degreeed faculty have since been hired but this has not led to an increased workload for the librarian. Most of these faculty do research themselves with very little help from a librarian unless they need help finding an article. Additionally, the graduate program did not grow as expected. While the librarian maintains a helpful one-on-one relationship with most graduate students, the biggest involvement is a one-shot instruction session in their first semester. The slow growth in this area allowed for the addition of administrative functions and a title change to Library Director.

What has grown exponentially is the IDT work. This position has taken on the role of the campus LMS Administrator, as well as the local video storage solution administrator. This individual has also grown faculty development for online teaching. A six-week hybrid course was developed to assist faculty to create quality online courses and teach online. This course has proved successful and has been offered every summer since 2012. In the summer of 2014, the class was expanded to the main campus, while still being taught by this combined position. The evolution of this position has led a one-stop shop for faculty. This person assists with research, instructional design, and instructional technology needs leading to a collaborative and trusting work relationship with fellow faculty. It should be noted that the decision to make this a tenure-track faculty position has assisted in creating those relationships as well. Faculty see this person as a colleague with similar struggles, which has led to a better working relationship.

**Benefits and Challenges**

**Benefits**

Cost savings is the most important benefit when it comes to any combined position. Individuals at small universities often take on many roles in order to serve the needs of the campus community in a cost effective manner. The combination of a librarian with instructional technology skills met many important needs at K-State Polytechnic. As blended librarians, or instructional design librarians become more common, this is a combined position that could work for many institutions.

The addition of a new position to the library allowed for more focus on different populations; leading to a higher level of service. In the past, one librarian served the research needs of both students and faculty. With the addition of the new position, the library now has an Undergraduate Services Librarian, as well as a Faculty and Graduate Services Librarian who can offer technical and instructional technology assistance. This allows for more focus on the different populations of patrons that come into the library. This level of service is one step closer to the one-stop-shop model that many libraries now offer.

Other than cost savings, the biggest benefit to date has been how this position has assisted faculty to accept technological change. In the spring of 2015, Kansas State began the switch over to a new LMS from their own homegrown system that had been in place for 15 years. The responsibility of this individual was to get all courses on the K-State Polytechnic campus onto the new system. Faculty had until spring of 2016 to complete the transition. You can see from the charts below that the Polytechnic campus, while smaller than most schools in the university system, were always ahead or tied for the percentage of courses transitioned to the new system. Most Polytechnic faculty made the move in the spring of 2015 when the 2016 deadline was announced.
Table 1. Percentage of courses in old LMS
Spring 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>% Still in Classic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-State Polytechnic</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Education</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Architecture, Planning &amp; Design</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Vet Med</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Engineering</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Agriculture</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Human Ecology</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Business</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Percentage of courses in old LMS
Fall 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>% Still in Classic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-State Polytechnic</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Education</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Human Ecology</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Vet Med</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Agriculture</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Architecture, Planning &amp; Design</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Engineering</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Business</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The relationship that this position enjoys with fellow faculty by not only doing their assigned job but by doing college service and other functions side-by-side has allowed them to build a relationship which made the LMS transition easier to understand and accomplish. While there were plenty of complaints, they had someone they trusted to share their concerns with and that they were comfortable asking questions of therefore easing anxiety. Because this position is a fellow faculty member, they felt comfortable with this point person as a colleague and an expert on the LMS.

Challenges

At K-State Polytechnic keeping this position busy has been not been a problem despite the fact that two key areas when justifying the position have not grown. For a position like this to work there has been assessment and adaptability on part of the individual as well as the institution. The individual must possess initiative to carve their own path in a newly created position where there is no history of responsibilities and issues. This includes looking for new opportunities while staying within the constraints of your position and department and not intruding on area of other college departments.

Another challenge is the balance of being in an administrative position while being a faculty member going through the tenure process. At K-State Polytechnic, a librarian's appointment mostly includes their job description, making it not as difficult to complete this task as it might be for a teaching faculty member. However, the appointment does not lessen the struggles that can come from supervising others going through the tenure process. It is difficult to mentor and guide others when you have not experienced the entire process yourself. This also causes issues with balancing the library and technology aspects for the position. It is important to remember that there is a responsibility to both areas, even when one is screaming for more attention. It can be challenging to keep knowledge current in both areas while working towards tenure requirements.
Summary

In conclusion, combined positions can provide many benefits to an institution. The blended librarian, a librarian with IDT education and experience is becoming more prevalent, allowing for new opportunities and utilization of librarians in higher education. At K-State Polytechnic, this combination not only provided a cost savings but a group of faculty who were able to better accept and understand a major technological change at a faster pace than their counterparts in other colleges of the university. Though there are some challenges with this position, the benefits have far outweighed any negatives. This position will continue to grow and evolve with the campus through current leadership and structure changes.

References


Lisa Craft is the Library Director/Instructional Designer at Kansas State University Polytechnic campus, Salina, Kansas. lmccraft@k-state.edu.
Understanding Where to Find the Answers to Institutional Copyright Issues

Sher Downing
University of South Carolina

Abstract

Understanding the basis of intellectual property and copyright is imperative with the move to digital content for online learning at organizations worldwide. Knowing how an institution interprets the law can aid in how to manage content; recognizing what resources are available can ensure guidelines to enforcing those efforts.

Introduction

Higher education institutions have made great strides to expand their learning offerings through differentiated applications over the last decade. To gain traction, many have expedited the movement to digital content to provide online course offerings while attempting to maintain academic freedom, the principle of teaching and research in higher education. Over time this issue has continued to become of greater concern; the ability of materials existing online for easy distribution with little recourse for remittance has caused apprehensions for faculty and online developers alike. Moreover, the understanding of the fundamental issue combined with identifying who has the responsibility for assuring protection of digital materials requires institutional planning. To identify the current responsibilities and trends, we must first look at how we reached this impasse.

Review of Literature

The history of copyright began in the 1700’s when it first acknowledged the process of creation and ownership of physical works and now is being challenged to adapt to our modern needs.

“To every cow her calf.” (Gornman & Ginsburg, 2006, p.1). Our first concept of copyright came from England at a time when the recognition of individual efforts as deemed important for ownership. Physical labor, drawings, writings were all protected. What was unpredicted was early efforts to make duplicate copies and no longer falling under the protection as they were not original works. For the United States, the first statute focused on copyright came as the Act of 1790 was created to provide protection for a scope of fourteen years to any author who created any map, chart or book. Once again, the author was initially protected but held no protection for unauthorized use (p. 5). After this, statutes regularly recognized time limits for protection, allowing others to claim or use works in the event an author did not renew application. The 1909 Act held a seventy-year reign that acknowledged the “birth” of the work rather than the date of filling and also acknowledged unpublished works still brought forth to the public, the extension of renewal years to a maximum 56 years, and the allowance of prima facie or face value for any recorded works (p.7). The 1976 Act brought about a full review and subsequent provisions including a single federal system of protection inclusive of published and unpublished “original works of authorship”; a single term of protection measured by the period of life of the author(s) plus 50 years beyond their death; specifications on transfer applicability to exploit derivative works before the end of term; notice provision for usage and incentives to encourage registration; acknowledgement of limits based on the public/private use; an acknowledgement of copyright liability based on licensing and limitations; establishment of royalty and subsequent assembly within license and distribution efforts; and the ability to divide ownership as applicable (p. 8). Future amendments to this act began in 1990 in the scope of artists and architectural works. In 1992, the Audio Home Recording Act came as a result of DAT (digital audio tape) recordings and musical distribution (p. 11). The years 1994 and 1995 brought about additional review and application towards the move to digital efforts leading to the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act (Pauken, 1998) and the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act both developed to protect works, limit infringement through licensing and/or usage, and protected ownership beyond the previous life cycle (Gornman & Ginsburg, 2006, p. 12).
While we have made tremendous progress to align laws with technological changes, it has had difficulty keeping up with the pace of change in the digital age. While it provides a foundation support but for institutions, there are still many areas of concern that require the law to stretch to fit the application.

Copyright in traditional higher education

In a traditional world of papers and other tangible portions, it was easy to confirm and identify usage as needed in higher education (Horizon, 2006). Faculty have long had academic freedom, the ability to teach and convey information without ownership or penalty as long as the effort was for the betterment of educating others. To protect faculty and aid authors, the Library of Congress developed a brochure covering Fair Use and copyright registration to assist in understanding the rights and responsibilities for this effort.

This ease of knowledge began to change when publishing houses began to offer payments to authors who were writing books while under a separate contract of employment. At this time, the sharing of electronic files became acceptable providing an opportunity for information to leak outside of the intended parties and become available to the public. This became further complicated with the introduction of online course delivery in higher education. While the law converges to discuss what is or is not public domain, it physically allows anyone access and through copying and/or downloading promotes the assumption of free use for all posted assets. This is often not the case, resulting in a challenge to track and defend materials in an open environment (Latourette, A.W. & Stockton, R., 2006).

Even courses defined as free still have implications for digital content, its distribution, and ownership. MOOCs were created to offer an open source level of learning while providing the quality of traditional academic content and learning, creating unique spaces attempting to combine Fair Use, Copyright protection, and tuition-free courses, which by term allows for no direct violation of ownership while providing a service (Meloy, 2013).

For administrators in higher education institutions, it is imperative to understand the basic needs and resources to assist academics in handling copyright issues. With the inability to have structured policy it often becomes difficult to provide guidelines for development and protect ownership of authors while providing support to the institution. The matter is beyond academic freedom and reaches proportions of costs, legal fees, implications for the institution and the faculty member. For faculty, there are two sides to the issue: one, the Fair Use Act, which allows within reason the use of materials for the purpose of teaching and learning without penalty and, two, the infringement of another utilizing one’s work for the same gain. Additionally, the Copyright Act may come into play as a result of one using vast amounts of content resulting in a violation based on the breath of material (Wiggins, 2011). Those administrators who work to oversee distance education areas must seek to balance Fair Use, appropriate permissions when applicable, and concede to violations all within the digital age.

The TEACH Act (Technology Education and Copyright Harmonization Act, 2002) was created to provide a protected sector in the online environment, providing targeted guidelines and restrictions to allow faculty the freedom to utilize materials without penalty. Initially, this seemed to serve as the missing link for the protection of digital materials in education but upon review of the restricted and eligibility requirements, it served as only a partial solution. Rules that dictated the need to fit into a designated type of institution, tracking and ensuring only registered students would gain access through minimally secured sites, and limiting the recreation of materials to only those that had no digital footprint already in existence quickly impacted administrators with greater complexity than the original doctrine (Minnesota, 2016).

Institutional Policies and Resources

Most institutions had to revisit their processes and policies regarding intellectual property. The introduction of online curriculum requiring digital content has prompted many to begin developing policies in regards to any works created while employed in their organization. The difficulty, however, has proven in the level of enforcement resulting in variances of proper handling of materials. Others will try to rely upon The Copyright Act, assuming that the rights of intellectual property may convey with the transfer of ownership to the institution. However, this too can have implications.
Some institutions began to institute *works made for hire*, providing additional payment for an identified task that is beyond the original scope of daily assigned work. Typically, these are coordinated with an independent contractor rather than a faculty member or multiple parties (joint works) but in rare instances agreements and ownership of copyright is assigned to the institution (AAUP, June 1999). While this provided an avenue for dealing with payment and proprietorship, it created a greater difficulty in providing stability while maintaining academic freedom and aligning employment practices and recognition where needed.

For many institutions, the hiring of General Counsel with focused intellectual property experience has been an investment in the ability to manage the use of digital files. This scope can go beyond the origins of work created but also the alignment of instructional technology, storage of all pertinent audio and video files, distribution, and accessibility of those materials. It can also apply to all digital storage at the university level from personnel records to student information and historical documents. How this information is maintained and released is critical in the balance between access and copyright. To assist others in understanding this effort, many will recommend resources regarding intellectual property including counsel on staff, policy manuals, librarians versed in intellectual property guidelines, and the U.S. Department of Education.

**The Global Future**

As the digital world progresses, the need will continue to drive the law to provide guidelines and answers to usage and ownership. In the United States, the U.S. Copyright Office has issued a strategic plan, 2016-2020, to expand their role as a resource, advisor, and supporter of authors regardless of the medium presented. It also seeks to invest in technological advances and legal counsel that can assist in creating pathways for information but also to support in shaping the role of the law in future efforts (United States copyright office, 2016).

**Conclusion**

Today’s institutions provide wealth and value in higher education content providing the ability to learn from anywhere in the world. The balance in identifying, cataloging, and ensuring the protection of those pieces and creating a space that nurtures and allows growth is still problematic and ever-changing. Authors of newly created works must prepare for discussions and investigate all potential usage; in turn, institutions must be ready to discuss rights and enforce ownership and proper use of materials. Curriculum and instructional designers must understand the rules and established guidelines for their institution to assist faculty and other authors in developing materials and to identify how materials are delivered and stored. Global implications, introductions of new technology, and the ability to gain access to information from a variety of sources will continue to influence the law and the ability to protect these works; the need to have an understanding and annual reviews of how the institution interprets the law is imperative for current and future works.

**References**


*Sher Downing is the Vice Chancellor for eLearning at the University of South Carolina Palmetto College, Columbia, South Carolina. sdowning@mailbox.sc.edu.*
Teaching and Assessing Ethics across Disciplines in Online Education

Russell E. Fail  
Kaplan University

Michele H. Riley  
Kaplan University

Abstract

Organizations continue to expect college graduates entering the workforce to be prepared to address specific professional ethical issues. One challenge in higher education is preparing students to not only successfully operate in the legal environment of their chosen profession but also engage in sound ethical reasoning that goes beyond simple compliance. In addition to the challenge of teaching ethics across multiple disciplines, colleges and universities must also develop effective approaches to assess the students’ progress and capabilities. This paper describes the approach of Kaplan University in teaching as assessing ethics across its various programs of study.

The Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions at Illinois Institute of Technology notes that during the 16th century, a scholar seeking a profession had just four choices: divinity, law, medicine, and the military (Professional Ethics, n.d.). The choices facing today’s seekers of higher education are substantially more diverse as are the challenges in preparing students for professional careers. The focus of this preparation logically centers on equipping students with the necessary skills and knowledge required to carry out expected tasks. Yet in recent decades, the scandals that shook American markets and confidence have lead to a heightened expectation that educators teach professional ethics to students who will make decisions that impact their careers, their profession, their country, and possibly even their world. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wisely noted that “the function of education is to teach one to think critically…Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education” (1947). In the spirit of this charge, colleges and universities have endeavored to teach ethics. With teaching comes assessing for only with measurable outcomes can the effectiveness of education be determined. This poses a challenge for educators who seek to offer effective ethics education across the multiple disciplines. Kaplan University accepted this challenge and created a system for integrating ethics assignments and assessment in all of its degree programs.

General Education Literacies

Kaplan University’s School of General Education administers the General Education Literacy (GEL) program for all of Kaplan’s online and ground degree programs. The university established eight competencies that are taught and assessed for all students: Arts and Humanities, Communication, Critical Thinking, Research, Science, Math, Social Sciences, and Ethics. Each competency is represented by a committee. These committees are chaired by subject matter experts and are represented by faculty from various disciplines. For example, the Ethics GEL committee is chaired by Dr. Russell Fail who is the Professor of Humanities and Social Sciences and course lead for Kaplan’s main ethics course. This committee has representatives from business, health sciences, nursing, legal studies, and psychology. The committee determines which outcomes are to be taught and assessed. For Ethics, the following outcomes were established:

Overall GEL Program Outcome: Identify, apply, and evaluate ethical reasoning

GEL 7-1: Identify the ethical issues within the field of [insert field]  
GEL 7-2: Apply ethical issues within the field of [insert field]  
GEL 7-3: Analyze the effects of ethical decision making on human behavior  
GEL 7-4: Evaluate the reasoning of opposing perspectives on ethical issues  
GEL 7-5: Evaluate ethical rules applicable [insert topic or field of practice/study]  
GEL 7-6: Apply ethical rules governing [insert topic or field of practice/study]
GEL 7-7: Analyze the effects of ethical decision making on [insert topic of practice/study]

For each GEL, a detailed rubric is developed for assessing the level of learning the following scale: 1 (Introductory), 2 (Emergent), 3 (Practiced), 4 (Proficient), and 5 (Mastery). It is important to note that the GEL assessment is separate from the assignment course grade. This is because a student’s grade is a composite of several factors including content, grammar, style, and formatting. The GEL assessment score isolates the student’s performance to just that one specific competency.

The Process

Kaplan University curriculum is faculty driven and student centered. Our program courses and general education courses are designed by subject matter experts. Courses and assignments are developed by these subject matter experts who work in conjunction with curriculum specialists. The course designers and curriculum managers determine which General Education Literacy to include within their course. A typical ten week course will have one to three assignments that are assessed according to one or more GELs. Once the literacy or literacies are chosen, the course designer creates an assignment that he or she believes would be suitable to a specific GEL outcome. That assignment is then sent to the appropriate GEL committee for review. The assignment is then accepted or returned for revision with guidance from the committee. Once the assignment is approved by the committee, it is implemented in the course. The instructor grades the assignment using the appropriate GEL rubric. This system allows for the student to track his or her progress not just with letter grades, but with meaningful scores that are specific to the eight general education literacies. For example, a student may see that her GPA is 3.5 but note that she is currently averaging a “3” for the Research GEL and a “5” for the Ethics GEL. This data is also beneficial for the school to determine areas of strength and weakness as data from all students, courses, and degree programs are analyzed.

Ethics GEL Assessment Data

Our GELs are strategically mapped across the curriculum so that our students will encounter each GEL several times throughout their collegiate career. Students experience the Ethics GEL within their general education core, but additionally have opportunities in their major program courses. When a course is developed, the course designer has the option to implement one of the seven Ethics GELs outcomes. From Table 1 it is clear that the Ethics GEL outcome 7.1 has been the most implemented into our curriculum across KU. Lower level GELs are typically assigned to 100 and 200 level courses. It is likely that the overwhelming majority of assignments are assigned to lower level courses. Furthermore, the task to correctly identify an ethical issue represents a far easier task than those GELs which require evaluation or analysis. However, it should be noted that to achieve “mastery” of 7.1, the student must demonstrate “the ability to identify reasoning of perspectives on ethical issues as an example of decision-making that uses consequential, non-consequential or a virtue ethics methodology.” In other words, students are required to demonstrate an understanding of what constitutes ethical reasoning in the philosophical sense.

Table 1: Ethic GEL Outcomes Mapped Across the KU Curriculum
Table 2 represents the Ethics GELs score averages for 2013, 2014, and 2015. The trend over the past three years has been a steady increase in averages with most achieving between the “Practiced” and “Proficient” range. Given the rigorous verbiage of the grading rubrics, these represent high scores across KU curriculum. It is interesting to note that the most widely used GELs 7.1 and 7.2 tend to score lower than most of the other GELs with the exception of 7.6. It would be expected that higher GELs which would be used in higher level courses would represent a higher level of student performance as the concepts in ethics are taught and reinforced through the student’s KU career.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GEL</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand total</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Average Ethic GEL Outcome Score, 2013-2015

Challenges and Future Direction

Several years of teaching and assessing ethics across multiple disciplines at Kaplan University has highlighted successes and challenges. Students benefit greatly from repeated exposure to ethical concepts and instructions that reinforce prior exposure and help students achieve higher level learning. Yet challenges remain. While integrating ethics in assignments is clearly beneficial, it is not a substitute for entire courses on ethics. Kaplan remains committed to teaching ethics courses in both general education and degree specific courses. It is also clear that supplemental ethics instruction is sometimes necessary for assignments that require high level ethics comprehension. The Ethics GEL committee works with course developers in creating supplemental learning modules to help prepare students for challenging assignments. Since each assignment is graded by the course instructor, rater reliability is an issue. Rubrics help to reduce subjectivity but the process of perfecting rubrics, refining outcomes, and training instructors is ongoing. Nevertheless, higher education must continue to emphasize, teach, and assess ethics in order to prepare students for their chosen careers and provide society with graduates who understand the importance of being an ethical professional.

Since the implementation of the GELs in 2009, there has not been an update. Even with the promising average scores over the past 3 years in our Ethics GEL, it is time to re-evaluate the outcomes, revise assignments, and redesign our Ethics GEL rubrics.

References


**Russell E. Fail** is a Professor of Humanities and Social Sciences at Kaplan University. rfail@kaplan.edu.

**Michele H. Riley** is the Chair for the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at Kaplan University. mhintonriley@kaplan.edu.
Faculty Development: Preparing for the Transition to Online Teaching

Lydia R. Frass
University of South Carolina

Ryan D. Rucker
Midlands Technical College

Gloria Y. Washington
University of South Carolina

Abstract

Teaching online is different from teaching face-to-face. Preparing faculty members to teach online for the first time is important for student success. In this paper, the authors will compare and contrast professional development opportunities and requirements for faculty who teach online at traditional public and fully online institutions.

Introduction

Transitioning to teaching online can be a challenge for faculty who have taught only in traditional formats. As more traditional institutions move to online courses and programs, preparing people to teach online and to use new technologies is important (Wilson and Stacey, 2004). Lane (2013) discusses several formats for professional development for teaching online that various institutions use. Chickering and Gamsen’s (1987) seminal article on the seven principles for good practice for undergraduate education have been applied to online teaching by Dreon (2013) and are a good starting point for faculty professional development. Marek (2009) outlines the need for institutional support for faculty who teach online. Institutions considered fully online have also implemented requirements for training faculty to teach online. Traditional public institutions can learn from fully online. The authors share the initiatives of the institutions in which they are involved in regard to faculty development.

Literature Review

Online instruction is a core teaching and learning environment in higher education institutions. Online instruction is a course delivery method where most or all of the content is delivered online (80+%), typically with no face-to-face meetings (Allen & Seaman, 2014). According to Allen and Seaman (2014), nearly all public higher education institutions offer online courses and nearly 7.1 million students are learning online. As a result of the increasing numbers of online programs and course offerings in higher education, there is a greater demand of online instructors (Ching, Hsu, & Rice, 2015). Creating a meaningful and successful learning experience for online students is key to student success. Online instructors need to develop new skills and sets of pedagogies to become effective online instructors (Ching, Hsu, & Rice, 2015; Lane, 2013).

Teaching online is different from teaching face-to-face. Teaching in the online environment involves additional skills than classroom teaching. Online instructors undertake different roles than the roles of traditional face-to-face instructors. Baran, Correia, and Thompson (2011) identified common roles assumed by online instructors: pedagogical, facilitator, instructional designer, social, managerial, and technical. These roles can guide the development of professional development for online instructors. In a study to identify and prioritize areas for training and professional development, Ching, Hsu, and Rice (2015) surveyed prospective online instructors’ experiences with online technology, pedagogy, assessment, and course design. Overall, the study’s participants had more experience with various online teaching technologies than with online teaching pedagogies, online assessment, and online course design (Ching, Hsu, & Rice, 2015).

There are unique aspects associated with the online environment. Strategies used to prepare instructors to teach online are substantively different from strategies used for teaching face-to-face (Shahdad & Shirazin, 2012).
Thomann and Zimmerman (2015) found two major categories of differences between teaching online courses and teaching face-to-face courses: the design and implementation of the course. Before a course is taught online, preplanning must occur. Course design and development involves the decision on an online teaching philosophy; developing learning goals, objectives, and outcomes; selecting online instructional approaches, technology, and delivery methods; and developing an evolving syllabus (Thomann & Zimmerman, 2015). Once the course design is complete, implementation of the course occurs and needs to support the principles of online engagement (Thomann & Zimmerman, 2015).

Training faculty to teach online is different from training faculty for teaching in the traditional classroom. Preparing faculty to teach online is a critical component for student success in distance education programs (Kerrick, Miller, & Ziegler, 2015). Professional development for online instructors varies at different higher education institutions. Many universities are preparing instructors through faculty development courses and training programs (Kerrick, Miller, & Ziegler, 2015; Lane, 2013), whereas some institutions inadequately prepare instructors to teach online (Yuksel, 2009) or limit professional development opportunities (Lane, 2013). Faculty professional development tends to focus on technology rather than pedagogy, and almost always within the particular context of the institution (Baran & Correia, 2014; Lane, 2013). Online teaching certainly involves the integration of technology into the teaching and learning environment. Teaching online goes far beyond technology training. There is a complex relationship for online instructors between technologies, pedagogies, and the content in the online teaching context (Ching, Hsu, & Rice, 2015).

Methods

The authors describe their experiences with professional development and preparation for teaching online at five institutions of higher education. They outline their personal experience with the requirements of each and describe the degrees offered, date of founding, and estimated number of students served (if known to them).

Institutions’ Professional Development Initiatives for Online Teaching

Institution No. 1

Institution Number 1 is a private, nonprofit institution established in 1891 and offers online and on-campus programs for Associate’s, Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees. Their course schedule is on a module term (each course last 4-weeks). The on-board process to teaching a class here, after being hired, is broken down into 3 modules.

- In the first module, future instructors will complete a course conducted by the Associate Dean of Faculty Development. During the course, future instructors learn more about teaching online, using the Canvas Learning Management System (LMS), and Zoom (platform used to hold synchronous class sessions). At the end of the course, future instructors will demonstrate their knowledge by conducting a short class in their subject specialty using Zoom. The Dean of their perspective college and the Associate Dean of Faculty Development attend this session. If both the Dean and Associate Dean of Faculty Development believe the future instructor has the ability to continue at this institution, then the instructor moves to the second phase.
- During the second module, future instructors “shadow” a senior instructor (in most cases in a course that the future instructor will likely teach). Throughout the “shadowing” process, the senior instructor works with the future instructor on best practices and institutional course policies/procedures. During Week #3, the senior instructor allows the future instructor to “take over the course” for the entire week. This involves the future instructor conducting the weekly live session, managing the discussion forums, and grading. At the end of the module, the senior instructor and Dean of the college discuss the future instructor’s performance (to determine if the instructor should remain a faculty member).
- During the third module, the future instructor is an actual instructor. The instructor solo teaches a course with their mentor (senior instructor) checking in often and making sure live sessions, grading, etc., are being completed and handled according to college policy.
- During the fourth module, no supervision (outside of the normal Dean) is conducted.
Institution No.  2

Institution 2 is a system of for-profit private colleges whose programs lead to a Certificate of Achievement or Associate of Science degree. The system has over 7,000 students, combined on-campus and online. Their online course schedule is on a quarter schedule (classes last 6 weeks). Their instructor preparation includes the following:

- The on-board process to teaching a class, after being hired, is to complete a 4-week in-house teaching online course. During this course, future instructors are introduced to LearningStudio (LMS created by Pearson), Adobe Connect (how to hold office hours or create recordings), college policies, and best practices for teaching online.
- After completing this course, the future instructor is listed as instructor of record and given a course to teach. No mentoring or “practice teaching” is required.

Institution No.  3

Institution 3 is a for-profit technical institute founded in 1969, offering Associate’s, Bachelor’s and Master’s (business online, online) to over 57,000 students on campuses throughout the U.S and online. This technical institute’s course schedule is on a quarter schedule (with some courses offered in the 6-week format).

- No “official” on-board training is required.
- LMS is an “in-house” system.

Institution No.  4

Institution No. 4 is a large public research university located on the East Coast, founded as a branch of a large state institution in 1957 which became independent in 1972. Overall, the university has over 33,900 students, awarding Bachelor’s, Master’s, Doctoral, and professional degrees through on-campus and online options. Their course schedule is a traditional regular semester schedule (with some courses offered in the 8-week format).

- No “official” on-board training or process is required for teaching online.
- Library and Blackboard Support staff reach out to all faculty members multiple times throughout the semester to provide any assistance or direction.

Institution No.  5

Institution 5 is a large, public research university system founded in 1801. System-wide the university has over 49,000 students and offers courses primarily in the traditional, on-campus format, with an increasing number of classes and programs being offered online. Their course schedule consists of the traditional semester, half-semester (7-8 weeks), May-mester, and summer options (4-week, 10 week, etc.).

- There is no required on-board training or system-wide process for teaching online.
- The university’s Provost’s Office supports faculty development through a central Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) which provides a series of workshops and professional development events on various pedagogical and technology-based topics, including best practices for teaching online, how-to sessions on technology usage, accessibility, teaching large courses, and so on.
- CTE offers an 8-week long online “Getting Started Teaching Online” short-course twice a year, opened to all who teach online at the university. Up to ten faculty (full-time and adjuncts) apply and are accepted into the course. Those who complete it receive a small stipend and a certificate of completion.
- The university’s IT department also provides training on the use of Blackboard through two two-day institutes, coordinated sessions with CTE, and by department or individual requests. They also offer an 8-week short course on effective online teaching (certificate awarded only).
- Some online programs who predominantly use adjuncts have training workshops to ensure consistency between instructors and to discuss program policies.

Discussion

As demonstrated through the experiences of the authors, training varies across institutional type. Institution No. 1 seemed to have the most organized and formalized program for new faculty. Institution No. 2 had a 4-week onboarding course requirement. Institutions 3-5 had no formal requirement but optional opportunities for faculty. The author who taught at the institutions with required onboarding, believed he was more prepared to teach because
of it, and this experience helped him transition to adjunct instruct at other online institutions. Two authors are also teaching the “Getting Started Teaching Online” short course. Feedback from past participants who have taught online since taking the course, as well as information related to successful approaches from other institutions, have helped make improvements in the short course offering for Spring 2016.

As more institutions move to online courses, the need for development for faculty who have never taught online increases. Faculty will be more successful and increase the chances of a positive learning experience for their students if they are prepared for this new environment—both pedagogically and technologically. As Kerrick, Miller, & Ziegler (2015) write, faculty preparation to teach online is crucial for student success.

References


**Lydia R. Frass** is the Senior Instructional Designer at the Center for Teaching Excellence, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina. lfrass@sc.edu.

**Ryan D. Rucker** is Faculty in the Information Systems Technology Department at Midlands Technical College, Columbia, South Carolina. ryan@ryandrucker.com.

**Gloria Y. Washington** is an Instructional Designer at the Center for Teaching Excellence, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina. thomasgy@mailbox.sc.edu.
Evaluation of Instructional Design Capabilities of Asynchronous and Synchronous Instruction

Kristi N. Garrett
Instructional Design & Technology Consultant

Angela D. Benson
The University of Alabama

Abstract

From a quantitative perspective, this study examined the instructional design knowledge of higher education instructors and others within the instructional design/technology arena who are members of a global educational based Internet forum. Results showed significant difference in opinions between genders, where males were more inclined to incorporate instructional technology into their asynchronous and synchronous teaching environments. Based on the results, providing training for gender specific groups could foster a more collaborative learning environment. Whether male or female, designing and developing quality instruction for use in online and face-to-face environments is paramount in order to give students an engaging learning experience.

Introduction

Instructional design is dated back to World War II when training was developed for military services (Reiser, 2001b). In the education arena of the early 1970’s, instructional design evolved as a heuristic instructional strategy that encouraged the learner to independently explore and discover solutions (Hirumi, 2002). Today, the face of education is steadily evolving to accommodate the busy schedules of current and potential learners. This greatly impacts the need for qualified instructors who can not only facilitate, but also design and develop curriculum with instructional technology tools for use in traditional and distance education courses.

Instructional design models have become more systematic over the years by including specific phases, such as analysis, design, and evaluate used to develop curriculum. In addition to the educational arena’s focus on instructional design, the military developed the Interservice Procedures for Instructional Systems Design (IPIS) for developing and delivering training that continues to influence business processes and other training (Hirumi, 2002). This paper evaluates the instructional design ability among higher education staff and instructors to effectively design courses for use in asynchronous and synchronous environments.

A properly designed learning environment will result in “learner-centered, knowledge-centered, and community-centered” (Snyder, 2009, p.49). For most adults, the learning process interconnects the “mind, body, spirit, emotions, and society” (Merriam, 2008, p.97) in which experiences are stored and available to be reflected on during the learning process. It is through this interconnecting process where students learn better when they can associate experiences or real world scenarios with new learning. This reflection process promotes critical thinking which increases high order thinking skills. Learning can be promoted through forming communities that encourage interaction with a variety of perspectives, in addition to using examples and scenarios to convey meaning with the purpose of increasing knowledge and understanding (Merriam, 2008).

Instructional Design Preparation

Survey statistics obtained from Dan Heffron (2010), a Kforce Government Solutions statistician for the National Center of Education Statistics, reported during the last 1998-1999 survey polls that only 22.1% of institutional funds allocated for improvement training were actually used for this purpose. With the increase of technology tools used for instructional purposes, it is probable that more funding would be allocated for professional development. This would be an incentive to encourage faculty to advance their pedagogical techniques, while making learning more engaging for the millennial learner. This percentage represents roughly 215,784.4 out of the 976,400 faculties with
More learners are enrolling in distance education courses which increase the need for more faculty members with the skills to develop and teach with instructional technology (Orr, Williams & Pennington, 2009). This demand for the use of instructional technology also increases the workload of the faculty, which in turn poses a challenge on the institutions to compensate for course development and teaching tasks (Orr et al., 2009). With the increase in job tasks, motivation of faculty is an important factor to consider when addressing the demands of instructional technology. This motivational pressure is due to the fact that many faculty members begin to feel threatened by their lack of technical expertise. Another pressure is the lack of institutional support for instructional preparation of content and technology (Orr et al., 2009).

**Instructional Design**

Gustafson and Branch (1997) state that existing instructional design models are dynamic, therefore allowing for new models and processes to evolve and conceptualize the desired outcome of courses or curriculum. This would allow instructional designers opportunities to develop new technology enhanced pedagogy to use for instructional purposes (Gustafson & Branch, 1997). Instructional technology that is designed using a reputable framework results in more positive student perspectives toward independent and self-paced learning (Vernadakis, Giannousi, Derri, Kellis, & Kioumourtzoglou, 2010).

Instructional design methods should take into consideration the various learning styles to stimulate higher order thinking in addition to promoting an interactive learning environment (Hirumi, 2002). According to Merrill (2002), learning is more effective when the instruction given 1) involves prior experiences, 2) gives a demonstration of the content in practice, 3) allows skills to be practiced by the learner, and 4) merges the newly gained knowledge with real world scenarios.

Organization of content is a key factor that the learners consider important for the development of successful synchronous environments and support of student learning (Harrington, Staffo, & Wright, 2006). Reiser (2001a) states that the use of instructional technologies promotes interaction among the instructor, learner, and content. Instructional activities are comprised of the following combinations: 1) the content and the learner, 2) the instructor and the learner, and 3) the learners, collectively, as a community (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Reiser, 2001a). According to the California State University Committee for Online Instruction (2009), effective instructional activities are based on six categories that evaluate the following: redesign based on student feedback, creative teaching methods with technology, student learning evaluation, design and delivery of instruction, organization and design of online content, and available support and resources for the learner.

**Methodology**

A self-assessment survey was developed to gain insight on the beliefs and skills of instructional technology professors, instructional designers, and faculty with technology interest who are using instructional technology tools for asynchronous and synchronous environments. The survey (see Appendix) on instructional technology beliefs and skill sets contained twenty-five items, based on a 4-point Likert scale (categories listed as: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree) along with four demographic items. The four demographic items measured education level, occupation, gender, and number of years experience using a learning management system (LMS). The survey was distributed via email to a global online professional learning community of professors, instructional designers, and a combination of future professors, instructional designers, and other interested individuals as volunteer participants. There were a total of 52 anonymous survey responses in the initial data set. After examining the data for errors, one survey response was deleted leaving a total of 51 usable survey responses, consisting of 31 females and 20 males, in the final data set. The years of experience using a LMS ranged from 0 to 20 years.

The data collected indicated that 98% of the survey participants held Master’s or Doctorate; the remaining 2% held a 4-year college degree. Based on the responses pertaining to occupation, 21.6% were classified as traditional classroom instructors/professors, 19.6% were classified as distance education instructors/professors, 51% were classified as curriculum instructional designers, and 7.8% were classified as in a none instructional technology related. Table 1 illustrates the number and percentages of respondents based on occupation. Reliability and validity of the data analysis were determined by Cronbach alpha, item-to-total correlation, factor analysis, and standard error
of measurement. In addition, statistical significance was determined by \( t \)-test and chi-square. An alpha level (\( \alpha \)) of .05 was used for statistical analysis of this instrument. The survey was used to answer the following two questions:

1. Is there a difference in instructional design beliefs and skills across genders?
2. Is there a difference in instructional design beliefs and skills across years of experience with use of learning management systems (LMSs)?

### Table 1

**Frequency of Occupation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Traditional Classroom Instructor/Professor</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distance Education Instructor/Professor</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum Instructional Designer</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>92.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None Instructional Technology related</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Results**

The reliability coefficient of this instrument was determined with an initial Cronbach’s alpha of .917 (Appendix) and item-to-total correlation ranging from .117 to .900. After removing items #1, 6, and 7 with item-to-total correlations below .300, a revised instrument was determined consisting of 22 items with a final Cronbach’s alpha of .939 (Appendix). With the remaining 22 items (Appendix), the lowest item-to-total correlation was .334 with the highest being .923. This implies that most of the items gave a significant contribution to the total instrument. High item-to-total correlations support the internal consistency reliability of the instrument (Cronk, 1999). Using the total mean and standard deviation (Appendix), the standard error of measurement was calculated to be 1.98.

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the survey responses using principle component analysis with a varimax rotation. This factor analysis method was used to extract the maximum variance from the data set while reducing the component complexity. This method is useful in establishing construct validity of the underlying dimensions of variables defined by some of the factor analysis tools. There were a total of 3 factors with initial eigenvalues of 1.00 or greater (Appendix). The first factor explained 57% variance with all 3 factors extracted explaining 76% variance. The scree plot, in Figure 1, verifies the extraction of the 3 factors. According to Kim & Muller (1978), a scree plot uses eigenvalues and groups the factors according to the point where the eigenvalues level off and begin to form a straight line.
The 3 factor solution was the best simple structure retained by evaluating the principle component analysis. Table #2 contains the item loading per factor component. All loadings were .534 or greater. The dimensions identified by each factor are as follows: I) LMS Proficiency, II) Instructional Design, and III) Multimedia and Distance Education. Analysis was done using a t-test and chi-square. An alpha level (α) of .05 is used for statistical analysis for this instrument.

**Table 2**

*Factor Loading Rotated Component Matrix*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q14</td>
<td>.979</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12</td>
<td>.979</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q16</td>
<td>.957</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13</td>
<td>.957</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q18</td>
<td>.923</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17</td>
<td>.905</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q21</td>
<td>.901</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q15</td>
<td>.892</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11</td>
<td>.814</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q20</td>
<td>.752</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>.548</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10</td>
<td>.534</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>.832</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8</td>
<td>.795</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5</td>
<td>.781</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9</td>
<td>.732</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q19</td>
<td>.640</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>-.605</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

For question 1, there was a significant difference in the instructional design beliefs and skills found between genders when the t-test was performed, \( t(49) = -2.019, p = .049 \). A contributing factor could be that the males surveyed generally pursued STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) disciplines giving them a greater understanding of technology, which promotes greater proficiency when implementing into instructional strategies. This greatly impacts the need for qualified instructors of both genders who can not only facilitate, but also design and develop curriculum with instructional technology tools for use in on-ground and online courses. Additional analysis was performed using chi-square to determine if a difference of opinion was significant between each item and gender. The results of the chi-square analysis revealed no significant difference of opinion based on gender. Both genders have similar opinions pertaining to their instructional design capabilities to deliver distance education. This can be contributed to the fact that 51% of the participants are in the curriculum instructional design profession, who have more experience designing and developing using instructional technology tools. Based on this occupation, it is implied that many of the respondents have equivalent educational background and/or professional developmental training. In regards to instructional design professional development, there may be a need for homogenous training groups that will encourage same gender participants to be more willing to engage in the learning community by reducing the possibility of gender inferiority of a heterogeneous group. Gender inferiority could be a contributing factor to the negative perception of the value of instructional design training.

For question 2 there was no significant difference in the instructional design beliefs and skills between years of experience with use of learning management systems (LMSs) when a t-test analysis was performed, \( t(49) = .447, p = .657 \). A contributing factor could be that most respondents had an equivalent understanding of LMSs and how it can be used to deliver instructional methods to enhance learning. Another factor could be that the respondents had more confidence in their instructional design capabilities with LMSs. The chi-square results did indicate a significant difference of opinion on whether teaching traditional (on-campus) courses are more likely to require more time preparation than teaching distance education courses based on the hypothesized demographic out of the 51 item responses. Interestingly, the responses based on years of experience with the use of LMSs indicated courses developed using a modeling framework could transition from a traditional (on-campus) course into a distance education course; based on \( p = .036 \), which is significantly lower than \( \alpha \). A reason for this difference could be that these respondents have gained their skills from hands-on experience using an instructional design model. The responses for years of LMS experience in category 0-6 were 12 out of 30(40%) disagreement and 18 out of 30(60%) agreement. Another reason could be that these respondents have more in depth theoretical exposure on instructional design for asynchronous teaching than the respondents in the 7-20 category.

The responses for years of LMS experience in category 7-20 were 16 out of 21(76%) disagreement and 5 out of 21(24%) agreement. From a contrary perspective, these respondents could be bias to learning new technology. They could also believe that instructional design models are perplexing for any form of curriculum design, thus does not merit the effort to learn without some form of compensation or employee performance benefits. Therefore, for respondents who have limited instructional design experience used for developing asynchronous environments, the use of instructional design models does not increase their belief that those models are effective when transitioning a traditional on-campus course into a distance education course. The respondents in this category have more years’ experience using a LMS, yet their experience may have been gained informally without the use of any instructional design training. It is important to note that respondents could have limited knowledge of instructional design concepts used in the instrument along with the perspective that instructional design only applies to the online environment. As a result, participants could have inadvertently answered some of the instrument items.

From these results, it can be concluded that respondents have some differences of opinion on their instructional design capabilities based on gender and years of experience using a LMS. This reiterates the need for skilled instructors (i.e., personal and professional instructional knowledge) who can not only facilitate, but also design and develop curriculum with instructional technology tools for use in both asynchronous and synchronous environments. According to Yarbrough (2001), content and “lived” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999) experience with subject matter are deemed the determining factors for success of both technology enhanced and traditional methods of instruction. Therefore, more effective student outcomes result from instructors with more experience and knowledge with the subject matter in addition to experience using technology for educational purposes (Yarbrough, 2001). Whether a more traditional instructional design model is used as the instructional design methodology versus other models, the goal of instructional designing of distance education classes should be to enrich teaching for improved student learning.
Conclusion

The participant responses indicated gender as having a significant difference in opinion on instructional design capabilities. In order to provide quality instruction, all instructors regardless of gender should be able to design and develop curriculum for face-to-face and online classes. Quality instructional design preparation is paramount for providing learners with quality content that contributes to an effective learning experience.

Future studies could be conducted to more closely examine 1) the instructor knowledge and beliefs in using other instructional technologies, such as simulation and virtual worlds, between traditional classroom instructors and distance education instructors, and 2) the difference of opinion on instructional design skill sets using technology tools between experienced instructors and novice instructors?

Appendix

Section 1: Based on your knowledge of using instructional technologies, please answer the following:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Teaching traditional (on-campus) courses are more likely to require more time preparation than teaching distance education courses.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The skills required to teach distance education courses are different than those required to teach traditional (on-campus) courses.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Distance education provides just as effective learning as traditional (on-campus) education.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>In the next 5 years, the need for instructional designers will increase as colleges and universities implement more distance education programs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>In the next 5 years, the need for instructional designer training will increase as colleges and universities implement more distance education programs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Traditional (on-campus) professors can transition their courses using instructional design methodologies into online curriculum with limited instructional technology skills.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Instructional technology skills to design and develop courses in Learning Management Systems (LMSs) are a skill set that all professors should obtain.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Instructional design training would better prepare professors for using the basic ADDIE (Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, &amp; Evaluate) model to develop instructional technology based courses using Learning Management Systems (LMSs).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>If effectively developed using a modeling framework such as the ADDIE model, any college course can be transitioned from a tradition (on-campus) course into a distance education course.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>In order for professors to be successful at designing and developing distance education courses using instructional technologies, he/she must have a desire to acquire the necessary skills in order to develop effective courses.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I can create a high quality syllabus within a Learning Management System.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>I can post announcements that will display upon the learner entering a LMS.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>I can generate emails using the email feature within a LMS.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>I can create a discussion forum within a Learning Management System (LMS).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>I can create a learning assessment (i.e., quiz) within a Learning Management System.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Section 1: Based on your knowledge of using instructional technologies, please answer the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>I can load course materials, such as, PowerPoint slides and/or lecture notes within a Learning Management System (LMS).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>I can setup the grade book feature to display learner progression within a Learning Management System (LMS).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>I can set due dates for assignments that automatically restrict late submission within a Learning Management System (LMS).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>I can create multimedia tutorials with tools (such as Camtasia, Captivate, etc.) within a Learning Management System (LMS).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>I can load multimedia tutorials (such as Camtasia, Captivate, etc.) within a Learning Management System (LMS).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>I can create learning modules for each course topic within a Learning Management System (LMS).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Section 2: Please answer each of the demographic related items below.

22. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - Some College
   - 2-year College Degree
   - 4-year College Degree
   - Master's Degree
   - Doctoral Degree

23. Please indicate your occupation.
   - Traditional Classroom Instructor/Professor
   - Distance Education Instructor/Professor
   - Curriculum Instructional Designer
   - Not Instructional Technology related

24. Please indicate the number of years you have developed and implemented curriculum using a Learning Management System (enter numbers only; for example, if two years is your answer, you would enter “2” without the quotation marks).

25. Select your gender: Male Female

### References


**Kristi N. Garrett** is an Instructional Technology Consultant and also the Director of Instructional Design within the Technical College System within the Southeast. itsolutions@kngarrett.info.

**Angela D. Benson** is an Associate Professor in Instructional Technology at The University of Alabama. abenson@ua.edu.
Characteristics of Successful Online MBA Students: 
An Empirical Analysis

G. Ronald Gilbert  
Florida International University

Walfrid M. Lassar  
Florida International University

Sara Ormaza  
Florida International University

Clark Wheatley  
Florida International University

Abstract

This is an integral part of a university’s effort to improve the design and delivery of its MBA program. The study is based on information from an initial population of 636 students enrolled in a completely online MBA program specifically designed for students with business experience. We examine the association of a variety of unique student characteristics and their performance in this online program. Specifically, we examine student scores on psychological work preference measures that differentiate MBA students from samples representing a general adult working population and college students representing over 30 undergraduate majors. In addition, we test for relationships among psychological work preferences, undergraduate majors, undergraduate GPA, and graduate GPA, with the expectation that our findings will yield practical insights about student success.

Introduction

Florida International University is a Research I institution. Its graduate school of business is accredited by both the AACSB and SACS. While the university is located in Miami, Florida, it is an internationally focused business school with face to face, blended, and totally online MBA offerings. This study is based on FIU’s Online “Corporate” MBA program.

Our Corporate MBA curriculum is targeted for more experienced leaders in industry. Its curriculum consists of courses normally included in the MBA per AACSB standards. While the majority of its applicants live in the South Florida area, the program is also attended by students from other parts of the world. Courses are taught in English, thus students must demonstrate the ability to read and write and speak in English.

The research team conducting this study had key roles in the program design, management, academic oversight and online teaching of the program.

Research Questions

1. Are there differences in the successful participation of Graduate students based on criteria used for admission into the program, i.e., undergraduate major or undergraduate GPA?

2. Are certain work preference dimensions associated with student performance in our fully online graduate MBA program?

Literature Review

Student work preferences (related to work interests, values, temperament, and learning styles) are found to vary based by business disciplines (Gilbert, Burnett & Leartsurawat 2010). That is, among accounting, decision science, finance, hospitality, marketing, and management and international business majors, work preference
response patterns vary by business discipline. However, as the MBA consists of students who majored in business and other undergraduate majors, and its curriculum is generic as opposed to accounting or finance or marketing per se, it remains unclear if certain undergraduate majors tend to perform more effectively within the program than others (Braunstein, 2006).

Studies related to the efficacy of criteria used to select applicants for admission into the graduate MBA have provided mixed results. In some cases, strong relationships are reported between undergraduate GPA’s and graduate GPA’s, while in other cases such relationships are not found. It remains unclear if an applicant’s undergraduate major influences the likelihood of successful performance in the MBA. Thus, there are gaps reported in the literature that this research seeks to address (Truitt, 2002). There remains a need to attempt to further unravel the relationships between undergraduate GPA, undergraduate major, student work preferences and the successful performance of an applicant in the MBA program.

**Findings** (To be presented in more detail at the conference)

Relationships of Undergraduate Major with MBA GPA per MANOVA application were significant ($\eta^2=.036$, $p=.014$). Finance ($\chi^2=3.61$ SD=.439), Accounting ($\chi^2=3.50$; SD=.567), and English and Fine Arts Arts ($\chi^2=3.43$; SD=.531) had the highest GPAs in the program. Criminal Justice, Social Work, Community Service ($\chi^2=3.23$; SD=.741)

International Business, Human Resources Management ($\chi^2=3.16$; SD=.805).

Health Services ($\chi^2=3.00$; SD=.993) had the lowest.

Some findings of note:

1. The correlation between undergraduate GPA and graduating GPA is positive yet relatively weak.
2. MBA students score higher than the average working adult population on 13 of 17 work preference indicators. Most notable is their high achievement motivation, wanting to lead and control others, working with a schedule and following it, not working with mechanical things, working with data, and experiencing job fulfillment. Having a high achievement orientation tends to differentiate MBA students from other working adult populations.
3. Negative correlations exist between student GPA at graduation and both mechanical interests and working within a flexible work environment.
4. The above effects of these on program performance is discussed by the authors.

**Future Research**

The courses in the MBA curriculum offer very different challenges for students. Some are more quantitative while others are more qualitative. We will explore if some courses serve as gateways to success and possibly mediate between the work preferences and overall performance in the program.

A second focus of follow-up studies will look at the differences between fully online and face-to-face MBA programs.

**References**


G. Ronald Gilbert is a Clinical Professor in the Department of Management & International Business at Florida International University, Miami, Florida. gilbert@fiu.edu.

Walfried M. Lassar is the Associate Dean of the Chapman Graduate School, Ryder Professor and Chairman of the Marketing Department, and Director of the Ryder Center for Supply Chain Management at Florida International University, Miami, Florida. lassarw@fiu.edu.

Sara Ormaza is the Assistant Director of Academic Support Services at Florida International University, Miami, Florida. ormazas@fiu.edu.

Clark Wheatley is the Faculty Director of the Professional MBA Program and Associate Professor in the School of Accounting at Florida International University, Miami, Florida. wheatley@fiu.edu.
Crafting a Culture of Online Instruction

Marilee Hall
Independence University

Pamela A. McCoy
Independence University

Abstract

Independence University (IU) currently offers new instructor training, mentoring, and ongoing professional development on the following: 1) development of knowledge and skills to be a successful online instructor at IU and 2) developing an understanding of the culture to enable faculty to teach effectively within the school’s model. The assessment of the success of this process is evaluated by survey tools delivered to faculty and students.

Background

Distance education and the need for additional online instructors continue to grow and expand in higher education. As institutions continue to grow new instructors are hired and trained on the expectations, skills, and institutional culture allowing the institution to continue offering the same quality and style of education. According to the report on adjunct faculty, “During 2015, 56% of institutions report that the percentage of adjunct faculty that teach online has increased at their institution…” (Magda et al., 2015, p. 8). According to Baran and Correia (2014) “…successful online teaching is considered to be the result of complex interplay among personal, pedagogical, contextual, and organizational factors within higher education institutions.” (p. 97). Marek (2009) also recommends a model of standardized courses, instructional training and structured mentoring (p. 286).

Independence University (IU) has identified key skills, expectations, and a support structure for orienting faculty to the online teaching at the institution. This includes orienting new faculty to the culture of the institution and key roles faculty plays within it. According to Puzziferro and Shelton (2009), “Our faculty development, orientation, and evaluation methods create a culture that faculty must identify and can reconcile their role with.” (p. 7). The culture at IU is based on the overall mission, priorities, and expectations of faculty, measurement tools, and the instructional model. IU subscribes to a master course model so instructors can focus on teaching the material and students can expect consistency. Instructors facilitate courses via a combination of live sessions, discussion boards, daily checkpoints, writing assignments, and assessments. Additionally, IU employs a student-centric model with many support features available to students and faculty.

Orientation

Instructors are hired from a variety of backgrounds including transfers from affiliated campuses, those with prior online experience, those with only face-to-face experience, and subject matter experts with industry background and no teaching experience whatsoever. All of these instructors are considered to be new instructors.

All new instructors meet for 1 hour with the Associate Dean of Faculty Development in a live session, and then spend 9 to 10 hours in the self-guided course. Feedback is offered throughout, expectations are clearly stated, and completion of tasks is required. Due dates help to keep instructors on task, and deadlines support the importance of regular participation as a future online instructor.

The main resource referenced during the New Instructor Training course is the Online Instructor Manual. This document provides details on such items as best practices for teaching online; guidance for using the live session software; online instructor expectations; grading policies; instructor and student resources; and instructions for documenting student contacts in the student information system. Additional training videos, customized for IU processes and expectations, offer the material new instructors need to acclimate to teaching at IU.
A final session is held approximately two weeks after the initial new instructor meeting. The session is attended by the Associate Dean of Faculty Development and the hiring Dean. It is held within the webinar software with the new instructor as host, and includes a fifteen minute teaching session presented by the new instructor. The Associate Dean of Faculty Development and the Dean offer feedback to the new instructor on vocal quality, volume, and pacing; the knowledge and comfort level of the chosen topic; the instructor’s ability to share visual content and applications as appropriate; and meaningful student engagement.

**Mentoring**

Following the successful completion of the new instructor course, new instructors are assigned a veteran instructor who will act as their mentor and coach during course shadowing. The new instructor completes tasks throughout the module under the guidance of the coach. A formal evaluation is completed by the coach and reviewed by the hiring Dean. Following a successful shadowing experience, the instructor is assigned to solo teaching their next course, and continues to be mentored by the veteran instructor.

During course shadowing, the new instructor serves in a role similar to a student teacher. By the third week of the four week course, the new instructor hosts one of the weekly live sessions, posts announcements, grades and participates in discussions, and grades assignments. The veteran instructor is ultimately responsible for the course.

The new instructor who shadows a course successfully is assigned to solo teach a course in the subsequent module. During solo teaching, the new instructor is completely responsible for the course, while the coach serves as an immediate contact should any problems arise. At the conclusion of this module, the coach completes a detailed evaluation, which provides qualitative feedback in the areas of technical skills, soft skills, overall teaching ability, and commitment to IU.

Not all instructors who begin the New Instructor Training complete the process. Occasionally, the time commitment required during training is an alert to the candidate that they don’t have the time required available to dedicate to teaching online, and they choose to drop from training. Should an instructor repeatedly fail to meet lesson deadlines or be non-responsive for days at a time, the option to terminate the relationship with the candidate exists. Whether the instructor is a good fit for IU becomes clearer throughout the training process. Examining a four year time period from 2012 through 2015, an annual average of sixty-eight new instructors started training, with 86% successfully completing the process.

**Ongoing Professional Development**

Professional development is offered monthly at Independence University within the learning management system. Topics fall within the following categories: Best Practices, Student Focus, Adult Learning Theory, Technology Focus, and Personal Growth. Instructors are expected to complete not less than four internal trainings per calendar year. In 2015, 40% of instructors completed six trainings, while 28% completed more than six of the twelve offered trainings, exceeding minimum requirements.

**Results: New Instructor Survey**

All instructors hired in the last year who completed new instructor training and taught at least three modules for Independence University were surveyed on the new instructor training, mentoring, and ongoing professional development offering. Of the forty-eight individuals surveyed there was a 52% response rate.

Overall, faculty response was positive with 100% of respondents agreeing that the new instructor training prepared them to teach at IU, they received a good understanding of teaching requirements in order to teach, and that shadowing a veteran instructor reinforced the skills learned during training helping them understand the culture of teaching for IU.

Open ended questions asked for positive feedback and areas for improvement. Over 50% of the positive comments reference the feeling of community with other faculty. Other positive comments mention the commitment to faculty, communication, and being prepared to teach. Areas for improvement include request for additional tools
and opportunities for additional observation and practice of specific skills not currently covered in the formal training.

**Results: Student Survey**

Independence University measures student satisfaction via a survey during the last week of every course. The first three courses taught immediately after new instructor training were reviewed for the same set of faculty included above, investigating the overall satisfaction scores and student open-ended responses.

Instructors in their first three courses received an average satisfaction rating across all three courses of 89.9%. Most new instructors scored between 80% to 100% satisfaction rates. During the same time frame, student satisfaction scores for all instructors received an average score of 90% across the institution.

Student open-ended comments were coded to determine which comments were specifically related to instructor performance and whether they provided positive comments or suggested areas for improvement. Students provided 300 total open-ended comments specific to instructors with 67% of the comments deemed to be positive. Eleven new instructors received more negative student comments than positive comments relative to their teaching.

Additionally, the university conducts a bi-annual survey polling all students with results that show a 97% approval rating of all instructors across the institution.

**Conclusion**

Providing extensive new instructor orientation, mentoring, and professional development is positive for faculty, for students, and for the institution. Faculty members benefit from the new instructor training by connecting to the culture, department, and peers as well as having the necessary information to be successful within the institution. Students benefit by receiving continued education from qualified professionals within the framework they are accustomed to in their other courses. The institution benefits due to the ability to deliver education within the current model while continuing to grow.

Future studies may involve longitudinal study of faculty results following new instructor training, further review of ongoing professional development and success measurements, and more in-depth study of student comments related to new instructors.

**References**


Marilee Hall is the Dean at Independence University, Salt Lake City, Utah. marilee.hall@independence.edu.

Pamela A McCoy is the Associate Dean of Faculty Development at Independence University, Salt Lake City, Utah. pamela.mccoy@independence.edu.
Exploring Support for Online Students:  
The Cherries and the Pits

Alan D. Hansen  
Independence University

Joseph Dunlop  
Independence University

Abstract

This paper examines a six year journey of seeking the best means of providing support to students in a fully online environment. During years 2009-2015 the university grew from 168 students to over 6,000 students taking their online educational programs. The intent of this paper is to identify and explain initiatives that have been executed at one institution, and the successes and failures of those initiatives. It is important to note two variables: (1) the rapid growth of this institution and (2) the administration was given carte blanche opportunities to test initiatives without fear of reprisal for failed experiments.

Introduction

In 2009, the university's online division was primarily a support vehicle for seventeen physical campuses. The administration was comprised of two full-time staff members, who both worked remotely. In that year, the institution determined that the struggling full-time online component of the institution needed to be better organized, supported, and grown. To that end, a team was organized and given the mission of growing a sustainable student population supported by a strong admissions initiative. It was determined that in order to sustain growth and retain students, resources needed to be dedicated to provide strong support for a national student population, with the institution having an open enrollment business model. Over the course of six years, more than twenty initiatives and modifications to initiatives were implemented, with many being institutionalized and others abandoned as tests.

Student Services as a Department

In 2009, a student services department was organized. It was modeled, in part, by the example of the St. Joseph’s College of Maine. Student advisors are dedicated to students to serve as their conduit to the university throughout the student's academic career. This model was adopted, tested and revised four times in six years by the online division.

- The original model assigned a dedicated student advisor for every 350 students
- A second adaptation of the model was to reduce the ratio to one student advisor for every 150 students
- Upon the recommendation of student services personnel, the ratio was increased to one student advisor for every 300 students
- The department has been restructured, removing the model assigning specific students to individual advisors. The department now consists of three separate departments:
  - Concierge services or help desk
  - New Student coaches
  - At-risk mentors

The institution supports the original model as a viable model in an environment where both the student services staffing and the student population are stable. However, the concept of building a long-term relationship between advisors and students became problematic for the institution because of its rapid growth. Student advisor turnover and promotions made it impossible to maintain the relationship building model that the institution had envisioned. This led to the relationship building model being transferred to full-time faculty who advise a smaller population of students, with a mission of having a live exchange monthly with each of their students.
The current model of three departments for student services has been in place nearly two years and is considered successful. All students are advised to contact the concierge or help line for any problems they are facing. The full-time staff is trained to either address and resolve student issues (75% of the time) or make a single contact, while retaining responsibility for the student to have their issue resolved. This has reduced complaints about poor communication or ‘getting the run around’ by 80%.

The new student coaches focus exclusively on new students. They are responsible for weekly, then monthly, contact of all new students during their first four modules or term of enrollment. New student coaches ensure that the student is aware of their responsibilities and the support services that are available to help them to succeed in school.

Many students will struggle at some time during their academic career. A watchdog group of student service representatives has been assigned to serve as at-risk mentors. Through reports, they identify students who are struggling with any aspect of their education. Next, they proactively reach out to those students to encourage and help them succeed. As an example, students who fail the same course three times are expelled from school. The at-risk mentors have been able to reduce the failure rate of those students by half.

**Mentoring/Tutoring**

The institution tested a separate mentoring program where tutors were assigned to courses in one program as teaching assistants, who would reach out to students to help them succeed. In the initial test, this was an effective program. The university determined to expand mentoring throughout all of its programs. The impact of this expansion of service was negligible in the areas of completion and retention. In further investigation, the institution determined that instead of providing added services to the students, the impact was to reduce the workload and ownership of the courses by the instructors. The program was deemed a failure as an institution-wide initiative and abandoned.

The university now offers a full array of live tutoring in the student success center. It is designed in a hub-and-spoke system. Students will enter the virtual tutoring center and be directed to the appropriate tutoring room by the center facilitator. This eliminated situations where students were unable to connect with tutors. Tutoring is proactively promoted in the courses, and the center has an unlimited budget as long as it maintains a one student per tutoring hour ratio. Nearly 20% of students take advantage of tutoring services on a monthly basis.

**Additional Academic Support Services**

The institution determined that helping students find the help they needed from a single support site would be of benefit to the students. In 2010, an academic resource center was developed through student services. Students could go to this site to access everything from tutoring to career services. The site was built as a separate open access channel with nine categories of services, which grew to twelve over the course of six years. It is the home of the online library, as well as the repository for recordings of all webinars conducted for the students. This has been an extraordinary initiative and is currently being rebuilt to enhance the look and feel of the site. It operates independent of the university website, focusing on meeting existing students’ needs.

**Remediation**

As an open enrollment institution, over half of students demonstrate a need for remediation in math and writing skills. The university determined it needed to offer remedial Math and English courses. The courses are taught in tandem with the regular curriculum. The institution soon recognized that this was a self-defeating approach. The workload was being doubled for students who were struggling. The project was reimagined as a course that had a curriculum, but with a lab approach that did not function like a full-scale course. The results were significantly improved. As the remediation coursework was voluntary rather than mandatory, the university was able to measure student success. The breakdown of the students who elected to participate and not participate was nearly evenly split. The results for those who participated in the remediation coursework fell halfway in between the results of those who did not need remediation and those who did need remediation and chose not to participate. Both retention and grades were improved for those students who participated in the remediation coursework.
Early Admissions Course

In 2013, the university tested an Early Admissions Course (EAC). The course was set up in individual modules that now include the orientation module. The EAC was tested for over a year, and demonstrated success in both short-term and long-term retention of fully online students. In 2015, the EAC became part of the enrollment process and a requirement to be completed before students were enrolled in their first course.

Conclusion

In summary, this represents only a small portion of the initiatives the university has tested over the past six years. Some of the initiatives have been tested and revised; others have been tested and abandoned. Those initiatives that demonstrated success in helping students succeed in their programs and to remain in school became part of the institutional model. The university continues to test new programs for student success and retention. Some failures have been costly, but the objective remains to provide the best student services experience for students at any online institution.

*Alan D. Hansen is the Vice President Online, Executive Director at Independence University, Salt Lake City, Utah. Alan.Hansen@stevenshenager.edu.*

*Joseph Dunlop is Associate Director at Independence University, Salt Lake City, Utah. joseph.dunlop@independence.edu.*
Support Considerations for International Faculty Teaching in an Online Program

Johnna L. Hodges
University of Georgia

David W. Mullis
University of Georgia

Abstract

Effective technical support of faculty plays an integral part in the success of an online educational program. The purpose of this paper is to describe faculty technical support considerations for instructors located outside of the U.S. who are teaching in a unique distance learning degree program from the University of Georgia’s College of Pharmacy, the BioPharma Regulatory Affairs Graduate Education Program. This paper will include a review of the program and outline practical and sequential steps that the program took to help new faculty become acclimated with the program. It will include a current assessment of some of the challenges faced by this unique situation of utilizing international content experts, as well as future considerations and lessons learned. This document is not intended to address every situation faced when considering international distance teaching, but it provides some initial practical considerations for engaging these new faculty members including a few preliminary steps when a program has the good fortune to include international experts. The UGA Regulatory Affairs Program is still in the process of determining and evaluating its faculty technical needs, and thus, the process is evolving. This paper describes our current approach.

Background

The University of Georgia (UGA) BioPharma Regulatory Affairs (RA) Program was created by the College of Pharmacy in 2004 to advance the understanding and application of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations through graduate-level distance education and to help increase the number of professionals for an emerging field commonly called Regulatory Affairs. The original curriculum was designed to disseminate unique regulatory information focusing on the US FDA requirements for drug, device and animal health firms and to aid in developing competencies among biomedical regulatory and clinical personnel who are critical in helping assure the development, manufacturing, and marketing of safe and effective medical products. Due to the globalization of the healthcare products industry, including global supply chains (import and export of both finished medical products and components) and worldwide markets, there is an increasing need for Regulatory Affairs Professionals who understand global regulations and can work with international regulatory agencies. To address this ever-increasing demand, the UGA BioPharma Regulatory Affairs Graduate Education Program has responded by expanding its curriculum to include a focus first on the European Union and Latin American regulatory requirements, with the expectation of further expansion in the future.

As a part of its five-year strategic plan, the UGA RA Program focused its expansion on providing an increased international perspective because of the high volume of marketing submissions for new medical products and increased regulatory activity in Europe and Latin America. These regions have some of the same common regulatory requirements as the US FDA; however, there are many unique differences. To help achieve the goal of a more global perspective, in late 2015 two international faculty were hired to help develop the international curricula with a focus on these two geographic areas. Prior to November 2015, all UGA RA faculty resided in the U.S. even though many possessed considerable global regulatory affairs experience in pharmaceutical, biotechnology, medical devices and animal health.

New RA Faculty

Mr. Seppe De Gelas is based out of Brussels, Belgium with an expertise in the industry including EU laboratory testing, drug evaluation, animal health products, medical devices, and biologics. In Latin America, Dr. Samuel Silva, based out of Sao Paulo, Brazil, was hired for his expertise in pharmaceutical research and development.
protocols, pharmaceutical operations, and for drug development management from initial discovery to the regulatory marketing clearance in Latin America. Both faculty are experienced instructors but have limited online teaching experience. Mr. De Gelas and Dr. Silva maintain professional positions within the healthcare products industry and both are employed by the University on a part-time basis. Due to the rapid change in regulations governing the development and marketing of new medical products, maintaining faculty who are concurrently working with regulatory agencies on new product submissions helps assure that the curriculum remains current.

Program Description

Most students enrolled in the RA online graduate program are currently employed in the biomedical industry. Primarily, these students have returned to school on a part-time basis to enhance their academic and professional credentialing. They expect their instructors to remain knowledgeable about the industry, whether in a government agency or public/private company. The students expect current, real-world examples in the course content. Furthermore, they expect their instructors to employ a variety of teaching activities (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009).

The online courses in the RA Program are broken down into synchronous or live class activities, which make up only a small percent of the total class time, and asynchronous content activities comprising about 95% of class time. The live sessions occur via a web-conferencing service called Blackboard® Collaborate. The pre-recorded digital content, or the asynchronous activities, is broken down into content modules based on topics and timeframe. Each module contains a module “launch” page, which is an HTML page with links to the module’s lecture(s). It includes, at least, one recorded lecture, generally a PowerPoint Presentation with a synchronized audio file; PDF copies of the lecture slides; and, a module activity. Sometimes content modules will contain videos and other documents used to support the lecture’s content. All content is contained within the learning management system, Desire2Learn’s Brightspace® called eLearning Commons (eLC) at UGA.

Each online course is staffed by the instructor of record, the faculty member who is the subject matter expert, and a course support person. Each course support person is employed full-time by the University. The course support person’s role is primarily to assist the faculty with the content presentation, serve as a backup for the instructor in the event of the instructor’s absence, and to provide student support with technical issues. This person may also help facilitate communication between the instructor and the student and assist with the use of online technologies.

Current Steps

Following the standard University process for new faculty hires, the program was faced with the initial question of how to best acclimate these new instructors to this program, i.e. how it is run, our commitment to student development and success, and how faculty create and facilitate the online courses and the learning content.

For these new faculty hires, this table lists the early considerations for their guidance and acclimation.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Syllabus Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Introduction to UGA’s eLC/ D2L’s Brightspace®</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>From a student perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>From an instructor perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Introduction to the course support staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Give access to existing classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Have faculty teach a module in an existing course where they are not the lead instructor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Introduce the course content development process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Introduction to ADA Compliance requirements for their content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Introduction to the delivery options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Provide virtual meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Introduction to other online necessary components, like online grade rolls and their possible participation in Student and College Committees (like MS Thesis or Project committees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Introduction to University and Program Policies: Academic Honesty, Academic Writing, Change of Grade, Student Appeals, and so forth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Request digital photos and signatures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Initial Considerations for New Faculty Acclimation
As a preliminary step, early in the introduction process, the department requested that each new faculty member provide a digital picture for the internal database and online class directories. With that, the department also requested that each new faculty member create a digital signature for use with various University forms. The digital signature requirement is beneficial in that it speeds the form processing time and eliminates the need for faxing or scanned copies. The forms are already digital and thus easier to file. If set up correctly, the digital signature is electronically protected through passwords or encryption.

In the first phase of the introduction procedure, the faculty were oriented to the course syllabus process and an overview of the learning management system (LMS) and electronic resources that the University provides, including the UGA Library System, the Center for Teaching and Learning, and Information Technology support. To help achieve this goal, the department created a series of online video tutorials using TechSmith’s Camtasia and then uploaded the videos to Screencast.com.

Regarding the syllabus process, each course that is added to the Regulatory Affairs Program curriculum must undergo a series of review and approvals by various college and university committees. The initial step for adding a new course involves the submission of a course syllabus to the Departmental Curriculum Committee and then to the College of Pharmacy Curriculum Committee. The syllabus contains educational objectives and an overview of the content including methods of delivery. If approved by these initial committees, then the application will be reviewed by the University’s Curriculum Committee Executive Committee and the Vice President for Instruction. The time and the process required for this is an important consideration in the development of any new courses.

For students enrolled in the RA Program, the course syllabus is the most important document. The RA Program views this document like a general contract - what the instructor expects from the students and what the students can expect from the instructor. This document also sets the tone for the course. In addition to the instructor’s contact information, this document includes the program’s accessibility statement, course objectives, the grading scheme, significant course assignments and activities and a detailed course calendar with noted class meetings and other events. It is important that, for each course syllabus, there be some consistency and continuity among our courses. The level of detail in a syllabus is important for our working professional students. As such, the department created a video lecture and tutorial on this important component and included a template from which the instructor could draft a new syllabus.

The next and current step in the acclimation process is to introduce the new faculty to the LMS, D2L’s Brightspace or eLearning Commons at the University of Georgia. Clearly, LMSs are set up to be intuitive and easily learned, but providing no initial training would have negative consequences, like frustrated faculty and students, ineffective use of the course tools, and inconsistencies among the look and feel of the RA courses. The RA Program employs the use of a course template to ensure continuity among the courses so that students do not have to reacclimate themselves each time a new course is taken. Moreover, leaving the instructors to learn the LMS system on their own was not a productive use of their time. The faculty are subject matter experts in the field of international regulations, and that is their primary focus. As such, the department has provided a series of short online videos to introduce the faculty to eLC, from a student perspective and an instructor perspective. As of the writing of this
document, the faculty are addressing this activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. UGA Digital Resources – <a href="http://www.screen.com/LBYG2D0Xtw99">http://www.screen.com/LBYG2D0Xtw99</a> (20:56)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Includes an overview of UGA electronic and digital resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. eLC Demo Part One – <a href="http://www.screen.com/LBYG2D0Xtw99">http://www.screen.com/LBYG2D0Xtw99</a> (20:56)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Includes a review of the eLC Student Homepage, Setting up Notifications, and Student Profile</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. eLC Demo Part Two – <a href="http://www.screen.com/LBYG2D0Xtw99">http://www.screen.com/LBYG2D0Xtw99</a> (20:56)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Includes a review of the eLC Course Homepage, Calendar Settings, Content Module layout</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Includes a review of the eLC Assignment, Quizzes &amp; Surveys, and Discussions Tools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. eLC Demo Part Four – <a href="http://www.screen.com/LBYG2D0Xtw99">http://www.screen.com/LBYG2D0Xtw99</a> (20:56)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Includes a review of the eLC Email (messaging system), Chat Tool, Grades Tools and Wrap-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Image 2: List of sample video tutorials covering digital resources and the LMS**

It is equally important and timely that the new faculty are introduced to the course RA support staff. The course support person’s role is to assist the faculty with course development; and thus, the support staff can assist with addressing any faculty questions or needs as they learn about the overall program. To achieve this end, the department is using simple tools such as email exchanges. In one instance, a new faculty member will travel to the University’s campus for a professional conference, where face-to-face introductions can be made. The use of tools like web-conferencing, the LMS, instant messaging services, and perhaps telephone systems will be used to facilitate further communication between the internationally-based faculty and the course support person.

Another strategy that the program has currently employed to support these faculty members is to provide observer access to a current course in the program. This access provides an excellent real-life orientation on how the classes in the RA Program are laid out, how they function, and how instructors interact and engage with the students. Once their comfort level increases, it will also be helpful if the newly hired faculty are given the responsibility of one or two modules within an existing course to allow for experience using the LMS and interaction with students before assuming the responsibility for a full course.

Each of these early steps is helping these new faculty to better understand the departmental culture and expectations within which they will soon teach. Moreover, it has helped these new hires know that while they may be physically located outside of the U.S., the RA Department is committed to mentoring them into successful instructors, and will address their teaching needs.

**Going Forward**

The module that focuses on instructor content development is currently under revision. While most course activities, like exercises, discussions, and quizzes, are created within the LMS, faculty in the RA Program often include content-specific presentation lectures; lectures that students can listen to and replay for comprehension. These are generally recorded lectures, videos, and multi-media content. This type of content is created outside of the LMS and, once edited, is then uploaded to the LMS for student access. The current development process usually involves the use of Adobe® Presenter, for example, to synchronize lectures and presentations. There are other options available like Adobe® Captivate, and TechSmith® Camtasia Studio®. The faculty require training in these software application options. A detailed tutorial on how best to approach content development is needed, so that the instructor will understand available options. The instructor needs to consider how best to convey the content, and how to match that approach with the appropriate software application and process.

Another question that will be addressed in content development is how the course support person will engage in assisting with the content development process. Each instructor is likely to have unique needs and requirements. Once details are addressed, the department may need to consider purchasing licensed software applications for the instructors. Like many of the other support components, the department will address this by the use of online video tutorials.

Important to the content development process is an understanding of the Americans with Disabilities Act and how this influences the faculty’s content development and delivery choices. For a review of this requirement, the
department will develop an online tutorial explaining this federal legislation and the compliance requirements for their content. While there are ample resources currently available online, it is in the best interest of our faculty to provide the crucial and essential components as it relates to making their course materials accessible. In addition to a video tutorial on ADA compliance, the department will provide “job aids” or checklists of considerations. Highlights include (Hodges, Sylvia, & Brooks, 2013, pp. 200-201):

- Accessibility Statements on the course homepage and syllabus;
- Include an orientation document that describes the overall layout of the course;
- Font color is not the only means of conveying important information;
- Course contains no blinking components;
- Standard font size (12pt) and font type (sans serif) are used;
- ALT text descriptions (100 characters or less) are provided for all non-text elements;
- Organizational charts are provided in graphic and text-only formats;
- Multimedia content includes synchronized captions and text transcript;
- Word documents converted to PDF retain accessibility elements;
- Documents (Word, PDF) contain hyperlinked Table of Contents or Bookmarks;
- PowerPoint slides use accessible layouts and color schemes;
- External resources referenced must also comply with Section 508 Standards (e.g. FDA, NIH).

For live class meetings, the Regulatory Affairs Program uses the web-conferencing tool Blackboard Collaborate™ Classroom. Use of this system by instructors generally requires hands-on training and some detailed instructions. The use of this system is optional; however, it is important that the instructors know about this tool and understand its capabilities should they wish to use it in their class. The most efficient approach again is to rely on both video tutorials and accompanying job aids to convey the necessary information. The Blackboard system is embedded into eLC and was first briefly introduced to the faculty in eLC tutorials. Yet, a more detailed video tutorial specific to Blackboard will be provided as this is an important tool for student engagement. It has a lot of potential uses for instruction.

Going forward, it will also be important to establish monthly virtual faculty meetings using Blackboard Collaborate™ Classroom. This way, the new faculty members can engage with long-standing faculty members. These virtual meetings, moreover, will be an opportunity for the faculty to:

- discuss instructional challenges and strategies;
- discuss ethical issues or other problems;
- share tools & techniques for online instruction;
- get updates on administrative issues or training requirements; and,
- practice using Blackboard Collaborate™.

Beyond the LMS/ eLC and their course responsibilities, the RA instructors are also required to insert their students’ final course grades into the online grade roll system at the University of Georgia. Their access to this system is based on their University I.D. This system is called Athena. Athena is also the system used to process a change of grade. Providing a video tutorial on this system along with a detailed job-aid is important and another element toward supporting the new online faculty.

**Other Support Considerations**

In our program, these new faculty will also engage with the masters degree seeking-level students as part of the students’ thesis or project work. While this does not require extensive online time by the faculty member, it does require a level of commitment by the instructor to the student and a willingness to help mentor or support the student toward the completion of his or her graduate degree. This responsibility warrants additional explanation and discussion in addition to administrative requirements of the Graduate School. How to best address this responsibility is an evolving process. There is a discussion on creating a section of our program’s website, contained within our MS portal area that is devoted to faculty committee work where the program addresses faculty roles, requirements and expectations.

It is also vital that the new faculty be made aware of important University and Program policies. These include Academic Honesty, the Change of Grade process, and the Student Grade Appeals process to name just a few. At UGA, this information is distributed on various departmental websites. Having a consolidated list and location of
these policies and appropriate web links will be helpful. For this, the department will create a section of its website outline these “frequently used” policy topics. To supplement this site, the program will also create a departmental video tutorial that covers these instructor responsibilities.

Conclusion

The online technical support considerations for international distance learning faculty needs are not significantly different from other online faculty. Using existing faculty support strategies with only moderate alterations or considerations are necessary. It is important to recognize what strategies work and document those strategies while adjusting for the fact that international faculty are less likely to be able to come to campus for training, meetings, and other face-to-face activities. Consideration must also be given to such things as time zones and monetary currencies. Flexibility and creative problem solving frequently will be required to address unexpected situations. Furthermore, these faculty members likely do not have a full appreciation for university administrative procedures. Their ultimate success is greatly dependent on having a quality support team and plan in place. In the Regulatory Affairs Program, we are heavily utilizing online and multimedia tutorials, specific job aids and other web-based technologies. While the Regulatory Affairs Program has only just begun the integration of these new international faculty, having a flexible action plan serves to make the project more manageable and helps to further discover some of their unique needs. With a detailed plan of action, the international faculty will bring a new dimension to our online program.

References


Johnna L. Hodges is the Assistant Director of the BioPharma Regulatory Affairs Graduate Education Program at the College of Pharmacy, the University of Georgia Gwinnett Campus, Lawrenceville, Georgia. jhodges@uga.edu.

David W. Mullis, Jr. is the Director of the BioPharma Regulatory Affairs Graduate Education Program at the College of Pharmacy, the University of Georgia Gwinnett Campus, Lawrenceville, Georgia. dmullis@uga.edu.
Logic, Critical Reasoning, and OER/CC Materials

Christine A. James
Valdosta State University

Abstract

In Spring of 2015, an Affordable Learning Georgia Grant created an entirely online and textbook-free PHIL 2020 Logic course. We included Open Educational Resources and Creative Commons materials, some written and some multimedia content. The course included CC linked videos as well as The Logic App, for students to do symbolic logic proofs and derivations using a phone or iPad. In planning the course a variety of online Logic apps with automatic grading and feedback capabilities were tested. The course units were planned with attention to how students can apply logic principles to real-world situations like writing research papers, studying for the LSAT, and legal reasoning. I also designed online discussion boards that promote student engagement with course material; video content that includes examples of traditional lecture demonstrations as well as more funny/humorous video examples of fallacies in reasoning. The process of evaluating OER/CC materials, and the current status of Logic material in repositories for online content like MERLOT, both presented important challenges. This presentation will address some of the advantages and opportunities for expanding online OER courses in the Humanities fields.

The process of developing an online PHIL 2020 Logic course with content from Open Educational Resources and Creative Commons material began with a careful survey of currently available material. This material would have to include a variety of text and video material, as well as currently available apps that might be linkable, or importable, in the course management system. Scholarly literature on teaching Logic online has a consensus that a “variety of media is optimal,” given the range of student interests and abilities in college courses, as noted in Miller (2014). The course would have to be designed with careful attention to “metacognition” so that the students could be mindful in the process of developing their critical thinking skills. A combination of different activities, including Content pages, external Links for readings and multimedia, Self-Assessments, Discussions, and Quizzes would be needed to introduce and reinforce specific skills. Discussions would include specific concrete scenarios, showing how Logic is applicable to real life (Clifton, 2015, 2). Instructor presence in all Discussions would be imperative, so that students would be aware of their own accountability and the instructor’s investment in their success. A special effort to include analytic reasoning scenarios in the Discussions, similar to those on the GRE and LSAT exams, was successfully completed. Such practical scenarios are in concert with the literature on teaching “practical logic” as in Hiller (2014, 23). Use of Blackboard Collaborate as a synchronous office hours tool would also be available.

Teaching the Course

A variety of Creative Commons licensed material was collected into a coherent structure of seven units that is comparable to any introductory level Logic course at most peer institutions and comprehensive universities. The units in the course can be adjusted for emphasis on different types of Logic; for example some universities use a Logic course as a replacement option for a beginning English course on argumentative writing, some use Logic to replace a first Math course because of symbolic language, and some universities specifically use Logic as a pre-law course. This set of unit material can be adapted for any of these interests. Students noted that they enjoyed positive personal engagement with the instructor, introducing new Content items and providing notes or PowerPoint material to accompany them. The “team” feeling among members of the class was truly positive. Our Logic tutor during the semester, Dan Nix, found himself showing material from our class to students in other sections who he was tutoring because he liked the active engagement of many of the Creative Commons sources we used. Material was made available in Vtext, Valdosta State’s portal for open course materials, with the assistance of co-investigator Michael Holt. Students felt a keen sense of empowerment, since they were able to work through new websites and videos in a positive sense of exploration, rather than working through a textbook alone. The asynchronous Discussions provided a unique opportunity for students to consider differences of opinion, and to work on problems from different roles (as the student providing the answer, or as the “grader/rater” evaluating another students work. The
secondary literature on teaching critical reasoning notes that these asynchronous discussions are very valuable, and that acting as a grader is a key step in developing student skills (Kim 2014, 469).

Challenges

In terms of lessons learned, The Logic App did present some challenges as students needed to install Java or update their Java settings in order to use the web-based version of the app. A special PowerPoint explaining how to deal with any kind of error message they might see eventually helped all the students to use the app. As David Johnston notes in his final report, the version of the app we used was an older web-based version, and he is willing to work on improvements in the future. In future it would be wonderful to have The Logic App connected with Desire 2 Learn, embedded, with automatic grading capability. Other challenges that may arise over time include transferring the course materials between Vtext (Valdosta State’s portal) and other course management systems, and making a rotation to change out specific self-assessments and quiz questions in different semesters to keep the course fresh.

Quantitative Results

The students in section A and G unanimously enjoyed the concept of a textbook-free course. In a comparison between the PHIL 2020 ALG pilot grant sections’ SOI quantitative results, and the average SOI number for all sections of PHIL 2020, it was shown that the ALG grant sections were performing above the regular sections in terms of student satisfaction. Please note that this data is only available in aggregate form to protect instructor privacy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOI data chart</th>
<th>Likert scale, out of 5.00</th>
<th>Likert scale, out of 5.00</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2015</td>
<td>ALG section A = 4.71</td>
<td>Average of all PHIL 2020: 4.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ALG section G = 4.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2014</td>
<td></td>
<td>Average of all PHIL 2020: 4.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
<td></td>
<td>Average of all PHIL 2020: 4.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
<td></td>
<td>Average of all PHIL 2020: 4.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td>Average of all PHIL 2020: 4.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td>Average of all PHIL 2020: 4.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following chart illustrates that DFW rates for the Spring 2015 ALG term were definitely comparable too, or better than previous semesters:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHIL 2020 DFW Rates, Fall 2013-Spring 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHIL 2020 DFW Rates, Fall 2013-Fall 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average grade data for the two sections involved in the grant, A and G, were very comparable to the other sections’ average grades:
In general the two sections of the class using the ALG model were successful. The only possible area of difficulty noted on the students’ midterm surveys was the use of The Logic App, since it required specific settings and “Exceptions” listings in both Java and the web browser’s settings and options. I quickly made a PowerPoint explaining how to deal with each kind of Java error when the midterm surveys came back, and the issue was worked out.

Selected quotes from students in the sections taught with the OER/CC materials:

“I enjoyed having a variety of sources made available. The Affordable Learning Georgia grant offered a more diverse learning perspective through the use of different learning tools.” Maria Maguire, PHIL 2020 Section G, Spring 2015

“The Affordable Learning Georgia program has helped me utilize my computer skills better and has also humbled me to be thankful because I didn’t have to buy books that would add more expenses to my college career.” Nydrah Wright, PHIL 2020 Section G, Spring 2015

“I had a very pleasurable experience while taking this class. I enjoyed the time I was in class, and I loved not having to buy a book. I also liked the Logic App, which made some of the exercises a lot more easy.” Mikel Laurita, PHIL 2020 Section G, Spring 2015

“I enjoyed this class. I loved how I didn’t have to spend money on buying a book that I would never use again. Putting all the resources for the class online made it super easy to access so that came in handy.” Jazmin Garza, PHIL 2020 Section G, Spring 2015

“I’m appreciative of my PHIL 2020 class. Taking a course with no cost for textbooks was a help to me, I would like to be a part of this program in future classes!” Brad Duncan, PHIL 2020 Section G, Spring 2015

“I enjoy this class, because I feel like since we as students do not have to utilize a textbook, makes the class more personable with the professor and allows us to gain a different style of learning.” Konosha Smith, PHIL 2020 Section A, Spring 2015

“The idea for a book free class was awesome it allows us to get more of a quality relationship with the teacher and save money.” Tyrone Dixon, PHIL 2020 Section A, Spring 2015

“This is something that should have been done long ago. The online material is much more comprehensive and clear than a paper textbook would be.” Colin Woodman, PHIL 2020 Section A, Spring 2015

“At first I was skeptical of a class without a hard copy of a textbook because of my learning style, but the class was great! It saved me money and I could access material without carrying a bulky book.” Esmeralda Eichler, PHIL 2020 Section A, Spring 2015
References

Affordable Learning Georgia. http://affordablelearninggeorgia.org/

DOI: 10.5840/teachphil20151528


*Christine A. James* is Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Valdosta State University, Valdosta, Georgia. chjames@valdosta.edu.
The Evolution of Faculty and Expertise in Higher Education

Lisa Johnson
Ashford University

Abstract

Technological changes have accelerated the unbundling and specialization of duties and responsibilities historically aligned to faculty in United States’ higher education systems. These changes have redefined the scope and significance of faculty expertise in and outside of the classroom. This paper provides an overview of the evolution of faculty roles and expertise occurring 1956-2016 and was written primarily with the intention of encouraging discussions among legislators, administrators, faculty and learners about the impact these changes are having on the quality of learning and satisfaction of all higher education industry participants and beneficiaries.

Introduction

A defining feature of the faculty educator in higher education environments, much like the teacher educator in primary and secondary (K12) school environments and the trainer in both corporate and military environments, has been to serve as an expert in specific domains and combinations of knowledge and skill. Technological changes in the past sixty years have dramatically reshaped the scope and significance of faculty expertise in and outside of the classroom. This paper informs and will provide structure for beginning or continuing discussions among legislators, administrators, faculty and learners about the impact the evolution of faculty roles. It also informs discussions about the nature and significance of expertise in higher education and its impact on the quality of learning and satisfaction by every participant in and beneficiary of the higher education industry in the United States. The paper is framed by sections highlighting notable influences on the evolution of faculty roles and expertise over a sixty-year period.

Expertise: 1956

In 1956, the distribution of expertise and access to experts was relatively scarce. The use of the term expertness coincides with the rise of universities during the 17th century with the term expertise appearing the 19th century, which coincides with an increase in public schools, colleges, universities, and, notably, the industrial revolution (Harper, 2016). For centuries prior to and in 1956, accessing expertise and employing the services of an expert involved a concentrated effort unless an individual was employed at an organization with experts, affiliated with experts through social or familial relationships, geographically in close proximity to a library or university or, eventually, if the individual had access to television or radio where limited types of instructional programming were offered. Thus, in 1956, faculty and their expertise were scarce and often highly esteemed as well.

Expertise: 1976

Beginning around 1976, college and universities began to rely more heavily on adjunct faculty. This reliance on a part-time contingent workforce was facilitated by an increased supply of experts resulting from growth in the number of advanced degrees being awarded in the United States. Citing a 300-percent increase in reliance on adjunct faculty highlighted in a 2011 study, Weissmann (2013) remarks how this reliance on adjuncts is related in part to innovations in the educational technology industry influencing changes in the duties and responsibilities of faculty. An area where the faculty role began to shift at this time was in the development of the curriculum. Increasingly, pre-packaged curriculum, initially including disks, discs, and eventually, cloud-based and fee-wall protected online content, is sold to universities and less often developed exclusively by individual or groups of faculty (Weise & Christensen, 2014).

Expertise: 1996

The year 1996 was momentous for the evolution of the role of faculty and expertise in higher education as well as all sectors of the education industry. Recall that in 1996 the World Wide Web and Internet were widely accessible by faculty and learners at colleges and universities. With the nearly ubiquitous use of the Windows 95® and Macintosh®
operating systems, availability of desktop and laptop computers, and the online content production software for personal desktop publishing, the very foundation of expertise was remade. Now, anyone with these Web and publishing technologies could produce or reproduce and rapidly share expert content freely or at a significantly reduced cost online. During the 1990s, it became common to access university catalogs, entire course syllabi, scholarly publications, static web pages, web rings, wikis and a variety of other expert content and services online.

The shift in the creation and (re)distribution of expert content increased the access to expertise on a global scale unlike any other witnessed throughout recorded human history. Additionally, although email was not entirely ubiquitous at this time, faculty could more easily be reached by current and potential learners and other experts than telephone or postal mail had previously allowed. Networks of professionals and lay persons sharing their expertise began to grow exponentially through widespread use of listservs and other online discussion technologies. It was also in this decade the first wikis and blogs were created and co-authorship and distributed asynchronous collaborations began to accelerate online, which for some authors, such as Turoff (2006), proved problematic for the esteem and necessity for tenured full-time faculty.

**Expertise: 2006**

Now, let’s consider an era that as characterized by the mainstream use of read-write Web technologies, known as Web 2.0, and the proliferation of accredited online learning opportunities for formal higher education degree-seeking learners. Recall that, in the decade between 1996 and 2006, the revolutionary technological advances explored already in this paper were in their infancy in 1996. Computer-based assessment (e.g., with scantrons) and computer-based-learning (CBL, i.e., eLearning) had already reshaped the faculty duties and responsibilities significantly. And, by 2006, high-speed access to online content was increasingly the norm for universities as well as many non-academic populations employed or serviced by corporations, the military, and K12 school systems. The practice of one-click online publishing, participation in the interactive and social Web, and the widening of access to expertise without needing access to the faculty became the ordinary. In 2006 also, fully accredited online universities had made gains in acceptance by potential learners and securing financial assistance for student tuition and other services at both state and federal levels while mobile learning devices, such as the smartphone and tablet, were increasingly common and affordable.

And so around the year 2006 the United States witnessed a proliferation in the unbundling of the faculty role through with expertise-driven services, such as online tutoring, originality checking and other writing services, and other services. This proliferation led to a wider recognition of the value of collaborative learning, outsourcing and further specialization of faculty duties and responsibilities, and of how expertise was now virtually accessible to anyone willing to consume it. Notably, it was also about this time there was also an increased in organized resistance by faculty and publishers against open-access and non-peer reviewed content distributed online, such as through the numerous websites, blogs and wikis that, although sometimes peer reviewed, did not adhere to the traditional distribution path for print publication (Frosio, 2014). The very meaning and purpose of institutions of higher education and faculty began to be questions as individuals could learn as much from freely available web-content, in text, videos, and interactive eLearning tutorials, and massively open online courses (MOOCS) as they could at a university.

Not surprisingly, first decade of the 21st century there has been an accelerated shift in the perceptions of value of expertise coupled with changes in faculty duties and responsibilities for developing, implementing, and evaluating curriculum. As has been highlighted in the analyses by Turoff (2006), Sener (2012), and Weise and Christensen (2014), the evolution of the faculty role for curriculum was accelerated by the need for scalable, accessibly, and usable Web-enabled content, which required increasingly specialized expertise from instructional designers, and the adoption of economic models for enterprise-level and scalable online course content. The adoption of the standardized curriculum (i.e., canned courses) was widely embraced by universities for both cost-saving and quality assurance purposes. This shift toward an enterprise-level curriculum production model decreased costs in time investment by faculty to produce online curriculum, reallocated some of those savings to hiring instructional technology and designer staff, and provided a sense of re assurance to internal and external stakeholders, such as regional and national accreditors, about the oversight given to ensure a quality curriculum was provided across varying course sections, which are more often facilitated by a massive adjunct faculty workforce. Thus, where the expert faculty had once been esteemed in their roles characterized by the phrase sages on the stages, the rise of and mainstream acceptance of online and blended higher education with standardized curriculum repositioned the faculty as guides, facilitators, and a workforce characterized by the less esteemed phase sages on the pages.
Expertise: 2016

In 2016, expert knowledge is distributed globally and commonly created and shared online in every discipline commonly taught in colleges and universities. The technological changes in the past sixty-years have irreversibly altered the definition of expertise and the value of the faculty role in the system of formal place-based, blended, and online higher education. In 2016, there is an established norm and acceptance of self-publishing of curriculum by experts in an outside of the academy (e.g., Coursera), global access to freely available content provided by businesses (e.g., Khan Academy) and historically inaccessible content from renowned faculty at esteemed universities (e.g., MIT OpenCourseWare). There are rapid advances occurring in the use of data analytics to define and shape the faculty role, use of virtual reality and other immersive learning technologies, artificial intelligence, robotics, alternative pathways to credentialing and advanced degrees, and adoption of adaptive and competency-based learning models. The evolution of the faculty role and expertise is ongoing. Discussions are needed among legislators, administrators, faculty and learners about the impact the evolution of faculty roles is having on the quality of learning and satisfaction by every participant in and beneficiary of the higher education industry.

References


Special thanks to participants in the conference sessions presented by the author with colleagues Daryl Yarrow, Lisa Cheney-Steen, and Joh Sener where inspiration to write this paper for the Distance Learning Administration Conference, 2016, occurred.

Lisa Johnson is Assistant Professor, Instructional Design & Technology at Ashford University, Fort Walton Beach, Florida. lisa.johnson@ashford.edu.
Faculty Professional Development and Student Satisfaction in Online Higher Education

Robert Todd Kane
Clemson University

Melanie Shaw
Northcentral University

Sangho Pang
Clemson University

Witt Salley
Clemson University

J. Blake Snider
Clemson University

Abstract

With the ever-increasing availability of online education opportunities, understanding the factors that influence online student satisfaction and success is vital to enable administrators to engage and retain this important stakeholder group. The purpose of this ex-post-facto, nonexperimental quantitative study was to investigate the impact of faculty professional development, faculty degree status, and faculty longevity upon online student satisfaction and success. A large, archived dataset from an online public state university was analyzed. Repeated measures Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) analysis was used to explore changes in student satisfaction over time. Results showed that both training and degree were not significant predictors of student satisfaction. On the contrary, faculty longevity was found to be a predictor of student satisfaction. Recommendations for future research include incorporating qualitative analysis and expanding the study to diverse institutional types to determine whether findings are consistent.

Introduction

Faculty abilities and the degree to which institutions develop faculty talent are among the most reliable measures of academic excellence (Astin, 1996; Burke, 2005; Jackson, Jones, & Rodriguez, 2010; Sweitzer, & Volkwein, 2009). Given the emergence and expansion of online education at all levels, ongoing evaluation of online faculty qualities, teaching methods, competencies, and best practices is important to ensure that online education demonstrates and maintains academic quality comparable, if not superior, to traditional higher education (Meyer & Murrell, 2014b; 2014c; Mujtaba, 2011). Standardized, regularly scheduled faculty development, training, and remediation options, as needed, have been shown to enhance student outcomes and help administrators ensure quality teaching, credibility, and accreditation (Meyer & Murrell, 2014b; 2014c; Mujtaba, 2011). Given the rapidly increasing demand and competition in the online higher-education market, examining the faculty factors that result in increased student satisfaction is critical to assist administrators in decision making and resource allocation.

University education is undergoing a paradigm shift in how information and knowledge are transferred. Online education expanded rapidly over the past twenty years and continues to represent the fastest growing sector of higher education (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Online education is expanding access to students internationally and domestically to students who would otherwise be unable to attend college (Christensen, Horn, Caldera, & Soares, 2011; Simpson, 2013). Additionally, online education has increased access for nontraditional, working adults and older students returning to obtain an advanced degree or continuing education for personal satisfaction or professional advancement (Christensen, Horn, Caldera, & Soares, 2011; Simpson, 2013). The increasing demand has led established universities to develop whole online programs across all degree levels and disciplines. Fully online institutions have emerged and now directly compete for traditional-aged college students (Allen & Seaman,
2013; Mujtaba, 2011). As university administrators struggle to respond to market forces and adapt to new technological contexts, they face the challenges of maintaining academic quality and credibility (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

Despite overall increases in acceptance of online education by faculty and administrators and a majority’s indicating that online education was “just as good” as or “better” than traditional face-to-face instruction, almost one-quarter of chief academic officers continue to perceive online instruction as inferior to traditional instruction (Allen & Seaman, 2013). The perceived level of faculty acceptance decreased in 2012 regardless of institutional type and number of online offerings (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Because academic leaders indicated that lack of faculty acceptance of online education is a critical barrier to success (Allen & Seaman, 2013), educators in the online environment have begun to receive greater emphasis and attention (Meyer, & Murrell, 2014a; 2014b). Preparing faculty to be effective online instructors requires a new paradigm comprising technical proficiency and virtual engagement (Meyer, & Murrell, 2014b; 2014c; Mujtaba, 2011). To remain competitive and demonstrate equivalent academic quality, chief academic officers must provide resources and training for their faculty teaching online courses (Burke, 2005; Sweitzer, & Volkwein, 2009) as well as appropriate means to assess that training and academic quality (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Meyer, & Murrell, 2014a; 2014b). Unlike a traditional classroom that relies heavily on lectures and dialog, the online learning environment requires that faculty play “learning facilitator” (Vaill, & Testori, 2012, p.111)—which, absent face-to-face interaction, requires the use of various multimodal resources to engage students. As Vaill and Testori (2012) reminded us, faculty quality and effectiveness largely determine institutional success. (Vaill, & Testori, 2012).

Problem Statement

While perceptions of online education have steadily improved, administrators, faculty, students, and the general public remain skeptical regarding the overall quality of the online educational experience (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Because instructor quality and student satisfaction are significant predictors of successful learning outcomes, the implementation and evaluation of faculty training activities and their potential impact on student satisfaction prove as useful means to demonstrate academic quality and institutional credibility, and may reduce any remaining uncertainty about online academic institutions.

Though nearly all of the institutions surveyed provide some form of training for their online faculty (Allen & Seaman, 2011; Meyer, & Murrell, 2014b; 2014c), the training quality and methods vary widely (Meyer, & Murrell, 2014a; Vaill, & Testori, 2012). Additionally, little is known about whether the training improves facilitation skills or outcomes in any changes in student satisfaction (Meyer, & Murrell, 2014b; 2014c). According to a 2014 study, more than 90% of institutions surveyed evaluated their online faculty training based on faculty satisfaction with the training itself rather than any direct measure of course or student outcomes, such as changes in teaching practices or improvements in student performance (Meyer, & Murrell, 2014b; 2014c).

The link between instructor quality and student satisfaction is well established; however, far less is known about the potential value of faculty training to improve student satisfaction directly, particularly in an online environment. Given the rapid expansion of online institutions, coupled with continuing skepticism regarding online academic quality, additional research is needed to evaluate faculty training and its potential contribution to student satisfaction. Further, the question of whether student satisfaction scores improve over time regardless of faculty training or degree remains unclear. In addition to providing a practical evaluation of faculty training practices and online undergraduate student satisfaction data to contribute to the body of knowledge, the results of the proposed study would document whether faculty professional development improves student satisfaction and whether training effectiveness varies by faculty degree status or faculty longevity.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this ex-post-facto, nonexperimental quantitative study was to investigate the impact of faculty professional development and degree status on student satisfaction. An archived dataset from an online public state university was analyzed to compare student satisfaction before and after faculty training intervention. Student satisfaction was measured by end-of-course evaluations. Faculty characteristics and professional development data were reported along with comparisons of student satisfaction based on variations in faculty degree status (master’s versus terminal) and pre to post faculty professional development course participation. Descriptive statistics were reported on the sample characteristics and range of student satisfaction scores for each pre to post intervention and
by faculty degree status. Data were also tracked over seven terms to determine whether student satisfaction scores improved for faculty over time.

**Research Questions**

1. Do faculty members in online higher education perform better over time vis-à-vis student satisfaction?
2. What impact do faculty training and degree have upon student satisfaction over time?

**Null Hypotheses**

- $H_1$: No difference exists in faculty member performance over time vis-à-vis student satisfaction.
- $H_2$: No difference exists in student satisfaction scores based on faculty training and degree.

**Literature Review**

Key theories inform postsecondary professional development, specifically online instructional design, andragogy, and student development theories. These related theoretical frameworks were multifaceted and complex, and they were composed of motivation (Maslow, 1958), adult learning (Knowles, 1973), transformative theory (Mezirow, 2000), and the foundational theories of Vygotsky (1987) and Piaget (1929) regarding social learning and knowledge construction. Guskey (2002) and Guskey and Huberman (1995) drew upon learning theories to develop a clear and simple model of teacher change based on training and professional development that reflects a recursive relationship between teacher beliefs and attitudes in response to improvements in student outcomes that result from implementing new practices.

While adult learning and transformative theory provide a means to understand how and why faculty learn, Rogers’s (2010) diffusion of innovation theory is useful to explain faculty willingness and motivation to implement remediation or training as well as the steady expansion and acceptance of online learning. Because the theory describes how individuals adopt and spread new ideas, the theory aligns well with the emphasis on faculty training to increase the rate of online education diffusion, adoption, and acceptance. Rogers’s diffusion of innovation theory provides a bridge between learning theories and faculty training within online higher education.

Additional theories relevant to the study are student involvement and student satisfaction theories. Student involvement refers to the amount of time and energy students devote to their academic lives, including their studies and engagement in college related activities as well as interaction with other students and faculty. Astin (1984) is a foundational author of research on student development and student involvement theories, which emphasize the “behavioral mechanisms or processes that facilitate student development” (p. 522) as well as student satisfaction. According to Astin (1984), involvement is the investment of both psychological and physical energy and manifests in many forms and degrees; involvement can be measured both qualitatively and quantitatively; student learning and development are directly related to the quality and quantity of the student’s investment; and the effectiveness of any program is measured by how well that program increases student involvement.

Based on years of study, numerous researchers concluded that the quality and quantity of faculty and student interactions predict how invested a student feels and the likelihood of ultimate student satisfaction and success (Astin, 1984; Kuh, & Hu, 2001, Noel-Levitz, 2014). A goal for this study was to understand the ways in which a distance education institution can implement clear and consistent faculty training and development activities that will ultimately improve student satisfaction and organizational outcomes.

That faculty quality and student satisfaction are key indicators of institutional and academic quality is well established (Astin, 1996; Burke, 2005; Jackson, Jones, & Rodriguez, 2010; Noel-Levitz, 2014; Sweitzer & Volkwein, 2009). Given the increased reliance on online learning, systematic training and evaluation of online faculty qualities, teaching methods, competencies, and best practices as well as the degree to which faculty training improves student satisfaction are valuable means to ensure and demonstrate academic quality comparable, if not superior, to traditional higher-education institutions (Meyer & Murrell, 2014b; 2014c; Mujtaba, 2011). Regardless of institutional type, traditional institutions’ incorporation of online components or fully online campuses, faculty development and evaluation in online course design and delivery require technical proficiency and engagement (Meyer, & Murrell, 2014b; 2014c; Mujtaba, 2011). To remain competitive and demonstrate academic quality, chief
academic officers must provide resources and training for their faculty teaching online courses (Burke, 2005; Sweitzer, & Volkwein, 2009) as well as means to evaluate training efficacy (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Meyer, & Murrell, 2014a; 2014b).

Faculty characteristics and faculty engagement with students and are key measures of academic quality (Astin, 1996; Burke, 2005; Jackson, Jones, & Rodriguez, 2010; Sweitzer, & Volkwein, 2009). Given the increasing presence of online education at all levels, ongoing evaluation of online faculty qualities, teaching methods, competencies, and best practices is an important means to ensure that online education demonstrates and maintains the academic quality comparable, if not superior, to traditional higher education (Meyer, & Murrell, 2014b; 2014c; Mujtaba, 2011). Faculty development, training, and remediation (as needed) can scaffold to achieve academic goals and improve student outcomes and to describe and audit the steps that online institutions take to promote quality teaching as well as demonstrate academic credibility (Meyer, & Murrell, 2014b; 2014c; Mujtaba, 2011). Regular, formal, research-based faculty professional development that promotes faculty engagement and student satisfaction is critical to prepare faculty to transition their teaching skills to the online environment.

**Online University Organizational Structures**

Distance learning has been defined as a learning environment in which “students and teachers are separated by distance and sometimes by time” (Moore & Kearsley, 1996, p. 1). Distance education exists in several different forms. Two common types include, but are not limited to, single-mode and dual-mode institutions. Single-mode institutions provide the online mode exclusively. In other words, single-mode universities do not provide any traditional classrooms (Moore & Kearsley, 2011). A dual-mode institution added a distance component to an already-established traditional classroom model (Moore & Kearsley, 2011).

A separate administrative unit typically manages the distance education component, essentially replacing what had been a correspondence delivery method with a newer online system to provide course offerings via traditional classroom and online delivery. Additionally, instructors of traditional courses are often encouraged to include an online component in their courses (e.g., online quizzes and webinars). In a relatively short timespan, the demand for the online courses has dramatically increased, which has in turn increased the size, scope, and operating budgets for separate online organizational units (Moore & Kearsley, 2011). Similarly, researchers have described the variations in online courses on a continuum from *Web-enhanced* and *media-enhanced* to *fully online* (Hartman, Dziuban, & Moskal, 2000).

**Diffusion of Innovation**

Once the traditional higher-education paradigm is disrupted, the process by which participation in online education shifts from the margins to the mainstream can be understood using Rogers’ diffusion of innovation theory (2003). Rogers described diffusion of innovation as “the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system” (p.5). Successful outcomes for early adopters of innovation (in this case, various forms of online higher education) provide information and reduce uncertainty, motivating others to participate and contributing to further diffusion and expansion. As traditional institutions develop online program options to improve convenience and compete with innovative new higher-education entrants, online institutions should focus on demonstrating quality to attract and retain dedicated instructors and improve institutional prestige to compete for highly qualified students.

**Faculty Professional Development and Training**

Distance educators must manage the online modality by using a wide variety of technologies and classroom platforms while engaging with students and teaching the course curriculum (Allen & Seaman, 2011; Hixon, Barczyk, Buckenmeyer, & Feldman, 2011; Lackey, 2011; Meyer, & Murrell, 1014b). In addition to orienting and socializing new faculty, the training and professional development opportunities provided by the hiring institution may be the only teacher training in which new faculty participate (Hixon, Barczyk, Buckenmeyer, & Feldman, 2011).
A number of faculty training varieties and models is used in online distance education. Gibson and Blackwell (2011) divided online faculty training models into four categories—formal or informal, voluntary or required—and describe the common varieties as coaching and mentoring, immersion and workshop. Gibson and Blackwell (2010) and Palloff and Pratt (2007) recommended comprehensive training that encompasses both the pedagogical and technical aspects of online training.

Based on a recent survey of 39 institutions that collected data on faculty development for online teaching (Meyer, & Murrell, 2014b), nearly all provided training on how to assess student learning (97%) and create online communities (91%). Eighty-one percent of the institutions surveyed provided training on the learning management system (e.g., Blackboard Learn, Instructure Canvas, etc.), student learning styles, and instructional design models. Workshops were the most common method of providing faculty training among the institutions surveyed (Meyer, & Murrell, 1014b). However, the delivery of online faculty training varies widely (Allen & Seaman, 2011; Hixon, Barczyk, Buckenmeyer, & Feldman, 2011; Lackey, 2011; Meyer, & Murrell, 1014b). Training may be developed and delivered by the institution or by an external third party and can range from informal, individualized consultations to formal, instructor-led courses (Allen & Seaman, 2011; Meyer, & Murrell, 1014b).

Mujtaba (2011) described the best practices for ongoing faculty training and professional development to improve teaching and student learning outcomes. Based on the author’s professional experiences and best practices used by several universities and corporations, Mujtaba recommended an immersion “train the trainer” model that includes the following steps: hire, orient, model, mentor, teach, evaluate and develop. Mujtaba recommended the following best practices: formal, standardized, regular faculty training; frequent communication regarding program updates, technology usage, organizational announcements, and invitations for faculty input; standardized mechanisms for student feedback and documentation; regular student learning assessments; faculty peer review; and adequate compensation for training and course development. Institutional implementation of consistent, formal faculty training and remediation are required to ensure faculty engagement and student satisfaction to improve and maintain positive student outcomes (Mujtaba, 2011).

Faculty and Student Engagement

The migration from traditional to online classrooms has created new challenges for both faculty and students (Keengwe, Georgina, & Wachira, 2011). Faculty must be technologically literate in general as well as proficient in online delivery and able to integrate their teaching skills and best practices (Gibson & Blackwell, 2010; Keengwe, Georgina, & Wachira, 2011). According to Keengwe, Gerogina and Wahira (2011), students taught by faculty who have received both pedagogical training (i.e., how to implement learning communities, improve classroom management, and cultivate faculty-student interactions) and focused technological training report increased learning and more positive perceptions of the online learning environment.

That faculty interaction and student satisfaction are key predictors of student achievement and success, regardless of institutional type or instructional modality, has been well established (Astin, 1984; 1996; Kuh, 1996; Kuh, & Hu, 2001; Tinto, 2010). A plethora of research documents the importance of such faculty qualities as educational background and engagement to improve student satisfaction and outcomes (Astin, 1984; 1996; Kuh, 1996; Tinto, 2010). According to Tinto (2012), far less is known about how research on faculty training and professional development can be translated into effective institutional practice toward improving the student experience.

Undoubtedly, the instructor (regardless of teaching modality) has a critical influence on his or her students’ academic experience (Gibson, Tesone, Hodgetts, & Blackwell, 2001). Faculty who teach online appreciate professional development opportunities and prefer institutional administrators who value online education and demonstrate an understanding of the differences in an online teaching environment and the workload that comes with it (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Bolinger & Wasilik, 2009). Chronic technological difficulties, inadequate tools, and unreliable infrastructure to teach effectively in the asynchronous environment are reasons faculty report lower satisfaction and support by their institution (Bolinger & Wasilik, 2009).

The historical trend has been that most faculty feel positively toward and satisfied with their online teaching experiences (Bolliger, & Wasilik, 2009; Hagedorn, 2000; Hartman, Dzubian, & Moskal, 2000, NEA, 2000). Faculty satisfaction within the online context depends upon several factors. More specifically, the motivating factors that
faculty provide as reasons for continuing to teach in an online environment “can be categorized into three groups: (a) student-related, (b) instructor-related, and (c) institution-related” (Bolliger, & Wasilik, 2009, p.106).

Online faculty indicated student-related satisfaction in knowing that they are serving a diverse population, including students who may not otherwise attend college were it not for the online option. Faculty described the online environment as positive with regard to innovation as well as faculty-student and peer-peer communication, but they lament the lack of face to face interaction (Bolliger, & Wasilik, 2009). The extent to which faculty can feel that what they do improves student learning is an important instructor-related satisfier. Although the hiring institution can attempt to choose faculty who are intrinsically motivated or motivated by student interactions, institution-related motivators fall within university administrator’s control. Key factors that the institution can provide include appropriate technological infrastructure and appropriate training on teaching effectively in an online environment (Bolliger, & Wasilik, 2009).

Astin (1984) described student development theory with particular attention to student involvement. Student involvement refers to the amount of time and energy students devote to their academic lives, including their studies and engagement in college related activities as well as interaction with other students and faculty. Numerous research studies have supported theories of student development by measuring relevant constructs, including student engagement, student satisfaction and their relationship to student achievement, persistence, and graduation (Astin, 1984; Kuh, & Hu, 2001).

The Effects of Student-Faculty Interaction in the 1990s by Kuh and Hu (2001) was a large-scale study of student-faculty interaction that included over 5,000 undergraduate students from 126 four-year U.S. colleges and universities nationwide. The survey utilized the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ), which has been validated and used to collect data on self-reported learning and development as well as the quality and frequency of student-faculty interactions. According to the study’s results, student-faculty interaction frequency tended to increase from freshman to senior years. Key findings demonstrated a positive relationship between the faculty interaction frequency and student effort, learning outcomes, and satisfaction.

Student Satisfaction

Evaluation in higher education typically focuses on student content knowledge as demonstrated by course grades, the alignment of courses, and program and institutional goals. However, key affective factors are equally important to explain and predict student learning in online settings (Kuo, Walker, Belland, & Schroder, 2013). Student satisfaction is among the most useful attitudinal constructs to predict whether students will persist and ultimately complete their studies. Further, higher-education institutions consider student satisfaction a key determinant online program quality (Yukselturk & Yildirim, 2008).

As college costs have escalated and student enrollments among traditional age students have steeply declined, student satisfaction has become a high priority among college administrators (Noel-Levitz, 2014). While a number of factors contribute to student satisfaction, including financial concerns, ease and convenience, college reputation, and campus culture, faculty engagement with students has a consistent, direct relationship to student satisfaction (Noel-Levitz, 2014). Colleges with high student satisfaction have corresponding high graduation rates. Students who report high satisfaction, defined in large part by their opinions of faculty teaching, tend to persist to graduation, which improves institutional outcomes and contributes to student satisfaction (Noel-Levitz, 2014).

In their most recent publication, the National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report, the authors made the following recommendations to promote faculty-student engagement and measure improvements in student satisfaction:

1) Satisfaction assessment is a way to keep tabs on the priorities of students and to create an environment where improvement matters.
2) Measurement is necessary for action.
3) Student satisfaction assessment can set the retention agenda and provide crucial data for accreditation and strategic planning.
4) Communication with students can combat perception issues.
Satisfaction has benefits beyond serving your current students.

(Noel-Levitz, 2014, p. 13)

Faculty characteristics and behaviors, particularly faculty actions that engage students in distance environments, directly contribute to student satisfaction (Kuh & Hu, 2001). Because student satisfaction is correlated with several outcome measures—such as persistence (Tinto, 2010; 2012), course quality (Moore & Kearsley, 1996), and student success (Noel-Levitz, 2011)—taking steps to improve how faculty engage with students in their online courses has a clear and direct benefit to the institution.

Method

Participants in this study were drawn from an archived, large dataset from an online public, state university in the United States. Seventy-five faculty members in the university were purposely selected because, during the set period of this study, (a) they had been teaching online courses; (b) they were required to participate in a professional development course as a requirement of continued employment; and (c) they had been evaluated by students through the use of post course surveys before and/or after participation in the training course. Student satisfaction scores were not available for all the participants across all terms as is often the case with longitudinal data. However, these missing data do not pose problems with the multilevel approach employed in this study (Field, 2013). Seven terms (from fall 2010 to fall 2013) were used to trace student satisfaction scores longitudinally. There was a gradual increase in the total number of participants who were evaluated by students on post course surveys and there was also a small rate of faculty attrition.

All the participants had a master’s or doctoral degree from a regionally accredited university in order to be eligible to teach at the study institution. For this study, faculty members’ highest degree was entered and used as a basis for comparison of end-of-course student satisfaction scores, overall and as a change from pre- to post-professional development intervention.

Faculty Certification Courses (FCC) are offered every term to improve facilitation and other skills, such as APA format training. At the study institution, faculty are required to participate in at least one FCC course per calendar year to remain in good standing and are paid a stipend of $100 for completion. Each course lasts three weeks and is designed around a topic of interest for online faculty. In this case, the course was Information Literacy in the Online Classroom.

Student satisfaction was measured using a student satisfaction scale, which consisted of six items, all representing instructor-related satisfaction: (a) The instructor provided timely feedback on my assignments (72 hours or less), (b) The instructor demonstrated knowledge and expertise in the course content, (c) My online interaction with the instructor met my expectations, (d) The instructor typically responded to my questions in a timely manner (24 hours or less), (e) My interaction with the instructor outside of the discussion board met my expectations, and (f) My interaction with the instructor in the discussion board met my expectations. Response options used the same 4-point Likert scale: (1= does not meet expectations, 2= somewhat meets expectations, 3= meets expectations, and 4= exceeds expectations). The scale had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach’s alpha of .957.

Every semester, at the end of every course, students in the faculty members’ online courses rated their satisfaction level on the scale, resulting in 1199 evaluations in the dataset, meaning that a faculty member in this study, on average, has 2.28 student evaluations per semester. All the values on the scale averaged across all items and the average scores across all courses taught by a faculty member during a semester were averaged again to measure the faculty member’s overall student satisfaction per semester, resulting in only one student satisfaction score for a faculty member per semester. In this way, the data were restructured for each faculty member to have repeated measures of student satisfaction over time.

Data Analysis

Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) was used to test a repeated-measures model with term or measurement occasion and training (Level 1 predictors) and degree (Level 2 predictor) predicting online faculty members’ student
satisfaction scores across seven semesters. The terms were coded as follow: 0=Fall 2010, 1=Spring 2011, 2=Fall 2011, 3=Spring 2012, 4=Fall 2012, 5=Spring 2013, and 6=Fall 2013. The first term (Fall 2010) was set to zero so that it could provide a meaningful zero point. A dichotomous variable was created in order to indicate whether the faculty member had completed the selected professional development course (0=not received, 1=received). Faculty highest degree status was also coded as a dichotomous variable. (0=master, 1=doctoral or terminal). The scores on training and degree were centered on the overall mean before they were entered into the model hierarchically so that they could provide a meaningful zero point as well.

Results

Given the nature of the HLM analysis, several models with different predictors were tested step by step, while looking at the change in student satisfaction scores over time. Table 1 summarizes the results from the HLM analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Null Model</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estimate</td>
<td>3.54 (.05)</td>
<td>3.44 (.05)</td>
<td>3.44 (.05)</td>
<td>3.44 (.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 Time</td>
<td>.03 (.01)**</td>
<td>.03* (.02)</td>
<td>.03 (.01)**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 Degree</td>
<td>- .11 (.07)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N=75 online faculty members measured over 7 semester. R² is the HLM version of the reduction in variance, *p<.05, **p<.01

Given the hierarchical nature of the study, first determining a baseline (or null) model for the individual level outcome variable (faculty’s student satisfaction score) was important. These analyses show how much variance resides within and between individuals and serve as a baseline for further analyses. Results from HLM analysis of the intercept-only model indicated that 26.46% of total variance resides between faculty members and that 73.54% of the total variance resides within faculty members, thereby supporting the HLM approach. The estimate for the intercept in the model was 3.54 which was the average student satisfaction score across all the faculty members and measurement occasions. When considering the range of the student satisfaction variable (from 1 to 4), it showed that participants in this study received relatively higher scores over time from their students as a whole.

In the first model, time or term (measurement occasion) was entered as a fixed effect to determine the linear trend of student satisfaction scores across the seven semesters. Time or term was also entered as a random effect to allow the linear trend of student satisfaction vary across the faculty members. In general, online faculty members showed significant growth over the seven semesters with regard to student satisfaction. The intercept in the first model changed from 3.54 to 3.44, meaning that, in the 2010 fall semester, the student satisfaction scores started at 3.44 on average across all the participants. The estimate for time or term was .03, meaning that the participants’ student satisfaction scores increased by .03 on the scale each term and the increase was statistically significant, b = .03, t = 3.16, p < .01. Specifically, student satisfaction scores significantly increased over time, reducing the residual variance by 3.27% from the null model.

In the second model, training was entered as a fixed and a random effect as well. Training did not significantly predict student satisfaction score, t = .30, p = .77 and, thus, was deleted in the model.

In the third model, degree was entered as a fixed effect. Degree was not significantly related to student satisfaction score, t = -1.51, p = .14. The estimate for degree had negative value (b = -.11), meaning that faculty members who have a master’s degree turned out to perform better than those who have a doctoral or terminal degree. Overall, online faculty members showed significant growth over time with regard to student satisfaction; however, neither degree nor professional development training had significant impacts on student satisfaction over time.
Conclusion

This study was designed to evaluate professional development and faculty qualities as markers of student satisfaction. Archived faculty and student data collected since 2009 by a large online public university constituted the data sources for this study. Records from 75 faculty members who meet the criteria of having student satisfaction scores for professional development course participation were analyzed to test the hypotheses. Based on the findings, neither degree status nor professional development significantly affected student satisfaction; however, faculty were evaluated more favorably in terms of student satisfaction over time. As such, the null hypothesis for research question 1 was rejected, but the null hypothesis for research question 2 was accepted.

An important limitation was the degree to which student end-of-course evaluations reflected instructor quality. While student surveys are ubiquitous, they do not necessarily provide a fair and accurate assessment of faculty teaching skills. Another potential limitation regarding the student survey data was a small sample of student evaluation responses per course. The use of a consistent tool to measure student satisfaction and a large sample size may have mitigated the noted limitations.

Because this study was limited to the findings from one institution, it should be replicated across diverse institutional types to determine whether the findings are similar. In addition, qualitative studies could be conducted to determine faculty perspectives of the effectiveness of the professional development offered and to develop deeper understanding of factors that influence student satisfaction with their faculty both before and after professional development interventions. Finally, a study comparing how different professional development interventions affect student satisfaction should be conducted beyond the scope of the trainings provided in this study.

The researchers were intrigued that faculty with only a master’s degree overall outperformed terminally degreed faculty on post-course student surveys. Based on early qualitative indicators, students seemingly experience higher levels of instructor presence and engagement from faculty without a terminal degree. Because universities often emphasize high ratios of terminally degreed faculty, further research is needed to determine whether this emphasis is misguided based these preliminary findings.

Professional development is heralded as an important factor in faculty growth. The researchers set out to examine whether professional development directly affected student satisfaction. This was not the case. The research reveals that administrators should use professional development as a tool for faculty retention rather than a driver of student satisfaction. This study’s findings show that faculty longevity leads to student satisfaction. The investment in professional development, then, is well worth the cost if it promotes faculty retention.

References


Robert Todd Kane is a Course Development Leader at Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina. rtkane@clemson.edu.

Melanie Shaw is a Professor in the School of Education at Northcentral University, San Diego, California. mshaw@ncu.edu.

Sangho Pang is a Graduate Assistant at Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina. spang@clemson.edu.

Witt Salley is the Director of Clemson Online at Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina. witt@clemson.edu.

J. Blake Snider is an Academic Program Director at Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina. sniderb@clemson.edu.
A Comparative Study of Competency-Based Courses Demonstrating a Potential Measure of Course Quality and Student Success

Jackie Krause  
Central Washington University

Laura Portolese Dias  
Central Washington University

Chris Schedler  
Central Washington University

Abstract

While competency-based education is growing, standardized tools for evaluating the unique characteristics of course design in this domain are still under development. This preliminary research study evaluated the effectiveness of a rubric developed for assessing course design of competency-based courses in an undergraduate Information Technology and Administrative Management program. The rubric, which consisted of twenty-six individual measures, was used to evaluate twelve new courses. Additionally, the final assessment scores of nine students who completed nine courses in the program were evaluated to determine if a correlation exists between student success and specific indicators of quality in the course design. The results indicate a correlation exists between measures that rated high and low on the evaluation rubric and final assessment scores of students completing courses in the program. Recommendations from this study suggest that quality competency-based courses need to evaluate the importance and relevance of resources for active student learning, provide increased support and ongoing feedback from mentors, and offer opportunities for students to practice what they have learned.

Introduction

The effectiveness of a competency-based education program depends on the overall course design to enhance student learning. As noted in the literature review, these factors can contribute to student success in a competency-based course and program and are necessary to enhance the overall learning experience of the student. Measurement of effective competency-based courses should not be based on a traditional online course evaluation rubric because the unique needs of a competency-based course require a different design. This paper will address a previously proposed rubric for competency-based education (Krause, Portolese Dias & Schedler, 2015) and assess the effectiveness of the rubric based on unbiased course review and student success (competency mastery) in the course. After the data analysis, the authors will provide recommendations on possible improvements in the course review rubric and overall course design considerations. Finally, the authors will provide suggestions for future research in competency-based course design.

Literature Review

Competency-based education (CBE) is one of the fastest growing sectors of online education. Fleming (2015) suggests that as many as 200,000 students currently participate in approximately 150 different CBE programs, while as many as 400 programs are in the development stage. In CBE programs, students demonstrate their understanding of topics through various activities that prove mastery of the subjects (U. S. Department of Education, n.d.). Skills or learning outcomes are evaluated against given competency requirements. Students proceed at their own pace and typically work one-on-one with mentors or evaluators as they progress through their program. As a result, CBE courses are designed to help students understand the competencies by which they are evaluated and to provide resources that will help students successfully demonstrate their mastery of those competencies.

Effective online course design is one of many important factors in student success in online courses and competency-based programs (Yukselturk & Bulut, 2007). Student success factors related to this study include (but are not limited to): student interaction with the instructor/mentor, student self-regulation, active learning, and quality
Students' interaction with instructors is an important factor in online learning. In fact, students have more success in instructor-led online courses than in independent study online courses, which are similar to competency-based education models (Jiang, Parent & Eastmond, 2006). However, despite students' expectations for interaction with an instructor in online courses, the same learning outcomes can be accomplished through clear guidelines for interaction between students and mentors (Graham, Cagiltary, Craner, Kim, & Duffy, 2000). Social presence refers to the degree of awareness of the other person in any given communication (Sallnas, Rassmus-Grohn, & Sjostrom, 2000) and has been found to be a critical link in learning, and an element of student success in an online course environment (Pollard, Minor & Swanson, 2014). Social presence is a necessary component in any online course, but it is especially important in self-paced competency-based courses, in which the mentor is responsible for providing the student with motivational factors contributing to student success (Robb & Sutton, 2014).

The next factor contributing to effective online course design is high self-regulation by the student. Self-regulation requires students to take primary responsibility for their learning. It is especially important to the success of students in self-paced competency-based education courses, as much of the work is done on their own. It is imperative that mentors and completion coaches have an understanding of how to assist low self-regulated learners in a competency-based learning environment (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2004). Besides the focus on the student's social and motivational needs in online courses, another factor contributing to student success in competency-based education is the quality of learning activities.

Involving students in active learning is crucial to online course success, by providing many types of learning resources, such as videos, textbook, and articles, and having students engage in real-world activities related to those learning resources (Graham, et al., 2000). Lee and Choi (2011) proposed factors for success, including quality course design and learning activities, which supports earlier research by Graham et al. (2000). Sixty-nine total factors were identified in three categories: student factors, environmental factors, and program quality factors (Lee & Choi, 2011). Student factors accounted for the largest number of dropout factors (55%) and included such categories as academic background, relevant experiences, skills, and psychological attributes. Environmental factors made up 25% of the total dropout factors and included the categories of work commitments and supportive environments and addressed issues related to both the college/university support and services as well as support from family, work, and friends. Program quality made up 20% of the total dropout factors and included course design and interactions, specifically course activities such as team-building, well-structured and relevant course content, course orientation, student-to-student and student-to-faculty interactions, and student participation. Ineffective or low-quality courses were identified as a significant barrier to student success.

All of the above factors, and many more beyond the scope of this paper, impact student success; however, we will focus on factors related to program quality and successful design of competency-based courses. By utilizing a comprehensive evaluation rubric, such factors can be taken into consideration for quality course design.

**Purpose Statement and Research Question**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the competency-based evaluation rubric in terms of defining course quality and student success. Therefore, the research question is: How effective is the proposed rubric in evaluation of competency-based courses in terms of design quality and student success prediction?

**Methodology and Results**

**Study Design**

Because no standardized rubric for evaluating competency-based courses existed, the Multimodal Learning department at Central Washington University developed an instrument (Krause, et al., 2015) to evaluate twelve newly developed courses in support of the competency-based FLEX-IT program for the Information Technology and Administrative Management (ITAM) Bachelors of Science program at Central Washington University (CWU). These twelve courses comprised core classes within the Retail Management and Technology specialization and the Administrative Management specialization. Each course was evaluated by peer reviewers within the CWU Multimodal Learning department using the new rubric. Peer reviewers included experienced online teaching faculty.
Courses were developed by a variety of faculty within the ITAM department. No specific course development experience was expected of these faculty. The emphasis on selection of faculty for course development was based on subject matter expertise. Twelve different faculty were used to develop the courses between the two specializations, ranging from full professors to adjunct faculty. The courses were designed using a master-course model, which implements best practices and ensures that the menu options for each course are the same for the student. Each competency was divided into topical areas, and modules were built around the topical areas for each of the courses. The master-course model was shared with faculty, and then each completed course was reviewed by Multimodal Learning using the competency-based course evaluation rubric.

The evaluation rubric includes 26 individual measures, which are grouped into seven categories (see Table 2). A three part scale was used to assess quality: Improvement Needed, Effective, or Exemplary. Reviewers rated each course on all 26 measures and included comments with additional feedback for improvement. Rating forms were captured electronically as Microsoft Word documents.

Once the ratings were complete, any identifying information was removed from the forms, and the completed rubrics were assigned a number from 1 to 12. Researchers then compiled the information from each rubric into a single worksheet using Excel. To create quantitative data for analysis, quality assessments were coded as 1=Improvement Needed, 2=Effective, and 3=Exemplary. Once the data was coded, each measure was averaged to develop an overall assessment of the individual measures. Descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies and percentages were used to summarize characteristics of data and were deemed appropriate for this study as there was no attempt to associate variables (Park, 2001). Finally, measures were grouped together and averaged to form a view of each category. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for all 26 measures evaluated.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

| Question | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 |
|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Mean     | 1.08 | 2.08 | 2.17 | 2.26 | 1.92 | 1.51 | 1.26 | 1.67 | 1.17 | 2.33 | 1.67 | 1.42 | 1.75 | 1.92 | 1.17 | 1.75 | 1.17 | 1.92 | 1.83 | 1.58 |
| Median   | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1.51 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2.5 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Mode     | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1.51 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2.5 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Minimum  | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1.51 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2.5 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Maximum  | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Sum      | 13 | 25 | 26 | 24 | 23 | 21 | 18 | 12 | 12 | 20 | 14 | 28 | 20 | 17 | 13 | 18 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 |
| Count    | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 |

Results

Table 2 provides a detailed look at the averages of each of the 26 measures. Of the 26 average measures, 7 scored between 1.00 and 1.50, with 3 measures scoring the lowest score of 1.00 (Improvement Needed). Twelve measures scored between 1.51 and 2.0 (between Improvement Needed and Effective), four measures scored between 2.01 and 2.5 (Effective and Exemplary), and finally, three measures scored above 2.51 (Above Effective). No single measure rated consistently Exemplary (3.0).

The individual measure that received the highest rating was 10) Learning resources support achievement of competencies and learning objectives at 2.67. There were three individual measures that received the lowest ratings: 8) Learners have opportunities for ongoing assessment and practice with mentor feedback, 9) Expectations for evaluator’s response time and feedback on assessments are clearly stated, and 20) Instructions are provided on how and when to contact mentor for instructional support, all with scores of 1.00.

The category of measures that received the highest overall rating was 7) Policy Compliance with a score of 1.86 and
the category of measures to receive the lowest rating was 2) Assessment and Evaluation with a rating of 1.50. Two of the three lowest individual measures were part of this category. No single measure received an average rating above 2.67 (between Effective and Exemplary) while no category of measures averaged above 1.86 (between Improvement Needed and Effective).

Table 2. Averages by Measure

1. Competencies & Learning Activities

Competencies and learning objectives are measurable and aligned with learning activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IM = Improvement Needed</th>
<th>EF = Effective,</th>
<th>EX = Exemplary</th>
<th>IM</th>
<th>EF</th>
<th>EX</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Competencies and learning objectives identify measurable knowledge, skills, and abilities to be demonstrated by learners</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Learning activities support achievement of competencies and learning objectives</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Instructions on how to complete learning activities and meet competencies are clear</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learning activities provide opportunities for interaction with content for active learning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Totals</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Assessment & Evaluation

Assessments measure mastery of competencies with specific evaluation criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IM = Improvement Needed</th>
<th>EF = Effective,</th>
<th>EX = Exemplary</th>
<th>IM</th>
<th>EF</th>
<th>EX</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Assessments are rigorous and valid measures of learners’ mastery of competencies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Requirements are clearly stated for achieving mastery-level on competencies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Assessment rubrics provide detailed and specific guidelines and criteria for evaluation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Learners have opportunities for ongoing assessment and practice with mentor feedback</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Expectations for evaluator’s response time and feedback on assessments are clearly stated</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Totals</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Learning Resources

Learning resources support achievement of competencies and learning activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IM = Improvement Needed</th>
<th>EF = Effective,</th>
<th>EX = Exemplary</th>
<th>IM</th>
<th>EF</th>
<th>EX</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. Learning resources support achievement of competencies and learning objectives</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Use of learning resources (required and optional) for learning activities is clearly explained</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Learning resources are current, flexibly available, and appropriately cited</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Totals</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Technology & Navigation

Course technology and navigation support personalized learning pathways.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IM = Improvement Needed</th>
<th>EF = Effective,</th>
<th>EX = Exemplary</th>
<th>IM</th>
<th>EF</th>
<th>EX</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. Tools and media support personalized learning pathways to attain required knowledge, skills, and abilities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Navigational structure of course is explained, logical, consistent, and efficient</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Students can readily access technologies required in the course with instructions provided</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Minimum technology requirements and technical skills are clearly stated</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Totals</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Learner Support

Course facilitates access to support services essential to student success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IM = Improvement Needed</th>
<th>EF = Effective,</th>
<th>EX = Exemplary</th>
<th>IM</th>
<th>EF</th>
<th>EX</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17. Instructions are provided on how to access technical support services</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Instructions are provided on how to obtain accessibility support services</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Instructions are provided on how to access academic support services (e.g., Library, Writing Center, Tutoring)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Instructions are provided on how and when to contact mentor for instructional support</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Totals</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Accessibility

Course demonstrates a commitment to accessibility and usability for all students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IM</th>
<th>EF</th>
<th>EX</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21. The course provides learning resources in alternative formats for diverse learners</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. The course follows universal design principles for usability</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. The course design accommodates the use of assistive technologies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Category Totals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IM</th>
<th>EF</th>
<th>EX</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Policy Compliance

Course complies with institutional policies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IM</th>
<th>EF</th>
<th>EX</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24. The course materials comply with Copyright Policy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. The course complies with Intellectual Property Policy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. The course complies with FERPA Policy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Category Totals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IM</th>
<th>EF</th>
<th>EX</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To examine the overall effectiveness of the rubric to evaluate quality competency-based course design, researchers examined the final assessment scores of students who have completed courses in the program. Due to the fact that it is a new program, the sample size is small but will provide a preliminary basis to support or reject components of the rubric created for competency-based programs. For the purposes of this study, scores for the final assessments were only recorded if there was more than one student who had completed the course. A total of twenty-two courses have been completed in the program, nine of which have had more than one student complete the course. Table 3 shows these courses, the number of students to successfully complete the final assessment, the number of students who attempted the final assessment more than one time, and the average score for all final assessment attempts. In five of the nine courses, students submitted more than one attempt. Table 4 examines individual student performance and includes the number of courses completed, the number of courses that required multiple attempts, and the maximum number of attempts for the nine students in the program. Of these nine students, four required multiple attempts and no student required more than two attempts to complete the final assessment.
Table 3. Course Completions and Average Assessment Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Number of students completed</th>
<th>Number of students with more than one attempt</th>
<th>Average assessment score for all attempts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADMG201</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>89.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADMG271</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>90.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADMG302</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>92.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADMG371</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>96.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADMG372</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>97.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADMG385</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>91.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT101</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>97.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT260</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMT330</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>96.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Individual Student Course Completions and Attempts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Total Number of Courses Complete</th>
<th>Courses completed with more than one attempt</th>
<th>Maximum Number of attempts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students are required to score at least 80% on their final assessment for the course to achieve competency mastery. Students may take the assessment two additional times to improve their final score. Should a student fail to achieve mastery after 3 attempts, the student is then requested to withdraw from the program and attend a more traditional program. It should be noted that such a withdrawal has not yet occurred in the program.

**Discussion and Recommendations**

Based on the course evaluation rubrics, the individual measure that received the highest rating was 10) Learning resources support achievement of competencies and learning objectives at 2.67. This correlates with the average grade received in all courses, at an average of 94.6% after all attempts had been taken. This is consistent with the fact that learning resources supporting achievement of competencies and learning objectives is clearly correlated between the course reviews by Multimodal Learning and the student achievement (competency mastery).

The lowest ratings on the course evaluations by Multimodal Learning were measured for 8) Learners have opportunities for ongoing assessment and practice with mentor feedback, and four students out of nine resubmitted assessments more than once (44% of students). This supports the course reviewers’ evaluation that ongoing assessment and practice with mentor feedback would improve some of these courses so that students do not require multiple attempts on their final assessment.

The other measures with low ratings on the course reviews, 9) Expectations for evaluator’s response time and feedback on assessments are clearly stated, and 20) Instructions are provided on how and when to contact mentor for instructional support, had scores of 1.00. These lower ratings can be resolved by simple operational changes and
Overall recommendations for improving the quality of competency-based courses include:

- Opportunities should be provided for students to practice what they have learned
- Practice opportunities should include feedback by the mentor
- Expected response time of evaluators and information on how to contact mentors should be included in an introductory module
- Resources should be included from a variety of sources (textbook, videos, articles) to support active learning
- Additional training for faculty course developers and faculty mentors should be provided to address areas of opportunity for improving CBE course design and student success
- Distance learning administrators should implement an evaluation rubric specifically designed for competency-based course design; however, the true measure of quality competency-based courses must be verified through a correlation between course design and competency mastery by students

Conclusion

Based on the data analyzed, it appears that the proposed rubric as outlined in this paper is appropriate for evaluating competency-based course design and includes measures that correlate with student success. Because competency-based courses are different than traditional online courses, use of such a specific evaluation rubric is beneficial when measuring the quality of competency-based courses.

References


research. Educational Technology Research and Development, Volume 59, Issue 5, pp 593-618


Jackie Krause is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Information Technology and Administrative Management at Central Washington University, Ellensburg, Washington. krausej@cwu.edu.

Laura Portolese Dias is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Information Technology and Administrative Management at Central Washington University, Ellensburg, Washington. diasl@cwu.edu.

Chris Schedler is an Associate Professor of English at Central Washington University, Ellensburg, Washington. schedlerc@cwu.edu.
Using a Cohort Forum Structure to Promote Interaction

Felicia L. Tucker-Lively
Academy for Academic Leadership

Abstract

To manage the enrollment growth, enhance the online learning experience, and foster interactions amongst participants, the Institute for Allied Health Educators (IAHE) program made improvements in 2015. A cohort forum structure was instituted for discussions on the weekly synchronous sessions and online submissions. The purpose of this paper is to provide information on the cohort forum structure, implementation process, and course evaluations.

Introduction

Faculty development initiatives combine a variety of approaches to assist institutions maintain and prepare their faculty members. In recent years, online faculty development serves as an additional approach to the traditional workshops, seminars, and courses (McLean, Cilliers, and Van Wyk, 2008). Although institutions recognize the critical need to equip educators with contemporary educational methodologies and techniques for a new generation of learners, many institutions do not have the resources to provide ongoing comprehensive faculty development programming (Gadbury-Amyot et al., 2015). Faculty members search for online opportunities to assist them in enhancing their classroom and clinic teaching, while providing them with the skills, knowledge, and academic credentials (Trotman, Haden, and Hendricson, 2007). Research has found some perceived advantages of online faculty development are flexibility, convenience and the opportunity for multidisciplinary and geographical collaborative learning (Cook and Steinert, 2013).

Background

In 2007, the American Dental Education Association (ADEA) and the Academy for Academic Leadership (AAL) established the Institute for Allied Health Educators (IAHE) as an onsite development program for health educators. In keeping with changes to the scope and delivery of oral health care services (Taichman et al., 2012) and the reframing of accreditation standards to ensure the integration of these ever-evolving needs in educational programs, the IAHE converted to an online delivery method in 2009 to provide health educators with topics on classroom and clinical teaching effectiveness. In 2012, Colgate-Palmolive Company provided exclusive sponsorship to the IAHE.

The IAHE program featured two web-based interfaces to enable participants to download class materials, upload completed assignments, comment on peers’ completed work, receive feedback from instructors and teaching assistants, and access an online classroom at scheduled intervals for synchronous education. The web-based interfaces were Adobe Connect, a commercial software product for the live, online classroom, and a Learning Management System (LMS) created for AAL by DID Media. The LMS served as a repository for program content and host for the discussion forums.

Active Learners and Contributors

The structure for the IAHE courses incorporated interactive online teaching practices (Sher 2009) and the expertise of distance and online education faculty. The course syllabus and orientation provided expectations, content, assignments and deadlines. The four courses in the 2015 IAHE online series were Teaching Foundations in Allied Health Education (January-February), Clinical Teaching Best Practices (March-April), Advances in Educational Methods for Allied Health Educators (June-July), and Revitalizing Curriculum and Calibrating Faculty (October-November). The courses were independent of the others and participants enrolled in any order that suited their schedule. For instructors to reinforce the content and establish an online community, each course consisted of five weekly synchronous learning modules for the duration of 1.5 hours each session. Applying a flipped classroom philosophy, the deadlines for the module assignments were prior to each live session.
The design of the LMS forum structure modeled the five modules in each IAHE course. Upon enrollment in the course, participants were grouped into cohorts to facilitate learning, establish a feeling of connectedness, and further the exchange of information (Beachboard, 2011). The cohorts consisted of a maximum of 15 participants with each instructor assigned to a maximum of two cohort groups within each forum. In the cohort forums, participants and instructors interacted asynchronously by posting messages for one another. The assigned instructor was the one to provide feedback to the participants regarding the completed assignments posted for continuing education credit. One or two teaching assistants for each course tracked and commented on the completion of the course modules.

Participants completed an end-of-course evaluation to assess their perceptions of specific aspects of the program curriculum and their experiences with the online program activities. The majority of the evaluation respondents (92%) agreed or strongly agreed the syllabus - knowing what assignments to do and the order in which to do them - was clear and easy to understand. Another question asked whether the small group (cohort) structure was a helpful way to learn from each other in the forums, 81% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed. For a related question about whether the small group (cohort) structure was a helpful way to learn from the instructors in the forums, 75% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed. For each course, respondents were also asked whether they were able to participate in all five online sessions and access the related course materials, with 64% of the survey respondents answering affirmatively.

**Participants Quotes**

For the purpose of incorporating the perspectives of the program participants, a representative sample of quotes from course evaluations are provided to convey their experiences when asked to *Please describe which parts of the program were most effective.*

- I thought the interactive format was excellent, and I appreciated the forum and commenting on each other's work.
- This course was well structured and easy to follow. I plan to adjust the courses I teach to make them more student friendly because of having taken this course.
- I enjoyed the small group forum postings, responses from the instructors, and collaborative discussions.
- I truly appreciate this resource. Despite being an educator and program director for over 15 years, I learned excellent methodologies and techniques to improve my ability to provide the best education possible to my students. Interaction with other educators in a discussion forum setting and receiving feedback from those peers was invaluable!

**Conclusion**

The transition from an onsite program to an online delivery format provided solutions for managing the enrollment growth and fostering the interactions of participants. To enhance the online learning experience, the program moved to a cohort course delivery. The overall responses about the cohort forum structure were positive. Participants also reported incorporating the competencies and knowledge gained through their online interactions back at their home institutions. The IAHE will remain committed to enhancing online faculty development via interactive collaborative course delivery. Efforts for continued improvements will remain a goal of the program.

**References**


*Felicia L. Tucker-Lively* is Director of Professional Development at the Academy for Academic Leadership, Atlanta, Georgia. f.tucker-lively@aalgroup.org.
Status Tracking and Reporting the Quality Matters Process at UNG

Nina Lamson
University of North Georgia

David Babb
University of North Georgia

Robert Schmidt
University of North Georgia

Abstract

The University of North Georgia utilizes the internal Quality Matters (QM) process to review all their online courses. As our online course offerings have increased, the need to devise a system to track the QM process, ensure timely reviews, and begin recertification of previously reviewed courses was necessary. As a result, several reports have been devised to capture this process: 1) a master list of all online course offerings, 2) bi-weekly status reports, and 3) QM reviewer status reports. The process that is used and the resulting reports will be shared in this report.

Introduction

Gainesville State College and North Georgia College and State University were consolidated January, 2013, and became the University of North Georgia (UNG). Each institution offered online courses before the consolidation, but only NGCSU was using Quality Matters (QM) as a means to review online courses. After consolidation this became the method for review of all online courses at UNG. The management of the quality assurance program is overseen by the Distance Education & Technology Integration (DETI) Division and, in particular, the presenters of this paper.

Online course offerings at UNG have increased considerably since consolidation with a 19% increase from 2013 to 2014, and a 12% increase from 2014 to 2015. As of spring 2016 there are 577 online course offerings with a status record in the Master List (ML) that is maintained. This report identifies the status of the course as 1) the QM course review process is completed, 2) it is currently in the QM process, or 3) for various reasons the course did not require a review. What follows is an outline of the QM process at UNG and descriptions of the main reports that are produced.

The Internal QM Online Course Review Process at UNG

Initial Stage (the Master List and Status Reports)

1. Each semester when UNG’s course schedule becomes available, the ML is updated with the Course Reference Number (CRN) for the current semester.
   a. If the course already exists with the same instructor, only the CRN is added to the semester column. If there are additional sections of the same course/instructor, those CRNs are added as well.
   b. If the course already exists, but with a new instructor a new row of course information is created.
   c. If the course does not already exists, a new row of course information is created.

2. The ML is continuously updated with course schedule changes (with new faculty and new sections being added) prior to the start of the semester until the conclusion of add/drop (approx. 2 weeks into the semester.)

3. Status reports are produced. (Descriptions provided below)
   a. Bi-weekly report: open QM courses, courses with no review status, and courses needing recertification.
   b. Additional reports: (e.g., reviewer, contract, chair) as needed

4. QM Coordinator (QMC) team meets to discuss the status and develops status plan of action

Initiate QM Process
1. If it is a new course (never offered online), it is eligible for the Incentive Program
   a. QMC contacts the course representative (CR) with relevant information
      ▪ Sends contract, QM rubric to assist in development, helpful links, and sets up time to discuss needs.
      ▪ QMC stays in contact with CR to aid in course development and when complete assists the CR in a QM self-review.
      ▪ QMC creates a folder for filing with notes on course development and QM review
   b. Course added to QM for review
      ▪ QM sends initial email to CR
   c. QMC contacts CR
      ▪ Emphasize worksheet completion within 14 days
      ▪ Contract denoted in ML
      ▪ Worksheet start date denoted in ML
   d. QMC receives completed contract
      ▪ DETI Director signs (QMC adds date to contract information)
      ▪ Confirms if new or redesign amount to be paid (different amounts)
      ▪ QMC emails CR, contract has been received
   e. If course has been certified: no incentive is offered. (QMC confirms if course has been previously certified)
      ▪ CR can use existing certified course
      ▪ CR can design a new course and QM process initiated

2. If the course has been significantly redesigned since completing a QM review (same steps as above)
   a. A redesigned course is a course that underwent significant change. Textbook changes and the use of the DETI Online Course Template (OCT) does not fulfill the requirements of a redesign.
   b. Denotes as redesign contract in ML

3. If the course is ready for a QM recertification (3 years from last certification)
   a. Recertification may also include textbook changes and use of the OCT where applicable.
   b. Listed on separate tab in ML
   c. Follows same process as above without contract

QM Peer Reviewer Process

1. QMC reviews and accepts CR’s QM worksheet (dates/duration noted in ML)
   a. assigns reviewers in QM (names and start dates noted in ML)
   b. assigns chair in QM (name noted in ML)
   c. adds reviewers to D2L (learning management system) section being reviewed
2. QMC emails reviewers info on section to be reviewed
   a. Includes links and instructions
   b. Emphasize review completion within 30 days
3. QMC gets an automatic email, from QM, when review is completed
   a. QM Reviewer #1 (dates/duration noted in ML)
   b. QM Reviewer #2 (dates/duration noted in ML)
   c. Chair reviews: breaks ties, adds comments and resources (start, completion dates/duration noted in ML)
      ▪ Communicates with reviewers when necessary

Concluding the QM process

1. If meets standards
   a. QM sends automated email to CR
      ▪ Review is complete and met standards
      ▪ QMC sends a simultaneous email.
         ▪ Outcome response form to be completed.
         ▪ Emphasize completion within 14 days
         ▪ (dates/duration noted in ML)

2. If does not meet standards
a. QM sends automated email to CR
   - Review is complete, but did not meet standards.
   - QMC sends a simultaneous email.
     - Outcome response form to be completed
     - Amendment form to be completed.
     - Emphasize completion within 14 days
     - (dates/duration noted in ML)

b. Once amendment form completed (dates/duration noted in ML)
   - Chair of 3 person review team reviews updated section
     - Chair Confirms
       1. Review complete (dates/duration noted in ML)
       2. Chair Denies
          1. QMC emails CR to make updates
          2. Emphasize completion within 14 days

3. Upon QM course review completion
   a. QMC adds certified course to DETI internal website (date noted in ML)
   b. QMC removes reviewers from D2L section being reviewed
   c. QMC sends thank you emails to reviewers
   d. DETI initiates payment process.
     - When contract is paid, the date is noted in the “contract” column of the ML

The Master List

The master list is an excel file, which tracks the status of all the online course reviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRN</th>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Instructor Name</th>
<th>CRN</th>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Instructor Name</th>
<th>CRN</th>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Instructor Name</th>
<th>CRN</th>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Instructor Name</th>
<th>CRN</th>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Instructor Name</th>
<th>CRN</th>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Instructor Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1001</td>
<td>Mathematics for the Gifted</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>1002</td>
<td>Mathematics for the Gifted</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>1003</td>
<td>Mathematics for the Gifted</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>1004</td>
<td>Mathematics for the Gifted</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>1005</td>
<td>Mathematics for the Gifted</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>1006</td>
<td>Mathematics for the Gifted</td>
<td>XXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1007</td>
<td>Methods of Teaching Gifted</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>1008</td>
<td>Methods of Teaching Gifted</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>1009</td>
<td>Methods of Teaching Gifted</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>1010</td>
<td>Methods of Teaching Gifted</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>1011</td>
<td>Methods of Teaching Gifted</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>1012</td>
<td>Methods of Teaching Gifted</td>
<td>XXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1013</td>
<td>Methods of Teaching Gifted</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>1014</td>
<td>Methods of Teaching Gifted</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>1015</td>
<td>Methods of Teaching Gifted</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>1016</td>
<td>Methods of Teaching Gifted</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>1017</td>
<td>Methods of Teaching Gifted</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>1018</td>
<td>Methods of Teaching Gifted</td>
<td>XXX</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continuation . . .

The information contained in the ML columns have this information (duration is measured in workdays):

- Semester CRN
- Course Abbreviation, Number, Name, Instructor
- QM Instructor Name (often same as instructor)
- QM Certification Date, Contract Date, Status Comments
- Worksheet Start, Completed, Time to Complete (duration)
- Reviewer’s Name, Review Start, Completed, Time to Complete (duration)
- Chair’s Name, Review Start, Completed, Time to Complete (duration) [not visible in illustration]
- CR’s Amendment Start, Completed, Time to Complete (duration) [not visible in illustration]
- Course Review Completed, Time to Complete (duration) [not visible in illustration]

The Bi-Weekly Report

The ML is condensed into a bi-weekly Excel report that the QMC’s use to determine the follow-up actions that need to be implemented to identify courses needing to be put into QM, following up with CR’s, Reviewer’s, Chairs, as needed depending on the current course status (see the “comments” column). The report consists of these tabs:

1. **Overview:** Summary of the information contained in the report
2. **Open**: Listing of all courses currently in QM in chronological order of oldest to newest
3. **No Reviews**: Courses for which their status classification is yet to be determined. Most are the new online courses currently being taught for the first time. Reviews are initiated once a course has been taught for a semester.
4. **Recertification**: This lists the courses that are up for recertification, 3 years after haven been certified

**The Reviewer’s Report**

Also condensed from the ML, this report identifies the active, QM certified, internal peer-reviewers, the number of reviews they have conducted in a fiscal year (FY) and their average time to complete a review. At UNG we have a memo of understanding with our reviewers for which a stipend is earned for completing a minimum of six reviews in the FY. The reviews are evenly assigned to meet this objective.

**Conclusion**

It is stated in the UNG faculty handbook that “all courses offered fully online will be Quality Matters (QM) certified.” In support of this policy the above mentioned process and reporting system have been developed so that this goal is met. But, it goes beyond this, as we know designing (and, delivering) quality online courses is paramount in providing a quality education to our student body.

*Nina Lamson* is an Assistant Director of Distance Education & Technology Integration and QM Coordinator at the University of North Georgia, Oconee Campus, Watkinsville, Georgia. nina.lamson@ung.edu.

*David Babb* is an Assistant Director of Distance Education & Technology Integration as well as QM Coordinator and Master Reviewer at the University of North Georgia, Dahlonega Campus, Dahlonega, Georgia. david.babb@ung.edu.

*Robert Schmidt* is an Instructional Designer and QM Coordinator at the University of North Georgia, Gainesville Campus, Gainesville, Georgia. robert.schmidt@ung.edu.
Web Solution for Communicating with, Supporting, and Training Distance-Learning Faculty

Georgianna Laws
Augusta University

Abstract

Distance-learning support professionals (such as instructional designers, instructional technologists, and librarians) serve many instructors and face the dilemma of how to best reach all these faculty clients in a timely manner. The solution discussed here is a website used to distribute information and resources, facilitate reserving appointments, and much more.

Problem

Rather than having one main instructional-support services office, many public higher-education institutions with wide ranges of educational options prefer to offer embedded instructional designers, instructional technologists, and/or librarians to their various colleges. In this way, each such support specialist can really immerse him/herself in the context of his/her college's clients, offering more personalized services.

However, with campuses spanning vast urban areas, the high employment costs of "at the client's elbow" services, all balanced on a public-university budget, higher-education institutions need to assign one instructional-support service provider to multiple college clients.

Furthermore, the typical university website is centralized and few people are in charge of making updates for each college's webpages. With instructional support services being decentralized and web services being centralized, these support services staff members face a dilemma. How can they best communicate with their faculty clients? How can they efficiently support and/or train so many clients located in several parts of town without having a web presence allowing for just-in-time updates? This paper outlines how a web solution could address this dilemma and empower instructional-support specialists to more easily reach their clients.

Solution

The author of this paper is an instructional designer at a comprehensive institution with two main campuses in town (and multiple satellite campuses elsewhere). The author offers instructional-design services to three clients at this institution: one specializing in allied health sciences, another specializing in dental medicine, and yet another specializing in Traditional Chinese Medicine as well as Chinese language and culture. These clients are spread across the Summerville and Health Sciences campuses and teach a combination of web-enhanced and web-only courses. Classes take place in about half a dozen buildings in Augusta, and faculty conduct research and/or hold office in these and other buildings, thus creating a vast physical footprint for one designer to cover.

In aiming to offer meaningful just-in-time training, support, and communication to all these clients, the author chose to invest in a website. The first logical method of implementing this solution was to look for a university-provided web page. But where to create the page? Within the first, second, or third client's web presence? Choosing one means leaving the others out. Choosing all means duplicating information. Another consideration has to do with the availability of a college-based webmaster to make changes, often multiple changes a day, to this web presence. The webmaster is already working hard to accommodate the needs of the entire college and cannot allocate the manpower needed to make such frequent modifications to just one of the many clients s/he serves.

Not having a web presence leads back to square one: how to best communicate, support, and train faculty? Email could be a solution but frequent emails would turn faculty off (they are already very busy with their classes, clinical practice, and research/grants).
Therefore, the author chose to invest in an independent website. After leadership sanctioned this decision, on condition that anything put out to faculty be of high quality, the author started with a free wordpress.com blog.

**The Evolution of the Web Site**

**Wordpress.com**

The early wordpress.com site helped the author distribute blog posts about timely information that faculty needed to know. For example, some of the earlier posts dealt with how to get your course ready for an upcoming semester (syllabus, content, resources, and LMS post-production).

When working with faculty on getting courses ready for the semester, the author would refer to the website (often emailing out a link to a specific blog post). The site then offered a master syllabus template, which increased site utilization, along with a search feature and a contact page. Traffic to this site was further increased by having a web presence in each client college's website (which linked to the author's geolawsdesign.com site).

The site needed an identity and it also had to look professional. The author chose a very simple and clean Wordpress template (dark gray text on white background) and branded it with custom-made graphics, including a logo. The logo states the service offered (i.e., instructional design) and includes the author's name and photo (so faculty would know who they were about to meet). Figure 1 provides an at-a-glance view of the site in the context of the contact page.

![Figure 1: Site At A Glance (Contact Page)](image)

As the blog scaled up in scope over the years, the same graphics were used consistently on each page, giving the site an overall unified look. Whenever a blog post surpassed the designer's subject matter expertise (say a post on how a particular instructional technology works), the designer partnered with SMEs to produce that article. Appropriate leadership approval was sought when communicating enterprise-wide information.
Wordpress.org

The site's domain name was free and thus very long and hard to remember. Also, the site itself was free and thus limited in capability. To address these concerns, the author found that the site would provide more value and be more likely to be accessed by the faculty for which it is intended if it were paid. Thus, in April 2015, came the move to wordpress.org and the shorter, more meaningful domain name the .com site has today.

As the site migrated from wordpress.com to wordpress.org, suddenly a whole array of new capabilities became possible (including more hand coding), as shown in the following alphabetized list of pages:

1. About
   The about page was added to provide a variety of topics on the designer, to help faculty members learn who she is and how she can help. This page includes her mission and goals, her client groups, the scope of her design services, and the instructional-design method she uses. This page also hosts her traditional CV and her visual resume, a brief video introduction through which faculty can meet the designer, a selection of eLearning instructional-design articles that the designer curates on Scoop.it, information on the designer's conference presentations and publications, and more.

2. Blog
   The blog page is the original page with which the site started in late 2014. It continues to offer articles useful to faculty members. One of the latest posts at the time of this article's publication had to do with a breakthrough in technology that allowed for the creation of a digital textbook that can think for itself as it provides each learner an individualized learning path, optimized for his/her unique way of learning.

   Some posts include video tutorials, such as how to submit final grades in the learning management system (LMS) and in the academic record repository (Pounce) or how to make the best of the syllabus template. In general, videos that are devoid of HIPAA and FERPA protected information can go on the website and are closed captioned. All other videos (such as a tutorial on how to grade with the LMS, looking at an actual live gradebook, populated with student information) are private, can only be accessed by the designer and the client, and are not closed captioned due to the designer's limited time and the video's single use by a single client.

3. Book Now
   The biggest improvement to the site was the addition of the book now page. Inspired by the type of site that service providers such as beauty salons and massage therapists use, this tool allows the end user (the faculty member) to generate appointments with the service provider at their convenience, out of times the provider has available. This not only saves time (otherwise spent in back-and-forth email negotiations about the day, time, place, and nature of the meeting), but it also proves to be an equitable way to offer first-come, first-served appointments to the hundreds of faculty members served by this one provider.

   The author examined many free scheduling tools but in the end opted for a paid tool offered by Acuity Scheduling, which:
   • looks professional
   • allows for each service to be spelled out
   • can insert custom time buffers in between meetings (so the designer can wrap up the paperwork for one meeting before starting another one)
   • enables the use of an intake form (described in more detail in the next paragraph)
   • allows for custom, automatic pre- and post-service emails to go out to the faculty clients
   • allows the client to modify (or even cancel) the appointment at any time
   • allows the clients to send the appointment to their university calendar and/or mobile phone calendar, to avoid a double booking through their other systems
   • offers great analytics about how the designer's time is spent and how her services are utilized.
The scheduling page is shown in Figure 2, below.

The intake form allows the designer to ask the faculty member questions ahead of the meeting, such as:

- what a specific course, certificate, or program the meeting will be about (with that information, the designer can have a look at the respective academic produce before the meeting)
- what need the faculty has regarding that academic product
- what timeline is involved
- what the faculty member wishes to achieve by the end of the meeting (the clearer this part, the more likely the faculty and designer can meet that goal)
- where/how to meet (in a specific office or via video or phone conferencing)
- what document, if any, the designer needs to study ahead of the meeting, etc.
The post-service, custom thank-you email that this system automatically generates thanks the faculty member for his/her time and invites him/her to complete an anonymous 2-question survey describing what went well and what the designer can do better. Many faculty have chosen to fill out this anonymous survey and provided the author and her leadership with valuable, rich feedback.

In the future, as the author's online continuing education, faculty-development courses open up to the faculty clients (to be delivered via the university's learning management system), registration for those courses will be handled via this scheduling system, using a personalized intake form.

4. Calendar
A plugin for a calendar allowed for events with design implications (an overlay of academic calendar, scheduled maintenance, training opportunities, webinars, etc.) to be made available in one consolidated place, thus saving faculty time otherwise spent going to various sources to get event dates relevant to their work. One of the main uses of the calendar page is to offer the latest details about the designer's office hours (which flex based on tasks that need to be completed against hard deadlines).

5. Contact
The contact page was expanded to include not only the designer's contact information, but also a map to her two offices, tips about parking, and tips on avoiding construction areas. This page also illustrates in which office the designer is located based on the day of the week.

6. Glossary
The glossary plugin brings the ability to list, explain, and exemplify terminology commonly used in instructional-design contexts. For instance, when the concept of a flipped classroom comes up in a conversation with a faculty member, the designer can point that faculty to the glossary entry on this topic. That glossary entry offers an overview and then further points out a web resource that offers detailed multimedia explanations of the concept.

7. Lending Library
The lending library lists titles faculty can borrow from the instructional designer's private library. The collection will evolve but, at the time this paper was written, 13 titles were available on topics related to eLearning, learner engagement, online course evaluation, instructional design, teaching, and technology.

8. News
The news plugin allows the author to announce news that interest faculty. Items listed on the news page may also appear on the calendar page, if day/time bound. For example, an announcement about Fair Use Week belongs on the news page, and specific events around Fair Use Week (e.g., a copyright workshop on Friday at 1 pm) belong on the calendar.

9. Portfolio
The portfolio tool shows finished products that may inspire faculty. The author could not find a plugin that allowed for a variety of media to be displayed in a carousel and opted for a temporary solution with limited capability. Eventually, the author replaced that tool with a portfolio powered by wix.com, which does not fit within the author's site frame, so it needs to be an external link (small price to pay considering the much more powerful capability of this tool).

10. Templates
The templates page offers faculty examples to follow, if desired. All these templates are free, of course, and fall under a 4.0 creative commons international license (i.e., attribution, non-commercial, share alike). This page also offers forms that faculty can use when requesting sandbox courses, manipulations of courses (such as linking two sections into one shared course shell), and copying of content from previous semesters to upcoming semester shells.

11. Testimonials
A testimonials page allows faculty to share what they find most useful about their interaction with the instructional designer, in hopes to inspire their fellow colleagues to consider similar solutions for their courses, certificates, and programs.
Site Statistics

At the time of this publication, the following statistics characterized the site:

- 698 people had used the site and visited a total of 3416 pages.
- Traffic to the site is 100% through links (rather than search engine or direct URL input).
- 90% of the site's viewers were on a desktop and 10% on mobile devices.
- 40% of the site's viewers used Chrome, 38% used Firefox, and 11% used Safari.
- 48% of the users were accessing the site on devices running Windows, 42% on Mac, and 9% on Linux.
- The top three most visited areas are the Book Now page, the About page, and the News page.
- The top three most searches run on the site were for "student-student interaction" and "getting ready for an upcoming semester" and "course development plans".

Considerations

The solution presented in this paper raises several considerations:

1. Financial
The author started with the free wordpress.com tool but soon had to move to the paid wordpress.com for the ability to hand code and install plugins.

The author pays for her scheduling system and she will soon upgrade to the next price tier, allowing for the use of two calendars, one for each office the designer uses. This solves the issue of faculty from one geographical area of the campus booking appointments in the designer's office for the other geographical area of the campus. The use of two calendars (that Acuity Scheduling overlays as one) will make the designer's time more efficient, as she will be able to spend more time on task and less time commuting from one office to the other.

2. Access
Many university services are offered behind a password wall; the author wanted to address her faculty clients without barriers. Many distance-learning offices, instructional-design consulting firms, and centers for teaching and learning offer similar content freely to the general public. Although the content this author offers on her website is specific to her clients at Augusta University, it can also be accessed by the general public, in spirit of knowledge being a right, not a privilege.

3. Technical
The author had designed several websites from scratch in the past. However, this web design project pushed the limits of her technical knowledge, as she looked to use technology tools to meet specific communication, service, and training needs. Luckily, Wordpress has a robust community and there are many tutorials and FAQs available online.

The site is mobile friendly to begin with, and the simple addition of a menu repeated at the top of each page ensures that mobile-device viewers have the menu at their fingertips (the system collapses it and places it at the very end of the page).

Designing a website that grows as the service provider putting it together finds additional ways to serve her faculty clients is a little bit like playing chess; you have to think a couple of moves in advance and make sure you do not back yourself into a corner. The technology tools you choose to use today have to be flexible enough to grow and evolve tomorrow. In some cases that works, while in other cases that involves purchasing additional features for the existing tools (as is the case with the author's online scheduling system) or starting over with a new tool (as was the case with the author's portfolio).

4. Marketing
Taking on your own site means that you have to be in charge of your own image and marketing. At a minimum, you'll have to come up with my own custom graphics, logo, an overall site layout, look, and feel, etc.
5. Time
Being in charge of your own website also means that you are at once the employer and the employee, so to speak. It is essential to not stop at being the "employer" and to allocate appropriate time to be the "employee". You'll need to take time for the upkeep and expansion of your site as you constantly strive to provide better service to your clients through the site.

6. Ethical/Legal
It goes without saying that anyone undertaking the task of putting together such as website moral and legal obligation to not to share private information under FERPA and HIPAA guidelines and to comply with ADA and copyright law.

Recommendations
For this solution to work for others, the following prerequisites need to be met:

- You have to have a need for creating such as site that cannot be met through other means.
- You need to obtain the necessary internal approvals from your leadership.
- You need to be willing to put the time and effort into this endeavor. You can start small and see if you can sustain the site; if you can, move forward with gradual expansion of the site.
- You need to have basic skills in:
  - technology
  - web design and HTML (there are many free online HTML tutorials)
  - graphic design (or use Canva, which requires no previous knowledge of graphic design)
  - writing
  - copyediting
  - closed captioning
  - working within the confines of ADA, copyright, FERPA, and HIPAA legislation.
- You will also need to have some basic tools:
  - free website authoring tool (Google Sites, WordPress, Wix, etc.)
  - free or paid domain name (Go Daddy is a cost-effective source for paid domain names)
  - server space (Blue Host works really well for Wordpress)
  - any desired paid or free add-ons (such as Wordpress plugins for a calendar, glossary, etc.)
  - graphic design software (the Adobe suite or alternatives such as the above-mentioned Canva)
  - media sources (start with Wikimedia, Google Images labeled for reuse, Pixabay, etc.)
- In some instances, a little bit of money from your own pocket is well spent. Decide where your limits are on using personal funds to improve the functionality of your website.

Conclusion
While a web solution is not for everyone (based on your specific needs, skills, time, and funds), it can be an effective way in communication with, supporting, and training your faculty clients. And what better way to assist distance-learning faculty than with a distance-learning solution.

Disclaimer
This paper offers the author's views based on personal experience. Any providers mentioned in this paper are simply the author's recommendation based on trial and error. The author is not paid for by these providers and is only affiliated with them as an end user.

Georgianna Laws is an Instructional Designer at Augusta University, Augusta, Georgia. glaws@augusta.edu.
Advantages and Barriers to Using Social Media in Online Education

Laura McNeill
The University of Alabama

Margaret L. Rice
The University of Alabama

Vivian H. Wright
The University of Alabama

Abstract

In recent years, social media has allowed people to connect and collaborate despite being separated by time and space. As today’s college students use social media tools for communication, entertainment, and recreation, many educators believe incorporating social media into online instruction is a viable way to enhance learner engagement. Particularly in light of the significant dropout rate in online courses, social media tools are being considered as methods to boost online interaction and participation. Barriers to using social media tools in distance learning include distractions, equal student access, and ethical considerations.

Integrating Social Media in Higher Education

Over the past several years, as researchers have identified the significant amount of time college students spend on social media, educators have taken notice, predicting that social media and Web 2.0 tools may hold exciting promise for pioneering new pathways to engage and enlighten learners, using a constructivist approach (Lenoue, Hall & Eighmy, 2011). Some instructors have taken the opportunity to integrate such tools into the learning process with the hope of creating increased engagement and participation (Abe & Nickolas, 2013). It is hoped that by blending pedagogy and technology, these new approaches to teaching and learning may also help bolster student motivation for learning (Ebner, Lienhardt, Rohs, & Meyer, 2010).

Stemming Attrition and Enhancing Learner Engagement and Interaction Online

Though the popularity of distance learning continues to grow, attrition continues to be a major issue facing colleges and universities that offer the programs. Reasons for attrition include, but are not limited to, possible confusion about course activities and deadlines, isolation from the instructor and classmates, low student motivation and poor study habits, and slow Internet connections and use of older devices (Reed, Wise, Tynan & Bossu, 2013).

Martin (2009) observes that the most well planned online and explicitly laid out instructional environment is not enough to sustain learner interest or support intrinsic motivation. He goes on to state that although student motivation can truly only happen intrinsically, creating an online environment where students want to learn and feel successful is the primary responsibility of the course designer and instructor. Martin (2009) also recommends increasing student collaboration through a variety of technology tools that simulate or are close to face to face interaction. This helps students feel less anxious, more connected, reassured and supported, and safe when contributing (Martin, 2009). Clark and Mayer (2011) observe that providing students the opportunity to collaborate, share, and create enhances the online experience, increases learners' use of various technologies, and supports self-directed and ongoing learning. Social media tools may offer one method of boosting the online experiences.

Use of Specific Social Media Tools

Examples abound of social media’s integration into higher education settings, but Twitter and YouTube, in particular, seem to have gained traction in many classrooms. Technologies most widely used by students include Twitter, Facebook, and Google, which all provide intuitive methods of communicating with classmates and instructors (Thoms, 2013). Research suggests that adult students using social media in online classes prefer social tools that require minimum participation, suggesting the simplest and most popular social media tools may be the
easiest to implement into a course (Poellhuber & Anderson, 2011). Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube are some of the more frequently used social media tools. With the surge in online learning, instructors have also utilized Skype, blogs, wikis, and podcasts as a means of creating positive and productive learning environments (Duncan et al., 2013).

**Twitter**

Twitter has been observed to promote engagement and translate into increased enjoyment of coursework, better retention of concepts, and improved student achievement (Junco, Heibergert, & Loken, 2011). A recent study found a strong relationship between Twitter usage and student engagement (Evans, 2014). This is consistent with an earlier study which concluded that Twitter usage increased overall student engagement, including extracurricular activities (Junco, 2011). Previous research integrating Twitter with blogs showed moderate levels of interaction, learning, and community (Thoms, 2013).

Forgie, Duff, and Ross (2013) found that the use of Twitter can enhance participation in lecture-based settings. Students may post questions via Twitter, which are posted, live, onscreen as the classroom discussion unfolds. If instructors are concerned about interrupting the flow of the lecture, teachers may wait until the end of the class to address questions students tweeted during the presentation.

Educators may also use Twitter polling applications as a different option for informal quizzing and polls (Forgie et al., 2013). During a synchronous presentation, questions can be projected on a screen, and students can tweet their answers, allowing for instant feedback about group understanding, as well as additional discussion and clarifications.

**Facebook**

A 2014 study by Churcher, Downs, and Tewksbury found evidence that utilizing Facebook created a more positive and less-threatening learning environment which enhanced students’ engagement and learning experiences while creating a stronger rapport between each other and with the lecturer. It was also discovered that Facebook provided a rich team-based learning environment that was used to channel the students’ creativity in a virtual medium (Churcher et al., 2014).

Manca and Ranierit (2013) identified five uses for Facebook in education, which were allowing students to learn from each other through discussion, mutual understanding and critical thinking; through developing multimedia content; sharing resources; exposing students to resources outside the course; and using Facebook to bolster self-managed learning.

Facebook was also found to be useful as a means for business computing students to get the extra support and instruction they needed outside the classroom (Nkhoma et al., 2015). Every week, instructors discussed review questions relating to the prior week’s lesson before moving on to new material. Those review questions were also posted on the class private Facebook page, allowing students to comment on and form discussions online as needed.

In two studies cited by Wang, Sheu and Masatake (2011), the researchers demonstrated that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students improved their English vocabulary knowledge through periodic entries in English on a private Facebook group. Facebook groups also promote motivation, socialization, discussion, and sharing resources for language learners (2011).

Additionally, Schwartz (2009) found that instructors can successfully mentor students on social networks like Facebook. Schwartz discovered that instructors’ exchanges with students on Facebook provided comparable benefits to holding after-class meetings and provided highly valid opportunities for communication and mentoring students.

**YouTube**

YouTube has also been shown as a tool that can help students participate in the educational process and learn effectively. By preparing and recording an individual report for submission to the class, or through collaboration with other students to complete a project, YouTube provides an opportunity for students to communicate, problem-solve, and demonstrate higher order reasoning skills (Duncan, Hart, & Younger, 2013). In 1990, Mayer and Gallini
discovered that memory process and visual cues are connected to recalling new information. Later research underscores this point, with Galbraith (2004) citing that video was found equally effective as an instructor’s demonstration when it came to mastery learning of complex or mechanical procedures.

YouTube has been frequently employed as an educational tool for undergraduate students. In England, college students studying polymer chemistry were given the choice between writing a magazine-style article and creating a YouTube video (Smith, 2014). The students who chose the video reported it a much more enjoyable project than those who wrote articles. The latter students also developed better public engagement and presentation skills, enhanced creativity, and honed beginning skills as “global educators.”

O’Connor (2011) cited that preservice teachers improved their performance and skills after enrolling in an online teacher education course utilizing YouTube. The preservice students developed self-videotaped microteaching lessons, which enabled the instructor to review and critique the pre-service teachers’ strengths and weaknesses. As a result the preservice students were provided further opportunities for practice with teaching.

Similarly, Albert (2015) reported the use of YouTube in assisting students to augment and enhance their music education experiences. YouTube can be used to host video and/or audio files for the purpose of soliciting supportive and constructive feedback. In turn, teachers then facilitate a discussion about constructive feedback, model it for students with a sample video, and then ask students to contribute comments. After outlining what constitutes “appropriate” comments, students can respond to each other in the hope of creating meaningful dialogue.

Other Tools

Other collaborative and communicative tools, such as blogs and wikis, have grown in popularity and usage in online courses. These tools allow for multiple users to contribute content and to communicate, therefore, promoting social interactions (Skiba, 2005).

Muncy (2014) conducted research which found that regular, reflective journaling in blogs helped marketing students to better retain course information on research, advertising, e-marketing, and sales. Students were also better able to connect the material to their life experiences and existing knowledge of the material.

Halic, Lee, Paulus, and Spence (2010) discovered that college nutrition science students who blogged about lessons also reflected on course-related concepts outside of the class. The same students shared that their blog experience was positive, enhanced their overall learning, and facilitated the sharing of knowledge among peers.

Finally, in an online women’s health course, Oomen-Early and Burke (2007) determined that blogging was a viable strategy to prepare health education students to better communicate health information, interact with their peers, and practice current technologies. The intent of the weekly blogs, according to instructors, were to allow students more self-expression, synthesis, and personalization of the course material.

Barriers: Distractions, Quality, and Access

While using social media can be an enjoyable and impactful educational experience, risks and liabilities can exist with these technology tools, ranging from a learning distraction, to simple miscommunication, and an imbalance in access to technology tools. For many teaching professionals, social media represents a classroom distraction for students that takes the focus off learning (Liu, 2010). In addition, by its very nature, communication through social media, like Twitter is more limited than speaking to another person face to face. Research shows that digital communication is more ambiguous, primarily because of the lack of non-verbal signs, such as gestures, body posture, and facial expressions, so the odds increase exponentially for another person, or hundreds of people, to misinterpret a message posted online (Epley & Kruger, 2005).

In addition, one of the most common criticisms of using social media for online learning is the possible divide between digital haves and have-nots. However, Ahn (2011) concluded that computers in schools and the proliferation of smartphones has allowed young adults to access social networks more than ever, thus bridging the divide better than expected.
Ethical Considerations

As young people turn to social media as a means to express themselves and meet other people with similar interests and beliefs, teens often share too much personal information on sites like Twitter and Facebook (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Cyberbullying

Sharing of personal information on social media makes it easy for predators to quickly propagate rumors and share content and photos. Done anonymously, often the person posting the offensive information suffers no consequences. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 32 percent of teenagers have experienced cyberbullying, which is defined as the publication of private content and/or pictures, rumor spreading, and online threats (Lenhart, 2007).

College Sports

Over concern that athletes might post negative or inflammatory comments on Twitter or Facebook, schools like Florida State, Boise State, and the University of Louisville are enforcing rules or outright bans on team members using social media (Lomonte, 2014). On other college campuses, athletes are expected to provide social media login and password information or pay penalties for inappropriate posts (Lomonte, 2014).

Career Cautions

A blog post on Mashable cautions students to use common sense when communicating online, and offers 12 rules for students to follow before posting on social media. As social media posts never disappear, the article’s author warns students to refrain from trashing teachers and posting illegal activities, reminding them that threatening violence and ignoring school-specific policies can have long and lasting consequences (Buck, 2012). As many companies research a job candidate’s social media profiles and postings, students who eventually hope to enter the job market should avoid an unprofessional profile (Buck, 2012). One employer stated that otherwise experienced and qualified candidates were rejected because their social media profiles featured firearms (Buck, 2012). A simple fix is to remove the photos or decide not to post them in the first place.

Conclusion

As colleges and universities continue to expand online learning opportunities, student engagement, interaction, and participation, as well as the prevention of attrition, will be crucial to the success and growth of such programs. As has been noted, current research indicates that the integration of social media tools in distance learning programs is a viable method of bolstering learner engagement, student interaction, and online participation.

Though preliminary research has examined the benefits of using tools such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, there is much left to discover. New social media tools and technology will continue to emerge, in turn, creating additional advantages and barriers in online learning. In order to succeed, colleges and university leaders must remain vigilant in their goal of creating an engaging and interactive online experience for students. Chen and Bryer (2012) recommend that institutions continue to focus on inclusive ways of harnessing the power of social media, using it in such a way that it adds to the quality and connected nature of collaborative learning.

References


Laura McNeill is a Graduate Student at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama. She is also an Instructional Design Manager at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Birmingham. lmcnell@uab.edu.

Margaret L. Rice is an Associate Professor of Educational and Instructional Technology studies at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama. mrice@ua.edu.

Vivian H. Wright is a Professor of Educational and Instructional Technology Studies at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama. vwright@ua.edu.
Away With Words: Considerations of Online University English Composition Courses

Gregory J. Orme
East Carolina University

Abstract

Online learning is indisputably a major component of higher education, with 33.5 percent of enrolled students taking at least one online course. Handled well, online education has the potential not only to increase student access but also to enrich learning. Despite initial resistance among humanities professors, a significant number of institutions are now offering online programs in English composition, although among members of the academy, attitudes persist that online instruction is inferior to corresponding classroom versions. In contrast to these widespread beliefs, an analysis of case studies from 1999 to 2012 reveals that, rather than online instruction being a weaker substitute, it boasts significant benefits for writing courses. Some of these advantages are applicable across the disciplines, but others are particularly germane to the instruction of composition. The studies revealed that criticism of online learning as failing to properly socialize students is unfounded and that, in meaningful ways, online students get more out of discussions, grow as peer resources, and gain a sense of belonging more than do their classroom-bound counterparts. As administrators increasingly look to cut costs, online and hybrid solutions are heavily promoted, but the unique strengths of online composition courses are downplayed or dismissed altogether, raising the question of whether there could be political motivations behind which disciplines are considered appropriate for the online environment.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, online learning has emerged as a major component of higher education. Learning at a distance is nothing new, but the widespread adoption of new technology has allowed for collaboration and rapid feedback that were not possible with earlier methods, such as correspondence courses. For these and other reasons, institutions and students alike have embraced online learning. In a 2013 survey of more than 2,800 universities and colleges, two-thirds of chief academic leaders in the United States agreed that online learning was critical to their institution’s long-term strategy. Likewise, online enrollment grew that year to 7.1 million, with 33.5 percent of enrolled students taking at least one online course (Allen & Seaman, 2014, pp. 3–4). Despite this unprecedented success, a schism has formed among educators.

Proponents of online learning not only point to the obvious advantage of it being able to increase access but also suggest that it can enrich the quality of education (Kanuka & Garrison, 2004). Much of the relevant research holds that online students’ learning outcomes are similar to those of students in conventional classrooms (Ward, Peters, & Shelley, 2010). Moreover, the online students seem to be satisfied with their education (Phipps & Merisotis, 1999, p. 1). Detractors, however, remain skeptical of such claims and raise issues such as a lack of face-to-face interaction and oral discussion in suggesting that online learning remains a poorer substitute for the traditional classroom (Kanuka, 2011, p. 92). Despite a body of evidence to the contrary, that same 2013 survey of academic leaders found 26 percent believed online learning outcomes were inferior (Allen & Seaman, 2014, p. 10). A similar poll taken the year before found that only about 30 percent of these leaders believed their institution’s faculty members accepted that online learning was valuable and legitimate (Allen & Seaman, 2013, p. 6).

Current State of Online English Programs

Based on a review done in 2014, there are fifty-one accredited colleges and universities nationwide with online programs in some credit-earning variant of English composition or literature, excluding programs strictly for English education. Only four of these are at for-profit institutions: the American Public University System, Ashford University, Grand Canyon University, and the University of Phoenix. Six offer associate’s degrees (shown as an Associate of Arts in English, an Associate of Science in English, or an Associate of Arts With an English
Emphasis), with annual tuition costs ranging from $7,170 at South Texas College to $22,295 at Drury University. Twenty-nine have bachelor’s programs (shown as a Bachelor of Arts in English, a Bachelor of Arts in English [Professional Writing], a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature, a Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature, a Bachelor of Arts in English Writing, a Bachelor of Applied Science in English, or a Bachelor of Science in Liberal Studies With a Concentration in English), with annual tuition costs ranging from $6,300 at Bellevue University to $32,115 at the University of Colorado. Nineteen have master’s programs, with annual tuition costs ranging from $6,072 at Spring Arbor University to $28,616 at the University of Central Florida. Old Dominion University offers an online doctorate in English with synchronous class meetings. Bowling Green State University, East Carolina University, the University of Massachusetts, and Washington State University offer certificates (Complete Guide to an Online English Degree, 2014). A summary of this information is shown in Figure 1. In addition, many other institutions have stand-alone courses in English and several universities—including venerable institutions such as Duke and Stanford—have offered not-for-credit open courseware English courses, usually in writing (Shah, 2014).

Characteristics of Online English Courses

Teaching the humanities, whether in a classroom or on the Web, differs from teaching the basic sciences. English composition, in particular, has proved itself to be time-consuming work regardless of the method (Singleton-Jackson & Colella, 2012, p. 24). One reason for this is that questions and answers are rarely definite and cannot be graded effectively by automated means (Miller K. O., 2015, p. 10). Adding an online component may add convenience for some students but brings special challenges to instructors (Hoffman, 2015, p. x). Likewise, even ordinarily successful online students can find composition courses difficult (Stella & Corry, 2013). Writing has been defined as a process that is both social and recursive (Hewett, et al., 2011). Unlike subjects that involve primarily memorization, writing requires students to make connections, often across disparate academic subjects, blending their own personal experiences and then practicing that skill. Put succinctly, writing requires doing and thinking (Creswell, 2013), but facilitating student thinking is a complex effort regardless of the environment (Stella & Corry, 2013). Unfortunately, although there are myriad resources about teaching online, those specifically designed for teaching composition or its philosophy are rare (Warnock, 2009, p. x).

Opposition to Online English Courses

Critics contend that institutions promote online learning only because it is arguably more profitable, citing high attrition rates as evidence that the system is not working (Jenkins, 2011). Attrition is undeniably high, but a strong indicator of student retention is the amount of experience an instructor has had with online learning (Ronsisvalle & Watkins, 2005).

Even among alleged supporters of online education, there is hedging—a reluctance to admit that online learning could ever completely replace the classroom. Although these sentiments—as evidenced by the recent surveys—are widespread, they are perhaps most acute in those departments where instruction is seen not so much as the teaching of facts but in socializing students into a culture. This attitude was recently expressed in clear terms by a professor of English at a large state university who opined that no online variant could ever manifest the “intellectual joy” generated by a “real course” (Edmundson, 2012). One can almost hear the echoes of John Henry’s hammer hitting that spike.

In the past few years, the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) has emerged as a significant progressive force in higher education. One might expect that educators involved in such a pioneering effort would embrace a pedagogical challenge. There is, however, still trepidation when crossing the paths of the humanities, which are among the least represented on major players such as Coursera, a Stanford-developed online learning platform, and edX, originally a joint venture between MIT and Harvard University. Administrators have wondered aloud whether courses traditionally dependent on Socratic dialogues were good candidates to become MOOCs. Richard Saller, dean of Stanford’s School of Humanities and Sciences, cautioned that the humanities, which rely on the exchange of differing viewpoints, would not transition as easily as basic sciences: “I guess my hunch is that the kinds of platforms that are available now can provide a forum for exchange among students with different ideas, but I doubt that that will come anywhere near the quality that we have in our introductory seminars” (Reichard, 2013).
Figure 1. American College and University Online English Programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>For-Profit</th>
<th>Certificate</th>
<th>Associate’s</th>
<th>Bachelor’s</th>
<th>Master’s</th>
<th>Doctorate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Public University System</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona State University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashford University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellevue University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowling Green State University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarion University</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Southern Nevada</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darton College</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drury University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Carolina University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Canyon University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harding University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana University East</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judson College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana Tech University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercy College</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota State University at Mankato</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohave Community College</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morehead State University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Arizona University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwestern State University of Louisiana</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Dominion University</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottawa University Online</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Mary of the Woods College</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Texas College</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern New Hampshire University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwestern Assemblies of God University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Arbor University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Catherine University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarleton State University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee Temple University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas A&amp;M University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Edison State College</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffin University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Central Florida</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Central Missouri</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Colorado</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Colorado-Denver</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Houston-Victoria</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Illinois-Springfield</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Louisiana-Monroe</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Maryland University College</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Massachusetts</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Memphis</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Michigan-Flint</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Phoenix</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington State University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayland Baptist University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winston-Salem State University</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 4 4 6 29 19 1
MOOC torchbearer Andrew Ng, who with Daphne Koller founded Coursera, stated that the traditional classroom discussion—considered essential to teaching the humanities—cannot be replicated through current technology. In his view, even successful approaches such as discussion forums are limiting; “I think we still have a long way to go, frankly, to simulate more of the average classroom discussion” (Savenije, 2013). Koller herself agreed that such courses have proven to be more difficult to convert into online versions, particularly with regard to assessment of the students’ work, but asserted that they could be taught online effectively. She suggested that technological improvements would go a long way toward replicating the traditional classroom (Reichard, 2013). In a case that highlighted the sharp differences of agreement on the subject, professors from San Jose State University wrote a vociferous open letter to Harvard University after the latter had made one of Professor Michael Sandel’s social justice courses available online. The SJSU professors warned of the educational repercussions, writing, “The thought of the exact same social justice course being taught … across the country is downright scary—something out of a dystopian novel” (Murphy, 2013).

One particular pragmatic concern with teaching composition courses online goes back to the age-old problems of plagiarism and use of outside help. Such issues are not unique to online courses but would be concerns in any course, particularly those with a large number of students (Singleton-Jackson & Colella, 2012, pp. 29–30). In a classroom environment, a suspect student can be compelled to demonstrate writing while being supervised, but the options are more limited for an online course. One approach to curbing abuse is to have papers run through plagiarism checkers to ensure they are not a copy-and-paste pastiche of others’ words. TurnItIn, a Web-based service operated by iParadigm, scans tens of millions of papers each year to check for such issues (Anders, 2012). Another method to reduce cheating is to incorporate real-time synchronous assignments to preclude the buying of papers off the Internet, but this approach reduces one of the major benefits of the online course—its flexibility—and does not rule out that another person can be completing the work for the enrolled student. Likewise, proctored tests can be given but effectively transform the online course into a hybrid (blended) course.

The problem does make a case for composition courses being more effective with smaller class sizes; in such cases, the professor can become acquainted with a students’ work and be more likely to recognize drastic changes of style from project to project. When secondary instructors are used in online courses, best practices include having regular meetings involving the professor and teaching assistants, using experienced teaching assistants to guide inexperienced ones, and allowing for the professor to spot-check assignments (Singleton-Jackson & Colella, 2012, p. 30).

**Promotion of Online English Courses**

Notwithstanding significant opposition to online instruction in English, there seems to be a foundational relationship between Web learning and the composition process inasmuch as the bulk of academic and professional writing is done on a computer (Singleton-Jackson & Colella, 2012, p. 24). English composition appears to be a field that would benefit many students and potential students because the ability to write well remains a valued skill in academia (Torrance, Thomas, & Robinson, 1999, p. 189) and the contemporary workplace (Stella & Corry, 2013), although one that remains elusive at all levels of education (Flateby, 2005). Indeed, although automated grading of writing is difficult, technological advances have made their way into composition courses, serving as an enriched way to aid students in developing literacy skills (Scott & Mouza, 2007). As some scholars have pointed out, writing online vis-à-vis the classroom is not without its advantages. Chief among these are more opportunities for collaboration and an increase in time on task (Mazoué, 1999).

Judging from the admittedly nonscientific approach of student recommendations, it becomes clear that not all programs are created equal and that, in the view of many students, quality really does matter. Tellingly, the programs judged the worst by students and alumni are the large for-profit institutions such as Ashford University (64 percent recommendation rate based on 528 reviews), Grand Canyon University (50 percent recommendation rate based on 230 reviews), and the University of Phoenix (57 percent recommendation rate based on 1,027 reviews). Large state-run and nationally marketed programs also fared poorly, with the University of Maryland University College (60 percent recommendation rate based on 91 reviews) being a primary example. In contrast, many smaller institutions and small programs at large state-run universities (such as Bowling Green State University, East Carolina University, Northern Arizona University, and the University of Massachusetts) boasted 100-percent recommendation rates, although naturally on a more limited number of reviews (Complete Guide to an Online English Degree, 2014).
In the institutions offering these courses, opinion differs among leadership. Whereas Stanford’s Richard Saller seemed less than enthusiastic about the prospects of online education, Gavin Jones, chair of the English Department there, expressed hope that online education can, if not replace classroom courses, be used to supplement them. His department hired an academic technology specialist specifically to help professors investigate online education. Jones admitted that humanities professors have a reputation of being naysayers when it comes to teaching online, but he cautioned against throwing out the academic baby with the online bathwater, saying that, although “healthy skepticism” was needed, educators should recognize the good aspects and use them “to improve the educational resources and the pedagogical mission that already exist” (Reichard, 2013).

Case Studies

As early as the turn of the 21st century, researchers had already developed a foundation of research regarding the use of technology to teach English composition (Miller S. K., 2001, p. 424). There have been significant studies comparing online and classroom learning in general, with the general consensus being that student satisfaction is equivalent (Allen, Bourhis, Burrell, & Mabry, 2002) and learning outcomes are similar (Maki & Maki, 2003). With regard to the particular issues of teaching English or other humanities courses online, however, there exists comparatively little metadata. Some of the most useful information may be drawn from the several case studies and other reports that have been published.

Windsor University. One noteworthy case study, conducted by Jill Singleton-Jackson and Julia Colella, looked at the development of the Foundations of Academic Writing course at Windsor University in Windsor, Ontario. The two-part course (the first part focused on basics of grammar and paragraph writing; the second part focused on research, citation styles, and development of essays) was put online, largely at the insistence of the dean, and initially was not housed in any particular academic department. Consistent with what has been shown in surveys regarding online learning, professors at the university soon formed two camps: one in favor of the course, and the other strongly opposed. The statistical evidence revealed that students were grasping the material, but opponents of the course dug in their heels, contending that foundational composition was an inappropriate choice for online instruction. In any respect, the course proved popular, growing to include more than 2,000 students across social sciences and engineering majors.

Among the lessons learned in the evolution of the course was that proper orientation contributed significantly to student success. In the case of Foundations of Academic Writing, this orientation was delivered live prior to the start of the course. The more fixed portions of the course, such as basic grammar, were tested via automation, whereas the writing was initially evaluated by peer review prior to final assessment by instructors and teaching assistants (Singleton-Jackson & Colella, 2012). Separate research has shown that this type of collaboration is valuable to improving writing (van den Berg, Admiraal, & Pilot, 2006). One of the potential pitfalls, and one that initially plagued the developers of this course, was that some students were loath to accept the reviews of their peers. The study revealed best practices as 1) grading the students’ efforts at evaluation (participation rose from 60 percent to 85 percent after grading was instituted), 2) developing confidence in students to the point where they feel comfortable in rejecting incorrect criticisms, and 3) guiding students on how to give useful corrective feedback. As other researchers have noted, providing constructive criticism is a learned set of strategies that fledgling college students may have been exposed to but should not be expected to have mastered (VanDeWeghe, 2004).

University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. The University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee established a Graduate Certificate in Professional Writing and Communication program in 2002, allowing students from disciplines other than English to improve their writing skills, primarily with the goal of advancing in their careers. In reviewing the development and progress of the program, several points were brought to light:

- The editing process seemed to be a comfortable fit for online collaboration because effective tools for electronic editing were already built into word processing software that the students had become accustomed to using.
- The writing required for course interaction (peer introductions, questions for the professor, and discussion board postings) served also as practice in writing to communicate, and the students readily embraced electronic communication. In a class of a dozen students, the professor received an average of thirty-five email messages per student over the course of a 13-week semester.
- Students went far beyond the minimum requirements when posting to the forums. As the semester went on, these posts generally reflected more confidence, as students not only answered basic questions posed by the professor but began to reach out to their peers, offering advice on writing, technology, and other pertinent
subjects. The professor noted that these posts emulated the kinds of professional writing exchanges that students might expect to have in the workplace.

- Writing for the class became more than just a second-tier substitute for class discussion; the asynchronous and written model brought its own set of benefits that facilitated the education process: 1) It was appreciated by the students who wanted to contribute but resisted being put on the spot by real-time question-and-answer class discussions, 2) it allowed the quieter students a chance to make their thoughts known without directly competing with their more assertive peers (although the requirement to contribute regularly has been shown to be stressful to some students), 3) unlike ethereal speech, it provided a fixed document of ideas and resources that could be referred to as learning progressed, and 4) it allowed for students who were traveling or out sick to receive the same information as those who were able to check the board without interruption.

The course had the usual technological hurdles that were common to most online courses. Establishing social interaction was a challenge, but it was far from being the overwhelming detriment that some critics claim. Perhaps the most interesting finding of the study, although one not limited to writing courses, is that the class dynamic changed in a positive way to benefit collaboration.

In the traditional classroom, visual rhetoric and social customs shape the interactions. The instructor is at the head of the classroom, sometimes behind a podium, and with each student a different distance away. The instructor holds the keys to the blackboard, whiteboard, projector or other visual display, whereas the students are obliged to take on a passive role of note-taking, encouraging the social norm of silent response when questions are posed. The instructor is generally free to move about the classroom, but students are confined to desks, often in parallel rows that deemphasize individuality. In contrast, the virtual classroom is more egalitarian. The instructor typically asks opening questions but has no visual trappings of authority other than perhaps a signature line indicating “instructor.” This case study found that not only did course preparation differ substantially from classroom versions but that the teacher-student roles also changed and did so in ways that were conducive to collaborative learning (Van Pelt & Jones, 2003).

**Winona State University.** This small first-year composition course of fewer than twenty students was a far more modest venture than the Windsor University course of 2,000-plus students. Still, the reflection by the course professor, J. Paul Johnson, provides compelling insights to the nature of teaching composition online. Johnson, in addition to the usual concerns about technology and being able to establish a sense of community across the miles, found (as did others) that providing feedback (especially feedback that students can read) was easier online using only Microsoft Word and Blackboard’s Digital Drop Box. His revelation, though, concerned the ability to get to know students without being able to engage them face-to-face: Johnson stated that what he learns about his students in any composition course comes from reading their writing and, by his own estimation, the online course allowed for three times the amount of writing than did its classroom equivalent (Johnson, 2003). This estimate is not an aberration, but is consistent with what other experienced composition instructors have reported (Warnock, 2009, p. xi). Online courses are not just writing-intensive but virtually writing-exclusive. Moreover, they demand thoughtful evaluation of peer writing. As one group of scholars eloquently phrased this phenomenon, “Teaching online privileges writing in ways that traditional classes cannot” (Harrington, Rickly, & Day, 2000, p. 8).

**University of Southampton.** Researchers in Great Britain looked specifically at a master’s program in English, citing a “paucity” of such offerings. Many of the study’s conclusions were important but unsurprising. The researchers found that students responded well to content-rich and interactive lessons as opposed to traditional text-based lessons, that discussion forums were effective in countering the isolation that is a concern of those involved with online learning, and that student satisfaction was high. Among the conclusions cited by the researchers (and one that may be disputed by professors) was that student engagement with discussion boards was likely to be uneven and that, consequently, instructors needed to show maximum flexibility with regard to participation. The online students’ outcomes were equivalent to their counterparts in face-to-face courses, and as with other studies and surveys, students reported making progress in the course. One of the key findings was that—along with the expected student progress—instructors in the program also reported significant personal growth. Unfortunately, the researchers did not specify whether the instructors’ feelings of accomplishment were related to developing technological confidence or from the content knowledge gained by redeveloping the course content for the online format (Baker & Watson, 2013).

**Bowling Green State University.** Whereas most case studies focused on service classes for college freshmen and sophomores, this one looked at implications for adult learners taking an intermediate English composition course
Although the author’s conclusions were unremarkable (a promotion of student-centered learning and better-trained professors), the 210-page dissertation resulting from the work remains one of the most detailed qualitative examinations of an online English composition course. What is more remarkable, in light of the reality that so much online program marketing seems aimed at adult learners, is that there is not a greater body of research relative to this topic. The characteristics of the adult learner are not specific to composition courses, but these courses are in a strong position to capitalize on what adults bring to the interaction. The more democratic structure of the best online courses allows for more sharing and, when appropriate, peer mentoring. Adult learners, who generally have a wealth of experience, can fit comfortably into these roles and thereby “fulfill their sense of self” (Hoy, 2010, p. 146). In many cases, older adults who might find it awkward to go back to school with teens and twenty-something adults can find the online course presents a less discriminatory environment.

**Christopher Newport University.** One of the earliest case studies to focus on English composition courses (English 207G and 208G) was conducted at this small public university in Virginia. The programs here were founded on the belief that online courses should be at least as good as classroom versions and that online education is by nature favorable to student-centered pedagogy—presumptions that the research set out to test. The study proved beyond argument (if there ever was one) that online learners write more. The researchers found that these students wrote an average of 54,938 words per semester in English 207G and 70,916 words in English 208G, roughly fifty times the amount common to classroom iterations. The authors also reported greater participation in general, which they attributed to a change in the traditional teacher-student roles prompted by the online environment (Mulligan & Geary, 1999). This type of transformation had already been observed as far back as the first years of online delivery, wherein “the traditional classroom pattern of teacher initiation/student response/teacher evaluation disintegrates” and a new dialectic rises from its ashes (Butler & Kinneavy, 1994). The researchers held that online writing courses provide collateral benefits, including the production of a copious amount of written communication that allows for analysis that would be difficult if not impossible to conduct on an otherwise-similar classroom course. There is another profound benefit of this voluminous work, noted by all the instructors and flatly expressed by one: “I learned a great deal about [my students] because they spoke up more than if they were in class” (Mulligan & Geary, 1999, p. 393).

**University of Georgia.** One of the few published head-to-head comparison studies of classroom and online English composition courses (in this case, ENGL 1102) looked primarily at student satisfaction, learning outcomes, and participation in classroom discussion. The researchers found that satisfaction and participation were greater in the online courses but that there was no significant difference in learning. The study showed that student satisfaction in these courses had far more to do with individual instructor differences than with the mode of instruction. Consistent with earlier studies, students responded well to instructors who were available and innovative.

One incidental finding of the study was that the face-to-face classes had a significantly greater percentage of students with high (3.5 or above on a 4.0 scale) grade point averages: 14.8 percent in the online courses compared to 34.7 percent in the classroom courses. This discovery warrants further investigation, as it may have a strong correlation to some of the criticisms of online education (notably, high attrition rates) and also suggests that online courses—considering they have a disproportionate number of poor students but are accomplishing the same measured amount of learning—are actually more successful than classroom courses. A related concern, however, is the potential for grade inflation in online courses. Although the classroom courses seemingly recruited better students, the online students received better grades, with 29.5 percent earning an A compared to just 18.0 percent of the face-to-face group (Finlay, Desmet, & Evans, 2004). In other studies that found similar grade boosts, researchers attributed the better grades to a finding that the online students legitimately worked harder, wrote more, and developed a capability for reflection (Mulligan & Geary, 1999).

The final grades to a large extent reflected initial student expectations: 33.3 percent of the online students expected an A going in, compared to only 14.7 of the classroom students. From a qualitative review, the online students reported high satisfaction with online discussion, which was seen as an equitable and nonthreatening way to exchange ideas and provide help. At least in composition courses, the online learning environment—far from being an isolating entity—was highly conducive to building a cohesive community. This finding strongly indicates that ongoing criticism of online learning as failing to properly socialize students is unfounded and that, in meaningful ways, online students get more out of discussions, grow as peer resources, and gain a sense of belonging more so than do their classroom-bound counterparts. Some of these benefits may be associated with the instructors who found it more comfortable to assume a guide-on-the-side role online than when physically standing in front of a class (Finlay, Desmet, & Evans, 2004).
Hybrid Alternatives

Some educators hold that English composition is not a good fit for a course that is entirely online and instead favor a blended approach (Stine, 2004). Overall, hybrid courses have been blossoming, by some estimates accounting for roughly half of all online education by 2007 (Allen, Seaman, & Garrett, 2007). Despite this growth, only about 4 percent of English composition courses were in a hybrid format at that time (Gerlaugh, Thompson, Boylan, & Davis, 2007). Supporters see hybrid courses as embodying the best of both worlds, with the potential for the higher success rates of online courses and the higher retention rates of classroom courses. It could be argued just as easily that the hybrid glass is half-empty, offering none of the geographic or time flexibility of the online environment while still failing to address the issues that have plagued online instruction, such as technological hurdles and students with poor reading, writing, and study skills (Harrington A. M., 2010). As these blended courses gain in popularity, the same accusations once leveled at administrators hyping online solutions are likewise now directed at those promoting hybrids; namely, the “flexibility” they espouse has nothing to do with educating students and everything to do with the fiscal benefits envisioned through improved space utilization and reduction of instructor costs (El Mansour & Mupinga, 2007).

A Reasoned Response

The current financial and political environment presents a catch-22 for English professors. They seemingly must support what they perceive as academically inferior instruction methods or be painted as out-of-touch elitists—with either choice putting their careers and the health of the profession itself in jeopardy. The scathing letter penned by the SJSU professors lamented not just the loss of student perspectives but the loss of education jobs (Murphy, 2013). California Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom confirmed these fears when he stated, “The old education financing model, frankly, is no longer sustainable,” (Fowler, 2013).

Although these threats are real, the dilemma apparently facing English professors is a false one: One need not check one’s academic integrity at the door to support online learning. The evidence of these multiple case studies from different times and circumstances shows that, particularly in subjects such as composition, traditional online courses are not simply acceptable, they are often superior. MOOCs, although they have academic limitations, have the ability to reach students who previously would have been shut out of higher learning because of financial or geographical considerations. Partisan politics and academic job fears aside, online delivery is generally advantageous for students.

Once we accept that technology is not itself the enemy, we can deepen our research to determine the key aspects of successful online learning, conducting more rigorous studies that compare classroom, online, and MOOC environments in a meaningful way. We must take what we learn and promote it in our own institutions and, when appropriate, to different audiences. If we are administrators, it is time to quit looking only at cutting costs; if we are professors, it is time to quit looking at only at self-preservation. More than ever, it is time to look at effective solutions. When we quit fighting one another, we can begin to fight for the students of tomorrow.

Resources


Kampov-Polevoi, J. (2010). Conversations for supporting faculty in transitioning a course to online format. Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 13 (2).


McQuiggan, C. (2007). The role of faculty development in online teaching's potential to question teaching beliefs and assumptions. Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 10 (3).


Torrance, M., Thomas, G. V., & Robinson, E. J. (1999). Individual differences in the writing behaviour of
undergraduate students. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 189–199.


**Gregory Orme** is a Graduate Student in Instructional Technology and a Doctoral Student in Technical and Professional Discourse at East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina. Ormeg11@students.ecu.edu.
Case Study: Using HE-TPACK to Improve Virtual Professional Development Opportunities

Veronica Outlaw
University of South Carolina Aiken

Kristi N. Garrett
Instructional Design & Technology Consultant

Abstract

The authors used the development process of the HE-TPACK framework to gain more insight into the types of professional development programs that will foster technology-based pedagogy. Based on the development of the HE-TPACK survey, implications for future practice indicated that not only does creating professional development opportunities provide faculty with the chance for collaboration and support (Messina and Tabone, 2012), these opportunities also engage faculty with technology as instructional tools. This engagement helps to equip faculty with sufficient technology integration knowledge and capability, while allowing faculty the opportunity to practice developing technology knowledge. To demonstrate the importance of providing robust training programs for online faculty to address skills needed to properly develop online courses, enhance online pedagogy and facilitation skills, and decrease deficiencies in online teaching and learning, the authors have piloted a two year case study in planning and hosting a free national virtual conference opportunity to commensurate National Distance Learning Week as a mechanism to strengthen the understanding and usage of technology integration with pedagogy used by online faculty. This article will also demonstrate how to successfully launch a national virtual conference with limited resources and the use of Web 2.0 tools and social media.

Introduction

Developing and/or teaching online courses is a different paradigm for faculty and specific knowledge and skills are needed to successfully perform the task. While most institutions offer professional development opportunities for faculty in online course development and facilitation, many faculty do not partake in these opportunities for a plethora of reasons. Some faculty do not participate due to lack of time, workload, schedule conflicts, location, limited financial resources, lack of incentives (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008), no suitable topic, too expensive, lack of employer support, and other demanding responsibilities (OECD, 2009). In addition, learning new skills involves change. Change perpetuates behavior that contributes to anxiety, frustration, stress (Wirth, 2004), fear and self-doubt (Durbin & Ireland, 1993), and change results in resistance. Because most individuals naturally resist change (Belker, McCormick, & Topchik, 2012), employers need to understand the cause of the resistance and involve faculty in the decision-making process to obtain their support. A successful faculty development program needs to take into consideration the concerns faculty have with professional development offerings and suggestions they feel would enhance professional development. The authors recommend the use of virtual methods as one workable solution for offering and participating in faculty professional development programs for online teaching and learning.

The successful increase in online enrollments rely heavily on the ability of faculty being able to design and development content for online courses (pedagogy). Another aspect is the skill and ability to properly integrate technology with online pedagogy and being able to translate classroom instructional strategies into a robust online format. The final aspect is andragogy by Malcolm Knowles, the method and practice of teaching adult learners (Pappas, 2013). It is important that faculty are aware of the five characteristics of adult learners and how to apply the four principles of andragogy to produce an engaging online learning experience for students. This comes with the knowledge (and willingness) of knowing how to incorporate best practices in online teaching similar to Boettcher’s Ten Best Practices for Teaching Online (Boettcher, 2011); Chickering’s Seven Practices for Good Practice in Online Education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987); and Gagné’s Nine Events of Instruction (Gagné, 2013).
Boettcher (2011), Chickering and Gamson (1987), and Gagné (2013) suggest elements of teaching an online course that go beyond the mere use of technology. The use of technology can increase faculty presence, and foster learning communities and connectedness, (Lefever & Currant, 2010; Palloff & Pratt, 2011), which reduces student isolation and increases achievement and retention, and deepens student satisfaction (Oblinger, 2014). In short, this is achieved by:

- using text, images, audio, and videos to provide meaningful feedback via asynchronous and synchronous technologies (Morrison, 2014),
- conducting formative and summative assessments to make continual and appropriate adjustments (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2007),
- clearly and constantly communicating (Winter, 2007),
- engaging students with other students, faculty, and content (Winter, 2007),
- establishing guidelines and procedures to maximize participation, collaboration, and reflection (Palloff & Pratt, 2000), and
- developing quality and robust content (Winter, 2007).

Faculty not only need professional development in the actual use of various features with a technology, but also how and why to use it; therefore, the quality of a faculty professional development program is vital to faculty’s skill set relating to teaching and learning. In order to accomplish these goals, more specialized training is needed, not only for course development, but also for online course facilitation and integrating technology with pedagogy. Teaching online is more than a different medium of delivery; therefore, fostering technology-based pedagogy for faculty is an essential element in teaching online. Faculty presence, student engagement, multimedia development, course development and facilitation best practices, quality assurance, and copyright and accessibility compliances are a few key areas to include in professional development programs to produce effective faculty, as “technology does not teach students; effective teachers do (Whitesel, 1998, p. 1).”

Theoretical Framework

Higher Education - Technology, Pedagogy, and Content Knowledge (HE-TPACK)

Golde & Dore (2001) indicated that faculty do not hold adequate knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to integrate their existing pedagogy and content knowledge with technology based on limited existing technology knowledge, in addition to limited availability of professional development, faculty support, and technology focused curriculum for all faculty. With this in mind, the HE-TPACK concept was used to frame this virtual conferencing case study.

HE-TPACK instrument allows faculty in higher education settings to self-assess their knowledge to effectively intertwine technology, pedagogy, and content in order to increase student learning. Some of the findings from the initial study using the HE-TPACK instrument revealed that faculty believe that training specific to technology is important (Garrett, 2014).

Professional development should provide an opportunity for faculty to develop and hone their knowledge and skills on pedagogical tasks. However, with the growing use of instructional technology tools in higher education, there is a gap in the method(s) used to deliver professional development on the topic of instructional design for use in asynchronous learning environments. The existing faculty knowledge of members who participated in the virtual conference conducted during National Distance Learning week, described later in this article, provided implications that the primary author’s constructivist based virtual conference enhanced faculty knowledge of virtual technology. The primary author designed the virtual conference to provide ease of navigation using both paper and web based surveys to capture the participants’ perception of their experience attending the virtual conference.

Types of Effective Professional Development Programs

The National Education Association’s (NEA) (n.d.) Guide to Teaching Online Courses suggest recognizing and understanding the skills online faculty need to teach online being vital into developing the necessary topics for faculty training. According to NEA, faculty need skills in understanding online jargon and be familiar with online tools and infrastructure. Online faculty should be familiar with the course or learning management system (how to write and revise documents, select appropriate elements for design and teaching and content standards) and ensure its proper use, while complying with accessibility regulations. In addition, faculty should maintain current and
accurate course documents and incorporate Internet resources into the course content. In meeting student needs and institution expectations, faculty presence is a major element in online courses; therefore, faculty should develop skills in appropriate faculty-student and faculty-parent/school communications, and student-student discussions and collaborations (group or individual) to provide timely feedback and model effective behavior. The paradigm of teaching in the classroom and online is different; therefore, faculty should grasp the need to complete online course materials in a timely manner (preferably with having the entire course complete before the start of the term). Tracking student success is essential in online learning. Faculty should track registered students’ online participation in all course activities. Lastly, faculty should be familiar with the types of technical and student support services. On some level, each of these require the use of one or more technologies to accomplish the task(s).

Constructivism supports the authentic learning experience, as individuals’ perceptions of learning is based on personal meaning and epistemology supports how individuals learn by interpreting experiences … both aiding in the construction of self-reality authentic meaning of experiences (Tam, 2000). The literature introduces several studies that indicate faculty’s perceptions on how faculty best (or desire to) learn to teach online, with the goal of increasing knowledge and work skills and improving efficiency, performance, and productivity. A few types of professional development include: small focus groups (cross disciplined or discipline specific), small groups with hands-on opportunities to practice, formal sessions with informal discussions, informal sessions (mentoring/coaching, in-service training, individual session, small group sessions), specialized training for department/college, networks/communities of practice, case study, and self-directed learning (newsletter, blogs, webinars, observations, conferences). According to (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008), preferred faculty learning modalities resulted in high level of effectiveness in one-on-one with a mentor/colleague (55.9%), with an instructional designer (52.5%), and somewhat level of effectiveness with technical staff (42.6%). Relating to face-to-face learning modalities, the study reported somewhat level of effectiveness within the department (42.6%), within the college (45.6), and within the university (41.2%). Lastly, relating to online learning modalities, the study reported somewhat level of effectiveness with resources/references (45.6%), self-paced modules (35.3%), and instructor-led modules (36.8%).

Although the face-to-face learning modality was deemed the most favorable among faculty, the authors wanted to explore future possibilities with virtual learning modalities because the format allows for teaching and learning opportunities outside of the work environment and increases the exposure to other experts in various disciplines. Virtual opportunities are cost effective, flexible, and less intimidating than in-person offerings. In addition, virtual opportunities allow for replay, archives are supportive for e-portfolios, valuable supplement for teaching and learning, and has the potential to reach a wider audience when disseminating knowledge. Following describes a virtual conferencing case study as one workable solution for offering and participating in faculty professional development programs for online teaching and learning.

Case Study: Pilot of Two Year Virtual Professional Development

Background of Virtual Conference Pilot

The primary author accepted a Director of Distance Learning position for a newly created distance learning office at a small four-year southeastern teaching university. The initial goals for the position were to build a distance learning infrastructure for the institution, assist faculty in building online courses to increase online enrollments for the summer terms, and to provide pedagogical and technological professional development for faculty. The office of one staff had to become resourceful in outsourcing services to reach the intended goals. Recruiting resources for training in pedagogy and/or technology was a simple task for the director.

For the month of November 2014, the United States Distance Learning Association (US NDLW) announced its annual week-long virtual conference to commensurate innovations educators were making in distance learning. U.S. NDLW dedicates one week each year to provide an opportunity to celebrate growths and accomplishments in distance learning and for faculty and/or students to showcase excellence in teaching, technology, and/or research. National Distance Learning Week (NDLW) is an opportunity to disseminate the amazing innovations being used to help provide quality and robust online education for learners. The primary author recognized this as an opportunity to bridge the technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge gaps faculty experienced when integrating technology with online pedagogy and started planning to host the first annual NDLW for the campus, using a plethora of Web2.0 tools to design, develop, manage, recruit, schedule, train presenters, advertise, host, moderate, record/edit/publish video archives, and evaluate for the conference. The HE-TPACK framework was referenced to illustrate how this constructivist based conference gave the presenters and conference attendees the opportunity to
test their technology skills within a virtual environment. In addition, conference attendees could enhance their technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge based on their interest in various conference sessions.

**Conference Planning: Using Web 2.0 Tools & Social Media**

**Year 1:** September 2014 started the planning of the first annual National Distance Learning Week virtual conference for the home campus to launch November 10-14, 2014. Analyzing the needs to plan, advertise, recruit, train, host, moderate, record, archive, and formatively and summatively assess a campus conference resulted in the use of several Web 2.0 tools to build, launch, and archive the conference. The institution’s .dotCMS system was used to create the conference main webpage. GoogleDocs was used to create the session description page and schedule page. Google Forms was used to create the registration form, the Call for Proposals forms, and the summative exit survey. Google Sheets was used to collect and analyze the data retrieved from the Google Forms. Email and social media (Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, and Facebook) were used to advertise the conference and solicit presenters and participants. GoogleDocs was used to maintain standard templates of email correspondence to presenters and participants. The tiny URL webpage (www.tiny.cc) was used to shorten and customize long web links. Microsoft Word was used to generate the formative paper surveys for each classroom session.

Because the initial intent started with plans for a classroom-based conference (face-to-face) for the campus faculty, the participants were guided to register for the sessions they wanted to attend so that appropriate accommodations could be made for classroom space. Incentives for presenting and moderating included the award of digital badges through www.credly.com. Incentives for participation in classroom sessions included the raffle of tickets to win door prizes (which were collected through various donors from the institution’s Marketing Department) and a closing celebration reception on the last day of the conference to recognize co-hosts, presenters, moderators, sponsors, speakers, and special guests, especially those who traveled a distance to participate in the conference. However, as the word spread over the social media airwaves, professionals outside the institution wanted to participate, but were limited in funds to travel or had scheduling conflicts. Because of this demand, Adobe Connect was used to create webinar meeting room spaces for those who were out of state to allow them the opportunity to present and/or participate. This opportunity provided the chance for individuals to present for the first time (ever) and/or their first time in a webinar format. Over the course of 4-6 weeks, conference plans to host face-to-face presentations and virtual sessions in Adobe Connect to accommodate presenters geographically dispersed were finalized.

During the week prior to the conference, the presenters and registered participants were emailed with the final conference plans, along with reminder emails of the registered sessions. The lineup covered sessions relating to multimedia, accessibility, copyright, integrating technology with online pedagogy, facilitation and/or feedback best practices, online course development best practices and models, and faculty and student showcases of innovative works.

During the week of the conference, the host greeted presenters and participants in the classroom sessions, moderated and recorded each session, and issued paper formative surveys to classroom participants. Participants were emailed daily of the sessions line up for each day. When participants realized some sessions were virtually presented, the host received emails requesting the ability to virtually conduct other sessions virtually because of scheduling conflicts. Adobe Connect meeting rooms for each session were set up so that each presenter could conduct their presentations in the campus TV Studio (blended format). In many cases presenters were in front of a live audience and virtual audience. The sessions were recorded and the videos and available handout archives were hosted on the conference web page.

As indicated in Image 1, with the use of social media, email, and word of mouth, the host and supporting colleagues managed to recruit 23 presentations, 26 presenters (from GA, FL, SC, VA) and 68 registered participants from 15 institutions in 7 states (AL, GA, FL, MS, OK, SC, VA). Fifty seven percent were registered on-campus employees, sixteen percent were registered off-campus employees, and twenty-six percent were registered individuals from other institutions in other states. Sixty-two percent only attended some sessions, sixteen percent only presented, and twenty-two percent attended and presented. A keynote speaker was not retained for the event due to the short notice of the event.
The five day blended conference ended with a closing luncheon in honor of those presenters and participants who traveled from out of state to support the conference. Administration provided a few words regarding the unique experience for the campus and desired to have it be a signature event for the campus.

Although the conference was originally for the faculty on campus, there was a lot of feedback from external constituents praising the wonderful event. Virtual presenters indicated their appreciation for the unique opportunity to present for the first time ever, or for the first time in a virtual format. The opportunity was extended to graduate students from the Educational Technology master’s program and four graduate students were included amongst those presenting for the first time in a virtual format. Participants were in awe of the new information learned and how well the conference was organized.

**Year 2:** In 2015, the NDLW conference was recognized November 9-13, but was offered on November 9-11 due to the host’s scheduling conflicts. In the second year, some planning and processes changed due to the change in the delivery modality (100% virtually) from the first year. Although the conference operated for three days, links were provided for participants to participate in other virtual opportunities on the latter two days.

As with year 1, several Web2.0 tools were used to build, launch, and archive the conference. GoogleDocs was used to create the conference main webpage, session description page, and schedule page. Google Forms was used to create the conference registration form, and the Call for Proposals forms. Google Sheets was used to collect and analyze the data retrieved from the Google Forms. Email and social media (Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, and Facebook) were used to advertise the conference and solicit presenters and participants. GoogleDocs was used to maintain standard templates of email correspondence to presenters and participants. The tiny URL webpage (www.tiny.cc) was used to shorten and customize long web links. Qualtrics was used to create, administer, collect, and analyze the formative and summative digital surveys for each webinar session. The formative survey links were immediately sent to participants at the end of each session in Adobe Connect by using the Weblink Pods feature, which allowed the host to push the survey link to the user’s browser in real time. The summative (exit) survey (using Qualtrics) was emailed to everyone at the end of the third day.

There was no set theme for this conference; however, presentations in the areas of accessibility, copyright research in progress (doctoral students were welcomed and encouraged), design principles for learner engagement, developing activities to engage your learners, increasing learner engagement with Web 2.0 tools, active learning strategies, online/blended learning, emerging technology, and technology that supports and enhances teaching and learning initiatives were encouraged. The recruitment of presenters and participants were conducted via email, social media, and word of mouth. The host discovered a new scheduling management tool, www.SignUpGenius.com, which allowed presenters to select from a pre-determined list of days and times to participate in Adobe Connect training session(s) and/or conduct their presentation. The host moderated, recorded, and archived the sessions (including handouts) on the conference schedule webpage. The second year, the host replaced the presentation incentive of issuing digital badges through Credly and provided each presenter with a letter of thanks, which was signed by the Chancellor, Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, and the Director of Distance Learning.
As indicated in Image 2, with the use of social media, email, and word of mouth, the host and supporting colleagues managed to recruit 20 presentations, 20 presenters (from AR, CA, FL, GA, IL, MS, NC, SC, TX, and UT), and 112 registered participants representing 46 institutions in 17 different states (AL, AR, CA, CO, FL, GA, IL, MI, MS, NC, NJ, PA, SC, TX, UT, VA, and St. Augustine, Trinidad). Seven percent were registered on-campus employees, twenty-five percent were registered off-campus employees, and sixty-eight percent were registered individuals from other institutions in other states. Eighty percent only attended some sessions, three percent only presented, and seventeen percent attended and presented. The second year was privy to a keynote speaker, Dr. Thomas Tobin, on *Copyright for Faculty Members in 90 Minutes Flat*. Although the conference was originally to support the faculty at the home campus, there was a lot of feedback from external constituents praising the event and appreciative of the opportunity to serve. Virtual presenters indicated their appreciation for the unique opportunity to present for the first time ever, or for the first time in a virtual format.

*Image 2: Year 2 Geographical Location of Participants and Presenters*

Following includes details describing major differences from both years:

1. In year 1, the presenters were invited to present and upon accepted, they submitted their call for proposal for review. In year 2, the conference was advertised and individuals voluntarily submitted call for proposals for review.

2. In year 1, the presenters were given digital badges through Credly and classroom participants were entered into a raffle drawing to win various prizes. In year 2, each presenter was issued a letter of thanks which was signed by campus administration.

3. In year 1, due to limited notice a keynote speaker was not attained, but in year 2, the conference was privy to an astounding keynote speaker.

4. In year 1, themes were defined for the invited presenters. In year 2, themes were encouraged, but not defined with the hope obtaining more volunteers to present.

5. In year 1, scheduling presentations were done via email, which proved to be very demanding on time. In year 2, SignUp Genius was used to allow presenters to use a click and save method to sign up for a desired time slot. That information was easily transferred to the conference online schedule webpage.

6. In year 1, because the conference started in a classroom format, formative surveys were issued on paper to submit at the end of each session. The summative survey was administered to all participants via email, providing a link to a Google Form, which was collected in Google Sheets. In year 2, the formative and summative surveys were created, administered, collected, and analyzed in Qualtrics.

*Image 3 below indicates the participation for both years. Compared to year 1, the second year of the conference registrations increased by 1.65% and there were 3.06% more institutions and 2.43% more states represented. Everything regarding the conference development, recruitment, scheduling, training, survey form and reports, were archived and shared on the web and/or social media.*
**Image 3: Comparison Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenters</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Participants</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USC Aiken Employees</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USC Other - Employees</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Institutions Employees</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Attendee Only** | 42   | 62%  | 90   | 80%  |
|**Presenter Only** | 11   | 16%  | 4    | 3%   |
|**Both - Attendee/Presenter** | 15   | 22%  | 18   | 17%  |

**Formative and Summative Evaluation Results**

**Year 1**

Because the first year's conference was offered in a blended format, participants who attended the classroom sessions were asked to sign in and issued a paper survey at the end of each classroom attended session. Some participants filled out a form at the end of each session, and others elected to fill out one form at the end of the week. The formative paper surveys had to be entered manually in order to capture all of the results in one report. The formative survey included a Likert scale, asking participants to indicate the level of helpfulness next to each webinar session attended (Very Helpful to Not Helpful), and one open-ended question to leave additional comments. Each session had a response rate that ranged from .37% to 100%, and all the sessions were rated Very Helpful.

The summative survey was created in Google Form and the data was collected and analyzed in Google Sheets. The weblink to the summative survey was shortened and customized using the www.tiny.cc web service and the links were administered to participants via email. The summative survey was open for 10 days and the response rate was 84% (68 registered and 57 responses).

On the formative and summative surveys, participants were asked to rate each session attended (Very Helpful, helpful, Not Sure, Not Helpful, and Did Not Attend). The following open-ended questions were presented:

1. What was the best part of the conference for you?
2. How can we improve this conference?
3. What topic(s) would you like to see presented in future trainings and/or conferences?
4. Overall, how helpful was/were the session(s) you attended to your online and/or classroom teaching?

**Year 2**

The formative and summative survey links were created using Qualtrics and the www.tiny.cc web service was used to shorten and customize the weblinks. The formative survey links for each presenter was issued to participants at the end of each virtual session by using the WebLink Pods feature in Adobe Connect, which allowed the host to push the links to the participant's web browser in real time for immediate response. The formative response rates ranged from 0% to 89%, with an average of .60% completion rate, and the majority of the sessions were rated Agree to Strongly Agree. The formative survey included a Likert scale, asking participants to indicate their level of agreement* with the following statements (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree), and one open-ended question**:  

1. This sessions’ information will be useful to me in my job (and/or personal life).*
2. This description matched what I experienced in the sessions.*
3. The facilitator demonstrated good presentation skills.*
4. Overall, this was a good session.*
5. In a few words, share your overall impression of this session.**

The summative survey was open for 5 days and the response rate was 18% (112 registered and 20 responses). Although the number of registrations increased in year 2, the participation was significantly less than the first year.
Participants were asked to rate each session attended (Did Not Attend, Not Helpful, Not Sure, Helpful, and Very Helpful). The majority of the sessions were rated Helpful to Very Helpful. In addition, the following open-ended questions were presented:

1. What was the best part of the conference for you?
2. How can we improve this conference?
3. What topic(s) would you like to see presented in future trainings and/or conferences?
4. Overall, how helpful was/were the session(s) you attended to your online and/or classroom teaching?
5. How did you hear about the USCA 2015 National Distance Learning Virtual Conference (check all that apply)?
6. Please indicate your role (check all that apply)?
7. Were you a presenter or co-presenter for the 2015 National Distance Learning Week Conference?
8. If yes,
   a. Have you ever presented in front of a live audience (face-to-face)?
   b. Have you ever presented in a webinar format (online/virtual)?
   c. Please indicate the level of ease for each category (Not Sure or N/A, Not Easy, Somewhat Easy, Easy, Very Easy)
      i. Filling out the conference registration form
      ii. Filling out the Call for Proposal Form
      iii. Reserving your presentation slot using SignUp Genius
      iv. Reserving Adobe Connect practice and training
      v. Use of Adobe Connect to present
      vi. Presenting in Adobe Connect
9. Indicate how satisfied you were in each of the following categories (Not Sure or N/A, Not Satisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Satisfied, Very Satisfied)
   a. Conference Registration
   b. Call for Proposal Registration
   c. Reserving your presentation slot using SignUp Genius
   d. Reserving Adobe Connect practice and training time using SignUp Genius
   e. Receiving training in Adobe Connect
   f. Using Adobe Connect to present
   g. Presenting in Adobe Connect
   h. Audience participation
      i. Email and/or social media notification
      j. Conference webpage
      k. Host and moderator services
10. Overall, elaborate on your virtual conference presentation experience. Feel free to share your thoughts on how the conference experience could be improved.
11. Would you consider presenting for future virtual conference opportunities? Why or why not?

**Virtual Conferencing Lessons Learned**

*Location & Equipment Logistics:* In the first year, attempting a blended approach proved a bit challenging due to the restraints in limited classroom availability, which made the logistics of reserving space somewhat difficult. Also, the dated equipment delayed in startup and/or did not have updated plug-ins to run certain applications. Due to this, it was planned to offer the second year in a 100% synchronous modality using Adobe Connect because the presenters and participants only need Internet access, a web browser, webcam, speakers/microphone, Adobe Connect plug-in, and the link to the meeting rooms. In the next offering, the conference will be offered 100% synchronously in Adobe Connect.

*Design and Development:* The overall process to design, develop, organize, recruit, schedule, train, host, moderate, record, archive, and evaluate the conference design and development was the easiest task of all for both years. The use of the various Web 2.0 tools eliminated the need for strains on the budget; therefore, the conference practically operated on zero budget (other than the cost for the institution’s campus license for Adobe Connect and the host’s salary). In the next offering, the conference will use the same Web 2.0 tools to plan, design, develop, and operate the virtual conference.
**Scheduling:** The first year, the host endured additional stress in organizing presenter schedules via email. The task was a bit challenging due to delay in email responses from presenters and multiple scheduling conflicts, especially as it related to the availability of classroom space. Discovering new tools, such as SignUp Genius to schedule presenters made scheduling a seamless task the second year. In the next offering, the free SignUp Genius tool will be used for all scheduling needs.

**Training:** Because the sessions were originally planned the first year to be in the classroom, no true training needs were warranted. However, when the planned diverted to offering a blended method, the host quickly made arrangements with the virtual presenters to conduct a quick practice session in Adobe Connect. The second year, training of the virtual presenters were a seamless process, as presenters were required to participate in at least a thirty minute Adobe Connect session with the host. The session provided presenters with the layout of the meeting room, how to use webcam and audio, how to upload files for display and sharing, and polling questions. Because there were only 20 presenters via a distance, the burden to provide training was not excessive or burdensome on anyone. In the next offering, Adobe Connect will be used to conduct trainings, as was done in the second year.

**Weblinks:** In the first year, even though the www.tiny.cc website was used to shorten URLs, the complaints about the long links pointing to the department webpage was feared as spam, so the following year the host used GoogleDocs for the conference webpages. In the next offering, an actual web page will be created for the conference.

**Assessments:** During the first year, because the majority of the presentations started in the classroom, paper survey forms were issued to participants at the end of each session with the goal of collecting them for chances at a higher response rate. Many participants indicated the desire to only fill out one form, as they were attending multiple sessions. The digital exit survey was emailed to all the presenters and participants at the end of the conference. The host realized that the following year’s formative and summative surveys would need to be submitted digitally for a virtual conference. Using the *Weblink Pods* feature in Adobe Connect to push survey links to participants in real time was likely the reason for higher completion rates.

**Future Discussions**
1. Why do individuals register for training and not participate?
2. Why was faculty participation from the home campus low for this free professional development opportunity both years?
3. What virtual conference best practice tips and/or guides can be incorporated for future offerings?
4. How could one plan monthly webinar sessions with various experts and topics? What does this model look like to plan on a continuous basis? Is monthly too obsessive?
5. Does the increase in registered numbers justify a budget line to support staff, resources, and/or keynote speaker(s) for future conferences? What variables would help support a line item on the budget for virtual professional development?
6. How important is active engagement (i.e., constructivist based training) to faculty?
7. Would department sponsored technology symposiums/conferences foster a technology interest and collaboration among departmental peers?

**Conclusion**

Faculty reported in exit evaluations, in distance learning newsletters, and in verbal communications that they learned a lot from the virtual professional development opportunities and received valuable knowledge and skills in online course development and facilitation training that they could also transfer into the traditional classroom, in addition to skills to work more efficiently in both modalities. First, the virtual conference sessions provided faculty with engaged discussions with the presenters. In addition, the presenters created poll questions that required immediate response from the audience. As faculty witnessed this concept, it supported the notion and importance of faculty presence in online courses with students. Second, the virtual conference sessions provided faculty with the opportunity to attend the sessions synchronously. The sessions were recorded and archived, which allowed those with scheduling conflicts to view the presentation at a later date, or allow those who attended virtually to also replay the video archives. This method for increasing retention is also a supported strategy faculty could use in their online courses to increase student retention: live, record/archive, and replay. Lastly, the virtual conference sessions provided the potential for global access of knowledge and information and global recognition for the dissemination
of innovative knowledge. Various archived links were used from other professional development programs as recommended resources or were shared with other colleagues to enhance knowledge and skills.

The future practices indicated in the HE-TPACK study suggested that technology support should be provided for emerging technology (Garrett, 2014). As discussed above, the primary author planned and delivered training for virtual conference presenters during the National Distance Learning week conference. This level of technology support is a positive indicator that faculty were able to learn new technology focused skills while actively engaging their virtual audience.

While the host had great success with individuals with various roles who participated in various sessions, there is still a challenge to get faculty to participate in free professional development opportunities, even virtually. Garrett (2014) noted that due to limited time to alter/enhance faculty pedagogy along with existing workload, faculty opt not to participate in training opportunities. However, with ease of planning and conducting virtual conferences, faculty should consider interacting and learning new technology enhanced teaching strategies for the millennial learners.

References


*Veronica Outlaw* is the Director of Distance Learning at the University of South Carolina Aiken, Aiken, South Carolina. veronicaoa@usc.a.edu.

*Kristi N. Garrett* is an Instructional Design & Technology Consultant in Atlanta, Georgia. itsolutions@kngarrett.info.
Creating Synergy & Best Practices in Online Course Development Partnerships

Veronica Outlaw
University of South Carolina Aiken

Kay M. Sackett Fitzgerald
Formerly with the University of Alabama

Abstract

Imagine you are a faculty member leading a group of students on a Study Abroad trip to Chiba, Japan and you have the opportunity to collaborate with an Instructional Designer (ID) to develop an online transcultural nursing course. This paper will describe the collaborative partnership between a faculty colleague and an ID to develop an online transcultural nursing course that was able to bridge the geographical gap and conclude with best practices and tips for a positive faculty and ID partnership in an online course development project. The powerful integration of Web 2.0 tools and other technologies was used to create a dynamic course that included asynchronous and synchronous modalities for global teaching and learning. The experience resulted in an invitation to present the course to Japanese faculty from a Japanese Distance Learning and Global Leadership Consortium of five nursing schools.

Introduction

Nursing students often like to travel internationally as part of their university experience. Faculty-led Study Abroad programs were available for interested students looking to immerse themselves in another culture. Study Abroad programs must be proposed, developed, and approved by a faculty member’s college/department with final approval granted by the responsible university Vice President for international programs. Program proposals included both academic and budgetary content. For purposes of this paper, development of the academic portion of the program proposal will be illustrated by a collaborative partnership between a faculty colleague and an Instructional Designer (ID) to develop an online transcultural nursing course.

A faculty member at a large southern research university was offered the opportunity to conduct a Faculty-led Study Abroad trip to Chiba University, Chiba, Japan. The combination of an online Transcultural Nursing course plus the trip was offered over nine days during summer 2013 for interested undergraduate and graduate students. The course and travel to Japan started on July 15, 2013. The faculty and students resided in Chiba, Japan from July 16 to July 24, 2013 and returned to the United States on July 26, 2013. The completion of all student activities was due on July 31, 2013. Three goals were identified: 1) to create a fun, engaging, and different learning experience for the nursing students; 2) to provide opportunities for the students to present to Japanese faculty and students from five Colleges of Nursing; and, 3) to participate in an experiential online activity via the Blackboard Learning Management System. The faculty (as the content expert) needed the expertise of an ID to develop portions of the course using Web 2.0 tools and other technologies, and to incorporate best practices using asynchronous and synchronous modalities. The remainder of this paper describes the synergistic relationship developed between the faculty member and the ID to create the opportunity that bridged the geographical gap and incorporated best practices and tips for a positive faculty and ID partnership in an online course development project.

Faculty and Instructional Designer Partnership

The online course development partnership with a faculty member and an ID involved extensive conversations regarding the course faculty’s teaching styles, teaching philosophies, technological self-efficacies, course purpose and goals, course design, course delivery modalities, multimedia, integrating technology with online pedagogy, instructional content, assessments, accessibility, copyright, and best practices for technology, pedagogy, and online facilitation. To do this, individuals in the partnership understood and considered each other’s roles and how the project’s process would evolve, with the overall goal of creating a robust and quality online course. The emergent themes (partnership, communication, collaboration, cooperation, and commitment) (Steven, 2013) from the
literature were directly aligned with the qualities and characteristics the faculty and ID needed in the online course development project. These themes were conducive to the understanding, respect, and trust needed for both parties to foster a professional and productive relationship.

**Faculty’s Role:** The faculty member served as the subject matter or content expert. The course faculty was responsible for collaboratively working with the ID to create an interactive online learning experience. The course faculty was the content expert in the partnership and was responsible for guiding the ID regarding the measurable goals, objectives, outcomes, course overviews, module content, supplemental materials, and measurable activities and assessments. The course faculty relayed the vision for the course to the ID, who in turn translated that vision into a course that promoted an online community of engaged learners by using individual and group interactive learner activities. To maximize personal skills and the quality of the online course, the course faculty recognized the need for assistance with technology-pedagogy integration, transforming classroom strategies to online strategies, development of instructions and multimedia, and compliances relating to accessibility and copyright. It was vital that the course faculty be open minded, trusting, vested, professional, able to work collaboratively (Stevens, 2013), and compliant to deadlines set for the delivery of content to build the course.

**Instructional Designer’s Role:** The ID served as the instructional educator (designer, trainer, researcher, and technologist), trained in emerging technologies and pedagogy, regardless of the discipline of the course being developed. The ID was responsible for building a course, which is normally similar to putting together a one-thousand piece puzzle. That involved having the knowledge and skills to know exact questions to ask the course faculty about the course (storyboarding, creating a comprehensive syllabus and course schedule, building modules, supplemental content and multimedia, aligning goals, objectives, and outcomes, adhering to quality assurance rubrics, and creating assessments). The ID was trained to develop online courses, assess proper measurement of course learning outcomes and objectives, review course materials to ensure that the content aligned with learning objectives, revise and rewrite instructional content to shape it for all learning needs, structure content and activities for robust student learning, advise on media to support learning, create animation, videos, and games to enhance student learning, and adapt instructional materials from the classroom to meet various online delivery modalities. To maximize the quality of the online course and the skills the course faculty needed to develop and facilitate an online course, the ID had to build an interpersonal, safe, and trustworthy relationship with the course faculty. Like faculty, the ID had to be very collaborative in order to recognize gaps and needs and suggest recommendations. Like faculty, it was vital that the ID (as an educator) conduct needs assessments to solve problems, critically think, and make sound pedagogical, instructional, and technological decisions (Schwier & Wilson, 2010). The ID was flexible, patient, and a great communicator. In addition, the ID had exceptional project and time management skills, was organized, and possessed great attention to detail. The ID was able to motivate, persuade, support, and encourage (Stevens, 2013) without being aggressive.

**Implementation of an Online Course Development Model:** In addition to having positive synergy within the faculty member and ID partnership while developing an online course, a strong and comprehensive online course development model was needed to work through the project. For example, using Outlaw’s Six-Phase Course Development & Delivery Model (Outlaw & Rice, 2015) or a similar strategic model ensured the course faculty was introduced and guided through the online course development project and partnership. Similar to a grading rubric for assignments, parties were aware of the expectations and processes for the project and the use of universal design templates to manage quality and standards for the development process and for the online course (Borgemenke, Holt, & Fish, 2013; Chao, Saj, & Hamilton, 2010; Liston, 1999; Stevens, 2013). The partnership included explicit plans for creating support structures, which included a pre-review process of collaboration modalities and content development, ongoing support and review of instructional content and technology, post-review of quality assurance and efficiencies, and continual course improvement for future deliveries.

To summarize, the Outlaw Model (Outlaw & Rice, 2015) involved a six-phase process to strategically plan, develop, and execute an online course.

- Phase 1 was the Initial Meeting phase where both parties met to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment of the faculty, the potential audience, and the course content. The data obtained from this conversation resulted in the creation of a storyboard for the development of the online course. A plethora of topics were discussed that pertained to the quality of the course and various compliances (i.e., supplemental resources, assessments, multimedia, accessibility, copyright, media and graphics, length of course, course requirements, outsourcing resources and services, purchasing equipment and software, and training).
Phase 2 was the **Content Build and Review** phase. The plan of action dictated in Phase 1 was being transferred to a templated syllabus, schedule, and modular formats in Microsoft Word. The use of templates provided efficiency in the workflow process in building the content. The ID reviewed the drafts and continued to make recommendations regarding any aspect of the course as described in Phase 1. This phase required great attention to detail to minimize confusion for students. Once all matters on paper were resolved, the course faculty moved to Phase 3 (as training was needed) or Phase 4 to start building the course in the learning management system.

Phase 3 was the **Training** phase. Depending on the technological self-efficacy of the course faculty, he/she may elect to obtain training in any of the various tools used for the online course. Training may also relate to pedagogy and/or online facilitation best practices. This phase was very flexible and transpired at any point in the six-phase model as needed; however, it was recommended that any training be complete by the conclusion of Phase 4.

Phase 4 was the **Build in the Learning Management System** phase. In this phase, the content built in Phase 2 in Microsoft Word was transferred into a course shell template in the learning management system and was prepared for the course review and quality assurance review in Phase 5. The course faculty was highly encouraged to complete any training during this phase, complete course development 3-4 weeks prior to the start of the delivery term, and to partake in the course from a student’s perspective. Any issues discovered in design, pedagogy, or technology were resolved during this phase.

Phase 5 was the **Course Review and Quality Assurance** phase. During the first four phases, content and structure were reviewed in draft form; however, the entire course was reviewed again once the content was built in the learning management system during this phase. This ensured that the draft on paper technically aligned with the structure and features in the learning management system. Attention to detail was also vital in this process to ensure naming conventions were consistent, all components and instructions were present, the grade book was set up correctly, and all aspects of the assignment and assessment settings were set up (i.e., due dates, grade values, release parameters). Because reviews and edits were completed during the first four phases, Phase 5 was more about functionality and accuracy. The course faculty completed the final tasks (i.e., welcome video, welcome email, starting announcements, etc.) and prepared for the start of the term, which gave students the opportunity to start work on introductory assignments and purchase course supplies at least two weeks before the start of the term.

In Phases 4 and 5 of the Outlaw Model (Outlaw & Rice, 2015), the course endured stringent pre, during, and post reviews, technical testings, and usability testings to ensure the course faculty and students were clear on instructions, expectations, and processes. The differences in the time zones would not accommodate students who had issues during non-business hours. This process also acclimated the faculty to specifics of the course in the event there were technical issues abroad. It was recommended that the faculty member and ID complete the course in its entirety 3-4 weeks before the start of the semester so that any issues could be resolved (if any).

Phase 6 was the **Facilitate, Journal, and Revise** phase. By this time, the course faculty worked on their own while the course was live, and was encouraged to keep a daily or weekly journal of how the pedagogy, facilitation, technology, etc. fared. It was suggested that the course faculty conduct formative assessments during periodic points in the course. Obtaining feedback early in the process helped the course faculty make necessary and immediate edits, which prevented confusion in upcoming modules. The data from formative and summative assessments and self-journaling afforded the faculty with the opportunity to expedite revisions at the end of the term to have the course ready well in advance of the next offering. Working with an ID to make revisions was advised to maximize the enhancements needed, especially where technology use, instructions, and/or revising strategies were concerned.

Both parties entered the partnership with a vested interest in the outcome and they remained objective, positive, and encouraging. Although oftentimes challenging, both parties entered the partnership with trust, an open-mind, and a true willingness to work through the project in a safe and non-obtrusive manner. The goal was not to infringe upon academic freedom, but merely to provide guidance on the development of an online course in areas that are often unbeknownst to faculty (i.e., design, instruction, accessibility, copyright, multimedia, best practices). The faculty
acknowledged the value in the process and embraced how it would enhance online skills that could also be transferred in the classroom, which included strategies that proved more efficient in facilitation and workflow processes. Transitioning from the classroom to an online environment required a shift in pedagogy (Steven, 2013); therefore, the partnership required research and knowledge of best practices that united experiences from both parties to make specific transformations (those that both parties did not possess on their own cognizance). The overall goal of the partnership was to produce a robust, interactive, and engaging course to increase the faculty’s course development and facilitation skills, increase the efficiency of workflow processes for faculty and students, and to increase the value of the online student learning experience.

**Development of Online Transcultural Nursing Course**

As outlined in the Outlaw Model (Outlaw & Rice, 2015), the faculty and ID in this case were partnered to develop a new transcultural nursing course for undergraduate and graduate students participating in a culturally competent care immersion-learning program trip to Chiba, Japan during summer 2013. As the couple met to begin Phase 1 (Initial Meeting) of the project, the nursing faculty member explained that the elective course offered the opportunity to explore transcultural nursing in Japan, explore roles of cultural beliefs and values in cultural competence care, and immerse students in the daily lives of a diverse population to which they would provide health care.

The course faculty needed a way to capture this unique experience in real-time, provide self-efficiency in workflow in reviewing, grading, and providing feedback, and offer students a chance to reflect and accumulate work into various projects while on the trip (versus trying to recall the nine-day long experience in a single reflective paper). The faculty used keywords such as “active participation, immersion, experience, think, talk, write, reflect, demonstrate, and evaluate” to describe what the students would be doing on the trip and wanted a productive way to capture this nine-day experience for assessment and grading.

Because this course was an elective and for academic credit, the ID suggested using the current Blackboard Learning Management System, since the students were familiar with the tool, and it would serve as a repository for the artifacts students would collect and create. The ID suggested several strategies to capture the daily experiences, as waiting after the return from the trip could have resulted in loss of details in trying to reflect on a ten day trip in a few hours. Intense collaborations resulted in a storyboard for the course content and activities, and for the video scripts for the recorded lectures using Google Earth and GreenScreen technologies.

The course shell included a copy of the learning management system course template for ease of use and navigation, which included a designed homepage, Course Menu, and various tools for teaching and learning (Messages, Announcements, Blog, Assignments Dropbox, Weblinks for asynchronous communication, and Blackboard Collaborate for synchronous communications). The shell also included content such as the faculty welcome video and course presentation video, syllabus, course schedule, articles and weblinks, instructions to blog assignments, reflective paper assignments, and student presentation assignments. The following student activities were required to satisfactorily complete the course:

- introductory assignment to create a digital flipbook (using Flipsnack.com)
- active participation in transcultural nursing experiential learning activities while in Chiba, Japan
- participation in cultural activities of interest while in the country
- completion of daily journal entries to the course blog (12)
- reflective evaluation paper
- final PowerPoint presentation (undergraduates); final narrated PowerPoint presentation using Screencast-O-Matic (graduate)

**Transcultural Online Course Components**

*Blackboard Navigation:* For the purposes of this course, the Blackboard navigation relates to the design of the course shell in the learning management system, which enabled students to know how to easily progress through the course. These components consisted of the course homepage, course menu, announcements, syllabus, and course schedule.

*Homepage:* The course homepage was the landing page for the course and provided students with the opportunity to know where to begin to start the course and access pertinent links. The use of the Quality Matters Rubric (Quality Matters, 2011) was referenced to address certain standards that should be included in an online course. For the
purposes of this course homepage, standard 1.1 from the rubric was referenced to ensure basic standards were implemented to steer students in an easy way to get started.

Course Menu in Blackboard: The faculty member and ID ensured that the course menu was easy to access and follow by incorporating intuitive naming conventions of buttons. Tools that were not being used were hidden from the students, eliminating confusion on what was available (or not) in the course shell.

Announcements: The Announcements tool was used to allow the course faculty to push important information or updates to the students as necessary. It was the first button on the course menu and students were accustomed to checking it for immediate course updates.

Course Syllabus: The course syllabus served as the contract for the course. It detailed the course title and number, course faculty information, course description, required prerequisites, outcomes/objectives, required readings, textbook(s), technology and other resources needed, policies for the course, department/college, and institution, grading policies and scale, system and technical requirements, and student support services links. A template was used for this course syllabus to ensure all of those components contained the standard and required verbiage and jargon and policies and procedures used within the college.

The use of the syllabus template literally provided the course faculty with the opportunity to only fill in the blanks relating to contact information, course description, prerequisites, objectives, readings, specific resources, class policies, and grading criteria. The use of a syllabus template helped the course faculty maintain a functional, readable, accessible, and consistent document for students. Any templated scripts relating to policies or technology could be edited to fit the needs of a course. For the purposes of this course syllabus, the use of the Quality Matters Rubric (Quality Matters, 2011) was referenced to address the course overview and introduction (1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7), learning objectives (2.1, 2.3, 2.5), assessment and measurement (3.1, 3.2), instructional materials (4.6), and learner support (7.1, 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4) standards of the rubric.

Course Schedule: A course schedule was vital to include with the online course, as it provided a detailed outline of when students needed to submit various assignments. It also served as a great tool for those who needed help with discipline and project and time management. Being clear as to how much effort and time would be required on a weekly basis kept course related surprises to a minimum. As with the course syllabus, the course schedule incorporated a standard template that is functional, readable, accessible, and consistent. For the purposes of this course schedule, the use of the Quality Matters Rubric (Quality Matters, 2011) was referenced to address the overview and introduction (1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4) standards of the rubric.

Course Content

Blog Tool: The faculty wanted the students to blog their daily experiences while in Chiba, Japan. Students were asked to include text, images, sound, and/or videos in their blogs. The accumulation of all this information would have proven too taxing to report upon return from the nine-day trip and students would have likely not captured everything due to lapse in time, jet lag, or rushing to complete the final assignment. Completing it daily afforded students with the chance to capture the true and complete essence of their daily experiences. Using this tool allowed the students and the faculty to engage in each other’s daily posts for additional sharing and collaborating.

Assignments: Students were introduced to Tellagami and Screencast-O-Matic to integrate creative audio/video components to their final PowerPoint presentation assignments. Tellagami is a mobile app that allows users to create and share animated videos. Screencast-O-Matic is an online and/or client screen recording application. Both are free and allow users to convert static text and/or images into a narrated video presentation.

Articles and Weblinks: The nursing faculty provided articles, a document, and a weblink as supplemental content for students. The purpose was to introduce students to articles published by some of the host Japanese faculty, a World Health Organization (WHO) document on global hypertension, and a weblink to cultural competency information. Following is a list of the supplemental student resources provided for the students.

Cultural Competency: http://nursing.ua.edu/graduate_cultural_competency.htm


Supplemental Instructional Resources: As an added bonus, the ID provided students with Blackboard video tutorials on how to use the Blog tool and how to submit assignments to the drop box. In addition, the ID provided instructional handouts and videos for the use of Tellagami and Screencast-O-Matic to have while composing the PowerPoint presentation final assignment.

Web 2.0 Tools and Technology for Multimedia Content

Asynchronous Communications: The combination of Google Earth (demoed traveling from Alabama to Japan) and GreenScreen were used to produce a creative, engaging, and interactive narrated video lecture. Also, the use of a digital ebook application was used to create an interactive and shareable ebook of faculty, students, and ID introductions.

Faculty Welcome Video: First, the course faculty created a welcome video using GreenScreen technology to display the course shell for navigation and demonstration purposes for the students. For the purposes of this faculty welcome video, the use of the Quality Matters Rubric (Quality Matters, 2011) was referenced to address the course overview and introduction (1.7) standards on the rubric. GreenScreen and Google Earth were used to create the video to introduce students to the course faculty, the entire course, expectations, and course navigation.

Flip Book eBook: Second, as with the faculty welcome video, students were also asked to complete course introductions, which was in the form of a digital eBook using www.flipsnack.com Web2.0 technology. Students were asked to provide a picture and a 1-3 paragraph biography of themselves. The course faculty and ID completed the activity also. The pictures and introductions were created in Microsoft Word and imported in Flipsnack to create a digital eBook. Upon completion, the shareable link to the ebook was shared with the Japanese colleagues and students so that they were familiar with the U.S. faculty and students before their arrival. This could have easily been done in a text format using the Discussion Board, but that would not have been shareable with the Japanese faculty and students, nor as engaging. Incorporating technology, text, and pictures to create course introductions was a more engaging and shareable way to build community in an online transcultural course (Gagne, 2013; Pappas, 2015; Quality Matters, 2011).

Faculty Course Presentation Lecture: Lastly, there was a personal invitation from the Japanese Distance Learning and Global Leadership Consortium of five nursing schools to have the faculty and designer synchronously present on the planning, development, and execution of this transcultural course using Polycom technology and Blackboard Collaborate. The virtual connections did not withstand the presentation; therefore, the course faculty and ID used PowerPoint and MediaSite technology to capture the presentation, then the video link was shared via email with the Japanese colleagues. The course presentation for the Japanese faculty included an overview of the course, virtual
tour, information about the nursing program, course format, and explanation of the faculty and ID partnership to plan, develop, and execute the online course.

*Synchronous Communications*: Blackboard Collaborate was the licensed technology the university provided for faculty and students to collaborate in the Learning Management System. Blackboard Collaborate was used for the ID to communicate and conduct a presentation to the colleagues and students in Japan that ultimately failed due to connection issues on the host side in Japan. The tool had the capability to text chat, audio chat, share files and screen, and share webcam.

**Formative and Summative Assessments**

E-Learning formative and summative assessments are vital to the success of an online course. By definition, formative assessments occur during an instructional process and are always done before the summative assessments (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2007). Formative assessments are a form of monitoring ongoing student feedback and the information is useful in assessing immediate issues that can be adjusted or resolved to improve student learning while the course is in session. On the other hand, summative assessments evaluate overall student learning after an instructional process and guide adjustments needed in future courses (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2007).

Perea-Diltz & Moe (2014) describe the importance of using online tools that create meaningful and effective assessments. Selected exemplars include blogs, wikis, rubrics, journaling, discussion boards, reflection papers, and collaborative reports or presentations used co-creatively by students (peers) and faculty. Subramanya (2014) explores the need to address end of course evaluation tools that are fair, objective, and valid from the online perspective of anytime and any place versus the traditional face-to-face teaching and learning interaction. Research by DeGagne & Walters (2009) and Schacher & Neumann (2010) support the need for continued study of formative and summative assessments from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective. These formative and summative methods help faculty and designers gauge whether the pedagogy and technology are being used properly and, according to Chappuis and Chappuis (2007), measure student mastery of content standards.

**Formative Assessments**: Because the faculty and students were dispersed from immediate technical assistance while on the nine-day trip in Chiba, Japan, the course faculty needed a way to formatively assess student learning and the ability to complete daily assignments. The ID recommended a non-invasive approach to this request by incorporating daily blogs, not only about their experiences, but also on any issues relating to Blackboard and completing the daily tasks. Not only was the Blog tool in the learning management system used to journal daily activities, it created the opportunity to reflect on daily experiences, whether it related to their cultural experiences or to any course components and communication with the faculty. The faculty was able to ascertain from the daily blogs whether the students were facing technology or instructional issues that would have delayed their progress and it afforded the faculty the opportunity to make immediate adjustments. Although there were no reported issues, having this strategy in place proved to be a useful best practice to include in all online courses.

**Summative Assessments**: For this particular course, there were only four students enrolled (3 undergraduate and 1 graduate); therefore, the formal Student Opinion of Instruction (SOI) end of the semester student evaluations were not conducted because the numbers were too small; therefore, the students were asked to complete a final reflective evaluation paper and final PowerPoint Presentation (the graduate student was required to add narration to her presentation). Selected student comments on their reflective papers included an appreciation for the overall cultural experience of traveling to Japan; the interaction with peer Japanese nursing students and faculty; the difference in educational styles; the types of care provided for patients in a variety of facilities; the eagerness of the Japanese students to practice English; their international presentations; the trip to Tokyo Disney; karaoke; dressing up as a geisha for a traditional tea ceremony; and a visits to McDonalds© and Starbucks©. Students liked the blog tool for the daily journaling because it provided the opportunity for them to add text, sound, video, pictures, poetry, commentary about their travels, and observations about their cultural experiences. Journaling also allowed them to compose the content for their final presentations in order to share with the Japanese faculty and students. Lastly, students were intrigued with the use of GreenScreen and Web 2.0 technology to create the interactive and engaging welcome video.
Course Analytics

*Overall Summary of User Activity:* Image 1 is a pie chart view that includes data from the Blackboard Learning Management System that was generated at the conclusion of the course. The actual duration of the course for the students was July 15 - July 31, 2013; however, the faculty and ID had access to the course shell from June 1 to October 10, 2013. The user data includes activity from the course faculty, nursing students, ID, and Japanese faculty and students from 5 collaborating schools (as guest users). The greatest number of hits and percentages were from the following top 4 areas:

1. Blogs (872 hits at 53.53%),
2. Content Item (456 hits at 27.99%),
3. Grade Center (123 hits at 7.55%), and
4. Messages (114 hits at 7%).

The total number of hits was recorded as 1,629. The activity makeup included: 1) the course faculty posting grades, email, announcements, content, etc., 2) the ID for technical support issues and building and editing of content areas, 3) the four nursing students, 4) the university’s unit technical support team, and 5) other Japanese faculty and colleagues as guest users. The students and course faculty gave permission to one Chiba colleague to look at the structure of the grade book. No grades were posted at the time.

Image 2 is a graph view of the user activity. The timeframe marked in Red indicates the time in Japan. The timeframe marked in Green indicates the time students were concluding their final requirements and checking for grades, along with hits from the guest users in Japan to view the extra information that was sent after the trip concluded, and from the course faculty and ID to analyze data from the number of hits.
Overall Summary of User Activity - Hour of Day: The time difference from the United States and Japan is twelve hours. There were hits to Blackboard every hour of the day, with the top six contenders being:
1. 3:00am (203 hits at 10.47%),
2. 7:00am (158 hits 8.15%),
3. 5:00pm (157 at 8.10%),
4. 8:00pm (118 hits at 6.09%),
5. 6:00pm (114 hits at 5.88%), and
6. 9:00pm (112 hits at 5.78%).

Overall Summary of User Activity - Day of Week: Image 4 depicts each day of the week that had user activity. Monday (420 hits at 21.66%), Sunday (387 hits at 19.66%), Wednesday (354 hits at 18.26%), and Thursday (249 hits at 12.84%) were the days with the most activity. Although Saturday had the least number of hits (185 hits at 9.54%), the usage was still exceptional for a course that had only four students.
Lessons Learned

Overall, the experience in developing this transcultural online nursing course was very positive. First, the faculty and ID partnership in developing the online course was very productive and resulted in a collegial relationship that extended to other projects, mentorship, and friendship. Second, the use of the Outlaw Model (Outlaw & Rice, 2015) to complete this project and the steps in each phase proved that the strategic process could work in the partnership, provided that both parties are dedicated, trustworthy, respectful of roles, open-minded, creative, and committed to the same outcome . . . positive online student learning experience. Third, the use of Blackboard and other Web2.0 technology provided efficiency in workflow for the course faculty and students and was strategically selected to align with the course goals and objectives. Fourth, the partnership between the American and Japanese faculty members continues to this day. In person and virtual visits continue as does work on a variety of articles and abstract submissions for presentation. Lastly, the students had many varied experiences. The opportunity for students to provide international presentations was a significant bonus.

Even though the overall outcome of the course was positive, it was not without minor challenges. An invited synchronous virtual conference call was scheduled to present to an interested consortium of five Japanese nursing universities. Chiba University hosted the virtual conference call. Using Blackboard Collaborate, the ID, nursing faculty, and nursing students were to present the partnership in developing and executing the online course. The four Japanese universities were trying to connect to each other using Polycom technology in order to view the interactions with the ID (in the U.S.) and Chiba University. With the twelve hour difference in time zones, it was about 3:00am for the ID.

The conference rooms at each Japanese nursing university had a Polycom system with webcam, microphone, speakers, and Internet connection, but the audio connection was inoperable. Only Chiba University was able to see and/or text chat with the ID. The ID could see and text chat with the individuals in the conference room at Chiba University, but could not hear, nor see, the colleagues at the other four universities. In spite of delivering instructions for connecting to Blackboard Collaborate, there were unanticipated connectivity issues among Chiba University, the other four Japanese Universities, and the American University faculty and students. Interestingly, however, individual faculty from the various Japanese universities were able to gain video visuals for brief moments, but audio never worked, and some individuals completely lost connection. After about thirty minutes of trying to troubleshoot the problem, the connection ended. Upon return to the United States, to supplement the missed virtual conference opportunity, the course faculty partnered with the ID to record a faculty video course presentation and recorded the selected 2013 FantasTech Virtual Conference presentation to share with the Japanese colleagues. These archives provided the international colleagues the opportunity to obtain the information they were
seeking about the execution of this transcultural course. The videos and virtual presentations provided the opportunity to reach people globally about this transcultural online course development experience.

After reflection and discussion, the faculty and ID figured out that one of the issues could have been the polycom bridge connection requirements from Japan to United States. In the future, the authors will partner with an instructional technologist expert to collaborate with international colleagues regarding technology use for synchronous communications. Planning, pre-testing, and post-testing of technical operations and functions are vital to ensure that all stakeholders have sufficient technology requirements to successfully communicate.

Future Opportunities

The development of this course awarded the faculty, students, and ID with an award, a publication, an invited international presentation to the Japanese Distance Learning and Global Leadership Consortium of five nursing schools, international collaboration opportunities, and a selected presentation for the 2013 FantasTech Virtual Conference (Bytes, Blogs, eBooks, Storyboards, GreenScreens, and Polling: Creating An Online Course Circa 2013). The undergraduate students presented their final PowerPoint presentations to their nursing peers and to the Alabama State Student Nurses Conference group in fall 2013. The graduate student’s final narrated presentation was used in an Issues in Community Health course in fall 2013 and Population Health course in spring 2014.

Conclusion

The collaborative opportunity between the course faculty and ID to develop a transcultural online nursing course to incorporate the Outlaw Model (Outlaw & Rice, 2015), was a unique and rewarding experience. The addition of GreenScreen and Web 2.0 technology enhanced the course’s interactivity and sparked the interest of the American students, as well as intrigued the Japanese faculty and students. This experience provided an example of how the use of robust instructional strategies and technology aided in bridging international gaps with teaching and learning. Other than the minor issues with connectivity, the course provided a robust learning experience and exposed the international guests to a working course development model that could be used as an example for future educational international collaborations.

References


Veronica Outlaw is the Director of Distance Learning at the University of South Carolina Aiken, Aiken, South Carolina. voutlaw37@gmail.com.

Kay M. Sackett Fitzgerald is a former Associate Professor at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama. kay.sackett@gmail.com.
Accessibility and the Art of Building Buy-In

Jessica M. Phillips
The Ohio State University

Abstract

As distance education creates more learning opportunities for a wider audience of students, with it comes the growing responsibility to make those learning experiences accessible, relevant, and engaging for learners of varying abilities, disabilities, background, preferences, and cultures. While Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and ADA Title II guarantee accessibility as a civil right, it will require strategic change management and creative messaging to build the buy-in necessary to move an accessibility initiative forward at an institutional level.

Introduction

Building interest, buy-in, and momentum to move a project or initiative forward requires a great deal of strategy. If done well, it may even feel a bit like a carefully choreographed dance. Without a doubt, to effectively move an idea forward and to springboard it into driving action will require messaging that is catered toward specific audiences, empowerment of champions to drive the change forward, and careful analysis of the ways in which key people are motivated at the institution.

Accessibility and UDL Defined

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) involves a proactive process of designing learning experiences that achieve the highest level of functionality and positive learner experience for the widest audience possible (Burgstalher & Cory, 2008). In order for UDL to be effective, it requires purposeful consideration and strategy in all areas of course planning and design. The end result will be online learning that allows students to access, interact, and learn in a variety of ways, addressing the learning styles and learning needs of a wide variety of students.

Accessibility refers to the ability of a device, product, service, or environment to be usable by as many people as possible. This is an important aspect of UDL and they often go hand in hand. UDL, in the context we use, refers to the process of making learning effective and usable for all and can extend beyond accessibility to addressing learner preferences, styles, and methods of instruction that meet students’ needs. Often accessibility is considered when integrating technology into the learning environment. UDL extends to how the technology is integrated into the learning plan, along with the other elements of the course.

Social Style Identification

There are multiple methods of identification of personality, professional, and/or communication styles. Whether you ascribe to StrengthsFinder, DISC, Myers Briggs, or another framework, each of them can help you in moving forward with strategic messaging and empowerment. For sake of this presentation, we will use a simplistic framework of Social Style Identification adapted from the work of J.A. White, Performance Consulting Services.

This framework identifies four social styles: analytical, driver, amiable, and expressive. Likely we dance between all four but may find ourselves in one or two domains a majority of the time. They key to unlocking this framework is to examine some characteristics of each so that you may begin to identify the potential social styles of key figures at your institution.

Those who fall in the analytical domain of the framework are often considered perfectionists, task-oriented, precise, cautious, and schedule-conscious. These individuals will appreciate the “why”, details, and time efficiency.

Those who fall in the driver domain are likely to be considered more competitive, independent, forceful, controlling, and straight-forward. These individuals are likely to appreciate a competitive advantage, leadership opportunities, and taking ownership.
Those who are in the amiable domain are likely to be considered sensitive, committed, cooperative, consensus-builders, and often desiring of approval. These individuals will sympathize with student stories, appreciate leadership opportunities, like to be involved in raising awareness, and to collaborate on solutions.

Those who fall in the domain of expressive may be considered to be spontaneous, less interested in detail, creative, personable and perhaps more likely to be the center of attention. These individuals are likely to enjoy being involved in brainstorming ideas and will be a powerful person to share successes.

**Benefits to UDL and Accessibility**

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and ADA Title II guarantee accessibility as a civil right. Increasingly legal action is taken against institutions that neglect to design with accessibility in mind. By implementing UDL and accessibility in design we are directly impacting the experience of students with disabilities but we are also improving the experience of all students, thereby increasing student engagement, retention, and student success for all.

Ultimately, building accessibility into the very foundation of Higher Education is simply the right thing to do. Daniel Goldstein, counsel to the National Federation of the Blind, states that “if the digital world is not made accessible, then you deny the opportunity to people with disabilities – not just deaf-blind people, but people who can’t use their hands – to participate in the social, educational and political life of our nation” (Brody, 2016, para. 10).

**The Art of Building Buy-In**

Now that you have a framework from which to build your plan for buy-in, you can consider the various audiences you might encounter and what sort of messaging might appeal to them based on their social style domain(s). Messaging this around key pillars will also be helpful.

1. **Connection to the mission.** Consider in your messaging how the initiative of UDL and accessibility is related to the mission of your institution and identify specific alignments. Then consider how someone in each of the domains of social style might best respond to messaging around the connection to the mission.

2. **Financial implications.** When it comes to accessibility, there are multiple financial implications to be considered. One is, of course, the legal risk. As lawsuits continue to emerge legal fees and settlement costs can be expensive. In addition, the loss of revenue as an institution’s reputation is marred in a lawsuit can be another implicit repercussion. Along with the legal risk comes the cost of retroactively fixing accessibility issues rather than proactively considering them at the onset of a project (which is more resource and cost efficient). Consider how you might build messaging around financial implications for those in the various social style domains.

3. **Professional implications.** At most institutions, professional development, marketability, and reputation go a long way. Consider what the professional implications of driving forward with accessibility might be and how you might build interest while thinking of the social style domains.

**Leverage Champions**

As you build buy-in through messaging, consider how you can further leverage the champions that emerge from each social style domain. The “driver”, for example, is likely to be effective in pushing forward with accessibility as a directive in his or her area whereas the “amiable” individual will be able to share powerful student stories to drive interest.
Conclusion

Building buy-in around accessibility and UDL is no small task. It requires a multi-faceted approach that considers the unique motivations and styles of those you are trying to reach. Once the buy-in is built, reap what you have sown and leverage those champions to further the cause and ultimately lead Higher Education toward higher levels of accessibility.

References


Jessica M. Phillips is a Sr. Instructional Designer and Strategic Initiatives Coordinator at The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. Phillips.1507@osu.edu.
Is Your Online Course a Flat Pancake or a Hot Tamale?

Angie Parker
American College of Education

Abstract

The students we teach have never known a day without technology. The classrooms of today often are not conducive to learning for these students because the lectures, paper/pencil activities, and homework assignments are foreign to them. Research tells us these Digital Natives have brains that are wired differently and anticipate material in whole new ways. This presentation will utilize many new techniques to enhance engagement, collaboration, and critical thinking for the students of the 21st Century.

Introduction

Before we can begin to consider how to restructure instruction in the virtual environment, we need to know who our students really are. Whether we are teaching doctorate level students, high school, or even K-12, we need to understand how these students learn. Today’s students from kindergarten through college represent the first generation to grow up with technology. They have spent their entire lives surrounded by computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age. Today’s average college graduates have spent less than 5,000 hours of their lives reading, but over 10,000 hours playing video games (not to mention 20,000 hours watching TV or surfing the web). Computer games, email, the Internet, cell phones and instant messaging are integral parts of their lives (Miller, 2015).

Changes in How We Learn

It is now clear that as a result of this technology-rich environment and the sheer volume of their interaction with technology, today’s students think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors. These differences are much more profound than most educators realize. “Different kinds of experiences lead to different brain structures,” says Dr. Bruce D. Perry of Baylor College of Medicine (2014). It is very likely that our students’ brains have physically changed and are different from previous generations as a result of the instant decision making skills required in digital gaming or internet “surfing”. But whether or not the physical brain has changed, we can say with certainty that their thinking patterns have changed.

The importance of the distinction is this: “Digital Immigrants learn like all immigrants; some are better than others at adapting to their new environment. Most, however, retain, to some degree, their ‘accent,’ that is, their foot in the past” (Prensky, 2001). The “digital immigrant accent” can be seen in such things as turning to the Internet for information after all other avenues have been exhausted or in reading the manual for a program’s instructions rather than assuming that the program will install itself and provide online instructions. Today’s Digital Immigrants were introduced to their culture differently from previous generations, and are now in the process of slowly acquiring a new language. Prensky (2001) provides us with numerous examples of the immigrant accent: printing out your email, needing to print out a document written on the computer in order to edit it and bringing people physically into your office to see an interesting web site (rather than just sending them the URL). My own favorite example, says Prensky is the “Did you get my email?” phone call. Those of us who are Digital Immigrants can, and should, laugh at ourselves and our “accent.”

Teaching the Native

All too often the “Immigrant” continues to think of their world as it was decades ago before the influx of technology. They complain about the new generation and their new language. If we look at actual immigrants coming to the United States, we see that it is the youngest children who learn the new language first. They want to immediately assimilate. We see adult immigrants using children to help them learn the new culture and the new language. The students we teach will not go back to the world as it was before. They want to move forward and to
continue that adventure with technology in hand! So if we take this information into the educational setting, what should happen next?

Research by Gee (2016) illustrates that gaming may be the next trend in education. His views are supported by other researchers on gaming such as Nagle (2005) and Schute (2011) who see gaming as a way to connect the students of today with a rich experience in learning. Gaming allows the student to easily gain new skills, apply those skills, and make split second decisions to advance to higher levels. Games are played at the skill level of the player. The player advances at their own pace, unlike much of education today.

Games are only one way to engage “native” students and to enhance their critical thinking skills. Thousands of Web 2.0 tools are available to allow for collaboration and use of the new digital language these students bring the classroom. Educators often feel that designing games or even implementing new tools is far too time consuming and that the alignment with content may not be sufficient. That need not be the case. Throughout this presentation, attendees will see how online tools are providing a wealth of new techniques to seize the minds of our 21st century students.

Other ideas for redesigning and enriching online courses include virtual field trips, QR codes, and word clouds. In this presentation each will be presented with numerous ways to integrate these tools into all content areas and all levels of learning. Remember, these students are our digital natives and they want to be involved in their learning. They do not want to be fed the flat pancake for one more day!

References:


Angie Parker is Full Time Faculty in Digital Teaching and Learning at American College of Education, Indianapolis, Indiana. angie.parker@ace.edu.
Storm Proofing Your Online Course Schedule

Oscar W. Raile
The University of Virginia’s College at Wise

Abstract

This paper looks at the impact of an epic storm in February 2015 and the resulting state of emergency that closed The University of Virginia’s College at Wise for a three week period. It examines how some faculty were able to keep their classes on schedule while others fell further behind each day the college was closed. Findings from a study of how other institutions prepare for extended closures and evacuations are presented. Examples from two exemplary plans are presented to assist in assessing and updating an institution’s plan for extended closings and campus evacuation. The session is relevant to teaching faculty, administrators and instructional design staff and others that have a role in “storm proofing” course schedules.

Introduction

While significant winter storms are a common part of winters in the mountains of the southwest end of Virginia, every few years we get one that stands out from the norm.

For example, a 2009 snowstorm started in Wise county with heavy, wet snow that coated power and phone lines. The snow coating was observed to be as great as the diameter of a typical dinner plate. The weight of this wet snow brought down lines and broke so many power poles that a line crew said we had more power pole loss than they saw Katrina. While the college had commercial power restored within a couple days, residents that got power back in a week considered themselves lucky since many did not get power back for several weeks and the full restoral took several months. Phone, Internet service and TV cable tended to lag behind power restoration as the power lines had to be made safe before the other service crews could enter an area. Impact on classes was minimized by the timing of the storm as the fall semester was done and most of the recovery efforts took place over the holidays.

In 2015, the storm hit in the middle of the Spring semester maximizing the disruption to the academic schedule.

Note: This study found it unwise to try to focus exclusively on online delivered classes due to the common elements with traditional classroom classes, shared supporting systems and the fact that faculty often teach both modes.

The Storm Called SnowMagedden

The 2016 storm hit with a vengeance the middle of February with a “first punch” of nearly a foot and a half of snow. As is common, schools and businesses closed while the road crews worked to make the roads passible and allowing time to clear their own areas so their customers and students could return. To this point it seemed like a normal winter storm but then the forecast came that we would have a second round of heavy snow followed by a warming trend that would end in rain.

The second wave of snow started and dumped another foot and a half of very heavy, wet snow as rising temperatures inched closer to freezing. As the snow changed over to rain, the icy base under the new snow became so slick that snow plows were sliding off the road. The rain soaked into the nearly three feet of snow on the ground, roads …. and roofs. As local disaster response braced for flooding, the governor declared a state of emergency to make a lot of resources available. Now we are into uncharted waters and the usual 3 day or less storm closure playbook didn’t cover where we were now. Forecasts made it clear that conditions would remain challenging for the near term.

From the human side, students on campus, and maybe our faculty too, enjoyed the first few days of this closure. The break from studies and a chance to play in the snow was quite welcomed at first. But as our college and local schools closed reached a week of closure, the novelty began wearing off. The snow was no longer a playground for students but had become a foe that made it hard to get across campus on foot and vehicle travel was nearly
prohibited in the county to minimize the number of vehicles that ended up abandoned thus hindering emergency vehicles and snow removal.

While the county and state workers struggled to clear emergency routes, help began arriving in the form of the National Guard with their Humvees, huge transports and heavy equipment and Team Rubicon, a volunteer group of military veterans that work with first responders in emergencies around the world.

The conditions in Wise County proved challenging even for this “power team of heroes” as snow plows and heavy equipment got stuck in the slush covered icy roads. As the rain accelerated the melting process, the roads got even more slippery and flooding started. Now the big National Guard vehicles assisting local agencies had to wade through flood water supporting local rescue teams to reach those trapped by water and to deliver medical supplies, food and heating fuel. Swift water rescue teams worked around the clock assisting those who fell victim to fast moving flood waters.

The rain soaked snow placed an extraordinary weight of roofs, more than some could support. Reports of roofs collapsing began flowing into the county dispatch center. In a region with many people that need assistance and a generous population that is known for helping their neighbors, the cruelest hit of this storm came when the county food bank’s roof collapsed, a blow that staggered a community.

Clearly no one was getting back to campus anytime soon. Survival had become a focus for many including our students and faculty. Fortunately, the new power and communications infrastructure that was constructed following the 2009 storm along with other efforts minimized outages of communications and allowed access to teaching and Internet resources.

In spite of everything this monster storm hit us with, most students doing online classes generally stayed on schedule and even worked ahead on papers due later in the course. Well designed courses allowed them to look ahead and work ahead on some assignments.

A number of our faculty that had not taught online classes embraced various technologies to restore communications with their students. Some of these creative approaches will be discussed later in this paper. Their students responded and engaged with their classes. Not only did these faculty members keep on schedule, they provided positive, supporting activity for students during a very stressful period and lessened the burden of catching up when the school reopened.

The battle with this monster storm continued keeping schools closed for three weeks before main and secondary roads were made passible and campuses were sufficiently cleared to reopen and return to normal class schedules.

**How Did Our Traditional Classroom Faculty Improvise, Overcome and Keep Classes Going?**

In the SnowMaggeddon case, college systems remained in service but student ability to access was impacted by the inability to travel and life events. Alternative communications used in this case included social media and consumer technologies which accelerated the student reengagement with the academy.

Still (2015) Reported how faculty kept classes going in spite of the weather:

- Created video tutorials using Camtasia for every lecture and uploaded them on YouTube
- Used Google Drive to create online surveys to test whether the students studied the material
- Using real-time weather events as ways to teach concepts related to how the Appalachians influence local meteorology and climate
- Used technology to engage with learning resources 24-7 (normally face to face only)
- Using the College portal and Google Docs to engage students in discussion about their developing qualitative projects or drafts of pieces they are writing
- Google Hangout for real-time discussions - sent out follow-up messages to students when it became apparent that the College would be closed for a lengthy time.
- Explained expectations for when assignments would be due, as well as when we might have exams
- Kept in daily contact with her students via email and Moodle
• Asked students to use this time to work on final projects, and I have had a lot of communications with students about getting topics and articles approved.
• Meeting with students via FaceTime to discuss student projects
• Students are also watching experiments on YouTube as motivation for their laboratory projects

These ad hoc applications of technology definitely aided the continuity in the classes these faculty members taught.

Summary of Key Points from the SnowMaggeddon Event

• Student and employees were essentially homebound for three weeks
• Power and communication outages while less common than with past storms, still prevented some homebound students from accessing college systems
• Cable based Internet service (most common in the area) experienced outages in some locations with prolonged restoral times, in part due to the inability to get to residences
• Cellular service stayed up and some students engaged the technology based teaching efforts via smartphones (supports notion of designing for mobile screens first)
• College data center and Internet service stayed up providing normal access to college resources
• Academic continuity varied
  o Online classes were available and continued on schedule
  o Some faculty used familiar, consumer and social media technologies to continue their classes
  o Others simply fell behind necessitating actions to recover lost class time
• Communications between off site participants and instruction was a key factor for continuity
• Students’ “sense of disconnectedness” mitigated by course activity. Hartman (2008) examined the experiences of faculty and students from the University of New Orleans and documented how great the human side sense of loss and displacement was and the value of online discussion forums to assist students in processing and dealing with their experience.

A Need for Planning

In the literature reviewed for this study, one paper summed up some key concerns. Meyer & Wilson (2011) in their review of 50 state Flagship Institutions concluded three points about these institutions incorporation of statements about academic continuity in emergency situations. They concluded:

First, only a third of the flagships had incorporated statements about academic continuity in the face of an emergency, largely urging technological solutions.

Second, even when technological solutions were mentioned, they seemed to be in the form of suggestions that faculty could consider were they so inclined.

Third, in no case did an institution state a policy that courses would continue to be delivered online in the event of an emergency, although the University of Alabama comes very close.

We can only conclude, as did Hsing et al. (2003), that “higher education . . . is not well prepared” (p. 53).

The findings in my own literature review correlated with a statement in the Meyer & Wilson (2011) paper, “While this literature on emergency management is detailed, Well-conceived and thorough, very little mention is made of the academic side of the institution or the continuity of operations as soon after the disaster has passed as possible.”

Online Teaching Issues in Academic Continuity

• Clearly life and environmental events are pivotal factors in disruptions.
• Communications is essential. The loss of communications disconnects students from instruction and is often an early casualty in major events. Pre-event planning mitigates communications outages
• Students and faculty delivering instruction are affected by the life event and communications both during the disruption and during the recovery from the disruption. Planning should consider the human factors.
• Fully online classes developed using proven pedagogy were very effective in providing continuous instruction as noted by Bates (2013)
• While communications are often addressed as an IT Department issue (I will start teaching when IT has things working again), our faculty proved that even those that “don’t teach online” can overcome disruptions with some simple technologies
• As an interim measure, a variety of social media and consumer technologies were proven to effectively restore communications and facilitate instruction
• The best planning as is the case with all disaster readiness efforts is to work out as much as you can before the event so you only have to deal with unforeseeable things in the heat of the event
• It is important to keep the students engaged with instruction to keep them making satisfactory progress, and for retention and compliance reasons. (especially with a high first generation and/or high risk student population)

Literature Review

Of the 30+ school sites searched for academic continuity, two institutions had exemplary plans that address key issues and serve as good references for institutions reviewing and updating their own academic continuity plans. The following is a brief highlight of some key points and perspectives from the plans of these two institutions.

**Loyola University**  The Loyola University plan defines actions by length of disruption in weeks and by type, either suspension of operations (a school closing) or an evacuation (used most for major hurricanes). The plan begins:

“This document primarily addresses contingencies for suspension of on campus operations for periods of up to two weeks, with some strategies for addressing longer evacuation periods…. general guidelines based on the experiences of Loyola University's faculty, staff, students, and administrators in emergency situations both longer and shorter term.”

Loyola put a lot of details that help the college community know some key things to expect as well as spelling out faculty and student responsibilities. Their lessons learned with the evacuation for Hurricane Katrina make their plan a highly suggested reference for planning. Some key points:

• Information and policy
  o Building closure and lockdowns – clarifies they can’t be accessed.
  o Details time and notification requirements for evacuating faculty and students – typically 48 hours to relocate and check in with new location and contact details.
  o Details on how to handle missed class days by percentage of course missed and the policy associated with each. Grading options are also stated in detail (avoids the time of a case by case process)

• Faculty
  o Ensure each course has a Blackboard presence and participate in training
  o Develop assignments appropriate for suspended operations or evacuation periods
  o Syllabus should have details on accessing the LMS, a stated expectation of course continuation, and details that would allow the student to work for 2 to 4 weeks without LMS access
  o Requirement to collect and keep student contact info
  o Instructions to “take what you will need” to continue classes from off campus locations

• Students
  o File personal evacuation plan
  o Practice accessing LMS
  o Provide regular and alternate email addresses and phone numbers
  o “Take what you will need” – Books, materials, etc.
  o complete assigned work
  o Monitor main web site for general information and announcements
Requirements that assume power source is available – power can be off hours to months depending on the extent of infrastructure damage.

While the items I have listed may appear to be more aligned with the face to face class, I have read student accounts where they left computers and all class materials (to travel light for an anticipated short term event) to find they have lost everything due to storm damage or looting that followed the storm. Therefore, the application to online courses may be more relevant that one would think at first glance.

**East Carolina University** East Carolina University focuses more in guidance to faculty as evacuation may be a less likely scenario for them. East Carolina University has two plans each defined by availability of a computer and Internet access:

“The following two sets of recommendations are offered as guidelines to encourage the continuation of instruction within East Carolina University (ECU).

The first set of recommendations assumes faculty and students will have Internet and/or computer access, and presents a Just-In-Time scenario, Scenario 1.

The second set of recommendations assumes that access to the Internet and/or a computer will not be available, and presents a Just-In-Case scenario, Scenario 2.”

Since policies rarely if ever prescribe how faculty will prepare and deliver courses, the language we find points toward preparation and technologies that can be used thus faculty must decide what works for their classes. Faculty are to create their own plan to ensure “the continuation of student learning” for a period of 2-4 weeks. On page 4 is a list of 10 questions for faculty to consider before creating their plan.

Tables cover aspects of operations with options for those with Internet and/or computer access followed “Just In Time options” for courses that don’t normally use the LMS.

Appendices include Discussion points for faculty to discus concerning the planning process and operations in adverse conditions along with a faculty checklist to guide preparation of each course so it can be delivered during a catastrophic event.

**Summary of Planning Considerations**

- Communications – both electronic and documentation written for distribution before the event hits (written, downloadable resources serve students during power and / or Internet outages)
- Access to campus – from off site and on site
- Travel safety (on campus as well as for commuting students and employees)
- Power and internet service outages for students and faculty
- Service outages between campus users and cloud, hosted or subscription services
- Alternatives to the usual face to face delivery of instruction
- How to operate without a help desk (if necessary)
- How to handle student issues when key offices are closed (Registrar, Financial aid, business office, etc.)
- Plan to go prepared! Faculty need to take sufficient materials and technology with them to continue classes.
- Faculty should be prepared to restore courses when leaving campus in the face of a major storm or event
- Schools must have a plan to quickly restore communication (web, text, email, emergency notification, etc.) and learning resources including systems hosting instruction activities. (Consider Katrina destroyed data centers.
- Students need to plan how they will protect their own technology, texts, course materials and copies of completed work to be able to resume their studies. Destruction and looting in Katrina resulted in loss of these things for some.
The time to plan for the next “SnowMaggedon”, Katrina or other disruption is now. Do you have a plan that will “storm proof your online course schedule”?

References


Oscar W. Raile is the Coordinator of Learning Technologies at The University of Virginia’s College at Wise, Wise, Virginia. owr3k@uvawise.edu.
Open Educational Resources: A Cost and Copyright Analysis

Tiffani Reardon
Kennesaw State University

Abstract

With the rising cost of education, textbooks are following suit. Books that might have been only $20 or $30 just 10 years ago might now be $100 or more. Alongside this, faculty are struggling with copyright and Fair Use, and they often find themselves backed into a wall that forces them to make their students buy these overly expensive textbooks. Good news! There is a solution. Open educational resources (OERs) have been in the past regarded with distaste because of quality issues and copyright issues. That is in the past, and with more and more people interested in creating and implementing OERs, the quality is going up, and the copyright questions are resolved. This paper analyzes the current state of cost and copyright in OERs with specific attention to an open online textbook being written at the time of this paper, Sexy Technical Communication.

The Case of Sexy Technical Communication

Since spring semester 2015, Affordable Learning Georgia (ALG) has been through five rounds of Textbook Transformation Grants. In each of these projects the grantees are creating or implementing open educational resources. There is an option to build a course around an OpenStax College textbook, another to replace textbooks with open educational resources, and another to create an open education resource. Sexy Technical Communication is an open, online technical writing textbook that is the result of one of these grants.

Sexy Technical Communication is an adaptation and expansion upon David McMurray’s Online Technical Communication textbook, with additional chapters from Steve Miller and Cherie Miller’s Why Brilliant People Believe Nonsense and chapters written by a team of four technical communication professors and an instructional designer from Kennesaw State University. Both Online Technical Communication and Why Brilliant People Believe Nonsense were used and changed with permission from the authors.

Cost Analysis

In 2013, 30% of students did not purchase the required textbook for a course, according to ALG (2016). Why? Because textbooks prices have gone up by 82% in the last decade, the annual cost of course materials per student is an estimated $1,200, and the average cost of 1 year of in-state tuition, fees, and housing in 4-year institutions is $18,000 (ALG 2016). Not only are the explicit costs of textbooks a problem, but the update cycles of many books are getting closer and closer together (2-3 years, right now), “wreak[ing] havoc on alternative markets for traditional textbooks, discourage[ing] sharing of books among friends, and lead[ing] to new library purchases of the same titles every few years” (Clobridge 2015).

The grant that sponsored the creation of Sexy Technical Communication was $30,000, and it was used to compensate for the time of all team members, honorariums for all contributors including several video guest speakers, and travel funding to promote the textbook at conferences. Sexy Technical Communication is set to replace the textbooks for two courses (four professors) at Kennesaw State University, TCOM 2010: Technical Writing, and WRIT 3140: Workplace Writing. These courses run 21 times a year, with between 20 and 50 students per section, for an estimated total of 525 students. The previous textbooks used in these courses are priced at $115.99 and $49.95, and Sexy Technical Communication will save students this cost. The total projected savings per year is expected to be $55,611.55, which far surpasses the original grant in only the first year of implementation.

Copyright Analysis

Perhaps the most commonly referenced and the most relevant part of copyright law to educators is Fair Use. Fair Use, outlined in section 107 of the Copyright Act, is essentially a legal way for people to use copyrighted works
without the proper permission in certain circumstances. Typically, it applies to nonprofit education and noncommercial uses, and it has restrictions that determine whether the use was Fair Use. While this opens so many doors for educators, there is some questionability in it because according to the U.S. Copyright Office, Fair Use is determined on a case-by-case basis, and every case is different (2016). Because Fair Use is vague in its guidelines, many educators don’t bother with it. For a work that they only plan to use certain sections of, they often make their students pay for the book, which could be anything up to $400 depending on the discipline. Often, when a student is faced with this decision, they decide to violate copyright on their own and look for an online copy of the text to download from unauthorized sites. According to ALG, 34% of students downloaded textbooks from unauthorized sites in 2013 (2016).

The most common types of copyright license for open educational resources are Creative Commons (CC) licenses. Creative Commons is an organization dedicated to giving people and corporations a way to allow their product users to copy materials while making sure that the people creating these resources are given the credit they want or deserve. The six most common CC licenses are described in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>License Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attribution</td>
<td>This license lets others distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon your work, even commercially, as long as they credit you for the original creation. <em>Sexy Technical Communication</em> will use a CC BY license.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution-ShareAlike</td>
<td>This license lets others remix, tweak, and build upon your work even for commercial purposes, as long as they credit you and license their new creations under the identical terms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution-NoDerivs</td>
<td>This license allows for redistribution, commercial and non-commercial, as long as it is passed along unchanged and in whole, with credit to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution-NonCommercial</td>
<td>This license lets others remix, tweak, and build upon your work non-commercially, and although their new works must also acknowledge you and be non-commercial, they don’t have to license their derivative works on the same terms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike</td>
<td>This license lets other remix, tweak, and build upon your work non-commercially, as long as they credit you and license their new creations under the identical terms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs</td>
<td>This license is the most restrictive of their six main licenses, only allowing others to download your works and share them with others as long as they credit you, but they can’t change them in any way or use them commercially.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The information in this table is from the Creative Commons website, which is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution license, CC BY. https://creativecommons.org/licenses

Perhaps the most beneficial thing to faculty of these Creative Commons licenses is that all except the NoDerivs options can be edited to reflect the specific needs of the instructor and his or her class. In a study done with OpenStax College and OER Research Hub, Rebecca Pitt reports that “[i]n contrast to copyrighted resources, our survey findings…[reveal] that openly licensed materials enable educators to take back some of that ‘control’ which was perceived as lacking when seemingly tied into using a costly resource with students” (2015). So, not only do OERs give educators the freedom to *use* materials without worrying about copyright and Fair Use, but they often also give the freedom to *change* them to fit their needs.

**A Solution to the Problem**

So how do we solve these cost and copyright problems? For Kennesaw State University’s technical writing classes, the solution is *Sexy Technical Communication*—an open online textbook that has been designed specifically for KSU’s classes and their needs, and is licensed only with attribution so that anyone else can use it and change it to fit
their needs. Every class is different, and creating a new textbook will not always work, but there are resources out there that can be used, molded, and distributed for free. If educators can make their classes better and their content more focused while lowering the debt load of their students, ask yourselves: why not give open educational resources a try?

References


Creative Commons. (n.d.) About the Licenses. https://creativecommons.org/licenses


**Tiffani Reardon** is the Instructional Designer for the Office of Distance Education in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, Georgia. treardo2@kennesaw.edu.
In an online environment where students cannot see facial expressions, body language, voice inflections, voice tones, or other non-verbal language which instinctually provides context through which to interpret the meaning of the instructor’s words, the words themselves become the sole focus within the spectrum of meaning for the your online students. The instructor’s words, often unintended or used in jest, can be interpreted by student working at a distance as offensive, derogatory, sexist or even discriminatory and have substantial unintended impact on the student working online in their home or work place.

Instructor teaching via distance are often placed at a disadvantage in that he/she conversely cannot see the students, cannot see their facial expressions or body language, and thus must rely specifically on their words. Paralleling George Carlin’s “7 Dirty Words You Cannot Say on TV”, online instructors should consider the following “7 Unprofessional Words and Actions” when teaching in an online environment and consider the impact on the online student sitting in their room reading the instructor’s words:

- **Selective Word Choice**: THINK before your write…….Words such as imbecilic, idiotic, stupid, dumb, and related words, used as either a noun or adjective, can impact a student.
- **Political or Religious Rants**: The online classroom is not the place for the instructor to espouse his/her beliefs and your students are not your future converts. Neutrality works.
- **Having a Bad Day**: Instructors should be cognizant of their personal situations and ensure outside influences do not impact their responses to students. Never use George Carlin’s “7 dirty words” or other inappropriate language in class.
- **Jokes**: Telling jokes may have their place but it is not in the online classroom. Jokes, although often intended to lighten the mood or serve as an “ice breaker” can offend students.
- **Denigrating Students**: Just as in the traditional classroom, online students should not be demeaned through condescending remarks by the instructor. Remove your ego…Students are in your online class to learn from you!
- **Forgetting Your Manners**: Instructor’s manners are not placed on a shelf when teaching online classes. “Please and thank you” do work and have an impact on your students.
- **“Silence Isn’t Golden”**: Students expect feedback, both positive and negative, in a timely manner and some students require more feedback than others. The instructor’s silence, in and of itself, can be negatively misconstrued by the student.

Although instructor’s academic freedom can extend to the virtual classroom, instructors should be aware of the other ramifications which can ensue when netiquette protocol is not followed. Online students are provided the same protections and rights as campus students and in our litigious society, an instructor can find himself/herself involved in a complaint or charge from a statement made in a virtual classroom. Additionally, unlike the traditional classroom, each and every word produced by the instructor within the classroom is “locked in stone” and discoverable.

Instructors should also be cognizant and appropriately address the behavior and language utilized among and between students in the online classroom. In many circumstances, online students are provided guidance through netiquette policies/protocol however the simple act of clicking on the “I agree” button identifying he/she has read and understands the policy statement sometimes does not provide appropriate guidance to the student. Just as we have the “7 Unprofessional Words and Actions” for instructors, students should adhere to the established netiquette policy/protocol and the instructor should strictly enforce this policy/protocol. The enforcement of the netiquette policy/protocol often requires the instructor to immediately react, identify the words or actions of the specific online
student, and initiate appropriate action. Herein lies another potential “mine field” for online instructors when the instructor confronts the student online and requests a “cease and desist” of the action or words. This interaction can lead to confrontation and often escalation beyond the spectrum of professional behavior.

In distance education, the time of day is essentially inconsequential. Students often can complete their assignments at any time so long as they meet a specified deadline. However, instructors should be cognizant of the day and time when receiving or responding to online students. Although online students may have been drinking, lack sleep or have been involved in other activities which can impair their judgement when communicating with the instructor or classmates, the instructor should never be impaired when responding to students. As noted above under the category of “Having a Bad Day”, instructors who have been drinking, working all night to meet a deadline or other activities which can impair his/her judgement, instructors should refrain from responding to online students within the class, via email, texting or other communications.

Words can hurt! The words the instructor provides to their online students can and do impact each student…..The question for the instructor is whether the words are up-lifting and motivational or detrimental and offensive. Online instructors should always be professional and choose their words carefully when responding to their students. There is no room in the online classroom for unprofessional words or actions.

References

1 “The 7 Dirty Words Turns 40, but They’re Still Dirty”, Bella, timothy, the Atlantic, (May 24, 2012).


Thomas D. Schneid is the Chair and Interim Graduate Director at the Department of Safety and Security, Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, Kentucky. tom.schneid@eku.edu.
Many Universities are missing an opportunity to focus student recruitment marketing efforts and budget at the program level, which can offer lower priced advertising opportunities with higher conversion rates than traditional University level marketing initiatives.

At NC State University, we have begun to deploy a scalable, low-cost, program level marketing system across 18 online and distance education programs. Programs that have deployed this system for two years or more have achieved 95-125% enrollment by the end of their second year in the program.

The Status Quo: University Level Marketing

Today’s college applicants are heavily influenced by their online experience. Subramaniam, Wan Yusoff and Othman (2014, p. 94) found that the University’s website had the greatest reach and influence on students’ decision to choose that particular institution. In fact, a significant portion of prospective applicants (25%) will never look to sources outside of the web when shopping for education (EAB COE Forum, 2015, p. 27).

While many universities recognize this and expend considerable resources on their web experience, it is often done by promoting the university as a whole, rather than specific programs. This approach can be inefficient:

Search Term Inefficiency
When buying a search engine term using pay-per-click, or attempting to optimize a website for a search term online, broad search terms are generally more competitive, and thus more expensive, than narrow search terms. Broad terms can also lead to low conversion rates because people using them have not yet decided what they want. For example, on February 27th, 2016, Google AdWords suggested a cost per click bid price of $42.67 for the keyword “nc online degrees.” At the same time, the keyword “online master of statistics” suggested bid price was only $4.94.

Landing Page Inefficiency
When marketing at the University level, prospective applicants have to navigate a web of likely inefficient search utilities or browse through department level sites to find the programs they are interested in. Even if the institution has a decent search interface, online and adult focused programs are likely to exist in a distance or adult learners section of the site.

Analytics Inefficiency
Traffic directed to University websites will often leave to go to a department website or course directory. Because most universities don’t have one unified analytics system, it then becomes difficult to know where users are coming and going. This then makes it impossible to measure the Return On Investment for marketing expenditures.

The Alternative: Program Level Marketing

Lowry and Owens (2001) suggest that today’s prospective students are career-oriented and focus on specific academic programs during their search, rather than the total offerings of the institution. Our experience has proved this out, and thus our hypothesis is that Universities can win the recruitment race by focusing marketing efforts at the program level.
This starts with driving prospective students who know what they want to highly targeted websites that deliver a personally relevant experience. This leads to a lower cost per prospect, higher engagement, higher application rates and a high return on investment.

While the program level is the optimal place to focus marketing attention, program coordinators are often responsible for recruiting with limited access to technical and marketing resources. Thus, to achieve our goals, we have deployed a low cost combination of web technology, marketing services and online community management best practices.

The first component is a solid program level website that is focused on just one academic program or subject area, even if multiple related degrees are available.

Content on the site should be constantly revised to account for new information, and should anticipate prospective students’ needs. In a survey of college bound students, 88% of respondents indicated they would stop researching a school or be disappointed with the school if its website didn’t provide the content they needed, and 80% said content was more important than design. In fact, more than half (57%) of respondents indicated they would remove a school from their list if the content on their website seemed dated, incorrect, or unhelpful (Noel-Leutz, 2009, p. 2). As such, the content on a program site should help prospective students see how these degrees can help them along their career path, answer key questions they have, and drive them to very specific points of engagement (such as contacting an advisor, requesting additional information, or applying to the program).

![Figure 1. A simple, program level homepage that directs users to the content they are most interested in and a specific degree landing page with clear calls to action, promotion of the program advisor and good SEO content.](image)

Impeccable content, however, may not be sufficient to provide a positive website experience for a prospective student. We now live in a multi-screen world; 65% of online searches begin on a smartphone before transitioning to a different device, and 90% of adults use multiple screens sequentially to accomplish a task (EAB COE Forum, 2014, p. 11). Thus, the program site should be mobile and tablet optimized, with clear calls to action above the fold on every page. Pages should promote the contact information for advisors within that program to begin to build a human connection with the prospect.

Next, you will need to deploy some basic Online Marketing. Campaigns should initially target audiences who have already shown an interest in the subject matter. While traditional University based advertising sends a broad message to a broad range of people, our marketing methodology aims to saturate the online experience of only the best prospective applicants. This begins with tie-ins from main university pages and continues with advertising in and optimization for Search Engines. This is a critical part of the system because “online marketing provides the best return on investment for enrollment; Google AdWords and SEO offer the two highest returns on investment.”
within this sector” (EAB AA Forum, 2014, p. 10). We then reinforce targeted messaging with remarketing ads, contextual banner ads, career-targeted LinkedIn ads and interest-based Facebook ads.

![Google AdWords, LinkedIn, Google Banner Ads, and Google Remarketing](image)

**Figure 2.** Some real life examples of contextually targeted, pay per click ads served from Google AdWords, LinkedIn, Google Banner Ads, and Google Remarketing. The same basic ad templates were used for all programs.

The third component is a focus on relationship building that seeks to quickly connect a prospect with their personal advisor via email responses, web conferences and phone calls. This relationship is then supported by monthly email marketing and regular personal outreach from their advisor. To compete within an ever-growing marketplace, a positive customer experience driven by personalized communication, especially during the recruiting process, is not just important - it is increasingly a necessity (Wood, 2015).

Another key relationship program coordinators should develop is with industry partners. This outreach can help establish key content partnerships, referral partnerships and deep links to the program website.

Once the key marketing activities are in place, performance reporting is critical. Web analytics should be used to track each marketing activity, how it brings users to the site, what those users do on the site, and how they find and engage with the key calls to action (such as contacting an advisor, requesting information or beginning the application process).
Finally, we suggest deploying professional marketing coaches that help put these systems in place, guide the program coordinator along the way, reviews the analytics to see what’s working, and tweak the program to move closer to what works best and away from what doesn’t.

Following these best practices, we deployed online experiences for online and blended programs at NC State University over the past three years to great effect.

Of the 3 Programs that have deployed this approach for over two years, all of them exceeded 95% of their target enrollment before the end of the second year. After participating in this approach for two years, one program declined to continue with the approach, only to see their enrollment drop 65% the following year.

Of the 12 Programs have deployed this approach for more than one year, 50% of them have already met or exceeded their enrollment objectives. The average return on investment across these programs is 1340%.

In conclusion, Universities who generally focus on university-wide and “brand” marketing should consider broadening tactics to include more individual online and distance education program-level budgeting and marketing. Following these best practices at the program level drastically improves a program’s likelihood of student recruitment success and self-sustainability.

References


208


*Adam Schultz* is the CEO for Verified Studios, Durham, North Carolina. adam@verifiedstudios.com.

*Kay Zimmerman* is the Associate Vice Provost for Marketing and Partnership Development for Distance Education and Learning Technology Applications (DELTA) at North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina. kezimmer@ncsu.edu.
Factors that Influence Student Attrition in Online Courses

Melanie Shaw  
Northcentral University

Karen Ferguson  
Colorado State University-Global Campus

Scott Burrus  
University of Phoenix

Abstract

Research was conducted to examine predictors for online higher education student attrition. This research was conducted using results from the SmarterMeasure Learning Readiness Indicator to track students in their degree programs. In addition, student outreach was conducted with an experimental group of at-risk students to determine if additional academic support promoted retention. Results demonstrated that verbal and physical learning styles and personal attributes such as procrastination, increase the likelihood for attrition, while clear reasons for pursuing a degree and typing skills decrease the likelihood for attrition. Outreach to identified at-risk students did promote greater levels of student success and persistence. Recommendations for future research include comparing results from online and traditional student groups to determine if similar at-risk factors influence the likelihood of student withdrawal, and examining the characteristics of students who withdrawal before completing their first course. Moreover, qualitative research should be conducted to more deeply understand the reasons associated with online program attrition.

Factors that Influence Online Student Attrition and Strategies to Promote Retention

Many online institutions are challenged to retain students beyond the first few courses. While the data are complex, most studies show that student attrition rates at online institutions are 3% to 5% higher than those of traditional institutions (U.S. News and World Report, 2015). Student retention is a noteworthy issue for higher education institutions and is closely tied to accountability (Eaton, 2011). Research on student attrition has been well documented over the past few decades (Astin, 1993; Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Pascarella, 1985; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1993), yet the growth of online education and the heightened focus on institutional accountability adds to the complexity of this issue. There is an urgency to understand the student risk for attrition. More research is needed to identify the factors that may affect student persistence.

In a study of variables related to retention in online higher education, Dupin-Bryant (2004) found these factors were related to student retention: class rank, grade point average (GPA), previous online experience, internet training, technology training, and internet training. Higher education leaders need tools to allow for assessment of such factors. SmarterMeasure is a tool used by many institutions to evaluate the attributes, skills, and knowledge students possess that may contribute to their overall success in degree completion. The assessment allows for measurement of student self-motivation, time management skills, self-discipline, reading rates, reading recall, persistence, availability of time, ability to use technology tools, typing speed, and typing accuracy (SmarterServices, LLC., 2016). The instrument is used by higher education institutions to provide indicators of student readiness for success in distance, hybrid, or technology-enhanced courses and programs. Using this tool, it is possible to correlate measured indicators with student retention.

In this research, three questions were explored to better understand at-risk factors for student retention. The following questions guided the research:
1. What factors can institutions use to identify at-risk students?
2. What learning readiness factors are associated with online student retention?
3. What strategies can be used to promote student retention once at-risk students are identified?
Literature Review

Student success, persistence, and completion are of utmost importance, not only for the long-term success of students, but also for longevity of our universities. Completing a degree is a well-earned accomplishment for students and the culminating experience following years of hard work. For the institution, it is evidence of meeting the mission of educating and graduating students. However, persistence and completion pose unique challenges in today’s online and open enrollment universities. U.S. institutions of higher education that offer online programs have become a fast-growing segment (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2011; Planty et al., 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Effective online learning is about providing students with a rich, engaging, professionally-relevant, and academically rigorous education. The individual’s return on investment of an online education can be significant for career advancement, including career change, compensation, leadership development, and life quality intimations resulting from the attainment of the degree (Boud & Lee, 2009; Boud & Tennant, 2006). Yet, online program attrition rates continue to be a problem across programs and demographic considerations (Council of Graduate Schools, 2007, 2010, 2012). As the U.S. has emerged from a challenged economy and the 2008 recession, individuals with advanced degrees continued to hold the lowest unemployment rate (1.9%) and the highest median weekly income (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010), so there are compelling reasons to maximize student completion of online programs.

Student Retention

Kara and DeShields (2004) emphasized the importance of recognizing factors that contribute to student satisfaction in online educational institutions of higher learning. Gilliam and Kristonis (2006) recommend institutions examine and identify problems related to student attrition and retention. Wang, Shannon, and Ross (2013) suggested courses be designed to promote student self-regulated learning behaviors. In the online course, student self-regulation can occur when student receive effective feedback, which allows them to master content knowledge and increases satisfaction with the learning experience (Hattie & Temperly, 2007). In addition, course mastery is closely tied with degree completion and student retention (Scott, Bailey, & Kienzl, 2006). Helgesen and Nesset (2007) suggested student loyalty is another factor linked positively to student satisfaction. Tinto (2005) noted that integrative college experiences increase the likelihood of student persistence to degree completion. Fike and Fike (2008) concluded it is essential to use data to guide decisions supportive of retention and to provide insight into factors influencing student retention. Researchers note that it is always more cost effective to retain students than replace students (Flegle, Pavone, & Flegle, 2009).

Researchers have linked high school GPA and college entry exam scores with student persistence in college courses (Astin, 1993). Yet, many online institutions allow students to enroll without test scores and with no minimum GPA. Tinto (1993) indicated that least selective institutions often have the low student retention rates. Tinto also linked lack of academic preparedness to higher student attrition. Remediation is often required for students who enter college without requisite academic skills (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 2006; Kuh, 2007). In addition, many online students come from nontraditional student groups at greater risk for attrition including older adults, military members, minorities, working adults, and parents.

Method

Quantitative correlational and experimental designs were used to assess at-risk factors and intervention techniques at an online, primarily graduate, institution located in the Southwestern United States. Quantitative data in the form of a college readiness assessment designed by SmarterMeasure were gathered from students prior to enrollment at the University and experimental studies were conducted prior to the start and during the first six months of the students’ enrollment. SmarterMeasure scores for 2,400 students were used to identify factors related to student persistence and attrition. All students were enrolled in degree programs at the online institution. These students took the assessment prior to enrollment in their first courses. SmarterMeasure scores provided a diagnosis of several factors or domains including:

- Individual Attributes - motivation, procrastination, willingness to ask for help, etc.
- Life Factors - Availability of time, support from family and employers, finances, etc.
- Learning styles - Based on the multiple intelligences model
Scores for students on these factors were used to indicate early warning signs for student attrition. Each of these factors was correlated to student persistence in online programs. Then, students were tracked to determine rates of persistence. Students who withdrew or were dismissed from the programs were evaluated to compare scores on the SmarterMeasure assessment. Based on the students who were successful in completing their programs versus students who were not retained, it was possible to determine factors related to student persistence. Once this initial analysis was completed, experimental research was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions for identified at-risk students.

**Results**

To answer research question 1 (What factors can institutions use to identify at-risk students?), the researchers conducted a multiple regression analysis to predict the statistically significant effect of various life factors, learning styles, personal attributes, technology competencies, technology knowledge, typing speed, typing accuracy, and reading ability on the overall likelihood of withdrawal or dismissal. The results from the analysis demonstrated that verbal and physical learning styles and personal attributes such as procrastination increased the likelihood for attrition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Likelihood of Attrition</th>
<th>$p$-value</th>
<th>Amount Predictor Increases Likelihood of attrition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical learning style</td>
<td>Increases</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>14.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal learning style</td>
<td>Increases</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>33.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procrastination</td>
<td>Increases</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To answer research question 2 (What learning readiness factors are associated with online student retention?), the researchers conducted a multiple regression analysis to predict the statistically significant effect of the same factors to determine if any decreased the likelihood of student attrition. The results from the analysis demonstrated clear reasons for pursuing a degree, typing speed, and technology skills decreased the likelihood for attrition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Likelihood of Attrition</th>
<th>$p$-value</th>
<th>Amount Predictor Decreases Likelihood of attrition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for enrolling</td>
<td>Decreases</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>27.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readiness skills</td>
<td>Decreases</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>20.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typing speed</td>
<td>Decreases</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>20.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the domains that influenced student attrition and retention, there were many measured factors that had no effect on student retention or withdrawal/dismissal. These included:

- **Life factors** – the place students devote to studying, the resources students have available like technology, and the time students planned to devote to their coursework did not have an effect.
- **Learning style** – aural, logical, social, solitary, and visual student learning styles did not have an effect.
- **Personal attributes** – academic, help seeking, locus of control, persistence, and time management factors did not have an effect.
- **Technological** – technical competency, technology knowledge, typing accuracy, and reading (words per minute) did not have an effect.
To answer research question 3 (What strategies can be used to promote student retention once at-risk students are identified?), an experimental study was conducted to provide outreach to students with low readiness scores on any of the statistically significant at-risk factors. Researchers placed students with similar scores and demographics into two separate groups. The first group served as the control group and received no additional outreach. The second group, the experimental group, received an outreach call prior to the first day of the first course. During that call, a representative from the school shared school-specific information and resources to support the students’ areas of low readiness. In addition, the representative demonstrated how to access the library, academic success center, time management support program; and provided students with guidance on how to schedule time with an academic coach. The conversations were followed up with emails that included links to all of the support resources available. Additionally, school representatives ensured students understood the SmarterMeasure assessment scores and were able to use the resources provided as part of the assessment tool.

After six months, the experimental group had an 11% greater level of retention than the control group. Additionally, there were observable differences in the performance of the two groups. The control group had more dropped courses, more failing grades and course withdrawals, and tended to have more students who were two or more assignments behind the course due dates. The experimental group showed greater persistence, fewer failing grades and course withdrawals, and submitted more on-time assignments.

**Discussion**

In this study, at-risk factors were identified from students enrolled at an online higher education institution. SmarterMeasure was used as a diagnostic tool to determine factors that influence student persistence and attrition. In addition, at-risk students were identified and then an experimental group received an outreach and additional support. Findings showed that students who received this additional support were better retained and had greater levels of success as measured by course completions with passing grades and on-time assignment submittals.

Following this study, and based on the assumption outreach was part of the reason the experimental group experienced higher levels of success, researchers created an early alert system pilot. Faculty teaching first courses in two programs with highest student attrition were asked to submit an e-mail-based alert directly to the students’ academic advisors if they were concerned about student progress or performance. There was an overwhelming response, with an average of 20-25 alerts completed each week by faculty involved in the pilot. Reasons for alerts included lack of timeliness in assignment submissions, low academic performance, concerning student life circumstances, and poor student writing.

Focus groups, following this pilot, revealed advisors were able to intervene much earlier with at-risk students. Moreover, advisors perceived they were able to provide much more specific support and retain students who might have otherwise withdrawn from the University. Faculty also appreciated the system and expressed they were able to partner with the advisor to provide more holistic support for their at-risk students. Early course persistence of these two groups improved by 1% during the pilot.

**Conclusion**

Based on the findings and the literature review, several potential interventions are available, which may play a significant role to play in student success. It is recommended that:

- Students articulate their motivation for engaging in their program early in the enrollment process. Because students who had clear reasons for enrolling were more likely to be retained, effort should be made to assist the student in specifying educational goals and the rationale for enrolling in the first place.
- Students develop college readiness skills. Because of the influence of readiness on student success, institutions should provide resources for and remediation to students who do not possess fundamental readiness skills.
- Online institutions understand their students’ technology readiness. While many technology factors were not indicators of student retention, typing speed was. More research is needed to understand the meaning of this finding. Typing speed may be correlated with higher levels of computer fluency, so more research is needed relative to this success factor.
Institutions apply a variety of strategies that address the needs of students with various learning styles. If students identify as having a physical or verbal learning style preference, greater levels of support should be provided to ensure online success.

Faculty should develop a mentoring skill set to best support student progress (Bégin & Gérard, 2013; Salter-Dvorak, 2014; Willis & Carmichael, 2011). Because the literature so clearly connects effective teaching with student success, efforts should be taken to promote faculty mentoring skills.

A quality student-faculty relationship and healthy communication should be fostered (Bitzer, 2011; Salter-Dvorak, 2014; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2011; Stallone, 2011). The literature and the experimental aspect of this research study demonstrated that proactive faculty, who are attuned to student needs are more likely to intervene to promote retention.

Students are provided with regular feedback to help them master content knowledge (Hedge, 2013). While this study did not address faculty feedback, because of the prominence of this factor as an influencer of student success in the literature, this recommendation should be heeded.

Recommendations for further research include replication of this study in traditional institutions to determine if at-risk factors are similar for traditional and online students. Moreover, examining the characteristics of students who withdraw before completing their first course would both inform enrollment policies and promote strategies to support students at the earliest stages in their program. In addition, qualitative research should be conducted to more deeply understand the reasons associated with online program attrition. In particular, research should be conducted to explore student reasons for withdrawal at various degree levels to provide a more complete picture of the interventions needed to support these students. Finally, long-term quantitative, experimental research should be conducted to determine if interventions provided to students on low scoring factors on the SmarterMeasures assessment result in greater persistence to degree completion.

References


Melanie Shaw is a Professor in the School of Education at Northcentral University, San Diego, California. mshaw@ncu.edu.

Karen Ferguson is the Dean of Professional Studies at Colorado State University - Global Campus, Greenwood Village, Colorado. karen.ferguson@csuglobal.edu.

Scott Burrus is a Research Director at the University of Phoenix, Phoenix, Arizona. scottwmburrus@gmail.com.
Two Radical Shifts in How and Why Higher-Education Distance-Learning Administrators Should Promote Universal Design for Learning

Thomas J. Tobin
Northeastern Illinois University

Abstract

Currently, about ten percent of higher-education faculty members and programs across North America have adopted Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in order to broaden access to learning interactions, despite compelling evidence that doing so increases student retention, persistence, and satisfaction. This article examines the perceptual and organizational barriers that prevent wider acceptance and use of UDL in higher education, and puts forward two ways to shift our approach as distance-learning administrators in order to achieve higher rates of UDL adoption across our programs and institutions.

Katie

Meet Katie, who was, until recently, a student at a university in the Midwestern United States, studying to become an elementary-school teacher. Ever since Katie was a little girl, she knew that she wanted to be a teacher. After she graduated from high school, she was eager to get started with her teaching certification program.

That’s not why I know Katie, though. In my role in that university’s teaching and learning center, I work with faculty members to help them with innovative teaching techniques, including strategies for encouraging academic integrity. When Katie was a first-semester junior, one of her professors came to me with a puzzle: “I have a student who I just know is cheating, but I can’t for the life of me figure out how.”

The professor showed me one of Katie’s early papers for his course. The writing was uneven, with a few well-written passages but mostly disjointed prose, with few details, evidence, or examples to support ideas. Then the professor showed me the last paper that Katie had submitted: it had a clear thesis, with polished prose, and was supported with subordinate ideas and details. I agreed that the two papers showed a great jump in quality. Given the disparity in quality, I asked the professor why he was seeking my input.

“That’s the problem,” he said. “I’ve run this new paper through Turnitin; I’ve Googled phrases from several paragraphs; I’ve asked my colleagues if the writing sounds familiar. Every way I try, this comes back as being original. But it can’t be. So, I came to you.”

I thought hard about the situation. If Katie had found a new way to obtain quality writing—work that wouldn’t get flagged in our automated academic-integrity systems—then perhaps I could find out more about this method and alter the rest of the faculty-support community about a new kind of cheating. I started my inquiry where I always do: with the student herself. I set up a phone call with Katie, and said “Hello, Katie. My name is Tom. I work with faculty members to help with their teaching challenges.” And I said it. “Katie, you're doing really awesome work in this course. Tell me how you're doing it.”

Katie told me a very different story.

Katie confessed that she had been struggling in her college courses all the way since her freshman year. She understood what the professors were saying in class. She knew what she wanted to say in response. And when it came time to write the papers, what was in her brain wasn’t what came out of her typing fingers.
She had gone at mid-semester to the university’s Learning Resources Center. Now, my colleagues in the Learning Resources Center are not trained counselors or psychologists. But they figured out that when they talked with Katie, she could express what she wanted to say. However, when they said, “Katie, please sit down at this computer,” or “please grab a piece of paper and a pen and write it out,” things didn't come out the way Katie wanted them to.

Katie had never been diagnosed with anything. Katie did not have a special piece of paper that said, “hey, Professor, please treat me differently from other students or give me an accommodation.” In fact, after the people at the Learning Support Center helped Katie to train a copy of the speech-to-text program Dragon Naturally Speaking, the quality of her writing went up—by a lot. So much so, that her professor was convinced she was being dishonest.

What happened to Katie? When I met her, she was on academic probation, and was on the cusp of dropping out of the university. Two years later, Katie graduated summa cum laude with a degree in elementary education. She is now a fifth-grade social-studies teacher in the Schaumburg school district outside of Chicago. She is very happy doing what she does. I felt honored to be a little part of Katie’s story.

Not the Real Story

I must apologize to the reader. Katie’s story of success despite a hidden challenge likely reinforces some common ideas for you about the concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL): in the learning environment, UDL is primarily thought of as a way to accommodate and support people with disabilities. Often, when we think about strategies for making situations more accessible, we limit our thinking to the impact that such design choices have for people with physical disabilities, such as challenges with vision, hearing, or mobility. This is no accident. The concept of UDL is an offshoot of Universal Design (UD) in the built environment, which has its roots in advocacy for the access rights of people with physical challenges. The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 mandated access for “physically handicapped persons” to buildings created or modified with federal funds (US Access Board, 2016). After many years of protests by people with disabilities, such as the 1990 protest in which demonstrators left their wheelchairs to crawl up the 83 steps of the U. S. Capitol building to speak out against accessibility challenges, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990 to mandate broad access to the built environment (US Department of Justice, 2016). These days, more than twenty-five years since the ADA was originally enacted, we seldom think twice about the elements of UD that surround us. Curb cuts accommodate not just wheelchairs, but bicycles, shopping carts, and rolling luggage. Wider doorways accommodate baby strollers, wheelchairs, and the poor friends whom you cajoled into helping you move your couch into your new place.

The fight for equal access rights to the built environment may be said to be largely won, thanks to the advocacy of people with disabilities and their allies. The end result has been to make the physical world more accessible for everyone—not just for people with disabilities.

This is the real story behind UDL: they are ways of designing the physical world (UD) and the interactions among learners and professors (UDL) that provide greater access for everyone, not just for people with disabilities. So why does the concept of UDL most often call to mind negative associations for faculty members who have experience interacting with learners with disabilities? We may be hard-wired to do so.

Emotional Valence and Accommodations

Most college and university faculty members and staffers have had the experience of working on requests for accommodations from students with disabilities. Also, most people in higher education have not received training or done research about Universal Design for Learning (Lombardi & Murray, 2011), and are unlikely to know specific details about what UDL encompasses. This sets us up to inflect our emotional response to UDL with the valence that we associate with our experiences making specific accommodations.

For neuropsychologists, the term “valence” has to do with how we add emotional coloring to “events, objects, and situations” that “may possess positive or negative valence; that is, they may possess intrinsic attractiveness or aversiveness” (Frijda, 1986, p. 207). In plain English, this means that our emotions associated with past events affect how we perceive the world around us and the new events that we experience.
Researchers have been asking college and university faculty members for decades about how they respond to having students with learning challenges in their courses. We all know how faculty members should respond when students come to them with forms for accommodating challenges. Say that you are a faculty member teaching a business-writing course, and a student comes to you at the end of the second week with a piece of paper to request an accommodation. The student says “I need time and a half on tests and quizzes, and I need either software that can read the test questions out loud for me, or a live human being to do the same.” What should your answer be? Of course, it should be “Sure, I’ll set that up. Thank you for letting me know.” This, thankfully, is how most people do respond.

But how do faculty members actually feel when presented with accommodation requests? Based on several large research studies (Fonosch & Schwab, 1981; Fichten, 1986; Nelson et al., 1990; Houck et al., 1992; Bento, 1996; Benham, 1997; Bigaj et al., 1999; Cook et al., 2009; Murray et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2010; Lombardi & Murray, 2011; Murray et al., 2011), the emotional valence associated with accommodations is almost uniformly negative.

In many faculty members’ minds, the fact that one must accommodate learners with disabilities brings up feelings of uncertainty, confusion, annoyance, and even anger, as the following excerpts from the research indicate.

Although faculty [members] were willing to accommodate students with learning disabilities, they were concerned about maintaining academic integrity. For instance, several faculty members indicated that they would be willing to make accommodations for students with LD only if they could be assured that it would not lower academic standards . . . Some faculty [members] commented that each student’s case would have to be treated on an individual basis. Finally, faculty indicated that the student’s attitude would influence whether or not they would provide him or her accommodations. (Nelson et al., 1990, p. 198)

Among the statistical group comparisons presented . . . four are somewhat troubling. Specifically, if faculty [members] perceive that having a learning disability could limit the selection of a major . . . and influences whether students with a learning disability can complete a degree program, such views may be inadvertently communicated to students with learning disabilities. . . . This could be especially damaging at the university level, where student-teacher interaction is often limited, thus making alterations in one’s perceptions more difficult. Whether conscious or unconscious, misconceptions or prejudicial attitudes may create barriers to the pursuit of certain careers or result in unequal opportunities. (Houck et al., 1992, p. 693).

Faculty attitudes towards disabled students were typically characterized by . . . the perception that disabled students were somehow “less able” and that their “disability” could jeopardize not only their own individual performance, but also limit the other students and the instructor. In several cases, these unfavorable feelings were compounded by the phenomenon of reactance: the professors grieved the perceived loss of their academic freedom, curtailed by the legal requirements of special accommodations. (Bento, 1996)

Faculty members rated the majority of items under one theme, Accommodations-Willingness, as low importance and low-agreement. . . . It is possible that faculty members felt negatively about . . . accommodations because they are relatively difficult to implement, perceived as altering the nature of the course, or both. (Cook et al., 2009)

Many faculty members are not fully supporting students with disabilities according to legal requirements or recommendations for best practices. This is an area of concern that institutions of higher education need to address to make certain that faculty members provide the necessary and reasonable accommodations and supports to students with disabilities. (Zhang et al., 2010, p 283)

For many faculty members, interactions with students with disabilities, especially specific requests for accommodations, carry an aversive and negative emotional valence. Regardless of what we think ought to be the case—and regardless of whether we act consciously on such negative emotions—they ground our reaction and approach to learners with disabilities. In interviews about adopting UDL with faculty members throughout North America, I have heard feedback similar to the research findings above:
• “I don’t have time to do all of that work if it benefits just a few students with disabilities.”
• “My institution doesn’t have a service for captioning videos, so I would have to do it all myself, and I have a lot of video clips for each of my courses.”
• “I’ve had a number of students come to me with ‘learning disabilities,’ but they don’t seem to be disabled when I interact with them in my courses.”
• “I think at least a few of my students are trying to game the system by claiming to have disabilities.”
• “I know that I should be following the law, but I’m not always clear about what it requires, and no one at my institution is enforcing it.”
• “I haven’t had a student with a disability in my courses for years. I will wait until I have a request for an accommodation before I start doing all of that work.”

In all of these situations, any conversations, training programs, and advocacy for adopting Universal Design for Learning principles would stand poor chances of success, even before they happened, due to the negative emotional valence associated with making accommodations for students with disabilities—even though UDL is not a means of granting accommodations.

In fact, the contrary is so. As Sam Johnston, a research scientist at the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) puts it, “we want a situation that is good for everybody. Part of it is thinking about what has to happen at the level of design that makes accommodation less necessary” (personal communication, November 15, 2013). Dr. Johnston means that by adopting UDL principles in the design of our courses, we can greatly reduce the need for specific accommodations requests.

So, why hasn’t everyone adopted UDL yet? Because we apply our negative emotions related to our experience of granting accommodations when we are presented with the option to apply UDL principles in our course design and teaching. Conversations about UDL are often smothered by the aversive emotional valence of their audience before they can be considered on their merits.

**What is UDL?**

Before we can address how and why we should adopt UDL principles widely throughout higher education, we should ground ourselves in a few core definitions. David H. Rose at CAST came up with the concept of UDL, based on the various ways in which our brains process learning tasks:

> Universal design for learning (UDL) is one part of the overall movement toward universal design. . . . While providing access to information or to materials is often essential to learning, it is not sufficient. UDL requires that we not only design accessible information, but also an accessible pedagogy. . . . The framework for UDL is based in findings from cognitive neuroscience that tell us about the needs of individual learners. It embeds accessible pedagogy into three specific and central considerations in teaching: the means of representing information, the means for students’ expression of knowledge, and the means of engagement in learning. (Rose et al., 2006)

UDL is often associated with the use of technology to help extend learning opportunities for students. UDL is an approach to the creation of learning experiences that incorporate multiple means of

- engaging with content and people,
- representing information, and
- expressing skills and knowledge.

The CAST web site for higher education, *UDL on Campus*, notes the importance of learner engagement among UDL principles (CAST, 2014). In light of this, CAST re-arranged the presentation of the components of UDL in 2014 to list engagement first. In the category of engagement, this means creating multiple ways to help students to self-regulate, such as helping them to keep pace with readings for the course, suggesting ways to portion out writing and research to avoid last-minute “crunching,” and encouraging learners to make connections beyond the immediate work they are doing in our courses.
Making multiple representations of information is the part of UDL with which most of us are familiar: we know that we should be captioning or transcribing video clips, providing audio versions of text-based lecture notes, and segmenting longer items into more manageable (and more reviewable) chunks. Allowing learners to express their skills in multiple ways is often a new exercise for faculty members and course designers: if we ask learners to write a 3-page essay, we can also allow them to choose to create an audio podcast or video report, so long as all of the alternatives provide students with the means to meet the required assignment objectives.

Before we can dive in to practical applications about how best to apply UDL principles to our courses, programs, and institutions, we must first determine how to uncouple UDL from the negative emotional valence of people’s experiences with requests for specific accommodations. For that, I want to propose two radical reflections on the nature of teaching and learning in higher education today: our students today aren’t like our students twenty-five years ago, and our faculty members aren’t like their counterparts from the past, either.

Growing Beyond the Roots of UDL

UDL began in the disability-advocacy community as a way of creating a more inclusive society, generally. “Recognition of accessibility as a civil right entails making sure that a person with a disability has access to the buildings, classrooms, and courts where those rights are learned and adjudicated” (Davidson, 2006, p. 126). UDL is an outgrowth of universal-design ideas in the built environment, such as allocating parking spaces for drivers with disabilities.

UDL can often get mired in people’s perceptions of a “medical model” that perceives disability as primarily a health issue, where disabilities are deficits in function that reside within the individuals themselves. This medical model of disability helps to explain why many people unconsciously associate negative emotions with their interactions with people who have disabilities (Stodden et al., 2011): the “otherness” is associated with the people with whom we interact. Contrast this with a social model of disability, in which the disabling factor is seen to be in the environment. If a student in a wheelchair encounters a library building with stairs but no ramp, the disability is not inherent in the student—it is the design of the building that presents the challenge. Essentially, as the legal scholar Andrew Lessman from Temple University says, “if you’re not doing everything you can to include people, then you’re excluding them” (personal communication, February 2, 2016).

Oh, Wait, I was Looking at My Phone

Because higher education is largely in transition between these two mental models of disability, my first radical reflection about UDL is to re-frame it away from the concept of disability all together, and situate UDL in a narrative with which all faculty members and staffers are familiar—and one which has a much more neutral emotional valence: mobile learning.

In comparison with learners from only fifteen years ago, the students who come to college today are significantly more likely to require remedial instruction (Adams, 2015), more likely to have poor study habits and time-management challenges (College Board, 2015), and less likely to have significant time for study outside of the classroom. In North America, more college students than ever before are adult learners with family and job responsibilities—and precious little time for studying: “Adult learners are juggling family, work, and educational responsibilities. They don’t do optional” (Mason, 2014).

A recent EDUCAUSE study shows that 86% of college students own smartphones, and a significant percentage also own other mobile devices such as tablets (Chen et al., 2015). The authors of an article reporting on the study extol the potential benefits of any-time, anywhere learning and collaboration:

As an integral part of students’ daily lives, mobile technology has changed how they communicate, gather information, allocate time and attention, and potentially how they learn. The mobile platform's unique capabilities—including connectivity, cameras, sensors, and GPS—have great potential to enrich the academic experience. Learners are no longer limited to the classroom’s geographical boundaries; for example, they can now record raw observations and analyze data on location. Furthermore, mobile technology platforms let individuals discuss issues with their colleagues or classmates in the field. The ever-growing mobile landscape thus represents new opportunities for learners both inside and outside the classroom. (Chen et al., 2015)
The argument for adopting Universal Design for Learning was always based on the broad benefits that UDL methods provide to all learners, but for years we haven’t been able to find a compelling and simple, case that demonstrates in a concrete way how those benefits play out. Now we have one: UDL is a way to reach out to adult learners on their mobile devices to help them to find more time for studying and engaging in learning.

An important aside: if the fight for access to the built environment has largely been won, thanks to the protests and voices of disability-rights advocates, the fight for the rights of people with disabilities in higher education continues in earnest. In recent years, several high-profile court cases took nationally-prominent institutions to task for failing to meet even the minimum legal requirements, such as the decision against Harvard and MIT for not captioning their edX course materials (Lewin, 2015).

In advocating for a switch in tactics to broaden the argument for adopting UDL practices, I am cognizant of the way that such a switch can take the spotlight off the struggles of people with disabilities. My hope is that making the argument that adopting UDL benefits students using mobile devices will reduce the need for making specific accommodations and move us closer to the larger goal of disability advocacy, which is to allow everyone to have the same opportunities to learn—to erase difference and the need for separate accommodations as far as possible.

Three Students

Imagine a single mother—call her Melissa—who is taking business-management courses at her local community college. She has a job in order to be able to support her family, and she takes courses in the evenings and on weekends. She does her homework, engages with the course readings, and completes her course projects after 10:00 p.m., when the kids are finally in bed. Her statistics-course professor has posted video clips in the learning management system as study aids toward the midterm and final exams, but Melissa cannot take advantage of the videos because she doesn’t want to wake her children, but she doesn’t want to tune them out altogether by using headphones. Melissa does not have a disability, but she does have a challenge: time.

Now, imagine if Melissa’s professor provided transcripts of the audio in the video clips, or, better yet, captions. Melissa can turn down the sound, turn on the captions, and study for her course examinations, while remaining accessible to her children. Adopting good UDL practices lets Melissa’s professor reach out to her—and to all of her classmates—with options that allow them to choose how they experience the materials that the professor has posted. This is a double win: the professor’s work in creating the videos and one alternative version is rewarded with more students actually using the resources, and the professor’s students are rewarded with more flexibility in how they study for the course and learn its materials, concepts, and processes.

Imagine, too, a student on the football team at a large university in the Southeastern United States: call him Jamaal. Jamaal is often on a bus or train, traveling to away games with his teammates. He already has a special arrangement that allows him to miss a certain number of in-person course meetings in his chemistry course, and he realizes that he’s missing out on an opportunity for learning. He wants to keep up with his professor’s narrated lecture slides, but his Internet connection is spotty when he is traveling. Jamaal has to wait until he is back on campus to be able to download and open his professor’s PowerPoint slides from the course web-resources page, since his mobile phone doesn’t have Microsoft Office on it. Jamaal does not have a disability, but he does have a challenge: resource availability.

Now, imagine if Jamaal’s chemistry professor took the same narrated PowerPoint slides and created a screen-capture version that was then uploaded to YouTube. Jamaal—and all of his classmates—could then stream the video, even under challenging bandwidth conditions, and he would not need any specific software title in order to experience the lecture slides. Jamaal could then easily break a stereotype about student-athletes and study while he is on the bus or the train.

Finally, imagine a student—call her Amanda—whose National Guard unit is called up for an active-duty military tour of duty, right in the middle of her studies toward her nursing degree. Amanda’s professor in her anatomy and physiology course requires all students to pass a two-part final examination, in which the professor and student meet one on one and the professor quizzes the student on the name and location of various parts of the human body, with the professor providing one piece of information (the name of the part or its location on an anatomical model), and the student providing the other, by naming the part or pointing to the location on the model associated with the
name. Amanda suspects that she will need to drop the course, since she will not be present to be able to complete the final examination, and there are no options for demonstrating her knowledge in a different way. Amanda thought she could buy her own anatomical model, but a quick look online showed her that the model used by her professor costs upward of $6,000.00. Amanda does not have a disability, but she does have a challenge: distance.

Now, imagine that Amanda’s professor offered students two different ways to take the final examination: in person (as above) or by Skype or other video-call software, using un-labeled diagrams provided by the professor ahead of time. The professor asks the student to pan the camera being used around himself or herself to show that there are no open books or study sheets being used, and the student can schedule the one-on-one time when and where it is most convenient to conduct the exam. Amanda uses the “private calls to home” area where she is deployed in order to do her live session for the final exam, and is able to continue her studies.

These examples highlight professors adopting UDL techniques in order to reach out to their students who are using mobile devices in order to overcome distance, time, and resource limitations: challenges that we can all relate to, and which are not freighted with aversive emotional valence. If anything, these stories about designing course interactions for mobile learners are uplifting, and they provide faculty members with motivation to put in the effort up front. Educator Allison Posey is interviewed in CAST’s recent book Universal Design for Learning: Theory and Practice about why she adopts UDL practices: “I work the hardest the first time I design a lesson; then it gets much easier and I even find that I do not have to re-teach the content as often: most students get it the first time” (Meyer et al., 2014, p. 161).

Isn’t UDL a Lot of Work?

In my interactions with faculty members and support staff at colleges and universities across North America, this is often the most difficult argument to make. If we put in significant effort ahead of time, during the design or re-design of course interactions, then we will improve and expand learner engagement, options for taking in information, and options for control and choice in demonstrating knowledge and skills. This effort will then pay the faculty member back many fold in the form of decreased student questions, decreased requests for accommodations, and a re-focus away from the administrative minutiae of the course back to the interactions with students that motivated many of us to become faculty members in the first place. Adopting UDL also pays the institution back many fold in the form of increased student persistence, retention, and satisfaction. Because this argument is a challenging one to put forward, I pair it with my second radical reflection about UDL: we should not train only faculty members how to do it.

In many institutions, there is near consensus among faculty members and campus leaders that the institution itself bears a responsibility to provide educational opportunities to the broadest possible audience of learners (Rapp & Arndt, 2012). However, there is often a disconnection between that high-level responsibility and its operational implementation. Too often, the challenge is left to be addressed by an institution’s office of disability services, which provides non-mandated training courses on UDL and outreach techniques to individual faculty members.

A recent study of such training programs found that they increase faculty and staff confidence in working with students across the ability spectrum (Murray et al, 2011), but the adoption rate for UDL principles in North American colleges and universities continues to hover around 10% of faculty members in most reported research (cf. Murray et al., 2009), with the highest concentrations among faculty members in Education departments and colleges.

Unlike the Americans with Disabilities Act in the United States, Canada does not yet have a nationwide set of laws requiring accommodations for people with disabilities. Starting in 2014, Roberta Thomson at McGill University in Montreal began a still-ongoing study in which she and her colleagues interviewed faculty members about their perceptions surrounding and adoption of UDL; her preliminary data suggest that even with training in UDL practices, only a small fraction of faculty members go on to implement UDL in a significant way. Dr. Thomson hypothesizes that this is due to the fact that most faculty members do no choose to attend UDL training, and, of those who do attend, a large percentage of faculty member report not having enough time to be able to accomplish a “full” UDL re-development of their existing course interactions (personal communication, December 16, 2015).

At my own university, and when I consult with other institutions, I advocate that we move the focus away from training faculty members in UDL principles, and start training the people who support faculty members in the
course-design process: people in our IT departments, our teaching-and-learning centers, our media services areas, academic-department staff members, and the help desk staff.

Over the past three decades, especially, the role of faculty members in academia has become increasingly atomized. Faculty members in 1985 were routinely expected to

- design their course structure,
- create their own individual syllabi,
- pull together their ancillary materials (which often took the form of photocopied “prof packs” of readings, overhead transparencies, and vendor-produced VHS tapes on topics of interest),
- teach their course sessions,
- grade student work, and
- hold office hours for communicating with students outside of class time.

Fast forward to today, and faculty members are still responsible for their content expertise. However, large swaths of what used to be the domain of individual faculty members has become the responsibility of the faculty as a whole (agreeing on common syllabi across course sections and even common reading lists, texts, and resources) or the responsibility of support staff (e.g., creation of video clips, multimedia content, and course content for use within a learning management system). In many cases, the design of a course’s content and interactions is accomplished by a team of experts, of which the faculty member is only one part, in collaboration with an instructional designer, a media specialist, an IT coder, and others throughout the organizational chart of the institution. This seems not to have saved faculty members much time, incidentally: faculty members in 1985 didn’t have email or always-on connections to their course environments to contend with.

This diffusion of faculty responsibilities is why I advocate focusing UDL training on the people listed above who actually put together the designed elements and interactions for courses. Imagine the following scenario under a faculty-only training regimen and then under a train-the-support-staff model.

Professor Wilson wants to expand her sophomore-level algebra course to provide access, encouragement, and choice for as many students as possible. She has heard that the flipped-classroom model tasks students with encountering new ideas on their own, leaving time for engagement, inquiry, and assessment when the learners and professor are together. She goes to her media service people on campus and talks to George at the service desk about her options for doing lecture capture.

A) George tells her that the media-services department has the equipment she will need in order to do lecture capture, and that he can even schedule a student worker to come to Professor Wilson’s classroom to set up and run the equipment while she is teaching. Professor Wilson will get a DVD of the raw video within three working days, or she can have the video uploaded directly to her online course-support environment. Professor Wilson asks about captions and accessibility. George says that she should contact the disability support office for more information.

B) George tells her that the media-services department has the equipment she will need in order to do lecture capture, and that he can even schedule a student worker to come to Professor Wilson’s classroom to set up and run the equipment while she is teaching. Further, George himself will schedule a meeting with Professor Wilson once the raw video is ready in order to select the most appropriate parts of the video to select and keep as five-minute mini-lecture sessions. Once those are selected, Professor Wilson will receive a text transcript of the content along with a captioned version of the mini-lecture segments—either on DVD or she can have the video uploaded directly to her online course-support environment.

Note how in narrative A, the responsibility for UDL is perceived through a disability-accommodation lens, and “it’s not my job” is the theme of George’s support for Professor Wilson. Narrative B sharply contrasts this: George knows UDL best practices and states that his staff and Professor Wilson will follow them. They will chunk up the video and create transcripts and captions, all as a matter of course. George doesn’t even call the actions “UDL,” instead folding the best practices into the normal order of business for the media services area.
Implementing a change from narrative A to B in areas across an institution is no small undertaking. It requires leadership support and resources. As Candyce Rennegarbe at Tacoma Community College reports, the investment pays back an adopting institution handsomely:

By far, strong administrative support is the most important element. Our Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs has supported this project with funding and personal support since we started. He has used Achieving the Dream [program] funds and reserve funds; no major grant funding has been accessed to fund this project. We give release time to a faculty member to be the project manager in an affordable way to make sure there is sustained leadership. . . . We have also secured stipends for faculty and mentors and have involved the instructional research department from the beginning. We have a strong cross-disciplinary advisory team (Dean/VP of Instruction, Access Services, E-Learning, Developmental Studies, Professional Development, Student Services, Faculty), and strong support for building technology resources on campus. (in Meyer, et al., 2014, p. 169).

This approach—training those who actually do the development work on materials and interactions that UDL touches on—results in greater levels of adoption of UDL across the institution (Meyer et al., 2014, pp. 172-173). There is one more piece to the UDL-adoption puzzle. “If you build it, they will come” (Robinson, 1989). But will they know how to use it?

**From Three Domains to “Plus One”**

CAST has narrowed the tenets of UDL down to three brain networks that are addressed by well-designed learning interactions: the affective, recognition, and strategic networks (CAST, 2015). Each of these neural networks corresponds to one of the strategic areas of UDL:

- **Affective networks:** the *why* of learning. How learners get engaged and stay motivated. How they are challenged, excited, or interested. These are affective dimensions. Stimulate interest and motivation for learning.
- **Recognition networks:** the *what* of learning. How we gather facts and categorize what we see, hear, and read. Identifying letters, words, or an author’s style are recognition tasks. Present information and content in different ways.
- **Strategic networks:** the *how* of learning. Planning and performing tasks. How we organize and express our ideas. Writing an essay or solving a math problem are strategic tasks. Differentiate the ways that students can express what they know. (Meyer, et al., 2014, p. 90)

In working with faculty members and support staffers, I used to expand these domains into five areas of execution (Tobin, 2014). More recently, though, I simplify them down to one rule for UDL: adopt a “plus one” mentality.

It can seem like a nearly insurmountable task to take a course that has been offered at an institution for years without UDL practices in it and retrofit the entire course. There are likely to be dozens—if not hundreds—of elements and interactions in the course that need to have alternative formats and options created for them, to say nothing of all of the motivation and encouragement that needs to be made explicit and added in to the design of the course materials. Looking at the project in this way is daunting.

However, by adopting a “plus one” mind set, we can speedily chop down the work into parts that can we can work with. For instance, instead of creating all possible alternative formats for multimedia, select one consistently throughout the course. Create transcripts for video resources, but don’t also create captions. Or vice versa; just be consistent.

Further, identify where the course materials will get the greatest impact from the inclusion of UDL principles. Talk with the faculty members who teach the course and learn the parts of the course where students

- always have questions;
- always get things wrong on tests, quizzes, and assignments; and
- always need things explained in more than one way.
Those are the “UDL hot spots” in the course. Focus efforts at adding UDL content and interactions around those hot spots for maximum impact. In their study on faculty willingness to adopt UDL principles, Lombardi and Murray seem almost surprised to come to a similar conclusion: doing the work up front reduces accommodation requests down the road.

Actions associated with adopting inclusive instructional practices can be broken down into measurable steps. Ideally, this operationalization of U[niversal] D[esign] principles will help inform and encourage faculty to modify their instruction to be more inclusive and accessible to a wider range of learners, which will benefit all students, with and without disabilities. Further, some items . . . illustrated the inherent overlap between accommodating students and adopting the UD principles. (Lombardi & Murray, 2011, p. 50)

Finally, draw a “line in the sand” for the institution regarding the creation of new content and interactions. As of an agreed-on date, mandate that all new materials meet UDL standards, to avoid continuing the need for retrofitting. By providing UDL training to the people on campus who actually do the work of course design and content creation, we stand the greatest chance of achieving broad-based implementation across the institution.

A success story is the College STAR (Supporting Transition, Access, and Retention) consortium in North Carolina (College STAR, 2015), composed of colleges and universities from across the state that used a federal grant in order to create a curriculum shared across campuses. Because the grant required the use of UDL, all of the participating campuses sent their support and design staff to common training sessions, and now all of the courses and support mechanisms designed by the consortium are “born with UDL” as a matter of principle and practice.

This is the goal of UDL, after all: to reduce barriers to learning for everyone. I argue that, while we should keep learners with disabilities always in mind, we can best serve the broadest audience of learners by making the case for UDL as a way to reach out to mobile learners as part of our any-time, anywhere learning initiatives, and that we should train our institutional support staff in good UDL practices, so that faculty members who wish to work on their courses will automatically be presented with UDL practices as “just the way we do things here.”

Coda

James is a 28-year-old junior at a university in British Columbia, studying to be a radio-station manager. He is carrying a 3.6 GPA despite his job working in a donuts-and-coffee place during the day. He is taking most of his communication and media courses online, and he goes to campus one day a week in order to take a course that isn’t offered online. James is able to get by with the help of student loans and his income—and a little help from mom and dad now and then, too.

Right now, it is 10:30 at night, and James is at his desk in the living room of his apartment, working on a project for his mass-communication course. His professor has asked students to research a chosen job role and then create a job application through a traditional written résumé, a two-minute audio presentation, or a two-minute video application. Because James wants to go into radio, he has taught himself how to use the free sound-editing program Audacity to mix and record his audio file.

He is excited to complete this project, because, over the past week, James has been e-mailing back and forth with a radio-station manager in Vancouver, who encouraged him to reach out for a quick meeting. James has just concluded the interview with the station manager by Skype. He wearily saves his recording of the meeting and his notes, and he closes the lid on his laptop.

He turns off the desk lamp, grips the wheels of his wheelchair, and rolls himself toward the bathroom to get ready for bed, because tomorrow is his day on campus. Just like any other student.

References


Thomas J. Tobin is the Coordinator of Learning Technologies in the Center for Teaching and Learning at Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, Illinois. t-tobin@neiu.edu.
FERPA stands for the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and protects students' records. ADA stands for the Americans with Disabilities Act and protects individuals with disabilities through provisions that have to do with equal access opportunities.

"Words Turns 40, but They're Still Dirty", Bella, timothy, the Atlantic, (May 24, 2012).