Chapter 9

Project Management Methods for the Implementation of an Online Faculty Development Course

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The case study describes the project management methods used in the implementation of a faculty development course at a small liberal arts university. The faculty development course, which was delivered online through the Learning Management System (Blackboard), not only provided faculty with technical competencies, but also a pedagogical framework for online instruction. As faculty members began to see the potential of using technology to overcome time and distance challenges, they became more interested in online education. To accomplish the project goals, the instructional design team created a detailed spreadsheet that outlined the design and implementation strategy for the initiative. Success criteria included increased

demand and enrollment in the course, formal adoption of the professional development course as an institutional requirement, expansion of student enrollments in online courses, and student retention rates. The case study describes the unique project management considerations, documentation, and planning required throughout the project.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The university began as a small faith-based teachers college in 1863, located in the Midwest region of the United States. With small faculty to student ratios, the culture of the university often emphasized close faculty and student relationships. However, in 2002 the university experienced a financial crisis that nearly caused the institution to close its doors. The university faced a significant debt of millions of dollars and struggled to maintain an undergraduate enrollment of 1,000 students. This crisis caused the university to conduct extensive staff reductions and bring in new institutional leadership. To overcome the challenges, the graduate college sought to develop new programs, increase enrollment, and offer alternative delivery modes to generate additional revenue.

SETTING THE STAGE

Prior to the project, the small liberal arts university had very few early adopters of online education. Although a Learning Management System (Blackboard) was licensed in 1998, the medium was not used for course delivery until 2004 when faculty members began to offer some undergraduate courses in a hybrid format. The institution had also made some initial efforts in online education at the graduate level in 2007 in a joint online initiative with a partner institution. However, the partnership effort was unsuccessful due to unclear partner expectations and an apparent lack of a priority status for either institution.

In 2007, a major step forward was made in the graduate college with the creation of an Instructional Design Team, which consisted of two instructional designers and a Blackboard administrator. The head of the instructional design team served as the overall project leader. The three members of the team brought together the technical and pedagogical expertise needed to support the transition to an online learning format. It was believed that the development of online programs at the graduate level would increase student enrollment, build retention, and increase student satisfaction by providing increased accessibility to courses.

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