Developing a Faculty Level eLearning Strategy

Western

Teaching Support Centre
Western University
elearning.uwo.ca

Purpose: to improve the quality of student learning, reduce the cost of instruction and communicate a clear plan of action aligned with Western's E-Learning Task Force Report.

1

Questions to consider when developing an eLearning strategy

What is the proposition (of our strategy) for our students?

An eLearning strategy must be able to communicate the outcomes as benefits to our students. Such benefits could include increased student flexibility, increased student success or improved student access to a course topic or instructor that would be otherwise unavailable. It may also mean considering different strategies for different student populations, for example, graduate degrees delivered fully online are an attractive prospect for working professionals and an area of growth (Bowness, 2015).

What is our Faculty's differentiated approach to online learning?

Within higher education, online learning has become a growing area of focus. In Ontario, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities has been driving growth and collaboration in the online learning environment through the development of the Online Ontario Centre of Excellence (Bradshaw, 2014). As Western students look to other institutions for increased online learning opportunities (and vice versa, other students studying here) a clearly differentiated approach to online learning will be important in an eLearning strategy to: 1) keep Western students enrolled at the institution and 2) attract new learners.

How does our strategy align with face-to-face?

While online learning environment presents new challenges and opportunities for teaching and learning, eLearning courses are (re)developed along a continuum of fully face-to-face to fully online courses. Innovative pedagogy utilizing technology to improve student achievement can occur across these domains of delivery. A fully conceptualized eLearning strategy should consider the relationship between courses taught fully face-to-face, those that are blended and those offered fully online.

How will we engage and support interested faculty members?

Developing an eLearning strategy without appropriate mechanisms to: 1) ensure faculty consultation and 2) support faculty's success will likely hinder its successful implementation. It is important to identify interested instructors and provide them with sufficient support during the complete (re)design process: initial design, through delivery and assessment. Support, in part, includes access to aligned eLearning tools and appropriate design and technical expertise. Innovative program designs and improved instructional quality, key outcomes of an eLearning strategy, will only be achieved with meaningful faculty collaboration and on-going support.

Models for course redevelopment

Ramp-up courses

Most often seen in introductory courses, incoming students often arrive on campus with uneven prior knowledge. These differences can result in increased student drop rates or loss of instructional time spent remediating student knowledge. Ramp-up courses are offered in an accelerated, online format that allows incoming students to complete them prior to arriving on-campus. Mastery-based assessment allows those students with adequate prior knowledge to move quickly through the curriculum, or pre-assessment can direct students into the appropriate ramp-up course level.

Target courses:

- First-year courses in your program where significant numbers of students routinely struggle with course content

Curricular Bottlenecks

These lower year, large enrolment courses act as prerequisites for admission in upper years to modules. Redesigning these courses towards a blended model (combining web-based content and face-to-face learning) can allow for 1) lower per-student costs through reduction of weekly in-class meetings and; 2) improved student success rates through the use of small-group active learning exercises.

Target courses:

- Lower-year, large enrolment courses
- Prerequisites for upper-year module admission
- Courses with higher failure rates

Underlying design approaches:

- Replace teacher-centred strategies with learner-centred, active learning strategies
- Undertaking whole course (versus per-section) redesign, resulting in higher impact
- Redevelop courses to use eLearning tools in course that provide students with opportunities for frequent practice and feedback
- Align learning tasks with appropriate instructional support: instructors with tasks requiring expertise, peer mentors with tasks such as review

Summer course recapture

Summer courses allow students to catch up or get ahead in their program of study. Students are often looking for flexible online courses that can fit their summer schedule and program needs. If a course is not available at Western, students will take similar credits at another post-secondary institution on a Letter of Permission.

A list of courses with the highest potential of "recapturing" Letter of Permission students can be created by identifying the courses within the Faculty with the most-commonly transferred credits. By investing in redeveloping these courses for online delivery, these highly viable courses will retain students at Western, even when they're not physically located on-campus.

Target courses

- Courses with the highest Letter of Permission credit transfer requests
- Lower-year, large enrolment courses
- Prerequisites for upper-year module admission
- Courses that do not require sophisticated laboratory work

References

Bowness, S. (2015). Moving online for a graduate degree. *University Affairs*, 56, 11-17.

Bradshaw, J. (2014, January 13). Ontario to launch $42-million central hub for online postsecondary classes. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/ontario-to-launch-central-hub-for-online-postsecondary-classes/article16299333/

Education Advisory Board. (2014). *Online and Hybrid Course Prioritization Guide*. Washington, DC.

Twigg, C. A. (2003). Improving Learning and Reducing Costs: New Models for Online Learning. *EducauseReview*, (September/October), 28–38.

Between 2011 and 2014, 67% of all LOP have been granted for the summer semester.

Ten most commonly transferred credits between 2011 and 2014:

1. Business 2257
2. Biology 258B
3. MOS 3300 LOP
4. Biochemistry 2280A
5. MOS 2200 LOP
6. Biology 2382B
7. Political Science 3300 LOP
8. MOS 2100 LOP
9. Chemistry 1200B
10. Sociology 2200 LOP

For further consultation

The eLearning and curriculum specialists at Western's Teaching Support Centre are available to act as consultants in the development of a Faculty eLearning strategy.

Contact Dr. Gavan Watson, Associate Director (eLearning): **gavan.watson@uwo.ca**