

Chapter 5

Moving e-Learning Forward: A Study of the Impact of the Continual Changing Landscape of e-Learning

Deb Gearhart
Ohio University, USA

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the chapter is to incorporate current research into a review of the administration of an e-Learning program at a traditional university. The study reviews the background for a strategic online administrator, reviews the challenges of integrating e-Learning in a traditional institution, and review models for developing the e-Learning program of the future. The research review demonstrates the need for a strong, strategic e-Learning administrator to champion e-Learning within the institution. Literature supports the need for enrollment growth, providing services to faculty and students, to deal with internal and external constituents and the need for continuous quality improvement. Models are provided to the readers.

INTRODUCTION

eLearning is an ever changing area of higher education. The chapter discusses how a traditional institution moves forward with developing an eLearning program. In this chapter, the emphasis will be on program administration of the areas to be covered by an eLearning unit, primarily the services to be provided to faculty and students, developing effective eLearning partnerships, addressing state authorization and federal regulations, preparing for accreditation, and using data for decision-making.

The goals of the chapter are to:

- Provide the readers with models for strategic online administration of eLearning in a decentralized institution.
- Address the challenges facing eLearning integration into a traditional institution.
- Discuss developing and implementing an eLearning continuous improvement strategy.
- Look at the future trends that will play a role in higher education and eLearning.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0877-9.ch005

STRATEGIC CONCERNS FOR e-LEARNING

In a recent keynote address, Gary Miller (2015) noted,

In today's world, education is no longer about the one-way transfer of knowledge from teacher to student. Today's world demands an education in which students actively seek out information, evaluate it, and turn it into knowledge, and then apply that knowledge to address problems or situations." He pointed out "Online learning is not simply a new educational technology...but rather the way that higher education can adapt to the new demands that has arisen as the Information Revolution and matured in a Global Information Society (p. 5).

As eLearning programs have grown over the past decade, to meet the demands of the Information Revolution, institutions look to improve the quality of their online programs by mainstreaming eLearning in the institution. This is done through a strong eLearning program managed by a strong leader. In fact, according to Shelton and Saltsman (2005), in order for an online program to be integrated and accepted on a campus it needs a champion and strong leader. Research has acknowledged three types of distance education leaders: a transformational leader, a situational leader and a systemic. In Table 1, Shelton & Saltsman describe the three types of distance education leaders.

It is important for an online learning administrator to balance the three roles in order to move forward within the institution and make it grow. The key to balancing leadership roles is strategic planning. It takes balancing all three leadership roles to move an online program into an institutional strategic plan, where it is more likely to be successful and grow. A strategic plan provides the vision of an institution and the online program administrator needs to convince university administrators to invest in the vision of online learning and include it in the institutional strategic plan. The concept that eLearning must strategically align with the institution's mission is widely recognized and is part of the regional accreditation process. The Council of Regional Accrediting Commission (C-RAC) Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Learning state "The on-line learning is appropriate to the institution's mission and purposes" (p. 2). As demonstrated in Table 2, the institution's mission is the foundation for the strategic plan and for the growth of a quality eLearning program, the eLearning program must be part of the institution strategic plan.

How does an eLearning administrator become a strategic leader able to affect change within the institution? Based on an EDUCAUSE report by Harrow and Oblinger (2015), there are leadership roles which technology and eLearning leaders should avail to be a:

Table 1. Three types of distance education leaders

Transformational leader	Reaches major stakeholders, administrators and faculty, to explain how online works, the changes in teaching and learning.
Situational leader	Assesses and prepares an institution for online learning. This leader is adaptable and flexible, being able to work with stakeholders to bring online learning to fruition.
Systemic leader	Is a relationship manager, taking a holistic approach to moving the institution forward in online learning.

(Shelton & Saltsman, 2005)

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