

Chapter 10

A Holistic Professional Development Model: A Case Study to Support Faculty Transition to Online Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Institutions struggle to develop online curriculum that meets increasing student demands for online education. The explosive growth of online learning necessitates that many higher education faculty transition from a traditional classroom to a web-based format, sometimes with little or no training. This chapter describes a holistic online faculty professional development (PD) model developed through use of a concerns-based adoption model (CBAM). The CBAM model provides an affective and behavioral lens for managing change. Through two of CBAM's components called stages of concern and levels of use, a PD plan was constructed that approaches the transition to distance learning as an ongoing process rather than simply as technology training. The holistic PD model considers each faculty member as an individual with unique needs. Components of the PD model and new Center for E-Learning (CeL) development and program building are explained. Impact on faculty and students and recommendations for program planning and future research are included.

INTRODUCTION

Distance learning (DL), a critical component of the long-term strategy of over 70% of higher education institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2015) continues increasing at a steady rate. Millions of U.S. students take online courses every year (Allen & Seaman, 2015), a number that rose at a spectacular rate in the past decade. Distance learning, undeniably an instructional delivery mode with staying power, still prompts

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5631-2.ch010

strong opposition from traditional faculty members, with concerns ranging from technology to time to fundamentals of teaching practice. Changes incorporating web-based technologies in higher education curricula surge forward as some faculty struggle to keep up with the most basic techniques. Acceptance of online learning by faculty remains nearly flat, from 27.6% in 2003, rising only slightly to 28% in 2014 (Allen & Seaman, 2015).

This chapter describes a case study of the journey of a large state university's Center for e-Learning (CeL) to incorporate the faculty voice into enterprise-wide decisions affecting the growth of DL, including training and support for faculty transitioning to online teaching of graduate and undergraduate courses. Yielding 35% growth in this university's faculty and staff participation so far, implementation of the change in services represents over 50% participation of total university faculty utilizing services.

This chapter discusses a flexible, holistic program of online faculty professional development (PD), which emerged as a product of a needs assessment based on a concerns-based adoption model (CBAM) described later in this chapter. This model, chosen for its implications in supporting change in individuals, allows for acknowledgement of faculty experiences at varying levels of comfort and ability. Initially responding to the immediate needs of faculty identified through CBAM stages of concern and levels of use, the PD program design also offers a suite of pedagogical and technological development opportunities from novice through advanced levels. Serving a broader purpose, a consequence of this PD plan is the opportunity to provide pedagogical training addressing the gap that may exist between being a subject matter expert in a field of study and having knowledge of best practices in higher education instruction. Trainings developed recognize change as a process rather than as a one-and-done occurrence and honor individuals wherever they are in the adoption process. The PD model uses a holistic view to address the comprehensive experience of online faculty as having technology concerns and course design and facilitation needs, as well as the social factors related to their transition to online teaching. Emphasis on community building among faculty across all disciplines, a key component of the holistic PD program, allows for maximizing the potential for social learning, peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, and support.

In the pages that follow, a case study is presented on one institution's efforts to determine how to best support faculty teaching online. First the authors show a brief history of the evolution of distance learning in the United States, then follow with an overview of a change initiative that fueled the development of a holistic PD model at a southeastern state university. In addition, this chapter includes a review of general perspectives on a shift to online teaching and to adoption of DL. Recommendation for the development of a holistic PD model and evidence of impact are presented, along with future research directions in online faculty PD.

EVOLUTION OF DISTANCE LEARNING IN U.S.

Distance learning has a long, rich history in the United States, which has changed overtime. An instructional delivery method where time and distance separate instructor and student, DL in the United States dates back to a shorthand course offered in 1728. In that course and many that followed, the U.S. Postal Service provided a delivery system for two-way correspondence between student and teacher (Holmberg, 2005). Early DL offered passive learning experiences with the student accessing instructional materials through text, photos, and, eventually, recordings. These formats delayed feedback extensively making communication with the instructor challenging. The Society to Encourage Study at Home, founded in 1873 by Anna Eliot Tickner (Holmberg, 2005), became the earliest formalized DL effort in the United

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