Chapter 1

The Evolving Landscape of Instructional Design in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces the readers to the current practice of instructional design in higher education and describes the need for optimizing instructional design methods and practice to increase its nimbleness and adaptive capacity. It also aims to challenge the readers to imagine how instructional design methods in higher education could serve as a catalyst for solving adaptive and complex systemic challenges. The authors argue that instructional design is no longer a process that should be relegated to online course design but is, in fact, a process that can bring about organizational change.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we focus on the integration of instructional design within higher education and argue that there is a need for optimizing instructional design methods and practice to increase its nimbleness and adaptive capacity. With such optimization, instructional design approaches could be used to address the yet unknown challenges of teaching and learning within higher education. Instructional design as a formalized practice in higher education is fairly new, emerging out of the need to support online distance education and digital learning overall. With this in mind, this chapter introduces the readers to the current practice of instructional design in higher education. It also aims to challenge the readers to imagine how instructional design methods in higher education could serve as a catalyst for solving adaptive and complex systemic challenges with potentially boundless permutations. We argue that instructional design is no longer a process that should be relegated to online course design but is, in fact, a process that can bring about organizational change.

BACKGROUND

During the first decade of the 21st century, post-secondary education enrollment in the United States (undergraduate and graduate) grew by approximately 37 percent, reaching a total of 21 million in (McFarland et al., 2018). However, between 2010 and 2016 the total student enrollment reached only 19.9 million, and projected growth in enrollment, between 2016 and 2027, is expected to be .6 million students (McFarland et al., 2018).

By 2016 student enrollment in at least one distance education course reached more than 6.3 million with approximately three million of students enrolled exclusively in distance education (Seaman, Allen, &, Seaman, 2018). For this chapter, we adopted the definition of distance education provided by the U.S. Department of Education:

Distance education uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the student and the instructor synchronously or asynchronously. (McFarland et al., 2018, p. 171)

The hiring of instructional designers in higher education is linked to the expansion of online distance education; just in the United States alone, there are over 13,000 instructional designers who work in colleges and universities (Intentional Futures, 2016). The work of the instructional designers in higher education tends to be based on social and cognitive skills developed through their experience as designers

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