Leadership through Instructional Design

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Abstract

This paper presents an Academic Program Review process undertaken to increase program effectiveness and improve learner experiences in an online Master of Science Instructional Design (MSID) program. Implementing a competency based education using a tiered approach not only moved students along the continuum of learning ID knowledge and skills to establish professional knowledge in designing and developing instructional solutions, but with professional leadership skills to evaluate and manage change with instructional design solutions.

Key Words: Program self- assessment; Instructional Design; Leadership; Change; Quality Measures

In higher education, graduate programs are built around notions from academics about what students need to know. As graduate programs are about professional preparation, questions often being pursued are about what professional standards relate to the discipline must learners possess? What knowledge, skills, and abilities are consistently being sought by employers? What forces are defining newer competencies and standards? Competencies and standards define what learners should know and be able to do in a professional arena. They provide guidance for curricular planning, strategic instructional initiatives and assessment at both course level as well at the program level. Learning outcomes derived from professional standards relate to workforce needs and student success in jobs.

Leadership

Leaders in all organizations facilitate change, guide the development and implementation of organizational goals, and are held accountable for results. Literature supports multiple types of leadership, including distributive, hierarchal, transformational, transactional, and autocratic or bureaucratic leadership (Barsh & Lavoie, 2014; Hewertson, 2015; Maxwell, 2013). Leadership is a process of influencing how others think or act and the consequences of those results. Leaders must delegate, make decisions and guide other's practice in those skills. Ethics of leadership define the interactions between leaders and those they influence (Aefsky, 2016).

Cohen (2005) outlined a three step process for leading organizational change.
Creating a climate for change, engaging and enabling the whole organization, and implementing and sustaining change offers a framework for leaders to include all stakeholders on behalf on improving student achievement and increasing positive learning outcomes.

Leaders facilitate the evaluation of programs in order to create ownership in a process of change or potential change and validation of work. One example of a program evaluation is described below.

Academic Program Review (APR)

Academic program review is the process adopted by institutions and programs for program improvement and to determine the implications of adopted curricular processes. The process serves to assure program quality. In many institutions these processes are now part of an expected process of continuous improvement for the programs and regional accreditation.

Objectives of the APR

Conrad and Wilson (1985) identified four models utilized by institutions for conducting academic program reviews: decision-making model, which emphasize accountability and decisions related to resources or program continuation; goal-based model, which compares data from the review process to existing program goals, objectives, and standards; responsive model, which focuses on concerns of stakeholders; and the connoisseurship model, which used expert judgments for program review. At this institution, the model adopted for the academic program review is the goal-based model (Conrad and Wilson, 1985). The goal of the APR process was to compare information gathered from review to revise program goals, and the effectiveness of the adopted standards in order to increase program effectiveness, improve learner experiences, improve marketability, and improve instructional design skills for learners in an online Master of Science Instructional Design (MSID) program at a four-year institution which used competencies derived from professional standards as the overarching model.

Standards Based Program Design

The standards used for structuring the Masters in Instructional Design program are the International Board of Standards for Training, Performance and Instruction (IBSTPI), Association for Education Communication and Technology (AECT) and Teacher Leadership Model Standards (TLMS). The ideas was to utilize competencies that clearly defined, measurable, and have maximum durability for program continuity and have value for students.

APR Self-Study

Most academic institutions use self-study as an objective, comprehensive evaluation of their academic programs during an accreditation process. The elements that would be chosen for evaluation depend on the purpose of data collection. Whether for accreditation or for cyclical reviews of programs, most self-studies choose framework depending on the goals of the institution. For the self-study of the MSID program, the evaluations elements chosen were: institute's mission and goals, curricular plans, assessment of learning outcomes, and outputs faculty productivity and credentials, number of program faculty, future plans, information gathered from stakeholders: current students, alumni and faculty, and an external reviewer. While the APR process was conducted by the program administrator, a partnership with the Office of Institutional Research provided the framework for the study. The timeline for the study was the duration of the academic year of 2014-2015.

Grounded in Theory

The learning theory that guided this program evaluation project consisted of a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. The choice of this theory was founded on the belief that graduate students learn best when they are in authentic learning environments where they are engaged in relevant tasks that incorporate their prior learning experiences and enable them to construct meaning.

Methodology

A needs assessment at this four year institution was conducted with faculty and students. The gap analysis data received from faculty input and student feedback showed that there was a need to (1) increase student knowledge of ID processes, (2) improve acquisition of technical skills for program graduates, (3) improve graduates' ability to utilize learning theory for various learner constituencies, (4) increase their knowledge of project management principles, and (5) improve communication skills during project design and development.

The Case Study Approach commenced with Needs Assessment (founded on student and instructor feedback) and utilized the Instructional Design process to move to an Instructional Systems Approach for program redesign. Due to the recent emphasis in the United States on standards-based education, the International Board of Standards for Training, Performance and Instruction (IBSTPI) standards, the AECT standards, and the Teacher Leader standards were chosen as the main guide for program development.

The IBSTPI standards provided the overall guidance for conceptualizing program design. The AECT and Teacher Leader standards provided benchmarks in the areas of educational technology. The cross walk of these three sets of standards provided for strong degree of flexibility to establish a program that ensured that graduates had essential instructional design knowledge and the skills.

Results

As a result of implementing a competency based education for program design a tiered approach was utilized to move students along the continuum of learning ID knowledge base and skills. Students not only enhanced their ID knowledge base and skills as they moved from establishing professional knowledge in ID toward learning to design and develop instructional solutions, and end the program with an advanced repertoire of ID related competencies and professional leadership skills to manage change with instructional design solutions.

While focus on the IBSTPI standards gave the program a holistic framework, the AECT and the TLM standards provided the basis for newly developed courses on technology tools and innovative ID frameworks for the design of instruction. Additionally, the need for knowledge of project management principles was identified from the IBSTPI, Evaluation and Management strand to assist students manage projects with learners from different learner constituencies.

Another need was to deepen the application of principles of andragogy, which was added on to the course on application of the learning theory for instructional designers. A final gap area that the standards help meet was communication - relationships that IDs build with subject matter experts and other stakeholders.

The impact of theory and research on developing ID skills as well as the need for communication skills is emphasized in IBSTPI, Professional Foundations, which provided the foundations to highlight the importance of active listening, effective communication, and successful collaboration during the design and development phase. Competency based educational practices allowed for the seamless integration of ID standards with ID knowledge and skill to provide for an effective program in instructional design.

Summary

The changes that were ultimately implemented were determined collaboratively by the teaching faculty within the program. A secondary goal was to build community among the faculty so that they could in turn model collaboration and team building for learners. The changes resulting from the APR created a standards-based, nationally supported, instructional design program that is innovative, grounded in theory and implemented in practice for educators, corporate and military practitioners.

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