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The professional role, tasks, and skills of online community college faculty are evolving. This chapter describes the factors that influence the skill set needed for online faculty to be successful.

Essential Tasks and Skills for Online Community College Faculty

Vernon C. Smith

A recent commentary in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* exclaimed, “I trained for it, I tried it, and I’ll never do it again. While online teaching may be the wave of the future (although I desperately hope not), it is not for me” (Clift, 2009). This experienced college professor went on to lament the difficulties of communicating virtually, the design of the curriculum, the challenges and workload associated with managing the course management system, and the loss of control over familiar classroom processes. Ironically, the reasons given for not teaching online also hinted at the skills that an online faculty must master to be successful, including ways that this faculty role is transforming.

While purposely choosing not to teach online may still be possible for faculty at community colleges, this may not be an option in the future. Examine any posting for a faculty position, and notice the level of technology skills or online teaching experience that has been incorporated into the minimum job qualifications. The use of technology and the sheer volume of courses moving online in community colleges are undeniable. It is no secret that significant enrollment growth for community colleges has the greatest potential through online courses. The Instructional Technology Council (2009) survey reported an 11.3 percent increase in distance education enrollments above campus enrollments for associate’s-level colleges, with an 18 percent increase from fall 2005 to fall 2006 for e-earning enrollments specifically. Allen and Seaman (2008) note that these institutions

provide over half of all online courses to undergraduate students and are “overrepresented among the online student population compared to their share of higher education enrollments” (p. 6). It follows that if community colleges offer mostly online courses, there are community college faculty teaching those courses.

Describing an online faculty member or community college faculty member may soon be synonymous. The role of the online faculty and the knowledge and skills associated with the growth of online course enrollments are transforming the nature and characteristics of community college faculty as a profession. This transformation is highly influenced by the essential tasks needed to create and deliver an online course. To accomplish these tasks, an online community college faculty member must master new skills that incorporate new technologies and new instructional assumptions and strategies. The model for creating and delivering online courses, and the efforts by faculty members to rebundle their role, meaning to maintain control and performing all the tasks themselves influences which skills will be required to be a successful online community college faculty member. This will transform the skills, the role, and the community college faculty as a profession.

This chapter identifies the essential tasks, skills, and knowledge that online community college faculty members need to master as a profession in a dynamic time of change, including the online course production models that enhance or detract from that mastery.

Faculty as a Profession

In academia, the faculty as a profession emerged from its origins in the scholars' guild. In contrast to other craft guilds, the scholars' guild has survived in its same basic form since the Middle Ages. (Think of the robes and academic garb that we see during commencement ceremonies as an example of a Middle Age fashion show.) Community college faculty have emulated the professoriate's teaching and service roles while deemphasizing the research tasks typically associated with the university professoriate. Modern professional power rests on the ability of a profession—in this case, community college faculty—to control their membership and their workplace conditions, including the knowledge, tools, and means of production (Krause, 1996).

Changes to the professional role and its core professional power come about through a number of internal and external forces. Internal forces include the acquisition of new knowledge or skills and the internal dynamics that stratify the profession itself (Hughes, 1994). For example, the use of teaching assistants instead of tenured faculty, or part-time faculty over full-time faculty, is an example of an internal stratification that alters the nature of the profession. External forces include the introduction of new technologies, market demand, and interprofessional conflict over the pro-

professional domain and social movements (Abbott, 1988). New technologies, as the Internet once was, and the ability to organize work in new ways have the most profound effect on a profession and are its “central destroyer” (Abbott, 1988), meaning that technologies replace the need for human expertise embodied in a profession.

In the case of online teaching and learning, nearly all facets that challenge and shape a profession both internally and externally are present. Rhoades (1998) has noted how the professional domains of faculty are being increased, altered, or destroyed as new technologies are introduced. These new technologies and work processes may remain with faculty as they attempt to control and rebundle their role or may be championed by groups other than faculty members, for example, instructional designers.

In summary, professions complete a series of essential tasks through special skills and knowledge that they have obtained over time through affiliation with the profession. When the skills and knowledge change, or when others can obtain that knowledge and use those skills, the profession either moves to protect its knowledge or skills in its domain, or it loses control.

Essential Tasks

What are the essential tasks and the corresponding skills that an online community college faculty member must master? The answer is complex and depends on a number of factors. What is clear is that an established body of literature has described these online faculty tasks and skills in specific terms, founded in the concept of the unbundling of the faculty role.

All professions consist of bundles of tasks (Hughes, 1994). Through specialization, each of the task bundles can be unbundled and performed by substitutes: by technologies and machines or by other people who specialize in those specific tasks. In the online course context, these essential tasks needed to create and deliver an online course from the conceptualization of the course to submitting final grade rosters have gone through an identification process over the past forty years. These unbundled tasks also correspond to the literature on what skills online faculty need to master (Paulson 2002; Levin, Kater, and Wagoner, 2006; Smith and Rhoades, 2006).

Troutt (1979), who wrote before the rise of online courses, separated the teaching and assessment tasks from the teaching and advising tasks that community college faculty normally perform. Starting from Wang’s (1975) notion of specialization around educational tasks or functions, Troutt described the rise of advisement centers and advisors as specialists to perform faculty tasks with the assumption that advisors would have more incentive to perform the advising tasks than faculty members would. Troutt described these roles as “a corporate rather than an individual responsibility,” and he suggested that “an advisor would assume a mentor or tutor role . . . to assess what the students’ needs are to guide them through their educational experience” (p. 258). Troutt identified advising, mentoring,

and tutoring as separate tasks normally performed by a faculty member that could be unbundled.

Daniel (1996) described the unbundling of the faculty role at the British Open University. In a tutoring model, distance learning courses were designed and created as standardized courses. Likewise, Twigg (1996) described the unbundling of the faculty role as an essential process in the redesign of large-enrollment, technology-mediated courses. Technology substituted professional expertise in the form of course management systems; automated assessment of exercises, quizzes, and tests; and tutorials would be coupled with the substitution of lower-cost labor in order to achieve greater learning efficiencies and cost savings (Twigg, 2003). Twigg (1996) also identified four faculty tasks that could be unbundled: development of course content, delivery of instruction, mediation, and evaluation.

Jewett (2000) and Boettcher (2000) used Twigg's (1996, 2003) description of unbundled tasks in course redesign to present an economic model with unbundled tasks in order to measure productivity in distance learning courses, including online courses. Jewett collapsed the essential tasks into three functions: preparing instructional materials, presenting the materials in the classroom, and student-related tasks such as "interaction regarding course content and evaluation of homework, quizzes, examinations, projects, and papers, up to and including assignment of course grades" (p. 101–108). He further divided the student-related tasks into interaction and evaluation. Jewett commented, "This 'unbundling' of the components of faculty workload represents one of the key differences between distributed instruction (online courses) and classroom instruction when the various instructional activities . . . have usually been performed by the individual faculty member teaching classroom courses" (p. 117). In other words, the essential tasks and the skills to perform those tasks in online courses were differentiated and identifiable.

Goodyear and others (2000) reported the results of workshops involving practitioners and theorists who identified the essential competencies and the corresponding online faculty tasks: process facilitator, advisor-counselor, assessor, researcher, content facilitator, technologist, designer, and manager-administrator. In this more detailed list of essential tasks, the tasks of design and interaction became more apparent.

Paulson (2002) conceptualized five essential faculty tasks that could be unbundled but acknowledged that academic advising "could be included as a sixth activity, especially in baccalaureate institutions." She identified these faculty tasks or functions:

- Designing the course or curriculum
- Developing the course or curriculum by selecting appropriate instructional methods and course materials, or creating those course materials

- Delivering the subject matter previously selected either in person (lectures, presentations, and so forth) or through the use of various forms of media
- Mediating (also called “tutoring”) the learning process, which helps students understand materials in ways tailored to their individual learning styles and levels of understanding
- Assessing individual student learning through appropriate methods and assignments designed to certify the attainment of a given level of competence.

Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) noted that the control of the intellectual property and the commodification of courses were a means of unbundling essential faculty tasks. They gave examples such as the use of specialists, part-time faculty, and low-cost faculty as ways faculty tasks were unbundled in community college online course settings. This analysis identified such specific tasks as design, delivery, evaluation, assessment, and technical and academic advising that were unbundled along lines that reduced costs, controlled intellectual property, and increased managerial control.

Levin, Kater, and Wagoner (2006), relying on Paulson’s (2002) conceptualization of unbundling, indicate that community college faculty are unbundled in terms of the “loss of the professional identity as an autonomous expert” because of the use of part-time and contingent faculty, managers, and technicians to perform traditional faculty tasks. They thus recognized unbundling within the context of globalizing community colleges, in particular, with the delivery of instruction through the use of technology.

In their study of Web-based community college courses in a multi-campus urban community college district, Smith and Rhoades (2006) confirmed the essential faculty tasks that could be unbundled from the literature and identified a previously unidentified essential task: improving the online course in a systematic fashion:

- *Design.* The selection of teaching and learning pedagogies, strategies, and methods, including learning objectives, goals, and outcomes
- *Content.* The curriculum or subject matter, including the course materials and competencies needed to be presented in order to reach the objectives and expected learning outcomes
- *Development.* The creation and placement of the content in order to be viewed digitally on the Internet, usually through placement of the content into a course management system
- *Delivery.* The transmission of the developed course to students using the Internet
- *Grading.* The evaluation and feedback of student assessments (quizzes, papers, exams, portfolios, and so on)
- *Interaction.* Communication, mediation, and motivation with students

- *Improvement.* The change process to improve course effectiveness, including its documentation
- *Advising.* Answering curricular, programmatic, college, and other questions from students

Essential Skills

The essential skills that an online faculty member must master correspond to the essential tasks. The most familiar remain based on sound instruction and pedagogy: grading, interacting, advising, and content creation. Experienced faculty members know the ins and outs of grading assignments, providing feedback for student improvement, and answering questions. This is familiar ground regardless of whether the teaching is done in a classroom or online. The same may be said of content creation. Faculty members seek not only to convey the content but also inspire and cause the students to consider the subject matter in new, analytical, and critical ways.

While these tasks seem more familiar, the other essential tasks often require the faculty member to journey to new territory. Instructional design is a discipline that has made significant strides as an empirical science over the past few decades, especially with the computer and Web-based learning. New technologies cannot be overemphasized. Course management systems are now approaching their third or fourth iterations in complexity. Consider how many faculty refer to teaching their “Blackboard” or “WebCT” course instead of an “Internet” or “Web-based” course. Delivery options have also changed dramatically within the past five years. Second Life, Facebook, Twitter, smartphones, and social media or Web 2.0 means of delivery have altered the channels for delivering courses to the point that mobile learning has become a subset of online learning.

These skill sets have been confirmed in various studies. In a meta-analysis of the literature covering essential skills and knowledge for teaching online, Lee and Hirumi (2004) identified six essential skills and accompanying subskills that were consistently identified across the academic literature: in order of importance, interaction, management, organization/instructional design, technology, content knowledge, and teamwork skills. In terms of the familiar ground versus the new skill set, take note that the first two skills are familiar, while the next cluster of skills takes the faculty member into new territory. Lee and Hirumi (2004) emphasized this point when they noted, “Even though many educators urged the competency of technology in online teaching, this ranking also presents a trend that online education is driven by pedagogical concerns instead of technological concerns” (p. 536).

But even the familiar territory is changing. Interaction, management, and content knowledge no longer mean the same thing in online courses as they do in traditional courses. By definition, the application of these skills is different for online courses. Kim and Bonk (2006) reported the findings

of a survey sent to over twelve thousand experienced online college professors, instructional designers, and administrators that articulated the perceived future of online teaching. Although these findings suggest that new technologies will have a significant impact on the skills online faculty must master, institutional factors and pedagogical competence are ranked as greater in importance than technological skills competence. “Monetary support” and “pedagogical competency of online instructors” precede “technical competency of online instructors” and “improvements in online technologies.” Technologies were followed by “marketing” and “rigorous quality management in the accreditation process,” suggesting a mix of both faculty skills and institutional support. Kim and Bonk report “that this study found that the most important [pedagogical] skills for an online instructor during the next few years will be how to moderate or facilitate learning and how to develop or plan for high-quality online courses” (p. 27). Surprisingly, breaking down the reported skills corresponds with the essential tasks required to create and deliver an online course. These skills were, in order of top ranking and percentage: course developer (66.4 percent), facilitator or moderator, (65.8 percent), subject matter expert (55.7 percent), instructor or lecturer (51.0 percent), student counselor or advisor (36.1 percent), technology trainer (30.3 percent), and program coordinator or developer (28.6 percent).

One might ask when developing a course or training in new technologies became a pedagogical skill faculty need to know. But the nature of online courses has pushed and reshaped the essential tasks and skill sets that faculty have traditionally held. This new pedagogical skill set is dominated by instructional design theories and principles that describe how to accomplish the essential online course tasks. These principles prescriptively dictate how specific online tasks should be done, especially the design tasks, and what the final product should look like. These theories and principles are the basis for new instructional assumptions and strategies for online faculty. Implicit in these instructional design principles are the skills needed to create a quality online course—the quality standard being defined by these same principles. The most advanced application of these principles, outside the many educational technology graduate programs, is Quality Matters. Quality Matters (QM) is a quality rubric based on research literature and recognized best practices for online teaching and learning. The rubric is characterized by eight quality standards divided into 40 subcategories that prescribe minimal online instructional quality. Using this QM rubric, an experienced faculty member may choose to participate in a peer review process to evaluate the quality of his or her online course design. In general, the instructional strategies prescribe the need to align measurable learning objectives to the presentation of course materials, the practice of new content, and the assessment of learning outcomes. In addition, instructional strategies include the grading and interaction strategies identified as essential faculty tasks, but more commonly referred to in

terms of preparation to teach, facilitation of the learning, and communication with students. Although it is new territory for many online community college faculty, they are learning the essential tasks and pedagogical skills through trial-and-error. As noted, the technological skills are not as important as the instructional assumptions and strategies associated with the pedagogical approach, which are shaped by the field of instructional design.

Online Course Production Model

How an online course is produced has a tremendous impact on what knowledge and which skills the faculty member will need to master, whether those skills are related to new technologies or instructional design. The type of production can increase, change, or eliminate the need for acquiring new skills and knowledge and reposition the faculty member's traditional place in the teaching and learning process. In any case, the type of production model in which the faculty member works helps indicate which skills and knowledge he or she will need to be successful.

When a faculty member performs all of the essential tasks in an online course, the professional role can be described as tightly bundled; in other words, the faculty member maintains control over the how the work is performed, who performs it, and how the quality is determined. He or she shoulders the full weight and responsibility for performing these tasks. When the essential tasks are performed by others or by using technologies as a substitute for faculty interaction, the professional role becomes unbundled. Online course production models exist on a continuum from bundled tasks done by the faculty member to highly unbundled tasks performed by others. This helps to share the load the faculty bears but also tends to decrease the need for mastery of all of the essential skills and tasks.

The production of online courses in community colleges can be classified as three models: craft, collegial, and virtual assembly line (Smith and Rhoades, 2006). In each model, the knowledge and skills needed to accomplish the essential tasks are completed in similar and contrasting ways. Depending on the model, the faculty member may or may not need to perform the essential task and therefore may or may not need to acquire the corresponding skill set.

Craft Production. Generally the craft model is characterized by a single faculty member working as the primary producer of all the essential tasks. In the model, faculty members work collaboratively in teams to accomplish the essential tasks. The full unbundling of the faculty role happens in the virtual assembly line model as the essential online course tasks are segmented, specialized, produced, and delivered by other professionals and semiprofessionals. The faculty member may perform some or none of the essential tasks needed to create and deliver an online course.

In the craft model, the faculty role is highly bundled. The same faculty member performs all of aspects of the online production process: course

design, content, development, delivery, grading, interaction, improvement, and advising. This model produces mastery in all of the skill sets over time. Craft model faculty members do their own research and development on what will be best for their online course in terms of pedagogy and technology. They learn instructional and graphic design principles. They become skilled at putting courses into the course management system and figuring out how to make that system work with the student information systems. They tackle testing and proctoring issues, constantly improve their online courses, and conduct the advising tasks for their students. No essential task is ignored.

Because the tasks are performed by a single faculty member and are highly bundled, the result is a greater impetus for that faculty to increase professional knowledge and skills development. He or she tends to be a full-time faculty member in the craft model. This is the default online course production model. Course management systems are implicitly or explicitly structured around the assumptions and characteristics found in this way of accomplishing these essential tasks. Most online community college courses fit into the craft model.

Collegial Production. Much like the craft model, the collegial model for online production uses the professional and collegial relationships of faculty to accomplish all of the essential tasks and processes needed to create and deliver the online course. These faculty members work within their departments and through organizational structures across campus e-learning committees and in conjunction with teaching and learning centers. Informal collegial networks provide the support to create and collaborate on courses.

Much like the traditional guild model, new or curious online faculty work with colleagues who are experienced in the use of the course management systems and the types of pedagogical approaches most effective as determined by the technology or media and their own experience. Professional relationships, where there are informal mentoring and apprenticeships, often are developed. The new faculty member analyzes the structure, format, and instructional strategies found in previous online courses and then consults with the experienced faculty member to understand the rationale and history behind the syllabus, lessons, assignments, exams, and so forth.

In the collegial model, full-time faculty members work together to complete all of the tasks of course production, with minor assistance from other personnel, mostly for technology support and access to college servers. While colleagues may specialize in certain essential tasks, all members are expected eventually to master all of the tasks as well. For example, one faculty member may work on the production of the assessment instruments for the grading tasks, while another works on putting the course lessons into the course management system to accomplish the development tasks. The collegial model increases the technology skills and professional

expertise during all phases of the production process. Because the tasks may be performed by one or more faculty members, including part-time faculty members, the collegial model can be described as being partially unbundled. This model emerges as college departments seek to increase the number of online courses available. Each faculty member builds on another's skills and knowledge by creating a synergistic online course that is then shared by colleagues with their students.

Virtual Assembly Line Production. Whenever the virtual assembly line model exists, the faculty role becomes highly unbundled. Essential tasks, functions, and processes become the domain of part-time faculty or other nonfaculty professionals. A team assembles virtually, in many cases never having face-to-face or synchronous meetings with all team members present. The full-time faculty team member may be asked to take care of the content tasks as a “content specialist” or “subject matter expert.” Course design is done by instructional designers, and content can be created by part-time faculty members hired for that specific task. The placement of the course materials into the course management system, the coding, and other development tasks are performed by technicians who specialize in those skills. The delivery is assisted by other technicians found in the information technology or distance learning course office. Grading and interaction may be done by a faculty member, but such tasks are most likely performed by part-time faculty or other graders who may not be faculty. Improvement tasks fall to instructional designers, and advising tasks are done by advisors in the student services or student enrollment offices.

In this model, the entire production process, starting with course design, is directed and coordinated by instructional designers who may or may not report to faculty. The model uses a temporary workforce in an inverse ratio to full-time faculty where few full-time faculty take part in the essential tasks, and large numbers of part-time faculty and managed professionals do the work in their place. The result is a complex organizational structure, highly specialized and bureaucratic in nature. Because the tasks are performed by a number of people—instructional designers, graphic designers, Web specialists, advisors, and so forth—the virtual assembly line model is highly unbundled. Technology is for the instructional technologists or IT department, and pedagogical issues are for the instructional designers. Faculty do not have the same need or impetus to increase their professional knowledge and skills development in the virtual assembly line model. In fact, it may be in the interest of the faculty to move to the heart of their professional domain and concentrate on the subject matter of their discipline to preserve their remaining unique skills and knowledge. This model can be found in colleges with large numbers of online courses where there has been a strategic effort to offer online courses in the attempt to reach economies of scale.

Rebundling Essential Tasks. Of the three models of online course production, the bundled craft model is the default mode as well as the pre-

ferred state for faculty members. By controlling the production of essential tasks, faculty members maintain their professional role. Given the opportunity, they will try to rebundle their professional role despite the production model. Both a sense of responsibility to complete essential tasks associated with the faculty member's sense of professional identity and the desire to meet perceived student needs are primary drivers for faculty members to rebundle their roles in online community college courses (Smith, 2008).

Rebundling the essential tasks helps faculty members determine who accomplishes the work and how the essential tasks will be organized and accomplished, and it makes the determination of how and when online courses will be offered and by whom. This rebundling becomes possible for the faculty member through involvement in all of the essential online course tasks and mastering the skill sets associated with the tasks. The extent to which a faculty member does not possess the skill sets for essential online course tasks, the greater the likelihood is that he or she will run into a great deal of frustration, like that expressed by the faculty member who said that she would "never do it again."

Alternatively, the tasks will be performed by others, such as instructional designers and Web specialists. These nonfaculty members then gain the skill sets while the faculty member, if not gaining more knowledge and expertise in some way, becomes marginalized, deskilled, and unbundled. Clearly there are trade-offs between lightening the load and supporting faculty members and creating new relationships that make the faculty member more dependent on other specialists in order to teach online classes. Rebundling is a natural tendency because of the desire on the part of faculty to maintain control over the work they perform.

Suggestions for Practice

As part of the ongoing professional development in an online community college setting, faculty members, administrators, and online course staff should identify the model of course production supported at their college. The strategic placement of teaching online courses should be examined within the context of the college's future trajectory. With this understanding, the essential tasks that faculty members will need to perform become apparent. Next, the institutional support systems and personnel, such as instructional technologists and instructional and Web designers, should be identified. Faculty members should also conduct a self-inventory of their own skill set, ideally with the assistance of experienced online faculty members. Learning and mastering the technologies associated with a course management system cannot be avoided. The level of mastery would be highly determined by the type of course production model used at the community college. Familiarity with the course management systems and other online technologies for the presentation of content and interaction with

students can be obtained through many educational opportunities—again, depending on the course production model. Finally, faculty members, administrators, and all of those involved in online courses should approach the acquisition of these skills in a systematic and patient manner. Great faculty can become even greater as they become familiar with this new professional territory, its tasks, and required skills.

Online courses are growing at a rapid pace in all of higher education, and especially in community colleges. Over the past decade, creating and delivering online courses has also led to new and essential tasks that faculty must accomplish, and new skill sets accompany the essential tasks. These new skills incorporate the selection and application of new technologies and new instructional assumptions and strategies. The online course production model used to create and deliver online courses, and the efforts by faculty members to control and rebundle their role, influence which faculty skills will be required to be successful as online faculty. This will transform the skills, the role, and the community college faculty as a profession.

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