TEACHING EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION THROUGH WEB-BASED INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

The Department of Educational Administration and Counseling at Southeast Missouri State University decided to introduce web-based instruction as a means of integrating ever changing technology into an educational administration masters degree program. The article dis- cusses the goals established by the Department of Educational Administration, the incentives offered by the university, the course design for delivery, pros, cons, and recommendations for developing web-based instruction. Overall the experience of implementing web-based instruction was positive. Both students and professors benefited from the process.

The Department of Educational Administration and Counseling at Southeast Missouri State University decided to introduce web-based instruction as a means of integrating ever changing technology into an educational administration masters degree program. After having many discussions focused on technology, the decision was made to ensure that students would be technologically proficient by requiring at least one web-based course in the masters program. An alternative that was considered was teaching a course focused on technology for the administrator. However, it was decided that teaching a class using technology that students may or may not have access too was not beneficial to students in the long run. Instead students are asked to take one web-based course and use technology located in their school districts to complete assignments in the web-based course, the internship and other courses. Geography was another reason for offering web-based courses. Many students drive two or more hours to attend classes on campus or professors drive several hours to off cam- pus higher education centers. Web-based instruction made sense in reaching a geographically diverse student population. As a whole, Southeast Missouri State University encouraged and offered incentives to faculty to develop web-based courses.

Goals

The Department of Educational Administration and Counseling implemented web-based instruction with the following goals in mind:
1. All students will possess a minimum level of technological skills.
2. Design a user friendly interactive web page.
3. Make course objectives equal to any other three-hour course.
4. Meet the needs of students in diverse geographic locations.
5. Challenge students academically .
6. Meet the needs of students in our degree programs.

University Incentives

Southeast Missouri State University focused on the development of web-based courses across the university and provided incentives to encourage development of web-based courses. Initially any professor with the support of his or her department and the dean of the college could propose a web-based course and receive three hours of release time to develop the course. During the second year of implementation, the decision was made to pay professors $2,500, which is the approximate pay of an adjunct professor. Many department heads on campus felt that release time was not an adequate incentive because they could not find qualified adjuncts to cover courses. In addition to release time and money, each professor developing a web-based course was assigned two student workers in the Center for Scholar- ship, Teaching, and Learning to assist with the design of the web page and the implementation of the course.

Course Design

Considering the goals of implementing web-based courses, the first step was to deter- mine which course was most appropriate for web delivery. It was decided that the introductory course to the masters degree, Foundations of Educational Administration, was the best suited to web delivery. The decision was made to develop the course with students enrolled in the traditional masters program in mind. The intent of web-based instruction was not to offer degrees to students around the world. Some out-of-state students from other universities did express an interest in taking web-based courses. However, the requirement of out-of-state tuition scared away potential students.

Foundations of Educational Administration is a required course for the masters degree and for state principal certification. Since this was a survey course taught to beginning students, a textbook was selected to provide background information and to provide structure. Additional readings were provided online and students had to search for supplementary readings on their own. One of the unresolved issues with web-based courses is copyright. If a professor provides a reading assignment online with password protection, does that violate copyright law?

The course was designed based on a 15-week semester. The course had weekly assignments and was not a self-paced course. Students were required to post weekly discussion questions and other assignments to a group bulletin board. Each bulletin board group consisted of approximately five people. Each week students were required to respond to other group members' postings as well as post their own assignments. The reason for setting up online discussion groups was to promote student interaction and introduce students to vary- ing viewpoints.

The weekly assignments were designed around readings, case studies, ISLLC principles, and discovery activities. Weekly assignments were usually posted to the group bulletin board. The Professor read, commented on, and graded weekly assignments by going to the group bulletin boards. Communication occurred with students individually through e-mail and individual assignments were turned in through e-mail. Semester assignments were completed individually and consisted of activities such as interviewing a principal, writing a personal best story, in-basket activities, and writing a reflective journal. Often students were required to post semester assignments to the group bulletin board and respond to other group members' work.

Pros, Cons, and Recommendations

Overall the experience of implementing web-based instruction was positive. Both students and professors benefited from the process.

1. Students are, in general, very positive about the experience of online courses. They like being able to work on the course at any time. Most of the students posted assignments during the workday on their conference period or after school. A few students posted assignments late at night. Students also commented that they liked not having to drive to campus.

2. Web-based courses do not allow procrastination. During a traditional course that meets for three hours every week, a student could get by without doing the reading and without participating in class for one week. However when weekly assignments must be posted on the bulletin board, it is obvious that the work is not there. If a student does not post his or her assignment on time, that puts the entire group behind because often part of the assignment is to respond to other group members' assignments. Attaching points to each assignment and only accepting assignments posted on time is one way to motivate students to post assignments on time.

3. Students did express some frustration at not being able to access the servers at their schools. The university's server also went down a few times during one semester. Technology problems require a good relationship with the technology support person. Through the technology support person at the university, the professor was able to learn if students' servers were actually down. The problems with technology diminished the second semester the course was taught. Dealing with technology takes understanding on the part of the student and the professor.

4. Students were forced to learn to use technology that was available in their schools and by the end of the course students reported a high comfort level with technology. Most students reported that they would take another online course and that they would recommend to others taking an online course.

5. The biggest shortfall with online courses is the lack of face-to-face interaction among students and with the professor. Web-enhanced courses may be the more effective method of delivery. Meeting as a whole group three or four times a semester may be a better strategy than conducting an entire course online.

6. Because some students are not initially comfortable with technology, it is a good idea to meet with the students at least once. This avoids a lot of questions regarding technology and the design of the course. It also allows the professor to put a face with the name and allows the students to feel a connection with the professor.

7. Online courses are a good place to use problem-based learning, case studies, and other discovery learning techniques. Again, meeting a few times during a semester would allow for some face-to-face debates over the issues.

8. The question most often asked by professors considering developing an online course is, how much time does it take? It takes a lot of time to develop an online course. Materials must be pulled together for an entire semester and revised to work with an online course. FrontPage and other web page development software make developing a web page a simplistic activity. If you can use a word processor, you can develop a web page. Once the course web page is developed, the time commitment for teaching a web based course is similar to teaching any other course.