Pedagogical Approaches to Teaching Online

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Teaching and learning online has changed the paradigm of teaching and teacher-student interactions. The field of education has transitioned from the traditional pedagogical modality to online learning, online teaching and online modes of delivery. New technologies have presented both opportunities and challenges for university educators. The growing body of research on online teaching and learning substantiates the need to prepare faculty for competencies related to teaching in a new paradigm. This paradigm shift has implications for the faculty role and changing pedagogies.

The Faculty Role

The online environment varies and provides ranges of possibilities for stimulating learning for both the students and faculty. The skills for effective online pedagogy extend beyond the competencies required for successful teaching in the traditional face-to-face classroom environment. Faculty see themselves as innovators and collaborators, learning and teaching as a process with the flow of information and ideas. Some faculty members see their role as facilitators rather than as authority figures in the classroom environment. This collaborative environment creates a community of learners which results in an increased focus on course content and outcomes. The move from face-to-face classrooms to online teaching is a challenge and holds strong views to the commonplace practices of teaching. As technology is redesigning pedagogies and rethinking the faculty role for online

teaching, faculty must enhance their understanding of instructional design issues, student preparation, and communication practices to improve teaching.

Faculty who teach online must be able to modify traditional practices and pedagogical techniques to fit the virtual environment. Watson (2007) identified three categories of skills that are required by online faculty to be effective: 1) employing technology and tools of the online delivery platform; 2) heightened communication skills; and 3) time management skills.

1. **Faculty must be able to utilize and know the technology available to teach online.** Hampton University's Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) provides Blackboard training on the use of software, teaches basic computer skills such as web-browsing, word processing, and presentation applications to learn the technical aspects of teaching online fairly quickly.

2. **In the absence of visual and verbal cues, online programs require professional development that focuses on helping faculty understand how to motivate diverse learners, enhance student interactions, and modify interactive lessons to meet student needs.** Consider the difference between knowing how to post messages on a discussion board versus understanding how to use a discussion board to create a lively, educational debate. Researchers and online teachers have indicated several key competencies for online teachers to enhance through professional development. Written communication, in particular, is a key component as students and faculty communicate through writing, using mechanisms such as email and discussion board postings. Faculty must be cognizant of the tone of their writing and the nuances of words. Additionally, faculty must be able to recognize different learning styles, adapt the class to ensure that the course meets all student needs, and understand student skills and challenges in the early days of an online course.

3. **A good time management skill set in asynchronous courses is important as faculty and students can be online at any time.** In asynchronous courses, planning is an issue as the course work may have multi-media components which require more planning than a typical traditional classroom. The volume of emails, messages, discussion board responses, quizzes and questions require skillful handling to prevent information overload. This immediate

and continuous feedback identifies program deficiencies and allows faculty to formulate researched-based strategies for strengthening and improving the course.

Additionally, online teaching is evaluated on more dimensions than most traditional courses due to the nature of the learning management system which captures teacher-student interactions, class discussions, and course content.

I am fascinated by the emergence of the Internet which brings faculty together to create, re-design, and explore ways to teach online. The greatest "perk" to teaching online is the flexibility and convenience it provides for students and faculty, and it is an acceptable, effective way of teaching. As I explore a range of strategies to enhance my instruction, I find the "best practices" and stick with those. I am excited about the unlimited possibilities of teaching online, using new pedagogies and the transition into the new role for faculty, even though there are challenges.

References

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