

"Kicking and Screaming:
Overcoming Faculty Resistance to Teaching Online Courses"

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Abstract: Faculty may find themselves in an awkward position: having to reformat a face-to-face course to an online course because of institutional or departmental need. Faculty may not want to make this change, but it is necessary. They come in "kicking and screaming" about the changes. What approaches might be used, what guidelines can be offered, what safeguards can

be built into the process for faculty, student, and course success rather than failure?

Introduction

Imagine a traditional face-to-face class which must be adapted to an online course format to meet the needs of a department, institution, faculty and/or students. The faculty member is "kicking and screaming" about the necessary change, doesn't want to make this change, but is being told this is required. Perhaps not an ideal situation, but frequently the case in point. As an instructional technologist or as another faculty member, you can help facilitate this change from an F2F (face-to-face) class to an online course.

This presentation and proceedings paper will briefly address:

- research findings about distance education
- characteristics of successful distance education students
- reasons for using distance education to teach a course (online)
- guidelines and strategies for working with the naysayer
- effective teaching strategies for an online course
- alternative forms of assessment in lieu of paper-and-pencil tests
- constructivist approach to teaching/learning
- practical tips for converting the 'naysayers' to online learning, the faculty who come "kicking and screaming"

Research Findings about Teaching Online Courses

Before jumping in head first, it's important to understand some of the research findings regarding teaching online courses. Of primary importance in working with reluctant faculty is what will be involved in the process from design to implementation. Basically, how much time and effort will this change require? This question will be one of the first ones (if not **the** first) that the faculty member asks, so you need to be prepared with findings to support online learning and possibly dispel myths.

Research findings indicate that

- there is no significant difference in outcomes between F2F and online learners.
- institutions have a number of ways to train faculty for online teaching, even faculty who have been late (not to mention reluctant) adopters of online learning; these faculty can design and develop courses which follow online pedagogy and be successful instructors.
- online courses take almost twice as much time as the F2F course.
- development time and instructional time distinction is critical in faculty workload research.
- more time (hours) per week is spent preparing and delivering a distance education course than a comparable F2F course.
- the use of extensive e-mail and downloading of student assignments can contribute to a very heavy instructor workload.
- most students in distance education courses are nontraditional students.
- faculty members and support personnel often spend most of their problem-solving time dealing with the challenges students have with their computer equipment.

Characteristics of Distance Learners

Distance learners enter our classrooms (traditional F2F, hybrid, or online) from a variety of backgrounds, including educational, socio-economical, and geographical differences. They may take the online course at the same time (synchronous) or at different times (asynchronous) from others in their class.

We do know that most (but not all) distant learners are highly motivated, are independent, and are active learners. They usually have good organizational and time management skills, and they have the discipline to study without external members. They can and do adapt usually to new learning environments, and they may have different educational goals from others in their class (certificate, degree, additional training). In addition, their backgrounds are frequently quite varied: traditional student, mid-career professional, job changers, students with handicaps/learning disabilities, and/or geographical/logistical differences. Students who enroll in online courses do so willingly, often enthusiastically; to many students, it is the only option available to them to obtain this course.

Reasons for Using Distance Education to Teach a Class

Why do we teach online courses? The reason(s) can and do vary. Perhaps we are using the online portion of the course as a supplement or hybrid. Or, perhaps we are offering the course as a standalone course where the students are not in the same room at the same time at any point in the course. Sometimes, as we are seeing frequently, a department, college or institution is pushing for more online courses to boost enrollment and retention.

Students indicate that they like the online course environment for a number of reasons. The course may be convenient (time and place), it might be a logistical necessity, timeliness provides access to the student now rather than waiting a semester or year, and it might be possible to enroll in courses at two or more institutions concurrently. In some cases the content of the online course is needed but not available at a student's home institution.

The following examples can further explain how and why online learning is used in place of the more traditional face-to-face classroom.

The first example is the the DLiTE (Distributed Learning in Teacher Education) program at Bemidji State University in Minnesota (very northern Minnesota). This is a three-year program and will graduate 23 students this year; and about half the prospective graduates already have jobs lined up. This alternative program focuses on training teachers in areas where shortages exist—science, mathematics and special education—and bypasses the four-year, 9-5 weekday program. One student in this program works full time at the Boise Forte Reservation and has four children, and this alternative program permits him to continue his work and home life and still achieve his goal of becoming a teacher. Another student is a full-time retail department store manager in a small town in northern Minnesota and also the father of four; he, too, is finding a way to complete his goal to be a teacher while still being an active husband and father. The students must meet three weekends a year for testing and student presentations.

Another example of online learning in Minnesota is the entirely online graduate program in special education at Minnesota State University, Mankato. When the wind and snow are bitter, these students can stay indoors, continue with their assignments, take part in classroom discussions, and teleconference with their instructors.

Yet one more example of online learning is a graduate program in Applied Behavior Analysis at St. Cloud State University. It is in its third year and has graduated 15 students. The program started as a cohort model and worked with autism partnerships. The program admits about 20 students per year, and the students must come to campus only to defend their thesis. Much of the communication is via e-mail and telephone, and the faculty feel they know their students quite well even with the lack of face-to-face contact. Students are physically located in the United States, Canada, and England.

Another example of an online learning course is to supplement the curriculum when a course "doesn't meet" because of low enrollment. This is a situation that I find quite lacking and undesirable, simply because a faculty member takes on this student (or students) on an independent study basis with no compensation. And just why would a faculty member do this? To meet the needs or wishes of students. For those of us in strong collective bargaining environments, watch for the red flags.

Converting or Training the "Naysayers"

If everything is so wonderful, why do we have a need for online courses and at the same time have faculty who are resistance to this type of teaching? Once we determine the **why** for the naysaying, we then need to identify ways to assist the faculty member in this transition. Whether we are administrators, faculty colleagues, or institutional instructional designers, there are steps we might take to ease this transition. Before tackling the deep end of the swimming pool, however, it is helpful to understand how and why a faculty member is undertaking this new assignment. After identifying the cause(s) of apprehension, the technology training environment can be determined and addressed.

Faculty have indicated a number of reasons for not wanting to use online teaching. Each reason has logic and rationale behind it, at least in some situations. Note the following reasons for the reluctance:

- Faculty doubt their own technology skills.
- Faculty doubt the reliability of the institution's technology framework.
- Faculty question the adaptability of certain courses to the online format.
- Faculty negate the entire online concept.
- Faculty are suspect of administration's motive(s) for encouraging online learning.

Proactive vs. reactive training. It is probably wise to be proactive rather than reactive when working with faculty who are less than enthusiastic about teaching an online course. Talk with the faculty member ahead of time, determine the reason for the lack of enthusiasm about this change, and offer your assistance and services to get the course up and running. It is very beneficial if your institution has an in-place instructional development office to work with the faculty member. Or, perhaps **you** are the instructional development person who has the challenge of assisting the faculty member during this transitional period.

Voluntary vs. forced online teaching. It is important to identify whether this faculty member is voluntarily moving to online teaching (and is just being cautious) or whether this is a forced move with the faculty member not wanting to do this but is being told by administration it is a must. For some faculty a forced online adaptation can be the difference between a year or two earlier retirement. If the faculty member has strong pedagogical reservations about online teaching and these apprehensions can be addressed and resolved, the possibility for course success is good.

Individual vs. group training. Even before a "kicking and screaming" faculty member is committed to teaching an online course, it may be necessary to explain the types of training available. Some faculty prefer one-on-one individual training, while others are willing to be part of a small group as they become more familiar with the online format. Although the individual method of instruction is costly and time consuming, for some faculty this will be the only way they will agree to teach an online course.

"Boot camp" approach vs. one- or two-hour sessions routinely scheduled. At my institution, St. Cloud State University, we are fortunate to have available a number of options for faculty training. During the summer (before summer school actually starts) we have a "boot camp" for the novices, running this session for four hours each day (three hours of instruction, one hour for course development) for three days. Faculty receive no additional compensation for attending this "boot camp"; it is yet another example of a faculty "labor or love" to meet the needs of students, departments, and administration. In addition, we have 50-minute blocks of time to address each of the component parts of a training package, and during faculty workshop days at the start of each semester, slightly longer training sessions are held.

Our administration has provided support for these types of training as a way of recognizing that "learners" (in this case faculty members) have a variety of learning styles and preferences. After training is completed, faculty can "stop in for a chat" with one of our online specialists, e-mail their questions, or sign up for refresher sections of training.

IT vs. faculty trainers or a combination. A big question is who actually does the training of faculty to teach online courses. The trainers working with the reluctant faculty member can wear different hats. Perhaps the trainer is an IT person, perhaps the trainer is a faculty member assigned to assist with training, or perhaps the trainer is a faculty member who has had great success with online teaching. It can be quite beneficial to have a team of trainers, people who understand the technology as well as the pedagogy. Administrative support for faculty training is critical, and there is not question that it is a huge investment on the part of the institution. It is important, however, that the faculty member be a team player and whenever possible utilize the expertise and support of the instructional designer, graphic designer, technology specialist, resource personnel, administrative personnel, and even a learner liaison.

Designated troubleshooting e-mail for faculty. Have a designated troubleshooting e-mail account for faculty to use with questions and problems. Perhaps it is not a 24/7

official account, but it will need to be accessed and questions/problems addressed very quickly.

Training and resource materials. It's a good idea to have training and resource materials available for users as they begin the long journey towards online teaching. The materials need to be user-friendly and accurate. Use the "bite-size" approach to training, keeping the materials organized and in small sections.

Showcase courses of experienced users on your campus (or elsewhere). One way to impress upon the reluctant faculty member the benefits of using online teaching is to show that person examples of well designed and well taught online courses. Most faculty are willing to share their successes, even if it is to a person from another institution. You might even set aside a faculty/staff development day to bring together online instructors on your campus to demonstrate what they do. Suggest the faculty member "sit in on" the class of one of your campus stars. Some classroom management systems permit quests

Spotlight "best practices" of online teaching. Never underestimate the impact of success stories. Invite a reluctant faculty member to peruse research findings, case studies, and "best practices" examples.

Weekly or monthly discussion group of online teachers. Invite the reluctant online teacher to participate in a weekly or monthly discussion group already established and meeting on campus. If your campus does not already have a discussion group of online instructors meeting, it might be a good idea to establish one. It's always nice to know there is support available, and the existence of the discussion group might reduce the anxiety of the reluctant faculty member. How about calling the group something a little unusual, perhaps the "munching lunch bunch."

Positive attitude regarding online creation or switchover. Let this naysayer know that online learning works, it is an effective teaching format, and students like it. Although being realistic about online teaching and its complexities and difficulties, a positive attitude goes a long way in influencing an anxious person.

Practical Tips for Teaching Online

147 Practice Tips for Teaching Online Groups: Essentials of Web-Based Education (Hanna, Glowacki-Dudka, and Conceicao-Runlee, Atwood Publishing, 2000) is a must read for the naysayers who are convinced either that online learning isn't effective or they can't do it. This group of experienced distance educators provide a comprehensive collection of strategies for teaching effectively online. This book dispels myths, guides a person through the planning and implementation stages of an online course, and provides many valuable teaching strategies that will reduce the negative effect of students not being in the same place at the same time.

Present to the instructor many options for teaching strategies from which to choose. There might be need for a "hard sell" if the faculty member's style is more teacher-centered than learner-centered. Faculty might want to consider some of the following active learning strategies for their online course:

chat rooms	discussion boards
e-mail	ice breakers (bingo)
reflective activities	peer partnerships and team activities
authentic activities	games and simulations

Rita-Marie Conrad and J. Ana Donaldson provide some creative ideas in their book *Engaging the Online Learner: Activities and Resources for Creative Instruction* (2004, John Wiley/Jossey-Bass).

Additional Resources

You may wish to look at the following resources for more information about teaching online

courses.

Abacus Associates. 2000. A survey of traditional and distance learning higher education members (National Education Association). Available online at <http://www.nea.org/he/aboutthe/d/study.pdf>.

Bender, Diane M., B. Jeanneane Wood, and Jon D. Vredevoogd. 2004. Teaching Time: Distance Education Versus Classroom Instruction. *The American Journal of Distance Education* 18(2):103-114.

DiBiase, D. 2000. Is distance teaching more work or less? *The American Journal of Distance Education* (14 (3):5-20.

Gillespie, Frank. 1998. Instructional design for the new technologies. In *The impact of technology on faculty development, life, and work*. Vol. 76, ed. K. H. Gillespie, 39-52. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lazarus, B. D. 2003. Teaching courses online: How much time does it take? *Journal of Asynchronous Learning* 7 (3): 47-54.

Moore, M. G. 2000. Editorial: Is distance teaching more work or less? *The American Journal of Distance Education* 14 (3):1-5.

Conclusion

Although online teaching is not a "slam dunk" to many people who find they will soon be utilizing this format, with careful and thoughtful planning as well as effective training in developing an online course, the naysayer can be converted. Online teaching is not easy, in fact it's hard work. It requires effort on the parts of a number of people within an institution to make it all work. We are, however, able to reach students who are unable to join us on our campuses in traditional face-to-face classes.