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The eLearning Literacy for Suddenly Online - Voices from the Field

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From Survive to Thrive: Using Professional Development to Advance Online Teaching

Article Info	Abstract
Jennifer Ibrahim, Ph.D. Temple University Anne Frankel, Ph.D. Temple University Laurie Friedman, Ph.D. Temple University Jamie Mansell, Ph.D. Temple University 	In Spring 2020, Covid-19 forced educational institutions to quickly pivot courses to an online format, leaving many schools unprepared to support students or faculty. The Professional Development Framework for Online Teaching was a suitable guide for the development of training and support for faculty moving to online teaching; key elements include teaching, community and organization. Using this framework, a faculty team from a College of Public Health worked to develop an interactive online teaching training, including: activities to practice skills; assessments to demonstrate competency; community support groups organized by type of class; and organizational support including a standardized syllabus, Canvas template, and support from technology specialists. This case study shows promise for a systematic approach to ongoing faculty development outside of moments of crisis. Future work includes the development of parallel online training for students, more opportunities for assessment, and recognition of high-quality online teaching with meaningful use of technology.

In Spring 2020, with the rapid spread of Covid-19 across the US, institutions of higher education were forced to modify their delivery of academic programs. At many schools, classes were temporarily halted or students who were on Spring break transitioned back to a fully online offering. On March 7, 2020, the University of Washington was among the first institutions to start the transition to a fully online format (Baker et al., 2020). By the second week of March, more than 100 universities had followed suit (Voytko & Porterfield, 2020). By mid-March, 1,102 universities nationwide had moved fully online, a move that impacted upwards of 14 million college students across the country (Hess, 2020).

The sudden transition to online learning exposed a systemic gap in faculty preparation; namely, a lack of comprehensive training for online learning for all instructors. As of 2018, more than half of college instructors nationwide have never taught a fully online course (Jaschik & Lederman, 2018), despite a growing demand among students for online education (Koksal, 2020; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Within the College of Public Health at Temple University, the breadth of instruction and variety of course modalities introduce myriad challenges to successful online teaching. Courses include large, introductory lectures (150 to 600 students) to small didactic seminars (20 students); they can be lab-based, clinical, writing intensive, or practica that enable students to meet field and clinical licensure requirements, as well as adhere to accreditation standards, where applicable. Further, the current social environment has created an emphasis on topics such as social justice, complex ethical scenarios, structural discrimination and bias

and inequality (Hamedani et al., 2020) - topics that can create "hot moments" during on-campus courses. The nuances of these types of interactions can be even more difficult to navigate online where visual cues and emotional inferences are not readily available. Finally, our student body is diverse by race and ethnicity, age, sex, gender, religion, sexual orientation and country of origin; includes first-generation students and older adults returning to seek higher education; and constitutes undergraduate, graduate, and professional students; and nearly every metric in between.

Faculty Concerns with Online Teaching

Faculty have long expressed concerns about online teaching, including the amount of time and effort needed to teach online (above and beyond in person teaching) as well as a lack of support for teaching online (Allen & Seaman, 2009). They generally believe that "in-person" instruction is more effective than online teaching (Jaschik & Lederman, 2018), and express skepticism about the ability of online education to help students meet and achieve equivalent course objectives and learning outcomes because of technology and pedagogical challenges. Instructors may question whether online learning allows for sufficient student-teacher interaction and reaching at-risk students, including historically underserved students (Jaschik & Lederman, 2018). Further, they often have minimal experience as online learners, which can leave them unprepared to create a rich learning experience for students (Cicco, 2013; McQuiggan, 2012).

Faculty members that have experience teaching online typically espouse more positive attitudes about the potential

for online courses to produce equivalent learning outcomes (Jaschik & Lederman, 2018), and experienced online teachers spend significantly less time preparing their courses due to comfort with technology and teaching strategies (Mandernach & Holbeck, 2016). These findings suggest that advanced preparation, experience and planning can lead to a change in faculty attitudes about online teaching. In April 2020, the college distributed a brief questionnaire through the college listserv to all instructors to understand their concerns and to support them with online teaching. Of the 148 respondents, 43% indicated that they wished there was more advanced notice to move online, 19% wished that they had additional training to move online and 26% wished that students had additional training to move online. We sought to address gaps in online teaching preparation through professional development for full-time faculty and adjunct faculty, as well as doctoral students who were Teaching Assistants. While we searched for existing trainings to prepare faculty, we found trainings that were either too basic and largely focused on the technology alone or too expensive to scale to the entire complement of over 200 faculty. We knew that we needed a training that would consider teaching in the health professions and across a very diverse audience of students; due to these conditions, we decided to develop our own in-house online teaching training.

The purpose of this article is to explore the role of professional development to prepare faculty for online teaching. Using a descriptive case study methodology (Yin, 2003), we began with the identification of an appropriate theoretical model to guide our work. We then translated that model into practice and implemented a series of

professional development opportunities for the faculty throughout the summer of 2020 to prepare for online teaching in Fall 2020 and beyond. The remainder of this article will create a chronological narrative of the experience within the College of Public Health at Temple University and the lessons learned from the approach.
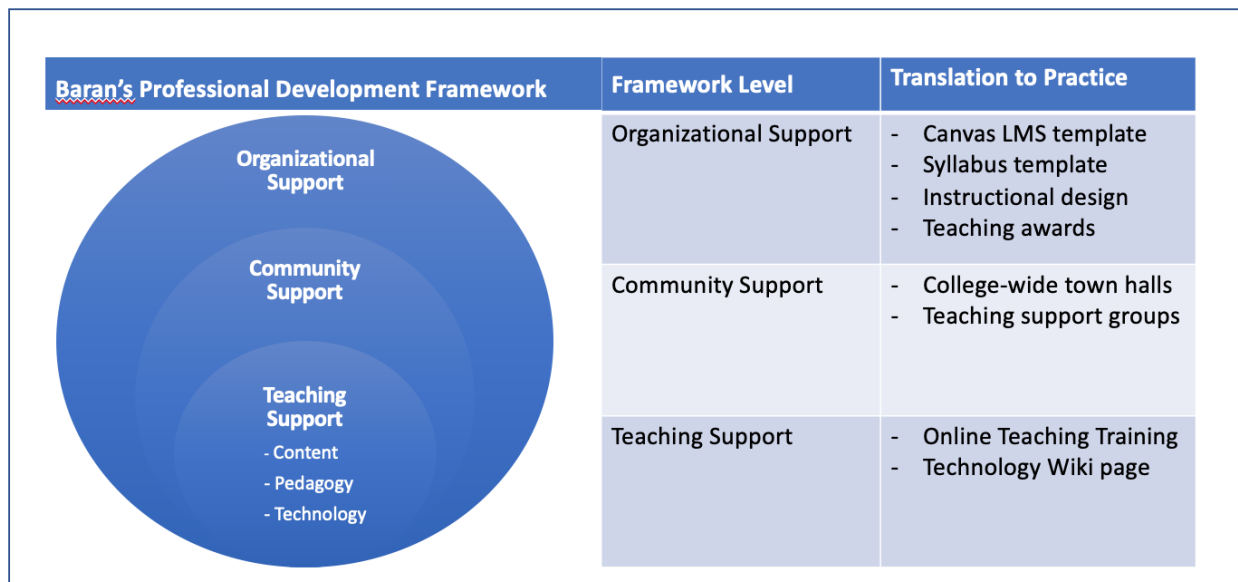
Professional Development Framework

The purpose of professional development is to enhance an individual's skills and abilities or to address a deficit in performance (Brinkley-Etzkorn, 2018). In higher education, faculty may be offered a wide range of professional development opportunities ranging from conferences, research methods training, leadership development programs, to teaching webinars or workshops. Development opportunities may be offered but not utilized due to barriers such as lack of funding, competing demands and/or a lack of time (Caffarella & Zinn, 1999). In some disciplines, professional development is focused on the specific field (continuing education credits) and not on teaching more broadly (Haras, 2018). Professional development opportunities must meet a need, be convenient, accessible to the intended audience and be valued by the institutional administration.

In 2014, Baran and colleagues developed a "Professional Development Framework for Online Teaching." The framework posits that successful online teaching is built on three concentric layers of development: teaching, community and organization (see Figure 1) (Baran & Correia, 2014). At the level of the individual, there needs to be training related

to sound teaching pedagogy, knowledge of the content specific to the course, and support with utilization of technology for engagement with the students. The idea of integrating knowledge of subject matter, learning theory and pedagogy, and digital technologies is widely accepted among online teaching researchers (Mbati &

Minnaar, 2015). The "teaching" level of the model helps to build individual confidence and provides an opportunity to reflect on previous teaching. The faculty member can also look for ways to be innovative and seek new ways to integrate technology to engage all students.

Baran's Professional Development Framework	Framework Level	Translation to Practice
Organizational Support **Community Support** **Teaching Support** - Content - Pedagogy - Technology	Organizational Support	- Canvas LMS template - Syllabus template - Instructional design - Teaching awards
	Community Support	- College-wide town halls - Teaching support groups
	Teaching Support	- Online Teaching Training - Technology Wiki page

Figure 1: *Translation of Professional Development Framework into Online Teaching Training*

The second layer of the framework – "community" – calls for opportunities for instructors to engage with other individuals who are teaching online. Baran and colleagues noted that successful online teachers were engaged in mastery of the content to be delivered but also designing the form and content of the online course (Baran & Correia, 2014). While some institutions separate the online course development process between instructional designers and faculty, a more collaborative approach is to integrate the process so that faculty are aware of the mechanics and the decisions made in the design of the course. The development of a community of support

encourages collaboration across disciplines and between faculty and technology staff (Hill et al., 2007), thereby providing a space for open discussion and innovation.

The outer layer of the framework – "organization" - points to the need for administration to support faculty online teaching. Within academia, some have advocated for professional development as a "fourth leg" to the tripartite focus of teaching, research and service to demonstrate the value and importance of ongoing training (Altany, 2012). It is important that the organization is committed to enhancing and advancing their faculty and

publicly recognize faculty for their online teaching efforts. While the Covid-19 pandemic forced institutions to move swiftly to avoid long breaks in the delivery of their curricula, the rush to "survive" the circumstances should be replaced with a "thrive" mindset that promotes online learning. If faculty members see that the institution values and respects online teaching, they will be more confident and motivated to engage in online learning (Baran & Correia, 2014) and perhaps co-curricular initiatives, as well. Outward signs of organizational support for online teaching may include rewards and recognition of individual faculty, financial stipends, acknowledgement during consideration for merit/promotion/tenure, and workload release (Maguire, 2005). The next section demonstrates the translation of the theoretical model into practice within the College of Public Health at Temple University.

Approach

Using Baran's Professional Development Framework (Baran & Correia, 2014), we developed an integrated approach to provide free support and assistance to faculty moving to fully online course offerings. The process, which began in March 2020 and continued through summer 2020, consisted of three steps: 1) Comprehensive Online Teaching Training, 2) Community Support and 3) Organizational Support.

Comprehensive Online Teaching Training

In Spring 2020, less than 40% of the faculty in the College had recent experience with teaching online and many faculty

members expressed the need for assistance transitioning to the online environment. College leadership decided that all faculty needed to be trained in online teaching to maintain compliance with existing structures such as the State Authorization and Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) (National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements, 2020a). SARA is designed to ensure quality online education for students; one requirement of the Agreement is that all faculty delivering online education must be "appropriately qualified and effectively supported" (National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements, 2020b).

Beyond the requirements, we sought to make the training of value to the faculty. Feist found that when faculty are seeking professional development opportunities related to online teaching, they want training that can immediately be put into use, is convenient and fits with their schedules, includes a process for follow-up, is centered on curriculum and not just a generic approach, and includes a support person that is accessible for questions and feedback (Feist, 2003). Therefore, we decided to create an interactive learning experience that would be self-paced, could be revisited when needed, included feedback on progress and allowed for the creation of teaching products that could be used in the upcoming semester.

We began with the materials that were developed for a pilot online training which included content on how to develop an online syllabus; create alignment of learning objectives, activities and assessments; set up a Canvas course site; record lectures as videos; host video conference sessions using Zoom; create

synchronous and asynchronous experiences; and provide constructive timely feedback to students (Frankel et al., 2020). Based on feedback from our small pilot group, we updated the content and included more specific information in areas where faculty identified the need for greater training (e.g., online test proctoring, assessment of hands-on clinical skills and inclusion, diversity and accessibility). The comprehensive training is composed of eleven online self-paced modules (see Table 1).

Table 1

Overview of Comprehensive Online Teaching Training

Module	Topic	Assessments
1	Student Learning in the Online Space	Content quiz Posting welcome message for new course
2	Creating Alignment	Create an alignment table (learning goals, activities and assessments)
3	Preparing Your Syllabus	Create an online syllabus
4	Setting Up Your Canvas Site	Develop course Canvas site
5	Using Web-conference	Record a videoconference practice session
6	Creating Videos	Record an asynchronous video lecture
7	Asynchronous Activities	Content quiz Practice with discussion board and voice thread
8	Designing and Delivering Synchronous Sessions	Content quiz Develop a synchronous session lesson plan
9	Providing Feedback to Students	Content quiz on feedback to students
10	Online Assessment	Content quiz Demonstrate feedback to online assignment
11	Inclusion, Accommodations and Accessibility	Content quiz

Using Baran's Framework, the modules provided faculty with evidence-based practices in online pedagogy following Quality Matters standards

(Quality Matters, 2020), information and demonstrations on the use of technology and examples across the fields of health and health professions. Within each module, participants engage with readings, videos, demonstrations, and sample work. At the conclusion of each module, they have the opportunity to demonstrate their skills by completing content quizzes or brief assessments. Finally, as the participants are completing the modules, they are actually building out their next online Canvas course, developing the syllabus for that course, creating assignments and assessments; this fits with Feist's findings that faculty want something that can immediately be put into use and is related to the curriculum, not a generic approach (Feist, 2003).

Lastly, in order to provide guidance to faculty along this professional development journey, we (the four faculty course developers) divided the participants from the eight departments, each assuming responsibility for two departments. We met weekly throughout the summer to discuss questions, monitor trends, and discuss any needed improvements as faculty moved through the material. Announcements were posted to the training Canvas site to encourage faculty to keep working through the modules, provide feedback where we were receiving questions and remind faculty of the deadline to complete.

Community Supports

Moving from the teaching level to community supports, we developed two sets of activities that would serve as voluntary supplements to the comprehensive training. First, there was a college-wide "Town Hall" meeting to provide a forum in which faculty could voice concerns, share ideas, and generally build a sense of "we are all in this together." In addition to the large "Town Hall" meeting, there were five different round-table discussions, where faculty from across the college came together to discuss how online teaching was progressing, share ideas for improvement, and provide a sense of community amongst faculty who were facing similar challenges.

Evolving from the success of the original round-table discussions, five voluntary working groups were created for faculty to continue conversations, share ideas and concerns while thinking ahead for the fall semester. The five different working groups focused on 1) writing intensive courses, 2) large lecture courses, 3) clinical courses, 4) small group labs/recitations, and 5) fieldwork courses. Each session was largely informal but brought together people facing similar challenges from across departments and professions for interdisciplinary collaboration. The development of opportunities to create a sense of online learning communities is important; such efforts do not need to be time or labor intensive but can signal administrative support for faculty to develop as teachers and professionals (Hill et al., 2007).

Organizational Supports

Within this framework, the faculty leaders often serve as a bridge between community and organization supports (Hill et al., 2007), identifying needs from the faculty and working with administrators to identify solutions. The college is fortunate to have an in-house Information Technology (IT) team which supports faculty

development and instructional design. In collaboration with our IT team, we created a standardized Canvas template and corresponding syllabus template which provides the framework and all Quality Matters required elements for effective organization and communication (Quality Matters, 2020). Our IT team also tracks faculty hardware and reaches out to update machines to ensure that faculty are operating with appropriate speeds and memory capacity; the same is true for needed software.

Beyond the technical support, the college also offered stipends for faculty to develop online courses that will remain in an online offering (not just during the pandemic). The idea of course release was considered but financial constraints and the need for specific faculty expertise made this not feasible. To receive the stipend to create the course, faculty were asked to complete the online teaching training, develop a plan and timeline for creating the course in compliance with Quality Matters standards (Quality Matters, 2020), and share the course upon completion for feedback.

Results of Online Teaching Professional Development
Comprehensive Training

In May 2020, all full-time and adjunct faculty (as well as any interested doctoral students) were enrolled in the "Online Teacher Training" in Canvas Learning Management System (LMS). Participants were asked to complete the training by the end of August 2020 to ensure that everyone started the Fall semester fully prepared. As of June 1, 2020, there were 264 faculty, adjunct faculty, or PhD students

who were Teaching Assistants enrolled in the course. Depending on the participant's comfort with teaching online, experience with the use of technology, and the amount of new content that needed to be built, the training required anywhere from 25 to 35 hours to complete.

The participants were divided by department and we tracked the progress of our assigned group of faculty and provided real-time feedback to each individual. We worked to review assessments through the use of rubrics, monitoring course progress, and providing encouraging feedback for improvement. There were also quizzes for some modules that included multiple choice questions where faculty would receive immediate feedback through automated answers and open-ended questions that required us to provide more detailed feedback. The intent of grading the modules and offering feedback was to model the behavior that we wanted instructors to use with their students. All participants had to complete the modules with a score of 80% or better; if a participant received a score less than 80%, they were required to return to that module and retry until a score of 80% or better was achieved. All participants who completed and received a score of 80% or better received a digital certificate at the conclusion of the training. By the end of August, 236 (90%) of the faculty had completed the modules. (Note: There were some faculty who were enrolled but on sabbatical or not teaching until Spring and therefore did not complete by the end of August.)

Town Hall and Support Groups

During the Town Hall webinar event, there were 122 faculty (61% of full faculty complement) that participated. There was

representation from across all departments in the college, as well as several adjunct faculty members. (Note: There was also an online teaching workshop being held by the University Teaching Center on campus at the same time, which may have reduced participation slightly.) The faculty were engaged, asking questions and offering suggestions on their own approaches to online learning. There was a positive mood to the gathering and faculty requested some form of follow-up after the meeting, noting that another full Town Hall over the summer may not be practical as most faculty do not regularly work during the summer months.

The working groups met every other week on a specified day at noontime beginning at the start of June and continuing through the summer months. While the sessions were voluntary and confirmation was needed to participate, there was a googledoc shared with the faculty and adjunct faculty listservs with the log-in information. At the end of July, there were between five and seventeen faculty that attended each session. The conversations focused on expressing concerns, seeking support, sharing information and asking for additional references/resources. A shared folder was also created for each working group to disseminate best practices or innovative ideas for that specific type of online class.

In addition to the working groups, faculty had regular access to their assigned course developers - the four authors of this paper. Each of us was responsible for grading between 60 and 75 faculty members. In addition to evaluating all the faculty assessments, we were also available to answer general questions and offer recommendations for faculty. For example,

as faculty had challenges using technology to submit assessments for a given model, we would reach out to provide assistance and teach them how to complete that module. We also provided weekly "open office hours" for any instructor that wanted to drop in for assistance.

The outcomes of the support groups were varied. For example, in conjunction with the college IT team, we uncovered additional technology needs for faculty who had not fully considered what they needed to be able to reach remotely. Faculty who had previous experience teaching online shared tips and techniques for teaching, time management and engagement with students in the online space; the groups were not just about advice from the organizers, but a more organic sharing among participants. The groups also provided a forum for faculty to express frustration and make suggestions; this is important to help faculty feel empowered to have a voice, particularly in times of great uncertainty (Hrabowski et al., 2020).

Organizational Support

The organizational support for online teaching grew over the course of the semester. As college leadership saw the time and effort put forth by the faculty (particularly over the summer when many faculty are not typically working), there were new ideas created to demonstrate organizational support for online teaching. While the college had several teaching awards at the department and college levels to provide external recognition, there are now conversations about creating a dedicated online teaching award. In addition, the dean will use on-time completion of the training when making decisions about merit awards. The public

acknowledgement is important, but the inclusion of stipends and merit awards provide financial incentives, as well.

Discussion

The literature regarding teaching online demonstrates that there are a number of key considerations when developing opportunities to support faculty online teaching. While the pandemic certainly moved institutions of higher education to "suddenly online learning," there may be a silver lining in the process. The rush to move online may have released innovation and creativity that was not previously needed. In traditional teaching structures, many instructors teach what was handed down and if it works, then there is no need to change course. Framing the training for online teaching as professional development provides the faculty member with something to show for their work while enabling them to take their teaching to a new level.

The opportunity for faculty to develop their online teaching abilities also allows them to create more meaningful interactions with students through student-centered teaching (Sorcinelli, 2007). Rather than focusing on the logistics of teaching, if the faculty member has developed a level of comfort and confidence in teaching online, the process of learning can be the focus rather than just teaching. With appropriate training, the instructor can think more about assessment and understanding how the students are digesting the material. The creation of this type of environment makes the learning experience more positive for the faculty and the students. Moreover, the home-grown professional development creates a social norm specific to our college

that we are never truly done learning. In turn, we hope that the shift in social norms creates a sustainable environment to support a culture of quality and innovative online teaching. While we (the course developers) began the process, we hope that other faculty will continue the journey.

Challenges

Some of the challenges of offering professional development opportunities to faculty is that the faculty composition can be changing, which may have an influence on motivation to participate; the student body is changing; and the approach to teaching is changing (Sorcinelli, 2007). By offering the training to all faculty members (full time and adjunct faculty) as well as PhD students who were serving as Teaching Assistants, we tried to make this a culture shift at the organizational level. By framing the training as professional development and providing a certificate upon completion, all participants were able to build on their skills but also have something to document on their CVs. While the focus was training for *online* teaching, this was also a way to improve faulty teaching in-person as well. Finally, it was a challenge to address faculty concerns of duplication if they had already completed an online training elsewhere; there was no way to know the quality of other trainings and there was not the same depth of assessment to understand faculty members' skills and abilities.

Beyond the content in the modules, there were some challenges from faculty about the time needed to complete the training as well as the fact that this was being required over the summer months, when most faculty are not working. In an ideal situation, the training would have been released at the start of the academic year and

faculty could complete on their own time prior to the end of the same academic year; however, the pandemic did not afford us that time frame. What we have learned from the 24 faculty who completed the pilot version of the online teaching training prior to the pandemic is that while they offer some resistance during the training, there has been unanimously positive feedback on the depth and breadth of the training once the faculty member was actually teaching. Not only did the faculty find the techniques useful, but they also mentioned referencing back to content in the materials as a refresher in real-time.

Opportunities

Online teaching requires the participation of the instructor and the students. While the online teaching modules are useful for the faculty, there is an opportunity for a parallel training for students to better understand online learning. We believe that parallel training for students and faculty will ensure that both parties are receiving the same information and can appreciate the value of different aspects of online learning such as the importance of effective and timely communication. (Please reference the postscript for updated details.)

The online teaching modules also present an opportunity for ongoing professional development. As faculty receive feedback in the form of student course evaluations or peer evaluations, department leadership can refer faculty back to particular modules as a refresher or to consider supplemental materials to improve teaching in a given area. In addition, the use of support groups provides a mechanism for faculty to learn from one another and seek mentorship and advice to make improvements (Hill et al., 2007). The intent

of the training is not just education at a single point in time, but rather to create a culture change related to online teaching. As we move forward and have a chance to evaluate faculty teaching in the fall, we will be able to test the idea that the online teaching training leads to improved learning experiences.

Even without a pandemic, online instruction can be more demanding than on-campus teaching. Online teachers often report that there is no clear start or stop time, which can contribute to burnout (Covington et al., 2020). Novice online instructors can spend significantly more time preparing for class than experienced instructors (Mandernach & Holbeck, 2016); those "novice" online instructors may be experienced faculty that have been teaching on-campus for decades. The experience of teaching online can be isolating but with ongoing support opportunities such as those outlined in this article, it is possible to minimize that isolation; which leads to the final point.

The true value of the teaching training was to build community and collaboration. In addition to ensuring that the faculty were learning how to teach online (both pedagogy and technology), the training and associated supports created a sense of community. As faculty developed content, they were sharing with one another; the same was true as we provided feedback on the different assessment items. The support groups brought faculty together from across the college around teaching approaches and techniques and broke down departmental boundaries; discussions resulted in ideas for how to move the institution forward and not just individuals. Future efforts to encourage these behaviors

may include an Online Teaching Award and online teaching expert panels. In addition, and in response to the Spring faculty questionnaire, a parallel training for students to be better prepared for online learning could also be developed in the future.

Limitations

There were several limitations to the study. While participation in the support groups and town hall events were voluntary, the online training modules were required by college leadership. There were faculty who were not happy about having to complete work over the summer months when they are not formally working and so we saw many participants rushing to complete in August just prior to the start of the semester. There were no requirements for participants to view all of the readings prior to starting the assessment activities, so it is possible that some of the grades below 80% were a result of jumping into assessments without completing preparatory work. Finally, we do not yet know how the training translates to long-term application of the skills developed during the training. Future work will include an assessment of the faculty teaching experience post-training.

Conclusion

Looking ahead to Fall 2020 and beyond, there are many schools and colleges that are planning to offer at least a portion of their curricula in an online format (Aspergren & Zwickel, 2020). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has made recommendations for institutions of higher education to enforce physical distancing (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020), necessitating online

teaching for many courses and reinforcing the need for online teaching training. By framing teaching training as professional development, it provides faculty with a tangible means of documenting and being recognized for their efforts, within their home institution and beyond. Moving forward, there are opportunities for the administration to identify additional ways to acknowledge outstanding online teaching and recognize leaders to foster a culture of excellence in online education. In terms of next steps for faculty professional development related to online learning, assessment is a priority (Mueller, 2005). Once faculty are well-trained in the basics of online teaching, there is an opportunity to build on that foundation to help them evaluate how students are learning in the online space, as well (Sorcinelli, 2007).

Postscript

Since the submission of this article in late August, the faculty have continued to progress through the revisions in the online training; almost all have completed their revisions to achieve the score of 80% or greater on each module. We have begun to add additional adjunct faculty and doctoral students who plan to teach online in the Spring. As faculty who completed the training in the summer are now teaching online, we continue to hear comments such as "wow, that actually helped prepare me" and "it was a lot of work, but I see where it is informing my teaching."

In addition, we built on our experience of developing faculty modules to create a parallel version of self-paced "Student Online Learning" modules for all of our students (graduate and undergraduate)

to feel more prepared with the technology being used and the pedagogical approaches to online education. We released the training for all incoming and continuing students during the second week of August; this provided a sufficient amount of time for students to complete the interactive training prior to the start of the fall semester. While the training was voluntary, 425 students enrolled in the modules. We plan to build on this work moving forward and as we consider which courses we will continue to offer in an online format moving forward.

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