“We All Had To Become Stronger Together”
Faculty Experiences of Disruption and Innovation during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Suzanne Ensmann, Ed.D.
Aimee Whiteside, Ph.D.
Lina Gomez-Vasquez, Ph.D.
Ronda Sturgill, Ph.D.
The University of Tampa

2020 Online Learning Consortium Conference
Overview

• This presentation discusses the transition to emergency remote teaching and learning for a mid-sized, private four-year university with very limited online learning offerings.

• This session describes the framework, methods, and findings of our study as well as challenges and lessons learned now and in the future.
Background/Challenges

• Distinct **difference between remote learning and online learning**
  • Online learning is planned systematically by instructors and taught via the Internet at a distance (Hodges et al., 2020)

• **Critical disruption of classroom and learning leads to examine the disruption innovation framework** (Christensen, 2011)
Disruptive Innovation Framework

- Ability to adapt
- Technology offers a solution to barriers of learning at a distance
- Rethink age-old assumptions of higher education

For Disruptive Innovation Framework, disruption describes merits of the innovation disrupting the path of the traditional method, turning it on its head to improve the production of education (Christensen, 2011).
Disruptive Innovation Framework

Within the disruptive innovation of remote learning, disruptive technologies may be seen to improve connectedness, engagement, and student-centered learning. Webinar rooms became a popular technology offering students synchronous learning in this COVID-19 remote-learning environment (Gegenfurtner, et al., 2020).
Methods

• **Survey**
  Electronic questionnaire with 46 closed- and open-ended questions (including 7 demographic questions) sent to all full and part-time faculty at a mid-size private institution in May 2020. 242 Faculty consented (30% response rate)

• **Focus group**
  Conducted a focus group with 5 consenting faculty in August 2020.
Methods

Survey areas

• Transition to remote teaching
• Health and wellness
• Technology use
• Learning technologies
• Synchronous vs. asynchronous learning
• Ways that faculty promoted connectedness and presence in the virtual classroom
• Role of video conferencing tools and learning management systems in virtual classrooms
• Overall experience
## Results: Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>College</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Online Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55% Female</td>
<td>73% White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>32% Arts &amp; Letters</td>
<td>27% Tenured</td>
<td>51% None/Less than One Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39% Male</td>
<td>5% Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>30% Natural &amp; Health Sciences</td>
<td>27% Part-time</td>
<td>32% 1-5 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2% Transgender female/Non-binary</td>
<td>4% Asian, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>20% Social Sciences, Mathematics, and Education</td>
<td>22% Tenure-track</td>
<td>16% 6-9 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4% Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>3% Black or African American, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>17% Business</td>
<td>20% Fulltime, Non-tenure-track</td>
<td>8% 10+ Years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: Health and Wellness

- The majority of faculty spent more than 11 hours adapting the course material to remote learning in less than 4 days.
- Faculty spent more time daily/weekly (prepping, grading, emails, etc) or remote teaching than traditional classes and less time on scholarship.
- Majority of faculty felt okay, but almost 33% were worried, struggling or in a really dark place.
Results: Professional Development

Faculty largely figured out how to teach remotely by trial and error, colleagues’ help, and online resources—many turned to Facebook groups, such as Pandemic Pedagogy or Teaching During Covid-19.
More than **half of the respondents** used a combination of synchronous and asynchronous **learning**, mostly for class meetings, screen sharing, and virtual office hours/meetings, and one-on-one meetings with students.
“We had ‘Chats’ where students could join a class zoom just to hang out. They all repeatedly said \textit{it helped them feel more connected}. I was surprised by how many students attended these optional sessions.”

“I started a \textit{GroupMe chat} with my students so they could send questions and interact with one another in an informal manner.”
“Overwhelmed by different tools provided in such short amount of time.”

“Keep it simple”

**Most used:**
Blackboard, Zoom, Screen recording apps (VidGrid), collaborative writing tools, Proctorio.

**Not used frequently:**
Project management, polling tools, video discussions, social media platforms
Results: Technology Comfort

Technology comfort

- Very low (0)
- Below average (1)
- Average (2)
- Above average (3)
- Very high (4)

Red bars represent before COVID-19, and blue bars represent after COVID-19.
“Overall it was a positive experience although I missed the personal interaction with the students; my number one reason for teaching.”

“As crazy as it sounds, the physical distance made us all (students and teachers) socially closer. We were all in our natural surroundings, which made the students feel more comfortable talking, which increased social engagement.”
Challenges

• Overwhelmed by time needed for student communication
• Work-home balance
• Lack of support
• Adapting practicum, hands-on/lab classes
• Little time to adjust the courses for remote learning

Major challenges during remote teaching

- Learning how to teach remotely (including learning new software, adjusting the class material, teaching and learning strategies, etc): 26.30%
- Communicating/engaging/issues with students: 26.59%
- Balancing remote work and family responsibilities: 10.69%
- Other, please explain: 36.42%
Lessons Learned

Worked Well
- Instructors and student connecting
- Zoom (small classes, one-on-ones, and breakout rooms)
- Combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning
- Pre-recording short lectures with VidGrid/PowerPoint, videos, tutorials, and interactive assignments

Did NOT Work Well
- Synchronous learning (big classes)
- Online exams/quizzes (technology challenges)
- Lack of a policy about online course etiquette
- Lack of support
Conclusions

• Faculty repeatedly noted that the abrupt move to remote teaching did encourage and push them to innovate and engage and connect more with students.

• Providing more opportunities for feedback and revisions promotes further opportunity for critical and creative thinking.

• Findings conclude that disruption to remote teaching could have a positive lasting effect on traditional teaching.
Moving Forward

• Much has changed. **For this academic year, the faculty in this study are required to teach hyflex (combination of face-to-face and online) with CDC Covid caps in each room.** This requires faculty to split classes into 2-4 cohorts.

• University leaders/HR permitted remote accommodations to some faculty yet **allowed only synchronous teaching options.**

• University Senate then passed a motion allowing instructors limited asynchronous options. The academic leadership strongly discouraged this approach.
Discussion

• What’s happening on your campuses?

• Future research opportunities

Suzanne Ensmann
sensmann@ut.edu

Aimee Whiteside
awhiteside@ut.edu

University of Tampa
Tampa, FL
References

Christensen, C. M., a, L., & Soares, L. (2011). Disrupting College: How Disruptive Innovation Can Deliver Quality and Affordability to Postsecondary Education. *Innosight Institute*.
