Collaborative Scholarship – A Success Story

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Abstract

This presentation will focus on the collaborative work being carried out by faculty in various disciplines from four different departments at the College of Technology and Aviation, KSU-Salina. Faculty at first worked individually using a university developed online system to enhance classroom teaching. The process of improving student learning provided a common base and motivation for these faculty members to share their experiences and lessons learned.

This paper will also illustrate the role of online hybrid instruction as a main contributor to collaborative scholarship and address several outcomes from the collaboration, such as the fostering of mentorship, shared scholarship of teaching, and building a community of learners.

Introduction

Online instruction requires more planning, takes more time to prepare materials, and there is no standard approach. Faculty training is key to success and "just-in-time" resources for instructors-in-training is an effective training approach. While the motivation and incentives to adopt web-based technologies for faculty are intrinsic[1], the rewards can include innovative teaching and amplified teaching effectiveness. Further benefits include the collegiality of the development process.

Background on Collaboration

KSU Online – KSOL (http://online.ksu.edu) is an online course management tool developed at Kansas State University by the Division of Continuing Education (DCE). The system includes features that are organized into five modules: Content Management, Communications,

Assessment, Utilities, and Help. Within each module, faculty can choose the functions to be implemented such as posting lectures notes, video clips, and voiced over lecture slides.

The concept and development began as a text only system limited to web documents. Frequent faculty and student feedback to developers early in the process was crucial to creating the current version, which continues to be an ongoing improvement process.   The number of students and faculty using the system has grown dramatically. In the Fall semester of 2000, the web site averaged 0.5 million hits per month. In the Spring semester of 2003, there were over 9.5 million web hits per month. Annual hits range from 2.5 million in 1999 to 62.3 million in 2003. Faculty use has likewise increased, due mainly to the demand for web-accessible material from their students.

The authors are using KSOL as enrichment to traditional classroom instruction by combining face-to-face lectures and online supplemental materials. This hybrid approach to instructional delivery has been tailored by each faculty member to fit their disciplinary interests, specific pedagogical aims, assessment practices, and philosophical intentions. Through weekly meetings, the authors have shared experiences in using KSOL as instructional tool and discovered the system's valuable role in their scholarship of teaching as well as an instrument for collaborative scholarship.

Building a Community of Learners

Stage I (1999-2002)
In 1999, three KSU Salina's faculty (Barnard, Leite, Oh) started an attempt to use KSOL, originally designed for distance education, to see if it would facilitate and enhance student learning in the traditional face-to-face classroom. They used the available tools independently at first and administered student surveys without knowledge of each other's work in the classroom. Barnard surveyed students because he wanted to know if the hybrid model added value to the student experience. Oh, a participant in Plains Academy Co-Op project, FIPSE (Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education) grant for faculty development in curriculum revision and technology enhancement, surveyed students to discover how they perceived her use of the technology to publish her handwritten notes on their chemistry problems, for students to view through KSOL. Leite was interested in knowledge construction, retention, and transfer.

Because the early conversion of course materials to an online format was time consuming, these three found common, cross-curricular interest in sharing their experiences and started regular weekly meetings with Gail Simmonds, Director of Instructional Technology. This group's feedback as faculty users to the system's developers led to ongoing improvements in the features available on KSOL. In 2001, the group developed an initial common student user survey to collect data on students' perception and attitudes toward hybrid instruction and to identify any cross-curricular similarities and differences. This initial survey yielded out first collaborative presentation at the 2001 Conference on Information Technology[2], held in Minneapolis, MN.

Stage II (2002-2003)
Collins joined in the faculty user group and strengthened the group once a week sharing meeting with new and creative perspectives on hybrid instruction. The survey in 2003 shows that in four

disciplines (Aviation, Chemistry, Computer Systems Technology, and English), a majority (70%) of students found KSOL to be convenient and beneficial to their learning. Students' demand for access to KSOL features in their courses across the curriculum led to increased faculty support for its adoption, and consequently, to a continuous improvement process to the system due to its developers solicited and acted upon faculty feedback. In March of 2003, KSU's Student Governing Association voted unanimously in favor of all faculty adopting some online course features.

During this period the collaborators continued to improve and administer student surveys to collect data on the impact of hybrid delivery on the learning process. The group has also developed and administered a faculty user survey to identify which features faculty are using and to act as peer consultants on their efforts in implementing online features to enhance classroom instruction.

Stage II was productive in the scholarship of teaching. The authors made two collaborative presentations, one regional and one at the national level[3,4]. The group has also worked on a collective literature review on online hybridization from their fields to submit first collaborative publication.

Stage III (2004 and beyond)
Fred Guzek, a new faculty in 2003, became another member and brought to the group his experience with distance education. Although still early in Stage III, the authors have submitted two papers for publication and have three papers accepted for presentation.

The group has also started working on a new project, actually an off-spring from our collaborative work, that aims at developing standard procedures to assure high quality on the development, delivery, and continuous assessment of online course delivery at KSU – Salina.

Conclusion

Collaborative scholarship occurred as a result of opening communication channels among faculty across disciplines on common threads: added instructional value to their courses, enhancement of student-centered learning, and lessons learned with an innovative medium for the continuous improvement of teaching.

A passion for student learning and success combined with technology has provided an arena for the authors to meet, discuss, share success stories, and document the process. Perhaps the most important and rewarding outcome was the opportunity to share individual frustrations and help each other find ways to "get back on track."

Our plans for 2004 and beyond include:
- Continue to work collaboratively.
- Continue to study ways to improve student learning and knowledge transfer.
- Continue to work with KSOL's developers in improving the systems' features.
- Serve as peer consultants to faculty interested in using hybrid delivery to improve

instruction.
- Start a faculty development program for the College of Technology & Aviation.

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