Chapter IV

Strategic Planning for E-Learning in a Polytechnic

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Abstract

This chapter is a case study of how a polytechnic developed a strategic plan for e-learning. It describes the institution's rationale for moving more strongly into e-learning, the processes followed by the institution to develop a plan and ensure its acceptance through the institutional community, and the factors that facilitated the process. It indicates that attention to objectives, core values and principles, and faculty development and training, are critical for the successful transition from mainly face-to-face teaching to e-learning. The development of key performance indicators will allow the success of the plan to be measured in 2010.

Introduction

In many institutions, the introduction of e-learning follows a fairly standard pattern. Five distinct stages can be observed:

- **Stage 1 – "Lone Rangers" (Bates, 2000):** These are the early adopters. E-learning is introduced through the initiative of individual faculty members or instructors, often with no immediate or direct support from the institution.
- **Stage 2 – Encouragement:** The activities of the early adopters attract the attention of senior administrators, who try to support them with small grants or a slightly reduced teaching load.
- **Stage 3 – Chaos:** After a period of time, a growing number of instructors embrace e-learning, but the administration starts to get worried about quality, duplication of effort, lack of technical standards, such as the need to support different course development platforms, and above all, the costs of scaling up to large numbers of classes and instructors.
- **Stage 4 – Planning:** The senior administration realizes that priorities need to be set, common technical standards established, technical and design support and training for faculty or instructors developed, and cost-effective ways of developing e-learning established so that budget and instructor workload can be controlled.
- **Stage 5 – Sustainability:** The institution has established a stable system of e-learning that is cost effective and scalable. Few institutions to date have reached this stage.

This chapter is about the fourth stage, how one institution developed a comprehensive, formal strategic plan for e-learning. Stockley (2004) notes that there are many examples of how an institution should develop a strategic plan for integrating educational technology (e.g., Benjamin, Carroll, Jacobi, Krop, & Shires, 1993; Bruce, 1999; Dill, 1996; Ford, 1996) but few of how a strategic plan for e-learning has actually been developed and implemented in a particular institution. This chapter provides a case study of such a process. Although each institution is unique, this case incorporates planning processes and strategies that could be applied to a wide variety of postsecondary institutions.

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