

Summary of Chapter 10 – Implementing Distance Learning

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According to Dr. Ann Barron (1999), effective implementation of distance learning technology requires careful planning. To that end, Barron recommends a four-phase procedure for implementation: conduct needs assessment; outline instructional goals and produce instructional materials; provide training and practice for instructors and facilitators; finish with implementation of the program. Throughout all of these phases, designers should conduct evaluation of their work, as well as a summative evaluation after instruction is completed.

The first major phase, needs analysis, involves four parts of its own: course analysis, audience analysis, instructor analysis, and technology analysis (Barron 1999). Course analysis involves identifying content that can be improved through distance learning techniques: for example, if a course has high demand but few instructors available, if the course is taught in multiple distant locations, or if a course could benefit from involving a remote expert (Barron 1999). Audience analysis involves examining the students who will be taking the course. In order to benefit from distance learning, students must have high motivation and an ability to work in a self-paced environment. Furthermore, designers must examine where students are located, how literate they are, and if instruction will be delivered to their homes or to schools (Barron 1999). Instructor analysis involves examining the faculty and support staff, to make sure that all equipment involved functions properly and to provide supervision for students if necessary (Barron 1999). Technology analysis examines what sort of technology would be appropriate for instruction depending on the content, the geographical dispersal of teachers and students, existing hardware and software. For example, satellite videoconferencing is ideal for courses with a single teacher but students from various locations. Any course teaching a foreign language must have audio support. If students can't access a computer, Web-based education will do them no good (Barron 1999).

For the second major phase, outlining instructional goals and producing materials, Barron emphasizes that the "technology should be as invisible as possible," functioning only as a tool with which teachers can convey content and interact with their students (1999). To this end, instructional goals and objectives must be given top priority to ensure the distance learning course is well-designed and effective. Enough time must also be allotted to the development of instructional materials, as it is especially demanding of a development team's time and energy to create effective distance learning content. (Barron 1999)

The third major phase—providing training and practice for instructors and facilitators—emphasizes the need to acquaint teachers with the new distance learning-based instruction and technology involved (Barron 1999). According to Barron, there are four areas with which teachers require the most assistance and practice: strategies for effective implementation individual and small group exercises; techniques for maximizing interactions between students and with the instructor; integrating the technology effectively; and how best to motivate students involved in distance learning. Barron again emphasizes that local "facilitators" should be closely involved in both training and communicating with the instructors, as they will be on-site support for the students. Similarly, Barron emphasizes that support staff must be properly integrated to ensure that all technology used in the course functions as intended without frustrating either the instructors or the students (1999). The fourth major phase, implementation of the program, begins with a pilot test of the course to ensure that all technology is working properly before it is offered to students. Barron reminds designers that distance learning courses still require structured activities. Timelines, deadlines, and feedback help motivate students and provide a framework students require for functioning in such a flexible environment (1999). Interactions must be similarly emphasized; research demonstrates students respond positively when they know someone cares (Barron 1999).

On-going, or formative, evaluation occurs throughout of the development process. Barron recommends that instructors and administrators stop and review their work (1999). Designers should not only get feedback from students, but others who have implemented similar programs in order to compare effectiveness of various approaches. Revisions should be made as often as necessary (Barron 1999). After instruction has been completed, surveys, achievement tests, interviews or other methods should be employed to conduct one final summative evaluation. Analyzing the feedback from these inquiries can then be used to identify strengths and weaknesses of a course's content and approach (Barron 1999).

From this chapter on implementing distance learning, one can easily appreciate that distance learning instruction is not as simple as leaving a student alone with a computer and some sort of educational website or program. Not only must designers analyze the course, audience, instructors and technology employed, but time and careful attention must be given to the materials, and all faculty and support staff must be involved closely with the development of the course as well as after its implementation.

References

Barron, A. Implementing Distance Learning. In *A Teacher's Guide to Distance Learning*. Retrieved January 15, 2016, from <http://fcit.usf.edu/distance/chap10.htm>.

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Read and **understand** the content of the following page carefully. Write a summary of the page content and submit it on time (Jan 22). This will receive a maximum of 15 points (see rubric).

<http://fcit.usf.edu/distance/chap10.htm>

Rubric:

Introduction 3

Body 3

Conclusion, your rating of the paper 3

Free of Spelling and grammar error (writing center) 3

Typed and Title 3

Response:

Introduction—3 of 3. Introduction paragraph satisfactorily introduces reader to purpose of writing.

Body—3 of 3. Body paragraphs satisfactorily address the topic at hand.

Conclusion—3 of 3. Conclusion paragraph satisfactorily sums up writing.

Writing Center Check—3 of 3. Taken to the writing center and examined for spelling, grammar, formatting and focus on topic, with revisions applied.

Typed and Title—3 of 3. Paper typed and titled according to the APA format.