
Adjunct Faculty Participation in the Centralized Design of Online Courses

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Abstract

This literature-based study seeks to identify best practices for adjunct faculty participation in the centralized design of online courses. Literature from 2014–June 2018 relating to faculty participation in course and curriculum design was identified through a search of the ERIC database. Following further examination, nine studies were selected for analysis. These were analyzed within the framework of participative decision-making, by identifying whether participation was formal or informal, direct or indirect, long-term or short-term, and high or low access/influence. Findings indicate that faculty participation in course design takes place in a variety of ways and is frequently accompanied by faculty learning and development initiatives. For adjunct faculty, it is particularly important to create a variety of opportunities that meet their willingness and ability to participate. Though online courses, centralized design, and adjunct faculty are each discussed in some of the selected studies, no studies were identified that specifically addressed adjunct faculty participation in the centralized design of online courses. As this context is likely to be important in the future of higher education, further study of effective approaches is recommended.

Introduction

The scaling up of online education may be accompanied by increasing unbundling of the faculty role, such that adjunct faculty are hired to teach courses that they had no hand in constructing. While this model has benefits and may be necessary in large-scale operations, it also raises questions regarding how adjunct faculty, as employees and as users of an educational product (the centrally designed online course), can and should be involved in its creation and improvement. This literature-based investigation addresses best practices for working with adjunct faculty who teach centrally designed online courses in higher education, in order to support administrators in having a well-considered plan for collaborating with adjunct faculty on course design, which will contribute to a well-functioning academic program and a successful learning experience for students.

This work will be useful to administrators of online higher education courses, including deans, department and program chairs, and course coordinators. The overarching research question, “What are the best practices for fostering effective course design and teaching in centrally designed online courses taught by adjunct faculty?”, is addressed within the theoretical framework of participative decision-making.

Review of Literature

Course Design

Dubin and Olshain (1986/2000) describe course design as “the planning of courses and the writing of materials” (p. 1). “Curriculum development” is a related term, sometimes used interchangeably with “course design” (Posner & Rudnitsky, 1994). Whetten (2007) refers to the process of “designing ‘significant learning experiences’” (p. 339), focusing on the selection of learning outcomes, activities, and assessments. Often, a course designer will not only plan courses and create materials, but also work to measure the effectiveness of those plans and materials, and make corresponding adjustments.

The closely related term “instructional design” has roots in military training and focuses on analyzing systems to produce education and training programs through a consistent process (Gustafson & Branch, 2002). Most modern instructional design models are variations of the ADDIE model, including the five components Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate (Molenda, 2003). The Evaluate step reflects the iterative nature of the instructional design process.

In higher education.

There is a high degree of variation in the process for planning and creating courses in higher education. This activity may be referred to as “course design,” “instructional design,” or simply “planning,” depending on the person engaging in the activity and the formality of the process. The term “course design” will heretofore be used to refer to any variation of this process. One way in which the course design process can vary is in the degree to which it is a centralized activity, controlled by organizational units higher than the individual class level.

The traditional western college model places much of the course design responsibility in the hands of the individual instructor (Fyle, Moseley, & Hayes, 2012). In a 1994 briefing paper on faculty work, the Washington State Higher Education Coordinating Board described faculty teaching work as including not only classroom instruction, but also design, update, and revision of the courses that they teach. Paris (2013) observed that this model is now most visible in the liberal arts college. While the instructor may have to work within certain college-level, department-level, or program-level constraints, he or she typically retains a great deal of latitude in the selection of course materials, learning activities, and assessments (Paris, 2013). Viewing course design in terms of the ADDIE model, the instructor is responsible not only for the implementation component, but also for the analysis, design, development, and evaluation. This approach can be called a *decentralized* model of course design.

In a *centralized* course design model, greater control over and uniformity of materials, activities, and assessments are imposed at the college, department, or program level. Paris (2013) noted that the centralization of course design has increased, with “many of the things faculty members used to do—course design, selection of materials, creation of assignments, and assessment...increasingly being organized by administrators and specialists” (para. 1).

In distance education.

The provision of a single set of course materials to a large number of students is common in distance education, with this model used heavily by single-mode distance education institutions before the advent of online learning (Guri-Rosenblit, 2009). While online learning allows more interaction between teachers and learners than distance learning based on earlier technologies, the central-course-design model has remained relevant. Callan, Ewell, Finney, and Jones (2007) cited the UK’s Open University as an example of this model for online learning, with central design of course content and assessments that are then deployed by multiple teaching faculty. They noted that full-time faculty perform the design work, and adjunct faculty take on the teaching role (implementation only), as a cost-saving measure (Callan et al., 2007). This approach can be found in large online public institutions such as Rio Salado College (Smith, 2007) and private or for-profit institutions such as University of Phoenix (“The University of Phoenix Way,” 2005).

It is not only full-time faculty who perform the work of centralized design in distance education programs. Institutions may employ instructional designers to work with faculty on online course design (Berrett, 2016), and other specialists—including adjuncts—may be involved as well. Bates (2015) emphasized the value of a team approach to online course design:

It is best to work in a team. Blended and especially fully online learning require a range of skills that most instructors are unlikely to have. Good course design not only enables students to learn better but also controls faculty workload. Courses look better with good graphic and web design and professional video production. Specialist technical help frees up instructors to concentrate on the knowledge and skills that students need to develop. (“Key Takeaways”)

Cini & Prineas (2016) argued for economies of scale as a reason to employ centralized course design in online education. They observed the various inefficiencies of de-centralized design, including the ordering of multiple textbooks and the design of multiple versions of course materials. They also noted that inefficiencies of decentralized design are magnified in an online environment, where the work of technologists and instructional designers comes into play. They further argued that decentralized design is accompanied by the risk of an inconsistent learning model. With centralized design, it is more feasible to ensure that course content is consistent with established program and course outcomes and that established learning principles inform course design (Cini & Prineas, 2016).

Adjunct Faculty

As centralized models of course design have taken hold in higher education, particularly in online education, the use of adjunct faculty for classroom instruction, whether traditional or online, has also increased. The term “adjunct faculty” is used to describe part-time non-tenure-track faculty (Hoyt, 2012; Magda, Poulin, & Clinefelter, 2015).

The American Association of University Professors (2017) reported that part-time faculty increased from 24% of

the academic labor force in 1975 to 40% in 2015. In online education, the use of adjuncts has increased as well: In a 2015 survey of 202 higher education institutions, 56% reported an increase in the number of adjuncts who taught online only during the preceding year (Magda et al., 2015).

The employment of adjunct faculty leads to challenges that can be considered from the adjunct perspective and from the institutional perspective. Ultimately, addressing both perspectives is essential for creating a mutually beneficial employment relationship.

From the adjunct faculty perspective, many of the challenges fall into the category of fair labor practices and equity among different groups of faculty. Though the availability of precise compensation data is limited, it is widely acknowledged that adjunct faculty are compensated at lower rates than tenure-track faculty. A GAO report found that adjunct faculty at public institutions in North Dakota and Ohio are paid, on average, 75% less per course than full-time tenure-track faculty (United States Government Accountability Office, 2017). The report also documented disparities in the provision of health benefits, retirement benefits, and employment stability.

From the institutional perspective, ensuring the high quality of instruction is an essential issue to address. Despite the many talented and effective teachers in the adjunct labor force, some studies have shown lower student satisfaction, success, and retention rates in courses taught by adjuncts as compared to those taught by full-time faculty, whether face-to-face (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008; Jaeger & Hinz, 2008) or online (Mueller, Mandernach, & Sanderson, 2013). Proposals for improving these measures have included enhanced professional development, increased opportunities for engagement and participation in the institution and department, and improved working conditions.

The Compounding Challenges of Managing Online Adjuncts and Centralized Course Design

Both centralized course design and the staffing of adjunct instructors are growing practices that have been used as cost-saving measures in online multi-section courses. Together, they contribute to a practice of “unbundling” faculty roles, with one group of faculty designing courses—with “design” used here to refer to the analyze, design, develop, and evaluate steps—and another (the adjuncts) teaching them. This practice is consistent with Peters’s (2010) industrial model of distance education, which includes a trend toward division of labor. Peters (2010) explained that division of labor takes place in distance education when “teaching is divided into several functions that are assigned to different persons: authors, instructional designers, media specialists, correctors, tutors, counselors, moderators, evaluators etc.” (p. 15).

Along with any benefits of this division of labor, however, the separation of the teaching role from other typical faculty activities is accompanied by potential drawbacks. In fact, Peters (2010) went on to comment that the division of faculty labor “means that the teaching is detached from the original teacher or lecturer, disembodied and depersonalized” (p. 15). Such detachment includes the risks that the teaching faculty do not have access to the interaction and professional development that would benefit their job satisfaction and teaching effectiveness, and that course designers and administrators do not fully benefit from the teaching faculty’s expertise. Indeed, Senge (2006) has identified increased specialization as a barrier to systems thinking and a potential reason for suboptimal organizational performance.

Centralized course design, then, has the potential to compound any deficiencies that already exist in the engagement and participation of adjunct faculty, factors which may contribute to adjunct faculty’s satisfaction and teaching effectiveness. Furthermore, when adjunct faculty are not involved in the course design, the benefits of their contributions are lost, potentially resulting in less effective courses than could have been developed with their input. The detrimental effects of adjunct faculty’s isolation from departmental or program work may be even further amplified when online adjunct faculty work from geographically remote locations (Dolan, 2011). It is therefore essential to develop best practices for adjunct faculty participation in the centralized design of the online courses that they teach.

Participative Decision-Making

Participative decision-making (PDM) refers to employee involvement in decisions relevant to their work. Numerous studies have demonstrated positive effects of PDM in the workplace, as described in the meta-analysis by Spector (1986). While PDM can have positive workplace effects in a number of areas, two broad categories that stand out are employee performance and employee satisfaction.

Bouwman, Runhaar, Wesselink, and Mulder (2017) considered the effects of PDM on teacher performance by examining it as a mediator between transformational leadership and team learning. They found that PDM was an

effective tool for transformational leaders to empower teams of teachers, resulting in increased team commitment, task interdependence, and proactivity.

Turning to job satisfaction, Probst (2005) has shown PDM to be particularly useful to counter the negative effects of job insecurity. Probst's research builds on the demand-control model, which predicts that job strain will increase as job demands increase, and decrease as employee perception of control increases. The study supports the predicted positive effects of employee perception of control, by showing that PDM increases employee satisfaction, and in doing so, counters the negative effects of job insecurity on satisfaction (Probst, 2005). This finding is particularly relevant for adjunct faculty, given that they may experience high levels of job insecurity due to the contingent nature of their employment.

When implementing PDM, it is important to consider exactly what PDM will entail. Cotton, Vollrath, Froggatt, Lengnick-Hall, and Jennings (1988) reviewed 91 research studies on the effects of PDM on employee productivity and satisfaction, and found that PDM is not a unitary concept. They placed studies of PDM into six categories, based on the level of formality, direct or indirect participation, long-term versus short-term participation, and degree of access/influence. They found that the effects of PDM on productivity and satisfaction varied with PDM type. Overall, their findings suggested that PDM that is direct, long-term, and high-access/influence most strongly support productivity, but that lesser forms of PDM may be sufficient for employee satisfaction. However, the authors emphasized that various factors can influence the selection and effectiveness of forms of PDM in particular contexts (Cotton et al., 1988).

Motivation for Current Investigation

Centralized design of online courses and teaching by adjunct faculty are trends that are likely to be sustained in the coming years. These approaches will be most successful if careful consideration is given to the role of the adjunct faculty member. Limiting adjunct faculty to implementing course designs over which they have no influence is likely to result in discontent among faculty. It is easy to see this discontent in the reactions of faculty organizations that deny the validity of centralized course design. For example, both the American Association of University Professors and the Conference on College Communication and Composition have put out statements claiming the right of teaching faculty to retain control over what and how they teach (American Association of University Professors, 2013; Conference on College Composition and Communication, 2013). Neglecting to utilize input from the teaching faculty also risks the loss of valuable insight from those working "in the trenches." Collaboration with instructors will result in a stronger instructional strategy.

Despite the need for collaboration with adjunct faculty in course design, little research has been conducted to determine how this collaboration might best be achieved. In the decentralized liberal arts model, the role of faculty in course design has been taken for granted: faculty have traditionally held total control over the course design process. When this status quo is disrupted and teaching faculty no longer control the course design process, it is necessary to ask what mechanisms can facilitate their effective participation in course design. The part-time nature of adjunct work, along with the remote nature of online work, place additional constraints on this determination. This investigation will start by examining recent studies that discuss faculty participation in the course design process. It will then consider how existing practices might be maintained or modified to meet the needs of programs with adjunct faculty teaching centrally designed online courses.

Methodology

The current investigation examines existing empirical studies related to faculty participation in course or curriculum development. Studies for possible inclusion were identified through search of the Educational Research Information Center (ERIC) database. The initial search included resources from 2014–June 2018 (using the "last 5 years" limiter in ERIC) that included the terms "college faculty" AND "participation" AND (curriculum OR curricular OR course).

The identified resources were narrowed down through further examination, to identify those that address faculty participation in course or curriculum development. The selected studies were then analyzed according to the dimensions identified by Cotton et al. (1988): Do they support (or fail to support) formal or informal participation? Direct or indirect participation? Long-term or short-term participation? High or low access/influence?

Finally, the implications of these results were interpreted within the constraints of a program or department employing adjunct faculty who must teach from a common online course design. Recommended forms of effective faculty participation in that context are provided.

The remainder of the methodology section explains how the existence of formal/informal, direct/indirect, long-

term/short-term, and high/low access/influence participation was determined in examining the selected studies.

Formal and Informal Participation

Following Dachler and Wilpert (1978), Cotton et al. (1988) identified formal participation as participation that is institutionalized. It is codified by law or policy and follows a rule system. Informal participation arises in a spontaneous or grass-roots manner and proceeds without rules. Cotton et al. name casual conversation as an example of informal participation in the workplace.

In some of the selected studies, reference to committee memberships and participation commitments were taken as indicators of formal participation. When study authors stated that participation was formal or informal, this information was also taken into account.

Direct and Indirect Participation

Again citing Dachler and Wilpert (1978), Cotton et al. (1988) described direct participation as that which is “immediate” and “personal” (p. 9). Indirect participation involves representation. In a corporate context, this representation might take place through election of a board of directors by employee owners.

For this investigation, the concept of immediate versus representative participation was reinterpreted in terms of whether all faculty have an opportunity to engage in a particular type of participation (direct participation), or if that opportunity is limited to a smaller group of faculty who might be understood as representing the faculty at large (indirect participation).

Long-Term and Short-Term Participation

Cotton et al (1998) described short-term participation as participation that is “of limited duration, ranging from a single laboratory session to training sessions of several days” (p. 15). It is not clear exactly where to draw the line between short-term and long-term participation: For example, is participation for one month short-term or long term? Additionally, it seems relevant to draw a distinction between participation that is of limited extended duration (say, one year), and participation that is of a more permanent nature. In considering the selected studies, participation of up to one month was considered short-term. Participation from one month to one year was considered medium-term. Participation longer than one year was considered long-term.

High and Low Access/Influence Participation

Level of access/influence refers to the “amount of influence organization members can exert when making a given decision” (Cotton et al., 1998, p. 9). Dachler and Wilpert (1988) identified six levels of access/influence, from lowest to highest:

1. Employees are not notified of the decision in advance.
2. Employees are notified of the decision in advance.
3. Employees have the opportunity to state their opinions before the decision is made.
4. Employees’ opinions are considered when the decision is made.
5. Employees can veto a decision.
6. Employees make the decision.

When faculty are fully responsible for course design decisions, this was considered high access/influence. In a non-centralized course design model, this could mean that faculty are making course design decisions for their own courses only; thus, they have high influence but within a limited scope or domain.

Findings

The initial search yielded 65 results. Examination of the abstracts narrowed these down to 19 sources to be more closely examined. Of these, the researcher was able to obtain full text of 18. These 18 sources were read in full, and 10 were found to address faculty participation in course or curriculum development: seven journal articles, two book chapters, and one dissertation. Two of the journal articles describe the same study and are treated together, resulting in the following nine selected studies.

Baker and Beams (2016)

The article “Good CoP: What Makes a Community of Practice Successful?” (Baker & Beams, 2016) describes the

participation of faculty teaching a first-year science course at a single university in a community of practice, with the purpose of supporting student learning. The community of practice provides faculty with a direct mode of participation that can be long-term; participation is informal and lasts as long as the participant chooses. The authors noted that the community of practice began with some more formal practices to guide meetings, but the participants preferred a less formal approach. Given the informal nature of the community of practice, the level of access/influence that participants have on course and curriculum development seems to be low, or at least obscured. The authors wrote:

In terms of measuring outcomes, the influence of the CoP is likely to be longer-term and perhaps it will prove difficult to identify specific impacts. It may be possible to identify curriculum changes or introduction of a new approach that led to an improvement in pass-rate in a subject but tying that change back to the CoP might be difficult. (Baker & Beams, 2016, p. 78)

Betts and Heaston (2014) and Betts (2014)

“Build It But Will They Teach?: Strategies for Increasing Faculty Participation & Retention in Online & Blended Education” (Betts & Heaston, 2014) and “Factors Influencing Faculty Participation & Retention in Online & Blended Education” (Betts, 2014) analyze a research study surveying faculty and deans at a single university on factors likely to motivate or inhibit teaching of online or blended education courses. When these studies use the term “participation” they are referring to faculty’s teaching of online courses; however, they find that broader participation in course development and review are important factors in motivating willingness to teach. The authors recommended that institutions involve faculty in a formal online course development process and online course review process and described a model in which faculty participation is direct, long-term, and medium-high access/influence. Betts and Heaston (2014) asserted that “Faculty need to be involved in the development of online and blended program initiatives from the beginning” (“Recommendations” section). However, faculty in the study cited time constraints as an inhibiting factor.

Emery, Literte, and Chang (2014)

The book chapter entitled “Developing, Implementing, and Experiencing an Online Sociology Degree Completion Program at a Large California Public University” (Emery et al., 2014) describes the development of a new online sociology program by a team including faculty. This was formal and high influence/access participation that was indirect: not all faculty were able to participate in the program development process, so we can understand participating faculty as representing the faculty at large. Participation in the development process was long term but not indefinite.

The authors discussed the importance of motivating faculty to teach in the new online program, quoting a faculty member who highlights the need to consider “why we would rather teach in house for a program that we can control, rather than driving down the freeway and teaching in this other market” (Emery et al., 2014, p. 191).

Hunziger, McConnaughay, and Burge (2016)

The article “Curriculum Design for Campus-wide Learning” (Hunziger et al., 2016) describes faculty participation in an institution-wide curriculum redesign initiative, couching this participation in terms of long-term and informal professional development. The participation of faculty was sustained over multiple years, but the level of faculty participation varied. Some faculty participated on committees, while the rest had opportunities to provide feedback; this can be seen as an indirect participation model. The level of faculty access/influence is unclear, as the article does not specify how final curricular decisions were made.

Hutson and Downs (2015)

The article “The College STAR Faculty Learning Community: Promoting Learning for All Students through Faculty Collaboration” (Hutson & Downs, 2015) describes the participation of faculty from across disciplines at one university in a faculty learning community (FLC) that focused on implementing principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Faculty participated in cohorts, with each cohort active for one year.

Participants were selected from among the faculty, with the hopes that they would share their learning with the broader faculty, making this an example of formal, indirect (representative) participation. Participating faculty had high access/influence, in that they could implement the ideas they developed in the FLC in their own courses, and the one-year duration of their participation is considered long-term.

Parker, Gleichsner, Adedokun, and Forney (2016)

In the article “Targeting Change: Assessing a Faculty Learning Community Focused on Increasing Statistics Content in Life Science Curricula,” Parker et. al (2016) described the participation of life science faculty in an FLC to learn about and implement new pedagogical approaches. Participation in the FLC was formal, with faculty making a commitment to participate for a given period of time. It was direct and high-influence participation, with participation available to all faculty, who then had the ability to develop new ideas that they could implement in their own courses. While early FLC cohorts were asked to make a year-long commitment, this changed to one semester for later cohorts, to accommodate faculty time constraints.

Sherman et al. (2014)

The book chapter “Integrating Course Quality within a Community of Practice” (Sherman et al., 2014) describes an online university’s adoption of Quality Matters (QM) standards. Adoption involved a community of practice allowing broad faculty and staff learning and participation. Both formal and informal participation were accommodated; formal participation took place through the Course Quality Committee and the steering committee, while various other training and professional activities provided less formal entry to the community of practice. Participation was direct and could be long-term, depending on the wishes of the participant. Level of influence/access was higher for those who participated formally.

Surpless, Bushey, and Halx (2014)

The article “Developing Scientific Literacy in Introductory Laboratory Courses: A Model for Course Design and Assessment” (Surpless et al., 2014) describes the redesign of an introductory geology course. The article attributes the redesign to “faculty,” making it clear that faculty have ownership of this course and were the primary, if not only, contributors to the redesign. Participation in the redesign process appears to have been formal, medium-term, and high access/influence. It is not clear whether participation was direct, with opportunity for broad participation, or indirect, with a small group of faculty representing the faculty at large.

Yowe (2016)

Yowe’s (2016) dissertation, *Faculty Perceptions of the Online Course Review Process: Does it Improve Quality?*, examines the online course review process at a community college. As part of this examination, the author described the existing state of faculty participation in course development at the college. This participation relied on formal training and mentoring programs, particularly when faculty were new to online course development. Although specific durations of these programs are not specified, it seems to be short-term; training and mentoring are discussed as preparation to teach online or design courses, not as ongoing activities. Participation in course development was both direct and medium-high access, as faculty have the opportunity to design their own online courses.

Analysis

The studies identified and selected for this investigation cover a range of institutional contexts. The modality of instruction in the selected studies is presented in Table 1.

Modality of Instruction	Studies
online	Betts & Heaston (2014) / Betts (2014) Emery et al. (2014) Sherman et al. (2014) Yowe (2016)
both	Hutson & Downs (2015)
unspecified; likely face-to-face	Baker & Beames (2016) Hunziger et al. (2016) Parker et al. (2016) Surpless et al. (2014)

Table 1: Modality of Instruction in Selected Studies

Table 2 summarizes the findings for each study on the four dimensions of participation: formal vs. informal, direct vs. indirect, long-term vs. short-term, and high vs. low access/influence. The column “Form of Faculty Participation” uses the language of each study to identify the type of activity in which faculty participated.

Study	Form of Faculty Participation	Formal/ Informal	Direct/ Indirect	Long-term/ Short-term	High/Low Access/Influence
Baker & Beames (2016)	Community of practice	Informal	Direct	Long	Low/Unclear
Betts & Heaston (2014); Betts (2014)	Development of online programs and courses; course review	Formal	Direct	Long	Medium-high
Emery et al. (2014)	Program development	Formal	Indirect	Medium-Long	High
Hunziger et al. (2016)	Curriculum redesign	Informal	Indirect	Long	Unclear
Hutson & Downs (2015)	Faculty learning community	Formal	Indirect	Long (one year)	High
Parker et al. (2016)	Faculty learning community	Formal	Direct	Medium: reduced from 1 year to 1 semester	High
Sherman et al. (2014)	Community of practice	Formal and informal	Direct	Long or Short	High or Low
Surpless et al. (2014)	Course redesign	Formal	Unclear	Medium	High
Yowe (2016)	Training and mentoring; course development	Formal	Direct	Short-term	Medium-high

Table 2: Characteristics of Participation in Selected Studies

The institutions and programs discussed in the studies varied in their levels of centralization of decision-making about curriculum and course design, though the studies do not always explicitly state the degree to which course design is centralized. However, there is indication of the varying scopes of influence in some of the studies. For example, it is clear in the Parker et al. (2016) and Hutson and Downs (2015) studies that faculty had the ability to implement their ideas in the design of their own courses. The Surpless et al. (2014) study, on the other hand, describes the redesign of a course by a group of faculty, implying some degree of centralization. In all of these cases, there may be some aspects of course design that are centralized and some that are left to individual faculty, but such details are not specified in the articles.

In many cases, the scope of faculty influence in decision making can be fluid. For example, faculty may have high influence over the course sections that they teach, and this influence may be expanded as they share ideas with other faculty and administrators. Baker and Beames (2016) described this phenomenon when they observed that faculty participation in a community of practice may result in “incremental adoption of good practice and in the longer-term there may be a substantial change in culture” (p. 78).

Discussion

Formal vs. Informal Participation

The majority of selected studies focused on formal modes of faculty participation. Formal participation can take place through membership on ad hoc or standing committees or through other established participatory processes. Some studies documented a combination of both formal and informal participation. In the case of the community of practice discussed by Baker and Beames (2016), participation changed from more formal to less formal, following faculty preference.

In a context with online adjunct faculty, formal modes of participation are necessary to ensure that faculty have an opportunity to contribute to decisions. Online adjunct faculty are likely to work remotely and to work for multiple employers. Both of these factors mean that opportunities for informal participation—talks over lunch or in hallways—are limited. Opportunities for participation must be deliberately provided and structured to facilitate remote participation by faculty with varying schedules and availability.

Direct vs. Indirect Participation

For the purposes of this investigation, direct participation was defined as participation that is open to all faculty, while indirect participation was defined as that which is open to a select group of faculty who can be said to represent the faculty at large. The selected studies included examples of both direct and indirect participation. However, even when participation was direct—when all faculty had the opportunity to participate—not all faculty chose to participate.

In a context where adjuncts comprise a substantial proportion of faculty, it is to be expected that their desire and ability to participate in curriculum and course design activities will vary. Some adjunct faculty may value the opportunity to teach a centrally designed course as it is provided to them, and some faculty may be limited in their ability to participate in course design activities by obligations outside the institution. While it may be possible and desirable to have options for direct participation, open to all adjunct faculty, coordinators should be prepared for the possibility of low or unpredictable participation. In situations where more predictability is required, such as time-sensitive work on course design, a representative (indirect) participation model may be preferred.

Long-Term vs. Short-Term Participation

The selected studies clearly favored medium- to long-term (one month to longer than one year) participation over short-term participation. Nevertheless, constraints on faculty time were sometimes cited as a concern (Parker et al., 2016; Sherman et al., 2014), particularly for online faculty (Betts, 2014; Betts and Heaston, 2014).

It may be wise to increase opportunities for short-term participation, such as focus groups, for online adjunct faculty. While some faculty will be willing to engage in longer-term participation, short-term participation opportunities will allow for the inclusion of a larger and more diverse group of faculty.

High vs. Low Access/Influence

The faculty in the selected studies often had a high degree of access/influence. In many cases, this can be attributed to decentralized course design: faculty held nearly total control over the design of the courses they taught.

Centrally designed courses taught by adjunct faculty are accompanied by constraints in the degree of influence that can be granted to the faculty at large. Making course design decisions by consensus, or even by vote, is logistically impractical and unlikely to be effective when a centrally designed course may be taught by dozens or even hundreds of adjunct faculty. When participation in course design is open to all adjunct faculty (direct participation), it may be advisable to place this participation at Dachler and Wilpert's (1988) third or fourth level—faculty can state their opinions, and these opinions may be considered in final decision-making.

Faculty Learning

Though this investigation undertook to survey recent literature related to faculty participation in course and curriculum development, a striking result of examining the selected studies is the focus on faculty learning. Two studies focused on faculty learning communities (Hutson & Downs, 2015; Parker et al., 2016), and two focused on communities of practice (Baker & Beames, 2016; Sherman et al., 2014). Other studies made reference to faculty learning as well: for example, Betts and Heaston's (2014) recommendation for faculty training on online course development and Yowe's (2016) discussion of training and mentoring.

Faculty learning is inseparable from faculty participation in course design because participants must develop their knowledge in order to maximize the value of their contributions. Yowe (2016) pointed out that “In most cases, teachers are subject matter experts and lack the experience or knowledge to design an online course” (p. 20). In establishing avenues for faculty participation, it is crucial to consider what expertise faculty currently hold and how their knowledge and abilities can be developed in order to meet needs that fall outside of their current expertise. An additional issue to be considered is how to focus faculty development efforts so that new faculty expertise supplements and does not replicate expertise held elsewhere in the institution, such as with instructional designers and media specialists.

Conclusion

This investigation sought to determine what recent scholarly literature said about trends and recommendations for faculty participation in course design. Of nine relevant studies that were identified from a recent five-year period, four focused exclusively on online or blended learning contexts (Betts/Betts & Heaston, 2014; Emery et al., 2014; Sherman et al., 2014; Yowe, 2016), four explicitly mentioned adjunct or part-time faculty (Betts/Betts & Heaston, 2014; Emery et al., 2014; Hunziger et al., 2016; Yowe, 2016), and four explicitly or by implication dealt with a centralized course design model (Emery et al., 2014; Sherman et al., 2014; Surpless, et al., 2014; Yowe, 2016). No literature dealing specifically with adjunct participation in centralized design of online courses was identified, indicating a research gap in this area. With this model likely to grow in the future, it is important to give greater attention to desirable forms of faculty participation.

Remote adjunct faculty are a heterogeneous group, and not all faculty will be willing or able to participate in the same way. Administrators may wish to consider a multi-pronged approach to seeking faculty participation in course design. Direct, medium-influence participation methods will allow input from the largest group of faculty. Periodic faculty meetings or online discussion forums can afford faculty with opportunities to provide opinions and feedback on proposed course design elements. Smaller groups of faculty may be chosen for participation in higher-influence participation avenues, such as course design and review committees. Care should be taken to ensure that adjunct faculty are compensated appropriately for these activities. In addition, participation opportunities should be designed with consideration for the time constraints that adjunct faculty are likely to face.

Finally, the importance of faculty learning and its relevance to participation in course design cannot be overemphasized. When faculty are asked to participate in course design, they should also have access to learning opportunities aligned with this activity.

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[Back to the Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration Contents](#)