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An Exploratory Multi-Case Study of the Perceptions and Views of Academic Faculty Union Members Relative to Online Distance Education, Collective Bargaining & Related Policy

Dianne A. Wright, Ph.D. & Damon A. Davis, M.Ed.



Introduction

- Today's college and university faculty are faced with increased challenges and apprehension in light of the increasing existence and opportunities of online distance education.
- Further, according to some (Dooley and Murphy, 2000, et.al), with increased opportunities come the potential for increased full-time tenure-track faculty retrenchment, stress and tension.
- As such, online distance education obviously raises new issues for collective bargaining.

Purpose

- The purpose of this presentation is to share the results of a multi-case study conducted in two selected sites in the State of Florida and to consider the following three broad questions:
 - (1.) What is the interplay of **FORCES** that are **INFLUENCING** the changing role of the American academic faculty union?
 - (2.) What is the **VOICE** of the academic (faculty) union in light of the ever increasing existence of online environments in U.S. higher education?
 - (3.) How have online distance education environments in higher education influenced academic faculty union **POLICY** with regard to the professoriate?

Significance

- This study is significant in that it explores the perceptions and views of academic faculty union members in terms of the intersections between Online Distance Education (ODE) and Collective Bargaining.
 - Many faculty believe that ODE undercuts the skills and status of the faculty; thus reducing faculty power, and thus has weakened faculty unions.
 - In many respects, according to others, the ODE issue has gotten away from the academic faculty union.
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- However, little research to date has been conducted to test these assumptions.

Methodology

- Mixed Method Multi-Case Study Design
 - Qualitative Approach
 - Document Review
 - Open-Ended Electronic Survey Questions
 - Quantitative Approach
 - Closed Ended Electronic Survey Questions

Methodology Cont'd.

- **Sampling Plan**

- Convenience Sample

- Two Selected Sites/HEIs

- (One 4-yr. Public Institution; One State College)

- **Data Analysis**

- Document (Content) Analysis

- Survey (SPSS)

Results

Document Analysis:

- **According to the results of the researchers' content analysis of documents reviewed (i.e., selected HEI Statewide Union Faculty Senate meeting minutes between February 2010 – September 2013, and the most recent current Collective Bargaining Agreements of the selected study institutions:**
 - There were no mention of ODE until February 2012 with the mentioning of Western Governor's University as a threat (cited in the President's Address).
 - Distance learning and continuing contracts for college faculty was discussed during the February 2013 Faculty Union Senate Meeting.
 - A workshop presentation was given in September 2013, describing Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

Results (Cont'd.)

Document Analysis:

- Following are Articles pertaining to ODE language in selected study institutions' Collective Bargaining Agreements:
 - Discussed under:
 - Article 10 (Intellectual Property)
 - Article 12 (Work Hours)
 - Appendix B Compensation (Distance Learning)
 - Discussed under:
 - Preamble to Appendix G BOT-Union Policies
 - Assignment of Responsibilities:
 - Item #10 – Instructional Technology

Results (Cont'd.)

Response Rate – 74 union members

Demographics:

- Eleven Chapter Presidents
- 42% - Undergraduate Level
- 11% - Graduate Students
- 47% - Both
- 52 % - Tenured; 12% Tenure-Track
- Years Taught = 3 – 41 Years
- 81 % - 9 Mo. Faculty; 16% Twelve Mo. Faculty
- Salary Range = \$41K – \$98K+

Results Cont'd.

Interplay of Forces Influencing the Changing Role of the American Academic Faculty Union:

- Budget Cuts
- Technology vs. Brick & Mortar
- Education "On the Cheap"
- Corporate Mentality of HEI Administrators
- Legislative Agendas
- Contingent Faculty

Results

- Most of the study participants indicated they were not sure whether ODE has had any **influence** on academic (faculty) union policy.
- Other survey participants described ODE as:
 - Sometimes more concerned with financial and administrative issues, rather than teaching issues.
 - Having made legislators think that they can deliver **education “On the Cheap”** and do more with less.
 - Increasing the quantity of students by decreasing the quality of the education.
 - Expectation of/Pressure for **“High Enrollments”** in Online courses.
 - Money/Incentives For More Students.
 - **Eroding Academic Freedom and,**
 - Making Education a Commodity.
 - Expands the reach of the university [administration] to obtain adjuncts to do the teaching work.

(Results Cont'd.)

Influence of ODE Environments on Academic Faculty Union Policy (*Policy Questions*):

- **Work Conditions**
- **Academic Freedom**
- **Time Accountability,**
 - Work and Student Contact**
 - Office Hours**
 - Credit for Work from home**
- **Autonomy**
- **Course Creation & Delivery**
- **Intellectual Property**
- **Obligation To Teach on Line**
- **Compensation**
- **Evaluation**
- **Academic Quality & Integrity**

Results Cont'd.

Voice [view] of the Academic Faculty Union [role] in Light of the Ever Increasing Existence of Online Environments in U.S. Higher education...

- Role should be the same as for F2F class faculty.
- E.G., should:
 - pursue and advocate for equitable rights and treatment of ODE faculty.
 - defend academic freedom & protect autonomy.

Results Cont'd.

View of Role Cont'd.

- In addition:

- Negotiate ODE Work Conditions (e.g., office hours, respectable load credit/pay for work done

- Ensure the courses provided in the ODE belong to the institution's faculty.

- Promote the idea that work from home associated with **ODE = duty hours.**

- Demand accountability for quality standards & outcomes.

- Resist attempts to corporatize higher education.

- Make sure profits are shared with faculty.

- Advocate for Choice in whether to do online teaching.

Summary/Conclusion

- **Online distance education brings with it, new issues to take under consideration and, according to some, make faculty work more complicated as well as making it harder to bargain.**
- **This issue has, in many ways, gotten away from both the university and the union.**

Summary/Conclusion (Cont'd.)

- **Online Distance Education Has Not Been Dealt with Sufficiently in terms of academic faculty union policy development and advocacy.**
- **Faculty unions need to take a more active leadership role in the development of online distance education policy.**

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- There are still a lot of warts to be exorcized in terms of online distance education policy.
 - Consideration of dialoguing with some of the high-ranked institutions, e.g., MIT and Stanford, in terms of how they address related issues, and in particular promotion of forward-thinking approaches to use online distance learning in advantageous ways rather than to undercut the value of traditional coursework.

Recommendations for Further/ Future Research

- **Expand The Current Study to Increase the Response Rate.**
- **Continued Study and Research to Determine Whether ODE classes are as Instructive as In-Person Classes.**

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