Addressing Faculty Readiness for Online Teaching

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About this Document

This document provides recommendations and other considerations for higher education institutions as they evaluate and address faculty readiness for online instruction. Areas of focus will include:

1) A background of online teaching and learning
2) Criteria for defining faculty readiness
3) Methods to evaluate faculty readiness
4) Strategies for increasing faculty members’ readiness level
Addressing Faculty Readiness for Online Teaching

Online education is an important aspect of education in our world today. The flexibility offered by online learning programs and courses creates greater accessibility to the resources and tools needed for learners to succeed—students have certainly expressed their readiness for this type of learning, but what about faculty? Are they ready to facilitate online education in a way that will be both engaging and meaningful while retaining the flexibility they need to deliver high-quality instruction?

Background of Online Teaching and Learning

Distance education delivered online is a viable and, in many ways, preferable means of learning for many students across the globe. It wasn’t always this way. Early adopters of online learning were thought to be lessening the value of education by offering course material in a non-traditional setting. Why did this perception exist? Some suggest it was a fear of the unknown, while others felt that a “brick and mortar” approach was the only option that truly met students’ needs. Others believe that a lack of understanding and preparedness by institutions and faculty may have influenced this perception.

Benefits of Growing Online Learning in Higher Education

Despite these reservations, the implementation of online learning has steadily grown in recent years. The reason for this is simple: students need it. With increased globalization, competitive job markets, and fast-paced lifestyles, students need the flexibility of online learning in order to meet their educational goals. In addition to their studies, students must balance work, volunteering, family, and social commitments.

To facilitate student success, an institution must make online learning a significant part of its strategic model for growth and opportunity. Otherwise, it can potentially suffer a decline in enrollment and a loss of revenue. In order to successfully develop, grow and facilitate online programs, an institution must employ faculty who are willing and able to understand the need for online learning while also committing to academic quality and integrity.
Defining Faculty Readiness

Online learning is an integral aspect of the current educational framework— institutions must be able to strategically adapt and change based on student needs. How these efforts and activities are defined may look very similar across the spectrum, but they must also be tailored to support the unique needs of each institution. This also applies to defining faculty readiness for online learning. Although the concept can be globally defined, each institution must incorporate relevant details and aspects in their approach.

What is Faculty Readiness?

On a global level, faculty readiness for online learning simply suggests the willingness to prepare, effectively design, and facilitate courses within an online environment. It refers to the interest in, current knowledge of, and experiences pertaining to the delivery of online coursework. Readiness can mean different things to different people depending on institutional expectations and resources available to faculty.

Why is Faculty Readiness Important?

Understanding the level of faculty readiness for online teaching at your institution is important to enhancing the success of your online efforts. Institutions that have not identified the perceptions, experiences, or abilities of their faculty—as they pertain to online learning—are missing a key component in the journey to successfully facilitating online courses and programs. Every institution has goals and objectives surrounding its online efforts. Those goals may include enrollments, growth in online courses and programs, or an increase in revenue. Failure to successfully identify faculty members’ readiness for online teaching may lead to a lack of engagement with students, the creation of courses that do not meet objectives, unsatisfied students, attrition, or loss in revenue.
Ways to Evaluate Faculty Readiness at Your Institution

Evaluating faculty readiness for online teaching at your institution can be accomplished in a variety of ways. One of the best ways is to conduct a preliminary assessment or survey. Up until a few years ago, a survey such as this was not readily available or was developed internally and likely based on a limited sample size. With the tremendous growth in online learning throughout higher education, a simple internet search can direct you to a number of credible tools that will help begin the process of evaluating faculty readiness. Typically, faculty readiness surveys can be completed online and ask questions that focus on the participant’s skills, experiences, education and beliefs regarding technology and online learning. The insight derived from a faculty readiness survey process is able to offer invaluable information regarding faculty as you plan and prepare for growth and/or change in your online activities.

Key Aspects in Evaluating Faculty Readiness

Key considerations to identify during the survey process include:

- Experience with online learning as either an instructor or learner
- Experience with technology
- Years of teaching experience
- Ability to deliver content in various forms
- Comfort with and ability to change
- Communication skills
- Time management skills

This information will collectively help evaluate faculty members’ past experiences and identify opportunities for training and development moving forward. Using this data, institutions will be able to identify opportunities to assist, change, or increase a faculty member’s readiness to teach effectively online. Instructors with confidence in their skills and their institution’s support will find it easier to implement web-based courses and drive successful collaboration with students online.
Increasing Faculty Members’ Readiness Level

Once faculty readiness levels for online teaching and learning have been evaluated, faculty members can be prepared to effectively develop and facilitate online courses through various methods, including:

- Professional development
- Faculty/peer mentoring
- New faculty orientation
- Semester start packages
- Ongoing evaluation and feedback

Professional Development

Professional development for faculty is a key component of any institution’s online strategy, especially when it comes to addressing faculty readiness. Refining faculty members’ abilities and perceptions while also increasing their comfort level with the technology they’ll be using can equip them to teach more effectively online. Whether utilizing internal expertise or external professionals, facilitating opportunities for professional development will help offer professional growth, confidence, and motivation to faculty members.

Faculty/Peer Mentoring

Through the faculty readiness survey process, differing abilities among faculty will be identified. Depending on their past experiences and abilities, some may have a higher level of readiness than others. By partnering faculty that have a higher level of readiness with those who are identified as less ready, an institution can establish collaboration, peer feedback and essentially a “lifeline” to those who need extra guidance.

New Faculty Orientation

New faculty members bring unique backgrounds with them when arriving at an institution. Utilizing the faculty readiness survey as part of a new faculty orientation program can help evaluate their abilities and set expectations early regarding the online efforts at your institution. Incorporating this process as part of your faculty orientation also allows for follow-up conversations down the road that could help shape faculty mentoring, professional development, and best practices for online teaching as they are identified at your institution.
Semester Start Packages

Semester start packages for faculty can help accomplish several tasks. Traditionally, they might include key dates for the upcoming semester, exam schedules, evaluation information, new initiatives, and any expectations for online classes. The packages are fairly simple to produce and can help create consistency across course development. Additionally, they serve as a consolidated resource for all of the information that faculty need for the semester. A well-prepared semester start package can help ease faculty concerns or anxiety, mitigate stress at the start of the term, and increase readiness for online teaching.

Ongoing Evaluation and Feedback

Conducting a faculty readiness survey yearly or bi-annually allows for the recognition of growth and development by faculty members and can enable your institution to review trends resulting from your online teaching and learning efforts. Additionally, creating evaluations for faculty to offer feedback based on their perceptions and experiences will serve as a tremendous asset in enhancing and streamlining the online strategy.

Recommendations and Considerations

Faculty readiness for online teaching and learning is a key factor in the success of an institution’s online presence. The term essentially represents an individual’s or a group of faculty members’ ability and willingness to effectively prepare, design, and facilitate courses within an online environment. Evaluating the readiness level of your faculty for teaching online will contribute greatly to the overall success of your online courses and programs.

Through the development or adoption of a faculty readiness survey, your institution will be able to pinpoint and showcase the abilities, experiences, and insights that faculty possess for online teaching and learning. This can help tailor efforts to increase faculty readiness through professional development, mentoring programs, orientation interactions, semester start packages, and ongoing opportunities for evaluation and feedback. Ultimately, addressing and evaluating faculty readiness can help create more positive and engaging opportunities for both your institution and the learners who rely on you to help them achieve their own goals.
Additional Consulting

D2L employs a number of experts with extended experience leading academic programs. The D2L community of users includes experts in many fields related to the management and delivery of instructional programs and technologies. D2L stands ready to collaborate and coordinate with you on your advanced consulting needs, as well as research studies related to instruction.
ABOUT D2L
A global leader in EdTech, D2L is the creator of Brightspace, the world’s first integrated learning platform. The company partners with thought-leading organizations to improve learning through data-driven technology that helps deliver a personalized experience to every learner, regardless of geography or ability. D2L’s open and extensible platform is used by more than 1,100 clients and almost 15 million individual learners in higher education, K–12, healthcare, government, and the enterprise sector—including Fortune 1000 companies. The company has operations in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, Brazil, and Singapore.


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