Training the Trainer for a Virtual Classroom

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Abstract:

As distance education was beginning to grow at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, the libraries garnered their own virtual room through the campus wide license for Blackboard Collaborate. Having a virtual room allows for the librarians to offer orientations, host workshops, have meetings, or even offer virtual office hours. Hosting online workshops not only allows us to teach distance students, but allows both students and staff on campus to participate and learn virtually from their desks and get comfortable with online meetings and training. As online learning continues to grow and budgets continue to shrink, less travel is possible for training both internally and externally - but online learning opens more opportunities for all.

Keywords: librarianship | online education | distance education | Blackboard Collaborate | online workshops | academic libraries

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The Distance Education (DE) Librarian has been training the library staff to ease their fears of the webinar software through hands-on sessions, virtual at your desk sessions, one-on-one trainings or small group consulting, attempting to meet all comfort levels and needs. Slowly rolling out this new technology internally to get buy-in by library staff was key. In the past two

years, more and more library staff now use the library's virtual room for their own committee meetings, to collaborate with others in a different location, to host virtual office hours for students, and to present online sessions or one-shot classes. The library webinars have become an easy way for library staff to participate and get accustomed to using online technology in a safe environment. The webinars also market the library as a leader in online learning, both campus-wide and with alumni.

The webinars are generally managed by the DE Librarian, who often hosts practicum students from our graduate school of Library and Information Studies. This spring 2012 one such student interned to gain experience with teaching online. The internship is still in progress, but thus far has been a great opportunity for mutual benefit. While the DE Librarian provides a background of experience with both the technology and the broader audience being served, the student can do focused work on developing the material of the workshops. This allows the student to not only get on-the-ground experience in what works and doesn't work in online learning, but also to learn more about what various groups on a college campus need in the context of such online workshops.

In addition, the student continues to benefit by having the opportunity to collaborate with other librarians on workshop preparation and presentation, gaining insight into more areas of the library through these other subject specialists. In collaboration with the DE Librarian, the student has also been able to use connections within the Library and Information Studies Department to co-present with other graduate students. This opportunity allows other students a chance to try online presenting and gives both students a peer to peer collaboration on workshop topics beyond what is supported by the library or university.

Online learning and training is not as difficult as it may sound. There is the expense of virtual software but if it allows a world of opportunities for students, staff, campuses, communities and beyond to share ideas, attend training, mentor others, and learn, it's worth the expense and challenges of getting it up and running.