Supporting Online Faculty - Revisiting the Seven Principles (A Few Years Later)

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Abstract

Since 2005, the landscape of online teaching and learning has changed as well as the landscape of the academy, and continues to transform before our eyes. These changes are not only a product of technological innovation, but also a result of new and reconceptualized *values* of higher education, and so we must reexamine what changes to faculty role, position and perspectives best support these new values. Drawing on the Seven Principles of Good Practice, this article visits the need for effective faculty support and development in online education. Online education has forever transformed higher education, and we are learning that quality requires flexibility and the ability to adapt to the changing demands of learners, the new promises of technology, and the new competitive landscape of higher education. If higher education is to remain competitive, we must refocus and redesign our paradigms, as well as design business processes that integrate with quality assurance models.

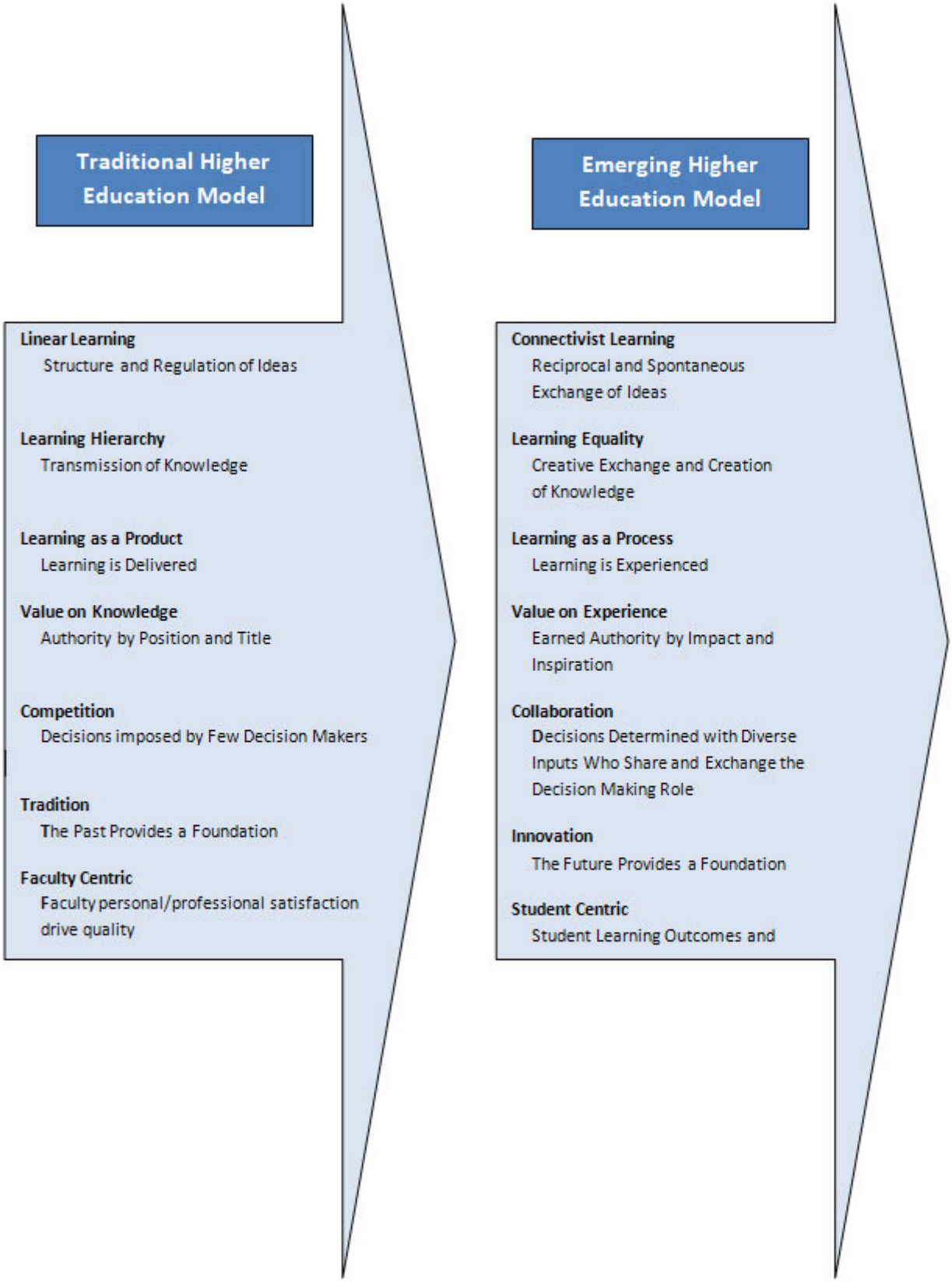
Introduction

The previous article, *Managing Virtual Adjunct Faculty: Applying the Seven Principles of Good Practice* (Puzziferro, 2005), identified some best practices for supporting "virtual online faculty" organized around the Seven Principles of Good Practice (Chickering & Gamson, 1991), including mentoring, faculty development programs, and strategies for faculty engagement and involvement.

Since 2005, the landscape of online teaching and learning has changed as well as the landscape of the academy, and continues to transform before our eyes. These changes are not only a product of technological innovation, but also a result of new and reconceptualized *values* of higher education, and so we must reexamine what changes to faculty role, position and perspectives best support these new values.

The first of these general trends is the move toward learning equality. Online learning is often credited with encouraging the move toward constructivist pedagogies; however, online learning may very well be a symptom and not a cause of a changing student body. Student values have changed, as well as their expectations about the nature and purpose of higher education. While many of us earned our degrees in an environment where the learning hierarchy was clearly defined, and the apprentice culture was tacitly accepted, today's students see the world of higher education very differently. Whereas our traditional paradigm was faculty-centered, the new paradigm is decidedly student-centered, and students see themselves as the customer of higher education (not the product) and an equal partner in the learning process. The "student as customer" concept is still difficult for many to accept in academe; however, student access to postsecondary learning has decidedly become easier as well as an increase in the nontraditional student body.

In a study of nontraditional students, Levine (1997) found that nontraditional students wanted a relationship with their college more like the relationship they have with their bank, supermarket, and other service providers. They valued quality, convenience and cost and these expectations have tremendously increased in the last decade. Moreover, Morey (2004) noted the shift in focus on teaching (process) and toward learning (outcomes), which necessitates new ways of looking at instruction, pedagogical method, and measurement of learning outcomes. Online education has added a completely new dimension, and overall, these trends have challenged, stretched and even redefined the learning paradigm in interesting ways.



In 2007, Hanna discussed the emerging culture of higher education organizations, and noted a shift from institution to organization. Essentially, we are seeing the move from the rigidity of the ivory-tower culture to a more dynamic, student-responsive, integrated and collaborative culture, which is closely aligned with the values, skills and ideals of the ever-evolving global information age.

For the purposes of considering faculty support and development, a fundamental aspect of this shift is the impact on the roles of faculty in higher education, particularly in the online environment where nontraditional students

are mainly concentrated. Nontraditional students expect faculty to have real-world experience, the ability to be flexible and dynamic, possess a comfort and fluency with shared decision-making, demonstrate entrepreneurial mindsets, and be customer-service oriented. Adjunct faculty have demonstrated much more potential in adapting to and emulating these qualities than have many traditional campus faculty. In fact, these qualities are essentially incongruent with campus faculty roles of service and scholarship, entrenched incentive systems, and the research agendas of more traditional universities. We are not suggesting that the "traditional" university should dissolve. On the contrary, society needs the traditional academy, and we must not forget that the great research of the world comes from these faculty. However, it is clear that the traditional university of today is no longer the same.

The for-profit university model of unbundling faculty roles into course development, instruction, and scholarship tracks is already beginning to occur in online education at traditional higher education institutions. This approach may overall provide a reasonable, cost-effective, and organizationally sound strategy that will allow traditional higher education organizations to serve the online education market without compromising the scholarship and curricular oversight of the traditional faculty. As we well know, the issues of reward structure, incentive and faculty participation in online education are still problematic, at best. According to a recent Sloan-C report (2007), while 58.4 percent of institutions surveyed noted that online education is critical to the long-term strategy of their institutions, only 27.6 percent reported that their faculty accept the legitimacy of online education. Faculty effort, workload and lack of reward systems may very well be a hidden factor in the perceived overall lack of acceptance. That is, it may not be that faculty simply think online is "bad;" rather, they cannot reconcile its legitimacy with the time demands of their primary roles. However, members of administration may have wonderful ideas and visions, without faculty, nothing moves forward (Bates, 2000).

The bottom line is that it is difficult for traditional institutions to make this organizational shift and serve nontraditional students on a broad scale without eroding the very nature of academic institutional values (Morey, 2004). In the increasingly unbundled online faculty model, adjunct faculty are stepping in and filling the instructional role, and identifying with and emulating the values of nontraditional students. They have the great potential to be the vital bridge between nontraditional students and institutions that are more traditional in central mission. Moreover, the importance of online adjunct faculty may very well be that they enable institutions to integrate online education into the core organizational mission, while preserving and protecting the faculty roles that are essential to the research and scholarship functions of the academy.

The second trend we would like to present is that "virtual adjunct faculty," are becoming less "virtual" and less "adjunct." In fact, they are becoming highly professionalized, profoundly entrepreneurial, and very "full-time." Interestingly, a book titled, *Make Money Teaching Online: How to Land Your First Academic Job, Build Credibility, and Earn a Six-Figure Salary*, by Danielle Babb and Jim Mirabella was published recently (2007). Though no accurate, aggregated data exists yet on the number of online courses on average that "virtual adjuncts" teach for multiple institutions, it is clear that the "fulltime part-timer" referenced in a previous 2003 article is becoming the rule, and no longer the exception (Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003).

Clearly, online adjuncts are not truly "adjuncts" anymore, and we need to change our attitudes toward their role in higher education. If you input "adjunct" into the thesaurus of your word processor, the words offered are *addition, add-on, appendage, extra, accessory, optional extra*. The 2007 Sloan-C study, *Online Nation: Five Years of Growth in Online Learning*, reports that online enrollments (9.7 percent growth rate) have far exceeded the growth of the total higher education population (1.5 percent growth rate). In addition, approximately one-third of higher education institutions account for three-quarters of all online enrollments in the United States with future enrollment growth most likely coming from these institutions. Given the issues of traditional faculty acceptance and slow rate of adoption, who is teaching online and accommodating this rapid growth? It is clear that many institutions rely very heavily on online adjuncts faculty to meet online enrollment growth demands, as the innovation adoption curve slowly inches along on the traditional campuses. Adjuncts are clearly not an "optional extra," and so we must ask ourselves: is it even appropriate to refer to them "adjuncts?" Is it time to create a new rank for a new kind of *online teaching faculty*?

Third, we would like to propose that the popularization of online teaching coupled with the need of institutions for online faculty to support growth has propelled the idea of online teaching into the mainstream. Online teaching is now more accessible to the general population of educated individuals than ever before. A previous 2003 article referred to the "Philosopher" as an emerging category of adjunct faculty who is likely not professionally employed in the field in which she is degreed (Schnitzer & Crosby, 2003). She may be degreed in a high enrollment general education area, where online faculty availability is low, such as Philosophy, Humanities, or Religion. These areas are also typically the lowest areas of full time faculty participation in distance learning, thus creating an even greater dearth of available instructional staff for alternate delivery which may lead to the

perception that online teaching is her opportunity to finally make use of her advanced degree.

The implication of this is that there is emerging a large pool of academically qualified online faculty in multiple disciplines that can certainly sustain the enrollment growth in online programs; therefore, our approach to developing faculty must change. Online adjuncts are no longer one group that we can lump together into "online adjunct faculty." If we pay attention to curriculum, quality and academic integrity, we know that teaching is a disciplinary function that takes place in an interdisciplinary world of knowledge. We must think about creative ways to engage online faculty in a community of practice within the context of their disciplines, as well as in interdisciplinary contexts. Online faculty need professional development to foster excellence, recognition and reward, and an outlet to share and mentor other faculty in meaningful and professionally fulfilling ways related to their areas of interest and expertise. This presents higher education with a tremendous opportunity to develop professional online faculty and to leverage their experience to further enhance the quality of online learning for students.

Fourth, and the basis for why we care at all about this topic, is the fact that any administrator of a growing online program reading this article is (hopefully) thinking… *what about quality*? Faculty mentoring systems, building virtual faculty communities around common interests, and maintaining the balance of academic freedom and standardization in a "course shell" world are ideals administrators strive to achieve. Now, we may find ourselves in the rigorous and sometimes awkward discipline of reexamining what "quality" really means when we are squarely facing the management of hundreds of online faculty and enrollments of "nontraditional" students in the triple digits. We should never compromise quality. However, we must work harder, smarter and more creatively to leverage the talents of our existing faculty and engage new faculty in creating standards of excellence and quality assurance models for online education that are scalable. For this reason, we have revisited the Seven Principles and shared some of the current thinking on best practices (and even better practices) for supporting online "adjunct" faculty.

The nature of higher education is the process of change. As administrators, we spend a great deal of time and effort establishing prescriptive policies, procedures and faculty support programs to effect streamlined and efficient instruction. Interestingly, a 2001 study showed that online administrators perceive quality to be based almost exclusively in the performance of faculty (Husmann & Miller, 2001) which makes faculty support even more critical. The Seven Principles of Good Practice (Chickering & Gamson, 1991) provide a timeless, reflective foundation for faculty support and give us the principles around which to implement quality practices.

1. Good Practice Encourages Contact

Frequent contact and communication is the most important factor in faculty motivation and involvement.

Contact fosters accountability and accountability is the core of quality. Faculty who feel connected, accountable to, and valued by the institution are likely to develop a confidence in their teaching, their value and their longevity that is conveyed to learners. If you are unsure as to whether faculty satisfaction affects student learning outcomes and satisfaction, just begin to analyze your end-of-term evaluations in the context of faculty development opportunities and faculty satisfaction, and you will observe definitive and remarkable trends.

We can think about faculty contact, motivation and engagement in much the same way in which we think about the student context of engagement and involvement. We know that "presence" enhances student learning outcomes and perceptions of connection (Shea, Li, Swan, & Pickett, 2006). The characteristics of "presence" generally include "direct instruction" which can be understood generally as clarity, consistency and reliability. Of course, faculty need the same support in order to be establish connections. Mentoring is one way to accomplish this, by providing a direct "contact," but we should be also thinking about how to leverage the newest communication technologies to this end. For example, the use of blogs, Wikis, and social networking sites may provide more opportunities to create multiple points of contact for faculty.

Creating multiple and diverse points of contact is an important aspect of encouraging motivation and involvement. As administrators, we are often juggling many administrative responsibilities, but we should ensure that we are approachable and accessible and also ensure that we are not the only point of contact for online adjunct faculty.

Mentoring is a proven, effective strategy for support, connection, and community building. There are many excellent models for online faculty mentoring programs. The culture of peer review and peer mentoring are well aligned with the pedagogical philosophies of online teaching and learning communities. It is also important to remember that many online adjuncts come from industry—this, in fact, is one of their strengths; however, they

may not be necessarily current in the *academic* discipline. Creating contact in the form of a community of practice around academic resources, institutional accountability, teaching strategy and culture, and the academic discipline are critical to faculty success.

2. Good Practice Develops Reciprocity and Cooperation

Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated.

No one would deny that the traditional academic culture is mostly isolated, outside of meetings, committees, and other governance mechanisms. For the most part, faculty work, independently on their research and teaching preparation, then retreat for the summer months and return quietly onto campus in the Fall. This culture of independence is built into the very structures within which the academy operates, including the way higher education is organized, as well as the course development process itself.

For example, degree program structures are isolated, linear and sequenced. Degrees are structured as a sequenced collection of discrete courses, and often faculty teaching the courses have little or no interaction with each other, despite the prerequisite structures often built into the course sequence. Moreover, courses overlap, are irrelevant to each other, and are taught by faculty who are only familiar with their own course and their own discipline. If a prior course in the sequence loses its relevance, the opportunity to update knowledge is lost. The next generation of online learning will need to think about bodies of knowledge as cross-disciplinary, thematic and, connected – not isolated units with no context for the interrelationships among the disciplines.

Even online course development in its present state is a very instructivist hierarchy where an esteemed "content" expert develops the course, instructional designers assemble the course into a series of learning experiences intended to "teach" students the specific content, and teachers—many times adjuncts—dispense the course to students as prescribed.

As educators, indeed we are generally obsessed with organizing things. When we organize, however, what we do categorize, separate, sequence, structure, define, and then enforce students to follow our version of the "course." Yet, as Siemens (2004) states, "the ability to synthesize and recognize patterns is a valuable metaskill in the global world" (¶11). Does this fit well with what we know about how knowledge is created and shared?

A cooperative, collaborative and social learning culture is part of the emerging academic practice and we know from research that collaboration, interaction, connection and relevance all enhance learning outcomes and the quality of the learning experience. The evolution of the learning community model has helped us to understand more about how people learn, thrive and connect in collaborative communities. The Community of Inquiry model (Garrison, 2007) offers an excellent framework within which to understand the importance of connection, the concept of learning equality, and breaking down barriers between "students" and "faculty" and engaging them together around the topic of teaching and learning.

It is no wonder then that many adjunct faculty complain that they have no sense of engagement with other faculty. Part of this feeling could be attributed to the "course" and "discipline" focused culture. The breakdown of the course mentality and the move toward more interdisciplinary, less isolated, and less compartmentalized learning models will happen eventually and naturally. But, there are still things we can do to foster movement toward more collaboration.

One excellent strategy to move the online learning culture toward more collaboration is to build a culture around peer review. The Quality Matters peer-review process is an excellent way to do this – where faculty review other faculty courses across disciplines. A general culture of peer review helps to create the right conditions for faculty to share, critique, and gain new insights and practical strategies for their own practice. The Quality Matters rubric can be utilized and implemented in many different ways, both in the course design process as well as in the course improvement and review process. In order to build the peer review culture and create faculty connections, institutions should consider using the tool for "peer review" of courses before they "go live." Faculty can be engaged through stipends or release time to conduct such reviews, which accomplish not only a quality assurance checkpoint, but also helps the reviewer to think about quality measure to enhance his or her own instructional development and practice. Although Quality Matters is intended for faculty, it can also be used to engage faculty and learners in the peer review process, through course evaluations, feedback surveys, or student focus groups.

3. Good Practice Encourages Active Learning

Faculty must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences and apply it to their daily lives.

Of course, a good teacher will have the desire to continuously improve, learn new instructional skills, and enhance his or her pedagogical strategies. Many institutions offer professional development workshops, orientation programs, certificate programs and other activities to "train" faculty. These programs are necessary and successful in preparing faculty, in particular adjuncts, to get up and running and perform specific "teaching" tasks within the learning management system. However, it seems necessary that we begin to shift our focus from "training" and to "developing" our online faculty.

In order to excel, faculty must be active, lifelong learners. Critical to the notion of active learning is learning that is dynamic, relevant to one's life, and authentic (geared toward real, practical issues and problems). Much of the training and development for adjunct faculty is still focused on technology, tasks, and very general pedagogical technique. This translates to a lack of active learning amongst students, possibly in part because faculty may not have the skills to create active learning environments in the context of the course and making effective use of the available technologies. A 2002 survey (Pankowski, 2004) found that 75 percent of faculty reported that they had received 30 or more hours of technical training in the course management system; however, only one third reported that they had ever received pedagogical training. Further, only 56 percent reported that they had ever taken an online course themselves.

Kim and Bonk (2006) surveyed instructors and administrators in postsecondary institutions to learn more about trends in the future of higher education. They found that survey respondents predicted that active learning techniques such as collaboration, case-based learning, and problem-based learning would be the preferred learning methods of the future. However, existing research indicates that online instructors tend to use easy-to-implement tools and strategies within the context of the learning managements systems (Liu, Lee, Bonk, Magjuka, & Liu, 2007).

Why we develop our faculty is so that they will meet the needs of students, and facilitate learning outcomes and student success. *How* we develop our faculty simply may not be aligned with our expectations for active learning.

This shift from task-focused, technical training to transformational development means that we need to update our orientation and development programs and even look at new organizational models that create more integration between the professional development "course" and actual "practice." The foundational strategy to further this goal is to begin to merge what has traditionally been two groups - "faculty support" and "faculty." Successful faculty can be the best teachers of other faculty, and which contributes to the peer review and mentoring culture. In addition, we often provide faculty with professional development "workshops," but perhaps do not do enough to provide these development opportunities in the actual teaching context, or find ways that faculty can "bookmark" certain strategies and ideas for use in the future. We often use "learning objects" as reusable content, and should consider creating "teaching objects," that is, a repository of best practices, strategies, ideas and facilitation techniques that faculty can access "just in time." A final strategy to consider is differentiating our professional development into a "theory and practice" approach, where some workshops are taken while the participant is not teaching and thus intended to enhance future instruction; while other workshops are designed to enhance the current teaching environment.

4. Good Practice Gives Prompt Feedback

Knowing what you know and don't know focuses learning.

A mistake we often make is that we evaluate faculty using the traditional method of evaluation. We tend to ignore those who do fairly well, instead focusing our efforts on the faculty whom we perceive as "needing" evaluation and correction. However, by doing this, we may miss an opportunity to help a good faculty member become a great faculty member.

The standardization of the feedback process may limit our thinking about providing relevant feedback. Rubrics, standard forms, and clear criteria are important, great to show accreditors but can be used for providing usually only limited suggestions for improvement. In fact, Mandernach, Donneli, Dailey, and Schulte (2005) remind us that the traditional evaluation instruments do not "emphasize key competencies for effective online instruction, such as instructor response rate and availability; frequency and quality of presence in online classroom;

facilitation of discussions in writing; usability of instructor-created supplemental content; and overall management of the administrative aspects of the course" (¶4). Furthermore, traditional evaluation methods may not be available until weeks into the next teaching semester which does not provide opportunity for revision and improvement.

To truly improve online teaching, qualitative feedback is needed as well as opportunities for reflection and revision before the next time a course is taught. This is no different than our thinking about formative student feedback that reinforces, guides, and directs – not merely redirects. It is also important to create a culture where evaluation is not something that is "done to" faculty; rather, it is a process that enhances quality and enhances the faculty member's receptivity and participation in the process. We should remember that good instructors truly want to improve their teaching; therefore, evaluation is necessary and will usually be welcomed. Also, the evaluation process may reveal a weaknesses in the overall faculty development process which could be addressed by providing additional online instructor resources or recommending strategies for managing the online workload.

5. Good Practice Emphasizes Time on Task

How an institution defines time expectations for students, faculty, administrators, and other professional staff can establish the basis of high performance for all.

We have made great strides in streamlining administrative processes for online faculty. Human resources, student management, and other administrative work are mostly online. However, in the context of considering time on task, workload issues are now emerging as a significant issue.

It may be time to revisit the overall design of online courses, and have a more realistic view of faculty workload in the context of our instructional expectations. The professional literature consistently echoes the notion that online courses take more time. And, to compound that issue, in our pursuit of "quality," we design additional expectations that employ quantitative metrics to measure qualitative things.

To begin to think about this issue, it is important to ask ourselves the question… can interactivity as a learner experience be measured? Is it measurable in terms of a certain number of clicks, a magic number of emails, or a specific number of discussion board postings? Yet, this is how we structure and measure interactivity in the online environment. Think of the incessant structure of the discussion board setting. It can be somewhat reminiscent of being called on in class, not necessarily knowing what to say, but knowing you need to say something.

There needs to be more attention to "authentic" interactivity. This is the interactivity that students seek when their creativity and curiosity are stimulated by a learning experience. And, that interaction may take place outside of the learning management system, where we unfortunately can't measure it. The truth is that "engagement" isn't necessarily the same thing as "participation." And, certainly, engagement can't truly be calculated by a quantitative formula of participation. Our over-reliance on discussion boards is such that we may be missing many opportunities to redefine learner engagement and interactivity in truly authentic ways.

For example, some common instructional requirements are 24-hour response rate, grading within 3-5 days, and a certain number of postings within the discussion forums. The purpose for these requirements is that we believe that they indicate engagement, collaboration, responsiveness, and quality. However, we must ask ourselves if these measures are truly measuring quality and engagement, or are they just administrative controls?

Most troubling is that many institutions have increased class size, which translates to an unrealistic workload for faculty, and ultimately compromises their ability to give extensive and meaningful feedback to students let alone build the learning communities and student engagement that we value and seek to create. Consider a typical 25-student class with a weekly student workload of two papers, an individual assignment, and discussion participation with a minimum of 2 posts per week per student. This translates to 75 papers and 25 individual discussion participation for the instructor to grade, with a bare minimum of 50 discussion posts to read with response to at least half. And, this is for only one week and one class.

So, how do instructors do it? And, especially, how do online faculty who are teaching multiple classes and perhaps even holding down a fulltime job manage such workload? Though most of us will not admit it, they essentially cut corners, and we tend to see the symptoms of this in student evaluations. Faculty responsiveness and quality of student feedback remain the critical quality issues in online education. These are problems that in order to solve require a much more holistic review, rather than simply evaluating the problems as faculty

performance issues.

We are not advocating for a reduction in all class sizes, but we are suggesting that we review faculty workload issues with a realistic eye, and also consider the issues in the context of the quality of the student experience. Still, many online courses contain "busywork" for students, which translates to "busywork" faculty workload issues, and both faculty and learners are distracted from the transformative process of teaching, learning, and building collaborative communities. As administrators, we must ensure that our expectations are not only reasonable, but also accomplish the goals we intend.

Another thing we can do is to provide ideas, tools, development opportunities, and more assistance to faculty to help manage the workload and provide substantive formative and summative feedback to students. For example, using comment bank programs, comment management strategies, and grading assistant models can help. Workshops on how to create feedback rubrics that can be shared amongst faculty are useful, as Ragan and Terheggen (2003) have described.

6. Good Practice Communicates High Expectations

Expect more and you will get more.

Communicating high expectations assumes several things: a) administrators are clear on what those expectations are and how they are being measured; b) communication is strong and consistent with faculty so that they are aware of the expectations and how to meet them. It is critical that they identify with the mission, values and expectations of the institution and that those relationships are encouraged and nurtured upfront. Clearly, there are sometimes mismatches between faculty attitudes and campus cultures–however, it is sometimes too late once a class has already started that this incongruence in values is recognized.

As we know, faculty want to affiliate with institutions that demonstrate a commitment to quality, professional development, and overall satisfaction. Many factors influence how adjunct faculty feel about the schools they are teaching for. Two key goals that must drive our efforts in this area are retention and engagement.

Finding and retaining excellent online adjunct faculty is no easy task. As online teaching has become more attractive, there is certainly a greater number of adjunct faculty available – but, fewer experienced online faculty are available. Retention is a serious issue, as a high instructor turnover rate can negatively affect quality and student satisfaction and make it difficult to promote faculty community.

Engagement builds accountability. When you engage online faculty, and establish strong relationships, they feel more accountable and will likely not want to disappoint others with whom they feel connected. It is important to be fully engaged in faculty development and communicate a culture where faculty are truly important to student learning, not just "factory" workers. In large online programs, this can be challenging, but with straightforward, honest, and timely communication, mentoring and contact, expectations can be reinforced and further developed.

There are many seemingly simple, yet very powerful strategies that can be implemented as best practices in creating a culture of excellence, with a focus on faculty engagement and retention. Each individual best practice is not as important as the value of the strategies as they are integrated and experienced.

1. Make the faculty application process streamlined and straightforward.
2. Clearly communicate and reinforce expectations in the interview process. Treat the interview as a mutual screening process, and a chance to explore whether there is a match in values in key areas. For example, areas that we typically seek connections are:
    a. Attitudes toward nontraditional students.
    b. Views about how to balance flexibility and academic integrity.
    c. Strategies for working with "difficult" students.
    d. Perceptions about the role of the faculty member in an online classroom.
    e. Availability for student inquiries and need for feedback.

    Anyone can learn how to use a learning management system, but values, attitudes and beliefs are not easy to change. Creative, scenario and example based questioning can help structure the dialogue, and also allow the interviewer to communicate key cultural norms and values.

3. Consider reviewing student references or copies of previous teaching evaluations, in addition to the usual administrator reference contacts.

4. Have a strong and informative orientation course in place, facilitated by teams of experienced faculty and faculty support staff.
5. Avoid on-boarding faculty who will not be used within a significant period of time. This simply wastes their time and your resources.
6. Implement a peer-based mentoring program that will assign a mentor to faculty teaching their first online course. It is also a good practice to have faculty mentors facilitate the orientation course, so that they can continue the relationship from the orientation through the first teaching experience.
7. Facilitate regularly scheduled "virtual" faculty meetings, and archive those meetings for faculty who cannot attend the live sessions.
8. Create some form of a "virtual lounge" for faculty where they can access information, documents, and have a forum to discuss current issues.
9. Survey faculty periodically, and ask for their input into decisions about workload, compensation, technology, and student retention issues. When their input is used, send communications explaining how their feedback was considered in administrative decisions.
10. Establish an academic governance or advisory system for adjunct faculty so that their concerns and feedback is accessible and honored, and create multiple opportunities for faculty to participate.
11. Involve adjunct faculty in student retention initiatives.
12. Treat evaluation as a tool for improvement and development. Implement a system of ongoing evaluation so that major problems are not discovered at the conclusion of a course. It is a good practice to involve faculty mentors in this process, and encourage a climate of peer review, peer assistance, and support.
13. Promote professional development and mini grant opportunities for course enhancement and instructional innovation, and employ faculty to develop and administer workshops to others. This is also a great strategy to keep faculty engaged who are not teaching in a given time period because of enrollment patterns.

7. Good Practice Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning

There are many roads to learning. People bring different talents and styles of learning to college.

A great deal of time, effort and money go into the development and design of standardized online courses. The selection of content, assessments, interactive activities, reflective activities, and constructivist techniques comprise a very extensive and lengthy course development process. In fact, educators are obsessed with organizing things. When we organize, however, what we do is compartmentalize, categorize, separate, sequence, structure, define, and then enforce students in our version of the "course." Embedded in the existing course development approach is a very instructivist hierarchy (an esteemed "content" expert develops the course, instructional designers assemble the course into a series of learning experiences intended to "teach" students the specific content, and teachers – many times adjuncts – dispense the courses to students. The effect is that online courses can become routine. In fact, many adjunct faculty who teach at multiple institutions simply "facilitate" courses and have no input into the content or design.

Perhaps we need to change our view of "courses" altogether. A degree is an organized and sometimes sequenced collection of discrete courses. Often, courses overlap, are irrelevant to each other, and taught by faculty who are only familiar with their own courses or disciplines. If a prior course in the sequence loses its relevance, the opportunity to update the knowledge is lost.

Constructivism has guided online learning and pedagogical development. The two main tenets of constructivism are a) learning is an active (rather than passive) process of creating knowledge, and b) instruction is the process of supporting and facilitating knowledge construction. The Web 2.0 environment supports constructivist techniques, and with general success we typically implement pedagogical strategies such as discussions, case studies, and group work to engage students in the process of knowledge construction.

But, is it time to look beyond constructivism? Siemens (2004) has proposed a theory called connectivism that seems to be at odds with our instructional, curricular and standardized course shell approaches. Siemens main tenets of connectivism are:

1. Learning and knowledge rests in diversity of opinions.
2. Learning is a process of connecting specialized nodes or information sources.
3. Learning may reside in non-human appliances.
4. Capacity to know more is more critical than what is currently known
5. Nurturing and maintaining connections is needed to facilitate continual learning.

6. Ability to see connections between fields, ideas, and concepts is a core skill.
7. Currency (accurate, up-to-date knowledge) is the intent of all connectivist learning activities.
8. Decision-making is itself a learning process. Choosing what to learn and the meaning of incoming information is seen through the lens of a shifting reality. While there is a right answer now, it may be wrong tomorrow due to alterations in the information climate affecting the decision.

There will undoubtedly be a next generation of online learning that facilitates connectivist learning, self-directed learning, and embraces the values that we described at the beginning of this paper. In fact, this next generation of online learning will likely see a move away from the "learning management system" as we know it. Note the key word – "management." These systems evolved from the need early on to replicate the f-2-f environment online and "manage" content and "students" in spite of geographical distance. In some ways, learners have even less control than in the f-2-f environment. Learners have no control over the presentation of content, how the course is structured, what content they see, in many cases the sequence in which they move through the course, and with tracking tools that measure time online… adjunct faculty who teach from a course shell also have little control, and so one has to wonder who has the real "control" in the online environment.

Nonetheless, standardized course shells and the linear organization of curriculum are important ways that we control quality and provide a standard measure of student achievement. In fact, we cannot imagine a world without "course shells;" however, we must find ways to allow faculty to bring their talents into the online classroom.

As we begin to slowly shift toward a new generation of higher education, and begin to "think outside of the Blackboard," we will likely find ourselves more and more adapting to diversity, learner control, faculty control, and the value that diversity of experiences and perspectives brings to the learning environment. Progressive thinkers are already thinking of these changes. For example, a recent survey of online executives in education and corporate settings conducted by New Media Consortium (2008) found that the majority of respondents predicted that over the next five years we can expect to see a greater number of interdisciplinary majors, inter-university collaboration among students from multiple institutions, and the rise of online materials replacing traditional textbooks. These trends clearly foresee the diverse and many roads to teaching learning.

Conclusion

There is an abundance of literature written on what factors contribute to an effective learning environment for students. However, if you are involved in faculty support and development, every time you read those articles, you should replace the word *student* with *faculty*. In many ways, online adjunct faculty are exactly the same as online students. ADEC's (adec.edu) guiding principles for teaching and learning are:

1. The learning experience has a clear purpose with clear outcomes and objectives.
2. Learning designs consider the importance of context and the characteristics of the learner.
3. The learner is actively engaged, and authentic activities are used such as hands-on, concrete experiences that relate directly to real-life needs.
4. The learning environment makes appropriate use of a variety of media.
5. The learning environment includes a mix of problem-based (analysis, synthesis and evaluation) and knowledge-based (recall, comprehension and application) learning.
6. Learning experiences support interaction and the development of communities of interest.

If we keep the Seven Principles of Good Practice (Chickering & Gamson, 1991) in mind, as well as these simple principles, we will undoubtedly enhance online faculty satisfaction and effectiveness.

Online education has forever transformed higher education, and we are learning that quality is really about flexibility and the ability to adapt to the changing demands of learners, the new promises of technology, and the new competitive landscape of higher education. If higher education is to remain competitive, we must refocus and redesign our paradigms, as well as design business processes that integrate with quality assurance models.

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