Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice

Volume 21
Issue 2 *Intensive Modes of Teaching: Past, Present and Future*

Article 11

Expanding faculty development through capacity-building: An institutional case study

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Recommended Citation

Baker, V. L., Christopher, A. N., & Noah, S. (2024). Expanding faculty development through capacity-building: An institutional case study. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 21*(2). https://doi.org/10.53761/1.21.2.11

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Expanding faculty development through capacity-building: An institutional case study

Abstract

The global pandemic highlighted the need for diverse faculty development partners to ensure student and faculty learning was supported, particularly in intensive modes of educational delivery. Our paper presents an institutional case study of how educational technology, in collaboration with the Center for Teaching and Learning and subject matter experts, served as untapped providers of faculty development. We detail the decision to shift to an intensive 7-week module system rather than our traditional 15-week semester in response to COVID-19. Although challenging for both faculty and students, this shift in educational delivery facilitated innovative approaches to faculty and student learning that are present on our campus today. This institutional case study highlights the role that capacity-building plays in capability development and professional learning for faculty and students alike to support effective teaching practice across diverse delivery modes.

Practitioner Notes

1. Adapt to different modes of educational delivery, which require different models of faculty development, particularly in institutional settings that rely heavily on in-person instruction.
2. Engage intentionally with diverse faculty development partners through capability development efforts. The institutional case study presented, coupled with the corresponding lessons learned and outcomes realised (e.g., faculty development resources), is a direct result of such efforts on our campus.
3. Coordinate input from both student and faculty perspectives for a holistic approach to faculty development.
4. Seek formal student feedback opportunities to identify intensive mode strategies to build into faculty development workshops and just-in-time resources.
5. Develop resources to help students adjust to a new mode of learning.

Keywords

faculty development, capacity-building, intensive modes, blended learning

This article is available in Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice: https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol21/iss2/11

Introduction

All higher education institutions were forced to adapt to COVID-19 (Zerbino, 2021), which created particular tensions in liberal arts colleges (LACs), given the emphasis on in-person instruction and residential learning (Baker, in press). This paper presents an institutional case study of Albion College, in the United States (US). Specifically, we feature how two separate faculty support units including Educational Technology (ET), in collaboration with the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), combined to provide more comprehensive faculty development on campus. We detail the shift to an intensive 7-week module system from our traditional 15-week semester, in response to the pandemic. The shift facilitated innovative approaches to faculty and student learning that are present on our campus today. For this paper, faculty in a US context are defined as teachers who impart knowledge and help students develop skills in formal classes. Staff are defined as people who support the work faculty do with students (e.g., Registrar's Office). CTL is an institutional unit that helps faculty members improve their classes through programming via group and individual consultations (Lieberman, 2018).

The knowledge gleaned from this transition speaks to the importance of diverse campus partnerships, showcasing the value those partnerships bring to faculty development. Alongside tangible outcomes (e.g., training sessions), lessons were learned about how to better facilitate faculty and student learning. This case study contributes to the special issue by highlighting the role capacity-building plays in capability development and professional learning via a more holistic approach to faculty development that considers synergies among campus units.

Literature

LACs: A Unique Institutional Setting

The LAC learning environment and underlying educational model informed the educational delivery and instruction strategies chosen by Albion College. In an attempt to honour the importance of the in-person experience that aligns with a LAC education, Albion created an environment that would allow for in-person learning, but in a more flexible format, while also accommodating those who would be uncomfortable with in-person teaching and learning during COVID-19. The result was offering three types of courses: in person, flex (courses with both in-person and online portions), and online. The decision to move to a 7-week module system was made to minimise anticipated interruptions to student learning during this time. If the college needed to close or switch to fully online learning due to a COVID-19 outbreak, this could easily be done. Additionally, this method would ensure faculty had an easier time accommodating student illness in two classes at a time, where they may have struggled with the traditional four. The chosen system comprised four 7-week modules throughout the academic year; students focused

Academic Editors

Section: Special Issue
Editor in Chief: Joseph Crawford
Senior Editor: Jo-Anne Kelder

Publication

Received: 02 April 2023
Revision: 26 September 2023
Accepted: 25 October 2023
Published: 31 January 2024

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on two classes per module. The college relied on critical campus partnerships and subject matter experts (SMEs) to deliver much-needed faculty development. We define SMEs as persons who have accumulated in-depth knowledge and experience in a particular field or topic. In the following section, we provide important insights into the LAC as a unique educational context in which faculty and student learning occur. We conclude this section by discussing the role of ET in faculty and student development.

An Overview of LACs: Providing Context

Residential LACs provide an all-inclusive living and learning experience. Such institutions often appeal to students because they provide a safe space in which students can explore their interests. They often encourage new students not to declare a major until they have explored a variety of academic disciplines as part of their general education requirements. LACs typically emphasise, and make possible, a path to finish an undergraduate degree in no more than 4 years, even if a student does not declare a major until the end of their second year. Students learn to place strong emphasis on developing working relationships with faculty, staff, and peers.

An oft-heard phrase in the LAC environment is that learning occurs both inside and outside the classroom. Students often play multiple sports, act in campus theatre productions, and volunteer in the community. LAC faculty and staff facilitate these experiences, and some colleges require these activities for graduation. Indeed, for new faculty entering such an environment, embarking on a faculty career in this institutional setting can be overwhelming. Although invigorating in some ways, disorientation about what students expect and the different, often seemingly unrelated roles that faculty must play in this environment creates a steep learning curve. During the onset of the pandemic and the following years, even highly experienced faculty felt some degree of disorientation, wondering how to continue to meet student expectations.

Faculty and Student Learning in LACs

We draw on Neumann's (2005) definition of learning to provide further context of the approach we employed to support faculty and student learning: "Learning, as changed cognition, involves the personal and shared construction of knowledge; it involves coming to know something familiar in different ways, or to know something altogether new, from within one's self and often with others" (p. 65). The pandemic, and shift to an intensive mode of educational delivery, required personal and shared construction of knowledge, taking once familiar modes of educational delivery and re-envisioning them to respond to the challenges of the moment.

In the LAC environment, faculty and students engage as co-creators and co-disseminators of knowledge (Baker et al., 2017). Walk across campus or step into a classroom or community organisation and one will see evidence of Kuh's (2008) high-impact practices on full display. It is in the context of these high-impact practices where the hallmarks of a liberal arts education are realised. Habits of heart (e.g., appreciation for others' lived experiences) and mind (e.g., analytic, deductive reasoning) are cultivated as the next generation of engaged, democratic citizens are developed (Baker, 2020). Great care and concern were needed to ensure these hallmarks were honoured despite the pandemic challenges. Thus, there was a need to think about who, how, and in what ways capacity building could (and should) support capability development and professional learning for faculty and students. ET proved to be one such critical partner.

The Role of ET in Faculty Development

Depending on the institution, ET as an organisational unit can play different roles in faculty development and pedagogy practice. At some institutions, there are educational designers who create online, digital, and supplemental materials for courses on campus. At other institutions, ET acts as more of a facilitator, providing training on how faculty can create their own online, digital, and supplemental materials. When a faculty member is working to develop their own materials, they are likely drawing from three areas: content knowledge, pedagogy, and technology (Rust, 2019).

LACs often fall into this second category, where ET acts as a facilitator of professional development and related training, and thus faculty members find themselves needing to research a wide range of areas to prepare for teaching. With an abundance of other factors to consider, many faculty report not having enough time to research pedagogical approaches that use technology meaningfully (Kurzweil & Rossman, 2021). Therefore, they must rely on various campus partners to conduct this research for them (College Innovation Network [CIN], 2022). At many institutions, ET departments conduct this research and then provide workshops, training opportunities, and one-on-one consultations. These sessions cover a wide range of technological tools, such as learning management systems (LMS), software, student response systems, virtual/augmented reality, and more (Meyer & Murrell, 2014).

Data collected by the CIN (2022) suggest that LAC faculty have an interest in ET, but not campus-wide attendance at training and collaboration sessions. Many faculty preferred to discuss ET with their teaching peers whom they believe have a better pulse for the actual work happening in the classroom, something those in ET may not be able to provide (CIN, 2022).

Faculty development can come from diverse areas, with sessions led by ET, libraries, student support services, and CTLs. Recently, institutions have been combining their CTL and ET departments to ensure more collaborative practices between the two. Given that technology is an integral part of pedagogy, combining these areas can allow for more comprehensive faculty development (Lieberman, 2018). This proved to be the case at Albion, as we made an abrupt shift to intensive learning modules in response to the pandemic. With no guiding precedent, we needed to engage in divergent thinking to understand the different entities on campus that support teaching and learning. We tried to approach this situation as a learning opportunity to evolve and emerge as a stronger institution, better equipped to educate an increasingly diverse undergraduate population.

The efforts outlined in this paper are guided by three research questions:

1. What institutional partners are well positioned to support faculty and student learning?
2. What lessons can be realised by engaging diverse faculty development partners?
3. What are the critical considerations that must be accounted for in faculty development when facilitating a shift from traditional to intensive modes of delivery?

Conceptual Framework

Collegial Faculty Development

Given the collaborative approach to faculty development and student learning described in this case study, Esterhazy and colleagues' (2021) framework of collegial faculty development is apropos. They coined this term given a recent reliance on popular forms of faculty development that facilitate formative purposes in which the engagement of subject matter expertise is fundamental. At its core, collegial faculty development is about quality teaching and sharing of knowledge and experience. Collegial faculty development is particularly salient in our experience given "faculty development can be understood as a set of social practices that faculty members and developers in a community share and that are shaped by social conventions and the cultural tools used …" (p. 241). Conceived as a form of faculty development that serves "formative purposes by drawing on the available expertise of colleagues" (p. 238) via peer-to-peer exchanges, the collegial faculty development framework is useful for our purposes given the need to engage and draw on the collective wisdom of individuals (e.g., faculty, students, staff) *and* institutional units (e.g., CTL, ET, Registrar's Office) to conceptualise, implement, and assess the shift in learning modes at Albion.

The collegial faculty development framework has three core factors: contextual, relational, and individual. Contextual factors focus on the sociocultural context(s) that shape collaborative faculty development in practice (Esterhazy et al., 2021; Lave & Wenger, 1991). In our case, the LAC environment was a critical context in which to explore the impact of a switch to intensive modes of instruction on faculty and student learning. The shape of our teaching period changed. There were twice as many teaching periods per year, while students studied half the number of subjects in each period; we offered many virtual and hybrid delivery modes of instruction and sought to support wellbeing while seeking to "learn as we go". The sociocultural practices, particularly high-impact practices (Kuh, 2008), we employ in our LAC environment were challenged. Institutional policies and practices had to be adapted to align with the teaching and learning needs necessitated by the module system while still seeking to ensure appropriate faculty input and discussion of academic requirements and regulations during this time.

Relational factors focus on the interpersonal relationships among community members. Such relationships are rooted in trust, respect, and knowledge of power dynamics (Esterhazy et al., 2021). These relationships proved critical to providing the needed professional and personal support required to manage the forced isolation and steep learning curve all Albion community members experienced. The lack of firmly established relationships proved to be a challenge for the newly hired faculty and staff who joined the college during the pandemic; these individuals did not have the luxury of drawing on years of working together or knowledge of the written (and unwritten) rules of engagement. This required veteran community members to be co-creators and co-disseminators of newly acquired knowledge.

Lastly, individual factors proved to be critical when navigating the shift to an intensive mode of educational delivery. Esterhazy and colleagues (2021) defined individual factors as the person-level aspects that shape collegial faculty development. This includes faculty members' prior experiences with collegial approaches, formal training, and individuals' perceptions of teaching and learning (Esterhazy et al., 2021). It was our community's collective commitment to deliver a

high-quality liberal arts education despite the challenges and shift to a module system. Undergirding that commitment was an appreciation for the knowledge and collective wisdom we could (and did) leverage from the campus and surrounding community. Finally, we granted each other grace, given the speed with which these changes needed to occur and be implemented.

Method

What we describe in this paper is not a traditional research study; rather, it is an institutional case study in which we report our institution's response to the pandemic. As all institutions of higher education experienced, the pandemic required key stakeholders to be responsive and adaptive to effectively manage the crisis situation; our methodological and data collection approaches illustrate that reality. As such, we employed a case-study methodology (Yin, 2014), which is defined as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context" (p. 16). The case-study approach was salient given our desire to use evidence from actors in organisations to make an original contribution to the field of faculty development in intensive modes of teaching and learning (Yin, 2014). A case-study approach, in brief, facilitates an exploration of the how and when of a given phenomenon.

The case study featured here illustrates Albion's approach to training faculty and students, who had been accustomed to teaching and learning in a traditional residential LAC setting, to navigate multiple teaching formats during the 2020–2021 year (and beyond). Specifically, we describe how ET and other campus partners, in collaboration with the CTL, were able to support faculty teaching and student learning across three diverse, newly adapted teaching models in the module system (i.e., fully online, flex, and in person with social distancing). The data-driven approach, and subsequent lessons learned presented, paints an accurate picture of the realities institutional leaders, and corresponding key stakeholders, face daily (e.g., the need to respond to environmental demands in an intentional, thoughtful way). Therefore, institutional ethics approval was not sought nor required. Rather, our paper offers a roadmap for institutional leaders and others involved in decision-making processes to navigate those realities and to benefit from the lessons learned.

Guided by the collegial faculty development framework, we focused data analysis efforts to understand how the pandemic required campus leaders to alter teaching modes and increase the use of technology to promote educational delivery. We examined how these necessary changes were facilitated, the associated outcomes, and the extent to which they influenced permanent change in our sociocultural practices (contextual). Furthermore, we engaged faculty and students in the process both as contributors to the process changes *and* as learners influenced by the changes. An examination of faculty, staff, and students as co-creators and co-disseminators of knowledge was imperative (relationship). Finally, the faculty, staff, and students enrolled and employed at Albion at the time brought their own lived experiences to the academic environment, many of which also included personal realities outside the academic setting. Such considerations were vital to supporting the "whole person" and understanding their positioning in the process (individual).

Data Collection and Analysis

The institutional case study featured and its subsequent results, lessons learned, and critical considerations outlined were informed by a data-driven approach that was nimble, by necessity, given the immediacy of the actions required to support the shift in educational delivery. As evidenced by the details shared, the data-driven approach undergirds the diverse faculty development partners and stakeholders who worked collaboratively. Such an approach was necessary, given the need to be both reactive to constantly changing environmental factors spurred by the pandemic and proactive to anticipate student and faculty teaching and learning needs. Given the reduced 7-week time frame, real-time data collection and analysis was critical to track the experiences and learning of faculty and students to inform and accelerate subsequent decision-making and technology investments.

Data sources include faculty and student surveys (prior to, during, and after the change) that were administered to all faculty employed during the semesters in question and students enrolled across the four divisional areas. Surveys were administered via Survey Monkey and Google Forms, in addition to the multiple mechanisms (e.g., student/faculty focus groups, pilot testing of technology) employed by the Registrar's Office, Provost's Office, or ET to engage faculty and students in the data gathering, data analysis, and decision-making processes. Data collection and analysis were completed by staff members from the Registrar's Office, Provost's Office, and ET, with assistance from experienced faculty, staff, ad hoc committees, SMEs, and stakeholders who participated in decision-making processes. These units led collection and analysis efforts for two main reasons: First, the Registrar and Provost wanted to ensure they had information needed to best assist faculty in identifying students who would need additional support to succeed in the new learning environment and to ensure continued governance and oversight based on changing needs of faculty and students. Second, ET wanted to provide directed training sessions based on what faculty and students were experiencing, or would experience, in the new teaching environment. Data were collected and analysed rapidly to remain responsive to campus needs. Table 1 contains a sampling of the data collection efforts and associated outcomes of knowledge gleaned.

Additionally, the three authors' personal observations were foundational to organising the themes presented, given our roles as faculty developers/faculty and staff deeply immersed in conversations that led to a shift towards an intensive learning environment. We each served as SMEs engaged in faculty development program creation and implementation. Lastly, as a team, we reviewed knowledge gleaned from these sources to ensure consistency in interpretation and organisation of the findings presented.

Table 1

Data Collection Samples From Prior, During, and After the Shift to Intensive Mode

	Technology Review Survey	Focus Group (July 2020)	Educational Technology (ET) Campus-Wide COVID Response Survey
Target audience	Faculty	Students	Faculty, students
Aim	IT-based survey to determine programs faculty need/use to support module (intensive modes) of educational delivery	Gain student perspective on teaching and learning strategies; student engagement strategies during modules (intensive mode)	Gain insight into how faculty and students used technology during the module system; learning impacts
Response rate [a]/No. of participants	52 faculty responses (31% response rate)	6 student participants selected from Student Senate (representing each class year)	77 faculty responses (42% response rate) 376 total student responses (25% response rate)
Sample questions	What training topics or sessions would be most helpful to you in preparing for online or hybrid teaching and learning? What equipment or technology do you believe would help make you more successful for online or hybrid teaching?	In spring 2020, did you feel a disconnect from other students in your classes, and if so, were there any strategies your professors did to keep you engaged with other students in your class that they can use going into a semester of online and hybrid teaching? What could be done similarly or differently from online teaching in spring 2020 going into hybrid/flex teaching and learning in fall 2020 that would help you as a learner?	Which campus-wide programs were most helpful to your learning in fall 2020? What was your biggest technology challenge or hindrance in the fall 2020 semester? What was the biggest technology success?
Outcome(s)	Feedback informed ET-facilitated training sessions (summer 2020)	Shed light on level of student (dis)engagement due to module/intensive model; developed and delivered training for faculty and students Improved accessibility for online, hybrid courses	Investment in most usable/useful technologies Focused technology training sessions; training materials Creation of technology resources

[a] Response rate was calculated based on No. of total responses/No. of invitations sent.

Results

A Sudden Shift in Educational Delivery at Albion College

Esterhazy and colleagues' (2021) framework of collegial faculty development organised our discussion via the three tenets of the framework: contextual, relational, and individual factors.

Contextual Factors: Pre- and Post-Pandemic

Prior to the pandemic, Albion operated on a semester system, with 15-week fall and spring semesters. We have historically offered a small number of in-person summer classes, often for students who must complete one or more required internships during the school year. Students typically enrol in four courses each worth 1 academic unit (equivalent to 4 academic credits in such a tracking system) each semester. Students can opt to take an extra .25 units in experiences (e.g., tennis, yoga) for 1 to 2 hours each week. Most classes meet either 3 days a week (typically, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for 65 minutes) or Tuesday and Thursday for 100 minutes each. A 4-day final exam period occurs at the end of each semester. Some classes require an exam during that week, others use the time to finish class presentations, while others require a final paper or project.

For the 2020–2021 academic year, it was decided in mid-June (2020) that the college would implement an intensive learning environment, referred to as a "module system", instead of the traditional 15-week semesters. Students enrolled in four 7-week modules (two modules per semester) and in two 4-credit classes per module. To the extent possible, all classes were held in person. The first module (Module A) ran from late August until the second week of October, followed by 2 days of final exams. The second module (Module B) started the day after Module A's final exam period ended. Module B ran through Tuesday 24 November. The college then asked students to return home and scheduled 3 days of online exams for after November 26th (the American holiday of Thanksgiving). As an aside, the college did not want students physically returning to campus after a holiday for pandemic-related concerns. To accommodate for December holidays, Module B was followed by a 7-week winter break. College administrators planned for a holiday peak in COVID-19 and were hoping case counts would subside by late January 2021. Students returned for the start of Module C on 25 January 2021. Module C ran from late January to mid-March, with 2 days allotted to final exams. Module D began after a 2-day break following final exams and ran though the beginning of May, with graduation occurring in early May.

Although classes were to be held in person, it was not possible to do so in all cases. Thus, the college offered some classes online, others in person, and some in flex mode. Flex offerings allowed students to have in-person contact with faculty and classmates, while still adhering to social distancing guidelines mandated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The flex model was typically used with relatively large classes. Students attended class in person half the time and online the other half of the time. Thus, half the class would be physically present for each class meeting, and the other half would be present online for each class meeting. This allowed for social distancing in the classroom.

Modules also provided faculty and students with new challenges due to the intersectionality of the scheduling change coupled with the educational delivery mode, given it was not feasible to repackage 15 weeks of course content in a 7-week period. An essential task for faculty was deciding which learning objectives were most critical in their courses, then aligning readings, discussions, activities, and assessments around those objectives. The module system in essence forced faculty to treat all their courses as new course preparations, which proved challenging for even the most-seasoned colleagues on our campus. In addition, faculty had to do so using technologies many of them had not used previously. Even for faculty who had experience with online teaching, few, if any, had taught in different modalities during the same term. In this instance, many were being asked to teach some classes in person, but others in a different modality, all during a condensed semester. For faculty used to in-person discussion-based classes, learning how to maintain discourse with students who were not physically present was difficult. Likewise, students often felt awkward speaking when online. For flex classes, faculty had to attend to two populations of students at once. Even with daily meetings, most faculty found it hard, if not impossible, to learn students' names, a basic tenet of student–faculty interactions at LACs and a seemingly critical thing to do during a period of much forced isolation. For students, there was confusion about which days were in person versus online; inevitably, students confused the rotation and showed up in the wrong space, throwing off social distancing mandates. Table 2 contains the breakdown of the percentage of courses offered in each format during the 2020–2021 school year.

Table 2

Percentage of Classes in Each Format During Each Module of the 2020–2021 School Year

	Flex	Online	In person
Module A	6.83	5.90	7.15
Module B	8.54	6.06	14.14
Module C	9.94	5.28	8.70
Module D	11.65	4.19	8.54
Full semester (spring 2021 only)	0.30	0.60	2.29
Overall 2020–2021 year	37.26%	22.03%	40.82%

Note. These figures do not include data from the 43 first-year seminars, which were taught with a "linked" disciplinary-area 101-level course (e.g., Introduction to Sociology); these classes were taught in person. Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

These characteristics of the module system necessitated that faculty learn – and learn quickly – new ways to teach their students. For instance, as of March 2020, many faculty had never taught online at all; some had only taught asynchronously. All faculty were forced to teach online and often synchronously. Going into the 2020–2021 school year, faculty had to learn different methods

to deliver course content and activities to students in different formats, sometimes within the same course during the same module. Thus, faculty development opportunities were needed immediately in the spring 2020 semester. With time during that summer to prepare for the upcoming "pandemic year", additional development opportunities were needed to meet the varying needs of different courses based not only on the intensive module system but also on course enrolments and the needs of students and faculty alike to be available in person and/or online.

Relational Factors: Who Was Involved (Why and How)?

On our campus, the CTL is administratively separate from our ET unit. Therefore, the expertise needed to help faculty facilitate students' learning in a virtual environment was dispersed across two units on campus. Indeed, the specific technological knowledge rested not in our CTL but in our ET unit. These two units needed to quickly merge their boots-on-the-ground efforts to help faculty continue to assure student learning and development.

Because of the disparate needs and skill levels of faculty, ET realised they would need to lead numerous sessions throughout the summer to help faculty prepare for the upcoming shift to the module system. When preparing the topical list of sessions, they realised they would need to conduct roughly three to four training sessions each week during the summer. To ensure training sessions met the needs of faculty and staff, ET engaged SMEs to supplement and enhance sessions. SMEs included the Provost, Registrar, CTL, Learning Support Center, and faculty who had strengths in online and hybrid learning environments.

Why Were They Involved? What Did They Do?

SMEs, by definition, have discipline-specific knowledge and expertise most people do not (Sutton, 2021). They were needed to supplement many of the workshops that were held throughout the summer. For example, their shared experiences and lessons learned teaching in a 7-week module system, using various teaching technologies and firsthand knowledge of diverse teaching approaches, were invaluable to those with little to no experience in this space. The peer-to-peer faculty mentoring was instrumental to making the abrupt shift.

Our educational technologists conducted 30 workshops lasting 1–1.5 hours each to help faculty prepare for the school year. These sessions covered a variety of online teaching tools and different contexts in which those tools could be used. Some of those workshops focused explicitly on how to use technologies (e.g., Loom to record videos), whereas others were devoted to larger pedagogical issues faculty would face in the uncertain school year ahead. Moreover, the CTL provided resources for faculty in preparation for the year and worked with ET to prepare an online week-long course on how to teach online courses.

ET provided over 85 one-on-one sessions outlining how to use new technology in classrooms for flex teaching. Because the ET team had a background in pedagogy, they also offered sessions to discuss pedagogical plans and technology usage. In addition, they provided faculty and student training videos, guides, and resource lists organised by subject area or need.

What Were the Outcomes?

Prior to COVID-19, faculty had many different teaching styles and methodologies. This trend continued in fall 2020, which spanned August to December of that year. Whereas some focused on using the Moodle LMS, others created courses fully on Google Drive. There were multiple strategies for annotating documents, communicating with students, sharing content, capturing lectures, and even positioning web cameras in the classrooms. In a survey conducted at the end of fall 2020, faculty listed Google Meet, Moodle, and Google Apps as their most-used technologies.

The average attendance for workshops leading into the start of the module format (May to early August 2020) was 42 faculty, with some sessions engaging as many as 60 faculty. Some came to sessions they felt adapted to their teaching styles, whereas others attended all sessions to inform decisions about how to proceed in the fall. Because these sessions presented multiple ideas, faculty could select the technologies and teaching pedagogies that worked best for them.

The most notable tech change in pedagogy compared to pre-pandemic was the use of a second device for teaching, including tablets, iPads, or laptops for presentation purposes. The most-used Moodle LMS tools were the Assignment and Quiz modules, followed by the Gradebook. In a typical year, an average of 77% of faculty use Moodle. This number rose to 83% in fall 2020. The Gradebook previously had an average of 55% faculty usage but jumped to 77% in fall 2020.

Individual Factors: Faculty and Student Learning

Faculty

Faculty found teaching in the module system to be challenging for many reasons. First, many faculty found that technology was no longer just an optional teaching tool, but instead a necessary component for student learning. Some faculty were reliant on using a chalkboard and chalk, or entirely discussion-based teaching methodologies. Suddenly being forced to incorporate technology was a large stretch. Others, who may have been used to basic technology, such as PowerPoint, were required to navigate multiple technologies in a single class session, putting them outside their comfort zone. The ET team found themselves looking at a roughly 300% increase in daily emails that were (a) requesting one-on-one training; (b) asking questions about how to use the campus LMS, Google products, and other online teaching technologies; and (c) posing the question “How do I teach online or hybrid?” This dramatic increase demonstrated that many faculty were nervous about the shift, and some were not sure where to start. In response, ET implemented weekly “Cocktail Hour” sessions, a digital space where faculty, ET, CTL, and support staff could discuss concerns, issues, and ideas for teaching in the new modes. Additionally, leading into the start of the intensive modes, ET offered three training sessions per week, with roughly one to two of those sessions being co-led by SMEs. The Cocktail Hours and formal training sessions continued throughout the module system, but faculty time became much more limited, and sessions dropped in frequency to one every 2 weeks. Because of the nature of the teaching schedule, these sessions could only be offered prior to 8 a.m. or after 4 p.m. to have faculty attend. Session topics were informed by anecdotal feedback and recurring questions that arose from faculty.

Throughout these faculty development sessions, and into the start of the intensive teaching mode, verbal feedback from faculty made it clear there was a need for faculty to continue to share their knowledge with each other. Adapting content from a 15-week to 7-week model meant quickly determining where to make cuts to course content without sacrificing key knowledge or student skill development. Indeed, the emphasis on core learning objectives has helped our college-wide assessment efforts in that faculty were forced to discern the most essential knowledge and skills their courses intended to develop, and then craft streamlined assessments of those knowledge and skills. In a space where faculty needed to adapt their content and pacing, and utilise new and unfamiliar technology daily, faculty were at the whim of failed technologies or were moving too fast for students. They needed to remain flexible with their content, and potentially make large course changes as the modules progressed. Cocktail Hours became a lifeline for many, given the resources and support shared during those gatherings by ET and CTL, as well as other units on campus as related needs arose. Such units included Student Success, the Library, and Community Living. Faculty could use feedback from each other, ET, and varied campus units to make adaptations.

Students

Students shared mixed reviews of the module system. Although they appreciated being able to focus on two classes at a time, rather than the four classes they were accustomed to, the intensity and pace at which that learning occurred was overwhelming. In the summer of 2020, ET initiated a Student Feedback Panel, inviting faculty to pose questions to students about online learning, methodology, and preparing for the 7-week learning mode. The students acknowledged they believed the biggest challenge would be pacing. Although some students were saddened they would miss out on optional complementary content because of the module system, they advised faculty to focus on overarching themes and concepts instead of forcing too much content into a brief time frame. Students also suggested strategies such as outlines for the whole course and individual sessions to help keep them on track. Students also recommended adding in expected time of completion for assignments.

Regarding technology, the student panellists did not seem too concerned. Their main advice to faculty was to ensure students had time to practise the needed tools as soon as the course began. They suggested videos and tutorials on how to use the technology or navigate the faculty member's online course. ET utilised this feedback to develop brief videos on how students could use campus technologies and encouraged faculty to use these videos to save time developing their own. In practice, many faculty found that students were not as tech savvy as they had hoped, and video tutorials became a best practice in assisting students to learn the technology quickly.

The sessions that ET, CTL, and campus SMEs provided leading into, and throughout, the module system allowed faculty to hear multiple pedagogy options for how they could teach within the 7-week intensive model, assess what they believe might be the best approaches for their specific courses, receive stakeholder feedback from campus SMEs and students, and then evaluate the information provided to develop their course content. Specifically, the student panel session demonstrated just how this process worked. Prior to the session, faculty had been provided with numerous training sessions on topics including Engaging Activities for Students in an Online and Flex Environment, How to Encourage Student Discussion, and Building a Classroom Community. Initially, faculty were able to assess the strategies they preferred for their teaching. Then, during

the student panel session, they were able to collect direct feedback from students about which methods would best work for their learning. Based on the combination of these training sessions, as well as student and SME feedback, faculty could evaluate the best approaches for their intensive mode courses. The process of assessing teaching methods, hearing from the stakeholders, and evaluating all the presented information and feedback allowed faculty to develop effective course content for the 7-week modules.

Discussion

Lessons Learned and Implications for Practice

Globally, members of the academy were faced with what felt like insurmountable challenges as the COVID-19 pandemic took hold. The ease with which we could walk into a classroom, be present and together, and engage in learning as a collaborative process was turned upside down. Issues of educational and technological access surfaced; matters of personal health and wellbeing were heightened. Faculty, students, staff, and administrators were forced to adapt with little to no runway as we sought to salvage the remainder of the spring 2020 semester (January to early May) and looked ahead to a very uncertain 2020–2021 academic year (and beyond). Because of lessons learned, we have helped craft a “new state” in higher education at Albion College, one that still honours the values of a residential LAC. Despite the real and present challenges that remain, positive outcomes have also resulted. We organise our discussion by returning to the research questions including implications for practice.

What Institutional Partners are Well Positioned to Support Faculty and Student Learning?

As communicated throughout this paper, the diversity of campus partners engaged was vital to navigating a shift to the module system, an intensive mode of learning, and subsequent lessons learned. Those partners included ET, CTL, SMEs, faculty, staff, and students. We specifically focused on ET as a critical campus partner and resource for delivering and assessing faculty development. By centralising technologically focused faculty development, our campus created an open forum in which faculty could share ideas and best practices, seek advice, and create a community around online and hybrid learning and teaching pedagogies. This serves as a model of organisational communication that remains visible on our campus. Besides its ostensible function on campus, ET has become a gathering place in which other issues, less directly relevant to ET, have been discussed and new campus collaborations spawned. Perhaps it was the survivalist imperative that drove faculty to ET, and from there, these collaborations could develop.

The relationship among faculty, students, and ET was foundational to our teaching and learning success during the pandemic. The symbiotic relationship enabled faculty to serve as a primary driver enabling ET to act on faculty needs. Additionally, ET also offered, and continues to offer, faculty development based on solid teaching practice and related experience. Many of our faculty colleagues have noted that ET is more integrated into their professional lives now than compared to pre-pandemic times; students are more comfortable engaging in diverse educational modes. A takeaway from this lesson is the importance of fostering collaborations with other units on campus to provide needed professional resources and support and to foster a community of learning using technology.

In addition to dedicated discussions of teaching issues across campus, the realisation that SMEs can supplement the work of not only educational technologists but also others across campus is important. The use of SMEs highlights their expertise and the value they add across campus and makes visible other resources on campus that can support faculty and student learning. We found that this type of resource is vital, particularly during stressful times. Acknowledging the work of others not only reinforces those being recognised but also helps all members of campus understand the resources available to them.

An invaluable practical implication from the case study presented is the importance of maintaining flexibility to meet faculty and student needs, which has persisted to the present day. Flexibility in our case was realised because of enlisting the support and engagement of a multitude of institutional partners to envision, implement, and assess the switch to intense modes of educational delivery. Critical to our experience was engaging those who executed the shift in educational delivery (faculty) and the end recipients of that shift (students). We strongly encourage others considering intensive modes of educational delivery to engage in a knowledge assessment on their respective campus and community to determine what resources (e.g., intellectual, human, financial) are in hand and how those resources can be best utilised to achieve desired outcomes.

What Lessons Can Be Realised by Engaging Diverse Faculty Development Partners?

LACs have been characterised as test kitchens for advancing student learning because of their use of high-impact learning practices, many of which were incubated in this institutional environment (Baker et al., 2012). Despite the rapid pace and minimal runway available to make the shift to an intensive mode of delivery, the approach outlined in this paper modelled that of a liberal arts education – one focused on breadth and depth via engagement with diverse faculty development partners.

Despite present challenges, faculty have expanded their teaching repertoires with the help of colleagues from across campus, ET, and CTL. New sociocultural teaching practices were envisioned and realised that remain present on campus today. For instance, prior to the pandemic, only 77% of faculty members used Moodle with regularity; 83% used it during the 2022–2023 academic year, and the college expects continued growth in the 2023–2024 academic year. Faculty who experienced teaching in the 7-week modules, or who viewed the training materials from that time, were exposed to a variety of teaching pedagogies, activities, and best practices that have relevance to student learning.

ET has developed a robust portfolio of best practices accompanied by resource guides and other supporting documentation (e.g., how-to videos). Engaging diverse faculty development partners was the main driver behind portfolio creation, particularly the comprehensiveness of what was created. These tools are now featured in new faculty orientation, and they inform topic-specific workshops and training. Those campus resources are now organised by categories and continue to be available: (a) Activities & Engagement; (b) Flipped Teaching & Learning; (c) Online and Hybrid Teaching & Learning; (d) Protocols & Culture Building (for online and hybrid classrooms); (e) Tech Tools; and (f) Technology Program Features & Updates. Indeed, being forced to conceptualise the tasks required to teach online (and in person) has helped faculty improve how they approach their in-person classes as well. This observation, and subsequent outcome of

creating targeted resources to support online and hybrid teaching environments, aligns with the work of Whittle and colleagues (2020), given their emergency remote teaching environment framework provides guidance on how to navigate and support online teaching in times of crisis. As new needs arise, there is a model in place for how to create resources and support around those needs in a more informed, timely manner with consideration for faculty and student learning at the forefront.

As we reflect on the practical implications that surfaced, we highlight the importance of using a process that facilitates faculty exploration of pedagogy options to incorporate into their courses. Diverse faculty development partners were invaluable, as they allowed faculty to not just hear ideas, but to take those ideas and consult with campus stakeholders (e.g., SMEs, students) for feedback and to utilise all the information provided to develop their course contents. Faculty appreciated that the content they created (and continue to create) is comprehensive, relevant, and likely to result in increased student learning.

What Are the Critical Considerations That Must Be Accounted for When Facilitating a Shift From Traditional to Intensive Modes of Delivery?

Despite best efforts, students could not absorb and apply the same amount of information during the module system, which was shared by students via the IT-hosted student panel and faculty survey responses as informed by their classroom observations. During the 2020–2021 school year, a faculty respondent shared, "… I am not convinced it [the module system] is good for having a sense of community or for deep learning … Classes are long and it is difficult for students to focus". Indeed, the virtues of spaced practice for learning are well established (e.g., Kornell, 2009), and the module system made such practice difficult for students to do, even when faculty provided incentives, such as grading for completion (not accuracy) of daily after-class quizzes. Another faculty member noted on the survey, "Students cannot actually process what they are reading and doing, even if they have the energy to read and do it".

Second, the stressors of the pandemic exacerbated the problems from the quickened pace of the module system. Although the worst of the pandemic appears to be behind us, we as faculty must continue to be cognisant of the stressors that our students are facing and help them learn to balance all aspects of their lives, sentiments also expressed by our students. Based on student feedback, those external stressors weigh more heavily in an intensive mode of learning than in a more spaced time frame. Related student input helped those in decision-making positions think more creatively and holistically about how to leverage existing and needed resources to better support capability development at the student level. Some faculty were justifiably concerned about students taking advantage of the situation to turn in work late (if at all) and get other special accommodations.

Third, cost was a factor in this equation. Initially, Albion was uncertain that we had the technological capacity and funding needed to execute the module-system plan. The initial shift to online with everyone working from home was beyond challenging because many faculty only had desktop computers in their on-campus offices. Every available laptop was in use, as were web cameras and Wi-Fi hotspots. Our ability to increase technological resources was further challenged as needed equipment was often on backorder. As such, we had to order web cameras that were not to our typical specifications because they were the only ones that could be delivered

in time for the start of Module A in August 2020. Being adaptable and flexible with technology was paramount.

Fourth, the shift to the intensive modes surfaced software and tech redundancies. As an ET training team of just two people, condensing the list of supported software was paramount. This list of software was based on technology the ET team was best able to support and troubleshoot at the least detriment to those who would need it. This often led to disappointment and arguments from a small fraction of faculty and staff. For instance, some campus members preferred Zoom over Google Meet, but as a team responding to questions, we had 3 years working knowledge of Google Meet, a program our campus already paid for, and no working knowledge of Zoom, a program that would have been a significant cost addition to the campus. Therefore, Google Meet became the default meeting platform.

Finally, determining the type of training was critical. Oftentimes, faculty and staff did not know what training they needed to do what they wanted in their courses. ET, however, had the expertise to help faculty with their needs and to provide ideas that, because they are content and not technology experts, faculty may not have known about. There will likely be a technology, pedagogy, and possibly even a structural component (e.g., What does the semester look like? When are exams? How do we ensure we meet such deadlines?) that plays a role in what training different constituents need.

An important practical implication that surfaced from this experience was the importance of community – both virtual and in person. It is easy to revert to old ways of engagement and communication, but such methods are not always as productive as they need to be. We continue hosting Cocktail Hours online in which faculty and staff assemble around specific and general issues faced on campus. Furthermore, in addition to “normal” in-person meetings, we now regularly hold meetings between faculty and students virtually, which oftentimes allows for greater attendance than would be the case in person only.

Conclusion

On our campus, there are many definitions of “faculty development”, with most encompassing faculty scholarship at the heart of this phrase. Since fall 2021, we have returned to fully in-person instruction. However, the past 36 months provided us the opportunity to change aspects of the in-person learning experience, informed by lessons learned from teaching during a pandemic. Crucially, we realised the explicit need for faculty and staff to stay current well beyond one’s scholarly or professional interests. For us, the inclusion of ET as an important resource for faculty development, coupled with CTL, SMEs, faculty, and students, helped build the skill sets and acumen of all involved. Our hope is that the knowledge gleaned, and the lessons learned featured in this paper, will encourage others seeking to engage diverse faculty development partners to support faculty and student learning.

Limitations

As stated previously, what we outline in this paper is not a traditional research study; instead, we describe the data-driven processes that informed and facilitated an abrupt shift to an intensive educational delivery mode, called modules. Such a response was necessary to manage an ongoing emergency situation caused by the pandemic. The type and flexibility of the modes used

on our campus may not match other situations and contexts. As such, our findings are informational and provide ideas for others to consider. Further, the methodological approach, the absence of formal ethics approval, and the single-site setting means what is described may not be generalisable across the academy.

Conflict of Interest

The authors disclose that they have no actual or perceived conflicts of interest. The authors disclose that they have not received any funding for this paper beyond resourcing for academic time at their respective universities.

Non-Use of AI

Artificial intelligence was not accountable for the production of this research output, or any part therein, including the contributing methodologies, results, and discussions.

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