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Getting the Right SCOPE: How to Equip Online Faculty of the 21st Century with Perfected Knowledge and Skills

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Academic Leadership Journal

Expansion of Online Educational Platforms:

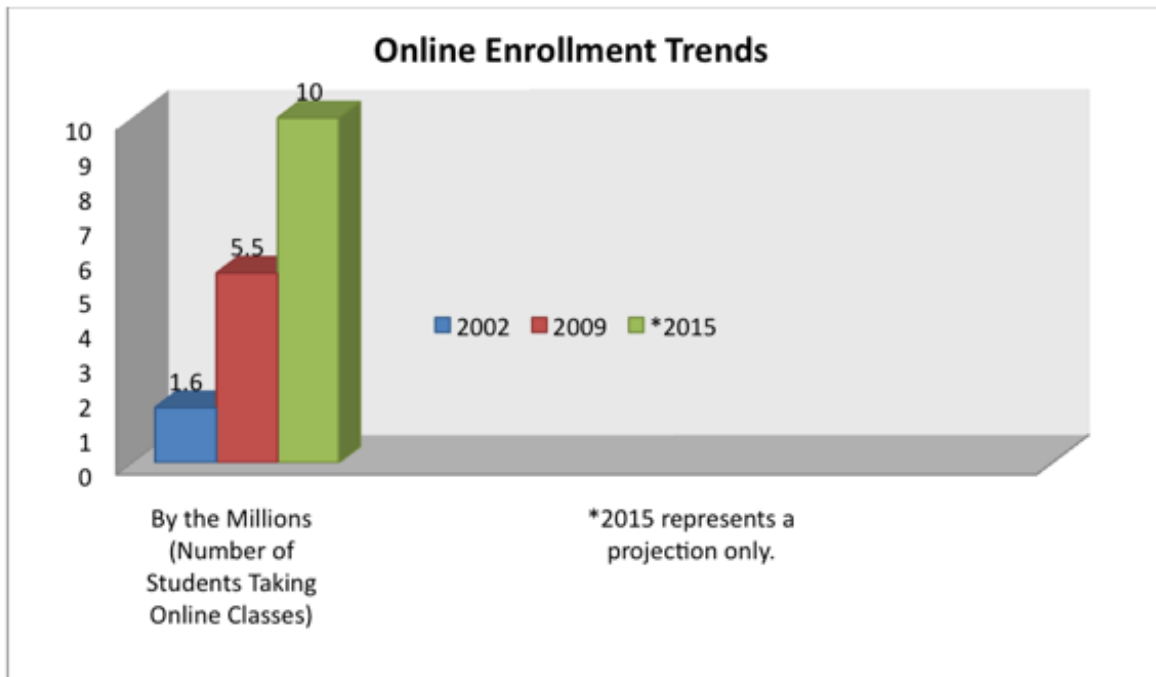
The expansion of online learning students can be best described as being permanently fixed in a catapultive state. The growth is not only shocking (when you look at the numbers), but it is sobering, for it offers a glimpse of what education will look like as we move towards the next half century.

Technology consumes us and has become so intimately connected in our lives that now, to a large degree, it is dictating its use (in educational settings throughout the globe). It's like a lion that never stops roaring—it's demanding our attention, and its' breathe and impact are so far reaching; it can be best described as inescapable. Thus, universities and colleges alike no longer can sit by and speculate whether or not this is a trend that will eventually disappear (as other educational trends have done so in the past). Rather, institutions need to understand that online education is more like Alexander Graham Bell's, "Mary had a Little Lamb"; it's a breakthrough in the delivery of education that is seeing such growth and having such an impact one would have to be oblivious not to see it. As educators, we can debate the healthiest of this growth, but cannot argue against the facts, considering that the University of Phoenix now bodes over 400,000 online students (Apollo Group, 2010), and is without question is one of the largest universities in the United States. And, according to the most recent Sloan Consortium Report,

The growth from 1.6 million students taking at least one online course in fall 2002 to the 5.6 million for fall 2009 translates into a compound annual growth rate of nineteen percent for this time period. For comparison, the overall higher education student body has grown at an annual rate of less than two during this same period – from 16.6 million in fall 2002 to 19.0 million for fall 2009. (Allen & Seaman, 2010, p.



Other evidence of this growth can be pinpointed if one looks at what is happening on the campuses of traditional colleges and universities. "The percentage of institutions using asynchronous Internet-based technologies...nearly tripled, from 22 percent of institutions in 1995 to 60 percent of institutions in 1997-98" (Lewis, Snow, Farris, Levin, & Green, 1999, p. vi). Today, this figure continues to increase at phenomenal rates. In fact, according to the Sloan Report, from 2002 to 2009, total online student enrollment increased from 9.6% (of the total student population enrolled in higher education) to 29.3%. What this comes out in sheer numbers is startling, for it reflects that of the 19+ million students enrolled roughly, 5.5 million enrolled in at least one online course. In comparison, in 2002, that number was 1.6 million students (Allen & Seaman, 2010), as pictured below. And, if this trend continues at the same pace it has been growing, we could see this figure reach 10 million students by 2015.



Expansion = Need for Faculty Training

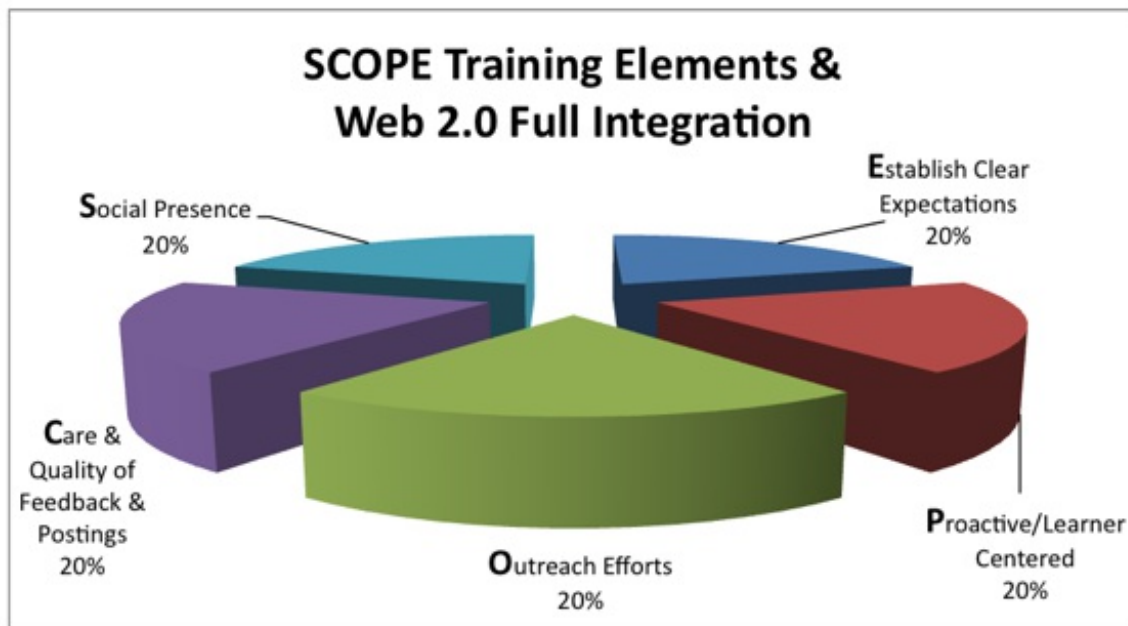
So, as McIsaac and Gunawardena (2001) keenly observed, “What was once considered a special form of education using nontraditional delivery systems is now becoming an important concept in mainstream education” (as quoted in Jonassen [Ed.], p. 403). With that in mind, as educators absorb these very real facts, it is important to consider how to respond to the growing demand for online education, and in doing so, institutions need to consider how to best prepare its faculty in order to provide online students with a rich learning environment that represents the quality and depth as the traditional classroom offer.

This need for training cannot be underestimated, for online platforms create unique and perplexing hurdles for teachers to overcome because they lack a powerful element (face-to-face communication), and as such, need to learn key strategies for online course delivery success. In addition, another threat is that some traditional instructors have grown suspicious of online learning platforms and may not be as willing to partake in a venture they have little to no experience in. And, other problems prevail as well. Sikora and Carroll (2002) reported that although the online trend is making its mark and growing exponentially, students were less satisfied with their experience as online students versus being in the traditional classroom. As a result, attrition rates in online courses range from 10 to 20% higher than what is seen in traditional classes (Angelino, Williams & Natvig, 2007). And, this dissatisfaction (which can lead to attrition) is attributed to many factors to include feelings of isolation, inadequate feedback, ambiguity within the structure and format of the Learning Management System (itself), and confusion over assignment specifics and requirements (Hara & Kling, 2001). Further “the costs for development, delivery, and assessment, as well as lost tuition revenue, result in wasted expenditures for the institution” when online education programs are poorly executed (Moody, 2004, p. 205). Thus, it behooves institutions to develop professional development/ training programs that embolden the skill level of its faculty to combat the “...pedagogy employed by some online faculty who have limited skills” (Hara & Kling, 2001).

SCOPE Elements of Online Teacher Training Programs:

In developing a professional development strategy, there are key components (identified as SCOPE elements) that all quality training programs should address as they work to retool and retain a league of faculty equipped to deliver online courses in the 21st century.

Defining SCOPE:



Recommendations for SCOPE training elements for online instructors are designed and supported by best-practices and incorporate a variety of components and are heavily integrated with Web 2.0 technologies. Elements include: **(S)** social presence ;**(C)** care and quality of feedback and postings; **(O)** outreach efforts to students; **(P)** proactive approaches to create a learner-centered classrooms; and **(E)** establishment of clear expectations. Each essential element of SCOPE is illustrated below.

S-Social Presence, More than just a Introduction

The first and primary component to any **SCOPE** training model is teaching the importance of establishing Social Presence. Moore (1989) outlined three key interactions that are essential to the incorporation of best practices in online settings: 1) connection of the learner to the course content, 2) connection of the learner to the-instructor, and 3) connection of learners to other learners in the course. Thus, social presence in this context deals with the instructor's ability (through high engagement and specific direction) to connect students to all three components as aforementioned-the instructor, the course, and other students.

This lack of presence has led to criticism as it relates to the quality of instruction students experience in online settings. Indeed, some online critics have likened online learning to that of a manufacturing assembly line where students and instructors are just consuming information and "spitting" out product as in an "assembly line" (Peters, 1993). Critics also challenge the creditability of online instructors and their ability to overcome the embedded limitations of teaching in an environment where there is no or very limited face-to-face interaction, and as such, faculty are limited to secondary methods of

communication (i.e., email, Wikis, Blogs, discussion boards, announcements, etc.). Thus, training programs should strongly consider the inclusion of SCOPE elements as they work to equip faculty with the skills to overcome such limitations. The absence of face-to-face student/teacher interaction is clearly a weaknesses in online settings, but with the plethora of Web 2.0 technologies (which can be best described as user-friendly multimedia and social networking applications), online instructors have a treasure chest of online applications that will enable them to not only bring their voice in the classroom, but simulate their full presence as well.

Establishing Presence (Tier One)

In training faculty in the area of online presence, training is best when broken down into two tiers: traditional and non-traditional approaches. First, emphasis should be placed on traditional online methods of establishing faculty and student presence to include introductions and bio pages, Wikis (for discussion and group work), Facebook, email and blogs. Students, though, in creating such pages, should be encouraged to use pictures, audio clips, Avatars and other multimedia (Animoto, Stupflix, Voki, Voice threads, etc...) to bring their own voice into the course. Indeed, social networking sites can be highlighted as a method of bringing in social aspects of online courses and drawing in student personalities (as a means of combating feelings of isolation). Faculty teaching online programs should never underestimate the value of bringing in student and faculty voice/presence in class, for any effort to do just that will enhance the online environment and strengthen communication channels. Thereby, the more engaging one can be in carrying out such aspects of course development, should be highlighted in SCOPE training efforts.

What is important for faculty members to understand and accept is that the loss of face-to-face interaction is a major hurdle for online instructors to overcome because a teacher's instrument (his or her voice) has been muffled to a large degree. That is why it is critical in training programs to emphasize the importance of addressing and proactively erasing such limitations. Online seminars, chat sessions, and group work are other effective tools in not only delivering course information but such interactions with students also help to establish rapport and solidify presence.

Establishing Presence (Tier Two)

The second tier of social presence training should include exposing faculty to creative approaches that reinforce and maximize presence (and impact) in the class. Emphasis should also be placed on the inclusion of Web 2.0 technologies in support of this effort. Web 2.0 technologies, which can best be defined as online applications that enable users to communicate and deliver multimedia information on the Internet (with little to no prior experience with multimedia applications), are helping faculty to find their voice in online classrooms. For instance, Screencasting which enables faculty members to record lectures or provide students with illustrations, examples, directions and personal introductions is a growing trend and is a highly effective tool in online classrooms. Screencasting applications include Screenr, Jing, Camtasia, BB Flashback, Tegrity and more. Other Web 2.0 technologies like Animoto and Stupeflix help online users create relatively high quality videos using very simple applications. Thus, one no longer needs a degree in video production or have extensive editing skills to be able to produce steaming media productions. These tools (and more from creating Avatars to instant messaging and beyond) are readily accessible and can be easily embedded in most Learning Management Systems (LMS). So, what is essential in any online faculty training program is to not only study, examine and critique common practices for establishing presence, but to shift faculty to

establishing a true voice in their classes through the use of Web 2.0 technologies. It's the difference between writing an introduction compared to recording an introduction and loading it in one's class-the power and impact are unequal. Indeed, training programs that do not address the use of Web 2.0 technologies lack in ability to really bring online faculty up to 21st century standards.

Another key in developing faculty to teach online is to make sure they fully understand that their course (albeit online) is their course. Establishing ownership for one's course is important as it relates to faculty training, for accepting ownership helps faculty to bridge the gap between the Learning Management System and establishing voice. Given that many online courses are pre-developed, it is important to address how faculty members can breathe life into their courses through the addition of supplements that will strengthen their ability to communicate and connect with their students which ultimately improves learning.

C-Care and Quality of Feedback and Online Posting

The second component of SCOPE training elements focuses on the care and quality of feedback and online postings (regardless of their purpose). As previously discussed, a major disadvantage within online teaching environments is the lack of face-to-face interaction with students. Certainly, this must be coined as a disadvantage because without face-to-face interaction, there are no verbal cues which account for (in some estimations) 90% of understanding (to be formed) between human beings (Wertheim, 2008). Thus, to the online instructor, the written word plays a highly significant role in not only creating teaching presence but works to create the overall environment, tone, and attitude in and outside of an online class. It is important, then, for online instructors to understand the impact of word choice-both its strengths and weaknesses, for it has the capability to motivate and deflate student involvement, their attitudes, and their interest in the class. With that in mind, then, effective training programs should center on how to provide adequate and substantive feedback, but at the same time, how to craft language that promotes learning, rather than deflate learning. Training should be immersed with examples (both good and bad) and emphasize tone (which should be warm), approach (which should be inviting and motivating), and style in writing and also focus on providing online students with specific praise (which outlines positively what students are doing correctly) and constructively (points out how students can improve). Training should also address those practices within online learning that derail true learning as substantiated when instructors give general critiques on student work and paste in the same responses per assignment, opposed to specific and direct praise and critique. Program developers can assist faculty by keeping online enrollment numbers down to a reasonable number that conforms to best practice. The verdict is out as it relates to the ideal classroom size for online classrooms; however, most research supports smaller classes (<20) in order to strengthen communication and protect the quality of instruction in the course (Colwell & Jenks, 2004). Training should also include exposure to Microsoft Word review features that enable comments to be added to Word documents. Other strategies include using the instructor's picture and align the picture with the comments, in an effort to personalize feedback from the instructor to the student. Faculty should be provided with training opportunities that expose them to more engaging and impacting ways to deliver feedback. Such strategies include the use of Web 2.0 technologies which include audio streaming comments via such programs as Aviary, Audacity, Voice Thread and more. In doing so, students will be able to hear specific feedback on key assignments directly from the instructor's mouth. Such approaches not only improve the learning experience for students, but directly counter the lack of face-to-face interaction that many online environments suffer.

O-Outreach Efforts to Students

As previously noted, one factor linked to high attrition in online classes is feelings of isolation among online students. And although social networking has been discussed and is paramount in an online course, faculty outreach to students should be as constant as the teaming of a keyboard to its computer. Outreach efforts and the defining of effective outreach efforts are paramount to online faculty development. To define, outreach efforts are those strategies online instructors employ in order to assist and help online students persist. Thereby, in consideration of SCOPE elements, faculty should be trained to recognize and value the variety of means one can employ to reach out to students (i.e., telephone, Instant Chat, email, Blog, Wiki, texting, etc...) to establish entry points for beginning dialogue and outreach. One such strategy that warrants highlighting is the use of personal phone calls to students-one-on-one student teacher sessions. Phone calls, in fact, can be a highly engaging and motivating tool to address student questions, provide additional information, or to simply check on the progress of a student. In addition, most institutions have other outreach programs on campus to assist online students such as Academic Advisors, Counselors and/or centers such as Writing Centers, Math Support and beyond. Thus, the role of the online instructor is to massage such connections between the student and these support systems in order to help the student persist in the course. Instant Chat/Messenger and Video conferencing (i.e., Skype, Google Voice, Go to Meeting or Go to Training) are valuable and emerging tools that faculty should be aware of and comfortable using to assist individual students or groups of students in a single setting, especially if the Learning Management System (that is being utilized) has limitations. When utilized appropriately, all work to break down barriers between the instructor's world and the student's world and provide for unique avenues to reach out to students for improved performance and enhanced support (in the class).

Other strategies that should be explored during training relate to the importance of close monitoring of student progress and the frequent and immediate need for teacher assistance. The idea in an online environment one needs to consider is: because students are even more connected (even though this connection is via the Internet) outreach efforts are seamless and can occur on any given day of the week. Hence, the idea of "being connected" within the course every day, 24-7, is viewed as a clear advantage for online educators. Again, the idea for SCOPE training is to ultimately dismantle the barriers that inevitably are present in online courses.

P-Proactive Approaches to Create a Learner-Centered Classroom

Another key element in the SCOPE training approach is a focus on equipping faculty with skills that will enable them to create and craft a learner centered approach in their online classroom. Learner centered can be best defined as putting the central focus on the individual learner and the unique characteristics "their heredity, experience[s], perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities and needs" they bring to the classroom (McCombs & Whisler, 1997, p. 9)

In an online classroom, this approach to learning is not only essential for the success of the student, but paramount to the quality and delivery of instruction. McCombs (2000) put it best when he wrote "that... our challenge [is] how to design educational systems where technology is in service to, values, and supports diverse learners and learning context"(p. 12). Therefore, effective SCOPE training focuses on helping faculty to engage students in such a way that triggers student discussion that centers on personal experiences, perspectives, and more.

Another approach to building a learner-centered classroom is building an engaged learning environment. Instructors within a SCOPE training platform should be versed in the following: (1) maximizing the full use of all Learning Management System (LMS) capabilities; (2) incorporating Wikis, Blogs, Instant Messaging and more; (3) Use of Web 2.0 technologies, guest speakers and more to augment learning; (4) addition of synchronized and asynchronized online presentations; and (5) incorporating group work, where applicable.

Maximizing the full use of all Learning Management System capabilities & Incorporating Wikis, Blogs, Instant Messaging and more in the class.

One of the most essential components to SCOPE training is ensuring that all faculty undertaking the training are well versed in the full capabilities of the Learning Management System (LMS) that is being used to deliver the course (it strengths and weaknesses).

Training should focus on how to manage Wikis, Blogs, Seminars, group work , discussion board threads, embedded multimedia, instant chat, online office features, and other embedded features

unique in the LMS. Undeniably, online faculty need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the specific LMS they will be using to deliver the course and gain hands-on experience prior to teaching online.



Use of Web 2.0 Technologies to Augment Learning

As previously discussed, Web 2.0 technologies enable a faculty member to engage students more effectively in an online environment and fold in a wealth of resources into an online course. They also enable a faculty member to breathe more life and ownership in an online course and erase the stereotype of online courses being formulized courses. Web 2.0 technologies enable faculty to bring state of art technologies that augment and enhance the learning environment. Other inclusions such as online guest lecturers and virtual tours should also be encouraged. In fact, there are endless possibilities once faculty members discover the world of Web 2.0. Thus, one of the primary elements of any SCOPE training program is the inclusion of training specifically targeted at building faculty members comfort and confidence levels in the use and inclusion of Web 2.0 technologies. The listing below reflects a sampling of popular Web 2.0 technologies and provides a general description of each.

Name	Description
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Screer	Used to create screencast recordings for lessons, tutorials, demonstrations, directions and more
Jing	Used to create screencast recordings for lessons, tutorials, demonstrations, directions and more
BB Flashback	Used to create screencast recordings for lessons, tutorials, demonstrations, directions and more
Camtasia	Used to create screencast recordings for lessons, tutorials, demonstrations, directions and more
Tegrity	Used to create screencast recordings for lessons, tutorials, demonstrations, directions and more
Avairy	Record audio and edit it
Audacity	Record audio and edit it
Vocaroo	Send and record emails
Voicethread	Audio and video recording site
Photobucket	Photo and video sharing site
Dailymotion.com	Online video site
Animoto	Video and audio streaming from pictures
Stupeflix	Video production site
Merlot.org	Online educational resources by subject and type
Weebly	Website creation
Flickr	Photo and imaging sharing site
WordPress	Blog creating site

Blogger.com	Blog creating site
Vimeo.com	Video sharing site
Wikia.com	Wiki creation site
Squidoo.com	Web creation site
Syype	Teleconferencing, instant messaging, video conferencing, screen sharing site and more
Voki	Create personal Avatar
Sliderocket and Slideshare	PowerPoint Slide sharing sites and creation
Webbrush	Collaboration site to discuss graphical projects, designs and sketches
Skrbl	Virtual whiteboard
Virtual-whiteboard	Virtual Whiteboard
SynchroEdit	Where multiple users can edit a single/shared document
Thinkature	Group collaboration site
Hylighter	Review documents as a group, edit, highlight and even add notes
Twiddla	Clean slate canvas used to discuss and brainstorm ideas, topics, material. Great tool for conference calls.
Slideshare	Create and share presentations, Webinars
Brainshark	Create presentations (with audio) and share
Slideboom	PowerPoint share site

YouTube	Video sharing site
Ning	Social network creation site
Teacher Tube	Educational videos by subject

Addition of Asynchronized and Synchronized Online Presentations

As noted in terms of faculty learning how to use the Learning Management System, the Seminar presentation component should be highlighted during SCOPE training. Seminar inclusions not only strengthen online course delivery, but they serve to provide online students with the immediacy of communication exchange, which is often lacking in online environments. Seminars (whether synchronized or asynchronized) should be key components of any training and should delve into hands-on application of all seminar features as well the full inclusion of best seminar practices (i.e., invite guest speakers, have students review essential material prior to presentation; include students in discussion, use instant chat features, incorporate surveys (if possible); include visual aids; include multimedia (if doable). The idea is to expose faculty to the full application of all Seminar features, so implementation of seminars is a norm, not a atypical occurrence in their online courses.

Group Work

Most Learning Management Systems typically have a built in function to form and manage online groups. Faculty need to not only understand how to manage groups within an online setting (from a technical standpoint point), but they need to also be versed in the best ways in which groups function in an online environment. SCOPE training should showcase best methods in forming groups, monitoring groups and assisting and motivating groups on projects. Training should center on exposing faculty to proper techniques they can apply within an online classroom that will enable them to assist groups effectively. Emphasis should be placed on establishing clear expectations of groups, outlining of roles and responsibilities of each group member, establishment of performance objectives of each team, and the monitoring and grading of groups within online settings.

E-Establish Clear Expectations of Learners

The last element of SCOPE training deals with the importance of online faculty understanding how imperative it is to set and articulate clear expectations and guidelines for online students (throughout every aspect of the course). Expectations can be as simple as use of appropriate tone in the classroom to expectations of performance in discussion boards, Wikis, group work, blogs, etc... The key is to provide students with clear and detailed performance expectations and criteria (which is typically highlighted in rubrics). Communication of expectations (i.e., setting posting deadlines, establishing minimum levels of posting requirements, defining such terms as substantive postings and content-specific postings, providing students with word count minimums, etc...) are recommendations that work to guide online students on a path to being successful. Faculty need to understand that rubrics guide students but setting expectations compels students and directs them in a more efficient and effective way. Faculty should also consider, especially early on in the course, what limitations students have that could possibly impede their initial progress in the course. And as such, should be

trained to embed tutorials (via screencasts) or step-by-step guides that will assist students in quickly acclimating to the learning environment in order to better navigate the course and complete the expectations each week.

Conclusion

SCOPE training identifies five critical elements that should be included in online faculty training programs. Institutions looking to revamp, revise or create such training programs should strongly consider infusing the following components, called SCOPE: (S)-social presence;(C)-care and quality of feedback and postings; (O) outreach efforts to students; (P) proactive approaches to create a learner-centered classroom using Web 2.0 technologies; and (E) establishment of clear expectations. Each element of SCOPE is essential, and when pulled together, will enable institutions to enhance current training programs or launch relatively new ones. In doing so, institutions will be better prepared to address the need of creating a pool of qualified instructors ready to teach online effectively and equip their faculty with the essential and unique tools they need to maximize online instruction.

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