Chapter VIII

Collaborative Learning Among Faculty: Using Course Management Systems to Support Faculty Development

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Abstract

In higher education today, faculty members are faced with ever-increasing expectations for their teaching, scholarship, and service. Faculty in the 21st century college and university must teach with technology, incorporate student research opportunities into the curriculum, employ active learning strategies while accommodating learners with disabilities, engage in scholarship at the edges of the traditional disciplines, demonstrate multiple forms of scholarship in a professional portfolio, implement classroom and departmental assessment strategies, and provide service to the discipline and community in addition to the college. These complex roles frequently require faculty to collaborate with staff, administrators, students, and peers for the
most effective engagement in these new modes of scholarship, service, and teaching. Faculty development professionals are faced with the challenges of supporting faculty in this new environment, and in particular with finding ways to facilitate the sharing, interacting, discussing, questioning, and brainstorming necessary for success in a highly-demanding work environment. Given the time constraints that are endemic in today’s academy, creative solutions that will facilitate collaboration are necessary.

Introduction

This chapter will examine principles of adult learning and cognition, as well as theories and perspectives on collaboration that inform best practices in supporting faculty as they find creative ways to work together. These best practices are examined in their applications to faculty collaboration using course management system software (e.g., BlackBoard). Four projects that exemplify the new and challenging roles of faculty as teachers, scholars, and contributors in the new academy are described and analyzed. Recommendations for the future are then discussed.

The Principles of Adult Learning

The design of supports for faculty development and faculty collaboration should rest on the principles that promote effective learning and change. In the same way that excellence in curriculum and pedagogy in any classroom should be informed by the practices that have been shown to be developmentally appropriate to the population in question, so too should faculty development practices follow what is known about adult learning. The following paragraphs review some of the adult learning literature, and examine the principles of adult learning that are most clearly relevant to the special case of learning in those adults who happen to be faculty members.

Malcolm Knowles is known by many as the “father of andragogy”—the science of teaching adults (Bash, 2003). Knowles’s work was initially written to help guide how one teaches the adult returning to, or perhaps first starting, higher education. He contended that teaching adults is most successful when the needs and motivations of the learner are primary, rather than the wants...
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