

## **Using Their Tools: Faculty Training Innovations**

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This paper explores The University of Toledo Distance Learning's transformation from a typical faculty development model to an efficient and effective team-based paradigm. A vital part of the team is an assistant instructional designer whose skill as a multimedia artist is able to facilitate the increasing demands of today's online learners. The presenters will showcase practical applications that demonstrate the improvements in the relationship between faculty and instructional designers. In order to assist faculty to become an online instructional expert, methods used include group training, online development, and individualized consultation. Regarding faculty as clients, content experts, and colleagues, assists in fostering a team-based approach toward higher learning outcomes. The implication of providing several methods of faculty development and the impact on course development is explored.

### **History of Faculty Development**

While Distance Learning at The University of Toledo continues to grow at a rapid pace (see. Fig. 1), the methods of faculty development, training, and support have evolved into innovate processes which provide for efficient and effective learning outcomes for the faculty, and in turn, University students. For the purposes of this paper, distance learning is defined as courses that students complete entirely online (i.e., students do not meet in a traditional classroom). While Distance Learning also provides faculty training for web-assisted courses, this paper does not detail the processes involved in this endeavor. UT's Distance Learning also provides ITV and CD-ROM courses; however, the primary medium for delivery is via the Internet. Many of the courses offered involve more than one delivery media.

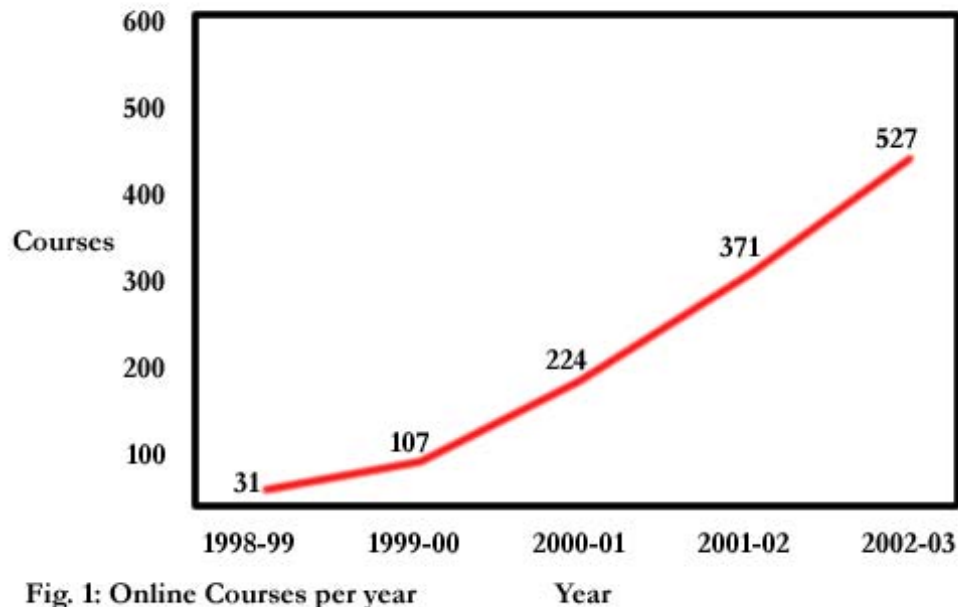


Fig. 1: Online Courses per year

In the early stages of faculty development, most faculty were early adopters<sup>1</sup> with high intrinsic motivation, computer technical skills, and a desire to teach using the courseware application (WebCT). In light of this, the primary focus with faculty was to provide WebCT training on the course tools and suggested applications leading toward success. This typically occurred in a computer laboratory with a group of discipline-specific faculty. Individualized sessions were provided for support and follow-through of the training provided in the group session. As growth continued, the need for additional instructional designers and multimedia artists increased. The role of individualized consulting expanded beyond support and the demand for consulting increased exponentially. However, the demand for group work – other than a basic introduction to learning online – diminished (see fig. 2).

As the late majority of faculty began to teach online, the need to provide services beyond that of training became apparent immediately. While group training was sufficient for early adopters as an introduction to teaching online, it did not provide the detailed assistance necessary for the late majority. Furthermore, faculty computing skill and anxiety were dissimilar. Through this experience we learned that (a) many faculty do not want their peers to be cognizant of their ability level and work style, (b) faculty preferred a more personal affinity with their design team, and (c) faculty required the design team provide extensive services in course development.

After evaluating the faculty requests and the probable increase in course quality and learner outcome, a third organizational shift in the process was implemented. The changes recommended by faculty would allow them to focus their attention on course management and interaction with learners. Increasing Design Team/Faculty individual consultations to include extensive services (e.g., HTML page construction, interactive multimedia design and development) enabled faculty to engage the learners. Faculty send content to their assigned design team. The team then designs and develops a module according to Best Practices found in

the North Central Association standards.<sup>ii</sup> The team assigned will examine the document, write learning objectives, and select media to present the materials, and employ design ideas according to Best Practices to discuss with the faculty. Then the team will develop the modules as discussed. By providing extensive instructional and multimedia design and development to faculty, the faculty are more responsive to our suggestions of using sound learning theories and practices (e.g., learning objectives) which increase the students' knowledge of the content.

### Team Approach

Faculty are the key component in facilitating online instruction as a quality learning experience. Students learn more effectively through provision of a significant interaction process with faculty, peers, and the learning content<sup>iii</sup>. Faculty also provide a mentor/leadership role to students in their learning; thus, students rely on faculty response to their questions in a timely manner.

A team-based approach is necessary in order for faculty to become successful online instructional leaders. In the team approach, the team consists of the faculty (Subject Matter Expert, SME), Instructional System Designer (ISD), and Multimedia Artist (MA). As shown in the graph below (Fig. 2), all team members have a role in the design and development of the course, including the instructional system design and the multimedia design. All members focus on the content in applying current theories and practices in the design to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

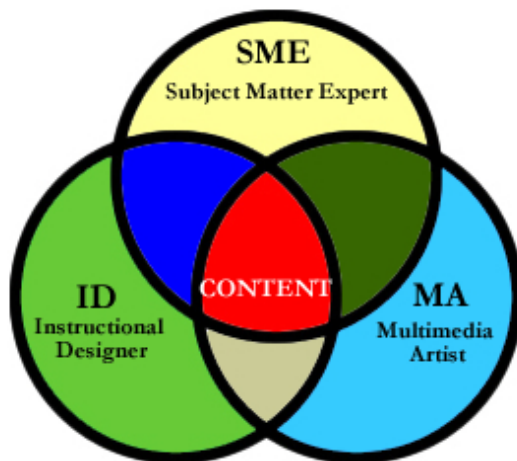


Fig. 2: Team Approach

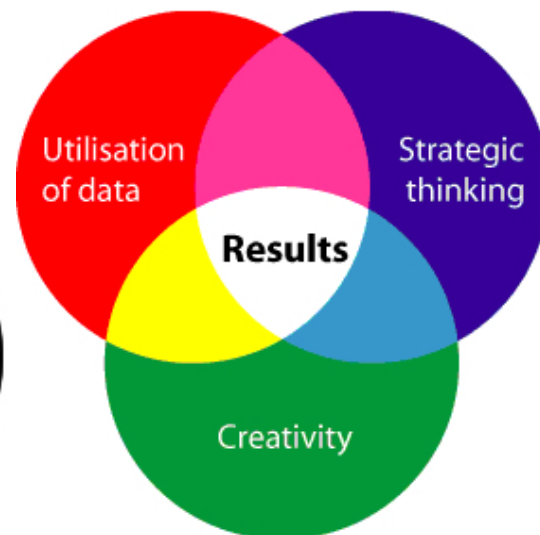


Fig. 3: Presky Model

### Engaging Faculty to Engage Learners

Good practice encourages active learning in which faculty engage students using several tools: designing interactive activities such as threaded discussions, online simulations, streaming media, group projects, and online assessments.<sup>iv</sup> From the Presky<sup>v</sup> model above (Fig. 3), all team members bring significant higher-order cognitive skills to effectuate quality learning

outcomes. In the utilization of data area, faculty are required to re-examine their traditional delivery of course content in order to “reach” students at a distance. The instructional designer must ensure materials provided are in line with the instructional objectives of that particular module. The multimedia artist in this area must ensure content is not distorted by communication “noise”<sup>vi</sup> when transforming static text to an interactive component. Within the strategic thinking area, the faculty member and the instructional designer must create measurable learning objectives and assessments based on the objectives prescribed. The instructional designer must plan the thematic flow of information, consider the learner characteristics, and utilize clear design practices geared toward the learning objectives. Under the creativity domain, the faculty member must think outside of the “top-down” traditional teaching practices and develop ideas that engage, challenge, and oftentimes motivate learners in rigorous study. Here, the instructional designer and multimedia artist facilitate the professor’s selection of instruction by demonstrating various instructional and multimedia techniques used in similar and different disciplines that are successful in obtaining high learning outcomes.

### **Methods of Faculty Development**

Three methods are utilized to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of faculty development:

1. Group Training – Discipline-specific groups meet in a faculty computer laboratory to receive an overview of the experiences and opportunities for teaching online.
2. Online Training – Modules for training via WebCT (e.g., email tool, assignment tool, assessment tool, Respondus, calendar tool) are used for faculty to learn in an anytime, anywhere environment like their students. A “faculty lounge” is in development which provides not only support and training, but also resources and current research on teaching via distance.
3. Individual Consultation – A variety of tasks often are accomplished in the consultation process. This consultation occurs at the faculty’s office, the offices of the Distance Learning Design Center, or even at the faculty member’s home. This is a primary and significant contribution to the methods and key to the success of developing courses on a large scale.

### **Evaluation**

In addition to the summative and formative evaluations conducted by the team, the Assistant Director for Course Development reviews each course upon completion by the team. This is beneficial because (a) the Assistant Director has no development bias enabling him to evaluate the course as a learner; (b) has an overview of the program level strategies and plans in order to ensure there are no course-to-course gaps; and (c) can ensure proper sequencing of communication, content, and assessment.

The team-based approach has proven successful for the large scale operations of Distance Learning at The University of Toledo. It is unknown whether this approach would be successful

or practical at a small to medium size Distance Learning program. However, quantifiable feedback from student surveys and qualitative forums and interviews with students suggest that the team approach is accomplishing the goal to provide high learning outcomes.

## **The Need for Multimedia Design**

Regardless of the quality of the instructional design or the clarity of content provided to students at a distance, the goal of any course taught at a distance should be to provide the highest possible learning outcome, or effectiveness. While the content and interaction within the course remain the primary avenue, experience and research shows that students' learning outcomes are increased when they are engaged through dynamic multimedia components.<sup>vii</sup> Furthermore, the learner's perception of the course is greatly influenced by the way in which the content is introduced online.

Today's learners attend highly digitized movies with a flurry of special effects. They play computer and video games and watch television more than any preceding generation. They are accustomed to the audio and visual quality of these media and imply that the quality of that media is directly related to the quality of the content. The common element in media today is the quality of multimedia design, from exciting Digital effects and cinematography to awesome soundtracks and imagery. This perception is transferred to online courses. An online course that provides high quality multimedia design including interactive learning, instructor based Flash presentations and the proper mixture of Graphics will engage students in their learning experience. It is the duty of the instructional designer to work closely with the subject matter expert in order to communicate the course work to the students. The multimedia artist conveys the proper visual metaphor. A good multimedia artist can transform lecture notes into an interactive learning experience that emphasizes the content and focuses the learner in interaction with the course material. Multimedia can be woven into any course from streaming audio files defining a complex mathematical equation, to an interactive presentation of the brain, or a CD ROM presenting the best of Renaissance Artisans.

The team model is intrinsic to the development of an effective distance learning course. This model effectuates the processes that have driven the growth of online courses at The University. It remains an evolving dynamic as technology advances and more faculty become involved in online course development.

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<sup>i</sup> Rogers, Everett C. (1983). *Diffusion of Innovations*. New York: Free Press; 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.

<sup>ii</sup> The Higher Learning Commission/NCA. Addendum to the Handbook of Accreditation, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Chapter Reference C: Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs. March 2002.

<sup>iii</sup> The Higher Learning Commission, A Commission of The North Central Association of Colleges and schools, Addendum to the Handbook of Accreditation, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, March 2002

<sup>iv</sup> Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson (1991). *Applying the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*. Number 47, Fall 1991. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

<sup>v</sup> [www.sovereign-publications.com/preskymaves.htm](http://www.sovereign-publications.com/preskymaves.htm)

<sup>vi</sup> DeVito, Joseph A. (1996) *Messages: building interpersonal communication skills*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. HarperCollins College Publishers: New York.

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<sup>vii</sup> Jeffries, Pamela, Rhett McDaniel, and Michael Vaugh (2002). Development of an interactive, Multimedia CD ROM to Teach Medication Administration to Undergraduate Health Professionals. The Center for Teaching & Learning, IUPUI School of Nursing.