Capstone Evaluation Report

CNM FACULTY GUIDE FOR COURSE DESIGN
INTERNSHIP PROJECT: REWRITE CNM'S DISTANCE LEARNING GUIDEBOOK FOR FACULTY

Executive Summary

My internship project is rewriting the *Distance Learning Guidebook for Faculty* at Central New Mexico Community College. The OILS MA program at UNM has prepared me well for this large, complex project, the scope of which will exceed the duration of my Capstone courses. I have created a whole new structure for the new faculty resource guide that is based on a faculty perspective of need-to-know information instead of the policy-driven focus of the former guide. My understanding of how we learn and what motivates us informed the way I structured the content flow; I took a "What do I need to know and why should I care?" perspective.

The new guide is intended to be a living document that can be updated as needed, so it is never actually "completed". My role as primary manager of the project will continue long past the duration of my Capstone project, and potentially for as long as I work at CNM. Evaluation of the product will be an ongoing, iterative process, parallel to the process of creation. Currently, at the time of this evaluation, the guide is an almost-fully fleshed document that is ready to be distributed in a modified, trimmed version (e.g. placeholders for future content cut, etc.). So far, only a select few people have read it in its entirety and provided information for evaluation. Many sections from it have been widely distributed to faculty but tracking response to the information in anything but the most informal and anecdotal way has been prohibitively impractical.

Background

I came to this project during a staff meeting shortly after starting as an instructional consultant at CNM when the head of the department requested volunteers to rewrite and update the *Distance Learning Guidebook for Faculty*. This document is outdated for a few reasons:

1. CNM is switching learning management systems.
2. It contains a lot of outdated information.
3. It needs to be more comprehensive and include more learning theory, Quality Matters, and instructional details.

This project is just one piece in the complex, multi-departmental effort that has been in process for more than a year supporting CNM's migration from the Blackboard Learn learning management system to D2L Brightspace. It has been very exciting being immersed in this intense learning process concurrent with my graduate studies in the OILS program. I ended up not only being heavily involved in creating instructional material for faculty, but I am part of the CNM Student Onboarding Team (SOT), which has given me the

opportunity to create content to help students navigate the new learning management system. This rapidly led to a project that was not only large but was urgent with a fixed deadline. One other SOT member and I were interested in the brainstorm suggestion of creating a scavenger hunt; her goal was to expose students to resources, clubs, and ways to participate in the CNM community and mine was to create a fun and challenging deep-dive introduction to the Brightspace Learning Environment. Despite only the two of use creating content, the project grew to be a full-fledged course with 734 students enrolled.

When I realized that the scavenger hunt was developing into a perfect capstone project, I was slightly and momentarily regretful that I was too far in to switch projects. I had not lost interest in the guide, but I recognized that the scavenger hunt was better suited to the structure of the OILS Capstone internship project than the faculty guidebook, especially for the evaluation phase. So, the scavenger hunt course has become my honorary "second capstone" and I consider myself fortunate to be responsible for creating essential content for instructors as well as learners. These two projects have a fundamental similarity: they focus on targeting learner gaps and targeting key areas that instructors and students need to know to navigate effectively in the new LMS without creating cognitive overload.

Like everything else happening in 2020 and 2021 as of yet, this project has been impacted by COVID-19. No doubt students and faculty alike have wondered *why*, in the middle of a global pandemic when local public schools have been closed for face-to-face learning for nearly a year, are we switching learning management systems *now*? It was just unlucky bad timing—like all the other cool, fun plans people had had for 2020.

Evaluation Objectives

The scope of the evaluation will focus only on the original capstone internship project: the rewriting of the CNM faculty guidebook. The objectives of this evaluation are to determine:

1. The degree of to which the "CNM Faculty Guide for Course Design" fits the expectations of the CNM Online Director who requested the project.
2. The degree of to which the "CNM Faculty Guide for Course Design" is considered a valuable, helpful resource that should be distributed to faculty.

Evaluation Design

My evaluation design loosely follows the qualitative case study evaluation approach, relying on individual input, limited observation, and informal focus group data. Conventional evaluation instruments for data gathering, such as surveys, formal interviews, or intentional focus groups is not possible due to timing and the general context. As noted in the background section, this project is part of a much larger institution-wide effort to rapidly prepare faculty and students for successful navigation within the new learning management system. Were it not for the fact that faculty and students were suddenly thrust into all-online learning the transition to the new LMS would have been quite different and there may have been more opportunity to evaluate learner needs and evaluate the effectiveness of learning material deliverables. As it is, the college is in triage mode focused on survival skills and the CNM Faculty Guide for Course Design is geared toward helping instructors utilize the LMS more effectively to improve the quality of their course design. Expecting

faculty to use the guide and provide feedback at this time is like telling a drowning man to work on his form—he just wants a life preserver.

Data Collection

Nevertheless, I have conducted an evaluation based on recognizing that every bit of input and feedback I receive serves as data for my evaluation. As Russ-Eft states in *Evaluation in Organizations*: "One consideration for choosing data collection methods is the degree of intrusiveness the evaluation can tolerate and the extent to which data already exist within the organization." Because no degree of extra intrusiveness is currently tolerated at CNM, for now, I am limited to purposive sampling consisting of anecdotal and written feedback. Most of this data has come from peers and supervisors within the Distance Learning Department. Beyond that, there is no comprehensive way to track the various components of the guide that have been disseminated amongst CNM faculty. I have an anecdotal ad-hoc collection of data gathered from questions our department is asked, support tickets we have responded to, training we have created, and feedback we have received, but the relationship of this data to elements of the guide is unclear. There is no way to know for certain if the information from the guide was useful to faculty.

Sampling Strategy

There is a wide variety of skill level among the CNM faculty of LMS competency and experience, just as there is a wide of range of CNM faculty experienced in online instruction. The course design guide is meant to address this range of experience and preparedness, but it is too soon to evaluate its effectiveness on a truly representative sample. Purposive Sampling, a form of nonprobability sampling (Russ-Eft and Preskill) is the best choice for evaluating this project at this time. I chose six people, three from within the Distance Learning Department, and three from other schools in the college to provide evaluation data. The three people in the DL department are also my internship mentors. The other three are a Peer Coach (a special grant team consisting of representatives from each school in the college who provide support and guidance in the new LMS to their fellow faculty), a faculty member who is the Presidential Fellow for this phase of the LMS integration, and an English instructor who worked for a time in the DL department. These six people are all experienced in working with a wide range of faculty in addition to being faculty themselves, and their collective experience is a suitable sample for this stage in the project's development.

Analytical Method

The analytical method for evaluating the data is quite straightforward. Although this is strictly a qualitative analysis, the amount of feedback is not too abundant or overwhelming to carefully comb through and address.

Evaluation Instruments

In consideration of my sampling participants, I asked them to read the shared document, make comments, and reply to comments. The document is shared on SharePoint and comments and track changes are the primary evaluation instruments.

Results

One of the challenges is that because a lot of the material is derived from various sources, there are multiple author "voices" and much of the material was written with an imperative tone. Much of my own contributions have this flaw also, as I was trying to maintain the tone of the original document.

The results summary follows:

1. Edit to make the tone ("voice") consistent.
2. Change imperative tone to more gently phrased suggestions showing respect for faculty.
3. Include more detail and provide more links to other resources.

Discussion and Recommendations

1. Work through all the suggestions and make changes accordingly to the 78-page document.
2. Make a new copy and trim out any incomplete or underdeveloped sections to that the document can be made available to faculty as a resource.
3. Continue to develop the working copy of the document using
   a. Resources that staff and faculty throughout CNM have produced
   b. Resources from other sources, like D2L or other institutions
   c. Information about learning theories and best practice—especially Backwards Design and Universal Design
   d. Information about how and why to strive to meet the Quality Matters standards rubric
4. Refine the distinction between what information belongs in the main body of the document and what is best suited to the substantial appendix—which should be a rich resource for finding details about topics that are in the main body.
5. Flesh out all the areas marked only with a placeholder so that the overall scope of the document is more comprehensive.
6. Establish a protocol for document maintenance and continued development so that it continues to grow but can be more collaborative than it currently is.

Limitations

The scope and the timing of this project mean that a traditional and thorough evaluation process is impractical. It is unlikely that we will ever get a summative evaluation, but there is unlikely ever going to be need of one. The learning intervention this guide provides is best suited to an ongoing process of formative evaluation with an increasingly broad range of sampling to provide data.

Another limitation is that although the guide is a resource that will be available to all CNM faculty, it is by no means required, so the self-selected pool of users will be limited to the population most interested in improving their online course content, which may potentially be the same population that already delivers the highest quality online course content at the organization. This means that even if I could include a broader spectrum of the population of CNM faculty, the result would not necessarily be meaningful or helpful because only a self-selected group would be represented in the sample. For this reason, using individuals who are expert at helping a broad range of faculty will provide the most useful data to continue to improve the CNM Faculty Guide for Course Design.