Chapter 1
Innovative Curriculum in Distance Learning: An Ohio Case Study

Gail S. Peters  
Ohio Learning Network, USA

Kate M. Carey  
Ohio Board of Regents, USA; Ohio Learning Network, USA

ABSTRACT

Ohio is an undereducated state with 21.1% of its adult population holding a bachelor’s degree or higher. This chapter illustrates the innovative curriculum in a free, online course that shows significant promise as one strategy to raise the educational attainment of adults. This case study enables readers to look at fundamental instructional and delivery issues in providing distance learning to adults. Successes and weaknesses of the program may help other states address the needs of returning adult learners.

BACKGROUND AND NEEDS ANALYSIS

E 4 ME was born out of a need to target the non-traditional, adult population in Ohio that needs to return to school in order to upgrade skills and knowledge for the demands of the 21st century economy. Nearly 1.5 million Ohio adults had some college education, but no formal degree (OBR, 2004).

In 2003, Ohio was undereducated compared to the rest of the United States, with 21.1% of its adult population 25 and older having a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 24.4% for the United States (2000 Census). This gap was critical, because income levels and standards of living were closely tied to education levels. Nationally, bachelor’s degree recipients earned nearly $18,000 more than high school graduates earned in 2001. Furthermore, the unemployment rate for workers holding a bachelor’s degree was 3.1%, compared to 5.3% for those with only a high school diploma. It was of vital importance that more Ohioans participate in higher education so that our economy could provide the jobs and income levels required to maintain a high quality of life (OBR, 2004).

Ohioans who earned post-secondary credentials would be better positioned to earn more money, contribute more to their communities, pay more taxes to support vital public services, and depend less on public support. Ohio, as a low graduation
state, ranks 37th in the nation for undergraduate degree completion. For Ohio’s workforce to catch up and keep pace at a national level, higher education in Ohio must graduate more people, keep them in Ohio after graduation, and attract more talent to Ohio so the state becomes a net importer of people with college degrees, rather than a net exporter as it is today (Fingerhut, 2008).

No single solution would provide a panacea to solve the educational attainment problem, but through a collaborative effort, Ohioans could be best served. The Ohio Learning Network joined a cadre of organizations to raise educational attainment by providing services and resources to raise the state’s educational attainment.

The Regan and Smith Discrepancy Model provided an effective way to determine needs assessment. Distance education was growing rapidly in Ohio colleges and universities in 2003, yet, many adults were unfamiliar with this delivery method. Across the nation, working adults were finding e-learning more flexible than campus-based learning which made an introductory course a reasonable approach for recruiting adults into college.

Ohio’s low educational attainment ranking in the nation combined with the charge from the governor and the Ohio Board of Regents to increase the participation of Ohioans in higher education led to the course creation by the Ohio Learning Network (OLN). OLN is a consortium of 83 community colleges and universities within the University System of Ohio, and the state’s independent colleges and universities. An initiative of the Ohio Board of Regents, OLN helps Ohioans gain access to higher education through an online catalog of courses and degrees and provides faculty development programs and student support activities.

Adult learning theory drove the design of the E 4 ME course. The course must assist adults in overcoming barriers of time and location as well as provide a cost effective course without unexpected or additional fees attached. The course must be structured to foster short-term success providing immediate results for adult learners. The course experience must build confidence in adults while adequately presenting the challenges of online learning.

**DESIGN RATIONALE**

Learning theories have their basis in philosophy and psychology and provide the overall framework for teaching and learning activities (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The E 4 ME course was designed using a blend of the constructivist approach to teaching and learning as well as the instructivist approach. The course was created with clear performance objectives and has a systematic approach to the learning content to insure consistency in delivery across class sections and among instructors who teach the class concurrently each month. The course also was designed with the needs of the learner in mind, and encourages the learner’s interpretations through self-directed exploration of the content, group and individual class exercises, surveys and self assessment activity.

The Morrison/Ross/Kemp Model describes the process used for creating E 4 ME by using nine basic steps in its systematic design process (Gustafson, K. & Branch, R.M. (1997):

- identify instructional problems, and specify goals for designing a program;
- examine learner characteristics that should receive attention during planning;
- identify subject content, and analyze task components related to stated goals and purposes;
- state instructional objectives for the learner;
- sequence content within each instructional unit for logical learning;
- design instructional strategies so that each learner can master the objectives;
- plan the instructional message and delivery;
Related Content

An Efficient Method of Supporting Interactions for an Integrated Distance Learning System
Shimon Sakai, Naoaki Mashita, Yasuhiro Yoshimitsu, Hiroshi Shingeno, Kenichi Okada and Yutaka Matsushita (2004). *International Journal of Distance Education Technologies* (pp. 1-10).
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Enhancing the IMS QTI to Better Support Computer Assisted Marking
Damien Clark and Penny Baillie-de Byl (2009). *Methods and Applications for Advancing Distance Education Technologies: International Issues and Solutions* (pp. 174-189).
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