BUILDING HIGH-QUALITY

Online Learning

INSIDE HIGHER ED

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Optimizing Online Platforms for High-Quality Learning

The recent educational climate has definitely seen its fair share of ups and downs. D2L has been by your side through many of these changes, and we know that it hasn't been easy. We recognize that transitioning academic programs to an online environment can be daunting and overwhelming, to say the least.

Most of you have had no choice so far but to be reactive. You've spent the past months changing gears, getting others up to speed, and possibly trying to convince faculty and students that online learning actually works.

That's why it's so important for us at D2L to help you make your online campus experience as beautiful and as well-supported as your existing on-campus one.

Online and blended learning are likely going to be part of our lives for the foreseeable future, so let's instead start being proactive. The time has come to take the online infrastructure you've put together and ensure that you're optimizing it by offering high-quality, on-brand digital learning experiences.

But how? Most of us have learned that delivering online courses isn't just a matter of replicating an in-class structure. So how can we turn online courses from content storage facilities into interactive learning communities?

D2L strives to help you provide high-quality programs that give your faculty, staff, and students the confidence that online learning really can enhance your existing teaching and learning models. Plus, we're here to show you the many added benefits that online learning has to offer, like flexibility, accessibility, automation, and personalization.

With online classes, students have the flexibility to learn anywhere and anytime—addressing known challenges for today's on-the-go student. You're naturally going to increase levels of student satisfaction and retention by incorporating asynchronous opportunities so that students can work around their own schedules—or time zones! Reach a diverse student population by making your programs accessible to them.

Our Brightspace learning platform offers responsive design and is compliant with industry accessibility standards, including the WCAG 2.1 guidelines, Level AA, and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. We believe that students should have access to the best possible learning opportunities, no matter what their individual needs may be.

Perhaps one of the best ways to improve online quality is by optimizing personalization. Conditional release allows you to create custom learning paths for differentiation and accommodation, so that learners can work at their own pace. Plus, automated messaging makes personalized communication a breeze for instructors. Increase levels of student engagement with interactive content, gamification, self-assessment opportunities, video responses, and badging systems.

Last but certainly not least, we can't forget about collaboration. Many students worry they'll feel disconnected from their peers in online courses; but it's absolutely possible to build meaningful connections through an online platform, even without constant video calls. Discussion forums encourage social/collaborative learning and peer-to-peer communication. Asynchronous video feedback is a fantastic way to save time and personalize output while catering to a variety of learning preferences.

So, let's move forward in a proactive way—by building high-quality online learning experiences together, so that all students can reach their full potential.

Aly Scott
Chief Marketing Officer
D2L

Introduction

Even before COVID-19 forced most college instruction online in early 2020, virtual learning had become an important component of many students' postsecondary experiences. About a third of all students said they had taken at least one online course and nearly half of all college and university faculty members reported having taught at least one course virtually.

Post-pandemic, using technology tools to design and deliver high-quality education will be even more essential. Even when most colleges and universities bring most or all of their students back to campus, professors' and students' increased exposure to remote learning during the pandemic will have reshaped their comfort with using technology, and their expectations for how effectively they can teach and learn in virtual or blended settings.

This compilation of *Inside Higher Ed* articles and essays explores how institutions, professors, instructional designers and students are striving to make online and blended education more effective and engaging.

We welcome your ideas for for further coverage on these topics, and encourage you to reach out to us at editor@insidehighered.com.

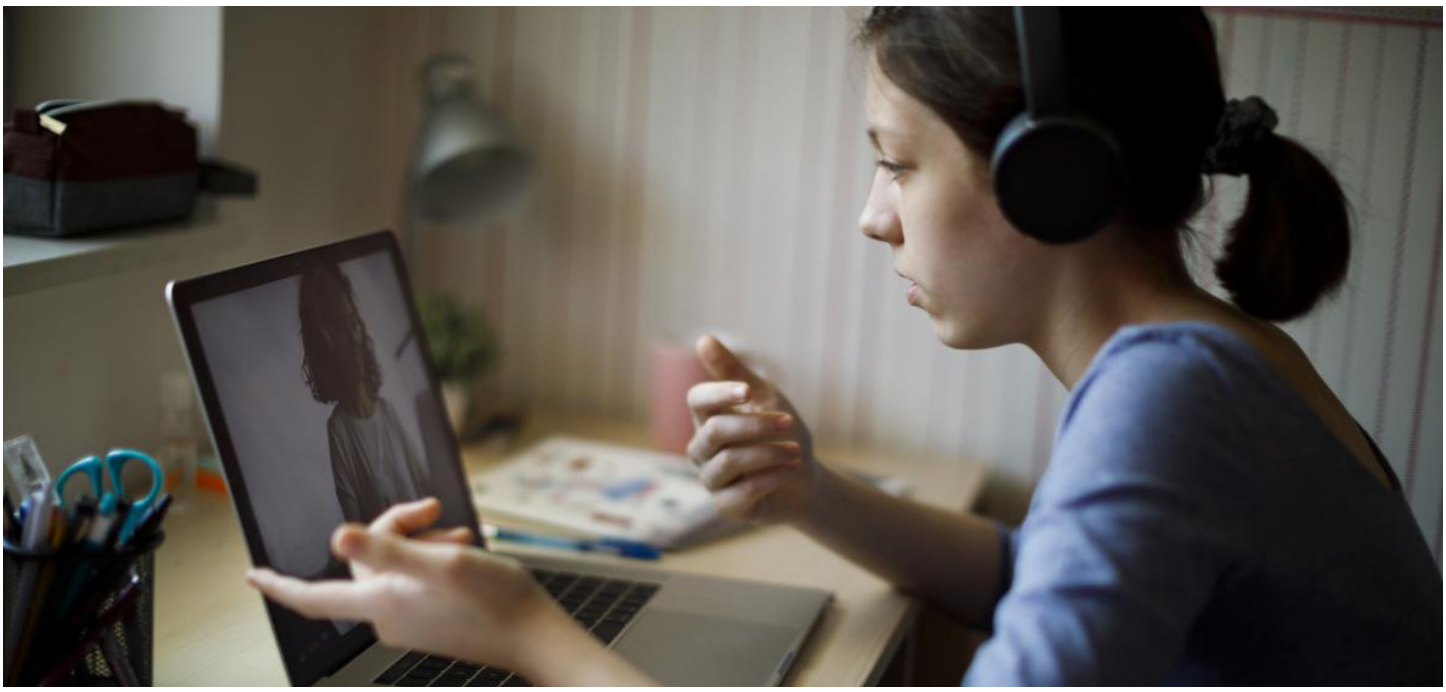
--The Editors

NEWS

Faculty Confidence in Online Learning Grows

Survey finds significant increases in professors' confidence in virtual learning and their sense of support from their colleges -- but continuing concerns about equity for underrepresented students.

By Doug Lederman // October 6, 2020



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For years, advocates for online learning have bemoaned the fact that even as more instructors teach in virtual settings, professors' confidence in the quality and value of online education hasn't risen accordingly. *Inside Higher Ed* has documented this trend in its annual surveys of faculty attitudes on technology going back over most of the 2010s.

Some hoped that by thrusting just about every faculty member into remote teaching, the pandemic might change that equation and help instructors see how virtual learning might give students more flexibility and diminish professors' doubts about its efficacy.

A new survey finds that COVID-19 has not produced any such miracles: fewer than half of professors surveyed in August agree that online learning is an "effective method of teaching," and many instructors worry that the shift to virtual learning has impaired their engagement with students in a way that could exacerbate existing equity gaps.

But the report on the survey, "Time for Class COVID-19 Edition Part 2: Planning for a Fall Like No Other," from Every Learner Everywhere and Tyton Partners, also suggests that instructors' increased -- if forced -- experience with remote learning last spring has enhanced their view of how they can use technology to improve their own teaching and to enable student learning. The proportion of instructors who see online learning as effective may still be just under half -- 49 percent -- but that's up from 39 percent who said so in a similar survey in May.

It also suggests that most professors feel much better prepared to teach with technology this fall than they were last spring -- and they generally credit their institutions for helping to prepare them.

"It's not so much about whether they support online learning now than whether they're more comfortable with the adoption of prac-

tices and instructional methods in ways that are really powerful to support student learning in meaningful ways," says Kristen Fox, director at Tyton Partners and project lead on the survey and report.

Historical Attitudes

Faculty skepticism about online learning and other technological approaches to higher education is long-standing -- and arguably well earned. Too often campus administrators or technology advocates have heralded digital forms of higher education by focusing on cost savings or efficiency over quality, or set instructors up for bad outcomes by imposing solutions on them without seeking their input or giving them adequate training.

Even so, pre-COVID-19, more and more instructors had taught online or hybrid courses (the percentage was at 46 percent in an *Inside Higher Ed* survey last fall). Yet when asked in that same survey whether "online courses can achieve student learning outcomes at least equivalent to in-person courses," fewer than a third agreed.

Every Learner Everywhere, a network of college and technology groups focused on using digital learning to drive equitable access and success in higher education, and Tyton Partners, an investment, research and consulting firm that is part of the network, published the first "Time for Class" survey in July, focusing on how professors adapted (successfully and not) to the sudden shift to remote learning.

This follow-up survey focused on this "fall like no other" and on how instructors and their colleges and universities prepared for it.

The answer is "first and foremost about sentiment," says Tyton's Fox.

In May's first survey, 39 percent of instructors agreed with the statement "online learning is an effective method for teaching," and 31 percent disagreed. When the question was asked of the 3,569 respondents in August, 49 percent agreed and only 21 percent disagreed, with the neutral group remaining about the same size. (About 1,000 professors were queried in both surveys, and 9 percent more of them answered positively in August than in May.)

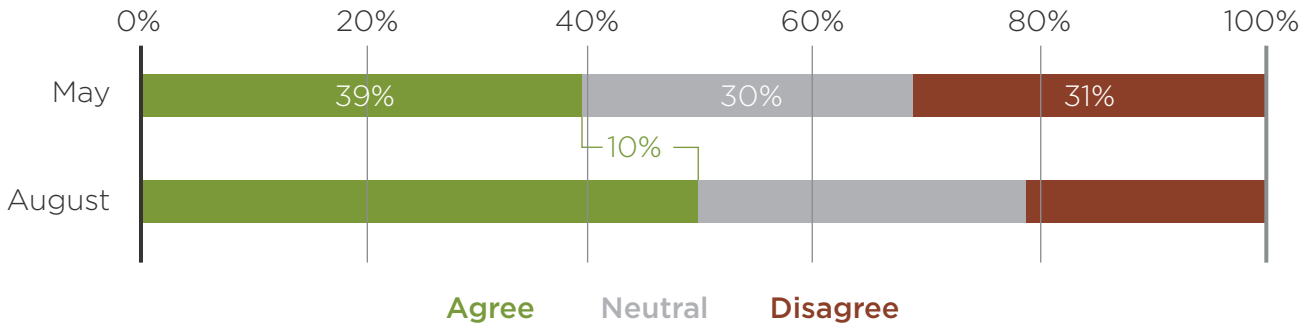
They cited a variety of reasons why: one community college teacher said that "every student engages (there are no 'quiet' students), there's a degree of flexibility for students, using online resources in place of purchased texts relieves student cost," while another instructor said that her "course content is the most up-to-date it has been in several years with the extra prep I have been doing for the transition online."

By far the biggest complaint from students and faculty members alike about the remote learning that most experienced last spring was the lack of engagement and interactivity between students and instructors and among students themselves.

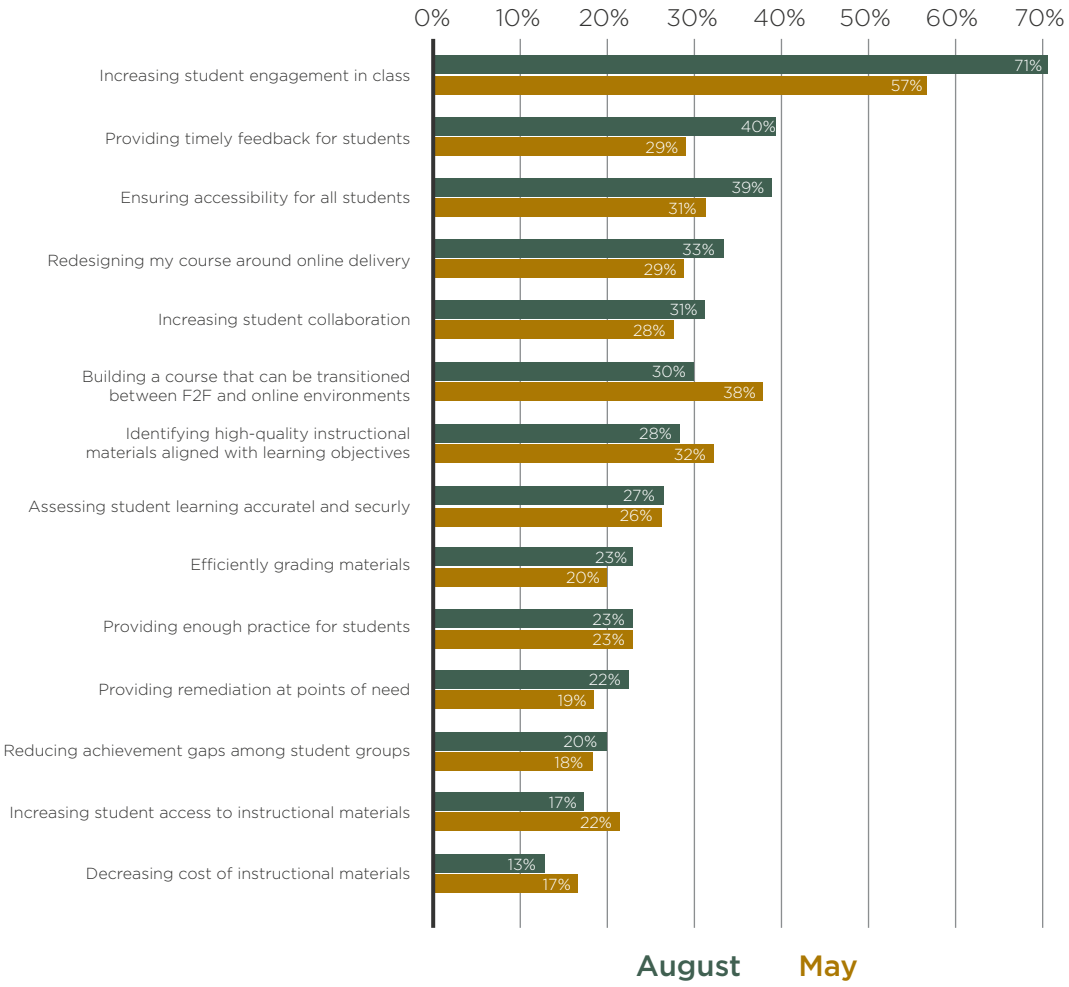
So it's probably not surprising that instructors' biggest objective this fall, by far, was to increase that engagement, they say. Among other changes they pursued was to provide more timely feedback and ensure accessibility for all students -- a recognition that students from low-income backgrounds were likelier than peers to lack access to good technology, broadband internet access and quiet places to study, among other necessities for digital learning.

Four in five instructors said they had participated in professional development for digital learning to prepare for this fall, with community college professors (86 percent) more likely than their peers at four-year colleges to say so. Two-year-college instructors were also likelier to say that they were required to participate in instructional professional development, by 40

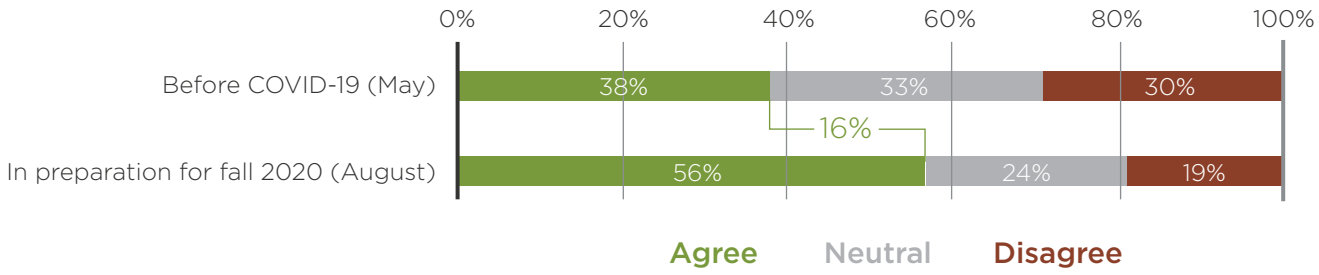
"ONLINE LEARNING IS AN EFFECTIVE METHOD FOR TEACHING"



TOP FACULTY PRIORITIES IN PLANNING FOR THE FALL TERM



"MY INSTITUTION HAS PROVIDED SUFFICIENT TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHING ONLINE"

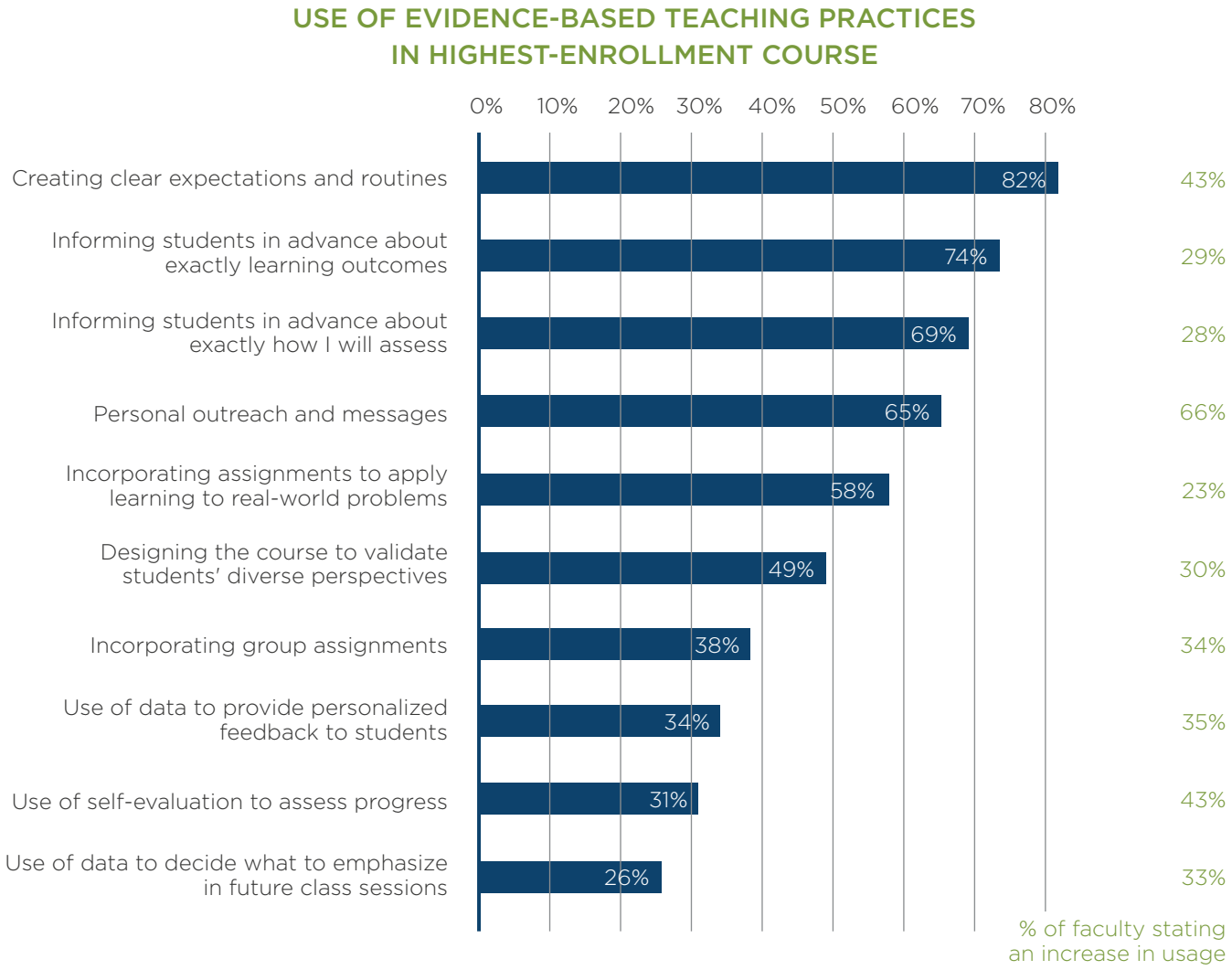


percent compared to the average of 27 percent.

More than half of instructors credited their institutions with providing sufficient training for the fall, compared to fewer than two in five who felt that way pre-COVID.

Instructors said they turned to a mix of institutional resources and peer support for help -- more than three-quarters said they received aid from instructional technology staff members (78 percent) and peer-to-peer forums (76 percent), while about two-thirds cited teaching and learning centers and instructional designers.

Asked how, with that help, they



had redesigned their courses from spring to fall to achieve those goals, more than half of instructors said they had updated their learning objectives, assessments and activities (61 percent) and integrated the use of new digital tools (60 percent), while nearly half (46 percent) said they had embedded "more active learning elements (e.g., group discussion) to enhance student learning and engagement."

Much larger proportions of faculty members say they will use a set of what the report calls "evidence-based teaching practices" in their largest course this fall than was true the last time they taught the course pre-COVID-19.

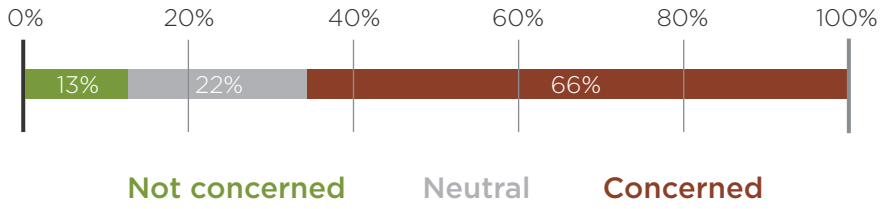
For instance, as seen in the chart above, roughly two-thirds of instructors (65 percent) said they would engage in personal outreach and messages to students; that 65 percent represents a 66 percent increase over the last time the courses were taught, the professors collectively said.

These figures suggest that the COVID-19-driven changes in how colleges operate are driving the sorts of pedagogical innovation that critics have long suggested (fairly or not) professors engage in too rarely.

Some of those practices -- like the personal outreach approach cited above -- take significant time and energy and add to many instructors' sense of being overwhelmed, says Fox of Tyton.

She sees some irony in the fact that one of the least-used of the evidence-based practices listed above -- using data to give personalized feedback to students -- could make it much easier for professors to do the outreach they so clearly want to do.

"We hear, 'I want to engage my students, give them more timely and personalized feedback, but it takes so much time to do it right and well,'" says Fox. "If I have 100 students, I'd ideally use the student learning data I have at hand" -- maybe the results of more frequent



quizzes, data on who is showing up in class or logging in to use the content -- "to figure out how to triage and intervene in ways that aren't killing me as a faculty member."

Many faculty members know how to do that in the physical classroom, Fox says, relating a commonly heard faculty comment: "I know how to read the face of a confused and struggling student."

Doing so in a different format is a "learnable, teachable skill that faculty are asking for" and that colleges could help with, she adds.

Hopeful for Fall

All of the changes that instructors have made, with all of the help their institutions have given them, had professors stepping into their classrooms -- virtual or otherwise -- pretty confident this fall. About three-quarters of those who were preparing to teach online (74 percent) and those who were preparing to teach fully in-person (73 percent) agreed with the statement "I am prepared to deliver a high-quality learning experience to my students this fall," while about 10 percent disagreed.

Those who were preparing to teach in hybrid or other "flexible" formats were slightly less confident, with about two-thirds saying so.

"This reflects the unique challenges of these delivery modes and the need to better support and share best practices for mixed-mode course delivery," the report states.

Worries Remain

Lest anyone think most instructors have gotten overly confident in their own abilities or the efficacy of their colleges and universities, however, many faculty members believe they have a long way to go in delivering technology-enabled learning that meets their students' needs.

Professors' support for the statement "my institution is achieving an ideal digital learning environment" (How many faculty members would say anything at their institutions is ideal?) climbed noticeably from the spring, with a particularly sharp rise among two-year institutions. This is "an outcome of the herculean efforts that many across higher education have made," the report states.

The area of largest concern for many faculty members appears to revolve around equity. Professors' lists of the top challenges their students faced in the spring, and are likely to face in the fall, included things like fitting coursework in with home and family responsibilities, managing student mental health and wellness, ensuring reliable internet access, and managing financial stress in light of COVID-19.

Most of those challenges disproportionately affect students from low-income and other disadvantaged backgrounds, which is why two-thirds of surveyed instructors said they were concerned about equity gaps.

Fox and the report's other authors find an almost hopeful note in that concern about equity, which they suggest may be a silver lining to the hardships presented by COVID-19: "greater empathy for and understanding of the challenges faced by students."

"As soon as we made the decision to go fully online last March, there was a clear difference in success rates for the rest of the term because of access to technology, equipment, and internet," the report quotes one community college faculty member as saying. "It was frustrating and heartbreaking to see which students struggled to manage the class. This is the biggest hurdle we face. Making online classes is hard, but not as hard as making sure everyone has equal access." ■

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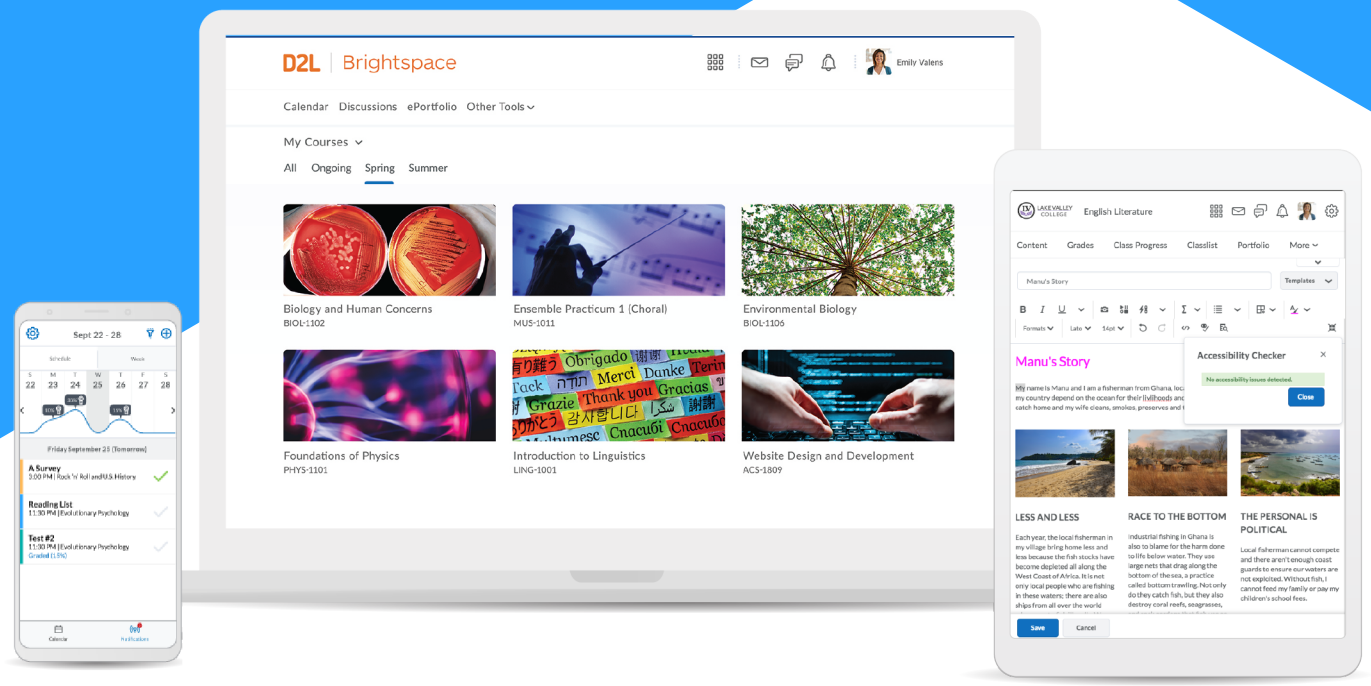

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‘We’re All in This Together’

Most instructors were novices in a new environment last spring, and many sought help. In preparation for fall, colleges and others share their expertise freely. Here are some new initiatives.

By Doug Lederman // June 17, 2020

MUHLENBERG COLLEGE
Camp Design Online screenshot

Most professors became learners themselves this spring. Forced by COVID-19 to make their in-person courses available to suddenly dispersed students, instructors had a matter of mere days to figure out how to deliver their curricula and connect with students from a distance, using technology tools many had never used before.

They got help from their fellow instructors and from their institutions' teaching and learning centers and instructional technologists, who worked overtime to smooth the transition. They turned to more digitally experienced peers at their own colleges and elsewhere, and they sought advice from their colleges' technology partners, from new crowdsourced resource lists and from experts sharing their tips in *Inside Higher Ed* and elsewhere.

Two things were heartening about that phenomenon. First was the willingness of so many instructors to acknowledge that they needed help and to seek it out. As Jessamyn Neuhaus of SUNY Plattsburgh described it in this column two weeks ago, "For the first time, it was acceptable, even desirable, for smarty-pants experts to say, 'I need some assistance; I'm not sure how to teach this right now.' It became culturally acceptable for people to just admit, 'I'm not totally sure how to do this.'"

That isn't the behavior of a group of people who don't care about teaching or whether their students learn, as critics often assert about higher education faculty members.

The other noteworthy aspect of the sharing economy around improving teaching this spring was how willing individuals and institutions were to share their wisdom and their ideas with others. Some of it might have been self-interested, like the technology companies that made their products freely available temporarily because of the pandemic.

But much of it is consistent with the communities that have emerged over the last decade around open educational resources and digital pedagogy, in which curricular materials and teaching

practices are freely shared, with the goal of trying to raise the bar for learning broadly.

"Those communities are built on the premise that we're not in competition with each other, that we're stronger together," says Lora Taub, dean for digital learning and professor of media and communication at Muhlenberg College, in Pennsylvania. "And this moment has proven that to be true: we see campuses and working groups sharing out resources on a very small scale to a very large scale."

Now colleges and professors are preparing for a fall like no other. Whether they are currently planning for instruction to be mostly on campus or mostly virtual, most are working to ensure that courses can be delivered to students face-to-face or online, given the reality that at least some students and some instructors will choose or be forced to remain remote.

In response, several new initiatives are emerging to help individuals and institutions continue to navigate this terrain. Some of them are explored below, and I encourage you to share others in the comments section or directly with me.

Taub, of Muhlenberg, says her institution has benefited enormously from previous efforts by other institutions to share their wisdom and resources, such as the open source "Domain of One's Own" project out of the University of Mary Washington that allowed for the creation of personal webpages for instructors and students.

So when Muhlenberg tasked Taub and her colleagues to provide faculty development this summer to prepare every one of the college's 320 full-time and part-time faculty members to teach both in person and online this fall, "we committed to doing it in a way that could be shared openly" beyond Muhlenberg.

> Faculty turn toward each other to share their experiences last spring, what they found worked, what they want to carry forward this fall and what they struggled with. That discussion space for faculty to share examples, experiences and approaches is vital.

Cue Camp Design Online, "an intensive, peer-supported learning community for bringing courses online." The course, which was built using a Creative Commons license that allows others to use and build off it, was reimagined from the semester-long faculty development program that Muhlenberg has offered every spring since 2015, usually to cohorts of a dozen or fewer faculty members. (A total of 40 instructors had completed it before this spring.)

To meet the charge of preparing hundreds of instructors, Taub and her Muhlenberg colleagues, including Jenna Azar, a senior instructional design consultant, refashioned the semester-long course into two nonconsecutive weeks. Participants spend the first week undertaking a curriculum on effective practices in building courses, during which they engage in discussion boards, Zoom calls and other activities within the Canvas learning management system the college uses. "Faculty turn toward each other to share their experiences last spring, what they found worked, what they want to carry forward this fall and what they struggled with. That discussion space for faculty to share examples, experiences and approaches is vital," Taub says.

For the next three to four weeks, instructors build their own courses, building off what they learned during the first week's curriculum. After that, they return for a second, "peer-driven" week, in which they "share what they've been building, practicing, working on," says Taub. "At the end of the second week, they should emerge with something solid that they can move into the uncertainties of fall with." The course should be a "foothold for what remains, still, a fairly uncertain fall semester."

Muhlenberg has not yet announced its plans for the fall term, but Taub notes that "even if we're on campus, there will be students and faculty and staff who remain remote, for health or familial reasons … So we're encouraging them to redesign their courses for a multimodal experience."

The course is a team effort. In addition to the instructional designers and other professional staff members, professors who previ-

ously took Muhlenberg's spring faculty development course are serving as faculty fellows, and Azar has a team of student digital learning assistants who are paid to serve as the "central student voice" as faculty members build their courses. "We can't get by just sharing anecdotally what the experience might be for students," says Azar. "They've been really critical partners."

The Centrality of the Liberal Arts Experience

Muhlenberg's commitment to digital and online learning is larger than is typical for liberal arts colleges, and Taub says the college has put its faculty development process "out in the open because we recognize that the very thought of online learning in the liberal arts is anathema to some … We wanted to engage our community and the wider higher education community so that each step of the way, we're engaged in critical conversations about the extent to which our exploration in digital and online learning aligns with our tradition of liberal arts learning."

Taub and Azar don't assume that Muhlenberg's approach to faculty development will necessarily apply to every institution. But so far liberal arts peers such as the College of Wooster, Wesleyan University and Middlebury College have embraced Camp Design Online wholly or partly this summer, and their experiences will in turn help Muhlenberg "hone, revise, improve our model," Taub says.

Like many professionals who've been working for years to help and encourage faculty members to experiment with new ways of teaching, Taub is "energized" by the fact that so many more instructors are doing so now, even if they haven't chosen it.

"Nobody wants to be in the situation we're in now, but nobody wants again to be where we were in the spring, either," she says. "So we have a remarkable opportunity to make visible what we know: that [digital learning] is not by and large a technological endeavor, it's a human endeavor to which we are accustomed to bringing a great deal of care for students."

"Many faculty experienced a real profound loss of connection with their students in the spring," Taub adds. "That translates to a commitment to craft ways of centering connection and engagement and relationships in the hybrid and online learning we'll have this fall, if necessary. Each of us has had an experience where voices that we don't often hear in the classroom find space to express themselves online."

With a smile on her face, Taub relays the experience of watching one of Muhlenberg's longest-standing faculty members -- "who has described himself as a technophobe, Luddite" -- join the ranks of instructors who've shown "a remarkable willingness and curiosity" to learn new things.

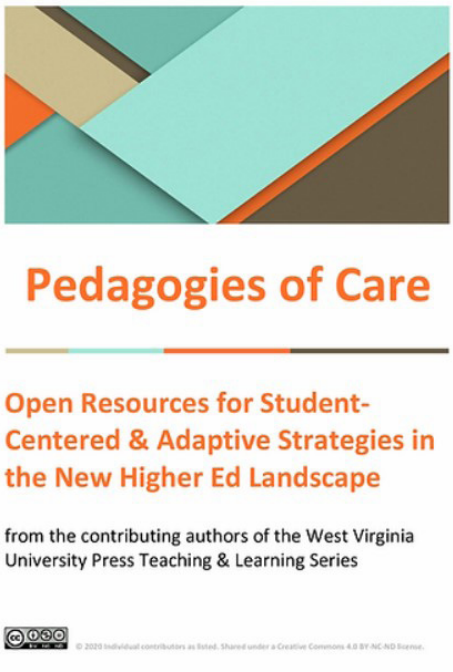
"I did not expect to get excited about all this; I expected only to learn how to handle a few inadequate, unexciting tools," Alec Marsh, an English professor, wrote to Taub and Azar at the end of Camp Design Online. "Instead, it feels like looking out at a big lake. It'll be fine, more than fine, once I get into that water. Now I'm in about up to my ankles! The water's cold, now, but it'll refresh by and by."

Muhlenberg's faculty development course is just one of numerous new initiatives designed to help faculty members and professional staff prepare to remake their approaches to instruction for a highly uncertain and potentially unstable fall term (and beyond). The list below is not meant to be inclusive, so please don't be angry if yours isn't there. Instead, please add your suggestions below, or tell me about them and I'll check them out.

Open-Source Collection From an All-Star Group: West Virginia University Press's Teaching and Learning in Higher Education series, edited by Assumption College's James M. Lang, author of *Small Teaching*, is among the best collections of instructional expertise around. So it's not surprising that a website developed by the series' authors, released this week, is likely to be enormously valuable, too.

Pedagogies of Care: Open Resources for Student-Centered & Adaptive Strategies in the New Higher Ed Landscape features advice from 16 authors in the WVU Press series on course design, teaching, collaborative practice and assessment, through a mix of videos, presentations, recordings and Google Docs, all under the banner "You Are Not Alone."

Victoria Mondelli, founding director of the Teaching for Learning



Center at the University of Missouri at Columbia, drove the creation of the collection by asking the series' authors whether they'd be willing to create a derivative work from their books and license it openly. "I reckoned a collection of educational gems from these particular experts could be a lifeline for not just me and my campus but everyone else, as well," she said via email.

The authors -- who include many leading lights in the teaching and learning world -- responded overwhelmingly, and as the selections poured in, Mondelli said in an interview that she was struck by a "thread" that ran through many of them: "the need to center student well-being." That might have been the case even before the pandemic upended students' worlds, educationally and otherwise, but providing education that is student-centered and adaptive "is going to stick here," says Mondelli, who co-edited the collection with Thomas J. Tobin of the University of Wisconsin at Madison. "I don't think there's any going back."

The time is right for more attention to how professors teach and students learn, she says. Faculty members need and want to improve how they teach in new and unaccustomed venues, and provosts, deans and other administrators are increasingly concerned about how to ensure quality instruction at a time of educational disruption, Mondelli says.

"This is a moment that folks are willing to make really strategic resource allocations to serve faculty," she says. But it's also clear that "all but the wealthiest centers for teaching and learning" may see their budgets constrained as colleges struggle with state funding cuts or enrollment declines, or both.

"This collection has a lot of great stuff in it, and you could fashion a summer institute or a book club approach to keep your faculty stimulated at extremely low cost or no cost," she adds.

A MOOC From Michigan: The concept of resilient pedagogy is getting a ton of attention right now, which makes sense given the moment we're in.

Rebecca Quintana, learning experience design lead at the University of Michigan's Center of Academic Innovation, describes resilient teaching as "the ability to facilitate learning experiences that are designed to be adaptable to fluctuating conditions and disruptions." Her new massive open online course on Coursera, Resilient Teaching Through Times of Crisis and Change, has about 550 faculty members and instructional designers enrolled, and Quintana says she's been "astounded" by the degree of interaction in the course -- "very different from other MOOCs."

"There's almost a cathartic sharing of what the spring was like," she says. The course, which she and Michigan's James DeVaney described in an *Inside Higher Ed* blog post last month, grounds learners in the principles of resilient design for learning and highlights examples of new courses that have been redesigned to align with the theories.

As is true for Taub and Mondelli, Quintana is hopeful that the tumult and uncertainty faculty members have faced this spring will have a real upside.

"We see a vulnerability among faculty, a willingness to throw open the doors of their classroom, which is not something you're used to doing," she says of the spring. "We were all thrown off-kilter and did the best we could, but people are more willing to share what worked well and what didn't. It's somewhat freeing and terrifying, too."

Looking toward fall, "people are spending more time than ever thinking about their teaching," she says. "They're investing all kinds of effort, all kinds of attention, and I'm hopeful we can come out even stronger, with course design that could be even more effective for more learners." ■

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Ramping Up for Remote Instruction

Anticipating continued remote instruction this fall, nonprofits, ed-tech companies and institutions race to provide faculty with the resources and training they need to teach well online.

By Lindsay McKenzie // May 27, 2020

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many instructors with little or no remote teaching experience were forced to move their classes online.

Given scant guidance or time to prepare, this large-scale experiment in remote instruction wasn't destined for success. While some faculty members embraced the opportunity to try out new teaching methods, many understandably struggled to adapt rapidly to new tools and new ways of communicating with students.

As institutions prepare for the potential of another semester taught fully or at least partially online, there seems to be a widespread desire among college leaders to turn things around. Several surveys conducted during the spring semester indicated widespread dissatisfaction among students with the remote learning experience they received (see here, here, here and here) -- no institution wants there to be a repeat this fall.

Demand for resources and training to support faculty and deliver quality online instruction is at an all-time high, says Angela Gunder, vice president of learning at the nonprofit Online Learning Consortium.

"Our phones are ringing off the hook," said Gunder. Membership inquiries are way up, and the organization is in talks with many institutions, systems and companies to deliver training in best practices for online instruction.

"We hate the circumstances, but we are humbled to be a position where we can accommodate the needs of so many," said Gunder.

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With a mission to promote quality online instruction, the OLC is striving to make many resources free so that the group's expertise can be accessed by everyone, regardless of their budget. "We're in continuous conversation with our stakeholders to ensure we are providing adequate access. We strive to lead with empathy while still figuring out how to pay our bills," said Gunder.

The OLC recently secured a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, which will be used to provide professional development scholarships to faculty at minority-serving institutions. The OLC was originally funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and was known as the Sloan Consortium until 2014.

One of the companies the OLC has recently partnered with is McGraw-Hill Education, a textbook and digital courseware publisher. This week the OLC began delivering "train the trainer"-style workshops to an initial group of 30 faculty consultants working for the company.

Robin Lucas, senior director of marketing at McGraw-Hill Education, said demand for the OLC workshop was exceptionally high, even though McGraw-Hill's faculty consultants already have experience teaching online and working with digital tools.

The workshop will offer around 20 hours of training and is designed to be collaborative, said Lucas. Faculty members who complete the program will be awarded a certification from the OLC and encouraged to share their expertise with colleagues. Some McGraw-Hill Education staff have also asked to participate in the training so they can better understand best prac-

tices in online instruction.

The training isn't specific to McGraw-Hill products but supports the company's focus on learning science, said Lucas. "We didn't want the program to be about McGraw-Hill products," she said. "It's about the best way to design online courses and approach online instruction."

Many education publishers are offering a mixture of generalized resources on online education, in addition to specific guidance on how to best implement their own products. Both Pearson and Cengage, for example, are offering extensive written materials, webinars, and one-on-one training to faculty to help support them through this transition.

The OLC recently published a free comprehensive playbook on how to move courses online in cooperation with Every Learner Everywhere, a network of higher education organizations supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Alison Pendergast, senior program officer at the Gates Foundation, said promoting quality teaching and learning is always a priority for the foundation, but there is new urgency to ensure vulnerable students aren't "pushed off track" by the impact of the pandemic.

"We have no way of knowing what the future holds. There are at least three scenarios emerging for the fall semester. They may continue teaching online, they may teach online to some degree or they [may] largely teach on campus under certain conditions," said Pendergast.

Regardless of what happens in the fall, all instructors would benefit from planning a multimodal delivery. "Face-to-face instruction supplemented by high-quality online courseware can accelerate students' ability to engage with the curriculum. Active learning can have huge benefits," said Pendergast.

"If I were preparing for the fall semester, I'd be taking this opportunity to rethink some of my teaching practice -- now is the time to do it. Providers are providing a lot of training, a lot of resources. People are eager to help faculty develop these skills," said Pendergast. "Some of the changes may not be as hard to implement as you think."

For faculty members looking for some extra support, the Every Learner Everywhere network is planning to offer free 30-minute one-on-one coaching sessions at the end of June. The concept is similar to the Instructional Design Emergency Response Network, established by instructional designer Diann Maurer. Maurer told *EdSurge* in March that hundreds of instructional designers had already stepped up to volunteer their time.

"The reason I am trying to reach out to faculty in my spare time [to support] other instructors who have never taught online is because I know the people who ultimately are going to suffer are the students," said Maurer in her *EdSurge* interview.

Instructional designers are in high demand right now. The University of Waterloo, a public research university in Canada, for example, is currently looking to hire 11 instructional designers on one-year contracts. But not every institution has access to this expertise, and that is why free training resources are so valuable, said Pendergast.

"It is always a challenge to meet faculty where they are, but we hope the organizations we partner with will amplify the resources we make available," said Pendergast. ■

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/05/27/new-resources-help-support-faculty-quality-online-instruction

The Messy Conversation Around Online Cost and Quality

> Asked to explain how they balance financial and academic considerations, administrators and professors say quality is key but struggle to define it.

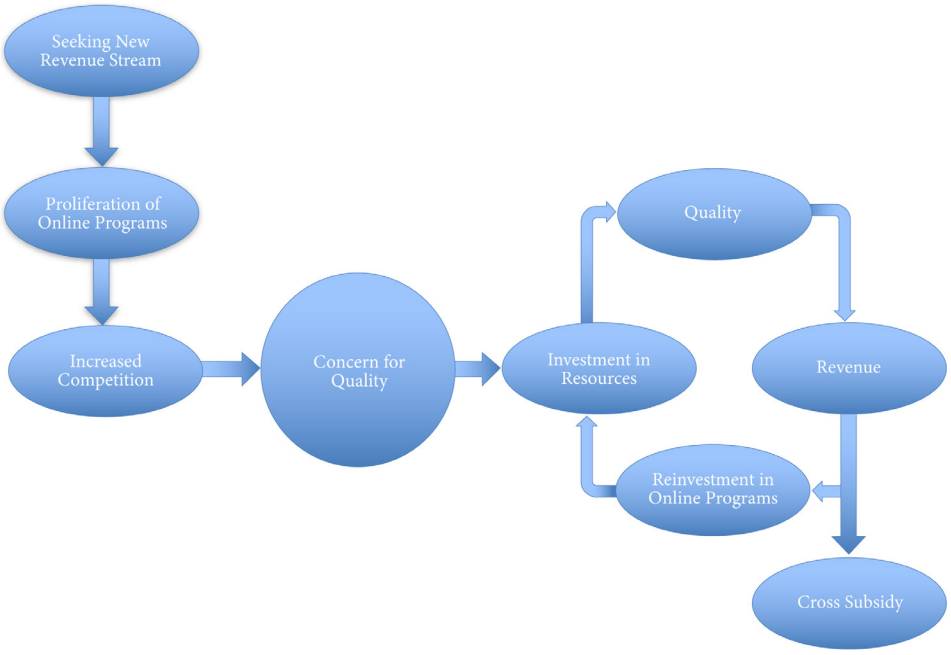
By Doug Lederman // September 4, 2019

Like many early-career researchers, Justin Ortagus is typically drawn to quantitative studies that -- at least in theory -- are likely to produce unambiguous, sharply defined results. So his studies about online education have tended to focus on quantifiable issues such as whether cuts in state funding lead to increases in online enrollment (on balance, yes) or whether enrolling online in their first year of college helps or hurts students' long-term academic prospects (modestly helps).

His new study offers no such clarity, which will surprise no one once they hear the topic: the intersection of cost and quality in online education. "'Like Having a Tiger by the Tail': A Qualitative Analysis of the Provision of Online Education in Higher Education," published in *Teachers College Record*, examines (and tries to make sense of) the complicated and often conflicting perspectives of 22 administrators, professors and instructional designers at three research universities with significant online offerings.

The goal of Ortagus and his co-author, R. Tyler Derreth, associate director of SOURCE at Johns Hopkins University and a faculty member at Hopkins's Bloomberg School of Public Health, was to interrogate how those involved in online programs seek to balance financial and quality considerations.

That required participants in the survey to explain (to themselves and to the researchers) how they assess the finances and quality of online education.



The former was relatively easy; "nearly every participant referenced the potential of online education as an alternative revenue source for the university," and several said they envisioned revenue from online offerings subsidizing on-campus programs. One cited a foremost rule: "Thou shalt not cannibalize or impact any opportunities or poach any of the enrollments from existing on-campus programs."

(The "tiger by the tail" of the paper's title came from a quotation from an online program coordinator citing a trustee's assertion -- which not everyone shares -- that online education is "like having a tiger by the tail -- it's an area of profit and enormous growth. You'd better not let it go.")

The Quality Conundrum

Defining quality was much more difficult -- and varied.

Respondents frequently defined quality by comparing online to face-to-face courses, often bristling at the commonly proffered belief that online courses are worse. One associate provost interviewed asserted that online courses receive much more scrutiny than do their in-person peers, Ortagus said.

"For our online courses, we have weekly learning outcomes that we are strictly adhering to, and we have instructional principles -- our videos need to be 10 to 12 minutes long. We optimize student learning and engagement in these ways," Ortagus quoted the associate provost as saying.

"We don't offer this same level of scrutiny to our face-to-face courses. Why is it OK to have a 400-person lecture hall?"

Other survey participants de-

scribed judging online programs by a set of indicators, such as student outcomes (student feedback, retention, labor market outcomes), the centrality of the faculty role and assessments of how the courses were designed.

Ortagus said he was struck (but perhaps not surprised) by how closely tied respondents' views of "quality" were to their job -- which he termed "perspective-bound quality."

"I would speak with instructional designers, and for them it was all about how the course was designed, and how much engagement was built in to the course," Ortagus said. "I'd ask them about the importance of who is engaging with the student -- the professor -- and they would say, 'Yes, that matters, but it's really about the design.' "

Professors, in turn, tended to focus their definitions of quality entirely on the strength of the instruction -- difficult as that was to describe.

The administrators responsible for managing online programs weren't necessarily any clearer in their answers. "I would talk to senior leaders whose entire job scope is online, and they would sometimes offer conflicting, confounding and inconsistent definitions of quality," Ortagus said. "Defining quality was by far the most frustrating aspect of this work."

"I would talk to senior leaders whose entire job scope is online, and they would sometimes offer conflicting, confounding and inconsistent definitions of quality."

Striking a Balance

While most of the researchers' subjects struggled to define quality, Ortagus said, to a person they asserted that quality considerations could not be separated from financial considerations -- and they are intertwined in ways that have significant implications for colleges' online strategy.

"Online education requires administrators to provide substantial financial investments to develop online courses and exclusively online programs; however, net revenues generated through online education may not be available until after several iterations of the online offerings," the study states. And while "the cost structure of online education is associated with economies of scale and suggests that the financial advantage of online instruction will be most prevalent at extremely large enrollment levels, high enrollment numbers may come at the expense of quality and student-centered pedagogies."

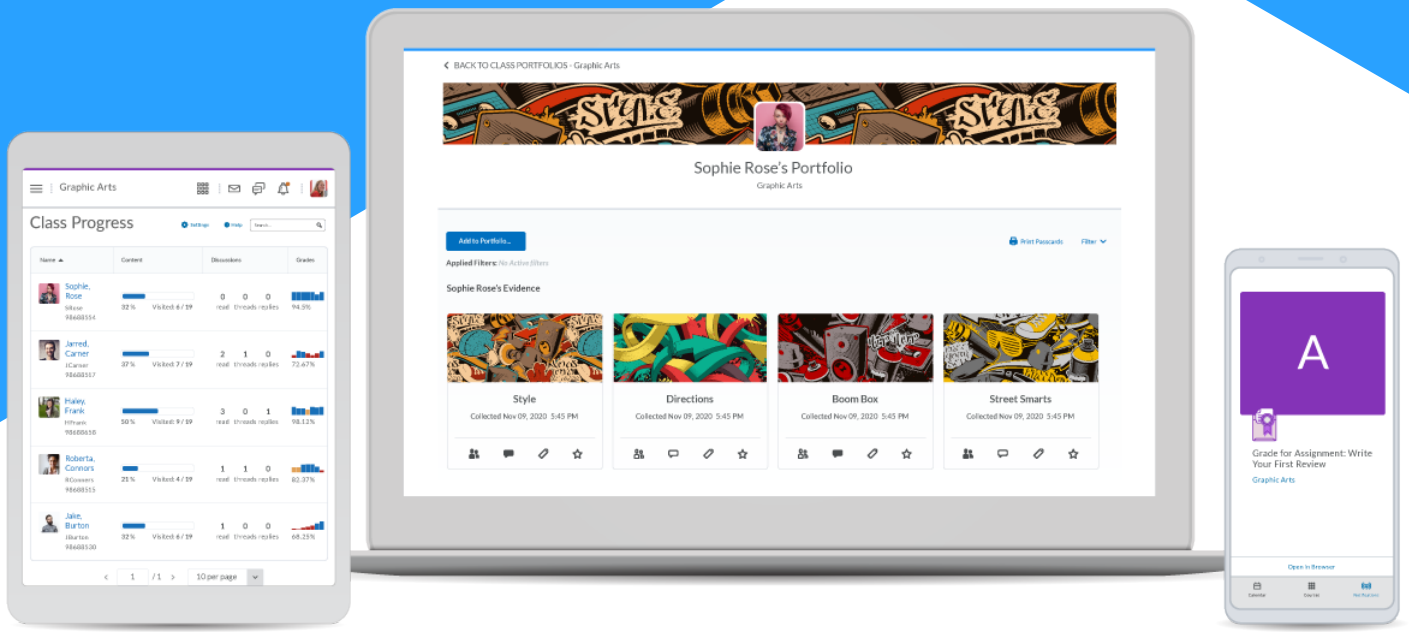
In other words, online education -- done right -- is expensive, in terms of building or buying software, designing and creating courses, and training instructors, among other things. And because it can take significant time to recoup that up-front investment, "you have to be in it for the long run if financial considerations are critical to why you launched online programs in the first place," Ortagus said in an interview. And if colleges build programs that aren't of high quality, their students won't succeed -- and ultimately the programs won't, either.

To try to impose some structure around the potentially befuddling conversation around cost and quality, Ortagus and Derreth developed a model that seeks to help "tell a coherent story" around how institutions that want to be seen as "quality" providers of online learning should think about the balance between quality and finances.

The gist of it, Ortagus says, is that even if institutions (as most do) start online programs with the goal of improving their financial situation in one way or another (starting on the left side of the model, below), they will ultimately fail unless they put the quality of those programs at the center of their strategy.

"If you get revenue from tuition, you need to be reinvesting in the program if you want to have stability and success with online degree programs," he said. ■

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2019/09/04/researcher-seeks-clarify-messy-conversation-around-online-cost



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OPINION

Increasing Empathy and Access

Are online courses actually better?

By Emily Dosmar **// November 3, 2020**

When the small engineering college where I teach went online at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, I felt like I was losing the best part of my job. I enjoy learning about my subject, I like research and I am eager to engage in service for my school; however, what I really love is seeing my students. When we turned to 100 percent remote engagement, I felt like the best part of my job had been taken away from me and wondered how my students could possibly learn and thrive in the same way they had been when we were face-to-face. However, as I spend more time in the online learning space, I find myself wondering: Are online classes actually better?

Online Classes Can Promote Empathy

The circumstances of this pandemic have made me particularly compassionate. The flexibility of online classes have allowed me to make myself available to my students in the evenings when they are actively working on assignments and need me most. In some instances, when it is late, I can lead by example and demonstrate my commitment to mental health and a work-life balance. "This is not so important that you should lose sleep over it" is something I regularly say. I have noticed that no one takes advantage of me.

Online learning gives me an opportunity to be less rigid, and my students are grateful. By glimpsing into their stressful evenings, I am more understanding and gain empathy for their experience. This works in the other direction as well. My evening meetings often take place over video chat while I sit holding my toddler. I believe that this helps my students see me as a real person with a life outside school. The remote experience facilitates compassion and empathy on both ends.

Online Classes Allow for Asynchronous Pacing

My online classes follow a self-paced model. In the current climate, I understand that my students might have a period of reduced engagement, and I have planned for it. My classes allow students to pace themselves through most of the quarter, and if their progress is interrupted for a period, it is still possible for them to complete the course and to do well. This would not have been possible in the face-to-face version of this course.

Online Classes Liberate Us From the Constraints of a Weekly Calendar

I am no longer constrained by the class time allotted to me by the registrar, and so I have the liberty to structure my course according to the natural breaks in the content. My content is now bundled by topic rather than by week. In many ways this is much better. Why add an extra assignment, an extra homework or an extra lecture just because I need to fill time, when I could allow the students to use that opportunity to catch up

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and really immerse themselves in the content?

Online Classes Lower the Barrier to Entry for Students Who Struggle to Seek Help

At my college, we pride ourselves on providing individualized attention and being readily available to our students. We boast an "open office door policy" and know the names of all our students. The reality is, however, that the individualized attention is usually only provided to the students who seek it. To some students, walking into my office is prohibitive. With online learning, I am able apply the mission of individualized attention and support to every single student. The versatility of the digital format provides easier access to an open line of communication at a level that is comfortable to the particular student. I regularly check in with every single student using a simple chat message and offer the option of a video chat to those who feel comfortable.

Online Classes Provide Improved Access to Course Materials

With posted videos, worksheets and supplemental resources, students can revisit topics repeatedly until they achieve mastery. With faculty pouring countless hours into developing high-quality online course materials, it is likely that the students will find particular-

ly focused and carefully constructed content delivered through a variety of communication modes. My own course includes both videos and instruction packets that contain the same information but allows for students to access information in a variety of ways.

Perhaps Online Courses Are Actually Better

This pandemic has allowed us to harness the tool that is online learning to engage every single student, better assess learning outcomes and potentially produce the best crop of engineers that we have yet. ■

> Individualized attention is usually only provided to the students who seek it. With online learning, I am able apply the mission of individualized attention and support to every single student.

Bio

Emily Dosmar is an assistant professor of biomedical engineering at Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology in Terre Haute, Ind., and a mom to 18-month-old, Eleanor.

Read Original Article ▸▸ https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/university-venus/increasing-empathy-and-access

Turning the Tide on Online Learning

Only when it provides the full range of instructional connection points available in a traditional classroom will it begin to be a viable educational model, argues William G. Durden.

By William G. Durden // April 8, 2020

The rush of colleges and universities to complete the current academic year online in response to the COVID-19 crisis, and possibly prepare hastily for the same delivery mode this coming fall, could well result in unprecedented turbulence for faculty, students and families. The unavoidable haste of implementation presents a highly uneven and potentially unsatisfying educational experience -- threatening to further discredit distance learning as a viable educational platform. The potential backlash from students, parents and faculty members is well described in a recent commentary by Peter Stokes and Mark Johnson.

The challenge then is to identify how to deliver high-quality learning at a distance -- especially if these necessary yet on-the-fly efforts run into challenges from students and their families. What type of digital learning platform will emerge from this crisis that might assuage faculty members' lingering doubts about the medium and students' motivational challenges with online learning?

To answer that question, I return to an article I co-authored several decades ago with Bryan Polivka, "Distance Learning: Education's New Oedipus." We argued that the most effective learning at a distance will be that which, through ever more sophisticated technology, approximates most completely the live classroom environment, including both direct instruction and instructional support.

The year before, Tom Haskins had written in an online article, which said, "A virtual university must abandon most aspects of classroom delivery systems. Formulating any strategy requires intense scrutiny of assumptions and creation of new rules to play by." We disagreed. Learning at a distance cannot emerge as a reliable and desired learning option as long as its proponents reject the conventional classroom and what makes learning possible -- and enjoyable -- in that setting. Only when distance learning advocates finally embrace the full range of instructional connection points available in the traditional classroom will they begin to offer the public a viable educational model.

The most important connection point we identified is *impact*. And the most essential component of impact is the affirmation of a learner's identity by the instructor, with other students and with the material to be engaged. We asserted further that identity affirmation in learning consists of several factors, including recognition of the student's name, appearance, thoughts/ideas, abilities, sense of purpose and individual preferences and values, as well as the culture that each individual brings to learning.

Additionally, and perhaps most important, since human beings are "affinity" beings, students ultimately want to learn among other people -- "to see them, to hear them and to exchange ideas." Assuming that content is substantial and

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meets expectations, people are prepared to learn and stay motivated over a sustained period of time regardless of delivery system, if as many as possible of these factors are present.

Perhaps I am distinctively situated at this point in my career to comment about distance learning in higher education. I am permitted singular insight into two scenarios that are often thought at odds, but which I trust I have been able to reconcile as I more fully appreciated what united them beyond differing tax status. As a former president of Dickinson College, I have firsthand knowledge of and respect for colleagues in a sector of higher education that historically is highly suspicious of the equivalency of distance learning to the in-person classroom.

I have also worked in the for-

profit higher education sector -- specifically Sylvan Learning Systems and its associated satellite-based learning platform, the Caliber Leaning Network, which have embraced learning at a distance. Caliber broadcast live courses from elite universities to both qualified high school students and physicians interested in the business of medicine. It was while shaping the educational ambitions of Caliber that Bryan Polivka and I, colleagues there, drafted our 1999 article and its affirmation of human identity as an objective in distance learning.

In the 1999 article, we wrote, "The challenge then to establish distance learning as a viable supplement to, or even a replacement of, the conventional classroom is not to disparage or eliminate the long-standing virtues of impact and identity embedded in the conventional classroom delivery model, but rather to create imaginatively a single, integrated, technology-enhanced learning platform that approximates the maximum number of these identity-producing capabilities provided fully in the conventional classroom."

At the time, we declared, "No one technology can achieve this today." Twenty-one years later, this assertion no longer holds. Innovations in technology, including artificial intelligence, should motivate providers to offer transnational learning platforms that proximate the maximum number of identity-confirming factors present in conventional classroom education.

For example, Walden University, founded 50 years ago to provide distance education to working adults, in its effort to define the next generation of online education has introduced proactive, digital intervention tools aimed at delivering through big data and artificial intelligence the precision guidance students need to support learning as it occurs. A real-time "digital coach" analyzes classroom engagement patterns and connects a student one on one to an adviser if their pattern deviates from historical norms. A student's preferences, needs and patterns are recognized and acted upon immediately.

Various education commentators speculate whether the pervasive use of online learning during the COVID-19 might be its black swan moment: a reversal of its fortunes for more widespread adoption in higher education. But will COVID-19, in fact, create the moment that turns the tide for online learning in higher education, leading to its unquestioned and comprehensive embrace? Or will online education suffer from a backlash over its lower quality and effectiveness compared to traditional classroom instruction? That depends on the success of the various emergency applications now being tried and what higher education learns from the student and faculty response for improvements going forward.

Unquestionably, faculty and staff members in large numbers must find a digital delivery platform worthy of teaching and learning, measured against the personalized level of exchange to which students and faculty are accustomed in their conventional classroom. Most important, the particular online delivery platform that a university, department or single faculty member chooses in haste must, at a minimum, provide identity affirmation of both students and faculty, if the online offering is to be successful.

This means, for example, preferably a full or partly synchronous experience that ensures any student can speak up at any time and be seen and heard by the instructor and other students and that the real-time personalities of students and the instructor can emerge and interact. It also means that students have access to virtual hand raises that the instructor and other students can see immediately and to which the instructor can respond; that the instructor has an icon to speak with any student face-to-face as all other students watch and listen; that students have access to whiteboards, slides and their own materials as they choose, not as somebody else chooses; and that there are options for in-class small group discussions that can be reported back to the instructor.

It is too early in the massive turn to online education to draw conclusions about whether these requirements are being fulfilled by all, or even a majority of, the online efforts by colleges and universities around the country. The degree to which they ultimately are will be the degree to which the tide, in fact, turns. ■

Bio

William G. Durden is Courtesy Professor, research, in the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University, president emeritus of Dickinson College and president of the International University Alliance. He was president of a division of Sylvan Learning Systems and simultaneously vice president of academic affairs at the Caliber Learning Network. He is also a director of Walden University.

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Meeting the Instructional Challenge of Distance Education

Alexander Astin outlines some specific pedagogical practices that might enhance student involvement online and warns against a course content approach.

By Alexander Astin // September 30, 2020

Most colleges and universities will be employing some form of distance learning during the fall term. Especially for those that have shifted totally online, their major challenge will be to design and implement effective learning strategies without the aid of classrooms, laboratories, learning centers, residence halls, communal eating facilities and myriad student organizations.

Findings from research on undergraduate education point to several considerations that might be useful in guiding the design of an effective online education experience. Perhaps the most relevant generalization to be derived from thousands of studies is the importance of student involvement. Basically, involvement refers to the amount of time and physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience: the greater the degree of student involvement, the better the outcome.

According to the research, the greatest challenge for online educators concerns two activities that have the most potential for enhancing student involvement and learning: contact with faculty and contact with fellow students. In other words, the most impactful undergraduate experiences appear to be effective because they increase student-faculty contact, student-student contact or both. With distance education, of course, the student typically has little opportunity to experience personal contact with either faculty members or fellow students, so the challenge for the online instructor who seeks to maximize student involvement is formidable.

Given the many ways in which it is possible to design an education-at-a-distance experience, it is important to know if the research points to specific pedagogical practices that have the potential to enhance student involvement. While it may not always be possible to duplicate such practices in a distance learning environment, knowing what is effective in a traditional campus setting can still be helpful in designing an impactful online experience. A partial list of such practices includes:

- Courses that emphasize writing. Most faculty members would probably agree that writing is a basic skill that has tremendous relevance not only for academic work in a university but also for postgraduate study and employment. Writing assignments are capable of enhancing student involvement in part because the instructor generally has to provide the student with personal feedback. Few educational experiences have as much potential to involve students and get their attention as personal feedback from an instructor.
- Narrative evaluations. Like writing assignments, narrative evaluations -- as an alternative to traditional course grading -- have the potential to enhance student involvement because they involve personal feedback from the instructor.
- Independent study. Independent study projects may well serve to increase involvement because they require students to take on a good deal of personal responsibility. Like writing assignments and narrative evaluations, independent study can also include a good deal of personal feedback from the instructor.
- Participation in faculty research. Involving undergraduate students in faculty research projects, a relatively recent phenomenon in higher education, most likely enhances student involvement because it almost certainly results in increased student-faculty contact.

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- **Limited use of multiple-choice tests.** Unlike writing assignments, narrative evaluations and essay exams, multiple-choice tests tend to be highly impersonal, with feedback usually limited to a simple "right-wrong" result.

Faculty members might well be reluctant to adopt some of these effective practices because they tend to be labor-intensive. It takes time and energy to read and critique writing assignments, to write narrative evaluations, and to supervise independent study and participation in research projects. But for their online classes to be effective, they should consider pursuing some, if not all, of these strategies.

The Threat of the Course Content Approach

The transition from campus-based instruction to distance learning also comes with a major risk: it can tempt instructors to think of undergraduate education strictly in terms of course content. In this view, a liberal education is defined simply in terms of course credits: take such and such an array of courses in the right fields, pass them, and ipso facto, you've been liberally educated. Under this view of undergraduate education, it doesn't much matter how you acquire the requisite credits or degrees. You just need to pass the right combination of courses, and you're done.

That view of a liberal education obviously flies in the face of the research evidence. Among other things, it allows little or no room for the sort of student-student and student-faculty interaction that has been shown to be such a key part of a quality undergraduate education. Unfortunately, however, for the past several decades, some cost-conscious state legislators and policy makers have advocated this approach. They've argued that a traditional residential liberal arts education is outmoded and needlessly expensive, and that the future of public higher education lies instead with distance education and online learning.

If the online education that the pandemic has forced on our colleges and universities persists much beyond the fall term of this year, public higher education in some states might well begin to morph into a version of the course content approach. To salvage state budgets, policy makers might be tempted to dispense with expensive "frills," such as residence halls, student services and co-curricular activities. As long as students are able to take the right set of courses, the method of delivery is more or less irrelevant, their thinking could go. But if something akin to this actually occurs, the quality of undergraduate education in the United States will decline precipitously.

In sum, since distance education severely limits the opportunities for students to interact personally with fellow students and with faculty, online instructors in traditional colleges and universities face formidable challenges in their efforts to offer students an impactful undergraduate experience. Findings from research on traditional undergraduate education suggest that distance education can be made more effective if it provides students with opportunities to interact more frequently with each other and with faculty members. Moreover, since most college faculty are currently employing Zoom, FaceTime or similar software in conducting their online instruction, they should strive to use any apps or other features that might facilitate either student-student or student-instructor interaction. ■

Bio

Alexander Astin is the founding director of the University of California, Los Angeles's Higher Education Research Institute and the Allan M. Cartter Distinguished Professor of Education Emeritus. His latest book is Are You Smart Enough? *How Colleges' Obsession With Smartness Shortchanges Students (Stylus, 2016).*

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Beyond Compliance

Mallory Smith, Laura Pineault, Marcus Dickson and Krystal Tosch give advice on why and how to make online teaching accessible, even during a pandemic.

By Mallory Smith, Laura Pineault, Marcus Dickson and Krystal Tosch // September 2, 2020

In March 2020, we joined colleagues across the country in dealing with rapid changes to the courses we were teaching and taking. In many cases, instructors had little choice but to default to the same content and course structure that they used in face-to-face instruction, as time pressures precluded the opportunity to engage in careful online course design.

In our experiences -- those of one professor, two instructional support professionals and one graduate student -- we have seen firsthand that the haste with which courses were transitioned online placed one group at a particular disadvantage: students with disabilities.

Last spring, the use of platforms and content formats not optimized to meet the needs of students relying on assistive technologies amplified barriers to their engaging fully with online learning -- for example, Flash-based e-learning tools or photocopied images of text in a PDF. As we begin a semester in which many institutions will be online, faculty members now have the opportunity to adequately address these issues. Many, however, still haven't received enough guidance on how to design remote instruction to meet such students' needs and to comply with laws and regulations.

Administrators must be prepared to enforce minimum accessibility requirements for all online courses and establish a framework for aligning online course delivery with an inclusive, student-centered mission. That must go beyond idiosyncratic compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act when students request accommodations in an online or hybrid course. Instead, we call upon instructors and their institutions to proactively invest in training and software and to develop accountability procedures -- such as redefining instructors' performance criteria to incorporate accessibility standards -- to promote effective e-learning for all learners, regardless of disability status.

Instructors can find a wealth of resources, including those offered by advocacy groups like AHEAD (the Association on Higher Education and Disability) and NCCSD (the National Center for College Students With Disabilities), to help them extend the guarantee of full and equal access to educational experiences in the virtual classroom. But our recent data collection suggests that a lack of guidance, infrastructure and accountability across institutions means that these practices are not being widely implemented.

In April and May 2020, our research team conducted an online survey as an extension of our ongoing research about the adoption of educational technology in higher education. College instructors from approximately 20 institutions in the United States and Canada who were in the midst of quickly transitioning their face-to-face course to be online in response to the COVID-19 pandemic answered a series of questions about the institutional support they received while making this transition and how they adapted their teaching strategies to an online platform.

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Even within our limited sample of responses, we see a concerning trend: a reported lack of institutional support with respect to making online course materials accessible. Specifically, 75 percent of the respondents reported not receiving training when we asked, "As you may know, the Americans With Disabilities Act requires that colleges afford the educational experience to those with disabilities as fully as possible. As of today, have you received training from your institution on how to make online course materials ADA-compliant?"

And when we asked those surveyed to describe how they adapt-

ed their courses to be online and to share any concerns they had about their students, only three instructors mentioned accessibility. Seemingly, concerns around accessibility to students covered by the ADA were overshadowed by such other (also important) socioeconomic issues (e.g., reliable access to necessary technology and internet) and general student safety, health and well-being.

These results are not entirely surprising. They substantiate anecdotal reports in *Inside Higher Ed* and elsewhere of accessibility being forgotten in the haste to move online course content online in the midst of COVID-19. In the frenzy to move face-to-face courses online -- a frenzy experienced both by institutions supporting the infrastructure and instructors adapting course content -- accessibility was not top of mind, as is too often the case with underrepresented populations.

Review of social media forums on teaching, as well as our personal experiences and the data we collected, suggest a substantial gap in institutional support for accessibility in creating online course materials. They also serve as a call to action for academic institutions to activate support systems, such as trainings and infrastructure, and to provide road maps for faculty members to make their online courses accessible for all students, not just the majority. Institutions must empower instructors by developing their ability to design courses with universal access, functionality and student learning at the forefront.

In a first step toward elevating the capabilities of course instructors in this respect, we offer actionable recommendations for keeping accessibility in mind while creating content and selecting technology platforms to use in online courses. This advice is targeted toward instructors who may be unfamiliar with the challenges posed by inaccessible web content and are just beginning to consider accessibility when adapting materials for virtual instruction. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is often the first step to creating an accessible course, regardless of the delivery method. We call on instructors to design their courses using UDL guidelines for making various types of content accessible, which we outline in the recommendations below.

> "The coronavirus pandemic has exposed gaps in higher education's ability to provide accessible learning for all. Fully addressing those gaps will require significant investment and commitment over time from college and university administrations."

Creating Accessible Visual Content

For students with visual impairments, navigating online courses can be difficult if the content is not compatible with screen readers. We suggest some basics that instructors wrestling with these challenges for the first time can use as starting points in this process and that can have significant impact for students. Additionally, we provide information on some resources we rely on, although we certainly recognize that there are many additional alternatives.

Descriptive headers and titles. When assigning reading or providing other text-based materials such as handouts or reference sheets, ensure that the information is presented in a format that is optimized for assistive technologies. Effective use of headers, lists and other mark-up styles allows a screen reader to navigate the page and make it easier to understand how it is organized. This practice applies whenever you are presenting text, such as on webpages or in Microsoft Word or PDF documents.

Similarly, when referring students to other locations on the web via hyperlinks or URLs, use a descriptive title that will allow learners to clearly understand the link's destination. As a best practice, avoid inserting the link by itself as a web address.

We have found these guides from Microsoft helpful for creating accessible documents in Microsoft Word and customizing the text for a hyperlink. You should also test class materials' screen-reader compatibility, and we have found free screen readers (such as NVDA for Windows and VoiceOver for Mac) to be fully sufficient for our needs.

Font color and contrast. To make text accessible to learners that have

colorblindness or low-contrast sensitivity, the font color should have sufficient contrast to be distinguishable from the background. That includes any text on images, maps, diagrams, icons and buttons. The Colour Contrast Analyser is a cross-platform accessibility tool that helps determine the contrast of visual elements.

Alt-text for images and graphics. Courses that rely heavily on charts, graphs and photos can use alt-text, which allows a screen reader to convey important content that would be otherwise inaccessible to learners with visual impairments. Instructors can differentiate between informational images -- which are photos or graphics that convey meaning or content (e.g., tables, charts) -- from decorative images -- which do not convey content and can be marked as stylistic. Software applications like Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and some learning management systems include the option to add alt-text to an image.

Creating Accessible Audio Content

Captions or transcripts allow learners to access content that is delivered via audio. Many video services, including some licensed lecture capture (e.g., Echo360) and video creation software (e.g., TechSmith Camtasia) provide options to provide transcriptions. YouTube automatically generates captions and transcripts, however, the accuracy depends on audio quality, so instructors may need to review and edit the file. In Microsoft PowerPoint, you can include your transcript in the notes section. For example, an add-in called STAMP (Subtitling Add-in for PowerPoint) can be used to add closed captioning to video or audio clips in your presentation. For synchronous sessions, Zoom and some other videoconferencing systems provide autogenerated real-time closed captions.

Adopting Accessible Learning Technology

Universal Design for Learning provides instructors with a comprehensive tool kit for presenting their own course content in an accessible way. However, many instructors also rely on educational technology platforms in their courses that may not offer the same level of customization or control. To guide decisions about selecting and implementing accessible instructional technology, instructors should look for several features. Many educational technology companies will provide a Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) that explains how the technology conforms to the Revised 508 Standards for IT accessibility.

The accessibility standards outlined in UDL can also be applied to evaluating instructional technology tools. If the technology involves audio and/or video components, find out whether captions and transcripts are included. Select platforms that are keyboard accessible (i.e., information and content be accessed using tabbing, arrow keys, enter/return buttons) and can be navigated and read consistently by a screen reader.

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed gaps in higher education's ability to provide accessible learning for all. Fully addressing those gaps will require significant investment and commitment over time from college and university administrations. And, indeed, some people have called for administrators to push top-down mandates for accessibility in all online courses, an action that would certainly signal a commitment to providing inclusive instruction. To fully achieve the desired reality of equal access for all students, institutions must enact this value by making investments in the systems that support effective teaching and learning practices.

In the meantime, and especially as we begin the fall semester's online and remote learning courses, individual faculty members may need to take the initiative to address these concerns. Our goal here has been to provide suggestions and resources for instructors to ensure their online courses are ADA-compliant and accessible. With increasing numbers of instructors developing proficiency in and commitment to accessibility in online education, it will be easier to call colleges and universities to account for the crucial next steps on this path. ■

Bio

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Remote Learning Isn't Going Away

It's time to figure out how to make it more effective.

By Steven Mintz // October 12, 2020

As we enter our second online semester, it's time to stop thinking of remote learning as a crisis-prompted expedient. It will not go away as soon as a vaccine appears.

Online learning is going to be a permanent fixture in how institutions deliver high-demand lower-division undergraduate introductory courses. We need to face up to the challenges.

As much as many undergraduates complain about the quality of current online courses, at least as many who work, commute or care for others appreciate online learning's convenience and flexibility. It's a particularly popular option for students who regard required courses as boxes to be ticked off.

For all that's lost when faculty and students interact remotely, something is gained in well-designed, highly interactive online classes that feature personalized adaptive courseware; online tutorials; synchronous interactive lectures with frequent polls, surveys, questions and answers, and whiteboard sessions; and breakout groups.

Remember: for students who sit in the back rows of an auditorium, every large face-to-face lecture class is a distance ed course.

If we see remote learning as part of a permanent restructuring of how higher education is delivered, rather than as a stop-gap response to an emergency, we need to address the four horsemen of the online apocalypse:

- Isolation: How to transform an online class into a community.

- Engagement: How to keep students motivated and on track.
- Rigor: How to ensure student learning outcomes and academic honesty.
- Quality: How to make sure that online courses meet minimal standards for accessibility and usability, learner support, interactivity, and robust assessment.

Let me be frank: I face all these challenges. I'm currently teaching an introductory U.S. history class with nearly 1,500 students. So how have I tried to address these challenges?

Community Building

Much of college's appeal lies in the opportunities for social interaction, whether intentional or serendipitous. Undergraduates, after all, are social animals who crave interactions with others. We need to ensure that they get frequent opportunities for social interaction.

How can we mimic virtually the in-person connections of the face-to-face classroom?

By creating a host of ways for students to interact.

- Weekly breakout sessions: These are 45-minute sections in which students can discuss the course material, ask questions, hold debates, analyze primary sources and build their writing, critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Messaging and chat tools: To promote student interaction outside of class, the class features video chat and instant messaging apps and online spaces where students can take part in chat rooms and hangouts when classmates are online and available.
- Social interaction tools: Giving students access to digital whiteboards, digital sticky notes and

mind-mapping tools (which make it easy to organize information and display concepts or causal factors and illustrate their interrelationships) to facilitate conversations and brainstorming sessions.

Keeping Students Engaged and Motivated

I think we'd all agree that among the biggest challenges we've faced teaching online is keeping our students engaged and motivated without the structure and regular interaction provided by face-to-face class sessions. Here are some techniques and strategies that work:

- Make sure your lectures are interactive: Online lectures, like their in-person counterpart, can involve a multidirectional flow of information. Every major videoconferencing service includes tools to facilitate interactivity. All a lecturer needs to do is take advantage of the polling, hand raising, chat and Q&A functions or the ability to invite panelists, co-hosts and other presenters.
- Emphasizing the instructional material's relevance: History's rarely been so timely, and I would be remiss not to connect past to present, examine the history behind the headlines, or explore the backstory of the crucial issues of our time, such as the impact of pandemics, the roots of racism and racial disparities, or the role of protest movements in fomenting historical change.

But every subject can be relevant. You can make a stats class relevant by incorporating real-world examples: Is it true that one in four young people have been abused or that over half of marriages end in divorce or that tall people have higher incomes or how we can best illustrate the infection or mortality rate of the novel coronavirus?

Ditto for a sociology course. Examine how incomes vary among occupations or how visual imagery reveals and reinforces various cultural stereotypes involving race, gender, class or sexual orientation, or how household budgets differ at various income levels or how various factors influence decision making among a group of students.

> "Let's ... embrace this transition moment as an opportunity to move higher ed in a direction that can better serve today's incredibly diverse, highly differentiated student body."

Ensuring that Students Stay On Track

- Combine a task orientation with a time orientation: An effective online class needs to establish clear deliverables, provide a well-defined schedule and offer frequent reminders of the tasks that need to be undertaken and when they are due.
- Measure and monitor student progress and performance frequently: Your LMS can tell you whether students are logging in to your class and how much time they spend reading or interacting with your course material. UT Austin's information technology team has created a tool to allow me to send early alerts to students who are disengaged or off track with a single click.

Offer a Quality Learning Experience

A quality online learning experience is a design challenge. The literature on online learning suggests that the most effective courses include:

- Asynchronous and synchronous elements: My own big class includes an asynchronous component -- weekly modules that include readings, activities and assessments -- and a synchronous component, which combines interactive lectures that build on the modules with weekly breakout sessions.
- An emphasis on access and accessibility: In line with the principles of universal design for learning, all the asynchronous and synchronous portions are fully accessible to all students. The lectures, discussions and all

videos are captioned and downloadable. The PowerPoint presentations are text-heavy and also downloadable.

- Making active, hands-on learning a defining pedagogical principle: I urge you in the strongest terms to embed simulations, interactives, inquiries, problem-solving exercises and other active learning strategies into your class. My class includes a host of activities that that require students to do history:
- Geo and social mapping: Students plot social information on geographical maps, create visual tours, map social networks and use maps to visualize and analyze demographic, economic, political, religious and social trends.
  - Historical forecasts: Students explore how earlier generations imagined the future.
  - Historical icons: The students examine symbols of American nationhood, freedom and the landscape.
  - Historical judgments: I ask students to render professional judgments about past decisions and historical figures in a balanced, nuanced manner that takes account of context.
  - History happened here: Students identify and interpret the landmarks, monuments and historical and cultural sites that lie around us.
  - History through sight and sound: Students uncover the insights that artworks, movies, photographs and songs can provide about the atmosphere and dominant attitudes of a historical era and into historical memory and the reconstruction of the past.
  - My history is American history: Students examine how their family's history can illuminate key aspects of the nation's history, including immigration and migration, economic transformations, and the impact of war.
  - Primary source interpretation: Students evaluate sources for accuracy, audience, authenticity, authorship, bias, context, information and purpose.
  - Reading maps: Students see what historical maps can tell us not only about the growth of geographical knowledge, but settlement patterns, the influence of geography on historical events and developments, and the politics of border construction.
  - Simulations: Students sail across the Atlantic using current wind and ocean currents, extract information from colonial cemeteries, analyze fugitive slave ads, and reexamine Abraham Lincoln's decision-making process at critical junctures during his presidency.
  - Uses of history: Students examine how advocates and partisans have invoked history to advance their causes.
  - What if: Students explore how a key decision or incident might have altered the course of history.

Student Support

Access to timely support is even more important in an online course than in its face-to-face equivalent. Virtual office hours and study guides can certainly help, but consider other ways to assist your students.

- FAQs: Create a single resource where students can turn to when they encounter a problem. Make sure that the questions are those that students frequently ask and that the answers are concise yet thorough.
- Generalized feedback: Every week, my class provides all students with our observations about the responses we received to the essay prompts. This feedback builds on the class' rubric and seeks to improve their performance by discussing the weaknesses we saw and how these can be rectified.
- Video tutorials: Much as a textbook might use sidebars to explicate difficult topics, video tutorials can elaborate on a topic, reflect on a historical controversy and explain how to analyze a piece of evidence.
- Peer support: Make it easy for students to reach out to peers by facilitating study groups or creating online spaces where students can interact and ask each other questions. Although peer assistance can lead to cheating, it much more often leads to productive conversations and superior performance.
- Proactive intervention: Watch for warning signs that a student is off course. Monitor online engagement and attendance at live sessions and poor grades and send out an alert or reach out whenever a problem is detected.

Maintaining Rigor

- A high-quality online course includes frequent assessments to monitor learning and keep stu-

dents on track. It also uses assessments as learning opportunities. I myself have adopted a multitier assessment strategy, which combines various kinds of questions for a variety of purposes. These include:

- Checks for understanding: These multiple-choice questions make sure that students complete and understand the class readings.
- Document-based questions: These questions require students to analyze a historical issue or evaluate a controversy with the aid of a provided one or more primary or secondary sources.
- Inquiry and problem-solving activities: In order to build higher-order thinking skills, students are given a range of sources -- such as a gravestones or charts and graphs or advertisements or photographs or political cartoons or propaganda posters -- and are asked to devise a thesis or argument (and address counterarguments), develop a generalization, synthesize information, or render a judgment.
- Reflective essays: These essay prompt students to engage in metacognition: to reflect on the course material and their own learning.
- Identifying academic dishonesty: One advantage of online teaching is that it has become much easier to identify examples of plagiarism or collusion or duplicate submissions and to intervene quickly as appropriate.

It's easy to dismiss online learning as a poor substitute for face-to-face instruction -- and in too many instances it is. But it is also becoming increasingly clear that highly interactive, well-designed large online classes can be more effective than the large in-person lecture courses they replace. The best large online classes significantly reduce achievement and equity gaps, lower DFW rates, encourage students to take more classes within the discipline, and produce higher grades in more advanced classes.

Let's not allow bias and prejudice to us to reject very large online classes out of hand.

The key lies in intentional, thoughtful course design.

Building a truly effective online class is -- or ought to be -- a collective endeavor. The lone artisan approach that typified course development in the past doesn't work well in online classes that require sophisticated simulations, advanced interactives, a wide range of cutting-edge applications and instructional and communication technologies, and high standards of accessibility.

I'd urge faculty to not only work with IT professionals, but to integrate students -- who are brimming with interesting ideas and who possess a host of design and technology skills -- into the course development process.

Faculty training and instructional design and ed-tech support are essential elements in the creation of quality online courses. So, too, are shifts in incentives and reward structures if we want faculty to become much more undergraduate and pedagogically focused.

Let's not think of online learning as a one-off or as a poor but necessary substitute for the face-to-face education we prefer. Let's instead embrace this transition moment as an opportunity to move higher ed in a direction that can better serve today's incredibly diverse, highly differentiated student body. Let's consider this a great experiment and a challenge to our ingenuity and resourcefulness.`

In short, let's apply the qualities that we associate with our scholarship -- imagination, vision, inventiveness and creativity -- to our teaching. ■

Bio

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4 Reasons Why Every Course Should Be Designed as an Online Course

After the pandemic.

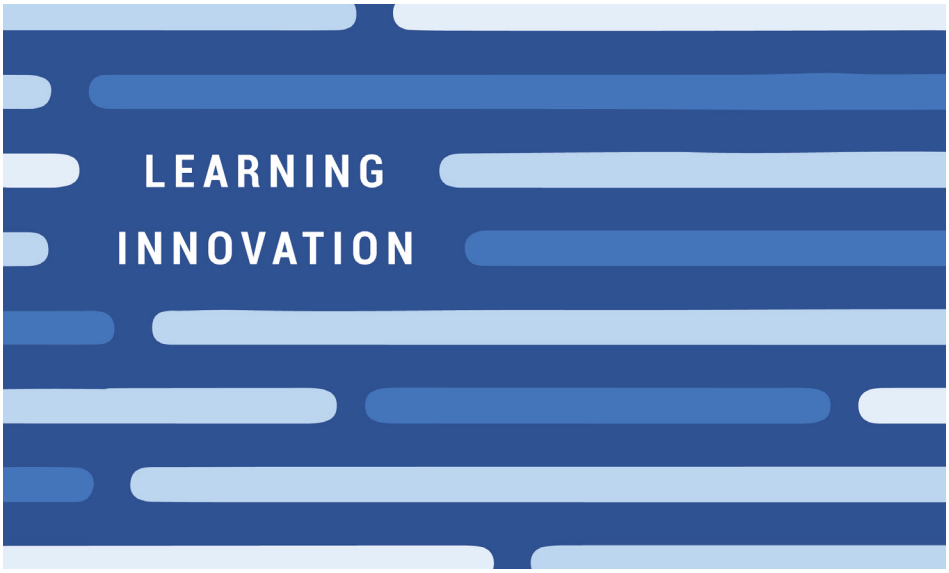
By Joshua Kim // November 3, 2020

Now is the time to plan for the post-pandemic university. Too early, you say? Still in the midst of managing the low-density university amid surging COVID-19 cases?

I never said it would be easy to plan for the post-COVID university. I am saying that the time to do so is before the pandemic ends so that whenever that shift occurs, your school will be able to hit the ground running. Failure to plan now for life after the pandemic is the fastest path toward regression to pre-pandemic norms.

What should be on the list of every post-COVID-19 university?

One idea that I'd like to nominate for consideration would be a commitment to design every course as an online course. That's right, every single course. Even if there are no current plans to expand online offerings in, say, a core undergraduate residential program, my recommendation is to still design those face-to-face courses for online delivery. Each and every single one. Here's why.



No. 1: Resiliency

Obviously, a course designed for online delivery will more easily be able to pivot to remote, should we ever need to make that pivot again. We learned from COVID that smart institutions make significant investments in preparing for low-probability, high-impact events. The next black swan that causes all courses to toggle from residential to remote may not be a pandemic, but it might be a wildfire, a hurricane or an earthquake. The ability to seamlessly move between residential and online delivery modes is the best guarantee for resiliency in an uncertain world.

No. 2: Flexibility

Current plans may not envision shifting core residential programs online, but plans can change. Professors and students now have some experience with remote learning. It is less of a stretch to think about moving part or all of a degree online. We may see rapid growth in summer online offerings, complemented by online courses between the fall and spring terms. Students vote with their feet, looking for schools that offer the flexibility of both residential and online offerings. Colleges and universities can prepare for this shift by designing all courses to work both face-to-face and online.

No. 3: Quality

Every instructional designer knows that there is fundamentally no difference in the design of an online and a face-to-face course. There are not residential and online courses. Instead, there are well-designed courses and poorly designed courses. A well-designed course is built around learners and learning, rather than content. When professors work with an instructional designer, they end up with a course that is backward designed around learning objectives, not content. Good courses feature opportunities for learners to actively construct knowledge rather than passively absorb materials. Good courses utilize assessments for learning as well as evaluation. The best courses are immersive, built for faculty presence and student engagement. A course designed around the core principles of learning science and instructional design will pivot seamlessly between face-to-face and online modalities.

No. 4: Extensibility

The future of higher education belongs not to the credit hour but the competency. The fastest growth in postsecondary educa-

tional offerings is occurring not at the degree but the alternative credential. Certificates and other certifications of competency, almost always created for an online offering, are rapidly gaining acceptance by employers. This does not mean that schools should abandon their credit-bearing courses that lead to degrees. Instead, schools should offer both noncredit/nondegree online programs and credit-bearing courses and degrees. Alternative credentials are not a competitor to degrees. They are a funnel. Designing all courses for online delivery will make it easier to unpack and repack materials into alternative credentials. The name of the game is blending, remixing and reuse. Even if the original use is face-to-face, courses born online lend themselves to transformation for alternative online offerings. ■

> A course designed for online delivery will more easily be able to pivot to remote, should we ever need to make that pivot again.

Bio

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