

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN AN ONLINE CONTEXT: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FROM THE VOICES OF COLLEGE FACULTY

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## ABSTRACT

*Given the variety of learning and engagement needs of the increasingly diverse student population in higher education, flexible approaches to teaching are critical for improving student success. Professional development that provides faculty exposure to effective, evidence-based instructional strategies in an online context may enhance their teaching practices. This study explored the advantages and disadvantages of the online context from the perspectives of ten faculty who completed an online disability awareness program, designed using two promising models: Universal Design for Instruction and Community of Inquiry. Thematic analysis of the qualitative results indicated control of pace, flexibility, and continued access to resources were benefits of the online context, while lack of social interaction, intrinsic motivation, and accountability were challenges for faculty in completing professional development online. Implications for designing and promoting online faculty professional development are presented.*

*Keywords: higher education; online faculty professional development; Universal Design for Instruction (UDI); Community of Inquiry (CoI) model*

## INTRODUCTION

Given the increased diversity of the student population, flexible approaches to teaching and learning are critical for improving student success in higher education. In today's postsecondary classroom, there are more nontraditional students such as older and returning students, first-generation college students, and those with disabilities—many of whom may not be prepared for or lack support conducive to the academic demands of college (McKee & Tew, 2013). Inequity in the persistence and completion rates for these underrepresented groups necessitates a reevaluation of teaching methods for promoting student learning and engagement (Brancato, 2003). Students of today need more interactive teaching strategies that connect their learning to personally relevant, real-world situations and that engage them in diverse ways (Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy, 2011).

Kezar and Maxey (2014) argue that faculty play a crucial role in student success; their

contact and relationships with students inside and outside the classroom have a strong impact on student persistence, engagement, and motivation, particularly for at-risk student populations. Research documents the benefits of high-impact educational practices, such as writing-intensive courses, undergraduate research, and service learning, for improving the success of college students from diverse backgrounds (Kuh, 2008). However, 54.6% of all higher education faculty at Title IV degree-granting institutions in the United States are part-time instructors (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011) whose employment contracts may limit their inclusion in the institutional culture. Adjunct faculty members may not be given resources to participate in professional development and have been found to be less likely to use student-centered and active learning approaches in their teaching (Dailey-Hebert, Mandernach, Donnell-Sallee, & Norris, 2014; Kezar & Maxey, 2014). The contingency of part-time instructors making up

the faculty has increased in recent years, and such instructors make up a substantial portion of the faculty population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011), yet institutions struggle to offer the resources, time, and communication necessary to facilitate faculty use of high-impact practices.

Many faculty lack knowledge of diverse teaching methods to promote student engagement and often work in isolation from one another, adhering to traditional higher education practices that prioritize professional autonomy over collaboration (Brancato, 2003). For example, many faculty rely mainly on lecture-style delivery of course information and static readings, often failing to use technology creatively to provide more interactive components within both the traditional and online class environment. Faculty in higher education are hired for their disciplinary expertise and are rarely given training in pedagogy and andragogy (Brancato, 2003; McKee & Tew, 2013; Mundy, Kupczynski, Ellis, & Salgado, 2012). Although tenure-track faculty may have more institutional support and resources than part-time faculty, they often lack time to invest in their own developmental learning because of having to balance research and service demands in addition to teaching (Kezar & Maxey, 2014).

Confronted by diverse student learning needs and a faculty struggling to keep pace with new instructional practices, ongoing professional development that addresses evidence-based teaching strategies should be made more widely available. Faculty development programs that are well-designed and effectively implemented promote vitality, collaboration, and productivity that enhance the campus community (Brancato, 2003). Therefore, institutions need to look for ways to provide professional development opportunities that are easily accessible to both full- and part-time faculty and enrich their awareness and application of effective teaching practices. In this article, we examine the literature on two promising models to guide faculty development: Universal Design for Instruction and Community of Inquiry. We then explore the advantages and disadvantages of the online context based on the perspectives of faculty who completed an online disability awareness program created using principles from these two models.

### *Professional Development focused on Universal Design for Instruction*

One of the growing diverse student populations increasing in higher education is students with disabilities. Because the number of students with disabilities in higher education has more than tripled in the last three decades (National Council of Disability, 2003), many institutions throughout the country have implemented policies to ensure that course materials and technologies are accessible for individuals with disabilities. For example, the California State University system adopted the Accessible Technology Initiative in 2005, establishing their ongoing commitment to provide information resources and technologies that are accessible to all students (California State University, Office of the Chancellor, 2004). Using a variety of teaching strategies to appeal to diverse modalities in the classroom is essential to improve student success, especially because faculty are often unaware of the unique challenges faced by students. In fact, national research evidence suggests that close to three out of four college students with disabilities do not disclose their disabilities to others at their institution (Newman et al., 2011).

Universal Design for Instruction (UDI) is an educational paradigm aimed at promoting equitable access to learning and designing an inclusive environment to accommodate students with varying ability levels and backgrounds (Scott & McGuire, 2005; Scott, McGuire, & Shaw, 2003). UDI involves proactively creating a welcoming classroom environment with accessible instructional materials and methods while maintaining academic standards. This paradigm originated in the 1970s with Ronald Mace and his colleagues at North Carolina State University. They created seven principles for designing objects like doorways, sidewalks, and machines to accommodate human diversity (McGuire & Scott, 2006).

UDI capitalizes on the universal design principles originally used in architecture and adapts them to the classroom environment to embrace the diversity of students as the norm. Although the educational literature uses a variety of terms (e.g., Universal Instructional Design, Universal Design for Learning), in this article, we use UDI to encompass the major principles shared by each.

To summarize, UDI encourages college instructors to use multiple methods of presenting information (e.g., lecture, graphic organizers, videos), multiple types of assessments (e.g., projects, papers, tests), and multiple means of engagement (e.g., hands-on activities, group discussion) (Center for Applied Special Technology, 2011). Not only does use of UDI permit higher education to meet legal mandates for students with disabilities, but it also fosters a rich and inclusive learning environment that benefits all students. The UDI framework has been further identified to be consistent with the high-quality educational standards set by online pedagogies (Scott & Temple, 2017). Two recent studies have provided empirical evidence of UDI's beneficial effects on student learning after faculty received professional development in UDI strategies (Davies, Schelly, & Spooner, 2013; Schelly, Davies, & Spooner, 2011). Given the positive effects of UDI training for faculty enhancement of effective teaching, institutions can benefit from providing all faculty with basic professional development on this topic and the online context may be an efficient place for this education to take place.

### *Effective Professional Development*

Faculty development centers are confronted with the challenge to find ways to provide programs that promote meaningful, deep learning, while at the same time provide convenience and flexibility. Many faculty development opportunities involve one-day workshops focused on a particular technology tool or skill development, irrespective of whether faculty will be teaching face-to-face or online (Dailey-Hebert et al., 2014). However, this strategy of providing one-time training is unlikely to lead to deep learning and course reform, which requires more time to process and further examples with which to engage (Bickerstaff & Cormier, 2015). In reviewing the best practices for faculty development curriculum, Elliott (2014) identifies that effective programs are directly tied to the institution's mission and goals and include assessment of the success of the program in achieving these goals. In a study examining the preferences of adjunct faculty for professional development, faculty expressed a desire for opportunities that capitalize on their intrinsic motivation for growth and reward them for the time invested (Dailey-Hebert et al., 2014). They also desired opportunities that could be accessed

on demand and could continually provide access to resources even after program completion.

The online context may be ideal for meeting all of these needs. Several research studies have emphasized the potential economic benefit of developing online professional development opportunities for higher education faculty, yet they acknowledge the limited progress of implementation across universities (Cook & Steinert, 2013; Rienties, Brouwer, & Lygo-Baker, 2013). A recent review of the literature on online learning for faculty development indicated that despite evidence suggesting online faculty development is at least comparable in knowledge and skill learning outcomes to traditional in-person training, the evidence base is sparse and needs further exploration (Cook & Steinert, 2013). The advantages of the online context include the potential for large enrollment and flexibility in timing. Learners controlling the pace of instruction was also noted as a significant benefit. Features favorable to successful online outcomes include well-designed organization, easy access to materials, and clearly communicated expectations for the time commitment. One of the challenges frequently noted about online professional development, however, is the difficulty in creating meaningful collaboration among participants (Good & Schumack, 2013). The online professional development program described in the present paper was designed to meet many of these recommendations by using the Community of Inquiry Model.

### *Online Disability Awareness Program and the Community of Inquiry Model*

In this paper, we reflect upon the qualitative themes described by faculty who voluntarily completed an online disability awareness program. The purpose of the program was to introduce faculty to the principles of UDI to help them apply these strategies to their own course materials and activities to enhance their teaching. The program was created by a task force at a large, public four-year university focused on fostering campus-wide education related to the needs, rights, and issues of individuals with disabilities. It consisted of three modules accessed in the university's learning management system, each made up of text-, audio-, and video-based materials, that provided faculty with continued access to these resources. Each

module took approximately one to two hours to complete, and faculty could take up to one semester to complete all three modules, which would earn them a certificate documenting professional development.

The online program was constructed to follow the recommended components of a Community of Inquiry (CoI) model, which is a theoretical framework that has been used to enhance the learning effectiveness of online instruction for adult learners in postsecondary education (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). CoI consists of three interdependent elements: teaching presence, cognitive presence, and social presence (Garrison, 2011). Teaching presence is the first element and focuses on the provision of strong organization, direct instruction, formative feedback, and clearly communicated objectives (Garrison, 2011). This study's online program addressed teaching presence by stating clear learning objectives at the start of each module and providing immediate feedback on required self-check quizzes at the end of each module to aid faculty assessment of their own learning progress. The materials within the modules were organized into 20-minute segments, with a clear step-by-step design, and incorporated multiple media formats, such as video, examples, illustrations, and narrated slides.

Another element of CoI is cognitive presence, which involves the promotion of critical thinking and reflection and encourages learners to explore different alternatives and integrate concepts (Garrison, 2011). To establish cognitive presence, the online program provided videos that could be easily stopped and started as needed for processing and reflection, in addition to intermittent quizzes with feedback to check their own understanding of the program content. The last element of CoI, social presence, is established via a collaborative community environment in which participants feel part of a cohesive group and communicate purposely with trust and respect (Garrison, 2011). Learning from others and hearing diverse perspectives is essential to establishing social presence. In this program, videos were included to promote a sense of social presence. Videos displayed students with disabilities sharing their personal experiences and faculty demonstrating various UDI techniques in the classroom. Although the use of videos does not allow for authentic social bonding experiences and

personal connections between learners, the videos were chosen as a method of providing some social presence with the goal of keeping the length and complexity of the online program to a minimum. The limitations regarding this choice are elaborated upon later in the paper.

According to CoI theory, the three elements of teaching, cognitive, and social presence are all necessary to create an educational environment that maximizes high levels of learning and engagement. Research supports both the practical application of CoI's three elements to higher education and its relationship with adult student learning effectiveness (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). Brancato (2003) recommends that faculty professional development programs should be designed to recognize "faculty as adult learners and employ adult learning strategies to foster their development" (p. 62). Consistent with adult learning theory, faculty as self-directed learners need materials and examples that are practical and relevant to their teaching and afford them the opportunity to reflect and examine their current practices (Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy, 2011). Furthermore, optimal learning environments for faculty capitalize on their internal motivation by allowing them to control their pace of processing information. In the current program, an attempt was made to incorporate all the elements of the CoI model to create an optimal environment for online learning. The purpose of this paper is to consider the advantages and challenges of the online context for professional development by reflecting on the themes reported during interviews with faculty members who completed this program. Moreover, we examined how well the program fit the CoI model from the participants' perspectives.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

Participants were ten faculty members interviewed regarding their experiences completing the online disability awareness program. In fall of 2014, all full- and part-time faculty at a public four-year institution were sent email invitations to participate in the online disability awareness program. The institution is located in the western region of U.S. and has approximately 2,000 full-time and part-time faculty members (49% female, 29% ethnic minority). During the fall semester, 38



Table 1. Interview Participant Demographics (N = 10)						
Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	College	Academic Rank	Years Teaching
Alaska	F	White	50-59	Educ	Tenured	21+
Colorado	F	White	50-59	Arts	PT Lecturer	21+
Delaware	F	White	60-69	HHD	FT Lecturer	11-15
Florida	F	White	30-39	Library	Tenure-Track	1-5
Hawaii	M	White	70+	Educ	Tenured	21+
Idaho	F	Latina	40-49	HSS	PT Lecturer	11-15
Kansas	F	Latina	40-49	Educ	Tenure-Track	6-10
Louisiana	F	Asian/PI	40-49	HHD	FT Lecturer	11-15
Michigan	M	White	40-49	HHD	Tenured	6-10
Nevada	M	White	50-59	HHS	PT Lecturer	21+

Note: Educ = College of Education; Arts = College of the Arts; HHD = College of Health and Human Development; HSS = College of Humanities and Social Sciences; FT = full-time; PT = part-time

self-selected faculty members completed the online program. A purposive sample of ten participants was chosen for qualitative interviewing. They represent maximum variation in demographic characteristics of those who completed the program in the previous semester (see Table 1). Interviewees were randomly assigned a pseudonym to protect confidentiality, and each faculty member permitted disclosing his/her college discipline. All procedures were approved by the institution's board for research with human subjects.

#### *Materials and Procedure*

The 45-minute interviews, conducted in each faculty member's office, were part of a larger study conducted on the effectiveness of the program (see Wynants & Dennis, 2017 for more information on evaluation of the program). The interview data described in this paper focused on how participants described their experiences in the online professional development program. Specifically, they were asked: (1) what parts of the program they found effective

and not effective and why; (2) whether there was anything about the program they found challenging and why; (3) whether they found anything about the program enjoyable and why; (4) to describe how their experience in this program compared to their past professional development experiences; (5) and lastly to compare their in-person professional development experiences to the online format of this program and describe how it added to or detracted from their learning and enjoyment.

Participants accessed the program via the college's learning management system. The program consisted of three modules, each taking approximately one to two hours to complete. Module 1 provided an introduction to higher education disability laws, accommodation policies, disability types, and campus services available; Module 2 focused on UDI principles and included examples of teaching strategies and class activities; and Module 3 provided instruction on creating accessible instructional materials. Participants

could continue to access the multiformat content (text, audio, and video) as resources after the program was completed.

### *Qualitative Analysis Methodology*

The two researchers worked collaboratively through all steps of the qualitative data analysis to increase the validity of the developed themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis method, we first familiarized ourselves with the data by reading interview transcripts, making notes, and jotting down initial ideas for coding. Next, we applied a deductive-inductive approach to category construction (Bradley, Curry, & Devers, 2007), which involved developing some codes by reading over the transcripts and looking for reoccurring ideas and potential themes and developing others deductively by looking for advantages and disadvantages to the online context gleaned from specific interview questions. Once thematic categories were created and defined, each researcher independently coded the excerpts, and interrater reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa. Results indicated satisfactory reliability (Burla et al., 2008) for each of the three major coding categories: .86 (advantages to online), .91 (barriers), and .65 (improvement suggestions). Discrepancies between coders were resolved by consensus. Lastly, we refined themes by discussing and analyzing how the coding categories could be combined to form overarching themes.

## **RESULTS**

Two major themes emerged from the analysis of the interview data: (a) the advantages of online as a forum for faculty development and (b) challenges and opportunities for improving and promoting online professional development.

### *Advantages of the Online Context for Faculty Development*

Regarding advantages of the online context, two subthemes were found: (a) control of pace and attention enriched faculty learning and engagement, and (b) flexibility and continued access to resources made the program convenient and useful.

*Control of pace and attention enriched faculty learning and engagement.* All faculty expressed that they learned as much or more from this online professional development experience as compared to any previous in-person programs.

Both Professor Kansas and Professor Idaho found both types of professional development "equally valuable," while some, like Professor Michigan, stated that he "maybe [learned] even more by doing it online." Moreover, all ten faculty shared that they experienced equal or greater engagement in this online program compared to past professional development experiences. For example, Professor Florida, a new tenure-track faculty member, said, "I would rather watch videos than someone lecture."

Every interviewee responded that the online program was well designed; they appreciated the multiple components with diverse presentation styles offered (e.g., text, narrated PowerPoints, videos, quizzes) and found the 20-minute segments to be digestible. Faculty identified that the online environment allowed them to control the pace of information, which led to enhanced learning. Professor Colorado, a part-time instructor with over 20 years of experience, asserted:

*I think I probably learned more because I focused in on things and then I had time to think about, what is this, and then go back and reread some of the things that would clarify that information. Whereas, sometimes when you're in a one-on-one class that somebody's teaching, you are just trying to take it all in, and then you go home, and you read your notes, you're like, oh, my gosh, what is this? And I know with classes, they feel like they need to get all this information out there, and then there's not really a lot of time for reflection. I had more time for reflection online.*

Many also shared that they appreciated being able to start and stop when needed for reflection or a break and to rewatch materials to process better. For example, Professor Idaho, another part-time instructor, mentioned, "As soon as I could feel my attention span wavering, I'm going to pause it; I'm going to take a break here, and I'm going to come back." Expanding upon why he learned more, Professor Michigan, a tenured faculty member, emphasized the advantages of intermittent feedback from quizzes:

Because your control over the material, going back, going forward, the self-testing that you kind of bake into it. That you can kind of do in these in-person things with clickers and et cetera, but

it's not the same. Nobody in these in-person things is literally giving out a quiz that everyone takes, stops, and scores. At least I've never experienced that. So that ability to do that, and it's easier to do in an online thing like this.

In fact, faculty were so satisfied with their online program experience that all ten expressed willingness to do more online professional development courses in the future, provided they were similarly relevant and well-designed. This satisfaction was true despite the fact that only three had prior experience with online professional development, and only six had occasional or frequent participation in professional development experiences at all. However, this finding needs to be interpreted within the context of self-selection, as all faculty participants volunteered to complete the online training, and different results may occur if faculty are mandated to complete online professional development.

*Flexibility and continued access to resources make program convenient and useful.* Additionally, the majority of the faculty expressed that they liked the convenience and flexibility of online professional development regarding scheduling and control of the environment. As Professor Kansas humorously noted:

*It was at my pace. I got to remain in my pj's. I wasn't in my pj's, but I was at home and dressed comfortably, and I may have eaten an ice cream while I watched videos. I'm not allowed to do that in the FDC [Faculty Development Center].*

Likewise, Professor Louisiana shared that the online program was “doable because I could do it from home, I could do it whenever. It wasn't a scheduling where you have to block out all this much time.” They also appreciated that they could download and save resources for future use, as Professor Colorado stated: “What I do is, like when I'm redoing my syllabus and setting up my online class, I'll forget how to do it, so then I access the tutorials. I do that a lot.”

#### *Challenges and Opportunities to Online Context for Faculty Development*

Faculty acknowledged several challenges relating to online professional development, but they also suggested exciting innovations to address these. This theme had three subthemes: (a) lack of

social presence—need for collaborative features and personal connections; (b) lack of intrinsic motivation—need to promote the value of effective teaching strategies for diverse learners; and (c) less accountability—need for administrative support and incentives.

*Lack of social presence—need for collaborative features and personal connections.* One disadvantage to online professional development noted by seven of the ten faculty is the lack of social connection. Professor Alaska, an education professor with substantial teaching and administration experience, stated that she missed “the conversation, the reflection you get when you have other people there that you can talk to about it.” Some faculty also wished that they could have had questions answered or be given feedback or further clarification of content. Professor Michigan noted, “having a person in front to talk to—there's an advantage to that.”

Faculty recommended several ways to enhance the social connection in online professional development. One simple idea to improve it involved adding a discussion forum feature to the online program. As Professor Louisiana remarked, she would have liked, “a discussion thread, where people could put up what they're doing or ideas.” Professor Florida elaborated on the benefit of having a social connection:

*That would be kind of inspirational because it's things that you might not have thought of. When you do something like this, particularly this class, there's no community, and there's no instructor; it's just you and your videos in your office. A little more of a community [would be nice].*

Others expressed that they would like to have a cohort approach to the online program, which may or may not include an in-person component. For example, one idea was for an entire department to go through the program at the same time so they could discuss and share curriculum ideas together. Another idea was to have at least one session be hands-on so that faculty could get one-on-one help with technical issues. Professor Louisiana elaborated on what an in-person component might involve:

*Having those trainings where you're each*

*sitting at a computer, and you can create a document, and they take you step by step, so it's not just like watching a video of someone doing it, but you're actually creating one at the same time. I feel like if I'm actually doing it, it's going to stick more.*

One last program enhancement for professional development was to require the creation of a product by the end of the program that could be turned in for feedback and provide a measurable outcome for assessment. Professor Alaska shared this idea:

*I think the difference is that in many of the professional development trainings I've had, I had to create a product, and you did not require that. Or even an action plan. So as you go through the course, you may cover the part on disabilities, and then your action plan would be, what are you going to do after module one; what are you going to try and do?*

Some faculty further mentioned that a way to improve program participation would be to increase the personal connection by reaching out to other faculty members and sharing what they learned. Professor Alaska stated this succinctly, "Have faculty reach out to other faculty and personally invite them to participate. Word of mouth is powerful. Have them share how it benefited them, target them with specifics such as relevant quotes and examples." This sentiment aligns with statements by several faculty who reported that referral by another faculty member who endorsed the program was one of their primary motivations for participating in the program.

*Lack of intrinsic motivation—need to promote the value of effective teaching strategies for diverse learners.* The invitation to participate in this program was sent to approximately 2,000 full-time and part-time faculty at the university, yet only 38 faculty members completed the program during the fall term. Some interviewees acknowledged that one of the challenges to getting faculty to participate is that not everyone has the drive to seek out professional development and some may feel its value is not worth their time. Professor Idaho was concerned about this:

*I thought it was a really beneficial program.*

*It disturbs me greatly to know that the numbers were so low on participation, but I think it's really useful for all faculty. I mean, you have a responsibility for serving all students, so to not take something like that, it's a real shame.*

Furthermore, as Professor Alaska put it, some faculty may not benefit from an online experience "because they just don't have the skills yet" to be an online learner.

Several faculty mentioned that one way to promote participation in professional development is to emphasize to faculty how programs such as this could be used to reach diverse student learners. Professor Kansas shared, "At least in our college, we don't have a lot of students that declare a disability." However, Professor Kansas went on to note that if the program was marketed to focus on enhancing effective teaching strategies, more faculty might be interested because "this would be a natural part of the toolbox to address" the needs of diverse students in their classrooms and could improve the feedback they get in teaching evaluations.

Indeed, the majority of the ten faculty interviewed expressed that intrinsic motivation and an inherent interest in pursuing development to augment their teaching skills were primary factors in their decision to participate in this online disability awareness program. Professor Delaware communicated her appreciation of professional development:

*I love learning. So it's very, very positive. I mean, especially as it relates to helping me be a better teacher. And I love when I can see the examples of how other people are doing things too. That really, really helps me. I like to try out tools. I'm always playing around with new web tools.*

Empowering faculty to recognize how their teaching can positively impact student success may improve participation rates in professional development.

*Less accountability—need for administrative support and incentives.* A final challenge to online professional development noted by a few faculty involved the lack of recognition of the value of professional development for enhancing teaching skills, not only among faculty but particularly



among the administration. Faculty professed that tenure-track and tenured professors are expected by the administration to put in substantial time to scholarship and may feel that time to invest in developing their teaching is less appreciated. Professor Delaware, a full-time lecturer, mentioned, "It's challenging to get faculty because, for many people, scholarship is the biggie."

One way to promote the value of professional development for pedagogy is to emphasize its relevance among new faculty who can put documentation in their portfolios as evidence of their efforts to improve their teaching. Professor Florida, a new faculty hire, commented:

So for new tenure-track faculty that might be a nice carrot; like if you do this, you put it in your RTP [retention, tenure and promotion file]. I don't know if you can convince separate departments to put more weight on things to improve teaching.

Nevertheless, the majority of faculty members acknowledged the fact that administration needs to do more to recognize the importance of teaching for improving student success. Professor Nevada, a long-term part-time instructor, emphasized this point:

*This has to be top-down. The administration everywhere has been approaching this from the wrong angle that they keep making the students better; make the teachers better. You can't pat yourself on the back and go, "We have this many tenured people." But how good at teaching are they? Administration has missed the boat on this one, and they need to rethink that.*

About half of the faculty mentioned that administration should provide more monetary resources for incentivizing professional development with stipends, release time, and raises. Professor Nevada further stated:

*If this would be worth another percentage point raise, I mean, you're getting a better instructor. Reinforce the person who acquires the skills. It might not be required at that point, but it might be one way to get a two percent raise, so incentivize it. You don't make this a requirement. This is if you do this, you get the raise.*

Although many faculty suggested requiring this

type of professional development for all faculty, they still emphasized that it should be recognized and valued by those making retention, promotion, and tenure decisions as a key component in improving student success. Professor Michigan highlighted that one way to increase administrative buy-in for providing more resources toward professional development is by connecting it to:

*closing achievement gaps, improving first-year retention, improving four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates. Yeah and then suddenly that opens up the conversation to anything that can be done to do that, including training, you know. Then faculty know how to teach to those students better.*

In conclusion, faculty participants viewed the online disability awareness program as a valuable opportunity to improve the quality of education provided by the institution and as one that should be promoted and supported by the administration.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this paper was to examine and reflect upon faculty perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of the online context for professional development. The qualitative responses from faculty demonstrate how an online professional development program focused on UDI and disability awareness was able to effectively achieve the elements of the CoI model. Figure 1 displays the CoI model applied to online professional development, as informed by this study's findings. With regard to the teaching presence component of CoI, which reflects organization and well-designed content (Garrison, 2011), all faculty participants identified the strengths of the program design as including clear objectives, structured modules, and use of multimodal presentation styles to appeal to all styles of learners (e.g., auditory, visual). Additionally, participants endorsed the flexibility, control of pace, and continued access to resources offered by this online program. These features were reported to lead to optimal learning because participants were able to process and digest the information at their own pace and revisit the material as needed. Thus, these features helped to enhance learning, which is where teaching presence and cognitive presence overlap within the CoI model.

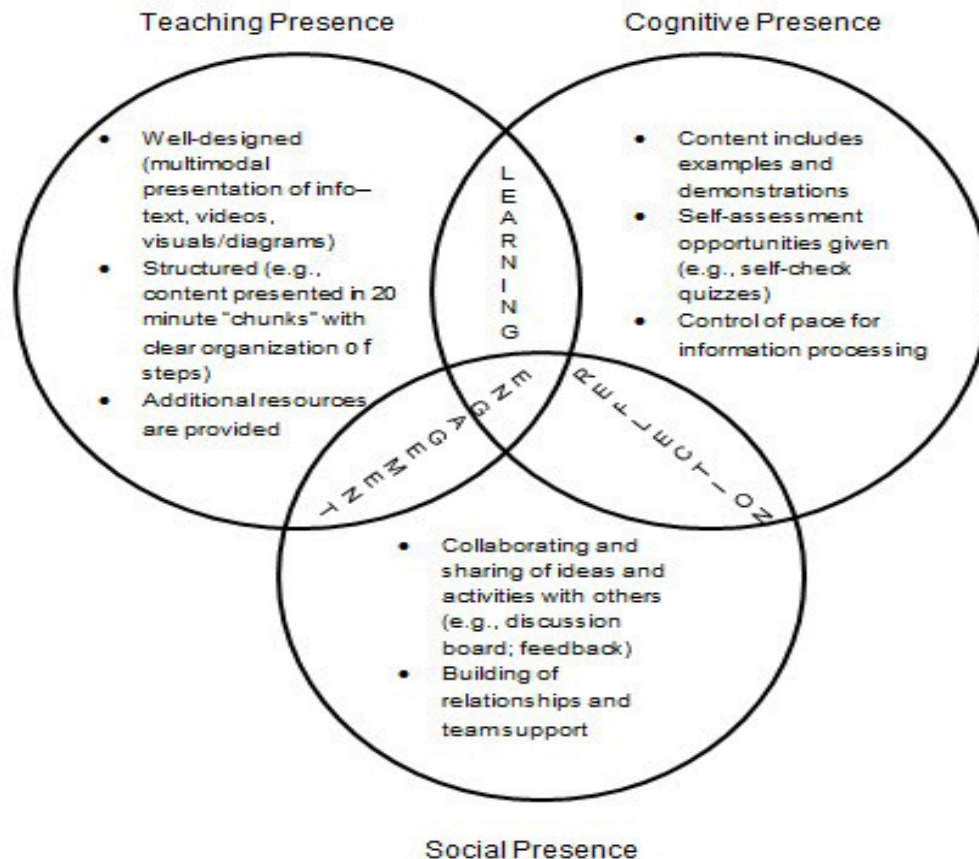


Figure 1. Community of Inquiry (CoI) model for online professional development. Adapted from Garrison (2011).

Another area of CoI is cognitive presence, which involves providing activities that promote critical thinking, reflection, and consideration of alternative concepts (Garrison, 2011). From the interviews, some faculty reported that having intermittent quizzes motivated them to more actively pay attention, and all faculty noted that they learned as much or more in the online context compared to other in-person professional development experiences. Faculty recognized that the primary benefit of the program was the way the program led to greater reflection and processing of the program content. Some mentioned that the videos of other faculty demonstrating new concepts moved them to critically think about the UDI strategies. Reflection is represented in the model as the area of overlap between cognitive and social presence.

Social presence is the last element of the CoI model that establishes a collaborative community of learners to promote the sharing of ideas in a safe, comfortable environment

(Garrison, 2011). The overlap between teaching and social presence involves the engagement of participants in a motivating and interesting learning experience. Specifically, in this study, faculty who were interviewed acknowledged that the video demonstrations of students sharing their perspectives, faculty sharing their experiences, and hearing the voice in the narration to the PowerPoint slides kept them engaged and interested. However, social presence was the area that faculty identified that could be the most improved in this program; they would have liked to share ideas with other participants, get feedback from others, or have their questions answered. Future research could provide evidence as to whether such additions effectively help to increase faculty members' sense of community and motivation, but also whether enhanced learning might follow from these interactions.

The CoI model illustrated in Figure 1 may be used to guide future professional development workshops and programs as it permits the optimal

experience of learning, engagement, and reflection. This model shows promise for designing high-quality professional development experiences, both in-person and online, and can be incorporated into professional development theory. Although social presence is often lacking in an online context, the incorporation of videos, narration, forums for discussion, and the posting of materials to be shared can promote a sense of community and collaboration important to the learning process. The interviews generated a promising idea to promote a greater sense of community: use a department cohort approach for professional development programs. This approach would involve the participation of several faculty members within the same department completing the online program during the same semester. By using this approach, colleagues within a department would have shared goals and student learning outcomes to enhance the application of program learning, such as generating products or artifacts to be shared in the department community. Additionally, this approach would enhance social presence by stimulating discussion and interaction among colleagues.

Clearly, the substantial advantages found in this study and past research (Cook & Steinert, 2013) with regard to online professional development's effectiveness indicate that these types of experiences should be made more widely available and more frequent, especially as universities tend to favor in-person professional development workshops over online experiences (Cook & Steinert, 2013; Rienties et al., 2013). Many faculty desire this flexibility and convenience and might be more willing to participate, particularly once they find it to be effective. All ten of the faculty interviewed indicated they would be more likely to take another online professional development workshop such as this one, although many of them had never taken an online class previously. In many ways, the timeframe for this study's online program was ideal for a first comprehensive introduction to UDI and disability awareness. The four- to six-hour length, which could be completed over a semester, allowed for a good breadth of content with practical examples, but it was not so long as to be onerous. Faculty who were interviewed about the program stated they found the time commitment very "doable."

Echoing the pervading sentiments of higher

education scholars (Kezar & Maxey, 2014), faculty interviewed in this study stressed the importance of highly skilled instructors to facilitate the persistence and retention of diverse and at-risk students and urged administrators to recognize better the value of programs that can enhance teaching effectiveness. High impact practices (HIPs) would be most effective if taught by a faculty member with professional development in UDI as they can present material in multiple ways, offer flexibility in assessment, use multiple methods of engagement, and know how to make materials accessible to all learners. Several faculty acknowledged the central role administration could play in promoting these programs, such as directing funds to increase participation and helping to market and promote awareness of professional development for improving student success outcomes. Not only would these professional development programs aimed at UDI and accessibility training enhance the use of HIPs but also students' in-class experiences across the campus curriculum. As noted by Kezar and Maxey (2014), "most studies find that in-class interactions, particularly for students of color, have a stronger impact than out-of-class interactions on persistence, engagement, motivation, aspirations" (p. 37). It is essential that part-time faculty also be included in these efforts as they are a large part of the faculty who are often not given enough training and resources to facilitate their use of HIPs.

In summary, we recommend that colleges establish a plan for institutionally supported, ongoing UDI professional development that reaches the majority of faculty on campus. The online context is ideal for meeting this goal because of the flexibility, convenience, and cognitive reflection it affords. Such opportunities have the potential to improve the overall instructional climate of the institution, better include diverse students, and provide greater recognition of their unique strengths and abilities. In turn, the campus community will be transformed to one that values diversity and equity and promotes success for all students. The educational community can benefit from more studies such as this one, using not just qualitative, but also quantitative methodologies and including the perspectives of a diverse array of faculty to provide evidence-based approaches to instructional development.



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