

Online Faculty Professional Development: An Approach to the Design Process

Authors : Marie Bountrogianni, Leonora Zefi, Krystle Phirangee, Naza Djafarova

Abstract : Faculty development is critical for any institution as it impacts students' learning experiences and faculty performance with regards to course delivery. With that in mind, The Chang School at Ryerson University embarked on an initiative to develop a comprehensive, relevant faculty development program for online faculty and instructors. Teaching Adult Learners Online (TALO) is a professional development program designed to build capacity among online teaching faculty to enhance communication/facilitation skills for online instruction and establish a Community of Practice to allow for opportunities for online faculty to network and exchange ideas and experiences. TALO is comprised of four online modules and each module provides three hours of learning materials. The topics focus on online teaching and learning experience, principles and practices, opportunities and challenges in online assessments as well as course design and development. TALO offers a unique experience for online instructors who are placed in the role of a student and an instructor through interactivities involving discussions, hands-on assignments, peer mentoring while experimenting with technological tools available for their online teaching. Through exchanges and informal peer mentoring, a small interdisciplinary community of practice has started to take shape. Successful participants have to meet four requirements for completion: i) participate actively in online discussions and activities, ii) develop a communication plan for the course they are teaching, iii) design one learning activity/or media component, iv) design one online learning module. This study adopted a mixed methods exploratory sequential design. For the qualitative phase of this study, a thorough literature review was conducted on what constitutes effective faculty development programs. Based on that review, the design team identified desired competencies for online teaching/facilitation and course design. Once the competencies were identified, a focus group interview with The Chang School teaching community was conducted as a needs assessment and to validate the competencies. In the quantitative phase, questionnaires were distributed to instructors and faculty after the program was launched to continue ongoing evaluation and revisions, in hopes of further improving the program to meet the teaching community's needs. Four faculty members participated in a one-hour focus group interview. Major findings from the focus group interview revealed that for the training program, faculty wanted i) to better engage students online, ii) to enhance their online teaching with specific strategies, iii) to explore different ways to assess students online. 91 faculty members completed the questionnaire in which findings indicated that: i) the majority of faculty stated that they gained the necessary skills to demonstrate instructor presence through communication and use of technological tools provided, ii) increased faculty confidence with course management strategies, iii) learning from peers is most effective - the Community of Practice is strengthened and valued even more as program alumni become facilitators. Although this professional development program is not mandatory for online instructors, since its launch in Fall 2014, over 152 online instructors have successfully completed the program. A Community of Practice emerged as a result of the program and participants continue to exchange thoughts and ideas about online teaching and learning.

Keywords : community of practice, customized, faculty development, inclusive design

Conference Title : ICDEVL 2018 : International Conference on Distance Education and Virtual Learning

Conference Location : Melbourne, Australia

Conference Dates : February 01-02, 2018