

# Faculty Development Practices In Distance Education For Success With Culturally Diverse Students

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## ABSTRACT

*The student population is becoming more geographically and culturally diverse in the online arena because students from all parts of the world are able to register for online classes. These diverse students need competent and qualified online facilitators that are able to use diverse teaching pedagogies to meet their learning needs. Therefore, developing and training faculty members through a successful orientation program to integrate diverse cyberspace technology into the classroom for student learning are a necessity today. As such, administrators should focus on the effective development, training, and retaining of technologically savvy educators to teach in various distance learning modalities (online, on-ground, and blended formats) using cyberspace technology while focusing on effectively achieving learning outcomes with diverse students. The document discusses diversity issues, the desires and views of online students based on a survey of 229 graduate students, and suggestions for new online faculty members. An emersion model of training used for faculty orientation and development is presented.*

## BECOMING A CULTURALLY COMPETENT EDUCATOR

Society can condition people to behave in predictable patterns which at times can negatively impact others. Educators, like all other human beings, come from the society and follow the same patterns. Thus, educators too can fall victim to societal conditioning with regard to differences that exist among groups of human beings. What differentiates effective educators from others who continue to behave based on past conditioning and assumptions is that they think before they act and they choose their actions based on current facts instead of biases and opinions. Today's environment is very diverse and very different from what it has been in the past. As such, educators must also change with it by being innovative in their teaching and facilitation skills with diverse learners. Unfortunately, the traditional culture of academia which is more than 1,000 years old and many of today's educators are known for cherishing the paradigm of "what was and is must always be." Some cultures of traditional academic organizations tend to be very conservative and many of their educators can also be highly resistant to innovative ways of doing things. Business strategists tend to agree that to move forward, academic organizations must first remove this mindset from their cultures (Westerbeck, 2004). Westerbeck stated that "like all modern organizations, business schools will survive or perish on their ability to evolve with and within a rapidly segmenting marketplace." According to Gary Hamel, visiting professor of strategic and international management at the London Business School, "business schools can be notorious institutions of habit" which has served them well for over a century but it is not going to get them through the next decade if they do not bring about changes to their culture and environment. Business gurus in academia offer the following suggestions for modern business schools wishing to be successful in the twenty first century environment (Westerbeck, 2004):

1. Defy conventions.
2. Innovate.
3. Do not follow fads.
4. Create new competitive contexts.
5. Do not just research—experiment.
6. Globalize.
7. Form the future—do not follow it. The modern business schools should be creating meaningful change.

Plato long time ago stated that learning occurs in the mind regardless of time, location and many of the outside variables. Perhaps Plato was saying that the Socratic method of questioning concepts and phenomenon can lead to learning by thinking both formally and informally. Similarly, learning about diversity in education is not an innovation but it can take place regardless of whether it is formal or informal. However, when it comes to diversity in human beings, it takes reflection and conscious thinking on each individual's part to separate opinions and myths from the current facts. The term diversity describes the many unique characteristics and qualities that make a person (student) similar to or different from others. Some of these characteristics can be apparent such as skin color, hair color, body size, and general appearance. Other characteristics such as ethnicity, disability, religion, financial status, age, value, cultural background, sexual orientation, and many others are not always apparent based on one's first impression as they could require more interaction and communication with the person. It is imperative that educators not judge students based on assumptions and must treat everyone fairly and equitably based on their level of actual performance. In 1975, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandated that young students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment. This was meant to place students with various disabilities in regular classrooms as much as possible so that expectations of performance can be the same from them as with any other student. In 1980, the Science and Engineering Equal Opportunities Act was passed and it proclaimed that "it is the policy of the United States to encourage men and women, equally, of all ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds to acquire skills in science, engineering and mathematics, to have equal opportunity in education, training, and employment in scientific and engineering fields, and thereby to promote scientific and engineering literacy and the full use of the human resources of the Nation in science and engineering" (SEEOA, 1980). As recent as 1990, The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed to ensure equal opportunities to individuals with disabilities in the areas of employment, public accommodations, state and local government, transportation, and telecommunications (WEEA, November 1999). Unfortunately, unfairness and blatant discrimination still exists in the work environment and such legislations can assist in providing equal opportunities to everyone (Karahalios & Mujtaba, 2004). In the mean time, educators can make sure that their learning environment is free of discriminatory and unfair behaviors by creating an inclusive classroom regardless of whether they are teaching onground or cyberspace.

Diversity encompasses the multitude of experiences, aptitudes and attitudes available in today's population. Diversity initiatives encourage educators to empower their students as well as to tap into their wealth of differences in order to achieve synergistic results in the learning process. In return, these students will be ready to satisfy, excite and delight their diverse customers and achieve organizational effectiveness by delivering superior customer value as a result of diversity initiatives modeled in the classroom by educators. Robert Reich, Secretary of Labor during Bill Clinton's first Administration as President, said, "No longer are Americans rising and falling together as if in one large national boat. We are, increasingly, in different smaller boats." So, classroom students will become progressively more diverse and educators need to tolerate differences, respect them, understand their nature, and educate students about them so they can successfully work with today's diverse organizations and customers. Eventually, this may lead or at least contribute to students' personal and professional success. What is success in a diverse education environment and who defines it? According to Sophocles, "success is dependent on effort" and not necessarily physical characteristics or limitations. According to Brian Tracy, Author and Speaker, "One of the most important rules for success is this: Every great success is the result of hundreds and thousands of small efforts and accomplishments that no one ever sees or appreciates." Successful education to everyone wishing to learn is a moral imperative in today's diverse environment of adult learning. Educators are obligated to avoid making statements that lower learning expectations from students as a result of their gender, ethnicity or country of origin in order to create a healthy learning environment for all students. Most people are aware of the fact that they need to eliminate all harassment-related issues from the learning environment but some do not think much about the concept of self-fulfilling prophecy in relation to the diverse environment of education, diversity management concerns in learning, and effective teaching practices geared toward adult educators of diverse populations.

It is apparent that diversity exists in both the student and workforce population today and will continue to increase at a growing rate. There is a moral responsibility for each faculty member to become a cultural ally and a TRUE educator with regard to today's diverse students and workforce. Valuing diversity and becoming a TRUE educator requires each person to tolerate differences, respect differences, understand differences, and to educate others about these differences in order to maximize the productivity of students in the workforce so they can remain competitive. Valuing diversity is not just an idea that sounds good and promotes positive publicity for the institution.

Valuing diversity and the educator's genuine commitment to its thorough implementation are critical to one's success as an individual educator and to students' survival in the real world. In order for educators and students to be successful, they should become culturally competent. *Cultural competency* can be defined as the continuous learning process that enables individuals (faculty and students) to function effectively in the context of cultural differences both in school and in the work environment. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. dreamed that someday people would be judged by the content of their character and not by the color of their skin, not by their gender, not by their ethnic backgrounds, and not by their disabilities. He also envisioned that, someday, all individuals would sit down together at the tables of brotherhood and sisterhood jointly discussing and resolving challenges. Those tables are in the classrooms, conference rooms, boardrooms, cafeterias, restaurants, and manufacturing floors. The responsibility and challenge for educators are to not only take their seats at the heads of these tables but to sit there with an open mind and unclenched fists so they can be the appropriate role models for students. The same responsibility is true and equally applies in cyberspace or online education.

Being responsible for everyone's learning and acting as such consistently toward all students is a must for educators and faculty members. Being a responsible educator means expecting the same standards from each student regardless of the individual make-up of the student's background. Teachers should not grade students differently because of their race, nationality, or language. Students must *earn* their grades based on their performance in the course. Faculty members of higher education are required and obligated to treat each student fairly and expect high standards from each student regardless of his/her ethnicity/nationality, primary language, age, experience, disability, and other such variables. Shelby Steele, author of "*The Content of Our Character*" published in 1990, said "What is needed now is a new spirit of pragmatism in racial matters where 'disadvantaged minorities' are seen simply as American citizens who deserve complete fairness and in some cases developmental assistance, but in no case special entitlements based on minority status." The only individuals that should be given special accommodations in the classroom are students with legally recognized disabilities whose needs are communicated to educators by the university officials prior to the start of the class. Overall, regardless of teaching modality, educators have the responsibility of being and becoming role models for students as these future leaders/managers are likely to mimic the actions of their teachers. Through understanding, accommodating the various learning styles of students, and the effective use of differences in the classroom, faculty members can become TRUE cross-cultural educators who would be able to work effectively in the context of cultural differences both nationally and internationally. Becoming a TRUE global educator requires:

- Tolerating differences,
- Respecting differences,
- Understanding differences, and
- Examining differences for the purpose of Educating students.

The first step in becoming a TRUE educator is usually the most difficult but a very important step in the process. For example, tolerance is a personal decision and it comes from an attitude that is learned. Every human being needs to embrace the belief that each person on earth is a treasure who must be treated with respect. Everyone has the power to change his/her attitude to overcome ignorance as well as to influence his/her students, offspring, peers, and colleagues positively. It begins with a personal commitment to consciously choose one's speech and thought patterns based on intrinsically chosen values. It starts with the fact that many individuals should and can stop labeling others simply as "good in math," "good in science," "does not seem to have a brain," "will never make it," or other oppressive terms based on misinformation, first impressions and/or physical appearances. As such, managers, employees and faculty members must prevent inappropriate or offensive statements (such as Polish one-liners or other offensive jokes) from taking place in the classroom, online or onground, in order to create an inclusive and healthy learning environment and to become a TRUE educator. Becoming a TRUE educator will enable a person to provide a supportive and inclusive learning atmosphere/environment for students. This will result in fairness, equality, and a talented diverse workforce that can successfully function in today's global world of competitive marketplace. Some of the common benefits of incorporating diversity initiatives into the classroom facilitation can be satisfied students which will eventually benefit the society by having a talented diverse workforce with satisfied customers, high morale and commitment, low employee recruitment and retention cost, better teamwork and increased productivity, and an inclusive as well as a supportive learning environment. So, all educators should attempt to become TRUE educators

in order to continue making a positive difference in the lives of all students. While it is a good practice to offer diversity training and awareness opportunities to all faculty members and staff, it is equally important to provide them a good orientation to the school's policies and expectations along with the technical skills needed for quality education to all students.

### **THE NECESSITY OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING FOR ONLINE STUDENTS**

Prospective graduate students in business are encouraged to research various programs and consider enrolling in programs that best match their learning style and needs. According to the U. S. Department of Education, in 2000-2001, one-quarter (about 116,475) of the masters degrees awarded were in masters of business administration. There are over 1,700 MBA programs available in today's global world of education and the Graduate Admissions Council reports that "demand for seats in MBA programs still exceeds the number available" (Hamilton, 2004). Hamilton offers students several helpful tips for selecting an appropriate MBA program: start early, understand the applicant pool for the chosen schools and distinguish your personal traits, seek out schools where top employers recruit their future leaders, and know exactly where you are headed and how you will get there. When choosing a graduate program, according to Barbara Marquand (2004) and other writers, prospective students should:

1. Assess their needs and interests.
2. Assemble a list of various programs that are likely to best meet the aforementioned needs.
3. Learn about the credentials of the faculty and their teaching philosophy to see if they match or accommodate diverse learning styles. Students can observe several faculty members in live classes to assess their teaching or facilitation styles.
4. Interview the school's administrators, advisors, and determine their student service offerings.
5. Determine each program's graduation rates, employability rates after graduation and the program's overall rankings.
6. Spend more time with the programs that look the most attractive to get a feel for the campus, their culture and the overall school.
7. Select a program that best matches their learning styles, learning philosophy and a place that provides helpful information to make sure students are able to finish the program.

Since students have many choices in today's competitive environment of higher education, schools must understand their needs and offer them the appropriate tools so they can be successful using today's cyberspace technologies. Furthermore, they must appropriately train and orient their staff and faculty members to offer the best education possible. Students must be selective since the cost of education can be very high in terms of time, money and dedication to hard work. For example, today's graduate business students can expect to pay anywhere from \$15,000 to over \$100,000 for a Masters of Business Administration degree depending on the school offering the degree. The business of higher education has become very competitive as schools move far beyond their main campuses to offer programs nationally and internationally. Just in the South Florida area, students can choose from over 30 different universities and colleges to complete their associate, bachelors, masters, and/or doctoral programs. Recently, in South Florida which is already very competitive, two other top business schools in the nation announced their entry into the Masters of Business Administration (MBA) sector. The University of Florida, which is located in Gainesville of Florida, is now offering MBA programs in South Florida. Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management will also be establishing clusters in the area. The University of Florida's new MBA Program in South Florida costs about \$45,000 including books, tuition and program fees (Perdue, 2004). Lois Perdue also stated that Kellogg charges about \$105,000 for its Evanston-based MBA Program and University of Miami's executive MBA program cost about \$55,000. However, Nova Southeastern University's H. Wayne Huizenga School of Business and Entrepreneurship has been able to keep their cost down to about \$20,000 for the MBA program so more working adults can afford to achieve their higher education dreams. According to the South Florida Business Journal (July 16, 2004), Nova Southeastern University has the largest MBA Program with an enrollment of 1,482 students taking classes onground at the main campus (full-time or part-time), at education centers throughout Florida and other states, at their international sites, and through their online platform. Second largest MBA program in South Florida is at Florida Atlantic University with an enrollment of about 650 students. Many of the top schools involved in distance education also offer the complete MBA program through the online modality for similar fees. Students need not be

concerned about the modality of distance education programs since many of the same faculty members who teach the traditional programs at the main campus also teach at distant sites and online programs. As such, the quality and outcomes achieved are likely to be the same for all programs.

Of course, there has been much written about the use of advanced technology in distance education and how best to use that technology in the teaching-learning process. According to researchers (Boyd, 2004 and Eastmond, 1998), the term distance education has become synonymous with instruction and facilitation provided through cyberspace technologies via the Internet. As such, many of such programs are commonly referred to as online education. Eastmond (1998) described three different types of Internet-based courses: *first*, there is the distance learning programs which are supplemented by use of Internet technologies as a support mechanism as opposed to being the primary medium of delivery; *second*, there is the computer conferencing medium where the Internet is the primary delivery utilizing asynchronous discussions and emails; *third*, there is the virtual course from the virtual program or institution where all or most aspects of the course are delivered online. Within this document, the author discusses suggestions and best practices associated with the third type based on personal experiences of over six years as an educator and administrator of academic online programs.

In an online survey of eMBA students in the spring term of 2004 by the author, from a total of 987 students enrolled in online business courses, over 229 students completed the surveys providing a return rate of 23.2%. The demographics of respondents vary greatly by gender, age, and location since most of the students are working adults and live in different locations within the United States and foreign countries such as Jamaica, Korea, Bahamas, Kenya, etc. The respondents, as can be seen from Table 1, were mostly from the masters of business administration program taking classes during the spring term.

**Table 1- Online Program Enrollment**

Business Administration	165	72%
International Business Administration	23	10%
Human Resource Management	25	11%
Public Administration	9	4%
Leadership	3	1%
Master's of Accounting	2	1%
e-MACC	1	0%
Master of Taxation	1	0%
Total	229	100%

About 53% (121 students) of the respondents are completing all of their courses online while 47% (108) are taking online courses in addition to the onground. Most of these online students are accessing classroom material from home (59%) and 3% of students only have access to the online classroom from their offices as demonstrated in Figure 1. About 38% of students are able to access online classes both from home and from their office locations. Majority of the respondents, as shown on Table 2, have the basic tools such as speakers, microphones, CD-Rom Drives, Windows 2000, and Microsoft Office. Most of the students own the basic tools for having synchronized chat sessions. About 70% of these students owned Windows 2000 which means some people are still using older versions or other software.

**Table 2- Software Ownership**

Software or Tools Owned by Students!	Speakers	Microphone	CD Rom Drive	Windows2000	MicrosoftOffice2000
Students	220	160	224	160	191
Percentage	96%	70%	98%	70%	83%

One of the questions asked on the survey is the following: “On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the highest) what is your level of satisfaction with the technology used in the online programs (i.e. text-based chat sessions, bulletin board,

course resources to include Power-Point presentations, lecture notes, etc.)” On the satisfaction scale of 1 to 5 (five being most satisfied) for this question, over 82% of the respondents rated the technology used in the online program as 4 or 5 signifying above average level of satisfaction. About 13% of the respondents marked 3 signifying average satisfaction with 5% of the respondents providing a rating of 2 or below showing a less than average level of satisfaction with the technology used in the online courses. Students were also asked for their thoughts on the technology used as well as other suggestions about the program and the following represents some of their comments:

1. Sometime technologically powered communication problems exist, and some lecturers are not understanding of this fact. In my experience, I had tremendous difficulty with E-share chat. Apparently, I was not authorized to be in the class during chat even though I was registered.
2. The potential for improvement is great, especially with the use of high speed connectivity. I recognize that the requirement to serve more students limits the technology, but see a tremendous opportunity if all students had broadband connectivity.
3. Doing an excellent job. However, technology has only really been fully utilized in the technology portion of the MBA. It would be nice to see other professors utilize all their options for various chats.
4. Every online professor has a different method of teaching. When a professor does use the text-based chat sessions they are very helpful, because it allows me to understand what I am reading better.
5. Good technology, but too many students in each chat. Limit the number of students in each chat session.
6. Technical difficulty, it took over three contacts with the online help before it was resolved. Also received a poor grade on one of the chats because of technical difficulty not on my end.
7. Some professors use software that is not common among computers, and in which you have to download from sites. Concern is viruses.
8. Some faculty members have lecture notes and PowerPoint's others do not. No consistency.
9. Very disappointed with the chat sessions. The first session there were 16 people in the class. You can barely read the response as they scrolled across the screen. The second chat had a constant distraction as one student was having technical difficulties. Provide an effective format to make the chats more useful and a better learning opportunity.
10. The chat is only as effective as the instructor. The most effective instructor is Dr. John Wilson. Find out what he's doing and get the other instructors to follow his style.
11. The effectiveness of chat sessions depends on the professor. I have been in some that are a total waste of time and some that are very valuable.
12. When the instructor is knowledgeable and puts time into the class it is very helpful. Most only read the PowerPoint slides and those chats are useless.
13. Important to be able to interact with the professor as it is hard to get the full classroom experience online.
14. The chat sessions have been great thus far. It is great to be able to communicate with the professor and classmates in greater depth. It definitely enhances the learning process.
15. Although text chat sessions are somewhat confusing, I feel it is a vital part of the on-line environment to have some type of interaction with other students. Although the chats may not be the most productive, I think the social part of learning from one another and meeting one another is imperative to success of the class/program.
16. I like the online courses and what they have to offer. However, would improve some of the professor's quality of information covered: cut down on chit-chat and cover more important material.
17. There is little to no interaction with students or the professor in some classes except via e-mail, and the material is cumbersome and the assignments are simply busy work. Don't feel I'm learning anything new, and the text book is very tedious and difficult to read.
18. The chat sessions did not really work for the Business Finance prerequisite. The professor asked that we e-mail our problems and questions to him, so there was really nothing to discuss during the scheduled chat.
19. Some of the chat sessions are used just as time fillers and question and answer sessions. These I consider a waste of time, as they do not correspond with the material presented or what is on the assignment manager.
20. Enjoyed the benefits of the online experience. It allowed me a venue to learn and grasp the material being covered, from the comfort of my home.
21. Lectures are not available for all relevant chapters. Post more lecture notes created by the teacher.

22. The chat sessions are valuable in that it allows you to interact with your fellow classmates and your professor to discuss any topics you are having difficulties with while sharing this information with fellow classmates.
23. Professor response to questions has been slow. On-line course professors must respond within hours and if they are away on meetings then they should designate someone to take care of student questions as deadlines are un-changed.
24. The level of completeness varies with each Professor. Should create consistency among classes.

The above comments convey a message that there is a lack of consistency in how some online classes or chat sessions are facilitated and taught. Perhaps the chat sessions and online classes can become more consistent in operation in order to minimize student confusion and enhance student learning by creating formalized templates and training sessions for all faculty members that teach online. Before any training program can be effective, it is important to say that schools should create and design fair incentive and compensation strategies for those faculty members who regularly attend and contribute to the training and orientation processes by assisting or mentoring new (online) faculty members. Institutions should discuss and create effective criteria for fairly compensating faculty members for developing or updating the training orientation for new faculty, lecture notes, exercises, cases, and other teaching tools for the online environment so such tools can be made available for others to use. During orientations and faculty meetings, intellectual property issues and concerns should be addressed and policies should be created according to the specific rules of the institution so there is clarity before asking faculty members to devote time into developing lectures that will be made available for others who are teaching the same course. These may appear to be “little things” but they do make a huge difference in the morale and success of an orientation and training program.

#### **FACULTY TRAINING AND ORIENTATION PRACTICES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION**

Vincent Van Gogh, artist, said that "Great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together." Many universities have integrated short sessions of training and development strategies into their initial and annual orientation programs to enhance their offerings, to meet student needs and to make great things happen. Many of the universities such as Carnegie-Mellon, London School of Economics and Political Science, Columbia University, and University of Chicago have created partnerships with suppliers such as UNext to aid with their online initiatives in course development (Barnes & Blackwell, 2004). Some of the for-profit institutions that are successfully using commonly available platforms in cyberspace technology include Walden, Kaplan University, University of Phoenix, Capella University, Jones International University, and Unexus just to name a few. Some of Nova Southeastern University's internal schools have used their own custom-built platforms such as the H. Wayne Huizenga School of Business and Entrepreneurship which used e-University while their undergraduate programs used the standard WebCT package. Other universities and colleges may be using software and courseware programs such as Outlook Express, Blackboard CourseInfo, Web Courses-in-a-Box, TopClass, WebMentor, Lotus LearningSpace, Groupware, and/or many other user-friendly packages entering the market. Hearing about such new software programs and their usage can be scary to traditional faculty members who have been effectively teaching classes in a face-to-face format without the integration of advanced technology. As such, many of the aforementioned schools have developed standardized training programs to make sure their faculty members are trained, developed and successful in using cyberspace technologies as they compete to survive and hopefully capture a fraction of the market share in the education industry. It has been claimed that Universities will not survive if they do not adjust to distance learning. So, online education will be around for both traditional and continuous development purposes of the workforce. Many researchers are of the view that the future is outside the traditional classrooms and the traditional campuses. So, educators and administrators must be prepared for the future by being updated on the latest aspects and best practices of distance education. Faculty training, orientation and development programs vary in terms of skill and pedagogy. Many schools are creating programs that use online training and orientation because of its low cost and flexibility of scheduling to orient and develop qualified faculty members throughout the globe so long as they have access to the internet. Distance education and distance learning are realities of life and educators must embrace it in order to create a healthy learning environment for diverse students. Educators can use distance education technology to enhance their traditional course offerings. However, they need continuous training and development opportunities to keep up with the changes in the application of technology. Stefanie Lenway, associate dean and professor of strategic management at the University of Minnesota, said “We need to provide more opportunities for completing some degree requirements through distance learning...and this will require a major investment in training faculty how

to teach online” (Westerbeck, 2004). Lenway continued to say that Masters of Business Administration program faculty and administrators should entertain the reality that increasingly more courses can fruitfully be completed online.

Developing and educating faculty members are today’s necessities as new technology to enhance learning is being introduced periodically so everyone can stay updated and skilled in their usage. During the training, facilitators should acknowledge the wealth of experiences that adults bring with them that can be integrated into the learning modules. These adult learners should be encouraged to take initiative in their learning and they must become a part of the learning process through effective facilitation by the facilitator and appropriate administrative processes that allow learners to become a part of the learning experience. There are many elements that should be considered with adults in the educational environment and one is that adults are likely to engage in learning activities before, after, or even during any challenges facing them (which are described as “teaching moments or opportunities”) and they are likely to engage in learning that promises to help them cope with the transition. Furthermore, adults are concerned about their self-esteem and ego which influences their behavior. Facilitation should respect their dignity and self-esteem concerns. Facilitators must remember that the average adult can effectively focus on a limited number of concepts at a given time. The facilitator or trainer should effectively balance the presentation of new material, discussions, sharing of relevant experiences, and in the time allotted. Trainers and facilitators should recognize that adults want their learning to be problem-oriented, personalized and appropriate to their need for direction and personal responsibility. Result-oriented facilitators have always been and will continue to be an important and mission critical asset to any University as they have the most important job in the world - preparing future leaders of the society! Therefore, one of each educational institution’s goals must be to recruit, develop and retain part-time and full-time faculty members with the required skills to effectively compete in the global industry because students seek to learn from them the skills required to compete with the very best in their professions.

As most entrepreneurs know, for many institutions today, the true sustainable advantage comes from out-innovating the competition in a timely manner. Someone said that it matters not which particular organization stays alive, rather, it’s only essential that competition among them is fierce, fair and eventually the fittest will survive. Therefore, educational institutions cannot survive nor prosper without extraordinary faculty members who can be innovative and globally competitive. So, all institutions need to have a standardized process to consciously recruit, hire, orient, develop, and retain extraordinary faculty members for all education modalities. Having a standardized faculty development process is even more critical for institutions involved in distance learning. The faculty development process and model suggested in this paper is one way of having a standardized process for development and orientation purposes.

Best practices and specific details on each step of the model should be designed as per the needs and situational variables of the institution. Benchmarking can take place by speaking with others involved in distance education and those who have years of experience in academic administration using cyberspace technology. Some general considerations for each of the steps in a faculty orientation and development model may include *hiring, orienting, modeling, mentoring, teaching, evaluating, and developing*. This model requires that faculty members wishing to teach online become online students first and learn the pedagogy of online education, first hand, along with the school’s electronic platform. Such immersion models of training have been used by the author to train corporate trainers and to develop faculty members in distance education. Understanding its practical application, successes, challenges, and best practices can be of great assistance as a starting place. Beginning online faculty members should learn and understand the mechanics of how online environment of education works. They should collect best practices and tips for beginning online faculty members to be effective in their initial online experience. Online faculty members also need to know how to best engage students, keep them interested and on track to achieve course and curriculum learning outcomes. In general, they need to find out how to best manage discussion threads with large quantities of comments.

There are many best practices that new online faculty members can absorb, perhaps through osmosis, and benefit from as they observe an actual class facilitated by an experienced online educator. Furthermore, online administrators and facilitators should discuss and integrate some or all of the following suggestions for online courses (Mujtaba, 2004):



1. Use the basic technology available to everyone in the market and the sophistication of technology requirements should be kept simple or to the lowest common denominator as recommended by Barnes and Blackwell (2004).
2. Software, content links and “self help” training sessions should be regularly updated and made available asynchronously. Technical support experts should be available for online learners and educators seven days a week and 24 hours each day as online education is about learning at one’s own pace and time.
3. Ask for contributions from faculty members, staff and students on ways to improve the system. Involve everyone that is impacted by the process, hear their concerns and, when possible, integrate their suggestions.
4. Rules, policies and training material should be formal and standardized. However, the training and facilitation of the content should be personalized, to the fullest extent possible, based on learning styles and the individual needs of each learner.
5. For best results and when possible, effectively and appropriately use both asynchronous and synchronous formats depending on the learning objectives. Because adults like to learn at their own pace and time, synchronized online learning and assessment requirements should be limited to the bare necessities when used.
6. Communicate regularly with online faculty members and students about the technology usage, software updates, and overall program objectives. Also, questions submitted through emails and bulletin board postings should be answered within a 24-hour period or as determined by the needs of learners and the availability of resources.
7. Create a standardized mechanism for documentation of feedback and development for each learner. This helps the faculty member to effectively observe, monitor, evaluate, and develop the progress of each learner. Similarly, such a process can greatly assist the learner understand his/her learning gap and do what is possible to close the gap between where he/she is and where he/she intends to go at the end of each term or module.
8. Compensate facilitators fairly while considering the amount of work that goes into preparing for the class before its beginning, interaction time and content preparation while the class is in session (asynchronously or synchronously), and communication time or follow up needed with learners once the session has ended.
9. Periodically measure and assess the actual learning to make sure it matches the intended learning objectives. Online groups can be compared with each other or with groups that meet face-to-face learning the same content through similar facilitation. Statistical analysis can be performed for data over time and relevant conclusions can be drawn. Make appropriate adjustments as needed.

Pedagogy in online education requires the application of learning techniques and facilitation that works in the on-ground environment using different mediums or instruments of teaching delivery. For example, in the traditional classroom students complete their exams using a computer, the paper and pencil format, and/or through oral examinations. Online faculty members can use the same techniques with online mediums both asynchronously and synchronously (in real time) using proctored formats when needed. Computerized cameras and teleconferencing technology has made the impossible possible and yesterday’s vision into today’s reality for online students and faculty.

For effective learning of students, online faculty members should be involved in class interactions each week (four-five days) and respond to questions within 48 hours since the new generation of learners are being conditioned to expect feedback instantly through the widespread use of “instant messaging” software. If one is not able to adhere to such simple guidelines by providing feedback to students in a timely manner due to other responsibilities, then one should not teach in the online modality. Online classes should achieve the same outcome as on-ground courses using online modality. Often students will spend more time on online courses than they do at the on-ground courses because there is no face-to-face interaction. Generally speaking, online courses have more assignments submitted than on-ground courses. This also means more work for the faculty which implies that enrollment in each section of the course should be limited based on the faculty’s overall course load and/or compensation. Online education is and should be convenient (as is the case with evening and weekend programs) but should not be lenient with its academic rigor. The following are some general guidelines and best practices that could be included in the orientation and training of online educators.

1. All assignments should be posted with clear directions, expectations and due dates. The evaluation methodology should be mentioned to students as well.
2. Post a comprehensive lecturette each week for students the day before the week starts. The lectures should be related to the assigned readings and the faculty member's personal experiences and thoughts about the material. The lecturettes should not just summarize the assigned textbook and article readings but it should offer more examples and personal experience with the literature. Faculty members may supplement weekly lecturettes with PowerPoint slides and links to relevant online articles, websites and newsgroups. One should make sure students know that they are to read their assigned textbook reading since lecturettes are supplementary material to reinforce and/or enhance their learning.
3. Discussion Board should be monitored every other day (if not every day) and used by the faculty member in all classes. Faculty members should post and respond to students' postings regularly to monitor learning, guide interactions toward course objectives, show presence, and to encourage effective participation. Furthermore, faculty members should post appropriate cases and topics to reinforce the weekly assignments and objectives when needed. One should be involved and post something related to the weekly objectives of the class at least three to five days each week to raise student contributions, interest in the content and learning. One can post relevant weekly questions, dilemmas, problems, cases, etc. to achieve the stated objectives of the course and to involve students in the interaction each week.
4. Holding synchronized chat sessions is a good idea to either clarify content or to test everyone's comprehension of material on a real time basis. For example, Huizenga School encourages that each online faculty hold several chat sessions during the term with students and require students to attend at least two of the assigned chat sessions by awarding points (which can be a small portion of the participation grade). Attendance to two chat sessions should be mandatory; while, attendance to the remaining chat sessions should be encouraged by linking them to awarding of weekly participation points. Chat sessions can be about one hour and they should be conducted at reasonable times to accommodate working adults living in different parts of the world. Determine chat session times and dates during the first week of class to accommodate as many of the students' schedules as possible. Chat sessions should not be confused with online office hours since effective chat sessions can be used to evaluate students' comprehension of the material by asking them direct questions related to the content of each week's objectives. Although, having online office hours is not a bad idea to answer any questions for students. *Online office* hours often range from 10-15 minutes at a specified time each week (or day) in case students have questions about course content, assignments, or team activities.
5. Presence of the faculty and requesting relevant contributions from students to specific assignments (discussion questions, case studies, article summaries, debates, etc.) each week will increase participation, interaction, student reflection, the quality of learning in each class, and the program effectiveness. Again, the faculty member should be involved with the students each week in the online class several days each week to facilitate the learning objectives.
6. Quality feedback for all assignments should be provided to students within one week of original assignment due date (or submission), if not earlier. Timely and quality feedback is critical to student learning and progressive improvement.
7. Participation feedback/grade should be given each week (if grades are awarded on a weekly basis) or at mid-term and final week (if participation points are cumulative). If student grades are low because of lack of participation in the online classroom and nothing was communicated to them in a timely manner then they would not be aware that they needed to improve. So, proper feedback in a timely manner must be provided to students starting at the end of week one of the course!
8. Individual email correspondence should be reserved for personal student issues and course feedback. All other course related discussions should be conducted in the course newsgroup and/or course bulletin board.
9. Deadlines and submission policies must be consistently applied and enforced with all students. All assignments must be received by the course deadline and grades should be awarded appropriately. Offering students extended time to complete assignments without a good reason (exceptional circumstances) is not a good practice in the online world either. Students need to discipline themselves to complete their work on time. Also, providing extra credit opportunities for students may not be a good practice as it conditions some of them to not worry about completing quality assignments in a structured manner which is very important for all students, especially in the online environment.

Timely and constructive feedback benefits the faculty, students and the institution itself; in that regard, a peer review can be one of the most positive features of the online teaching experience. As such, an important aspect of online education is the effective evaluation and feedback process that is ongoing for both students and faculty members. Faculty members, especially those who are just starting to teach online, need quality feedback in order for them to improve their facilitation skills. The review program should be designed to provide online faculty members with personalized feedback, based on performance, as observed by experienced online faculty leaders/reviewers. The feedback should be designed to help faculty members in their continued development and to enhance their online skills in order to provide the finest educational experience for students.

## **SUMMARY**

Adult education using blended pedagogies and cyberspace technology has achieved a special market by offering quality educational programs both nationally and internationally at times convenient to students. Through professional faculty members committed to student learning and their ability to combine academic theory with successful practical tools as well as their ability to effectively adjust to the changing educational needs of working professionals, online education offers great value to students and the community at large. As such many schools have enjoyed increased online enrollment over the past five years due to their quality, convenience, and satisfied stakeholders completing their courses in cyberspace. Such increases in enrollment demand more skilled online faculty members to effectively satisfy the needs of online students. Therefore, formal training and orientation programs that fully prepare and develop prospective online faculty members are becoming the norm.

Administrators and educators are keenly attuned to the complicated demands placed on today's faculty members, employees, managers, and leaders. Administrators, in conjunction with faculty members, must integrate fair and consistent policies with regard to minimum standards and professional development guidelines for all educators who wish to integrate cyberspace technology to enhance student learning. Furthermore, equitable compensation strategies must be established for online educators since they do quality work and must constantly stay abreast of new technologies needed to keep up with the cyberspace generation of students. Thanks to the dedication of both administrators and faculty members, online students experience some of the most exciting, enriching course work available anywhere in education today...courses designed to challenge critical thinking skills... to widen perspectives on traditional business practices, and to foster an entrepreneurial spirit due to the unique skills of course facilitators and their technical coordinators who can reside anywhere in the world while teaching courses online.

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#### NOTES