

How to Develop an Effective Bachelor's Degree in Online Physical Education

By Brian Sather

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Abstract:

This draft plan includes recommendations for how to develop an online bachelor's degree in physical education. An undergraduate degree that includes an online community of learners model will give the program distinctive advantages. Key elements of the plan include recruiting technology savvy adjunct faculty, developing a custom online learning platform, and employing the use of video. The conclusion lists reasons the author will be the best person to administer the program.

Introduction

The draft plan I am outlining here is grounded in my years of experience in online teaching of university physical education. Based on my initiative to develop online pedagogy classes, Eastern Oregon University was able to offer a new concentration that allowed for both physical education and health to be taught online as a bachelor's degree in Physical Activity & Health. This began around 2004 and it still continues to be the only physical education bachelor's degree that can be completed entirely online. I will share my expertise and ideas about how to build an even more effective online program. While this is aimed at pedagogy, or physical education teacher education (PETE), this plan is adaptable to at master's degree or other sub-disciplines of kinesiology. More broadly, the principles can adapted for other university disciplines as well.

Distinctive Advantage

The reason this plan targets a bachelor's degree is because of its unique demands; that is, the perceived hands-on nature of undergraduate physical education is considered to be incompatible with online instruction. Because of this, many faculty are outrightly against offering online classes for undergraduates. Several universities do offer masters degrees online, presumably because the classes are more theory based.

I can say from personal experience and observation that it is entirely possible to effectively teach the classes of a physical education bachelor's degree online. Furthermore, "online" is does not preclude "hands-on." I will outlined the principles that support this notion as "key elements" below. Since programs are hesitant to proceed with online physical education classes, to offer an effective bachelor's degree provides a service that is unique and focuses on a niche market with great potential.

As an added benefit, my recommended approach is to develop a community, not merely a series of isolated classes that make up a degree. Students will join into a community that will extend beyond the classes and degree. The process starts when students are accepted and oriented into a system that includes peer, faculty, and alumni support. The online environment that is developed will offer a venue that is a community-based virtual meeting and collaboration arena.

Key Elements

- **Instructors:** The best approach is to hire an all-star cast of adjunct professors that are adept at using the tools of online education. This marks a departure from traditional programs that rely on full-time faculty. The adjunct model offers several advantages, but of particular importance is the ability to pull in the talented online teachers in various areas of expertise. Retrofitting an online program to an existing group of faculty inhibits the effectiveness of the program. Furthermore, faculty would likely be resistive to changing their teaching techniques or learning new technology skills. They should not be expected to make this change. Existing faculty contributions would certainly be welcome, either as instructors or in planning (e.g. curriculum design, teaching methods). The newly-hired online adjunct instructors would likely teach one or two classes each and retain their full-time positions elsewhere. As the program matures and demand increases, full-time positions may be developed that are dedicated to online instruction.
- **Teaching Platform:** A platform needs to be established that accommodates the unique demands of physical education. An example is the platform I developed at UniCommons.com. This or a similar application will be developed to accomplish the program objectives and teaching philosophy.
- **Video:** The program will employ the power of video as a medium for physical education instruction. Movement education is very visually oriented, and video serves as a valuable tool for demonstrating skills, evaluating movement, laboratory activities, presenting instruction, and communication. The platform I developed at PEvideo.org is an example of using video for instruction. I also have similar models employed on my sites CyclingAnalysis.com and PerformanceVid.com.
- **Financial Advantages:** One key feature is that this degree is offered at a state university or private institution with very low tuition cost to the student. This will allow for a competitive advantage based on price. The cost to the university will be relatively low. Pay should be on a per student per credit basis for faculty, which will have the advantages of accommodating fluctuations in student enrollment and incentive for faculty to take on more classes or students. Costs are low for software, but infrastructure is needed to support the software and technology that will be used directly by the instructors and students.
- **Quality Controls:** There will be several quality controls in place to ensure that the teaching is of high quality and objectives are met. Some ideas include peer review, "third-party" facilitators in classes, viewer metrics, and work output analysis. Most importantly, the feedback will be focused on the instructor's own improvement of online teaching. The university and department standards and objectives would be fully supported in the classes too. In other words, there would be no sacrifice in the integrity of the online classes compared to other classes at the university.
- **Establishing a Community:** A key concept is the development of a holistic community of learners. Learning opportunities should transcend the traditional boundaries of an individual class. The learning platform in my plan will be designed to allow for inter-class interactivity, virtual meeting areas for all students (e.g. forums, chats, conference rooms), and many other features that enhance a sense of community. These will be open to contributions by faculty, current students, perspective students, and alumni. This approach will allow for benefits to students that can last a lifetime. Some of these concepts I have outlined at www.UniCommons.com/main-menu/about

The Plan

Pre-requisites: The university already offers enough online classes that most general education classes can be covered. State university or low tuition recommended.

Year 1: Introduce the plan and offer a few starter classes that are part of the degree. Develop the learning platform. Design the curriculum based on existing curriculum. Recruit adjunct faculty.

Year 2: Introduce more classes that are part of the degree. Continue recruiting faculty. Targeted marketing of the degree. Ongoing learning platform development.

Year 3-5: All classes provided for degree. Development of full-time online faculty positions to "anchor" the program.

Years 4-10: Concerted ongoing market and product development.

Market development: Potential markets for new students.

- Military
- State certification to teach
- Students residing in other countries
- Region targeting

Product development: New products to offer.

- Other concentrations in kinesiology
- Certificate programs
- Other degrees: Associates, Masters, Doctorate
- Other academic disciplines

Why This Plan Needs Me

Here are the reasons I need to be commissioned as the planner and program director:

- **Teaching experience:** Most importantly, my experience in online teaching is largely unparalleled for physical education professors. I have a documented collection of information that demonstrates the effectiveness of my online instruction.
- **Technology competency:** I have consciously made an effort in the last 15 years of my teaching to stay current in web-based applications and technology tools for teaching. As a result, I am well-versed in website development and administering content management systems (e.g. Drupal, Moodle).
- **Video competency:** Video is another technology I have embraced and the skills I have developed have allowed for significant enhancements in the effectiveness of student learning.
- **Ready-to-go platforms:** My platforms for video and instruction already exist and have been tried and tested in live teaching environments.
- **Management expertise:** My experience in administration and advanced study of business management gives me the qualifications to oversee an outstanding online academic program.

- **My network:** I already have a provisional list of potential faculty and technology experts to pull together as a project team.
- **See my vita for more:** see www.BrianSather.com/content/professional-vita

To continue this discussion or share ideas related to this plan, please contact me directly at www.BrianSather.com/contact