Building a Community of Inquiry for Students and Faculty

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Background

This initiative addressed a current trend in higher education, and in nursing programs specifically: Pressure to provide high quality blended and online programs and courses to students in our graduate and undergraduate programs.

Twenty-seven (27%) percent of masters programs in US schools of nursing offer courses online as do the majority of RN-BS programs. Further, a growing number of RN to MSN programs are also finding new homes in blended and full online courses. Despite this growing demand and need for online programs that allow current RNs to further their education and careers (undergraduate and graduate), faculty development in this rapidly expanding teaching modality is often limited. Faculty teaching in blended and online courses need training in designing and delivering effective high quality education to blended and online learning settings.

The approach and process of developing an innovative faculty development initiative to improve collaborative learning and teaching in blended and online courses in a large multi-campus school of nursing is described.

Goals and Objectives

The overall goal was to engage faculty from multiple programs and regional campuses, and instructional designers, in discussions of current pedagogy and the application of evidence-based strategies for teaching of online, blended and face-to-face courses. The Community of Inquiry (COI) framework was identified as an appropriate model for designing meaningful learning experiences. An Education Summit was organized to launch this initiative. The COI Education Summit yielded scholarship, sustainability projects, and a dynamic online collaboration space.

Methods

Input from representative faculty and an instructional designer informed the design and learning objectives of a two-day Education Summit January 2017 focused on the application of the COI to class and/or course design.

Faculty from six regional campus faculty were invited to select two champions from each campus to attend the Education Summit for face-to-face training and community-building. Participants included faculty from each of the six campuses across the undergraduate and graduate programs with 40+ faculty attending. The overall objectives for the COI Summit were the following:

- Address faculty concerns about learner, disciplinary, and professional differences in the application of online and blended learning using the CoI framework.
- Expand ideas and opportunities for collaborative evaluation and implementation of online and blended learning environments.
- Increase faculty experimentation and innovation in use of online and blended teaching.
- Deliberately and intentionally practice the application and use of the CoI framework components with a cohort of engaged and committed SoN faculty and instructional designers.

Day One: Engage undergraduate and graduate faculty in discussions on the components of CoI.

Day Two: Faculty participants paired with expert consultants to apply the CoI framework and relevant teaching strategies to their individual teaching domains and specialties.

Impact/Effectiveness

2017 Education Summit Evaluation N=39

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<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Average</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. The summit was well organized and the objectives were clearly communicated and addressed.</td>
<td>3.6/4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. The presenter demonstrated comprehensive knowledge of the subject matter.</td>
<td>3.9/4</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. The presenter helped me to understand how the summit material related to my work.</td>
<td>3.6/4</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. The presenter conveyed ideas effectively and clearly and the material was informative and easy to understand.</td>
<td>3.6/4</td>
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<td>5. I gained usable skills and will be able to apply them to my academic and professional life.</td>
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Education Summit evaluations revealed attendees had a positive experience and in fact committed to continued engagement integrating COI design into their classes, courses and/or program.

The momentum from the Summit spurred new initiatives such as a resource-rich website for faculty engagement and collaboration with the COI model. Another outcome is an ongoing research project study measuring faculty perceptions of COI Framework as a faculty development tool.

Overall, the initiative provided well-appreciated expert training and consultation for faculty interested in using the Community of Inquiry framework in their teaching and learning experiences.