



FACULTY ROLE CHANGE: ADJUSTMENT TO THE INFLUENCE OF ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Abstract

This paper presents an argument which rests on two interrelated premises regarding the influence of new pedagogies in higher education. The first is that the phenomenon of web-based teaching and learning is dramatically affecting faculty roles in higher education. The second is that the role of faculty member is saturated with requirements and adding a teaching process that requires advanced teaching expertise and additional time commitments will not fit into the current role of faculty; this is so for web-based teaching and learning. Survey data from seventy-seven faculty from eighteen comprehensive academic institutions in Canada provides evidence of change in faculty views and activities in refer to teaching, whether faculty are engaged in teaching with technology or not.

Introduction

Technological advancement has a dramatic effect on every-day life in contemporary society and its many social institutions, from the workplace to entertainment. Higher education is not immune to these changes, but the exact impact, nature and scope of changes is still unclear (Gumport & Chun, 2005). According to Keller (2008), changes in many things including technology “constitutes [sic] the most consequential set of changes in society since the late nineteenth century, when the nation went from a largely domestic, rural, agrarian mode of living to an industrial, international, and urban economy” (Preface xi). Consequently, for higher education, “this set of circumstances is going to force all academic enterprises to rethink their place and purpose not just in philosophical terms but in very pragmatic ways as well.” (Beaudoin, 2003, p.520). In the past two decades, higher education has, if not embraced new technology, reached out to utilize the Internet and other forms of technologically-mediated learning. This has transformed interaction opportunities among students and between student and faculty, particularly through online learning.

Online learning offers the opportunity to examine and rethink the teaching and learning enterprise in education broadly. Online learning can be conceived of as the new pedagogy, where strategies such as interaction and dialogue are introduced back into the higher education model. Regardless of education delivery mode – face-to-face, online, distance or

some combination through blended learning – teaching (and learning) is changing. Key to this change is the new ways of being as a teacher in higher education – a central part of the role of faculty member in universities. The additional duties, responsibilities, and changing role of faculty can create a high level of dissatisfaction, particularly if they feel they are not well supported (Satterlee, 2010).

This segment of the study is guided by the following research question:

- To what extent, if at all, has the existence of online teaching and learning shaped, if at all, the role and nature of teaching for faculty in higher education.

Background Information

It is unrealistic to expect higher education faculty to have sound, current, content expertise, a productive research program, an active service commitment and be expert online teachers. The biggest lie in the academy is that the role of faculty, and its rewards and responsibilities, is made up of a seemingly balanced set of activities around teaching, research and service (Atkinson, 2000). With some variation across type of institution, research is the most valued work and most notably rewarded. While this reality has not changed “... classroom teaching and course materials (have become) more sophisticated and complex in ways that translate into new forms of faculty work. ... such new forms are not replacing old ones, but instead are layered on top of them, making for more work.” (Rhoades, 2006, p.38). It is time to clarify this reality and consider how, if at all, changes in teaching are, or may be, integrated into the role of faculty member.

This social agenda supports improvements in education access and quality learning experiences afforded by online education delivery. Online learning involves the use of the Internet for interaction and collaborative engagement previously unavailable to teachers and students. What changes are required to the role of faculty member to allow engagement in online teaching? Any effective teacher must be true to the learning objectives of the subject-matter at hand while attending to the multitude of characteristics students bring to the experience. Effective teachers bridge content and student needs through appropriate student engagement; a tactic as old as education itself. The role of effective teacher in online learning environments is newer and more complex. Even more complex are the implications of adopting the new teaching requirements into the current role of faculty. Knowledge from this research project will help make decisions about realistic expectations of the role of faculty and how much, and how fast, changes may be made in teaching. All the teaching development and technology training in the world will not realize significant quantities of teaching change, even for the most motivated to do so, until the context changes to support and reward teaching in ways that it has not in the past and, in addition, support the increased requirements for teaching activity using new technology.

Even before the imposition of new technology, both excellent teaching and excellent research records were difficult to achieve. Fairweather’s (2002) research suggests that new ways of

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teaching will make it more difficult for faculty to be exemplars of research and teaching. This study examines the myth of the “complete faculty member” – that is one who can sustain high levels of productivity in both research and teaching at the same time. Data from the 1992–93 National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty provided a representative sample of 29,764 part-time and full-time faculty in 962 American research universities, doctoral-granting universities, comprehensive colleges and universities and liberal arts colleges. For the purpose of that study, Fairweather identified faculty as highly productive researchers if refereed publications exceeded the median for program and institutional type over a two year period. Faculty members identified as highly productive teachers were those above the median in student classroom contact hours. In the first instance, 22% of faculty in 4-year institutions met both criteria. However, adding collaborative instruction to the teaching criterion reduced the percentage of highly productive researchers and teachers to about 6%.

This time consuming collaborative instruction is central to the benefits of online teaching and learning. The individualization of communications, and the role of instructor as a facilitator of student participation and learning, add to instructor workload when teaching online (Davidson-Shivers, 2009). A central advantage of online delivery is the opportunity to better engage learners in more active and collaborative educational experiences. Tomei (2004) proposes that online student expectations for on-demand, continuous feedback necessitates smaller class sizes relative to those in traditional classroom instruction. This is one option available to compensate for the imposition of time online teaching will impose. For Tomei, the 40-40-20 formula for allocating faculty time (40 percent teaching, 40 percent research, and 20 percent service) suggested by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) is unrealistic for faculty teaching in an online environment.

As well as adjusted teaching practice, support for new online students requires adjustment for the instructors in reference to the learners. For example, one instructor said “I actually prefer online teaching because it can take time to think through responses to students, um, and you can do it on your own time, your own speed. So in other words, what’s good for students in terms of asynchronous is I think good for instructors as well.” This provides new views to the role of online teacher. In addition to these insights, we had further access to the instructor experience when we studied the need for instructor support in relation to student adjustment (Cleveland-Innes & Garrison, 2009). Instructors were very forthcoming and descriptive about the many things that had to be learned and implemented in order to teach in the highly interactive and collaborative online environment. These anecdotal findings generated a great deal of discussion and excitement about challenges experienced in the transition to online instructor – and the adjustment to such a role. These new insights were synthesized and presented (see Cleveland-Innes, Sangra & Garrison, 2008).

This research builds on earlier findings. The central objective is twofold. Academic instructors, those teaching online and those who are not, will have the opportunity to describe the details of his or her teaching role under current conditions. Those not teaching online will describe what teaching online looks like from the position of observer; what challenges, limitations, benefits and interests are present for them. Most importantly, they will be asked to

consider how they imagine such a change may be integrated into current teaching practice; i.e., how would online instruction change their role as teacher? This will be repeated for those already teaching online. Those already teaching online will describe what teaching online is like from the position of participant; what challenges, limitations, benefits and interests are present for them. They will be asked to explain how such a change, if it is a change, was integrated into past teaching practice; how does online instruction change their role as teacher? We will also ask faculty how the existence of online teaching and learning is changing, if at all, the role of face-to-face teacher.

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

A mixed methods approach was used to collect data from fixed-choice and open-ended questions utilizing an online survey. The online survey consisted of 5 demographic questions, 3 open ended questions, 47 likert-scaled statements and 14 closed questions.

Findings

A total of 77 faculty from 13 different institutions in all Canadian regions completed the online survey. Sample demographics identify 62 full time faculty, 9 part time faculty, and 6 contract instructors from seventeen different disciplines. Thirty-one or had taught at least two sections of a course fully online (80+% of the content delivered online). Seventy had experience using the Internet for instruction that included more than email and/or posting course outlines on the Internet. Table 1 identifies the range of post-secondary teaching experience in years.

Table 1: Years of Experience Teaching Post-Secondary

11	0-5 years experience
19	6-10 years experience
18	11-15 years experience
08	16-20 years experience
11	21-25 years experience
10	26+ years experience

Only a portion of the data will be presented here; further analysis will occur for presentation in October. Table 2 outlines responses to statements about current and future use of online delivery.

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Table 2: Perspectives on Online Delivery

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Online education is critical to the long-term strategy of my school.	7.79% 6	7.79% 6	9.09% 7	38.96% 30	36.36% 28	77
Open educational resources will be of value for my campus.	1.32% 1	1.32% 1	14.47% 11	46.05% 35	36.84% 28	76
Online education is significantly represented in my institution's formal strategic plan.	7.79% 6	15.58% 12	32.47% 25	36.36% 28	7.79% 6	77
There is increasing competition for online students in higher education.	0.00% 0	4.00% 3	33.33% 25	44.00% 33	18.67% 14	75
Faculty at my school accept the value and legitimacy of online education.	10.39% 8	25.97% 20	32.47% 25	24.68% 19	6.49% 5	77

Forty per cent of respondents are considered experienced online instructors (defined as having taught at least two sections of a course 80+% of the content delivered online. When asked, "Do you feel the phenomenon of online teaching has changed what you do as a faculty member?" 89% said yes, 11% said no.

Table 3 outlines thematic areas of change faculty identified when asked "If yes, in what way(s)?" as a follow-up to the question answered above.

Table 3: Areas of Change

Teaching	30%
Learning	22%
Content	20%
Materials	16%
Assignments	15%
Face to Face Interaction	13%
Use of Video	9%
Students Expectations	7%

Discussion

Our country-wide sample includes respondents a wide range of post-secondary teaching experience and a wide range of disciplines. Close to half have experience teaching online courses. Those who haven't taught online report using the Internet for pedagogical support for courses delivered face-to-face. Almost all respondents report changes to their teaching because of online learning, and identify most aspects of course design and delivery as areas undergoing change.

In response to the statement "online education is critical to the long-term strategy of my school," 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. In spite of this strong response, only 42% agreed or strongly agreed to the statement "online education is significantly represented in my institution's formal strategic plan." Competition for online students is seen as on the rise for 63% of respondents, but only 30% agreed or strongly agreed to the statement on value and legitimacy of online education; "faculty at my school accept the value and legitimacy of

online education.” Related to the delivery of online education, the statement “open education resources will be of value on my campus” received 80% agreement.

The vast majority of respondents (89%) said yes when asked “do you feel the phenomenon of online teaching has changed what you do as a faculty member.” When asked what changed, text responses ranged for teaching strategies (30%), learning perspectives (22%), and content (20%). This applies whether respondents are teaching online or not. Changes to instructional materials and assignments were noted often. Other pedagogical elements of interaction, use of video, and expectations were also noted multiple times by separate respondents.

Conclusion

These findings support the premise that pedagogical change is widespread in Canadian post-secondary education and is likely to continue. This paper presentation focuses on one part of the study; the extent to which faculty are responding to changes in the teaching environment due to discussion and integration of online learning, whether they are teaching online or not. Our current results report that significant change is underway, for those teaching in face-to-face environments and those teaching online.

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