

Podcast for September 22, 2006

The podcast segment that answers the questions

1. Is Online Teaching For Me?
2. Teaching Online – How Much Time Does It Take?
3. What is one (almost) sure-fire way to improve faculty satisfaction with teaching online?

Other podcasts might consider that a tall order – aah, but that's other podcasts!

Is Online Teaching For Me?

Online classes are extremely popular and probably will continue to be. At Palomar College online classes typically reach enrollment capacity within the first few days of enrollment – often the very first day. Clearly, online classes meet a student need. But online classes tend to have a higher attrition rate than comparable on-campus classes. There are many reasons for this finding but a principal one is that many students who take an online class don't demonstrate the qualities that make online students successful. We've talked before about those qualities and you've developed a self-assessment quiz to help students see whether or not they are a good fit for an online class.

It is equally true that not all instructors are a good fit for teaching online. What does it take to be a successful online instructor? That's exactly what a self-evaluation quiz from OnlineLearning.net purports to tell you. I was interested in this instrument and, being an experienced online instructor, took it with eager anticipation. The quiz assesses one's likely success in teaching online by asking questions in a number of categories:

- Computer Skills assessment
- Attitudes Toward Teaching and Learning Online
- Training and Commitment

After you supply Yes/No answers to the questions, the web site scores your responses and analyzes your results. The overall assessment of my likely success as an online instructor, and I quote, was

Based on your answers to the self-assessment quiz,
online teaching may not be for you.

Now, before you say: "You didn't have to take that quiz, I could have told you that!" I want to state for the record that I purposefully answered some questions falsely because I wanted to see the effect on the scoring. No, really! For example, I stated I wasn't willing to spend 4-6 hours a week, and I didn't think critical thinking and problem solving skills were important for my students. My bottom line opinion of this assessment is that it does

have promise but I plan to revise it and perhaps expand it a bit – in other words, get it so it tells me I can be a good online instructor! Seriously, I think it can be a useful assessment for our faculty with some modification. I would be interested in hearing from any listener who takes it – how would you improve it? I'll post it on my teachingonline blog as well.

Teaching Online – How Much Time Does It Take?

An issue that often surfaces when instructors first become interested in teaching online is: How much time does it really take? A recent study reported in the Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks addressed this very question. The study was conducted at the University of Michigan-Dearborn and used a self-monitoring methodology to determine how much time it took the online instructor to complete three activities central to online teaching:

- reading and responding to emails
- reading, posting, and grading online discussions
- grading 15 assignments.

The results indicated that each instructor took between 3-7 hours a week for these three duties. Granted this doesn't include such time-consuming activities such as preparation, uploading documents, course management activities in Blackboard or other CMS – still, it seems like many fewer hours to me than I actually spend; I'll easily spend 7 hours just on the weekend alone. It would be interesting to me to get some other data to compare this with – I'm going to start a little log just to see if my subjective sense of how much time I'm spending is grounded in reality.

What is one sure-fire way to improve faculty satisfaction with teaching online?

Florida Community College at Jacksonville has experienced the same phenomenon many other colleges, including Palomar, has – student demand for online classes has exceeded the supply of full-time faculty. Consequently, FCCJ, as is true with other institutions, has increasingly turned to part-time faculty to teach online classes. FCCJ reports that the institution supports some 160 part-time faculty with the number rising every semester. In order to attract and retain well qualified part-time instructors to teach online, FCCJ has developed what they call their Virtual mentoring Program. This program consists of Lead Mentors and what they call Virtual Mentors. Lead Mentors must be full-time faculty but the Virtual Mentors can be either full or part-time – with the stipulation that the part-time Virtual Mentors have taught at least one year of consecutive assignments.

The Virtual Mentors help the new online instructor with all the administrative procedures as well as assist them with everything required to get their class up and running. It sounds like a great idea – having someone who is more experienced and is committed to helping you be successful. All new instructors are required to complete an online orientation course before they are eligible to teach online – something we've talked about

implementing here but haven't. The Lead Mentor "provide oversight and coordination among the Virtual Mentors." Both Lead and Virtual Mentors are paid a stipend.

How is it working? FCCJ conducted a survey of online part-time instructors. The results were that 60% thought the Virtual Mentors were helpful, 17% did not, and 21% did not use them. Put another way, 78% of those who used the Virtual Mentors found them helpful. The report doesn't do into detail about how helpful and didn't reproduce the survey instrument but this seems like a promising effort to support online faculty.

Resources

Is Online Teaching For Me? Self-evaluation quiz

<http://www.onlinelearning.net/InstructorCommunity/selfevaluation.html?s=024.4090b5636.029h321p21>

Teaching Online – How Much Time Does It Take?

http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/jaln/v7n3/v7n3_lazarus.asp

What is one (almost) sure-fire way to improve faculty satisfaction with teaching online?

http://www.sloan-c.org/effective/details4.asp?FS_ID=48