

Chapter 2

Online Teaching: Perceptions of Faculty at a Research University

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ABSTRACT

This chapter includes a report of a study conducted to investigate the perceptions of faculty teaching online at a doctoral research university in the southeast United States. Research literature regarding faculty satisfaction with online learning is summarized. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyze the results of an online survey administered in the Spring of 2010. Major findings are that faculty enjoy the convenience and flexible scheduling that teaching online offers them and their students but consider teaching online to more labor-intensive compared to teaching face-to-face courses. Faculty expressed the need for reliable and current technology for online teaching, improved technical support and training, and clear institutional policies regarding online teaching and developing online courses. Methods for improving faculty satisfaction with online teaching are suggested, which include collaborating with academic librarians to enhance the online teaching and learning experience.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will interest readers who apply technology to deliver online instruction in higher education contexts, work with faculty who develop online instruction, or administer online learning

programs. It aligns with the theme of *Faculty Experience of Online Learning*. The results of a survey to explore faculty satisfaction with online teaching at a mid-sized, public, doctoral research university in the United States are reported and integrated with existing literature. The objectives of this chapter include:

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-3688-0.ch002

- Summarizing current literature regarding faculty satisfaction with online learning
- Providing results from a recently-conducted survey of faculty satisfaction with online teaching
- Describing perceived challenges for faculty teaching online and proposing methods for improving faculty satisfaction with online teaching
- Suggesting how faculty teaching online can collaborate with academic librarians to enhance the online teaching and learning experience.

BACKGROUND

Online teaching and learning is now prevalent throughout the spectrum of educational contexts and the number of online learners is growing rapidly (Allen & Seaman, 2010; Staker, 2011). The increasing number of online learners should correlate with either more faculty being added to teach online, or having existing faculty teaching more sections. Therefore, administrators and professionals charged with supervising and supporting faculty teaching online should be concerned with the level of satisfaction that faculty teaching online experience. The Sloan Consortium, a nonprofit organization focused on quality online education, lists faculty satisfaction as one of five pillars in its quality framework for online education (Sloan Consortium, 2011).

To emphasize student retention, progression, and graduation in higher education tends to make students the entire focus of a customer-satisfaction model, especially in this time of expanded global competition and the growth of online for-profit institutions. Institutions of higher education should not, though, sacrifice faculty satisfaction as they are usually the ones creating the online courses that students experience. A satisfied faculty may lead to better-designed and better-facilitated courses

which, in turn, will maintain student satisfaction with their exposure to online learning.

A literature search on faculty satisfaction and their perceptions of online teaching returned articles dating back to 2004. This date is consistent with Roblyer and Doering's (2010) assessment, which marks 2000 as the year that "online and distance learning increases in higher education, then in k-12 schools" (p. 11). While there are certainly many examples of online teaching before 2000, faculty teaching online at that time would have likely been early adopters and, thus, especially motivated. Faculty satisfaction with online teaching would have been more relevant after online teaching and learning became more widely adopted, and even expected. Topics found in the literature included influences on teaching online, faculty attitudes toward technology, faculty support needs, impact on faculty workload and productivity and, more recently, faculty satisfaction with online teaching.

Grant (2004) reports that faculty were already feeling pressure to teach using distance education technologies and were seeking specialized professional development to learn to do so. At the same time, Hislop and Ellis (2004) were examining the effort faculty expended teaching online. They attempted to measure faculty effort in order to provide quantitative evidence of the anecdotal belief that teaching distance courses took more time. When controlling for class size, the researchers found that the time required to teach online courses was slightly higher, but equivalent to the time required to teach face-to-face courses when considered as time-per-student. Thompson (2004) also found that the time faculty spent teaching online courses was comparable to teaching face-to-face courses. However, Thompson found that the time *required* to teach online courses was slightly less than that required to teach face-to-face courses. Both these studies used quantitative methodologies. Their data sources included time tracking of faculty and did not rely on faculty perceptions.

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