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## Interview with Neal Legler

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USU COVID-19 2022 Oral History  
TRANSCRIPTION COVER SHEET

Interviewee(s): Neal Legler

Place of interview: SCA, Fife Room

Date of interview: April 11, 2022

Interviewer(s): Todd Welch, Tameron Gentry Rains Williams

Recordist: Tameron Gentry Rains Williams

Photographer:

Recording equipment: Zoom H5 Handy digital audio recorder; Senal ENG-18RL omnidirectional microphone

Transcription equipment: The FTW Transcriber with USB foot pedal.

Transcribed by/date: Pioneer Transcription Services/Kathleen M. Carter/15 June 2022

Transcript proofed by/date: Neal Legler/05 July 2022

Brief description of interview: Neal Legler works as the Director of the Center for Innovative Design and Instruction [CIDI]. He discusses the many challenges the campus was faced with, and how they worked to adapt and change, throughout the pandemic, to meet the needs of their students and their specific academic programs and needs. Mr. Legler talks about the lasting lessons of meeting the needs of students all the time, including that of improved mental health.

References: TW: Todd Welch  
NL: Neal Legler  
TGRW: Tameron Gentry Raines Williams

NOTE: Interjections during pauses, transitions in dialogue (such as “umm”), and false starts and stops in conversations are not included in transcribed. All additions to transcript noted with brackets.

## TRANSCRIPTION

[00:01]

TW: Today is Monday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022. My name is Todd Welch from the Merrill-Cazier Library Special Collections and Archives. This morning I am interviewing Neal Legler, Director of the Center for Innovative Design and Instruction, or CIDI, within USU’s Academic and Instructional Services. This is another oral history interview for the Covid Collection Project. Joining us on the interview is Tameron Williams, the Covid Collection Project graduate intern.

Good morning, Mr. Legler.

NL: Good morning.

TW: So, let’s start by asking when did you begin your career at USU [Utah State University] and what were the various positions you’ve served in during your USU career?

NL: So, I came to USU in 2005 as a graduate student and I was a graduate student here from 2005 to the end of 2006. And while I was here, I had a couple of student jobs. I was — I worked for the

Math Department and I did some instructional design work there as part of their National Library Virtual Manipulatives Group, and then I worked for a time as a T.A. for some broadcast courses, and then I was a co-P.I./Intern with a project run out of the Fact Center at the time, P.I.'d by Eddie Lou. And as we neared the end of that project, Eddie Lou got another job in Iowa, and as he was getting ready to leave, they posted his position and I applied for it and he was on the search committee. And I wound up graduating and then going straight into that position that he left vacant.

**[0:02:05]**

So, I started working with the Fact Center actually here in the library when they were located here just up on the second floor in 2007 and worked — I've been part of the team that is now CIDI but, you know, has gone through a number of changes over the years since then. So, I started out as just a beginning instructional designer — it would be an Instructional Designer I, is what we classify it as now — and kind of quickly got involved being the Learning Management Systems Administrator and that kept me busy and got me in touch with a lot of people and a lot of projects. And over the years, our team, our group, went from being — I showed up just after Fact had moved from being under the purview of the library to being under the purview of IT. And in that time, we went from being part of IT to being part of the Provost Office to being part of RCDE, and then RCDE evolved into being AIS, and my position gradually grew and by around 2013, I was the Assistant Director, do just a number of different advancements and counteroffers and things. And then by — I think it was — I want to say 2015, 2016 when I became Director? I don't remember the exact year to be honest but it was around then.

**[0:04:00]**

And before that John Louviere was the Director and he took a sabbatical to go do some work with a kind of a collaborative group and then that's when I went from being Assistant Director to Director.

TW: And what are the scope of responsibilities and duties as Director of CIDI?

NL: So, I have a fairly small team. I have, let's see, I have to always count it up in my head which is funny because it's not a big team. I supervise — let's see, Erin, Jen, Lisa, Amy, Christopher — five people. Five full-time people and then we're somewhere usually between seven to ten students at any given time. We sort of are kind of like the — so, our primary role is to support faculty and staff in their use of the educational technologies that are used on campus and to provide training and instructional design and development support for the instructional environments that they're building. So, we will spend a portion of our time just troubleshooting problems. We'll spend a portion of our time training. We'll spend a portion of our time sitting down with faculty and talking through their plans for a course and helping them do design a good learning environment whether it be for online, face-to-face, a blend of the two.

**[0:06:02]**

And then we'll provide actual development help putting things online and helping put together materials or help with various questions around materials. And then also on top of that we have over the years served as sort of an incubator for a number of other things. So, now we have a — there's an Empower Teaching Excellence Office which focuses on faculty development. That

started in our office when we started doing faculty development things. There's a Center for Student Analytics that focuses on learning analytics that started with initiatives that we started in our office and then it spun off. Our office right now still has the coordinator for all of the Electronic and Information Technology Accessibility and that may or may not stay with us for the long term. But it's something that's been part of what our office does and what we help coordinate. So, my job as Director is, of course, to make sure all of these gears are turning, making sure they're running, making sure that all of my full-time employees and part-time employees are resource trained, happy, getting along. But also, I — because we have a small team — I also do all of the grunt work that they do as well. So, — if you call it groundwork. It's not necessarily. But I do support, I do, you know, I still have some departments that I work with.

TW: I was going to ask is it divided up by college and departments or by function or, I mean, area of specialization? How are the assignments --

**[0:08:00]**

NL: Yeah, that's a good question. So, our full-time instructional designers do have departments that they work with. And at this point now, we have — actually, every department has two instructional designers assigned. A lead and a secondary. So, they can always get to someone if they need to. The lead takes that lead role. And so, whenever it comes to working on a development, you know, a consultation, any of that kind of long-term help, it goes to that, ideally, to that designer that's over that college. Now, everybody, you know, on my team has been here awhile and they've worked with different colleges. And so, sometimes they just work with somebody that they've worked with forever. But we generally do assign it by college. The support aspect, we have that just coming in to a couple of central sources. So, they can call our main line, they can hit us on Chat, they can email [CIDI@usu.edu](mailto:CIDI@usu.edu), they can drop in. We have a number of ways that we can just be contacted. And so, our students tend to form that front line. They pick up the phone when it goes to the main line first. When somebody just emails the main email address it goes to a central task board and students are looking at that or whoever is available to snag it. We're all kind of, we all just kind of dog pile on that one. So, the day-to-day, like, immediate real time support, it's not divided up by college. It goes to that tier one.

**[0:10:02]**

And then it can get escalated. But that ongoing work gets assigned out by college.

TW: Okay. And before March of 2020, what was the number of stakeholders that CIDI served?

NL: Yeah, that is a good question.

TW: Ballpark.

NL: You know, let me go see what I can pull up here. You know, I mean, we've always served all faculty and staff. I have a write-up that we did at one time — it would be nice if I could find it here.

TW: But you created a shell for all the courses and some faculty use it more than others, I imagine?

NL: We do, yeah. Yeah, I would say — oh, where's a nice write-up I have. If I can find it, it would be great. But, I mean, our —

TW: You can add it to the transcript afterwards.

NL: I might need to add it to the transcript afterwards.

TW: That's fine.

NL: But we have a nice write-up that kind of shows just the delta, the increase, in workshops and things. I mean, I would say beforehand we were working with somewhere in the ballpark of 400 or so fully online courses. And we were probably — it's hard to ballpark how many actual faculty we were working with. Let me just add that to the transcript afterwards because I have actual numbers I can give you.

NW: Okay. Sure. That would be helpful. So, what were some of the major projects or initiatives that CIDI was working on in that academic year of 2019-2020 before the COVID break, if you will?

**[0:12:08]**

NL: Yeah, so, around that time we were actually — we were going through a bit of a transition around that time. So, before that we had — really a lot of our focus had been on the fully online courses and whenever a fully online course was to be developed, we were — basically, the instructor of the department was given a contract and they were basically required to have an instructional designer be part of that development and sign off on that development. And in return for that the department was given money for that development. Also, kind of along with that there was a cap on the number of fully online developments that could be done. And so, at that time the Director of USU Online which was Kevin Shanley, had started to say that, you know, he didn't necessarily think this was the way we should go moving forward. That departments wanted to have more flexibility. That they were less concerned about funding. That we shouldn't be micromanaging quality we should leave that up to the departments. So, there was already some movement toward changing that structure so that we would suddenly no longer be, like, part of the contracted process of managing those fully online courses. And so, we were looking at what our workload, what our jobs could look like after that. And then there was also some strategic initiatives underway to see if we could beef up USU's online presence through some more strategic programs — certificates, a little bit more competency-based type programs, that sort of a thing.

**[0:14:12]**

And so, with that we were already kind of looking and saying, okay, one, how do we shuffle a little bit so that we can scale a lot more. How do we look at maybe outsourcing? How do we look at managing our support, redoing our support a bit? We were already looking at all of that when COVID hit.

TW: Well, this is a good place to talk about when COVID hit. So, how did it directly impact CIDI, you and your team?

NL: Yeah, entirely.

TW: Start from the beginning.

NL: I mean, you can already see kind of what's coming when I say our job on campus is to support faculty with putting their courses online and teaching online and managing the educational technologies. So, the COVID transition brought the entire University to our doorstep. And

suddenly made us the ones supporting, you know, thousands of courses and faculty. Going completely online. Needing help figuring out how to do it. People who had never done it. And making sure everything, all of those technologies were working and just providing significant amounts of training and support. Our phones just went bonkers, you know, at that point.

**[0:16:04]**

TW: Did you do it with existing resources? How did that work? Did Robert make a call out to folks maybe in the Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences program to get more students to help with some of that?

NL: So, things came together I feel like pretty well in a sense. So, for us. I had spent some time — it was February 28<sup>th</sup>. I went on a road trip with Robert Wagner and Rene Eborn and we went down to Dixie State to speak with Ryan Hobbs who now actually works with us here. But we were just going to go down and do a collaborative, like, meeting, just catch up on what they were doing, compare notes, that sort of a thing. And on that drive back — I was the one driving and Robert was in the back seat just watching the news, just scrolling through his newsfeed and he said, oh, this conference just closed because of COVID; oh, this conference is going fully online; oh, such and such a university just announced they're going fully online. This thing's really, really looking like it's going to get crazy. And he's like, I bet, he's like — and we just were talking on the way home like what are the odds that we'll end up as a university going online? And before that, I don't think very many people were thinking that that would happen at that point.

**[0:18:04]**

It wasn't something that people were necessarily were thinking of as a possibility. But somehow on that drive between the three of us it felt very impending even though like it didn't, like, it was just the very initial stages. And it kind of hit me. I was like, oh, my goodness. This is what I have to talk with my team about on Monday. We have to be doing a contingency plan. And I actually went skiing the next day and saw one of my student employees there, and I was like, well, — I asked about some project or something she was working on. She was like, oh, good. And I said, well, we have one more thing we have to get ready for. She's like, what? I'm like, coronavirus. She's like, what do you mean? What are you talking about? Are you serious? I'm like, yeah, we'll probably get shut down. She's like, what? What are you talking about? I'm like, we have to get ready in case we all get shut down. And she's like, okay, whatever. And then in staff meeting I was, like, the next day or the next Monday — it was the 2<sup>nd</sup>. I have a whole bunch of notes here on coronavirus that I took during our meeting. And I just said, hey, all it's going to take is, like, one case hitting Utah and hitting a campus or hitting somewhere and we could potentially be going completely online. And everyone at the table is — and we were connecting with some people remotely, the classrooms team and all that, because I had invited them and said, okay, can you come joint us? We're going to be talking about this potential thing we're going to have to be ready for.

**[0:20:02]**

And everyone was just kind of like oh, my gosh. You're right. We do have to, like, think this through. And it was all just kind of hypothetical. It was like, you know, it might not happen but just in case it does we need to be ready. And so, we started to say, okay, what is it we need to do? We need to have job aides for this, this, and this. Send it out to faculty. I need to talk to IT about

rerouting our phones in case we all end up going remote. We need to talk to — we don't want to be just doing phones because we might not be able to do phones. So, we had our classroom facilitators — they had a Chat program and we said, okay, let's meet with you and let's start getting set up and setting up Chat ques. And then I said, okay, assuming we all go remote you guys, the facilitators, the USU facilitators are going to need a job and they're not going to be in classrooms, so, but they know the technology. Can we have them plan on helping us pick up our phones and monitor Chat. And they were like, yes, we can. I said, okay. So, we scheduled a training date for March 12<sup>th</sup>, and said, okay, we'll do the training day. We'll bring all of your facilitators in, anybody who's like a student employee, ask them if they'd be willing, if the whole university shuts down for whatever reason, to help us support these things. We'll do a big training on campus and everything that we do and coordinating all of it. And we just set that date. And then I got in touch with Kenlee and IT and figured out how we'd do our phones.

**[0:22:00]**

And we met with the facilitatory team and set up the Chat and got a list of students who would help us. And I emailed Robert and said, this is what we're going to do if it all goes south. And I talked to the IT Service Desk and said, hey, we're planning on what's going to happen in case everything gets shut down. We just went through and just started planning it all. Wrote it all up. We decided what we would do with — right here, COVID 19 — yeah, we started to figure out what we'd do with students if they were, like, quarantined, figuring out how we would — yeah, we made a couple of decisions then. We decided we would help faculty to just figure out the easiest way to do things, like, through announcements or whatever. We made some decisions about which programs would hold up best. Testing. We made a bunch of decisions basically right there on March 2<sup>nd</sup>. Then it was the next weekend we had a conference down at BYU and we went down there and people were starting to get worried about COVID and I was, again, I was, like, grabbing other universities. I was like, hey, what are you doing in case we're all going to get put online? And everyone was like, wait, what? What are you talking about? Why are — you're thinking about that? I'm like, yeah, like, this really could happen. And they're like, well, I guess you're right. We really should probably talk about it. So, I had talked a little bit with some of the designers at BYU Idaho and said, well, we're planning on doing this and this and this. What are you planning to do?

**[0:24:04]**

And she's like, yeah, we really should start thinking about that. It was March 11<sup>th</sup>, I think, 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> that all of a sudden, I got pulled in. Robert pinged me on my phone and said, hey, can you come to this meeting with the Deans over in Champ Hall? And I went over and sat down and they were all like, okay, Gary Herbert meets tomorrow with all the higher ed leaders. He's really pushing for all of, you know, they've pushed for K-12 to go online. They're pushing for higher ed to do the same thing. Odds are the announcement to do this might come out tomorrow. CIDI, what are you going to do? And I'm like, we've been planning on this for the last ten days. And so, I think it is that same day — that was when Andy Walker — right around the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, or 12<sup>th</sup>, Andy Walker got in touch with me and said, hey, we might be able to volunteer some of our students to help you. And I was like, great, we already have a training scheduled for the 12<sup>th</sup>. Just send them over. And so, we ended up in getting a bigger room. But we ended up in DE013 down in the basement and we had a room full of facilitators, ITLS students, all sitting there in the room just going over Canvas training. And by that point, I'd written up a, like, training

documents and everything and started to write some of these things up and we made, like, a Canvas chorus and started putting people in there.

**[0:26:07]**

And while we were in the middle of that training the email came that we were going to get shut down. And I was like, well, here you go. I read it in the meeting there and I'm like, okay, it's official. I knew it was going to happen. It just hadn't been made official yet. I was like, sometime today this is going to come through and it came through while we were sitting in that meeting. So, it felt, like, nice that when the word hit, we had our feet on the ground and we were running. And we'd been running for ten days, you know? So, we were able to also, we had Business Services already figured out, how they were going to pay to have some of these extra people help us, how we do the indexes and all that. So, it was just like we had the trainings lined out and we said go through and get your training, go talk to Business Services, and then we had everybody on an index and ready to work with that day. And we had schedules. We had people with schedules for watching Chat and we had our phones. I just got a hold of Kenlee and said, okay, let's do this with our phones. And he did it. And we just flipped the switch and went into our action plan.

TW: So, when the decision was made to go to remote (a) how was that communicated to the faculty? What was the faculty support like from CIDI and AIS to help make that transition? And what steps did you take to mitigate any of the nervous faculty that are all of a sudden now told that they need to move to remote only for the remainder of spring semester?

**[0:28:00]**

And what were the aspects of the changes that were the highest bars to meet? Like, you said something about testing, you had said something about, you know, making sure that you're supporting them through the transition that you were preparing for ten, twelve days before the announcement was made.

NL: Yeah. So, I'm trying to remember initially what went out. We didn't — as CIDI, we ended up getting tied into most of the official, like, communications that went out. So, early on, okay, I'm pulling up a letter here. No, I don't want to do that. Sorry. Okay. So, early on there was the initial letter that went out. There's the initial email that went out to faculty and they were asked to contact CIDI. We in short order sent out — and I don't remember the exact date I sent this out — but we pulled down a list of all of the University instructors and their departments. And I stayed up really — I pulled a lot of hours right there around the 12<sup>th</sup>. I mean, I think I worked, like a, yeah, I worked a couple of 80-hour weeks and things.

TW: I was going to ask what you and your staff's work week was like for those two weeks in March when you were making the transition?

NL: Yeah, it was crazy. I mean, I was going home 3:00 or 4:00 a.m., you know?

**[0:30:00]**

Because I was pulling together, like, this email here, I had to kind of pull this together. I just had to, like, collect all of the faculty details, the departments, the instructional designers. We just put together this — we had already kind of started working on it. We put together, like, a transition



page, but we just finished it. We had Robert look at it. We had the Provost look at it. Just going through how to transition their course to online. I think we called it Keep Teaching — USU Keep Teaching. We directed everybody to that and said, go to the Keep Teaching page. It'll give you step-by-step instructions to keep teaching remotely. So, yeah, I put together this message: "Dear Professor [last name and mail merge]." So, I sent it out. I did a mail merge to over a thousand, like, 2,000, 3,000 faculty instructors. And it took a long time to run through my email. But, yeah, "Dear Professor [last name]: Under the direction of the Executive Vice President and Provost, CIDI has been asked to assist you in the process of teaching the remainder of your course online. The Instructional Designer assigned to coordinate help for your course conversation is [mail merge field for I.D.] available at [email]. Please do not reply to this email. If you feel you need assistance, please fill out our Help Request form here [and then here is a link just to keep our emails from going berserk and have some control — by putting it to a form we were also able to have our helpers, like, all of our — we were able to have more people going and working through those help requests.]

**[0:32:03]**

Please note that due to limited designer staff, outreach and work completion will likely come from someone besides your assigned I.D., although your assigned I.D. will be available to answer questions and help coordinate the meeting of your needs. As you plan your course conversion, please review CIDI's page of suggestions and tutorials [which was a link to our Keep Teaching site]. If you need immediate support, we encourage you to use our Chat channel [which was linked] which we can staff better than phones during this busy time. For at least the first week, Monday through Friday, CIDI will make Chat available from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. The Canvas 24/7 line also remains available for general Canvas questions at [this 1-800 number — that ended up getting bogged down — there was an hour plus wait — the Canvas 24/7 help line reference there goes out to the Canvas vendor and there were, like, hour long waits on that during that time] [and then I go into a bolded list]:

University expectations of faculty:

- (1) All courses are to move online. The definition of online is asynchronous, not real time, teaching and assessment available through Canvas;
- (2) Course expectations should be communicated to students through Canvas using the Announcements tool by end of day, Tuesday, March 17<sup>th</sup>. This announcement should include (a) tentative course schedule; (b) preferred communication methods and your availability for students; (c) office hours via phone or WebEx [which we were using at the time instead of Zoom]; (d) directions for finding, accessing, and navigating course content;
- (3) Provide ongoing substantive communication to students throughout the semester in the form of announcements, assignment feedback, online office hours or other means;
- (4) Online teaching readiness. Instructors should be ready and use the online tools necessary for their teaching requirements;

**[0:34:00]**

- (5) Exams and quizzes are to be made available online: (a) if necessary, virtual proctoring will be set up using Proctorio [which is our virtual proctoring solution]; (b) if necessary, in-person

proctored exams need to be scheduled through the testing centers [which quickly became not really an option];

(6) Any necessary lectures are to be recorded and made available for students online;

(7) Any necessary assignments and activities are to be provided online or asynchronously however possible.

[Heading] What CIDI Can Do for You

(1) Provide support and training for USU supported online learning tools such as Canvas, Kaltura, MyMedia, WebEx, and Proctorio virtual proctoring;

(2) Assist with assignment, quiz, and exam development and creation and set-up;

(3) Provide training and support to capture lectures and made them available to students;

(4) Assist with brainstorming and innovative pedagogical options to support course learning goals.

We recognize the challenges and effort required at this unprecedented time and we'll do our best to provide whatever support we can as you make this transition. Thank you so much for your efforts.

Sincerely,

Neal Legler, Center for Innovative Design and Instruction, Utah State University.”

TW: So, I have to ask, what was the response?

NL: The form did fill up. We had a lot of people filling out the form but really, I think what got hit the most became the Chat. So, I was surprised I didn't see as much responding to the form as I thought we would, but I saw a lot more Chat. And what was kind of interesting was that I did get a lot of responses — a mix of responses — from faculty saying, wow, you know, thank you so much, or, hey, you know, I've been teaching — it was actually kind of neat. It was like, hey, I've been teaching this way for years.

**[0:36:00]**

I'm really well set thanks to all the help we've been given over the years. And then other faculty had questions and basically my email just blew up and response to that. There was a lot of forwarding and adding things to forms. Yeah, we just saw a mix of responses. We saw quite a mix. But what was actually — I will say, and maybe it's because you tend to remember trauma positively more than negatively, like, once the pain wears off, right? It's kind of like mothers recalling how great, you know, it was to give birth and forgetting how painful it was. It could be that. But my recollection is that there was a lot of positive energy. There was a lot of sense that, you know, this was kind of crazy, but we've got this. If anyone can do this, USU can do this. If anyone's got the tool and the support, we've got it. And my team, everybody felt, hah, everybody just sort of adopted a gallows humor and kind of went for it. We had the communication disorders — the COMDDE Department — we've worked with them for a long time with online courses. And some of their faculty were very nice and they actually for a while brought us, like,

lunch. And brought in a whole bunch of food and a table and little, like, positive notes for us saying, we're here for you, we support you. And we had that for the first couple weeks.

**[0:38:02]**

And I remember us saying — because we were working so much — I remember saying to my team, I was like, you know, we're going to get through these first two weeks and then we're all going to get deathly ill.

TW: Optimism.

NL: And I did get severely ill two weeks later. And I was out just really sick with, like, pneumonia and everything for a solid — running a 100° fever for, like, two weeks. I got tested for COVID. It came back negative, but I got, I mean, I got so sick. It took me half a year to get over that illness. About two weeks after this whole thing hit, I was just down for the count. And we had a little scare where one of the people in our office decided he might have COVID. And so, I think it was the Friday after this transition our whole team was told to quarantine. So, we were all trying to manage all of this working from home because we had all been exposed to this one employee who couldn't get a COVID test at the time because they were so hard to come by. But he felt like he had all of the symptoms and everything. He finally was cleared but he never got tested. They just said, well, it probably isn't. So, they cleared us all to go back and we all went and kept working. So, we had a little scare. We thought we might have all been exposed to COVID within the first week and we had this day where we're all just, like, the phones were ringing like crazy and we're all at home.

**[0:40:08]**

And we hadn't quite planned on that yet.

TW: But did you eventually work to a remote from home environment for you and your staff?

NL: We did. It was really a week later. So, we, you know, when campus was basically told, when the staff were told that they could, should work remotely, that's what we did. So, we had our phones forwarding and we had our main line forwarding and all of our students, many of our students went home to their, you know, out of Cache Valley homes. And our staff went home. We only had one staff member, Amy Carpenter, who never ever worked from home. She could have, but she works over in the East Campus office building which we affectionately call The Bates Hotel. So, she works there and she had the whole place to herself and we figured well, that particular building has probably got small pox, Ebola, the Spanish flu, and probably some early permutation of COVID rolled into one since the 60's. So, you know, she's probably been exposed to everything working over there. If the COVID won't get you the asbestos will. So, anyway, so she kind of felt more comfortable going there and she just worked there the whole time. But she was the only person in that building so she had it all to herself. The rest of us worked remotely and we just ran all of our support. We divided up our team.

**[0:42:00]**

I had a meeting on March 27<sup>th</sup> which was — we had a meeting on March 27<sup>th</sup> which was my birthday. And it was for our Spring 2020 COVID-19 long game. Oh, I put in some stats here. During the first week of the transition, we had 312 Chats, average duration 23 minutes. The

second week 156, average duration 28 minutes. I have a really nice sheet I put together with all of our training, all the number of workshops and faculty we supported where I figured we trained at least a minimum of a thousand faculty over the summer. We had direct consultations and workshops with — we, yeah, so we talked through okay, how are the phones working? Who's getting calls? Who's able to pick them up? We determined that we would split up our staff and we would have some staff and some students work 7:00 a.m. to, like, 4:00 and other work until 10:00 p.m. So, we worked it out so we would have full-time and part-time staff covering from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. and we did that all summer. We covered until 10:00 p.m. And we had students scheduled to work weekends. So, we covered 7:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m., seven days a week. We had students monitoring Chats and working hours all over the weekends.

**[0:44:04]**

We had people initially taking point on tickets. Okay, that was what we had — 7:00 to 3:00 and 11:00 to 7:00, and then I think we had students going until 10:00, is what we had. We rearranged our staff meeting. We put it on a different day of the week. We put it in the middle of the day so that we could catch everybody during their shifts. And we adjusted our — yeah, we provided roles for our support — Tier 1, Tier 2. We had some specific students trained to help with exam conversion. We had some students trained to help with, like, first, you know, real time support. I got in touch with Robert and we had decided — I had a meeting with him on I think the 17<sup>th</sup>? I said, okay, let's see if we can take some of the money that we know we're getting — the COVID money — let's see if we can actually hire some of the ITLS students to be — we started to have certain faculty that we were hearing a lot from. We had certain faculty that were really struggling. Some faculty were managing, at least ostensibly, really just fine. But some faculty were really struggling. And had also certain — we had gone through early on working with Robert and Rene. We took a list of all of the courses in the University and we categorized them.

**[0:46:05]**

They had all of the departments categorized — courses into, like, Category 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. And I think Category 5 courses were the ones that were the most critical in need of help. The ones that had, like a hundred plus students or that had lab components that were really hard to put online. So, we had all of the departments — kind of identified those. And we reached out to those Category 5 courses and some of the faculty that were really struggling and my proposal to Robert was let's reach out to them and let's offer them a temporary T.A., and let's get some of these instructional technology students, instructional ITLS students to be temporary T.A.'s. They need internships. We'll count it towards their internship. And we got, I believe, seven? If I remember, we got seven instructional technology students to do internships with us that summer and be temporary T.A.'s and we assigned those out to these faculty. And that was paid for by COVID money. And I worked with them. I met with them weekly. They were remote. Most of them weren't in the Logan area. I met with them weekly. I met with them and Kristy Bloxham. She was the coordinator through ITLS for all of that. And they were the ones that really did the bulk of the ITLS side of things — the support there. And I'll probably have to send you names afterward to make sure I get them all right in the spelling. But they worked 150+ hours with specific faculty to help them and just became the go-to.

**[0:48:02]**

And that was one of the ways we provide really, like, direct support to faculty who really needed it.

TW: Was that just the summer of 2020 or throughout the fall and spring of that academic year that the T.A.'s were helpful?

NL: They were helpful through the entire summer and a handful of them stayed through until about mid-fall and continued to wrap-up work until they were ready to move on. And we maintained communications. So, John Louviere was my Director at that time and he started sending out weekly newsletters through Mailchimp with trying to give some updates, some tips. We sent out a couple of responses. We sent out a four-week — four weeks in we sent an email to every department head. So, I took again the list of all of the departments — I took a list of all the department heads and each of the instructional designers and I just sent out, like, a mail merge list or through reply to the designers saying, hi, Dr. [your name here]. What did I say — I'll read it to you again for the record here: "Hi, Dr. [so and so]. Now that we are a good three weeks into the semester and starting to settle," — oh, this was fall. Sorry. We had a number of follow up communications. We had — okay. I'll have to follow up. I thought I had better notes in here.

TW: That's fine. We can always add it to the transcript.

NL: Yeah, we can add it to the transcript. The one I was looking at was actually a fall one.

**[0:50:00]**

But we did a couple of follow-ups with department heads saying, how are things going? Who are the main faculty that you need help with? Just checking in.

TW: So, in that fall semester the decision was made that at Thanksgiving when the students went home for the break, they were going to move all the courses to remote only. What role, if any, did CIDI play in that, what, three-week period that courses moved to remote only?

NL: Yeah. We, I mean, we were, we basically just kept doing what we were doing. So, by that time we were in a groove. Faculty had done it in the spring. We had, of course, we had messages go out from Robert and from the Provost. All of the messages that were sent out from the Provost Office really were collaboratively written by — Robert put a lot into it. We provided links to our tutorials. We were asked to write certain tutorials and provide links. So, we provided our input. Robert wrote it up. The Provost edited it. We all looked at it and then it went out. And so, the communications came from the Provost Office and they directed them to our team, but we had a say in that. And we just basically kept our engine running that we had in place with support. By that point, by the end of — during the whole summer — we spent the whole summer putting together a whole bunch of web materials. In fact, coming out of COVID we completely redid our whole website. We launched a new one called Teach.USU.edu and we moved all of our — just massive tutorials we had pulled together and we cleaned them up and coordinated them.

**[0:52:00]**

We put them all in one spot that faculty could go to just to find all of their resources. But during the summer we started working on that. We wrote tutorials for every — there were all of these new delivery methods that were designed for fall 2020. And we put together a whole bunch of web materials for those. And we created a site called USU Ready that listed the best practices for

each type of delivery. And we organized a whole bunch of workshops. So, we had all of that in place and we just kept directing faculty to that site, to those methods, to our Chat, to our phones, and just kept the machine running. So, we did scale back our hours in the fall where we would stop going all the way until 10:00 p.m. And we stopped going seven days a week. We kept an eye on Chat if it happened over the weekend, but we just went 7:00 to 8:00. Just kind of just kept the machine running.

TW: So, during these two years that we've been under a kind of COVID, I mean, restrictions. Now there are more guidelines and we have vaccinations and social distancing and mask wearing has been modified. What were or were there any new challenges or things that CIDI had to do to support the learning and teaching that was going on at USU?

NL: Yeah. I mean, there were — we changed a lot as a team as a result of COVID.

**[0:54:00]**

I mean, obviously, we went from being, I mean, I'd say before COVID we were playing man-to-man and then we went to zone. Playing zone defense when it came to online courses. We had already been looking at doing that but it just accelerated that because suddenly we had so many fully online courses. And in fact, the fall fully online courses, you know, we looked at as a unique opportunity for doing a little bit of internal research. So, once I took an economic class and the teacher described the types of research that you can perform and he said, well, there's the designed experiment that you can do but sometimes there's the data you can get from basically raw fortune. Like, things — you can never design a study about people who fall out of a window but you can ethically design it. But you can run research on people who happen to fall out of a window. So, we had this opportunity here where we had something that we could have never ethically designed which was forcing thousands of faculty into putting materials online without a lot of support. And then seeing what it looked like, you know? What the results were for students. And so, we just went through and looked at all of those courses. We'd put together a very kind of a raw rubric. A very scaled down version and had some of our students — we actually took a couple of our students and extended their hours and used COVID money to allow them to be basically benefitted full-time hourly helping us with support.

**[0:56:10]**

Some of our really kind of veteran students. And we had them help us with this. And we just pulled together all of this data on these courses and we looked and said, okay, where did these courses do well without us and where did they fall short? What was the value of an instructional designer? What is the value of an instructional designer when we compare courses that had input and those that didn't? And we were able to get that kind of quantitatively to a certain extent. We're all practitioners. We're not researchers. So, it wasn't like awesome data. It wasn't perfect but we were able to just get a sense. And it, you know, it became clear that faculty on a whole they manage to pull together if they care, pretty decent content and pretty decent activities. But they really struggle to put it together in a way that is consistent. To put it together in a way that doesn't have, like, inherent problems for students to access it. To put it together — to really just kind of like put the appropriate level of polish on it for it to be a good student experience. Or maybe to see all of the areas where students might run into trouble. And so, we actually began a Q/A process that we're still running to this day. We pulled together a — where now we take all

of the courses that are fully online and then we also pull in all of the courses that are any other format.

**[0:58:00]**

And we pull them in to a tracking spreadsheet and we have this basic Q/A rubric that highlights those specific areas that we saw that faculty have trouble and we just have our students go through them and check for issues. And we specifically identify kind of following what we did with COVID. We identify those that have, like 100+ students, those that are in some of these high impact categories and we start with those. And then we reach out and say, you know, we noticed these issues. Can we help you fix them? And we do that. We just go through and try to find those issues and fix them. And so, I'd say we're spending a lot more focus now on the whole and on kind of leavening the whole so that everything gets a little bit better. Everything gets a little bit of attention. We've added to our services the ability for faculty to tell us — when we were doing this, we kind of had to start doing things like asking faculty, well, in bulk, what can we fix? What do we need to ask you about first? And so, we created like a services preference dashboard that's there now that faculty can work with. We dramatically increased the amount of student support. My full-time staff were getting burned out. They were getting edgy. They felt like the quality of their jobs had gone down quite a bit because all they were doing was answering phones and emails. So, we kind of reworked it so that we have a stronger kind of front-line staff with our students and got our designers taking more of an escalation role and doing more design work.

**[1:00:00]**

Actually, I mean, this forced us into productivity software in a big, big way. Whereas before we weren't, like, closely tracking what we were doing. We went crazy with, like, we have full-blown, like — it became very clear that I needed to understand what we were capable of doing in a given week. Our team, like, velocity, so to speak, in the amount of work we can knock out. So, we just started tracking it. We started tracking what was coming in and we realized we'd need to report this, too, for CARES funding. So, now we log everything that comes through the door that we do. We changed when we do our staff meetings. We kind of had a structure built where we had, like, once a week kind of core meetings that are really focused, and then once a month we bring in the larger group. I don't know. Just a lot of things changed. We've eventually adjusted our support schedule back to 8:00 to 6:00. We kept Chat. We've kept Chat because that was really popular. We've kept all of the website stuff. We redid our website. We just completely reorganized based on COVID.

TW: You touched on this a little bit. I just want to know if you want to add anymore about the general mental health and the stress that you and the CIDI team related to how the pressures of COVID were added on to what was asked of you. Is there anything else you want to add about that?

NL: Yeah. So, we worked a lot through summer.

**[1:02:00]**

We pulled a lot of hours all the way through. Summer of 2020 was pretty tough. I ended up teaching a class, too. So, I felt like I was just pulling, like, 60+ hour weeks. I think one of the challenges that I saw with the team, and again part of the reason why we ended up having to track

things a little bit more — it was kind of funny. Like, because we were separated and there was so much coming in, there became a little bit of, like, internal strife between team members about who was carrying more weight than whom. And we just ran into trouble with people kind of making assumptions about who was picking up more phone calls and more Chats, and in some cases, the numbers kind of showed that some people were just faster on the draw. And that took over a year to kind of work through. And we had to ultimately have some pretty, I don't know, we had to kind of have some team — we had to work together as a team to kind of work through that. And, you know, we did performance appraisals and I kind of had to just deal with some baggage on the part of different team members. We had somebody who went into maternity leave around that time and actually for her that worked out kind of nice because she was able to be remote during that whole time. But, you know, she came back from maternity leave and had a new baby and was doing child care and things.

**[1:04:03]**

And it just became hard for everybody to, like, there was just kind of a trust issue on the team. And part of why beyond just trying to, like, track for CARES and understand our velocity and things like that — part of why we went having people track their work was just so that everybody could see that each other was working. And it's just taken awhile. It just took a little while. We've worked through it but it just kind of happened.

TGRW: So, speaking kind of broadly here, what have been the most significant successes you've seen from CIDI's response to the pandemic?

NL: Yeah, that's a good question. Well, I feel like we were ahead of the curve relative to all of our peers everywhere in our COVID response. I don't know of any other institution that was already, they already had things in — that already had a plan for support and was able to implement it on day zero. And we were able to do that. And we did, you know, we talked to some of our other institutional contacts and they were like, we're not doing anything. Our faculty are on their own. And we did, we did. We responded. We were there. We had faculty telling us that their colleagues at other institutions had no support, that they were talking to their other colleagues and they just were all on their own. And they were like, we are in a completely different boat. We have lots of support.

**[1:06:00]**

We're feeling really good about the support we have. That is the biggest success, I think. We were able to be there when other institutions weren't. And I think we'll always be able to feel really good about that as a team. And I feel like we were able to also build a really — utilized campus resources really well. So, we had at that point full engagement. We were able to keep all of AIS's student employees employed. Immediately we were able to put them to work. They still had work. They were able to survive through COVID. And we were able to also give ITLS opportunities that were immediate and relevant. And we were able to build a stronger partnership with them. And other successes, I mean, we made some pretty useful changes to our instructional technology. I credit probably John Louviere most for, like, the transition to Zoom, but we got onto a better tool there and that served us a lot better. I feel like all of the changes we made ultimately have led to much better overall focus on all of the courses that USU offers. And as we're coming out of COVID, all courses are just a little bit better. And all faculty right now, like



right now, believe it or not, like, our phones are noticeably quieter than they were pre-COVID because right now we have an incredibly trained group of faculty.

[1:08:00]

And it's going to be just the new ones who are coming in that are going to need all the training. Those who haven't been through the ringer. But right now, we've got an incredibly trained group of faculty. Right now, we can talk formats and nobody bats an eye. Like, we can say the word 'asynchronous' and they know what we're talking about. Right now, I think the University as a whole and our team as whole has gotten so much better at what we do. So much more efficient.

TGRW: And you speak to, you know, trust issues and then issues with workflow early on, even getting sick. What have been the most significant or even difficult lessons you've taken away from the pandemic personally or professionally or both?

NL: Oh, boy, yeah. I think we'll all be a little bit — I don't think anyone who's been through this will ever be the same. We'll always have in the back of our mind that something could happen that turns things upside down. And on the other hand, so many things are relative now. Like, people ask, oh, how have you — you know, I can have what would have previously been a pretty stressful week and it doesn't feel very stressful. It just is kind of, you know, people are like, well, how are things going? Are things busy right now? I'm like, it's all relative. This is great. This is fine, you know? Like, it's not as bad as it could be. We've been there. It's the equivalent of looking at a marathon after you've run a hundred miler, you know?

[1:10:00]

It's like, oh, yeah, 26.2 is a warm-up, you know? So, we've just learned that. I think we have — I mean, I was a little bit surprised at what people did and didn't. I was a little bit surprised at what faculty did and didn't ask for help with. I think looking back, I think faculty probably didn't ask for as much help as they could have or should have. There was a general sense that faculty had that we were overwhelmed and they needed to leave us alone in CIDI. So, there were a number of faculty — I talked to a lot of faculty that said they intentionally tried not to contact us. And what's actually kind of interesting is that we, I think, actually had more capacity than was actually used. When we got everybody, all of our students and everything there to help us, we actually had more capacity than was actually used. If we were to go into this again, I don't know exactly how to necessarily communicate that, but I mean, at the time we weren't complaining. Yeah, I don't know. I don't know how that kind of falls into being a lesson, per se, but we also learned a lot looking at how — we got a lot of student data. We learned a lot from students about what they did and didn't respond well to with faculty and we've used a lot of that in our training materials. I had one — sorry I [unclear] pretty soon — but I had — we did one survey that I spent three hours reading, just going through student responses from the pandemic and their responses to the teaching experience.

[1:12:05]

And it was hard. It was hard to read because it was — back then when we discovered that despite all of the work that we'd done, the faculty had done, that it was still really hard on students. That the students themselves felt really beat down by that experience. And it was very clear to us to see, like, the good behaviors and the bad behaviors that occurred with the transition. You know,

we didn't ever see names, but we saw specifically, like, that there were faculty who just kind of dusted their hands off and threw their PowerPoint files online and kind of walked away. And there are faculty who went crazy with lecture material and actually made things harder on their students and kind of overwhelmed them. And then there were ones who kind of struck a balance and were supportive and things. So, we learned kind of a lot about what sorts of things we should focus on helping faculty. Like, the response that they could've — like, the things that they should focus on when we make a transition like this. So, I think if we ever go into a situation like this again, and actually even on our materials that we have, like, we now have materials on contingency response that we didn't have before. But it's very focused on this feedback that we got from students because we learned a lot about, like, what you do and don't do and that I wish we'd known going into it. That we could've maybe preempted somewhat by saying, look, you know — we could've had a little bit more advice that we could've given that could've made students' lives a little easier that we just didn't know about because we hadn't seen what happens when it actually hits.

**[1:14:05]**

But we used that to go into fall. We used that to go into spring.

TW: Mr. Legler, I would like to thank you for taking the time this morning to discuss your experiences with the COVID pandemic at Utah State University.

NL: Thank you so much. I appreciate your time.

**[End recording – 1:14:21]**