For discussion postings 4 and 5, you will consider and respond in depth to the following scenario. This posting counts double the points and effort above and beyond the minimum will garner extra credit.

Imagine if you will: Having made a name for yourself in distance education, you and your classmates in this section have been hired as distance education consultants for a regional university (referred to as "The University"). The University administration is worried about dropping enrollment numbers due to the rise in students (who would otherwise attend the institution) choosing to attend places like The University of Phoenix or other national/regional/state/ universities to get their degrees in a fully online program.

The University has mandated that all departments begin offering DE courses as a substantial portion of their offerings. The administration has only offered these three guidelines:

 • The classes need to be 100% online.

• The online classes must charge a higher tuition rate than comparable f2f offerings.

• The program needs to be rapidly scalable (i.e. able to handle large numbers of incoming students).

In return, the university has offered to spend considerable money advertising the program the department creates. You have been hired by the education department to help get this initiative up and running. There is almost no (ZERO) faculty support for this endeavor. But some of the more techno-literate faculty, seem willing to discuss the idea. Some of the concerns the faculty site:

• The administration does not have a clear understanding of DE or the scope of what it is asking.

• Quality of the program will diminish considerably

• It is too much work with no reward (extra pay, release time, etc).

• Lack of DE design and teaching experience.

• Copyright and ownership of intellectual property (e.g. classes they create)

• There is no infrastructure (people and resources) in place to handle this change.

• Funding

• Not having strong enough technical skills

• Lack of a clear DE vision for The University

Frances makes a really good point: For any change to be successful the faculty has to buy in wholeheartedly. As an educator, I have seen 'new, new things' rolled out year after year. Some sticking, to various degrees. most being tossed away in favor of the new, new, new thing.

Patsy and Frances both make good points to ensure faculty buy-in, but as I started writing, I realized that there are basically 2 big issues on the faculty side, and failing to address either of them fully would cause the project to fail:

1. Converting their course to a D.E. friendly format
2. Producing their course in the Learning/Content Management System.

For converting the courses, we need blended training for instructors in course design, technology, and distance instructional design. As Patsy said: Immersion in a well-designed online learning experience will enable instructors to see the possibilities and to experience the asynchronous benefits. Rebecca said something that echoed my own experience: having a blended- learning program in-between a fully classroom-based program and a fully online program, made the transition go smoothly for me.

Not all classes will be easily converted. There needs to be a timeline for conversion and a support team to provide scaffolding. Templates could provide structure, mentors would also be useful here. Heather said it well: Investigate co-teaching arrangements that pair technology-literate faculty with those less skilled.

For producing the course in the CMS, we need assistants to handle the technical side of things and training in the system, a help desk and mentors. Bliss makes a good point: building practice modules for experience could be part of the training. Using the University's technology students as help desk or part of technical support might be worth considering.

Conversion and production will both take a considerable amount of time and effort. Not all faculty members will be willing to put in this effort, but steps can be taken to 'bait the hook.' Stipends for attending training, for example, pay incentives for mentors or those willing to step into the technical support role. Offering the option to telecommute makes a lot of sense.

Infrastructure and funding dovetail well. Once an inventory of current hardware, software and peripherals is conducted, research into content management systems can be taken to the next level, determining which system is the most financially efficient to implement while still being user-friendly and intuitive to use for both faculty and students. And, as Heather said: Once infrastructure and additional teacher resource and training needs are determined, the distance learning fee will be calculated and added to student tuition.

As a student, my concerns are rather similar to the instructor's. I have technical concerns and content concerns. My technical concerns are: is class truly online? By this I mean is it accessible across platforms and browsers? Will I be able to attend class via my tablet or smartphone or will I have to be tethered to a computer? Will I be able to access the class via Linux? Will open source software be provided and accepted?

My content concerns are: how does this degree compare to a brick and mortar degree and a University of Phoenix degree? Will getting my degree online from a 'real school' still look like I got an 'online degree?' Is the school accredited? Are the professors assigning a proportionate amount of work per class? How much time per week will be expected per class?

The emergence of online education as a viable alternative to face to face learning is undeniable. Students of all ages are assessing their educational institutions and looking for options that will make them employable in today's economy. Online degrees offer a much wider pool of possible students for the University, opening up increased revenues which can be put back into incentives and more robust course management.