

Academic Programs

From the Office of the Associate Dean

What Influences Student Attitudes Toward a Course

Drawing from work in their discipline, services marketing and management, they extrapolated seven factors that might be significant determinants of student attitudes. Using a complex statistical model, two researchers tested the seven factors and found that four of them explained 77 percent of the variations in attitude toward the course: instructor, course topic, course execution, and the room (physical environment).

They write of these findings: “An important result is that there are significant factors, in addition to the instructor, at work shaping a student’s attitude toward a class that he or she may take. The model shows that course topic has just as strong an influence on attitudes as does the instructor.” (p. 144) Only required courses were included in the study. They covered topics about which students had a range of interests, from not being interested at all to the course topic being introductory to a major. The researchers point out that if the subject matter of a course influences how stu-

dents related to a course, then their level of interest out to be acknowledged as a contributing factor on course evaluations. At this time most course evaluations focus exclusively on instructor-related variables.

Equally interested in this work are those other factors **not** found to influence student attitudes toward courses. For example, the student him- or herself was not found to significantly contribute toward attitude about the course. The researchers explain why they were surprised by this finding. “Given the emphasis some educators place on encouraging students to take ownership of their education, it was surprising to find that, overall, this group of students did not see themselves as being instrumental in shaping their own education experience.” (p. 146) What the finding confirm is that students (at least those in this cohort) do not understand that they are at least partially responsible for what happens to them in courses. It seems reconfirm the extremely passive orientation may students take toward knowledge acquisition.

Also surprising was that fact that other students were not seen as a factor influencing student attitudes.

Finally, in a follow-up analysis that explored some of the factors related to course execution (which these researchers defined as overall design and conduct of the course), there was confirmation for some facts about participation many of us have observed in our individual classrooms. “Students in classes where participation was expected and graded were significantly more likely to prepare for class, attend class, and commit to excellence. Students in those classes where participation was emphasized were also significantly more likely to value the contributions that other students make to their learning experiences.” (p. 146)

Reference: Curran, J.M. and Rosen, D. E. (2006). Student attitudes towards college courses: An examination of influences and intentions. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 28 (2), 135-148.

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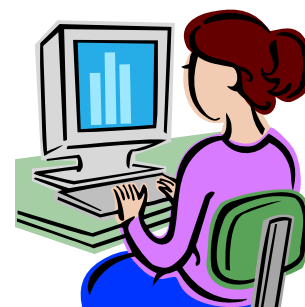
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“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”

Eleanor Roosevelt

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How to Support Online Teachers In Their Work

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http://community.flexiblelearning.net.au/ManagingFlexibleDelivery/content/article_4501.htm

There are many facets to supporting teachers and many of the issues are the same, whether they work online or via traditional delivery methods. Teachers need access to reliable facilities and resources, pedagogical, administrative, technical and social support, access to professional development and career progress, information on employment and health and safety issues and an opportunity to improve their skills and the quality of the courses they deliver. This article will focus specifically on providing an online support system for teachers that can allow them access to these opportunities regardless of their geographical location or delivery method.

Whether the online teacher is working at home or in the workplace, the online environment provides a unique opportunity to provide teacher support in a way that is difficult to replicate face-to-face. It has the potential to provide a better and more active service for teachers if it can be online, accessible, asynchronous and reliable. This allows equal, flexible and visible participation and there is the potential for greater interaction across locations than traditional support methods. It is innovative in its ability to allow teachers to be actively involved in their own support network.

The benefits of providing an online teacher support system includes:

- It can be accessed at any time from any location
- It can bring together teachers in similar disciplines at different locations
- It promotes the sharing of resources and ideas
- It allows teacher-to-teacher support and mentoring
- It can be used as a tool for course and curriculum development
- It can act as a central repository for resources and information
- It can be archived

A framework for an online teacher support system can revolve primarily around an asynchronous discussion forum, which can take a variety of forms depending on the number of participants and available facilities:

- **Shared set of email addresses.** This is ideal for very small groups who use email regularly and have limited access to more extensive online facilities. It can be used with a common email software application to share document versions automatically (for example Qualcomm Eudora's ESP feature.)
- **Email mailing list.** Free versions are available and this is a simple way to ensure all participants automatically receive all messages. An Example is Yahoo Groups.
- **Discussion Board.** This is good for larger groups or multiple disciplines as separate conferences can be set up. It allows a central document depository to be established and can often be accessed via the Web or email. Examples

are WebBoard, FirstClass.

- **Virtual Learning Environment.** This allows for a more structured environment that can accommodate various facilities such as a discussion board, chat, home pages, link depository and specific customization. Examples are WebCT, Blackboard, and Moodle.

The online discussion forum allows:

- **Open communication between teachers, administrators and technical support.** The forum can act as a common communication point between staff who may rarely meet face-to-face.
- **Support on pedagogical issues.** This may include
 - * The nature and meaning of course materials
 - * The standard and frequency of contributions from students
 - * The type and level of feedback required on specific activities
 - * The source and selection of additional student materials
 - * How learning outcomes and assessment criteria are defined and met
 - * The relationship between theoretical concepts and practical application
 - * Learning styles and relationships
 - * Innovations and current thought in specific subject areas.

How to Support Online Teachers In Their Work Continued

- **Mentoring of new staff.** New teachers can ask for support and guidance on a range of issues and receive personalized and timely feedback that is viewable by other teachers. Past questions and answers can be archived so that they can be accessed at any time, avoiding the need to repeat common issues every time a new teacher joins the group. Group mentoring can be as effective as one-to-one interaction and has the added benefit of drawing on a broader pool of experience, an advantage that is harder to replicate in traditional face-to-face support networks.
- **Support on technical issues.** Teachers and technical support staff can share their expertise in an open forum to resolve common technical issues. Archived discussions can form the basis of 'frequently asked questions' (FAQ) and technical problems that can be foreseen (for example, planned interruption to server access and maintenance of facilities) can be shared in a timely manner so teachers can inform students and make contingency plans.
- **Social interaction.** This can be an important part of building teams and rapport between staff and is particularly important for staff who may not meet face-to-face frequently.
- **Sharing of resources and ideas.** Teachers, who use their particular skills to develop new ways to manage their work or students or may have new ideas and resources, can use the discussion

forum to share their ideas and to collaborate.

- **Course development.** All of the aspects listed above can contribute to teachers being involved in ongoing active course development and this can be made possible and encouraged by a facilitator with the ability to implement changes.

One of the key benefits of a web-based discussion forum is that it can act as an archive of information and can be a place to share and store key documentation. These could include:

- A Teacher Guide
- Templates for students progress tracking, attendance, portfolios, etc.
- Examples of student work
- Minutes of meetings
- OH&S guidelines
- Employment information
- Professional development information

In order for an online discussion forum to be successful, it can help if there is:

- **Management and teacher support.** This allows the facility to be seen as a positive tool that has real benefits and is not just an added responsibility.
- **A facilitator to implement ideas.** The facilitator can draw discussions to a close and should have the authority to actually implement new ideas. This makes the system an active tool that can affect real change and progress.
- **Equal access for all relevant staff.** This may mean the forum needs to be accessible from any

location, especially asynchronous so staff can contribute at any time.

- **A reliable system.** It can be very discouraging if teachers can't access the forum when their schedule allows and frequent lack of access can deter teachers from contributing at all.
- **Participation across levels.** This can include management, administration, teachers and technical support and allows several facets of teacher support to be realized.
- **Regular contributions and active participation.** All of the aspects listed above encourage teachers to become actively involved on an ongoing basis and the failure of any one aspect can discourage teachers from contributing regularly or understanding the value of helping create an active and productive forum.

Some examples of different ways an online discussion forum can be utilized:

- A student submits work that is of dubious quality and the teacher posts a message to the teacher support group asking for feedback on whether the work is acceptable. This can help standardize assessment levels and can encourage more objective feedback from individual teachers.
- A teacher has a suggestion for new resources or links to be included in the course materials and asks for feedback from others. This allows a broader assessment of fresh information and eases the load on course developers to keep up-to-date with new resources.

How to Support Online Teachers In Their Work Continued

- A student sends an aggressive email to their teacher who is unsure how to respond and asks for advice from other teachers. It can be difficult to respond objectively to emotional content and seeking feedback helps the teacher stay objective whilst also giving them time to think carefully about their response.
- A teacher develops a new system for tracking student progress and shares it with other teachers. This allows teachers with a variety of skills to share their expertise and innovative ideas.
- A farewell celebration is being organized for a teacher and the discussion forum is used to organize a time and location. Various social interactions and activities can be contributed to and this can help build teams and rapport between individuals.
- New Occupational Health and Safety guidelines are released and the relevant documentation is shared with the teach group. This can allow an archive of essential work related information to be kept so that staff can access it any time.

A robust and active online teacher support system has the potential of providing a better and more effective service to teachers than an equivalent face-to-face network if it is implemented successfully and supported sufficiently. It can allow flexible access, equal and visible participation and has the potential for greater interaction across locations than traditional support methods. It can be innovative in its ability to allow teachers to be actively involved in their own support network and to participate in the quality of the learning environment they provide.



ACADEMIC/ ADVISING DATES

Friday, December 8, 2006

Last day of instruction

Monday, December 11, 2006

Final Exam week

December 11-16, 2006

Monday, January 8, 2007

**Beginning-of-semester Inter/Intra
Collegiate Transfer Period**

January 8-22, 2007

Monday, January 22, 2007

**Deadline to add a 1st half-session
course**

Friday, February 9, 2007

**Deadline to drop or elect credit/no
credit for a 1st half-session course**