



How Community College Faculty View Online Learning: Conversations with the Field

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I. Background and Overview

In January, 2006, the Monterey Institute for Technology and Education (MITE) published a paper entitled "Online Education in Community Colleges: Conversations with the Field." The paper was a synthesis of open-ended interviews with more than fifty thought leaders, online education managers, and instructional designers around the central theme of how online learning is currently being perceived and practiced in community colleges, large and small, throughout the country. During 2006, this initial paper was presented at a number of conferences and received favorable reviews.

While the findings of this first *Conversations* paper provided a general overview of online learning in community colleges, two important audiences were absent from the interview process: faculty and students. The current paper is an attempt to get the views of one of these groups, the faculty. In the first paper, online learning managers and instructional designers talked extensively about faculty attitudes, beliefs, and practices. Both groups work with faculty daily and therefore have very informed opinions. However, logic suggested that we should plumb faculty directly. The January 2006 paper raised some intriguing questions:

- How do faculty go about creating online courses?
- How do they learn to teach online?
- Where does course content come from?
- What are the major satisfactions from online teaching?

The present paper provides answers to these questions by direct faculty interviews. Similar to the first *Conversations* paper, this one also uses data which were generated from interviews. Over the course of the first few months of 2006, I interviewed some forty-two faculty members and a dozen program administrators. Some of the interviews were held by telephone. Others were group interviews on site at five colleges scattered throughout the country.

Two community colleges, Florida Community College at Jacksonville, and North Harris Montgomery Community College District, were singled out for a more extensive study. Both represent colleges which have invested planning time and resources to create a more systemic approach to online education. These two case studies are included for comparison with the data from the faculty interviews.

This paper consists of three major parts. Roughly the first third is a report of the actual responses of interviewees organized around interview topics. The second part provides a description of the two college districts, North Harris Montgomery CCD, and Florida Community College at Jacksonville. Finally, the paper ends with an analysis of the previous two parts.

II. Interview Findings

The interviews, both those done over the telephone and in on-site groups, followed a loosely structured outline. Faculty were asked a bit of background information about themselves and their current workloads. Then they were asked first how they currently develop and teach traditional face-to-face courses. Next, faculty described how they developed and taught online courses. Finally, those interviewed were asked about general opinions related to online learning. Occasionally a question yielded no useful information and it was dropped from subsequent interviews. Conversely, if answers to some questions were consistently the same, these questions were also dropped. In addition, some interviews led to the addition of new questions for future interviews. The point was to gather useful information from faculty, not to create a statistically bullet-proof design.

Let the reader beware that this qualitative research has been filtered through my twenty-five years of experience in the distance learning field and is subject to my own personal bias. Responses to the first *Conversations* paper have been encouraging, however, and I hope the current paper will strike a cord in readers, as well.

A. Who were the faculty interviewed?

The forty-two faculty with whom I spoke were from thirteen community colleges. Some were from the largest colleges in the country, others were from small schools. The colleges were situated in nine states, from Washington to Florida.

The faculty were an experienced group. On average, they had been teaching about fifteen years. The disciplines they represented were many and varied. Most taught traditional subjects such as science, social science, or languages. A few came from more applied disciplines such as nursing, business technology, or computer applications.

Surprisingly, the faculty interviewed were also very experienced in online or distance learning. Typically, a faculty member had been doing distance teaching for at least five years, and several had been involved since the middle 1990's, starting with other technologies, such as live video, telecourses, or audio instruction. Some began the use of online technologies in the early days of the web. Roughly a quarter of those interviewed were active as online learning mentors on their campuses, and a few had created teaching materials for faculty new to technology.

At the beginning of this study, I solicited faculty names from distance education administrators and asked for "your average run-of-the-mill faculty member." From the level of sophistication and experience described above, these faculty do not represent a random swath from their colleges. I suspect the DE managers wanted to highlight some of their best faculty, so the names they proposed were skewed in the direction of experience with and enthusiasm for online learning.

B. How do these faculty create courses and teach in the traditional classroom?

Most online courses are not immaculately conceived. They are an outgrowth of existing campus-based courses, courses which individual faculty members may have taught for years. Therefore, I asked a number of questions related to traditional teaching.

When faculty were asked about how they originally learned to teach, the most common response was something like “Well, I watched my own professors, took what I liked and went from there.” Many mentioned phrases like “on the job training, learned as I went, thrown into it, self taught.” Many learned from formal or informal mentoring from fellow faculty members.

A natural progression for teachers is to move from the K-12 to community college system. Several of those interviewed had been high school teachers or administrators. In that setting, teachers are required to develop and display lesson plans. The focus is on teaching. Those who had come from this background felt well-grounded in the teaching process.

A small number of faculty members had taken education courses in their own studies and a small number had learned how to teach from Sunday School experiences or growing up in a family of educators.

The interviewees were asked about how often they created new courses. When asked when they had created their most recent course, few said they had done so in the past several years. Common comments were “rarely, not in a long time, not often.” One person stated, “Once I get a course the way I like it, I stick with it.”

Community college courses often begin with more structure and regimentation than do those from four-year institutions. Faculty members were asked “what they started with” when they designed a course. Unless the course is very specialized (e.g. Introduction to e-learning), the state or college district has specific objectives, learning outcomes, assessment models, and often textbooks for each course. Some colleges have lead instructors who develop content-infused course templates which faculty are required to use for common courses. Often this degree of standardization is necessitated because courses need to articulate between two and four-year institutions.

The textbook forms the basic structure of the course. Chapters are linked to the weeks of the course and faculty members add their own readings and activities to the process.

The range of creativity in course design is constrained. The notion that a faculty member is given a course to develop simply from a general description is now outdated. Therefore, when asked about outlets for creativity in course design, most faculty talked about the differing, individual ways in which they teach the content, the examples they use, and their general teaching “style.” One faculty member said her creativity comes into play “when I ask myself what these students need and what am I good at?”

Those interviewed were asked how often courses are revised. Almost universally they responded that revision was constant and ongoing and that there was no formal revision schedule. Indeed, that response was so consistent that the question itself was ultimately dropped from the interview.

Faculty were asked to describe a typical face-to-face class session and what actually took place during the class. As one might suspect, lectures were most common in science classes. One science faculty member said, “My classes usually follow this sequence: announcements, when assignments are due, an overview of the chapter, a lecture on the chapter, examples, a summary that provides the whole picture, then questions and discussion.”

Those in the social sciences or language arts seemed to have more flexibility in their teaching. Much more class time is spent in discussion and group activities. In public speaking classes

much time was spent in presentations. In writing classes, students worked in clusters to do group revisions. A humanities instructor described her typical class this way: 'I like to have a hook like a contest at the beginning of the class, for which students get extra credit. I give a short lecture early, and then turn the class over to groups of students to present various chapters.'

A surprising finding that reinforces one from my previous paper¹ was the growing use of course management systems (CMS) such as Blackboard in face-to-face classes. Roughly half of the faculty interviewed made some use of their campus CMS in their classes, usually to post announcements or content, or for discussion forums. One faculty member had moved almost everything to the CMS, including homework submission and assessments. He said that he told students that coming to class was optional and that this approach was useful for students who traveled frequently.

C. How do these faculty learn to teach online and create online courses?

In some sense, this question is the heart of the reason for producing this paper. Indeed, it is in the paper's title. The answer, it seems, has less drama than might be expected.

Faculty, especially the seasoned faculty who were interviewed, learned to teach online in the same way that they learned to teach in the classroom: through trial and error, experimenting, and asking those around them. While some faculty reported attending workshops, taking advanced degrees online, or teaching for a proprietary online university, most learned on their own. The faculty who were interviewed were often quite technology capable, and would fit the Rogers² description of "innovators," people who are venturesome, educated, use multiple information sources, and have a greater propensity to take risks. A typical response to this question was:

I started in 1999. I'm computer savvy. I learned by doing it. Faculty helped other faculty. I went to some early WebCT conferences, but I basically did it on my own.

Most of these faculty had made some use of their campus faculty development or online learning centers, although involvement was often fleeting and erratic. Some had attended a session or two on the use of the campus CMS and occasionally called the center for specific advice. Four of those interviewed worked with their faculty development centers and mentored students. But, in general, these organizations were less significant to the faculty than informal advice and help from their peers.

Again, these faculty may not represent the majority of community college instructors who are newer to online learning and less confident with technology. This larger group may use college-provided support for online teaching and course development.

As with questions about traditional classes, faculty were asked how they went about creating courses for the online environment. Although some of the answers were surprising, in retrospect they might have been expected.

¹ Online Education in Community Colleges: Conversations with the Field, Monterey Institute for Technology and Education, Monterey, CA, 2006.

² Rogers, E., Diffusion of Innovations (5th edition), Free Press, New York, 2003.

First, most faculty are not creating many new online courses. When queried about how frequently they created new online courses, most provided the same response as with traditional courses: not very often. Although roughly twenty percent had created a new online course in the past year, most had not. Upon reflection, the lack of new course development is understandable. With the burst of campus CMS adoptions in the late 1990's and early 2000's, most colleges and universities rushed to put as many courses online as possible. Colleges achieved a certain status level by the number of courses and students online. The result seems to be that new course development has declined significantly at most colleges...those courses which need to be online are already online.

Second, for most faculty the online course development process is really a process of adaptation or conversion rather than creation. The ideal model for developing an online course would be to start fresh by reviewing course outcomes, then creating a set of course activities based on unique strengths from the capabilities of the new online technologies. While this "clean slate" approach might be admirable, most colleges do not provide faculty with the time and other resources to pursue this path. Therefore, the almost universal model is one of adjusting an existing course to the new delivery system.

A course is commonly adapted for online instruction in the following manner:

- Materials from the classroom-based course, the text, notes, PowerPoint slides, syllabus, and schedule form the basis for the online class. This forms a content platform.
- The CMS, most frequently Blackboard, is reviewed for its features and capabilities. Discussion boards, written activities, "who am I" sections, and online assessments are added. This forms a process platform.
- These two platforms are combined and the converted course is ready for delivery.

In general, the online course is the same as the classroom-based course, with some accommodations for the new technology. Some of these accommodations use the capabilities (asynchronous group work from multiple locations) of the new medium, while others are "workarounds" for the lack of face-to-face contact (e.g. student pictures posted on an introductory page).

Content seems to come from textbooks and other publisher materials which reinforces findings from the previous *Conversations* study. One can envision the textbook as a bare Christmas tree, which faculty individually decorate and personalize with their own additional content, web links, and activities. The content platform, which is usually collectively chosen by a department or college, forms the basic structure.

Because most online course creation is a conversion process, it doesn't seem to take faculty very long to accomplish it. When asked about this, most said it took them between 20-40 hours of individual work. At the shorter end, one person did three classes in four weeks and another estimated conversion to 4-12 hours. Other faculty spoke in terms of weeks, presumably working at the conversion on a part-time basis. Several adapted courses over summers.

Roughly half those interviewed received either money or release time for their work. Average cash payments were \$1,200 - \$2,000. Several institutions paid faculty for the first development of a specific course. If other faculty wanted to develop the same course online, no payment was provided.

Those interviewed were asked how the online version of a course differed from the classroom-based version. Most faculty focused on the addition of various communication venues: discussion boards, group work, and online presentations. Several mentioned the need for more student writing. PowerPoint slides were sometimes augmented with audio, so that students had access to a simulated lecture. The faculty often beefed up lecture notes to assist students.

In addition to the textbook, the most commonly used items from publishers were test banks. While some faculty used course cartridges or e-paks, most did not. Some also used publisher supplied CDs. Of note is one faculty member who built his entire course around a media series supplied by his professional organization. Since he made limited use of the text, the course development process was very time consuming.

As mentioned earlier, the use of college-supplied structures, such as faculty development centers, did not seem to be used often by the faculty who were interviewed. The most frequent use was for specific answers to questions about the CMS. Others attended occasional workshops sponsored by these organizations. Again, because the persons interviewed were very experienced, they were regularly used as mentor trainers for new faculty.

Faculty were also asked about whether or not they had ever developed an online course in collaboration with other faculty. Only three faculty had had such an experience, and even with these three, the collaboration had been minimal. One person interviewed had asked a colleague to assist in the development of a special unit. Another had worked jointly on a course with an instructor from another state.

D. What are faculty reactions to online learning?

At the end of both the group and individual interviews, I asked faculty some general opinion questions. Their responses seemed to be very instructive.

The reality of both online and classroom-based course development is that little of the content is created by the faculty. Again, most courses start with a textbook, which usually is itself an assemblage of others' original content. As one math instructor said in an interview, "There hasn't been much new in Algebra for 300 years."

Against this background, faculty were asked the following question: "If the best faculty in your discipline were brought together with the best instructional designers and media developers, and if they then created the best course in your area, would you use it?" The answer was almost inevitably, no; which was followed by a qualifier, that while the course would not be used in its entirety, parts of such a course might be selected to be used in the faculty member's own course. Faculty assemble courses from many sources and a model course would be one more place to find useful items. This response will be discussed in greater detail in the final section of this paper.

In the earlier *Conversations with the Field* paper, online learning managers were asked to speculate about what faculty like most about online learning. They suggested that convenience was the most appreciated element from this new way of teaching. When the faculty were asked directly the same question, their responses were somewhat different. While they liked the convenience of online teaching ("it fits my schedule"), many mentioned the impact on students. The faculty thought that students benefited most from the convenience. Two faculty mentioned that online learning furthered the mission of community colleges, reaching students who have busy lives. One person stated, "I imagine the lives of my students when I teach online. I picture

a single mother with two kids or a fireman who can't get to campus." Faculty also liked the richer and more frequent communications they had with their students. Some thought they knew their students better because of email communications. One said, "I can have regular communication with even the shyest student."

When queried about things they disliked, faculty responses clustered in three areas: workload; student preparation and expectations; and lack of face-to-face interaction. Many felt that online learning was much more time consuming than traditional classroom instruction. They felt the burden of increased time spent grading papers and answering emails. They also didn't like the concept that they needed to be available around the clock, answering student questions. Many felt that students weren't computer literate and needed help in the basics of computing, or that they didn't follow directions. Three faculty felt that students were rude in their emails and inconsiderate to other students. Finally, many of those interviewed voiced dissatisfaction with not seeing students face-to-face. These faculty either missed personal contact with students or felt that certain concepts were difficult to explain without having students watch some process.

At the end of the interview process, faculty were asked opinions about the future of online learning. In general, most thought that there would be steady growth for online education, that more students would enroll in more courses, and that numbers would increase. They also felt that online learning would never overshadow the campus itself, that most students and faculty value the campus experience and traditional classes would continue to be central.

The information above provides a snapshot of what some faculty do and believe about online education. It provides a sense of what is happening at community colleges, large and small. There seems to be a universal model of online learning in which individual faculty convert individual courses using the two existing platforms of the text and the campus CMS system. And in the main, this is a solitary process done without significant assistance.

While the solitary conversion model may be prevalent at community colleges throughout the US, it may be valuable to examine some colleges that have supported and extended online learning. With some trepidation, two model distance learning programs were identified in the course of this research. Both were at large community college districts which provide significant resources for online and distance learning. One program, North Harris Montgomery Community College District (NHMCCD) provides strong support to individual faculty. The second, Florida Community College at Jacksonville (FCCJ) has moved to team course development and entrepreneurial activities. This section describes both programs and provides analysis at the end.

III. Model Programs

North Harris Montgomery Community College District

NHMCCD is a large, five college district and related centers north of Houston, Texas. The catalog describes the district as the "third largest and fastest growing community college in Texas." Facilities, at least at the district level, are modern and well appointed. While each of the college campuses have their own online learning manager, the district's Center for Teaching and Distance Learning (CTDL) coordinates much of the activity. The Center's website, <http://ecampus.nhmccd.edu>, provides a good description.

CTDL reports through the Associate Vice Chancellor for Instruction and Distance Learning to the Executive Vice Chancellor of the district and is well positioned organizationally. CTDL consists of some twelve professional support personnel. The Center sees its role as providing support and technology leadership to the campuses. As such, its main activities concern faculty training and CMS support. The organization provides a variety of short courses, such as:

- Getting Started with WebCT
- WebCT Quiz and Exam Planning
- Best Communication Practices for Online Learning
- Camtasia video recording

CTDL's primary training effort is related to its Online Teaching Certificate program. This carefully planned and documented program has three levels: Level I is the minimum required training for any faculty teaching an online course. The program consists of 24 hours of instruction in 12 modules, and can be taken either face-to-face or online. Faculty create an online course as part of this training experience. The core of Level I training is a thick instructional manual which provides an introduction to online pedagogy, detailed instructions on WebCT and associated software related to online course production and assessment. Faculty learn to build pages, deal with copyright issues, and design courses.

Level II is a two-day, 12-hour program in which faculty develop portfolios of changes made to an online course that the faculty member had developed previously. This program can also be taken online.

Level III activities relate to formal course revision planning, but have not yet been offered by the District. It is hoped to use this training for developing exemplary online courses modules, NHMCCD faculty were interested on site, and it is interesting to note that they mentioned the importance of the district's training programs more often than did faculty at other colleges.

Analysis: The District's culture is one of maximum faculty freedom among the five colleges. For example, within a structure of common course outcomes and descriptions, faculty are free to choose whatever text they would like. This ability for individual choice makes it difficult for the District to insure quality and commonality in online courses. The CTDL is well aware of this and attempts, as one administrator puts it, "to obtain consistency with respect for how faculty design and run classes." This consistency is shown by the embracing of "minimum standards" for online classes. These standards, noted early in the required Level I training for faculty, insure that there is a common floor for quality in every course which is delivered. And while NHMCCD courses may not all have a common look and feel, each must meet a common set of content, assessment, and navigational standards, as well as response time to student emails.

NHMCCD is a good example of a distance learning program which seems to effectively straddle the issues of requiring quality online course development and delivery vs. faculty academic freedom. The CTDL is amply staffed and provides substantial and valued support to faculty. The Executive Vice Chancellor is clearly supportive of the Center and CTDL specifically. The Center is clearly a change agent and is creating change by example, without coercion or administrative mandate.

Florida Community College at Jacksonville

FCCJ is similar to NHMCCD in that it is a large district which the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching describes as a “very large two-year institution.” FCCJ is a five-campus district plus a virtual college which acts as the delivery organization for much of the district’s online instruction.

The developmental center for online learning is an organization with the unique title, “The Office of Organizational Learning Services” (OLS). The executive director of this unit reports directly to the Executive Vice President of the college, who is himself very active in promoting and developing online learning.

While individual faculty members are encouraged and supported in the development of online classes, OLS is the hub for the development of “college-owned online courses.” These courses are those which are supported by funding from the college itself.

OLS, one of several college organizations which are involved in online education, provides a number of functions, many of which are similar to other large, well-organized programs like those at NHMCCD. Two activities are unique and are emblematic of the creative thinking at this institution. One is the Sirius project and the second is called CREOLE.

The Sirius project is so named because, as the director stated, “Sirius is the brightest star in the sky.” The purpose of this project is to design high-quality courses which do not require textbooks because the content is developed by a team of faculty. An exception to the previous findings that colleges don’t do team course creation, Sirius courses are produced by a team of five faculty members who receive both time and funding to develop content. The courses are built so that they can be taught completely online, in a hybrid environment, or in the traditional classroom. Teams are well supported by OLS instructional design staff.

FCCJ has formed a partnership with McGraw-Hill Education to utilize the publisher’s raw content in course development. In return, McGraw-Hill markets the FCCJ courses nationally. FCCJ has the ambitious goal of producing twenty-eight courses in two and a half years. To my knowledge, this is the only publisher-college partnership of this type in the nation.

I was able to interview several of the faculty involved in Sirius when I made a site visit. The project began modestly. The first course, General Psychology, was developed by four faculty in 2004. The team members were trained by OLS, provided stipends of \$4,000-\$5,000, and given a timeline. According to the team leader, “We reviewed the table of contents from major psychology textbooks and chose four content areas, one for each team member.” Using a common template, they created course objectives, learning objects and assessments. In addition to creating the course, at the end of the project, the team developed a spiral-bound book to accompany it. While this book appears to be contrary to Sirius’s original “textbook free” aim, the material is also available on a CD and on the web.

According to the OLS staff, early Sirius courses had technical errors and inconsistencies. Because of this, the unit added instructional designers to review and revise the courses. Over time the Sirius model has become standardized and more structured in the production process. The college is now busily producing additional courses in order to meet their two dozen plus commitment to McGraw-Hill.

CREOLE stands for CREating Optimal Learning Environments. CREOLE is a joint effort between FCCJ and Virginia Tech and was funded by local money and a FIPSE grant. The outcome from CREOLE activities is an online course which, according to the CREOLE final report, has two purposes: noncredit faculty development and graduate-level credit in instructional design. CREOLE consists of four modules which provide both theoretical and practical instruction on research, motivation, and course development.

As with the Sirius courses, CREOLE will be sold commercially. Last year, Pearson Publishing agreed to market the course in the publishing world and FCCJ itself will promote the course in the higher education community.

Analysis: FCCJ is an institution which has given time, attention, and money to online learning. Sirius and CREOLE are two interesting projects at the college, but there are many more, including an Online Professor Certificate Program and FutureClass, a less ambitious project to design online courses. These are partially funded through allotments from an annual \$1 million president's discretionary fund.

While NHMCCD and FCCJ are similar in that both have large, well-supported, and mature online programs, they differ in some significant ways. NHMCCD is clearly a program which assists individual faculty in substantial ways to transition to online learning. The CTDL is truly a support organization, providing faculty with assistance and tools to do their work. At FCCJ, while all faculty get some support, there appears to be more direction in what program areas and courses are selected for special funding and attention.

FCCJ also seems to be interested in creating a profit center in its online learning. Many of the programs and services, while originally used locally, seem to have been developed with a national, fee-generating market in mind. Creating a revenue-generating educational activity at a public institution is challenging. This is an ambitious effort and it will be interesting to watch over the coming years.

IV. Analysis and Conclusions

"Faculty create online courses and then they teach them. That's what they do."
Online learning Manager

The purpose of this paper was to explore faculty opinions about online learning and the processes they use to produce courses and teach online. The previously reported data, based on fifty hours of interviews and five campus site visits, paints a picture that seems to have several key elements:

- At community colleges, online and traditional teaching are very similar. Many distance learning professionals hope that the new online technology will create a revolution in teaching and learning. It may be doing just that, but the revolution is unfolding in slow motion. Most faculty with whom I have spoken, faculty who are actively involved in online learning, are simply revising their classroom courses to adapt to a new technology. These faculty are technology wise, have learned the mechanics of educational software, and have moved what they do in the classroom to a new web-based venue.

Faculty learn to develop courses and teach online the same way they learned to do these things for the classroom; they use tools they learned from their own teachers, try things out, talk to colleagues, and occasionally seek help from their institutions. They see the web as a new tool to do what they have always done...teach students.

When online technology came face-to-face (no pun intended) with faculty culture, the latter seems to have simply absorbed the former. For those who expected online education to change and improve education, I fear they must be disappointed, at least for a while.

- Faculty see themselves more as artists than facilitators. I was surprised how negatively faculty reacted to idea of teaching a course produced by others, even a carefully crafted model one. There was an instinctive repulsion to the idea. The faculty I interviewed recoiled at the idea of teaching a course which he or she did not create. Indeed, one faculty member recounted an incident in which a student thanked her at the end of the semester for “facilitating” a class. The teacher growled, “Facilitate, hell, I created this course!”

Even given the constraints of mandated textbooks, course objectives and outcomes, assessments, and the class structure, faculty seem to be able to create courses which they describe, often lovingly, as “mine.” Their creative outlet seems to be how they select additional content, develop learning activities, and offer their own personalities up to students. Their courses are often revised and honed over a period of years and, in the end, they represent the faculty member’s own collage which is woven into the required standard course elements.

Thus, the quote at the beginning of this section. Faculty don’t just teach, they *create* and teach, and their creations are an integral part of their self-image as college instructors. Faculty don’t seem to question if this model of teaching is the best way for students to learn. Whether from personal philosophy or worries about job security, faculty assume that they themselves and the courses they create are essential to effective education.

- Faculty adopt content, not courses. While instructors seem to reject teaching courses they themselves haven’t developed, they seem quite willing to adopt external content. In reality, almost all content comes from outside the faculty member; books, articles, websites, and media. The ingredient for acceptance seems to be the size of the content chunk and the ability to choose whether and how to incorporate it into a course. Again, the collage analogy works: faculty find this and that piece of information and glue it together to make a course “theirs.”

One faculty member I interviewed, Kathy Chatfield from Clark College in Washington, wrote me a long email explaining her approach to course design. Because it was so articulate on the point of adopting content versus courses, I have included it in its entirety.

Designing a course that I consider mine really has a lot more to do with what I decide to DO with the content that will be used for the course. What will I assign for reading? What will I use for questions, review, activities, etc? Even if I use ideas provided by the publisher, I usually tweak them to fit my situation. I certainly never use all of the content in a textbook, so which parts are used, how are they used, which parts are left out. How will I schedule what I assign? How

does that assignment fit with the credit requirements for the class? How will I assess the learning in the student? Will they take tests and exams or complete some sort of project? (Since I primarily select projects for my online classes, these are almost entirely created by me.)

Thus, to me, a class design will NEVER be the publisher's, because I consider what I get from the publisher to be equivalent to any other "tool" or resource that I use for the class...comparable to the Internet or even just the computer itself. Perhaps I've been wrong all this time, but developing curriculum to me has always been the process of how the class will run and what I will choose to cover in it, rather than the content itself.

- There are key indicators of successful and mature online learning programs. Based on interview data from this and the earlier "Conversations with the Field" Study, one can discern some commonalities among those programs which seem to be most successful. First, the chief executive administrators of the institution provide strong and public backing for online learning. This support and advocacy is both verbal and financial. College resources, both cash and personnel, are funneled into the online endeavor. Second, the institution offers extensive support for faculty. This is often seen in a formal and extensive online education training program that is required of faculty before teaching online. Third, the institution has clear, written standards for online course quality. Courses are reviewed during the development process by outside faculty and administrators prior to being offered to students. Finally, there is usually a person managing the online learning organization who is a combination "spark plug" and politician who provides energy and direction combined with finesse and discretion to make things work.
- Things are changing...slowly. Against the backdrop of one faculty member creating one course and delivering it to one class, there are changes afoot. Washing against faculty culture are the changes seen in other sectors, such as health care, business, and government. Rightly or not, these institutions have moved away from the individual model. Doctors now have prescribed protocols, businesses now work in teams, and outcome measurements are everywhere. We rarely see family doctors anymore. We see teams of health care professionals. Is one better than the other? Hard to know, but that is certainly the trend.

I think we can expect to see greater and greater standardization in both online and traditional courses. Programs such as FCCJ's Sirius project will probably proliferate. Teams of faculty, often from partnering institutions, will create exemplary courses, which teaching faculty will have some ability to shape and personalize. But these changes will happen slowly, because such courses require large up-front investments, and because faculty will resist both the concept of the large-scale model and the reality of institutional budget changes.

This paper is the second in the *Conversation with the Field* series. Hopefully, it builds on the first, deepening our understanding of online learning as viewed by those who practice it daily.