A Strong Foundation: Best Practices for an Educational Technology Support Office for Postsecondary School Faculty

Abstract: This paper presents best practices for supporting faculty who are starting to teach online. It describes practices implemented by the leadership of a newly-formed teaching and technology support center at a medical school and also explains the rationale for those practices. Having such an organization is important, but it is also crucial that faculty know about and want to use the organization. The leaders of this effort built on both research and personal experience to develop the plan for the creation and management of the support center. The primary theoretical background comes from change management theory as it relates to instructional and technology innovation, and is based on the work of D. P. Ely (1990, 1999), J. P. Kotter (1996), and E.M. Rogers (1995). The practices fall into two main categories: organizational and procedural. These recommendations are presented in order to assist other organizations in their early stages to consider their own schools’ needs and structure their services appropriately.

Introduction and Purpose

Putting their face-to-face courses online can be difficult for instructors, who frequently must both master a new technology and adjust their course content and teaching techniques to take advantage of the strengths of the new medium. Many universities have started to address this issue by creating organizations that provide faculty with support for both of these elements of the transition to online learning, such as Duke’s Center for Instructional Technology (http://cit.duke.edu/home.do), Pennsylvania State University’s Teaching and Learning with Technology group (http://tlt.its.psu.edu/), and Stanford University’s Center for Teaching and Learning (http://ctl.stanford.edu/). Having such an organization is important, but it is also crucial that faculty know about and want to use the organization. Each decision made in planning the structure and function of such an organization affects the quality of service provided by the organization and can shape the way that the organization is perceived by its “clients” – the faculty members who will use its services. This paper presents the best practices implemented during the formation and initial work of a newly-formed teaching and technology support center at a medical school. It also presents the rationale for those practices. These recommendations are presented in order to assist other organizations in their early stages to consider their own schools’ needs and structure their services appropriately.

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Organizational practices included:

- Ensure school administration buy-in by making a member of the school administration part of the organization’s leadership
- Place instructional designers at the forefront of the group
- Make the artists and developers organization team, not another department

Procedural practices included:

- Develop and follow a project plan/process for completion
- Provide faculty with opportunity for input but don’t require extensive work from them
- Review content (as much as possible) as taught face-to-face
- Develop a template for putting content online
- Make clear what content needs to be provided for online version
- Provide support throughout the development and implementation process
References


