

Faculty Resistance to Change: An Examination of Motivators and Barriers to Teaching Online in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This study explored university faculty members' willingness to teach online in relation to their resistance to change. Researchers examined whether a relationship exists between resistance to change and motivators or barriers to teaching online. Participants were 131 faculty members of all ranks from a private, comprehensive university in the greater Los Angeles area. Participants reported such barriers as their discipline not being suited to online teaching, an absence of time for online course preparation, and a lack of skills or confidence in teaching online. Reported motivators included financial incentives, increased flexibility, and keeping current with various modes of delivery. Reported barriers were positively correlated with faculty's resistance to change, demonstrating that faculty who were reluctant to change their routines, had negative reactions to the presence of change, and saw short-term change as inconvenient were more likely to see barriers to teaching online. Faculty rank was related to certain study variables. Implications for these findings are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Distance Education, Higher Education, Motivation, Online Learning, Resistance to Change

INTRODUCTION

There is little doubt that the last 20 years have brought a shift in pedagogy for higher education institutions. Advancements in technology, coupled with more students seeking to work toward college degrees in the midst of balancing work and family responsibilities, has led to many universities offering alternative ways for students to complete coursework (Kemp & Grieve, 2014; Maguire, 2005). One specific shift has been a movement toward online education. Enrollment in online higher education programs has increased from 9.6% in 2002 to 29.7% in 2015 (Allen & J. Seaman, 2011; J. E. Seaman, Allen, & J. Seaman, 2018). During the Fall of 2016, 31.7% of all college and university students were enrolled in at least one distance learning course, and 15% of the more than 19.8 million students were attending fully online (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). According to the *Online College Students 2018* study, 85% of the students surveyed who took face-to-face classes and online courses felt their online experience was better or the same as in-person courses (Magda & Aslanian, 2018).

DOI: 10.4018/IJOPCD.2020010101

However, the shift to more online offerings within institutions of higher education is not entirely motivated by the increase in technological advancements and flexibility needs for students. Other interconnected factors such as the desire to increase access to convenient and flexible education (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2016), the value in students gaining more of a global perspective on issues (Jung & Gunawardena, 2014), and the competitive need to leverage markets to increase institutional profits (Craig, 2015; McGee, 2015) also motivate the shift. Benefits to online courses (e.g., improved student access, higher degree completion rates, and an appeal to non-traditional students) have been reported (Allen & J. Seaman, 2007).

Embedded in the movement to increase numbers of online courses are emerging methods for effective online teaching and learning. Over the last two decades, the “sage on the stage” model found in more traditional classroom environments has been viewed as less desirable to the more facilitative role of the “guide at the side” (Foster, West, & Bell-Angus, 2016; Morrison, 2014). Many have argued that creating learning environments that are more self-paced and that move away from simply putting content online for students to digest is best practice (Lim, 2016). In other words, online education has required faculty and instructional designers to rethink the learning process and provide more responsibility to the learner.

This shift toward online education in higher education, therefore, requires that faculty shift ways of teaching. But this change in the status quo is often viewed by faculty as difficult and unnecessary (Allen, J. Seaman, Lederman, & Jaschik, 2012; Glass, 2017; Mitchell, Parlamis, & Claiborne, 2015). As online education continues to grow, administrators see the lack of faculty participation as an obstacle to the process of growing online course or program offerings (Ortagus & Stedrak, 2013; Uderman, 2014). Administrators within higher education institutions have noted that some faculty have resisted the call to move courses to an online format (Allen et al., 2012; Mitchell et al., 2015), showing that factors such as time, lack of financial or technological support, lack of recognition, beliefs that their course content cannot be translated online, or fears of losing connection with students can act as barriers to online teaching (Mitchell et al., 2015; Prottas, Cleaver & Cooperstein, 2016). Institutions have not provided the necessary investment in time, support, and financial resources to assist developing quality online courses (Taylor, 2002).

For instance, time is a critical resource for faculty, and learning new technology and creating new instructional materials is often seen as a barrier to innovation (Beggs, 2000; Taylor, 2002). The amount of time it takes to develop courses online becomes a major deterrent to the adoption of instructional technology (Maguire, 2005). Faculty have reported spending 15-20 hours to develop multimedia lectures and 150-200 hours converting a face-to-face course to an online format (Beggs, 2000). In some institutions, increasing the workload in the necessary ways to convert courses is viewed by faculty as time that could be spent on research instead (Lloyd, Byrne, & McCoy, 2012), a requirement distinctly tied to the tenure and promotion process.

With proper support and training, conversion to online delivery of content could be easier for faculty members. The lack of this support is a primary reason why some faculty do not engage in technology initiatives (McLean, 2005). Training alternatives can move faculty forward; however, faculty members who avoid teaching online courses tend to perceive the availability and quality of training opportunities as negative (McLean, 2005). Of course, support and training are also tied to the issue of time--faculty members' investment in preparing high quality, engaging online courses requires that they take the time to learn effective instructional technology tools (Alexiou-Ray & Bentley, 2015; McMurty, 2013; Prottas et al., 2016).

In addition to lack of time and support, faculty also report concerns about the perceived quality of content for online education (McLean, 2005). Some institutions lack the monitoring of quality standards in online education, and faculty become concerned about how this will impact the overall quality of the students' educational experience (Marks, 2016). Specifically, the lack of standards that continue to exist in online education is a factor that lead faculty to believe that students cannot learn as well online as they would be able to face-to-face (Ritter, 2012). Some faculty members fear that

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