Preparing Faculty to Teach Online

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Abstract

Online education is now part of the fabric and long-term plans of higher education. However, in order for institutions of higher education to offer quality, scalable, sustainable online education programs there are issues to address. One is creating and maintaining quality faculty preparation and another is addressing faculty-perceived needs to teach online. Research shows that best-practice faculty preparation is supported by administration and, among other features, includes an online course where faculty experience online learning from a student point-of-view. There is a wide array of faculty preparation programs in place currently in the U.S. that comprise a face-to-face course, an online course coupled with face-to-face lab time, faculty and faculty center staff mentoring, and helpful Web sites (see Appendix A). This research can be used to further develop University of Hartford's efforts to prepare faculty to teach online. Finally, it might be helpful as a further research opportunity, to look into how faculty preparation for teaching online may advance teaching practices overall in higher education.

Preparing Faculty to Teach Online

Introduction

There is a rising trend to offer online courses or entire degree programs at higher

education level. Out of the approximately 18 million students enrolled in higher education in

2007, about one-fifth of them enrolled in online education. Also consider the following from

Allen and Seaman (2008):

- Over 3.9 million students were taking at least one online course during the fall 2007 term; a 12 percent increase over the number reported the previous year.
- The 12.9 percent growth rate for online enrollments far exceeds the 1.2 percent growth of the overall higher education student population.
- Over twenty percent of all U.S. higher education students were taking at least one online course in the fall of 2007 (page 1).

Institutions are embracing online education, in part, because it provides a revenue stream in

difficult economic times. In addition, Allen et al. found that online education weighs heavily in

long-term plans:

> Except for the very smallest of institutions (those with fewer than 1,500 total enrollments), the majority of institutions of all sizes believe that online education is critical to their long-term strategy (page 11).

With this in mind, logical thought leads most to agree with Clark and Mayer (2008) that online

education is here to stay.

The decision to embrace online education generates specific technical, legal, and ethical

problems that universities need to address. However, a more practical and urgent problem

involves shifting faculty from the face-to-face classroom to the online realm. Two issues surface

often in the research regarding this: faculty preparation and faculty perceived needs.

Issue One: Faculty Preparation

One of the issues facing institutions of higher education that are interested in offering

online education is addressing faculty preparation to teach online. Yang and Cornelious (2005)

state that instructors are concerned about adapting to the change in their role from professor-centered lecturer to student-centered facilitator. By virtue of being content experts in their field and knowing the institution's online learning management system (LMS), faculty are not necessarily equipped to deliver quality distance education. Bates and Poole (2003) state that many faculty, without formal training and basically on their own, have simply adapted their face-to-face teaching methods to accommodate online education demands. Likewise, Oomen-Early and Murphy (2009) state that institutions have pushed faculty into the role of online educators rather than transitioned them via preparatory training. And finally, Palloff and Pratt (1999) feel it is important that faculty are trained in the process of online learning if they are to move into the arena of online education.

Issue Two: Faculty Perceived Needs

Another issue facing institutions of higher education that are interested in offering online education is addressing what faculty *feel* they need in order to transition from the role of lecturer in a face-to-face environment to the role of facilitator in an online environment. Perceived needs run the gamut from strong support by administration, to robust technical infrastructure, to technical and pedagogical training and mentoring by staff and faculty, to recognition of time spent learning, preparing, and teaching online.

Ooman et al.'s research of faculty's perceived needs for effective online education shows that the most recurrent theme in the category of administrative and institutional support is the support, or lack thereof, shown to faculty by university administration. In addition, if the infrastructure of the university's online program is in its infancy, it is perceived as not ready to handle the high demand of online enrollment. Faculty feel the need to be prepared over and above simply the technical aspects of teaching online and need to learn the pedagogy and

teaching strategies related to online course delivery, and need to have faculty-led sessions along with staff-led sessions. Covington, Petherbridge, & Warren (2005) found that faculty feel that their peers would not 'sugar coat' online teaching but the faculty center staff might be inclined to do so. Faculty mentorship is clearly a perceived need, as well. In Pankowski's (2004) research, faculty respondents feel that mentoring should be provided as a training method and went so far as to respond that without faculty assistance, they would not have continued to teach online. Another emerging theme in this study reveals that faculty spend more time than perceived by administration attending and participating in training, and preparing and delivering online courses and therefore feel that rewards through release time or additional salary are warranted.

Best Practice for Faculty Preparation Defined

Experts have agreed for some time that faculty preparation to teach online is necessary. What constitutes best practice for preparing faculty to teach online? In an extensive review of the literature on faculty preparation, Wolf (2006) found the following to be the case:

> Training programs are successful when faculty have computing skills before enrolling in the training, are trained using the course delivery system with which they will be teaching, have ongoing institutional support, and are motivated to work in this environment (page 47).

Other findings from Wolf show that faculty do well as online instructors if they themselves have experienced online learning as a student, are involved in their own course design, and have ongoing support in the form of mentoring, shadowing, and workshops. In addition, successful training encompasses pedagogy and is supported by institutions. Ko and Rossen (2004) believe that faculty preparation works best in a face-to-face lab setting for immediate feedback, but must be coupled with online training off-site during which faculty can use their computer of choice.

Ko et al. also mention that online, asynchronous workshops are best for a geographically dispersed, busy faculty who would be able to find time on their own schedules to learn. Finally, in order to teach online, Pankowski's (2004) research shows that faculty should experience online education from a student's point of view using the LMS utilized on campus.

Faculty Preparation Practices Currently in the United States

In order to research nationally what institutions are doing now to prepare faculty to teach online, an extensive search online was conducted. Through this investigation, it was found that institutions' faculty centers for learning, alternatively called centers for teaching and learning, or centers for teaching excellence, have under their umbrella many directives, one of the most time-consuming and recent being preparing faculty to teach online. Links made in this investigation were not limited to universities of the same size and means as University of Hartford since in order to strive for quality online faculty preparation it is wise to look at what is current practice at any university, compare it to best practice research, and contend with the ways and means afterward.

Similarities of faculty preparation for online teaching methods across universities include (1) faculty training via an online course, or a combination of both face-to-face and online, covering both pedagogy and technology (2) faculty preparation via a series of face-to-face sessions, (3) a one-stop-shop Web page on the university Web site dedicated to distance learning (for faculty *and* students), and (4) fostering faculty mentoring groups, all of which are discussed below in more detail. Some but not all institutions considered in this paper offered faculty certificates of completion, monetary incentive, and /or release time to complete preparation seminars and, ultimately, teach online.

(1) Faculty Training via an Online Course or a Combination of Both Face-To-Face and

Online, Covering Both Pedagogy and Technology

Some of the faculty preparation methods found that are in line with best practice are in the

form of a combination online, face-to-face, and lab course series which require as many as 80

hours in a 6-week period to as few as 12 hours over a 3-week period.

The University of Central Florida offers two award-winning, non-credit courses for faculty

run by the Center for Distributed Learning (CDL) and Course Development and Web Services

(CDWS) titled IDL6543 and ADL5000. Both of these courses model how to teach online using

methods such as seminars, labs, consultations, and online instruction.

The University of Maryland University College (UMUC) offers another award-winning

course called CTLA201 which is a five-week, fully online training course. This course is

required for all UMUC faculty who are planning to teach online and covers the pedagogical,

design, and technical aspects of online education delivery. Run by the Center for Teaching and

Learning (CTL), each session is facilitated by faculty experienced in online education.

St. John's University runs a six-week online workshop called Distance Learning

Pedagogy I which is offered twice per year for faculty who want to teach online and requires

approximately 3 to 4 hours per week of online participation.

These online courses, and others listed in Appendix A, model exemplary course design

and utilize the LMS and other tools, such as blogs, wikis, and discussion boards, that will be

used when faculty teach online. Also, the online course offers links to teaching and learning

resources from the campus and other online sources. In addition, there is mentoring made

available throughout the online course as well as during the first teaching experience.

(2) Faculty Preparation via a Series of Face-to-Face Sessions

Other forms of faculty preparation methods found that are not quite in line with best practice are in the form of a face-to-face seminar series offered by faculty centers. Since faculty centers' directives include technology and how it fits best into teaching and learning, including the campus's LMS tools, many seminars and workshops apropos to teaching online are already in place. By combining a few of these with instructional design to help facilitate course design, a basic 'teaching online' seminar series can be created.

An example of this is offered by the Faculty Center for Learning Development (FCLD), in partnership with University Programs at the University of Hartford, called the Teaching Online Seminar Series. The seven-seminar series has been in place for three years and runs during the Spring Semester for faculty preparing to teach online during the Summer Semester. The series begins with a seminar led by the executive director of the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC), followed by seminars containing technical step-by-steps for using Blackboard, the campus LMS, and pedagogy strategies for online teaching, and ending with a faculty-led seminar of tips and tricks.

Similarly, the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching (FaCET) at Western Kentucky University (WKU) offers a weeklong Online Teaching Summer Camp, and the University of Colorado Denver offers Winter Web Camp that also runs for a week. Other face-to-face seminar series on campuses offer LMS training, such as getting started with Blackboard, Angel or Moodle and assist with tips and tricks for online teaching such as creating community and asking the right questions. Also part of some of these seminar series are instructional design methods for designing an online course, student assessment techniques, and course evaluation.

(3) One-stop-shop Web Page Dedicated to Distance Learning for Faculty and Students

Many faculty centers' Web sites contain an easily navigable 'one-stop-shop' Web page containing comprehensive links on a single main topic such as teaching online, or faculty resources. Many of these sites include everything faculty might need to get started with teaching online such as the campus protocols, where to start for training, what to expect during training, where to record grades, and where to find forms. The 'one-stop-shop' Web sites also include guides for online students and students wishing to find out if online education is the right choice and the institution's online teaching manual, if one exists.

(4) Fostering and Maintaining Faculty Mentoring Groups

Can faculty learning groups, or faculty mentoring groups, have a positive influence on faculty preparing to teach online? Barczyk, Buckenmeyer, and Feldman (2010) stated that although faculty are generally independent and entrepreneurial in their work, they may benefit from faculty mentoring groups in preparation to teach online. Faculty share a general deficit of knowledge of instructional design and other skills necessary to teach online. Barczyk, et al. formed a faculty mentoring group, called the Distance Education Mentoring Program, as a result of the findings of a 2004 task force that studied the quality and scope of faculty preparation to teach online at Purdue University. The mentoring program was highly successful measured in the high number of faculty volunteers in the first cohort of mentors, and now the second, who volunteered to mentor; in fact, the protégés from the first cohort were more than happy to become mentors to form the second cohort.

Likewise, Roberts, Thomas, McFadden, and Jacobs (2006), all professors, stated that the Faculty Online Teaching and Learning Community has been a positive and worthwhile endeavor, propelling Western Carolina University into the national spotlight as a leader in the

scholarship of teaching and learning, including a highly successful online program. In addition,

Roberts, et al. said this in regard to faculty learning groups:

> Teaching, once a private practice, is becoming more public at Western
> Carolina University, and Faculty Learning Communities are largely
> responsible. The campus is undergoing tremendous change and growth
> in distance education and the integration of technology into
> instruction. In such an environment, faculty often experience
> "transition angst". Our experience as a learning community, however,
> is that we now have a group of friends and colleagues across the
> campus who are there for advice and support. We have giving each
> other permission to be risk-takers and a safe venue to vent our
> frustrations and ask for assistance.

Finally, in their Distance Education Task Force report completed in December, 2009, Illinois

State University recommends this:

> The University should adopt a peer mentoring program for online learning. A
> common thread among the varying data sources was the value of peer mentoring. In
> the university survey, Illinois state faculty ranked "Peers, colleagues, or other faculty
> members", "Department or Collegiate instructional", and "On campus face-to-face
> professional development" as the top variables perceived to have the most impact on
> their ability to effectively teach online or in a hybrid course.

Recommendations for Faculty Preparation to Teach Online at the University of Hartford

The University of Hartford offers a seven-seminar series during the spring term, called

Teaching Online that covers the following topics:

1. What You Really Need to Know About Teaching Online (see video here: *provide link*)

2. Planning and Organizing an Online Course (see video here: *provide link*)

3. Facilitating and Grading Online Discussions (see video here: *provide link*)

4. Submitting and Grading Assignments Online (see video here: *provide link*)

5. Conducting Online Test and Surveys (see video here: *provide link*)

6. Grading Online: Using Blackboard's Grade Center (see video here: *provide link*)

7. Tips and Tricks from Experienced Online Instructors (see video here: *provide link*)

These seminars are face-to-face in a lab setting, led by faculty center staff and/or faculty, include

assisted 'hands-on' when appropriate, and participants leave with handouts highlighting

pedagogy and basic explanation of the step-by-step processes. Research, however, shows that the

following would help University of Hartford's Teaching Online series draw nearer to best

practice by incorporating the following:

- Enhance the face-to-face Teaching Online series with a facilitated online course to run

  concurrently, the outcome of which are assignments leading to a completed online course

  design for each participant. This has been initiated by the Faculty Center for Learning

  Development and will be offered for the first time during Spring 2010 Teaching Online

  Series as a Blackboard course called Preparing to Each Online. Click here to run a course

  overview in a slide presentation.

- Videotape each seminar to be included in the course so faculty participants can view again if

  needed. The Faculty Center for Learning Development has made plans to do this for each of

  the Spring 2010 Teaching Online seminars. Each video will be edited and included within a

  7-day period into the appropriate section in the Blackboard course.

- Offer the series with streamed video of each face-to-face seminar along with a facilitated

  online course again at another time during the year. Plans have not been made as to when the

  course might be run again.

- Create a one-stop-shop Web page dedicated to teaching online, one each for faculty and

  students, linked from the 'resources' page of the main University's Web site. Plans have been

  initiated to have students from the Multimedia Web Design and Development program on

  campus work with the Office of Communications and the Faculty Center for Learning

Development to create and build a prototype of a Web site that can be linked to the University's Web sites.

- Foster faculty mentoring whereby one expert faculty is 'assigned' to one novice faculty at the beginning of the Teaching Online Series, or at the very least faculty-to-faculty mentoring is introduced and encourage.

- Invite faculty to a one-on-one online conference or face-to-face session at which they can review their course with faculty center staff before actually teaching online.

- Offer faculty center staff or faculty mentor advising *during* the delivery of the online course.

Conclusion and Further Research Opportunities

Online education is now part of the fabric of higher education. Experts agree that faculty preparation is vital to quality, sustainable, scalable online education programs. Currently, best practice faculty preparation include offering face-to-face seminars in combination with an online course. Other trends include offering a face-to-face only training series, maintaining a one-stop-shop Web site, and fostering faculty learning groups through which mentor faculty provide shadowing and mentoring opportunities to protégés during the online learning and teaching process. Finally, although not mentioned in this paper, other trends found include publishing institutional guidelines, generally as a result of a task force dedicated to online education, purchasing services from professional nationally-recognizes places such as Sloan-C and Quality Matters, and using wikis and blogs, created by faculty center staff along with 'early adaptor' faculty, to create university-wide resources for online educators.

There is a rich research opportunity available on the subject of course design methods, which Bates and Watson (2008) dub the "new online teaching technique". See Appendix C for resources on course design and exemplary online courses. Further, since course design is being

scrutinized in light of online education, there is an abundance of research on how faculty

preparation for online teaching may be advantageous to teaching practices overall in higher

education. Some of the skills involved in designing a course for online delivery such as writing

clear objectives, chunking content in units or more manageable pieces, and creating a classroom

community make a positive difference in both online and face-to-face teaching.

Appendix A - Links Used Combination Face-to-Face and Online Preparation Courses

- The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at the University of Maryland University College (UMUC) offers CTLA 210 to faculty who wish to teach online. This course, a Sloan-C 2006 Excellence in Faculty Development for Online Teaching Award Winner, runs periodically throughout the year completely online. It is a demanding course that includes preliminary expectations including a basic computer skills inventory, and an evaluation once complete.

- The University of Central Florida (UCF) formed a separate entity of their faculty center, Information Recourses and Technologies, called course Development and Web Services (CDWS) for the purpose of launching online education. CDWS offers two courses, IDL6543 and ADL5000, both award winning courses for faculty in preparation to teach online.

Face-to-Face Seminars for Faculty Preparation to Teach Online

- The Faculty Center for Learning Development at the University Hartford

- FaCET (Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching) at Western Kansas University

- Winter Web Camp offered at the University of Colorado St. John's

'One-Stop-Shop' Web Sites for Faculty and/or Students

- Students are a big part of the equation when it comes to quality online education. Northern Illinois University (NIU) offers this online resource that walks students through the process of finding out if distance ed is a good choice for them, links to demo online courses, and offers information about skills necessary to be an online student such as getting into and using NIU's learning management system.

- The University of Connecticut (UCONN) offers a [Guide for Online Students](#) that includes everything from "Is Online for Me?" to "Before Class Begins" to tips, strategies, recourses, and services.

- The University of Central Florida's [Learning Online](#) site for students.

- Distance Education faculty help offered as [one-stop-shop web page](#) (UMUC) [here](#) at UCONN, [here](#) at UNC, here at [Faculty Central at UNC](#), and here [Resources for Faculty and Staff at NIU](#).

- "Starter Kit" for new faculty ([BYU](#)) that includes links to the faculty center that further link to teaching & learning.

- The [Oregon State University Extended Campus](#) offers an extensive and thorough Web site for faculty interested in teaching online.

- Distance learning faculty [handbook](#) from UCONN helps faculty get started teaching in the UCONN distance learning program, through course development and delivery, to getting help and resources and includes a student help section as well.

Faculty Mentoring Groups and Miscellaneous Findings

- Faculty mentoring program (experienced helps novice) ([NIU](#))

- [Faculty Learning Communities](#) at Western Carolina University

- Online instruction sites include direct link to [Quality Matters](#) and other [distance learning resources](#)

- [Competencies for Online Instructors](#) are encouraged at Penn State and listed on their [Penn State Learning Design Hub](#)

- Guidelines for faculty teaching online courses are offered here at the Community College of [Baltimore County](#)

- The Center for [Faculty Excellence](#) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill offers an e-Learning Community site (on Sakai), a listserv, and [separate webpage](#) for students and faculty interested in distance education.

- [The Center for Teaching and Learning](#) at Brigham Young University offers many services, notable among them in a wiki that lists [learning outcomes](#) for each degree program. This would be a great tool to help in the design of an online course.

- [Readiness Survey](#) from Leslie University

Appendix B - Nationally Recognized Resources Available for Online Educators

Sloan-C http://www.sloanconsortium.org

Quality Matters http://www.qualitymatters.org/

Illinois Online Network http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/

Multimedia Educ. Resource for Learning and Online Teaching http://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm

MIT OpenCourseWare http://ocw.mit.edu/OcwWeb/web/home/home/index.htm

MITWorld: Distributed Intelligence http://mitworld.mit.edu/browse

Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC)

Appendix C – Course Design Online Resources

California State University, Chico: http://www.csuchico.edu/celt/roi/eoi_vista.shtml

University of Central Florida: http://teach.ucf.edu/pedagogy/design-of-an-online-course/

Distance Education Task Force ISU:http://detaskforce.illinoisstate.edu/research/index.shtml

Faculty Focus online: http://www.facultyfocus.com/ Faculty Focus

Blackboard Exemplary Course Design:

http://kb.blackboard.com/display/EXEMPLARY/Exemplary+Course+Program

http://kb.blackboard.com/display/EXEMPLARY/2010+Exemplary+Course+Program+Documents

http://www.humboldt.edu/~aof/index.html

http://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/col/id/index.php

http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tsot.php

http://www.psuonline.pdx.edu/docs/id_handbook.htm

http://www.ion.illinois.edu/resources/tutorials/id/index.asp

http://ets.tlt.psu.edu/learningdesign/

http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/coursedesign/tutorial/toc.html

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