Abstract: In most universities, the required undergraduate courses have high enrollment (multiple sections) and are frequently taught by part-time instructors or graduate students. Part-time faculty are an important asset to any university, but this group can also present a wide range of professional qualifications and teaching experience which can result in significant variations in the depth and quality of instruction. This paper reports on the collaborative effort by full and part-time faculty in an urban Midwestern College of Education to improve the consistency of course content and quality of instruction between multiple sections of a core undergraduate course. One strategy used to reduce the threat of “course drift” was the development of web-based resources to support both the instructor and student.

In most universities, the required undergraduate courses have high enrollment (multiple sections) and are frequently taught by part-time instructors or graduate students. The National Center for Education Statistics reported that as of Fall 1998, 43 percent of postsecondary instructional faculty and staff were employed part time as defined by their institution (2001, p. 2). An additional survey by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce of humanities and social science disciplines showed that less than half of introductory undergraduate courses were taught by full-time tenured faculty, and approximately 43 percent of all undergraduate courses in those disciplines are taught by part-time faculty or graduate students (Townsend 2000, p. 2).

Part-time faculty are an important asset to any university, but this group can also present a wide range of professional qualifications and teaching experience which can result in significant variations in the depth and quality of instruction (Lankard 1993, p. 1). In the case of large classes with multiple sections, the use of part-time instructors or graduate students contributes to significant problems with consistency and coherence to learning objectives (Roberts 2001, p. 2).

This paper reports on the collaborative effort by full and part-time faculty in an urban Midwestern College of Education to improve the consistency of course content and quality of instruction between multiple sections of a core undergraduate course. One strategy used to reduce the threat of “course drift” was the development of web-based
resources to support both the instructor and student. The web site of shared course materials was intentionally designed to:

1. Improve consistency and quality of instruction throughout all sections of the course.
2. Reduce the preparation time for faculty.
3. Provide class materials such as PowerPoint presentations, web links, assignments, and other related materials in one easy to find location.
4. Model Internet resource use

The web site was developed using Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and FrontPage, and was made accessible to students and instructors approximately one month after the start of classes in the Fall 2001 semester. The web site has been enhanced and modified during its use in the Spring 2002 semester. A survey and set of interview questions have been developed to collect data from students and instructors on the utility of the shared web resources. Student work will be collected from sections that used the web resources and from sections that did not to compare the quality of the products. Additional sources of information include grades, course evaluations, and student comments on those evaluation forms.

References


