Crisis Meets Opportunity: Empowering Faculty when Returning to the Higher Education Classroom

Nicole Luongo
Saint Peter's University

Michael Finetti
Saint Peter's University

Kimberly Case
Saint Peter's University

Jay Garrels
Saint Peter's University

Renee Evans
University of Miami

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CRISIS MEETS OPPORTUNITY:

Empowering Faculty when Returning to the Higher Education Classroom

Nicole Luongo, Ed.D.; Michael Finetti, Ed.D.; Kimberly Case; Jay Garrels, Ph.D.; and Renee Evans

Abstract

This article presents information surrounding how the COVID-19 crisis can lead to opportunities for empowering growth in faculty course development and delivery. The authors show how higher education instructors have implemented remote teaching experiences they used during the pandemic to create engaging learning opportunities for students as they are returning to the higher education classroom. The article explores innovative ideas for communication and instruction, equity issues, and inclusive practices. The authors address the overall changing higher education climate and share their personal experiences transitioning from teaching in a face-to-face setting to going fully remote and back again.

Keywords: remote teaching, technology, pandemic, higher education

Introduction

The threat of COVID-19 presents unique challenges for institutions of higher education. All parties —students, faculty, and staff—are doing extraordinary things regarding course delivery and learning. The changes in education due to COVID-19 have never occurred at this scale before. Although this situation is stressful, when it is over, institutions will emerge with an opportunity to evaluate how well they were able to implement emergency remote teaching (ERT) to maintain continuity of instruction. (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020, para. 27)

The authors of this article facilitated a presentation where they demonstrated how higher education instructors used their experiences during the COVID-19 crisis to empower themselves as they returned to a sense of normalcy on campus (Evans et al., 2021). The focus was on how faculty created new and engaging learning opportunities for students from the successes they experienced during emergency remote teaching (ERT) in the higher education classroom. ERT is defined as "a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances" (Hodges et al., para. 13). Some ERT successes include using new technologies for communication and instruction, addressing equity issues, and adding more inclusive practices. Furthermore, the authors analyzed today's overall changing higher education climate as they shared their personal experiences in transitioning from teaching in a face-to-face setting to going fully remote and back again. Hence, the purpose of this article is to provide ways faculty can be empowered by using their ERT successes and victories in the higher education classroom.

Background of the Problem

At the time of writing, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a significant impact on higher education institutions.

Many schools are attempting to return to pre-pandemic norms by offering in-person classes and on-campus meetings. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) asserts that "new variants of the virus are expected to occur" (2022, para. 2). Therefore, institutions continue to navigate the unpredictability and uncertainty that comes with this pandemic. Many institutions have had to readjust academic calendars in response to this ongoing emergency (Jaschik, 2022). Some schools decided to pivot to remote instruction for the first few weeks of the semester, as they discouraged students from returning to campus. Other institutions delayed the start of their semesters pending the results of data collection analysis from the COVID-19 spread. As Amin, Dhunpath, and Devroop (2021) asserted, "Two years have passed, and the crisis has not abated. In fact, more variants have emerged, with UHI and Deltacron being the latest ones. More variants are expected. Thus, the temporary move to emergency remote teaching may be prolonged for months, if not years" (p. 2). So, what can higher education instructors do to empower themselves to succeed in the classroom? Can preparing for the next variant or crisis give instructors a greater sense of empowerment?

The start of the pandemic prompted a quick transition from traditional, face-to-face classroom teaching to fully online ERT, which involves the use of fully remote teaching solutions for instruction that would otherwise be delivered face-to-face (Evans et al., 2021). ERT assumes that instruction will return to the previous format once the crisis or emergency has subsided (Hodges et al., 2020). The COVID-19 ERT response was different for all educators and students, as it was unexpected and unprecedented; no one was prepared for the abrupt shift: "For the first time in world history, all students were required to take all their classes online and all teachers were required to teach online" (Misirli & Ergulec, 2021, p. 6700). Prior to the pandemic, most professors taught in front of a live class with a chalkboard, whiteboard, or an overhead projector. Suddenly, instruction was done via Zoom, by using Google Classroom, or by employing another online format: "Online learning, distance and continuing education have become a panacea for this unprecedented global pandemic, despite the challenges posed to both educators and the learners" (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021, p. 134). In fact, the switch to emergency remote teaching that occurred in schools during COVID-19 left many educators uncertain about the situation and unable to use technology effectively to communicate and teach (Shamburg et al., 2021). Faculty were expected to teach from home and assess students using unfamiliar online platforms. Moreover, this occurred while they were trying to take care of their own families and health situations.

Despite the challenges and changes to instruction, many higher education instructors prevailed by using innovative and creative ways of meeting the needs of all learners (Evans et al., 2021; Garrad & Page, 2022; Glantz et al., 2021; Johnson, Veletsianos, & Seaman, 2020). As Hodges et al. (2020) emphasized, "We have to be able to think outside standard boxes to generate various possible solutions that help meet the new needs for our learners and communities" (para. 14). During a 2021 investigation into remote classes during the pandemic period of COVID–19, Gopal, Singh, and Aggarwal (2021) found that certain factors (e.g., instructor quality, course design, prompt feedback, learner expectation) affected learners' satisfaction and performance. It is important these elements are prioritized for future success and faculty empowerment.

During the switch to ERT, many instructors discovered and used new technology applications to connect and communicate with their students (Evans et al., 2021). As Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) explained,

> The use of online platforms such as Google Classroom, Zoom, virtual learning environment and social media and various group forums like Telegram, Messenger, WhatsApp and WeChat are explored and tried for teaching and learning for the first time ever to continue education. This can be explored further even after face-to-face teaching resumes, and these platforms can provide additional resources and coaching to the learners. (p. 137-138)

As the switch to ERT happened, "higher education's COVID-19 response resulted in an unstructured boost in online teaching and learning, fast-forwarded the adoption of more broad-based online learning strategies and technologies, and demonstrated a resilience that created a prototype for excellence in online teaching" (Nworie, 2021, para. 4).

In a Fall 2020 EDUCAUSE study (Brooks & Gierdowski, 2021) aiming to gain insights into the student experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education students reported that the courses they took during the pandemic were well-organized (82%), offered a variety of interactions with course content (73%), and addressed accessibility issues (63%). Additionally, synchronous courses tended to be rated as better organized with greater opportunities for student–instructor and student–student interaction. Opportunities for formal interactions and communication with instructors had a clear advantage among students in synchronous courses (83%) over those in asynchronous courses (73%). Furthermore, the immediate need to pivot during the pandemic propelled faculty to find new ways to leverage tools to both teach course material and connect with students (Glantz, Gamrat, Lenze, & Bardzell, 2021). Another challenge for professors was managing advising/mentoring and research responsibilities. Most professors serving as mentors had to discover innovative ways to advise their mentees and conduct virtual research. They managed home life and school while making sure their students stayed on target for graduation. Above all, professors found success and empowerment teaching in a remote setting.

However, some faculty are looking forward to returning to their previous, pre-pandemic ways of teaching. As Nworie (2021) asserted, "it would be a mistake to assume that all faculty suddenly developed essential skills or an enthusiasm for online teaching as a result of the emergency remote teaching" (para. 23). This presents a challenge; how can instructors be encouraged to reflect upon and embrace the successes they encountered and use it to propel them forward? Do instructors go back to the way they taught in 2019? Or do they look ahead to 2025? These are important questions to ask as higher education instructors seek to move beyond the emergency remote teaching that occurred during the initial COVID-19 pandemic.

Faculty Survey

During the Fall 2021 semester, a faculty survey was sent out to 104 full-time and 220 adjunct higher education faculty at a private higher education institution in northern New Jersey. The survey assessed their experiences and perceptions about teaching and learning practices implemented as a result of the need to implement ERT due to the initial COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was approved by the institution's Institutional Review Board and included closed- and open-ended questions that focused on instruction, resistance to change, and technology equity. The sample was identified by obtaining a list of the names and email addresses of all current full-time and part-time instructors at the institution. Via email correspondence, the potential participants were informed of the study and asked to complete an online survey. The researchers used two main instruments in this study: (1) an implied consent form that identified who gave consent to be involved in the study and (2) an online survey that measured attitudes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010). The online survey was created using Google Forms and administered to all study participants. Participants were informed that the results of the survey were anonymous and confidential. Respondents included 13 full-time and 26 part-time higher education instructors. The majority taught undergraduate students in the traditional classroom for over 11 years.

In this article, the data collected from this survey is used and referred to as the results of the faculty survey.

On-camp and Online Instruction

In the survey, 11 of the respondents indicated that they taught mostly face-to-face courses; seven taught hybrid; and five taught fully online. As a result of going fully online during the spring 2020 semester, 35 of these respondents indicated changes in the design and delivery of their courses.

In early 2022, these faculty members found themselves again facing a similar crisis. As a new COVID-19 variant

named Omicron started to emerge, the faculty members were being asked once again to readjust and possibly pivot back to ERT. Yet, the CDC (2022) warns that "viruses constantly change through mutation and sometimes these mutations result in a new variant of the virus. Some variants emerge and disappear while others persist. New variants will continue to emerge" (para. 7). Hence, faculty will need to be prepared and proactive to adjust their teaching at a moment's notice.

In the faculty survey, a respondent emphasized that he designed his course in both the face-to-face and online format, and indicated an intention to do so going forward. This individual stated, "I learned that it was much better to already have an online course ready to go than to develop it on the fly." This course preparation method shows an example of a faculty member being empowered by the COVID-19 pandemic and not waiting for the next crisis to catch him or her off guard.

Course Format Factors

Higher education institutions can and should offer a range of courses in various formats to meet the needs of all learners (Evans et al., 2021). "If an on-campus program is planned for the coming academic year, physical distancing requirements will almost certainly prevent full classrooms at normal seating capacity. A variety of blended or traditional hybrid solutions can help institutions meet these new requirements" (Beatty, 2020, para. 7). Brooks and Gierdowski (2021) suggested investing in the design, development, and implementation of hybrid course models, as well as investing in the individuals (e.g., designers, staff, instructors) who support them. Hybrid courses should no longer be viewed as exceptions or secondary to face-to-face courses; these types of courses should be considered the "new normal." This idea is supported by Johnson et al. (2020), who said that "given the unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is likely that some form of online and hybrid models of learning will be the most viable options for course delivery for the foreseeable future" (p. 16).

Mode of Instruction Factors

Many instructors succeeded by offering their courses in various modes; hence, there should be a consideration of the various modes of instruction that can be implemented. One mode of instruction that was adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic was the development of the HyFlex classroom (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2021). Furthermore, Beatty (2020) found the following:

> The classic HyFlex (hybrid-flexible) course design model supports both in-class and online students in the same class sections, typically by using a combination of synchronous and asynchronous online participation paths for students who choose not to, or are unable to, participate in traditional classroom instruction. (para. 1)

HyFlex classrooms are designed in various ways, with students and instructors being in the classroom, remotely, or on a rotating schedule. These classrooms provide opportunities for visiting professors or guest lecturers to be participants, even from a distance. HyFlex classes allow for effective participation modes that lead to the same outcomes and provide empowering learning opportunities for all students. Although this format is relatively new and needs more study, many faculty agree that this format could work. One respondent of the faculty survey stated that higher education institutions needed to "include students who can't physically be in class but want to participate. Possibly record lessons that students can view if they are absent." Another respondent agreed, "I would like to teach more courses in a hybrid format rather than strictly face-to-face." However, Beatty (2019) stressed that instructors need to be able to handle the complexity of teaching students in multiple modes at the same time, which will most likely require professional development resources.

Course Design Factors

Another positive outcome of this crisis was the overall redesign of courses (Evans et al., 2021). Since instructors needed to adjust their instruction during the switch to ERT, professors evaluated how their courses were aligned and how the materials were made accessible to all students. Consequently, these teachers recognized the importance of using strong instructional design techniques that correlated to how students accessed, participated in, and showed what they have learned (Fulgencio & Asino, 2021). As Gopal, Singh, and Aggarwal (2021) explained, "the course design of online classes need to provide essential details like course content, educational goals, course structure, and course output in a consistent manner so that students would find the e-learning system beneficial for them" (p. 6939).

The survey revealed faculty use a variety of techniques to adjust the design and delivery of their courses, such as incorporating more multimedia instruction, changing timed exams to short answer and essay responses, and increasing the use of web conferencing to conduct discussions. Several participants reported, since they were already designing according to best practices, their transition to ERT was seamless, and the participants would continue to apply the same design methods going forward. In the open-ended survey results, one instructor reported, "I am glad I set up all my courses during the breaks on Blackboard...so if we need to change, my students have all the content and know that there will be very little disruption. I think it is best for students to have certainty, transparency, and continuity."

Many of the revised ERT courses were updated to meet online teaching and learning standards and structured in a way that fostered student engagement. Professors were introduced to innovative best practices, such as the Backward Design model (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998), as well as the Quality Matters rubric, a research-based tool that measures specific course design criteria. According to Quality Matters (2020), instructors can "focus on organizing weekly modules/learning units into folders that contain the materials and assignment information students will need for that week" (p. 26). Additionally, Correia (2020) recommended that instructors reach out to professional instructional designers who can provide insights on planning, organizing, and developing learning experiences that better address all students' needs. One instructor who responded to the faculty survey described a change in course design: "I was actually quite happy with my design in Spring 2021 when compared with Spring 2020, I thought it was effective. The reason being that it was planned from the onset to be online." This sentiment showed that professional development programs can help to empower faculty to make the necessary changes to their courses that will engage students.

Planning Factors

During this ongoing pandemic, educational institutions discovered the need to plan for future emergencies. Many institutions developed institutional-wide instructional continuity plans (Evans et al., 2021; Hooker, 2020). An instructional continuity plan (ICP) is a framework that presents guidelines and expectations regarding how learners will continue receiving education during emergencies and is another source of empowerment for faculty. An ICP provides a blueprint for faculty on what to do if learning is disrupted. An ICP can include information about the technology platforms that will be used for remote learning, as well as how to communicate with instructors and administrators. It can also contain specific campus-wide information that will be helpful for students in the event of a catastrophe or emergency. For example, each instructor's ICP explains to learners how they can contact the instructor (email, via online office hours, through the learning management system), how often they need to log into the class via the learning management system, as well as which activities will be synchronous or asynchronous (Quality Matters, 2021). A strong ICP can allow instructors and learners to quickly pivot during the semester, and can be used for any type of emergency, such as a hurricane or snowstorm. This type of proactive plan is designed to empower all learners and faculty with the most optimal experience during a crisis. In response to developing an ICP, one faculty survey participant claimed, "My courses are set

up so that I can adapt quickly to an online learning format, which I had been able to do for some of my courses prior to the pandemic outbreak."

Resistance to Change

Although professors are returning to classrooms better equipped to teach their students than ever before, there is resistance to teaching in the new remote environments; some professors want to return to the way they taught pre-pandemic (Evans et al., 2021; Ramos-Pla, del Arco, & Alarcia, 2021). Some professors are insistent that they want to go back to the traditional way of course delivery since the switch to ERT was not an easy transition and they faced many struggles along the way, despite the obvious safety benefits teaching remotely offers during a pandemic. The survey revealed that 12 of the respondents worried about safety related to the spread of the virus when returning to the face-to-face classroom. Interestingly, one participant stressed the need for a coordinated strategy that, if indeed another emergency happens, would provide a seamless transition from face-to-face instruction to remote teaching and learning.

Instructional Factors

Gratz and Looney (2020) cited challenging instructional factors, including appropriateness of online teaching for certain disciplines, lack of preparation time, and not having the skills to teach online. Even though 89.7% of the faculty survey respondents indicated changes in the design and delivery of their courses, resistance to change going forward was unveiled. Eighteen percent of the faculty respondents indicated that they would not make any changes to their upcoming courses since they will return to traditional, fully in-person classroom teaching. For example, one subject claimed, "Now that we are back to face-to-face classes, I have returned to the original design – the courses are no different from before the pandemic."

Campus Factors

Higher education campuses are changing and evolving to meet the needs and desires of the current college student and educator (Evans et al., 2021). Technology is not going anywhere and needs to be embraced in order for individual institutions to compete in the higher education landscape. One has to look no further than an institution's course catalog to see the expanding number of courses being offered in hybrid or online formats. Colleges and universities are investing in new technologies, such as HyFlex equipment and technology laboratories, with the expectation that professors will be using these tools in their classrooms. There are two caveats to this technological upscaling. First, professors need training and support to learn how to use the new equipment and platforms. Secondly, faculty need to understand why the inclusion of new technology will empower them (Ali, 2020).

Training Factors

The rationale behind the adaptability of professors to a new technologically-advanced classroom is that faculty have already accomplished it during the pandemic, and therefore, they can do it again. Despite critical barriers (and out of necessity), instructors learned new techniques and figured out how to deliver high-quality lessons while still meeting standards and goals set forth by their institutions (Ghazi-Saidi et al., 2020). There is some truth to this logic, but it is

not as simple as providing faculty with technology tools and expecting all parties to 'just figure it out.' As Nworie (2021) explained,

> Faculty now need to be, and deserve to be, part of a professional development effort to improve on the emergency remote courses, acquiring the necessary skills for developing and delivering online and hybrid courses. Those faculty members who lacked prior online teaching experience before the pandemic will most especially need additional training to engage in online instruction. (para. 25)

Extensive training needs to continue to take place (Ali, 2020). As one professor who answered the faculty survey explained, "Teaching online takes a lot of time and preparation. All courses (face-to-face or online) should be designed in a way that assessments, activities, and learning objectives are aligned. If you have all materials online, switching to remote learning is seamless." Colleges and universities need to invest in training their faculty to be proficient in these new technological areas. This venture takes time. Reasonable goals need to be established for how long it will take to fully incorporate and infuse the new technology into the actual teaching that will occur. Hence, professors should not forget what they learned during this time period; rather, the instructors should utilize their new skills where appropriate, even in a face-to-face setting.

Furthermore, implementation of professional development plans and support for faculty is needed as changes to instruction occur. Results of the Fall 2021 faculty survey identified critical areas in need of support. 89.6% of the faculty respondents indicated that they would need additional support. Specifically, 17.9% of the faculty said they would need the assistance of instructional designers to help with the implementation of best teaching and learning practices; 33.3% of the faculty indicated that they would require the support of instructional technologists to assist with technical support related to the use of Blackboard; 25.6% of the faculty indicated that they would need help making their courses more accessible for diverse learners; and 12.8% of the faculty expressed that they would need help with the delivery of their courses. By providing robust and relevant professional development training opportunities, higher education institutions will empower their faculty to be able to handle the ever-changing educational landscape.

Technology Equity Issues

Technological equity is a multifaceted issue that is affecting faculty and students during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Evans et al., 2021). Digital disparities are prevalent in technology access and innovative e-learning tool use because of differences in socioeconomic status, ability level, racial and ethnic identification, geographic location, and handicapping condition (Brooks & Gierdowski, 2021). During a 2021 investigation regarding technology equity during the COVID–19 pandemic, Erza et al. (2021) found that three main equity factors caused technology equity disparities: 1) socioeconomic factors, 2) language factors, and 3) juggling factors. These factors were crucial during the switch to remote learning because they led to lower internet quality and access, disrupted online class discussions and flow, and diminished student concentration. It is important for instructors to understand these factors and take the necessary steps to address them when designing their courses.

The survey asked about future plans of faculty to make their courses more accessible. Five of the faculty respondents indicated that they would pre-record lectures and make them available on YouTube with closed captioning. Several participants stressed the importance of making course materials more digitally accessible using digital textbooks, accessible .pdf files, and the use of additional multimedia resources.

Socioeconomic Factors

Principally, socioeconomic status affected many students during this time. Digital inequalities, such as the digital divide, existed before the COVID-19 pandemic (Correia, 2020). However, these discrepancies came to the forefront of higher education during this crisis. When higher education institutions flipped to ERT during the initial stages of the pandemic, many students were unable to connect from home due to poor internet connections and inadequate equipment (Erza et al., 2021). In a study conducted by Brooks and Gierdowski (2021), 36% of respondents reported that they always, very often, or sometimes struggled to find an internet connection that supported their academic needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, 16% of students in rural areas very often or always struggled to find an internet connection suitable to complete their required academic coursework, while 3% of students without computers relied on their cell phones to access classroom resources. Also, living in an area without a strong mobile internet signal caused digital equity issues, whereupon 23% of respondents stated that they had to leave their homes in search of a strong internet connection. Instructors will need to have a plan for those students who have difficulty with accessing a reliable internet connection.

Language Factors

Another equity issue that many individuals encountered during this time was language equity. For the purpose of this research, language equity refers to digital communication between faculty and students (Evans et al., 2021; Erza et al., 2021). In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, many traditional faculty members did not have the skillset to effectively teach or communicate online (Perrotta & Bohan, 2020). Since many of these instructors were accustomed to in-person lectures and face-to-face conversations, they were unfamiliar with using newer technologies such as online discussion boards, Zoom video conferences, and mobile phone texting. Hence, professors did not have the technical vocabulary or online communication skills needed to connect with their students. A recent study on students' perception of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic indicated that teachers managing online learning were not in line with student expectations (Syauqi, Munadi, & Triyono, 2020). It was revealed that 38% of the students did not agree that teachers provided adequate mentoring, response, feedback, discussion, and clear information. Moreover, 52% of respondents reported that their experience in online learning did not increase in better knowledge, performance, productivity, and learning. Similarly, Means and Neisler (2021) found that students struggled to stay motivated without being able to talk to their instructors; students missed getting immediate instructor feedback and collaborating with their classmates. Instructors should provide ample opportunities for communication and collaboration during their course. Instructors can address this issue by using the communication and collaboration tools available to them in learning management systems such as Blackboard, Canvas, or Google Classroom. Instructors can use the announcements or email feature to send weekly messages, can use the discussion board to create discussion activities, or the journal tool for reflective writing exercises. Providing frequent and timely feedback can be facilitated by creating assignments and using the gradebook.

Juggling Factors

A final equity issue that was revealed during the initial COVID-19 pandemic was a newer term called juggling. According to Erza et al. (2021), juggling refers to the difficulties and demands faced by educators and students who attempted to juggle numerous demands during this time period. These demands included work responsibilities, family responsibilities, and academic workloads. Some instructors and students were taking care of family members or had children at home completing remote learning while they were working full-time jobs and managing their own health (Evans et al., 2021). Due to these intense juggling pressures, a reduced degree of concentration existed among these individuals. Similarly, the

survey revealed that approximately ten of the respondents indicated that their students struggled with balancing home and work life.

As the pandemic continues to affect all parts of life, educators need to be flexible and aware of this juggling phenomenon with students in their courses as well as themselves (Evans et al., 2021; Erza et al., 2021). In order to manage these juggling inequities, instructors may consider shortening the duration of synchronous sessions or shift to an asynchronous mode of instruction. Professors may also need to focus on their own time management and self-reflection skills. Finally, an open line of communication must exist between teachers and students when juggling factors start to impede performance. These small alterations can help all individuals involved in higher education to empower them to succeed.

Implications for Further Research

After considering the opportunities and successes that were revealed in this article, the authors concluded that there are implications for further research on the discussed topics. Although this article primarily focused on faculty perceptions and experiences, there is a need to examine other higher education populations, such as students, administrators, and other employees (e.g., administrative assistants, librarians, and instructional technology staff). These studies would be helpful to reveal additional ways to empower other higher education individuals who experienced successes and challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, their perspectives could be compared to the ones that faculty experienced for a richer view of these issues.

There is the need for an analysis of instructional factors that were affected by the crisis, specifically the development and use of ICPs. During the current early 2022 COVID-19 surge, many ICPs have been implemented on higher education campuses. After the plans were used, more research is warranted on their effectiveness. How did faculty, administrators, and students feel about the ICPs? How can the ICPs be improved? Since higher education administrators and instructors have been encouraged to develop and maintain strong ICPs that would help during future emergencies, a deeper dive into this topic would be a relevant one.

Another idea for a future study is connected to the topic of resistance to change. A study is warranted into understanding what makes certain professors unable or unwilling to adopt new practices and utilize new technological tools. Before we can help professors evolve their instruction, it is crucial that the barriers that are preventing professors from naturally evolving on their own are identified. Furthermore, after the pandemic experience, it is necessary to explore why professors choose to revert back to pre-pandemic teaching approaches without the inclusion of the successes they gained while teaching in a fully remote environment. An investigation is needed into these areas first to better direct how to support and empower professors to advance their teachings to meet the expectations of the technologically-savvy student.

Finally, more studies conducted in the area of technology equity, including socioeconomic factors, language factors, and juggling factors, are needed. There is the need for an in-depth analysis on how socioeconomic equity factors impacted student success in higher education during ERT and what changes faculty made to assist during this time. Additionally, these changes should be examined to measure their effectiveness during ERT. Since many faculty were unfamiliar with using new technologies during the COVID-19 crisis, a future research study could examine the impact instructional technology coaches had on faculty managing their online courses and communicating with students. Another future research study may examine the strategies used by faculty and students to manage their juggling equity factors during the crisis mode.

Conclusion

As the swift change that has already occurred in early 2022 has shown, this pandemic is not over. How can higher education instructors use what they have learned to empower themselves and prosper in the new world? As Glantz et al. (2021) explained, "the COVID-19 pandemic has created an opportunity for positive change in traditional teaching methods. These adaptations can redefine engagement in and out of class while allowing learners increased flexibility and offering instructors greater ability to reach their students" (para. 28). The most important change, regardless of the policies individual institutions are developing, is a shift in thinking about COVID-19 (Jaschik, 2022). Instead of thinking of COVID-19 as something that will pass, it may be wiser to start refocusing with the idea of how institutions can reinvent themselves in the COVID-19 era. As was discussed by the authors, an astute idea would be to focus on the successes in course design and delivery that faculty have encountered rather than the setbacks. Hopefully, instructors can use the ERT experience as a springboard for what is next in higher education. Today's overall changing higher education atmosphere is an exciting one, filled with promise and hope for empowerment and development of a more inclusive learning environment.

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