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JOURNAL ON EMPOWERING TEACHING EXCELLENCE, SPRING 2022 SPECIAL ISSUE

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EDITORIAL: WE'RE GOING REMOTE!?!

A University's Tale of Two Cities

Robert Wagner, Ph.D.

In 1859 Charles Dickens published his masterful drama set within the backdrop of London and revolutionary France. According to Dickens, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” The insightful and dichotomous statement has been applied countless times since Dickens penned the famous opening. By Fall 2021, there was little doubt such an apt description could apply to higher education during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Since March 2020, I can think of numerous ways it describes the conditions brought on by the pandemic and Utah State University’s responses.

It was the best of times—at Utah State University and more broadly across higher education. First, faculty demonstrated their mettle and fortitude in adapting quickly to changing teaching and learning environments. To transition from over eighty percent of courses being taught in-person to one hundred percent of courses being taught online (remote) in a matter of days could not have occurred without dedicated faculty who were committed to ensuring the continuity of instruction. Those same faculty set record attendance at faculty development workshops in the Summer of 2020 as they prepared for continued remote and hybrid teaching in the Fall. Credit also goes to the faculty support professionals who developed new and enhanced (via remote delivery) workshops in online pedagogy, effective use of video technology, instructional design, and more diverse benefits using data to make informed decisions from our learning management system—including seating charts and COVID-19 case containment protocols.

Indeed, the pandemic seemed to offer a “best time” to demonstrate the efficacy of what Utah State University and other institutions have been working on for over twenty-five years—how to provide greater access to education through remote course delivery. And, for the most part, the instructional technology worked. For Utah State University, our use of video course delivery technology along with lecture capture, content management systems, course quality rubrics, and accessibility protocols proved consequential to our COVID-19 response.

At the same time, students demonstrated their resilience in a “best of times” scenario. Already gravitating towards online courses over the last decade, students responded to the university’s new “USU-Ready” resources by adapting their learning to an online (remote) environment. USU-Ready resources included academic study tips, mental and emotional well-being support resources, technology tutorials, and additional financial aid. Although student retention and completion were impacted over the pandemic semesters, most students persisted and successfully completed their courses.

As Dicken’s implied in his famous opening, however, not everything fit in the “best of times” category. COVID-19 also shined an uncomfortable light on common blind spots. The question of higher education’s cost to students surfaced as their expectations for rich educational and active student life were dramatically altered. The value of teaching and learning in an online (remote) environment was challenged and some wondered if remote learning was worth the same price as an in-person experience. If universities were not using their facilities during the pandemic, should students be charged the same as if they were? Across the country, and at Utah State University, some students bemoaned their remote experiences and lack of in-person engagement with their instructors and fellow classmates. We found ourselves proving our worth and value by expanding the digital portfolio of instructional learning tools, developing more training for faculty and students to successfully replace in-person academic experiences, and increasing our overall capacity to serve in a remote environment.

It was also the worst of times for an already growing plague of mental and emotional distress among students. Student health and well-being were impacted profoundly by the isolation, stress, and fear brought on by the global pandemic. As students lingered in their dorms or basement apartments, cut off from many of the in-person services universities had developed over the last several years to combat the debilitating plague, Utah State University and its peers re-engineered student services, along with highlighting the important role faculty play, in reaching individuals in need. COVID-19's impact demonstrated that universities still have much work to do in supporting and caring for their most precious assets—their students.

At the end of Dickens' novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, his character Carton concludes: "It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known." Universities are still looking for a "rest" after eighteen months of mitigating the effects of COVID-19. At Utah State University, we have determined it is a far, far better strategy to look ahead towards a post-COVID higher education landscape and ask ourselves: what did we do well? What could we have done better? How can we take these lessons and implement significant improvements to our mission and core services? We cannot go back to a pre-COVID world and, despite a lack of respite, our faculty, students and staff are energetically learning how to do many things differently—and, in some ways, even more effectively. We will continue to focus on empowering teaching excellence with a laser-like dedication to faculty development, instructional support, and learning engagement with the goal of improving student success and greater positive outcomes for all.

Indeed, our tale at Utah State University and for all higher education, in a post-COVID world has yet to be written.

IMPROVING PERFORMANCE THROUGH STRATEGIC TEACHING DOCUMENTATION

The Continued Importance of Seldin, Miller & Seldin's "The Teaching Portfolio" in the Face of a New Reality

Antje Graul, Ph.D.

Abstract

Book Review of Seldin, P., Miller, J. E., & Seldin, C. A. (2010) *The teaching portfolio: A practical guide to improved performance and promotion/tenure decisions*. John Wiley & Sons.

416 pages. Available in hardback, paperback, and digital format

Keywords: teaching, teaching documentation, teaching portfolio, tenure, promotion

Academics striving towards tenure and promotion are often tasked with strategically documenting their performance in the specific areas indicated in their dedicated role statements, including research, service, and teaching. However, during the last 18 months, faculty have faced many new challenges in light of a new teaching reality driven by the restrictions and amendments required to adjust to a COVID-safe teaching environment. Characterized by many pedagogical discoveries, pivots, and adaptations, this unprecedented upheaval to higher education challenged faculty not only to remain flexible and innovative but also to identify new ways in which teaching success could be achieved through various delivery formats including live streaming, asynchronous online, and hybrid formats. As higher education has evolved to a new reality for many, this poses the question of how faculty can continue to improve performance through strategic teaching documentation in the face of a new reality.

Indeed, with regard to documenting teaching excellence, classic literature on the components of strategic teaching documentation continues to play an essential role in helping faculty refocus and develop a blended skillset of past knowledge and present learnings. A practical guide leading towards a successful approach to documenting one's teaching philosophy and the resulting process of continuous improvement in teaching performance and classroom excellence over various semesters is now more crucial than ever.

Research has shown that the use of teaching portfolios stimulated academics to reflect on their classroom performance, learning content, and instructional methods (Rijdt et al., 2006). Guidance and ideas towards documenting classroom progress and success may be especially helpful to junior faculty building their portfolio but may also serve as a desired benchmark to senior faculty wishing to revise and improve their own teaching portfolio or judging others while serving on committees. It is this guidance that the essential text of Seldin, Miller, and Seldin (2010) *The Teaching Portfolio: A Practical Guide to Improved Performance and Promotion/Tenure Decisions* provides. While the book's title suggests a strong focus on teaching documentation, faculty may particularly benefit from the guide's framework and strategic suggestions in order to document their pedagogical discoveries and adaptations over the last 18 months, which are equally transferrable to the documentation efforts of both research and service portfolios.

The background and qualification of the three distinguished editors of the book mirror its applicability across a wide range of disciplines and areas of expertise. Particularly, Distinguished Professor of Management Emeritus at Pace University P. Seldin draws on consultancy experience with over 350 institutions of higher education across the world. Miller, Associate Professor of Family and Child Studies, has developed an original training program for teaching assistants at Northern Illinois University, and C. A. Seldin, Professor of Education at the University of Massachusetts, draws on practical experience mentoring faculty in the process of preparing their tenure and promotion portfolios (Seldin et al., 2010).

Based on their extensive experience as mentors, researchers, and practitioners in the field of teaching portfolio development, the three editors invited contributions from a wide range of authors and disciplines, including chemistry and mathematics, communication, justice studies, music, nursing, social and behavioral science and theater, representing one of the book's notable strengths.

A shortcoming for readers may first be the fact that the book strongly focuses on providing “hands-on” and “ready-to-use” information but misses out on presenting a strong theory-driven visual framework that captures the essence of the suggestions and addresses different learning types. Second, the book includes a list of survey rating questions that could be employed for teaching portfolio evaluation, including giving advice to colleagues or serving on committees (Centra, 2000). However, the book lacks quantitative analysis of the reliability and validity of the rating scales suggested for assessment. This is problematic considering a general paucity of research on the effectiveness and replicability of colleague or administrator evaluations in higher education (Centra, 2000), particularly considering the confusion between formative and summative portfolios (Bunker & Leggett, 2004) and the need to evaluate information on both qualitative and quantitative dimensions (Trigwell, 2001).

In its first part, the book sets expectations with a foreword by W. J. McKeachie and a preface to the fourth edition, reflecting on changes in college teaching over the course of the previous decades and discussing some of the current book's highlights, such as models of successful use and a field-tested templates. Further, providing additional background information on the authors and the twenty-seven contributors from multiple disciplines emphasizes once again the teaching portfolio's usability across disciplines.

Following the preface and introductions, part one of the book discusses the general importance and relevance of teaching portfolios, as well as the contents suggested to be included in a portfolio, aiming to answer the “what, why, and how” of teaching portfolios. Specifically, Part 1 outlines important practical steps faculty may follow in order to successfully start the process of developing their own teaching portfolio. The authors include guidance on selection of the right materials for portfolio documentation, structuring their suggestions into material from oneself, material from others, products of good teaching and student learning, and the appendices. Further, hands-on examples such as checklists and a detailed example of a table of contents aim to help faculty evaluate their portfolio choices. Additionally, the tips outlined for faculty who wish to further improve and evaluate their existing portfolio, which the authors suggest doing on a yearly basis (p.40), and a frequently asked questions section serve as a helpful guide not only for the submitters but also for committee members tasked with evaluating their peer's portfolios.

Following those practical steps, Part 2 draws on reports from four US institutions in order to illustrate how teaching portfolios are used in practice. The authors suggest the main areas of use include “teaching improvement, tenure and promotion, and preparing new professors to teach” (p.79). The four selected examples may prove helpful for faculty to understand the wide-ranging importance and impacts of teaching portfolios beyond being perceived as an extra administrative inconvenience (De Jijdt et al., 2006), such as their own hiring and tenure and promotion process as well as the implications beyond their own professional development. Further, Part 2 may be particularly relevant to faculty serving on committees and administrative positions at institutions of higher education tasked with developing workshops or institutes.

Finally, Part 3 of the book presents twenty-one sample portfolios from contributors across disciplines. While readers may be able to identify at least one example closely related to their own discipline, the authors emphasize the need for

cautious reading and application of these examples to one's own reporting as each portfolio represents an individual approach with varying importance judgments and emphasis. It is suggested that readers utilize examples from outside their own discipline as "helpful information," prompting faculty to think outside the box and strategically develop a high-level understanding of the relevance of teaching portfolios across departments and disciplines, which may prove valuable to central committee members exposed to a variety of portfolios across disciplines.

In all, *The Teaching Portfolio: A Practical Guide to Improved Performance and Promotion/Tenure Decisions* serves as an essential text and valuable guide of immediate usefulness for faculty and administrators irrespective of their levels of experience and disciplines. As M. L. Wharton, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs and Diversity at Loyola University, expresses, the book helps all individuals to "really understand the quality and value of individual teaching contributions" (Seldin et al., 2010). The book further contributes to our understanding of the importance teaching portfolios have held in the past and will continue to hold when integrating present learnings to help shape institutional improvement (Buckridge, 2008). The provision of an essential framework may be a helpful guidance in workshops and learning circles for faculty and administrators in higher education and can be applied to their latest discoveries through various delivery formats, including live streaming, asynchronous online, and hybrid formats.

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ENHANCING TECHNOLOGY-BASED DISTANCE EDUCATION DELIVERY USING COLLABORATIVE TEAM-TEACHING METHODS

Susan Cutler Egbert, Ph.D., LCSW and Sean Camp, LCSW

Abstract

Present pandemic-related circumstances have created unique challenges for educators and students alike. Information and communication technology (ICT) based team-teaching and collaborative course design can effectively mitigate feelings of isolation and disconnection and enhance student engagement within a remote education context. This article presents a theory-driven framework and “how-to” practical strategies for utilizing team-teaching methodology through web-based delivery platforms. Content focuses on student participation and active learning, curriculum- and technology-related issues, and challenges inherent in synchronous web-based course delivery.

Keywords: team-teaching, distance education, coronavirus, web-broadcast

The exponential growth of internet access and information and communication technologies (ICTs) has increasingly influenced educational practices in the United States and worldwide (Perron et al., 2010). The global coronavirus pandemic necessitated abrupt and unprecedented engagement with ICTs by educators everywhere (Shoraevna et al., 2021). Suddenly, emergency remote teaching became not simply a “necessary evil” or rural-based paradigm but a required solution (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020).

University students and instructors often perceive technology-based distance learning as impersonal and isolating, a challenge we had previously addressed pedagogically and methodologically through the development of an ICT-delivered collaborative team-teaching approach (Camp & Egbert, 2018). This established framework served us well in responding to the unique context created by the pandemic, and we found it to be easily adaptable to the Zoom-based, virtual teaching environment.

Neither of us ever experienced team teaching as students. We were taught by solo professors and were mentored and trained to teach alone. In 2008, we both accepted faculty positions at Utah State University in a newly created statewide Master of Social Work program delivered primarily via interactive video conferencing (IVC). We were assigned to campuses miles apart from each other and our faculty colleagues. We were tasked with teaching courses in areas in which we felt strong—and areas in which we did not—and to deliver instruction alone to a scattered group of mostly commuter students who arrived after a full workday and were expected to sit through six hours of class every Tuesday night. Both of us had prior university teaching experience, but this new context presented a new and challenging “perfect storm” for potential disaster in terms of our ability to keep students (as well as ourselves) engaged, connected, and entertained. Thus, we embarked on a team-teaching journey motivated more by desperation than inspiration.

The field of social work is a practice-based profession, as well as an academic discipline. It is underpinned by theories from the social sciences, humanities, and cultural studies. Our profession engages people, communities, institutions, and organizations to assess and intervene in human challenges and social justice considerations. Facilitating student development of these professional competencies and necessary interpersonal interaction skills is the primary goal of social work education. From our perspective as professional

social workers and professional educators, team teaching makes us better instructors and increases the impact we have in the classroom. Along with modeling collaboration and professionalism, team teaching in the distance education context reduces isolation, improves engagement, and mitigates technology-related anxiety for both students and faculty (Betten-court & Weldon, 2011). These concepts are particularly relevant to social work and other human service-based disciplines and are equally important in any educational realm in which instruction is delivered remotely using ICTs.

Blanchard (2012) describes “the vision of an individual professor lecturing in front of a classroom full of attentive students [as] so iconic that it is hardly ever questioned. Such a vision is not only a product of our own experiences as students but is reinforced by popular media images of bearded, tweed-clad, white men that [*sic*] bombard our collective subconscious” (p.338). The gap between the “sage on the stage” and reality in distance education is both profound and pervasive. Team teaching has been recognized as an effective strategy to bridge this gap, and numerous researchers have noted significant advantages in team teaching as compared to courses taught by individual instructors, including:

- Effectively managing workloads with regard to course design and development, ongoing course management, and evaluation (Canaran & Mirici, 2020; Eisen & Tisdell, 2000; Harris & Harvey, 2000).
- Modeling professional collaboration and problem-solving (Eisen & Tisdell, 2000; Laughlin, Nelson, & Donaldson, 2011).
- Exposing students to differing points of view and areas of instructor expertise (McKenzie et al., 2020; Harris & Harvey, 2000; Pliner, Iuzzini, & Banks, 2011).
- Enhancing faculty development and increasing support for pedagogical decision-making (Pliner, Iuzzini, & Banks, 2011).

Researchers have also identified various models of team teaching relevant to distance learning (Collins, B.C., Hemmeter, M.L., Schuster, J.W. & Stevens, K.B., 1996), including:

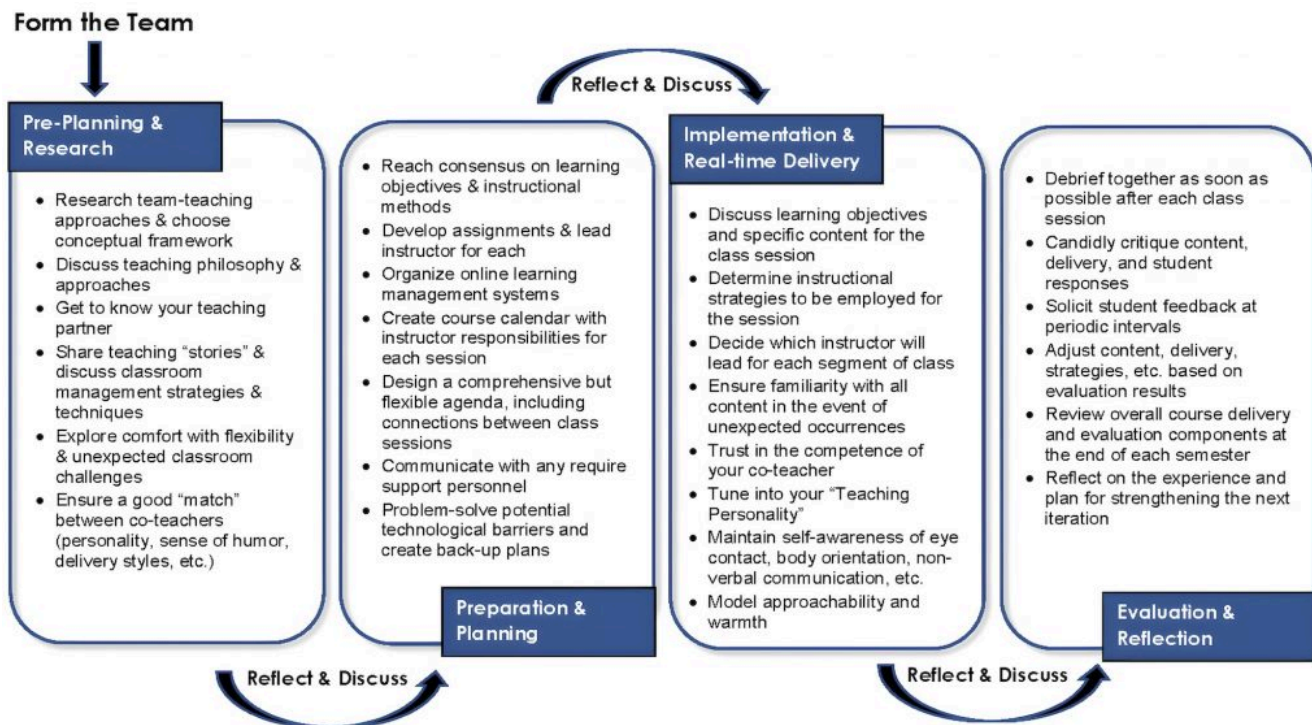
- **Lead and supplemental instructors model**, with one instructor assuming responsibility and the supplemental instructor providing support and back-up.
- **Multiple instructor model** with each instructor assuming full responsibility for specific portions of the course.
- **Guest lecturer model**, utilizing a primary instructor along with supplemental guest speakers.
- **Co-instructor model**, with two instructors sharing all responsibilities for all aspects of the course.

We have used all four of these models in our approach to collaborative teaching and have landed on the Co-Instructor Model as the most impactful for students, as well as the most manageable and equitable with regard to instructor workload.

We initially developed and delivered this model in a graduate social work program delivered to seven instructional

“I loved the team-teaching aspect. I was able to see clarification on items and see two different sides of a story; having two instructors brought greater perspective to the class.” – Student Course Evaluation comment

sites via IVC; with the onset of the global pandemic, it became essential to adapt the model for statewide, web-broadcast delivery (Zoom). For both delivery methods, the co-instructor model proved effective in mitigating the barriers to knowledge delivery and skill development inherent in distance education. We believe this model is generalizable and germane to an array of professional education settings and disciplines. To this end, we provide a how-to guide for designing and implementing a team-taught course in the distance education environment using various information and communication technology strategies. The following framework (see Figure 1) presents practical strategies for effective planning and preparation; responding to curriculum-related issues; addressing and managing dynamics inherent in real-time course delivery; developing professional use of self; creating a productive classroom climate; and incorporating a self-reflective process of ongoing evaluation and course improvement.



Adapted from Canaran, O., & Mirici, I.H. (2020). A New Model of Team Teaching for Teacher Professional Development: A Case Study of In-Service English Teachers. *Education & Science*, 45(201), 247-271.

Figure 1. A Framework for Technology-based Team Teaching

Planning and Preparation

Engaging in close collaboration and course preparation with a teaching partner allows each instructor to learn from his or her colleague’s content and teaching style. We have found that sharing course delivery with another instructor can foster a sense of competence and self-efficacy in that the combination of individual areas of strength and weakness can carry each instructor through moments of awkwardness and self-doubt. For example, when a student asks that inevitable question that catches the presently lecturing instructor off-guard, two things may occur: (1) Susan, the “stumped” professor, appears simultaneously thoughtful and collegial by inquiring, “Sean, what are your thoughts on that?” or (2) Sean proactively (but subtly) “rescues” Susan by interjecting his own answer to the student. Obviously, such attempts to help could be at best distracting and at worst dangerous to the co-instructor relationship without trust, insight into our own

and each other's areas of competence, and an appropriate lack of ego. After all, in most cases, two brains are thought to be better than one—we have had multiple experiences wherein teaching as a team has allowed us to appear twice as brilliant as we would otherwise. Between the two of us, we have over 50 years of experience as social work practitioners, as well as 28 years of higher education teaching experience. The depth and breadth of our academic and clinical practice know-how provides our students with a greater array of knowledge and examples of real-world application than could normally be embodied in a single professor. In the classroom, we are able to access and cite one another's experiences to provide an increased diversity of illustrations that make concepts more real and generalizable to the various practice areas in which students are interested.

This brings us to a word of caution: A primary consideration of choosing to team-teach is ensuring a *goodness of fit*, or match between teaching partners, including such characteristics as similar teaching philosophies, flexibility, and willingness to step outside of one's comfort zone, sense of humor, approach to student-related difficulties, and so on. As stated by Canaran and Mirici (2020), "In team teaching, it is essential to know your partner to ensure that you are compatible with one another" (p. 257). In addition, Rao and Chen (2020) state emphatically that team teachers must be granted the opportunity to choose their own teaching partners. Finally, McKenzie et al. (2020) found that when teaching teams have complementary skills and a clearly established teaching philosophy, the classroom becomes a successful mix of unique teaching styles and learning opportunities for students.

To maximize the benefits of team teaching, it is imperative that both instructors invest in careful planning prior to course delivery and systematic preparation for each class session. Intentional division of labor is critical to the successful delivery of the course from start to finish. Team teaching is most efficient when there is a clear understanding and consensus with regard to individual roles and responsibilities in teaching, student communication, and management of course business. We have found it most effective for both of us to attend every class session, which maximizes the benefits of our collaborative approach for students as well as instructors. However, team teaching reduces stress and provides continuity in the rare event that one instructor is unable to be present.

Critical elements on which to collaborate include course learning objectives, assignments, online learning management systems, course schedules and calendars, and course delivery team interfaces.

- **Reach consensus on course learning objectives and design instructional methods to increase student attainment of desired competencies.** Our course objectives are informed by the University's formal course evaluation protocol (IDEA), the Council on Social Work Education's required academic and practice competencies, and our agreed-upon ideas. We individually explore textbooks, readings, and resources related to the specific content each of us will be leading; we then arrive at a consensus on what elements will be selected.
- **Develop competency-building course assignments and identify a Lead Instructor for each.** For example, a required competency for a course we team teach on administration and leadership in social work states that students will "analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice" (CSWE, 2015). Based on Sean's expertise in agency administration and policy writing, we agreed he would design and lead this portion of the course and coordinate and grade related assignments. The same course included a competency that required students to identify and access resources to serve client needs. Susan used her experience to design, lead, and grade a section of the course devoted to documentation of need and writing grant proposals.
- **Work together to organize online learning management system elements.** Based on interest and specific skills, Susan contributes to our online course interface (USU uses Canvas) by uploading readings and resources and creating platforms for student communication and weekly homework assignments. Sean formats the various structural elements of the site (site map, links, assignment tabs, etc.) and focuses on making the interface visually appealing and user-friendly.

- **Create a course schedule and calendar that clearly designate each instructor’s responsibilities for all course sessions.** This area of pre-course planning and preparation must be done collaboratively. We typically use a five-week module format divided into three topical areas related to course objectives. We teach the first module (Administration and Leadership Skills) together, with equally shared responsibility for course sessions, assignments, and grading. The remaining two modules (Policy Development and Grant Writing) feature a single lead instructor, with the co-instructor in a more supportive role. This includes having the lead instructor conduct course sessions, grade assignments, and respond to related communication with students. This approach allows for each of us to have our “moment of glory” showcasing the passion we have for our own areas of interest while simultaneously modeling collaboration and mutual respect (Henning Loeb, 2016).
- **Communicate clearly with technology facilitators, administrators, teaching assistants, and other relevant parties to your course delivery team.** We originate from two different sites, each with face-to-face students, and our cyber-classroom includes five additional receiving sites. This introduces a lot of players into the course delivery equation (site managers, technology facilitators, administration, classroom aides, etc.). Assuming that all of these individuals will somehow magically anticipate expectations is simply asking for trouble. Any schedule changes, format adjustments, or special media considerations must be communicated well in advance in order to ensure smooth delivery. During one team teaching iteration, we elected to originate from different sites each week throughout the semester in order to facilitate better connections with students. Recognizing the potential disaster this travel could create, we developed a semester-long calendar designating where in the state each of us would be on any given week. We emailed this schedule to basically everyone who could potentially be impacted by our travel, which resulted in a smoother semester. It is worth noting that although students at our rural sites loved this “rotating instructor” approach—and greeted us with potluck dinners—by the end of the semester, we were travel-worn, exhausted, committed to being somewhat less self-sacrificing in the future, and in need of new car tires. Of course, the challenges and benefits of travel became non-existent during the course of the pandemic in the Zoom-based, virtual teaching environment.

The pre-course planning process should be underway well before the course begins, and then again—more comprehensively and task-focused—shortly before the course commences. Prior to each class session, it is also vitally important to schedule team consultation and collaboration as close to actual class delivery as possible. This promotes entering class fresh with energy and your team-teaching plan foremost in your thoughts. We recommend the following as part of the planning sessions prior to each class meeting:

1. **Identify learning objectives and student competencies for the class session.** For example, competencies for one class session included managing employees and supervising staff; recruiting, developing, and retaining staff; and the multiple roles of a social work supervisor.
2. **Discuss specific content, learning activities, and strategies to engage students at all sites, with a particular focus on students who do not have a face-to-face instructor.** Focused on the competencies described above, we created a site-based small group discussion activity based on leadership and administration case studies. Students at each site prepared a response and presented it to the entire seven-site cohort.
3. **Decide which instructor will take the lead on each segment of the class.** For one course session, Sean created the case studies and associated questions, and Susan facilitated the site-to-site discussion (at times akin to herding cats).
4. **Create a session-to-session flow by planning for follow-up from previous sessions as a bridge to future material.** We plan time at the beginning of each class to connect material discussed from the previous week to the competencies being addressed in the current session and entertain follow-up questions from students. For exam-

ple, in one session, we discussed a framework for various styles of leadership and supervision, and the effectiveness of each in different work contexts. As we began the next session, we invited students to share examples of the styles of leadership they had observed during the week in their employment and internship settings. As a bridge to the content of the present session, we asked students to explore and identify characteristics of the leadership style that were most congruent with their personal approach to administration.

5. **Consider class timing and time-management issues while creating a flexible session agenda.** Our philosophy is to over-prepare and potentially under-deliver rather than run out of things to say. Following this principle, we always have an “if we have time” learning activity for each session so that we are never left empty-handed. Thus far, this strategy has never failed us. For example, as a backup plan, we prepared media clips and discussion questions that were specific to the session’s content on leadership styles. As we worked through the session, we only had time to use one of the several media clips; therefore, we posted the remaining clips on Canvas so students could access them outside of class.
6. **Problem-solve for potential technological and other barriers to accomplishing class session goals.** We have learned from sad experiences that media and technology can never be fully trusted. We, therefore, always have a multilevel back-up plan, the most effective of which is emailing all course session material (including presentation materials, discussion questions, PowerPoints, links to media, etc.) to one another prior to class. For example, during one course session, the video we had chosen to show had no sound when it originated from Susan’s site. Since Sean had prepared to access the video clip, he was able to run it from his site with virtually no loss of class time.

When it comes to planning individual class sessions, it is essential to be intentional in the division of labor. Team teaching is most effective when instructors are equally yoked and each individual’s strengths illuminated (e.g., Sean is talented at creating engaging PowerPoint presentations, while Susan has considerable expertise in facilitating multi-site discussions—an impactful combination). Finally, to avoid triangulation—playing one instructor against another—we require that students copy both instructors on every email, text, or LMS communication.

Real-Time Course Delivery

As important as pre-course planning and preparation are, they will only get you so far without a solid plan firmly in hand to facilitate successful real-time course delivery. Rao and Chen (2020) state that working out an effective blueprint for what to teach—and how to teach it—is essential for a successful classroom experience. Beavers and DeTurck (2000) describe the process as “a semester-long jam session, where musicians who share a deep love for the material they play decide to explore its possibilities with little regard for the dangers” (p. 1). Team teaching has also been described as dancing with a “you lead, I’ll follow” theme, as well as sharing the characteristics of a high-wire act with its “I’ll start, and we’ll see what happens” impromptu dynamic (University of Western Ontario, 2002). In the classroom, we have experienced fantastic “jam sessions” and well-choreographed dance performances, along with unfortunate high wire mishaps (thank goodness there were safety nets, so we lived to teach again). These adventures have convinced us of the importance of an intentional approach to attending to all elements of real-time course delivery. We believe expecting the unexpected and trusting in one another’s competence are of paramount importance.

- **Expect the unexpected.** Having a flexible class agenda is beneficial if technology or other issues deter you from your specific plan. This allows you to shift to other session elements while awaiting and hoping for resolution of the problem. For example, if one instructor experiences unexpected technological difficulties, the other instructor

can take over with virtually no loss of class time or instructional quality. To illustrate, during one session, Sean repeatedly “techno-froze” mid-sentence, and Susan was able to carry the torch until he “thawed.” On another occasion, Susan was rendered “microphone-mute” for unknown reasons, and Sean took over the verbal communication. Although technological glitches cannot be fully avoided, as suggested by an analytical study from the Education and Information Technologies Journal, “proper preparation can overcome all but the most catastrophic technological failures” (Talib et al., 2021, Conclusion section).

“Love the team-teaching approach, with each instructor able to express and capitalize on their individual areas of strength.” —Student Course Evaluation comment

- **Trust in the competence of your colleague.** Proper preparation and a strengths-based division of labor fosters a sense of trust, strengthens your foundation of collaboration, and enhances your ability to facilitate student engagement and effective learning across the miles. Having faith in your teaching partner’s ability to carry on in your unplanned technological absence promotes a sense of confidence in knowing there are options available in the event of uncontrollable glitches or other difficulties. (Trusting in your students’ desires to care and engage in their own learning is another vital element of successful real-time course delivery.)

Professional Use of Self

In the field of professional social work (as well as others), the concept of *use of self* is employed to describe the practitioner’s authentic application of his or her personal qualities, belief systems, and life experiences to his or her work with others (Ruan et al., 2020; Edwards & Bess, 1998; Baldwin, 2000). We find this notion to be highly relevant to teaching, as well. Walters (2008) states:

One of the most important aspects you bring to teaching is your personality. Although fundamental to teaching, the teacher’s theoretical orientation and mastery of skills appear to have the least impact on student satisfaction when compared to the social worker’s authenticity and how they use personality traits as a therapeutic tool. What is important regarding authenticity is to reflect your real self at all times. (p. 1)

Specific attention to use of self is essential to effective real-time course delivery. One fundamental element we tune into is *Video Conference Personality*—the manner in which you present yourself on-screen. Personality is defined as “the set of emotional qualities, ways of behaving, etc., that makes a person different from other people,” including the “attractive qualities (such as energy, friendliness, and humor) that make a person interesting or pleasant to be with” (Merriam-Webster, 2016). This definition supports the use of self-approach, and we have found that “energy, friendliness, and humor,” as well as genuine enthusiasm and passion for your topic, travel well across the miles.

Another important consideration regarding use of self is that of mindfulness regarding non-verbal communication and body language. Drawing again from our social work experience, we understand the majority of human communication is non-verbal and are aware that factors such as posture, facial expression, eye contact, and body positioning communicate interest and engagement to your audience (Cornoyer, 2014; Ivey et al., 2010; Kadushin & Kadushin, 2013).

- **Eye contact.** In order to appear as if you’re making eye contact with your audience, you need to look directly into the camera, at least some of the time. In many ICT settings, this may create awkwardness, as cameras may be positioned divergent from your video screen. Further, in mixed settings with face-to-face and distance students, it may

be helpful to explain to students in the room that you are not ignoring them when attempting to simulate eye contact with their distance peers (Love, 2013). This recommendation is further supported by empirical studies that found eye contact is a core indicator of student's perception of instructor attention and contributes to student engagement (Kompatsiari et al., 2021; Pi, Xu, Liu, & Yang 2020), although Pi et al. (2020) also found that instructors should not stare directly at the camera continuously throughout a lecture, and should instead use “guided gaze to draw learners’ attention to the learning materials” (section 1.1). This is a particularly helpful suggestion when teaching multiple distance education sites.

- **Awareness and intention with regard to self-presentation.** Professional presentation and dress in a video conference context should be attended to as much or more than a face-to-face session, as it can be more challenging to convey a favorable impression. Students are tuned in to the “big screen factor” of web-broadcast course delivery. For example, Susan was interrupted by a group of students 300 miles away who had decided, “you look and talk just like Hilary Swank.” Similarly, Sean was designated as a doppelganger for Chef Gordon Ramsey, “although he doesn’t act like him”.

Classroom Climate

Team teaching makes maintaining an upbeat and engaging classroom climate significantly less stressful and more manageable, even with large numbers of students and sites. When we teach together, our focus is on keeping the environment positive, challenging, and enjoyable. Our goal is for students to walk out of class thinking critically and with concrete ideas and strategies about the topic’s application and implications. In social work, we address difficult issues that can be challenging for students both professionally and personally, as there is sometimes dissonance between the values of the social work profession and the value system of the individual student. Navigating these complexities necessitates working with intention to create a classroom that explicitly defines professional expectations, ensures emotional safety, and facilitates instructor approachability.

- **Maintain a setting with professional expectations.** Freeman and Walsh (2013) state, “Instructors should have strict guidelines for assignments and attendance, technology use, and classroom respect and civility” (p. 102). Accordingly, we establish clear ground rules for behavior, attendance, and student interaction. As an example, we tell students that our class is a professional commitment and if they are not able to attend this “appointment,” to please let us know in advance. This is particularly relevant in a distance environment where many of our students commute, sometimes in the harsh weather conditions of a Utah winter. Through these expectations, we communicate that we are genuinely concerned for students when they “no-show” for class.
- **Provide an emotionally safe and enlightening environment.** We intentionally model and emphasize mutual respect and an open exchange of ideas. The distance environment is often intimidating to students; having their comments broadcast to a host of their peers—that often cannot be seen—can contribute to student anxiety about speaking up or sharing their thoughts. Anticipating, attending to, and normalizing this dynamic empowers students to gain confidence and increase engagement. Some strategies for accomplishing this are actively inviting student participation in an intentional and systematic way, ensuring equal time and attention are given to each site and Zoom breakout room, and demonstrating patience for technologically-inherent time delays and student reticence in responding.
- **Make yourself approachable to students through the use of appropriate humor (Freeman & Walsh, 2016) and self-disclosure.** Relationship-building in the distance education context requires increased time,

attention, and proactive outreach to students; innocuous sharing of “things that make you you” (i.e., hobbies, interests, observations, etc.) demonstrates authenticity and provides channels for forming connections.

In summary, productive real-time course delivery depends upon flexibility, trust, professional use of self, maintaining a safe and productive classroom climate, and, most importantly, having a sense of adventure. Distance education and the use of ICTs is generally a student participation inhibitor—through team teaching, we are better able to foster student involvement and investment in the learning process. At the same time, we invest in our own learning process and professional development through systematic self-reflection and evaluation.

Ongoing Self-Reflection and Evaluation

Rao and Chen (2020) identify five constraints inherent in team teaching: lack of training in collaborative delivery, lack of mutual understanding of methodology and material, conflicting teaching styles, indistinct distribution of roles and responsibilities, and limited time for planning (p. 333). Fortunately, pedagogical literature provides guidance in addressing such challenges in the team-teaching environment. Epstein and Hundert (2002) propose that “professional competence is the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical reasoning, emotions, values and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and community being served” (p. 226). In the context of remote team teaching, the merits of self-reflection and evaluation are obvious in their contribution to ongoing competence-building in effective course design, well-organized preparation, and engaging real-time delivery. We use student feedback obtained via mid-semester qualitative evaluations and end-of-semester mixed methods evaluations, in addition to peer evaluations conducted by mentors and instructors outside of our teaching team. Using in-course process evaluations as well as outcome data strengthens our ability to make course adjustments mid-stream as well as to prepare effectively for the next iteration of the course. With these concepts in mind, we systematically engage in several self-reflective and evaluative practices:

1. **Debrief as co-instructors as soon as possible after every class session.** This allows for in-depth evaluation of what went well, what could be improved, and what issues warrant following up (Canaran & Mirici, 2020).
2. **While the energy is fresh, candidly critique our content, our delivery, and student responses** (McKenzie et al., 2020). We sometimes overtly communicate to students that we learned something from a previous class session and are implementing changes intended to improve the course. This models critical thinking, professional collaboration, and ongoing application of self-evaluation—key competencies of social work practice.
3. **Solicit student feedback at periodic intervals** (Shah & Pabel, 2019). We use a self-developed qualitative evaluation administered via our online learning management system mid-semester. Elements include asking students for feedback on their feelings about the format of the course (lectures, media, group projects, class discussions, etc.), texts and additional readings, their personal goals for the course, and questions and concerns they may have about successful completion.
4. **Review overall course delivery and all evaluation components at the end of each semester, with particular attention to qualitative student comments** (Marshall, 2021). This active appraisal of all course elements and associated outcomes allows us to incorporate lessons learned into future class sessions and future semesters.

We agree with Lester and Evans’ (2009) assertion that “when we are willing to engage in reflective practice with those around us, listen to the thoughts and perspectives of others, even when there is inherent risk of conflict and disagree-

ment, the opportunity to build greater understanding emerges ... [and] we make space to build something bigger than we could have built ourselves” (pp. 380–381).

Conclusion

Eisen (2000) describes team-teaching environments as “model learning communities that generate synergy through collaboration. Because the fruits of their efforts are often very visible and since team members’ excitement is often contagious, they provide inspiration for others to engage in collaboration.” (p. 12). Although there are challenges to delivering a team-taught course, we find the advantages outweigh the disadvantages—particularly in the context of a global pandemic. The process of addressing and negotiating the difficulties adds to the value of the team-teaching experience. Robinson and Schaible (1995) purport, “if we preach collaboration but practice in isolation ... students get a confused message. Through learning to “walk the talk,” we can reap the double advantage of improving our teaching as well as students’ learning” (p. 59). As professional social workers and academics we do preach collaboration, we do not practice in isolation, and we have a responsibility to socialize our students in this model. While this is explicit in social work education, we believe this professional socialization is just as important in other disciplines.

While we have experienced firsthand the isolation inherent in the distance learning environment—a phenomenon exacerbated significantly by the COVID-19 global pandemic—we have also found that when used strategically and with intention, team teaching within a remote education context using ICTs contributes to student engagement and performance and may reduce technology-related anxiety for students as well as instructors. It is true that we initially turned to team teaching as a survival strategy; however, as we have engaged with the model, immersed ourselves in the pedagogy, and observed the impact our efforts have had on our students, we become increasingly convinced that team teaching is the way to go. As stated by Tucker (2016), “Our connectivity to information and to one another makes this an incredibly exciting time to teach. Our collaborations are no longer limited to a school campus, and we no longer need to feel alone in our teaching practice” (p. 87).

The model of co-instruction we have detailed above provides a framework of practical strategies for effective organization of curriculum and course structure, preparation for and management of real-time course delivery dynamics, awareness of professional use of self, maintenance of a safe and productive classroom climate, and implementation of a

self-reflective process of ongoing evaluation and course improvement. Obviously, this approach necessitates up-front energy and investment, ongoing intentional planning, and collaborative trust between co-instructors; however, we believe the payoff to be both pertinent and generalizable to an array of disciplines and student contexts. We have also discovered this makes future iterations of course planning less time-intensive and course delivery more effective. Further, we have found the use of the co-instruction model to be a worthwhile and rewarding endeavor with exponential influence far beyond anything we have experienced when teaching alone via IVC. In fact, after multiple iterations of this co-instructional model, we have never had a single student complain about this approach—and we have received overwhelmingly positive feedback.

**“Having two instructors brought greater perspective to the class.”
“Team teaching rocks!” – Student
Course Evaluation comments**

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STUDENT AND INSTRUCTOR PERCEPTIONS OF ONLINE TEACHING RELATED TO COVID-19

The Need for Reflective Practices

Mary Browne, Ed.D.; Melissa Wuellner, Ph.D.; Jessie H. Hendricks; and John Howard

Abstract

Although online learning has been in existence for over 20 years, not all instructors have been trained to teach online or had the desire to teach online. The recent COVID-19 pandemic quickly changed typical face-to-face instruction and disrupted the current educational system by requiring all college courses be delivered online, either asynchronous or synchronous using various software platforms. This paper investigated both instructors' and students' perceptions of faculty online teaching preparedness as well as their thoughts related to various technological resources and issues that arose during this time period. Results indicated fairly high satisfaction rates of faculty's thoughts on preparedness and access to technological resources and tools. Students were fairly satisfied with the transition to online teaching and learning using quantitative measures; however, qualitative comments indicated otherwise. The need to use more reflective and metacognitive strategies to better online pedagogy as well as communicate more with students through a virtual environment was discovered.

Keywords: reflective practices, COVID-19, online teaching and learning, student and faculty perceptions

Introduction

In late 2019 the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission reported a cluster of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. This was the first detection of what is known today as the COVID-19 virus. In January of 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) established an Incident Management Support Team to investigate and report on the outbreak. The first report was a comprehensive package of technical guidance online with advice to all countries on how to detect the virus. By mid-January, the first case outside of China was recorded in Thailand. Within a week of this recorded case, WHO issued a statement saying that there was evidence of human-to-human transmission. By the end of January, there were 7818 confirmed cases in 19 countries. In mid-March, WHO made the assessment that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic.

As the number of cases began to spread across the globe, public and private organizations in the U.S. began taking steps to safeguard their people based on guidance from the medical field and government. One thing was unanimously agreed on: the COVID-19 virus was highly contagious, and close, human contact was discouraged. The workforce needed solutions for ways to continue to work, just not in the ways they had been working before. Many started to work from home, which solved the problem in certain sectors. But there were some organizations that needed to re-think how business was conducted. Education was at the top of the list. According to www.edweek.org, beginning in February, school districts across the nation, including universities, began closing due to the virus. From March 9 through

March 24th, 50.8 million schoolchildren were affected. Universities also closed in a similar fashion. The first university closed on March 7th, with other universities and colleges quickly following. By March 26, 2020, at least 14 million students had been affected by the pandemic, with the majority going to online learning (Hess, 2020). Students were now at home, and educators needed a way to connect with them and continue with their education. The solution: virtual learning through asynchronous or synchronous online platforms. Because of this sudden and required change, this study examined college students' and instructors' perceptions of their online experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, which provided results indicating the need for more online pedagogy trainings and reflective and metacognitive strategies throughout online courses within higher education courses today.

Review of Literature

Faculty in post-secondary institutes are often given teaching as a component of their workloads. They typically understand their responsibility is to instruct students in a variety of academic, career, and/or technical subjects yet are sometimes unsure how to teach other than reflecting back on their past experiences as students themselves. According to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), the effectiveness and the quality of the teacher is the single most important factor in student learning as well as achievement (2010). Thus, not only knowing what to teach but taking it one step further to knowing how to teach, specifically for each student, is integral for individual students' learning and success in their future careers. So, how should faculty teach, providing quality experiences and assuring students are learning the content, as well as providing experiences, so students enjoy the class? There are numerous research studies that have concluded various aspects to quality teaching. According to Akerlind (2007), faculty should move from a teacher-centered approach to a more learner-centered approach. In order to do this though, an integral part of the teaching cycle needs to take place – using reflective practices that foster the facilitation of students' learning, the ultimate goal of teaching. Unfortunately, according to LaPrade, Gilpatrick, & Perkins (2014), there is very limited data about self-reflection for online instructors in higher education. This is of deep concern as online teaching was the primary teaching methodology being used during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 1933, John Dewey encouraged teachers to make informed decisions based on systematic and intentional reflections that make them more aware of their own professional developmental needs. Reflective practices within teaching often refer to four major components: teach, self-assess, consider, and practice. As Finlay stated, reflective practice is learning through and from experiences in order to gain new insights into oneself and one's practice (2008). According to Mathew, Mathew, & Peechattu, "Reflective teaching is a process where teachers think over their teaching practices, analyze how something was taught, and how the practice might be improved or changed for better learning outcomes" (2017, p.127).

Kolb's Learning Cycle showcases four stages to reflective practices. Those stages include a concrete, active experience to test out new ideas and teaching methods; observation to reflect on the experiences; formation of abstract concepts where faculty members draw on ideas, support from colleagues, and their prior knowledge; and active experimentation where faculty members take what they have learned and put it into practice again (1984). These stages also incorporate Brookfield's four lenses to critical reflection, which include students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, personal experiences of self and others, and relationships of theory into practice (2017).

Reflective practices can consist of various face-to-face and/or online strategies such as learning journals, lesson evaluations, observations, student dialogue, shared planning, polling, recording lessons, peer observation, action research, and most importantly, student feedback (Gilbert, 2016; Mathew, Mathew, & Peechattu, 2017). Inner self-reflection can also take place as instructors mentally analyze their practices. Asking open-ended questions such as "Why?" and "How?" within these reflective practices will provide more detailed information and feedback than closed-ended questions that

simply allow students to answer yes or no. This holds true for faculty self-analyzing their own teaching as well, using metacognitive strategies that are often described as strategies that make faculty think about one's thinking. The process of metacognition requires faculty to assess, monitor, and reflect on their performance and learning, which provides more detailed, individualistic feedback to improve or sustain one's teaching strategies and ideas.

Many benefits arise from reflective practices within teaching, both face-to-face and online. These practices help make informed decisions and actions and develop rationales for practices, enlivens classroom experiences, keeps everyone engaged, and models a democratic process which involves both the faculty member and students (Brookfield, 2017). Specifically, when students are engaged and are provided opportunities to offer their ideas, this helps justify faculty members' decisions and challenge their perspectives and understandings of decisions made. Reflective practices also encourage innovation, allowing faculty members to create and experiment with new teaching strategies as well as create more confident teachers who better understand how specific students learn best and the best manners in which to teach them. It provides opportunities to create a learner-centered environment where relationships become positive and respectful, and students become active participants in their learning (Cambridge International Education Teaching and Learning Team, n.d.). Reflective practice in teaching also is an important source of personal, professional development, improvement, and a manner to bring together theory into practice (Mathew, Mathew, & Peechattu, 2017). Reflective practices offer detailed information, a process to better facilitate teaching, learning, and understanding. Although many faculty often use reflective strategies to better their teaching, not all do, leaving students in despair when technology is unavailable. Technology tools are difficult to use, directions are unclear, and/or communication is absent. This seemed to be more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic when many faculty were forced to teach online, and reflective practices were not used frequently. Thus, many faculty may have perceived the simple act of completing the semester online as a generally positive and rewarding experience without reflecting on whether students were gaining what they needed from the course and, thus, counteracting most students' perceptions of the learning experience.

Methods

This study, approved by participating institutional IRB committees, combined the results from two online surveys, both conducted in late spring/early summer 2020. The first survey was developed by the co-authors to assess faculty perceptions toward university and college preparedness for the emergency shift to remote learning. This survey was 15 questions long and included questions related to prior online teaching experience and other demographics (Table 1). Additional questions asked about previous experience with online instruction or learning to determine if prior experience influenced participants' views on preparedness for the emergency shift to remote learning. The survey was developed using QuestionPro software and advertised widely via email and social media by each of the co-authors. Response rates were low for all groups except for university/college instructors.

Goodman-Kruskal Gamma statistics (Agresti, 2013) were computed to compare faculty's previous levels of experience with online courses (both as an instructor and a student) and faculty perception of the overall preparedness of their institution and their ability to re-create all classes for remote learning. Significance was determined at . All analyses were performed in R (R Core Team, 2020).

The second survey was conducted between April and June 2020. This 10-question survey was created by instructional design personnel at a Midwestern university to identify students' attitudes toward the emergency shift to remote learning that occurred in spring 2020 (Table 2). These survey questions were also developed using QuestionPro software, and students were invited to participate in the survey via university email.

Table 1: Faculty survey questions – List of questions developed by co-authors of this study to assess faculty attitudes toward university and college preparedness for the emergency shift to online instruction in spring 2020 (n = 130 participants). Questions are grouped into one of three categories: attitude toward preparedness (“Attitude”), availability and accessibility of software and technical assistance (“Technology”), and demographics that may be related to preparedness and prior experience (“Demographics”). Possible responses are noted after each question.

Question category	Question	Response
Attitude	Overall, my college/university was well prepared for the transition to remote learning during the spring 2020 term.	Level of agreement (Strongly agree—Strongly disagree)
	The administration at my college/university was well prepared for the transition to remote learning during the spring 2020 term.	Level of agreement (Strongly agree—Strongly disagree)
	The instructors at my college/university provided experiences that were equal in quality to those in the classroom.	Level of agreement (Strongly agree—Strongly disagree)
	The same academic standards used in my in-person instruction were applied after my course(s) moved to remote learning platforms.	Level of agreement (Strongly agree—Strongly disagree)
Technology	The students at my college/university had the appropriate access to technology following the transition to remote learning.	Level of agreement (Strongly agree—Strongly disagree)
	I was able to re-create all my class(es), including all labs/clinicals/recitations/etc. (if applicable), for remote learning without issue.	Level of agreement (Strongly agree—Strongly disagree)
	All resources for supporting remote instruction were well communicated to the faculty.	Level of agreement (Strongly agree—Strongly disagree)
	Technical assistance from my college’s/university’s IT staff was available in a timely manner if needed during the transition from on-campus to remote learning.	Level of agreement (Strongly agree—Strongly disagree)
	I had or was provided the appropriate equipment/resources (both hardware and software) to easily move my class(es) to remote learning platforms.	Level of agreement (Strongly agree—Strongly disagree)
	My students had or were provided the appropriate equipment/resources (both hardware and software) to easily move my course(s) from on-campus instruction to remote learning platforms.	Level of agreement (Strongly agree—Strongly disagree)
Demographics	How many online courses have you taught prior to the spring 2020 term?	None; 1—3; 4—6; 7—9; 10 or more
	How many online courses have you taken prior to the spring 2020 term?	None; 1—3; 4—6; 7—9; 10 or more
	Which of the following describes your college/university?	Private; Public
	Which of the following describes the location of your college/university?	Large city—Small town (as defined by the U.S. Census)
	Where is your college/university located?	U.S. state or Canadian province

Table 2: Student survey questions – List of questions developed by the Midwestern university to assess students' attitudes toward the emergency shift to remote learning that occurred in spring 2020 (n = 671 participants)

Question	Response
Please select your college from the list below.	List of colleges at the university
I have internet connection at my location	Yes/No
My rating of my internet connection is....	1=very poor; 2=poor; 3=moderate; 4=good; 5=excellent
I am sharing the internet with others at my location.	Yes/No
I am using the following devices to learn online (select all that apply).	Desktop/Mac; Tablet; Personal laptop/Macbook; iPad; Mobile phone
My overall satisfaction with my university's IT support is....	Very satisfied; Satisfied; Neutral; Unsatisfied; Very unsatisfied
My overall satisfaction with my online learning experience at my university is....	Very satisfied; Satisfied; Neutral; Unsatisfied; Very unsatisfied
My overall satisfaction with my university's student services (advising, counseling, career service, financial, etc.) is....	Very satisfied; Satisfied; Neutral; Unsatisfied; Very unsatisfied
Overall, I feel stressed out....	Almost always; Most of the time; Some of the time; Almost never; Never
I need my university to assist me with (or biggest obstacles to keep learning online for summer/fall)....	Open comment box

Results

A total of 130 university/college faculty responded to the first survey. A majority of the survey respondents were from public colleges and universities in towns with 10,000-49,999 residents in the Midwest (Table 3). The majority of faculty had little or no prior online teaching experience and little or no prior experience taking online courses.

Faculty Survey: Attitude Towards Preparedness

Overall, faculty had a positive outlook on the preparedness of their institution for the emergency shift to online instruction in the spring 2020 semester. A majority (69.7%) of faculty agreed that their college/university was well prepared for the transition to remote learning during the spring 2020 term (Table 4). Comments included such statements as: "The tools were in place for a significant number of faculty to succeed." Another stated, "Infrastructure for online learning was in place, and resources to help faculty were quickly put in place for those who needed it." While another commented, "My school took action immediately and did well in giving great direction as to ways to help students participate in an online environment instead of in the classroom." More than half (58.3%) of faculty agreed that the administration at their institution was well prepared for the transition. Comments included, "The administration was prepared and adapted to the changing situation." Another individual stated, "The administration all took swift and immediate action

during Spring Break week which should be commended.” Others who were less impressed with administration preparedness stated, “They (administration) relied on the ability of others to carry out the daily reality of remote teaching and learning.” Just under half (48.1%) agreed that instructors at their institution were able to provide experiences that were equal in quality to those in the classroom, while over half (56.6%) agreed that the academic standards applied prior to the move to remote learning remained the same after the transition. Faculty commented, “My colleagues and I were very focused on meeting the student learning outcomes without extra burden to the students and planned experiences that met the outcomes.” Another stated, “I think faculty did the best job they could, but for many classes it is difficult to replace the in-class experience and transition in such quick notice.”

Faculty Survey: Availability and Accessibility of Technology and Resources

Just over half (53.5%) of faculty were able to re-create all classes (including labs, clinicals, recitations) without issue (Table 5). A majority (71.4%) had or were provided the appropriate equipment and resources to easily move their courses from on-campus instruction to remote learning platforms. Faculty agreed that resources for remote instruction were well communicated (74.7%), and technical assistance was available in a timely manner (62.6%). Many faculty made general comments that included, “....having everything we needed.”

A large majority (73.4%) of faculty agreed that students at their institution had the appropriate access to technology following the transition to remote; however, less than half of faculty (45.5%) agreed that their students had or were provided the appropriate equipment to easily move courses from on-campus to online instruction (Table 5). Faculty seemed to be aware of this through their comments as well, including, “I imagine some students are trying to do everything on their smartphones which is a poor tool.” Another stated, “Many students were sharing bandwidth and devices with others in their households, leading to challenges in adequate delivery, especially if it was asynchronous delivery.” Yet another indicated, “The students were entirely on their own to procure a device that might allow them some level of access.”

Faculty Survey: Associations with Prior Online Experience

Greater numbers of online courses taught prior to the spring 2020 term were associated with higher levels of agreement with the statement, *Overall, my college / university was well prepared for the transition to remote learning during the spring 2020 term* (). The number of online courses taken prior to the spring 2020 semester was not associated with faculty outlook on the overall preparedness of their institutions ().

Greater numbers of online courses taught prior to the spring 2020 term were associated with higher levels of agreement with the statement *I was able to re-create all my classes, including all labs / clinicals / recitations / etc. (if applicable), for remote learning without issue* (). The number of online courses taken prior to the spring 2020 semester was not associated with faculty perceptions of their ability to re-create all classes (). One faculty stated, “This transition really didn’t affect me or my courses much as I was already teaching some online courses and knew how to adapt.”

Student Survey Responses

A total of 671 students responded to the survey created by the Midwestern university’s instructional design services. Nearly all students (98.1%) had internet at their location following the switch to remote learning. Most students rated

their internet connection as good or excellent ($66.3\% = 42.6\% + 23.7\%$) and reported that they were sharing their internet services with others at their location (94.3%) (Table 6). A large majority of students (87.2%) were using personal laptops or Macbooks for their online learning. Nearly half (47.2%) of students reported using a mobile phone, 18.6% desktop or Mac, 14.0% iPad or tablet. Over half of students (53.5%) used multiple devices for their online learning.

Overall, nearly half of students were satisfied (33.4%) or very satisfied (9.8%) with their online learning experience, but just over a quarter were unsatisfied (17.7%) or very unsatisfied (10.0%) (Table 6). The remaining respondents (28.8%) were neutral about their online learning experience. Comments from both sides included such statements as: “My professors have done an amazing job adapting to the change and putting all the resources online that need to be there,” yet others stated such things as, “The transition was very rough and there was a lot of content, assignments, and exams that were difficult to find and properly prepare for.” Many other students included statements such as: “Some professors have very limited knowledge on how to use technology, which definitely hindered my learning experience. The university should have done more beforehand.” Although the majority of quantitative survey results indicated students being neutral to highly satisfied with their online learning experience, the qualitative comments indicated differently. Although the comment section was optional for students to complete, many frustrations, issues, and concerns were identified, many of which could have been fixed had the faculty member known about them during the course. Such comments included, “Professors seemed to take it easy and not do much for me.” Another stated, “Some professors did not communicate with me or others much.” And another, “Some assignments were unrealistic given the situation we were placed in or gave us more assignments because he/she thought we had nothing else to do.”

Most students were satisfied (41.9%) or very satisfied (16.0%) with the IT support available at their institution, while 37.7% were neutral, 3.3% were unsatisfied, and 1.2% were very unsatisfied. Student comments included general statements such as: “Every time I had a question for the IT support, they were always very timely in their responses as well as having reliable solutions to the problem.”

Table 3: Relative frequencies of the responses to demographic questions on the faculty survey¹

Question	n	Response	Relative frequency (%)
Which of the following describes your college/university?	99	Public	99.0%
		Private	1.0%
Which of the following describes the location of your college/university?	99	A town with 10,000-49,999 residents	85.9%
		A small city with 50,000-99,999 residents	7.1%
		A city with 100,000-249,999 residents	6.1%
		A large city with at least 250,000 residents	1.0%
Where is your college/university located?	97	Midwest	99.0%
		West	1.0%
How many online courses have you taught prior to the spring 2020 term?	99	None	38.4%
		1-3	22.2%
		4-6	10.1%
		7-9	7.1%
		10 or more	22.2%
How many online courses have you taken prior to the spring 2020 term?	98	None	38.8%
		1-3	29.6%
		4-6	9.2%
		7-9	7.1%
		10 or more	15.3%

1. Table 3: Percentages do not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding.

Table 4: Relative frequencies of the responses to questions focused on faculty attitudes toward preparedness for the emergency shift to online instruction in spring 2020²

Question	n	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Not Sure / I do not know
Overall, my college/university was well prepared for the transition to remote learning during the spring 2020 term.	109	16.5%	53.2%	13.8%	11.0%	5.5%	NA
The administration at my college/university was well prepared for the transition to remote learning during the spring 2020 term.	108	15.7%	42.6%	18.5%	18.5%	4.6%	NA
The instructors at my college/university provided experiences that were equal in quality to those in the classroom.	106	12.3%	35.8%	12.3%	28.3%	11.3%	NA
The same academic standards used in my in-person instruction were applied after my course(s) moved to remote learning platforms.	99	25.3%	31.3%	4.0%	24.2%	11.1%	4.0%

2. Table 4: Percentages do not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding. The response "Not Sure / I do not know" was not provided as an option for all questions. These are indicated by NA.

Table 5: Relative frequencies of the responses to questions focused on the availability and accessibility of software and technical assistance following the transition to online instruction in spring 2020³

Question	n	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Not Sure / I do not know
The students at my college/university had the appropriate access to technology following the transition to remote learning.	105	32.4%	41.0%	13.3%	9.5%	3.8%	NA
I was able to re-create all my classes, including all labs / clinicals / recitations / etc. (if applicable), for remote learning without issue.	101	19.8%	33.7%	6.9%	15.8%	21.8%	2.0%
All resources for supporting remote instruction were well communicated to the faculty.	99	41.4%	33.3%	9.1%	9.1%	6.1%	1.0%
Technical assistance from my college's / university's IT staff was available in a timely manner if needed during the transition from on-campus to remote learning.	99	48.5%	14.1%	8.1%	6.1%	4.0%	19.2%
I had or was provided the appropriate equipment/resources (both hardware and software) to easily move my class(es) to remote learning platforms.	98	41.8%	29.6%	13.3%	9.2%	4.1%	2.0%
My students had or were provided the appropriate equipment/resources (both hardware and software) to easily move my courses from on-campus instruction to remote learning platforms.	99	17.2%	28.3%	16.2%	13.1%	10.1%	15.2%

3. Table 5: Percentages do not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding. The response "Not Sure / I do not know" was not provided as an option for all questions. These are indicated by NA.

Table 6: Relative frequencies of the responses to questions on the student survey⁴

Question	n	Response	Relative frequency (%)
I have internet connection at my location	671	Yes	98.1%
		No	1.9%
My rating of my internet connection is....	671	1 = very poor	3.0%
		2 = poor	5.4%
		3 = moderate	25.3%
		4 = good	42.6%
		5 = excellent	23.7%
I am sharing the internet with others at my location.	671	Yes	94.3%
		No	5.7%
I am using the following devices to learn online (select all that apply).	671	Desktop/Mac	18.6%
		Tablet	3.0%
		Personal laptop/Macbook	87.2%
		iPad	11.0%
		Mobile phone	47.2%
		School loaned tablet	0.0%
		School loaned hotspot	0.3%
		Shared device	0.6%
My overall satisfaction with my university's IT support is....	671	Very satisfied	16.0%
		Satisfied	41.9%
		Neutral	37.7%
		Unsatisfied	3.3%
		Very unsatisfied	1.2%
My overall satisfaction with my online learning experience at my university is....	671	Very satisfied	9.8%
		Satisfied	33.7%
		Neutral	28.8%
		Unsatisfied	17.7%
		Very unsatisfied	10.0%
My overall satisfaction with my university's student services (advising, counseling, career service, financial, etc.) is....	671	Very satisfied	20.3%
		Satisfied	47.7%

		Neutral	25.8%
		Unsatisfied	4.2%
		Very unsatisfied	2.1%
Overall, I feel stressed out....	671	Almost always	15.8%
		Most of the time	26.23%
		Some of the time	35.32%
		Almost never	15.5%
		Never	7.15%

Discussion

This study identified faculty and students' perceptions related to their online teaching and learning experience when the COVID-19 pandemic arose, and most higher education institutes went to virtual classes. The results indicated fairly high satisfaction rates of faculty's thoughts on preparedness and access to technological resources and tools. In addition, students were fairly satisfied with the transition to online teaching and learning using quantitative measures. However, qualitative comments indicated otherwise, with many negative comments related to lack of communication between faculty and students, higher expectations given without explanations, more assignments without relationship to the course objectives or content, technology issues that arose due to faculty's requests, and feelings that faculty were not prepared or trained for online teaching or virtual learning. A similar study conducted in India showed similar students' perceptions of online learning due to COVID-19, such as lack of communication, technology issues that arose, and poor teaching skills (Muthuprasad et al., 2021). Yet another study conducted in Jordan found that online learning was difficult, especially for those who were deaf and hard of hearing students, and other issues such as a lack of interaction and motivation, technical and Internet issues, data privacy, and security (Almahasees, et.al., 2021). These were also similar to this study; however, mention of using regular, reflective practices were not mentioned as potential solutions.

These results indicate the need for faculty to be trained in designing and delivering effective online courses, how to use frequent reflective and metacognitive strategies to better online pedagogy, and how to communicate more with students through a virtual environment. Specifically, results indicate faculty need to ask for more frequent student feedback throughout the duration of the online course in order to gauge interest, ideas, and perceptions of student learning, engagement, and online needs so that effective teaching exists throughout the course duration and beyond. Faculty also need to plan and adapt current online teaching strategies so students can easily access the information using their laptops as well as smartphones, an instructional tool that nearly half of students responding used.

Implications for Practice

Reflective practices offer detailed information, a process to better facilitate teaching, learning, and understanding.

4. Table 6: Percentages do not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding. For the question, "I am using the following devices to learn online," percentages do not sum to 100% because this was a "select all that apply" question.

Although many faculty often use reflective strategies to better their teaching, not all do, leaving students in despair when technology is unavailable. Technology tools are challenging to use, directions are unclear, and/or communication is absent. In addition, faculty may use reflective practices, but students may not view them as such specifically because of the varied tools used. Or faculty may not use the data gained from their reflective tools back into their courses or have administration who do not offer professional development opportunities, so faculty are aware of potential reflection tools to use and how. This was more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic when many faculty were forced to teach online, and reflective practices were not used frequently, leaving many faculty's perceptions of online teaching and learning as being positive and rewarding, counteracting most students' perceptions.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic quickly changed higher education in various ways, including moving all courses to online delivery, future studies should continue to focus on assessing faculty and student's perceptions of quality online teaching and learning, the tools used to gain access to the online courses, and how reflective practices should be described and applied frequently throughout the course duration and future courses to come to better everyone's online experience overall. Future studies should also collect data for a longer period than this selected time frame, as well as times when emergency protocols aren't mandated, as these generalizations may change due to more time, preparation, and self-selection of teaching online or taking online courses.

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USING "HOW TO ..." VIDEOS IN FEEDFORWARD PRACTICES TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF ACADEMIC WRITING

Sally Quinn, Ph.D.

Abstract

The transition to Higher Education is full of new challenges for students not least the challenge to develop a style of writing expected within one's discipline of study at the HE level. Feedback on students' assessments can be one way that guides students to focus on the aspects of their writing that they should aim to improve at different points of their study but often students report difficulty in understanding markers' comments and exactly how to improve on these skills. We developed a library of 27 five minute "How to ..." videos to support the development of student academic writing with their key use being in the feedforward practice of markers, pointing students to relevant videos that can help to develop their writing skills at that point of their learning. Three semi-structured focus groups were conducted with students who had watched at least one of these videos, transcribed and analysed for emerging themes with four themes being identified (1. Characteristics of the videos; 2. When and why students watched the videos; 3. Using the videos to understand expectations; and 4. The effects on student writing and their marks). The data show that students valued the use of these videos in the feedforward information on their assessments. The use of examples in the videos were mentioned by students as a key benefit to them. Some students reported almost immediate improvements to marks after viewing one or more video. This suggests that using a library of videos which provide further information on how students can improve their writing is useful to integrate into feedforward practices.

Keywords: academic writing, feedback, feedforward, digital feedback tools

1. Introduction

The transition to Higher Education (HE) involves many challenges for new students but one key skill these new students need to acquire is the ability to write in a way expected at HE, and also in a way specific to their discipline of study. Many HE institutions, therefore, provide their students with centrally run or departmental run sources of support, programmes, and/or initiatives to help students develop these important writing skills. Often, students themselves are aware of their lack of skills in different types of writing (e.g., academic essays) and will sometimes seek out this support (Elander, Harrington, Norton, Robinson & Reddy, 2006). However, effective feedback can provide students with signposting to resources that can help them to develop the writing skills they need to succeed at University.

The Role of Assessment Feedback

Good quality assessment feedback is highly valued by students (Winstone, Nash, Rowntree & Menezes, 2019) and one of the key elements of effective feedback is to support students in closing the gap between current performance and desired performance (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). This desired performance not only involves a clear understanding of the topic itself but also being able to present this understanding effectively through written assessments. Having good writing skills is therefore vital for success. Importantly, the feedback markers provided on assessments need to ensure that students are given clear guidance on what good performance is, how their work meets that standard, and how they can close the gap between the two (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick). A vital part of feedback to enable this improvement in writing is “feedforward” information.

Feedforward information outlines where the student can improve their work next time they do a similar assessment (Duncan, 2007; Evans, 2013; Rae & Cochrane, 2008). Students value this type of information on their work as it provides them with the necessary information which could help improve their grades on subsequent assessments (Winstone, Nash, Rowntree & Menezes, 2019; Higgins et al., 2002). Although providing feedforward information on assessment is important, there is evidence to suggest that students are not always clear on how to use it effectively to improve their skills for future assessments (Price, Handley, Millar & O'Donovan, 2010, Nicol 2010). Oftentimes, feedforward practices will involve written feedback on the student's work (e.g., in a “To improve...” section on a feedback form) but students frequently report misunderstandings in interpreting what the written feedback means (Nicol, 2010; Chanock, 2000). This may be in part due to ambiguities in the way the feedback is framed (Rae & Cochrane, 2008). For example, comments such as “needs more critical analysis” are often unhelpful to students because these types of comments have a distinct lack of information on what the student did wrong and how they can improve (Wolstencroft & de Main, 2021). While it is fairly easy to outline *what* the student needs to improve on (e.g., critical analysis) it is often difficult to explain exactly *how* the student should do this. This is important to consider because students frequently report being unhappy with feedback that does not clearly outline *how* they can improve in their next assessment (Rae & Cochrane). The mode of delivery is also a potential barrier for students. Some students value verbal feedback more than written feedback (Blair, Curtis, Goodwin & Shields, 2012) but this is not always practically possible from the perspective of the marker, especially when providing individual feedback to students in large cohorts. This is where other methods of delivering feedback can be considered. For example, Evans (2013) suggests that digital tools can be extremely useful in providing effective feedback to large cohorts. Based on this evidence and the suggestion from Evans, we created digital resources in the form of videos to supplement the feedback students received on their assessments. The aim was that these videos would improve the quality of feedforward information to equip students with the tools they need to “close the gap” between their current performance and desired performance.

Creating a Series of “How To ...” Videos

We developed a set of 27 “How to ...” videos (see appendix for a full list of the video titles) to support students with the development of their writing skills. The videos were created in collaboration with a team of Graduate Teaching Assistants who mark assessments on our BSc Psychology undergraduate degree course. The videos were created to target key skills for students in the Psychology department of the author's institution whose assessments are largely in the form of academic essays and practical reports. Students often report feedback is not useful unless it can help them in future assessments (Duncan, 2007). Our students are assessed using the same marking criteria across all assessments of the same format (e.g., one set of criteria that cover all essays). Hence, the content of the videos mapped directly onto skills tested

by these standard criteria helping to support the development of writing skills that are transferable to other assessments (Nicol, 2010).

Each of these videos is approximately five minutes long and is captioned. The videos include examples of writing of varying quality (e.g., poor, average, and excellent examples) with an explanation from the narrator of where each example could be improved. The videos support students in three ways. First, the videos help students understand the marking criteria and how they can meet the objectives of the assessment. The use of exemplars is particularly important for this aspect because evidence suggests students value not only the use of exemplars to better understand the marking criteria but also an explanation of *why* these exemplars meet each criterion (Rust, Price & O'Donovan, 2003). The second way in which the videos support students is to be able to see marking and feedback "live". The use of exemplars, specifically with annotations or feedback, is best practice in this instance because it helps students to understand what the module leader is looking for and hence helps them work towards the desired performance (Handley and Williams, 2011). By the narrator explaining the strengths and weaknesses of the examples in the videos, the students are gaining "live" feedback on the exemplars, gaining an insight into what markers are looking for when marking their assessments. Third, the videos support students in their skill development for subsequent assessments. Students often are able to apply their new learning to their own work if the skills are taught within the context of their own discipline (Elander, et al., 2006). Therefore, we ensured all the examples used in these videos related to topics relevant to their degree (i.e., topics in Psychology).

One of the key principles of effective feedback outlined by Evans (2013) is to ensure all resources are available to students from the outset and are available digitally. One positive aspect of using digital tools for feedback is that they can be accessed almost anywhere and at any time. As such, we set up these videos on an open site on our Virtual Learning Environment which meant students can access the entire library of videos across the whole academic year. However, their key use is to supplement the information provided by assessment markers in the feedforward section of the feedback form on assessments. In line with the advice of Nicol (2010) and Evans (2013), markers select two or three points that the student should focus on in their next assessment and select the most relevant videos that provide guidance on how to do this. This results in a feedforward section on the feedback form that includes a written explanation of the key aspects the student should look to work on for their next assessment, and links to the videos the marker has selected. The current study reports on student feedback regarding the use of these videos to support the development of their academic writing.

2. Method

The study was approved by the Department of Psychology's Ethics Committee. An email was sent out to all our undergraduate and postgraduate students to ask for their participation in focus groups to discuss the "How to ..." videos. We stipulated that students needed to have watched at least one of these videos to take part. A total of 14 students (12 undergraduate and 2 postgraduate; 11 female, 3 male; 8 Home students and 4 International students) provided the final sample and each student was either paid £10 for their participation or was given course credit.

Three semi-structured focus groups were held with the focus group sizes ranging from three to seven students. These were round table discussions guided by three questions:

1. Which videos have you watched and why did you watch those particular videos?
2. What did you find useful and/or not useful in the videos?
3. What effect (if any) has watching these videos had on your writing?

All three focus groups were audio-recorded and lasted approximately 30 minutes. The focus groups were conducted at the end of the academic year at which point the videos had been available for one academic year.

3. Results and Discussion

The audio files were analysed for emerging themes. Four key themes were identified and are discussed below in turn: (i) characteristics of the videos; (ii) when and why students watched the videos; (iii) using the videos to understand expectations; and (iv) the effects on student writing and their marks.

Theme 1: Characteristics of the Videos

One key characteristic that almost all students appreciated was the use of examples of writing in the videos. Students found having concrete examples to look at while the narrator talked through the strengths and weaknesses of the examples was much better than stand-alone text comments on their work. This perhaps fulfils their need for further explanation of in-text comments (Rust, Price & O'Donovan, 2003), possibly due to their inability to understand the language used by the marker in these stand-alone comments (Wolstencroft & de Main, 2021).

"The examples are really useful."

"So usually [the marker] says 'expand on what the results can show you and how far you can generalize that' but in the videos they use an actual example which means it's also quantifiable ... and I can see how my work could be so much better if I did it like that."

The fact that different quality examples were used in a lot of videos also seemed to be useful to students, in particular the different explanations of why each example was poor, good, or excellent. Again, this supports the idea that students value the explanations that go alongside exemplars (Rust, Price & O'Donovan, 2003).

"The use of examples was really good, especially having poor and good examples as the narrator could explain why one was poor and why the other was good. I found that really useful."

Students also used these examples to gauge the level of their own work and the explanations guided them through each example to show how each had improved on the subsequent example. Using these videos in this way thus became a mode of self-assessment for students, one skill that's important in using feedback effectively (Evans, 2013).

"[when looking at the examples], I would think 'Oh that's me.' So, yeah, that was really good, because the way they showed it was like a spectrum approach ... and it would be like this is the first mark and this is how to expand on it. So you basically aim to just go straight to the third level, which is useful, especially for me."

Another important characteristic of the videos was their length, each being approximately 5 minutes long. Previous evidence has shown that students prefer videos that are less than 10 minutes but more than 3 minutes in length (Manasrah, Masound & Jaradat, 2021), and that they are more engaged with shorter videos (~6 minutes; Hsin & Cigas, 2013). This may be because shorter videos reduce the cognitive load on students (i.e., the amount of information they need to hold in their working memory; Sweller, 1994). As one student stated, "*[the length of the videos hit 'the sweet spot of my concentration']*". The short length may also be particularly beneficial to students who have limited time. For example, many

students have other commitments (e.g., family, part-time work) that they need to balance along with their studies (Lowe & Gayle, 2007) so offering resources that do not require a significant time investment can be useful.

"I liked the fact that the videos weren't too long."

"Yeah, you just want to have that refresher or that bit of advice on the sentence structure. But you don't want to spend an hour doing it if you've got a limited amount of time."

"I did like the fact that they weren't too long because obviously when you have assignments or stress, you just don't want to be watching, like, media for ten, fifteen minutes."

"Oftentimes I feel like I'm using these to aid sort of a fury of trying to write a report or an essay or something and it's great that it's five minutes."

Theme 2: When and Why Students Watched the Videos

Students had different reasons for accessing one or more of the videos. As expected, and in line with the idea that some students seek out support for their writing (Elander et al., 2006), some students had reported identifying a weakness in their own writing and therefore took a more proactive approach, accessing the library of videos in search of videos focussing on specific aspects of academic writing. Most students said they watched relevant videos while writing their assessments rather than when they got their feedback, using them for particular sections of their writing where they didn't feel confident often as a refresher to remind themselves of what they need to do.

"[I watched the videos] because I hadn't written a practical report before so I wasn't confident in writing them"

"I used to just like, before I started writing about my introduction, my discussion, for example, I'd go to a video, watch it and like sort of follow it and write mine."

"And while I'm writing my essay, my assignment or whatever, I just go back to whichever sort of section I'm not confident then watch [the video] again and like, pause it when I need to."

"So I thought let's just sit down for 5 mins in the middle of writing and get that refresher to see what to do."

However, some students were more reactive, reporting that they only started watching the videos after they had been provided with the links on their assessment feedback forms. This may be because these particular students are lower in self-regulation. Learners who are high in self-regulation are more able to set goals, to more effectively regulate their performance against these goals, and to better regulate their levels of motivation, cognitive processes and behaviour during learning (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002). Students low in self-regulation may therefore be less likely to take a proactive approach to gaining support for the development of their writing skills, and more likely to view the videos when directed (i.e., reactively). This perhaps indicates the need for links to specific resources to be used in feedforward practices for students who may not instinctively seek out this kind of support.

"So, I started looking at them after I got feedback on a report from my discussion section."

Nevertheless, for some students, watching these videos as a result of engaging with the feedforward information on their assessments subsequently resulted in a more proactive approach. This mirrors the feedback model proposed by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) whereby one of the purposes of effective feedback is to facilitate self-assessment, and for this to help develop strategies and tactics the student can use to produce an "outcome" (e.g., an essay). By the student actively

engaging in these videos after being directed to them, they have been able to assess their own performance against an example of “desired performance”. This in turn has led to the realisation that watching the videos can be a useful strategy or tactic to improve the quality of subsequent outcomes produced (i.e., their future assessments).

“In my first essay I waited until I had my feedback then watched the videos, but now I’m watching the videos before writing which is more useful.”

Theme 3: Using the Videos to Understand Expectations

Students also reported that the videos helped to develop their own sense of what was expected of their writing at university. This ties in with the idea that feedback should help students know what good performance is and to be able to more clearly understand where their own performance is in relation to that (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Additionally, existing evidence shows that the use of exemplars helps students see what they should be aiming for (Handley & Williams, 2011).

“I didn’t know what I was doing so this [the videos] gave me a really concrete thing.”

“I struggled a lot with relating back to previous literature in my practical reports so the videos really helped me because I could see what I should be doing.”

“I’ve used them when I’ve been completely stuck with something and I was trying to write my practical and I couldn’t think of any way to, you know, use critical evaluation and so the video did sort of prompt me and I thought ‘Oh I can do this,’ so I went away and did it.”

This was true for students early on in their degree as well as later on. This highlights the comments of Evans (2013) who states that there is perhaps an (incorrect) assumption that students further on in their studies (e.g., postgraduate students) have fewer writing problems.

“I think we all come to Uni with preconceptions that we know how to do things but [these videos] made me realize we need the support.”

“You think that maybe you shouldn’t be looking at these videos so late on in the degree because you should be able to write a practical report, but I learnt so much.”

International students found it particularly useful in informing them of the expected writing style in HE in the UK. One international student said:

“I opened the future research video and I thought ‘Wow is this how we have to do it?’ I didn’t know it. Before I used to write just a sentence, but I now know it’s different.”

Theme 4: Effects on Writing and Assessment Marks

Some students reported an almost instantaneous improvement in their academic writing after watching one or more of the videos

“After I watched my first video, I got 10 marks more for my next essay.”

"I had a lightbulb moment and thought 'Wow, this is amazing!' and I put it in my practical [report] and I got 10 marks more so they [the videos] do work."

"Like, for example, when I was doing my discussion I've watched the video, I've done my discussion. And I got quite a good feedback regarding my discussion with those. That was useful."

Although providing additional tools (e.g., exemplars) and interventions to support student writing can result in improved performance (and marks) for some students, this is not always the case (Wimshurst & Manning, 2012). In the current sample, some students reported a level of frustration after markers signposted them to a video they had already watched while preparing for that assessment which clearly indicates their usage of that video had not resulted in "good performance" on that particular writing skill.

"Although it can be quite frustrating when you've watched them and they [the markers] tell you to watch it again."

Nevertheless, these different experiences could be explained by the type of skill each student is trying to improve. For example, essay structure can be a fairly "quick fix" and can have an almost immediate effect on marks but a more advanced skill like critical writing will take time to develop. Since we did not ask participants what aspects of their writing they were looking to improve, it is difficult to come to any firm conclusions regarding the disparity in experiences. Additionally, there may be individual differences that affect how well the students can apply the advice given in the videos to their own work. For example, both self-regulation skills and previous experiences of managing self-assessment can affect how well students use resources provided to them to help support their learning (Evans, 2013) so it's possible that students who have a high level of these skills are better equipped to act upon the advice given in the videos and thus see more positive effects on their work.

Limitations

One of the key limitations of the current study is that we only gathered data from a small subset of students who had watched the videos and so may only form a narrow viewpoint of student perceptions of the usefulness of these videos. Additionally, we did not speak to students who had not watched any of the videos and thus cannot comment on why this might be. There is some evidence to suggest that some students are reluctant to engage with feedback that is delivered digitally (Timmers & Veldkamp, 2011) but this is also the case with written feedback. For example, Duncan (2007) reports that some students do not even collect their work yet alone read and engage with written feedback. A possible explanation for this may be due to the different types of learners. Passive learners may be less likely to engage more generally in feedback compared to active learners (Rae & Cochrane, 2008) so within the context of the current study, these students may also be less likely to watch the videos not only proactively but also reactively to feedforward information on their assessment. Additionally, Rae and Cochrane report that some students do not engage with the feedback if they are happy with their mark so this could also explain why some students may not watch the videos.

Another limitation is the type of data we gathered from students. Although the purpose of the study was to gain rich data about students' use of the videos, perhaps a cruder way of measuring their effectiveness is to track changes in the marks of student assessments (both for those who use and do not use the videos). This would provide some quantitative evidence of the efficacy of these videos for supporting improvements in student writing.

4. Conclusion

Ensuring feedforward practices are providing clear instruction on what students can improve on in their next assessment is important for the development of students' writing skills. The current study discusses students' perceptions of the efficacy of using digital tools in the form of a library of "How to ..." videos to support students' understanding of the information provided in the feedforward section of their feedback form. The evidence in the current study suggests that providing direct links to short, relevant videos which include examples and explanations can help students to develop aspects of their academic writing and thus reach or at least get closer to the expectations of their discipline. Directing students to specific videos at certain points in their studies can help them to focus on aspects that they need to improve at that point in their development and thus can be a useful tool to integrate into feedforward practices.

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Appendix

A list of the “How to ...” videos used to support academic writing in essays and practical reports.

Example Video: Topic 12: How to write a good introduction in an essay”



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://uen.pressbooks.pub/jetev5i3/?p=44#video-44-1>

1. How to write with clarity
2. How to read an academic paper
3. How to critically analyse an academic paper
4. How to find and select relevant evidence
5. How to use evidence to make a point or argument
6. How to provide a balanced argument
7. How to select points for your argument
8. How to structure your argument
9. How to develop your argument
10. How to ensure studies are clearly explained
11. How to construct the overall narrative in an essay
12. How to write a good introduction in an essay
13. How to structure the main body of your essay
14. How to write a good conclusion in essays and practical reports
15. How to construct a practical report
16. How to construct the overall narrative of a practical report
17. How to write a clear abstract
18. How to write a clear rationale in a practical report
19. How to write clear hypotheses in a practical report
20. How to clearly describe methods and designs in a practical report
21. How to report results clearly in a practical report
22. How to format table and figures in APA style
23. How to summarise your results in the Discussion section of a practical report
24. How to critically discuss your findings in a practical report within the context of previous research
25. How to discuss the implications of your results in a practical report
26. How to discuss the strengths and limitations of your study in a practical report
27. How to propose ideas for future research in a practical report

COVID ANXIETY AND STRESS IN HIGHER ED (CASH)

Letitia Bergantz, Ph.D. and Christopher Curtis

Abstract

College is a time of increased stress and anxiety. The current changes in attendance and methods of instruction due to COVID-19 have demonstrated even higher levels of stress, anxiety, and mental health issues. Tailoring interventions to the specific needs of a campus community has been proposed as an appropriate means to the current crisis. This study identifies the mental health needs of students at a rural college as they pertain to the effects of the pandemic. Questionnaires collected data from college students (N=33) at Athens State University, a rural university in north Alabama, to understand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their mental health and well-being. Data obtained from the 58-question instrument were analyzed through quantitative and qualitative methods. Results Data revealed that 33/33 (100%) students indicated higher levels of anxiety and stress due to the outbreak. Stressors contributing to the increased anxiety, stress, and depressive symptoms included anticipated duration of the pandemic (31/33, 93.9%), stress of current financial situation (24/33, 72.7%), uncertainty of the future (31/33, 93.9%), decreased social interactions and sense of community with peers (29/33, 87.9%), concerns about the health of loved ones and self (33/33, 100%). Students described a high level of comfort in participation in a flexible learning environment (31/33, 93.9%). Students identified various coping mechanisms. The results of our study underscore the need for directed mental health interventions for college students and flexible platforms of study. Consideration of developing a flexible learning environment should be included as part of directed mental health interventions.

Keywords: mental health, college students, suicide prevention, attitudes and behaviors, HyFlex

Introduction

Mental health well-being is an important factor contributing to the success of college students. (Eisenberg, Golberstein, & Hunt, 2009; Luca, Franklin, Yueqi, Johnson, & Brownson, 2016) The Spring 2019 reports from the National College Health Assessment (NCHA) indicate that 55.8% of college students felt hopeless, 87.7% felt overwhelmed, 70.8% felt very sad, and 13.3% reported seriously considering suicide during the 12 months prior to being surveyed (American College Health Association, 2019). Additionally, when asked about suicidal ideation (SI) in the preceding 12 months, those reporting SI had a lower average cumulative GPA than those who did not have SI during the same time period (Luca, Franklin, Yueqi, Johnson, & Brownson, 2016). The results of these studies revealed just how much mental health well-being factors into the success of college students. These results validated the results from the 2012 National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) survey that indicated as many as 73% of these college students will experience crisis while attending college. 64% of the survey respondents who were no longer attending college stated the reason for departure was

mental health related (Gruttadaro & Crudo, 2012), with anxiety being a common theme with attrition (Eisenberg, Golberstein, & Hunt, 2009), as well as poor academic performance. (Kitzrow, 2003).

Small, rural college campuses can pose different challenges to students than larger universities. Small class sizes and a more intimate learning environment are often cited as reasons students choose to attend small colleges. These same benefits of a small college can also contribute to added student stress. Students who are working while going to college may need to drive distances to and from their job resulting in increased stress levels. (Rasmussen, 2000; Calloway, Kelly, & Ward-Smith, 2012; Antoun, Edwards, Sweeting, & Ding, 2017; Nelson, Misra, Sype, & Mackie, 2016) Additionally, students may not have as many opportunities for extracurricular activities and may be reliant on the social interactions they are able to establish. (Graham, Hurtado, & Gonyea, 2018; Elliott & Healy, 2001; Calloway, Kelly, and Ward-Smith, 2012)

Many college students learn that campus life comes with new adjustments and, for some, new responsibilities which may create an increase in stress. A survey study of college students noted that up to 80% of students report responsibility for paying some or all of their college expenses (Citi, 2013). Stress due to financial concerns has been associated with increased anxiety in addition to physical and mental health impairment. (Jones, Park, & Lefevor, 2018 Hodgson & Simoni, 1995). 65.3% of matriculating college freshmen reported concern over successfully completing their degree due to financial reasons (Jones, Park, & Lefevor, 2018). Kitzrow et al. noted an increase in student mental health concerns concomitant with the increasing cost of education. The look and feel of the student population is changing as Nontraditional Adult Learners (NALs) are increasing among colleges. Up to 75% of students currently identify with this growing demographic (Bodfish, 2002). This is especially true at Athens State University, where a large number of students work full-time, have families, and juggle other responsibilities. Events that impact their financial resources may also lead to increased anxiety over housing, food, and meeting household financial obligations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted college students in ways that directly affect these identified causes of stress and anxiety. Early in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, college presidents reported in two surveys their increasing concern over student mental health and the disproportionate impact on students from low-income backgrounds. (Lederman, 2020) Federal Work-Study stipends on which many students rely for income were stopped for students who were not allowed to return to campus. (Gomez, 2020) Unemployment in the United States rose more over the course of three months early in the COVID-19 pandemic than it had during any three-month period in the history of the country. (Kochhar, 2020) Aucejo et al. (2020) noted their survey results indicated 40% of college students they surveyed had lost a job, internship, or offer due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Pew Research Center (2020) noted 25% of workers were employed in the industries most likely to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and that about half of workers between ages 16 to 24 work in those sectors. (Kochhar & Barroso, 2020) The bureau of labor statistics noted that part-time workers were twice as likely as full-time workers to be unemployed and that service occupations were impacted most due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (BLS, 2021)

The implementation of social distancing coupled with mandatory lockdowns of certain sectors of the population induces feelings of isolation and loneliness. Students who were used to traveling freely and communicating with others when they wanted were forced into a situation of social isolation and restrictions that have been demonstrated to be linked with feelings of frustration and uncertainty. (Serafini et al., 2020) COVID-19 revealed how many college students were grossly unprepared emotionally for separation from friends and family to this degree. Serafini et al. (2020) demonstrated how frustration and distress are directly related to quarantine, reduced physical and social contact with others, and loss of usual habits. Students were accustomed to their established social networking activities and daily routines. (Jeong et al., 2016) The newly imposed limitations on free movement due to the pandemic could contribute to a sense of pervasive loneliness and hopelessness, which are significantly associated with increased depression and suicidal behavior. (Cava et al., 2005)

The COVID-19 pandemic forced institutions to reconsider how to serve students in an ever-changing environment.

In January 2020, students, instructors, and institutions began the academic term with a “business as usual” mindset. Yet, by March 2020, the rapid spread of the Coronavirus forced institutions to shut down. COVID-19 resulted in the closure of schools all across the world where over 1.2 billion children (K-12) and in higher education were out of the classroom (Whiting, 2020). This resulted in institutions being shut down to in-person learning, with a quick shift to online education. In higher education, the impact on students came more into focus, highlighting education disruptions due to factors such as economic issues, childcare, and mental health. Moving online allowed for continued studies as the world continued to figure out how to adapt with various school reopening models. In order to help maintain student success and simultaneously strengthen Athens States’ ability to combat unforeseen circumstances, new methods of instruction were adopted and implemented like HyFlex to address the disruptions.

Dhawan (2020) describes HyFlex as a delivery where “each class session and learning activity is offered in-person, synchronously online, and asynchronously online. Students can decide how to participate.” In Fall 2020, several faculty at Athens State were trained and piloted classes using HyFlex as the university began to reopen its operations. The pilot offered lessons learned as instructors aimed to provide flexibility for all students in an uncertain world by implementing the HyFlex model.

This allowed students to be in an active learning community. According to Tinto’s SAM and SIM model of student retention, social integration (friendships, connections, interactions) is a key element in a student’s decision to remain in school (Manyanga et al., 2017, p. 33). It has been shown that community is directly tied to an adult student’s emotions (Hara & Kling, 2000). When participating in an online course, positive emotions can lead to reduced anxiety as students are integrated into such a community.

Harrell and Bower (2011) demonstrated that certain characteristics exist in students that tend to persist in online courses. With the uncertainty of what the pandemic would mandate in terms of traditional courses, the university wanted to create or utilize a system that would allow for students to change modality based on external circumstances. Therefore, if the students originally signed up for a distance learning course but a recession in the severity of the pandemic allowed for more traditional interactions, the students needing the traditional coursework could switch modalities and ultimately settle in the mode of course in which they felt most comfortable. Dealing with changing factors such as having children at home in quarantine or having to travel for the death of a loved one was not an issue with HyFlex, as it allowed for flexibility depending upon the circumstances.

Methods

Study Population and Setting

The current study was conducted at Athens State University, a rural, public, two-year upper-level university with an undergraduate and graduate enrollment of 3,621. The study was approved by the Athens State University Institutional Review Board. The cross-sectional study was conducted through an online survey over a span of three weeks in October 2020.

Recruitment Methods

After receiving institutional board approval, students were recruited through verbal announcements in courses through-

out the college. No incentives were given to students who elected to participate in the study. Each participant was only allowed to participate in the survey one time. Participation in the survey was voluntary.

Measures

Data were collected via an online survey through Assessment Management Evaluation Entry (AMEE), Athens State University's in-house survey system. Participants were asked their age, gender, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation. Eleven questions on the survey were previously used by the Healthy Minds Study (HMS) to evaluate concerns of students related to COVID-19. This portion of the survey containing five-point Likert-type response options ranging from "Not Concerned at All (1)" to "Extremely Concerned (5)" was used to ask students about their concerns related to COVID-19 over the previous two weeks. They were additionally asked on a five-point Likert type response options ranging from "A lot more stressful (1)" to "A lot less stressful (5)" their financial situation and the impact of COVID-19 on their finances. The next portion of the survey consisted of twenty questions on 5-point Likert type scales ranging from "Completely disagree (1)" to "Completely agree (5)" related to their perceptions of mental illness, mental health support services at the university, and personal needs related to mental health. Finally, students were informed of the HyFlex flexible learning environment offered to students at the university and were asked questions related to their comfort level of participation in HyFlex, stress related to the HyFlex model of learning, and interaction/social experience with the HyFlex platform.

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 16.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Values were expressed as mean \pm SD or as percentages.

Results

In total, 33 undergraduate students from Athens State University participated in the survey during the Fall 2020 semester of study. Most respondents were female (81.8%), and ages ranged from 20 to 64 years ($M = 32$, $SD = 2.18$). Reported religions among respondents were Agnostic (6%), Catholic (6%), None (15%), Protestant (70%), and Self-Identify (3%). Heterosexual students (91%) represented the largest demographic of sexual orientation, followed by gay (3%), bisexual (3%), and questioning (3%). See Table 1.

Table 1: Participant Demographic Information

Variables	% of Participants (<i>n</i>)	
Gender	Female	81.8 (27)
	Male	18.2 (6)
Religion	Agnostic	6 (2)
	Catholic	6 (2)
	None	15 (5)
	Protestant	70 (23)
	Self-Identify	3 (1)
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual/Straight	91 (30)
	Gay	3 (1)
	Bisexual	3 (1)
	Questioning	3 (1)

Respondents noted that duration of the COVID-19 pandemic (31/33, 93.9%), additional spread of infection (33/33, 100%), and additional deaths as a result of COVID-19 (33/33, 100%) were causing them concern. They further noted a personal sense of safety and security (28/33, 84.8%), personally contracting COVID-19 (30/33, 90.9%), and loved ones contracting (33/33, 100%) or dying from (32/33, 97%) COVID-19 were weighing factors for anxiety and stress. Additionally, not being able to spend time with loved ones (31/33, 93.9%), uncertainty of the future (31/33, 93.9%), and missing milestones at school (29/33, 87.9%) were also noted to be stress and anxiety-inducing issues.

Students admitted to feeling isolated from campus (20/33, 60.6%) and that the campus environment does not present a negative impact on students (28/33, 84.8%). In fact, students felt the campus climate encourages free and open discussion about mental and emotional health (31/33, 93.9%), students are working to promote mental health on campus (30/33, 90.9%), the administration is listening to the concerns of students when it comes to health and wellness (30/33, 90.9%), and there is a good support system on campus for students going through difficult times (31/33, 93.9%).

The opportunity to participate in the HyFlex learning environment was positively received by respondents. Students noted comfort in participating in a reduced size HyFlex course (31/33, 93.9%) and perceived the level of social experience and interaction through the HyFlex platform to be positive (25/33, 75.8%). Additionally, stress levels with taking a course through the flexible HyFlex model were not considered to be an issue for students (17/33, 51.5%).

Discussion

HyFlex learning was originally developed by Dr. Brian Beatty (Beatty, 2010). Athens began the HyFlex pilot with faculty training in late July of 2020. Beatty's framework of HyFlex features four principles:

1. HyFlex is the ability for students to have choice
2. Equivalency of all learning activities, regardless of format

3. Reusability of all activities, lectures, and multimedia in the class for all students
4. Accessibility of all students to have the technology skills to access all methods of delivery (Abdelmalak & Parra, 2016).

The faculty members were at varying stages of familiarity with the HyFlex content and the technology being used to make the HyFlex teaching work. With classes being scheduled to start approximately two weeks after the training session, it was determined that active learning pedagogies would be encouraged in the courses to foster a sense of engagement and to create an online learning community.

The focus on active learning also led to a wide spectrum of active and interactive elements among the courses. Students across all delivery modalities achieved the same learning outcomes. Student engagement through active learning increases student learning outcomes in different instructional settings (Khan et al., 2017). To engage students across multiple modalities, some instructors chunked instruction to allow for an opportunity for the instructor to share knowledge and an opportunity for the students to engage in collaborative activities. Including interactive elements among students in different methods such as using group work, discussions, and student presentations increased the views of HyFlex modalities throughout both faculty and students. Additional forms of engagement tested included Live Polling, where both students attending class and those joining online could participate. The students reached out using an instant message feature outside of class to ask questions and give feedback about personalized videos. This lent itself to better community and engagement so that students did not feel isolated.

Conclusion

Overall, most of the instructors involved with the HyFlex experience felt that students had more access, felt comfortable across formats, and viewed the extra setup as worthwhile. According to Beatty, the major benefits to faculty included the ability to serve more students with the same resources, skill development, and expertise in online teaching without the sacrifice of classroom instruction and provide alternatives for classroom instruction for conflicts (2019). Faculty members not involved in the pilot sat in on both the traditional section and the online synchronous sections of the HyFlex classes and were able to convert their own courses to teach in this mode and to accommodate students in a variety of formats.

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