

Chapter 49

E-LearningFacultyModules.org

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ABSTRACT

A team at Kansas State University recently launched the E-Learning Faculty Modules wiki to enhance and support online faculty development. This project is customized for teaching in the Kansas State University distance-learning program but contains a broad set of information that might be useful to others. This site is constructed using wiki technology, which permits access, multimedia expressiveness, remote collaboration, tracking, and reversibility of postings. Other tools on the site are derived from MediaWiki and its open-source capabilities. The wiki includes an overall ontology, templates, categories, completed and seeded entries, input boxes, and menus that ensure users can easily use and join the community. Taken holistically, these attributes create an ideal venue for sharing ideas and encouraging synergistic improvement of teaching practices. This chapter describes the implementation process of E-LearningFacultyModules.org and gives insight into its purpose, features, and uses.

1. OVERVIEW

Higher education has undergone incredible changes in the past fifteen years with the advent of distance education. Traditional universities have risen to the challenge of providing access to degrees and certificates to students in locations away from campuses. The fairly finite group of students served by universities in the past exploded with students from across the country and world knocking at their virtual doors. Fierce competition from higher educational institutions of all varieties has come along with the opportunity to serve expanded student populations. Students now shop for desired programs, affordable education and courses to fit into degrees from other universities. On this international stage, universities have to ensure that all courses are of the highest quality using benchmarks established within

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the online education world. Of course, this may require faculty members to gain new skills so they can provide effective online instruction which will help enable students to achieve course objectives and this can be an institutional challenge (Bower, 2001). The idea of the E-Learning Faculty Modules wiki was conceived by a committee to help K-State faculty, staff, and administrators gain the needed skills to be successful in an online environment.

At Kansas State University, a strategy aimed at providing tools for faculty already teaching online and those ready for the challenge of online instruction has taken the form of a wiki designed to serve faculty at all levels of expertise in online teaching. This wiki format was approached through an anytime, anyplace mindset with the goal of faculty access to information from offices, home or other remote locations. It was designed to allow faculty to boost their knowledge, build new skills, gain confidence and understand the complexity of moving from traditional classroom teaching to online teaching. This opportunity to learn by sharing experiences and expertise with peers was viewed as essential (Clay, 1999). Principles of good practice and the latest developments in wiki technology were used to ensure a stable and user-friendly platform.

The project was designed and completed by a team of faculty members, instructional designers and continuing education professionals. The project, called E-Learning Faculty Modules, started rather simply with three main modules—one for beginning online instructors (0-2 years of online teaching experience), one for intermediate level instructors (3-5 years of experience), and the third for expert faculty who had taught for a number of years but wanted to employ new technologies and methods of teaching. These three main sections were called *Beginners Studio*, *E-Learning Central*, and *Advanced Workshop*. As the project progressed, other sections were added. A *Getting Started* module that features online instructors who share experiences and knowledge was developed for beginning online instructors. A welcome and introduction from the university provost was added, as was a section named *Rules of the Road* that noted regulations related to distance education from different accrediting agencies. *Stand Alones* on pertinent topics such as accessibility, honesty and integrity, assessment, and fair use and copyright were created as well as sections called *E-Quality*, *Faculty Share*, *Best Practices*, *Take Five*, and *General Reference Resources*.

The development team made decisions that shaped the wiki. During the first year the team met on a monthly basis but later these meetings were replaced with small project teams focused on specific tasks. The project design and implementation process continues to remain fluid as new ideas are explored and developed. A marketing plan for the wiki was developed so instructors and others on campus could become aware of this resource.

On October 19, 2010, Kansas State University publically released E-Learning Faculty Modules (see Figure 1) with the overall goals of boosting faculty knowledge, building new skills for online instructors, enhancing confidence, developing standards for instructional approach, and providing a better understanding of the complexity required to move from traditional classroom teaching to online teaching.

The Website, located at [elearningfacultymodules.org](http://www.elearningfacultymodules.org) (<http://www.elearningfacultymodules.org>) provides the virtual space for faculty and staff to interact with a set of resources that can enhance their online teaching experiences. While the wiki is not universally used by K-State online instructors, feedback has been encouraging. Many faculty members and administrators now refer to “the faculty modules” in conversations. It even has been used by instructors as a teaching tool for education courses.

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