

Chapter # 8

ADAPTING TO CRISIS: A CASE STUDY IN EMERGENCY ONLINE FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The University of Central Florida (UCF) shifted to remote online instruction during the Spring of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, revealing gaps in faculty development for online teaching. This case study examines how UCF utilized its online pedagogy expertise and resources to create an emergency faculty development program. Through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, five key themes emerged: leadership challenges, reliance on existing resources, implementation barriers, foundational LMS tutorials, and strategies for diverse faculty needs. Findings showed that instructional designers adapted resources rapidly, defined training objectives, and supported faculty engagement despite challenges like departmental resistance. The study compared UCF's approach to those of other institutions, highlighting common issues such as tight timelines, diverse faculty needs, and effective practices like peer mentoring and data-driven design. The study concludes with recommendations for improving emergency faculty development programs, focusing on modular training, leadership support, peer collaboration, and accessibility. It offers valuable insights for institutions seeking to build resilient and inclusive faculty development frameworks for future emergencies.

Keywords: online learning, faculty development, pandemic.

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many universities to adapt rapidly, revealing significant gaps in faculty development for online teaching during emergencies. As a major global health crisis, COVID-19 led to the closure of schools and colleges worldwide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Faculty members faced challenges transitioning in-person courses, like laboratory work and cooking demonstrations, to an online format. The immediate shift to remote learning required instructors to quickly learn online teaching strategies (Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020). While some faculty and students were familiar with remote education, many struggled due to limited knowledge of online platforms, with effective communication being a key challenge (Gillis & Krull, 2020). Despite these difficulties, some faculty reported high satisfaction with the technological tools they learned to use, appreciating the new opportunities for innovative teaching. However, they also faced tensions regarding their instructional goals and teaching effectiveness (Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020).

This study examined how a public state university met the challenge of supporting hundreds of faculty members as they quickly transitioned to online course delivery during the 2021-2022 academic year. Using a case study approach (Creswell, 2015), the researchers investigated how the University of Central Florida (UCF), a nationally recognized leader in

online learning with a student body exceeding 70,000, adapted to the crisis and assisted its faculty in moving to a fully remote environment. UCF, which offers more than 240 degree programs and consistently ranks among the top institutions for online learning according to *U.S. News & World Report*, relied heavily on its Center for Distributed Learning (CDL) to spearhead these efforts. CDL supports the university's online faculty development programs by providing resources such as an online help desk, learning management system (e.g., Canvas) administration, instructional development, multimedia resources, and instructional design, all of which enhance the quality of online instruction at the university level. Central to the study are the unique insights of instructional designers, whose experiences illuminate the program's development process and impact. By applying Yin's (2008) qualitative case study framework, this research provides a detailed and comprehensive account of the strategies, challenges, and successes that characterized faculty development in online teaching during one of the most transformative periods in higher education.

2. BACKGROUND

Throughout the 20th century, the impacts of national emergencies on higher education have been profound. National emergencies, such as wars, pandemics, and economic crises, have demanded rapid adaptations by colleges and universities, often leading to significant transformation. For example, 2005's Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and profoundly impacted higher education institutions in the region, including student displacement, substantial drops in enrollment, and extensive damage to institutional infrastructure (Madrid & Grant, 2008; Raker et al., 2019). The legacy of Katrina for higher education in the region includes integrating disaster education into the curricula across various disciplines (Rivera & Miller, 2008). Similarly, the effects of the 2009 L'Aquila earthquake in Italy include a significant decline in student enrollments that resonated for years following the disaster (Cerqua & Di Pietro, 2016). In developing countries, natural disasters have posed an even more significant challenge for higher education institutions. The effects of such disasters often include the destruction of educational infrastructure, loss of academic staff, and displacement of students, which collectively hinder educational attainment and access. For example, natural disasters can undermine already vulnerable economic resilience and disrupt educational systems, particularly in geographically isolated communities (Hidayat, 2023; Shaw, 2020).

Adapting to new situations without institutional support can be challenging for faculty. The sudden shift to remote online learning caught many off guard, as they had to address previously unencountered problems (Flores & Swennen, 2020). A 2020 study by Van der Spoel, Noroozi, Schuurink, and van Ginkel surveyed 200 Dutch instructors and found that prior experience with learning management systems significantly eased the transition to remote instruction. Faculty members reported feeling a heightened urgency to adapt, but they also noted that the lack of interaction with students and colleagues was a major drawback (Van der Spoel et al., 2020). Despite these challenges, online instruction offered benefits. Many faculty observed that introverted students engaged more during online learning than in traditional settings. Faculty also expressed enthusiasm for integrating technology into their teaching post-COVID, aiming to promote active learning and improve feedback (Van der Spoel et al., 2020). Technology increased efficiency and motivated students through personalized experiences. The urgency of the pandemic has led faculty to continue incorporating technology into their lessons, even without professional development support (Gupta, 2021; Wyatt, Aburto, & How, 2023). However, it remains essential for faculty to stay motivated to use online tools after returning to in-person teaching.

In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, faculty members experienced varying levels of preparedness for online teaching, which increased stress and diminished teaching effectiveness (Kirschner, 2021; Zizka & Probst, 2021). A major challenge was engaging students, with research showing that about 65.7% of faculty perceived lower student participation in online classes compared to face-to-face settings (Khan & Jamil, 2022). This contributed to a sense of disconnection between faculty and students (Rahman, 2023). By 2021, around 30% of college students were enrolled in at least one online course, with expectations for this number to grow as institutions adapted (Bartek, Pellegrino, White, & Clayton, 2022). This shift illustrates a fundamental change in education delivery. While both faculty and students became more proficient with technology (Chhetri, 2022), many still felt that online learning fell short of traditional classroom effectiveness, highlighting ongoing concerns about education quality and learning outcomes (Almendingen, Morseth, Gjelstad, Brevik, & Tørris, 2021; Shirazi, Shekhani, & Moazam, 2022).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emphasize preparing students for an uncertain future (Hadar, Ergas, Alpert, & Ariav, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic exposed gaps in faculty development, particularly in social-emotional competencies. A study of 54 student teachers and 24 educators highlighted challenges with remote instruction and teaching skills (Hadar et al., 2020). To address these gaps, institutions should integrate stress management, mindfulness, and teamwork into professional development. The pandemic also revealed the need for innovative methods and resources to promote educational equity and sustainability (Chans, Orona-Navar, Orona-Navar, & Sánchez-Rodríguez, 2023). Overall, it is clear that public institutions must prioritize faculty preparedness to ensure adaptability during crises.

3. OBJECTIVES

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: According to instructional designers involved in creating the crisis-responsive faculty development program *Essentials of Online Teaching (EOT)*, what factors influenced this large-scale program's design and development to support faculty during an emergency?

RQ2: According to instructional designers who contributed to the development of the crisis-responsive faculty development program *Essentials of Online Teaching (EOT)*, what were the primary challenges and urgent obstacles faced during its rapid implementation to accommodate a substantial number of faculty participants?

4. METHODS

A qualitative case study design consisting of interviews and document analysis was used to analyze the phenomenon comprehensively. A qualitative case study design is an intensive examination of a bounded system, which can be a single entity or multiple entities over time. This definition emphasizes the importance of context and the holistic nature of the research, as it seeks to capture the complexity of real-life situations (Yilmaz, 2024). Researchers employing this design often utilize various data collection methods, including interviews, observations, and document analysis, to gather comprehensive insights into the case. The qualitative nature of this approach allows for flexibility in data collection and analysis, enabling researchers to adapt their methods as new findings emerge (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018).

4.1. Participant Recruitment

Eight participants, all instructional designers, were involved in designing, developing, and implementing the online faculty development program. These participants also supported faculty members throughout the program, ensuring the successful completion of their training. Participants were personally invited through email. Two participants had experience in at least one of the following four areas related to the rapid online faculty development course in response to COVID-19:

- Online course design,
- Implementation and development of the online course,
- Design and development of course evaluations, and
- Course facilitation.

4.2. Data Collection

The primary data source for this study was derived from interviews, which were complemented by a thorough analysis of relevant planning and implementation documents. The researchers employed a structured approach to data collection through scheduled, consensual interviews that adhered to a semi-structured protocol. This methodology facilitated the elicitation of responses through a combination of closed and open-ended questions, thereby enabling a comprehensive exploration of the research questions (Creswell, 2015; Yin, 2008). To ensure the confidentiality of participants, each interviewee was assigned a pseudonym. All interviews were conducted via Zoom, a widely utilized web-based video conferencing platform, where audio recordings were securely saved and subsequently transcribed within the same environment.

In addition to interview data, the study incorporated documents from publicly accessible sources, including institutional websites and repositories provided by the development team and relevant stakeholders. The selection of these materials was guided by their pertinence to the design, implementation, and adaptation of the faculty development program in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This dual approach of qualitative interviews and document analysis enriched the research findings, providing a multifaceted understanding of the program's dynamics during an unprecedented global crisis.

4.3. Data Analysis

The researchers used a qualitative research approach involving thoroughly examining and interpreting interview transcripts and existing documents to gain insights into the faculty development program. Regarding the analysis of qualitative interview data, the researchers employed a deductive analytical approach guided by constructivist principles. They applied coding and clustering techniques to identify key themes related to participants' attitudes, beliefs, and values. This process involved four coding cycles, with the final phase yielding themes that directly addressed the research questions. To ensure the accuracy of their findings, the researchers utilized Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software tool.

The researchers collected publicly available documents, including institutional reports, COVID-19 response plans, student support documents, faculty development plans, meeting agendas, and facilitation materials. Initially, these documents were organized according to institutional needs and program objectives. A comprehensive analysis of these documents produced contextual and detailed insights into the program's design and implementation. By applying Bowen's (2009) systematic procedure, the researchers reviewed and evaluated the documents to extract key information, identify patterns and themes, and highlight strategies for addressing the needs of faculty and students.

5. FINDINGS

While instructional designers struggled with limited leadership direction and the broad range of faculty needs, developers faced compressed timelines to produce training materials rapidly. Implementers managed skepticism and resistance from certain faculty groups, and evaluators encountered difficulties gathering comprehensive feedback due to limited analytics.

Table 1 depicts the program's roles and how they are interconnected. Instructional designers played a critical role by adapting resources and defining training objectives. Developers streamlined materials to ensure rapid development, implementers facilitated faculty engagement, and evaluators identified critical areas for future improvement. Together, these roles show the multifaceted picture of faculty development in a crisis.

Table 1.
Summary of Challenges, Strategies, and Outcomes Related to Participants' Roles.

Role	Key Challenges	Strategies Employed	Outcomes
Instructional Designers	Lack of leadership direction, tight timelines, and diverse faculty needs.	Leveraged existing resources, streamlined credentialing processes, and adapted content.	Established quality in training, albeit with limited scalability and differentiation.
Developers	A high volume of content to create and compress within a limited time.	Simplified course templates and repurposed pre-existing LMS tutorials.	Ensured rapid deployment of training but faced limitations in customization for advanced users.
Implementers	Skepticism from faculty in large, traditionally hands-on departments (e.g., Sciences, Education).	Encouraged faculty engagement via peer mentoring and success stories.	Increased buy-in in resistant departments but noted the need for enhanced departmental outreach.
Evaluators	Limited feedback mechanisms and lack of robust analytics to assess effectiveness.	Collected qualitative feedback through interviews and limited surveys.	Highlighted gaps in advanced training and areas for program improvement.

5.1. Challenges in Establishing a Starting Point

Participants reported difficulties determining a starting point for how and where to start the development, citing a lack of clear direction from the university and program leadership. Several instructional designers reported feeling “overwhelmed” and “lost” by the absence of

guidance. These instructional designers also suggested that the lack of direction may have delayed their progress and increased reliance on other colleagues or peers as support. This theme highlights the importance of leadership in providing structure and minimizing uncertainty. These findings align with Transactional Distance Theory, emphasizing distance education's psychological and communicative gaps when structure and dialogue are insufficient (Moore, 1997). Applying Bowen's (2009) systematic procedure revealed inconsistencies in leadership communication, as institutional documents lacked the clarity necessary for effective implementation.

5.2. Defining Purpose and Intent of Training

The instructional design team aimed to align the program with faculty needs and institutional goals by establishing clear objectives. They adapted existing resources, including a semester-long credentialing process in pedagogy and technology, for remote instruction, focusing on effective use of the learning management system (LMS), Zoom best practices, and faculty credentialing. This strategy follows Backward Design principles, which begin with desired outcomes to develop curriculum and assessments (Childre, Sands, & Pope, 2009; Rea & Román, 2019; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). By prioritizing faculty readiness and student engagement, the team ensured that training upheld pedagogical integrity while addressing urgent needs. Initial program goals targeted basic technical competencies, aligning with foundational resources while planning for advanced modules. Using Bowen's (2009) systematic procedure, researchers identified how adapting existing resources addressed immediate gaps. Institutional documents revealed that the program's initial goals targeted technical competencies, aligning with the team's strategy for foundational resources while planning advanced modules.

5.3. Barriers to Implementation

Participants faced several barriers during the faculty development program's implementation, mainly due to the rapid shift to online instruction. The program, which usually spans ten weeks, was condensed to a few weeks due to pandemic pressures. This accelerated timeline forced the instructional design team to prioritize content over quality. One participant remarked, "We had to make tough decisions about what to prioritize." Consequently, there was little time for feedback, leaving some faculty feeling unprepared for online teaching. The diverse backgrounds of faculty—ranging from novices to experienced educators—complicated matters. Although the design team aimed to offer flexible training, the urgency hindered their ability to differentiate content, resulting in unmet participant needs. Researchers identified scalability and differentiation as key challenges, with initial plans for tailored training pathways sidelined by time constraints and limited resources (Bowen, 2009).

5.4. Reliance on LMS Tutorials

The program utilized a self-paced Learning Management System (LMS) tutorial for faculty training, requiring a minimum of 40 hours to complete. It covered basic LMS navigation and functionality but did not address advanced topics in course development, instructional design, or online pedagogy, leaving gaps for experienced faculty. Bowen's (2009) procedure indicated that the tutorial was accessible but technical, lacking depth in teaching strategies. Training materials noted the need for additional resources, which were deprioritized due to time constraints.

5.5. Addressing Diverse Faculty Needs

The faculty participants in the program had diverse backgrounds, leading to challenges for the instructional design team in addressing varying levels of experience with online learning. Bowen's (2009) document analysis confirmed that faculty needs were a critical factor, with pre-training assessment data indicating missed opportunities to tailor resources. These findings highlight the need to balance baseline training with advanced modules to meet varying expertise levels effectively.

5.6. Summary

The findings highlight the complex challenges of developing a faculty development program during a crisis, including the need for leadership direction, goal-oriented planning, and scalable solutions to address diverse faculty needs. The team successfully navigated many challenges by leveraging existing resources and focusing on collaborative design, offering valuable insights for future initiatives.

6. COMPARATIVE APPROACHES TO EMERGENCY ONLINE TEACHING

As a leader in online education, Arizona State University (ASU) effectively transitioned to emergency online teaching by rapidly scaling existing courses and providing faculty with pre-designed templates and week-long boot camps for those new to online instruction. This approach is similar to that of the University of Central Florida (UCF), built upon its established online infrastructure. However, ASU's use of templates contrasts with UCF's more individualized course design.

In contrast, Harvard University emphasized innovation by launching a "Teaching Remotely" website that offered resources and established a peer support network. This focus on pedagogical innovation enhances UCF's structured faculty development program. The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) prioritized equity by providing loaner laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots, developing simplified course templates, and supporting trauma-informed teaching. This focus on accessibility is an area UCF could explore further, given its diverse student population. The University of Michigan (n.d.) took a data-driven approach, analyzing Learning Management System (LMS) data to inform faculty development and identify at-risk students. This contrasts with UCF's qualitative assessments and suggests opportunities for improvement through learning analytics.

Common themes emerged from these institutions' responses to online teaching challenges: the importance of established infrastructure, prioritizing faculty development, adapting teaching methods, ensuring access to technology, and using data to enhance online practices. UCF's strengths lie in its existing infrastructure, comprehensive faculty development program, and focus on online course quality. However, there are opportunities for growth in enhancing peer support networks, increasing learning analytics use, and expanding focus on equity and accessibility. While UCF aligns with many best practices, learning from other institutions could further refine its approach to faculty development for online teaching.

7. DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis of institutional approaches to emergency online teaching in Section 6 provides valuable context for UCF's faculty development program. The swift shift

to online learning required innovative solutions, and UCF aligns with best practices by leveraging its existing online infrastructure and offering strong faculty support. For instance, UCF's method of building on established online resources is similar to Arizona State University's, highlighting the need for continued investment in online capabilities as a preparedness strategy.

Defining the faculty development program's purpose guided its design. Participants used Wiggins and McTighe's (1998) "backward design" framework to set goals and plan content based on faculty needs. Recognizing the time constraints amplified by COVID-19, the team established an efficient timeline and workload distribution, emphasizing clear communication about delays. The analysis reveals opportunities for UCF's growth. Harvard's peer support network model could enhance faculty collaboration and knowledge sharing. One instructional designer noted the potential for more peer-to-peer learning opportunities, which could strengthen the existing program. Additionally, adopting a data-driven approach similar to the University of Michigan's could yield deeper insights into effective teaching practices, enhancing faculty support.

Moreover, initiatives at the Community College of Baltimore County demonstrate the need to address diverse student needs more thoroughly within UCF's faculty development program. Enhancing training on accessible materials and strategies for supporting technology-challenged students could be beneficial. To build on its strong foundation, UCF might consider implementing a peer mentoring system, expanding learning analytics for better program evaluation, and enhancing the focus on equity and accessibility. Developing flexible, modular training options could also cater to diverse faculty needs, increasing participation and engagement. By incorporating these enhancements, UCF can continue to innovate in faculty development for online teaching.

8. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This case study emphasizes the importance of establishing a timeline and understanding what can realistically be achieved. Participants pointed out that time constraints significantly affected their ability to design and facilitate a faculty development program. Instructional designers (IDs) needed to ensure their time was productive while considering the workload and the time faculty could commit to the course. Faculty engagement decisions impacted participant focus and progress, making it essential to maintain manageable expectations for participation. Collaboration among IDs proved effective in overcoming program design and development challenges. IDs could leverage their expertise to create effective faculty development solutions by working together towards a shared goal. This collaborative environment fostered innovation, efficiency, and transparent communication. Creating a culture of collaboration enhances work outcomes and allows IDs to learn from each other, encouraging open feedback and knowledge sharing. This emphasis on learning and development enriches the workplace culture. Higher education institutions often face crises that disrupt access to learning. While response teams focus on safety, they frequently neglect continuity in education. Lessons from the pandemic showed that better LMS utilization and adequate faculty training could have lessened the impact of shutdowns. Fundamental elements, such as LMS training, a design response team, and a contingency plan, can help facilitate a smooth transition to remote instruction without harming faculty and students.

9. CONCLUSION

This case study examined key practices used by instructional designers at UCF to create and implement the EOT faculty development program in response to the COVID-19 pandemic's shift to online instruction. Semi-structured interviews revealed that instructional designers felt a strong sense of collaboration and connectedness, enabling them to clearly define the program's purpose despite limited time and leadership direction. This research addresses gaps in the literature regarding faculty development during the pandemic and highlights the challenges instructors and students faced due to limited experience with online teaching and communication barriers (Gillis & Krull, 2020).

Future initiatives should prioritize institutional preparedness for emergencies and focus on seamless transitions to remote learning to overcome these barriers. Equity considerations, such as those adopted by the Community College of Baltimore County, could help UCF better serve its diverse student population. Modular training programs, like Arizona State University's boot camps, offer flexible, time-sensitive solutions tailored to faculty needs. Drawing on these strategies presents opportunities for UCF to refine its already strong faculty development programs.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the importance of institutional readiness, collaborative instructional design, and adaptive faculty development in addressing educational emergencies. Lessons from UCF and other institutions provide valuable insights for advancing faculty development in online and blended learning environments, ensuring they meet the dynamic needs of higher education in a rapidly evolving landscape.

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