FACULTY FOCUS

Special Report

Faculty Development in Distance Education: Issues, Trends and Tips

Featuring content from

DISTANCE education Report

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FACULTY DEVELOPMENT IN DISTANCE EDUCATION: ISSUES, TRENDS AND TIPS

One of the many lessons learned from the early years of distance education is the fact that you cannot simply pluck an instructor out of the classroom, plug him into an online course, and expect him to be effective in this new and challenging medium. Some learned this lesson the hard way, while others took a proactive approach to faculty training. All of us continue to refine our approach and discover our own best practices.

Today, it's possible to learn much from the mistakes and successes of those who blazed the trail before us.

Faculty development for distance educators is a critical component of all successful distance education programs. Well thought-out faculty development weaves together needed training, available resources, and ongoing support, and carries with it the same expectations for quality teaching that institutions of higher education have for their face-to-face classes.

This special report, *Faculty Development in Distance Education: Issues, Trends and Tips*, features 12 articles pulled from the pages of *Distance Education Report*, including:

- Faculty Development: Best Practices from World Campus
- Developing Faculty Competency in Online Pedagogy
- A Learner-Centered, Emotionally Engaging Approach to Online Learning
- How to Get the Best Out of Online Adjuncts
- Workload, Promotion, and Tenure Implications of Teaching Online
- Four Steps to Just-in-Time Faculty Training

This report is loaded with practical strategies that can help you build a comprehensive faculty development program, helping ensure that instructors stay current in both online pedagogy and practical technical know-how. No matter what the particular character of your program is, I think you'll find many ideas you can use in here.

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Secure Website Improves Faculty Recruitment, Development and Retention

By Judy Dahl

Any tool that helps distance education administrators with the important tasks of recruiting, developing and retaining high-quality faculty is worth a second look. Especially if the tool improves faculty administration without a huge cash outlay or a major technology investment. A tool developed at Anne Arundel Community College, Maryland, does just that.

"It's not a novel idea," says Richard Cerkovnik, Ph.D., department chair of physical sciences at Arundel, of the secure website he and colleague Lynn J. Tracey, Ph.D., associate professor of chemistry, developed. "It's an electronic version of asking faculty, 'Can I have your course materials?'"

A curriculum management system

The site, which Cerkovnik calls a curriculum management system, provides current and prospective faculty with a paperless, dickless way to share teaching resources and materials. In addition to course outlines, instructor notes, lectures, course activities, quizzes and tests, the site includes advice from previous instructors and cautions (such as common student mistakes to watch for in a chemistry lab). Faculty use of the site is voluntary, and Cerkovnik asks them to update course materials each semester.

Originally developed to give adjunct faculty remote access to course materials—for both face-to-face and distance education courses—the system is yielding significant benefits.

Recruitment

"We recruit adjunct faculty who have full-time jobs," says Cerkovnik. "They don't always have time to come to campus for interviews." He gives prospective faculty access to the secure Web site via a generic password, and even before the interview process begins, candidates can review curricula and teaching resources.

"It shows them what kind of support we'll have in place for them, and that they won't have to create courses from scratch," says Cerkovnik. Arundel is able to attract high-quality candidates with this electronic look at its support system, and eliminating the need to set up on-campus interviews—at least in the initial recruitment phases—speeds the process.

Viewing Arundel's online curriculum management system not only familiarizes candidates with the college's academic resources, but gives them an idea of its culture. This helps administrators conduct more informed interviews, and also lets candidates assess whether Arundel would be a good fit for them.

Development

Once new faculty are on board, the curriculum management system facilitates their training and professional development. "I can direct new faculty to the Web site instead of handing them a bunch of paper," explains Cerkovnik. "They can review the material, then we can discuss it." In previous attempts to eliminate paper, Arundel administrators tried disseminating curricula and teaching resources via e-mail or disk. "With e-mail, we filled up people's in-boxes, and there was just too much volume to use disks," says Cerkovnik.

The secure Website gives adjunct faculty background information about Arundel, informs them about appropriate teaching methods and student assessment methods, and conveys course goals and objectives. The site

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In this issue

Defining Competencies for Online Teaching Success

By Larry Ragan, PhD.

For faculty teaching facing the prospect of facing the online classroom, there comes a moment of realization that everything they know about teaching in the face–to-face classroom may not serve them well in this new "virtual learning space."

Aside from a quick pang of anxiety, many see this as an opportunity to focus on developing new philosophies, strategies and techniques and improve their teaching skills. A chat with online-experienced colleagues, perhaps a learning designer or even students who have taken other online courses, quickly reveals the need for a new set of teaching skills and competencies necessary for online success. It is in this context that faculty development professionals have focused their research and practical knowledge of what and how to prepare faculty for success in the online classroom.

The existing research in the area of online teaching competencies is varied in quality and value. Some data collected are vague statements of good teaching practice, some are highly detailed lists of specific "tasks" that should be managed by the online instructor, and others are mapped over statements of classroom skills. For the purposes of this discussion we will define a competency as the knowledge, skill, attitude or ability that enables the online instructor to effectively perform a function to some standard of success.

Surviving and Thriving in the Online Classroom

In order to articulate the skills and competencies required for online teaching success, the desired end-state of faculty preparedness must be considered. The primary goal of a faculty/professional development exercise need not be to create technological phenoms who can squeeze every bit of wizardry out of a given learning management system to the astonishment of their students. Rather, the goal is to develop competence in the necessary skills of the online instructor enabling them to survive initially and ultimately thrive in this new teaching and learning space.

Once the online instructor is confident in his or her ability to exercise the skills and manage the online classroom, a level of comfort develops where the natural rhythms of the teaching and learning process take place.

The competencies used to guide and direct the faculty development programs at Penn State's World Campus have been informed by literature review of existing studies, enriched by expert interviews, and shaped by practice and experience. This approach is ongoing and evolving and needs to be flexible in order to remain current and relevant. Constantly assessing the competencies in light of a changing student and instructor demographic as well as expanding technology capability forces refinement of specific skills and tasks. The current lists of competencies used by the World Campus will continue to morph over time as required to address the needs of both novice and expert faculty alike. The goal will always focus on creating a faculty competent and confident with their online teaching skills and comfortable with crafting a quality online experience for the online learner.

The Competencies for Online Teaching Success (COTS) Model

The COTS model classifies the list of competencies into six broad categories. The categories can serve for convenient management of large lists. Assigning titles to the categories is somewhat arbitrary, as others may see more logical category labels. The categories are also helpful when considering new competencies as a way to group tasks into like pools. The downside of using any categorization system is the over-generalization of the specific tasks and potential loss of value of individual item value.

The current six categories used for managing the 50 competencies in the COTS model are:

1. **Attitude/Philosophy:** comprised of approaches, philosophies and orientation to the task of teaching and learning online.
2. **Building Community:** those skills that enable the construction and management of a learning community including both learners and instructor.
3. **Classroom Management:** those skills required for successful classroom management of the operational and administrative functions of the online classroom.
4. **Faculty Workload Management:** those skills and abilities of efficient time management during the online course operation for both the leaner and online instructor.
5. **Teaching and Learning:** those skills specifically addressing the strategies and techniques of guiding and facilitating student learning.
6. **Technology Aptitude:** the ability to complete the

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variety of skills and tasks related to the operation of the online classroom most closely related to the learning management system.

Certainly other methods of grouping the competencies can be considered as well. Some have suggested grouping according to "sequence used" or by levels of importance etc. The COTS classification is built upon a framework of readiness, that is, the novice or entry-level online instructor requires a different set of skills than the intermediate or advanced online instructor. Much of the current research available in the area of online teaching competencies does not differentiate which competencies are appropriate for different levels of expertise. The COTS model is designed to define a sequence of skill development based on the online instructors' experience with teaching and learning online.

Keeping in mind the desired end-state of competence, confidence and comfort in teaching in the online classroom, faculty preparation programs should develop and deliver programs and services for faculty in order to help them achieve their instructional needs. Ultimately, our goal is to serve the online learner with the highest quality educational experience possible. They are the primary benefactors of a skilled and knowledge online faculty.

Dr. Larry Ragan the Director of Faculty Development for the World Campus at Pennsylvania State University, where he oversees the design and development of a wide range of faculty development services and systems. ✪

Faculty Development: Best Practices from World Campus

By Kay Shattuck, D. Ed.

Faculty development is one of the critical components within a whole system necessary to assure quality online distance learning. Well thought-out faculty development will weave together needed training, available resources, and engaging delivery that will provide invaluable support for the whole system. This can best be achieved when faculty development services work as a collaborative unit, not as a top-down directive one.

Much has been written about why faculty participate in online teaching and about retention issues that seem to be surfacing. Of course, not all issues relating to participation and retention are under the purview of faculty development managers, but recent data gathered by Green, Alejandro, and Brown (2009) indicated that faculty continue to see teaching online as an opportunity to develop their own teaching and careers. They also see the value of ongoing training and would like opportunities to share with other faculty.

Building on a systems approach to quality online education, I'm offering a few tips for faculty development managers:

1. Don't chase after "faculty buy-in". (The phrase has lots of negative connotations, and I prefer not to use it.) Instead, ask faculty what specific training they need. Begin by communicating directly with key online instructors or departments that have online degrees. Consider this as important data collection! Ask what they need now, as experienced online faculty, and what would have been helpful when they first started teaching online. Listen carefully as you'll be hearing levels of receptivity and need that can directly impact the necessary range of offerings.
2. Keep in contact with other key shareholders in your institution who might identify problem areas that reflect needed training. Invite key shareholders to join a faculty development committee. Do regular, informal information gathering sessions to stay abreast of issues that might be related to needed areas of faculty training. For example, student affairs staff will be able to provide problem areas from their perspective. Not all will be related to "teaching", but some might indicate needed "awareness" of "our students" or of "our policies" as a component during a training session.
3. Establish a menu of clustered offerings so that faculty can track themselves. Name the sessions or clusters something interesting, not just "online pedagogy 101". For example, Penn State/World Campus Faculty Development offers OL2000 (Effective Teaching Online), SMOW (Strategies for Managing the Online Workload), OIF (Online Issues Forum), Just2It! (Overview of Web 2.0 Tools. Having a theme or a concept, such as "presence" run through semesters' or years' offerings will better tie a cluster together (and thus make progressive transference into practice more likely).
4. Make courses application based. Present basic "how-to-teach-online" topics as the "whys" within applica-

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tion-based sessions. Include sessions related to the value of good course design as a way to improve quality of the course and also as a way to set up a course that is student AND instructor friendly and effective.

5. Offer sessions in online and blended formats. The experience is invaluable for online teachers!
6. Give certifications to faculty members who successfully complete a cluster. Recognize completers at an institution-wide level. Ask if they would like to be recognized as one of the "go-to" faculty in a particular cluster of topics. Stay in touch with them!!! Learn how the training offerings can be improved and expanded.
7. Launch topical sessions with key online faculty members sharing from their expertise. For example, see how Penn State's World Campus Faculty Development has gathered "advice from the experts" available at *http://www.youtube.com/facultydevelopment*. Follow with succinct background information about "why" the topic is important for faculty right now and with activities so participants might more easily transfer into their own courses. Make it worth their time – give them short, chunked experiences that they might use now. Of course, the goal here is to have the sessions so focused and engaging that participants will continue talking and experimenting after the session ends!
8. Provide appropriate examples/activities for the different disciplines and levels of academic offerings in your institution. Not every course will be of constructivist design that relies heavily on the discussion board. Provide examples and activities for the competency-based and credentialing courses as well.
9. Invite faculty to work on research projects or articles for publication with the faculty development staff. Remember, they might want to use participation in the faculty development towards promotion.

In business it might be "location, location, location", but in faculty development it's "timing, timing, timing". Experiment with providing sessions at various times during the academic year, but don't be surprised if those immediately prior to the semester end up as the most successful.

For further reading:

Green, T., Alejandro, J., & Brown, A. 2009. The retention of experienced faculty in online distance education programs: Understanding factors that impact their involvement. The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, 10(3). Available: *http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/683*

Wang, H., L. Gould, and D. King. 2009. Positioning faculty support as a strategy in assuring quality online education. Innovate, 5 (6). Available: *http://www.innovateonline.info/index.php?view=article&id=626*

Kay Shattuck, D.Ed., is an associate of Penn State/World Campus Faculty Development and an adjunct assistant professor in the Adult Education/Distance Education Certificate Program. She is also Director of Research for Quality Matters (http://www.qualitymatters.org/). ✪

Taking Advantage of Someone Else's Time and Experience

By Lori Norin and Tim Wall

Fifteen years ago at the University of Arkansas – Fort Smith a handful of teachers put some courses online, largely as an experiment to see whether the college and its students might benefit from the then-new web teaching concept.

Today the program has a professional web support team, an educational design team, a permanent Technical Support for Instruction committee and more than 100 teachers conducting web classes for more than 4,000 students. The university also has a growing set of policies that govern course design, teacher certification and student performance.

Teacher certification then and now

Initially the certification process included nothing little more than a few hours of instruction during one week, accompanied by a few handouts. The real learning took place in the weeks and months following as faculty frantically learned from each other out of pure necessity.

Eventually a handful of faculty became proficient with the software, and the certification process got better. Instructors presented to other instructors in their areas of strength.

Eventually an instructional design specialist was hired to take over the certification process. Additional personnel have been hired and the training endeavor has been expanded into an instructional design department. The in-

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structional design team has developed an intense web certification processes that takes several weeks to complete and ends with each faculty member presenting a final project, basically a ready-to-go online course, to a selected audience including their deans, the associate provost and provost.

The instructional design department:

- conducts certification classes
- researches new hardware and software
- coordinates mentors for recently certified teachers
- proactively seeks ways to improve distance education.

So why does this history matter?

It doesn't. It's simply the route along which an organization learns its lessons.

Here are some concepts that the online practitioners at UA Fort Smith solidified along the way.

The current teacher certification process

The certification process is presented through six well designed units. Each unit offers participants an opportunity to learn the fundamentals of teaching on online.

1. *First unit* – In this unit the training focuses on online course design principles. Specifics include: File Manager best practices, creating folders, and importing files. The goal is to build a homepage. The principles that teachers learn in this unit are central to designing a workable course with any software package.
2. *Second unit* – In this unit the focus is on the difference between folders and learning modules. Training includes creating and managing learning modules to organize course content. Course management tools are also taught. Folders and learning modules are the two main tools for delivering course content. Folders and learning modules each have their own set of strong points, and an online teacher must understand these tools thoroughly in order to get the most from their attributes. Likewise, the other supporting tools are very specialized, so knowledge of their capabilities and shortcomings is paramount.
3. *Third unit* – In this unit the training is centered on student activities: creating assignments and assessment, and using the discussion board and the chat rooms. These are the online equivalent of a classroom filled with engaged students. It's as close as an online teacher can get to the potential synergy of several people working in concert.
4. *Fourth unit* – This unit focuses on improving student learning through use of the communication tools: announcements, calendar, mail, and who's online. Since a teacher doesn't get to see students every day, these tools facilitate the ongoing communication necessary to any class setting.
5. *Fifth unit* – In this unit faculty learn how to use online teaching tools such as the assessment manager and assignment dropbox. These management tools allow grading, perusing, giving back for revision: bread and butter for the teacher who engages in ongoing assessment and recapping.
6. *Sixth unit* – In this unit, faculty learn how to copy the course content from development shells to production shells, export and import course content, and other housekeeping tasks. Online teachers constantly upgrade their courses. Efficiently using these tools saves hours of drudgery.

Certification coupled with shared experience

Much of a professional's learning comes through experience: lessons learned day after day, year after year, then filed away. Then over the years best practices emerge and become an integral part of the job. Here are some practices that work:

1. *Faculty must be certified before they attempt to teach on the web.* Asking a professor to jump in and teach a web course on short notice simply doesn't work. The professor is swamped; students don't do well.
2. *An administrator faced with a personnel emergency must not appoint non-certified faculty to teach online.* IT'S BETTER TO CANCEL THE CLASS THAN TO PRESENT IT BADLY.
3. *Department chairs should review content.* Although a chair may not be certified, he or she still must be sure that content (not necessarily design) meets departmental standards. That can be accomplished easily in a short conference.
4. *Maintain a roster of mentors for the benefit of recently certified faculty.* Regardless of the rigorous certification process, mastering the software and adapting to the online setting require practice. Recently certified teachers encounter class and software challenges they're not sure how to handle. Often what seems at first glance to be an overwhelming problem turns out to be a simple task that requires a few minutes on the phone with an experienced online teacher.
5. *Not all courses lend themselves to web-based learning.* If students obviously aren't benefitting from a web course, the format itself sometimes is to blame. In that case, the traditional classroom is the cure.

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6. *Web classes aren't for everyone.* Students often enroll in web classes for mythical reasons: Web classes are easier; web teachers won't notice late and missing work; students don't have to meet inconvenient deadlines; teachers can't confront students about questionable work. Many students should be steered away from web classes and into traditional classes.
7. *Students with weak academic background cannot enroll in web classes without administrative permission.* These students routinely flounder in a web setting because they have trouble with time management and study skills. Weak students benefit from daily, one-on-one contact with a teacher.

The result

The lessons learned over the course of 15 years have led to better student screening, better faculty training, and more involved administrators. More importantly, these lessons have led to courses and practices that serve students better. That's the only goal.

Lori Norin, University of Arkansas Fort Smith, Assistant Professor of Speech Communication, and Tim Wall, University of Arkansas Fort Smith, English Instructor. ✪

Developing Faculty Competency in Online Pedagogy

By Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti

Empowering online faculty to perform to their highest potential is a continual challenge for online education programs. At Syracuse University School of Information Studies, director of instructional design Peggy Brown makes this her full-time focus, concentrating on assisting faculty in developing the most effective pedagogy they can for their online classrooms.

The School of Information Studies started its first distance education program in 1993, with 10 different programs now offered by the school. Brown was hired eight years ago to assist faculty in their online pedagogy. "Having an [instructional] designer is very important to enhance the pedagogy," she says. Brown notes that the program is very highly ranked and is the only accredited online program at the university, so maintaining quality is paramount.

Brown serves as the dedicated instructional designer for the School of Information Studies, supporting 45 full time faculty and faculty dispersed throughout the country and the world. Her faculty development program offers a variety of techniques and options for faculty development, all with the goal of ensuring the same expectations for quality teaching that the university has for its face-to-face classes.

Some best practices include:

New Faculty "Playground": When new online faculty come on board, Brown gets them started immediately with access to the LMS and an invitation to visit the "playground" area. This is a sample course set up so that faculty can try out new tools and familiarize themselves with LMS functionality without corrupting their own new class. The "playground" allows faculty to gain a comfort level with the technology in a safe space.

New Faculty Access to Successful Courses: Brown also makes available a "new faculty account" with access to several successful distance learning courses. As faculty explore and take their training courses, they can refer to these sample courses to see how different faculty handle issues like creating assignments or running online discussion; exposure to these best practices gives the new faculty a wealth of ideas they can learn from. Six sample courses are available for the faculty to view.

New Faculty Orientation: Brown makes a point of "attend[ing] orientation so they see my face," making an effort to personalize her support of her online faculty. She is supported in this effort by an online task force comprised of faculty and staff that helps review and address concerns for the online program.

Asynchronous Training Course: All new faculty must also complete a six-day online asynchronous training course. The course has undergone several changes to make it work more effectively. When first conceived, the course was three days long; the participants had assignments to complete before each day of the course, and the course covered one module per day. Brown soon learned that a more leisurely pace was more effective, and she changed the course to six days long. She also has started incorporating the input of experienced faculty members, which makes the experience more relevant. "If it is faculty facilitated or driven, the faculty will come," she says. Participating experienced faculty can attend and assist with these trainings for a single session or for all six days.

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Mentoring: Brown is a proponent of the value of mentoring, and she promotes this practice with the PhD students in the program. In an effort to bring more of these candidates into online teaching, she promotes a mentorship opportunity. Doctoral candidates can audit an online course, observing the progression of the course and discussing the course with the primary faculty member. When the doctoral candidate is ready to teach online, the faculty member serves as a mentor. Faculty members who participate in the asynchronous training course also serve as mentors to new online faculty.

Virtual Brown Bags: Many universities make use of brown bag training sessions, but Brown conducts hers virtually, allowing faculty around the world to attend, participate, and present. These sessions can be recorded and archived.

Knowledge Base: Brown plans to start building a knowledge base that instructors can access to answer questions and learn more about how to effectively do their jobs. Recorded sessions from the virtual brown bags and other training resources can be made available electronically.

Instructors also have several instructional resources available to them to make their teaching more effective:

Impatica for PowerPoint: As with many universities, the School of Information Studies accommodates several learning styles and challenges of ability. Impatica for PowerPoint allows an instructor to take a PowerPoint presentation, narrate it, then compress it up to 95 percent and make it available via HTML. This accommodates students who do not have PowerPoint on their computers, those who cannot handle the huge file size that typically results from adding narration, and those who desire or need a narrated version of the presentation. *(http://www.impatica.com/)*

Camtasia: Camtasia allows a user to record an on-screen lecture or activity, edit it into a polished whole, and make it available to end users. (www.techsmith.com/camtasia.asp) Brown anticipates that some of this functionality will be handled by Adobe Connect in the future.

SelectSurvey: Brown encourages her instructors to use this tool to gain feedback from students throughout the course. *(www.classapps.com/SelectSurveyFeatures.asp)*

Webcam: Finally, instructors have access to a webcam so that they may add synchronous communication, record lectures, or otherwise add a "face" to their classroom.

Brown continues to innovate and improve the suite of tools available to online instructors. The school has recently adopted Adobe Connect to serve as a web conferencing tool. This program will allow instructors to hold virtual office hours in real time, in which students can log in and see the instructor's face and the instructor's desktop screen, allowing them to work through problems together. It adds a synchronous component to classes that are by definition asynchronous. Brown intends this and other applications to also make easier the task of recording lectures and information for later student use as well as for the knowledge base.

Products currently being evaluated or piloted include Echo 360, a lecture capture tool *(http://www.echo360.com/)* and Panopto for video capture, streaming, search and archiving *(http://www.panopto.com/)*. ✪

A Learner-Centered, Emotionally Engaging Approach to Online Learning

By Rob Kelly

Learning research indicates that people learn better in the presence of some emotional connection—to the content or to other people. Creating this emotional connection is particularly challenging in the online classroom, where most communication is asynchronous and lacks many of the emotional cues of the face-to-face environment. Nevertheless, it is possible to do, with a learner-centered approach to teaching and a mastery of the technology that supports it, says Rick Van Sant, associate professor of education at Ferris State University.

"One of the things we know about learning is that learning with emotion is a far deeper experience than learning without emotion," Van Sant says. Citing recent research (see reference below), Van Sant notes that a little bit of stress and the corresponding release of cortisol makes "neural connections grow thicker, stronger, faster." However, too much cortisol degrades memory performance.

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Creating an emotionally stimulating environment is something good face-to-face instructors do intuitively. "We live and thrive on the positive feedback from students. Students shape our behavior all the time. When technology is mediating between the learners and me, I lose the capacity to read my audience, engage my audience, and alter my style and cadence. I have no capacity on that kind of intuitive level [in the online classroom]. It all has to be intentional and cognitive," Van Sant says.

Technology provides access to a vast array of content that has the potential to resonate emotionally with students. One site that Van Sant uses in his courses is Technology, Entertainment, Design (www.ted.org/), which features top presenters talking on a wide range of topics.

"I can watch the world's best presenters, speakers, and thinkers and bring them into my classroom. I can challenge my students with that information. I can ask questions. I can engage them in discussion with their own small community of learners about just what [the presentation] meant for them. The goal is to produce some emotional response, and probably seventy percent come back and say, 'Wow, I've never known stuff like this existed,' 'That was the most amazing presentation,' or 'This person made the topic come so alive for me.' It's not foolproof. There are always students in the online environment who you just can't get to. It doesn't matter if they're watching the best videos in the world or if I'm writing them directly or if the assignment is about reflection. Whatever it is, they're guarding themselves and they're guarding their emotional connection to learning."

Even though the content may be emotionally engaging, the discussion it generates may not be.

"One of the biggest barriers to online learning is our inability to respond in the moment, unless we happen to be on live chat or video, which is really rare in most of the online learning world," Van Sant says.

That moment after viewing some emotionally engaging content passes quickly. In a typical online learning environment, students react and post to a discussion board or blog and wait for a response. "I think it's one of the downsides of asynchronous learning. You lose that opportunity for the teachable moment," Van Sant says. "There are many positive aspects to online learning, such as thoughtful reflection. One of the things I see, the students who do not often volunteer or engage in on-the-fly discussion in a face-to-face classroom will turn around in an online environment and become significant discussants. Not that they're lazy in the classroom; they just don't process information on the fly quite like somebody else."

Despite the limitations of asynchronous communication, it still can create an emotional connection that supports learning. For example, collaborating on a wiki can be just the thing to motivate and engage students.

"If we're working on a wiki together and you edit something of mine, chances are there's a mild emotional expression associated with that—I don't like the edit, I'm sensitive about the edit, or I'm thrilled with the edit. But it's personal because I wrote it and you changed it. Can I trust you? That's an emotional experience. It might be a positive emotional experience. It might be a negative one. Whatever it is, it contains that seed, that very small element of an emotional connection to it: ownership."

Another obstacle to creating emotionally engaging learning environments is that many online instructors are not technologists. "They're teachers, they know their subjects, but they don't necessarily do a good job from a pedagogy standpoint," Van Sant says.

Many online instructors take a teacher-centered approach to pedagogy, posting PowerPoint presentations, notes, readings, assignments, and tests and quizzes and "tell students to go forth and learn," Van Sant says. "Really good online teachers have taken up the challenge to learn about the various tools."

"The classroom must be a learning community. In an online environment, you must be sure you are using the tools to make that happen. And these are the blogs, wikis, Web 2.0 tools and social bookmarks, and the discussion boards. The interactivity creates communities. When that happens, you've got far greater potential of engaging that otherwise somewhat unengaged student," Van Sant says.

Instructors who seek to create learner-centered online courses often read the work of Howard Gardner on multiple intelligences and think that for every lesson they've got to create eight different kinds of assignments to reach the learning style preferences of all their students. But Van Sant assures them they need not go overboard in accommodating all learning styles.

"The goal isn't to cater to all eight individual multiple intelligences. It's about providing, over the range of a course, the opportunity for people to learn and express their learning within their strengths and not always have to operate within their deficits. To do that, you need variety. You need redundancy. You need multiplicity. You need different ways of sharing and knowing. … What happens here is working in a much richer environment. It is a challenge for us to understand that in this rich environment we've got to become masters of that domain."

Reference

Zull, J. (2006). Key aspects of how the brain learns. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Learning, 110* (Summer), p. 3–9. ✪

Teaching Faculty and Staff to Use Second Life

By Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti

More and more, universities are constructing a presence in Second Life, the virtual reality world that seems tailor-made for education. But for those faculty and staff members who did not come of age with this technology, developing a comfort level can be challenging.

Valencia Community College has taken steps to address that. There, Lisa Macon, professor of art, engineering, and technology, and Edward Howell, instructional design specialist, have developed a training class aimed at increasing the Second Life fluency of its faculty and staff, with an ultimate goal of perhaps opening this training to others outside the institution.

Course Structure

"We have a very talented team of instructional designers," says Macon, who notes that Howell was instrumental in building Valencia's Second Life campus, making the institution one of the few community colleges to have a virtual reality campus in this popular world. The college, she notes, is starting to offer classes that take place completely in Second Life. Currently, two courses are operating completely in Second Life: an honors mythology course that operates synchronously, and an honors English class. However, Macon notes, for every faculty member who is excited about the prospect of using Second Life, there is another that is not sure.

So, Howell designed a course that uses both Second Life and Blackboard Web CT, the school's course management system. The objectives include learning how to build three-dimensional virtual objects and store them; building a basic understanding of scripting and the Linden Scripting Language; achieving an understanding of the economy of Second Life and other virtual worlds; and exploring ways Second Life can be used for students with disabilities or for distance learning.

Typical class sequence

The class consists of several weeks of classes with online, synchronous, two-hour meetings held using both Second Life and the CMS. In a typical class sequence, the participants would take the first thirty minutes to get logged in, attend a presentation, and ask and answer questions. This would take place in a classroom located in Second Life.

Over the next ninety minutes, there are two field trips in Second Life. Each is accessible from a link in the CMS that takes the participant to the Second Life location, either allowing the participant's avatar to walk or to teleport. At the end of the synchronous meeting, the students receive their assignments.

It is this in-world participation in Second Life that really helps participants gain comfort with the world. For example, Macon tells of one field trip taken to a Second Life recreation of Paris. The participants' homework was to take snapshots of places they visited in-world, write a report, and post the results to the CMS. "[Second Life] is such a vast place, even within one region," Macon says. Requiring participants to explore and share helps the class as a whole gain an impression of the wide range of opportunities available in-world.

Overall, the course covers navigating, teleporting, creating objects, and some basic scripting. The structure of the course includes weekly presentations that are created in PowerPoint and then uploaded to Second Life as textures that are loaded into a presentation board for the weekly presentation part of the course. Weekly outlines are posted to the CMS, and teleport links, known as SLURLs, are placed directly in the course. Each week includes an assignment for the participants, and there are discussion boards to foster asking for help, sharing observations, and forming connections.

Since Valencia already has a robust presence in Second Life, it is a natural that the facilities available for this training class are impressive. The welcome center features comfortable chairs and large tables for participant avatars to sit, interact, and work together. One classroom shows a variety of chairs situated around a large presentation screen, much as someone might find in Real Life, while another is located in a picturesque building with virtual palm trees outside. There is even a student assistance desk located in Second Life.

Future Directions

Howell has run this class twice now, and Macon has stayed involved as a quality control tester for the endeavors. Now that they know the concept is effective, they would like to add a class that goes more into depth on scripting.

"It is too soon to tell the impact" of the training course on faculty behavior in a quantitative way, Macon says. However, she has anecdotal evidence that this course has increased comfort and curiosity about the world. "I run

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into people in the campus, building things," she says. "They are looking around for tools so they don't have to reinvent the wheel." And these tools are becoming more available all the time as third parties develop tools for use in the virtual world.

In the future, Macon and Howell would like to see the school develop several additional Second Life applications. They would like to offer an IT course in Web Publishing, perhaps slated for Fall 2010. They would also like to develop ways that Second Life can be used for student engagement, and explore options for providing student services in Second Life, including career counseling and advising.

Another possibility for the team is to open their Second Life training class to external participants from other colleges and universities that want to secure training for their faculty and staff but don't wish to develop their own course. "We have had a line of external people wanting to take the course," says Macon. She notes that this may ultimately become an income stream for the college, although it would require the dedicated attentions of a full-time person rather than just several hours a week from an instructional designer.

For institutions contemplating the development of their own Second Life training course, Macon has some suggestion. First, she notes, "it works better if you have a one semester reassignment to develop," she says. Developing such a course requires an upfront commitment that is made easier by allowing the developer to work without other commitments or classes. Additionally, Macon notes that opening the course to outside participants may require the reassignment of an entire person to this endeavor; the part-time efforts of a designer are only possible when the course runs occasionally, with a small enrollment.

Finally, she urges other institutions to be sure their Second Life training actually takes place in-world. Although there are some models that attempt to teach Second Life in a physical classroom with PowerPoint slides, this is clearly a world that must be experienced to be understood. ✪

Using Rubrics to Improve Teaching, Learning, and Retention in Distance Education

By Cindy Rippé, MBA

I have always enjoyed teaching in the classroom environment. There is something special about watching a student's eyes light up as a new concept changes perceptions. When I first taught in the online environment, I wondered how I would communicate with students without seeing them in person. Would they get my assignments? Would they understand the requirements? Could they produce the level of work I expected? Could we overcome the potential miscommunications of the written word?

My main concern is best summarized by Sue Hershkowitz-Coore in her book Power Sales Writing. She wrote, "Words on a page or screen are 'dead.' With no voice inflection, no eye contact, and no body language to help a reader grasp the words in the way the writer intends, the burden is on the writer to write so the reader cannot misunderstand. A powerful writer does everything possible to write in a way that doesn't permit misinterpretation …Yet even the best writers won't know what mood or circumstances the reader is in when he or she reads the message" (Hershkowitz-Coore, 2003, p. 49). So even if our message is clear, a student having a bad day can misunderstand us.

It is one thing to have a misunderstanding about an idea in discussion and quite another for a student to misinterpret a major project. If a final project is not communicated effectively, this could affect a student's grade and overall online learning experience. If a student has a negative learning experience, this may adversely affect retention. Instructors must go above and beyond to clearly communicate assignment directions and expectations. The best way to communicate these expectations is through rubric creation and implementation.

A well-designed rubric is an effective communication tool. It emphasizes the important skills or concepts to

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demonstrate. It provides criteria for evaluation and takes the intangible on an unfamiliar assignment and makes it more tangible. While rubrics clarify assignments for students, a rubric does so much more for the online instructor.

A rubric streamlines the grading process. It helps teachers to efficiently work through a stack of ungraded papers. It quantifies the elusive expectations and makes them clear. There can be no claims from students saying, "You never told us that was needed." One cannot argue with the on-screen, printed standards. It makes estimates more scientific and grading fairer. There is no room for bias or subjective prejudice in rubric utilization, because a rubric is impartial. A student either meets the defined objectives or does not. This helps promote fairness and increases satisfaction, since there is no preferential treatment when everyone is measured using the same benchmarks.

A rubric is surprisingly versatile and can be crafted to meet the needs of any assignment. The variety of rubrics available creates flexibility to meet a wide range of assignments. Holistic rubrics identify all factors for an assignment using a checklist or description. Analytical rubrics provide scales and a set of scores for multiple criteria (2008). There is a wealth of rubric resources available to help instructors build their own. Any search on the Internet for "rubric builder" will provide many sites. There also are many websites with specific assignment examples by topic for instructors. These resources aid clear communication in the online classroom.

The online learning environment brought many unexpected benefits. My initial concerns about communicating with students have vanished. Thanks to the use of rubrics, I am confident of a student's ability to understand the assignment criteria and to meet it. Rubrics have increased the efficiency of my students in creating projects and have maximized my effectiveness in grading them. When it comes to teaching online, rubrics are a necessary tool.

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Cindy Rippé is a marketing, sales, and business instructor for Bryant and Stratton Online Education. ✪

Workload, Promotion, and Tenure Implications of Teaching Online

By Rob Kelly

As more and more faculty are being asked to teach online, there is a growing need to address workload, promotion, and tenure policies to reflect the differences between teaching online and teaching face-to-face. Because of the differences among departments and institutions, there is no single solution to these issues.

The key question in determining whether there is a need for policy change is whether teaching online is more time consuming than teaching face-to-face. Philip DiSalvio, director of SetonWorldWide, Seton Hall University's online campus, says that offering online courses of a quality equal to or greater than comparable face-to-face courses takes more time.

"I think more and more we're seeing that online instruction demands more time of the instructor because of the interaction that's involved. I've taught online and continue to teach online, and most of our faculty do, and they consistently say that it just takes more time because of the interaction. They're in the course two or three times a day, and it's not just sort of floating into class and talking from their lecture notes and having two hours in class. It's a daily grind, and as such there should be a recognition, I think, and there seems to be a growing recognition that because of those distinctions, there in fact may have to be some differences in the rewards structure when you're dealing with online instruction."

A big concern for faculty is how the additional work involved in teaching online will affect their productivity in other aspects of their jobs. The question, DiSalvio says, is this: "Does teaching online reduce your productivity in those areas that will give you tenure or that will give you more compensation or a promotion?" He continues, "Most folks find that [teaching online] is more work, and so it comes to be seen as a perceived threat to productivity in research and service, and this has implications for compensation, promotion, and tenure."

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Varying attitudes in one institution

Attitudes toward online teaching and its prevalence vary widely across disciplines and institutions. "I think we're beginning to see, and the data seems to show, that more and more folks are recognizing that online enrollment is going to become a more important part of their overall portfolio. The percentage of schools identifying online instruction as a critical long-term strategy continues to grow. And I see among the staunchest detractors in my university and the folks I talk to around the country that there is a growing acceptance that online instruction is part of the future," DiSalvio says.

Acknowledging the role that online instruction might play in the future is one step in developing a response to the workload, promotion, and tenure issues. The institution needs to have appropriate policies in place, but because of differences among departments an institution-wide policy cannot be the final word on how to address these issues.

"I think it starts with the departmental leadership that either pushes or doesn't push the department into Web-based teaching. With that has to be a school or college vision that's consistent with the departmental strategy, and then I think the university has to establish some kind of parameters. Schools are going at different rates, and there are different levels of commitment to online instruction as being an overall strategy. But I think that what we're beginning to see is more and more a realization that just as technology increasingly becomes a part of our lives, then online instruction is going to as well," DiSalvio says.

Although many faculty members may feel that online instruction will play a key role in the future of the institution, the climate and culture within the department are more important factors because faculty members often feel closer ties to their departments than to the school, college, or university. And the department chair plays a crucial role in influencing the department. "I think there's got to be a recognition of the department chair's pivotal role in setting the direction and establishing a reward system and really articulating how Web-based teaching affects workload, promotion, and tenure," DiSalvio says.

Whether or not a department chair supports Web-based instruction depends on a myriad of factors. Among them are the following:

- **Departmental culture—**DiSalvio predicts that as older faculty members retire, younger faculty members will likely bring with them Web-based teaching skills, which will increase the recognition of online teaching.
- **Enrollment—**DiSalvio says that some department chairs might look to Web-based instruction as an alternate delivery mechanism that could boost enrollment. ("You don't want the online program to negatively affect the on-campus program. The fear is that an online program could negatively impact the numbers of the on-campus program because certain students or potential students would prefer to be in the online program because it's more convenient.")
- **Incentives—**If the administration wants to encourage Web-based instruction, it could provide money, release time, or even faculty lines to departments willing to participate.

Buy in from the dean is another important ingredient of support for Web-based instruction. It is essential that there are no conflicts of interest between the dean and the department chair, DiSalvio says. In addition, the dean and the chair need incentives so that their interests align.

"One of the things we do is fund faculty lines in certain schools where we have great growth. We've seen great growth in our counseling programs and so in order to accommodate that growth and to make sure that there are enough faculty, SetonWorldWide actually funds faculty lines to the deans, and the commitment to teaching would be half for the online program and half for the on-campus program. It's a way in times of constrained resources to help support the deans, and faculty lines are just so important to deans today," DiSalvio says.

Currently, each faculty member who creates an online course for SetonWorldWide receives a course author's fee. "I think that's going to change down the road. As Web-based courses become part of a university's portfolio, I think that will change as faculty contracts call for the development and delivery of online courses," DiSalvio says.

Before considering this or other policy changes, DiSalvio recommends answering the following questions:

- Is online teaching part of the institution's vision?
- Do the faculty consider online teaching important?
- How are the faculty distributed across the institution? Is there a greater proportion of tenured or untenured faculty? What might online teaching mean for those who are not yet tenured?
- How will a policy discussion be interpreted?
- Are other challenges or priorities more important than online instruction?

There is no single way to address Web-based teaching policy issues, but DiSalvio offers the following approaches to reaching a solution:

- Do nothing—This approach is appropriate if online

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teaching is not yet a substantial part of the department's activities or if the faculty are suspicious of the motives for considering policy changes.

• Revise current policies—Take this approach if faculty seem open to discussion on these issues and if it seems that faculty would be encouraged to teach online if there were supportive policies.

• Study the issue—This approach might be appropriate if faculty do not seem open to discussion but may be so in the future once they've had a chance to learn more about online teaching.

• Avoid policy—This approach might be appropriate if resources are available to encourage faculty to teach online rather than to avoid such courses out of fear that promotion or tenure might be endangered.

How to Get the Best Out of Online Adjuncts

By Christopher Hill

Excelsior College is a private, not-for-profit institution that provides assessment-based distance education to its students, still a relatively uncommon model among universities. Additionally, the institution does not have tenure track faculty and, although it does have some full-time faculty members, it operates primarily with the talents of part-time adjunct faculty.

This unique climate "adds layers of complexity" to the challenge of supporting, motivating, retaining, and empowering the school's faculty, says Dana Offerman, provost and chief academic officer. It also makes the institution uniquely qualified to offer suggestions on how to keep adjunct faculty content and functioning at their highest level.

Unbundle the Traditional Triad

Universities are often said to require their faculty to complete a traditional triad of teaching, research, and service. At Excelsior, this triad has been unbundled for both full-time faculty and for part-time adjuncts. Although some full-time faculty do operate in multiple roles, the unbundling is a necessity for adjunct faculty. djuncts often have other full-time jobs in academe or another industry, or they may be retired and starting on a second or third career.

Provide Adequate Training

Excelsior takes great care to be sure that adjunct faculty have access to an appropriate amount of training so that they may be successful in their courses. First, the institution offers a basic tutorial to teach faculty how to navigate the WebCT Vista course management system, a necessary introduction to the platform through which courses are delivered.

Second, the institution provides an online orientation course that is delivered through the course management system, just as the students will experience their courses. The course is moderated and designed to create a conversation among new faculty members and the facilitator.

The orientation course gives "an introduction to the Excelsior model and assessment of student learning," says Offerman. It is here that adjunct instructors learn the expectations and the practices that characterize an Excelsior education. For example, they learn about the policy on frequency and kinds of interaction desired in the online classroom and how to understand both the letter and the spirit of this policy. They also learn techniques for dealing with students who don't "show up" or interact sufficiently in the online community and what is expected as far as online office hours.

Additionally, they learn about the Excelsior expectations regarding academic freedom, which are not as restrictive as some institutions that might require their faculty to deliver a wholly packaged curriculum, but which are not quite as flexible as more traditional universities that may allow faculty to teach how and what they see fit.

The online orientation course takes faculty about 15 hours to work their way through, and it includes multiple opportunities for faculty members to discuss among themselves and with the course facilitator.

Third, Excelsior offers a subject matter expert course, aimed at faculty who plan to design a new course. This course is self-directed, designed to allow the participants to work more independently through principles of instructional design, curriculum development, and how to be sure that course components and assessments match up with stated course and program objectives. At this time, the subject matter expert learns how he or she will work with a dedicated instructional designer to make the course a reality.

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Provide Communications and Outreach

Another key to keeping faculty motivated and productive is the degree to which the institution reaches out and communicates with its faculty, a particular challenge when those faculty are spread across the country. Excelsior does so with a quarterly newsletter and with training on specific topics through webinars.

Webinars, by their construction, are best suited for brief presentations on specific topics. Excelsior has used the webinar format to discuss social networking, how to embed tests in a course, and other assessment topics. These are particularly useful for faculty who would like to tweak their use of unproctored quizzes to test specific subject matter understanding, a course alteration that is well within the adjunct faculty member's academic freedom.

This degree of academic freedom is something Offerman thinks about a great deal. "What continues to evolve is the degree to which we allow faculty to [be] independent," she says. She notes that the kind of professional who is attracted to the Excelsior environment is one who is experienced, professional, and highly independent in his or her day-to-day life, and that understandably these professionals would chafe under the constraints of being handed a packaged course to teach. At the same time, the institution has the responsibility to ensure a degree of consistency and to make sure that students have a quality experience. The balance between the two is one that is constantly being negotiated in many institutions.

Understand What Makes Faculty Successful Online

"I'm pleased to see the number of faculty who have been with our institution for years. Some say they can do at Excelsior what they can't do at their home institutions," says Offerman. Because of this, retention is a primary concern: "Keeping them engaged and retained is something I'm keenly interested in."

She has found that often the key to retention is not greater pay. Some adjunct faculty are by necessity pay-driven, as they are putting together a career out of multiple adjunct teaching opportunities and may therefore have to be concerned not just with income but with paying for benefits that might be automatic for those in full-time positions. Yet some of the retention balancing act involves not pay but security.

Offerman says she thinks extensively about "giving [adjunct faculty] more longer-term security" in their positions. The institution currently operates "course by course" on its need for faculty, and it does not offer tenure-track positions.

However, flexibility is important on the institutional level. "Excelsior is totally tuition-dependent, so we need a flexible staffing model." This flexibility also allows the institution to exercise more quality control, and, like academic freedom, the balance between job security and institutional flexibility is one that is worthy of continual consideration.

DER asked Offerman what kind of person makes the best online instructor, and she began by acknowledging the basics: the person needs teaching experience and a depth of experience in his or her discipline. But then she notes that the kind of faculty members who succeed at Excelsior are the ones who are primarily interested in teaching and who are willing to commit to exploring different teaching modalities and learning to facilitate a discourse online. However, in spite of the technology-mediated environment, she finds technical skills to be rather low on the requirement list: "They don't have to be a technology whiz-bang." ✪

The ABCs of Faculty Certification for Online Teaching and Development

By Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti

Ten years ago, an instructor at Tulsa Community College who wanted to teach a course online would have to go through a long approval process. The instructor would submit a proposal for a single course, and the process of approving the course to be offered would regularly take up to a year. If the same instructor wanted to offer another new course, he or she would have to begin the approval process again.

But as demand increased and it became necessary for the college to be able to respond immediately to need, Randy Dominguez, dean of distance learning, says it was time to "stop approving courses and start approving faculty." The college switched to a model through which instructors

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could be certified to deliver pre-designed curricula, or they could be certified to become online course developers in order to create new courses. Now, "we can meet enrollment needs just in time," says Dominguez.

A – Online Instructor Certification

Jennifer Campbell, instructional designer at TCC, works with the online instructor certification program. This track, she explains, is "for people who are going to teach online but not develop their own curriculum." This includes most adjunct instructors and a few full-time faculty members, although most full-time faculty ultimately go on to complete online course developer certification as well.

Candidates for this level of certification complete a four-week online seminar. The seminar covers what Campbell describes as "online strategy," including how to give feedback online and how to communicate with students. This is also a chance for instructors to "experience what it is like to be a student," Campbell says, as the online seminar is arranged like a course and includes most of the typical course components.

During the seminar, instructors get to engage in the kinds of tasks they will expect their students to complete. They submit assignments, receive feedback, take part in discussions, use the student email system, and complete a group project. This allows them to see what the student experience will be like and to gain first-hand knowledge about the effectiveness of certain teaching and communications strategies. Instructors also learn practical skills like how to manage the gradebook.

Before they may start the seminar, instructors are required to demonstrate certain basic technical prerequisites, such as the ability to handle a computer and to manage files. This helps instructors self-identify if they need additional technical training on the front end, and later on, it helps diffuse the number of "emergencies" that must be handled for faculty who may need to talk through a technical problem before they can continue teaching their course.

Instructors participating in this level of certification typically spend three to four hours a week completing the seminar. They are not paid additional money for completing the course, as certification is one of the prerequisites for being able to teach online.

Although the online instructor certification covers a lot of the online experience, it does not include topics like how to complete an online test. This is because instructors with this level of certification only will be teaching curriculum developed by someone else, so the components of the course will already be in place. For those wanting to develop their own course, the online course developer certification is available.

B – The Fast Track to Online Course Developer Certification

Tulsa Community College was very deliberate when designing its certification courses. "What we saw is a need to communicate with and motivate our students, [so] what does that mean and what skills do you need," asks Lynnda Brown, instructional designer who works closely with the online course developer certification program.

Rather than reinventing the wheel, the college chose to use the established standards from Quality Matters as the basis for the course developer certification. "We joined Quality Matters to legally use their materials; [we used their] standards to create the developers' course," Brown says.

With these established standards in place, the college still needed an option for the instructors who needed to become certified online course developers, but who did not need to go step-by-step through the course creation process. At that point, some 100 instructors had written course proposals under the old system, so there were many who had already developed online courses.

With the needs of this population in mind, the college developed a "fast track for experienced developers," Brown says. This group took a course they had already developed and conducted a self-review, evaluating their course according the Quality Matters standards.

The "course" for this group of people existed online primarily to give faculty a chance to communicate with other developers and learn from others' experience. Brown reports that this was a particularly valuable aspect of the fast track experience.

C – Full Online Course Developer Certification

For instructors who had not previously developed a course, the college designed a full developer certification version in which the instructor spend their training time developing an actual course that they plan to offer in the coming months. This course is typically populated by instructors who may have taught online previously using someone else's curriculum, but who are now ready to design their own course offering.

Based on the principles of backward design first explained in Understanding by Design by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, the course helps new developers learn to become rigorous about being sure every assignment included in a course matches back to a stated objective.

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The course is a five-week program. During the first three weeks, the instructors develop a curriculum plan, and during the last two weeks they begin to build their course shell, with placeholders standing in for future curriculum elements. As some instructors have already been teaching the course under consideration as a blended course, some of the elements may already be prepared or nearly-so, ready for introduction into the entirely-online course.

Typically, instructors completing this course have a semester or two before their course needs to go live. However, Dominguez notes that there might be emergencies in which a course absolutely has to be offered in a given semester to meet student enrollment or keep students on track for graduation, so there might be the occasional case in which the instructor is developing the course at the same time he or she is teaching it.

Tips for Success with an Online Faculty Certification Program

The Tulsa Community College team offers the following advice for constructing a successful online faculty certification program:

1. Draw on the experience of an advisory board.
2. Make sure the faculty are involved from the beginning of the project.
3. Look to national standards for guidelines.
4. Make standards clear and readily-available, so that faculty know how their online courses will be assessed.
5. Employ peer review of online courses. Let it be known that courses are evaluated by other faculty members, not by administration. ✪

Four Steps to Just-in-Time Faculty Training

By Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti

Training faculty is always a concern, but particularly where technology is involved. Not only do faculty need to stay current in pedagogical theory and practice, they also need to be able to use the learning management system and other tools effectively in order to deliver the most robust course possible to their students. This is further complicated by the fact that most universities have faculty with a variety of experience levels and skill sets, both pedagogically and technologically.

And like everyone else, faculty members are busy. They have a limited amount of time to devote to extensive training, but they want to receive the training they need when they need it. So, taking a cue from industry, universities might consider dividing training into chunks that are easily accessible and able to be completed in a short period of time.

When the University of North Texas was transitioning to Blackboard Vista 4.2 as its learning management system, the Center for Distributed Learning faced a unique challenge. Charged with the mission of assisting faculty in the development and delivery of high-quality instruction, providing expert consultation, and facilitating training for hardware and software, the CDL needed to find a way to provide convenient training to both the newest faculty on campus as well as to those who were much more experienced.

What they devised was a unique "just-in-time" training system that allows faculty to access convenient chunks of material and receive training in these topics in a short period of time. "We broke the training into pieces; each consultant took a topic or two that could be presented in an hour," says Michelle Farley, instructional consultant for the CDL. The concept is one that can be replicated on many campuses facing similar challenges.

Step One: Segment Content into Short Modules

The CDL started by looking at existing training modules and deciding which elements were the most important and which lent themselves to a training session of an hour or less. The key to the success of the training modules was to limit each one to a key topic that could be treated in reasonable depth, rather than attempting to cover every training need in one session.

The final list of training topics included: adding content; creating and managing assessments, assignments, discussions, and groups; encouraging academic honesty; grading forms; student motivation and engagement; using Wimba Live Classroom; and other topics.

Obviously, some training topics lean toward the theoretical, while others are more of a how-to. For example, Farley notes "Student Motivation and Engagement" and "The Learning Roadmap" are both highly theoretical trainings that she conducted that involve a look at pedagogy. So while she took the lead in isolating two or three key factors, she was aware that her trainee population was largely comprised of experienced faculty who had a very high combined level of expertise. These sessions, she says,

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generated a great deal of "robust discussion."

Other training modules were utilized more by less experienced faculty and by those who needed a refresher or update on the new LMS. For example, one module addressed how to use discussion boards, allowing participants to see how this critical function works.

Construction of the just-in-time modules was fairly time-efficient for the instructional consultants. Farley explains that each consultant looked at existing modules in the Blackboard system, then took one to two hours to develop a PowerPoint presentation that emphasized one or two of the most important take-aways.

It is important to remember that just-in-time training cannot completely replace more traditional forms of training. For some faculty participants, just-in-time training serves as a lead-in to later taking one of these more extensive workshops.

Just-in-time training sessions were offered through Wimba Live Classroom. Not only is this a convenient delivery platform, it also allows faculty not experienced with the tool to gain an introduction to it. Farley notes that this series of trainings was the first time the office used Wimba Live Classroom for training, and the initial experience seemed successful.

Step Two: Provide Tech Support

Three to four days prior to the training session, participants receive an email reminder verifying their enrollment and encouraging them to take preliminary steps to ensure technological capability. The email provides a link to the Wimba Live Classroom site, which the CDL uses to deliver the training, and it encourages them to run the set-up wizard prior to the training. Participants are then encouraged to log in for training 10 to 15 minutes before the session begins.

The training sessions are conducted by two instructional consultants, one to serve as the presenter, and one to serve as a technology troubleshooter. Nonetheless, in the first round of just-in-time training, "the major issue was technical," says Farley. She explains that some participants "don't have time to make sure their computer is working properly," a situation that many faculty encounter with their own students.

However, Farley notes that the training has sparked an interest in increasing technological competency among some of the faculty. She has heard some faculty express interest in learning to use the microphones, while others report purchasing headphones over the summer that they can't wait to try out during the school year.

Step Three: Archive Your Sessions and Provide Other Options

The CDL also archives its sessions, making them available for those participants who could not attend the live sessions. This practice may seem like an obvious one, but it is critical when trying to reach and train the largest population possible.

Additionally, it is important to remember that just-in-time training cannot completely replace more traditional forms of training. Farley notes that the CDL will continue to offer classroom-based workshops of one to three hours in duration. For some faculty participants, just-in-time training serves as a lead-in to later taking one of these more extensive workshops. The CDL also offers other types of training, such as self-paced online options.

Step Four: Ask for Feedback

Once the first round of training was complete, the CDL conducted an evaluation. Although the response rate was relatively low, the satisfaction rate was very high. The office is currently conducting a faculty training survey to learn what sorts of topics instructors feel they need training in. Asking for feedback and getting buy-in is one of the most important factors for success, says Farley. "Work collaboratively with your team, and listen to what your faculty have to say," she advises.

Current plans are to continue offering just-in-time training focusing on tools and functionality, but to continue to add more theoretical topics, such as facilitation skills, advanced theories, and best practices.

The CDL also is considering several options to motivate faculty participation in training. These include the awarding of participation and "excellence in teaching with technology" certificates, giving continuing education credit through human resources, and hosting giveaways and drawings. However, the biggest incentive may well be the ability to improve one's skills and become a more effective instructor in less than an hour. ✪

Why Faculty May Shy Away from Incorporating Distance Education Technology in their Classrooms

By Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti

Elizabeth Osika, assistant professor in the department of Technology and Education at Chicago State University, joined the university and was immediately faced with a problem. "I was brought in to help build the distance learning program; it just wasn't going anywhere," she explains. In spite of a university environment that seemed to have done things right in terms of encouraging faculty to put their courses online in a distance format — faculty were even paid to develop a distance learning course, a relatively uncommon practice — the growth in the number of distance learning courses was flat.

As research shows, faculty are the gatekeepers that can often control the degree to which technology is used in instruction. Enthusiastic professors can spearhead efforts to boost use of technology, bringing it into the face-to-face classroom and taking courses online. Conversely, professors not enthusiastic about technology can resist efforts to use technology in the classroom, and they are unlikely to wish to teach online.

Osika wanted to understand this phenomenon better, so she and her co-researchers, Rosemary Buteau, department chair for Reading and Elementary Education, and Rochelle Johnson, master's candidate in Technology and Education, conducted a research study designed to learn more about factors influencing faculty decisions to use technology.

Positive Factors

Certain factors were found to increase a faculty member's likelihood to use technology. These include:

- **Success with using technology:** The researchers found that faculty who were comfortable with technologies like email, PowerPoint, word processing tools, and the like, were more likely to use a course management system like Blackboard in the classroom. This finding stands to reason, and Osika says the university plans to address this comfort level by offering Wednesday Workshops, training opportunities that allow faculty to build their technology skills while deriving an additional benefit from attendance. For example, a workshop on "Using Email to Increase Productivity" could attract professors who want to learn how to get more done during the day without making them feel that they are taking a remedial email workshop.
- **Flexibility of schedule:** The same factor that attracts students to distance education is an enticement for faculty to teach online. Flexibility to teach at times and places chosen by the faculty member is a reason for electing to teach online.
- **Need for distance learning:** Faculty who understand the need for distance learning are also more likely to wish to take their course online. For example, Chicago State University is an urban school with a large population of non-traditional students (average age 27), African-American students, and single mothers. These students cannot always find time for a traditional face-to-face course, so serving this population requires flexible, distance learning options.
- Additionally, distance learning options improve retention rates, always a concern for universities, and at Chicago State, distance learning students pay more for their courses, which could benefit departmental budgets. Communicating these kinds of benefits could encourage faculty to take courses online.

Barriers

Likewise, there are barriers that make it more difficult for faculty to use technology. Some of the researchers' findings are:

- **Inconsistent technology infrastructure:** Not surprisingly, faculty who encounter problems getting technology, including the Blackboard course management system, to work well and who have trouble resolving technology issues in real-time may be less inclined to want to offer a course online. Osika says that "some [of these faculty members] have only been burned once," but that is enough to create reticence. Chicago state is addressing this problem on their campus; "we are using the data to work with the CIO and the provost," Osika says.
- **Faculty opinion of technology:** A curious dichotomy emerged from the study. Faculty at Chicago State seemed to understand completely the importance of distance learning and its role in the success of the university. Some 86 percent say that a strong distance learning program is critical to the success of the univer-

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sity, and 81 percent say offering courses online should be a priority. Faculty also understand the impact distance learning has on students: 100 percent say distance learning allows students to have more flexible schedules, and 75 percent recognized its role in allowing students to maintain attendance when otherwise they would not be able.

However, less than half (47 percent) say that distance learning courses have the same quality and rigor as traditional courses. Clearly, faculty who do not believe distance learning offers high quality learning experiences may be less inclined to want to take their courses online.

Motivating Faculty

The researchers further examined the data to determine which factors would be most likely to motivate faculty who do not currently use technology in their instruction to do so. These faculty perceive flexibility, monetary reward, and pressure from peers, administration, and students, to be factors that may motivate them to use technology. However, when looking at the data, what emerges is that flexibility far outweighs money and pressure from students.

In fact, those who are already successfully using technology are most motivated by internal factors, such as past success with other technologies, flexibility, and perceived need for distance education. Among faculty who do not currently use technology in their classrooms, external factors would be the biggest motivators to do so. These are as stated above: time, money, and pressure. These findings give clues as to how universities can entice faculty to consider using technology, then encourage continued success and foster belief in distance learning in order to encourage faculty to continue.

Osika is using the data from the survey to help her engineer ways to increase technology usage on the Chicago State campus. For example, faculty reported difficulty with students who could not effectively use the Blackboard system, as these students required additional time from the faculty and ultimately reduced the amount of time the faculty member could spend becoming more proficient with the CMS him- or herself. The provost had recognized this problem, and the university has purchased a student readiness survey to help assess whether students are prepared to study online.

Osika and the administration at Chicago State have begun to use the survey data to inform their efforts to attract faculty online. "We're doing some workshops; it seems to be having a positive impact, but it's too soon to tell," she says.

Most important, the university now has a more concrete idea of the motivators and barriers for faculty considering teaching online. "We're using data to drive the conversation," Osika says. "We have data to point to. You can't manage what you can't measure."

Osika says that she now has regular meetings with the provost, and enthusiasm for addressing problems and opportunities is growing. The university is using hard data to impact a soft issue. "We're trying to change attitudes," she says. "You've got to go to the heart and the head, and the work will follow." ✪

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