Partnerships in Faculty Development for Online Learning

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ABSTRACT

Online teaching and learning are becoming more prevalent in institutions of higher education across the globe. Too often, the attendant faculty development needs related to equipping faculty members with the knowledge, skills, perspectives, and confidence to succeed in online environments lacks sufficient coherence, connection, and context. This paper discusses partnerships for faculty development in online learning taking place at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), a large, urban-serving institution in the USA. The introduction and context for online teaching and learning and the faculty development needs is established; the significance of partnerships for faculty development is explained; an example of partnerships using a Curriculum Enhancement Grant process is highlighted; and next steps, recommendations, and conclusions are included. This paper is especially useful for individuals involved in developing, implementing, supporting, and evaluating programs aimed at increasing faculty effectiveness in online teaching and learning.

KEYWORDS

Online learning; faculty development; partnerships; teaching and learning

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) is a joint campus of Indiana and Purdue Universities, located in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA, comprising 30,000 students in 22 academic units offering over 250 degrees. IUPUI represents a partnership between Indiana and Purdue Universities, both of whom have been in existence since the 1800s and operate residential campuses in Bloomington and West Lafayette, Indiana, respectively. IUPUI, created in 1969 as an urban-serving institution, is managed administratively and financially by Indiana University (IU).

In 2020, IU will commemorate its bicentennial, marking 200 years of providing excellent higher education to Indiana residents and others from around the United States and the world. Throughout its history, IU has been widely recognized for its accomplishments in teaching and learning, research and creative activities, and engagement with its various communities. As this important milestone approaches, IU can reflect on its achievements, while rededicating itself to addressing the needs and expectations of our state. Indeed, the next decade will highlight important challenges for economic development and college degree attainment in Indiana. The Indiana Chamber of Commerce's *Indiana Vision 2025: A Plan for Hoosier Prosperity* calls for Indiana to become a global leader in innovation and economic opportunity, a place where enterprises and citizens prosper. Similarly, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education's *Reaching Higher, Achieving More* outlines an ambitious goal: by 2025, Indiana must substantially increase the proportion of its residents with a high-quality degree or credential to meet the economic and civic needs of the state. This is significant, as only 16.47% of Indiana adults between the ages of 25-64 hold a bachelor's degree, while 8.59% have an associate's degree and 22.05% have some college but no degree. In real numbers, these latter two groups comprise just over one million people who reside in Indiana that could benefit from baccalaureate degree completion opportunities.

IU has created an entity, known as IU Online, to accelerate and expand the number of online degrees and certificate programs it awards to students across all of the campuses in the IU system. IU Online permits IU to marshal all of its academic and technological capabilities toward expanding existing programs and developing new offerings that improve the educational attainment of students, address Indiana's economic and professional development needs, and extend the university's global reach. Funded by an initial $8M investment by IU, presently IU Online offers several undergraduate degrees and certificates, many of which are aligned with the economic clusters of Indiana (health and life sciences; information technology; advanced manufacturing; arts, culture, and tourism, and non-profit management). Additional certificates and degrees are being developed by IU Online, including the B.S. in Informatics and the Bachelor of Applied Science (B.A.S.) degree, the first of its type in the state. The B.A.S. holds promise to facilitate baccalaureate degree completion by providing upstream articulation and distribution of college credits earned by Associate of Applied Science degree holders. Based on employer-identified needs, IU continues to develop baccalaureate degrees and certificates to facilitate degree completion.

IUPUI is one of seven IU campuses and is participating in the IU Online initiative. Over the next several years, the IUPUI faculty will apply its creativity to developing new and innovative online opportunities, options, and initiatives to benefit our students. These opportunities will include not only formal courses and programs, but also innovative cross-curricular learning experiences like modules, tutorials, educational gaming, and immersive environments to supplement formal coursework, engage students, and enhance learning. Within this context, IUPUI's efforts to transform online education will aim to increase the number of degree programs offered in hybrid or entirely online formats; support the scalability and sustainability of the IU Online initiative at IUPUI; and develop an infrastructure that brings together IUPUI's online learning efforts in one easily accessible location. To do so effectively,

IUPUI administrators and faculty recognize that partnerships need to be fostered between faculty members and colleagues in our campus-wide Center for Teaching and Learning. The next section of the paper outlines the significance of partnerships for faculty development, followed by a discussion of IUPUI's Curriculum Enhancement Grants as a partnership example.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF PARTNERSHIPS FOR FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

On college and university campuses, partnerships between faculty and various institutional units are not a new phenomenon. Student affairs professionals frequently partner with academic affairs colleagues to promote the link between the curriculum and co-curriculum to strengthen student retention, engagement, and success [1]. Writing Centers routinely partner with faculty for writing-across-the-curriculum initiatives to reinforce student writing at multiple junctures during the student's progression through undergraduate education [2]. Librarians work in partnership with faculty to help enhance students' information literacy acquisition, application, and evaluation [3]. Information Technology units often partner with faculty to leverage technology's role in facilitating enhanced teaching, research, and service [4]. Finally, faculty themselves partner with each other on formal and informal bases in peer-based learning relationships designed to foster their own professional development [5].

Such partnerships are particularly successful when each partner brings a different skill set or experience to the relationship so together they achieve—often more effectively—what they might be unable to accomplish separately. Positive elements include shared mission, consolidation of redundant activities, strategic growth, expanded economic opportunities, and access to and conservation of resources. Despite the perceived benefits of collaboration, many partnerships fail to obtain the desired results, cannot be sustained, or cease to benefit both parties. Some potential roadblocks or obstacles are the challenges of preparation and sustainability of the partnership; varying levels or wavering leadership support; inflexibility of

one or more partners' policies, practices, and procedures; and negotiation of the political and ethical considerations of the partnership [6,7].

For faculty development, Zahorski [8] notes that intra-institutional partnerships have several benefits including promoting the scholarship of teaching and learning and facilitating improved student learning. Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, and Beach [9] describe faculty development today as being in the Age of the Network wherein "faculty, academic leaders, and faculty developers will need to connect, communicate, and collaborate to meet the challenge of how to do more with less while simultaneously maintaining excellence" (p. 158). As Feldman and Paulson [10] note, a supportive teaching culture provides various forms of informative feedback about individual teaching effectiveness in a way that feels safe and non-threatening to individual teachers. The risk associated with this work is minimized when administrative leadership has agreed that the work is important. This supportive approach stimulates motivation to achieve excellence in teaching.

This is especially significant because most faculty members hold their primary allegiance to their discipline. Thus, there is an increasing emphasis on development of discipline-specific pedagogical knowledge among faculty. Specific strategies for such discipline-centric development include recognizing particular curricular and pedagogic concerns of the disciplines; helping faculty to develop as scholars in the teaching of their discipline; encouraging some faculty to develop careers in the teaching of their discipline; and working with disciplinary organizations to promote discipline-based teaching initiatives [11, 12].

As Millard [13] noted, faculty development takes time, and a single workshop is not typically sufficient for deep, transformative change to occur. Furthermore, Baldwin [14] notes that incentives for faculty development have typically been provided to encourage them to experiment, implement, or revise courses or curricula. Release time from teaching and other responsibilities is one type of incentive that has been provided to facilitate faculty development

[15]. As online teaching and learning emerged, such incentives tended to focus overwhelmingly on equipping faculty with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to use various distance learning and related technologies in their teaching [16, 17, 18]. A more comprehensive perspective to faculty incentives links such rewards to the context and strategic directions of the faculty member's respective institution. In this view, incentives for faculty development are aligned with broader priorities of the campus [19].

Faculty consultations with instructional designers and learning technologists are a long-held tradition in faculty development [20]. These consultations include helping faculty develop learning objectives, determining instructional strategies for achievement of those objectives, leveraging active learning and instructional technology effectively, engaging students meaningfully in the class, and evaluating the overall outcomes of a course. Indeed, the type, frequency, and impact of such consultations are one way faculty developers gauge their effectiveness in serving institutional constituents [21].

Transformative faculty development requires stimulating interest, creating a deep understanding, and assisting with implementation of effective teaching interventions [22]. Thus, IUPUI developed a comprehensive program of faculty development activities and supports within a partnership framework that includes incentives, targeted workshops, consultations, and cohort building. This is organized under an initiative known as Curriculum Enhancement Grants, described in the next section, which are organized and leveraged to advance the IU Online initiative.

3. CURRICULUM ENHANCEMENT GRANTS AS A PARTNERSHIP EXAMPLE

The IUPUI Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) is a partnership among Academic Affairs, University Information Technology Services, and the University Library with the mission to advance teaching excellence while supporting faculty through a collaborative approach. The

CTL offers a wide array of programs, events, and services that foster innovation and translation of educational research into practice for traditional face-to-face, blended, and online courses [23].

The CTL developed a Curriculum Enhancement Grant (CEG) program to support the IU Online initiative. The purpose of the Curriculum Enhancement Grant (CEG) is to provide faculty with support, time, and resources to implement projects designed to improve student learning and success at IUPUI through the IU Online initiative. In addition, it is expected that the grants will increase faculty competitiveness for external educational or curricular improvement grants and increase the number of faculty involved in pursuing the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Each CEG provides funding to faculty members to analyze needs, design courses, develop instructional materials, implement online courses, and evaluate the effectiveness. Funds range from USD $5,000-$15,000 per CEG, depending on the scope of the project and the number of faculty members involved. Faculty make application for a CEG through a competitive peer review process, and CEG applications require the following submission components:

- *Cover sheet*, including contact information for the faculty member
- *Abstract*, which summarizes the proposed CEG project
- *Key personnel*, including the faculty member who is the Principal Investigator on the project
- *Project description*, which includes the following: Description of course, including enrollment figures; problem statement; rationale and literature review; project goals; proposed interventions; predicted learning outcomes; number of students impacted; and expected impact on enrollment (if applicable).
- *Evaluation/assessment plan*, including how the overall project effectiveness will be measured

- *Dissemination plan*, which includes how results of the project will be shared within the IUPUI campus and throughout the broader academic community
- *Project timeline*, including the milestones for key activities and deliverables
- *Budget,* which includes the anticipated project expenses and a budget narrative explaining how each expense supports the CEG project goals

In support of the CEGs, targeted workshops are conducted by IUPUI CTL personnel and other experts on campus and focus on education grant proposal writing, preparing for Institutional Review Board submission and approval process, assessment of student learning, project evaluation, as well as on specific topics related to online learning, all dependent on the specific needs of the faculty who are awarded CEGs.

In addition to targeted workshops, faculty consultations with instructional designers and learning technologists are a long-held tradition in faculty development. These consultations include helping faculty develop learning objectives, determining instructional strategies for achievement of those objectives, leveraging active learning and instructional technology effectively, engaging students meaningfully in the class, and evaluating the overall outcomes of a course. Indeed, the type, frequency, and impact of such consultations are one way faculty developers gauge their effectiveness in serving institutional constituents.

Finally, CEG awardees meet regularly in a faculty learning community in order to build an education research community that has a special focus related to online learning. This faculty learning community also serves as a context for planning and scheduling workshops to support project work. Eventually, this group of faculty is expected to become leaders of reform in online in their school by leading workshops and giving presentations as they disseminate their own work stemming from the CEG.

In the first year of the CEG process, faculty members from a wide array of disciplines have received funding, including the following:

- Science
- Liberal Arts
- Dentistry
- Nursing
- Physical Education
- Public Administration
- Engineering and Technology
- Law
- Medicine

The nature of courses or programs receiving funding from a CEG during the first year includes the following:
- Statistics Undergraduate Courses
- French/Spanish Undergraduate Courses
- Bachelor Completion in Dental Hygiene
- Distance Accessible Pediatric Nurse Specialist Graduate Program
- Online Professional Development Program for Physical Education and Health Teachers
- Online Course Series on Topics in Feminist Health Ethics
- Online Courses in Grad Certificate in Homeland Security
- Energy Assessment of Industrial Processes
- Building Information Modeling Graduate Certificate
- Core Components of Geographic Information Science Certificate
- Comparative and International Antitrust
- Creating a Blended Curriculum for Legal Process
- Needs assessment/development of Advanced Research Ethics Training

Each of the above projects has been successfully implemented, and many of the courses and programs have begun to offer or expand their online offerings in support of IU Online. Furthermore, a culture of partnership between the CTL and faculty members, and between faculty members themselves, has been created. The use of the CEGs has helped facilitate an evidence-based approach to online teaching and learning, and the sharing of best practices, lessons learned, and pitfalls-to-avoid has been aided by the structured workshops, learning communities, and consultations provided by the CEG process.

4. NEXT STEPS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

The IU Online initiative continues to develop and expand, both at IUPUI and the other campuses of Indiana University. The success of the CEG process at IUPUI is being considered as an exemplary faculty development model, one that has the promise and potential for adoption at other IU campuses. At IUPUI, another round of proposals for CEGs in support of IU Online has just been announced, and faculty members are in the process of submitting their proposals. Thus, the CEG framework is proving an effective mechanism to advance online teaching and learning, while fostering partnerships in faculty development.

In replicating some of the aspects of the CEG process in other contexts to support partnerships in faculty development for online learning, the following recommendations are noted:
- *An institutional strategy for online programming is needed.* This includes determining the institution's approach to online learning, the programs and services it desires to offer online, the market it seeks to serve through online delivery, and the infrastructure to be created or leveraged in support of the online strategy.
- *Senior level commitment to faculty development is needed.* This includes an appreciation for the knowledge, skills, experiences, and perspectives faculty members bring to the provision of the teaching and learning process, along with an understanding that targeted, sustained, and appropriate faculty development interventions are needed on an ongoing basis—especially salient as courses and programs are created for or converted to an online learning format.
- *Allocation of appropriate resources to support faculty development is needed.* This includes the physical, human, and financial capital needed to support faculty in their teaching and learning endeavors, and includes spaces for faculty to gather and receive support (such as Centers for Teaching and Learning), the instructional

technology consultants and others to provide guidance and assistance to faculty members, and the financial resources to invest in faculty development.

- *A framework to support partnerships in faculty development is needed.* This includes the appropriate programs and interventions to facilitate faculty development, including an initiative such as the Curriculum Enhancement Grant process, which builds capacity for faculty teaching in online contexts, provides partnership opportunities between faculty developers and faculty members, and makes a contribution to a broader institutional goal of supporting online teaching and learning.

As online teaching and learning become more ubiquitous in institutions of higher education across the globe, the attendant need for faculty development must accompany any strategy for increased online programs. Finally, the nature of faculty work is being reshaped by inter- and multi-disciplinary approaches; technology that redefines when, where, and how work is performed; and a need to frequently enhance and update knowledge, skills, and perspectives to keep pace with new disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge, changing student demographics, technology, external stakeholder expectations, and broader societal needs. Thus, institutional leaders should regularly revisit policies, approaches, and resources related to faculty to ensure that the institution is well-positioned to attract, develop, retain, support, reward, and advance the wide range of faculty talent. The examples provided in this paper related to partnerships in faculty development for online learning provide a good starting point for such investment in faculty talent.

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23. See www.ctl.iupui.edu for more details about the structure, services, and resources provided by the CTL.