Chapter 3
Faculty Experience of Online Teaching

Julia Khanova
University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, USA

ABSTRACT

Online education is growing rapidly and outpacing research efforts in this area. Online teaching in particular has received little research attention. Grounded in existing literature and empirical research, this chapter aims to describe the key dimensions of the faculty experience of preparing and teaching online courses. The differences between online and traditional teaching are highlighted, emphasizing time/effort cost, technology and support needs, as well as the relationship between online teaching technology and pedagogy. The shift in faculty role is discussed. Special attention is given to using various Web resources for online teaching and the impact of this trend on library services. Real-life examples and direct quotes from faculty who teach online are used to illustrate each of the themes and suggest directions for future research.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'online education' has been used in the literature to describe a spectrum of distance education (DE) options using computer network technologies, beginning with email-based courses that first appeared in the late 1970s and followed by a fully online program launched in early 1980s that used email, computer conferencing and other

telecommunication technologies (Harasim, 2000). In contemporary discourse, the terms 'online education' 'online teaching', and 'online learning' are most commonly used to refer to web-based educational models that were develop in the mid-1990s with the launch of Virtual-U in 1996 as the first large-scale online educational project (Harasim, 2000). A recent meta-analysis of online learning research done by the US Department of Education defines online learning as "learning that takes place partially or entirely over the Internet" (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009,

p. 9). In this chapter, online teaching is understood as web-based teaching supported by a variety of Internet technologies.

Online education in web-based format is the fastest growing segment of higher education in the United States, with more than two-thirds of higher education institutions offering online courses and, increasingly, fully-online degree programs (Allen & Seaman, 2007). According to the most recent Sloan Consortium report on the national state of online education, there is a 70% increase in student demand for online programs and course offerings, and a 17% growth in online enrollment from 2008 to 2009 (Allen & Seaman, 2010). This trend in online enrollment is projected to continue (Hussar & Bailey, 2008) and, as a result, university faculty are increasingly likely to experience teaching online in addition to (or instead of) teaching in a traditional on-campus classroom. In the LIS field, the vast majority of programs offer either select courses or entire degrees online (Marek, 2009).

The academic discourse on online education is dominated by learner-centered terms (e.g., 'online learning' or 'eLearning') and themes. This is not surprising given the general paradigm shift in education during the 1990s from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995) at the same time that online education started to develop rapidly. The emphasis on learners resulted in substantially less attention being given to the other side of the educational process: teaching, particularly in the online realm. Yet, excluding purely independent study, learning cannot occur without teaching, whether it happens online or in the traditional classroom. This chapter will concentrate on the teaching side of the online equation. The main objective here is to paint a realistic picture of faculty experiences while preparing and teaching online courses. After reviewing relevant research, the chapter will critically analyze some typical perceptions about online teaching and disambiguate myth and reality. This will be followed by a discussion, grounded in empirical research, of key facets of

becoming a successful virtual professor. Practical suggestions that address existing challenges and improve the online teaching experience will be given. The chapter concludes by considering future research needs.

BACKGROUND

Online education has been the subject of extensive cross-disciplinary research efforts for nearly two decades.[1] Over this time, with online education becoming increasingly commonplace, the research agenda has gradually shifted from proving that online education is a viable option, to examining its different dimensions. As mentioned in the introduction, most research efforts in this field concentrate on the students' experience. Even researchers who examine specific instructional strategies and instructor behaviors (Blingaut & Trollip, 2003; Brinkerhoff & Koroghlanian, 2007) present their findings from the students' perspective. The paucity of research on online teaching specifically can be attributed to its relative novelty and the lack of a suitable theoretical framework or model for studying online teaching (Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006). Four main themes emerge from this limited faculty-centered literature in online education:

- Faculty engagement with online teaching, and them factors that facilitate or inhibit it
- Faculty participation in online course design/development
- Specific technologies
- Shifting role of instructors in the online realm

Faculty Engagement in Online Teaching

Of the four themes, faculty engagement in online teaching has received the most attention. Over the past decade, a number of studies have been

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