

Chapter 28

Making the Move: Supporting Faculty in the Transition to Blended or Online Courses

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ABSTRACT

This paper is intended for new faculty and faculty who are new to using digital technologies and a learning management system in their instruction. As experienced faculty in the College of Education, the authors make a concerted effort to support faculty in their use of instructional technology. In this paper, the authors share their experiences with faculty who are taking early the early steps in the journey to integrate digital technologies into their instruction. The authors hope this article will help faculty on their journey by supporting them in teaching with technology. The authors focus on faculty development, adoption of new technologies into faculties' instructional practices, and introductory online teaching practices. The authors' ultimate goal is to support student learning by helping faculty encourage learning for the entire continuum of students: students who need to be supported as they develop digital literacy and those who come to us embracing technologies wholeheartedly.

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INTRODUCTION

Faculty should know that they are not alone in their careers; there are others who are available to lend a hand and offer their time, support, and encouragement. Furthermore, faculty should realize that the use of a learning management system (LMS) and the integration of technology is a gradual process that takes time, requires training and support, and evolves over time. Although many students today thrive in the face of digital technology, students vary widely in their technological proficiencies. Faculty have the responsibility to support all students in the continued development *both* of course learning outcomes through digital learning tools *and* of digital literacy. The central message of this article is that faculty new to the integration of technology should seek out support from mentors, faculty development centers, and online training resources to help with technology implementation.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF OUR STUDENTS

Our traditional-aged students are much different than we were as college students and have different instructional experiences. Rather than waiting in the hallway for a professor to arrive for office hours (as we did), our students are more likely to Skype or email us to determine an appointment time or to ask questions that could be answered during face-to-face office hours. Young college students, in many ways, were raised with technology. Many of our students constitute the “Net Generation,” which consists of individuals who were born after 1980 and who have lived with technology as a readily available and integral part of their lifestyles (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). Many of our students use technology to make their lives easier. Instead of shying away from educational technologies, many students today embrace technology in education. In fact, most of our students expect it.

Despite these generalized findings, however, today’s students are a highly varied lot. Results of the ECAR study indicate that students’ use of technology—although on a constant rise in life outside school—is not consistent (Smith & Caruso, 2010). Students tend to segment their use of technology into different components of life. For instance, most use the Internet, handheld devices, and social networking services daily. Also, the age gap in technology use is swiftly declining; a full 58% of students 50 and older report using social networking sites like Facebook. Further, regardless of age, many students feel underprepared for the use of particular course-based technologies.

We as faculty have the responsibility to support our all of our students’ growth as thinkers, collaborators, and creators; instructional technology can and should play a central role in our efforts to support students’ growth as emerging scholars and active citizens of the 21st century. Given the centrality of the importance as technology as a set of tools for learning and a set of digital literacy outcomes, a number of questions should remain central in our minds as each of us implements digitally rich instruction:

- What is the central message to be mastered? How can I best ensure that students grasp the message?
- What technology can I use to make this message more vibrant and engaging for students?
- What struggles might students face as they consider the learning challenges that I present for them?
- How can digital literacy goals be pursued tandem with course learning goals?

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