Does Participation in a Faculty Distance Education Mentoring Program Comprehensively Improve Teaching Methods?

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The Distance Education Mentoring Program (DEMP) is an initiative designed to assist faculty in learning the technology and instructional design principles necessary to develop and teach quality online courses. This paper describes the results of a survey assessment of 92 faculty members who completed the program over the last four years. Participants in the program not only developed high quality online courses, but also changed their beliefs and learned skills and methods that could be applied to their teaching practice in the classroom. This suggests that faculty members participating in the DEMP experienced a transfer of learning from their immediate task of online course development to other teaching contexts. Regression results show that the program’s success was strongly related to its collaborative atmosphere. These findings have implications for other institutions seeking to use a mentoring approach to successfully help faculty develop high quality online and traditional teaching practices.

Keywords: Distance education, faculty development, mentoring, teaching improvement, transfer of learning

In this paper, the results of a study evaluating the effectiveness of a unique program designed to mentor university faculty in online instruction are presented. Specifically, the program’s effectiveness in improving
teaching methods beyond just the online environment is examined. The innovative mentoring program is necessary because teaching online can be a challenge for university faculty (e.g., Gomes & Mullen, 2005). Mediocre or ineffective online teaching can imperil student satisfaction, instructional effectiveness, and overall perceptions of the university.

The online segment of the higher education market is large and growing (Allen & Seaman, 2007). The Sloan Consortium surveyed the chief administrative officers at 2500 colleges and universities and found that online enrollments have continued to grow at rates far in excess of the total higher education student population. The recent twenty-one percent growth rate for online enrollments far exceeds the less than two percent growth of the overall higher education student population (Allen & Seaman, 2010). Thus, it is safe to conclude that demand for online education is increasing at a rate faster than the demand for traditional courses.

Countless institutions and faculty members are new to online teaching and program development and are uncertain about best practices in this environment. The Sloan Consortium (2010) has identified five pillars of quality in online education: access, learning effectiveness, faculty satisfaction, student satisfaction, and scale (institutional commitment to achieve capacity enrollment via cost effectiveness). This study focuses mainly on faculty satisfaction as an important component to quality online education.

**Faculty and Teaching Online**

Many professors teach effectively and satisfactorily in a classroom setting, even though most have never received formal education in instructional design. In fact, recent studies (Bates, 2010) confirm that instructors in most institutions are not adequately prepared to teach (with or without technology). Teaching online is a further challenge; and doing so poorly can jeopardize student satisfaction and overall perceptions of the university and distance learning. As the number of students learning online has dramatically increased (Allen & Seaman, 2007), and the systematic assessment of learning outcomes has become more common in many fields, the need to ensure quality online teaching has become very important. A mentoring approach for faculty developed by Purdue University Calumet was a strategic response aimed at ensuring the academic integrity of distance education by aligning the conditions for optimal learning with the best technology for online delivery.

It is widely recognized that teaching online is a different experience than teaching face-to-face and requires new skills and techniques. The online learning environment is qualitatively different than the traditional face-to-face classroom environment. Many authors argue that the online environ-
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ment promotes more learner-centered instruction, requiring instructors to share control of the learning process with students (e.g., Jolliffe, Ritter, & Stevens, 2001; Palloff & Pratt, 1999; Shearer, 2003). Instructors may find that they need to play a more facilitative role, which can be a significant departure from their normal teaching style and require a shift in thinking related to control of the learning process. Teaching in the online environment “challeng[es] previous practice with regard to assessment, group interaction and student/teacher dialogue” (Ellis & Phelps, 2000, p. 2), and “necessitates a new model of instructor” (Cohen, 2001, p. 31).

Caplan (2004) argues that, “It is helpful to consider the web not simply as a new medium for distance education delivery, but also as a partnership of a new teaching paradigm and new technology, creating the potential for fundamental changes in how we undertake teaching and learning” (p. 182). Viewing the development and teaching of online courses from this perspective makes the development of web-based courses an excellent opportunity to bring about changes in teaching practice far beyond just the specific courses being developed. Faculty development programs targeting the development of an online course have the potential to create a far-reaching and lasting impact on faculty members and the institution as a whole.

After interviewing many practitioners involved in distance learning initiatives and considering the personal experiences of the authors, there seems to be anecdotal evidence that a significant number of faculty members experience shifts in pedagogical beliefs and make changes to their other courses after developing and teaching an online course. Some anecdotal accounts published in the early research on distance education (e.g., Alley, 1996; Frank, 2000; Jaffee, 2003) document this outcome, but the topic has not been adequately investigated and reported in the literature. The current study examines the notion of learning transfer and explores the mechanisms underlying the development and teaching of an online course that might explain further-reaching and substantial impacts on the faculty member’s pedagogical beliefs and teaching practices.

This study aims to determine whether faculty members believe participation in a structured mentoring-based cohort program is an effective and beneficial approach for the creation and implementation of online courses. The primary research question being addressed is, “how successful is the Distance Education Mentoring Program (DEMP) from the faculty participant perspective?” Success is examined by focusing on faculty participants’ satisfaction with the program and their ability to apply what they learned in it to their teaching more broadly. Examining these issues will help illuminate the factors that impact faculty members’ success in the program. This paper opens with a brief description of the mentoring program used to facilitate the online course development process.
The Distance Education Mentoring Program

The DEMP, described in *The International Journal of E-Learning*, is an initiative developed to meet faculty instructional needs (Barczyk, Buckenmeyer, & Feldman, 2010). This unique program focuses on peer-to-peer mentoring as the technique used to educate adults.

The DEMP is a faculty-driven, administratively-sponsored endeavor designed to educate and certify faculty members in the principles of instructional design in order to enhance the quality of their online courses. Specifically, the purposes of the DEMP are to (1) ensure the academic integrity of distance education courses and (2) align the conditions for learning with the technology used to deliver courses. The program uses a rubric developed by Quality Matters (QM), which is a faculty centered, peer review-based process designed to certify the quality of online courses and their components (MarylandOnline, 2006). Faculty members who have completed the QM certification process and have online teaching experience serve as mentors. Each participant is paired with a mentor from outside his/her discipline to ensure a focus on instructional design as presented in the QM rubric and avoid involvement with course content. A timeline and brief description of the four stages of the DEMP are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Four-stage model of the Distance Education Mentoring Program.

The first stage of the DEMP (Learn) takes place during one semester. During the learning stage, participants work collaboratively with their mentors to design and develop their online courses. Both receive quarter-time releases from their regular academic responsibilities. The focus of mentor-participant interactions is on the instructional design process and the Quality
Matters criteria. In addition to an intensive knowledge exchange session and several workshops, participants enroll in an online course entitled “Online Teaching Institute” which is hosted in the university’s course management system. Here, participants engage in online discussions and access resources related to the course design process.

At the end of the Learn stage, the participants self-assess the courses they developed. Next, each mentor evaluates their participants’ courses against the QM rubric. Based on feedback from their mentors, participants make final edits to their courses before teaching them online the following semester (Teach stage). Once this stage is completed, the full courses (including student and instructor interactions) are evaluated again. This time the evaluation is conducted by mentors who have no prior mentoring relationship to the participant (Evaluate stage). The full courses are evaluated according to the Quality Matters rubric. Based on evaluation of the criteria described in the rubric, participants’ courses are scored as “pass,” “conditional pass”, or “fail.” Participants whose courses do not receive a pass are given an opportunity to improve them based on feedback provided by the mentors. Once participants have taught their course and received a “pass” rating based on the mentors’ evaluation, they are publicly recognized at a luncheon and presented with a certificate of completion (Acknowledge stage).

To gain insight into the faculty participant experience in this mentoring-based online course development program, the participants from four cohorts of the DEMP were surveyed.

Methodology

This study examines whether faculty believe participation in a structured mentoring-based cohort program is an effective and beneficial approach for the creation and implementation of online courses. Fundamentally, we sought to address the question of whether faculty who participated in the DEMP report that their participation has impacted their teaching and if so, what factors might impact the reported changes?

Participants

This study surveyed the faculty participants of the DEMP. Four cohorts of faculty who participated in the program between 2006 and 2010 were invited to participate in the study. A total of 92 faculty were contacted with a request to complete the electronic survey.
Survey Instrument

A questionnaire was developed and administered electronically to all participants. Survey questions were created using the insights gained from the experiences of two mentors and a faculty member who participated as a mentee in the first iteration of the DEMP. Those insights are summarized in a conceptual paper describing the program (see Barczyk, Buckenmeyer, and Feldman, 2010). The items were grounded in the literature related to mentoring, online course development and quality management.

Research suggests that skilled faculty members and structured faculty development programs are key ingredients of quality distance courses (North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Higher Learning Commission, 2007). Faculty who teach online must be provided with both training and continuous support (e.g., Willis, 1994). The survey questions were created to reflect these criteria. Specifically, items on the questionnaire focused on the development of skills to teach online, elements of instructional design, qualities of the mentoring relationship, and general beliefs about online instruction.

The questionnaire contained 72 closed-ended items, 58 of which related to the characteristics and outcomes of the DEMP (the remaining 14 questions were demographic items). A majority of the items required the participants to rate their attitudes and perceptions using a four-point Likert-type scale where 1 corresponded to a rating of strongly disagree and 4 corresponded to a rating of strongly agree. Reliability of the survey instrument was calculated using Cronbach’s alpha (α=.971) revealing strong internal consistency.

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered electronically through the university’s Blackboard site. Participants in the first three cohorts were contacted after the completion of the third year of the program (April 2009). Participants in the fourth cohort were contacted at the conclusion of the fourth year of the program (April 2010). In each case, faculty participants were sent an email message that explained the study and invited them to participate in the voluntary, confidential survey. Faculty members were instructed to access the questionnaire by clicking on the appropriate site in their Blackboard menu. Faculty participants who had not completed the survey were sent follow-up email communications reminding them of their invitation to participate.
Results

Demographics

Forty-seven individuals (representing a response rate of 51.1%) responded by completing the online questionnaire. All participants were professors or instructors at a Midwestern state university, and represent a variety of disciplines. There were 26 female and 18 male respondents (3 non-respondents) whose age ranged from the early 30’s to over 66. Most participants were assistant (n=16) or associate (n=16) professors; six were full professors, six were clinical professors or instructors, and 3 did not report their rank. The majority of respondents (67.4%) had taught an online course prior to participating in the program, though far fewer participants (34.1%) had taken an online course. Table 1 summarizes the employment demographic characteristics of the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courses taught online prior to program</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years since receiving terminal degree</td>
<td>16.96</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of university teaching experience</td>
<td>19.07</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years employed at this university</td>
<td>14.47</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants’ Perceptions of Transfer of Learning

The survey included four questions probing participants’ perceptions of the transfer of learning that occurred between the DEMP and other courses they taught. Table 2 summarizes participants’ responses.

The vast majority of respondents (90.9% and 93.2%, respectively) indicated that they were able to apply what they learned in the DEMP to their other online as well as traditionally-delivered courses. Similarly, most respondents (90.9%) indicated that they had actually made changes to their other courses as a result of participating in the DEMP.

The Online Experience Factor

Twenty-nine (29) respondents (62%) had taught an online course prior to their participation in the DEMP. An ANOVA revealed no significant differences between those who had online teaching experience and those without experience. Further analysis revealed that reported changes made in respondents’ teaching were attributable to their participation in the DEMP and not simply to the process of developing and/or teaching an online course. This will be explained below.
Creating the “Transfer” Factor

To better understand the mechanisms behind these ratings, a number of faculty and program characteristics were examined in relation to participants’ ratings of program success. A composite rating indicating transfer of skills was calculated based on questions related to participants’ perceptions of transfer of learning. Reliability for the composite rating was calculated using Cronbach’s alpha (see Table 2 below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transfer of Instructional Design Principles</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My online teaching has improved as a result of participation in the Distance Education Mentoring Program.</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My on-campus or traditional classroom teaching has improved as a result of my participation in the Distance Education Mentoring Program.</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been able to apply the skills and knowledge acquired from the Distance Education Mentoring Program to my other courses.</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have made changes to my other courses as a result of participating in the Distance Education Mentoring Program.</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Cronbach’s $\alpha = .88$

Faculty Characteristics

Among the faculty characteristics examined were age, gender, perceptions of being an early adopter of technology, previous online teaching experience, discipline (based on the school in which they teach), and enthusiasm about participating in the DEMP. Each faculty characteristic was based on a single question from the questionnaire. Regression analysis was used to test whether faculty characteristics explained participants’ reported success in the DEMP. No significant relationships between any of these faculty characteristics and transfer of learning were found.

Program Characteristics

The relationships between the three major program characteristics – focus on instructional design, focus on mentoring, focus on collaboration – and transfer of learning were also examined. Three major program characteristics were created by combining questions that were semantically related (see Table 3). The items constituting each characteristic were tested for reliability. Cronbach’s alpha was highly significant ($\alpha = .91$, $n=8$) for the items related to the program’s focus on instructional design for online learning. It was also significant for the program’s mentoring quality ($\alpha = .94$, $n=15$) and its collaborative quality ($\alpha = .92$, $n=8$).
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Table 3
Participants’ Perceptions of Program Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Characteristics</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Design (Note: Cronbach’s $\alpha = .90$)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I demonstrated a competency to develop learning objectives.</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I demonstrated a competency to align objectives, learning activities, and assessment.</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor facilitated my learning about instructional design.</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor facilitated my ability to apply instructional design principles.</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The focus of my mentor was on the instructional design rather than the content of my course.</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor knew how to apply the principles of learning.</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Distance Education Mentoring Program provided me with a working knowledge of the infrastructure supporting online learning.</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Distance Education Mentoring Program exposed me to models of teaching excellence particularly appropriate for distance education.</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentoring Relationship (Note: Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94$)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor facilitated my growth as an online instructor.</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor worked to serve my needs.</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor responded to my questions in a timely manner.</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor shared information from his/her course to help me visualize processes and outcomes.</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor devoted time to establishing good rapport with me.</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor devoted time to clarifying expectations.</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would have benefited from more intensive interaction with my mentor earlier in the program.</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor provided me with adequate feedback once I submitted my course for evaluation.</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I developed a friendship with my mentor.</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor provided me with career support.</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor provided me with psychological support.</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor knew how to engender trust.</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor knew how to share information openly .</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor exhibited strong interpersonal skills within a professional framework.</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor had an open door policy encouraging us to freely offer suggestions.</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative Atmosphere (Note: Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel connected to my mentor or to other mentors in the DEMP.</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mentor provided me with access to new information.</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The DEMP provided me with an introduction to knowledgeable individuals across campus that could be helpful in the future.</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regression analysis was used to test whether the three program characteristics explained the participants’ reported success in the DEMP. The results of the regression, summarized in Table 4, indicate that the three program characteristics explained 59% of the variance in the reported success of the DEMP’s participants. According to the model ($R^2 = .59$, $F(3, 43) = 19.42$, $p<.001$), participants’ perceived they were successful in the DEMP because of its focus on instructional design, quality oriented mentoring relationships, and collaborative atmosphere.

**Table 4**
Regression Model of the Effect of Program Factors on the Perception of Transfer of Instructional Design Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional design for online learning</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.239</td>
<td>.812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualities of the mentoring relationship</td>
<td>-.098</td>
<td>-.441</td>
<td>.662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative nature of the program</td>
<td>.800</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $R^2 = .59$ for overall model; $F(3, 43) = 19.42$ at $p<.001$

More specifically, respondents’ perceptions of the collaborative atmosphere of the DEMP significantly predicted their success in the program ($\beta = .80$, $p=.001$). The more participants felt the program was collaborative (ideas were freely exchanged, feedback was welcomed, participants worked as a team and developed relationships), the more they perceived that the DEMP was successful.

**Discussion and Implications**

To address the trend of increasing numbers of online courses and programs, university administrators in general assumed that having access to technology (Sloan-C Pillar 1), such as an online course management sys-
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tem, would be enough to ensure that today’s university students would learn about and with technology and that instructors would immediately begin using the technology and integrating it into their teaching. This has not happened as quickly or as effectively as was hoped. If universities are to be successful at not only offering online courses, but also increasing the number of quality online courses, all of the Pillars identified by Sloan must be addressed. In particular, instructors must have access to appropriate technologies and acquire technical competence in using such programs in their teaching. Changes in beliefs, not additional access or improvement in technical skills, is required for advancing into the higher levels of online integration.

How faculty view their work affects whether it is done excellently, which ultimately impacts on the success (Seidman 1985) and perhaps on the competitive advantage of the university. The fact that faculty participants evaluated the DEMP so highly on important elements of quality provides an objective assessment of how faculty-customers perceive the DEMP experience. While the senior leaders and the program designers may extol the virtues of the DEMP, these are not as critical to the evaluation of its overall success as the perceptions of faculty members who participated in the program. The fact that faculty overwhelmingly agree that their online – and offline - courses improved as a result of participation speaks to the value of the DEMP.

University instructors are the true internal customers of the mentoring program. By insuring that programs such as the DEMP are perceived positively in terms of quality, the university enhances its identity (St. Clair 1994) and perhaps its competitive advantage.

An implication of this study relates to the quality factors deemed most important to performance – in the present case, the perceptions of teaching improvement. The self-reported data indicate that faculty participants in the DEMP overwhelmingly believe that participation in the program has positively affected the way they construct and teach other courses.

The questionnaire data provide support for the efficacy of the DEMP model and suggests that the development of an online course is a good opportunity to impact teaching and learning far beyond just the single course that is being developed. In general, faculty participants in the program reported that they were satisfied with their experience in the program, felt their teaching improved, and were able to apply what they learned in the program to their teaching more broadly. Faculty’s perceived improvements in teaching and ability to apply their learning to benefit other courses is central to determining the program’s success.

Understanding what factors are most responsible for participants’ favorable perceptions of the program’s success is also key to helping other insti-
tutions structure programs that can have the same far-reaching impact for their faculty. In predicting participants’ perceptions of program success, the regression analyses indicate that the design of the program is more important than the characteristics of the faculty members who participate. Three specific aspects of the DEMP model were examined in this study: a focus on instructional design for online learning, qualities of the mentoring relationship, and the collaborative qualities of the program. The data analyses indicate that the collaborative nature of the program impacts the extent to which faculty members are able to benefit from the program and make broader changes to their teaching. Among the topics included in the collaborative factor are providing access to new information, welcoming and thoughtfully considering participants’ opinions and suggestions, using participants’ feedback to improve the program, feeling connected to the mentoring team, introducing participants to knowledgeable individuals across campus that could be helpful in the future, encouraging teamwork, and finding solutions to problems.

Based on the findings of this study, other institutions interested in creating a program to facilitate faculty development of online courses should emphasize a collaborative focus to their program. This is supported by research which asserts that issues related to faculty satisfaction when teaching online include, but are not limited to, expanding professional development opportunities and working with supportive colleagues (Wasilik and Bolliger, 2009). Our results suggest that faculty need to feel connected to the program and know that they have a voice in how the program is conducted. The following general implications should be considered by program developers and staff:

- Make relevant information easily available to participants.
- Encourage suggestions and feedback from participants.
- Ensure participants feel connected to their mentor and other program participants.
- Encourage participants to work as a team with their mentors and others.
- Help participants find process-based solutions to problems encountered, rather than using quick-fixes.

Limitations

This study has two potential limitations. The first relates to the fact that the survey relies on self-reported data. Even though the participants completed their surveys anonymously and asynchronously, self-report has the potential of creating a social-desirability bias wherein participants want to respond in a way that makes them look as good as possible. Respondents
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may attempt to answer in a socially desirable way and occasionally under-report behaviors deemed inappropriate by researchers and over-report behaviors viewed as appropriate. The nature of the survey and its electronic administration likely prevented participants in the current study from knowing the research hypotheses or desired responses. While the possibility for this effect exists, the probability that it would impact the study’s findings is relatively low.

A second limitation relates to the use of a single survey instrument, which creates the potential for mono-method bias. For this study, a survey was the only feasible means of efficiently collecting data from the participants. Future research should substantiate findings with additional evidence beyond faculty self-report. Evidence can include rich, qualitative data from faculty narratives through interviews and focus groups. A mixed method approach would help strengthen the findings and partially mitigate threats to validity.

Conclusion

The results of this study provide support for the anecdotal evidence observed by the authors and reported by other researchers (e.g., Alley, 1996; Frank, 2000; Jaffee, 1997) related to the impact of a structured online course development program on faculty pedagogical beliefs and teaching practices. They also provide valuable insights to help other institutions structure their programs to promote the transfer of knowledge and skills to other courses and teaching more broadly, thereby maximizing the value of the program for the faculty participants as well as the institution. Despite these benefits, it is important to recognize that the generalizability of this study is limited because participants’ responses consisted solely of self-report data. Future research incorporating other methods to triangulate the data so as to provide additional insight into the ways faculty apply their knowledge and skills, and change their pedagogical beliefs will be important to develop a complete picture of the potential benefits of the program.

References


