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Faculty learning communities (FLCs): Using experience as a leveraged resource for an evolving
distance learning (DL) faculty development model

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Introduction

In this paper the first author describes how she leverages a social learning model, faculty learning communities (FLC), in combination with online technologies to extend limited resources for training faculty. This is the second year that the University's Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) has provided a stipend to faculty who attended a multi-week hybrid course, "Designing Interactive and Creative E-learning (DICE). The course, offered during the spring semester, has "graduated" over 20 faculty in two years. This year, the nine faculty members were from four different colleges and schools across campus.

The first part of this paper is primarily a description of instructional design choices for developing the DICE course. The structure, therefore, is around the instructional design heuristic Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation (ADDIE) with the theoretical framework introduced within that structure. The paper concludes with descriptions of lessons learned from four of the nine faculty members from the spring 2010 DICE course.

The Instructional Design Process

Analysis: Faculty-learners, Context, and Resources

Faculty-learner. Just as in any "class", these faculty-learners came in with different levels of experience with DL, technology, and course design, not to mention different disciplinary approaches to teaching and learning. Because this training was voluntary and there was no release time provided, the faculty participants were carrying a full teaching load, serving on committees, and conducting research in addition to attending the DICE class.

As stated earlier, the nine faculty members who completed DICE in the spring of 2010 represented four out of the six colleges/ schools at the University. Eight were full time, tenure-track faculty and one was an adjunct/ administrator.

Context. The University is a small private liberal arts college with a strong reputation for small classroom numbers and a traditional college experience. One of the University's strengths is the

personal attention afforded by small classes and engaged faculty. Until very recently, many faculty members at the University have expressed concerns that a distance learning environment may not be able to replicate the same level of interaction between students and faculty found in a traditional classroom environment.

Similar to all postsecondary institution, the University's student demographic has been changing as more minority students, less prepared students, and a greater diversity of socio-economic students enter higher education. While this democratization of higher education is important for the United States' ability to compete globally, it has necessitated a change in how we recruit, teach, and support students who have different needs and expectations than the student populations that we traditionally served. This shift in student demographic requires that higher education administration and faculty look for new tools (programs, instructional strategies, and technologies) that will help our students be successful.

Postsecondary institutions decide to move into distance learning (DL) for many reasons, most of which are related to increasing enrollments and retention. In addition to attracting a different student demographic, providing online and hybrid courses allows traditional on-campus students more flexibility in their schedules. Online courses can also help with retention by extending the classroom, which increases learner support and faculty student interaction, and by connecting to students over the breaks, especially over the summer months.

DL Training Resources. Because of the opportunities afforded by online and hybrid courses, the administration felt that some courses should be redesigned to replace a portion of seat time. However there had been little or no faculty training or support for distance learning (DL) courses. Truman-Davis, et al. (2000) state that there were four key areas that the University of Central Florida (UCF) addressed when developing its award winning approach to online learning: 1) the institution, 2) the faculty, 3) the courses, and 4) learners.

The University's CTL offers services and support for continuous instructional excellence by providing opportunities for faculty to develop their teaching, instructional technology, and scholarship knowledge and skills. As with most small higher-education institutions faculty and administrator wear many hats and have to maximize their time and other resources. The role of CTL Director is no different.

Instructional design is most often a team effort . However, with only the CTL Director to design and deliver DL training for faculty, there was a need to minimize both her time and the faculty members' time while widening the amount of shared experienced. To maximize the available resources (time and experience) providing pedagogically sound distance learning training for faculty, DICE was designed as a hybrid course with a very interactive component. By offering DICE as a hybrid course, replacing half the seat time, the faculty were afforded more flexibility and were able to experience of a learner would.

Design and Deliver.

A FLC is a professional learning community of trans-disciplinary faculty who come together on a voluntarily basis over a specified period of time (Cox, 2004) to discuss how to enhance teaching and learning. The conceptual framework on which FLCs are based is based on several decades of literature that began with John Dewey's student learning communities (see Cox, 2004 for a detailed literature review). A FLC provides faculty with opportunities to collaborate with each other on how to refine our practice. While the original intent of using FLC's was to increase scholarly teaching, this course was designed to capitalize on the collaborative piece of a FLC. The collaborative nature of the FLC allows for social learning between adults, i.e. faculty, with a great deal of experience

Because of the educational and professional experience of the CTL Director (e.g. an instructional designer and faculty in higher education), the following assumptions about learning influenced the design and delivery of DICE:

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- All instructional/teaching decisions are linked to the question “what is it that my learners need to be able to know, do, or feel?”
- Learning is an active process- both individual and social.
- Each person brings unique, yet similar, experiences to the learning process.
- Building upon prior knowledge is essential to learning new skills.
- Knowledge is linked to its context of application. Therefore learning any type of problem-solving process is best done through authentic activities.
- Developing expertise in a profession requires targeted practice, adequate time, good feedback, and some reflection. (Ingram, 2010)

Based on these theoretical assumptions, the UCF’s faculty support/training model (Truman-Davis, et. al 2000) and Cox’s (2004) FLCs a multi-week (eight the first year and 10 the second) hybrid-style course was designed. The course was organized around five modules, each containing one f2f meeting and two-three weeks of online (using the university’s CMS) activities . Both the f2f and online components of the modules are designed to foster active learning through student-to-student (faculty) interaction, student-to-facilitator (the CTL Director) interaction, and student-to-content interaction (Moore & Kearsley, 2004).

In addition there were optional Blackboard (our University’s Course Management System) workshops offered throughout the 10weeks. However, it wasn’t until the faculty members had experienced the course as students, completing assignments and receiving feedback, that they then began redesigning an approved course for online delivery.

Evaluation

At the end of the 10 weeks the faculty completed an anonymous survey online, much like student course evaluations. In general, faculty felt that after the course they had a deeper understanding of what it takes to design and deliver quality hybrid/ online courses. However, the responses also showed that the faculty feel that resources, i.e. time (theirs-release time, and mine- more support for them) and technology training were two areas they feel need to be addressed.

At the end of the 10-week DICE course, the faculty also presented their prototype courses and lessons learned to faculty and administration. The response to the faculty members’ presentations was

overwhelmingly positive. In the next section of the paper four of the faculty share much of what they presented to our University learning community.

Lessons Learned: Faculty Voices

George Gresham, Ph.D., Marketing: Hybrid-Style Introduction to Marketing Course

I have developed a hybrid-style introductory Principles of Marketing class. Development of this course began while taking a hybrid learning course at The University's Center for Teaching and Learning. This short paper provides a brief overview of how and what I learned in this 10-week development course and, most importantly, how I will use a hybrid-designed course to improve the learning environment for adult evening class students in The University's Accelerated Degree Program.

How I learned to develop a hybrid course. The 10-week course for faculty was a hybrid-designed course. There was traditional face-to-face (f2f) in-class time with my fellow students (colleagues) and classes held "out there" in cyberspace through the university's Course Management System (CMS). Having been a professor for some time, I was familiar with many Blackboard tools. But I never imagined what I could do (as a student and teacher) in a hybrid setting. I'll come back to that later.

The f2f classes focused on how to make the adjustment from total f2f traditional class settings to the hybrid setting. For example, measuring progress towards established learning objectives, conducting class exercises/projects, using rubrics for grading student participation and, of course, providing for assessments in a cyberspace setting require a different approach – for student and instructor. We completed exercises together as an entire class, as study groups and by individual effort. Feedback was continuous, from instructor and fellow students. The instructor provided guidelines for the completion of the exercises, including deadlines, but there was a great deal of latitude for each student and group to determine their own pace. Having the course conducted on campus also allowed one-on-one interaction with our instructor, which enabled me to quickly learn new skills and develop a strong foundation at the beginning.

Now, let me discuss what I actually learned (pedagogically speaking) in the class, i.e., beyond the necessary mechanics of building an online hybrid course.

What I learned I could do in a hybrid-designed marketing class. The most important thing learned was that I could do anything in a hybrid-designed course that I was already doing in f2f-only class settings. But the most exciting thing I learned was that the hybrid style course permitted me to perform additional tasks not possible with the traditional classroom setting, and some tasks were actually easier to perform as a student and instructor. Below is an example.

In our class, we were encouraged to share our work with our classmates. For example, in one exercise, we shared the learning objectives from one of our traditionally taught classes. How enriching! I was able to help a colleague with her objective setting while knowing nothing about the content she taught! And the input I received helped improve the clarity of my learning objectives. When students (like us) do this, we get different perspectives and viewpoints. In my marketing classes, I'll use this student-to-student communication to provide individuals with feedback on the marketing plans that they develop for new products they envision. The students can survey their classmates and even ask their friends (Facebook list?) for input. Student interaction appears to be enhanced in the hybrid setting. Maybe it's because the medium reduces the intimidation from f2f encounters. I don't know. But, I do know that students learn from each other. In the hybrid setting, we may learn more about what the students have learned this semester in our class!

How I will use the hybrid-designed class. The hybrid-designed class will be used in the College of Business's evening undergraduate program. Most students in our program are employed fulltime, often have young families and live far enough away from the university that the after-work commute makes for a very long day. For these students, efficient time management is critical to their success at home, office and school. In my experience, as well as what I have learned from my colleagues, much of what is done in the introductory marketing class setting can be accomplished in a hybrid-designed course. I believe this is especially true for the evening adult learners, most of whom are highly

motivated to learn and will take the initiative to get their assignments and projects completed when due. Marketing projects are often team projects. Teams must meet often, and the hybrid-designed course enables the teams to meet at their convenient times, not at an institutional appointed time and place. The hybrid course design improves team communication and saves valuable time. When properly designed, the instructor is much more a part of the team, since all can meet in cyberspace. With current Skype technology, students and instructor can have additional meeting time and real-time f2f.

Hybridization of the traditional learning environment offers so many advantages for students, instructors and the institutions that embrace IT. The short 10-week course has opened up new opportunities for enhancing my ability to create and optimize the learning environment for my students. *Angela M. Mattia, Ph.D, Decision Sciences & Information Management: Design and Development of a Hybrid Management Information Technology Course*

“Designing Interactive & Creative E-Learning” was a 10-week hybrid course offered to faculty. It introduced the fundamental differences of e-learning in a way that allowed faculty to design a prototype of a fully online or hybrid course that meets the course objectives and research-based best practices for online learning. Below is a brief description of the design decisions and lessons learned when developing a prototype of a hybrid Management Information Technology (MIT) course that will be used in The University’s Accelerated Degree Program.

Design Decisions. The design of the MIT hybrid course is fundamentally different than designing a traditional or an online course. Designing a course where e-learning occurs takes practice, patience, reflection, and hard work (Ingram 2010). With this in mind, the current MIT course was redesigned over a 10-week period, for hybrid delivery. The design included formulating goals, and student-centered performance objectives. A decision was made to structure the course around learning blocks called units. Assessment would include online quizzes, discussion boards, assignments, and group projects. A discussion board called “Ask the Professor” and daily announcements are used to facilitate online communication between students and the instructor. The design included “Group

Pages” to encourage collaboration between students. Weekly reminders are e-mailed to keep students engaged. A frequently asked questions (FQA) section was developed to help answer questions quickly thereby reducing student frustration. The prototype was implemented using a course management system (CMS).

Lessons Learned. The most important lesson learned was that a faculty member must become a change agent. It requires being open to the process of discovering how people learn and using that knowledge to build online and hybrid learning environments that promote learning. This is significant because a change agent needs to become responsible for the change process. This process begins by first considering the most appropriate e-Learning model for the MIT students. Next, you must develop the course goals. Lastly, performance (learning) objectives are derived in a way that supports the course goals.

In addition, e-learning issues are multidimensional and should be examined from a multidimensional point of view. The theoretical and empirical organizational change literature contributes to the lessons learned by supplying insight into four issues common to all change efforts: (a) content issues, which in this instance largely focus on the substance of contemporary classroom changes; (b) contextual issues, which principally focus on forces or conditions existing in a MIT courses external and internal environments; (c) process issues, which address actions undertaken during the creation of the MIT class prototype, and (d) criterion issues, which deal with outcomes commonly assessed using research-based best practices for online learning (Armenakis and Bedeian 1999). Therefore, the final lesson learned was that you need a multidimensional framework to create a comprehensive course that promotes e-learning.

Elizabeth Gregg, Ph.D., Sports Marketing

Charged with teaching a hybrid graduate class during my first year at The University, my only reference point was a fully online course I took as a graduate student. The instructor relied solely on a

chat room discussion for the duration of the term; a format that prevented many from engaging in the course material.

I was pleasantly surprised that online learning could actually be a rich experience with positive learning outcomes. Our learning community was constructed in a fashion that allowed for a basic level of understanding of hybrid course design. In terms of structure, understanding how to construct proper learning objectives is a crucial first step in the development of a college course.

This was surprisingly difficult and likely an area where many university professors need additional training. Through the development of sound learning objectives, the effectiveness of the course outline and learning activities can be maximized. With the learning objectives complete, the syllabus can be finalized. It seems necessary that a great deal of the DICE time needs to focus on how to design online assignments for the term. I was not fully aware of how to prepare a discussion board that would capitalize on student participation and knowledge acquisition.

Finally, building a Blackboard site and learning how to properly organize tabs for easy access would be the last phase. It was interesting to learn how to place links in multiple places for students to access assignments, discussion boards, instructor information, and other pertinent data. When properly organized, a DICE-like FLC can be a truly valuable training session.

Dr. Gordon W. Arbogast, Professor of Management: Graduate Hybrid Format Capstone Course

This past summer I delivered the MBA Graduate Capstone Strategy and Policy Classes (MGT 553 and 554) in a hybrid format for the first time. Development work on this course actually began while I was taking a hybrid learning course at The University's Center for Teaching and Learning with Kathy Ingram in Spring 2010. The purpose of this paper is to furnish a short description of the lessons learned in: (1) going through the 10-week development course and (2) how effective the course was in enhancing learning in a course that had heretofore been restricted to an in-class environment.

The 10-week hybrid-designed course for faculty turned out to be an excellent preparation for my goal of converting the graduate capstone class in the summer to a hybrid format. Kathy Ingram stressed

the proper way to establish learning objectives for the course, how to measure progress toward same, and lastly how to build-out the syllabus for a hybrid course. She provided real-time input to the students taking the course, and arranged discussion boards in which the various faculty critiqued each other.

Perhaps the most important exercise was to establish a requirement for a verbal briefing at the end of the 10 weeks in which each participant was required to brief on a real-world application of how the faculty member would be using their newly gained skills. The biggest lesson I learned in the course was that doing a hybrid was a fairly high time intensive exercise. Doing a hybrid was not easy and it required a good deal of time to re-do an existing, traditional course. However, it was well worth it. I needed to learn new Blackboard skills and to rethink what I would be requiring from my students.

The CTL Director was generous with her time and after working one-on-one with her on several occasions I was able to do a fairly worthwhile first iteration of my graduate course. She shared with me her Blackboard skills that allowed this to happen. Another major lesson learned was that practical blackboard skills need to be taught along with the pedagogy of on-line teaching to ensure that the faculty member secures the skills that he (she) need to be successful in launching a hybrid course.

The course where the class was applied was the graduate capstone business class in the College of Business's evening MBA program. In this course students need to demonstrate that they can integrate all of the learning in the functional courses that they have had to that point in the MBA experience i.e. marketing, finance, operations management, leadership, management of information technology, accounting etc. This is done using a series of group and individual exercises. For example, after learning the strategic management process, student groups choose a Fortune 500 corporation on which to perform a complete strategic audit. Another group serves as a devil's advocated for the presentation and follows up the actual presentation with a critical review.

Roughly one-third of the 16 week classes were conducted on-line. These supplemented the actual in-residence classes which were used early on to teach the strategic management material and later, for the students to present their strategic audits. Five on-line exams were used to ensure that the

students were learning the material. Most of these were multiple-choice and short answer questions.

Discussion boards were employed in which the students were asked to develop 300 word responses to questions such as “How well your company has implemented its strategy in the past three years?

Consider the various components involved in implementing strategy i.e. rewards, policies, culture etc.”

Other classmates were then asked to comment on their responses so that the student could gain feedback from their peers, as well as the actual professor. These discussion boards were extremely valuable in focusing attention on individual students and in securing the necessary feedback.

Course comments from the students were surprisingly positive about the hybrid format. While there were some early glitches that were encountered in giving the quizzes on-line and coordinating the discussion boards, a large percentage of the class stated that the format fit the class objectives well and that they enjoyed the freedom and flexibility that the class offered. The professor was encouraged to continue to develop the class and present it in hybrid form.

Conclusions

Faculty, like most students and specifically adult students, want to apply what they’re learning to realistic, meaningful assignments. In the DICE course they were able to learn from each other, experience distance learning from a students’ perspective, and to develop a pedagogically-sound course that they could deliver to their students.

The faculty evaluation data was overwhelming positive. However there are areas, such as technology training, that could be improved. Overall, especially with the limited resources, the FLC with the faculty taking on the learners’ role was an effective approach to DL training.

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