Faculty Support for Online Teaching: Instructional Design Issues And Beyond

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Abstract
When a faculty member decides to use online technology for teaching, the campus' faculty development center usually becomes one of the sources of support. This presents a great opportunity for the faculty development center to address instructional design issues. However, if faculty members who have done online teaching were the source of support, what issues will they address and what advice would they provide? This presentation summarizes survey responses given by faculty members who used online features for teaching between 1999-2001 at a four-year comprehensive university.

Introduction
When a faculty member decides to use online technology for teaching, support is sought in various ways: self-study/self-help, attending workshops, reading reports and publications, interviewing or listening to an experienced colleague, or going to the faculty development center.

As more and more demand is placed on faculty development centers to provide efficient and effective support for online teaching, finding the right approach and addressing the right issues become very important. Brown [1] reports that using the logical way with educational theories, or providing training on basic technology skills did not work. He reports greater success when support starts with teaching strategies.

While it helps faculty development centers to get reports such as Brown's, or consider guidelines that are reported in the literature, such as Sitze's [6] guidelines for teachers at a distance, there are campus factors and campus culture that need to be taken into consideration. As such, getting input and feedback from one's own faculty may prove to be the more useful source of information for addressing online teaching issues and giving the best possible support to faculty.

Faculty Survey
What issues will experienced online teachers address and what advice would they provide to beginners? To answer this question, 70 online teachers at a four-year comprehensive university (California State University, San Bernardino) were surveyed. Twenty (20) responses were received. Respondents included 5 lecturers, 3 assistant professors, 6 associate professors, and 6 full professors. Age range was from 28-64 years. Ten (10) of the 20 respondents preferred the lecture-discussion-test style of teaching, while 9 taught using lecture plus student activities and tests (1 had no response). In addition to demographic questions, each faculty member was asked what advice they would give to non-technologically oriented individuals who intend to integrate online features in their teaching. They were to give their top three (3) advice on: how to proceed, the best practices to follow, and what should be avoided.

Survey Results
The following sections summarize the responses given by faculty.

A. How to Proceed
Faculty respondents were cognizant of the work that needs to take place before actual online course development. Instructional/course design tips that were given for this phase included: finding a course that best fits online teaching, determining the number of class sessions that are needed for that course, locating and selecting material for online posting and that will be read outside of class, having a set policy for grading, and preparing 80% of course materials in advance.

Beyond instructional design, faculty responses advised that beginning online teachers get training before doing course development. In addition to training on specific technology skills (such as HTML, FTP, use of course software, etc), learning about pedagogy was highly recommended. Having students take training on how to use online software was also included among the responses.

Another advice on how to proceed was for the beginning online teacher to get online experience by taking an online class, by team teaching an online class, and/or by talking with an experienced online instructor. The experience of teaching the course face-to-face at least twice prior to teaching it online was considered an important and useful experience. Experience with
technology-use included creating one’s own webpage and testing/re-testing online equipment.

Embleton’s [3] Online Teaching Tips listed Aase’s recommendation that faculty need an ongoing relationship with a technical-support person so that students will receive support and the course will be of high quality. Faculty responses to this survey echoed the same advice and the importance of getting to know tech-support persons.

Lastly, beginning online teachers were advised to give themselves a lot of time to prepare. Successful preparation for online teaching requires a lot of time and successful teachers are prepared, organized, well-trained and plan well [4].

During online teaching, beginning teachers are advised to proceed slowly, by trying one or two online features or activities per class. A recommended strategy is to supplement one’s face-to-face teaching with online activities before going fully online.

Requesting feedback from students throughout the term was considered useful. Useful feedback include asking how they feel, the course’s ease of use, problems encountered, and what changes are needed. Beginning teachers should not hesitate to change midstream if things do not go well. Working closely with tech support was also recommended during online teaching.

B. Best Practices/What To Avoid

Various websites address the do’s and don’ts of online teaching (see [5] as example). They list online teaching tips, common mistakes to be avoided, practical lessons, strategies, etc. Faculty who responded to this survey listed some best practices and pitfalls that are similar to what has been reported in these resources. It was noted that these faculty responses focused more on course/instructional design issues than technology issues. This implies that faculty training for online teaching should address instructional design first, before the technology.

The following is a summary of faculty responses on best practices which were related to instructional design. These responses reflect the basic steps given in instructional design models, such as Dick & Carey’s [2], which starts with goal/task/content analyses, to formative/summative evaluation.

- Clearly specify what students should do
- Ensure accuracy of materials
- Start small
- Find effective pedagogical approaches for online teaching
- Do not use general teaching techniques you would not use face-to-face
- Provide examples
- Analyze online technology for benefits to class and students
- Include feedback and practice exercises
- Beta test materials with students prior to online use

Best practices related to technology included the effective use of email, being available by phone during the early weeks of the term, and making sure students have access to online course. Doing the work yourself was also recommended.

What to avoid? Experienced faculty advised against doing too much too soon, making too many assumptions on what will make students learn, doing everything the first quarter, and having too many online projects in the beginning. Practical advice included avoiding being too rigid during emergencies, and going solo. Long exams and optional assignments and/or participations were not recommended because students will decide against doing them.

Summary

When it comes to online teaching, faculty development centers could provide more meaningful support to beginners by seeking feedback and input from its own faculty who have taught online. The synergy that results from this could lead to better prepared faculty, better instructional design for online courses, as well as more effective ways of dealing with issues that go beyond instructional design.

References: