2020

Instructor-Initiated Communication and Student Success in Online High-Impact Community College Courses

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Walden University
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Abstract

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Tonia J. Benton

MA, University of Phoenix, 2008

BA, Converse College, 2004

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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February 2020

Abstract

The problem addressed in this study is low student success in online high-impact courses. Researchers have shown that instructor-initiated communication contributes to student satisfaction and success. The purpose of this study was to determine any relationship between instructor-initiated communication and student pass rates in online high-impact courses offered at a community college in the United States. The Community of Inquiry (CoI), which identifies teacher, social, and cognitive guidelines supporting learning experiences for students, was the theoretical foundation of the study. The research question was designed to explore relationships among the percentage of students passing a course with an A, B, or C and instructor-initiated communication as measured by the Teaching Presence instrument developed from CoI. Data from announcements, content, and email in 87 sections of online high-impact classes were analyzed using correlation and multiple regression. Success at the course level was the outcome variable. Predictor variables were ratings for instructor-initiated communication that correspond to teaching presence indicators. Results of descriptive analyses indicated that many instructors did not comply with the communication expectations at the college. The multiple linear regression yielded no statistically significant findings for communication variables, but results of Pearson's correlation coefficient indicated that both relevance and communication correlated with student success. A research-based professional development program was created based on the findings. Efforts towards improving the performance of instructors and students in online courses may lead to positive social change by enhancing student degree completion and increasing degree-holding citizens in the community; accountability personnel would welcome the efforts to improve.

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Dedication

To my father, who died before I began this journey, but whose constant presence reminds me never to give up and always to remember who I am. I still miss you every day, Daddy. To my big brother, who was excited to have a doctor in the family, but did not make it to the end. Little Sis made it, Big Brother; you and Daddy keep each other straight. To my mother, who taught me the importance of education and standing on my own two feet. I still want to be like you when I grow up, Ma. To my children, who have been supportive in spite of the fact that I have been in school their whole lives. Draven, your calm assurances have kept me going when I was ready to quit; I believe in you, too, baby. Sorchia, I see you coming after me; I pray you only make the good choices and not the bad. Valkyn, your creativity is only surpassed by your intellect; the world is at your fingertips. There is no way any mother could be more proud of her children. I love you all.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Section 1: The Problem

Regular and substantive instructor-initiated communication is the United States Department of Education (USDOE) expectation for instructor support in online classes (Mahaffie, 2014; Poulin & Davis, 2016). The communication must be (a) initiated by the instructors, (b) frequent, (c) of quality and of an academic nature, and (d) with the accredited instructor of the course (Poulin & Davis, 2016). The USDOE specifically noted that feedback on an assignment does not count as instructor-initiated communication (Mahaffie, 2014). Communication can be demonstrated through the instructor's use of announcements, content, and email in the learning management system (LMS). Even though the USDOE noted instructor-initiated communication as a requirement for online instructors, some instructors do not demonstrate instructor-initiated communication in their online classrooms (Garrison & Akyol, 2015). As more community colleges offer online high-impact courses, the role that instructor-initiated communication plays in student success may be important to explore.

Varying definitions for student success in higher education provide a moving target for academic leaders. Many reporting agencies define success by persistence or retention to degree attainment (or transfer) within a certain period of time (Kena et al., 2015; Wang, Wickersham, Lee, & Chan, 2018). Other researchers focus on persistence or retention from one year to the next (Wang et al., 2018). There even seems to be disagreement in the research over how to define persistence and retention: some researchers consider the terms interchangeable, some use *persistence* to define the end goal and *retention* to define the steps to persistence, and still others reverse the

relationship to have retention as the end goal and persistence as the steps to that goal (Hancock, 2018). Some researchers, however, limit the definition of success to completion of individual courses with a passing grade of C or better (Cutsinger et al., 2018; Gering et al., 2018).

Persistence to degree attainment is the ultimate goal and is a relevant definition of student success, and persistence to the next year is a step in the process, but these definitions are only representative of the end product. They offer little insight into the potential stumbling blocks to degree attainment faced by community college students in online high-impact courses. High-impact courses are those courses generally taken in the first year of college that are prerequisites for progression (Eagan & Jaeger, 2008). Because the majority of student attrition occurs in the first year of coursework (Martin, Galentino, & Townsend, 2014; Snyder, de Bray, & Dillow, 2016; Wang et al., 2018), for the purposes of this study, the best definition for student success would focus on students successfully completing individual courses with a grade of C or better.

Access to education does not equal success in attaining that education. For some community college students, the online environment can be an isolating experience that is not conducive to learning. Higher education places a high value on accountability. According to the human resource director at the online community college chosen for the study site, many institutions are moving to a performance-based system in which institutions and even faculty are assessed and earn funds based upon their course success rates. The low success rates of community college students in online high-impact courses are a problem facing academic leaders and faculty.

The Local Problem

The problem addressed in this study was that student success rates in online high-impact courses are nationally and locally low in community colleges in comparison to those of traditional face-to-face courses. The study site state is below the national average of 40% for successful degree attainment, and over 30% of the students in the state fall into the category of some college, but no degree (Lumina, 2015). Success rates over the last 5 school years at a 2-year, open-enrollment institution, which I will refer to as State Community College (SCC), have ranged between 46% and 59% in online high-impact courses, but between 57% and 66% in traditional face-to-face courses (ZogoTech, 2018). Table 1 compares success rates between online and traditional face-to-face classes for each of the last 5 years.

Table 1

SCC Five-Year Success Rates

Mode	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Face-to-face	66%	63%	57%	60%	57%
Online	59%	50%	48%	53%	46%

The differences in success rates between traditional face-to-face and online high-impact courses support that there is a local problem. The poor success rates of community college students in online high-impact courses is pertinent to study at the local level and could have strong positive social change implications for higher education leaders.

Degree attainment increases with the selectivity of the institution, and open enrollment community colleges have graduation rates as low as 32% (National Center for

Educational Statistics, 2018), yet community colleges serve 52% of all undergraduate students (Technical College System, 2018). The United States has fallen to 12th place in its percentage of degree-holding citizenry (USDOE, 2016), and degree completion is most frequently hampered early in the college career (Community Colleges for International Development, 2017). Ensuring broad access with high persistence through graduation has strong positive social change implications for community college stakeholders.

As the popularity of online courses continues to rise, it becomes ever more important for community colleges to meet the needs of online students. Two-year degrees are the highest level of education some students attain. In 2017, 87% of the adult U.S. population had a high school education or higher: 36% attained a bachelor's degree or higher, and 9% earned a 2-year degree (United States Census Bureau, 2019). As a result, only 41% of the total U.S. population earn degrees, and more than a quarter of the degree-earning population never earn higher than an associate degree. Ensuring that this subsection of the population has a degree that provides occupational and academic foundational knowledge benefits society as a whole.

Community colleges can serve as a bridge to those seeking higher degree attainment through transfer options, and the open access of community college is the only option many students have to degree attainment. Geographic location causes an additional barrier for students, and online classes may also be the only access many students have to higher education due to the location where they reside. In addition, the academic and personal challenges faced by many community college students tend to be

exacerbated in the online environment (Cicco, 2016; Hancock, 2018; Martin, Wang & Sadaf, 2018; Shelton, Jui-Long & Lowenthall, 2017; Zweig & Stafford, 2016), and faculty must be trained to facilitate these online courses and buy into the need to offer additional supports for the students.

Instructor-initiated communication is a key factor in promoting student success in online courses (Andrade, 2015; Brooman & Darwent, 2014; Fuentes, Alvadado, Berdan & Deangelo, 2014; Kezar & Maxey, 2014; Lundberg, 2014; Williamson et al., 2014; Wirt & Jaegar, 2014). As online courses continue to rise in popularity, they are also of special concern to student success. Online courses provide access to higher education for students who cannot or choose not to participate in traditional face-to-face classes. However, online courses come with their own problems. Students may not have the background in technology, college preparation, organization, or intrinsic drive that is often necessary to successfully complete an online class (Gillet-Swan, 2017; Martin et al., 2018; Shelton et al., 2017; Zweig & Stafford, 2016). Online instructors may not have the training in pedagogy or technology that is often necessary to facilitate an online class, which is more than just a traditional face-to-face class transferred to an electronic medium (Gillet-Swan, 2017; Humber, 2018). Students and instructors may not have the training to successfully complete and facilitate online courses.

Rationale

Community colleges serve almost half of the student population in the United States, yet less than half of community college students successfully complete all assigned developmental requirements, little more than a quarter successfully complete the

first college-level math course, and less than half successfully complete the first college-level English course (Community College Research Center, 2018). Community college students are also more likely to take online classes than are students at other schools (Ortegus, 2017), and success rates can be even lower in online classes than in other course modalities (Cicco, 2016; Kauffman, 2015; Shelton et al., 2017; Zweig & Stafford, 2016). As the dean of arts and sciences at the study site noted, community colleges support a large population with low first-year completion rates who frequently engage in online coursework, and there are strong positive social change implications for exploring ways to support students in online high-impact coursework.

The purpose of this correlational study was to determine the relationship between student success (as defined by passing the course with a C or better) and instructor-initiated communication in online high-impact classes. This study brought clarity to the gap in practice between the USDOE requirements for instructor-initiated communication in online courses (Poulin & Davis, 2016) and the failure of some instructors to demonstrate instructor-initiated communication in their online classrooms (Garrison & Akyol, 2015). By assessing the correlation between student success and instructor-initiated communication, practices that have the potential to support student success could contribute to positive social change. With the results of this study, I then created research-supported professional development (PD) for faculty that may help instructors meet expectations in high-impact courses.

Definition of Terms

The following are explanations of key terms used in the study:

Attrition: Not completing the course, the opposite of persistence (Wang et al., 2018).

Collaborative constructivism: A process for communication that involves people working together to derive meaning from the learning environment (Garrison et al., 2000).

Nontraditional student: Students who are any of the following: (a) older than 24, (b) has children, (c) does not attend school full-time, (d) has a job while in school (Dews, 2018).

Persistence: Completing the course, no matter the final grade (Wang et al., 2018).

Presence: To appear as a real person in spite of the limitations of the online environment (Hancock, 2018).

Retention: Successfully completing a course and re-enrolling the next term (Wang et al., 2018).

Student success: Completing the course with a C or better final grade (Cutsinger et al., 2018; Gering et al., 2018).

Teaching presence: The role of an online instructor to guide students' social and cognitive interaction. Conceptualized through the three indicators of course design, facilitation, and instruction (Garrison et al., 2000).

Significance of the Study

Online high-impact courses are especially important at community colleges because they serve a special population of students: students who may not qualify for select-admission 4-year institutions and nontraditional students who may have more

personal obstacles to degree attainment (Lorenzo, 2015; Hart et al., 2015; Tait, 2018; Wang et al., 2018). Failure to succeed in high-impact courses can also set a tone of failure for students new to higher education, fear of failure or lack of confidence in the ability to succeed becoming yet another barrier to degree completion (Mitchell & Hughes, 2014; Tait, 2018; Wang et al., 2018). The study site is a local, 2-year, open-enrollment institution referred to here as SCC. The study location is the largest of one group of state community colleges and serves a large geographical area. SCC offers certificates, diplomas, and degrees, most of which can be earned entirely or partially online.

This project addresses a gap in practice between USDOE expectations and instructor performance in higher education by focusing on instructor-initiated communication in the online high-impact classroom and its correlation to student success. Class-level aggregate, secondary data are useful when studying strategies that may support student success in the classroom, especially as it pertains to instructors assessing their own courses or having their courses assessed by administrators and outside sources focused on accountability. The study has the potential for positive social change because the findings suggest teaching strategies in online classes for practical application by instructors in the local setting. Improving the success of students in online courses decreases the chance of an intervention by the USDOE or other outside accountability organizations. Facilitating successful intervention strategies is not an exact science, but many believe in the necessity to train instructors in how to successfully facilitate online instruction in order to be engaging, maintain course standards, and address student needs

(Bigatel, 2015). Students and society benefit as more degree-holding citizenry enjoy economic stability.

Research Question and Hypotheses

Students, institutions of higher education, and the economy all suffer when students are not successful in the classroom, and instructor-initiated communication in the online classroom has been associated with higher course completion grades and lower dropout rates (Andrade, 2015; Wirt & Jaegar, 2014). To better understand the influence of instructor-initiated communication on successful course completion, I examined the relationship between student success and the rating and number of instances of instructor-initiated communication in announcements, content, and email. This quantitative correlational study, in alignment with the problem and the purpose of the study, was guided by the following research question:

RQ: To what extent do the ratings of instructor-initiated communication in announcements, content, and email in online high-impact classes at a community college predict student success (as determined by the percentage of students passing with an A, B, or C)?

The following null and alternative hypotheses were developed to answer the question:

H_0: There is no relationship between instructor-initiated communication and student success.

H_1: There is a relationship between instructor-initiated communication and student success.

Review of the Literature

The literature review includes references from databases such as Academic Search Complete, Communication and Mass Media Complete, Computers and Applied Sciences Complete, EBSCOhost, ED/IT Digital Library, Education Research Complete, Education Source, ERIC, ProQuest, SAGE, Science Direct, Teacher Reference Center, and Thoreau. Saturation was achieved using different combinations of search terms: *attrition, best practice, teaching presence, communication, community college, course completion, distance education, distance learning, dropout, engagement, facilitating discourse, first-year, foundation courses, freshmen, quit, high-impact courses, interaction, leave, new students, online courses, online education, online learning, persistence, presence, retention, strategies, success, technical college, two-year college,* and *withdraw*.

Information not related to higher education was removed from consideration, and there was a particular focus on peer-reviewed sources and seminal works. Opinion works and literature reviews were also removed. I limited the research to the years between 2014 and 2019. Citation mining from the references provided additional sources of literature, as did searching for particular authors frequently mentioned in the research. Saturation was reached when search results no longer provided new sources of information.

Theoretical Framework

The Community of Inquiry (CoI) provides a theoretical basis for studying online instructor-initiated communication. Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000) seminal

paper provided the foundation for the CoI framework, setting the CoI within a collaborative constructivist perspective, outlining the key categories of the three core elements of the CoI, and beginning to generate specific indicators for each. The collaborative constructionist perspective was traced back to Dewey' (1959) idea that learning requires both cognitive and social aspects.

Cognitive presence within the CoI can be considered critical thinking, both the reflective process and the communication of critical thought (Garrison et al., 2000). The idea of cognitive presence is linked to Dewey's (1933) practical inquiry model that cognition happens through perception of a triggering event, exploration of the idea through deliberation, integration of the idea through conceptualization, and resolution through action. Social presence can be considered the expression of humor and personal experience, the open exchange of ideas, and group cohesion within the educational environment (Garrison et al., 2000). Teaching presence, the critical third element that pushes the cognitive and social elements toward the intended educational outcomes, is divided into the three categories of building understanding, direct instruction, and instructional management (Garrison et al., 2000). Table 2 outlines the basic elements and categories of the CoI framework and highlights some potential indicators for each element.

Table 2

Initial Community of Inquiry Coding Template

Elements	Categories	Indicators (examples only)
Cognitive presence	Triggering event	Recognizing the problem Sense of puzzlement
	Exploration	Information exchange Discussion of ambiguities
	Integration	Connecting ideas Create solutions
	Resolution	Apply new ideas Assess solutions
Social presence	Emotional expression	Emoticons Autobiographical narratives
	Open communication	Risk-free expression Acknowledging others Being encouraging
	Group cohesion	Encouraging collaboration Helping Supporting
Teaching presence	Instructional management	Structuring content Setting discussion topics Establishing discussion groups
	Teaching presence	Sharing personal meaning Expressing agreement Seeking consensus
	Direct instruction	Focusing and pacing discussion Answering questions Diagnosing misconceptions Summarizing outcomes or issues

Note. Reprinted from "Critical Inquiry in a Text-Based Environment: Computer Conferencing in Higher Education," by D. R. Garrison, T. Anderson, and W. Archer, 2000, *Internet and Higher Education, 2*, pp. 102-103. CC-BY-SA.

Garrison et al. (2000) found the coding template valid and useful for "wide use and replication" (p. 103). The CoI instrument has been validated through principle component analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis (Arbaugh et al., 2008; Diaz et al., 2010; Kozan & Richardson, 2014). There is empirical support that the three-element CoI framework is valid as operationalized by the CoI instrument (Caskurlu, 2018) with teaching presence explaining over half of the variance within the three-element model (Arbaugh et al., 2008). There is also some support for a possible fourth element (Arbaugh et al., 2008; Diaz et al., 2010; Kozan & Richardson, 2014). However, researchers cannot agree on what that element may be, proposing learning presence (Hayes et al., 2015; Shea & Bidjerano, 2010; Shea et al., 2014), emotional presence (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012; Stenbom, Hrastinski, & Cleveland-Innes, 2016), autonomy presence (Lam, 2015), and agency presence (Anderson, 2016) as possible additions.

Content analysis was used in the first several years to explore individual presences (Anderson et al., 2001; Garrison et al., 2001; Rourke et al., 2001). Although the authors argued that all three elements are required in the educational experience, they also noted that teaching presence is the "binding element" (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 96) between cognitive and social presence and can be created and sustained through instructor-initiated communication. The CoI also offers instruments to study various elements of online courses, but teacher presence is most pertinent to this study of instructor-initiated communication.

Teaching Presence

The Teaching Presence Scale was developed with three categories of teaching presence indicators: design and organization, direct instruction, and facilitating discourse (Shea et al., 2003). Table 3 provides an overview of the Teaching Presence Scale with possible indicators.

Table 3

Teaching Presence Scale Items

Element	Indicator/survey question focus
A.1. Design	1. learning objectives 2. course overview 3. assignment instructions 4. planning/due dates/time 5. how to online 6. online interaction
A.2. Facilitating discourse	1. identifying problems 2. guiding 3. positivity/encouragement 4. learning climate 5. engagement/participation 6. time management
A.3. Direct instruction	1. questions 2. focus 3. helpful 4. correct misunderstandings 5. variety of sources

Note. Adapted from "A Study of Teaching Presence and Student Sense of Learning Community on Fully Online and Web-Enhanced College Courses," by P. Shea, C. S. Li, and A. Pickett, 2006, *Internet and Higher Education, 9*, pp. 175-190. CC-BY-SA.

Later factor analysis revealed a possibility of teaching presence with only two categories: design and organization and directed facilitation, direct instruction being a part of facilitation, revealing a possible need to refine the teaching presence element

(Shea et al., 2005). A principle coding analysis examining the Teaching Presence Scale culminated in a model for the teaching presence element that included only the two categories of design and directed facilitation (Shea et al., 2006). Researchers have since determined that the three-category model may be a better fit when surveying graduate students (Caskurlu, 2018; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2006; Garrison, 2007; Garrison et al., 2010), whereas the two-category model may be a better fit when surveying undergraduate students (Arbaugh, 2007; Caskurlu, 2018; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2006; Garrison, 2007; Garrison et al., 2010; Shea et al., 2006) because graduate students may be better able to differentiate between the categories than are undergraduate students (Garrison, 2007). However, this distinction is irrelevant if students are not being surveyed.

Teaching presence includes not only course design, but also instructor facilitation of the course. Facilitation can include the instructor actively looking for those who are not engaging, reinforcing active participation, and acknowledging students individually. Although facilitation can include such tasks as responding to student emails and grading assignments, the focus here is on instructor-initiated communication, specifically those instructor behaviors that serve to introduce students to the technology used in the course, acclimate them to the classroom and classroom expectations, provide organizational strategies, support their motivation by providing extrinsic motivation, offer information not contained in the predesigned course materials, and attempt to make the student feel the teacher is present and active in the classroom and attuned to student needs.

The most popular mediums through which instructors can direct facilitation within the LMS outside of course design include email, announcements, discussions, and

feedback. Although many consider feedback on assignments an important element of communication in the online classroom, the USDOE does not count feedback in its definition of instructor-initiated communication (Mahaffie, 2014). While much work has been done on teaching presence, it has often been focused on discussions, which are student-initiated (Kaul et al., 2018). Because feedback is not included in the USDOE definition for instructor-initiated communication and because discussions can be considered student-initiated, the focus of this study was on instructor use of announcements, content, and email within the LMS.

This study was grounded by a framework of teaching presence, an element from the CoI concept. The Teaching Presence Scale is applicable to assess the online classroom and "influences on student learning outcomes" (Caskurlu, 2018, p. 10). I operationalized teaching presence using a revised version of Shea, Li, and Pickett's (2006) CoI model instrument. Kaul, Aksela, and Wu (2018) pointed out its frequency of use for these methods and the frequency of successful revisions to the model in order to focus on specific elements in the survey.

Instructor communication with students is important in any class, but it is especially important in the online environment because students frequently do not have physical access to the instructor and must rely solely on electronic communication. Electronic means must be used to set course expectations, provide instruction, clarify expectations, submit work, offer feedback, and address questions or problems to a diverse group of students who likely have different learning styles (Hancock, 2018; Martin et al., 2018; Shelton et al., 2017). Written communication is the most popular method of

communication in the online classroom, but this type of communication is usually only preferred by visual learners (Hancock, 2018; Martin et al., 2018; Shelton et al., 2017). Electronic communication in the online classroom also does not offer the immediate feedback human beings get from facial expression and body language (Hancock, 2018; Martin et al., 2018; Shelton et al., 2017). Instructors in a traditional face-to-face class can often tell when a student is struggling just from being in the physical presence of that student. However, those important cues are missing in the online classroom, making online instructor-initiated communication even more important, especially in high-impact courses.

Review of the Broader Problem

The first year of college sees the highest rates of attrition, hence lower student success and completion. Many researchers noted that students struggle to progress through the first year of college (Martin et al., 2014; Snyder et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2018). Some showed age, race, or socio-economic status as important factors (Tait, 2018; Wang et al., 2018), but others pointed out that simply being a first-year student causes higher variance in success rate than any other categories including age and race (Gering et al., 2018). Failing to succeed is more pronounced in the first year of college than in any other year. High-impact courses are those courses taken in the first year of the college career that tend to have high enrollment, but low student success. They also function as prerequisites for progression to other classes. Success in high-impact courses is crucial because students cannot progress in their program before completing them.

Community colleges face extra challenges with student success because they often have fewer resources and report lower rates of student success rates compared to other post-secondary settings (Mitchell & Hughes, 2014; Tait, 2018; Wang et al., 2018). Most community colleges are open access institutions in comparison to most four-year colleges which only admit higher-level and academically better prepared students (Lorenzo, 2015; Tait, 2018). The Community College Resource Center (2018) noted that while community colleges serve more than half of the student population in the United States, less than half of the students who enroll in community colleges ever complete their developmental requirements and proceed to curriculum-level work, and only a little over a quarter of those go on to complete their first curriculum-level courses. Not only are community college degrees the only degree some students attain, but community colleges also serve as a bridge to a higher degree. The community college is important to study in relation to first-year student success.

Because community colleges support a diverse population, students have more personal stumbling blocks to degree attainment than other students. Community college students tend to have more diversity in personal characteristics (Wang, 2018). Time conflicts such as those between school, work, and family cause time poverty and have been found as impediments to success and completion, as has a longer time between high school and college (Lorenzo, 2015; Tait, 2018). Studies have also pointed to lack of technology and basic computer skills as barriers to student success, and poor communication between students and instructors can compound all of the reasons for withdrawal and lack of completion (Lorenzo, 2015). Compared to students at four-year

colleges, more community college students are part-time and distance students, who also tend to have lower success rates (Hart et al., 2015; Tait, 2018). Community colleges serve a diverse population of students with distinct impediments to degree attainment, so the diverse population of community college students represents a vulnerable population of students, and a better support structure could have positive social change implications for the families and communities of these students.

Online education is a growing trend in higher education, especially in community colleges, yet there are different nuances in defining online education. There is a higher population of nontraditional students than there are traditional students (those who come to college right after high school, traditional face-to-face on campus, and attend full time in pursuit of a bachelor's degree) enrolled in colleges than in the past (Cavanaugh & Jacquemin, 2015; National Adult Learner Coalition, 2017). Multiple researchers have highlighted the growth of online enrollment (Allen & Seaman, 2017; Allen et al., 2016; Almeda et al., 2018; Gering et al., 2018). Some even found the growth rate of online college classes exceeds the growth rate of those going to college (Allen & Seaman, 2015; Vang, 2018), that online enrollment is growing while traditional face-to-face enrollment has decreased (Allen et al., 2016), and that nearly all community colleges offer online classes (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Students in community colleges also are more likely than others to take online classes (Cutsinger et al., 2018; Ortagus, 2017). Traditional campus-based students are likely to take at least one online class (Allen & Seaman, 2017) during their college career.

Some definitions for online courses require as low as a 50% online component (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, 2014), others require the course to be fully online with no traditional face-to-face or synchronous requirements (Humber, 2018), and others range between the two (Allen et al., 2016). For the purposes of this study, online courses are those that are fully online with no synchronous or traditional face-to-face requirements because fully online courses provide access to higher education for students who cannot or choose not to participate in traditional face-to-face classes. As online courses continue to rise in popularity, they are of special concern to student success.

Online education offers conveniences for students, yet there are also challenges. Some researchers noted the lack of limiting distance and fewer time constraints and conveniences of online education (Hancock, 2018), yet others listed the same qualities of time constraints and the inability to meet live as challenges that can cause a sense of isolation (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016; Martin et al., 2018; Meyer, 2014). Many found that technology issues were challenges to online education (Gillet-Swan, 2017; Humber, 2018; Roby et al., 2013), yet even instructors who voice concerns over technology issues (Gillet-Swan, 2017; Humber, 2018) may not be receptive to allowing extra time for students to deal with the same (Gillet-Swan, 2017). There is also concern about the quality of online classes (Gurley, 2018; McDonald & Picciano, 2014; USDOE 2016), with some instructors not believing online instruction is as good as that of traditional face-to-face instruction (Nash, 2015).

There is also disagreement about whether students are as successful in online classes as in traditional face-to-face classes. Many studies reported that students do not do as well in online classes as in other modalities (Cicco, 2016; Kauffman, 2015; Shelton et al., 2017; Zweig & Stafford, 2016), making the online classroom important to study (Almeda et al., 2018; Allen & Seaman, 2015; Boton & Gregory, 2015: Lokken & Mullins, 2015). Kauffman (2015) found failure rates to be 10-50% higher in online classes, but Shelton (2017) only found a 10-20% rate of failure. Palacios (2016) found that while the major grades of online learners were similar to those of traditional face-to-face learners, the online learners failed to submit more work, which lowered both grade average and completion rate. Other studies found no differences in final grades success rates between online learners and traditional face-to-face learners, only that traditional face-to-face learners tended to be more evenly dispersed with online having greater distances between high grades and low grades (Hachey et al., 2013). Some research has even found online with higher success rates (Cavanaugh & Jacquemin, 2015), but that could be because they used student GPA and not course grades.

Students may perceive online classes as more convenient than traditional face-to-face classes because online classes do not require students to be in a particular location at a specific and predetermined time. Online classes also offer challenges because there is no clear answer as to whether or not online classes are as high quality as traditional face-to-face classes or whether online classes have lower success rates than traditional face-to-face classes. Issues with technology, isolation, and instructors who are unwilling to work with students on these issues could make online classes even more challenging. The

challenges with online education make the expectations and perceptions of students and instructors in the online classroom important to understand.

The expectations and perceptions of students who take online classes do not always align with the expectations and perceptions of online teachers. Some students see traditional face-to-face classes as more valuable than online (Ganesh et al., 2015), the student fearing that the material will be harder to understand without a physical teacher presence (Tchavsky et al., 2015). However, some students find traditional face-to-face classes to be a waste of time and online to be more efficient (Di & Jaggars, 2014), perceiving more equal opportunities for participation in online classes than in traditional face-to-face classes (Lorenzo, 2015). Students sometimes expect online classes to be easier than traditional face-to-face classes (Lorenzo, 2015), but instructors frequently see online as taking more time and effort (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Allen et al., 2015; Gillet-Swan, 2015).

Students frequently expect the instructor to be available for support 24 hours a day, much like they expect from other online services (Nash, 2015) while instructors usually insist on set working hours, some with options for appointments at other times (Community College Research Center, 2013). Instructors tend to see themselves as facilitators of learning (Welch et al., 2015), but students tend to see the instructor as motivator and entertainer (Nash, 2015). Some students find technology, pedagogy, and communication most important (Welch et al., 2015), yet instructors find their own expertise most important (Welch et al., 2015). Students see online as teaching themselves, in spite of high levels of teacher presence (Gering et al., 2018). These

students consider anything they have to read as having to teach themselves but consider watching video as being taught (Gering et al., 2018).

Instructors often attribute student dropout to personal student issues (Allen et al., 2015), yet students attribute it to teachers (Gaytan, 2013; Gaytan, 2015). Differences in expectations and perceptions could shed light on student success issues. However, these studies demonstrate that just studying the expectations and perceptions of either instructors or students (or even both) may not offer a clear or objective picture of student success because there tends to not be much agreement between students and teachers. While instructors and students do not always agree on expectations and perceptions of online classes, they tend to agree that instructor-initiated communication in the online classroom is important.

Researchers, practitioners, and students generally agree that instructor-initiated communication with students is important, but do not agree on how effective it is. Many find that instructor-initiated communication is imperative to student success (Andrade, 2015; Brooman & Darwent, 2014; Fuentes et al., 2014; Kezar & Maxey, 2014; Lundberg, 2014; Williamson et al., 2014; Wirt & Jaegar, 2014). Students also claimed to be concerned with the level of instructor-initiated communication in the classroom (Cutsinger et al., 2018; Di & Jaggars, 2014; Quieros & de Villiers, 2016; Tichavsky et al., 2015), but research results do not necessarily support this claim.

When studying online and traditional face-to-face classes at the same time, some researchers found no difference in student perception of instructor-initiated communication between traditional face-to-face and online courses (Cutsinger et al.,

2018), but found significant correlations when only looking at online classes (Bowers & Kumar, 2015; Cutsinger et al., 2018). Yet others find only a weak correlation (Hancock, 2018). Some attribute differences to the students' comfort with online classes, finding that the more online classes a student has taken, the more satisfaction students perceive in those classes (Platt et al., 2014). Research has found teaching presence to be a predictor of both student satisfaction and student perceived learning (Caskurlu, 2018; Khalid & Quick, 2016). Instructor-initiated communication is important to student success.

Implications

Online high-impact courses are important to study because community colleges support a large population with low first-year completion rates who frequently engage in online coursework (Lorenzo, 2015; Hart et al., 2015; Tait, 2018; Wang et al., 2018). This project addresses a gap in practice in higher education by focusing on instructor-initiated communication in the online high-impact classroom and its correlation to student success. There are strong positive social change implications for exploring ways to support community college students in online high-impact coursework. Facilitating successful intervention strategies is not an exact science, but many believe in the necessity to train instructors in how to successfully facilitate online instruction to be engaging, maintain course standards, and address student needs (Bigatel, 2015). The results of this study were used to develop professional development. Students and society may benefit as more degree holding citizenry enjoy economic stability.

Summary

This section included evidence for (a) the problem at the local, state, and national level; (b) the key factor associated with the problem; (c) the rationale for and significance of the study; (d) the operational definitions of terms; (e) the research question and hypothesis; (f) the review of the literature; and (g) the implications of the literature.

The United States has fallen to 12th place for a degree-holding citizenry in comparison to other countries (USDOE, 2016). Community colleges serve more than half of the student population in the study site state (Technical College System, 2018), but graduation rates for open-enrollment community college students are below 32% (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). First-year high-impact courses have been found to be of particular difficulty for students (Martin et al., 2014; Snyder et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2018), making high-impact courses important to study. Online classes have been found to be a growing trend (Allen & Seaman, 2017; Allen et al., 2016; Almeda et al., 2018; Gering et al., 2018) and also of particular difficulty for students (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016; Martin et al., 2018; Meyer, 2014), making online high-impact courses important to study. Success rates in online high-impacts courses at SCC in 2017-2018 were below 50% (ZogoTech, 2018), and instructor-initiated communication is a key factor for student success (Andrade, 2015; Cutsinger et al., 2018).

This study brought clarity to and added to the research on the problem of low student success by assessing instructor-initiated communication and its relation to student success in online high-impact courses. By assessing the correlation between student success and instructor-initiated communication, practices that have the potential to

support student success could contribute to positive social change. The results were used to develop professional development.

Section 2: The Methodology

Success rates consistently below 60% in online high-impact courses at SCC are a local problem that needs study. The rising number of students enrolling in online coursework and decreasing national degree attainment in comparison to other countries support the local problem. Instructor-initiated communication has been found to be a contributor to student satisfaction and success, so the purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between instructor-initiated communication and students passing an online high-impact course with a C or better.

Research Design and Approach

The research design strategy was quantitative and correlational. In order for a research study to produce meaningful results, the researcher must choose an appropriate methodology for the research questions (Vogt, 2007). Quantitative research can establish patterns and variable causality (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative researchers test theories by exploring the relationships among variables (Creswell, 2009). Relationship studies include the following characteristics: (a) at least two potentially related variables, (b) one group of participants, no control group, (c) one-time data collection, (d) individual scores for each variable, and (e) pair-wise statistical tests to calculate correlations between variables (Lodico et al., 2010). In correlation studies, researchers focus on the magnitude and direction of relationships between variables (Lodico et al., 2010). A quantitative correlation design fits this study because variables are not controlled, and the purpose of the study is to identify and describe relationships between the variables. The correlational aspects allow the measuring and examination of more than two variables and of the

strengths of the relationship among these variables. Quantitative researchers often form a hypothesis, collect and analyze numeric data, and then decide whether to accept or reject the hypothesis (Lodico et al., 2010). The quantitative correlational design allows for testing the hypothesis and determining the relationship between instructor-initiated communication and students passing an online high-impact course with a C or better. This approach allows for analyzing different components of instructor-initiated communication and if student success correlates to any.

Setting and Sample

SCC is a local, 2-year, open-enrollment institution. It is the largest of one group of state community colleges and serves a large geographical area. SCC offers certificates, diplomas, and degrees, most of which can be earned entirely or partially online. It has a large and growing dual enrollment program through which high school students earn college credit at the same time as earning high school credits, allowing some students to graduate with an associate degree at the same time they graduate with their high school diploma. The institution also has close ties with businesses throughout the service area, offering certificates and degrees that lead to direct hire agreements for graduating students in certain programs of study.

The population of interest in this study includes 211 sections of online high-impact courses (a high-impact course being a typical first-year course, a prerequisite to one or more courses, and with student success rates of 65% or less) offered by the study site in the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019 school years. The following courses are online high-impact courses offered at the study

site: ENG 100, ENG 101, ENG 165, MAT 152, MAT 101, and MAT 120. Each course offered has multiple sections so that no section is overloaded with students. Over the school years between 2013 and 2019, there were a combined total of 211 sections of high-impact courses offered by the study site.

The proposed study sample $N = 87$ are all sections of online high-impact courses offered by the study site in the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years. To be included in the study, the section had to be in session during Fall 2017, Spring 2018, Summer 2018, Fall 2018, Spring 2019, or Summer 2019, had to be from one of the six high-impact courses, and had to be assessed by the committee at SCC. I excluded any courses that did not fit these parameters. This purposeful nonprobability sample (Lodico et al., 2010) was chosen because the sample is a complete data set collected by the study site and likely represents the most currently available faculty knowledge and/or training. A population of 211 sections and a sample of 87 sections has a confidence level of 95% with an initial +/- 8 confidence interval (Creative Research Systems, 2012).

Recruitment was not relevant to the study because I used secondary archival data that is readily available due to the culture of transparency at the study site. I had no interest in collecting information on any individuals, be they students or instructors, and the data set did not include any names of instructors or students. Instead, the focus was on the average success rate for a course and elements of teaching presence in a course.

Instruments and Materials

The outcome variable is aggregate course success rates. I collected data on success rates from the ZogoTech database at the study site, specifically the success rate for a course (percentage of students passing the course with an A, B, or C).

The predictor variables measure the ratings for occurrences of instructor-initiated communication that correspond to teaching presence indicators in the course announcements, content, and email. The predictor variables are all present in the secondary data sets collected by a committee at the study site that were generated as a byproduct of regular organization operations and were measured by being present in the course or not present in the course.

The data collection instrument for the predictor variables was the Teaching Presence Scale (Shea et al., 2006) from the CoI questionnaire (Arbaugh et al., 2008), which is available for use under Creative Commons license (CC-BY-SA). The instrument is appropriate to the study because its purpose is to measure teaching presence in online courses (Kaul et al., 2018). Multiple studies have found it to be a reliable instrument (Arbaugh et al., 2008; Kaul et al., 2018; Shea et al., 2006; Swan et al., 2008).

Appendix B contains the Teaching Presence Scale Instrument (Shea et al., 2006). Appendix C contains the Online Quality Course Rubric used by the committee at SCC to assess online classes. Table 4 contains the indicator from the Teaching Presence Scale Instrument in the left column and the right column aligns it with how the information was rated by the study site committee using the SCC Online Quality Course Rubric. Because the focus of this study is on instructor-initiated communication, only elements from the

Facilitating Discourse section of the instrument were used. Any elements from the SCC Online Quality Course Rubric that did not align with the Facilitating Discourse section of the Teaching Presence Scale were not included.

Table 4

Teaching Presence Scale Alignment with Secondary Data Collected

Teaching Presence Scale Indicator	Teaching Presence Rated/Coded at SCC
(A2.1) Identify problems.	Address problems in Announcements. Address problems in Email.
(A2.2) Guide understanding course topics.	Instructions and Grading criteria posted for each assignment.
(A2.3) Encouraging, helpful, and positive attitude.	The instructor was helpful/positive in Announcements. The instructor was helpful/positive in Email.
(A2.4) Encourage exploring new concepts.	Information on how activities are relevant.
(A2.5) Promote engagement and dialogue.	Students required to interact.
(A2.6) Keep students on task.	The instructor used reminders in Announcements. The instructor used reminders in Email.

Note. From "A Study of Teaching Presence and Student Sense of Learning Community on Fully Online and Web-Enhanced College Courses," by P. Shea, C. S. Li, and A. Pickett, 2006, *Internet and Higher Education, 9,* pp. 175-190. CC-BY-SA.

According to the chair of the Online Review Committee at the study site, for a course to be assessed for an indicator, three members of the committee were required to be in a room assessing the course and all three had to agree with the assessment. To complete the assessment, each course was opened in the LMS. Ratings for indicators were based upon a *Yes/No* response; each indicator was either noted in the course or not noted in the course.

I considered that my alignment between the Teaching Presence Scale and the Online Rubric may not have maintained internal validity, so I conducted Cronbach's Alpha on the instrument. To revalidate that the Facilitating Discourse section of the Teaching Presence Scale aligned with the Online Review Rubric, Cronbach's alpha was calculated (Vogt, 2007). Cronbach's Alpha was .744, and because Cronbach's alpha should be above .7, the instrument is internally valid.

Data Collection and Analysis

After receiving IRB approval (08-20-19-0659990), I collected data from the SCC ZogoTech database on success rates for the 87 courses in the sample. The raw data are stored on a password-protected laptop and on a flash drive in a locked file cabinet in my home. The data will be stored for 5 years and then destroyed.

Ratings for indicators are nominal dichotomous because a *yes* or *no* response is a label without a quantitative value. Ratings were quantified by assigning a value of 1 to a *yes* response and a value of 0 to a *no* response. Success rates are interval because a count offers insight into both order and difference.

Ratings were analyzed using IBM® SPSS (Version 25 for Windows). Each indicator was analyzed for central tendency and standard deviation. Pearson's correlation coefficient and multiple linear regression analysis were used to examine relationships correlations between and among the elements of teaching presence (each row from Table 4) in an individual course and the percentage of students passing the course with an A, B, or C.

Assumptions and Limitations

The assumption is that the secondary data available from the study site were the best sample for the purposes of the study because they represented the current professional development of the instructors. The study was limited by the courses reviewed at the study site during Summer 2018 and Summer 2019 using the 2017 Online Quality Review Rubric that aligns with the Teaching Presence Scale.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study included the average number of students passing online high-impact courses with an A, B, or C and the indicators of instructor-initiated communication in a local community college. Delimitations are that the courses had to be one of 87 online sections of ENG 100, ENG 101, ENG 165, MAT 152, MAT 101, or MAT 120 (not the original numbers of the courses).

Protection of Participants' Rights

The ZogoTech report that was used to attain course success rates did not include any information on any individual. The secondary data provided by the study site also did not contain any information on any individual person. For these reasons, consent, confidentiality, and protection are not applicable.

There is a slight possibility of harm to the study site. Results and/or implications from the study could have possible negative ramifications. However, the study site was fully informed about the study and provided consent because it found the risk of harm negligible in light of the potential good offered by the study. Since an interested person at the study site could potentially use the course sections to attempt to identify the

instructor, after data collection was completed, all courses were assigned a number that could not be used to identify the course. This step helped protect all individuals and their identities.

Data Analysis Results

After receiving IRB approval and approval from the study site, I collected data from the study site. Data on the predictor variables were provided by the study site in an Excel spreadsheet, and data on the outcome variable were provided by the study site in a ZogoTech report. Data were exported into IBM® SPSS version 25 for Windows. Predictor nominal dichotomous variables were entered as nominal with 0 for no and 1 for yes. The outcome variable was entered as scale.

The Pearson product-moment correlation requires that variables be scale variables (Kremelberg, 2010). However, point-biserial is a special case of the Pearson product-moment correlation that allows for comparing nominal dichotomous variables with scale variables (Kremelberg, 2010), so that is what was used in this study. There are some limiting factors to point-biserial correlation, and four assumptions should be met:

1. There should be one dichotomous and one scale variable, and this assumption was met;
2. The outcome variable should be normally distributed for each predictor variable;
3. There should not be any outliers for the predictor variables; and

4. The outcome variable should have equal variance for each predictor variable (Kremelberg, 2010). Table 5 summarizes the results of testing for these assumptions.

Table 5

Testing for Normal Distribution, Outliers, and Equal Variance

Indicator	Description	Shapiro-Wilk	Box plot outliers	Levene
A2.1a	Announcement: Identify problems	.898/.801	N28	.330
A2.1b	Email: Identify problems	.411/.257	Y28	.530
A2.2	Guide understanding course topics with instructions and grading criteria for each assignment.	.823/.918	N46	.415
A2.3a	Announcement: Encouraging, helpful,	.660/.409	N80	.475
A2.3b	and positive Email: Encouraging, helpful, and positive	.756/.411	Y28	.059
A2.4	Encourage exploring new concepts with assignments that are relevant activities.	.929/.928	None	.401
A2.5	Promote engagement and dialogue by requiring interaction.	.781/.848	None	.705
A2.6a	Keep students on task with reminders:	.984/.908	None	.046
A2.6b	Announcements/Email	.497/.261	Y80	.690

Testing for normal distribution is done with a Shapiro-Wilks test (Kremelberg, 2010). If the significance level is above .05, it is not significant, and the assumption of normal distribution has been met. The results for all of the predictor variables were above .05, so the assumption of normal distribution was met for these data. Testing for outliers is done with a scatter box plot (Kremelberg, 2010). Indicator A2.1a had one outlier in the no responses, and A2.1b had one outlier in the yes responses. A2.2 had one outlier in the

no responses. A2.3a had one outlier in the no responses and A2.3b had one outlier in the yes responses. A2.6b had one outlier in the yes responses. A2.4, A2.5, and A2.6a did not have any outliers.

Testing for equal variance is done with Levene's test for homogeneity of variance (Kremelberg, 2010). If the significance level is above .05, it is not significant, and the assumption of homogeneity of variance has been met. The results for A2.6a is .046, so the assumption has not been met for that variable. However, the results for the rest of the predictor variables were all above .05, so the assumption of normal distribution was met for those data.

Next, I found the descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. I also calculated Point-Biserial correlation with two-tailed significance so I could analyze the possibility of both positive and negative correlation between each element and success. The results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics and Point-Biserial Correlation

Indicator	Description	*M*	*SD*	*r*	*p*
A2.1a	Identify problems:	.37	.485	.253*	.018
A2.1b	Announcements/Email	.36	.482	.006	.955
A2.2	Guide understanding course topics with instructions and grading criteria for each assignment.	.75	.437	.132	.222
A2.3a	Encouraging, helpful, and positive	.28	.450	.128	.236
A2.3b	attitude: Announcements/Email	.33	.474	-.007	.950
A2.4	Encourage exploring new concepts with relevant activities.	.81	.399	.211*	.049
A2.5	Promote engagement and dialogue by requiring interaction.	.90	.31	.012	.909
A2.6a	Keep students on task with reminders:	.26	.444	.090	.405
A2.6b	Announcements/Email	.33	.474	.122	.259

The descriptive statistics show that out of the 87 courses in the sample, less than 50% met the expectations for A2.1 (identifying problems), A2.3 (being encouraging, helpful, and positive), and A2.6 (keeping students on task with reminders). The descriptive statistics also show that 75% or more met the expectations for A2.2 (guiding understanding by including instructions and grading criteria for each assignment), A2.4 (encouraging exploration of new concepts with relevant activities), and A2.5 (promoting engagement by requiring interaction). Identifying problems in announcements (indicator A2.1a) and encouraging exploration with relevant activities (indicator A2.4) had statistically significant correlations with success. I have used the two-tailed critical *t* value, which is more conservative than a one-tailed test and is generally preferred (Kremelberg, 2010). This means that the probability that the correlation is simply due to

error or chance is less than 0.5% (Kremelberg, 2010). Between .5 and 1 is a high correlation, between .3 and .49 is moderate, and below .29 is small (Lodico et al., 2010). Indicator A2.1a (identifying problems in announcements) has an *r* at .253, and indicator A2.4 (encouraging exploration with relevant activities) has an *r* at .211, so both have small correlations to success. No significant correlations between any of the other indicators and success were found.

Next, I conducted regression analysis to explore the data. Table 7 shows the results.

Table 7

Multiple Regression Results

Predictor	Standardized β	*p*	Adjusted R^2
A2.1a	.328	.061	.108
A2.1b	.203	.396	
A2.2	-.189	.214	
A2.3a	.242	.254	
A2.3b	-.728	.036	
A2.4	.262	.055	
A2.5	-.121	.378	
A2.6a	-.379	.081	
A2.6b	.705	.006	

The regression model explains 10.8% of the variance in the outcome variable. While R^2 may traditionally be used to explain the variance, the adjusted R^2 was used, since it is more conservative given the sample size. Standardized β was determined to be better to use because it standardizes the contributions of the variables, allowing for comparison between variables. Email reminders seem to have the greatest positive

contribution, followed by identifying problems in announcements, relevance, encouragement in announcements, and identifying problems in email. However, Email reminders is the only positive predictor variable that is statistically significant. The only other significant contribution seems to be a negative one from being encouraging in email.

There is also an issue with multicollinearity in the model. Two assumptions should be met for regression: little to no multicollinearity and residuals (Vogt, 2007). Both standard residuals and Cook's Distance are within range. The standard is between -2.399 and 2.318; between -3 and 3 is within limits. Cook's is between .000 and .073; nothing above 1 is within limits. Collinearity diagnostics, however, show that only A2.2, A2.4 and A2.5 are within tolerance levels of .5 or above. All of the variables that are divided between communication in email and announcements (A2.1, A2.3, and A2.6) are multicollinear, so the assumption is not met.

To combat the problem, I attempted several variations of deleting variables and combining variables. I included only A2.1a, A2.3a, and A2.6a, leaving out A2.1b, A2.3b, and A2.6b, but there was still multicollinearity between all of the variables. I included only A2.1b, A2.3b, and A2.6b, leaving out A2.1a, A2.3a, and A2.6a, but there was still multicollinearity. I created a scale variable by combining A2.1a and A2.1b into A2.1, combining A2.1a and A2.3b into A2.3, and by combining A2.6a and A2.6b into A2.6, but there was still multicollinearity between A2.3 and A2.6. Finally, I combined A2.1a, A2.3a, and A2.6a into Announcements (A), and I combined A2.1b, A2.3b, and A2.6b

into Email (E). The A and E variables did not show multicollinearity with any other variables, so I ran the regression. Table 8 shows the results.

Table 8

Multiple Regression with Multicolinearity Removed

Predictor	Standardized β	*p*	Adjusted R^2
A2.2	-.015	.913	.008
A2.3	-.144	.419	
A2.4	.182	.158	
A	.193	.203	
E	.138	.378	

Once the multicollinearity was addressed, the results were quite different. None of the *p* values demonstrate statistical significance. Since none of the *p* values are below .05, I am unable to reject the null hypotheses. None of the predictor variables predict student success in this model. Since there is little support that the independent variables predict the outcome variable, I decided to focus on the results of the correlations for my recommendations.

Discussion

The descriptive statistics demonstrate a lack of compliance on the part of instructors. Only three of the nine indicators had instructor compliance at 75% or above. This could indicate a potential problem with instructor buy-in and/or instructor training.

The correlation findings indicate that relevance and problem-solving in announcements are correlated positively with student success, even if they were not

predictive of success. However, the results do not mean correlation does not exist; it only means the analysis was unable to reject the null hypothesis with this particular sample.

The regression findings show that, in general, the variables did not predict student success in this study. Multiple linear regression analysis that included all of the variables indicated that email reminders and encouraging emails both predicted student success at statistically significant levels. I found it odd, however, that email reminders had a positive effect while encouraging emails had a negative effect. I found myself wondering how encouragement could negatively affect success. While the model indicated at a statistically significant level that 10 - 20% of the variance in student success could be attributed to the predictor variables, the full model had multiple instances of multicollinearity. When the multicollinearity was removed, the model was not statistically significant.

Conclusion

In this study, I investigated the relationships between student success and instructor-initiated communication. The findings show that there were small significant correlations between relevance of activities and success and between announcements that include problem-solving and success. No significant correlations were found between the rest of the indicators and success. The multiple regression analysis did not add information that was significant.

Given the number of studies that support the importance of instructor-initiated communication and its positive relationship to success, the significant correlations between two of the indicators in this study, and the percentage of courses in this study

that did not meet expectations on the study site's Online Review Rubric, professional development may be needed by instructors at the study site. The results of this study may guide the creation of professional development to encourage instructors at the study site to meet expectations for instructor-initiated communication in the online classroom.

Section 3: The Project

Instructors may have differing views on the purpose of specific courses in the curriculum. For this reason, some professional development (PD) focusing on curriculum alignment may be beneficial to begin the process towards relevance and adequate instructor-initiated communication in the classroom. This project involved the construction of a PD offering that would include two workshops in which instructors and program leaders have an opportunity to discuss the specific learning outcomes of their programs and alignment to the assessment in the six high-impact courses (ENG 100, ENG 101, ENG 165, MAT 152, MAT 101, and MAT 120). The PD would involve the instructors and decision-makers of those courses and would be supplemented with an online discussion forum for use between the workshops.

Instructors are not required to have training in course design or assessment best practices, and individual faculty members may have different views, even within departments, on the student learning objectives for specific courses. For this reason, some PD focusing on student learning objectives and assessments may be beneficial to align the basic course expectations for instructors within departments (e.g., Developmental English and Reading with English and Developmental Math with Math), continue the process towards relevance, and increase awareness of the necessity for adequate instructor-initiated communication in the classroom. This PD includes two workshops in which instructors meet with other instructors within their departments and discuss what is expected within the department for each course and participants are asked to engage in an online discussion forum for use between the workshops.

Instructors who have been in their role for a long time may become overly comfortable with the way they currently run their courses to want to redesign their online courses to meet the expectations of the Online Review Rubric, or they may lack training in how to do so. For this reason, some PD focusing on aligning courses with the Online Review Rubric may be beneficial to help instructors meet expectations of the study site's Online Review Rubric and bring courses one step closer to adequate instructor-initiated communication. The PD would include two workshops in which instructors would be working within groups to align courses with expectations and an online discussion forum for use between the workshops.

Instructors may have differing views on what constitutes instructor-initiated communication in the online classroom, or they may lack training in how to initiate and engage in communication beyond the minimal course expectations. For this reason, some PD focusing on instructor-initiated communication in announcements and email may be beneficial to help instructors meet requirements for instructor-initiated communication. The PD includes two workshops in which instructors share models and exemplars for how they initiate communication in email and announcements in their classrooms and an online discussion forum for use between the workshops. These documents would be used to create a repository that other new faculty could use to create their own emails and announcements that are personalized to their classrooms.

Rationale

The problem addressed in this study was that student success rates in online high-impact community colleges courses are nationally and locally low in comparison to those

of traditional face-to-face courses. The data revealed that many instructors are not meeting the expectations of the college in their course design. The data analysis showed a correlation between relevant content and student success. It also showed a correlation between student success and instructor-initiated communication focused on problem-solving in announcements. When faculty have strong examples and good models to use when creating course communication, instructors may be able to meet expectations more easily in high-impact courses.

I chose PD as a project because most college instructors are not provided formal training in curriculum, course, and instructional design (Al Chibani, 2018; Kirpalani, 2017). Faculty are hired based on being content-area experts (Al Chibani, 2018; Kirpalani, 2017). However, expertise in a content area does not immediately translate into being able to teach the material to others (Allas et al., 2017; Kirpalani, 2017). Instructors are not consistently implementing the PD they receive on course design into their courses, so the PD must be delivered in a way that maximizes instructor buy-in and provides a repository of useful exemplars and precomposed content that they can provide to learners with little effort.

The project addresses the problem in consideration of the data analysis by providing instructors with the time and training they need to implement research-supported transformational change in their online courses, including making content relevant to students and addressing problems through course announcements, which may improve student success. There are strong positive social change implications to ensuring that students have the best experience in the foundational elements of composition and

mathematical reasoning, as these skills provide the basis for multiple other assessments in community college settings.

Review of the Literature

To further explore the literature to create the project, I sought current scholarship from databases such as Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost, Education Research Complete, Education Source, ERIC, ProQuest, SAGE, Teacher Reference Center, and Thoreau. Saturation was achieved using different combinations of search terms in relation to the main search terms *relevance, curriculum, curriculum mapping, course design, instructional design, pedagogy* and *professional development*: *best practice, community college, assessment, engagement, interaction, strategies, technical college,* and *two-year college.*

To ensure alignment to best practices, my search focused on peer-reviewed sources and seminal works. Opinion works and literature reviews were removed to ensure that the recommendations were anchored in current research on the topic. To ensure currency, I limited the search to the years between 2015 and 2019. Citation mining from the references provided additional sources of literature, as did searching for particular authors frequently mentioned in the research. Saturation was reached when search results no longer provided new sources of information.

Relevance

Course relevance can be viewed from multiple lenses and perspectives. One lens through which to view it is a course's connection to a specific degree path. Students often question whether specific courses in their degree plans are necessary and relevant to their

degree completion (Dyrberg & Holmegaard, 2018; Fedesco et al., 2017; Pisarik & Whelchel, 2018). Course relevance can also be viewed through the lens of a course's assignments' connections to learning. Students question whether the assignments in a course are necessary and relevant to meeting course objectives (Fedesco et al., 2017; Pisarik & Whelchel, 2018). Because high-impact courses are frequently a prerequisite for other courses, course relevance can be seen through the lens of parallel courses. Students question how different courses are related and why courses repeat instruction (Dyrberg & Holmegaard, 2018). Another lens through which course relevance may be viewed is that of instructor behaviors. Students describe the experience of learning as more profound and lasting if the faculty can make the course relevant on a daily basis (Fedesco et al., 2017). Course relevance may also be viewed through the lens of personal connection to the content itself. Students seek an explicit connection of the course as relevant to their personal lives (Belet, 2018; Pisarik & Whelchel, 2018). Course relevance may have many considerations, but there is still a disconnect that can occur when mandated course content is not perceived as useful to the learner and the instructor is not able to increase student engagement in the material.

Relevance Disconnect

Often, faculty understand the content as core to student development, yet there is a disconnect between what educators and students view as relevant. The expectations of most students are for occupational relevance, but most college administrators expect relevance to liberal ideals of civic duty, communication, critical thinking, cultural awareness, and problem-solving (Pisarik & Whelchel, 2018). While students may find

these ideals relevant, they are not finding the correlation between the ideals and their coursework in alignment to an occupational goal (Pisarik & Whelchel, 2018). Student motivation for learning is directly tied to teaching strategies that promote these motivations (Dyrberg & Holmegaard, 2018), so content must focus more on the student's reason for learning rather than the instructor's reason for teaching.

The academic intent behind most first-year courses is to ensure the interdisciplinary base knowledge required for a student's chosen degree program (Dyrberg & Holmegaard, 2018). Math and English knowledge is anticipated to carry over into the other assessments that a student encounters in their program of study. However, the experience of most students is multidisciplinary, meaning there is no connection between courses in relation to each other or the program of study (Dyrberg & Holmegaard, 2018). This problem can be further exacerbated because instructors in specific disciplines do not often know much about what is being taught in other disciplines (Dyrberg & Holmegaard, 2018). This supports that college instructors' focus on content knowledge is not always in alignment with the students' focus on career relevance.

Barrier Courses

The courses required in degree programs may need attention. Students struggle to see the relevance of required courses to their program of study and career goals (Dyrberg & Holmegaard, 2018; Fedesco et al., 2017; Pisarik & Whelchel, 2018). Students feel held back by the number of courses they do not find to be relevant to their program of study (Dyrberg & Holmegaard, 2018; Pisarik & Whelchel, 2018). A repeated theme in one

study was students' perception that many courses were a waste of time (Dyrberg & Holmegaard, 2018). Students also see a problem with the lack of coherence between the courses they have to take, within and outside of their program of study (Dyrberg & Holmegaard, 2018; Fedesco et al., 2017; Pisarik & Whelchel, 2018). It may be possible to provide students with assessment options that align to their major program of study. Faculty collaboration could lead to better types of assessments for students focused on occupational goals.

Students express annoyance that they complete similar work in different classes, either at the same time or in different terms (Dyrberg & Holmegaard, 2018). This is likely exacerbated because "faculty rarely teach across disciplines" and "academic departments rarely collaborate" (Pisarik & Whelchel, 2018, p. 31), leaving students unable to recognize the skills of critical inquiry that are congruent and transferable across classes, majors, and disciplines. Many programs of study are "built on long-standing traditions" (Dyrberg & Holmegaard, 2018, p. 105) and difficult to change, but they must be addressed before focusing on teaching strategies. Once the degree plan (curriculum design) is revised to provide relevance, then course design can be revised.

Traditional College Instructor Training

Hiring requirements for college instructors are based upon content knowledge instead of course design or teaching skills (Allas et al., 2017; Al Chibani, 2018; Kirpalani, 2017). However, student perceptions of course design problems influence students' decisions to leave school more than the ability level of students (Dyrberg & Holmegaard, 2018). Dealing with students in many programs of study in first-year

courses can be problematic in course design Dyrberg & Holmegaard, 2018), so training is essential to ensure that courses are geared to student relevance between and within courses in the program of study rather than solely on content-knowledge-based instructor relevance.

Instructors with less experience are less likely to promote relevance in a course and being able to promote course relevance may be a skill which has to be developed through experience and professional development (Fedesco et al., 2017; Kirpalani, 2017). However, some colleges offer less than a day of formal training for new instructors, and most colleges offer no training at all, so using course design to promote relevance may be more practical than training individual instructors in the instructional practice (Fedesco et al., 2017). Adjunct instructors are often not included in or required to participate in professional development even though they form a larger group than full-time faculty (Crimmins, 2017; Golden, 2016; Kirpalani, 2017)). This leads to instructors teaching courses with no understanding of how the course fits into the overall curriculum (Crimmins, 2017). With expanding student diversity, there is greater need for instructors to move from instructor-centered to student-centered practices (Cheong, 2017). The continuing demand for oversight and outcomes-based learning drives the need for professional development in these areas (Cheong, 2017; Kirpalani, 2017). Professional development may be able to address relevance and compliance.

Professional Development Gaps

It has been found that prescriptive change does not always lead to practical change (Naidoo, 2016), so there is a need for consensus instead of top-down change

(Hanrahan, 2018; Roseler et al., 2018). Initiatives are often not aligned with best practices, training, or how instructors can create their own collaborations, agreements, and professional development (Kirpalani, 2017) with “an environment of shared vision” (Roseler et al., 2018, p. 83). The project addresses this concern by ensuring that all stakeholders have the opportunity to voice concerns, share exemplars, and provide assessment feedback to course designers.

In community college settings, the most common PD comes in the form of seminars and conferences through which instructors are “passive recipients of information” (Baustista et al., 2017, p. 456). Teachers tend to find that most PD is not relevant to them or their classes (Al Chibani, 2018; Bautista et al., 2017), and major course changes lead to difficulties in timing, redesign of lesson plans, and other instructional factors during the first implementation term (Fedesco et al., 2017). Failure of PD is often linked to the failure of instructors to implement the PD into practice (Andersson & Palm, 2018), so instructor buy-in matters.

While the expectations for instructor performance have moved from content knowledge expertise to include maintaining current knowledge of pedagogy, technology integration, and student-centered learning, professional development does not always provide enough training for instructors to implement change in the classroom (Al Chibani, 2018; Golden, 2016). The way colleges handle PD is very different across colleges (Cheong, 2017), but there are best-practices.

Professional Development Theory and Best Practice

PD can move instructors from teacher-centered to learner-centered (Al Chibani, 2018), and can have a lasting impact on both teaching and learning (Bautista et al., 2017). PD can help instructors rethink their current practices and beliefs, consider the exclusionary tradition of the education system in favor of those with privilege, and be more aware of how student learning is measured (Ballysingh et al., 2018). This re-learning allows discussion of past beliefs in relation to new content (Ballysingh et al., 2018). Interaction is at the core of teaching and professional development (Morris, 2017), and it has been shown to improve student outcomes (Andersson & Palm, 2018) by exposing instructors to new strategies and connections across departments that revise the "limited view of their role within the larger scheme" (Morris, 2017, p. 128). Best practice PD can foster continuous improvement, "challenge traditional notions of education," and help instructors recognize "contemporary meanings of learning and outcomes" assessment (Ballysingh et al., 2018, p. 102). Best practices include consideration of the community of practice (CoP) and the expectancy-value theory.

Wigfiled and Eccles (2000) offered the expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation (Andersson & Palm, 2018). It is based upon the notion that instructors' motivation to implement PD into practice is based upon their expectancy of success in learning and implementing the PD and upon their feelings about the cost, importance, interest, and usefulness of the PD (Andersson & Palm, 2018). PD must be practical, focused on student learning, based on research, and instructors need to be able to build on their existing courses rather than believing they will need to rewrite them (Roseler et al.,

2018). Low cost is a high indicator of future implementation, and the more difficult and time consuming a practice, the less likely instructors were to implement it alone outside of the PD time (Andersson & Palm, 2018). In light of the expectancy-value theory, the CoP may be a means to promote buy-in.

Lave and Wenger (1991) developed the CoP theory. It goes beyond the idea of PD in groups to include an "evolving learning partnership" (Golden, 2016, p. 86), a project deliverable, and assessment through reflection on practice. Three required components for a CoP are a shared expertise, interaction, and learning from each other that influences practice (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Certain themes are found by instructors involved in CoP PD: sharing practice, leading change, and support (Golden, 2016). CoP PD can help instructors be collaborative and transformational leaders in their own classes (Naidoo, 2016). The Community of Practice (CoP) that results from open discussions should follow the process through problem, inquiry, solution, action, and reflection (Allas, et al., 2017; Morris, 2017). There are three elements of learning: theoretical, practical, and reflective (Elvira et al., 2017). Consideration of the CoP leads to some best practices.

PD is not just a lecture and should be designed and prepared with curriculum, course, and instructional design concepts in mind. Theoretical PD learning requires early discussion of student learning outcomes (SLOs): both curriculum-level and course-level (Elvira et al., 2017). It is important to provide the theory and articulate the values behind the PD content (Naidoo, 2016). PD must describe SLOs as an "input or output" (Cheong, 2017, p. 7) behavior that quantifies meeting or exceeding the SLO through assessment

(Al Chibani, 2018). Designing the PD curriculum in light of SLOs and assessments throughout the PD curriculum is important to maintain relevance to the PD goals. From the PD SLOs and assessments, the PD curriculum can be broken down into PD courses that have their own SLOs and summative assessments.

PD course design takes the course SLOs and assessments and considers how best to present the learning experience to the faculty. PD must not focus on what is taught, but instead on what is being learned (Roseler et al., 2018). It should include both real situations and the link to teaching concepts (Allas et al., 2017). It can include guided questions, simulations, and reflections over long periods that go past simple recall into practical and theoretical reasoning (Ballysingh et al., 2018). PD design should include consideration of how people interact with each other to understand change, and control over learning must be maintained without dampening trust (Greenwood, 2019). PD should be scaffolded to allow for immediate workshop implementation, implementation across a long period of time, and presentations and reflections (Ballysingh et al., 2018). Planning course design moves into consideration of delivery and instructional design.

The CoP is an extended learning experience for professionals to learn from each other and build stronger practice through interaction and sharing of ideas. Practical PD learning requires repeated practice in differing contents to help students form a more critical knowledge than mere facts and to experience problem-solving (Elvira et al., 2017). The process through problem, inquiry, solution, action, and reflection is an iterative process that is organic, yet can be planned (Allas et al., 2017; Morris, 2017). Interaction is a key to successful PD.

Presentation of a problem can lead to discussion among professionals. An important tenant of PD is that it should allow faculty to create their own solutions in context with their individual needs in order to promote buy-in (Golden, 2016; Naidoo, 2016). It should illicit debate and discussion and should engage faculty with educational theory in a venue that allows for critical discourse over following popular trends (Naidoo, 2016). The ability of instructors to relax and participate during PD is helped by social interaction and group work (Greenwood, 2019).

Instructors must be allowed to build from the knowledge of other instructors in both the changes needed and the methods to do so (Morris, 2018). It is important to operationalize that uncertainty does not mean incompetence and disagreement does not mean disrespect because professional development is for professionals (Greenwood, 2019). The sense of control of each individual should be balanced with open consideration of the control of others and with an attitude of problem-solving and exploration of new ideas (Greenwood, 2019). Once involved in the problem-solving and discussion phase of PD, instructors need time to process the information.

Presentation of PD must consider time and active learning. PD should be extended over a period of time (Al Chibani, 2018; Bautista et al., 2017). PD lasting over a term or longer and including at least 20 contact hours are the most successful in fostering change (Bautista et al., 2017). Short periods of time are not enough time to implement material but planning for the next term works well (Andersson & Palm, 2018). Active learning and workshop time should be provided (Al Chibani, 2018; Bautista et al., 2017; Kirpalani, 2017). “Already burdened” (Hanrahan, 2018, p. 7) instructors appreciate time

to work on PD rather than adding to their load. Instructors noted the need for support of their professional identity and time to work during the PD as important for buying into the PD (Andersson & Palm, 2018). The action phase of the process must allow for instructors to experiment within the agreed-upon guidelines for objectives and assessments because there is no one best way "to turn the standards into ideal outcomes for students" (Hanrahan, 2018, p. 127). Active learning opportunities and time to process PD leads to reflection on practice.

Reflection opportunities should be provided regularly. Interaction allows discussion, problem-solving, and critical feedback (Ballysingh et al., 2018), but the individual construction of knowledge comes from reflection, allowing instructors to link PD knowledge with practical application (Allas et al., 2017; Golden, 2016; Kirpalani, 2017; Morris, 2017). Reflective PD learning requires students make connections between theory and practice, make connections with prior knowledge, find relevance in the knowledge, share knowledge with others to expand meaning, and self-monitor (Elvira et al., 2017). Reflection can connect theory with practice, but PD delivery method must be considered.

Live, online, and hybrid PD are all delivery options. Live PD allows for the sharing of ideas and examples, social interaction, instant help (Golden, 2016). Online PD may require extra training, and some faculty may not participate more than the minimum required, but it allows for engagement, convenience, and inquiry (Golden, 2016). Hybrid PD, however, may be the most beneficial and include the best of both worlds (Ballysingh

et al., 2018; Bautista et al., 2017; Golden, 2016). Consideration of CoP, expectancy-value, and delivery method lead to some PD best practices.

Best practices in PD development includes PD that is content-specific (applicable to individual classrooms), course-specific (instructors know their own SLOs for the PD), and instruction-specific (instructor reflection on how meeting the SLOs impact student learning in their classroom) (Bautista et al., 2017). Best practices in PD delivery include discussion, collegial sharing, hands-on activities, constructive collaboration, reflection, frequent contact over an extended period of time, opportunities to put theory into practice during and between meetings, frequent clarification of theory, and the follow up support needed to turn theory into practice (Andersson & Palm, 2018; Bautista et al., 2017). Consideration of best practices in PD connects type-specific PDs.

Curriculum Program Design Professional Development

The purpose of higher education is to develop student competence in both liberal arts skills and professional skills (Elvira et al., 2017). However, there is often conflict between college, department, and individual goals (Golden, 2016; Hanrahan, 2018). There can be different, even opposing, ideas on a topic within various areas of a college (Golden, 2016; Hanrahan, 2018). Differing expectation and lack of common goals between different parties can handicap a curriculum (Greenwood, 2019), so instructors must be able to collaborate across the school to create common goals (Bautista et al., 2017; Kirpalani, 2017), and conflict can be a crucial step in moving instructors past their old approaches (Ballysingh et al., 2018) and into a process to learning and building

community across the college (Golden, 2016; Kirpalani, 2017). Discussion about differing opinions and goals can lead to consensus and broadened views.

Curriculum, or program, design includes aligning course goals across programs and within a curriculum, explaining how a course fits within a program, explaining how a course leads student growth within a curriculum, explaining how a course develops student work skills, and explaining how a course builds on prior knowledge and meets students where they are (Kirpalani, 2017). Curriculum Design PD should allow instructors to discuss apprehensions, to consider how confusing current practices may be to students rather than how it works for the instructor, and to realize that instruction to meet agreed upon assessment criteria can vary considerably by instructor (Ballysingh et al., 2018). Forming partnerships between departments/programs can lead to designing practices that work across the curriculum, developing assessment measures that assess SLOs in a way that communicates how students are progressing in achievement of meeting the SLOs, and working together in a way that respects the professional knowledge of all participants (Ballysingh et al., 2018). Curriculum PD can help instructors see how their courses affect the college and students.

Instructors must focus on the needs and goals of the students rather than remaining in the "safety zone" (Morris, 2017, p. 124) of what and how they are used to teaching. Disagreements are inevitable, but still allow for all to be part of the decision making process (Morris, 2017). Instructors should be able to openly discuss what they do not know about other classes or the expectations others have for classes (Greenwood, 2019). They can then move into a negotiation phase of coming to an alignment of

expectations, SLOs, and assessments in order to ensure courses are assessing what needs to be assessed instead of what instructors want to teach (Ballysingh et al., 2018; Bautista et al., 2017; Greenwood, 2019). The focus must be on SLOs (Andersson & Palm, 2018), and groups must reach agreement on SLOs and assessments across programs (Ballysingh et al., 2018). Learning objectives help students act toward their own learning (Ballysingh et al., 2018). Content knowledge is not in question, but pedagogy knowledge can be improved (Kirpalani, 2017). Curriculum PD can provide for better curriculum design and alignment.

Course Design Professional Development

Curriculum Design PD involves discussion across the college to create common goals and discuss SLO needs for each course that aligns with those common goals, but Curriculum Design PD takes those SLOs and further refines them within departments. Instructors within content areas to collaborate to build professional learning communities (Bautista et al., 2017). It is important to have both content knowledge and knowledge of how to teach that content (Allas et al., 2017; Cheong, 2017; Kirpalani, 2017). Those who teach precollege level are required to have teacher training and often experience a gap between the theory they have learning and practical application in the classroom, meaning they are not adequately prepared to teach (Allas et al., 2017). This practical teaching knowledge should be at the forefront of PD (Allas et al., 2017), and course design PD can provide this knowledge and opportunity to process and practice it.

Course design includes writing student learning outcomes (SLOs) that align with expectations, developing assessments, sharing SLO progress, and maintaining

consistency (Kirpalani, 2017). It is important for students to be able to perceive how much they are learning in a course and how to apply that knowledge outside of the course (Fedesco et al., 2017). Course directors should meet with those over particular programs to determine course expectations (Fedesco et al., 2017) to determine what exactly the program directors think the course teaches students in their program or what is important for students to be successful in their program.

Course design should link assignments/assessments to majors because students are often not able to transfer content knowledge from one course into another (Fedesco et al., 2017), so course design should help student see how the content is relevant and how to use the information in other classes. Co design should also link daily work and feedback with future work; relevance can be increased when students know previous work and feedback linked to future work (Fedesco et al., 2017). Including these methods to improve relevance in the instructional materials decreases the necessity of individual instructors promoting relevance daily (Fedesco et al., 2017) so that it is not a process that must be repeated often or causes frequent extra work on the part of the instructor.

Summative assessments need to be developed to assess SLOs (Andersson & Palm, 2018; Ballysingh et al., 2018), and there should be levels for students to reach the outcomes (Andersson & Palm, 2018). PD must discuss purpose of assessments to evaluate SLOs, develop a wide range of assessment tools, think critically on how assessment may marginalize any learners, and consider how assessment of outcomes is shared where grades are linked to outcomes, not assignments (Ballysingh et al., 2018). Only after SLOs and summative assessments are made can instruction be developed, and

instructors should be able to use their own practical knowledge and autonomy on how to teach students from agreed-upon objectives and summative assessments (Allas et al., 2017). Aligning SLOs and assessments across courses still allows for autonomy in instructional design.

Instructional Design Professional Development

Changing from the traditional role of lecturer to that of facilitator can be difficult for all levels of instructors (Cheong, 2017). Instructional design includes organizing instruction, utilizing multiple instructional methods, encouraging critical thinking, motivating students, providing meaningful and timely feedback, and helping students overcome difficulties (Kirpalani, 2017). Design of instruction should be student-focused and based on student needs (Andersson & Palm, 2018) to ensure high-impact courses are teaching what is needed without focusing overmuch on what is not needed (Hanrahan, 2018). Creating instruction from assessment can be difficult (Taras & Davies, 2017), but it helps to ensure the focus is on student need instead of what instructors are used to doing.

Instruction can be designed to help students become more responsible for their own learning so that students begin to see where they need help and improvement and become active in their own understanding (Andersson & Palm, 2018). Guiding questions for instructional design can include when and what types of feedback best helps students master the SLOs, how to develop instruction that allow students with differing learning styles to demonstrate meeting SLOs , and how to include opportunities for critical thinking and problem-solving (Kirpalani, 2017). Instructional design can include using

surveys to assess learning quickly and formatively to gauge student need in class so instruction can be modified on a just-in-time basis and to let student see where they are in reaching the outcomes (Andersson & Palm, 2018). Formative assessment includes sharing outcomes and success criteria so instructors and students have a "mutual understanding" (Andersson & Palm, 2018, p. 580) of outcomes, developing tasks that provide evidence of student learning, providing interactive feedback to help students progress, differentiating instruction, and engaging students in meeting goals (Andersson & Palm, 2018; Taras & Davies, 2017). Knowledge is received and processed differently by different people (Schwimmer, 2017), and instructional design must consider that.

Project Description

Based on the data analysis and the literature review on PD, the project is a year-long PD that is divided into four hybrid modules, each including two live workshops and an online forum. This area discusses needed resources, existing supports, potential barriers, implementation proposal with timeline, and the roles and responsibilities of those involved.

Resources and Supports

There are various needed resources. For the first PD module, a large conference room is needed that has tables for work groups and a SMART board connected to a computer. A room that suits this purpose exists in the administration building and can be reserved. For the last three PD modules a computer classroom with a SMART board connected to a computer is be needed. Multiple classrooms meet this requirement and can be reserved. An LMS course shell is needed for each of the four modules, and this can be

requested through the D2L guru. A small notebook and pen is needed for participants and can be requested through the PD department as take-home gifts for the participants. Both the PD department and SCC administration are in full support of PD that may improve instruction.

Barriers and Solutions

There are potential barriers, and solutions should be considered. One issue could be scheduling conflicts. If PD is provided when courses are in session, there is the chance instructors are in class and unable to attend. If PD is provided during the summer session, there is the same problem with the added risk of instructors taking off for the summer. Scheduling PD during administrative days surrounding the beginning and ending of class terms offers the best solution to scheduling issues.

Failing to push past the conflict stage and gaining instructor buy-in is another potential barrier. Instructors are busy and may see the PD as just another thing to add to their list of things to do. Like most problems, it may not be possible to avoid this issue completely, but the risk can be minimized with careful attention to planning, allowing conflicts to be heard with empathy, and providing opportunity for instructors to reflect upon their feelings and collaborate on how to come to consensus.

Another potential barrier is failure of faculty to participate in the online forums between workshop sessions. This can be offset by developing assignment folders for reflection and linking the PD assessments to faculty annual reviews.

Project and Timeline

The project (Appendix A) lasts a year and a half and consists of four PD modules, each including two workshop days and an online forum. In each module, the first workshop provides a problem, discussion time, collaborative group work, and two formative assessments. The online forum provides an extended time for instructors to communicate on the topic and a formative assessment. Then, the second workshop provides for collaborative group work, solutions, a formative assessment and summative assessment.

The Curriculum Design Module provides instructors and program leaders with an opportunity to discuss the needs of their programs from the six high-impact courses (ENG 100, ENG 101, ENG 165, MAT 152, MAT 101, and MAT 120). This begins the process of making courses relevant. The college-wide PD begins with a workshop day in early January before spring classes begin that offers insight into potential problems with course alignment in degree programs. The online forum allows four months between January and April for all to interact before the next phase of training. The online forum course concludes with a list of what the college as a whole expects students to be able to do at the end of specific high-impact courses and why the courses are relevant to the degree programs. The second workshop in May begins with the list of expectations as the problem to address and ends with clearer expectations and ideas for SLOs across programs. The online forum remains open indefinitely to promote a CoP.

The Course Design Module provides instructors of high-impact courses with an opportunity to focus on student learning objectives and assessments that may be

beneficial to align the basic course expectations for instructors within departments. Developmental English and Reading teams with the English department and Developmental Math teams with the Math department. This continues the process towards relevance and begins the process towards adequate instructor-initiated communication in the classroom. Course design best practices should make teacher presence more intuitive and easy to implement.

This department specific PD begins with a workshop day in May, soon after the end of the previous module, that offers insight into potential problems with course alignment in the degree programs and within the department. The online forum allows three months between May and July for all to interact before the next phase of training. The online forum course concludes with a list of possible SLOs for each high-impact course and ideas for assessing each SLO. The second workshop in August begins with the list of potential SLOs and assessments as the problem to address and ends with consensus on SLOs and summative assessments. The online forum remains open indefinitely to promote a CoP and continuous improvement.

The Course to Instructional Design Module provides help to instructors on meeting the expectations of the study site's Online Review Rubric and bringing courses closer to adequate instructor-initiated communication. This department specific PD begins with a workshop day in August, soon after the end of the previous module, that offers insight into potential problems with course consistency and alignment with the Online Review Rubric. The online forum allows four months between August and November for all to interact before the next phase of training. The online forum course

concludes with a list of ways to maintain consistency for students in each high-impact course and ideas for aligning courses with the Online Review Rubric. The second workshop in December begins with the list of ways to maintain consistency and alignment and ends with an online shell for each high-impact course that is consistent and aligned with the Online Review Rubric. The online forum remains open indefinitely to promote a CoP and continuous improvement, and to provide the space to create a repository of exemplar announcements and other course content.

The Instructional Design Module provides help to instructors in meeting requirements for instructor-initiated communication. This department specific PD begins with a workshop day in January that offers insight into potential problems with instructor-initiated communication. The online forum allows time between January and April for all to interact before the next phase of training. The online forum course concludes with a list of ways to improve instructor-initiated communication. The second workshop in December begins with the list of ways to improve instructor-initiated communication and ends with individual instructors documenting changes to implement in their courses. The online forum remains open indefinitely to promote a CoP and continuous improvement.

Roles and Responsibilities

My role is to develop, deliver and assess the PD; this includes scheduling the rooms, requesting course shells and other materials, and collaborating with the PD department and administration. The D2L guru creates four course shells as needed for the PD and six course shells for the instructors' group work in the third PD module. The role

of faculty is to complete the PD and assessments. The PD department reviews the PD modules before delivery. The administration support the PD.

Project Evaluation Plan

There are multiple evaluations placed strategically throughout the four PD modules. Each of the four modules includes a summative assessment aligned with the module's SLOs. The first module summative output will be clearer expectations and ideas for SLOs across programs. The second module summative output will be departmental consensus on SLOs and summative assessments in each of the six high-impact courses. The third module summative output will be an online shell for each high-impact course that is consistent and aligned with the Online Review Rubric. The fourth module summative assessment will be instructors documenting changes to implement in their courses. The final summative assessment of the complete PD series will be each instructor of high-impact courses reporting out to their department heads as part of the annual review.

Formative assessments are also planned regularly within each PD module. The first workshop in each module will end with a group project output and a personal reflection. Each online component will include discussion and reflection. Each second workshop will include a personal reflection. The end of the PD series will also include a personal reflection. The formative assessments allow for introspection and consideration of how the PD benefits each individual and their students, which may improve implementation of PD into practice.

Project Implications

Data analysis showed that many instructors are not in compliance with college expectations in their high-impact courses and that course relevance and instructor-initiated communication correlate with student success. The project addresses a possible need for PD in order to focus instructor attention on course relevance, alignment of courses with college expectations, and improving instructor-initiated communication.

The project has multiple positive social change implications. The PD may help bring about change that increases relevance of course work for students. It may help improve instructor compliance with college expectations and help bring about more consistency in online course delivery. The PD may also improve instructor-initiated communication in the online classroom. Finally, the PD may improve collegiality and alignment throughout the college while improving instructors' sense of autonomy and importance in the work of educating the masses.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

The project has a number of strengths in addressing the study problem, and yet a different researcher might have conceived of a separate project to enhance student success in high-impact courses. I developed the PD for this project using current research and theory on PD. The hybrid model has been shown to offer the advantages of both the online and live formats (Ballysingh et al., 2018; Bautista et al., 2017; Golden, 2016). The live workshops in the PD allow time for open discussion (Andersson & Palm, 2018; Bautista et al., 2017), time for instructors to apply the PD to their own classrooms (Al Chibani, 2018; Bautista et al., 2017; Kirpalani, 2017), and help to alleviate fears that the PD drains valuable time (Hanrahan, 2018, p. 7). The online forum allows the discussion to evolve with the need of the instructors (Golden, 2016) and to mature into a CoP (Elvira et al., 2017; Morris, 2017; Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). All of these factors contribute to instructor buy-in, which is the most commonly cited reason for PD failure (Andersson & Palm, 2018; Roseler et al., 2018).

The PD was also designed to address the problem in light of the results of the study. The study results showed that course relevance was correlated with student success. Therefore, the first two PD modules address course relevance across disciplines and within departments by opening the discussion of course expectations within programs and by aligning course goals, student learning outcomes, and student learning objectives within departments. The study results showed that many courses did not meet expectations for quality online courses, so the third PD focused on creating standardized

course shells for all six high-impact courses, which would ensure that all high-impact courses would meet the basic expectations. The study results also indicated that instructor-initiated communication was correlated with student success but that most instructors were not meeting those expectations, so the final PD module focused on ways to implements instructor-initiated communication in the classroom.

There are also limitations of the project in addressing the study problem. The problem is low success rates in online high-impact courses, and there is no guarantee that the PD equates to higher success rates. Another limitation is the constraints of time and physical space. The PD was designed for a specific site, but there may be problems with obtaining suitable space for the PD workshops and in fitting the PD into available time. Although the PD may have been designed to promote buy-in, there is also no guarantee it does so.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

There are alternative approaches to addressing the problem using the project. The PD modules could be expanded or condensed, delivered in a fully self-paced modality, or done entirely face-to-face during a faculty retreat. Expanding the individual modules could allow for instructors to more fully engage with the material, but a condensed version could allow for fitting the training into a full teaching schedule. The PD modules could also be turned into online or live modules rather than the hybrid. This PD has been designed for full faculty in the first and last modules, but only instructors of high-impact courses in the two middle modules. The training could be revised to include all in all four modules.

There are also ways to address the problem without using the PD project. Administrators could provide more oversight into instructor compliance with meeting quality course standards, and classroom investigation rubrics could be designed to align to the CoI framework. Administration could also provide standard course shells that all instructors must use, which would limit faculty autonomy, yet potentially enhance student engagement. Approaches could also be considered that are outside of the direction of this study. A focus could be put on the impediments to success that students experience in their personal lives, and a program could be developed to work on these impediments such as access to childcare, grants for at-risk adults, and inclusion best practices for textbook and case study coursework. Multiple interventions and other professional development alternatives could be constructed to help address low student success in online high-impact courses.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

Developing the project was both fun and informative. As an instructor, I understand that PD often seems irrelevant to my classroom instruction. On the rare occasions I find the PD useful, I often do not have the time to plan ways to implement it into practice. Through the research I did on the project, I found that I am not the only one who struggles with these issues. I was also able to research potential solutions to allow me to both improve relevance of the PD and provide the time instructors need to implement theory into practice. Because I have education and experience in curriculum and instructional design, I already knew about the need to develop student learning

objectives and align assessment with them. However, I have never put that into practice with any type of professional development, so it was a new experience.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

Completing this capstone project has been a multi-faceted experience. The academic writing style was different than that I typically use. The formal writing rules were sometimes completely opposite of those with which I am familiar. As I writer, I am used to the iterative nature of the writing process but working with a committee and implementing the feedback of multiple perspectives was sometimes difficult. I can clearly see my growth from the process, though. I began with what I perceived as a passion and a problem: student success. Student success is a focus point that I spent two full years of classwork refining and a year and a half of iterative writing to limit to my specific investigation scope appropriate for the capstone. Just in the prospectus stage of the capstone development, I seriously considered quitting the program multiple times. However, I have learned that perseverance is the most important part of the process.

Like many teachers, it is easy for me to want to save the world, and I have learned that it is the small steps that lead to great change. Through this research, I was able to examine teaching presence through the lens of the CoI in the context of high-impact courses. My study revealed a correlation between student success and elements deemed important in the CoI. Through analyzing the results of the study, I revealed a correlation between those elements and student success in a specific population. An additional finding was that some high-impact course instructors did not meet the expectations in relation to the elements of the CoI. The results of the study led me to develop research-

based professional development focusing specifically on improving instructor buy-in, instructor compliance, and instructor-initiated communication.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

There is the potential for positive social change at multiple levels. Through the PD, instructors may grow in their knowledge of curriculum and instructional design, in open communication with colleagues, and in instructor-initiated communication. This growth could lead to courses becoming more relevant to students, which has the potential to increase student success. Students and their families may experience an improved level of engagement in their community, as social change work opportunities increase in alignment to educational levels. Schools may experience increased enrollment as the data reveals more successful students, and society may benefit from a more educated citizenry prepared to think critically in their professions.

The capstone revealed some relationships, yet a qualitative investigation could help to reveal how individual students experience instructor presence in high-impact online courses. Methodologically, more quantitative research could be useful, and a mixed-methods research design could offer fuller information by including the perceptions of instructors and students along with the frequency. Although the study findings support the empirical research and theory behind a correlation between student success and the CoI, there were inconsistencies in the findings that may need more study. Recommendations for further research include (a) investigations into course alignment with the CoI, (b) norming the teaching presence scale as it lacks specificity in how compliance is evaluated, and (c) further review for how the scale is used to evaluate

compliance. More research is also recommended into how specific types of instructor-initiated communication may correlate to student success in high-impact course.

Conclusion

This study addressed the problem of student success in online high-impact courses. Research revealed a relationship between instructor-initiated communication and student success, and the research question explored the relationship between the percentage of students passing a high-impact course with an A, B, or C and instructor-initiated communication in announcements, course content, and email at a community college. The theoretical foundation of the study was the CoI, which provides guidelines on successful educational experiences for students, so instructor-initiated communication was measured by the Teaching Presence instrument from the CoI model. A quantitative research design was used to analyze any correlations between elements of the Teaching Presence instrument and student success in 87 course sections of online high-impact courses offered at the study site.

Descriptive analysis found many instructors did not comply with the expectations, and Pearson's correlation coefficient found that both relevance and communication correlated with student success. Research-based PD was created to attempt to address the problem. The study has the potential for positive social change because efforts towards improving the success of students in online courses may improve relationships with accountability organizations, and students and society benefit with more degree-holding citizenry.

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Appendix A: The Project

Purpose

The purpose of the project is to address the issues highlighted in the data analysis: (a) of instructor compliance with college expectations, (b) the need for course relevance to students, and (c) the need to increase instructor-initiated communication.

Goals

The goals for this project are to enhance high-impact instructor skills to enhance student performance. As an outcome of this professional development, it is important for faculty to gain a better understanding of the expectations of other instructors and stakeholders in the college have for high-impact courses. Also, this information is essential for instructors of high-impact courses to consider missing or unnecessary SLOs and assessments in high-impact courses. Next, the project seeks to empower instructors within the high-impact departments to align SLOs and assessments within courses and throughout the department in light of student need. To do this, we need to help instructors to develop course shells for each high-impact course that aligns with college expectations and is consistent across high-impact departments. Finally, the professional development should provide instructors with the knowledge and skills necessary to increase instructor-initiated communication in their online high-impact courses.

Learning Outcomes

- Module 1: Instructors will consider missing or unnecessary SLOs and assessments in their high-impact courses in consideration of the expectations others in the college have for the high-impact courses.

- Module 2: Instructors will align SLOs and summative assessments across the high-impact department.
- Module 3: Instructors will develop an online shell for each high-impact course that follows the Online Review Rubric.
- Module 4: Instructors will improve their instructor-initiated communication in their courses.

Target Audience

The target audience is college instructors, curriculum designers, department heads, deans, program designers and heads, and officers of academic affairs. The specific target audience is instructors of high-impact courses.

Outline of Timeline and Activities

1. Module 1: Curriculum Design
    a. Workshop 1 January 2020
        i. Lecture, Discussion, Activity
        ii. Reflection
    b. Online Forum January-April 2020
        i. Discussion
        ii. Reflection
    c. Workshop 2 May 2020
        i. Lecture, Discussion, Activity
        ii. Reflection
2. Module 2: Course Design

a. Workshop 1 May 2020
    i. Lecture, Discussion, Activity
    ii. Reflection
b. Online Forum May-July 2020
    i. Discussion
    ii. Reflection
c. Workshop 2 August 2020
    i. Lecture, Discussion, Activity
    ii. Reflection

3. Module 3: Course to Instructional Design
    a. Workshop 1 August 2020
        i. Lecture, Discussion, Activity
        ii. Reflection
    b. Online Forum August-December 2020
        i. Discussion
        ii. Reflection
    c. Workshop 2 December 2020
        i. Lecture, Discussion, Activity
        ii. Reflection
4. Module 4: Instructional Design
    a. Workshop 1 January 2021
        i. Lecture, Discussion, Activity

ii. Reflection

b. Online Forum January-April 2021

i. Discussion

ii. Reflection

c. Workshop 2 May 2021

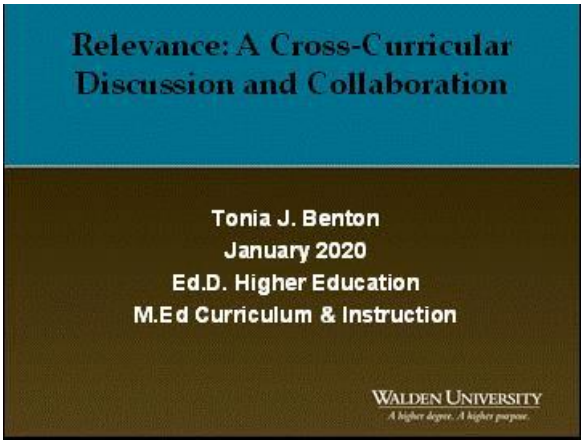
i. Lecture, Discussion, Activity

ii. Reflection

Module Formats, Trainer Notes, PPTS, and Implementation

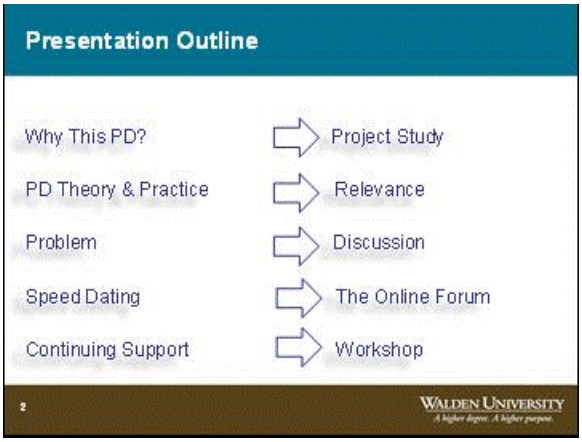
Module 1

Slide 1



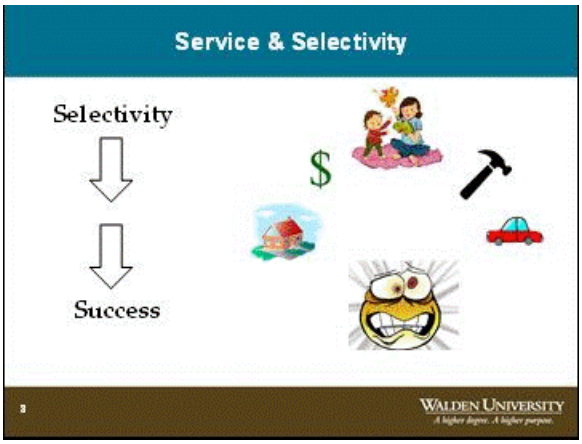
Welcome to Relevance: a Cross-Curricular Discussion and Collaboration. I am Tonia, and I will be working with you all through this program. You should each have some swag to thank you for your participation. I hope you find it useful today.

Slide 2



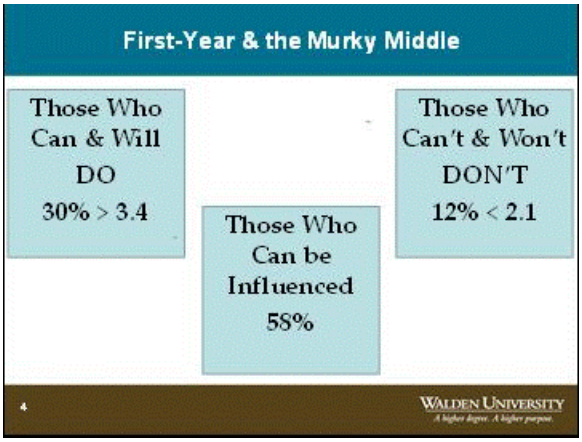
We are going to begin by discussing why you are even at this PD, how my project study lead to research into PD theory and practice and a focus today on relevance. You will then be presented with a problem and will be given time for open discussion. We will do an activity before getting into how this PD will continue on past today.

Slide 3



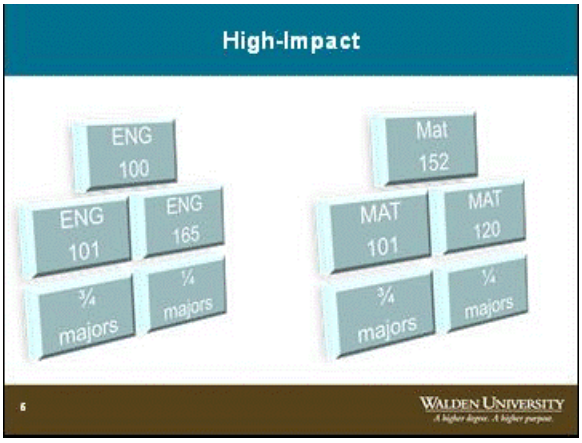
Community colleges serve more than half of the student population in the United States. However, most community colleges are open-enrollment institutions that end up serving a large population of students who are underprepared and a large population of students with other impediments to degree completion such as working full time, a longer time between high school and college, and the responsibility of raising children. As you can see, this juggling act can leave students (and teachers) stressed.

Slide 4



The first year of college sees dramatically higher non-completion rates than any other year. Students with a GPA higher than 3.4 at the end of the first year of college are likely to graduate, and those with GPAs lower than 2.1 are not likely to graduate. Tyson refers to the others as the murky middle. So what can be done about this murky middle? Back in the dark ages when I worked in finance, there was a saying: Those who can and will DO; those who can't and won't DON'T; but everyone else can be influenced. If we turn this business adage to our education system, that is well over half of our students, who as teachers, we can influence, either positively or negatively, in their success. Unfortunately, by the end of the first year, when Tyson says we are able to make these predictions, the student's direction is pretty well set, so if we are to make a difference, the focus needs to be on these first-year students.

Slide 5



Focusing on the first year of college leads us to high-impact courses. High-impact courses are those generally taken in the first year of college that are also prerequisites for progression. These courses are important because without being successful in them, students cannot progress past the first year, much less to degree completion. High-impact courses would include not only first-year courses such as basic math and English courses, but also any developmental courses the student may need to take before getting to

curriculum courses. Here, degree-seeking students have to take either ENG 165 or ENG 101, and ENG 100 is the developmental course some students have to take to reach these curriculum-level English courses. Degree-seeking students also have to take either MAT 101 or MAT 120, and MAT 152 is the developmental course some students have to take to reach these curriculum-level math courses.

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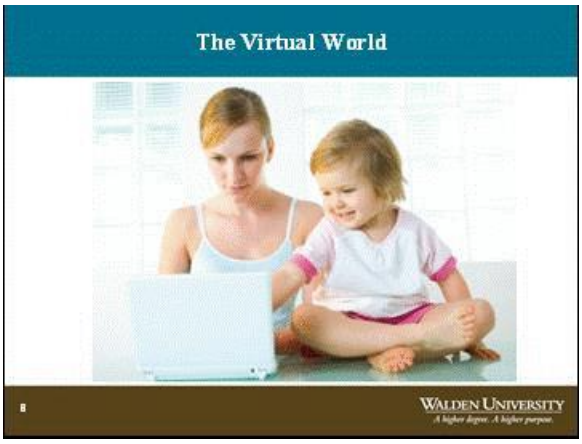
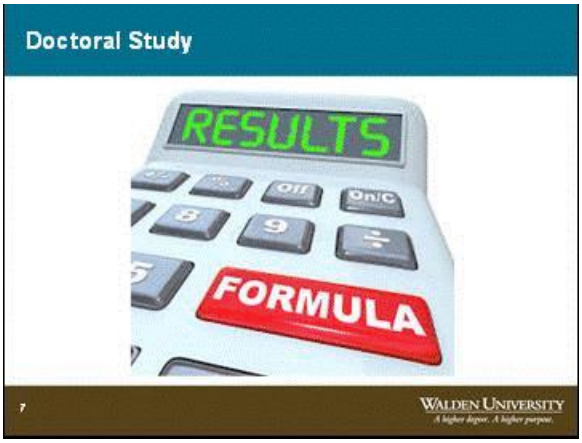


Add to all this the growing number of students taking online classes. Unfortunately, the academic and personal challenges faced by many community college students tend to be exacerbated in the very online environment that makes it possible for many of them to reach for higher education.

Slide 7

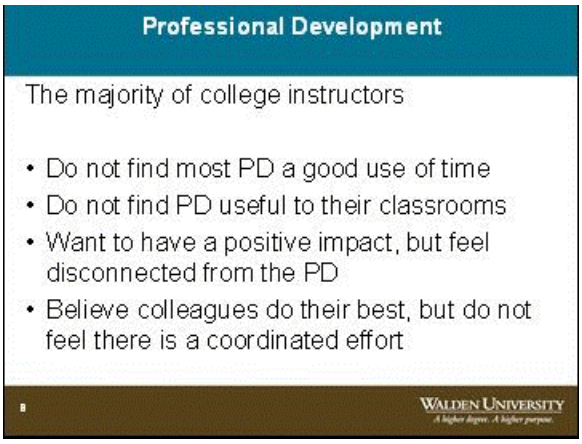


Given the importance of these online high-impact courses, I did a study on success rates in our high-impact courses and elements that may influence student success in them. One of those findings is the topic of this PD.

Slide 8

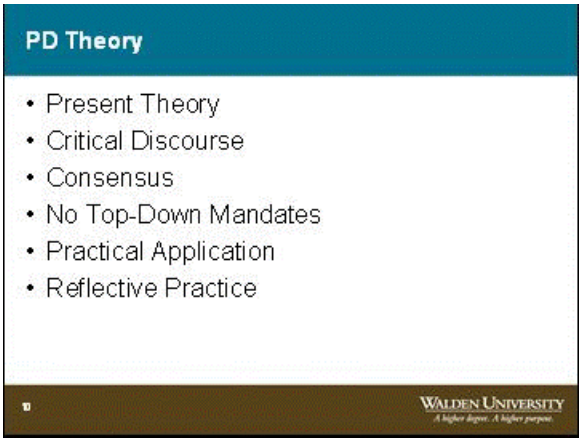
Course relevance was found to be significantly correlated with student success. Now, I have to point out here that correlation does not mean causation. Course relevance may not necessarily CAUSE student success, but the correlation does point out that there is a relationship between the two, not just in general, but here in our own classrooms. The relationship between relevance and student success led me to consider how we could increase relevance in our classes. It may not cause student success, but it sure is worth a shot just in case.

Slide 9



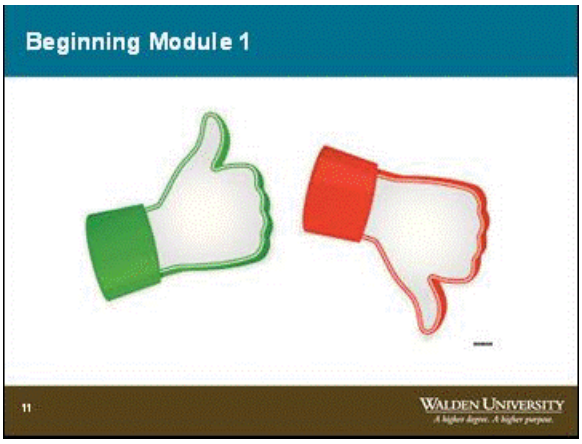
Please stand. Remain standing if you have ever felt a required PD was a waste of valuable time. Remain standing if you have ever felt a required PD was mostly useless to your own classroom. Remain standing if you have ever felt a disconnect between PD and reality. Remain standing if you have ever felt that some of the initiatives are good but lack coordinated effort and regular communication. You are not alone. You may be seated.

Slide 10



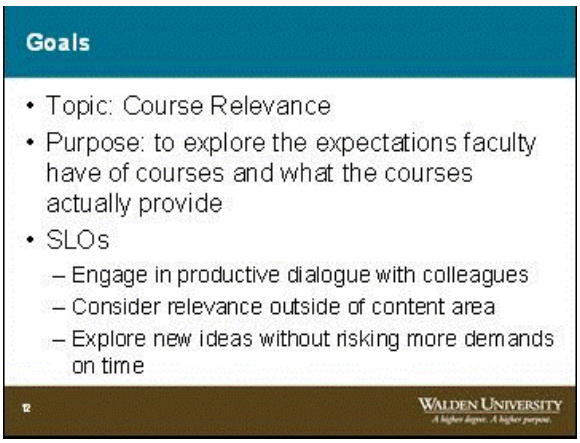
There were some common themes in the PD research. First, the PD topic should be introduced, but then open discussions between colleagues should progress to consensus instead of an attempt at top-down change from people who do not understand the different classrooms. Another important theme was that time needed to be provided to allow instructors to consider how the new knowledge could be implemented into their own classes. Then, critical reflection on practice was a final theme.

Slide 11



I attempted to design this PD in alignment with PD theory and best practices, but as with any new idea we implement into our classrooms, this one could be great or it could flop.

Slide 12



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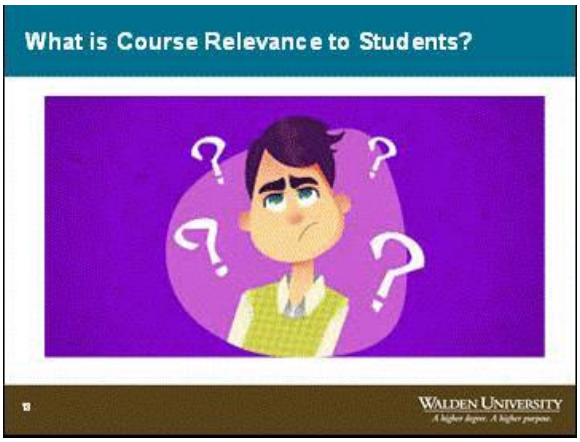
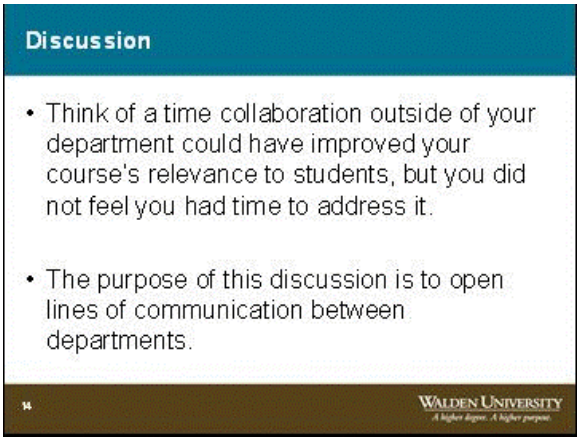


Beginning with an overview of the topic of course relevance, we have to consider multiple lenses. There is, of course, our own content-specific idea of course relevance. We know our content, and we know how to teach it in a way that works for us. However, students and instructors often have very different lenses. I want to focus on two of those students lenses today.

Students view course relevance in light of their degree path. Is the course necessary and relevant to the degree they seek? I frequently have welding students, for example, ask me how my writing assignments are going to help them be better welders. I can give the typical response that everyone needs to know how to communicate, but in reality, I have never been a welder, so I have no idea how my content is pertinent if I really try to view it from that student's perspective. This offers a wonderful opportunity to speak with welding instructors, but I honestly don't know who they are, and even if I did, too many other things pull on my time, so it gets pushed to the back burner.

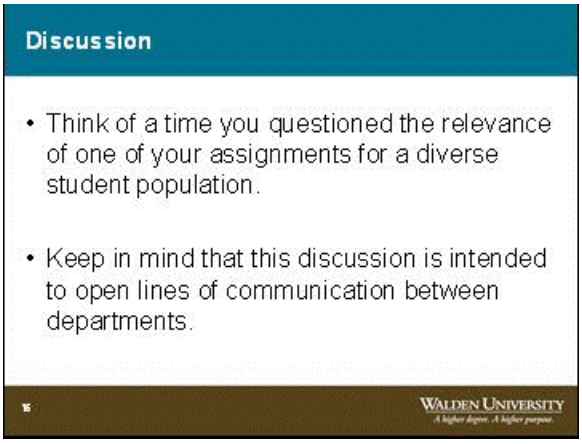
Students view course relevance in light of parallel courses. Is the course repeating information that is in another course they are required to take. I frequently have ENG 165 students tell me they are doing very similar assignments in one of their AOT courses. Sometimes they have very similar requirements, but sometimes they have very different requirements. Because I am never around any AOT instructors long enough or in a situation conducive to discussion on the topic, I have no idea how to address it in my classroom. And again, due to time constraints, it gets left for something I can do later.

Slide 14



Take a moment to think about the prompt. I am now going to open the floor to discussion. The intent of this particular discussion is to share experiences related to the prompt on the board. If side topics evolve from the discussion, I will put them on the board and return to them as time allows.

Slide 15



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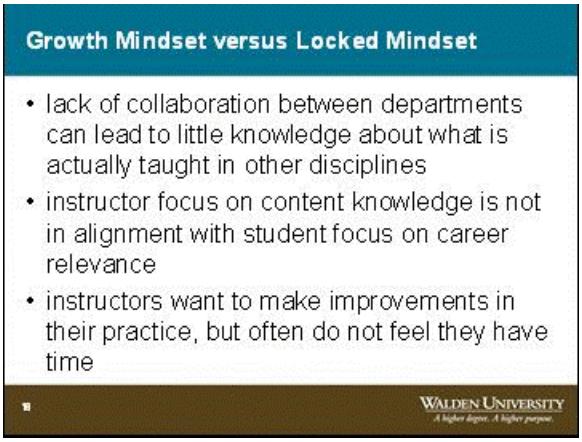
Slide 16



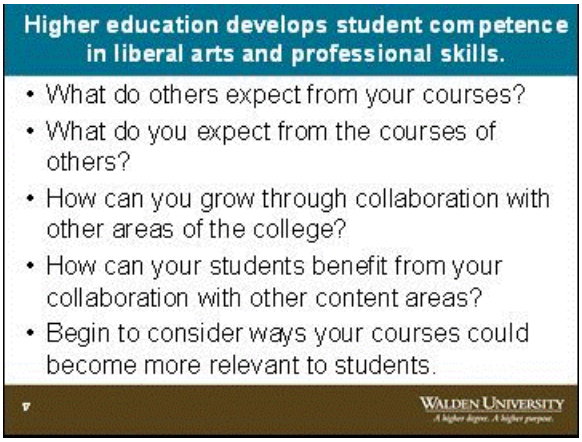
Working under the premise that lack of collaboration between departments can lead to little knowledge about what is actually taught in other disciplines, that instructor focus on content knowledge is not in alignment with student focus on career relevance, and the premise that most instructors want to make improvements in their practice, but often do not feel they have time, we will now begin an activity.

For this activity, I need all general education instructors to team up: math instructors at one table, English instructors at another table, science at a third, and social studies at a fourth. Everyone else should align yourselves by department. Then, I need all career-track departments to team up into four groups.

(NOTE: have these prealigned so the career-track instructors know which group they should be in).

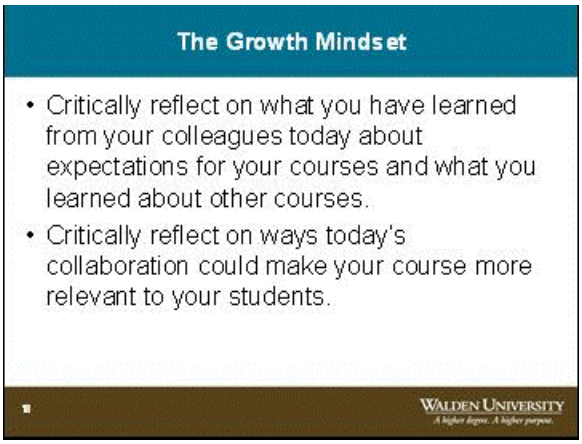
In this *speed dating* type of activity, we are going to swap off groups so that everyone has a chance to talk to everyone else to get to know about what the SLOs are for different courses and what types of activities and assessments are used in the courses.

Slide 17



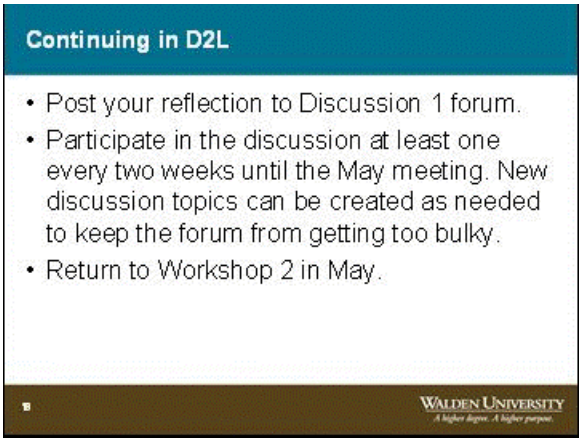
(NOTE: This is the “speed dating” of ideas activity. Check on discussion groups to keep them on target. When discussions begin winding down, but before they stall, move the groups.)

Slide 18



For homework (or now before you leave).

Slide 19



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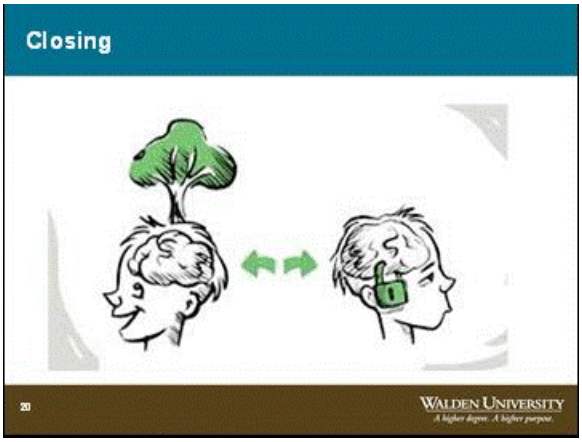


That concludes today's workshop. I enjoyed working with you all today, and I hope you were able to grow from the experience.

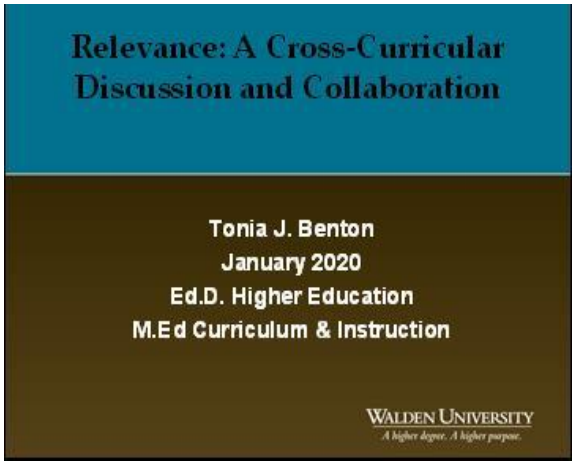
Slide 21

Note: This area holds the place for the online component and acts as a transition between workshops.

Get SLOs from each major program. Include them in the online forum for discussion. Connect the discussions about the SLOs to course relevance for students, and have participants consider how their courses align with program SLOs. Discussions should lead to the problem in the 2nd workshop.

Make sure to remind participants to bring pad and pen to 2nd workshop.

Slide 22



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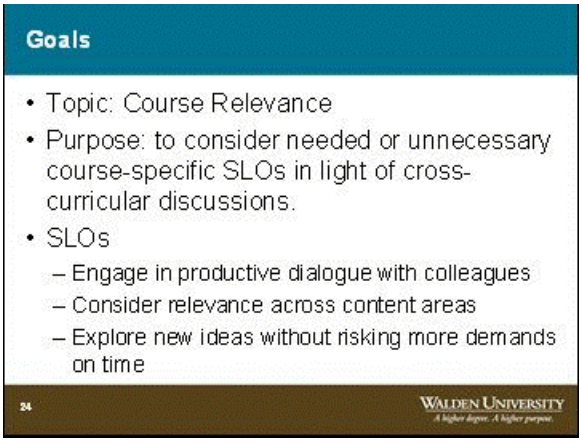
Slide 23



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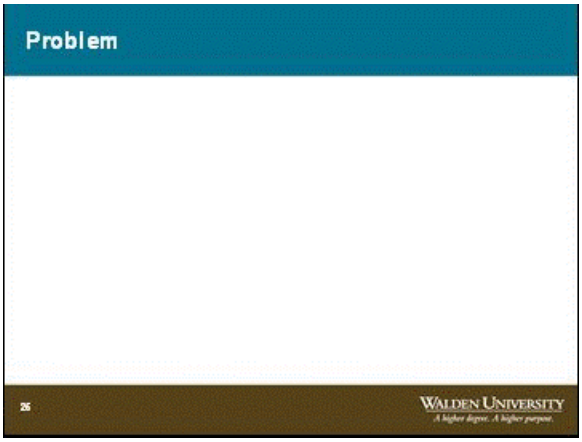
Slide 24

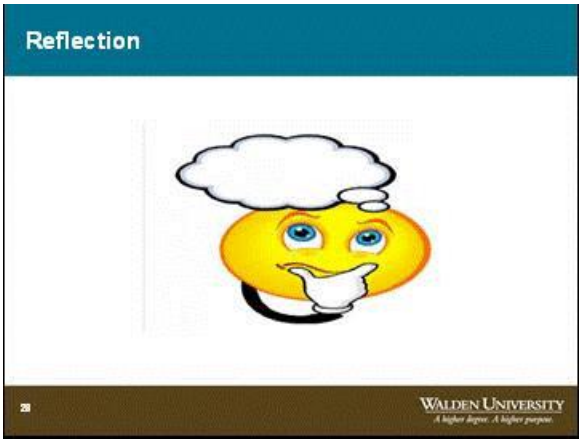


This slide is reserved to present example problems taken from the online forum.

Put students in preplanned groups to work on the problems. Move groups when discussion slows, but before it stalls.

Develop discussion based upon group work.

Slide 25



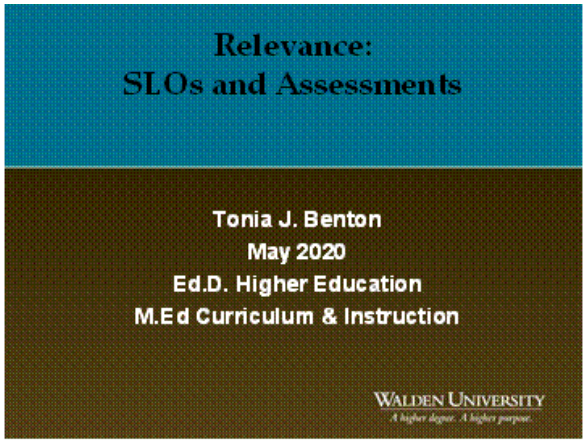
Your reflection on the Relevance PD should be submitted to the discussion forum.

Slide 26

That concludes today's workshop and the Relevance PD. I enjoyed working with you all, and I hope you were able to grow from the experience.

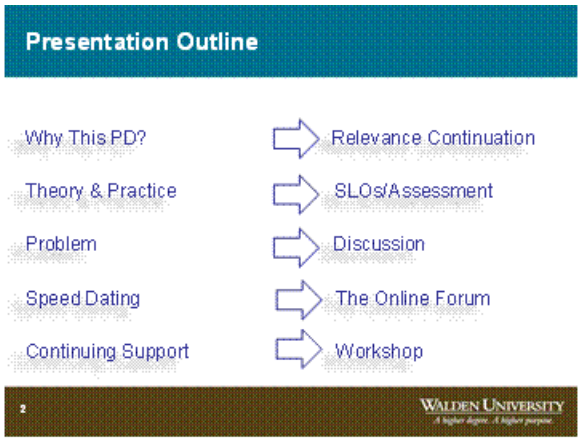
Module 2

Slide 1



Welcome to Relevance: SLOs and Assessments. I am Tonia, and I will be working with you all through this program. You should each have some swag to thank you for your participation and some handouts we will use today. I hope you find it all useful.

Slide 2

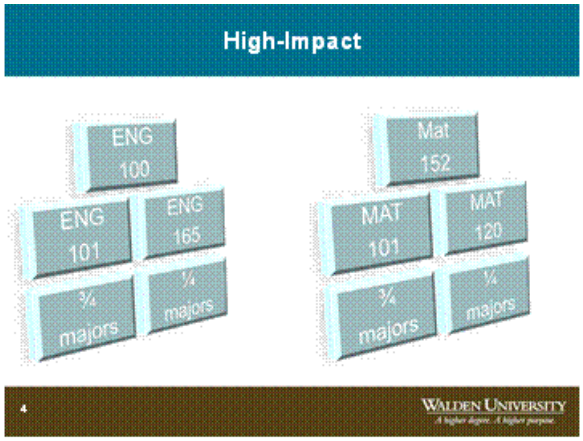


We are going to begin by discussing why you are even at this PD and the theory and practice behind SLOs and Assessments, with a focus on student relevance. You will then be presented with a problem and will be given time for open discussion. We will do an activity before getting into how this PD will continue on past today.

Slide 3

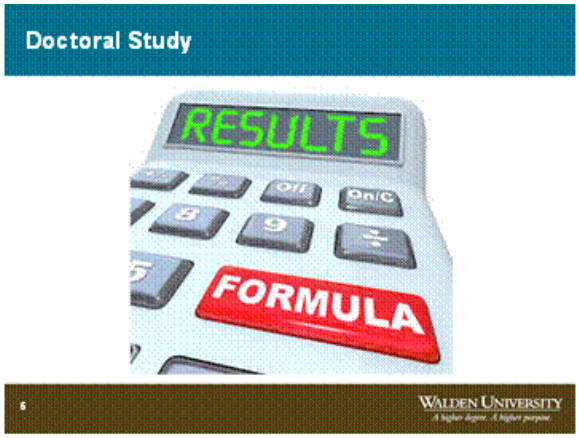
I want to take a moment to remind you of a slide we looked at back in January I the first PD Module. The first year of college sees dramatically higher non-completion rates than any other year. Students with a GPA higher than 3.4 at the end of the first year of college are likely to graduate, and those with GPAs lower than 2.1 are not likely to graduate. Tyson refers to the others as the murky middle. Back in the dark ages when I worked in finance, there was a saying: Those who can and will DO; those who can't and won't DON'T; but everyone else can be influenced. If we turn this business adage to our education system, that is well over half of our students, who as teachers, we can influence, either positively or negatively, in their success. Unfortunately, by the end of the first year, when Tyson says we are able to make these predictions, the student's direction is pretty well set, so if we are to make a difference, the focus needs to be on these first-year students.

Slide 4



Focusing on the first year of college leads us to high-impact courses. High-impact courses are those generally taken in the first year of college that are also prerequisites for progression. These courses are important because without being successful in them, students cannot progress past the first year, much less to degree completion. High-impact courses would include not only first-year courses such as basic math and English courses, but also any developmental courses the student may need to take before getting to curriculum courses. All of us here today are instructors of these high-impact courses.

Slide 5



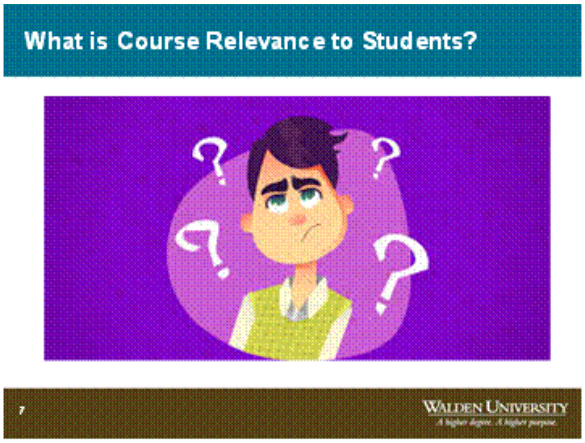
Given the importance of these online high-impact courses, I did a study on success rates in our high-impact courses and elements that may influence student success in them. One of those findings is the topic of this PD.

Slide 6

Course relevance was found to be significantly correlated with student success. We began back in January with college-wide discussions on the expectations our colleagues have for out high-impact English and math courses and what they believe students need from our classes. That was great discussion, and I think we learned something from it as well as opening channels of communication.

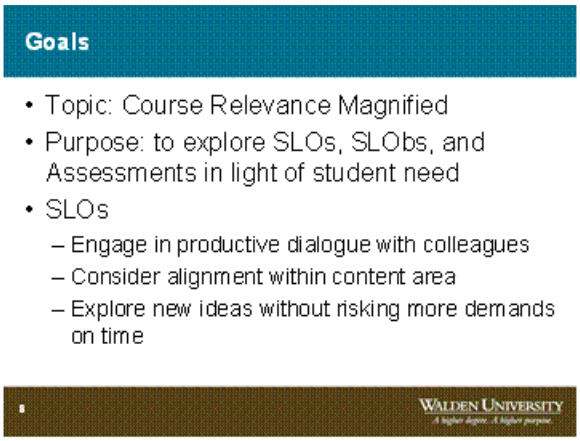
Today's PD is going to put us in our content groups, so all instructors of math will be together and all instructors of English and reading will be together.

Slide 7



Let us remember that students view course relevance in light of their degree path. Is the course necessary and relevant to the degree they seek? Students also view course relevance in light of parallel courses. Is the course repeating information that is in another course they are required to take. Finally, students view course relevance in light of how daily lessons are useful to them or teach them something they find important.

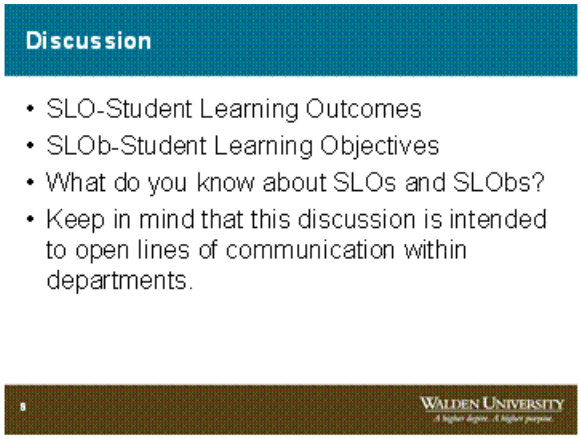
Slide 8



In our content areas, we are going to explore our course SLOs and SLObs to ensure student need is being met for degree programs. We are also going to consider if any of the SLOs we currently have are not aligned with student need. Next, we will consider how SLOs progress from one course to another.

It is important to point out here that how you teach SLOs and SLObs in your course is not the topic of discussion. Rather, our focus is on what students should be able to DO after completing our courses.

Slide 9



Take a moment to think about the prompt. I am now going to open the floor to discussion. The intent of this particular discussion is to share experiences related to the prompt on the board. If side topics evolve from the discussion, I will put them on the board and return to them as time allows.

Slide 10

We begin with the overarching goal of a course. What is its point? Where does it fit in the curriculum? Why is it important for students to take? In what ways will they use it in life? How is it relevant outside of the discipline?

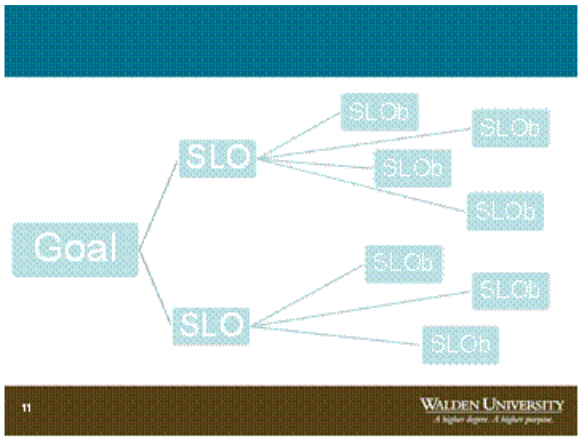
Next, we consider SLOs. What main things should students be able to do at the end of the course? SLOs build from both the goal and the college's GECs. They are a brief description of the broad, overarching skills students will demonstrate by the end of the course. We can use Bloom's Taxonomy or something similar to choose actionable verbs that describe what students must know at the end of the course. We have our SLOs for our courses in front of us now.

After developing SLOs, we can move on to SLObs. While SLOs are basic outcomes, SLObs are specific course objectives. What specific things should students be able to do

by the end of the course? SLObs build from the SLOs, so for each SLO, there are likely to be many SLObs.

We may get to assessments today, we may address it in the online forum, or we may save it for the next workshop, depending on how we move along today.

Slide 11

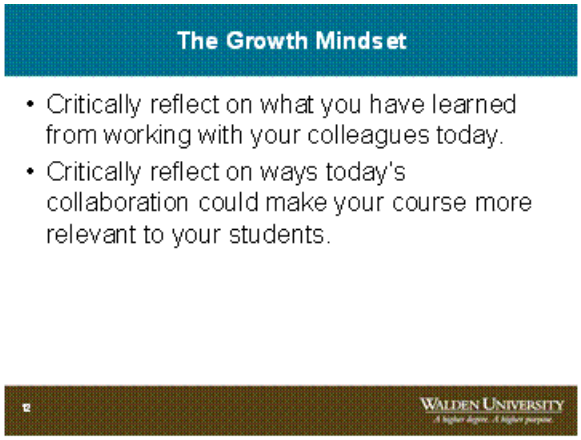


(NOTE: This is the collaborative activity. Provide the brainstorming and organizing handout. Check on discussion groups to keep them on target.)

We need to consider….what are students missing if they take my class rather than someone else's? What do I have in my class that students are missing if they take someone else's section?

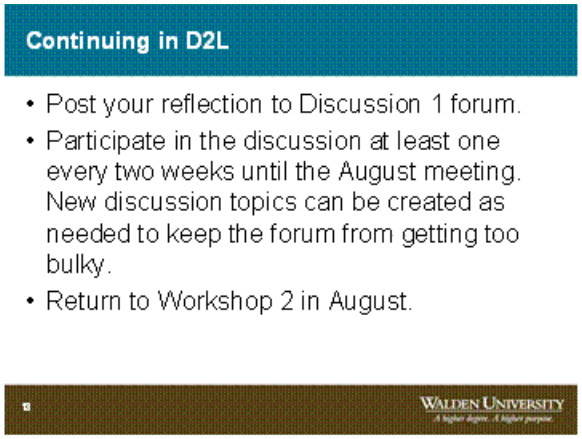
Again, we are talking about SKILLs here, not assignments or activities. There may be a thousand ways to get to the same place and how any individual does it is not in question.

Slide 12



For homework (or now before you leave).

Slide 13



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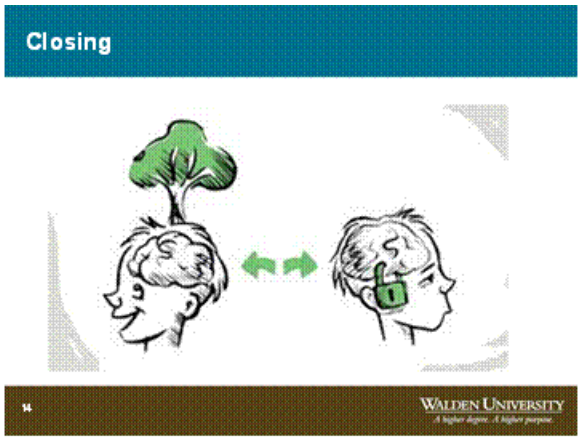
Slide 14



That concludes today's workshop. I enjoyed working with you all today, and I hope you were able to grow from the experience.

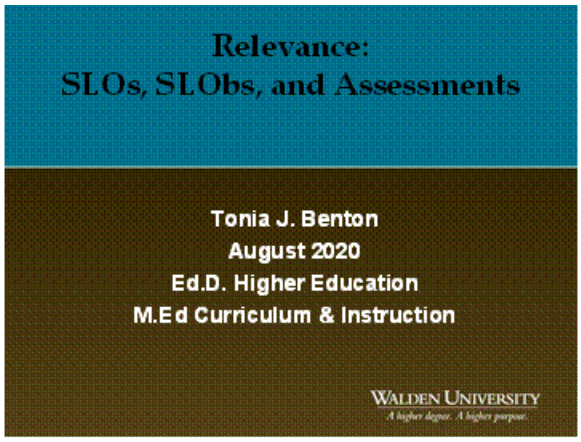
Slide 15

Note: This slide holds the place for the online component and acts as a transition.

Collect brainstorming and organizing activity from groups. Include them in the online forum for discussion. Connect the discussions about the SLOs and SLObs to course relevance for students, and have participants consider how their courses align with SLOs and SLObs. Discussions should lead to the problem in the 2nd workshop.

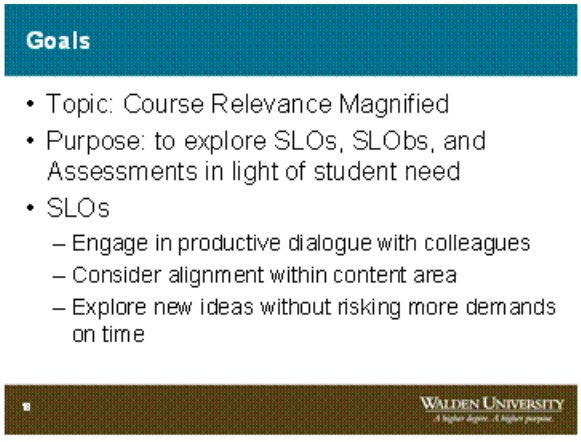
Make sure to remind participants to bring pad and pen to 2nd workshop.

Slide 16



Welcome to Relevance: SLOs, SLObs, and Assessments. I am Tonia, and I will be working with you all through this program. You should each have some handouts. I hope you find them useful today.

Slide 17



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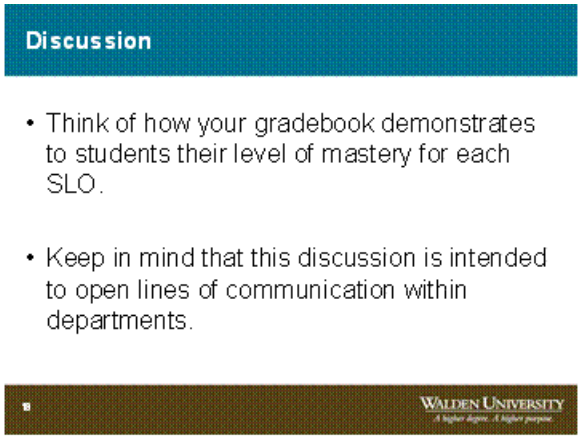
Slide 18



Take a moment to think about the prompt. I am now going to open the floor to discussion. The intent of this particular discussion is to share experiences related to the prompt on the board. If side topics evolve from the discussion, I will put them on the board and return to them as time allows.

(Note: This discussion is intended to illuminate the problem with assessments that do not align with SLOs, SLObs, and/or the gradebook.)

(NOTE: Next is the collaborative activity. Provide the Assessment handout. Check on discussion groups to keep them on target.)

Put students in discipline groups to work on developing aligned summative assessments that assess the level of student mastery of the SLOs. Have them consider how this SLO mastery is communicated to students through the gradebook.

Develop discussion based upon group work.

Slide 19

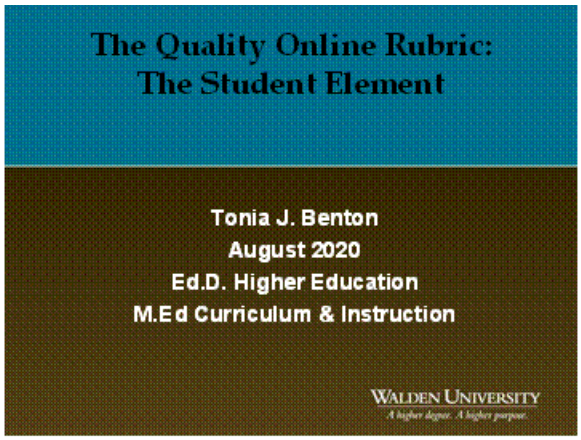
Your reflection on the Relevance PD should be submitted to the discussion forum.

Slide 20

That concludes today's workshop and the Relevance PD. I enjoyed working with you all, and I hope you were able to grow from the experience.

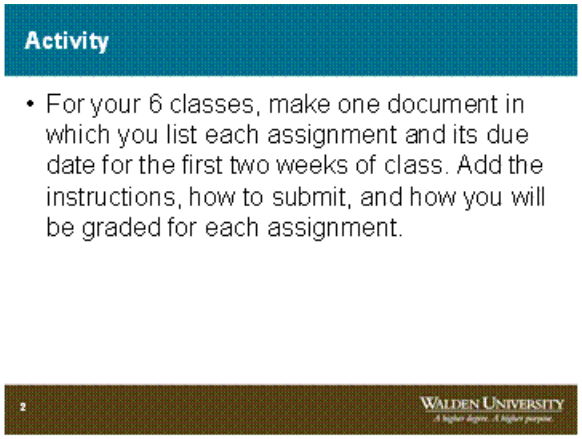
Module 3

Slide 1



Welcome to The Quality Online Rubric: The Student Element. I am Tonia, and I will be working with you all through this program. This module builds on the work you did in the last module. Let's begin today by opening D2L and pinning 6 courses: ENG 101x, ENG 101y, ENG 101z, MAT 101x, MAT 101y, and MAT 101z.

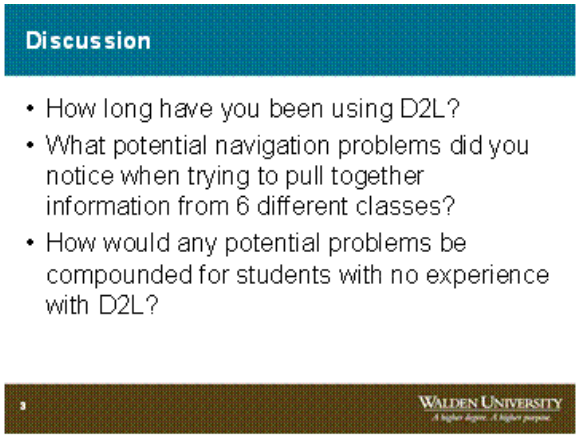
Slide 2



(NOTE: This is the problem with which we begin the module.)

The assumption is that even instructors who have been using D2L for a long time will find it difficult to navigate the differences in how the 6 classes are set up, especially in the other discipline, but maybe even within the same discipline.

Slide 3



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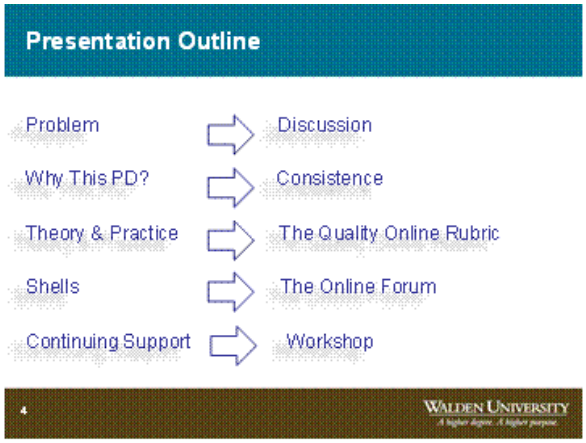
Slide 4



We just had a good discussion of potential navigation problems students may have when trying to get through the first couple of weeks of class and how what may be easy for us is alien to many of our students.

We are going to discuss why you are at this PD and the theory and practice behind the Quality Online Rubric. We will, then, work on an activity before getting into how this PD will continue on past today.

Slide 5

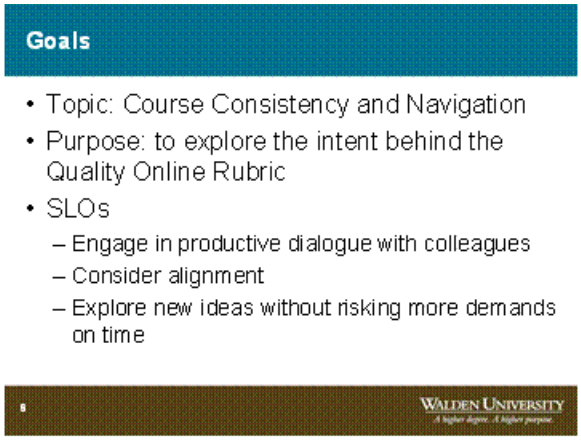
We have all seen this slide before, and this PD is a continuation of an action plan developed to address problems first-year students have that may prevent them from being successful. This slide demonstrates that those who can and will DO; those who can't and won't DON'T; but everyone else can be influenced. We can influence, either positively or negatively, 58% of our students in their success.

As you probably already know, I did a study on success rates in our high-impact courses and elements that may influence student success in them. One of those findings is the topic of this PD.

We began back in January with college-wide discussions on the expectations our colleagues have for out high-impact English and math courses and what they believe students need from our classes. That discussion opened some much-needed channels of communication. We also discussed the importance of SLOs, SLObs, and assessments in the May session and in the session the other day.

Today's PD is going to focus on the Quality Online Rubric and its intention.

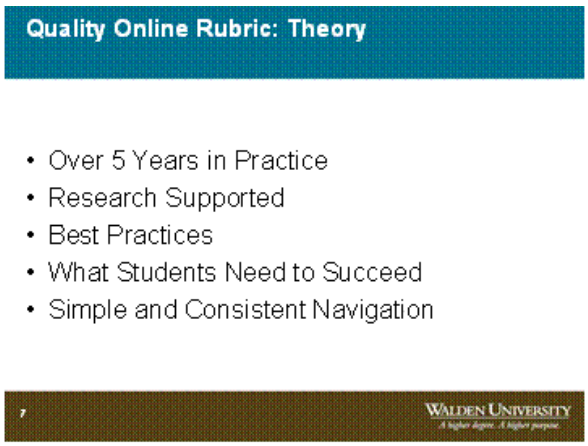
Slide 6



In our content areas, we are going to explore our course SLOs and SLObs to ensure student need is being met for degree programs. We are also going to consider if any of the SLOs we currently have are not aligned with student need. Next, we will consider how SLOs progress from one course to another.

It is important to point out here that how you teach SLOs and SLObs in your course is not the topic of discussion. Rather, our focus is on what students should be able to DO after completing our courses.

Slide 7



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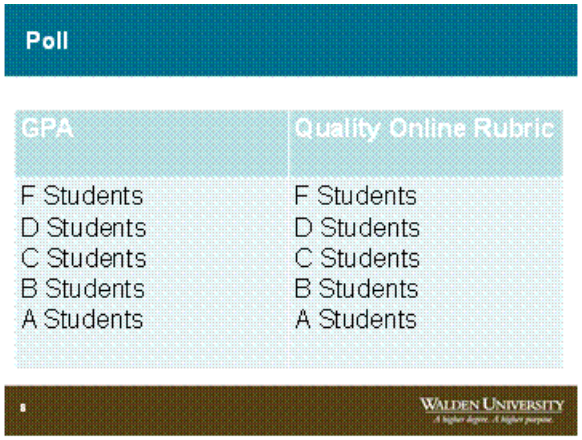
Slide 8



Ask instructors how they rate themselves as a student.

Next, ask instructors how they rate their use of the Online Review Rubric.

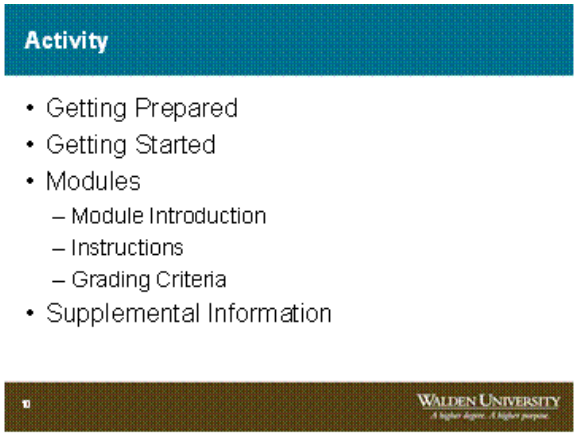
Slide 9

That means 70% of the people in this room did not meet expectations for being encouraging, helpful, and positive. Does this mean you did not do it? No, but it does mean if you did it was in obvious. It also means that 70% of the people in this room failed to use reminders in email or announcements. Does that mean you did not do it? No, but it wasn't found when the course was reviewed.

30% of the people in this room taught courses with confusing navigation. Would the navigation make sense if you explained it? Sure, but wouldn't it be better if it were not confusing?

25% of the people in this room did not provide instructions and grading criteria with every assignment. Does that mean it was not there? No, but shouldn't anyone be able to find such important information easily?

Slide 10

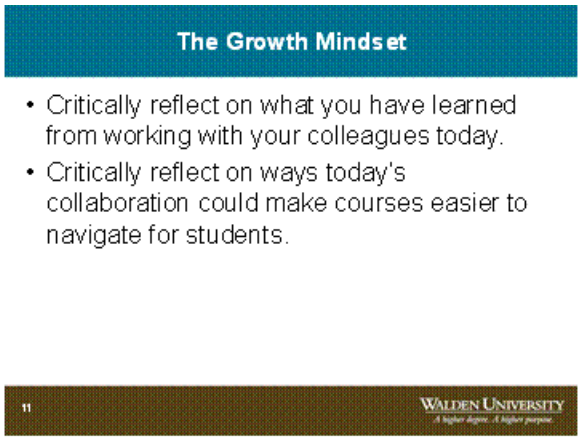


(NOTE: This is the collaborative activity. Each instructor will have their own computer, but there will also be round conference tables to allow for collaboration.)

Ask instructors to come to a consensus on the layout of the main D2L content areas. No instructor should feel the need to leave anything out. This is a time to problem-solve.

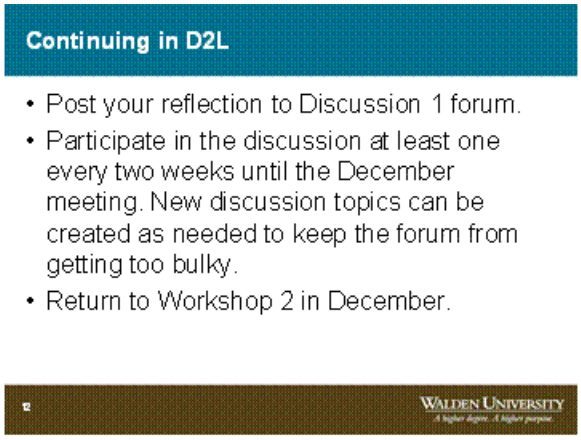
Instructors should work together to create one consistent shell for each of the 3 courses in their discipline.

Slide 11

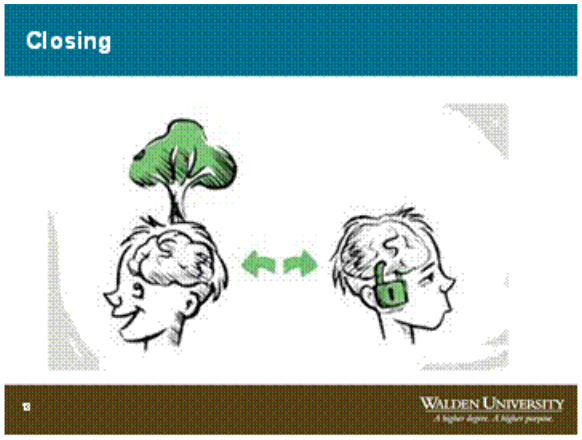


For homework (or now before you leave).

Slide 12



Slide 13



That concludes today's workshop. I enjoyed working with you all today, and I hope you were able to grow from the experience.

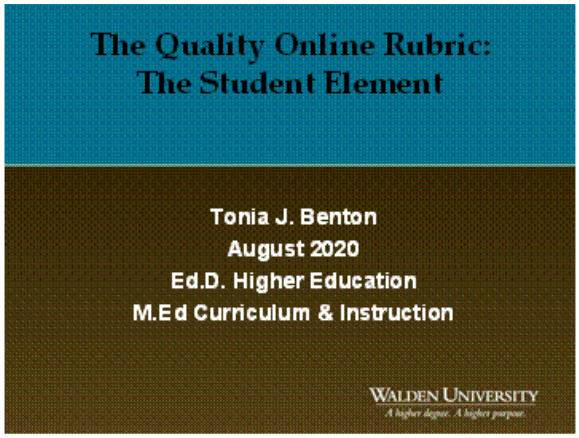
Slide 14

Note: This slide holds the place for the online component and acts as a transition.

Discussions should lead to the problem in the 2nd workshop.

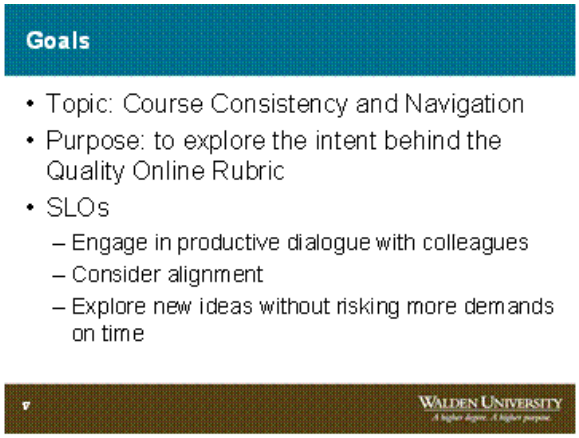
Make sure to remind participants to bring pad and pen to 2nd workshop.

Slide 15



Welcome to The Quality Online Rubric: The Student Element. I am Tonia, and I will be working with you all through this program. In our last session in May we worked together to begin to develop a consistent shell for each of the 6 high-impact courses. Today, we will build on that.

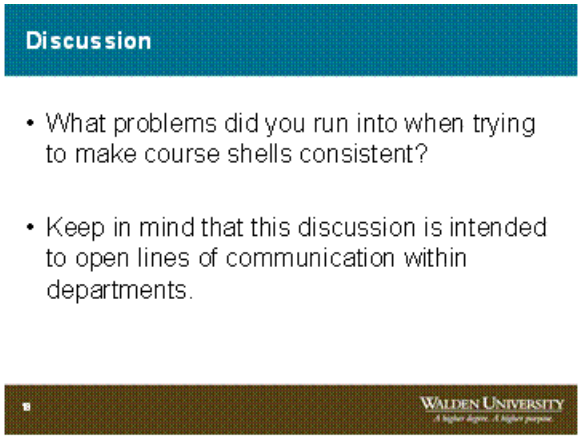
Slide 16



(NOTE: This leads to the collaborative activity. Check on groups to keep them on target.)

Put students in discipline groups to continue aligning course consistency.

Slide 17



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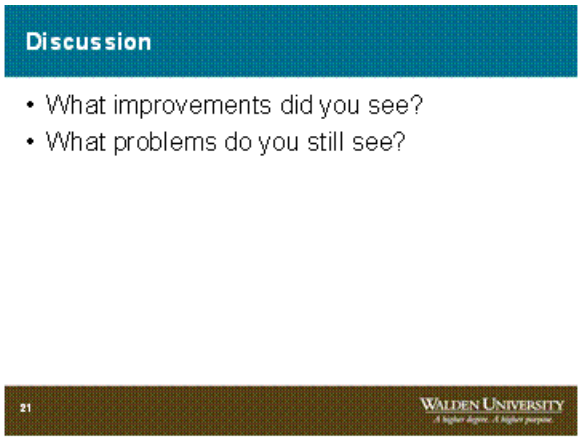
(Note: This discussion is intended to illuminate the problem with navigation and problems with designing for consistency.)

(NOTE: This leads to the collaborative activity. Check on groups to keep them on target.)

Groups at computers. Have math check English and English check math.

Slide 18



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(Note: This discussion is intended to illuminate the problem with navigation and problems with designing for consistency.)

Slide 19

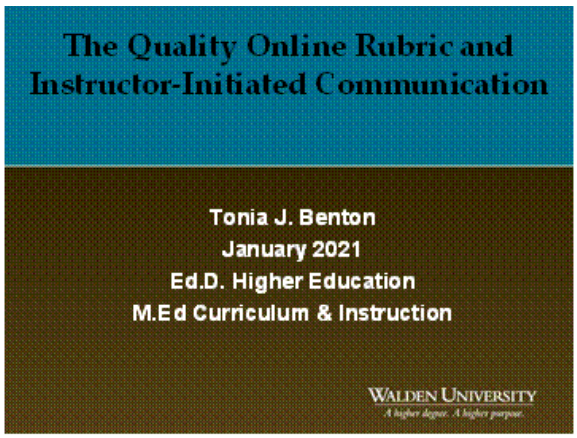
Your reflection on the Relevance PD should be submitted to the discussion forum.

Slide 20

That concludes today's workshop and the Relevance PD. I enjoyed working with you all, and I hope you were able to grow from the experience.

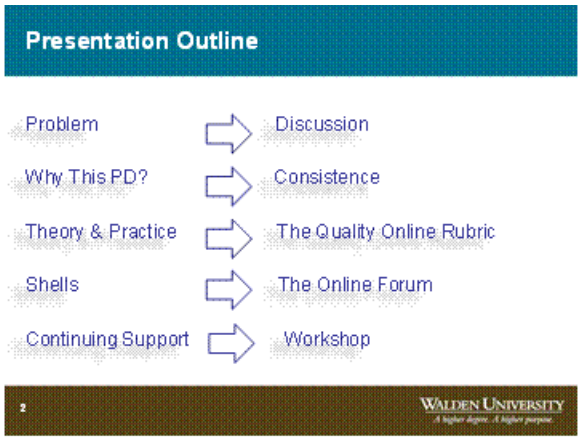
Module 4

Slide 1



Welcome to The Quality Online Rubric and Instructor-Initiated Communication. I am Tonia, and I will be working with you all through this program. This module builds on the work you did in the previous modules.

Slide 2



We are going to begin by discussing why you are even at this PD, then have open discussion before an activity.

Slide 3

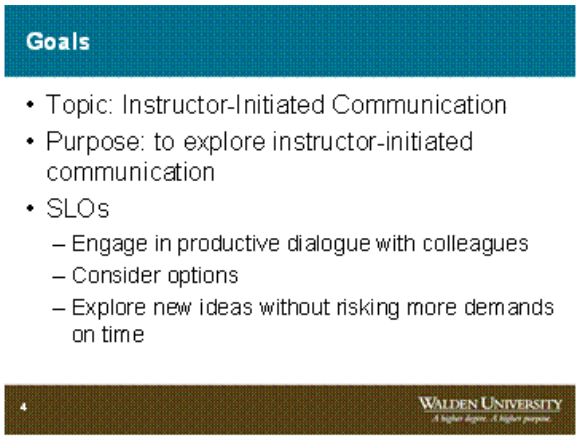
Again, our focus will be on the 58% of our students we can influence, either positively or negatively in their success.

As you probably already know, I did a study on success rates in our high-impact courses and elements that may influence student success in them. One of those findings is the topic of this PD.

We began last spring with college-wide discussions on the expectations our colleagues have for our high-impact English and math courses and what they believe students need from our classes. That discussion opened some much needed channels of communication. We discussed the importance of SLOs, SLObs, and assessments in the summer sessions, and the importance of consistency in the fall sessions..

Today's PD is going to focus on Instructor-initiated communication and its intention.

Slide 4



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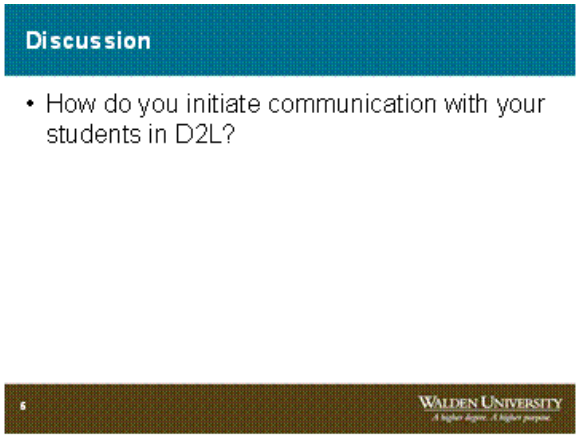
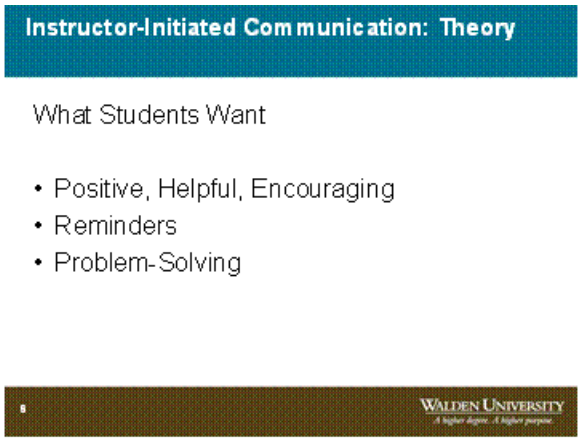
Slide 5



No notes

Slide 6



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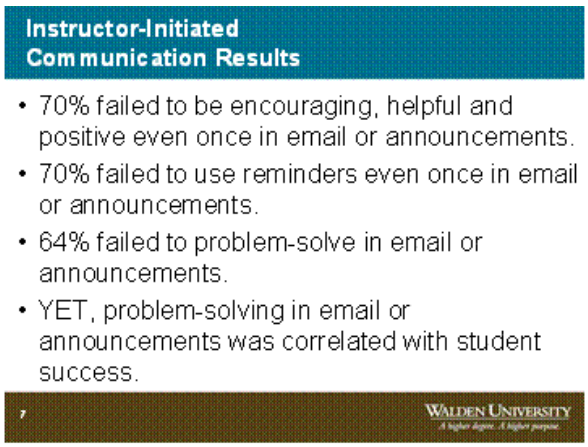
Slide 7



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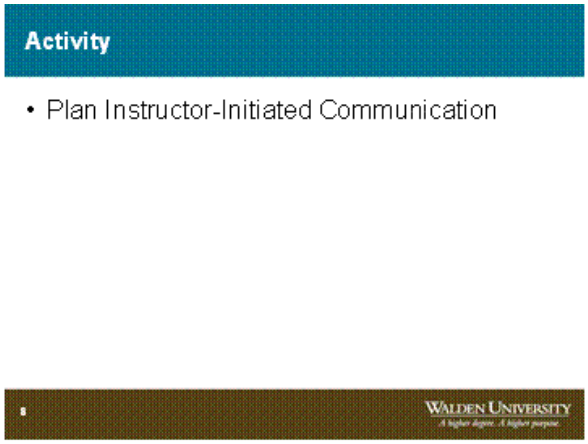
Slide 8

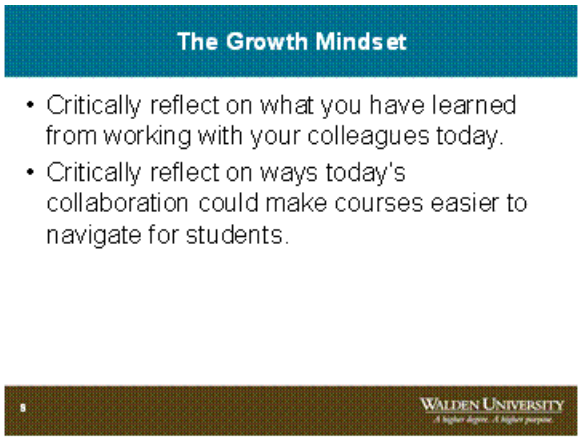


(NOTE: This is the collaborative activity.)

Ask instructors to self-group in small teams of 2-4 in order to share ideas. Two teams will share and plan. When discussions begin to wind down, the group on the left (or back) of the table will swap to the next group.

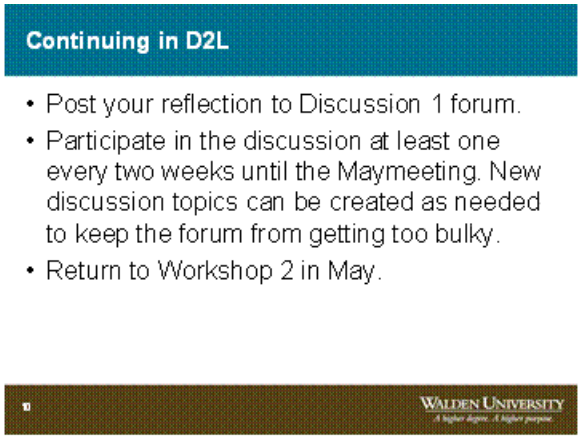
In this speed dating activity, we are going to swap off teams so that everyone has a chance to talk to everyone else and share ideas and implementation plans.

Slide 9



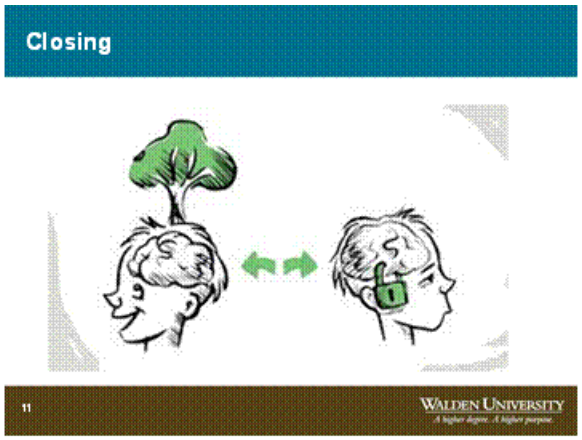
For homework (or now before you leave).

Slide 10



No notes

Slide 11



That concludes today's workshop. I enjoyed working with you all today, and I hope you were able to grow from the experience.

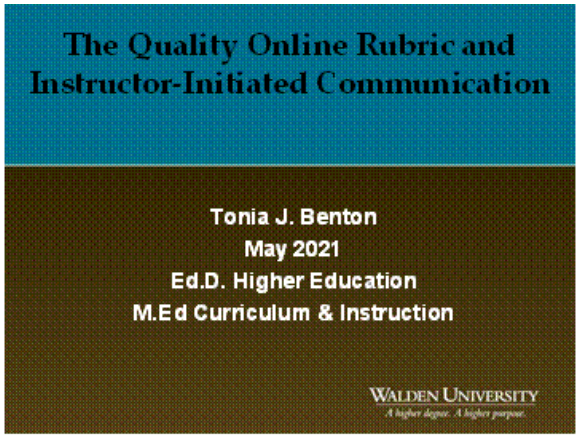
Slide 12

Note: This slide holds the place for the online component and acts as a transition.

Discussions should lead to the problem in the 2nd workshop.

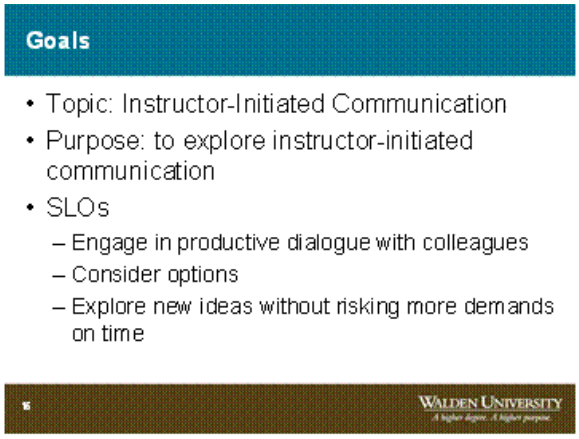
Make sure to remind participants to bring pad and pen to 2nd workshop.

Slide 13



Welcome to The Quality Online Rubric and Instructor-Initiated Communication. I am Tonia, and I will be working with you all through this program. This module builds on the work you did in the previous modules.

Slide 14



Present example problems taken from the online forum. This will likely be issues with trying to implement IIC.

Put students in preplanned groups to work on the problems. Move groups when discussion slows, but before it stalls.

Develop discussion based upon group work.

Slide 15

Your reflection on the Relevance PD should be submitted to the discussion forum.

Slide 20

That concludes today's workshop and the Relevance PD. I enjoyed working with you all, and I hope you were able to grow from the experience.

Evaluation Plan

There are multiple evaluations strategically placed throughout the four PD modules. Each of the four modules include a summative assessment aligned with the module's SLOs. The first module summative output will be clearer expectations and ideas for SLOs across programs. The second module summative output will be departmental consensus on SLOs and summative assessments in each of the six high-impact courses. The third module summative output will be an online shell for each high-

impact course that is consistent and aligned with the Online Review Rubric. The fourth module summative assessment will be instructors documenting changes to implement in their courses. The final summative assessment of the complete PD series will be each instructor of high-impact courses reporting out to their department heads as part of the annual review.

Formative assessments are also planned regularly within each PD module. The first workshop in each module will end with a group project output and a personal reflection. Each online component will include discussion and reflection. Each second workshop will include a personal reflection. The end of the PD series will also include a personal reflection. The formative assessments allow for introspection and consideration of how the PD benefits each individual and their students, which may improve implementation of PD into practice.

Hour-by Hour Detail (8 days)

Module 1

January 2020 Schedule	
9:00-10:00	SLOs, Theory, and Presentation of the Problem
10:00-11:30	Open Forum Discussion
11:30-1:00	Lunch
1:00-3:00	Group Activity (Speed Dating)

Online Reflection of the Day Due Tomorrow
Online Participate in the Online Forum every 2 weeks
Online Reflect on the Online Forum Due May 1

May 2020 Schedule
9:00-10:00 SLOs and Presentation of the Problem
10:00-11:30 Group Activity (Speed Dating)
11:30-1:00 Lunch
1:00-3:00 Open Forum Discussion

Online Reflection of the Day Due Tomorrow
Online Speed Dating Activity Due Tomorrow

Module 2

May 2020 Schedule	
9:00-10:00	SLOs, Theory, and Presentation of the Problem
10:00-11:30	Open Forum Discussion
11:30-1:00	Lunch
1:00-3:00	Group Activity (Round Table)

Online Reflection of the Day Due Tomorrow
Online Participate in the Online Forum 3 times
Online Reflect on the Online Forum Due August 1

August 2020 Schedule
9:00-10:00 SLOs, Assessment, Theory, and Presentation of the Problem
10:00-11:30 Open Forum Discussion
11:30-1:00 Lunch
1:00-3:00 Group Activity (Round Table)

Online Reflection of the Day Due Tomorrow
Online Round Table Activity Due Tomorrow

Module 3

August 2020 Schedule	
9:00-10:00	SLOs, Theory, and Presentation of the Problem
10:00-11:30	Open Forum Discussion
11:30-1:00	Lunch
1:00-3:00	Group Activity (Round Table)

Online Reflection of the Day Due Tomorrow
Online Participate in the Online Forum 3 times
Online Reflect on the Online Forum Due December 1

December 2020 Schedule
9:00-10:00 SLOs, Assessment, Theory, and Presentation of the Problem
10:00-11:30 Open Forum Discussion
11:30-1:00 Lunch

1:00-3:00 Group Activity (Round Table)
Online Reflection of the Day Due Tomorrow Online Round Table Activity Due Tomorrow

Module 4

January 2021 Schedule	
9:00-10:00	SLOs, Theory, and Presentation of the Problem
10:00-11:30	Open Forum Discussion
11:30-1:00	Lunch
1:00-3:00	Group Activity (Speed Dating)
Online Reflection of the Day Due Tomorrow Online Participate in the Online Forum 3 times Online Reflect on the Online Forum Due May 1	

May 2021 Schedule
9:00-10:00 SLOs, Assessment, Theory, and Presentation of the Problem 10:00-11:30 Open Forum Discussion 11:30-1:00 Lunch 1:00-3:00 Group Activity (Speed Dating)
Online Reflection of the Day Due Tomorrow Online Speed Dating Activity Due Report Out FPMS Due to Department Head

Appendix B: Teaching Presence Scale Instrument

A.1. Instructional design and organization

1. Overall, the instructor for this course clearly communicated important course goals (for example, provided documentation on course learning objectives).
2. Overall, the instructor for this course clearly communicated important course topics (for example, provided a clear and accurate course overview).
3. Overall, the instructor for this provided clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities (e.g. provided clear instructions on how to complete course assignments successfully).
4. Overall, the instructor for this course clearly communicated important due dates/time frames for learning activities that helped me keep pace with this course (for example, provided a clear and accurate course schedule, due dates, etc.).
5. Overall, the instructor for this course helped me take advantage of the online environment to assist my learning (for example, provided clear instructions on how to participate in online discussion forums).
6. Overall, the instructor for this course helped students to understand and practice the kinds of behaviors acceptable in online learning environments (for example, provided documentation on "netiquette" i.e. polite forms of online interaction).

A.2. Facilitating discourse

1. Overall, the instructor for this course was helpful in identifying areas of agreement and disagreement on course topics that assisted me to learn.
2. Overall, the instructor for this course was helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics in a way that assisted me to learn.
3. Overall, the instructor in this course acknowledged student participation in the course (for example replied in a positive, encouraging manner to student submissions).
4. Overall, the instructor for this course encouraged students to explore new concepts in this course (for example, encouraged "thinking out loud" or the exploration of new ideas).
5. Overall, the instructor for this course helped to keep students engaged and participating in productive dialog.
6. Overall, the instructor for this course helped keep the participants on task in a way that assisted me to learn.

A.3. Direct instruction

1. Overall, the instructor for this course presented content or questions that helped me to learn.
2. Overall, the instructor for this course helped to focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that assisted me to learn.
3. Overall, the instructor for this course provided explanatory feedback that assisted me to learn (for example, responded helpfully to discussion comments or course assignments).
4. Overall, the instructor for this course helped me to revise my thinking (for example, correct misunderstandings) in a way that helped me to learn.
5. Overall, the instructor for this course provided useful information from a variety of sources that assisted me to learn (for example, references to articles, textbooks, personal experiences or links to relevant external websites).

Appendix C: Online Quality Course Rubric

Clear, step-by-step instructions on how to get started are posted in the newsfeed of the course home page or near the top of the Content menu. Students are given information for linking to technical support services.

The instructor introduction is available and appropriate; it includes contact information.

The Getting Prepared Module is used and includes information on how to use D2L and links to technical support.

The syllabus and course information document links are posted in the Content section. A detailed breakdown of the components that makeup the final grade should be clearly stated.

Unit/Module Introduction documents are posted in the Content section for each unit/module. Unit/Module objectives are aligned with the competencies from the syllabus and course information documents. Course assignments, activities, and assessments are linked to unit/module competencies.

Assignment instructions are posted for each assignment.

Due dates are correct for the current term. Use Calendar, Assignment Schedule Template and/or Checklist.

The instructor provides information on how activities are relevant to course goals and/or life.

Navigation through course is logical and efficient. Course content and instructional material are arranged in consistently designed, reasonably assigned modules.

The instructor included content from multiple sources (presentations, lectures, notes, videos, personal videos).

Provided a mix of individual and group activities.

A variety of assessment measures are used throughout the course.

Students are required to introduce themselves to the class and/or interact with each other in course assignments.

Grading criteria are posted for each assignment.

The instructor helps keep students on task by using proactive reminders in Announcements.

The instructor helps keep students on task by using proactive reminders in Email.

The instructor reactively addresses problems, solicits questions, and provides clear contact preference in communications in Announcements.

The instructor reactively addresses problems, solicits questions, and provides clear contact preference in communications in Email.

Students are given the opportunity for direct, real-time communication with the instructor through the offering of at least one interactive online session (chat, Virtual Classroom, webcam, etc.).

The instructor is helpful and positive in Announcements.

The instructor is helpful and positive in Email.