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<center>Case Analysis Study: Designing an Online Graduate Seminar</center>

Introduction

John Falkin is an instructional designer at Rolling Hills University (RHU) in central Canada. RHU serves 35, 000 undergraduates and 4,500 graduate students, and Mr. Falkin is tasked with converting a graduate program in the School of Social Work to an online format. Roy Barrows, coordinator of the Teaching and Learning Center (TLC), tasked Mr. Falkin with the assignment after Dr. Jan Fellows, chair of the Graduate Studies Program at the School of Social Work, communicated the imminent need to do so in order to remedy the ongoing issue of declining enrollment in the program. Mr. Falkin has experience converting graduate courses into an online format but not an entire program.

Dr. Fellows proposes that the graduate program be converted online for the very next semester. This time constraint is a central issue to this task as it leaves little time for faculty to receive training and to build and maintain their online classes. Mr. Falkin could provide training and structure to support the transition, with some help from his colleagues in the TLC, but some instructors feel uncomfortable with expedient transition, especially with their lack of experience in online teaching and the particular needs of seminar-based graduate courses. A need to ensure copyright and intellectual property was also expressed. Providing a flexible transition period may help to accommodate the different needs of faculty to ensure quality instruction is not compromised.

Stakeholder Perspectives

At the initial Program Committee meeting, several stakeholder perspectives were communicated. Dr. Fellows began by pointing out the differences in graduate programs compared to undergraduate programs: (1) enrollment numbers are lower in graduate courses, which normally consist of 15 to 25

students; (2) graduate courses use the seminar method as opposed to the lecture method used in undergraduate courses; and (3) graduate course content tends to frequently change whereas undergraduate materials tend to stay the same. Dr. Fellows expressed the need to consider the technology requirements for the seminar method, and expressed one other concern, her worry about a trend of decline in student quality over the years which could threaten the credibility of the program. Her hopes are that an online graduate program would boost enrolment sufficiently to allow for more competitive acceptance rates.

Frank Jones, a graduate student of the committee, represented the student perspective and expressed the need for the program to continue. From his perspective, graduates of the program have consistently found favorable employment after graduation and an online format would make it easier for more students to complete the degree.

Faculty teaching courses in the program expressed several concerns. Associate Professor Patricia Bello expressed concern over the time commitment for faculty as well as the amount of redesign needed for a graduate course in which materials are constantly added. Eliza Bainsbridge, a new faculty member, wanted to ensure that she would maintain copyright and intellectual property and expressed that these issues are unclear in the collective bargaining agreement.

Full professors Michael Hatty and William Sears both expressed concern that the expediency of conversion to the online format would compromise the quality of teaching and learning. Professor Hatty communicated his lack of aptitude with technology and lack of experience teaching online courses. His concern rests on his ability to teach effectively in the online environment and with particular respect to a perceived loss of spontaneous discussions vital to the learning experience in traditional classrooms. Professor Sears also expressed his concern about technology detracting from the use of effective pedagogical practices instead of supporting them.

Analysis of Perspectives

One of the central issues in this case study is the timeframe of the transition. Dr. Fellows wants to transition the program for the following semester. Overall, the risk of such a quick turnover, especially

with faculty not trained in online instruction and with limited time on their hands, is ultimately a negative learning experience for students. This could affect completion as well as compel others to transfer out.

One major issue is the training of professors to teach effectively in the online environment, as both Professor Sears and Professor Hatty expressed. One was concerned about technical knowledge, and both were concerned about enacting effective pedagogical practices in the virtual environment. If training were to be designed, it would need to cover both of these areas. A second area of concern is the amount of time required for professors to design and redesign online courses, as Professor Bellow expressed. The availability of graduate student assistants may help to mitigate this time commitment. Also helpful could be a course design template provided by the TLC. The TLC should also provide services to ensure course content is ADA compliant.

The only professor comfortable with converting her courses and teaching online the very next semester is Eliza Bainsbridge. Her condition, however, to ensure copyright and intellectual property would require a faculty union representative to be involved in the process, either to clarify faculty rights and, if necessary, draw up an MOU ensuring copyright and intellectual property right for faculty content as waiting for the next negotiation cycle for the collective bargaining agreement, I assume, would not be possible given the time constraint.

Outside of these issues--training, workload, and copyright/intellectual property---one must consider the students already enrolled in the program who applied under the expectation of face-to-face classes. While Frank Jones spoke with enthusiasm about converting the program online, it may not be doable for other students. This means there would need to be a transitional phase built into the process that would allow already enrolled students the option to continue with in-person instruction.

Prioritization of the Issues

It would seem unlikely that such a quick transition to an online program would be plausible if curriculum was not already approved. It is unclear whether the RHU would require new course outlines of record to be submitted and go through the process of approval, but if it did, the process would potentially push the

timeframe to implement the graduate online program a year out already. It is not a new program per se, but online instruction is not the same as face-to-face instruction and should be treated as such. Activities and assessments will change to align with the virtual learning experience and, as Professor Sears pointed out, with pedagogical practices conducive to success. Touching base with RHU's Curriculum Committee would be helpful to clarify if this would be necessary before publicly offering a fully online graduate program. Given that the face-to-face degree program is already in place, this would probably be unlikely, but an expectation for new curriculum to be submitted for approval within a reasonable timeframe after the implementation of the program is likely.

A faculty union representative would need to be a part of the transition process, not only because of copyright and intellectual property concerns but also because of the increased workload and training required of faculty, particularly if this were to happen in such a short time frame as the case study suggests. There are only four representative faculty members in the case study, but one would assume that there are more to consider, particularly given the trend of academia to significantly rely on adjunct lecturers. It would be difficult to compel faculty to take on an increased workload without compensation. A faculty union representative could both arrange for an MOU on copyright and intellectual property as well as negotiate for a stipend for faculty taking on additional work.

With that said, the more nuanced issue from an instructional design perspective is creating and implementing training materials for faculty who need the most support. The training goes beyond learning how to navigate the RHU's learning management system and includes delivery methods for seminar courses that are discussion-based. Technology tools that enhance communication and collaboration and have the potential to support pedagogical practices, such as Hypothesis, Pronto, and Flip, should be considered in the process. Also to consider is the plausibility of blended learning formats, at least in the short term since a full conversion between semesters may be too ambitious.

Solutions

Low enrollment is at the center of this case study, and converting the graduate program to an online format is the potential solution to increase enrollments. The main barrier to making this solution viable is not the act of converting a face-to-face, seminar-based program to an online format, but the timeframe allotted for the transition. It would presumably require much of the work to happen during the summer and before the start of the new academic year. If it is Spring semester, as presumed based on the case study, then there would not even be sufficient time to promote the online program and potential students to apply for Fall acceptance (Power, 2019). Those applying to the program are likely under the assumption of it taking place on campus if the online conversion has not been noted on the program webpage. Given that the initial meeting illustrated in the case study functioned to get faculty on board with the idea, this is not likely (Power, 2019). The first recommendation, then, is to extend the timeline for full conversion to the online format to the following academic year. In this way, faculty needing time and training will not be put in a position of offering a subpar learning experience for students and administration will have sufficient time for outreach efforts to promote the program and increase applicants and potential enrollments.

With that said, an online modality should be an option for students in the meantime. Faculty comfortable with converting their courses fully online, such as Eliza Bainsbridge, should do so for the following semester (Power, 2019). To enact this, of immediate concern is contacting the faculty union representative to initiate a MOU that establishes clarity on ensuring faculty copyright and intellectual property. Those not comfortable with immediately converting their classes should be introduced to the Hyflex model as a potential alternative, which would offer students the option of attending class in-person or via Zoom (Abdelmalak & Parra, 2016). This would require training for some faculty but may be a more viable option for the time being. Faculty may choose to exercise this option, but ultimately would only be required to fully convert courses online on or before the following academic year.

To prepare faculty for full conversion of the graduate program online, Mr. Falkin would need to create and provide training materials with ongoing support that center around the following topics:

1. Using RHU's LMS for effective course design

2. Promoting discussion in seminar-based online courses

3. Community of practice in online pedagogy

Each of these topic areas would comprise a short workshop series available for faculty as needed. For example, the LMS and course design topic area could offer one workshop on articulating clear learning goals and course navigation, while another could focus on creating assessments and rubrics. For those focused on promoting discussion, one could center on model strategies for leveraging discussion boards while others can focus on different technology tools that promote communication and can integrate with RHU's LMS, such as the social annotation tool Hypothesis and the group texting platform Pronto. The third item, "Community of practice in online pedagogy," would function differently. While Mr. Falkin should initiate this series with an introduction to the TPACK framework, a foundational theory for integrating technology and pedagogy, it should ultimately be carried on by faculty and be guided by their experiences teaching online and/or preparing to teach (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Resources for this community of practice should be available and continuously updated online as part of the ongoing resource collection for faculty. Furthermore, to incentivize participation, a stipend should be negotiated for faculty involved in a series of workshops and participation in the community of practice.

Consequences

The benefit of this solution is that it offers faculty sufficient time to convert courses to an online format and have time to receive training to do so in an effective manner. It will also offer time for outreach efforts to promote the online graduate program and attract a wider range of potential new students. While some courses may convert to online the very next semester, others will take up to a year. A drawback is the potential of classes being cancelled for being under-enrolled. Enough students already enrolled in the program may not have the flexibility to attend synchronously (either in-person or via Zoom if it is a Hyflex class). In addition, there is the reality that some faculty may not take advantage of the training opportunities, and it is very likely that a community of practice would struggle with success if

participation was low. Incentivizing participation through stipends can help, especially among

participation with adjunct lecturers, but budget concerns could complicate this matter.

Conclusions

A graduate program in the School of Social Work at Rolling Hills University has been experiencing

declining enrollments. To increase enrollments, the program is proposed to be offered online. Stakeholder

concerns center around the time necessary to create and maintain online materials, the technical and

pedagogical understanding of creating effective online seminar-based learning experiences, and copyright

and intellectual copyright issues. To successfully convert the program online and accommodate for

stakeholder needs, a one-year transitional period is recommended. This would allow faculty comfortable

with readily transitioning their courses online to do so while those needing more support have the time to

receive it. Abundant professional training opportunities to support faculty should be provided and center

around three areas: Using RHU's LMS for effective course design, promoting discussion in seminar-

based online courses, and community of practice in online pedagogy. Faculty stipends for ongoing

training is recommended to incentivize participation. Furthermore, the faculty union should work to

ensure that faculty maintain copyright and intellectual property for the learning materials they produce.

Concerns to this approach are the potential for continued low enrollment (and possible cancellation) for

synchronous classes during the transitional period and budget constraints that would not enable stipends

to incentivize faculty participation in workshops and community of practice.

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