

# Instructors are the key to learning – not the setting

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The Coronavirus pandemic has changed our professional lives in ways we couldn't have imagined, but one thing remains true: a healthy workforce and learning workplace still thrives on training and education that creates personal, effective, and meaningful impact.

As many organizations have moved traditional training to online environments, it's not uncommon to hear criticisms of online education that seem to mistake the vehicle for the journey, as though every book tells the same story and face-to-face educational experiences automatically ignite passion and mastery over subjects.

We know that's not true. We live in the real world where we have slept through some face-to-face trainings and classes while other instructors have opened worlds to us. We can tell the qualitative difference between the two experiences. The walls of a campus or training center, the names on the buildings and rooms, are vastly less important than the instructors who connect learners to subject matter in ways that help them engage their passions and develop real-world applications in virtual classroom environments.

On behalf of the University System of New Hampshire, Granite State College has developed unparalleled expertise in online education for adult learners for more than 20 years. The college shares best practices and recently launched a new graduate certificate for Administration of Online Programs for Adult Learners, which helps human resource departments and internal cross-functional training teams navigate the components of successful online education programs.

## Key elements of online course delivery

Organizations seeking to build online training curriculum or programming should consider several key components. Recognize that you're not simply "moving" an educational offering online. You must develop or review your program plan in consideration of the user experience, design, technological capabilities, assessment of learning and teaching, and support.

Effective online education programs clearly identify why they are needed and the anticipated outcomes, who will benefit, how activities will be evaluated, and what types of activities and assignments will help participants succeed based on evidence.

Consider whether you have the following in place in relation to an online program:

- **A Logic Model or Conceptual Map**—a simple outline that clearly describes:
  - Anticipated short-, mid-, and long-term outcomes.
    - Typically described at the organization, team, and individual level.
  - The evaluation criteria that will be used to measure success.
  - The resources, activities, and tools that will help learners practice with and demonstrate learning for formative and summative feedback and continued growth.
- **The Human Element:** Online learners consistently say one of the most important success factors in their learning is the human connection with instructors and peers. Online education done right can result in powerful human connection and learning. One activity that can be helpful in this area is to create a virtual "wrap-around" team that intentionally works across multiple roles on online learning design, development, delivery, and evaluation.
- **An Eye on the Future:** Effective online education thrives when planners understand how to develop and evaluate programs for today, while also being able to forecast and respond to emerging issues. One skill that helps program administrators develop a realistic and effective vision is through the activity of "futuring." This includes—at a basic level—monitoring the educational landscape, analyzing our own as well other people's assumptions, developing multiple scenarios and forecasts, and developing plans to address a dynamic and changing landscape.

With each of these themes, it's also important to build in time to reflect, analyze, document

continuous improvement efforts, and celebrate. It's through collaboration and celebration that we connect with each other, reduce feelings of online distance, and engage in effective online experiences.

*Julie began her career 22 years ago as a journalist covering education issues for local towns in Maine. As the newspaper industry downsized in the late 1990s, Julie refined her skills and served as a marketing director for nonprofit adult education programs within university settings for nearly a decade before pursuing her lifelong passion to serve as an adult educator in online settings. She served for five years as the director of online education at a university organization that provided training on systems change across the country, and began teaching online at Granite State College in 2011. Today, Julie serves as the Associate Dean of Academic Engagement & Faculty Development.*



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Granite State College has been a leader in online education in New Hampshire for nearly 20 years. Since the inception of *U.S. News and World Report's* online rankings in 2012, Granite State College has consistently held a competitive top position. More than 3,000 students enroll at Granite State annually and every student engages in online courses to complete a degree program.