In the Classroom 27
How to Get More Faculty Involved With Professional Development

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Stan Skrabut: Thank you very much for taking time out of your schedule to hang out with me. Hopefully, you're also doing something fun while you're listening to the podcast. I realize you can be listening to other podcasts. The fact that you're hanging out with me, I really appreciate it. This week, we are going to look at a strategy that I use to get more faculty involved in professional development. That we are always trying to build upon skills to improve the use of technology, and the use of instructional methods in our classrooms, so we can help students learn more, learn better, learn faster. The problem is getting faculty and professional development in the same places.

I think I found a solution where I could get to pretty much anywhere in the world and I want to share that with you. First of all, let's start with the problem. My role as the director of Technology Enhanced Instruction is to help faculty learn how to use technology in the classroom and better instructional methods. This is not a unique problem; this is a problem that instructional technologists face all over the globe. We were spending a lot of time and energy building workshops, putting together our presentations, our instructional lesson plans, and just putting a lot of energy on topics that faculty wanted and topics that we knew could help them in the classroom and help students at the end of the day.

We would hold one of these workshops and maybe one person showed up. Two people at the most. This was happening month after month, after month. In spite of going out and asking, "What's the best days to do this? What's the topics that you want to hear about?" We put a lot of time and energy into doing it. To be honest it was demoralizing. Not giving up, we said, "Well, we'll create webinars and we'll try to get them through webinars." Very often I would give a webinar to an empty void. Nobody was out there, no participation, but we would still record them and make them available. We figured they didn't have to leave their office to come to a webinar, but that still didn't work.

We created courses in our learning management system but we got virtually no participation there. Frankly, faculty too busy. We were not in their face to help them out. Thinking about it, we needed to come up with even an easier approach. Here is the solution that I came upon. I came upon it rather by accident, and it came about because of a course that I took. I have a side-hustle. I try to help business owners to figure out how to leverage social media in their businesses. I had taken a course on podcasting by John Lee Dumas. I thought it was going to be like a typical course where there's a learning management system.

It could be Teachable or Udacity or something like that, but instead, suddenly I started getting a series of emails. John Lee Dumas set up his course to be sent out email, one email at a time for a period of five or six days. I thought to myself, "I wonder if our faculty would be interested in taking these courses this way." That's what I set out to do. These courses that I took from John Lee Dumas, his course was sent out every day for a period of five days. It was a single email each day with a bite-size chunk of information. That bite-sized chunk focused only on one topic. There would be text that you would read, it would have links to additional materials, and it would also typically contain a video where he provided some type of instruction.

I set out to figure out what I could do. I repurposed a course that we had put into the learning management system. That was my starting point to say, "I'm going to repurpose this. I'm going to take another learning management system; I'm going to build into this email course and I'm going to see if anyone wanted to take it." In piloting this, I used a program called Mailchimp. Mailchimp is an email service provider. This is really important because there, certain rules that you have to follow when you're sending email to individuals.

One of the important rules is they need to be able to opt-in and they need to be able to opt-out. Mailchimp, fortunately, provides this capability. It was possible that I could create a form that faculty could fill out, and they can indicate the course that they were interested in, and they would be enrolled in that particular course, and then it would automatically start sending out emails. It was now possible for a faculty to take a course from me anytime they wanted. It did not rely on me. It did not rely on being in a specific place at a specific time. They could just sign up for the course. Basically, in Mailchimp, you create these groups where you're placing faculty, and once they have joined a group, then the sequence of emails will start, and they will continue for as long as the course is. I'll talk a little bit more about the design of the course.

How did that work out? We have nine courses right now, and of those nine courses we have 105 participants who have taken at least one of those nine courses. As far as each course, the courses range from four participants to 47 participants, and total we have 176 seats that have been filled. We promote these basically every other month. We let faculty know that they are there, we announce new courses and we put that information out to the faculty. We keep adding new participants. This has worked out quite well in my opinion. Currently, as we have nine courses, we have four courses that deal on accessibility, from accessibility with videos and documents and blackboard and just the whole idea of accessibility in itself.

We have also created courses on open education resources and multimedia learning, quality user-experiences in the online world, universal design for learning. we also have our no-stress start-up course which is basically getting new faculty up and going, getting the course ready for a new term. On top of that, we just finished creating an adjunct onboarding course. All our new adjuncts, we do face-to-face instruction with them, but because there's so much information, what we're going to do is supplement this and put them into a course where we're going to send out this additional information, but something that they can save and use later if necessary.

We are also putting together an Interactive TV course and more online development courses. We're pretty excited where we are going. In our course development, we draft our courses in Google Documents. That way we can work out all the bugs, figure out where we're putting videos and different images, and just making sure that we get the language right before we go ahead and put into Mailchimp. To speed up the process, we have my whole team. We work off the same template and that way things are really standardized that people get used to how we have designed the course and we put that information out to them.

We've additionally-- In Mailchimp, you have the capability of creating templates and with those templates, it makes it easy to portal in new material and common elements that are across different messages such as the opt-out capability, or an announcement of things that we believe are important to the participants that we have in there. When we built the courses, one of the things that we have done is we use open education resources quite a bit. To get a lot of these courses up and going, basically, I scoured the internet for open education, or courses build with open education resources, Creative Commons documents just to make sure to use and repurpose that content.

I can't thank the individuals enough who made this information available using Creative Commons licenses. We continue to search the internet for these OER content courses, so we can turn them into email courses. As far as our course design, each course is basically structured the same way. That the first message they get after they sign up is they will get a welcome message that basically explains the process that's going happen over the next couple of days as well as provide an itinerary of the course content letting them know what modules that they're expected to see.

After that comes a series of messages. These messages will typically have instructional text as part of the content, but also, they may incorporate videos also as part of the course. Next to the last message of the course, I send out a congratulations message. With this message, I also include a video to congratulate them on successfully getting there. I also provide a claim code so they can pick up a digital badge that we have waiting for them on Credly so they can add to their badge portfolio. Then once the course is completed, seven days later, automatically we send them a survey to ask them about what they thought about the course and ways that we can improve the course, things like that.

So far, the response to the survey has been quite positive. The faculty who participated in the email courses really appreciate the format that we're using, and they encourage us to continuing on with that format. This is something I think other instructional technologists could do to help supplement what they're doing. Now, this is certainly not replacing what we're doing. We still hold face-to-face workshops. We're just doing less of them. We continue to have webinars and provide instruction on video and such. We are putting a lot of our energy into this email courses because of the response that we've seen so far.

It's just an idea that I think others can benefit from. If you happen to create a course and you share it with a Creative Commons license, I'd love to know and I would be happy to repurpose it for my faculty. With that, thank you very much for listening. Before you go, I just want to share a plug for my book.