Identification of an ITDE Issue:

Barriers to Faculty for Teaching Online

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ITDE Issues

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Identification and Background of the Issue

The vast majority of people grew up attending classes in a traditional classroom setting. The atmosphere, the surroundings, the classroom structure, the learning technologies, and even the instructional methods all became quite familiar throughout the educational journey. People who subsequently entered a teaching field, whether K-12 or higher education, then used these experiences as the foundation upon which to base current course design and instructional efforts. It is the past experiences as students in the traditional classroom that are used to model current behaviors in the traditional classroom. Courses will typically be designed around the lecture method, with material presented during class time and then supplemented with between-class assignments such as readings, projects, speeches, and similar activities.

A new type of classroom has entered academe that has had a profound impact on virtually every aspect of education: the Web-based classroom. Web-based classes have experienced increasing popularity for a number of years. During the Fall 2005 term over three million students enrolled in at least one online course, an increase of over 800,000 students from Fall 2005 (Allen & Seaman, 2006). In addition, this increase in enrollment was more than double the number of enrollments added in any previous year. However, with the rise in popularity of Web-based classes comes the need for qualified instructors to teach these classes. Faculty intimately familiar with the design and structure of the traditional classroom may be unsure or unfamiliar with how to approach designing course materials or for teaching those course materials in an online environment. Few instructors have ever taken an online course and have no experience in which to draw upon or model. Modeling can help alleviate concerns such as computer anxiety and assessment methods (Brzycki, D. & Dudt, K., 2005).
Past experiences, or modeling, can provide the foundation for instructors to build instructional practices in the online environment (Tremblay, 2006). Yet few instructors have either taken a Web-based course or have had any sort of training in the design and delivery of courses for online delivery. Instructors may not know how to handle such an environment without appropriate training in the use of the Web-based classroom or past experiences in which to model. As such, instructors may attempt to emulate a traditional classroom experience in an online setting (Carnes, Awand, & Marlow; 2003). This can result in online courses that are little more than supplemental readings and objective examinations. It is for this reason that the proper support of faculty migrating traditional courses to an online format has become a significant issue in the field of ITDE and demands further investigation into it’s causes and possible solutions.

**Importance of the Issue**

Regional accrediting agencies such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) require that online courses contain a number of criteria. SACS requires that all online courses and programs have timely and appropriate interaction, faculty that are responsible for the rigor and quality of instruction, that technology is appropriate to the program objectives, that all course materials remain current, and that online instructors receive appropriate training (SACS, 2006). Courses that have little more than text-based lecture notes and paper-based examinations are not appropriate nor conducive to achieve expected learning outcomes. In addition, it has been shown that students enrolled in properly designed online courses that use appropriate methods of interaction, assessment, and reflection activities learn at a faster rate and retain the learned material longer than students enrolled in courses designed without these methods (Yang & Cornelious, 2005).
Student satisfaction with course quality, instructional quality, as well as whether or not they will enroll in future online courses tends to increase with courses that are properly designed and delivered. Salmon (2001) determined that instructors will recognize the differences between the traditional and the distance classroom settings but that they lack the training and experience to properly practice appropriate instructional methods. A generally accepted link has also been established between student satisfaction with faculty methods and course outcomes (Graham, Cagiltay, Lim, Craner, & Duffy, 2001; Gross, 1991). Maudlin (2001) found a relationship between faculty’s enthusiasm for the technology used in the course, among other factors.

An important component for the success of online courses is strong institutional support as well as the availability of effective professional development activities (Yang & Cornelious, 2005). Faculty need to be made aware of the changing roles of the online instructor. The online instructor is more of a facilitator that filters information rather than a teacher that lectures (Kettner-Polley, 1999). In the online environment, the instructor and the students become a community of learners as opposed to the traditional classroom where the instructor is more of a disseminator of information to students who then reflect on the knowledge (Wu & Hiltz, 2004).

**Literature Review**

The level of expertise in both the design and the delivery of online courses has been shown to influence the attitudes of faculty in their move to the online classroom (Cooper, 2002). The greater the level of support for designing online courses as well as preparing instructors for the unique pedagogy of online instruction, the greater the level of support by faculty for adoption. Faculty do not believe they are being adequately supported for either designing or teaching online courses (Vodanovich & Piotroski, 2001). Billing (2000) found that faculty need
assistance with instructional design of Web-based courses as well as orientation to the learning technologies used on the Web. Instructors may also feel insecure about extending themselves to the online environment due to the lack of modeling experience and the lack of opportunity to work with other instructors that are more experienced in this instructional medium (Beckett, Marquez-Chisholm, & Wetzel, 2003).

Barriers that faculty face can be numerous. In one such study examining barriers facing faculty in the adoption of learning technologies, time limitations, lack of understanding (buy-in) by faculty, and lack of administrative support (Getzel, Briel, & McManus, 2003) were mentioned most frequently. Faculty also believe that it takes more time to design and administer a Web-based course versus a similar campus-based course (Mc Kenzie, Mims, Bennett, & Waugh, 2000). It was also suggested that insufficient institutional professional development training is available for Web-based instructors to become better prepared for the teaching environment.

Faculty are wary of the change of roles and responsibilities that accompany an adoption of the online classroom (Palloff & Pratt, 2000). These new roles include becoming a facilitator rather than a teacher, a greater emphasis on Web-based assessments, and a greater understanding of the learning technologies associated with the Web-based environment. Additional barriers identified by Bariso (2003) including a lack of technology and pedagogy training, a lack of institutional and administrative support, and a general lack of time for learning technology adoption and facilitation of courses.

Clay (1999) asserts that there is no area more important to distance learning administrators than the training and support of its educators. Clay goes on to say that faculty training should be continuous and include distance learning technologies, support services, course development fundamentals, interaction methods, and ethical and copyright issues. Taylor
(1999) found that a majority of faculty received little, if any, training on the development and teaching of courses online. Of those receiving training, only 13% received training from Web-based instructional specialists. Of those that received training, the majority indicated that the training had improved their Web-based course skills.

**How Could This Issue be Dealt With**

With the number of obstacles, both perceived and real, that face faculty in the adoption of the online classroom, it is critical that a well-orchestrated approach be used that will teach them the mechanics of learning technologies, the methodologies behind their effective uses, and assistance in the implementation of learning technologies. One obvious answer to better prepare faculty for the adoption of online classroom methods is to increase both the quality and quantity of Web-based training opportunities. These Web-based trainings could be designed using the tools and instructional techniques of credit-based courses. Doing so would serve the dual purpose of instruction and modeling. Each training would educate instructors on the different aspects of learning technologies such as communication, interaction, assessment, online classroom management, instructional design, synchronous and asynchronous learning technologies, among others. The use of Web-based trainings would also provide a model that participants could follow for using online course tools in an effective manner.

Web-based trainings would also provide instructors with opportunities to learn new skills or enhance current skills for the development and teaching of Web-based course materials. Web-based training could be designed to be easily customizable based on the individual instructor, the discipline, and the curricular need (Ailwood & Follers, 2001). Yang and Cornelious (2005) recommend that course management system training should be made more
user-friendly so that the focus is less on the technology and more on the pedagogy. They went on to recommend that academic departments have a mentor available to those faculty who are lacking Web-based teaching experience. All instructors should take at least one Web-based course to understand what goes on within the classroom. They also emphasized not forcing faculty into teaching Web-based courses.

Faculty may be concerned about the effective use of communications and methods of interacting online. To counter this, training on constructivist approaches to teaching should be designed into the professional development curriculum (Christi-Baker, 2004). The constructivist theory of knowledge and learning is highly applicable and desirable in the online environment (Bennett & Green, 2001).

**Conclusion**

The proper preparation of faculty to develop materials and teach in the online environment is critical for long-term success of students enrolled in online courses and programs. Institutions not providing appropriate methods to prepare their faculty for the Web-based classroom may encounter a double-edged sword. First, online enrollments may drop as students look elsewhere for courses that are properly designed and taught by instructors better prepared for the environment. Second, accreditation may suffer as regional accrediting agencies review the processes and procedures for preparing faculty for teaching online.
References


