The brave new world of e-learning: a department's response to mandated change

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This paper offers a case history of one university academic department's experience with the pressure to create online scholarship opportunities for professional educators. As tertiary education transforms its course delivery to Web-based learning management platforms, instructors are challenged to transform career-long practice suddenly and without warning. The department in question focuses on school leadership and primarily serves mid-career professionals studying at the post-baccalaureate level. Practical and political challenges encountered by faculty members and the measures taken to tackle them are addressed. Institutional support initiatives are described, along with perspectives on the consequences of sudden technology migration to the quality of teaching, learning, and lifestyle. Using various data sources, faculty and student responses to institutional change are assessed, with implications for further policy and practice.

Keywords: leadership; change; transformation; technology; teaching; learning

Introduction

In this article we examine the particular challenges of graduate-level university scholarship for school leadership in a rural, geographically remote region of American Appalachia. Relative to more populated areas, this region is poorly served with technology and transportation infrastructure. Yet it is confronted by similar professional pressures as more affluent, better served regions. Faced with sharp competition for students from other institutions and severe regional difficulties in travel, the university that serves as the setting for this experience, Western Carolina University (WCU), has launched strategies to make formal graduate education accessible and engaging to its professional constituents.

WCU's Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations (ELF) deals with demands consistent with state and nationwide educational leadership issues, among them the recruitment of qualified personnel to administer elementary and secondary schools successfully. Responding to the state-level elimination of baccalaureate add-on certification for principals over 10 years ago, ELF was awarded a Master of School Administration (MSA) degree (a 42 hour program) and a doctorate in Educational Leadership (Ed.D., 60 to 66 hours) offered through the Department. Additionally, a

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post-Master's specialist certificate (Ed.S., 36 hours) is offered for students who seek a credential beyond the master's and the school superintendency professional license.

Thus, we address questions of faculty and instructional development from the holistic perspective of institutional change, placing the particular challenges of online efficacy in the larger context of teaching and learning excellence. How do we improve scholarship for deep understanding? What implication does deep scholarship hold for teaching and learning in general? Once these principles are better understood institutionally, where do they point in terms of online, on-site and blended pedagogy? We expect that this inquiry will help inform the broader conversation about teaching, learning and tertiary institutional transformation against a backdrop of widespread digitization, changing student demographics, and increased market competition.

Supporting data for this paper range from quantitatively reported results from scaled surveys to narrative impressions culled from interviews and open-ended responses to "textbox" survey questions. Program enrollment statistics, training and professional development data, and expert opinion are analyzed against the backdrop of relevant field research on faculty development, technology integration, and online learning efficacy. Data analysis will attempt to reveal patterns of information that will inform future policy, organization, and program development.

Leadership and change under pressure

In this paper we offer a detailed examination of the challenging nature of technological transformation for faculty and students; describe the tactics and strategies of an educational leadership department to confront them, report on various assessments of faculty and student response to these transformations, discuss the respective responsibilities of the university units, faculty members and students to confront these challenges successfully; and recommend future courses of action.

Theoretical and practical framework

The literature on technology-driven organizational change in higher education is rich and deep. From top-level university administration (Brody, 2005) to front-line teaching practitioners (Kassop, 2003), computer-networked instruction is now accepted not simply as an immovable elephant on the table of tertiary instruction but also as a vehicle offering unprecedented opportunity for high-quality teaching, engaged learning, and access to the resources that enable constructive educational contact between individuals and their institutions. In this regard, Luke Fernandez (2006) urges higher education to marshal its research talent, especially in the social sciences, to guide critical decisions about educational technology so that they align with scholarly mission. Fernandez suggests that education should treat technology less as a utility than as an agent of scholarly transformation. Sadly, he suggests, the contemporary academic community appears loath to do this.

Engaged learning for adult constituents

Oblinger (2005) outlines the challenges for higher education struggling with a market swing from time-liberated twenty-somethings to circumstance-constrained adults unable to afford the luxury of full-time campus-based study. In remote, sparsely populated areas of the US, these limiting demographic circumstances are augmented by geographical

conditions that push prospective mid-career students toward alternative professional development channels on the strength of educational access alone. If for no other reason than access, universities need to tap the market and service potentials of online program development and to support faculty and students in preparing for such a tectonic shift.

A recent report declares "Face-to-face and online learning are quickly becoming equal and complementary ways of learning, just as newspaper and television have become complementary media of information" (Meyer, 2005). Supporting this perspective, recent literature details uniquely effective online teaching methods not typically offered in traditional classroom settings (Koory, 2003; LeBaron & Santos, 2005; McDonald, 2002; Meyer, 2003; Michelich, 2002; Smith, Ferguson & Caris, 2001; Wilson, 2002). The capacity of online learning to match or exceed the whole toolbox of face-to-face instruction (while offering far superior facilities for research and communication) will only grow (McGreal & Elliott, 2004).

Meyer (2005) suggests that the survival of traditional comprehensive universities will depend on their ability to identify and provide high-quality educational service to niche markets, and to capitalize on worldwide distribution opportunities to confront growing global competition successfully. Several years ago, Carol Twigg (1998) predicted that survivors of the online education "bubble" of the late 1990s would be institutions committed to scholarly excellence. Hindsight now bears out Twigg's prediction. Tello (2002) has demonstrated a positive correlation between faculty "presence" and positive student attitudes toward their online study.

Notwithstanding the improving capacities of user-friendly online learning technologies, many university courses still fail to incorporate procedures offering authentic student engagement. Constructivist online teaching includes multiple activities that promote asynchronous reflection and synchronous conversation. Course designers and instructors are therefore challenged to consider characteristics of engaged learning (such as those described by Jones (1998)), to devise deliberate techniques for assuring interaction among course participants, to promote purposeful peer dialogue, and to establish a sense of belonging where all participants perceive themselves as stakeholders in an online learning community (Santos & LeBaron, 2006).

Arthur Levine's recently released study *Educating School Leaders* (2005) has pronounced most preparation programs for principals, superintendents, and other school leaders as "inadequate to appalling." He claims that such programs in no way lead to enhanced student achievement. He blames school districts and universities, suggesting that universities often treat such programs as "cash cows" without providing the necessary resources to support scholarly excellence. Levine calls for the elimination of the Ed.D. and the creation of a new Master's of Education Administration degree, reserving the Ph.D. for pure research.

Cheryl McFadden's 2003 study of school leadership programs nationwide reveals that most departments of educational leadership are the last in US colleges of education to embrace online learning. Her research notes that many faculty members are former principals and superintendents who rely on their oral communication skills to create relationships in their settings and believe that such skills must be taught and practiced face-to-face (McFadden, 2004).

Notwithstanding this prevailing attitude, however, the professors' division of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) devoted an entire 2002 issue of the *AASA Professor* to issues related to online learning. While Killion (2002) cautioned against assessing communications skills online, Nutta and Govoni (2002) called for incorporating the best of face-to-face instruction into online courses. As technological

possibilities expand, however, this may not be enough; online learning should now aspire to its own high standards of efficacy whether or not it emulates face-to-face "best practice." Emerging school leaders will increasingly confront not only the business of online scholarship; they will also confront the business of online business. They must be exposed to best technological practice in their professional preparation. Accordingly, Van Patten and Holt (2002) have advocated online instruction for current and entry level administrators.

Relevant cases

Addressing these challenges therefore demands a significant reconsideration of higher education's approach to faculty development and workplace policy. Edgerton (2004) discusses higher education's need to approach reform from "the inside out (taking responsibility)" and "the outside in (rethinking accountability)" (p. 103). Based on cognition research, Edgerton takes a constructivist view of the ideal future university as an "involving institution" that engages faculty and students deeply in their ongoing struggle with new concepts and misconceptions. Since online learning will not, and should not, supplant site-based practice, the question of reforming university teaching needs to be addressed primarily from a scholarly and, secondarily, from a technological viewpoint.

Wergin (1994) identifies the university department as focal point for scholarly transformation within a university. If academic change fails to take root departmentally, it may not take root at all. He describes academic departments as "bands of individual entrepreneurs, pursuing professional self-interest, driven by discipline-imposed standards" (p. vii). Thus, Wergin appears somewhat pessimistic about the prospects for deep, department-driven change. On behalf of the now sadly-defunct American Association of Higher Education, Wergin conducted a study seeking unconventional models of collective innovation among university departments to serve as models to inform other institutions seeking to change their own structures. He found "the gulf between the abstraction and the reality to be distressingly wide" (p. vii).

Two particular cases highlight commonalities and discrepancies in the challenge to establish whole academic programs for fully online distribution. The first comprises two international online initiatives: one in Business Administration and the other in Information Technology (IT). Both of these initiatives are centered at the University of Liverpool in the UK (Kalman & Leng, 2007). Because these combined programs are global, they are particularly concerned with programmatic consistency across an array of courses taught by instructors resident anywhere in the world.

A different model is presented by Von Holzen and Runyou (2003). Here, three public teacher preparation institutions in Missouri combined forces to establish a cooperative online program in elementary teaching and learning. Like the WCU program, this initiative capitalizes on existing faculty to design and distribute academic substance. Unlike WCU, a driving motivation behind the Missouri program is the efficient use of scarce human resources through cross-institutional personnel-sharing. All three programs strongly stress accountability keyed to high standards. In Liverpool, these standards are expressed mainly in the consistency of high-quality program components. In Missouri, student admission standards are stressed, and at WCU, emphasis is placed primarily on effective faculty development and institutional change.

Both programs are concerned with learner engagement and instructional quality, and both place high value on student evaluation as a measure of success. The Liverpool program could be described as "package and deliver" (Wright, 2005) in so far as course

content and structure are developed centrally by full-time home faculty while instruction is carried out by contract with remotely located teachers. In such an environment, the primary leadership concern is instructor training and monitoring. However, because its success depends on existing tenure-track faculty the American program focuses on collaboration across institutions.

Distinct from the Liverpool and Missouri reports, the WCU initiative offers an in-depth analysis of politics and action taken within a single university department confronted by the institutional challenge of intense external pressure. This analysis is presented through a departmental organizational lens, contributing a somewhat brighter perspective on the pessimism expressed earlier by Wergin (1994). The other two case studies stem from broader perspectives of cross-institutional cooperation and global online program development.

Leading the search for solutions

In response to these conditions, WCU's ELF Department sought and received approval from our State's General Administration to offer the MSA degree entirely online. In addition, a few Ed.S. and Ed.D. courses have migrated to an online format in addition to an undergraduate foundations course and the four core courses in the Master of Arts in Teaching and the Master of Arts in Education.

The University's original face-to-face MSA program was highly rated each year on our State's "institutions of higher education" reports. One hundred percent of graduates have passed the School Leaders Licensure Assessment, a 6-hour problem based exam. The migration of this program to a fully online format has been accompanied by some initial faculty and student resistance. Such concern is consistent with experience around the nation (McDonald, 2002). Whether the demonstrated excellence of the face-to-face MSA program would carry over into the online distribution format remained to be determined.

Several departmental faculty members took advantage of incentives from the University's Division of Educational Outreach either for a $3,000 stipend or for a future course release per online course developed and taught. This opportunity led to 11 department online courses being offered by a full-time faculty. Several additional courses have also been developed in 2005 and 2006 by area school superintendents who frequently serve as an adjunct faculty. To facilitate network access by school-based students, the department head met with area superintendents to inform them of the move to online instruction and to ask their assistance with technical and perceptual issues in their schools.

In 2004, the department launched a voluntary faculty mutual support group for online course development that was later expanded to include the entire College. Throughout 2004 and 2005, this group met monthly. Closely involved with this group is the College librarian who has regularly attended department meetings and has served as a teaching assistant in the online courses. Also participating are highly capable trainers from the University's campus-wide Faculty Center. Many faculty members are still mastering the technical skills of online course design and teaching; some have moved beyond to focus on instructional issues, while others have launched nationally-recognized innovation designs in online instructional excellence.

The department has assumed leadership within the University in the transition to online teaching. For example, the department has been the first to use synchronous and asynchronous voice technology in its courses. Because the current department faculty evaluation instrument was not appropriate for online courses, the department created a new one. While this new instrument retained core questions about teaching and course

quality from the older paper-based form, it added questions particularly addressing issues about the technological tools, online course design, access to technical help, the online availability of the instructor, and about turn-around time on expressed student concerns.

One department member led the University Faculty Center's 2005 *Summer Institute Faculty Focus Team on Teaching and Learning in an Online Environment*; three department members participated, and another led the 2006 *Institute*. This focus team evolved into a Faculty Learning Community for e-learning for the 2005 – 2007 academic years. Membership was campus-wide but group leadership came from the Department. Meeting monthly, the group focused on best practices for student engagement. Two department members have offered summer orientation sessions for newly appointed faculty throughout the University.

In 2005, the department hosted a world-renowned European visiting scholar to share his perspective on the global future of networked learning. Five department members presented at the annual statewide university system *Teaching and Learning with Technology* Conference in early April 2005, representing the largest single departmental participation from this university. Moreover, several members have disseminated the results of their scholarship as e-teachers in journal articles and at conferences in the US and abroad. Under departmental leadership, our College of Education organized a half-day *Passages to Online Learning* faculty development event serving approximately 40 individuals. In 2006 *Passages* was expanded to a 2-day residential retreat serving the entire University. Participant-inspired improvements already under development for the 2007 edition of *Passages*.

Evidentiary foundations for this case

Several information strands support this article. A description of institutional efforts to respond to perceived pressures for the integration of online strategies into the core teaching activity of the department is presented earlier. The pressures themselves are outlined, along with a discussion of problems encountered and solutions realized.

The primary data sources for this discussion include: student feedback on online learning experiences within the university department in question; student and faculty perspectives related to the challenges of transformation from traditional site-based practice to online and/or blended instruction; and expert counsel from a European visiting scholar who, in 2005, examined department and university online practices and advised future action. Field research on faculty technology integration in higher education is integrated with results from the collection and analysis of local data.

First data source: student feedback on their online learning experiences

Dating as far back as two decades, reports from student evaluations of online courses suggest that they endorse computer networked access for reasons of convenience (Harasim, 1987; McConnell, 1990; Latchman, 2001). Using the department constructed instrument to evaluate online classes, we analyzed the data from the 87 anonymous responses we received from 10 post-baccalaureate courses in the spring of 2005.

This instrument was distributed to 125 students, yielding a highly respectable 70% response rate. Because the University offers no institutionally-available survey tool to enable the direct online submission of student evaluations, the instrument was distributed as an e-mail file attachment which students downloaded and completed anonymously at their local sites. They then uploaded the completed form via e-mail to the Department

secretary who stripped all information about the submitters' identities before forwarding results to the Department Head.

Soon, the University plans to migrate to a fully online student evaluation procedure for all courses, whether online, face-to-face or blended. Since the University is accustomed to near-100% response rates on student evaluations collected manually in physical classrooms, it is difficult to know if the non-responses in this case reflect bias in the results. Highly enthusiastic or particularly disaffected students might be more likely to take the trouble of completing an online form than those with a more neutral disposition. For some of the courses reported here, the response rate was 100%. We are confident that the results yield useful, formative information even though they may not meet the strictest rigors of research procedure.

Data reveal that of the 34 questions on the student evaluation, students gave positive ratings of either ''agree'' or ''strongly agree'' to at least the 91% level on all but seven questions. The highest rankings revealed that students accorded high marks to the usefulness of courses in attaining their professional goals and the goals of the program. As for student learning, 100% felt that course objectives contributed to their learning. Students also lauded the quality of syllabi, the organization of the scholarly content, the use of diverse communication strategies, and the stimulation of thinking. Ninety-three percent agreed or strongly agreed that they learned a great deal in these online courses. Table 1 displays student responses to questions posed specifically about their online course experiences (some questions are abbreviated to conserve space).

The student evaluations also indicated that students rated their instructors highly on dimensions of effective use of online resources and clear communication. Other high marks went to faculty for intellectual challenge, enthusiasm, and high expectations. Ninety-nine percent of responders felt positively about the availability of their instructors. Students also responded favorably to questions concerning the appropriateness of assessment procedures, the fairness of evaluation, creating environments conducive to learning and the contribution of course activities to learning. All respondents agreed that the instructor exhibited positive attitudes toward students. In addition to their strong affirmation of the timeliness, frequency, and usefulness of instructor feedback, students rated faculty highly in knowledge of content. Students also found the online learning management platform easy to use. They reported few technical problems connecting to the learning network.

Items that fell below a combined rate of 91%''Agree or strongly agree'' were the facilitation of peer interaction at 89%, meeting diverse student learning needs effectively at 85%, and using a variety of online teaching methods at 83%. Eighty-two percent agreed or strongly agreed that the instructor was available for academic assistance. Eighty-six percent felt that the online course equaled or surpassed the academic challenge of a face-to-face course with 68% indicating that the interaction with the instructor equaled or surpassed a face-to-face class. Concerning the quality of interaction with peers as compared to a face-to-face class, 54% felt their online experience equaled or surpassed the face-to-face course experience. Only 59% signaled that technical support from the university was adequately available, signaling an issue requiring future attention.

Students were invited to respond to three open-ended questions in their formal course evaluations. Their responses were coded and grouped into themes. The first question concerned elements of the course that students believed contributed to their learning of the course content. In general students responded positively to the discussions that were part of the class. Many students commented that the discussions, whether in small or large groups, contributed to their learning. Timely and constructive feedback from the professor and clear instructions on assignments were also recurring positive responses. Students were

Table 1. Student responses to course evaluation questions. $N = 87/125$ (70% response).

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable	Strongly agree + agree
The organization of online resources (lecture notes, readings) helped in learning material.	67 (77%)	16 (18%)	3 (3%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	83 (95%)
The online course setting featured diverse communication strategies to capture the interest and attention of students.	46 (53%)	33 (38%)	6 (7%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	79 (91%)
The instructor made effective use of the online resources linked from inside the WebCT course.	66 (76%)	18 (21%)	3 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	74 (97%)
The instructor facilitated peer student learning effectively (discussions, chat, email, voice tools).	62 (71%)	16 (18%)	8 (9%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	78 (89%)
The instructor was available for students via chats, email, discussion boards, and other means.	71 (82%)	15 (17%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	86 (99%)
The instructor used a variety of online teaching methods.	53 (61%)	19 (22%)	13 (15%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	72 (83%)
The online learning platform was easy to use.	62 (71%)	23 (27%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	85 (98%)
I was able to connect to my online course consistently.	61 (70%)	25 (29%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	86 (99%)
Technical help in using the online learning management platform was available from University IT Services when I needed it.	37 (43%)	14 (16%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	34 (39%)	51 (59%)
Academic help using online learning tools were available from the instructor when I needed it.	51 (59%)	20 (23%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	16 (18%)	71 (82%)
The academic challenge of this course equaled or surpassed that of on-site courses I have taken.	59 (68%)	16 (18%)	6 (7%)	2 (2%)	4 (5%)	75 (86%)
The quality of interaction with the instructor equaled or surpassed the quality of on-site courses.	37 (43%)	22 (25%)	16 (18%)	10 (12%)	2 (2%)	59 (68%)
The quality of interaction with student peers equaled or surpassed the quality of on-site courses.	23 (26%)	24 (28%)	28 (32%)	10 (12%)	2 (2%)	47 (54%)

especially positive about the use of voice boards and voice chats. In response to questions about ways to improve the course, many students requested at least one in-person meeting.

Some students suggested meeting once at the beginning or end of the course, and others suggested meeting on a regular basis. (When put to the test of a voluntary on-site Saturday meeting, however, only one student in a class of more than 20 actually appeared.) More live chats were also requested. Students also recommended improved professor interaction in the discussions and better quality instructor feedback. Others stated that the quality of the online classes failed to measure up to their site-based counterparts due to less frequent interaction and the relative inability of the professors to present and communicate their scholarly expertise online.

Kalman and Leng (2007) describe a constructive postscript to the process of student evaluation in the two UK-based international masters' programs mentioned earlier. Following student evaluations of courses taught by a worldwide cadre of campus-based and off-campus personnel, all instructors are expected to submit a structured, written reflection on the course and on the student feedback. Due to faculty contract agreements, such practice might be difficult in traditional American universities, but the notion of interactive dialogue about teaching carries much merit, offering an excellent opportunity for continual improvement of teaching and course design from semester to semester.

Second data source: feedback from the Passages to Online Scholarship *event*

The College of Education *Passages to Online Scholarship* event, mentioned earlier, was the only time in the academic year 2004 – 2005 when a critical mass of College faculty were simultaneously gathered in one place explicitly to address and discuss the workplace significance of transition from site-based to online teaching. Twenty-one of approximately 40 participants enrolled in the *Passages* event completed the formal session evaluation.

Scaled responses suggested that participants found the event satisfying as a means for addressing issues of technology, pedagogy, and workplace policy. Nearly 75% of the responses indicated dissatisfaction with the University's recognition of online teaching as a function of the time required for course development and instruction. More than 50% indicated dissatisfaction with the University's support for instructional design in developing online courses.

For this *Passages* event, a graduate online student was invited to join a panel discussion addressing the responsibilities and expectations that the University and its online stakeholders might hold of one another. To inform his remarks, this student solicited opinion from classmates in the asynchronous discussion forum of a single course. The results of this solicitation indicate strong, but not universal, acceptance and endorsement of online instruction. These perspectives were not submitted anonymously.

Students commended the online course scheduling convenience and the palpable organization of course content and procedure. Supporting Tello's (2002) premise that online student satisfaction is positively related to instructor "presence," a number of students indicated high satisfaction levels with several courses because of the instructor's constructive and consistent responsiveness. Numerous students appreciated the "new window" on learning methodology provided by their experience in an online course. The significant challenge of adjusting to online learning from long-standing face-to-face experience was mentioned repeatedly.

On the negative side, some students declared that they missed the face-to-face interaction of classroom instruction. Several suggested that online courses should incorporate face-to-face components to provide interpersonal "leavening." Most students,

however, applauded the instructional measures taken to compensate for the lack of in-person interaction (for example, the creation of student home pages, structured community-building activities at the beginning of the course).

Third data source: feedback from visiting scholar

A globally-renowned expert on e-learning visiting scholar, Dr Jyrki Pulkkinen of the Finland Ministry of Education, visited the University for 1 week in 2005. During this period, he met with several of the University's units and constituencies, including a session with our department. During this session, Pulkkinen responded to several issues about e-learning that faculty members have been tackling as they have migrated, or contemplated migration, from classroom teaching toward online instruction.

Questions posed by faculty members in earlier department meetings were presented to the visiting scholar in advance. Issues clustered around the following six themes: philosophy, pedagogy, technology, policy, organization, and student service. Responding to these issues, Pulkkinen stressed that institutional vision should clearly articulate where the university wants to go with technology. This comports with Fernandez's (2006) view in his discussion of higher education's decision-making tendencies related to the adoption of core technologies for academic development. He stressed the need for organizational policy formulation early in the developmental process and noted that support must be in place to help the faculty to create new approaches. By itself, initial faculty training is not enough to sustain and promote long-term institutional change. Ongoing technical and pedagogical support is required.

Pulkkinen addressed the question of the ownership of intellectual property created by the faculty for online teaching. Problems characteristically occur when faculty create and teach courses and then leave the institution where the courses were taught. Typically, he suggested, faculty members own the creative rights to materials developed for course distribution and may use them for whatever purposes they deem appropriate. Universities, however, often retain in perpetuity certain commercial rights to materials created while the developer remains on the institution's payroll.

Except in cases of patent or trademark, faculty developed materials are normally unique to specific course needs. In online settings, such materials instantly become more permanent and accessible than when used face-to-face. Brent (2005) describes a situation where a colleague with whom he had routinely exchanged scholarly "property" to improve one another's respective face-to-face teaching suddenly became intensely resistant when asked to share home-grown material for an online course. In faculty perception, at any rate, this issue appears far from resolved.

Recognizing the threat of commercial competition from non-traditional newcomers to higher education, Pulkkinen suggested that universities engage in deep developmental thinking, guided by their educational missions, to compete effectively with the lower-cost "package and deliver" strategies of learning distribution so common in certain marketplace segments. Like Twigg (1998), he believes that viable markets will continue to exist for high-quality post-secondary teaching, and that universities committed to scholarly excellence should avoid the trap of educational commercialization for short-term revenue gratification.

Leadership lessons learned

Based on the research outlined earlier, our department developed a white paper for the University Chancellor and Provost detailing the results and making recommendations.

One such recommendation concerns scheduling. The university has been using antiquated course scheduling software. Site-based course schedules must be submitted on paper to the registrar and online course registrations to the continuing education division. Since course listings appear in different publications, and since cross-listings are not made available, students cannot experience a "one stop registration" procedure. The university is now implementing computerized systems integration (*Banner*) for scheduling and registration that will enable these issues to be addressed more successfully.

Addressing appropriate faculty development to support such transition, Pulkkinen stressed the critical nature of ongoing one-on-one technical support to an individual faculty. When forced into a reactive response to external change, quick and deep institutional consideration is needed so that the response is appropriate, mission-centered, and coherent. Another key to sustainable success, however, is systemic support and recognition at the university level.

Policy-backed procedures should support expectations with ongoing training and professional development, intellectual property rights, workplace incentives and appropriate rewards for risk and performance. Such support requires adequate human and technical infrastructure. Pulkkinen also stressed the importance of recognizing faculty workload for those who develop and teach online courses. Online student mentoring must be recognized as teaching time calculated appropriately as a faculty workload component.

The Education Services section of the University's IT division provides technical workshops for online course developers and teachers. Since these workshops cross all departments, specific departmental concerns are addressed only obliquely. To offset this deficiency, an IT staff person has participated constructively in monthly College mutual-support meetings. Individualized technical assistance is usually available in a timely manner for faculty encountering mechanical challenges of development or instruction.

Notwithstanding such assistance, however, quandaries remain. Because the majority of our students are busy mid-career professionals whose discretionary time is typically limited to evenings and weekends, access to technical trouble-shooting should be available on a 24/7 basis. Currently, such help is available during the working week and at weekends, but neither at night nor during the wee morning hours when many mid-career graduate students engage in their online study. The University's Faculty Center is now considering measures to assure round-the-clock support for faculty and students alike.

Deeper support is needed to guide the faculty through the pedagogical challenges of online course design. A nearby peer institution, for example, employs several full-time course designers, each one assigned to individual faculty members for the purpose of translating scholarly content into instructionally engaging online learning settings. Such an arrangement recognizes the time-consuming work of online course development, especially in a relatively small public university such as ours that prizes teaching quality and personal student service. Following this example, WCU has recently hired two doctorate-holding instructional designers to assist the faculty with a myriad of instructional challenges, technological or not.

During the past year, the University has heard faculty concerns and is consolidating its federated approach to instructional support under the concept of a single "faculty development" umbrella. Our department endorses this concept provided that measures are implemented to assure smooth, seamless cooperation among service-providing units, and that the resources necessary to assure efficacy are provided and assigned for maximum impact. Administration of this effort resides in the University Faculty Center.

The University needs simultaneously to address essential workplace concerns at the policy level so that faculty members have confidence that mission-directed risk-taking will

be positively reflected in the processes of tenure, promotion, and faculty evaluation. By the same token, network and human infrastructure issues require constant attention. Faculty and student access to technological tools must be simple and seamless so that professors are free to concentrate on content and pedagogy, and students on learning and performance.

A lesson from this experience is that the faculty needs to step forward and take the lead in the transition to online teaching and learning. While faculty members may provide valuable mutual support, they must demand effective infrastructure, professional development and continuing support from the University. While the ELF academic department offers an admirable structure for achieving these conditions, a detailed description based on multiple sources of data serves as an effective basis for compelling arguments to provide and sustain such support.

Conclusion

WCU's mission statement holds the highest standards of teaching and learning to be central to its institutional purpose. The findings reported in this article demonstrate that, with effective leadership at all stakeholding levels and concomitant mission-driven support, an academic department can sustain such a commitment to scholarly excellence in its transformation from on-site instruction toward e-learning. A department-wide analysis of student perceptions of their online course experiences revealed generally high levels of satisfaction notwithstanding a sudden immersion of a predominantly veteran full-time faculty into a totally new arena of practice.

Assessed student perceptions of their online experiences reinforce existing research on successful e-teaching, namely that learning success emerges from strong, consistent instructor presence in course settings. Students' satisfaction also stems from their degree of engagement with peers, instructors and content. Students responded positively to innovative online course designs that capitalized on the unique strengths of e-learning settings, particularly the personal touch facilitated by voice communication. Weighed against face-to-face teaching, students perceived significantly higher degrees of challenge in online course and comparable levels of human interaction.

From the participant evaluations of the *Passages* professional development retreat, faculty attitudes have shifted from resistance to curiosity and acceptance, albeit with persistent questions about employment concerns such as scholarly load, career development, support, and recognition. Faculty members have clearly articulated their need for improved technical support and professional development. Faculty interest is demonstrated by their strong participation in e-teaching professional development opportunities. For example, interest in the most recent *Passages* retreat produced a long waiting list for an event whose enrollment was capped.

This case study affirms the wisdom of Pulkkinen's advice for universities consciously to maintain a persistent link to scholarly mission in the development of online courses and programs. To the detriment of constituents most affected by compromised commitments to the quality of teaching, according to Wright (2005), some colleges and universities have failed to observe this connection. A strong commitment to mission, backed by the allocation of resources and attention to stakeholding concerns, can spell the difference between success and collapse. WCU's Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations is cautiously measuring its success, mindful that a deviation of focus on mission at all levels will rapidly unravel all such achievement.

Notes on contributors

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