Faculty Recruitment Strategies For Online Programs

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Abstract

This paper addresses faculty recruitment for online programs. Related issues are faculty perceptions, program processes, and administrative supports. At traditional academic institutions, it is a challenge for program administrators to recruit admirable faculty members to teach in the online programs. The complaints and concerns expressed by the detractors need to be addressed in order to create a positive environment for the online programs.

In this paper we propose a model for faculty recruitment, taking into consideration areas of concern and contention, and suggest strategies to appropriately meet the challenges. Based on survey results, we suggest several criteria to be used in selecting online faculty members.

Introduction

Online education is going through an initial period of confusion and expectations. To date, it has received a moderate level of acceptance from the serious academic community. There is a philosophical division between the groups that approve and disapprove of online education. People who support online education refer to the many academic advantages of online education in a fast changing environment. They emphasize that the physical face to face classroom is inadequate to cope with the demands arising from the accelerating rate of change in the environment, or to meet the needs of a significant segment of learners and providers.

Those who are against online education argue that effective education is not possible via any virtual media. Their debate is mainly based on form and not substance. Detractors of online education emphasize form and supporters emphasize substance to build their respective arguments. The loss of the opportunity for face to face contact, provided by the physical campus, contributes to the crux of the arguments. However, to understand the actual nature of the assumed loss, it is important to look at the actuality of the face to face meeting of the instructor and students in a classroom situation.([2])

Faculty members who have entrenched themselves in the sanctuary of campus based face to face education are the most vocal critics of online education. The online education is a new paradigm; it has a new domain and limitations. The strength of online education is not in the medium it uses but in the way it is used. This paper deals with faculty perspectives on online education, and provides recommendations for successful online faculty recruitment. The recommendations are presented in the form of postulates. Some of the postulates are based on the author's experience, and others are based on a recently conducted survey. The relevant survey results are included in the appendix.

Online education in any institution has a history underlying its origin, and has reasons for its continuity. No matter how short the history is, it is important to keep that history in perspective. Providing a foundation based on institutional background, is the first thing one needs to anchor the strategy for gaining faculty support. This paper is based on data and experience from the online programs of a university which is 95 years old, and has national and regional accreditation for its different schools. Albeit, some of the situations described here may not be applicable to all institutions.

The Issue

Online education has both supporters and detractors within an educational institution. Usually, the detractors are more numerous than the supporters. We know that the survival and success of the online program depends on the support of the faculty leadership, administrative leadership, and the active participation of a significant cohort of faculty members. The issue is how to gain the support and encourage the participation of a significant group of fulltime faculty members.

The three-stage Five C Model is a sequential process model. The three stages may overlap sometimes, but never be truncated. Before a faculty member is convinced of the value of the online program, he/she must have sufficient information about the principles and practices of online education and its legitimacy within the environment. Thus, communication is the key to success in recruiting faculty - stage one in the model. The Online Program Administrators (OPA) should be proactive in reaching out to faculty members.

Figure 1. The Faculty Recruitment Process: The Five C Model
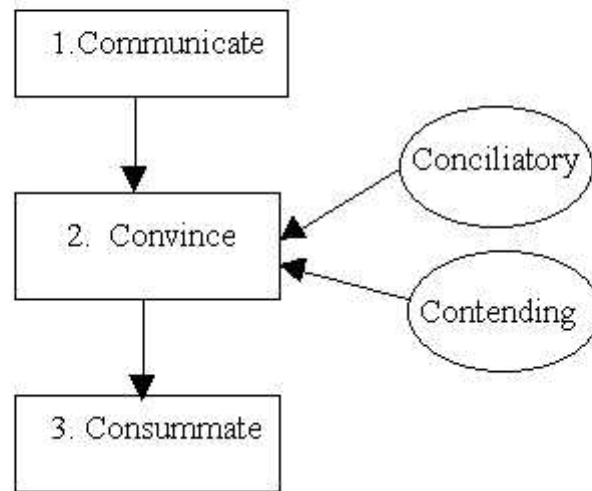
The next stage is to convince the faculty members, i.e. gain their support. Sometimes, this is a long and arduous process. I suggest two modes of persuasion: a) the conciliatory mode and b) the contending mode. Both are necessary and work well in relevant situations.

The third stage in the process is consummating - striking a deal. Once a faculty member walks through the door, care and attention must be given to make sure that everything works smoothly for him/her. There have to be very good reasons for a faculty member to be willing to build a lasting relationship with online education.

The following twelve postulates are designed to help implement each stage of the Five C Model.

Postulate 1

Online education is based on innovation and entrepreneurship.

Online education has created a new paradigm. Most people tend to measure their experience of progress in a linear fashion, while the world around us is progressing at an accelerating rate of growth. It is hard to comprehend that 100 years' growth will happen just within the next 10 years. The visionary leaders in education see the enormous effect of these changes on the whole realm of formal education. (3) Online education is the first major challenge to our tradition of education.

Accepting online education as innovative and entrepreneurial will enable us to move from the old tradition of teaching students to a new learner-driven paradigm. In many ways, the new paradigm is not comparable to the traditional system of education.

An entrepreneur is a risk taker, whose success is evaluated in the marketplace and not in the laboratory or within the internal bureaucracy of an institution. To protect the business of education we need many such risk-taking entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, the online programs are evaluated on the criteria used for the traditional system. (4) In order to evaluate online education as an innovative enterprise, a new set of criteria needs to be developed and adopted. The first step in accomplishing this is to communicate the unique characteristics of online education and to influence the culture of the organization to accept online education as a serious educational delivery system.

There has to be an environment of support and encouragement, which is germane to the growth of any innovative enterprise. The culture in the institution must be innovation supportive and not innovation averse. Unfortunately, this is not the case in academic institutions. The Online Program Administrators (OPA) must take initiatives that will encourage the university and the schools to support unique innovations in education.

Postulate 2

The online programs support the University Mission.

All educational institutions are mission driven. The mission provides either a cause for making things happen or an excuse for preventing things from happening. Some of the mission elements are well spelled out and others can be deduced. It will be easier to get faculty support if they are convinced that online education supports the mission of the university.

For example, Suffolk University's mission has a few key phrases which provide strong arguments in favor of online education, such as access, customer intimacy (total customer solution), and flexibility.

How the online program supports the mission is the single most important question asked and answered in promoting online education on a mission driven campus. Smart Online Program Administrators (OPA's) look for relevant phrases in the mission statement and use them as often as necessary. In our faculty opinion survey, the faculty members who are willing to teach online believe that online education supports university mission. The mission support is the third most important reason for faculty members to teach online. The most important reason against teaching online is that online does not support the university mission.([5](#))

Postulate 3

Effective teaching is possible through the online programs.

Both supporters and detractors raise the issue of "effective teaching." The supporters of online education believe that effective teaching is possible and the detractors argue to the contrary. Meanwhile, my survey results show that the most important consideration to faculty for teaching online is that "effective teaching is possible through online."

The following table compares the online and the physical campuses from the process viewpoint. These arguments are useful in convincing the faculty members to teach online.

Table 1. Comparison of online and physical campus, from the process viewpoint.

	Items	Physical Campus	Online
1	Professors	Anybody who is available from within the faculty pool	Selective. Can be recruited from anywhere in the country
2	Course Content	The same	The same
3	Contact hours	Limited to class hours	Continuous engagement in synchronous and asynchronous modes
4	Class experience	Students often do not prepare for class; they come to listen to a professor lecture.	Students must prepare in order to deliver what they have learned; professor moderates
5	Class meetings	Face to face	Virtual, synchronous and asynchronous
6	Class cancellations due to the weather	Always happens. e.g. snow emergency	Never happens. No snow emergency
7	Holidays	All holidays taken	Very few holidays observed (e.g. classes

			meet on President's Day)
8	Class attendance	In some classes only 20-25% of the students enrolled attend the class and thus defeat the purpose of face to face class meeting	100% class attendance required
9	Class participation	Typically, class participation is low.	All must participate in the written form in synchronous and asynchronous modes
10	Participation grades	Generally based on instructor's memory	Based on recorded responses
11	Feedback	Students are evaluated periodically at the end of a test or a paper	Continuous evaluation and real-time feedback
12	Regularity and punctuality	Schedules for materials coverage, paper submission, and tests are not generally maintained for the professor's or the student's reasons.	All units are closed at the end of a week. All work must be made available and must be done within the week.
13	Assessments	Tests and quizzes, homework	Portfolio of tools
14	Lectures	Notes or audio are not archived and not available to students after the class	Text, audio, and video lectures are archived and available on demand
15	Access to materials and references	Unlimited access could be provided but not practiced	The virtual nature provides unlimited access
16	Syllabus	Sketchy and incomplete syllabus is sometimes used	Must be detailed and complete
17	Course Evaluation	At the end of the semester with a long lag time	Online and real-time, no lag time.
18	Course audit	Faculty course files are not open for review	Always open to administrators and are reviewed periodically

Postulate 4

Having the dean as an ally always works.

If your dean does not vigorously support the online, chances of success are very low. The dean can cut you off from the faculty lifeline, stop additional money flowing into recruiting good people. The dean's support is necessary to recruit and keep faculty with the program. The university is governed through the traditional bureaucratic system, which is hierarchical and self-righteous. Without the strong support of the dean, you can't really go to the president or other university administrators. It is crucial that online programs have the dean as an ally.

Postulate 5

All that glitters is not gold.

Which faculty should we go after?

Below is a matrix of four A's. Faculty who will be interested and successful in teaching online are those who have teaching emphasis (6) and are technology oriented. Teaching emphasis professors are willing to invest additional

time in teaching if needed. Developing an online course and delivering it needs initial investment of time. Whereas, the 'research emphasis' professors (the "Attract") initially will not be willing to sacrifice their research time for major innovation in teaching. So, begin your recruitment effort with the "Acquire" group. The technology averse but teaching professors are interested but are shy to explore the unknown. We classified them as the "Attend." There is a good chance of success with this group. They need to be encouraged, and appropriate training must be available for them. The research people who are not good teachers and hate technology (the "Avoid") will not be a good choice to go after. Good teaching must be emphasized in the online programs.

Table 2. Faculty Matrix of Four A's

Faculty matrix

Orientation and skills	Research emphasis	Teaching emphasis
Tech. oriented	Attract	Acquire
Tech. averse	Avoid	Attend

The faculty pool is virtually unlimited. However, university policy and procedure must be observed to invite somebody to teach online. There are generally four faculty sources to recruit from:

1. Full time

2. Local area adjunct

3. Wide area adjunct

4. Well qualified professors from other universities nationwide

The starting point should be the full time and senior faculty members. The more one can bring the Acquire and the Attract groups on board, the more success one will have with faculty recruitment.

Table 3. Online Faculty Profile from the Experience of OPA's.

	Lazy(LZ)	*Busy (BZ)*	*Regular (R)*	*Star (S)*
Organization	Very low	Low	Good	Very high
Meets Deadlines	Misses frequently	Not always	Always	Always
Use of Tools	Below Average	Minimum to survive	Just right	Above expectation
Course Materials	Numerous misses and mistakes	Missing or late	Prepared	Continuous improvement

BZ's and LZ's are valuable colleagues within the system but you will be smart to look for the R's and S's first. You will not get too many S's. A few of them are essential for your program to succeed. The R's in my sample are "teaching emphasis and tech-oriented" people. Some of them are very good at both. A couple of LZ's and BZ's are in the mix. You need to have a strategy to manage them. For example, you may use consultants, TA intervention, and counseling; finally, you should be prepared to confront faculty members if specific problems persist. BZ's and LZ's will promise you the whole world but simply will not have the time or the discipline to deliver. They have too many commitments and the online one may be low in their priorities.

Postulate 6

Faculty don't always need money - a paradox!

This is disputable. It depends on the faculty member. Money is always a good motivator. Emphasizing only money is not going to work with all the people you want to recruit.

In my sample, money is not among the top reasons for teaching online. Financial consideration ranked ninth among the 12 items in my questionnaire. (7) It ranked higher for the adjunct professors than for the full time professors.

The junior professors' average score is 3.58 and the senior professors' average score is 1.75. Thus, my conclusion is that the senior professors will be attracted based on their priorities and not on monetary needs. It is important to note that the junior and the adjunct professors will be attracted if the program can provide competitive compensation for the development and teaching of online courses.

Postulate 7

Evangelists may be helpful.

Recruit evangelists from among your colleagues to preach the religion of online education to your colleagues. It should be remembered that converting faculty opinion is a hard thing to do. A core faculty group is essential to succeed in faculty recruiting. This core group should be made up of: the preachers, the red herrings and the foot soldiers. To make any entry into the traditional academic trenches, one needs to act as if fighting a war, preaching a religion, or even fishing in cold water. I found the core faculty group to be essential for the recruitment of the faculty and maintenance of the quality. Most of the core faculty group members join the online program for the 'romance of it and not for the finance of it.'

Postulate 8

There is no right time.

When is the right time to start recruiting faculty members for online programs?

If you have started the program by doing everything necessary, for example the mission matching, the appropriate technology research, the practice, and the training for your team, you are in the winner's circle. If you are a faculty member, get your own feet wet before inviting others. If you are a highly regarded faculty member, you have won the first battle. If you are not one, you need a red herring. You have to attract faculty with faculty. You will not recruit all the faculty members you need at the same time. Thus, take an incremental approach: one is good, two is better and more will come in the future.

Postulate 9

It is more difficult to succeed that it is to fail.

What works against online faculty recruiting?

The arguments we hear in the hallways, faculty lounge, or cafeteria, and the questions we answer in the faculty meetings, can be classified into two groups as listed below:

Table 4. Classification of Faculty Arguments Against Online Education.

A. Practical Concerns	B. Philosophical Objections
1. Hurts faculty research	**1. Online quality is not satisfactory**
-Avoid non-tenure faculty	*-Prepare your arguments and use quality controls*
2. Too much teaching overload	*-Emphasize the pros and cons - as in the Table 1 above.*
-Distinguish between authoring a course and teaching a course	**2. Cannibalization**
3. Don't have time	*-Eat your own meat before others start eating it*
-Use summer grants for course development	

| **4. Don't know how to use technology**

-*Organize more faculty training sessions* | *-Think online as an option for students and faculty, not a replacement of the physical campus*

3. Our students are not ready

-The current students are not the only online students |

Postulate 10

Stability and consistency of operation attract faculty to the online.

An online faculty handbook is good for everybody. It can define the policies and procedures, explain the processes, define the expectations, outline the responsibilities, and provide guidance. The OPA and the staff must be able to answer questions and help online faculty solve emerging problems as they arise. Faculty need to trust in your ability to keep your word.

Postulate 11

Credibility is the key to recruiting credible professors.

There are five areas where online credibility must be established. The level of credibility determines the quality of faculty who will be interested.

> 1. Program credibility
>
> Schools starting online programs in minor areas may hurt the future expansion of online in major subject areas. It is hard to migrate from peripheral to primary areas. For example, the MBA is a major program in our university. We leveraged the MBA reputation to accelerate online program acceptance among the university community and the faculty. Now we are ready to migrate from the primary to the secondary areas.
>
> 2. Faculty credibility
>
> It is very important to be selective in recruiting the early faculty members. Faculty members with high credibility will enhance the image of the online program.
>
> 3. Process credibility
>
> Process credibility assures the potential online faculty members of the fairness, reliability, and stability of the program processes - like selection, development, training, support and honorarium. It assures that the program is not a renegade.
>
> 4. Platform credibility
>
> A robust, reliable, and user-friendly platform is a must in faculty recruitment. Faculty members don't want hassle, or to waste time; however, if the platform inhibits smooth distribution, it is likely that faculty will become frustrated and spend time complaining about system problems to other colleagues.
>
> A careful selection of platform determines the success of the program. For the author's program, eCollege provides the platform credibility as desired by our faculty members. In terms of choosing a platform, my suggestion is to follow LCM (Lowest Common Denominator - accessibility and availability to a majority of your potential students). Let the platform providers do the experiment and you do the applications and implementation.
>
> 5. Leadership credibility
>
> Who heads up the online program? The qualifications and merit of the person heading the online program will speak a lot about how it is run and what kind of faculty support it will get.

Postulate 12

Enhanced quality enhances credibility

To enhance quality one can do many things, such as:

> 1. Course audit: Examine content, the use of tools, and the quality of the materials used.
>
> 2. Course evaluation: Make student evaluations available to all faculty members.
>
> 3. Sharing of the best practices (courses): let others see the best course materials.
>
> 4. Keep informed of new initiatives: People like to know what's new/new directions.
>
> 5. Seek criticism and feedback.
>
> 6. Finally, the quest for quality is a never-ending journey.

Summary and conclusions

Online education is a new paradigm. It does not always lend itself to comparisons with face to face education. The supporters among the faculty believe that effective education is possible through online education and the detractors don't think so. Online education meets the needs of a significant group of learners who otherwise would have difficulty pursuing their education or who would not have pursued it at all.

Successful online faculty recruiting depends upon a well-conceived strategy, which connects the benefits of online education with the background of the institution and its mission. It is important to point out that the university did not embark on online education by accident or by the 'contagion effect.' Online education is a legitimate pursuit of the university.

The twelve postulates delineated in this paper provide helpful guidance in developing an online faculty recruitment strategy. The faculty recruitment process involves three stages, as described in the Five C Model: The first stage is communicating, the second is convincing, and the third is consummating. Strategic dissemination of information, clear policies, and simple procedures are needed at each stage of the process.

This paper illustrates some of the pros and cons of the physical campus and virtual education systems. These comparisons are helpful in answering frequently asked questions raised by faculty members. It should be noted that the detractors' negative arguments center around the form, and the supporters emphasize the substance.

The Four-A model is useful in targeting potential faculty members. The teaching emphasis and technology oriented faculty members are more suitable for online teaching than the other three groups. Faculty members with research emphasis and no technology background are not suitable for online programs. We also suggest that professors who are 'too busy' and/or 'too lazy' should be a low priority in the faculty search.

Finally, a credible program attracts the attention of well-respected faculty members. Maintaining and improving quality should be an important consideration in designing and delivering online programs.

It is important to know and emphasize the reasons why faculty teach online. We observed from our survey that faculty members who believe that effective teaching is possible online, faculty who need flexibility, and those who accept that online education supports the university mission – these are the faculty who currently teach online or who offer the best potential for recruitment.

Endnotes

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2. I have recently investigated physical campus teaching in an urban university and found that in some classes 50% of the students do not show up for class meetings. The reasons cited by students are 1) the class is too boring, 2) the instructor tells us just what is in the book, and 3) I can learn by myself and earn a good grade.
3. The major accreditation bodies now include guidelines or standards for online programs.
4. For example, very often one will ask me how many students are in my online class? I say 15. Invariably, they tell me I

am not optimally utilizing the faculty resources. However, there are ways to increase faculty productivity by being innovative and using meaningful measurements.

5. Two sets of questionnaires were distributed among 72 full time and 6 part-time (all online) faculty members of the School of Management. Set B was given to the present and potential online faculty members and set A to those who have decided not to participate in online teaching. The response rate from full time faculty was 44% and from part-time was 100%. Of the total responses, 92% (35) were present and potential online faculty and only 7% (3) were in the non- online group. The majority of survey respondents were senior tenured professors with reputations as good teachers and researchers.

6. The teaching emphasis professor means the person does both teaching and research but emphasizes teaching. The research emphasis professor means the person does both teaching and research but emphasizes research.

7. The top four reasons are 1) I think effective teaching is possible through the Internet; 2) Flexibility of online teaching is important to me; 3a) I want to experience the new technology; 3b) It fits the university mission; and 4) I like Internet based teaching.

Appendix 1

Items Important to Faculty Teaching Online

Faculty were asked to rate the importance of each item to them on a scale of 0-5, 5 being the most important and 0 not important at all.

No responses are excluded from the number of responses.

Rank	Questionnaire items	No of valid responses	Mean	Mode
1	I think effective learning is possible through the internet	34	4.30	5
2	Flexibility of online teaching is important to me	32	4.13	5
3.5	I want to experience the new technology	31	4.10	5
3.5	It supports the university mission	33	4.10	5
5	I like internet based teaching	32	4.00	5
6	It attracts different type of students	32	4.00	4
7	I consider it an alternative to meet my campus teaching responsibilities	24	3.80	0,4
8	I can author a course	33	3.64	5
9	Financial consideration is important to me	29	3.45	3, 5
10	I am already familiar with online teaching	28	3.20	2,4
11	It helps my campus teaching	23	3.04	3
12	It helps my research	23	2.29	0

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