Best Practices in Online Program Development: Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

King, Elliot; and Alperstein, Neil
Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015

Book Review

Tags: online course design | online programs | online teaching

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This compact guide on building online programs has practical tips for faculty and administrators in higher education who are at various stages of online delivery. While mostly aimed at beginners, the book has ideas for institutions in the first, second, third, and fourth generations of distance learning, whether it is just one course, one department, a program or online delivery is fully integrated into the university's strategic plan. The authors share from personal experience, surveys of faculty and students, as well as best practices from accrediting bodies to assure the reader will enter the online delivery method with eyes wide open. The book also has helpful suggestions for administrators and instructors who have experience with online education, but are trying to move their program to the next level. After a brief history of distance education and its place within higher education, the authors cite a study by the Babson Survey Research Group indicating that 6.7 million students in 2011 took an online class (a jump of 9.3 percent from 2010) and one-third of college students had taken at least one online class (compared to less than 10 percent in 2003). The authors state many reasons for offering online classes: overcoming space limitations, reaching students who were not accepted in the traditional admissions process, non-traditional students and students with disabilities—who may not otherwise come to campus because of mobility or accessibility issues. Students also choose online programs because of the flexibility to study around family, work and personal commitments. Whatever their reasons for studying online, the book emphasizes the different study skills to succeed. The authors suggest that admission offices should find a way to assess readiness to assure student success and in best practice offer an orientation, ongoing support and an ample IT staff.

The authors acknowledge that teaching will be different online than in the traditional

classroom and administrators may find resistance from faculty. Therefore they recommend seeking faculty volunteers to teach online. According to a 2003 study, many faculty believe that teaching online requires more time than conventional teaching and a 2012 survey revealed that two-thirds of faculty believed that the educational outcomes were inferior to face-to-face teaching. Yet the authors estimate that between 25 and 33 percent of post-secondary faculty have taught at least one course online. Faculty also perceive advantages such as greater flexibility and reaching more and a different variety of students. Of course, faculty will have to make changes to relate to online students, for example Skype office hours, being socially present, while also managing student expectations for email correspondence. Once a class is prepared it is easier to teach again and can be taught by another instructor, however universities should have a clear policy of intellectual property rights. Other benefits of online teaching are greater attention to learning outcomes, methodology and assessment.

This book is not a "how to" book for instructors to develop an online class, nor is it an exhaustive manual for administrators, but it is an excellent overview and beginners guide for administrators to learn the challenges and best practices of high quality online programs.

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