Chapter 3

Comprehensive Faculty Development: An Innovative Approach in Online Education

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ABSTRACT

There is a significant need for faculty development and support as it relates to online teaching. Researchers assert that the success of online education may be a direct result of the training and support of the institution’s faculty. Higher education institutions implement a variety of online faculty development practices; however, little is known about which practices are seen as the most effective and efficient. In this chapter, the authors propose a strategic approach to building a comprehensive faculty development program that supports and engages online faculty from initial hire and beyond. The purpose of this chapter is to provide new insights to support faculty. The authors identify evidence-based strategies to incorporate adjunct and full-time online faculty into the university community. In addition, the authors share their experiences developing a comprehensive faculty development plan.

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INTRODUCTION

Researchers assert that the success of online education may be a direct result of the training and support of the institution’s faculty (Vaill & Testori, 2012). It has been asserted that supporting online instructors is paramount to developing high quality experiences for online teaching (Baran & Correia, 2014; Rhode, Richter, & Miller, 2017). This support empowers and challenges instructors to create transformative learning experiences (Mezirow, 1997). Professional development is a central factor leading to student success (O’Hara & Pritchard, 2012). Well-trained and supported faculty transfer their skills into the online classroom resulting in an improved student experience.

Professional development opportunities should include a variety of components including technology, pedagogy, mentoring/peer support, targeted modules for skill-set deficits, and discipline-based opportunities of scholarship (Baran & Correia, 2014; Scarpена et al., 2018; Schmit et al., 2016). The need for faculty members to engage in and complete training along their own time schedule, have access to archived live sessions, and be able to repeat trainings if necessary is of utmost importance (Scarpена, Riley, & Keathley, 2018). Because faculty have specific expectations and desires when it comes to professional development, it is important for institutions to assess the needs of faculty to develop an effective professional development plan (Mohr & Shelton, 2017). Administrators should seek to have faculty members self-identify weaknesses in skills important to online teaching and then provide the development opportunities needed to help faculty grow in those targeted areas (Rhode et al., 2017).

Chapter Objectives

- Examine current research related to strategies for online faculty development.
- Explore a strategic approach to building a comprehensive faculty development program which supports and engages online faculty from initial hire and beyond.

CURRENT RESEARCH

Comprehensive Professional Development

The authors of this chapter propose a comprehensive faculty development plan based on implementation of the most effective evidence-based strategies. This section explores some of those strategies. Development programs are critical in helping faculty engage in the process of pedagogical inquiry as they reflect on the interactions between content, online technologies, and pedagogical methods within their unique online classroom environment (Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2013). Characteristics of successful professional development programs include information that is able to be used immediately (Baran & Correia, 2014), focuses on smaller and more focused opportunities (Schmidt, Tschida, & Hodge, 2016) and a shorter delivery format (Scarpена et al., 2018). Baran and Correia (2014) recommend departments offer many types of professional development opportunities with a comprehensive approach to teaching. Schmidt et al. (2016) explain that modules or sessions may focus on discipline-specific content, practical pedagogical techniques, theoretical approaches, and institutional expectations.

The most effective professional development programs include both formal approaches and informal opportunities. Elliot, Rhoades, Jackson, & Mandernach (2015) recommend that professional development...