

Lessons learned from offering customized faculty development for a community of online educators

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In this poster, we share information from our faculty development programming for online educators, and our lessons learned from our 5+ years of offering ongoing faculty development that continues to engage online instructors over time.



The Challenge

- **Online Teaching Skills** - Online teaching requires a mix of technical skills and pedagogical skills specific to online classrooms
- **Lack of Instructor Experience as Online Students** - Online education is new enough that most instructors didn't take online courses as students
- **Staying Abreast of Evolving Technology** - Technology constantly evolves, thus instructor skills need to be continuously updated
- **Meeting Student Expectations** - Online students have high expectations for instructors' technical skills and reasonably expect technically smooth course experiences
- **Stigma of Online Education** - The field of online education faces stigma and questions about the quality of the education and teaching
- **Event Accessibility** - Online instructors are located across multiple time zones and generally don't come to campus, and therefore have little to no access to in-person communities, trainings and events. In addition, online education opens up adjunct teaching opportunities to professionals who may not have considered teaching due to other responsibilities, thus online instructors may also have limited availability for meetings and professional development.
- **Professional Isolation** - Adjunct instructors often report feeling isolated, which can be exacerbated when teaching online
- **Growth in Online Education** - As online education grows, the need to develop more online instructors with high-quality technical and pedagogical skills is also growing

The Solution

Customized Faculty Development Institutes, Series, & Intensive Workshops:

- **Complementing other professional development opportunities** →
- Providing information and practice to **stay abreast and knowledgeable of current online pedagogical trends and new technology updates**
- Providing **virtual support and opportunities to develop leadership and teaching skills**
- **Scheduled in the evenings & recorded** for geographically dispersed faculty & staff who have other full time positions
- **Building community** with teaching teams and connection with the School by celebrating accomplishments & milestones, modeling & practicing online community-building activities, and creating a shared experience
- **Honoring instructor and teaching associate's investment of time by:**
 - Curating online teaching pedagogy & CSSW online policy updates in a digestible format
 - Creating sessions with targeted & streamlined content, including sharing professional and academic resources
 - Providing a convenient open line of communication with administration
- **Providing opportunities for teaching associates to develop into instructor roles by:**
 - Continuing to develop their skills & knowledge around online education
 - Encouraging them to present, which develops their expertise and comfort with online teaching

Professional Development Opportunities for CSSW online instructors

External professional organizations

Social work organizations such as: Council on Social Work Education, National Association for Social Workers, and Network for Social Work Management
 Online education organizations such as: the University Professional Continuing Education Organization, Online Learning Consortium, EDUCAUSE, & US Distance Learning Organization
 Higher ed organizations such as: Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education, the Higher Ed Recruitment Consortium, and the American Association of Colleges and Universities

Columbia University faculty development

The Center for Teaching and Learning
 The Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Advancement
 The Office of Teaching, Learning, and Innovation
 The Science of Learning Research (SOLER) Initiative

School of Social Work faculty development

Weekly faculty support spaces
 New faculty orientation
 Anti-Black Racism and Navigating Difficult Dialogues workshop
 Free continuing education benefit through the Office of Professional Excellence
 Programming from the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, the Office of Academic Affairs, and the Office of Computing and Instructional Technology

CSSW Online Campus faculty development

- Institute on Pedagogy and Technology for Online Courses (launched 2017)
- Institute on Technical Skills for Online Events (launched 2017)
- Annual Online Faculty Development Series (launched 2018)
- Intensive workshop on Power, Trauma, and Grading (offered in 2019 and 2020)
- Virtual writing retreats, conference proposal clinics, and office hours

Lessons Learned

- **Online faculty need customized training to:**
 - Develop and sharpen their online teaching and online community-building skills
 - Stay up to date with technology
 - Provide a venue for discussing and learning about challenges, innovations, and ideas that are unique to online classrooms
 - Learn from and build upon each others' ideas
 - Provide instructors with experience as online learners
- **To develop professionals into future online instructors for a growing online program,** customized training is required
- **A commitment to online faculty development can elevate the reputation of an online program**
 - Online faculty development can demonstrate a program's commitment to quality for students
- **Administrators can provide additional benefits beyond the learning and community:**
 - Document learning via digital badges, which can be shared on social media, generate conversation about benefits of online education, help participants feel pride in their accomplishments & contribute a sense of professionalism as online educators. Digital badges also include printable certificates
 - Provide free continuing education units for professional licensure
- **Schedule sessions during evenings with fewest classes in order to increase participation, and allow for make-ups by watching and writing reflections on recordings of sessions they miss**
- **Ask for participants feedback** about their satisfaction & about desired future topics

Attending the online trainings puts me in the headspace of an online learner - how engaged am I in learning from the presenters, how distracting is the constant stream of chat comments while someone is speaking, how am I building connections with my colleagues in this online space. At the end of each training, I reflect on what I learned from the speakers and what I learned from the experience of learning to identify how the session can inform my teaching moving forward.
 -- Katherine Segal

It is truly a much-needed learning and supportive environment for those of us working on online courses. It helps create community and a space for learning and support, for and from each other in the online campus. Hearing about the work of other faculty is inspiring and gives us new ideas for developing an online classroom of learning, especially through a trauma informed lens. This learning environment was especially important and supportive during the pandemic by providing the opportunity to lean on one another while also supporting each other's achievements.
 -- Allison Ross

As an instructor who has taught both residentially and online, these meetings are a consistent source of inspiration that support me in honing my online teaching and technical skills and enhance my commitment to the Online Campus program. I am always motivated to show up with vulnerability, participate in good conversation with colleagues, and learn from the diversity that we all bring to these spaces.
 -- Bonnie Glass

They allow for all members of the Online Campus community to come together from across the country, reconnect, celebrate accomplishments, learn new information and skills related to online education, and stay updated about what's happening at CSSW. As a Live Support Specialist, I really enjoy the opportunity to learn what instructors do in their virtual classes. As an alum, it is also great to stay connected after graduation.
 -- Krystal Folk

What motivates my attendance are the variety of presentations that cover the wide scope of innovations occurring in the social work field and in online education. Presenters make the information accessible and I appreciate being able to connect with them directly after the presentation for follow up questions.
 -- Muhammed Garland

As a teaching associate, it is incredibly valuable to be in these meetings with instructors that have been teaching for decades and to be treated as an equal. The wealth of knowledge and experience in these meetings make all of us better educators and practitioners. I leave each meeting feeling supported by and connected to peers, inspired, and better equipped to enter the classroom. As an aspiring instructor, there is a lot to know about teaching online, and attending the faculty development series enables me to feel prepared for my transition into a future instructor.
 -- Elise Verdooner

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Citations and further info:

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