Chapter 8
A Historically Black College’s Approach to Integrating Culturally Diverse Teaching and Learning Strategies in an Online Classroom Platform

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ABSTRACT

Research on the state of online courses and degree programs have been described as ways for students to have more flexibility in meeting their educational goals while maintaining their other life responsibilities. In recent years, administrators at HBCUs have increased their investment in technological tools and learning management systems to make online teaching and learning a reality, while offering incentives and rewards to encourage faculty to move toward redesigning courses to an online platform and bolstering the campus’ online presence. Yet at the same time, some faculty worry that online educational programs are the antithesis to the traditional models of teaching and learning heralded by HBCUs with an emphasis on student-faculty interactions and close-knit academic environments for students. Moreover, advocates of traditional instructional models warn that students less prepared for college-level work may require significant academic support to successfully navigate an online program of study.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-3120-3.ch008
A Historically Black College’s Approach to Diverse Teaching Online

INTRODUCTION

Research on the state of online education claim that Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) lag behind their national counterparts in terms of the availability of online courses and degree programs (Evans-Bell, 2015). Online courses and degree programs have been described as ways for students to have more flexibility in meeting their educational goals while maintaining their other life responsibilities (Fedynich, Bradley, & Bradley, 2015; Galway, Corbett, Takaro, Taiyran, & Frank, 2014). In recent years, administrators at HBCUs have increased their investment in technological tools and learning management systems to make online teaching and learning a reality, while offering incentives and rewards to encourage faculty to move toward redesigning courses to an online platform and bolstering the campus’ online presence. Yet at the same time, some faculty worry that online educational programs are the antithesis to the traditional models of teaching and learning heralded by HBCUs with an emphasis on student-faculty interactions and close-knit academic environments for students (Evans-Bell, 2015; Gomez-Rey, Barbera, & Fernández-Navarro, 2016). Moreover, advocates of traditional instructional models warn that students less prepared for college-level work may require significant academic support to successfully navigate an online program of study.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities are institutions founded before 1864 with the explicit mission to educate African Americans (Brown & Davis, 2001). Although HBCUs historically have been predominantly Black institutions, today HBCUs are becoming increasingly diverse, attracting students from various racial and socioeconomic, and academic backgrounds. These shifts in enrollment require faculty members at HBCUs to take into consideration the cultural diversity of students while upholding our core focus on meeting the educational needs of Black Americans. Given our commitment to the mission of HBCUs, we recognize that in order to effectively integrate online courses and programs within these institutions of higher education they must reflect culturally diverse practices that reflect the traditional ethos of the campus. Aligned with this position, faculty members redesigned several courses in the College of Education at Bowie State University. Their primary focus was to create an integrated approach to implementing culturally diverse teaching strategies that engage students intellectually and innovatively; while maintaining personal interactions with their instructors. This chapter will present these strategies and the reflective practice derived from the redesign of a course focused on theory and practice in elementary education. The strategies include: culturally diverse assignments, interactive discussions to enhance cultural experiences, BlackBoard9 Collaborate conversations that involve specific topics on diversity and ethics, and the process of choosing culturally responsive materials and texts.
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