

Chapter 28

Faculty Development for Online Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Despite dramatic increase in online education and the benefits associated with this instructional pedagogy, many challenges exist with the design and delivery of online learning. Faculty play a critical role in the process of quality online education. Yet, development opportunities for faculty are too few, often lacking a comprehensive approach needed for faculty to function optimally in the online learning environment. The interconnection among pedagogy, technology, context, students, faculty, key decision makers, and administrators in higher education complicates the online teaching and learning processes. The purpose of this chapter is to address development issues related to faculty who teach online by embracing training and other critical developmental support needed to ensure success of online education. Various training and development frameworks and models are recommended as ways to prepare and support faculty to teach effectively online.

INTRODUCTION

In the United States more than 6.7 million students are enrolled in at least one online course (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Of the total student enrollment in higher education, approximately 32% of students take at least one course offered in the online format. The exponential growth in online learning has been accompanied by a variety of challenges. While online learning has presented many opportunities for students, ranging from convenience, flexibility, access to education, cost reduction, and college suc-

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cess, many critics, including faculty, question its authenticity and value. Only 30% of academic leaders are of the perception that faculty value and accept this instructional delivery method (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Furthermore, almost 45% of instructors are of the view that preparing for, and teaching online courses, can be more time consuming. Approximately 25% rate the learning outcomes as substandard to the traditional face-to-face classroom setting (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are also an emerging form of online learning. Numerous universities and other public and private organizations across the world are offering MOOCs to millions of people (Margaryan, Bianco, & Littlejohn, 2015). Though it is argued that the presentation of course materials in MOOCs are highly organized, research indicates that the quality of instructional design is low (Margaryan, Bianco, & Littlejohn, 2015). Yet, opportunities to develop faculty for online teaching are too few and when offered are of low quality with the focus primarily on the technology and little or no emphasis on the pedagogy of online teaching (Lane, 2013) or other supporting factors of online education. Furthermore, training is typically delivered in a face-to-face lab setting with hands-on activities rather than utilizing an online learning platform.

The mushroom in online learning as well as the cost-saving benefits to institutions has been unmatched with faculty preparation. While the above findings are valid, there are models of online training and development initiatives that can be adopted to influence online teaching and learning, as well as the perceptions of academic leaders and stakeholders. The chapter presents a comprehensive understanding of current issues, best practices, and propositions for improving the standards of online education through faculty development. Recommendations for future research are also provided.

BACKGROUND

Online education is characterized by: 1) the separation of teachers and learners which distinguishes it from face-to-face education; 2) the influence of an educational organization which distinguishes it from self-study and private tutoring; 3) the use of a computer network to present or distribute some educational content, and; 4) the provision of two-way communication via a computer network so that students may benefit from communication with each other, teachers, and staff (Keegan, 1988).

The history of online education has gained momentum since the 1960s with the first computer linked virtual classroom created by the University of Illinois. This experiment enabled students to access learning resources while listening to remotely broadcasted lectures (Smarty, 2010). Since then, the growth of online education in US Colleges has created greater access to higher education, attracting many different types of learner communities. The expansion of the World Wide Web enabled countries around the world to quickly reap the benefit of virtual education as well as access to online information. Within only a short time, large corporations embraced online employee training as a strategic action to slim their training budgets, save traveling cost and time, and minimize the loss of work time as well as software distribution costs (Pappas, 2014).

Initially online education was attractive to working adults. Today, online learning has become mainstream education for many learner communities, irrespective of age, gender, and location (Schulte, Dennis, Eskey, Taylor, & Zeng, 2012). No doubt online education created lifelong learning access to many who dreamed of higher education. With the rapid expansion of the Internet and learning technologies around the world, aspiring learners have the opportunity to earn any type and level of degree without physically traveling to a college (Smarty, 2010). Increasing access to online education for all age learners has

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