Chapter VI

Online Teaching Demands

Introduction

Teachers are aware of and reflect on a variety of issues related to teaching online. In responding to the demands they notice, they highlight certain things they would like to change—things they feel would improve their online teaching. Without a doubt, their use of technology in the classroom affects their teaching. As technology continues to improve, its usability, availability, and actual use are ongoing concerns. The same can be said for curriculum development, course design, and faculty training. As the teaching profession is changing, different challenges are posed to teachers and universities.

Background

As they teach, educators are subjected to various teaching demands. This chapter presents some of the factors that teachers perceive as relevant in setting the stage for and affecting their teaching. From interviews we learned that instructors report somewhat similar sets of demands: Online teaching requires more time, effort and
technical skills as well as a number of changes in their communication style. The academic literature pertaining to teaching demands in the online environment that was reviewed for this book, and the findings derived from interview data are generally in agreement.

Teachers acknowledge that teaching online is not easy, because it requires increased preparation and hard work and results in overall increased time demands. Those instructors interviewed by this author feel they need two to three times more time online, as compared to teaching in a traditional classroom. Palloff and Pratt (1999) reported similar figures, finding that online faculty members spend more time teaching online, from anywhere between 1 and 4 hours extra per week. Online, student contact hours increase more than two-fold: from $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours to 4 hours per week. Other activities (e.g., lecture, exams, class or conferencing meetings) posed similar time requirements (SchWeber, 2000). In addition to spending more time teaching, instructors note they spend more time updating their course Web sites and interacting with students (Hall, 2002).

Online teaching also requires more technical skills on both the student’s and instructor’s side; there is a perception that there is not enough teacher participation in course development. Furthermore, online education is expensive, and despite all the monies spent, online learning still tries to imitate what goes on in a classroom. The younger students—“Generation Y”—grew up with technology and therefore form a natural audience. However, there is ample evidence that they expect to be entertained (Gehring, 2002).

Online, the communication style is constrained by bandwidth limitations, the asynchronous nature of the medium, and excessive reliance on written communication. This requires an increase in the clarity of the materials, more time, and deeper discussions to support the online teaching process. Other issues related to this are that the initial anonymity of the participants evolves into online identities; that the instructor is challenged to rework his or her course materials when developing an online class; that teaching online requires long hours to respond to messages, e-mail, and evaluate discussions; and that more time is spent on editing responses (Smith, Ferguson, & Caris, 2002).

More issues pertaining to demands when teaching online address the educators, who are concerned with such issues as learner expectations, incentives, and content (King & Dunham, 2005). Moreover, the development and delivery of online courses requires significant effort (Schell, 2004). The production of a virtual course requires access to graphical designers, prototypes, appropriate technologies, and budget (Bergstrom, Grahn, Karlstrom, Pulkakis, & Astrom, 2004). There is a significant burden to prepare an online course, because they are much more demanding (Chang, 2001). Last, students should be evaluated using multiple methods to compensate for lack of face-to-face interaction (Vrasida & McIsaac, 2000).
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