Student and Faculty Transition to a New Online Learning Management System [1,2,3]

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Background: Online learning is rapidly emerging within nursing education. The purpose of this project was to provide a unified and consistent user interface in the new Canvas™ learning management system (LMS) for students and faculty and to promote super users who would assist faculty in a seamless transition from Oncourse™ to Canvas™.
Implementation Plan: Curriculum templates were provided within the LMS for nursing courses and numerous training opportunities with designated super users.
Results: Faculty reported feeling either competent (57%) or very competent (36%) in their ability to use Canvas™ LMS after implementation of the project; survey comments reflected an overall positive response to the transition to Canvas™.
Conclusion: This project resulted in a framework of standardized templates that are student centered and effective for quality online learning.

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Nursing education consists of rigorous academic demands targeted toward the safe practice of nursing and the preparation of students to meet minimum requirements on standardized nursing licensure examinations after graduation. Nurses must learn to think abstractly but apply their learning concretely. With an increasing number of associate degree in nursing to bachelor degrees in nursing programs available to students in a hybrid or online format, consistency in nursing education is threatened. Nurse educators must find ways to standardize curricula and instruction while still permitting room for creativity within courses (Schnetter et al., 2014). Student nurses are motivated by the combination of flexibility and convenience provided in online courses (Johnson & Smith, 2011), and hybrid models offer an additional opportunity for faculty and peer engagement. The literature for online education supports that, although students report a preference for online learning, it is not more time saving for faculty. According to Taft, Perkowski, and Martin (2011), the workload and intensity of effort for faculty are heavier for online education than for classroom education.

New online nursing programs are rapidly emerging that move the registered nurse from an associate's degree to a bachelor's degree. Online learning is especially useful when engaging returning students in rural settings who may struggle with flexibility to attend class, transportation time, and cost. The project discussed in this article took place on a small midwestern campus in preparation for the implementation of a new learning management system (LMS). The purpose of this project was threefold: (a) to facilitate a smooth transition from the Oncourse™ LMS to Canvas™ for the nursing division; (b) to provide a standardized user interface in the look and presentation of the LMS for students; and (c) to create two super users within the nursing division who would serve as educators and ongoing resources to faculty.

Problem Statement

Transitioning into the world of academia can be a challenge for faculty who have previously been in clinical settings; additional challenges may arise when introduced to an online LMS. Frustrations arise with changes, regardless of faculty experience (McDonald, 2010). The Scope of Practice for Academic Nurse Educators

(National League for Nursing, 2012) encourages nurse educators to develop innovative teaching and learning strategies that utilize resources and technology effectively. LMS's are tools to improve learning outcomes (Chipps, Kerr, Brysiewicz, & Walters, 2015) and can promote success for nurse educators when inclusive of student orientation materials and readily available resources (Johnson, 2016).

Self-directed learning provides students opportunity to develop autonomy. One of the largest challenges for online learning from both a student and faculty perspective is the LMS (Gummesson & Nordmark, 2012). The project members looked at the development of a standardized user interface for hybrid online nursing programs. The definition of *hybrid online* for this university is an individual course or academic program that delivers up to 70% of instruction in a fully online format but that also incorporates approximately 30% of learning via live classroom or clinical practice. Hybrid courses utilize a high number of adjunct and part-time faculty who may have minimal experience in electronic or Internet-based education or curriculum development. An administrative decision was made to move all nursing courses to the new LMS at the beginning of a new semester and faculty were expected to participate voluntarily in training sessions via online webinars or faculty development workshops (i.e., faculty were responsible for their own education). We anticipated that the conversion to a new LMS would be extremely stressful for all nursing faculty including adjunct teachers, and the risk of disruption in the learning process for our students was predicted to be very high as students were expected to independently utilize university resources in learning the new system.

Project Description

The project emerged from a concern over the full migration from the Oncourse™ LMS to the Canvas™ LMS at a single point in time. The rural school of nursing program involved in this project registered 55 traditional undergraduate nursing students and approximately 225 hybrid online and fully online nursing students. Instruction and faculty management for the fully online students was under management of the statewide regional home campus and was not included as a part of this project; however, administratively, those students are advised by our satellite campus; thus, they were included as comparators for the purposes of program evaluation. The project goals were to develop standardized template courses in Canvas™ specifically for the hybrid program that were available to the adjunct, part-time, and full-time faculty as they learned to use the LMS and plan for spring teaching assignments and to develop two faculty Canvas™ "super users" within the nursing department to serve as educators and resource persons.

Implementation Plan

The authors applied for and received a curriculum enhancement grant from the university to help support implementation of this project. Our intervention was twofold. First, we developed a template that was used to structure all of the hybrid online completion option courses delivered by our campus utilizing the new LMS, Canvas™. The purpose of this was to provide a unified and consistent user interface for both students and faculty. This need was identified in prior student feedback in which the faculty used the previous LMS in various and sometimes confusing ways for the students.

Framework

We conceptualized the hybrid online courses as a "textbook" that used the home page in Canvas™ as a "table of contents." On the home page, we provided hot links to Wiki pages that served as weekly "chapters." On each weekly Wiki page, faculty and staff were able to individualize and create activities, readings, and links to Web resources,

discussions, assignments, and/or quizzes. Several standardized pages (with active links to the home page) were added to all of the courses. These included links to the syllabus, academic policies, student support services, and Canvas™ support services for students.

Second, the authors became trained in the Canvas™ LMS in the spring and summer months prior to implementation. They developed a training schedule and then offered training and support to all of the full-time, part-time, and adjunct nursing faculty and staff in the nursing division at our campus ($n = 32$). Large and small group training sessions were held from during fall semester, and then, individualized training continued into the spring semester as the LMS was rolled out.

Collaboration and cooperation of the trainers and the faculty were vital to the success of the project. Collaboration consisted of scheduled meetings, structured deadlines to upload documents, and assistance for faculty and staff with individual courses. An emphasis was placed on courses that were scheduled to begin during the first term in spring semester.

During the evolution of the project, e-mails were sent to faculty asking for input, advice, and suggestions. In addition, this project was placed as a standing item on the monthly nursing division committee of faculty (with student representation) for review and discussion. At the completion of the project, all faculty who were teaching in courses that were transitioned into the Canvas™ LMS were surveyed to determine the effectiveness of the project, and students were contacted by their academic advisor and asked a series of questions about their experience during the first 8 weeks of 2016.

Results

Students

The academic advisor for the nursing department identified a total of 180 online students for telephone interview. Of these, 151 students were in the hybrid online track, whereas 29 were in the fully online track The number of students reached by telephone was 57 (32%) at weeks one, three, and six of the semester. The authors gave the academic advisor a list of questions regarding the LMS transition to ask the students and the advisor gathered the interview data. At week one, several of the fully online students reported being surprised by the transition to Canvas™ because they were not notified of any pending changes. Conversely, the hybrid online students were aware of the transition through announcements by previous semester instructors or academic advisors, although many seemed ambivalent about the change. Many students reported they liked Canvas™ once they got started, but they did not feel comfortable with the change so early in the spring semester. The overwhelming majority of students reported they had no previous experience with the LMS before spring semester (a few students taking online general education courses were more familiar with Canvas™). Most students did not attend a formal Canvas™ training; they just learned the system through trial and error. By week two, most students reported feeling more comfortable with the transition, with some students reporting they actually like the new system and preferred it over the former LMS. Near the end of the course (week six), several positive comments were made by students, along with worries about the rigors of some courses. Both hybrid and fully online students expressed no further concerns about the Canvas™ LMS transition.

Faculty

All faculty and staff members with teaching assignments ($n = 32$) were given opportunities to train in the Canvas LMS in either a group setting, online via webinars, or individually. Only those who taught in the first 8 weeks of 2016 were surveyed at week six of the semester ($n = 24$). Anonymous, 8-item questionnaires were distributed via