

at institutions of higher education. Although there continues to be an increase in online courses offered, institutions have not adequately addressed student evaluations of online instruction. In our School of Education, we have continued to evaluate our online courses, but the evaluation process has undergone many changes due to the lack of standardized instruments or consensus on best practice in online instruction.

Our findings indicate that the evaluation tool reported in this study has high reliability. In addition, the six factors that emerged appear to be related to aspects that need to be included when designing online courses [6], suggesting that the tool might adequately assess aspects of effective practices in online instruction. As noted by Lee and Duncan-Howell [20], key elements for assessing the quality of an online course include accessibility, clear organization of course content, clear expectations, and engaging communication, similar to the six major domains that emerged in our study.

Best practice in online instruction includes providing authentic learning environments where collaborative learning is enhanced through both synchronous and asynchronous discussion platforms [16]. "Dialogue provides not only information about students' learning but is also an important means by which teachers can gain instant feedback about how students learn [17, p. 315]."

Prior research has indicated that students desire a high level of faculty-student interaction in online learning environments [5], [6]. As noted above, students in our online courses reported lower levels of satisfaction with instructor feedback than they rated other aspects of the course, and instructor feedback is a vital component for successful learning in online environments [5], [6].

Students also rated items pertaining to technology (e.g., interactive media, links to external readings, authenticity of online assignments) lower than most other aspects of their online courses. Effective multimedia provides strategies that teacher candidates can also use in their own teaching [1]. Robson [18] has indicated the importance of student-technology interaction and that it has been frequently neglected when designing online learning experiences. Richardson and Turner [19] caution that, "Effective communication is not happening virtually, which is leading to fragmentation of a learning community with feelings of isolation and confusion among some students (p. 2).

The results of this study provide valuable feedback for redesigning specific aspects of our instruction of online courses. Specifically, the selection of technological tools needs to consider student ability to navigate with ease and success. Instructors should provide guidelines to students about technology and resources available for students who experience problems with using technology [6]. Furthermore, the courses must include more authentic experiences to engage students, one of the seven principles of effective on line teaching identified by Bangert [6].

Finally, one of the most crucial aspects of online learning is the faculty-student interaction; student learning is enhanced when faculty connect with students throughout the entire learning process and demonstrate an interest in their learning [7], [8]. Perhaps our School of Education should specify specific guidelines for minimal levels of faculty-student interaction, including feedback on assignments, as well as a framework that includes best practiced based on research and student input.

7. References

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