

Challenges and Issues of Teaching Online

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Teaching and learning in the 21st century not only utilizes various technologies, but also takes place any time and any place. During the last decade, higher education institutions equipped many of their classrooms with the latest computer hardware and software applications and trained their faculty and staff to use the technology. With the technological advancements and the changing needs of institutions and students, more faculty members are teaching online.

MAIN FOCUS: CHALLENGES OF TEACHING ONLINE

Faculty choose to teach courses online for a variety of reasons. Teaching online provides faculty with an opportunity to 1) get more involved with technology; 2) use technology more innovatively to enhance teaching and learning; 3) meet the needs of students at a distance; 4) increase flexibility in working hours and locations; 5) respond to students' requests for online educational opportunities; 6) interact with students more frequently; and 7) respond to administration's initiative (McKenzie, Mims, Bennett, Waugh, 2000). As they prepare to teach their courses online, faculty face numerous challenges that can be classified into four areas: online course design; technology tools and course management systems; faculty development; and finally technical and administration support (Berge, Muilenburg, & Van Haneghan, 2002; Levine & Sun, 2002).

Online Course Design

Teaching online and at a distance are different from teaching face-to-face (Cyr, 1997). Good teaching

practices, however, work in either instructional setting. Hacker and Niederhauser (2000) suggest five instructional practices that current research proves to promote learning in both online and face-to-face environments: 1) asking students to construct deep explanations, justifications, and reasons for what they think and do; 2) grounding learning through effective use of examples; 3) using collaborative problem-solving strategies; 4) using appropriate and adequate feedback throughout instruction; and 5) embedding motivational components that enhance students' self-efficacy. These practices are grounded in (also aligned with) the seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Furthermore, Cyr (1997) argues that teaching in distance-learning environments not only requires sound pedagogical practices, but additional skills in course planning and organization, and working collaboratively with colleagues.

A systematic and thoughtful approach to online course design is essential (Beaudin, 1999; Kearsley, 2002; Palloff & Pratt, 2001). McLellan (1999) recommends that instructors design online courses that communicate the course purpose, identify learning activities and course requirements, explain the role of the instructor and the student, provide an orientation to resources and the online learning environment, and reinforce the value of forming an online learning community.

In addition, online course design should incorporate teaching strategies. For example, the use of guided didactic conversations as a strategy for instruction at a distance can simulate a dialogue between the student and the faculty member (Morrison & Guenther, 2000). The dialogue that takes place in an online discussion forum usually leads to students' better understanding of the instructional materials.

Thank you for reviewing one of my publications.

Baylen, D. M., & Zhu, E. (2009). Challenges and issues of teaching online. In P. L. Rogers, G. Berg, J. Boettcher, C. Howard, L. Justice, & K. Schenk (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of distance learning* (2nd ed., pp. 241-246). Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference. (A revised book chapter for the 2nd edition)

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