DISTANCE education
Report

How Would You Rank the Critical Competencies for Teaching Online?

November 15, 2009
By Larry Ragan

Asked of Larry Ragan, Director of Faculty Development for Penn State's World Campus

1. Teaching and Learning

- State objectives, expectations, & policies
- Establish communication rules & group decision-making norms
- Give prompt, effective feedback

"I believe that you absolutely have to have an understanding of the pedagogy in order to be successful. If you try to map over what worked for you in the classroom and you don't make the accommodations – not that that was a bad thing, but if you don't make the accommodations and understand the dynamics of how it is now going to occur in the online classroom – you're going to struggle and I think your students are going to struggle. So I think that is really a critical dimension of being able to understand, and conceptualize, and manage that teaching and learning sphere. It's very, very important."

2. Technology Aptitude

- Know the LMS
- Seek technology assistance
- Be creative and flexible

"If I don't make you successful with the foundation tools that you're working with – that is, the learning management system, or if you're using Web 2.0 technologies, or whatever the environment might be – it might be Elluminate Live or it might be Connect Pro – but if you're not facile in those technologies, you are going to struggle and your students are going to struggle. So regardless of what tools are selected, I think the second largest category of competencies has to be around the technology."

3. Classroom Administration/ Management

- Check & manage roster
- Submit grades according to University policy
- Manage drop/adds

"There are some non-negotiables in this teaching and learning process. For the institution, for example, a non-negotiable is the fact that you are able to submit grades on time and that students are able to see their progress as they move through the course, or that you're able to manage the drop-add process. All of the mechanics, I think, have become so innate in us in the face-to-face environment that when we move to the online environment we sometimes forget that."

4. Faculty Workload Management

- Define time frames
- Develop schedule & responsibilities
- Communicate expectations

"In listening to faculty, a critical element of their success is how they manage their time. I would argue that I can't help you manage your time until you've had some experience. A little bit like attitude, I can probably give you some suggestions of things. I can suggest to you, for example, that you set defined time frames during the day when you're going to be teaching online, and that you try to prevent the course from bleeding into your home life, and your recreation life, and your vacation. I know none of you has ever done this, but sometimes faculty take their computers on family vacations and they're still teaching their course. And I'm not sure what I would say to that one, except you've got to be careful; you have to be able to define those boundaries about when you're teaching online and when you're not."

5. Building Community

- Foster dialog & interaction
- Provide for "space" for instructional & social interactions

"The need is for the instructor to be able to craft this learning space where people feel valued and they're contributing to it. Again, I would agree that that's really, really important, and it's certainly a potential outcome of a well-designed learning space. We have these tools, right, that allow us to do this, so why wouldn't we take advantage of it?"

6. Attitude/Philosophy

- Be open minded
- Take some risks
- Be willing to fail (with support net!)

"I went through three degrees from Penn State, I've had lots and lots of courses and lots of wonderful faculty members. I've also had some not-so-great faculty members, and some were cranky, some didn't really want to be in the classroom, or maybe some were just not very friendly. It didn't inhibit my learning. It maybe didn't make it as much fun as it could've been, but I still learned, and sometimes I learned in spite of my faculty member or my instructor. And so that's why I kind of come back to this idea that the attitude and philosophy is something that I think develops over time."

Would you give a different answer? Let us know… Send your comments to chill@magnapubs.com.