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Current Issue

Don't Tell the Faculty: Administrators' Secrets to Evaluating Online Teaching

by **Thomas J. Tobin**

Administrators at many colleges and universities have had online courses at their institutions for many years, now. One of the hidden challenges about online courses is that they tend to be observed and evaluated far less frequently than their face-to-face course counterparts. This is partly due to the fact that many of us administrators today never taught online courses ourselves when we were teaching. This article provides six "secrets" to performing meaningful observations and evaluations of online teaching, including how to use data analytics, avoid biases, and produce useful results even if observers have never taught online themselves.



**Thomas J.
Tobin**

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From the Editor



Dear Friends and Readers,

In this issue, prolific distance learning writer Thomas Tobin shares some evaluation "secrets," and Melanie Shaw discusses learning contracts as a tool for student success. In this day of a clear urgency to explore and move into various forms of competency-based education, I find it most refreshing that the basic premise of our distance education tools remain somewhat constant.

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Since joining this field nearly 20 years ago, I have found there have been components of our administrative toolbox that have proven consistently essential. While they evolve and

generally improve, they are mostly geared to one of several DL admin functions: faculty training, assessment, staff development, student support, recruitment, marketing, and course development. I've spent more than a trivial amount of time refining and developing our administrative tools over the years, working closely with staff to either purchase or develop structured pathways that streamline our operations. The most common mistake we've made is not a failure to develop what we need, but rather to develop or purchase more than we need. In other words, when we fail to define exactly what is needed from our tools, we end up further complicating that which we are attempting to simplify. And we can also end up with a "tool of the day" mentality, whereby we react as though new is always better.

DL administration is really very much like instructional design, and perhaps a bit like living. Ideally, simple really is best.

Have a fabulous fall.

Melanie