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Panel: Challenges and Strategies for Revitalizing a Mature Online Business Program

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ABSTRACT

In this panel, faculty teaching online classes will discuss the challenges faced when introducing innovations to revitalize and strengthen the quality of an established online degree program. The faculty will discuss barriers to innovation in mature online degree programs and share possible strategies and solutions for overcoming these barriers. The panelists' experience using Quality Matters, a peer-review process based on a rubric of course design standards, will be shared.

Keywords

Online learning, mature online programs, innovation, course redesign, Quality Matters

The AACSB-accredited undergraduate Business Administration degree at the University of Illinois Springfield has a 10-year history of its completely online program. The initial enrollment of 35 students has grown to a headcount of 171 in Fall 2016. As the program approached its 10 year anniversary, there was a need to update the aging program. An initiative to strengthen the quality, scale effective pedagogical practices and improve student learning outcomes was an important next step. The adoption and use of new educational technologies that support learning goals was also desired. In addition, incorporating universal design processes to comply with accessibility standards was also essential. Historically, course development and design at the University of Illinois Springfield has been faculty-driven. Persuading faculty to engage in needed revisions has been a challenge for the university. This panel will discuss the benefits, challenges, and lessons learned by faculty who are attempting to revitalize a mature program.

Much research has been conducted on the barriers for institutions to adopt online learning systems and on the barriers for faculty to adopt online teaching (Macguire, 2005; Shea, Pickett & Li, 2005; Panda & Mishra, 2007; Orr & Pennington, 2009; Lloyd, Byrne & McCoy, 2012). However, less research has been conducted on the barriers for faculty to adopt innovations in existing online courses, with a lack of time or motivation to become experts in how to use a learning management system being a common barrier (Christie & Jurado, 2009). Alternative barriers may include a belief that success equals complacency, that more time on teaching tasks means less time for research, or that the status quo requires less effort and attention.

Panelists will be asked to discuss the challenges they've experienced in revising the mature program, as well as the strategies that have been found to be successful in encouraging innovation within the program. Their experience with adopting Quality Matters, a peer-review process based on a rubric of course design standards, will be shared. Other potential strategies for overcoming barriers to innovation include promoting an understanding of urgency and the need for change (e.g. liability related to lack of accessibility), providing a framework for thinking through course design and learning processes (e.g. quality matters, community of inquiry), providing leadership opportunities (e.g. first to achieve quality certification), providing research opportunities related to student outcomes and pedagogical practice, providing monetary incentives (e.g. travel awards, stipends for completed course revisions), sharing knowledge and reducing fear through learning community. Attendees will be encouraged to share their own experiences with innovation within a mature online program.

Discussion questions will include:

- Are there legacy processes, courses, programs that need to be rethought and reworked on your campus? Examples?

- What approaches have you attempted to revise these processes, courses or programs?

- What barriers have you encountered when trying to implement change?

- What strategies have been successful for overcoming barriers? What strategies have been ineffective?

- What goals and benchmarks should be established to ensure that mature online programs maintain high quality and continue to improve over time?

Learning Outcomes

This panel is designed to allow participants to meet the following learning outcomes:

- Describe effective practices related to online program quality in a mature online program

- Recognize challenges experienced when introducing innovations to a mature online program

- Identify strategies for overcoming barriers to innovation within a mature online program

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