PROMOTING CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN ONLINE TEACHING: THE META MODEL

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ABSTRACT

Experienced e-learning faculty members share strategies for implementing a comprehensive postsecondary faculty development program essential to continuous improvement of instructional skills. The high-impact META Model, centered around Mentoring, Engagement, Technology, and Assessment, promotes information sharing and content creation, and fosters collaboration among a fifty-member faculty team that is geographically dispersed and teaching one hundred percent online. Among its goals are to increase student satisfaction, promote instructional quality and continuous improvement, and motivate faculty. Model components include customized individual mentoring, an emphasis on continuous professional engagement and development, the integration of technologies to reinforce ongoing communication and interaction, and ongoing assessment measures using self, peer, and student evaluations to guide the development of exemplary practices.

KEYWORDS

Faculty development, online learning, mentoring, assessment, technology integration

I. INTRODUCTION

The development and implementation of the comprehensive faculty development program for online instructors evolved from the need to design, implement, and update an engaging training program to enable self and peer assessment and reinforce continuous instructional quality improvement. The META Model ("Model") is developed and implemented with faculty members teaching within one undergraduate academic program at Capella University, a fully online higher education provider of bachelors, masters, and doctorate programs. The goals of the program include:

1. Promoting collegiality and affiliation within a decentralized organization that includes geographically dispersed faculty members employed on both a full-time and part-time basis.
2. Creating a community of practice for ongoing dialogue and the exploration of participatory pedagogies and instructional methods.
3. Reinforcing self-assessment and continuous quality improvement in teaching by promoting ongoing communication that results in collective problem solving and decision-making.
4. Coordinating the organized distribution of information, processes and procedures to promote instructional consistency and student persistence.
5. Facilitating continuous professional development related to teaching practice.
6. Promoting ongoing capacity building to facilitate faculty members' adoption of technologies for use in their online classes.
7. Distributing information related to organizational innovations, policies, and mandates, thus maximizing institutional effectiveness and reinforcing quality.
8. Reinforcing curricular standards and compliance with Quality Matters criteria [1].

9. Establishing benchmarks for continued assessment and improvement.
10. Establishing a foundation for scaling current and developing new program components.

II. DEVELOPING HIGH-PERFORMING FACULTY MEMBERS

Faculty development programs provided to postsecondary instructors are widely accepted as important to sustaining instructional quality so as to result in increased levels of engagement and innovative practice [2, 3]. A visible demonstration of an institution's investment in sustaining quality teaching to foster rigorous learning, such programs strengthen both effectiveness and productivity. They further assist institutions to sustain the means to continuously innovate, for example, integrating emerging technologies in curricula and instruction [4, 5]. In particular, peer feedback in the form of mentoring and instructional consultation has substantial impact in shaping instructional practice and technology use among colleagues [6]. Recipients of mentoring are particularly able to strengthen instructional skills fostered in a supportive, collegial, and professional environment [7]. Research indicates that high quality mentoring programs are closely linked to increased satisfaction with teaching practices, and therefore, essential to retaining highly skilled faculty members within academic programs and institutions [8]; this appears particularly relevant among those teaching cadres instructing online courses [9]. The program in which the META Model is applied reinforces such research results as the majority of faculty members routinely report a high level of engagement with colleagues, students and the curriculum that they specifically accredit to the amount and quality of development opportunities provided. Such satisfaction is concretely demonstrated in instructors' longevity within the Program; for example, many faculty members have taught in the program for more than three years, and several have taught in excess of six years.

Significant research has been authored documenting training and technical assistance programming designed to assist faculty members in developing curricula for online instruction. For example, numerous authors, notably Diaz, Garret, Kinley, Moore, Schwartz, and Kohrman [2], Irani [10], McQuiggan [11], Merisotis and Phipps [12], Palloff and Pratt [13], Pankowski [3], and Taylor and McQuiggan [14] provide exhaustive publications focused on the requisite components characteristic of faculty development programs offered through a centralized organizational structure. Additionally, consortia models, such as the Higher Education Academy in the United Kingdom [15] or the Sloan Consortium in the United States [16] are stellar examples of centralized programming offered beyond the borders of single organizations to serve and support a broad consumer base in developing and sustaining standards for excellence. Typical of institutional and consortia models, programming and associated training events and activities are provided on behalf of individual institutions and made available across disciplinary boundaries, which enables a rich exchange based on the transference of both traditional and innovative instructional approaches to web-based classrooms.

However, the model described in this paper is unique in that it represents a comprehensive yet decentralized approach to training development. That is, it is not distributed throughout the institution, but rather designed for utilization by faculty members instructing in one specific academic program, the curricula of which serve as a gateway to all undergraduate majors. As such, the department-specific model is designed to respond to the needs of fifty instructors that teach a student population possessing a wide range of attributes and skill levels. While centralized programs offer faculty development initiatives that focus on augmenting skills, abilities, and knowledge that are generally applicable to web-based learning, the META model focuses beyond generalities to center on furthering best practices that assure both learner success and faculty satisfaction within a specific context. Participation in this department-specific model is required for the teaching faculty, and, as such, is integrated within both student course assessment and instructor performance evaluation processes. Certainly, there are common content areas and instructional approaches inherent to both consortia, institutional, and departmental models such as the META Model in as much as all of the prototypes focuses on the development of best practices based in research and theory. However, these models can be differentiated in terms of their intent and application, as well as related to the faculty populations engaged and the student audiences targeted. For example, as research indicates, while such programs are essential to providing guidance, support, and advisement to campus-based faculty members, an argument may be made that they are particularly critical in

consistently engaging and training a large geographically dispersed faculty teaching one hundred percent online such as is the population utilizing the META Model. The departmentally centered Model offers a distributed, extended range of ongoing activities that are specifically customized to address program attributes related to curricula, pedagogies, and student populations. The faculty development program is responsive to the needs of both students and faculty members, focusing upon two specific goals. The first goal emphasizes strengthening student success, satisfaction, access, and persistence through instructional quality; the second promotes motivating and challenging faculty members to continuously shape their teaching skills by integrating best practices, current research, and emerging technologies into instruction.
While excellent teachers may innately understand ways to engage and excite student audiences in ways that further knowledge and skill-building, formalized faculty development programming can be essential to ensuring such talent is channeled in ways to meet curricular goals, student needs, and institutional requirements [17]. Through the use of the META Model a range of components combine to engage, motivate, and challenge faculty members as they teach undergraduate students to sharpen critical academic skills. For example, academic skills such as critical thinking, research and writing, and online learning are of focus throughout the curricula. As such, the training program includes elements designed to engage instructors on both individual and collective levels in order to promote such learning outcomes. The range of means utilized to facilitate a high level of interaction, communication, and information sharing provides variety and enables personalization, guarding against reliance on a single approach so as to respond to a variety of individual goals and needs. While some of the components are designed for customization with individual teachers (for example, just-in-time webinars may be viewed asynchronously as the faculty member judges them necessary), others (such as customized peer mentoring) are offered according to individual needs and requests. Assessment efforts occur on an ongoing basis and are integrated throughout all aspects of programming. As the chief academic officer for the department, the departmental chair employs strategic collaboration with fulltime faculty members as they jointly ensure quality control through the provision of critical oversight and training for faculty members. As the figure below illustrates, the META Model includes four distinct elements: 1) mentoring, 2) engagement, 3) technology integration, and, 4) assessment.

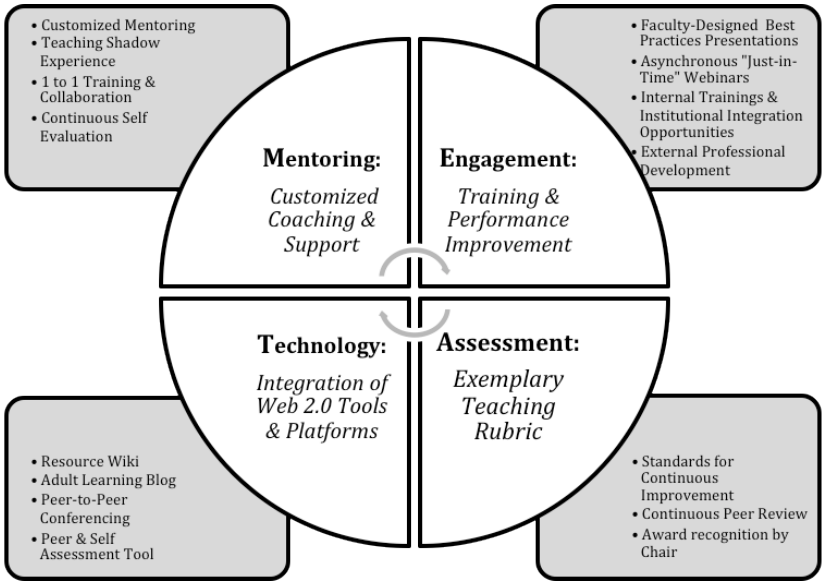

Figure 1: The META Model for Developing a High Performing Online Faculty, Dittmar, E. & McCracken, H., 2012

III. FOSTERING EXCELLENCE THROUGH MENTORING

Individual mentoring in the form of ongoing coaching is provided to instructors identified as needing assistance refining their teaching practices, all new instructors, as well as to veteran faculty members

upon their request. To accomplish such coaching a "multiple mentoring network" model is utilized in which senior faculty members are paired with both fulltime and part-time instructors to provide personal consultation related to pedagogical advisement, curricular implementation, students support, and policy and procedural information [4, 18]. Such a model resists a hierarchical approach, as mentors are rotated among the instructor population to capitalize on respective strengths and abilities to appropriately match expertise with changing needs. Coaching needs are identified as the result of mentors' ongoing interaction with instructors as they review teaching their assigned courses and corresponding data analytics reflecting student satisfaction and teaching performance. The subsequent provision of detailed feedback related to instructional approaches, classroom presence, grading and assessment methods, and, the application of technologies to facilitate learning and teaching is individualized according to observed strengths and needs as measured against an exemplary practices rubric. The exemplary practices rubric criteria focus on the assessment of teachers' demonstrated capacities for instructional leadership, teaching presence and communications, technology integration, continued professional education, and class administration and management, and are considered within the context of key analytics extracted from student evaluations of instruction and are correlated with course completion rates. For additional information about the exemplary practices rubric, see Appendix 1. Based on this extensive compilation of information, mentors customize coaching interventions designed to address the needs and requests of individual faculty members. Such a format enables a supportive environment in which instructors are able to build and refine specific skill areas, experiment with new approaches and technologies, and affirm knowledge related to institutional policy and procedure, as well as create professional networks and communities of practice for ongoing advisement.

Mentors are appointed through consultation with the departmental chair on the basis of consistent evidence of exemplary skills and abilities in their instructional practices, documented student learning outcomes, and technology use. This approach ensures that senior faculty members who assume the responsibilities of mentors are adequately prepared for coaching roles to model best practices for instructors with whom they work. Mentors collaborate with instructors as they reference a curriculum specific "course review worksheet", a formative assessment instrument that includes key instructional elements identified as critical to successful teaching. Together, the mentor and instructor review the instructor's performance, and collaborate regarding instructional goals and needs, for example, responding to questions and requests for additional information and assistance. This approach not only provides needed resources, but also assists participants to further identify areas of unmet need. Moreover, it promotes strengthened collegiality among departmental faculty members as well as reinforces affiliation with the larger institution.

Anecdotal information as well as data collected through ongoing performance reviews indicates the most requested areas for coaching assistance include: facilitating interactive discussions and maintaining a teaching presence; providing substantive feedback and meaningful assessment of student assignments; integrating emerging technologies into instructional practice; maintaining awareness of key institutional policies and mandates that impact instruction; identifying resources that support student learning; and, utilizing data analytics to strengthen approaches and methods.

IV. FURTHERING ENGAGEMENT

Participation in ongoing professional development activities and events is essential to the continuous development of instructional skills. It is important to mobilize robust web-based applications such as Skype™ or Adobe Connect™ to promote dynamic communications of the quality that promote authentic collaborations among a large faculty. The use of such technologies is particularly critical to facilitating intercultural communications among a diverse workforce such as they are integrated through the comprehensive META Model [19]. To disseminate information across the geographically dispersed faculty in a manner that enables interactions among instructors who possess a range of learning styles, communication patterns, and technology skills, ongoing training sessions and meetings are conducted through the combined use of a virtual conferencing application, VoIP (voice over Internet protocol) audio and video use, text, and chat messaging functions (such as Skype™). Faculty members easily use such

applications to enable not only an increased capacity for collaboration, but also the generation of peer collegiality and a sustained affiliation with the larger institution. These types of applications permit the facilitation of just-in-time meetings and asynchronous training events as well as the completion of collaborative projects that are truly representative of the diverse faculty's collective intelligence, education, training, and experience.

A wide range of topic-specific training webinars, or web-based seminars, centered on trends, information, methodologies, and best practices are developed and delivered to program faculty members by their colleagues on an ongoing basis. While such activities compliment institution-wide events, they specifically focus on the unique requirements of the department's students and faculty members. A Webinar Series 1.0 has been developed and is facilitated by the department chair in collaboration with those senior faculty members serving as mentors, and, based on its successful outcome, a Series 2.0 is currently in development. The integration of technologies to improve teaching and learning significantly assists faculty members to deliver high-quality teaching experiences specifically occurring in web-based learning environments. Such virtual presentations offer opportunities to hear and see evolving best practices in "real time". Archived audio and video recordings ensure that webinar content is available to instructors asynchronously on demand for purposes of retraining.

The content of Webinar Series 1.0 is continually reshaped to be responsive to anecdotal faculty feedback as well as student performance indicators. The result is ongoing improvement to the comprehensive six-part training series focused on communication strategies that motivate online students to develop specific academic competencies that maximize their potential for achievement. Such achievements are reflected by increased engagement and persistence as evidenced through course completion rates, and resultant strong end-of-course evaluations of instruction. The training series is centered around communication strategies for providing ongoing guidance that consists of substantial feedback on written assignments as well as related to course discussions, and includes such topics as: 1) utilizing pedagogical approaches to facilitate student connections with curricula, instructors, and peers; 2) guiding the use and application of a critical thinking process; 3) advancing research and writing skills, 4) strengthening substantive interaction in virtual discussions, 5) linking theoretical understanding with practical application of knowledge and skills; and, 6) assisting students to acquire abilities in self-assessment. A secondary goal of the training program is to communicate critical procedural information related to policy implementation, instructional quality, and resource utilization impacting teaching and learning. Substantive feedback strategies demonstrated during Series 1.0 promote student persistence in so far as they rely heavily on the use of experientially based examples and case studies generated from current online courses and related archives to demonstrate and emphasize best practices. By providing tools to assist the facilitation of high quality communications, faculty members are both challenged and inspired to maximize student success and motivated to continue to develop and sustain critical teaching skills based on individual and collective feedback. Series 1.0 represents a pedagogical innovation that produces high-performing faculty members within a student-centered instructional context. Through their participation in the training series, faculty members gain ideas for the continued development and refinement of practices, expanding their individual and collective skill repertoires as well as assuring compliance with departmental, university, and industry standards.

In addition to on-demand and synchronous training events, engagement is fostered through continuous support for faculty members' involvement in service activities to the program and larger institution for participation on committees (for example, serving on an institutional research board or a curricular planning and development committee). Such participation both ensures increased affiliation with the university as well as contributes to the development of individual instructors' professional experiences. Moreover, faculty members are encouraged to continue to build skills as well as resource networks through participation in professional organization- and association-based activities such as conferences, to further reinforce the development of skills, abilities, and knowledge about evolving practices and resources. Finally, they are encouraged to contribute to scholarship and research activities that contribute to both university capacity as well as their larger discipline affiliations.

V. USING EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Diaz et al., emphasize the importance of establishing a diverse series of applications to facilitate faculty development activities from which technologies can be selected based on user strengths, abilities, and preferences [2]. The use of Web 2.0 tools such as blogs, wikis, peer-to-peer media sharing platforms, and folksonomy tagging promotes knowledge sharing and collaboration among users [19]. Such emerging technologies enable participation to occur at a speed never before utilized in facilitating teaching and training efforts [20]. These technologies impact not only workforce economies, but also the very culture of organizations in so far as they promote communications and collaboration in ways previously unavailable [21]. Given that the broad-based goals for the training of faculty members require mechanisms to support not only information sharing through continuous communication but also the construction of new knowledge through ongoing facilitation, a range of Web 2.0 applications is particularly well-suited for integration with the META Model. Such applications provide mechanisms for requisite collaboration and interaction, particularly important when training a diverse and distributed faculty, common among online teaching teams. For example, tools such as wikis and blogs provide just-in-time information sharing and distribution. Additionally, a variety of Web 2.0 technologies afford the capacity to both promote knowledge generation and archive information. An important benefit to their use is that they are openly available at no or low cost to participants and generally can be implemented with a minimum of training. As such, their use enables innovation on both individual and collective levels, allowing creativity as well as personalization.

For example, a private wiki is designed to function as the informational hub around which teaching techniques and instructional strategies are provided, shared, and archived, assisting faculty members to efficiently manage time and schedules. The usefulness of a wiki as a mentoring tool is based on its flexibility and efficiency [22]. The capacity for negotiation is a critical characteristic of the wiki, which typically focuses on the community's purpose as opposed to individual goals, a particularly important aspect to furthering collegiality, collaboration, and affiliation [23]. A key concept driving the development of wikis is the management and sharing of data on "an epic scale" [24]; this function is particularly critical to the nature of the department's wiki in so far as it is an expansive resource upon which faculty members can confidently rely. The organized collection of information, documentation, and data decreases the administrative aspects of online instruction by sharing helpful elements such as checklists, policies, and procedures that assure thoroughness and consistency. In this way, the wiki assures that faculty members can focus exclusively on cultivating great teaching and providing learner guidance. In addition to text-based resources, it includes audio and video sources in an effort to promote the further adoption of technologies by users. Further, the resource wiki promotes user-generated content, contributing to a continually evolving community of professional practice representing the collective intelligence of the high-performing faculty team. The rich-featured wiki is a platform for facilitating the sharing of pedagogical methods, as well as providing ongoing mentoring and networking, empowering collaboration and assuring a uniquely capable department.

As an adjunct to the resource wiki, a professional development blog provides more general information related to current issues and pedagogical trends, events and activities, resources, and relevant publishing and research opportunities related to adult learning and postsecondary teaching. Blogs are increasingly utilized in education due to their ability to provide information on an immediate and continuous basis; in fact, one of the decisive strengths of the blog is its capacity to generate new intelligence and link to supplemental resources [25]. In educational environments such as the one in which this blog is introduced, its use enables the creation of new knowledge based on the continuous exposure to and exchange of information, opinions, experiences, events, facts, data, and images. The conversational format of the blog enables participants to contribute ideas, resources, and experiences about key news, events, and trends; this contributes both to the evolution of the blog itself as well as to the development of an informal community of practice based in teaching and learning. Because the purpose of the blog is to facilitate and motivate involvement in professional development activities and practice-based exchange, it is integrated into departmental training and mentoring efforts to enable a single access point for faculty

members seeking and utilizing practice-based resources. This aspect of the blog enables a dynamic context in which to engage colleagues, share information, generate debate, and collectively problem-solve.

VI. ASSESSING AND SUSTAINING PERFORMANCE

Online teaching requires attention to numerous intricacies that reinforce sustained consistency in the student experience both during academic terms as well as between student cohorts. This is particularly critical under conditions that include instruction by a decentralized, diverse, and expansive cadre of faculty members possessing divergent levels of mastery. Due to the level of complexity required in using the Internet to provide instruction, an essential aspect of the faculty development program is incorporating strong assessment practices to ensure learning outcomes are continuously assessed and reinforced according to both institutional data analytics, as well as discipline-specific trends in order to foster sustained, targeted improvement [26]. Equally important is the integration of a collaborative approach to both formative assessment and summative evaluation that enables the level of dialogue necessary for candid discussions of the instructional environment and teaching performance [4].

The META Model integrates three specific approaches to assessing and documenting progressive mastery related to instructional skills and technology use. For example, performance review and evaluation processes are migrated to on-demand self-service human resources applications available through the institution's web-based Intranet that feature document and file sharing, asynchronous collaboration and viewing, and universal permission-based availability. This has proven particularly effective when documenting developmental stages of mastery among online faculty [27]. To supplement this annual process, the META Model promotes the voluntary use of the term-based course review worksheet that identifies critical instructional tasks and methods correlated to performance standards. As previously noted, this approach provides a formative venue for self-assessment for faculty members during the mentoring process to record impressions of progress and performance from one academic term to the next. Instructors in collaboration with their mentors maintain the course review sheets weekly during academic terms. As a result, the peer evaluation that results from the mentoring process facilitates dialogue and collaboration to ensure the best teaching practices are identified and recognized. The tool itself facilitates a dynamic process in so far as it is constantly changing to respond to instructor needs, administrative requests, discipline-based best practices, and curricular changes. At the conclusion of each academic term the assessment process culminates with summative reviews facilitated by the departmental chair with each instructor to review key data analytics related to performance, mentoring reports, and student evaluations; in combination, these are correlated with the peer and self-assessment observations.

In addition to the self-evaluation process, a rubric measuring attributes, abilities, and knowledge at an exemplary status guides continued skill development as well as serves as a mechanism for the acknowledgement of high-performing faculty members. The department chair facilitates recognition of exemplary teaching status by reviewing a random sample of each instructor's archived courses, and provides evaluative feedback that corresponds to program benchmarks and rubric standards. The achievement of exemplary status for individual faculty members is also noted in personnel files and celebrated by university leadership. This combination of formative assessment processes contributes to semi-annual performance review processes. Assessment activities culminate in an annual recognition ceremony in which a range of achievements is acknowledged and celebrated.

VII. EVALUATING OUTCOMES

The success of the META Model is apparent in the review of weekly, term-based, and annual instructional performance analytics as correlated to documented learning and teaching outcomes. Further, the objectives, activities, and applications utilized in the Model correspond to data analytics reflecting performance variables such as time-on-task, presence, interaction levels, communication attributes, and student learning assessment measures. These metrics are collected and analyzed for each individual instructor, and are available to all stakeholders, including instructors, as well as mentors and the

university's leaders in real-time through the use of web-based dashboards accessible through an institutional faculty portal. The approaches and content of the Model are closely connected to specific evaluation criteria utilized in term-based end-of-course-evaluations (EOCE). As illustrative of its success, the consistent implementation of the Model has most recently resulted in the achievement of above-average instructor metrics related to student success and instructional satisfaction. For example, one of the criteria included in the EOCE requests that students respond to the statement,"I am satisfied with the overall quality of the instructor". On a five-point Likert scale of, "1" representing "strongly disagree" to "5" representing "strongly agree", the combined fifty-five faculty member cohort consistently achieves an impressive cumulative average metric of 4.68 out of 5 points.

As a second measure, the systematic use of the "Exemplary Faculty Rubric" enables individual faculty members and the administrative leadership to evaluate performance according to 13 discreet variables, the scope of which includes planning and implementing active learning techniques, facilitating engagement and collaboration, promoting student success through ongoing assessment, utilizing technologies in goal-directed ways, implementing institutional policies and procedures, and participating in ongoing professional development activities. The use of the rubric has resulted in an achievement of exemplary status by 10 out of 55 faculty members, or 18 percent of the faculty in the most recent academic term. Upon examination, the remaining 41 faculty members received ratings within a small percentage of achieving exemplary status, and as a result of the evaluation process they are able to clearly identify and target areas for improvement through continued participation in Model program components. Recognizing the importance of self-assessment to validating a comprehensive evaluation strategy, as a third measure faculty members are asked to assess their own performances within the context of reflecting on their teaching experiences and philosophies as well as those of their peers. This is particularly important in identifying specific goals and determining the allocation of resources in order to meet such for ongoing professional development. This level of benchmarking assists both faculty members and the program's management to set realistic program goals that align with both the institution's strategic priorities and resource allocation [4].

VIII. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The ongoing implementation of the META Model continues to be critical to sustaining quality, consistency, and collaboration among a large faculty teaching from locations throughout the United States and beyond. As a whole, it reinforces the importance of maintaining current knowledge of instructional best practices, information regarding relevant policies and procedures, and technological tools to aid in web-based teaching and learning, as well as continuous professional engagement and skill mastery. Its use impacts continued pedagogical development and curricular improvement, and reinforces ongoing professional development to sustain quality, promote innovation, and maintain policy compliance. Moreover, the positive effects of the Model are evidenced by a growing departmental cohesiveness and high degree of organizational affiliation, as well as through increased levels of engagement with both students and colleagues. Finally, the ongoing implementation of the Model consistently results in the achievement of above-average instructor metrics related to student success and teaching performance. In combination, the program components that comprise the comprehensive Model provide the framework for actualizing ongoing performance improvement initiatives, innovative pedagogical practice, and sustained quality.

While the benefits of such a model are many, there have been challenges at various stages of its development and implementation. Such challenges relate to integrating the META Model with administrative processes and instructional goals, for example, 1) generating stakeholder investment related to the potential of the Model to identify unmet needs for critical training and facilitate information distribution; 2) facilitating faculty members' adoption of strategies and technologies for instructional as well as professional development purposes; 3) sustaining a time commitment required to participate in associated programming; and, 4) ensuring all faculty members acquire the technical competence as well as requisite hardware, software, and access to connectivity to implement the Model on an ongoing basis.

The long-term use of the META Model evidences a marked impact on instructional quality, as well as effectiveness in meeting learning outcomes and furthering student engagement. It reinforces the importance of data-driven approaches to curricular development, skill-based training, assessment, and performance improvement strategies. Furthermore, it assists faculty members to connect instructional techniques, curriculum development and implementation strategies with institutional data analytics and student persistence trends with teaching performance. Authors such as Tapscott and Williams discuss the improbability of traditional organizational structures effectively adapting to environments made possible through adoption of and reliance on technologies, particularly in settings that prioritize team collaboration [21]. However, as experienced within the academic department of focus, a large, geographically dispersed workforce continues to experience consistent and substantial success through the creative coupling of a range of techniques in the accomplishment of shared goals and quality standards that defy potential barriers created by physical separation. From peer production and knowledge creation to self-evaluation and performance improvement, the implementation of the multi-functional Model encourages the democratic participation and representation of a diverse team of teaching faculty that is made possible through intentional communication and collaboration.

Expertise is not acquired through the one-dimensional distribution of information, but rather through intentional, well-designed programming that guides the incremental development and sustained application of critical skills. Applying the comprehensive META Model not only aids in the development of professional communities that produce a high performing online teaching faculty, but holds implications for potential impact to the larger field of faculty development and evaluation for those teaching in web-based learning environments. The integration of faculty development programming when combined with administrative and performance improvement structures is increasingly relevant as a model by which to engage, motivate, and challenge faculty members related to technology use, instruction and pedagogical practice, curriculum development, performance evaluation and management, and ongoing professional engagement.

IX. ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Eileen Dittmar, PhD, is currently a Faculty Chair at Capella University, where she teaches and manages online courses and faculty. She was awarded Capella's Distinguished Faculty Award, and twice has been recognized in Who's Who of American Teachers. As a national presenter Dittmar regularly shares ideas and innovations in technology applications for educators. Her expertise includes the development, administration, and leadership of distance education programs. Dittmar has professional experiences encompassing education, business, and information technology. Her research interests include web tools, student success, instructional technologies, curricular design for traditional and web-based learning, workforce education, and academic program development and administration. Dittmar earned a doctorate in Instructional Design for Online Learning at Capella University.

Holly McCracken, MA, is currently a core faculty member at Capella University where she teaches online undergraduate students. Additionally, she is a faculty member with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning's LearningCounts.org Program that emphasizes the assessment of experiential learning. McCracken has taught at the undergraduate and graduate levels, in the areas of experiential learning, adult and postsecondary education, training and performance improvement, online teaching and learning, and liberal and applied studies, and twice has been recognized in Who's Who of American Teachers. Previous professional experiences include the development and administration of distance education programs, grant writing and management, and academic program oversight. McCracken's research interests include adult, experiential and transformative learning, academic leadership, and, outreach and workforce education. She is earning a doctorate in Educational Leadership and Management at Capella University.

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APPENDIX: FACULTY RUBRIC

Faculty Rubric					
OVERVIEW: The rubric is applied while reviewing four to five curriculum units between class sections instructed in two of the most recent teaching quarters. A distinguished rating in each category results in a rating of "Exemplary".					
Instructor Name and Courses Reviewed					
Category	**Criteria Item**	**Non Perfor-mance 0%**	**Basic 70%**	**Profi-cient 85%**	**Distin-guished 100%**
1. Analytics scores from student evaluations 5 point Likert scale: Non-Performance = 4.1 & below; Basic = 4.2-4.4; Proficient = 4.5-4.7; Distinguished = 4.8-5.0					
	Course Quality (most recent two quarters average)				
	Faculty Quality (most recent two quarters average)				
	Category 1 Average				
2. The Instructor plans, designs, and incorporates instructional and communication strategies to encourage active learning, engagement, participation, and collaboration in the online classroom.					
	Demonstrates effective teaching strategies, knowledge, and techniques that actively engage diverse learners: intuition, leadership, problem solving, active discussion and evaluation via feedback private and public. Specifically creates a warm, engaging, and inviting learning environment that promotes learner success with				

	the course competencies.				
	Builds and maintains a community of learners who bring variable skills to the class by creating a relationship of trust, demonstrating effective facilitation skills, establishing consistent and reliable expectations, and supporting and encouraging independence and creativity.				
	Begins each unit with a short, learner-friendly, summary statement indicating a review of the previous lesson and the primary benchmarks that will be covered in the coming week.				
	Category 2 Average				
3. The Instructor provides online leadership in a manner that promotes learner success through regular feedback, prompt response, and clear expectations.					
	Maintains effective classroom communication skills and thorough records of applicable communications with learners.				
	Provides prompt feedback, communicates high expectations, and respects diverse talents and learning styles, including effective feedback about assignments and questions.				
	Tenuously persists toward successful completion of learners, in a consistent and reasonable manner, until they are successful. Includes personalizes feedback demonstrating support and encouragement for progress with the course competencies. Contacts students who are behind or low performing per Program and University guidelines.				
	Category 3 Average				
4. The instructor utilizes technology in a goal-directed manner to engage with learners, propel learners to engage with the content, and spark learner to learner interaction.					
	Effectively uses technology to engage with learners while sparking learner-to-learner interaction.				
	Embraces new technologies to benefit learner success and satisfaction.				
	Creatively uses technology to enhance instructions that assures learners engage with the course content that optimizes learner progress and success.				
	Category 4 Average				

5. The instructor demonstrates commitment with her/his professional disciplines, fields, and/or specializations, through participation in continued professional development activities.					
	Remains current in the profession (discipline, field, or specialization) with ongoing professional development (offered outside of the University) to enhance teaching practices with real-life experiences in the profession.				
	Participates in a range of professional development activities sponsored by the University and/or Program, such as webinars, workshops, research, scholarship, and service to advance current knowledge, skills, and abilities.				
	Category 5 Average				
6. The instructor supports the administrative aspects of instruction accurately and timely.					
	Consistently applies the wiki resources and instructions with appropriate personalization.				
	Consistently completes required communications (i.e. plagiarism issues, at-risk process, tracking, mid-term and final grade reports) accurately and timely.				
	Accurate and timely responses to university-wide activities and communications; such as, learner advising, human resources, ethics training, virtual con calls, and webinars.				
	Category 6 Average				
7. The instructor supports the course content and offers appropriate enhancements that assure learners are highly satisfied with the course.					
	Effectively uses the grading tool and offers appropriate grader comments that assure learner satisfaction with their learning and the course.				
	Consistently posts well-written, appropriate reminders to help learners focus on using the course studies.				
	Thoroughly provides instructor feedback to learners' assignments, discussions, and questions that integrate a connection with the unit objectives and specific course studies.				
	Adds discussion posts that advance the topic while stimulating engagement and learning.				
	Differentiates learner needs and adjusts communications styles related to the various needs.				