Administrative Concerns for Distance Learning

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INTRODUCTION

The establishment of a distance learning program is a significant effort. The prepossessing condition for such an undertaking is that distance learning be consistent with the mission and vision of the institution. Institutional endorsement is critical.

The principal concerns for the implementation of a distance learning program are suggested by Gilbert’s (1978) model of human competence (Chevalier, 2003). The model proposes three co-requisite conditions: information, equipment, and motivation. Each of these has both an external and internal complement. The administration of an institution represents the external complement, while the faculty represent the internal complement. The two constituencies are mutually dependent in their respective contributions to meeting the three co-requisite conditions in order to achieve a successful distance learning experience. The three co-requisite conditions and their complements must be met to achieve successful program implementation.

It is useful to examine each of the co-requisite conditions and how they relate to both the external complement (the administration) and the internal complement (the faculty). Use this framework to manage the administrative concerns that must be addressed in a nascent distance learning program.

INFORMATION

The administration must have clear goals, purposes, and expectations for its DL program and must communicate them to the faculty. Information from the administration should express the institutional vision for the distance learning program and how the program is related to the institutional mission. It should also communicate expectations for how the vision is going to be achieved and what the role of faculty is expected to be in achieving the mission.

The faculty in turn must be aware of, understand, and acknowledge the information from administration. Beyond receiving the information, faculty must also understand and share in the institutional vision in order to integrate this new pursuit into the existing culture. In short, communication must be successful within and between the respective groups. Communication exists in various forms; understanding them helps in the management of communication and program planning.

Types of Information

Beneath the umbrella of information, the mission is the basis for the administrative expectations upon the faculty. The expectations, in turn, are the bases for policies and procedures that need to be established as they are for residential instruction. It is useful to organize the areas of information and policy by matching these matters to the cultures that typically comprise an institution. The areas and examples of the topics that need to be communicated follow.

Bergquist (1992) suggested a model of institutional culture comprising four areas: “negotiation”, “collegialism”, “management”, and development. This model is useful for categorizing the types of communication that occur within an organization. The subculture of negotiation concerns the ways in which constituencies within an organization work toward common goals. The collegial subculture concerns matters related to the social and professional status that will be assigned to the new program. The managerial subculture concerns the administrative decision making required during program planning. The subculture of “development” concerns the new demands the emerging program will