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An Overview of How Four Institutions Prepare Faculty to Teach Online

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Abstract: As institutions of higher learning are tasked with offering more classes online, they need to consider how they prepare and offer support for the faculty members who will be developing and teaching these courses, as teaching online is different from teaching in the traditional face-to-face setting. The better prepared faculty members are, the better experiences their students will have. In planning and implementing professional development opportunities, institutions should review what other colleges and universities are doing to support their faculty members in their move to online. In this paper, the authors describe their institutional affiliations' professional development opportunities and requirements for faculty who teach online at four traditional public and/or fully online institutions.

Keywords: Online teaching preparation; online faculty development; online higher education preparation

Professional development can be a key to success for faculty members who teach online. Many faculty members who have little to no online experiences are often asked to teach online and are faced with the challenge of converting their traditional courses to online formats (Cicco, 2013; McQuiggan, 2012). Properly preparing faculty members to teach online can not only ease the course development process but help them in preparing high quality classes, thereby creating a better learning environment for students. Cicco (2013) further outlined a model for faculty development: "The protocol consists of five major steps including an introduction to

navigating through online courses, learning-styles training, online course simulation experiences, review of tools for relationship-building, and finally the launching of an actual online course under the supervision of a mentor" (p. 1). Cicco further wrote that "this type of faculty development is encouraged because appropriate training and preparedness typically result in improved levels of faculty and student performance and satisfaction" (2013, p. 1).

Transitioning to teaching online can be a challenge for faculty who have taught only in face-to-face formats. As more traditional institutions move to online courses and programs, preparing instructors to teach online and to use new technologies is important (Wilson & Stacey, 2004). Lane (2013) discussed several formats for professional development for teaching online that various institutions use. Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seminal article on the seven principles for good practice for undergraduate education have been applied to online teaching by Dreon (2013) and are a good starting point for faculty professional development. One fundamentally important component, as Marek outlined in 2009, is the need for institutional support for faculty who teach online. Many institutions considered fully online have also implemented requirements for training faculty to teach online. Traditional public institutions of higher learning can learn from these fully online institutions as they move forward.

The purpose of this paper is to describe how four selected institutions are preparing experienced and inexperienced faculty to teach online. Ultimately, prepared faculty members will develop high quality online courses. These high-quality courses should improve online higher educational experiences for both the faculty member and their students.

Literature Review

Online instruction has become a core teaching and learning delivery method in higher education. According to Allen and Seaman (2014), nearly all public higher education institutions offer online courses and nearly 7.1 million students are learning online; typically, these courses have no face-to-face meetings. Because of the increasing numbers of online programs and course offerings in higher education, there is a greater demand on online instructors (Ching, Hsu, & Rice, 2015). Creating a meaningful and successful learning experience for online students is key to student success. Online instructors need to develop new technological skills and learn new pedagogical methods to become effective online instructors (Ching, Hsu, & Rice, 2015; Lane, 2013).

In addition to learning new technologies and pedagogical methods, online instructors must also undertake different roles from those of traditional face-to-face instructors. Baran, Correia, and Thompson (2011) identified common roles assumed by online instructors; these included roles were related to: pedagogy, facilitation, instructional design, social, managerial, and technical assistance. These roles can guide the development of professional development for online instructors. In a study to identify and prioritize areas for training and professional development, Ching, Hsu, and Rice (2015) surveyed prospective online instructors' experiences with online technology, pedagogy, assessment, and course design. Overall, the study's participants had more experience with various online teaching technologies than with online teaching pedagogies, online assessment, and online course design (Ching, Hsu, & Rice, 2015). Knowing experience levels can help institutions better plan and prioritize what

online instruction trainings should be implemented.

When planning faculty development, institutions should also take into consideration the unique aspects associated with the online environment. Thormann and Zimmerman (2015) found two major categories of differences between teaching online courses and teaching face-to-face courses: the design and implementation of the course. Strategies used to prepare instructors to teach online are substantively different from strategies used for teaching face-to-face (Shahdad & Shirazin, 2012). Before a course is taught online, pre-planning must occur. Course design and development involves deciding on an online teaching philosophy; developing learning goals, objectives, and outcomes; selecting online instructional approaches, technology, and delivery methods; and developing an evolving syllabus (Thormann & Zimmerman, 2015). Once the course design is complete, delivery of the course occurs and this implementation "needs to support the principles of online engagement" (Thormann & Zimmerman, 2015, p. 4).

Preparing faculty to teach online is a critical component for student success in distance education programs (Kerrick, Miller, & Ziegler, 2015). Professional development for online instructors vary at different higher education institutions. Many universities are preparing instructors through faculty development courses and training programs (Kerrick, Miller, & Ziegler, 2015; Lane, 2013), whereas some institutions inadequately prepare instructors to teach online (Yuksel, 2009) or limit professional development opportunities (Lane, 2013). Faculty professional development tends to focus on technology rather than pedagogy, and almost always within the context of the institution (Baran & Correia, 2014; Lane, 2013). Online teaching certainly involves the integration of technology into the teaching and learning environment. However, preparing for online teaching goes far beyond technology training – there is a complex relationship for online instructors between technologies, pedagogies, and the content in the online teaching context (Ching, Hsu, & Rice, 2015).

Methods

Using non-experimental methods, the authors describe their experiences with professional development and preparation for faculty members teaching online at four institutions of higher education. They outline their personal experiences with each institution and provide an overview of the institution (i.e., types of degrees offered, date of founding, and estimated number of students served (if known)).

Institutions' Professional Development Initiatives for Online Teaching

Institution No. 1

Institution 1 is a private, nonprofit institution established in 1891 which offers online and on-campus programs for Associate's, Bachelor's, and Master's degrees, serving approximately 10,000 students. The institution's course schedule is on a module term (each course lasts 4-weeks). The on-board process to teaching a class, after being hired, is organized into 3 online modules.

In the first module, future instructors will complete an online course conducted by the Associate Dean of Faculty Development. During the course, future instructors learn more about teaching online, using the Canvas Learning Management System (LMS) and Zoom, a platform used to hold synchronous class sessions. At the end of the course, future instructors will demonstrate their knowledge by conducting a short synchronous class in their subject

specialty using Zoom. The Dean of their perspective college and the Associate Dean of Faculty Development attend this session. If both the Dean and Associate Dean of Faculty Development believe the future instructor can continue at this institution, then the instructor moves to the second module.

During the second module, future instructors "shadow" a senior instructor, in most cases, in a course that the future instructor will likely teach. Throughout the "shadowing" process, the senior instructor works with the future instructor on best practices and institutional course polices/procedures. During Week #3, the senior instructor allows the future instructor to "take over the course" for the entire week. This involves the future instructor conducting the weekly live session, managing the discussion forums, and grading. At the end of the module, the senior instructor and Dean of the college discuss the future instructor's performance (to determine if the instructor should remain a faculty member).

During the third module, the future instructor is an actual instructor, while being observed by a mentor (senior instructor). The instructor solo teaches a course with their mentor checking in often and making sure live sessions, grading, etc., are being completed and handled per college policy.

During the fourth module, no supervision (outside of the normal Dean) is conducted.

Institution No. 2

Institution 2 is a system of for-profit private colleges whose programs lead to a Certificate of Achievement or Associate of Science degree. The system has over 7,000 students, combined on-campus and online. This institution's online course schedule is on a quarter schedule where classes last 6

weeks. Instructor preparation includes the following:

The on-board process to teaching a class, after being hired, is to complete a 4-week in-house teaching online course. During this course, future instructors are introduced to LearningStudio (LMS created by Pearson), Adobe Connect (how to hold office hours or create recordings), college policies, and best practices for teaching online.

After completing this course, the future instructor is listed as instructor of record and assigned to teach a course. No mentoring or "practice teaching" is required.

Institution No. 3

Institution 3 is a large public research university located on the East Coast; this school was founded as a branch of a large state institution in 1957 and became independent in 1972. Overall, the university has over 33,900 students, awarding Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral, and professional degrees through on-campus and online options. The course schedule is a traditional regular semester schedule, with some courses offered in an 8-week format. No official on-board training or process is required for teaching online. The institution does not require training to teach online (or face-to-face). Most faculty members who teach online at the institution already have prior experience (a requirement to be offered the position), as well as familiarity with the LMS and institutional policies. However, library and Blackboard Support staff reach out to all faculty members multiple times throughout the semester to provide any assistance or direction. However, library and Blackboard Support staff reach out to all faculty members multiple times throughout the semester to provide any assistance or direction.

Institution No. 4

Institution 4 is a large, East Coast public research university system founded in 1801. System-wide the university has over 49,000 students and offers courses primarily in the traditional, on-campus format, with an increasing number of classes and programs being offered online. Their course schedule consists of the traditional semester, half-semester (7-8 weeks), and summer options (3-week, 6-weeks, 12-week formats.). There is no required on-board training or system-wide process for teaching online (or face-to-face). Most faculty members are experienced tenure-track or tenured members of the university community with previous experience using the system-wide LMS and are familiar with institutional policies. However, the university does provide support for online course delivery.

The university's administration supports faculty development through a central Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), which provides a series of workshops, webinars, and professional development events on various pedagogical and technology-based topics, including best practices for teaching online, how-to sessions on technology usage, accessibility, teaching large courses, and so on. CTE offers an 8-week long online "Getting Started Teaching Online" short-course, opened to all who teach online at the university. Up to ten faculty (full-time and adjuncts) apply and are accepted into the course. Those who complete it receive a small stipend and a certificate of completion.

The university's IT department also provides training on the use of Blackboard through two 2-day institutes, coordinated sessions with CTE, and by department or individual requests. They also offer an 8-week short course on effective online teaching (certificate awarded only).

Discussion

As demonstrated through the experiences of the authors, professional development and training varies across institutions. Institution No. 1 seemed to have the most organized and formalized program for new faculty. Institution No. 2 had a 4-week onboarding course requirement. Institutions. No. 3 and No. 4 had no formal requirement but optional support and development opportunities for faculty members. The author who taught at the institutions which required onboarding, believed he was more prepared to teach because of it, and this experience helped him transition to adjunct instructor at other online institutions. Two authors also have taught the "Getting Started Teaching Online" short course for faculty members at their institution. Feedback from past participants who have taught online since taking the course, as well as information related to successful approaches from other institutions, have helped make improvements in the short course offering.

As more institutions move to online courses, the need for faculty development for those who have never taught online increases. Faculty will be more successful and increase the chances of a positive learning experience for their students if they are prepared for this new environment—both pedagogically and technologically. As Kerrick, Miller, and Ziegler (2015) wrote, faculty preparation to teach online is crucial for student success.

In conclusion, when developing online teaching preparation programs, institutions would be wise to conduct an internal needs assessment of potential faculty members to gauge their level of current preparation for teaching online. Doing so can help with strategic planning and implementation of online faculty development to determine if professional development and training should focus on online technology, pedagogy, or both. It

would also be beneficial to explore the concept of faculty members as adult learners (McQuiggan, 2012) during the initial exploration and planning stages. Providing training and development for those who teach online will lead to high quality online courses and greater student satisfaction (Baran & Correia, 2014; Kerrick, Miller, & Ziegler, 2015).

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