

Support Services for Online Faculty: The Provider and the User Perspectives

Jane E. Brindley, Olaf Zawacki & Judy Roberts

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1. Introduction

In any educational context, the quality of teaching and learning depends primarily on the instructional staff who are responsible for facilitating the learning process. The online environment is no exception as authors such as Salmon note: "Successful and productive online *teaching* is a key feature of positive, scalable and affordable e-learning projects and processes. Regardless of the sophistication of the technology, online learners do *not* wish to do without their human supporters." (2002, p. 1). It is clear that faculty are as crucial to the online learning experience as they are in the classroom. However, it is equally clear that as new media evolve for teaching and learning, faculty roles are changing and becoming increasingly diverse and complex (NEA, 2000). In order for post-secondary institutions to successfully integrate new technologies, high priority must be given to faculty development and support.

Two recent studies have revealed the importance of faculty support in implementing online programs. The Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WCET, 2001), contracted by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) in the United States (US) to identify those elements that are essential for providing high quality online distance education, highlighted the significance of faculty training. The previous year, the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) identified faculty support as a critical standard of quality (2000). Although the importance of faculty support does not appear to be in question, many institutions are still struggling to provide appropriate and effective training, development, and reward opportunities for faculty. According to Bates (1999) "faculty members need much more support and encouragement than has been provided to date for their use of technology for teaching and learning. [...] Teaching with technology requires a high skill level, and this necessitates training not just in technical matters but also in educational practice." (p. 3).

What are the key elements of online faculty support? What organizational structures are needed to provide faculty support for online programs? And how are these services experienced and perceived by the users, i.e. the faculty members? This article seeks to provide some qualitative answers from both sides, the institutional (provider) and the faculty (user) perspective. The three authors are involved in a Master of Distance Education (MDE) program that is entirely delivered via the Internet by two universities: University of Maryland University College (UMUC) and Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg. Based on their experiences, the elements of faculty support services for teaching in an online environment are described from the provider perspective by Olaf Zawacki who provides the interface for Oldenburg MDE faculty to support services; included in his section is an interview with a counterpart at UMUC, Deborah Schroeder. Jane E. Brindley and Judy Roberts, faculty members in the MDE program from

Oldenburg and UMUC respectively, provide personal accounts of their experiences with the support provided by their respective institutions.

The MDE is an unusual program within the UMUC and Oldenburg University context because its faculty as distance educators bring to the program a set of skills that already qualifies them in many aspects of online learning and teaching. Despite this, there are still intensive needs for support by some faculty. This paper discusses that process.

2. Context

2.1. The Program

The Masters in Distance Education program is the result of an international collaboration between University of Maryland University College (UMUC) in the US and Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg in Germany. The MDE has attracted more than 350 students within 2.5 years. MDE students enroll with UMUC and the degree is awarded by UMUC. Oldenburg offers two certificate programs, each comprised of a subset of MDE courses, and currently contributes 6 of the approximately 19 courses. Each of the partner institutions is responsible for managing and teaching these courses. The program benefits from the large scale service infrastructure provided by UMUC, a distance teaching university with over 80,000 students and 60,000 web-enrollments in 2001. Faculty support services are provided by both institutions.

2.2. The Teaching Model

In general, two different approaches to online learning and teaching have been identified in the literature: the "broadcast" model and the collaborative approach. In the "broadcast" (Allen, 2001) or "cmc added-on" (Thorpe, 2001) model, computer-mediated communication (cmc) is used as a new channel for tutoring beside other forms of student support but the educational paradigm remains the same. Similar to earlier generations of distance education, the learning and teaching process is structured by the design of study materials that have been created in advance. In this model, online learning has more an evolutionary than a revolutionary impact on the role of the tutor (Thorpe, 2002, p. 111). In the "collaborative" or "interactive" model, instructors have broader responsibilities than in the broadcast model. They "carry authority to create the detailed course teaching as it progresses over the duration of the course, rather in the way a conventional university lecturer might decide how they were to teach (...). Such instructors must of course be content experts, but they will also need even more skills of learning facilitation than the conventional tutor of a second generation distance education course." (ibid., p. 112).

The teaching model that was chosen for the MDE program (and all other postgraduate courses offered by UMUC) is interactive and collaborative, enriched by both instructor and student experience. Most of the learning activities are focused on problem-solving and other types of meaningful knowledge application. Students are expected to move beyond content mastery to integrate and use their knowledge in real life situations. They work individually or in study groups on projects that they can apply in their work context. Nicholas H. Allen (2001), Provost and Chief Academic Officer of UMUC, talks of an "interactive model" of teaching and learning that is characterized by an emphasis on two-way communication (one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-many), little use of

expensive multimedia technology, extensive use of online asynchronous conferencing, small class sizes (20-30), and a focus on faculty involvement in the learning process. The type of model chosen for online teaching has direct implications for the nature of support required by faculty members.

2.3. The Faculty

One of the MDE program's strengths is that the faculty are international, and have been recruited for their many years of experience in distance education and their particular expertise in a specific area of the program. While there is a small core of full-time faculty at each of the participating institutions, most of the faculty in the MDE program are geographically spread, and like sessionals at a campus-based institution, these part-time or adjunct academics are contracted to teach a course or courses on a semester to semester basis. Most of the part-time faculty are engaged in other work (e.g. teaching, research, management, consulting), including some who are faculty members of other institutions. These part-time faculty work from their usual place of business and/or their home office. As of August 2002, a total number of four full-time and eleven part-time faculty are teaching in the program.

A further unique feature of the MDE program is the visiting expert model. In order to enhance interaction and enrich the content in the virtual classroom, distinguished experts and authors of textbooks are invited to participate in the virtual classrooms of the MDE. Visiting experts are distance education scholars, researchers, and practitioners who facilitate a course module or short-term discussion on their topic of expertise. To date, these experts have included Terry Anderson, Tony Bates, Richard Hezel, Börje Holmberg, Margaret Haughey, Wayne Macintosh, Michael Moore, Hilary Perraton, Otto Peters, and Greville Rumble (cf. Bernath & Rubin in this volume).

2.4. The Online Learning and Teaching Environment

WebTycho, the proprietary UMUC web-based learning and teaching environment, is used by the MDE and is shared with all other UMUC courses and programs. This online learning management system was developed in-house by UMUC, and has features such as common content presentation, asynchronous and synchronous communication, and assessment tools¹. The infrastructure for WebTycho is comprised of six servers in the US, one in Europe and one in Asia; the servers currently support over 60,000 web-enrollments per year. Technical support is available on a 24/7 basis.

2.5. The Challenges

The dynamic and collaborative teaching and learning model, international faculty, visiting experts, and open access of the MDE make it a very attractive program choice for students. However, these same features present major challenges for providing effective faculty development and support. The remainder of the paper will describe, first from the provider perspective, and then from the user perspective, what is currently being done, what is successful, and some of the remaining challenges for faculty support.

¹ A WebTycho Tour is available at: <http://tychousa.umuc.edu>.

3. The Provider Perspective

Three areas of support within online faculty services will be described: course development and teaching support, management of online material and resources, and technical support. It is recognized that although these areas can be identified separately, they are closely related and in some cases, overlap.

As noted above, provision of faculty support is complex and challenging in the MDE program. Courses are developed and taught by a decentralized team of faculty spread over eight countries and four continents. Faculty members do not have the opportunity to meet academic support staff in the corridor; they are not able to attend face-to-face training sessions; and faculty meetings are difficult to organize and expensive. Hence, with few exceptions, all three faculty support services have to be carried out primarily via the Internet.

All online faculty support services at UMUC can be accessed through a faculty support portal that resides at <http://www.umuc.edu/faculty>. Both Oldenburg and UMUC faculty have access to this portal.

3.1. Course Development and Teaching Support

3.1.1. Staff Support

In UMUC's Graduate School, course development as well as teaching is the responsibility of individual faculty members who are hired for their content specialization expertise. However, only a few of them have the skills to develop or convert courses to an online format (the MDE is an exception to this as noted previously). Therefore, UMUC introduced a five week required WebTycho training course (see below) and a team of web specialists and technologists called Distance Education Coordinators (DE Coordinators), to support and train faculty members (Allen, 2001). One of these DE Coordinators is assigned to the MDE. At Oldenburg, one person's (Olaf Zawacki) particular responsibility is to support Oldenburg's faculty members and visiting experts.

In order to understand the role of a DE Coordinator, Deborah Schroeder was interviewed about her responsibilities in faculty support. She is an experienced distance education professional at UMUC's Graduate School and a DE Coordinator for UMUC MDE faculty. The following interview was done by e-mail in January 2002:

Zawacki: Deb, could you describe briefly your role as DE Coordinator at UMUC?

Schroeder: My role as DE Coordinator pretty much encompasses anything and everything related to distance education. My primary role is to provide graduate school faculty with training and training material, technical support for WebTycho, technical support for Web related content such as web page development and the use of software/hardware, and ensure faculty have material loaded into their classrooms before the first day of the semester. I also, develop graphics and web pages for faculty use. I maintain a UMUC Faculty Help Desk² that was designed and developed by the DE Coordinators. Every other month, new articles are written and faculty

² <http://info.umuc.edu/de/ezine/welcome.htm> (accessed: March 22, 2002)

members are emailed of the updates. My secondary role, which takes just as much time as my primary role, is to work on special projects, such as building forms for surveys, create workshops for the President's Office, provide training for staff development and technology days, etc. Usually two or three DE Coordinators (sometimes more depending on the project) will work on a project together. Most of our training are not for graduate school faculty alone, we often have undergraduate faculty attending our training as well.

Zawacki: How many DE Coordinators are employed for UMUC's graduate programs?

Schroeder: Currently there are five DE Coordinators; a floater Coordinator who's primary responsibility is IT liaison, but helps the DE Coordinators as needed; and an Assistant Dean who helps with the coordination of the various projects.

Zawacki: And for how many faculty members are you responsible?

Schroeder: This semester I support about 95 online sections and about 30 face-to-face sections. Each semester is different. Summers are my lightest semesters. Each DE Coordinator is responsible for his or her own tracks. I am responsible for International Management, OMDE, and part of General Management Programs. I also provide back-up support for Masters in Teaching, and Master of Education.

Zawacki: How long have you been a DE Coordinator and what are your experiences?

Schroeder: What are my experiences.... Hmm, well I have been with UMUC for 14 years, if that tells you anything. Of those 14 years, I have been a DE Coordinator for 2 1/2 years. There are always new and exciting challenges for the DE group. As I mentioned earlier, the role of a DE coordinator encompasses just about everything pertaining to distance education for the Graduate School and various other departments throughout UMUC. We test new software and hardware to determine what is best for our faculty. We are constantly developing new training so that faculty can continually enhance their technological skills. We support our entire faculty, encouraging them to grow and try new things in their classroom. Of course, there are faculty members who take up more of our time than others. The DE group tries very hard to move our faculty in a direction of self-support. If we train the faculty and train them well, the DE group is able to remain scalable, able to handle the large volume of faculty, and able to continue working on special projects. There are, however, some faculty that are slow in coming around with technology, and that's okay. It will always be a bit of a challenge to get some faculty to embrace the technology, but we will continue to work with them the best we can by providing support and guidance. So, my experiences as a DE Coordinator and working for UMUC have always given me a sense of accomplishment. It's exciting to see faculty members load their own course materials for the first time, or create and publish web pages. And it's challenging, as well as rewarding, to develop training that all faculty find useful and beneficial, helping to keep UMUC an international leader of Distance Education.

Zawacki: As you just mentioned, the development of training for faculty members is an important part of your work in order to enable them to teach online independently. Are these trainings offered through the Office of Distance Education and Lifelong Learning (ODELL) or the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL)? What is your relationship to these two units?

Schroeder: CTL's primary responsibility is to train faculty to teach online using WebTycho. All faculty who are going to teach online are required to take this training. WebTycho training consists of a five week intensive online class. Before CTL changed the format of their training to include a CD-ROM, there were two parts to the training. A pedagogical part and a web design part. The CTL department held one face-to-face training to introduce the faculty to WebTycho. The face-to-face workshop started off the class. The remainder of the five week training was taught online. About the third week of training, the DE Coordinators were responsible for holding the second face-to-face training and teach the faculty how to build and post Web pages on Polaris, and to incorporate those page in their classroom. It was a required component for graduate faculty, but not for undergraduate faculty. They could attend if they wanted. Once the CD-ROM was developed, the DE Coordinators were no longer responsible for holding the web design face-to-face training. All the material that we taught in face-to-face class was placed on the CD.

There is, however, still a relationship between CTL and DE Coordinators because our graduate faculty attend the WebTycho training. We provide input for updating the CTL training and also work on any other projects that involve graduate school faculty.

Zawacki: UMUC's homepage provides a faculty area at <http://www.umuc.edu/faculty/> which is a sort of portal for faculty services (e.g. access to the Interactive Faculty Information System to submit grades, access to ODELL and CTL, library services, WebTycho support etc.). Who maintains this website?

Schroeder: It is my understanding that this page is maintained by the Faculty Recruitment Department. If a change needs to be made, it is made by that department. The changes are then sent to the Office of Communications where one of their web specialists will make the changes and upload the new pages to the UMUC server.

The DE Coordinators do, however, maintain the UMUC Faculty Help Desk. All the DE Coordinators had input into the design and layout of the material and we all provide the material that is at the site. There are several DE Coordinators who are responsible for writing articles, frequently asked questions, helps/how-too, and training. For now, I am responsible for uploading all changes and updates in material to the site. I am also the person that answers any questions that are submitted online via the questions form.

Zawacki: Deb, thank you very much for this conversation.

Schroeder: You are quite welcome. Thank you for interviewing me .

In summary, the interview with Deborah Schroeder revealed the following functions and roles of a DE Coordinator at UMUC:

- develop workshops and provide graduate faculty with training,
- support web page development and use of software/hardware,
- provide technical support for WebTycho,
- test new soft- and hardware,
- provide media services (graphics, web pages, audio files etc. for faculty use),
- maintain a faculty help desk (DE Oracle@UMUC³),
- contribute to course evaluation.

All MDE faculty members benefit from the services provided by DE Coordinators, including those employed by Oldenburg. Deborah Schroeder is the DE Coordinator of the MDE at UMUC. In Spring 2002, when the interview was done, 12 MDE courses with 13 sections (classes with up to 29 students) were run. Therefore she was responsible for supporting 82 additional online sections plus 30 face-to-face sections. Additionally, she is part of a team that has a variety of other responsibilities such as developing training and maintaining the Help Desk. Clearly, not all faculty members can get intensive support. The overall goals in faculty support from the provider perspective must be to help faculty move in the direction of self-support in order to remain scalable.

Although the MDE is embedded in a large scale distance education institution, it is a postgraduate program with some characteristics of a model that was described by Garrison and Anderson (1999) as "little distance education". In contrast to second generation distance education where the course material is developed by an expert and learner support is delegated to a tutor, it was viewed essential for the MDE to attract subject matter experts to develop the course syllabi and to teach the courses. The majority of these busy professionals were not able to attend any WebTycho training sessions when they started in Spring 2000, and hence, needed a great deal of help to get their courses online.

In contrast to the more narrowly defined role of a DE Coordinator at UMUC, the faculty support person at Oldenburg managed the courses for some instructors. His activities in this regard included posting announcements, creating conferences, syllabus and schedule, similar to the role of a teaching assistant. During this development phase, he was responsible for six faculty members, and hence, the support provided was very personal and tailored to individual needs. In addition to this faculty members received directions and guidance during course development from the Program Directors. The interaction between the faculty support person and faculty members focused more on training and professional development rather than strictly technical issues. All MDE faculty members are experienced scholars and educationalists. However, some of them found it useful to have someone with whom they could discuss the design and pedagogical issues related to teaching in the new online learning environment. Most of the conversation between the academic support person and the instructors was and continues to be through e-mail with the exception of the faculty meetings.

³ <http://info.umuc.edu/de/ezine/welcome.htm> (accessed May 6, 2002)

The Oldenburg support person assumes a training, development, and consultation role during the course development phase. He helps to get new faculty members "on board" with the goal of having them able to teach online with minimal support after two or three terms. During their first online class, however, they should be enabled to focus on content matters and on their pedagogical approach and strategies to online learning rather than on technical details. In the Oldenburg approach to faculty support, it is important for the academic support person to be accepted by the faculty members more as partner or colleague in the role of an educational consultant with the same sort of background rather than as someone whose role is restricted to technical support.

3.1.2. Institutional Academic Support

The online faculty support portal provides access to all kinds of services and information that are related to online teaching. For example, faculty members can enter the Interactive Faculty Information System (IFIS) where they can access class lists and submit grades in an electronic grade roll. This grade roll is available approximately two weeks before the end of the term and faculty members are expected to submit grades within 72 hours of the end of classes. The opportunity to submit grades online rather than by mail is an administrative support service that is appreciated by all faculty, not only by those who teach at a distance (Allen, 2001, p. 69).

The Office of Distance Education and Lifelong Learning (ODELL) is UMUC's unit that facilitates the transition to online learning and teaching. According to the Graduate School's Faculty Handbook (UMUC, 2001) this should be achieved through the following initiatives:

- "conducting research and advocating database improvements with a special focus on distance and lifelong learning,
- developing and implementing faculty development and training worldwide that applies current technology and pedagogy,
- creating and demonstrating innovative practices in technologically assisted teaching and learning,
- supporting and collaborating with UMUC's academic, technology, and information services and workforce development communities in their search for excellence in distance teaching and learning,
- developing and recommending policies and practices that further excellence in distance education and lifelong learning, and
- increasing the visibility of the benchmark qualities of UMUC in distance education." (p. 22).

ODELL provides media services, educational counseling, and resources about online pedagogy. An important unit within ODELL is the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) which is responsible for faculty training and development (see below).

3.1.3. Faculty Training

In order to prepare faculty members to use WebTycho and to teach in the online environment, there is a requirement for new UMUC instructors to participate in a five week WebTycho training course that is provided through the Center for Teaching and

Learning (CTL) at UMUC. Participants are expected to spend at least 8-12 hours a week on the course, more if they do not have basic Windows and Web skills.

The training course is comprised of two parts: The first provides participants with very basic computer skills, as well as an introduction to WebTycho and more generally, to online learning and teaching. The second part of the course addresses more advanced skills such as learning how to build and post a web page. The first part of the course was initially offered as a one day workshop session in a classroom setting. However, faculty members, particularly those in remote locations were often not able to attend. Hence, the workshop has been replaced with a multimedia CD-ROM (fig. 1).

The majority of the training course takes place online in the WebTycho "classroom". This introduces faculty members to online teaching in the environment that they will be using for their own course. The design of the training course is such that faculty members participate first as students, completing research, doing exercises and assignments and then as faculty, developing and posting an online course module.



Fig. 1: Screenshot of WebTycho training multimedia CD-ROM

The CD-ROM was not available when Oldenburg and UMUC faculty started in Spring 2000. Therefore, the Oldenburg support person needed to supply this training.

3.1.4. Faculty Development

New faculty members are introduced by the Program Directors to the overall concept of the MDE program in terms of content and approach to teaching online. During the first

term of teaching online, some faculty members preferred to be mentored by the Program Directors to ensure quality and consistency of approach.

Although expensive and not easy to organize with a distributed team of faculty, it has been possible to arrange at least one international faculty meeting per year since 2000. The first MDE faculty meeting involved Oldenburg faculty members and took place in Frankfurt (Germany) in Summer 2000. The most recent faculty meeting involved all Oldenburg and UMUC faculty members that teach the core courses and took place in January 2002 in Oldenburg. During these meetings, faculty members experience that they are part of a greater team, they have the opportunity to present and discuss their courses and get feedback by their colleagues. Furthermore, they participate in decision-making processes with regard to the academic matters and policies of the MDE.

3.1.5. Management of Online Materials and Resources

Online library services are regarded as key to success of the virtual university (Allen, 2001). It is UMUC's Office of Information and Library Services (ILS) that facilitates access to online library services and materials⁴. Students and faculty have access to the library holdings of all 11 institutions of the University System of Maryland (inter-library loans). The books are shipped directly to the homes of students and faculty and on request chapters and articles are scanned and placed on a server, where, after notification by email and provision of a PIN, it can be downloaded and/or printed at one's own computer. Librarians provide 24/7 asynchronous service to students and faculty and they are moving soon to 24/7 synchronous service. Furthermore, students and faculty get free access to major online distance education journals, such as *Open Learning*⁵. Library users can search in more than 90 databases, nearly half of which provide access to full text materials and a growing number of digital books. For faculty, the Office for E-Reserves, a division of the library, obtains copyright permissions, digitizes articles and makes them available in WebTycho so that students can download them.

In addition to online articles and books, courses have custom materials that have to be managed. Faculty members compose learning facilitation and management documents for their courses. These include introductions to discussion topics, detailed instructions for assignments and group work, content summaries, and study questions. The creation of this material is very labor intensive for the faculty. They received help to create these documents, most of which are formatted in HTML. The material must be reusable and made available for subsequent classes. Therefore, all completed courses are saved on an archive server and WebTycho provides a Course Import Function to enable reuse and updating of these faculty authored materials. The instructors can now retrieve their documents from the archive server and edit them independently with an easy to use HTML editor like Macromedia Dreamweaver.

3.1.6. Technical Support

The online teaching and learning environment has to be reliable and user friendly. Technology should be as transparent as possible to enable faculty members to focus on

⁴ <http://www.umuc.edu/library/library.html> (accessed: May 3, 2002)

⁵ <http://www.umuc.edu/library/database/ejournals.html> (accessed: May 3, 2002)

their subject matter, and technical support must be available on a 24/7 basis. As mentioned above, technical support is provided through the UMUC DE Co-ordinators via e-mail, asynchronous conferencing, and/or toll-free phone. They maintain an online help desk, the DE Oracle@UMUC. The functions and tools of WebTycho are explained in a faculty guide which is available on a help and support site⁶.

How are the described services perceived by faculty members? Do they work? Are they sufficient? Two "users" of faculty support will describe their experiences. Jane Brindley in Windsor, Canada discusses faculty support from her perspective as an Oldenburg faculty member, and Judy Roberts does the same from her vantage point as a UMUC faculty member located in Toronto, Canada.

4. The User Perspective

Although geographically spread and without the same support systems as campus-based faculty, the part-time academics in the MDE carry a level of responsibility and accountability identical to campus-based faculty. As noted above, the MDE program is based on an interactive and collaborative model of teaching and learning. Unlike tutoring for an institution which has pre-packaged courses as is the case in some distance education models, most of the MDE faculty develop the courses that they teach, and engage in continuous revision based on the response of students and new developments in the field. The courses each have a detailed syllabus, reading lists, and assignments but rely heavily on the asynchronous (and occasional synchronous) discussions and collaborative exercises moderated by the instructors. Faculty also have complete responsibility for student assessment (e.g. designing assessment tools, provision of feedback and submission of grades).

The engagement of distance education experts as faculty, most of whom are actively involved in research and practice, affords the opportunity for students to engage in discussions enriched by international perspectives and direct experience. Further, the autonomy offered to faculty in developing and moderating their courses is not only attractive but keeps the program up-to-date and dynamic. However, this model of decentralized course development and teaching is not without challenges for faculty and the institutions that employ them. Instructors must be carefully recruited and effectively supported in order for the program to maintain its quality over time.

4.1. A Faculty Perspective From the MDE at UNIOL

This section of the paper is written from my personal perspective as a part-time faculty member working in Windsor, Canada for Oldenburg. One way in which the effectiveness of faculty support can be evaluated is whether and how much it contributes to teaching effectiveness and facilitates being able to do the work necessary to teach online. In reflecting on what contributes to my online teaching effectiveness, I can clearly see how Oldenburg's particular model of faculty support was critical in developing both my confidence and skills. At the same time, I can identify personal attributes that I brought as an individual faculty member, and actions that I take to improve my skills that contribute to success as a remote faculty member. Hence, faculty support starts with

⁶ <http://tychousa.umuc.edu/help.nsf> (accessed: May 5, 2002)

careful recruitment of individuals who are independent learners and enthusiastic teachers as well as content experts, and is facilitated and maintained through well planned and executed training and development.

The Program Director at Oldenburg recruits faculty members, provides some orientation in terms of communicating expectations for course development and teaching, attends to performance assessment, and in my case, provided mentoring in the first course taught. Other than these functions, Oldenburg relies on one individual to provide most all of the day-to-day faculty support for all instructors teaching Oldenburg courses.

When I first considered teaching online, the most daunting aspect for me was the prospect of mastering the technology. However, once I realized that support was readily available from Oldenburg, I began to re-focus on teaching methodology and course content. In this respect, my experience is consistent with the Pajo and Wallace (2001) finding that faculty support needs change over time. This finding reinforces the need for a faculty support person who understands both pedagogical and technical issues, and can initiate and respond according to the situation.

4.1.1. Oldenburg Model of Faculty Support

4.1.1.1. Course Development and Teaching Support

Oldenburg supplied a written template for preparation of the course syllabus that I co-authored with Alan Tait, an academic at the Open University in the United Kingdom. We followed the basic template provided by Oldenburg, but added a great deal more content and a common structure for each section of the course (a guide to getting started, an introduction to the subject matter, and study questions). We then chose appropriate readings for each section of the course. During the writing of the course, we received no direction from Oldenburg other than the course template. I took the initiative to review a course package on the same subject from another institution, and there was constant exchange with my co-author, but for the most part, course authoring was managed independently. Once the course was complete, Oldenburg invited us to a meeting of faculty from the program.

So far, it has been possible to organize a face-to-face meeting with MDE faculty at least once a year to address both course development and teaching issues. In my case, my co-author and I had the opportunity to attend such a meeting in Germany prior to our course being offered. The meeting was after the first term of the offering of the MDE so a few faculty already had some experience with teaching online. All faculty presented their courses, and received feedback both on content and design. The meeting provided a very important opportunity to benefit from the experience of those with teaching experience, and to compare courses for consistency in approach. We were able to discuss issues such as how best to facilitate desired learning outcomes, consistency in student workloads and grading policies, and time required on particular teaching tasks.

The support and guidance provided by this meeting was a key factor in improving the course before it was offered, and in feeling prepared to teach it. One very helpful aspect of participating in the meeting was meeting with the faculty support person for Oldenburg. He plays a pivotal role in that he has expertise not only in the more technical aspects of online teaching but in the much broader pedagogical issues of

teaching at a distance with technology. One of his current areas of research is how to provide faculty support. Meeting him was the beginning of a close and supportive collegial relationship that facilitated ease of inquiry and regular contact about all aspects of teaching the course.

Since starting to teach, I have attended at least one and sometimes two meetings with my peers each year. These meetings are generally intense. We use most of the time to discuss pedagogical issues such as the structure of the program, student progress, desired learning outcomes, and grading standards. We also have an opportunity to present and get feedback on our courses and discuss teaching methods. We have had an opportunity to exchange information about applied research projects on online learning that are being carried out by faculty members. These meetings are valuable times of exchange and mutual support.

Before I started teaching, I had the opportunity to enrol in a WebTycho training course offered by UMUC. Unfortunately, at that time (early in the program history), the training course was offered only according to particular start dates and in a very structured paced style. This approach prevented my participation due to other work commitments. As a result, I embarked on the first semester with very little background in online teaching. The Program Director at Oldenburg allowed me access to a course that he was teaching so that I learned to move around with ease in the virtual classroom and observe the kind of interaction taking place. I also took the self-guided tour of WebTycho that was available, and read materials such as *"E-Moderating: A Guide to Online Teaching and Learning"* (2000) by Gilly Salmon in order to prepare myself for the first term.

As noted above, during the first offering of the course, I was mentored by the Program Director at Oldenburg. He was rostered into the course as a faculty member, and hence, had access to be able to monitor my work. He e-mailed me tips which were very helpful, and telephoned me at pre-arranged times during the term to give me feedback and advice. At the end of each term, I receive the student evaluations that are automatically done online by UMUC, and the Program Director reviews these with me by telephone.

As well as having had the Program Director as a mentor, I have access to Oldenburg's academic support person. As noted above, in addition to handling all of the technical requirements of the course, he provides consultation on instructional design and all other teaching matters. Prior to the first offering of the course, he transferred my word files into WebTycho, set up the readings so that these were available online, and during the first semester, handled anything for me which required technical knowledge such as posting announcements in HTML. This enabled me to focus on the interaction with the students, course content, and instructional design. Although we are on two separate continents, he is highly accessible. During the first term, I e-mailed him regularly with a wide variety of questions, and usually received a 24 hour or less turnaround for replies.

As he provided service, he also taught me how to manage some of the technical aspects of the course so that I could handle these myself. Although I still rely on him for certain kinds of technical support and to provide consultation about instructional issues, my contact with him after three terms of teaching is now minimal as it is with the Program Director. However, it is reassuring to know that if I need a question answered or want feedback on a particular teaching issue, the service is readily available.

4.1.1.2. Management of Online Material and Resources

The course that I teach in the MDE, *Student Support in Distance Education*, does not have an appropriate textbook as yet. The content covered is very broad, and the best sources are usually book chapters, journal articles, and conference proceedings. Initially, my co-author and I provided copies of all of the readings to Oldenburg, and these were scanned and provided online for students to download and print. Systems have been streamlined now so that I can update the list of readings before each term and submit the revisions to Oldenburg. In turn, they request the readings and copyright clearance through the UMUC Library. All of the readings continue to be available online as part of the course. This is a very important service that makes it possible to provide students with the most up-to-date and relevant reference materials each term. As well, both UMUC and Oldenburg have websites with online journals and other resources. The UMUC Library continually improves its services to online students and faculty. For example, students can now request journal articles (that are not online) and receive them by e-mail within about a week. This allows faculty to assign tasks that require extensive literature searches.

4.1.1.3. Technical Support

The faculty support person at Oldenburg is readily available by e-mail, and most technical support that I require to manage the course is available from this source. Occasionally, because the servers are maintained by UMUC, a technical problem arises which is not resolvable from Oldenburg. In this case, I use the 24/7 Help Desk available at UMUC. In all instances, telephone calls are promptly answered and helpers are available to diagnose and address problems. However, on occasion, the Help Desk has not been able to find a resolution to more complex problems. On at least two occasions, I have had to wait up to a week to get the assistance needed and could not communicate with the class during this time. During these times, I had the impression that I felt a great deal more urgency to solve the problem than the Help Desk. As a remote faculty member, this can be extremely frustrating and isolating.

4.1.2. What Contributes to Effective Teaching/Learning in the Oldenburg Model?

In on campus settings, new faculty members learn about their context fairly quickly through both formal and informal contact with peers and the acculturation process is generally taken for granted. However, when individual faculty members are geographically remote, there can be huge gaps in what they know about the institution and program of which they are a part, and obviously, this can have an impact on what and how they teach. The initial meeting with other faculty and the Program Director before I started teaching was important in not only preparing me for teaching online, but in providing me with a view of the program, its objectives, expectations of faculty members, and the content of individual courses. This meeting also gave me a strong sense of working as part of team. I was welcomed by the Program Director and my colleagues, and had an opportunity to meet the faculty support person who would be my key link with the team. In retrospect, the first meeting set a very positive tone and introduced me to the culture of Oldenburg, which is one of collaboration and teamwork. Hence, faculty development started with helping me to understand and place my role and my course in a larger context,

and with encouraging me to participate fully as a team member. This is critical to teaching effectiveness.

In much the same way that student support is intended to help learners become increasingly self-directed, the faculty support model used by Oldenburg is intentionally designed to help faculty members become increasingly independent. The greatest level of support is provided before and during the first term of teaching when need is highest. As well, it is important to note that Oldenburg faculty support is directed toward quality of teaching, with little pressure to become highly technically competent immediately. It was extremely reassuring to me in the first term that sufficient technical support was provided so that I could concentrate on adapting my teaching style to the online environment.

One of the important ways in which Oldenburg focuses its faculty support resources on quality of teaching is to have an academic support person who is an academic colleague as well as a technical expert. In working with him, I found myself eager to learn how to perform various technical functions because I could see how mastering certain technical functions would allow me to improve my communications in the classroom and have greater control over when and how I posted material. For example, I learned the technical skills necessary to post announcements in the course as a result of a discussion with the academic support person about when and why to post announcements, and how to communicate the status of assignments to students as part of a conversation about giving feedback. Hence, technical skills are learned on an as needed basis and usually, in the context of quality online teaching.

Although it might be intrusive to have a colleague stand in the classroom to monitor quality of teaching, the mentoring provided during the first term by the Program Director was not intrusive. I knew that he had access to the course and looked in on a regular basis but having been previously introduced to the collaborative culture of the program, rather than being threatening, his presence provided me with a sense that there was a safety net. It also allowed him to provide me with immediate feedback such as tips that save time and common standards of communication so that I adjusted to the online environment quite quickly. His support, particularly in the beginning, has been a key element in feeling confident about my work, and in making continuous improvement in my management and teaching of the course. His style was never punitive, always constructive, and above all, provided needed peer contact and encouragement as well as guidance.

The faculty support person also had and continues to have access to my classroom, and like the Program Director, often gave me tips and assistance as well as responding to queries and managing course materials. Contact with him was critical to my early success, and to my progress in becoming more autonomous. After a couple of terms, my need for instructional and technical support is minimal and my requests for assistance are few. However, it is reassuring to know that very good technical support is available from Oldenburg when needed and that I have someone with whom I can discuss teaching issues. Similarly, support from the Program Director is now at a much lower level. He is always available by e-mail and telephone, and responds quickly to queries. However, my need for his assistance is minimal. I usually communicate with him by telephone before the start of a term, and afterwards. And he continues to review the student evaluations of the course.

The faculty meetings each year continue to be extremely helpful. Once I had some teaching experience, I knew much more about what I wanted to discuss with colleagues. As noted above, these meetings are intense with very full agendas. We compare our experiences, discuss difficulties and possible solutions, present research findings, and contribute to program objectives and policies. We also discover common interests and take on special projects. As a result of the earlier meetings, I collaborated with a colleague in preparing generic self-help materials for entering students.

Oldenburg has experimented with different teaching models including the assignment of a senior student in the program as a teaching assistant. I had the opportunity to have a teaching assistant for my course, and it contributed a great deal to teaching effectiveness. Having a teaching assistant with whom I could share the workload meant that I could concentrate more on giving feedback and facilitating interaction. I learned some new strategies for mentoring at a distance, and it provided me with a colleague with whom I could check my perceptions - invaluable in an online environment. As well, she used her experience in the program to help me improve the course in a number of ways, particularly by occasionally challenging some of the assumptions that I had made. Although this project will probably not be continued on a regular basis, it was very useful as a faculty development tool.

UMUC also includes me in their routine communications with faculty. Hence, I receive some materials specific to the MDE program and some that go to all online faculty. For example, the MDE Program Director at UMUC will occasionally send me a reference that might be helpful for my course, notification of any changes that might affect me, and other related information. As well, I receive the online newsletter and notifications that go to all online faculty. Most of these communications are helpful in some way and I review all of them. On the other hand, I also receive a host of other communications from UMUC that are of no use. These arrive both by e-mail and regular mail, and are usually notifications of or invitations to on-campus events or faculty development activities that I cannot attend.

In summary, the elements of faculty support received from Oldenburg which contributed most to teaching effectiveness are as follows: the initial inclusion in a face-to-face meeting so that I was introduced very early to not only my colleagues but the culture and context in which I would be teaching, the unfailing availability of the academic support person for both pedagogical and technical issues, the provision of greatest support when it most needed with an intention of helping me become more autonomous, the mentoring and feedback from the Program Director, and the continual communication of a strong culture of collaboration and teamwork.

At the same time that Oldenburg's efforts to support faculty are critical to their level of comfort and skill acquisition, it is important to note that teaching staff can bring certain attributes that facilitate ease of adaptation to the online and geographically remote environment. In my own case, these included extensive experience as a practitioner and researcher in distance education including communication at a distance with students and colleagues, experience with teaching and counselling and a high level of comfort with student contact, and experience with being a distance learner and working independently out of a home office. As well, I was proactive in taking steps to enhance my effectiveness outside of what Oldenburg and UMUC had to offer. This included consultation with experienced online faculty members before and after starting to teach for Oldenburg,

setting up an efficient personal management system with easy to access paper files as well as online tools, compiling model assignments and grading tools, participating in faculty development workshops in my location, and making an investment in the MDE beyond teaching such as identifying program issues and generic student needs and helping to develop student self-help tools. Another personal factor that contributed to teaching effectiveness, particularly in the first term when my learning curve was particularly steep, was to have written the course. Hence, I had mastery of the content and design and could concentrate on all the other elements of teaching online with which I was unfamiliar.

4.1.3. Challenges and Ongoing Issues

The description of the support received from Oldenburg presents a very positive picture, and indeed, for the most part, my experience of teaching online in the MDE program has been a rewarding one. That being said, I have no illusions about the challenges I continue to face as a geographically remote part-time faculty member. Although all contact that I had with Oldenburg was extremely positive and the support was ever-present albeit at a distance, I have had times of feeling completely isolated. Being in a remote location means not having anyone that you can spontaneously chat with about practice, not having someone immediately present when you run into technical glitches or other problems (mostly due to inexperience but which could be cleared up so easily if one could run next door to an experienced colleague), not having anyone with whom to share perceptions and reflections at the time they occur, and sometimes, quite literally, not knowing how to do something and spending a great deal of time trying to figure it out independent of assistance.

It is also important to recognize that there are many faculty support issues still to be addressed. Most of these are directly related to the opportunities presented by the online environment for the teacher to be more than a tutor of a pre-set course. The MDE program takes full advantage of this opportunity by using an interactive and collaborative teaching model that does not differentiate between part-time faculty members on contract and full-time faculty members. Both categories of teaching staff have the same responsibility for their course(s). This model provides students with dynamic courses that are far different than packaged courses that can quickly become outdated. On the other hand, the model raises issues of faculty remuneration and other working conditions.

The institutions involved in the MDE program have not yet fully addressed what is realistic in terms of demands and expectations placed on part-time contract faculty members and what in turn, part-time faculty, particularly those who are geographically remote, can realistically expect from the institution. Within academia, there are high expectations for a certain amount of individual autonomy, input into decision-making, fair remuneration and benefits, opportunities for research, and a sense of collegiality. It may not be realistic to offer part-time faculty the same benefits and opportunities as full-time teaching staff. However, if the demands placed on them are similar in terms of the kind of responsibility taken for teaching, it raises the question of what can reasonably be offered in return.

The amount of time required for online teaching lessens as more experience is gained but it is never minimal. In particular, marking and giving feedback in writing is very time consuming but is one of the most important ways that a faculty member can

contribute to an individual student's understanding of how well they are learning, what they are doing well, and what needs improvement. Fair remuneration for time spent is a concern for faculty members who work on contract with no benefits or job security. Oldenburg pays part-time faculty a set amount for teaching one section (not to exceed 25 students) of a course. However, with the exception of travel to meetings, there is no provision for benefits. Full expenses are paid for attendance of a faculty meeting upon invitation of the Program Director. However, this is not a guaranteed benefit, and is dependent upon program resources being available.

It is very important for teaching effectiveness that faculty members continually engage in professional development and research activities. This includes opportunities to improve practice, for example, by learning more advanced online teaching and technical skills, and opportunities to carry out research. Full-time faculty at UMUC and Oldenburg have these kinds of opportunities available to them as part of their conditions of employment. Similarly, there are some faculty who teach for the MDE but are employed by another university full-time who look to their home university to provide funding and time for research and other development activities. However, for those part-time faculty who fall in neither category, there is little or no support available from either Oldenburg or UMUC. Lack of research funds and opportunities also affects the ability of part-time faculty to contribute to the program by initiating and carrying out research with direct applicability to online learning and related issues that affect MDE students. On a long term basis, this issue needs to be addressed in order that the MDE can continue to attract highly qualified teaching staff, regardless of their ability to fund their own research and development.

Part-time remote faculty provide all of their own equipment and supplies. This represents a considerable investment. The required hardware, software, and paper supplies alone are very expensive. Oldenburg does not make provision for expenses such as long distance telephone calls or server costs so these also have to be covered from the remuneration provided. The implication is that you cannot teach for the program unless you are willing and able to make this kind of investment, or you use the facilities of another employer (presumably with their knowledge and consent).

Another issue related to the MDE teaching model is that the time required for continuous revision is not reimbursed. Although faculty members, whether full or part-time have responsibility for the design and content of their courses, remuneration for writing the course is on a one-time only basis, and teaching remuneration is a set amount for each time the course is offered. UMUC sends out a request for new reading lists at the beginning of each term, the implication being that courses will be kept up to date, and that the teaching staff will somehow work this activity into their teaching schedule. Although faculty members usually take responsibility for revising their courses each term, this activity does not appear to be costed as a part of the program budget and no provision is made for the time spent on revision. Again, this is not so much an issue for full-time teaching staff who receive a salary and benefits. However, for part-time faculty, the per-course remuneration is scant considering the time investment in teaching and grading.

Traditional models of academic decision-making are democratic and participatory. However, as a remote faculty member, I often feel quite disconnected from the issues and policies affecting students. For example, students may talk about difficulties with

student loans or other administrative concerns, and I feel quite removed from the situation and unable to help them. There is a sense that I do not actually have any input or control over many of the things that affect students in my classes, and this contributes to my own sense of isolation. Similarly, there are only limited opportunities to have input into program decisions. At our faculty meetings, we do our best to discuss and give feedback on important pedagogical issues that affect our students and the Oldenburg Program Director encourages this but time is limited, and in practical terms, the Program Directors and the full-time faculty and staff have to make most of the decisions.

Finally, one of the unique features of the MDE program is the collaboration between a European university and an American one. It gives the program a richness through greater diversity of faculty, students, and program content. At the same time, the collaboration is challenging in that the two institutions have very different cultures, and are not always consistent in approach or policies. Differing policies in staff and faculty treatment have been the source of some tensions.

All this being said, I enjoy teaching online for the MDE program. There are a number of benefits beyond the monetary remuneration that keep me highly motivated. Teaching for Oldenburg has provided me with a unique opportunity to learn about online teaching in a very supportive environment. Each time I teach the course, it is a rewarding experience in which learning is mutual. The adult students in the program bring a wealth of experience and most approach the course enthusiastically, ready to challenge the material presented, question their own assumptions, and learn from others. As a side benefit, revising and teaching the course has also been a great way to stay current in my field. Despite being remote geographically from Oldenburg and UMUC, I have established a sense of community with my students each term and feel like an integral part of the larger MDE community. Above all, I truly do feel part of the Oldenburg team, valued and respected as one of their faculty members.

4.2. A Faculty Perspective From the MDE at UMUC

This part of the paper is also written from a personal part-time faculty member's perspective. In my case, I live in Toronto, Ontario and teach one of the mandatory core courses in the MDE as an adjunct UMUC faculty member. I am a self-employed consultant working out of a home office. Having often advised clients about online learning from a policy and project management perspective, I was intrigued and honoured at the opportunity to experience the faculty perspective and to benefit from the collaborative teaching model at UMUC and from the opportunity to create and own "my" course. I was certainly well aware of the importance of faculty support in theory and was delighted to have the opportunity to experience it in practice.

4.2.1. UMUC Model of Faculty Support

4.2.1.1. Course Development and Teaching Support

In this section, I will comment on issues such as faculty support in writing a course syllabus, needs assessment in planning and delivering faculty training, and faculty support in an atypically complex first year of online teaching. They are qualitative observations from personal experience of the UMUC model.

As a non-academic preparing a syllabus for a Senate, I felt quite intimidated but was supported by the UMUC Program Director's telephone and electronic counselling and the provision of a template to follow in preparing my document. His guidance regarding expectations and requirements reminded me that I was a subject matter expert, that I routinely write articles for peer-reviewed journals and that writing the Syllabus was a task that I was qualified to undertake. The Director commented on successive drafts of the Syllabus and so we completed the Syllabus effectively, supportively and efficiently at a distance.

When I first heard about the MDE, I felt that I was qualified to undertake the model as described by the two Program Directors when we met at an international DE conference. However, when I was actually confronted with the reality of an offer to become an adjunct online faculty member, I looked for materials on needs-based planning for the selection and training of faculty and did not find material that helped me decide if I was qualified and where I would need support. My self-developed list resulted in the conclusion that I did not need support in three areas but had strong needs in a fourth:

- (1) Comfort with writing, since print would be my primary means of communication with my colleagues and my students. I believed that I met that criterion without requiring additional support.
- (2) Knowledge of the content area was not, and should not be, an issue.
- (3) Grading student assignments was something of an unknown, but I had extensive experience as a grant assessor for funding applications in DE and often review articles submitted to peer-reviewed journals and to professional conference program committees. I felt, naively I would say now, that those skills would transfer well to grading and that I did not need support on that topic.
- (4) Knowledge of online course management software was my area of weakness. While I had often seen demonstrations of commercially available products, I had no hands-on experience with using the software. I did, however, feel very comfortable with the pedagogy in the MDE and knew that software could support it. UMUC takes a comprehensive approach to faculty training on this topic.

As noted above, the 5-week faculty training workshop design has changed since I experienced it in the Spring 2000 because of the addition of a CD-ROM. UMUC's practice of having a 5-week course, paying faculty a bonus to complete it successfully and providing so much scheduling flexibility that the model approaches continuous intake can be regarded as an important commitment to positioning faculty for success in their course development.

In particular, in my experience, the level of tutoring provided in the training is superb and is a key element of exemplary faculty training. I have adapted into my own course many techniques that I learned from the experience of being a student in the faculty training course (e.g., the use of graphics, music and humour to vary the pace of an intense course). When I requested telephone tutoring because I found that the online model was not resulting in effective learning, my tutor readily made his time and telephone number available. However, that course also introduced me to one of the biggest challenges that I experience in my life as a non-campus based faculty member: the schizophrenia of being "included but not included" which I discuss below.

Two other issues may be pertinent to the organization of successful faculty support: timing and mentoring. First, to enhance content retention, I selected dates for my faculty training that ensured that my own course started almost immediately thereafter so that the knowledge I acquired in the faculty workshop did not decay in any significant way before I started teaching online. In addition, I taught the course for the first time in a summer session, where the semester was half the duration of the fall and winter semesters. The short time frame made it possible to prototype approaches for the reality of the much longer fall semester. Second, I knew that I would co-teach the course with the UMUC Program Director the first time I taught the course. His role as mentor, supporting me as the theory of the faculty training course became the reality of actually teaching online, was critical to whatever success I may have had then or since.

In normal circumstances, my faculty training and novice teaching experience would have ended once I had been mentored in that first teaching experience. However, I had the typical experience of starting to teach just when UMUC was evaluating two commercial products against its own proprietary software. So, the second time I taught the course, I had to learn new commercial software and revise my course to work on a totally different platform than WebTycho. That challenge contains some other lessons that I would argue should relate to faculty support even during “normal” circumstances.

First, UMUC found a way to provide me with a teaching assistant in recognition of the extra work involved. She created tools and resources during that trial that are part of my course to this day and that would not be there without her. (I have had no similar assistance since.) It might be an idea to provide novice faculty with such support for two or three semesters to accelerate their mastery of online teaching. Second, of all the commercial course management software products that I had seen, the one that I had the chance to use at UMUC was the one that I had always liked best in demonstrations and I was delighted to have the opportunity to use it. Moreover, I knew some of the staff with the vendor and thus felt supported and welcomed – a critical support feature since I undertook the entire process with no formal training because there was no money to bring me to the week-long training at UMUC. However, as a result, I had access to considerable telephone support on a daily basis, a just-in-time faculty training model. For my learning style, I find that frequent telephone support while I am looking at the screen works best: I learn a small amount each time and have synchronous support if something goes wrong. Sending an e-mail to describe what went wrong and then reading a long message of suggestions later is not an effective way to learn for me and, to date, I use the 24/7 telephone line for troubleshooting, not e-mail. This question of faculty learning styles is important to consider when planning initial and ongoing training and support.

When my course went back to WebTycho, the third semester that I taught, it took on yet another new dimension and I had to learn a third software package and relate to a different set of teaching and technical support people: i.e., three consecutive semesters, three new pieces of software, three new teams to work with! To understand why I was agreeable to a degree of change that I would not recommend as exemplary practice in faculty support, it is important to know the financial challenge I was experiencing being a remote faculty member operating from a home office. I had had an ISP package suitable to my own consulting practice needs, but once I became an adjunct UMUC faculty member, my connection charges increased significantly and UMUC was

unwilling to reimburse me. In response to this challenge, my DE coordinator suggested that he could package parts of my course as files that I could manipulate off-line. After agreeing to this suggestion, I realized that I had to purchase, at my own expense, Macromedia Dreamweaver software! However, with continuous telephone tutoring from the DE Coordinator and eventual reimbursement by UMUC of my software purchase, I did end up with a course design and revision process that were less expensive than before we added the Dreamweaver element.

These year-long start-up training and support challenges have been replaced with support and training that are more typical of what most MDE and UMUC faculty would experience. DE coordinator support is critical at the start of each semester and at various points during the semester. When the course is transferred from one server to another at the start of a semester, even the new Class Import feature on WebTycho software does not eliminate the need for assistance. The DE Coordinator's help is needed when a hyperlink in the Dreamweaver Webliography breaks during a semester or when I want to add music, book an optional telephone conference call, etc. UMUC conducts an annual online faculty symposium that MDE faculty are eligible to participate in, another example of the institution's commitment to faculty development. I have attended one of the two offered each January since I started teaching but find them very impersonal as I know so few faculty. We have started our own MDE faculty area in WebTycho but are not yet in the habit of using it very actively.

A last element of faculty support is feedback from students regarding my work. Although UMUC collects student evaluations every semester, its issues are broad generic ones about student satisfaction with the course and the faculty. Delays in providing me with the summarized feedback as well as the generic nature of the materials have led me to create a customized evaluation conference in the last three weeks of my course where I ask students for the "one best feature of the course that I should keep" and "the one worst feature of the course that I should change". The constructive feedback that I receive there guides my course revision process.

4.2.1.2. Management of Online Material and Resources

I find that UMUC is constantly improving the support that it provides. UMUC library staff provide excellent support for the creation of Reserved Readings; online journals related to DE are regularly being added to the library, thus minimizing the need for the customized Web Resources that I initially created for my course. However, because of student feedback indicating challenges in using some of the UMUC databases and journals, I continue to upgrade my Web Resources as a service to students.

4.2.1.3. Technical Support

The 24/7 nature of the WebTycho Help Desk and its telephone or e-mail modes of service are a critical faculty support, primarily because I can refer students to the Help Desk and do not have to support them myself. When I have a rare problem that the DE Coordinator cannot handle, the telephone mode of support is what I use and what I value far more than e-mail support.

However, one of the issues that arises for me, perhaps because my course is about technology, is the lack of support that UMUC provides for technologies other than WebTycho. My students want to experience other technologies because of the nature of

the course and/or because of their own learning styles. While vendor demonstrations can meet some of those needs, I have found in previous semesters that students' online environments are so diverse that even trying to use a tool such as Netmeeting is too time-consuming in terms of helping them to install the free download on their computers.

4.2.2. What Contributes to Effective Teaching/Learning in the UMUC Model

First, the interactive collaborative model is the right one for masters-level graduate study. It supports reflective discussion, Socratic dialogue and informal social networking. A key feature of the model is the flexibility that it offers to faculty and students. For example, the customized web resources in my course empower the students more than relying exclusively on centralized resources I believe. This semester, for instance, students noted the lack of search engines in online DE journals. Because they were "our" course journals, we shared the load of contacting the various journals to ask about the lack of such a feature. The students were heartened by the positive responses, including having one journal redesign its search function in the light of the students' feedback.

Second, the international MDE model works, in my opinion, because, with very few exceptions, faculty have deep professional relationships of several years' duration, with the result that the distributed nature of our faculty existence and the rarity of in-person or even telephone conversations is tolerable. But, I've never met any of the support people at UMUC (e.g., in the library, in DE coordination, etc.) and am challenged by the turnover in the people I deal with in both places – I feel that I have to train them to what I need instead of them supporting me because they know what I need.

Third, revisiting my self-assessment may be useful in considering what contributes to the effectiveness of the UMUC model of learning and faculty support.

- Yes, I feel competent in print communication but have had to adjust my style to try to create warmth and community in the course while yet maintaining some academic rigor in some of the formal conferences. In retrospect, I don't think that I would have absorbed materials on that subject in my initial training but would value targeted just-in-time training on that topic now. UMUC has started an online writing skills course for students that I find is a valuable indirect form of faculty support, relieving me of the responsibility of being a writing tutor.
- Yes, knowledge of content is critical and one that is central to the UMUC approach. In my experience, I could not have coped with all the other challenges of going online (especially the changing software environments) if I had not known the subject matter in great depth, thus being able to concentrate almost exclusively on other challenges.
- No, I had not expected the process of grading to be as challenging as it has been; very few of my other critical reading experiences transferred over to grading, and UMUC did not cover the topic in its online faculty training. I felt that I was doubly challenged because I had not done it in the classroom before having to do it online. However, UMUC automatically inserts standardized wording about grading in my online Syllabus that I now use to organize my assignment feedback to students. However, there may be a challenge regarding grading consistency within our MDE faculty cohort that is challenging to identify and redress at a distance.

- Knowledge of software, which was indeed my biggest limitation (my tutor was talking seriously about my not passing the first half of the course!), has in many ways become my greatest point of personal pride in terms of the growth that I have experienced as a result of being an MDE faculty member.

Fourth, UMUC's openness to experimentation mean that I have had a depth and breadth of experience that I would not have had otherwise. UMUC continues to revise its services and practice and is gradually supporting other technologies such as audio clips and conference calls so that students who prefer to learn by means other than print can do so.

Online teaching, like any other form of teaching, represents a tremendous opportunity to stay current in the field and to meet adult peers who happen to be students from many walks of life. It is my practice to log onto my course every day except Saturday (with the occasional miss on a Sunday) because, while I might like to think that I am being a conscientious teacher, the reality is that I enjoy the connectedness and excitement and find that the course is a great start to the day.

Drilling down into the tangential experiences that other MDE faculty bring to the model would uncover perhaps unexpected findings that might also contribute to explaining why the MDE model works. For example, I find that the skills I have transferred or built upon have not been the in-person ones that I possessed before starting to teach online, but the technology-based skills that I had acquired from using other technologies, especially audio conferencing. One of the most cogent reasons that I can give for this impression is that audioconferencing, like online, has no visual element and so the techniques that I learned to promote community in the audio environment work well in the text environment. In sum, and regardless of my thoughts in the next section, I have found the experience of being an online adjunct faculty member in UMUC's portion of the MDE to be a highly rewarding experience, one that I value and look forward to continuing.

4.2.3. Challenges and Ongoing Issues

Notwithstanding the comments above, the UMUC model of faculty support as I experience it is that of the solitary faculty member who works pretty autonomously with minimal support. My experience might be seen as analogous, perhaps, to Moore and Kearsley's "author/editor" model (1996, pp. 105-106) except I would define it as an "author/DE coordinator" model. The team available to a remote faculty member is, in my personal experience, tenuous and not as a real presence in practice as it is intended to be in theory. What follows are my own personal perceptions of my reality, and are not, I want to stress, what either UMUC or the MDE program, have intended me to experience.

- **Inclusion and Community:** I routinely receive communications from UMUC administration designed to make me feel included in the UMUC community: e.g., invitations to commencement and other events. However, since neither UMUC nor the MDE program seem to have a travel budget to support my attendance, receiving such invitations has the opposite effect of what is intended – I feel excluded from the UMUC community and think that I would prefer not to be invited to events that I cannot attend. Second, while I have a strong sense of community with MDE core faculty after the January 2002 in-person meeting in Oldenburg, I have never met non-faculty who are my support team at UMUC and since most are hard, if not

impossible, to reach by phone, I have not been able to experience my preferred mode of distance relationships that would include a voice element.

- **Finances:** On a related issue, UMUC does not provide financial support for the additional office expenses that I incur as a result of being an adjunct faculty member: e.g., printer paper, computer and printer use, increased ISP charges, etc. In my experience, I subsidize the MDE, a model that does not seem scalable and sustainable in the long-term. The budget for the visiting expert model described above is unclear to me as a faculty member. The two faculty that I have invited as guests in my course participated as a professional courtesy at no charge.
- **Competition for DE coordinator time and lack of continuity:** My sense is that I am in a losing competition with on-campus faculty and on-campus meetings for access to my DE coordinator. Moreover, I have experienced a high turnover rate (2 DE Coordinators in 2 years) and have never met either person which works against continuity and a sense of being part of a team. It is important to note that my current DE Coordinator is not MDE Coordinator, Deborah Schroeder who was interviewed for this article. Hence, any continuity that she might offer the MDE is not one that I experience. The lack of continuity is a particular challenge because the previous coordinator customized my course with Dreamweaver but then left. My impression is that he, like myself, felt ownership of my course; understandably, I have lost that element of collegiality with a new DE coordinator.
- **Continuous course revision:** The degree of ownership given to us as course authors who teach our own materials rather than tutors who use others' resources results in the expectation of continuous course revision every semester without any equivalent difference in pay.
- **Policy asymmetry between two MDE partners:** Of necessity, UMUC and Oldenburg administer the MDE using a combination of (i) policies that are consistent and common to all faculty in the MDE and (ii) policies that are different and apply differently to faculty in the MDE because each institution is an autonomous university. While understandable, such a hybrid policy environment results in inconsistencies in faculty requirements and support. For example, UMUC's policy that all graduate faculty must use audio clips in their courses does not apply to Oldenburg faculty, resulting in extra work for UMUC faculty and differing resources for students depending on which institution's faculty has developed and taught the course.
- **Workload:** Allen's (2001) statement about features of the UMUC teaching model which noted "small class sizes of 20-30" is not something that resonates with me. My experience teaching a core course in the MDE is that I consistently have the maximum enrollment of 30 graduate students at the start of each semester and, unlike campus faculty, have no help in terms of a resource such as a teaching assistant.
- **Basic level of support tools for students:** My feedback from students is that the mandatory UMUC library course and the recently introduced writing course are too basic: e.g., they did not learn how to search online journals or indeed did not learn about the difference between peer-reviewed journals and professional newsletters. As a result, I find that there is no effective support to relieve me as a faculty of those burdens. My assumption coming into the MDE and seeing that UMUC offered those courses was that I could expect students to have a level of writing and research skills that they do not consistently have.

- Lack of support for other technologies than online text: Notwithstanding my previous positive comments on some of the work that UMUC is doing to expand its technology mix, I find that the essential requirement that text is the only mandatory, supported format (e.g., conference calls can only be used as an option) limits the teaching/learning formats faculty can offer and disadvantages students who would appreciate having audio and video modes of learning.

5. Conclusions

New technologies always have both intended and unintended consequences, creating new challenges at the same time as they offer new opportunities. The online environment allows institutions to recruit and employ teaching staff for their expertise regardless of geographic location, and hence, can facilitate the creation of a dynamic and richly diverse learning environment for students. At the same time, arrangements for faculty remuneration, working conditions, and all other facets of development and support are becoming increasingly complex. The MDE is part of a small but growing number of international collaborative graduate programs offered by institutions on two different continents and employing a combination of full-time on-site and part-time geographically remote faculty to teach an internationally based study body through computer-based technology. It offers an interesting model for examining and evaluating the practice of providing faculty support in an online environment.

The complexities and challenges presented by employing geographically remote faculty need to be addressed through careful planning and budgeting before a program is implemented. As well as ensuring adequate resources, basic questions such as the nature and appropriate level of faculty support should be addressed in the context of program design and philosophy. Based on the experience in the MDE program, the following are recommendations for faculty support practices that have the potential to contribute to teaching effectiveness.

If faculty members are geographically remote and have a high level of responsibility for course design and content, it is important to recruit faculty who are as independent and self-directed in their work and learning style as their students need to be. Shortly after recruitment (and if possible, regularly thereafter), it is ideal to offer the opportunity for faculty members to meet some or all of their faculty and support colleagues face to face. Provision of opportunities to meet with other faculty is very important to the effectiveness of both the individual and the teaching team and contributes to the quality of the program. If meeting face to face is not possible, it is important to find other ways to orient faculty to the culture and context within which they will be working and start a process of continuous dialogue by communicating a sense of inclusion and encouraging contact. An orientation should address the following:

- overall objectives and values of the institution and program (institutional culture; pedagogical stance; what kind of learning experience students should expect; what skills and knowledge students will be expected to gain)
- program and course content (faculty member's role in the larger context)
- expectations for faculty performance (e.g. availability to students, time to be spent online, turnaround times for feedback and grading)
- policies with regard to most common academic issues and where to find information on these (e.g. grading, extensions)

- information about who to contact for different types of assistance
- an opportunity for the faculty member to introduce themselves and talk about their course
- an exchange among experienced and new faculty about what practices might be helpful when starting online teaching

In addition to an orientation, a welcome should be sent to each faculty member before teaching begins. This welcome should be sent via regular mail as well as online, and include a message from the person with whom the faculty member will have the most contact. The welcome can reinforce the desirability of regular contact. The welcome package should not overwhelm with information that is not yet useful. However, a quick guide of perhaps 2 – 4 pages of most frequently needed information could be kept for handy reference by the computer. For example, this might include the following:

- faculty support contact information, e.g. name of main contact and telephone number and e-mail address; toll free number for the Help Desk,
- how and where to find information online, e.g. website for Faculty Portal, website for the Faculty Handbook with a short guide to content (e.g. incompletes, grading), website for academic policies, main program website, website for student self-help and student non-credit courses, website for Library, online journals and other resources.

Mentoring by an experienced faculty member during the first term of teaching online appears to be a very effective method of training and at the same time, ensures quality and consistency of approach. Further, online faculty members need to have confidence that assistance for dealing with technical procedures and problems is readily available in order that they can focus attention on course content and teaching. It helps if assistance is offered by someone who is experienced with pedagogical matters and with interacting with faculty. Online library services are as critical to geographically remote faculty members as they are to students. Services such as interlibrary loans, copyright clearance, online journals, and document scanning help faculty keep their courses up to date and dynamic. As well, the provision and management of online resources and materials are critical. For example, materials that are custom written by the instructor for the course should be easily accessible for updating and reuse.

The Oldenburg model of support provision is very successful in its objective of keeping the focus of faculty on pedagogical matters and content rather than having them spend a great deal of time on technical details. However, it is important to note that this model requires a faculty support person who is not only readily available when needed but who is highly skilled, both in pedagogical issues and technical aspects of teaching online. Supporting a first-time faculty member can be labour intensive in this model, and this raises the question of scalability. Oldenburg tries to maximize their investment by making the greatest effort in the first term with the intention that the instructor will become largely self-supporting fairly quickly. However, it would not be possible using the Oldenburg model to support large numbers of faculty with one academic support person. By contrast, UMUC is able to support many more faculty using a model which ensures scalability by having DE Coordinators who focus on technical assistance and who are assigned large sections of teaching staff. However, this model does not always provide the readily available and personalized service that a faculty member, particularly a new one, needs.

Online teaching and learning is growing at a phenomenal rate, and as with any new area of practice, there are still many questions of how best to proceed. In order to offer a quality learning environment, it is necessary to recruit and support quality teaching staff. However, supporting geographically remote part-time faculty is challenging and can be expensive. It remains to be seen whether and how institutions like UMUC and Oldenburg can maintain the type and quality of faculty support that they have provided to date. Further, issues of what part-time faculty can realistically expect in terms of remuneration, benefits, defrayment of expenses for costly home offices, opportunities for research and development, and participation in academic decision-making are yet to be addressed.

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