

Diffusion of Innovations: Can Faculty Champions Become a Virtual Lab?

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Abstract: Selected faculty served as change agents with the objective of improving distance education and promoting faculty collaboration and higher engagement. Champions literally became the virtual lab at Fischler School of Education, Nova Southeastern University, and enriched distance learning while generating a positive change in academic culture.

The Title V-B team (hereinafter referred to as the “team”) at the Fischler School of Education (FSE), Nova Southeastern University (NSU) applied Everett Roger’s diffusion of innovations model in creating an effective system for faculty collaboration. This systematic approach allowed the team to synergistically use their limited resources and create an instructional design virtual lab. As a result, to date the team has reported a positive impact on 16 courses (28 sections) and 450 students in less than four months.

The resources initially available to the team were two-fold: human resources, which were very limited, and technology resources, which were more available. Human resources consisted of a project manager, one virtual lab coordinator/developer and one instructional designer. The technology resources available consisted of 16 MAC Book Pro (laptop computers) and instructional design software.

The “Champions” and “Pioneers” became the virtual lab. In order to multiply limited human resources in a synergistic way, the team combined the available technology resources and the help of a selected group of faculty, identified as opinion leaders and change agents. This group of faculty was in turn divided in two teams, called “Pioneers” and “Champions”. “Title V-B Pioneers” were chosen by the Academic Directors at FSE, based on specific desired professional attributes as delineated by the team: they needed to have an ideal balance between technical, andragogical and people skills. Selected Pioneers received training and course media-enrichment services from the team. Subsequently, those Pioneers who had the most expertise working with instructional media and were also self-driven were “promoted” to Champions, and tasked with the responsibility of becoming ambassadors of the project. Champions were granted a MAC Book Pro laptop on loan, as a part of the Virtual Lab Loan System. This laptop was tied to a loan agreement detailing expectations of creating an instructional design “ripple effect” which would in turn promote the “naturally-happening” diffusion of innovation wave, among others.

The initial collaboration between the team, the Champions and other professionals from the Media Production Department was marked by the highly successful “Working Together Workshop”, held on June 29, 2011, in which concurrent training sessions on various software were held. Subsequently, the virtual lab has resulted into different collaborations and training sessions hosted by the instructional design team for faculty; peer-to-peer training among faculty; video production services for faculty; and ongoing faculty support.

Like ripples on a pond, the projected progression of the action plan involves selection of the second wave of Pioneers, who will further contribute to the institutionalization of best practices in distance learning at FSE.