Serving Students and Faculty – The Centre for Teaching and Learning at Humber Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning

Opportunity

The Humber Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning in Toronto currently has about 425 online courses in its database, with about 250 sections (some courses may be offered more than once) offered each semester. The courses are largely within the diploma and degree programs; registrations in online courses for the 2011-2012 academic years hould come close to 17,000. The School of Liberal Arts and the Schools of Business, Social and Community Services, and Health Sciences currently lead when it comes to online course offerings. Currently, only the School of Liberal Arts offers online degree courses.

Within the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), the eLearning division works with both students and faculty to encourage the best possible learning and teaching through online and classroom- based use of technologies.

Innovation

For students, support from the eLearning team in the Centre for Teaching and Learning is centred on the learning management system (LMS); with faculty it includes training through an extensive variety of workshops anda six-week online course to prepare for teaching online. New projects have been put in placeto make the services of the eLearning team more widely known and utilized within Humber.

Student Support Services: Student success isthe primary goal of the service provided to online students. Through phone lines, e-mail, drop-in, and a web chat facility, the 5,000 to 6,000 online registrants per semester are offered non-academic support for their use of the LMS (Blackboard). LMS introductory webinars and face-to-face seminars are also provided.

Faculty Support Services

eLearning Roadshow: Staff from the eLearning team set up shop for a morning or an afternoon in high traffic areas of different schools at Humber, displaying laptops, white boards, and other technologies and ready to talk to faculty about how they might use elearning for classroom or online learning. They discuss and demonstrate applications both inside and in addition to the LMS, including wikis, podcasts, virtual classrooms, Humber's learning object repository, e-portfolios, mind mapping tools, and video production. This initiative is now in its second semester of operation.

eLearning Credit Program (ECP): Introduced in January 2012, this program seeks to encourage schools to use the eLearning graphic artists, programmer, and instructional designer to develop or upgrade their elearning resources and online courses. Schools have been awarded credits, based on their current level of online presence, which they can trade foreLearning services. Credits are awarded each semester and cannot be accumulated or rolled over.

Credits can be used to update graphics and images, replace learning objects, revitalize content, references, or readings, improve or add databases, animations, or undertake complex coding and programming challenges. The number of credits distributed has been matched to a set number of hours of eLearningstaff time available each semester. Faculty members can approach their Associate Deans with potential online revision or development projects that could be supported using the credits and a discussion is then held with the eLearning team concerning the work to be done and the number of credits it would require.

Outside support for online course development, guided by a vendor list of graphic and instructional designers, is also available to the Academic Schools.

Outcomes and Benefits

Student Support Services: Students are guided through the use of the LMS from a teaching and learning point of view, rather than focussing on the technical aspects. They learn how to access Blackboard as an effective learning tool.

As Mark Ihnat, eLearning Director, describes the benefits of the services provided to faculty by the Centre for Teaching and Learning and his eLearning team, "the online courses are quality and the teachers are qualified." Student success potential is the critical factor, as students demand more flexibility, more versatile assignments and assessments, and more varied learning tools. Faculty have been very impressed with what they can do with elearning and many have become advocates within their departments.

eLearning Roadshow: By going into the schools, eLearning staff are able to meet with faculty members who may beunfamiliar with the services and possibilities offered through elearning and learner-centred technology.

eLearning Credit Program: Although the ECP has just been introduced, it is already showing results as discussions have started with a number of schools. It has encouraged the schools to look at what they are offering through online learning and where it might be improved; faculty are learning about the skills in the CTL and the eLearning division and the advantages of using the credits rather than hiring outside consultants. Credits facilitate fairer access to eLearning services than the previous first-come, first-served approach and may bring in the schools which are currently less involved in elearning.

Challenges and Enhancements

Keeping the discussion going on the role that elearning can play is an ongoing challenge; the Roadshow and the ECP are designed to encourage the conversation. Faculty need to be informed about and inspired by the diversity of possibilities for enhancing student learning and engagements from fully online offerings to use of technologies in the classroom, mobile applications, social media, maximized use of the LMS, and tools found outside the LMS.

Quality is always a concern for both face-to-face and online learning. Recently, the eLearning team helped in auditing all of the online courses in the 2 year Police Foundations diploma program, identifying those in need of upgrading.   Furthermore, the eLearning team have helped a number of Academic Schools create Master Lists of their current online courses in order to improve the management and quality control of Humber's online offerings.

Student Support Services: The challenge is responding to the volume of calls that can be received at the beginning of each semester, whileensuring that each caller gets effective support and advice.

eLearning Roadshow: The disadvantage of the time involved in hosting the Roadshow is offset by the opportunity it provides for introducing faculty to the opportunities offered to students through elearning.

eLearning Credit Program: The use of the credits has to be carefully calibrated to ensure that the eLearning staff can meet the commitments. For projects that cannot be completed within the credit program, outside expertise can be hired to supply the necessary support.

Potential

Humber has a significant presence in online learning in Ontario which they want to maintain and enhance by building unique, quality courses that bring in students and provide them with excellent learning opportunities. A continuing focus has been on growth – 30+courses and 7 new certificate programs were completed in the last year with plans for similar growth to follow in the 2012-2013 academic year.

For Further Information

Mark Ihnat
eLearning Director
The Centre for Teaching and Learning
Humber Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning
mark.ihnat@humber.ca

http://www.humber.ca/centreforteachingandlearning