Teaching philosophies and practices of highly experienced online educators

Proposal for ELEARN 2004

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Overview of the Panel:

With the Internet's rapid growth, the Web has become a powerful medium of teaching and learning at a distance (Khan, 1997). The idea of educating oneself with the flexibility of time and place offered by distance learning is gathering momentum and making an impact throughout society. Drucker (2000) suggests that the distance learning market will grow to hundreds of billions of dollars in the near future. In an age where the use of information and communications technologies (ICT) is regarded as essential to many daily activities, academics are coming under increasing pressure to offer courses online and to adapt their teaching to accommodate new technologies. The use of computer-mediated communication to create online classrooms has become a popular means of distance learning, in mixed mode along with face-to-face instruction as well as in a completely online mode with ICT providing the sole channels of education at a distance. The Internet is being used in various ways for educational and instructional purposes, and there are a number of projects underway to integrate ICT into higher-education institutions around the world.

Online teaching and learning appears to be changing the scope and the competencies required of teachers (Goodyear, Salmon, Spector, Steeples, & Tickner, 2001; Spector & de la Teja, 2001). Teaching online is different from teaching in a traditional classroom setting. ICT changes the way faculty teach and interact with students by providing an environment where there is little or no face-to-face interaction but where information is available to students almost instantaneously and opportunities for novel forms of communication abound. This situation requires the re-examination of the role of the teacher. As is the case with many efforts to integrate new technologies into teaching and learning, there is inadequate research or study on the effectiveness of online teaching, especially with regard to the skills required to teach online courses. So far, there have been few studies that focus on skills and competencies required to be an effective online teacher. A number of universities have conducted studies pertaining to student reactions, learning outcomes, cost-effectiveness and online course design, but inadequate attention has been devoted to the requirements of online teaching from the point of view of preparing and training effective online teachers.

There is a need and an opportunity to establish core competencies for teaching online. The specific skill sets required for teaching online differ from those required in traditional classroom settings, partly due to different delivery modalities and partly due to

different opportunities for learner activities. Whether and to what extent the standards that have been established for classroom teaching are appropriate for online teaching is worth a critical examination.

The intent of this session is to report outcomes of extensive interviews with experienced online instructors in terms of how they have re-conceptualized online teaching and the demands placed on them by online instruction.