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Pre-Symposium Materials for Roanoke

Improving Learning & Reducing Costs:
Redesigning Large-Enrollment Courses (1999)

1999

Discussion Outline for Pew Symposium in Learning and Technology in Roanoke

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Twigg, Carol, "Discussion Outline for Pew Symposium in Learning and Technology in Roanoke" (1999). *Pre-Symposium Materials for Roanoke*. 5.
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July Symposium Outline

INTRO

A. Why Roanoke – Virginia Tech

B. Willing suspension of disbelief concept

Every symposium that we have held has suffered from the same problem: rather than discuss the issue at hand, the participants wanted to discuss whether or not HED would/should/could change.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge called drama "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith." When we sit in a theater, we willingly suspend our disbelief. We know that everything that is happening on the stage isn't real, but the playwright, the actors and the audience all enter into a conspiracy "of poetic faith" in an attempt to bring to life a quasi-reality that will transcend and communicate some perception about life in this world.

I know many of you think HED doesn't want to change. I'm asking you to willingly suspend your disbelief today and focus on those who do want to change. At the end of the session, we will talk about those who don't and how to influence.

C. What is today's agenda? Structure?

D. What outcomes?

E. Finally, many of you may be wondering how you came to be invited to this meeting. You will see here represented two kinds of folks: 1) practitioners, and 2) influencers and big picture thinkers. (Some encompass both) But Molly has been busy leading the CSU and the U of NC system; John has been really busy developing software and teaching students. I'm hoping that this interchange will bring both perspectives to bear.

Representation: practicing faculty, national leaders, institutional leaders, IT leaders, foundation officers (sort of like 3 calling birds, 2 french hens, and a partridge in a pear tree).

Begin by introducing yourselves and describing your interest in and relationship to the topic. Also, of these many issues, which do you heartily concur with and which do you have questions about?

I.   Examine premises in intro of paper (pp. 1 – 3)

More productive learning environments are not synonymous with distance learning environments.

What evidence do we have that 1:15 online faculty/student ratios produce more effective learning than other models? Is appropriate use of faculty time a key to ongoing sustainability? Can the planning methodology help individuals and institutions think more clearly about the design of online learning?

II.   Examine first two premises of the planning methodology

The planning methodology has three interrelated components that cannot be separated from one another:

1) the concept of readiness – there are a number of concrete actions that institutions need to accomplish in order to be ready for large-scale redesign;
2) the goal of redesign must be on improving student learning – and assessing learning achievement must be part of the redesign
3) Cost reduction involves detailed financial planning

You must have a strategic focus.

Large enrollment, introductory courses appear to be the most logical target for redesign. Is this assumption correct? Are there other such targets for redesign that can have a significant impact?

You must be ready—i.e., you cannot start from scratch.

Does the readiness concept make sense? Are these the right criteria? Should others be added? Should any be omitted?

CASE STUDY

UW-Madison   John Moore, Carolyn Jarmon
Combo – external force – NLII

The overall goal of this collaboration is for the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Educom to engage in a project of mutual interest. University of Wisconsin-

Madison seeks to expand the national and global breadth of educational opportunities, an objective which requires the application of distance education and technology. Furthermore, UW-Madison wants to tilt substantially towards the radical in this project in the form of technology (e.g., web-based instruction 24-hours/day), academic organization, and scale. These goals are entirely in line with the NLII's vision to design, implement and expand alternative learning models to increase access, to improve the quality, and to control or reduce the cost of that experience.

Carolyn: talk about the process we went thru, esp. identification of project (strategic focus and readiness) and cost analysis (working with John).

John then describe redesign goals and process.

III. Examine learning goals

Redesign must adhere to sound pedagogical principles.

Are these the right pedagogical principles? Should others be added? Should any be omitted?

Assessment involves both impact and implementation.

These ideas provide a framework for how to think about assessment. Are there specific things that need to be assessed in each instance? Are there others that do not because of established practice?

IV.   Examine cost model and premises

There are three ways to reduce the cost of instruction, all of which translate to a reduction in cost-per-student.

Is the cost-per-student the correct common denominator of all redesign approaches? Are there other approaches to reducing the cost-per-student that are not listed here?

Cost savings are primarily the result of a reduction in time spent by instructional personnel.
Is this assumption correct? Are there other ways to achieve cost savings in instruction?

Financial planning involves analyzing the cost of traditional methods of instruction as well as new methods of instruction utilizing technology.

This methodology utilizes activity-based costing, a process generally regarded in higher education as difficult and unpopular. Is activity-based costing necessary to understand this issue? Are there alternative approaches that can work as well or better?

The planning methodology compares operational costs and does not include developmental costs.

Is this a reasonable approach? Are there issues or problems that such an approach overlooks?

Institution-wide support services and administrative overhead are not included in the comparative cost analysis.
Is this assumption reasonable?

Infrastructure and equipment costs are not included.

This is clearly a complex area. What do you think about these arguments?

LUNCH

V.   Examine 3 specific instances and draw lessons

Virginia Tech   Anne Moore
Institutional force
(show cost model for VT)

SCALE at Illinois   Lanny Arvan
Grant asking specifically to do

RPI studio   Jack Wilson
Institutionalization

Discussion – extract principles from the day

VI.   Examine the premise that any can implement

Sustaining innovation is the primary goal.

Do you agree with this last point? Does the methodology provide a way for institutions to fund their own development?

VII.   Examine what is needed for widespread implementation

What incentives need to be in place for change? how to disseminate – to put off the change discussion – this is really how to get people to change . . . e.g., alignment of faculty incentive and institutional goals