The purpose of this paper is to describe the development of a college course for rural adults in principles of marketing that utilized both distance education and class meetings.

Faculty Support

Many adults know they need to upgrade their skills, but need encouragement and personal recognition to do so. In the past, regular class meetings have provided the opportunity for the teacher to provide this support and encouragement. In many rural settings, students and families are new owners of computers and neophytes at using the Internet. They often need assistance with using the Internet as a means of course work and resource while at the same time learning the subject matter.

Utilization of Student Time

Adult learners who are employed full-time often cannot attend classes on a daily or even weekly basis. When the instructor posts course work including assignments, readings, notes, and web sites on the Internet, students can access these materials at their convenience. By utilizing e-mail for the transmission of homework and questions to the teacher, the teacher can respond in a timely manner without having to wait for the class to meet. In addition, regular postings of homework assignments help to keep each student focused and moving forward. Using the Internet as a means of communication between groups and partners avoids extra travel or time off from work.

Utilization of Class Time

While some people may be able to work alone at home at the computer, most careers today involve personal interaction with others. In addition, not all courses or teaching styles lend themselves to total web presentation. Scheduling class time for teacher presentations, group discussions, student presentations, and exams provides face-to-face opportunities for learning and interaction. Utilizing technology to communicate with students saves valuable class time for subject matter discussions and the presentation of original materials not available in the text. Students come to class prepared having sent homework assignments via e-mail several days prior to the scheduled class meeting. By utilizing the Internet students receive individual attention and acquire group skills.
Class Description

During the fall 1998 semester, a totally web-based course was changed to include several class meetings. None of the students were proficient in the use of the Internet and e-mail, therefore time was allowed for orientation to the Internet as a resource and as a medium for learning. This is a very small rural branch of a small college where the only technical assistance available is from the instructor. Class time was used for exams, instruction in presentation skills, and class discussions of readings and assignments. Individual and group presentations of projects were completed in person.

Teaching Goals and Objectives

This course was developed for the rural adult learner, degree or non-degree seeking student. Behavioral goals included helping adults to achieve a positive attitude toward life-long learning and technology, and increased self-identity through the development of individual potential. Instructional goals included knowledge about the Internet and its application to marketing, the preparation and presentation of marketing plans, and the understanding of the specific objectives associated with marketing concepts.

Summary

By the midpoint of the course students were regularly sending assignments to the instructor via e-mail without difficulty. Assignments that included searching the Internet were well done and thoughtfully completed. Utilization of class time was very focused. Students expressed concern that the course took a lot of work and were reminded of the time saved by not driving to and attending some classes. Presentations and projects were completed in a professional manner. Responses to the students by the instructor needed to be better planned. This format was a good alternative to totally web-based courses, it allowed for personal interaction among students and teacher while encouraging students to use new technology.

Literature References


