

Description

Please provide a description of the Effective Practice.

In 2016, our team was challenged by our college leadership to address the initiative: "Increasing Instructor Presence with the use of Technology". We learned many things about faculty development during this process that led us to the successful implementation of a 7 series module training product.

The first thing that became apparent was the differing opinions about "what" instructor presence is. Our team was familiar with the Community of Inquiry Model (Garrison, Anderson, Archer 2000), but it was important that we develop training that made this concept clear, to increase likelihood of successful application.

We also learned that instructors have very diverse viewpoints, limited work time, comfort levels for sharing personal information, experience with technology, and personal success goals. Meeting the diverse needs of the instructors, also became a key variable to consider as the training was developed.

After developing a supporting media development team, and outlining content and schedule goals, the content for each module began. The first module was launched, to the College of Health, Human Services, and Science faculty, in May of 2017 and the final module launched in October of 2018.

Our Research

In 2016, our team was challenged by our college leadership to address the initiative: "Increasing Instructor Presence with the use of Technology". We learned many things about faculty development during this process that led us to the successful implementation of a 7 series module training product.

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In January 2019, the formal IRB approved research project began collecting data and at this time, continues to gather key data to share throughout the academic community. At this time, these are our findings:

The institution has now created an Instructor Presence Certification, which is available to all faculty throughout the university, suggesting a useful sustainable product to advance instruction online.

To date, over 400 instructors have participated in the training opportunity.

Learning Effectiveness

Please describe how the practice demonstrates effectiveness in producing learning outcomes, which are consistent with learner needs and representative of the distinctive quality of the institution. 500 word limit.

Instructor Presence has been suggested to be an important variable in supporting students, but how this looks online has minimally been explored.

These seven stand-alone, interactive, self-paced modules were provided to all faculty in the college as an opportunity for professional development with the ultimate goal of enhancing presence strategies, thus improving the quality of the educational experience for faculty and students alike by encouraging engagement and fulfillment, ultimately fostering increased success.

While institutions of higher education strive to provide an engaging experience for students, online institutions, such as Ashford University, face special challenges, given the physical and even psychological distance students may perceive. However, evidence suggests that implementation of strategies addressing cognitive, teaching, and social presence in the online classroom can mitigate this, providing a key to supporting student success (Akyol & Garrison, 2008, Rebeor, Rosser-Majors, McMahon, Anderson, Harper, & Sliwinski, 2019). This initiative demonstrated effectiveness in producing learner outcomes through improved course completion rates and increased student success.

Although this analysis is still underway, the following results suggest increased effectiveness in meeting the needs of students and encouraging increased success:

A one-tailed, paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare drop rates among those who completed the entire series of modules. Results revealed a significant difference between pre-treatment ($M = 15\%$, $SD = 6\%$) and post-treatment conditions ($M = 11\%$, $SD = 7\%$), $t(57) = -3.76$, $p = .0002$. These results suggest that completion of the presence modules made a marked improvement in retention.

In addition, a one-tailed, paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare success rates among those who completed the entire series of modules. The analysis revealed a significant difference between pre-treatment ($M = 79\%$, $SD = 8\%$) and post-treatment conditions ($M = 82\%$, $SD = 10\%$), $t(57) = 2.41$, $p = .0096$. These results suggest that completion of the presence modules made a marked improvement in student success.

Scale

Please describe how the practice offers the best possible educational value to learners and supports achieving capacity enrollment. 500 word limit.

One appealing aspect of this initiative concerns the scale and cost. The modules were initially designed by the faculty team and subsequently produced by the media development team. No outside expenditures were incurred. After targeted implementation in the College of Health, Human Services, and Science, availability of the modules has been extended across the university to other colleges as a certification program, and the modules will now be available to all faculty for perpetuity.

Additionally, the educational value lies with the increase in student success and improved retention. This learning series, designed for online instructors, once applied, is suggested to decrease student isolation, increasing student satisfaction, and hence, retention and student success. Our research confirms this suggestion. This, in itself, reduces the financial responsibility of students who need to retake courses or completely drop out of school, still owing money they borrowed to take courses.

Exceptional delivery of virtual education is mandatory. Through application of these strategies, the value of the education offered at Ashford University increases, as well as the achievement of capacity enrolment.

Our instructors, as learners, are offered this training at no financial cost and was developed with students' success, as a key outcome. Initially the practice was offered exclusively to one college. At present, the institution now offers an Instructor Presence Certification training, using these created modules.

Access

Please describe how the practice has improved access to education by expanding opportunities and/or reducing barriers. 500 word limit.

Students in the online environment are often subject to feelings or experiences of isolation, which can be a barrier to effective learning (Galusha, 1997; Hara & Khling, 1999). Instructor presence in the classroom fosters intentional building of trust through enhanced communication and engagement between students and with the instructor, allowing students to feel more connected. This can reduce barriers of isolation, uncertainty, and confusion, enhancing efficacy and greater opportunities for student learning, improving opportunities to more deeply engage, ask questions, and broaden knowledge at a deeper level. Access improvement encourages diverse student populations the opportunity to succeed. In addition, it evolves an instructor's mindset in their own responsibility within the virtual environment.

Faculty Satisfaction

Please describe how the practice activities has maintained a high level of faculty satisfaction. 500 word limit.

Faculty have reported enhanced satisfaction with the series and the resulting interaction in their classrooms. Instructors are excited to have these additional tools in their skill set. Since the examples are created by Ashford faculty and used in the Ashford online setting, instructors can see the applicability of these s strategies and easily adapt them to their own courses.

For our initial role out, 78% of the College of Health, Human Services, and Science, participated in the training series. Instructor comments, which were abundant, about their experiences applying these practices, suggest increased motivation within the virtual environment:

“Thank you for offering such an incredible training. I think that we can all get a little bit stuck doing things just one way, and this has certainly opened by eyes to some to some amazing new strategies to apply in my classroom. I am so excited to get started!”

“I found it a good learning experience to give me the scholarly background for why these interrelated concepts are important for student learning and retention. I find myself already using some of these techniques in my current class.”

“My to-do list has just grown by leaps and bounds! Teaching accounting, working with numbers, can be rather dry cut and straight forward. Completing this series has given me much to think about for future courses – now to get busy!”

“Dr. M, Just a short note on my experience with video responses and the impact on instructor surveys and retention. My survey percentages for the 1/22 course were the best I have ever. May be an anomaly, but according to student responses it was directly connected to video responses for all DQ's and announcements. I believe that retention was better too because of personal touch...Glad I did the training modules to find out this option existed.”

Student Satisfaction

Please describe how learners who are impacted by the practice express satisfaction with their learning experience. 500 word limit.

Student feedback on end of course surveys (EOCS) often emphasize qualities recognized in instructors that align with instructor presence, such as inspiration, motivation, empathy, communication, critical thinking, and grading feedback. As noted in our findings, student success has significantly been affected in courses where the instructors have completed the series of training. EOCS's, in these courses, also suggest increased satisfaction by students, who have expressed key variables associated with applying all three areas of instructor presence:

"...is a great Professor. He regularly engaged with students in discussions, and always responded promptly to private messages. Very happy with my experience in this class."

" I really enjoyed this class and feel this professor was involved and helpful. Adding insight and additional information in each discussion. I would highly recommend her to other students who are looking for an interactive class. "

"The instructor has been very active and provides feedback in her own unique way which is very engaging and interactive. Her feedback is very informative and helpful. This is the best instructor I have had so far at Ashford University."

"This course was challenging but the instructors feedback and course structure made it clear what was required in order to succeed. I really appreciate the instructors feedback because he pushed the class to think critically!"

"...has been pivotal in my success at Ashford. She is a wonderful instructor that further explains material, asks thought-provoking questions, and really helps guide the classroom. She is always willing to help and will reach out to you if she feels you need some extra help. Her encouragement truly made a difference in my education!"

"This class more than met my expectations... it prepared me for more difficult courses and was a good start for my education at Ashford.... I learned so much from her. I would like to commend her on what she taught me. I know so much more on how to do a proper research paper and how to do professional research. She challenged me..."

"...he made me feel as if i was apart of the team. In the beginning i felt unsure of myself and a little intimidated by this class but the videos really helped me to understand it better..."

"...The information and assistance I received in this class made me feel as if it are a classroom setting opposed to an online environment! I am grateful...for consistently showing me she cares and I matter..."

"...she is not only knowledgeable about the subject she teaches but anything that is brought to the table...is addressed in minutes with additional feedback through a video...Her guidance is second to none...Each day was/is a learning experience as she replies to each classmate...and always provided a video, ...extra knowledge or just to give a boost on a job well done .I hold Ashford in high esteem as the majority of my educators had/have the students well-being at heart..."

*All comments gathered from instructors who completed the modules.

Estimated Costs

Please describe any estimated costs, including equipment needed, associated with implementing and maintaining the practice.

At this time, no outside expenditures will incur. The current instructor presence certification is housed within the university system, online, and will be offered to all faculty at no cost.