ONLINE INSTRUCTION SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES: FACULTY VIEWPOINTS

The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Education, with a major in Learning and Instructional Design.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, my husband, and my children
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Mara Alagic, for all her help, guidance, and support. Also, I would like to thank the members of my committee, Jaehwan Byun and Brien Bolin, for all their helpful advice and comments on my proposal.
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this exploratory mixed method study was to investigate how the successes and challenges of online learning are perceived by graduate faculty. The review of the current literature focused on: course development, course delivery, and evaluating course quality. Although there is a large number of studies focused on online learning, our review demonstrated a deficiency of research about online graduate courses quality of learning. The literature provoked the following questions: How would instructors describe the course development process? What do instructors consider the most important steps in delivering an online course? How is the effectiveness of an instructor’s class determined and how much value do they place on that process? Part 1 of the study included a Likert-scale Qualtrics survey consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions that asked participants to share their perspectives/perceptions. Part 2 involved interviews with instructors. Results indicate that faculty views about successes and challenges with online learning vary depending on the instructor’s online teaching experience, quality of various levels of, support and subject matter. Some key themes identified successes is more standards and technical support for designing course. The challenges identified include the heavy workload online learning creates and how to best evaluate online learning.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EVAL Replacement word for university evaluation system name to make it less identifiable
I. Introduction

The field of education is in a constant state of transformation with the ongoing introduction of new techniques, theories, methodology, and technology tools. Perhaps one of the biggest changes to higher education in this century has been the use of the internet to expand and transform long-distance education opportunities. Babson Survey Research Group (Seaman & Seaman, 2017) defined distance education as, “Education that uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor synchronously and asynchronously” (p. 6). However, through all this change, one thing has remained the same - the need for qualified instructors.

The need for well-trained instructors is especially important due to the substantial growth in online learning in the field of higher education. The Babson Survey Research Group (2016) reported that not only has distance education enrollment increased for the 14th straight year, but a record 30 percent of higher education students have taken at least one online course.

In 2017, The Babson Survey Research Group, WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET), and e-Literate (2017) conducted and published a survey showing that non-profit universities had an increased enrollment of online students, while profit universities had a decrease. Specifically, looking at the state of Kansas, among the total of students enrolled in Kansas degree-granting higher education institutions, 66,722 undergraduate and 12,961 graduate students were taking at least one online course (Seaman & Seaman, 2017). In the state of Kansas 36.2% of the students enrolled in at least one online class, which is considerably
higher than the national average of only 29.7% (Allen & Seaman, 2017). The strong growth in online learning means that online faculty must be prepared to meet the increased demands for online education.

The growth in online education has led to many research questions that can be delved into. The purpose of this study is to examine online learning through the lens of current research findings and consider instructors opinions about designing and implementing online classes. The literature review was focused on the following categories: course development, course delivery, and evaluating course quality. Before exploring these categories, two types of online learning are described.

II. Literature Review

Synchronous and Asynchronous Delivery Models

There are various ways to categorize the types of online learning models including synchronous and asynchronous. The synchronous model refers to online learning environments where the instructor is responsible for guiding learners through each instructional element such as; reading, discussion, and projects (Moore, Dickson-Deane, & Galyen, 2010). According to Rhode (2009), synchronous models require that all students engage in the exact same activities at the same time. There are set-deadlines and time periods in which to get assignments completed. In addition, synchronous models lend themselves to collaborative work. Synchronous models also include the following characteristics: course materials are made available on specific days during the semester, instructors tend to respond quicker, and the pace of assignments is not as flexible (Kocdar, Karadeniz, Bozkurt, & Buyuk, 2018). On the other hand, asynchronous courses refer to the delivery model that gives students more autonomy, because they can work through
content at their own pace (Moore, Dickson-Deane, & Galyen, 2010). In an asynchronous model, all course materials are immediately made available when the course starts, assignments and exams do not necessarily have start/end dates, and feedback from instructors can be delayed (Kocdar, Karadeniz, Bozkurt, & Buyuk, 2018). The type of model used greatly impacts the development of the course as will be discussed further throughout this thesis.

Course Development

Online instructors are faced with many challenges while developing online courses. The first is adjusting to changing roles within a new environment. Instructors have a considerably different role in online learning compared to face-to-face learning, within its brick and mortar classrooms.

Role of Instructor

The online instructor’s role has been studied for years. Thach and Murphy (1994), defined ten competencies that help define an instructor’s role: (1) Interpersonal Communication, (2) Planning Skills, (3) Collaboration/Teamwork Skills, (4) English Proficiency, (5) Writing Skills, (6) Organizational Skills, (7) Feedback Skills, (8) Knowledge of Distance Education Field, (9) Basic Technology Knowledge, and (10) Technology Access Knowledge. Even though these ten competencies can be applied to online learning, the role of instructors has changed. This role change can be frustrating from both instructors’ and a learners’ points of view because it shifts the traditional learning roles. Instructors have traditionally been labeled as “the sage from the stage” and online learning removes instructors from the stage and puts them in a new role (King, 1993, p.30).
Caris, Ferguson, and Smith (2002), ethnographically interviewed twenty-one college instructors, 15 of which taught for the Suny Learning Network, which provided the infrastructure for the State Universities in New York, and the remaining six instructors taught online classes in similar organizations in California and Indiana. All 21 instructors had experience teaching both online and in a traditional classroom, many of whom said that they felt students were more aggressive online since the lack of face-to-face communication put students on a more equal footing to college instructors.

One instructor voiced this concern when he/she stated the opinion that,

In a face-to-face class, the instructor initiates the action; meeting the class, hand out the syllabus, etc. In online instruction the student initiates the action by going to the website, posting a message, or doing something. Also, I think that students and instructors communicate on a more equal footing where all the power dynamics of the traditional face-to-face classroom are absent (Smith, Ferguson, & Caris, 2002, p.66).

Another interviewee stated that “Students tended to get strident with me online when they felt frustrated, something that never happened in classes because I could work with them, empathize and problem solve before they reached that level of frustration,” (Smith, Ferguson, & Caris, 2002, p.66).

Some researcher’s opinions vary in that they believe that the instructor’s role has not changed just because he/she is teaching online. Ross et. al (2014), who studied instructors’ roles in Massive Online Open Courses, (MOOCs) by looking at instructor’s reflections, claim that at its core, an instructor’s role has not really changed over the past four decades. Roland Barthes (1977), the author of “Writers, Intellectuals, and Teachers,” defined the challenges a teacher can have when he stated,

Imagine that I am a teacher; I speak, endlessly, in front of and for someone who remains silent. I am the person who says I (detours of one, we or impersonal sentence make no difference), I am the person who, under cover of setting out a body of knowledge, put out
a discourse, never knowing how that discourse is being received and thus forever forbidden
the reassurance of a definitive image— even if offensive—which would constitute me, (p.194).

Even though this quote is from the 1970s, many aspects of the instructors’ role as defined in the statement such as, “speak endlessly, in front of and for someone who remains silent”, and “put out a discourse, never knowing how that discourse is being received” could be said by some of the online learning today.

**Implementing Course Design**

Developing an online course is different than teaching courses face-to-face (Thormann & Zimmerman, 2012). Thormann and Zimmerman stated two distinct categories of difference between teaching online classes vs. face-to-face courses including course design and implementation of course design. Trammell and LaForge’s (2017), described how face-to-face teaching is different from online teaching by comparing it to methods one can use to take a cross-country road trip. In this metaphor, the driver starts the road trip with the end destination programmed into the Global Position System, but if the passengers later decided to take a scenic route, the original plan can be easily diverted. The researchers go on to describe, “While most instructors start the semester with a syllabus that lays out a clear plan of where they are going and what they want to accomplish, it is easy to divert attention to other topics if the need arises,” (p. 2). Trammel and LaForge continued by describing online learning as taking the same cross-country road trip but instead of using a car as a means of transportation, using an Amtrak train. Unlike traveling in a car, trains have a clear route that includes scheduled stops at specific destinations. They go on to finish this metaphor with, “In an online course, once the class begins, both student and instructor are on a path from which they cannot easily divert their attention or
interests” (p. 2). Although Trammell and LaForge’s (2017) metaphor can be applied to online learning it fails to distinguish the difference between managing synchronous courses vs. asynchronous courses. While their metaphor can be applied to asynchronous courses, where all the content is loaded at the beginning of the course, it cannot be applied to synchronous courses where the instructor can adjust the course as needed.

However, others disagree with Trammell and LaForge (2017)’s opinion, because they have found that regardless of if a class is taught online or in a physical classroom, the basic principles of teaching are the same. Alexander and Boud (as cited in “Teaching & Learning Online: New Pedagogies for New Technologies”) argue that “There is no doubt that the physical environment has a surprisingly powerful influence on teaching”, they argue that “…great acknowledgment should be given to the fact that most of what we know about teaching and learning is applicable in all learning environments, including online,” (Alexander and Boud, 2001).

Despite some arguing that the basics of teaching remain, models of design have been developed over time. One of the most prominent is called ADDIE (Bates, 2015 p. 115) defined as Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate. The first step, Analyze, is when the instructor, evaluates the learning environment to reflect on learning styles, prior knowledge, and resources. The next step, Design, is when the instructor defines the objectives, finds or creates teaching materials, and determines the best technology to use. Next is the Develop step, when the instructor must flesh out the lesson by creating and/or finding the content. The fourth step, Implement, is when the instructor carries out the lesson. The final step, Evaluate, is when the instructor reflects on the lesson, looking at both feedback and data, to see what worked and what
needs to be adjusted. The ADDIE model allows instructors to carefully plan, instruct, and evaluate their lessons.

**Time Commitment**

A big concern that instructors cite as an issue with online learning is the time commitment it takes to teach online (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006). Unlike in asynchronous learning environments, where instructors can upload all the course information and be finished, synchronous learning looks very different. De Gagne and Walters (2009) found that this time commitment, which they refer to as “work intensity” because online learning caused their workload to increase. The 203 participants each form very geographically diverse schools, responded that teaching online took more, “planning, designing, delivering, and evaluating,” than traditional teaching (p. 581). The researchers stated that:

The perception of workload may have been affected by the “non-stop” nature of online teaching, “constant” feedback and clarification, and higher expectations form learners. In many cases, online educators had to rearrange their daily routines so that they could become more accessible to their students who expected instantaneous responses (p. 581).

However, the issue of “work intensity” is more of an issue in synchronous courses, and not asynchronous courses where all the material is made ahead of time and then the instructor’s preparation work is complete. Allen and Seaman (2013) collected data from 2,820 respondents about their beliefs about online learning as faculty at higher institutions of learning. Their data demonstrated that “The percent of academic leaders that believe it takes more faculty time and effort to teach online has increased from 41.4 percent in 2006 to 44.6 percent this year,” (p. 5). The exception to this finding is that private non-profit institutions saw an almost 7% drop in faculty expressing that it took more time to learn online between the years of 2006 to 2012. One
of the tenants of this research project will be to determine if instructors still respond that online
teaching causes their workload to increase in comparison to face-to-face teaching now that
online learning is a more developed practice. Although, research has shown that teachers can
struggle with an increased workload that online learning brings some researchers, such as
Tallent-Runnels, Thomas, Lan, Cooper, Ahern, Shaw, and Liu (2006) find that the time an
instructor puts into a class, as well as the quality of instructor, makes a huge difference in online
learning. They state that:

Students’ learning in the online environment is affected by the quality of online
instruction. Not surprisingly, students in well-designed and well-implemented online
courses learned significantly more and more effectively than this in online courses where
teaching and learning activities were not carefully planned and where the delivery and
accessibility were impeded by technology problems (p. 25).

Course Delivery

Engaging Students

Teaching in an online environment can make engaging students a difficult process for
instructors. Khan, Egbue, Palkie, and Madden (2017), found that 100 percent of the 29
instructors polled cited student engagement as a challenge they face teaching online. The
researchers found that regardless of the number of years an instructor had been teaching online,
student engagement was an issue. The survey found that out of the 29 instructors, 22% had been
teaching courses one or two years, 33% had been teaching online courses for 3 to 5 years, and
another 33% had been teaching online classes between 6 to 10 years. Only 4% had been
teaching for 10 or more years. The authors, who focused the survey on active learning and
student engagement, offer several teaching strategies to improve online learning including,

A few aspects that should be considered with regard to online courses is the integration of
design elements, accessibility of materials, the value of interdisciplinary collaboration,
development of community among students and faculty, encouraging valuable
discussions and use of effective assessment methods (Khan et. al., 2017, p. 109).

**Quality of Instructor**

One of the most influential factors in a student’s success in online learning, as well as a
successful teacher-learner engagement relationship, is the quality of instructor they have
(Fedynich, Bradley, & Bradley, 2015; Blau, et al., 2018). Researchers have explored the qualities
instructors should have to make students more successful. Martin and Bollinger (2018)
discovered that students’ perceptions of engagement strategies that instructors employ can
greatly impact how engaged students’ feel. The study had 155 students, over half of whom were
enrolled in a master’s degree program, the rest were post-undergrad, post-master, doctoral, and
post-doctoral students. The survey found that some sending regular announcements on LMS
systems, sending e-mail reminders, as well as providing grading rubrics for all assignments were
rated most beneficial by students for promoting positive learner-to-instructor relationships.

**Instructor- Learner Communication Methods**

The way in which instructors communicate with their students is a significant factor in
online learning. Martin and Bollinger’s survey found primarily methods of communication such
as sending e-mail reminders, and announcements on LMS added to positive learner-instructor
relationships (Martin & Bollinger, 2018). Learner-Instructor communication has multiple facets.
Some of the facets include: how often and at what rate instructors respond to students’ online
discussions, their timeliness to students’ questions, and the quality of grading/comments on
assignments (Frazer, Sullivan, Weatherspoon, & Hussey, 2017). “Ongoing communication has the potential to increase student engagement in the class, which could help increase student success and lessen attrition rates,” (Steele, Nordin, Larson, & McIntosh, 2017, p.184). Byron (2008) adds that timeliness is important and that instructors should respond to any e-mail correspondence within 48-72 hours. Ni and Aust (2008) also cite that higher teacher verbal immediacy positively correlated with higher student satisfaction with their online course.

Other methods of communication, such as online videos to record lectures, can promote more teacher-learner engagement. In Scagnoli, Choo, and Tian’s (2019) study they found that “...the multiple ways to bring the teaching presence to the class, such as direct messages, forum discussions, live sessions, and others, video is a very powerful tool to do this,” (p. 408). Their study went on to note that video lectures are only effective if they add to learning through making connections and reinforcing concepts instead of just being a repetition of information from a textbook. However, not all instructors are willing to use this technology. For example, Dimeo (2017) found that instructors mentioned that they avoid creating videos to inform online because they do not like how they look on camera. An instructor made the point in his/her interview that any instructor is afraid of the video catching, students would already be able to see in a traditional setting. The article concludes that instructors should not be afraid of using tools to help promote student engagement with their instructor.

Finally, teaching online also changes an instructor’s role with technology, which is their primary method of communication. In a traditional face-to-face classroom, technology is used as an instructional tool (Major, 2015). In online learning, however, technology becomes more than just an instructional tool. The main tool that instructors have at their disposable is Learning Management Systems, (LMS). A Learning Management System is, “...a virtual learning
environment (VLN) that is used to deliver course material, track progress, and conduct assessments for e-learning,” (Reshad, 2018, p.1). Several researchers focused on collaboration in learning, specifically regarding discussion boards, (Correia, North, Korkmaz, Simmerman, & Wallace, 2018; Baisley-Nodine, Ritzhaupt, and Antonenko, 2018; Piro & Anderson 2018). While other studies on LMS focused on barriers that instructors may face when adopting learning management systems. Saovapa Wichadee (2015) conducted a study that analyzed both factors related to faculty attitude and the adoption of a learning management system. Before explaining the study, Wichadee shared that LMS can be separated into three subgroups: study tools, communication tools, and productivity tools. The second sub-group includes communication tools such as the announcement page and discussion board. Finally, instructors have access to productivity tools that help them manage the course by uploading material, organizing their modules, and post instructions.

Wichadee (2015) performed a study at a private university in Thailand where Moodle (open source LMS) was introduced in 2013 and all faculty members were trained in how to use it. Participants in the study were 62 instructors. During the 2014 academic year, one year after Moodle training, Wichadee sent out surveys to answer six questions about the perceived usefulness and instructor’s attitudes toward LMS. The study found that the instructors that did not perceive LMS as useful preferred to use different types of social media, such as Facebook, to communicate with students.

In addition, to LMS, different types of social media are available for instructors to promote learning. Education and learning theories suggest three potential reasons for instructors to use social media in their teaching: “(1) exposing students to practices, (2) extending the range of the learning environment, and (3) promoting learning through social interaction and collaboration,”
Gülbahar, Rapp, Kilis, & Sitnikova (2017) developed a social media tool kit to encourage higher education instructors to increase the use of social media. The social media tool kit allows instructors to select a type of social media and then offers advice about how to use it.

However, social media, which can enhance an instructor’s lessons, can also be a barrier at times. Instructors must decide how much impact new social media has on the way they design their lessons and what types of technology enhance their lessons. Online instructors are teaching students from multiple generations, and sometimes this age span can cause an obstacle for technology. Millennials are often referred to as “digital natives”, while Baby Boomers and Gen-Xers are considered “digital immigrants” (Bullen & Morgan, 2016). Bullen and Morgan (2016) claim that Millennials are not “digital natives”, but rather, all students should be considered “digital learners”. Bullen and Morgan (2016) came to this conclusion after conducting a multi-case study exploring three cases of digital technology being used from both the social and educational viewpoints. This study was limited to western universities, which somewhat detracts from its claims of being a global study.

However, not everyone agrees with the concept of “digital natives” and “digital learners” Bullen and Morgan (2016) assert that the idea of “digital natives” and “digital immigrants” is often propagated by non-scholarly literature, such as pop culture magazines (p. 61). Therefore, Bullen and Morgan claimed that researchers suffer from “snark syndrome”, in which a fact has been repeated so often and by so many individuals that it is believed to be true, even though there is no empirical evidence to back up this claim (p. 64). Bullen and Morgan (2016) concluded that:

It is time to move beyond the simplistic dichotomy of digital natives and digital immigrants. Our research shows today’s learners, regardless of age, are on a continuum
of technological access, skill, use and comfort. They have differing views about the integration of social and academic uses and are not generally challenging the dominant academic paradigm, (p. 65-66).

Therefore, if the authors are correct all students are digital learners the tools that can be used by instructors to approach their learning, will not have to vary according to their students’ ages. Two of the main instructional tools that research focused on include: Facebook© and Twitter ©.

Social Networking Sites (SNS) used in education today include Twitter© and Facebook©. Twitter© is, a social networking site, that allows users to communicate with one another in 140 characters or less, (Yuhan, Ying, Hew, & 2016). Yuhan, Ying, and Hew conducted the first empirical study of using Twitter© as a teaching tool. The study examined the use of Twitter© in teaching from 2006 to 2015. The researchers concluded that although Twitter© is commonly used for two purposes, communication and assessment, there is not enough research to support that it increased learning performance, (Yuhan, Ying, & Hew, 2016). The study revealed that Twitter© is beneficial in education as a method of communication between instructors and students so that they can send messages about when assignments are due, when upcoming tests will be, and so that students can interact socially.

Facebook© is also another type of platform that educators are using. The University of Dundee, in Scotland, switched from using their LMS program Blackboard to Facebook©. On Facebook©, the university set-up a variety of groups to meet the needs of their students so that they would have a forum in which to ask anything from “Is anyone else having trouble with their mail?” to sharing links and relevant information in an organized fashion (Menzie, Petrie, & Zarb, 2017, p. 10). The research conducted at the University of Dundee found that students were very supportive of using Facebook© as a learning tool and gave positive reviews about their
experience. The study found that using Facebook© as a replacement for Blackboard was effective. However, it should be noted that this study had 11 members, so the reliability of findings is very limited (Menzie, Petrie, & Zarb, 2017). Other research studies have also looked at how instructors use social media in their online classes.

The publishing company Pearson, along with Moran, Seaman, & Tinti-Kane, 2011 conducted a survey to inquire how higher education instructors use social media sites. The survey asked 1,920 participants, who were instructors from both traditional and online classes, to share their social media usage, including personal, in class, or professional (which they define as on the job but not teaching a class at that moment). According to the survey, out of the 1,920 participants, nearly two-thirds of college faculty have used social media during a class, while 30% have used social media to post content for students to access in or outside of class. Moran, Seaman, & Tinti-Kane, 2011 also reported that online video is the most common type of social media used by instructors, with 80% of educators using it in class. In addition, over 70% of the 1,920 participants rated privacy concerns as an “important” or “very important” barrier (Moran, Seaman, & Tinti-Kane, 2011).

There are areas for growth for using Social Networking Sites in higher education. As Selwyn (2012) pointed out, the intent of social media is to serve a purpose determined by its users. The question remains, how can instructors help students create social media that meets their needs? Social media can be used in education as a method of strengthening communication within instructors-student communication models.
Evaluating Course Quality

Defining a Successful Learning Environment

The majority of considered studies focused on how successful an online course is, by the percentage of students that completed the course/courses in their individual study, and not simply by their course evaluation ratings. For example, Patterson and McFadden (2009) found that,

Online program delivery is a viable method of delivery offering unprecedented access to higher education; however, the attrition rates in online programs found by this study suggest that attrition in online program formats remains an issue and challenge warranting the attention of educational leaders in program planning and development, (p. 6).

Two studies equate student success with completing a course (Bawa, 2016; Frankola, 2001, & Diaz, 2002). Bawa (2016) claims that 40% to 80% of online learners end up dropping out of their online courses. His claim, which cites Herbert (2006) as its source, is limited in that the range seems rather large to the average eye. Herbert (2006) cite two studies Frankola, (2001) and Diaz, (2002) as references to how he concluded that 20% to 50% of online learners drop their courses.

In addition, Bawa’s (2016) literature review involved analyzing 56 sources, including many educational journals. In his literature review, Bawa (2016) discussed many issues including motivational factors, technology constraints, and theoretical backgrounds for examine online learners. The conclusion Bawa drew from his research is that students mistakenly assume that online classes will be easier than traditional classes, and therefore require less homework,
take less effort, and less disruption their schedule. Bawa (2016) points out that even though students often take online learning courses for the flexible schedule, the cost of having such flexibility, sometimes is outweighed by the course load and technology issues that can develop.

Motivational factors, technology constraints, and theoretical backgrounds can impact course evaluations. The course evaluation section will look at advantages and limitations of course evaluations and what limitations online student attrition puts on the research available today. Course evaluation, is a method, used to evaluate instructor’s course development and delivery.

Course Evaluations

Course evaluations are an important part of both online instructors and face-to-face instructors’ self-reflection as well as how a course’s successfulness is gaged. However, the validity of the data these evaluations provide has been questioned. Course evaluations are, “surveys administered by colleges and universities directly to enrolled students under controlled circumstances, typically near the end of the academic term” (Linse, 2017, p.1). These course evaluations are also referred to as Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETS), Student Ratings of Instruction (SRI), and teaching evaluations (Linse, 2017, p. 1).

The Validity of Course Evaluations

The validity of course evaluations has been questioned by some faculty and researchers (Uttl, White, & Gonzalez, 2017; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). Some researchers have discovered that gender bias impacts an instructor’s scores (Boring, Ottoboni, and Stark, 2016). For example, Boring, et. al. found that if a student believes an instructor is a male based on the name of the instructor, the score tends to be higher. However, a lot of research shows support for using
student ratings to measure teaching quality (Marsh, 2007). Therefore, most institutions of higher learning use course evaluations as a method of measuring instructors’ teaching effectiveness (Dresel & Rindermann, 2011). However, based on the research on course evaluations, their validity is in question.

**Comparing Face-to-Face Evaluations to Online Evaluations**

A lot of research has been conducted on comparing response rates between face-to-face evaluations to online evaluations. Dommeyer, Baum, Hanna and Chapman (2004) conducted a study in 2000, that looked at comparing how student evaluations collected via the traditional method differ from those collected via online methods. The researchers’ objectives were: Does the method in-class or online affect the response rate?, Does the type of evaluation method used impacts an instructor’s evaluation score? and does using an online method to collect data affect the response rate and the instructors' score? Donmeyer, et. al. (2004) evaluated 16 instructors at a Californian University, who each had one class section complete instructor evaluations using the traditional method (i.e. in-class) and one section complete instructor evaluations using the online method. The researchers concluded that collecting responses online did not appear to impact the response rate and impact the instructor’s score. The possible limitation here is that both classes were offered traditionally, and students might have found online evaluation tool an easier way to do something they are used to doing in their classroom.

Face-to-face evaluations and online course evaluations also have different response rates and reliability rates. Anderson, Brown, and Spaeth (2006) found that over the past three or four years, 50% of students responded to face-to-face course evaluation requests, while 41% of students responded to online course evaluation requests. They described the limitations of the statistics when they stated that the response rates were unreliable due to: instruments were
changed from term to term, changes in the students taking the evaluations, and the mode of delivery were different.

When comparing online learning to the traditional classroom, researchers have discovered mixed results. Mortagy and Boghikian-Whitby (2010) study, which took place in 2001, looked at two concurrent 15-week classes, one taught in a face-to-face classroom and the other online. Each class size on average had 22 students. They claimed that online students evaluate their online course activities higher than course activities in a traditional setting. However, Cao and Sakchutchawan (2011) found that online students evaluated their classes slightly lower than traditional students. The researchers studied, “The aggregated course averages from Likert-scaled questions along the overall response rates for the MBA courses studied are examined,” (p. 8). More research is needed to support both Cao and Sakchutchawan’s and Boghikian-Whitby and Mortagy’s (2010) conclusions. With that said, course evaluations can be limited in other ways as well.

Course Evaluations Data Limitations

Data from course evaluations is limited, because most college classes ask for feedback in the end-of-the-year surveys, in which students who drop out of the course, do not participate in evaluating. Therefore, an accurate evaluation of an instructor’s ability to effectively develop courses and deliver content online can be challenging to evaluate. A landmark 12 year-study (Fetzner, 2013) that investigated why students considered themselves unsuccessful in an online class focused on Monroe Community College. Over the course of more than a decade, three individual surveys have been distributed and collected over the span of the following years; 2000-2001, 2005-2006, and 2009-2010. The purpose of these surveys was to determine what barriers unsuccessful students perceived as the reason they were unable to be successful.
Unsuccessful students were identified as students who earned an F or W in an online course. These students were asked questions about their online learning experience such as (1) Why do they feel they were unsuccessful in the online class? (2) What were their expectations for their online class? (3) What advice do they have for online students? The number one response that students cited for being unsuccessful in their online classes was that they felt they had fallen behind and could not catch-up. The second highest response of why students felt they were not successful were other obligations such as family or health. Since students who do not complete a course, do not typically complete a course evaluation, many course evaluations are limited by only researching students who are successful in completing the course.

**Quality Matters Training**

In addition to course evaluations, programs such as Quality Matters Online Training ©, have been developed to evaluate course quality. Quality Matters Online Training© was started to solve the problem of how can quality of a course be measured and guaranteed? (“About”). In response to this problem, the Quality Matters Program created a process that can be used to assure course quality (“About”).

**Conclusion: Follow-up Research**

The purpose of this literature review was to examine existing literature and what researchers have discovered about implications for instructors teaching online. Many of the studies focused on instructors who teach Massive Open Online Courses or undergraduate courses, (e.g. Fetzner, M. (2013), Mortagy, Y., & Boghikian-Whitby, S. (2010), and Ross, J., Sinclair, C., Knox, J., Bayne, S., & Macleod, H. (2014).) but there are not many that focused solely on graduate courses. The present investigation will add to the literature by illustrating how
graduate instructors’ approach online learning and what obstacles they face. The literature provoked the following questions:

- How would instructors describe developing an online graduate course?
- What do instructors consider as the most important steps in implementing an online graduate course?
- How is the effectiveness of their graduate class determined and how much value do they place on that process?

The purpose of this mixed method study was to explore university graduate faculty views of facilitating online learning within a public university in the Midwest. The relevance of this research is to contribute to the existing knowledge base of effective online teaching and learning by adding graduate faculty perspectives.

III. METHODOLOGY

According to Michael Crotty (1998), there are two questions that must be answered when developing a research proposal. The first is, “What methodologies and methods will we be employing in the research we propose to do?” (p. 2). The second question is, “...how do we justify this choice and use of methodologies and methods,” (p. 2).

Mixed methods research was selected for this study. This method included collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data using both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to investigate graduate instructors’ viewpoints of online learning guided by the three questions: How would instructors describe developing an online graduate course? What do instructors consider as the most important steps in implementing an online graduate course? How is the effectiveness of their graduate class determined and how much value do they place on that
process?

The methodologies chosen, (a) using a short survey with online graduate instructors at a Midwest university, and (b) follow up interviews with a small subset of participants, have complementary strengths and purposefully minimize overlapping weaknesses. The survey method was used because the objective of this research was to gather information on instructor’s opinions on implementing online learning, and a Likert scale scores can be used to create a chart that will show the distribution of viewpoints across the higher education population. Data was collected through an online survey produced using Qualtrics system. Interviews were recorded on a Sony recorder as well as the Otter app on the researcher’s password protected iPhone. All data will be stored on the researcher’s password protected personal computer, phone, and recorder and kept for five years after the study’s completion. Further details about participants, the survey, interview questions and data collection are described in the following sections.

Participants

The participants were online graduate instructors (instructors, from now on) teaching at a Midwestern public university. The university is in an urban environment. In the fall of 2018, the university reported 15,784 students enrolled, with 13,006 being undergraduate students and 2,778 students enrolled in the graduate programs. All instructors were teaching one or more of online courses in one of the following colleges: College of Applied Sciences, College of Health Professions, College of Engineering, School of Business, and Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Materials/Instruments

Survey. The 5-point Likert-scale Qualtrics survey (Appendix A) with varying categories consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions that asked participants to share their
perspectives/perceptions regarding: course development, course delivery, and quality of evaluations while teaching online. Some questions were of “yes-no” format. Some of the survey questions provided additional space for faculty to include anecdotal comments regarding their experiences on preparing for and teaching online. In addition, there were six qualitative questions on the survey, allowing instructors to elaborate on their responses. This survey also included an additional note requesting any instructors who are willing to participate in an additional interview to leave their contact information on the survey or email their information separately to the researcher. Here is a sample open-ended question and a Likerts:

Here is an example of the Likerts’ Scale Questions (Figure 1 and Figure 2)

![Figure 1. Likert Scale Sample Question A.](image1)

![Figure 2. Likert Scale Sample Question B.](image2)

These are the open ended questions examples (Figure 3 and Figure 4).
Interview Questions. To complement survey data in this mixed method study, the following questions have been asked from participants that volunteered to participate in this qualitative part: Based on your experience, how would you describe developing an online course? What do you consider as the most important steps in implementing an online course? How is the effectiveness of your class determined and how much value do you place on that process? Note that any future reference to vide evaluations named in this study have been changed to EVAL to protect the confidentially of the university. Do you have anything you would like to add about online learning? (Appendix B)

Collection of Quantitative Data
The study took place in the spring semester of the 2018-19 school year. The 52 participants were asked to participate in a survey on the implications that online learning has on their teaching. All graduate online instructors were sent an e-mail from Qualtrics that shared a link about this voluntary survey process. Participants were expected to complete the survey in roughly 5-10 minutes. The survey was intentionally short to encourage participation from faculty. Quantitative data was collected from 12 questions on the survey focusing on instructor’s perceptions of successes and challenges teaching online graduate courses. In addition, demographic information such as: how long they have taught graduate courses, how long they have taught online courses, what college they are a part of, and if they have taken Quality Matters Training.

**Collection of Qualitative Data**

Four instructors agreed to participate in an additional four-question interview, that lasted approximately 15-25 minutes. Participants’ responses were recorded on a Sony recorder as well as the Otter app on the researcher’s password protected iPhone. In addition, there were six qualitative questions on the survey, that were asked to allow instructors to elaborate on their responses. These comments were evaluated in the same manner as the interview transcripts and compared and contrast for similarities and differences.
IV. Results

Quantitative Analysis

For the quantitative data analysis, each variable was assigned a code. For example, the three five-point Likert scale questions were scored as follows: 5 points= Strongly agree, 4 points= Somewhat agree, 3 points= Neither agree nor disagree, 2 points= Somewhat disagree and 1 point= Strongly disagree. For another five-point Likert scale question, it was scored as follows: 5 points= Far exceeds expectations, 4 points= Exceeds expectations, 3 points= Meets expectations, 2 points= Short of expectations, and 1 point= Far short of expectations. The final five-point Likert scale question was scored as follows: 5 points= Extremely important, 4 points= Very important, 3 points= Moderately important, and 2 points= Slightly important, and one point= Not at all important.

Some of the questions were of the yes/no variety. These questions were coded as follows: yes-1 and no-0. Questions for collecting demographic information were not included in these calculations. Also, in order to analyze data, the system used to collect the survey data, Qualtrics, was used to create graphs (Appendix I and J) which were than interpreted and evaluated for trends, discrepancies, and limitations by the researcher. Many of the graphs showed results that were fairly equal in their response. For example, note in Figure 5, that seven instructors responded that they did not feel supported during the design portion of their course and six said they did feel supported. This is a fairly even response, since only there is only a one response difference.
Figure 5. Instructor Feelings about Level of Support Designing Courses

Also, notice in Figure 6 that six instructors said they feel supported during the delivery portion of their course and seven said that they do not feel supported. A trend began to emerge, because six instructors did not feel supported during both the design and delivery portions of their courses, and seven did feel supported during both the design and delivery portions. However, this trend is limited by the participation numbers, so more data needs to be gathered in order to define if this trend is valid.
Another aspect evaluated was the instructors’ feelings on if a lack of face-to-face communication affects their ability to communicate with students as seen in Figure 7. The figure below shows although seven instructors do feel that a lack of face-to-face communication impacts their ability to communicate with students, six instructors are either neutral on the topic or disagree. In the future, more research is needed on this topic to see if any new trends are emerging.
Figure 7: Instructor’s Feelings on if a Lack of Face-to-Face Communication Affects Their Ability to Communicate with Students

**Qualitative Analysis**

In a mixed method study, data cannot be simply based on numbers alone, a Qualitative Analysis. Merriam (1998) and Cresswell (2003) suggested analyzing qualitative data, through the following steps: Gather and organize data; Carefully read through all the data to discover trends and patterns; Divide data into similar categories and topics and code data; Identify and describe the people, setting, and categories impacting that data; Describe findings, data, trends, and themes; Interpret findings. However, in order to provide triangulation, the qualitative data in this study were transformed from qualitative to quantitative data using frequencies of codes/keywords in order to better answer the study’s questions.
The following procedure used to transform data was carried through according to the model designed by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007).

1. Each interview was transcribed in its entirety using both the Otter app and a Sony voice recorder. The Otter app transcribed the interviews as the participant was speaking. Then I listen to the interviews, and adjusted the transcription documents to fix any errors.

2. The data were organized under the framework of each interview question and read by the researcher several times in order to help identify any trends and patterns.

3. The interview questions framework was used for deductive analysis, determining trends and patterns. For example, how many times did the participants refer to the amount of time online learning takes. Codes were determined by selecting keywords based on their frequency in the transcribed interviews and qualitative type questions from the survey. The keywords used were: student aggressiveness, work intensity, attrition, face-to-face, communication/Zoom/Skype, Evaluations, EVAL, relationships, student expectations/realities, assessment tasks, engagement, objectives, and technology issues. Keywords and phrases were highlighted in each interview to keep track of them.

4. The researcher then identified recurring themes and opinions. For example, participants frequently mentioned the amount of time it took to teach online and concern with the validity of the EVAL program.

5. After evaluating these codes, the following themes and patterns were revealed. One theme revealed was that instructors called the validity of the EVAL program into question.

6. After each variable was scored (Appendix H), descriptive statistics were calculated for each item. The descriptive statistics analyzes included the frequency of each numbered
score for each individual variable, the mean for each variable, and the standard deviation for each variable.

7. Once this process was completed, a final analysis was conducted to look if there were any new patterns. See APPENDIX H.

For example, as shown in Table 1, the total frequency that interviewees mentioned work intensity was four, and since there were four interviews, that means everyone is in agreement that work’s intensity with online learning is a challenge, and therefore it noted that this topic should be explored further. However, the frequency must be carefully and reiteratively observed, because, as shown in Table 1, face-to-face has a frequency of 14, and yet those 14 mentions of face-to-face learning challenges were made by a single interviewee, so the number of times a topic is mentioned alone, cannot be the only factor taken into consideration
TABLE 1

FREQUENCY OF ONLINE CHALLENGES BEING MENTIONED IN INTERVIEWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency per Interview</th>
<th>Total Frequency</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>#2</td>
<td>#3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Aggressive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Intensity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attrition</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication/Discussion/Zoom</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluations/EVAL</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Expectations/Realities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Tasks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Issues</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 2, the frequency of challenges mentioned in the online survey open-ended questions tended to be more consistent across the board. So for example, there was a specific question that addressed student attrition directly in the survey. It is not surprising that six out of the 13 participants mentioned student attrition. However, the interviews did not include a question about attrition and therefore the number of participants that mention attrition as a challenge is significantly lower (See Table 1).
V. Findings

The findings section will begin with the quantitative data from the survey, and then discuss the qualitative data from interviews as well as the open-ended questions form the survey.

Quantitative Data

The survey was sent to 52 instructors, of which only 13 responded. The response rate was 25 percent or ¼. The respondents were from the following colleges: 5 from the College of Applied

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Challenges Addressed</th>
<th>Total Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Aggressive</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Intensity</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attrition</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication/Discussion/Zoom</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluations/EVAL</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Expectations/Realities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Tasks</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Issues</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Studies, 1 from the School of Business, 1 from Engineering, 4 from College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and 2 from Health Sciences. The instructors’ experiences with teaching graduate courses varied with some teaching since 1976 and others since 2016. Online teaching experience also varied with a range from 1989 to 2018. The thirteen instructors had all obtained a doctorate, with two having also post-doctorates. Six have taken Quality Matters Training (training was available since 2014) and seven have not. All 13 instructors teach asynchronous courses.

When responding whether they were supported during the design portion of their courses six instructors said they felt supported and seven said they did not.

About the support during the course delivery the results were somewhat similar, 46.15% said yes and 53.85% said that they did not feel supported.

The ability to communicate with students is essential to teaching and learning. When asked about if the lack of face-to-face communication affects the instructors’ ability to communicate with students 53.85% either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed.

Several instructors noted that video conferencing has allowed them to communicate well with students.

As shown in Figure 8, when asked about the time commitment it takes to teach online courses, 46.15% of instructors stated that the time commitment far exceeds expectations, 46.15% stated that the time commitment exceeds expectations, and 7.69% stated that the time commitment meets expectations.
Participants were asked to rate how important student course evaluation, student grades, and student attrition are in determining the success of their courses. Only 15.38% of instructors thought that student evaluations are extremely important, while 53.85% thought that student evaluations are very important (Figure 9).
However, as shown in Figure 2, 61.5% of instructors agree that it is very important to use student attrition to gauge student success.

The last survey question asked, “Anything else that you would like to comment on related to your experience with online teaching and learning?” One major concern repeatedly mentioned was internet connectivity being an issue.

**Interviews and Open-Ended Questions**

In addition, out of the 13 instructors who took the survey, four also participated in one-on-one interviews.
The first question was, “Based on your experience how would you describe developing an online course?”

The responses to this question varied greatly depending on the instructor’s general teaching experience, as well as their experience with their own online learning. One response was,

   It requires a lot of work. A lot of thought and I think it helps if you I think it helps if you have some understanding of education, educational theory, and perhaps some experience already with hybrid courses, they know what works and what doesn't work and the online component, but I couldn't imagine anybody winging an online course, it's just too much stuff to do.

Another participant, who had less experience with online learning prior to teaching online, explained,

   So, it was interesting for me, because I've never actually took undergrad or online course. So, the thing that I had to do is really talk to a lot of people, who took you know, online courses...And so what I, I had to do a lot of research online, reading a lot of different type of literature and talking to people. And really like, the, my process was, how can I make a class that simulates my face to face classes, ...

The second question was, “What do you consider the most important steps in implementing an online course?” Most of the participants responded with the importance of setting up strong learning objectives. Another response included the importance of establishing a strong instructor-student relationship. The respondent said, “You can't sort of just treat them like robots on the end of the internet connection.”

   However, in the survey open-ended survey questions, instructors reported a concern with implementing online courses.

   One instructor stated,

   I miss the interaction with students individually and as a group. There is spontaneity in the classroom that's lacking online. Teaching an asynchronous online course makes it more difficult for students to learn from me and from one another. I have learned ways to compensate for this.
With that said, in the open-ended survey questions, other instructors did not see the lack of face-to-face interaction as being a concern.

For example, one instructor said, “I provide information in multiple formats and I am available for virtual office hours 24/7 in multiple time zones via...Skype.”

The third question was, “How is the effectiveness of your class determined and how much value do you place on that process?”
Responses to this question were very similar. Respondents cited EVAL, as well as individual subject matter evaluation programs as a method of gaging effectiveness. However, all stated the concern that such evaluation programs, while the only method found thus far to gage course effectiveness, does not give instructors a clear picture of their own effectiveness. For example, one respondent stated,

Yes. Yes, one student will say I don't understand, you know, this course isn't very organized. And then you read the next one is like this, of course, is the most organized course I've ever had. And it's like, I don't understand how those two statements can be true at the same time.

Therefore, some of the instructors have developed their own means of formatively evaluating course effectiveness by creating their own questionnaires, which unlike EVALs are not only handed out at the end of the semester but also at midterm.

One example of a questionnaire created by an online instructor is simply asking students to give him/her a list of three things that are working in the course and three things that are not working for the class.

Some instructors added comments to the online survey to expand on their thoughts on student evaluations,
The EVAL instrument is flawed since it does not differentiate between students with different preparation, grades, or work practice. Essentially, it serves as a venue for weak or unreasonable students to gripe and impugn the reputation of the faculty. A new instrument is needed that makes use of metadata to normalize the scores and remove the effects of gratuitous negativity.

In the online survey, several open-ended question responses about course evaluations, included more discussion about grading and student attrition.

One instructor stated that, “Grading seems to be essential. Giving assignments without grades produces low participation rates. You might even call it freeloding.” Another mentioned that,

Grade inflation is a problem for professors, who try to maintain high standards and a bell-curve for differentiating between excellent and average performance. The A is treated more like a C. Students argue against the grading curve, which puts an A 2 standard deviations above the mean (C).

One of the respondents stated,

When the professor documents the quality requirements and workload of a course in the syllabus, the students who read it and realize that they cannot achieve those levels, leave the course early. Where students with unreasonable expectations continue, they tend to drop out late or fail.

One instructor summed up this question by stating,

I evaluate everything my students do. More important I provide extensive feedback to them about their assignments. Feedback in terms for the class as a whole and for individuals. Students show tremendous enthusiasm and willingness to work given feedback and a little encouragement.

Overall, common themes on online teaching tended to focus on the challenges including technical issues, the work load online learning creates, and how to best evaluate online learning.

VI. Discussion

Limitations and Delimitations
This study was limited by the number of participants that responded to the survey. Participation was low, 25 percent, so the findings reflect viewpoints of this small group of participants. To better understand participants’ viewpoints, a qualitative portion of this mixed study was included. The another limitation that surfaced was a noteworthy differences in instructors professional development training provided to those that started teaching online relatively recently, since 2014. Some instructor’s started teaching online in the 1980s, and some within the last five years, so their experiences colored their responses. Delimitations of this study include focusing on graduate online instructors from a single public university.

**Discussion per Study Questions**

The study questions were written after reviewing current literature (Figure. 10).

![Diagram](image.png)

**Figure 10. Literature Review Map**

After reviewing literature the following questions were developed and the findings were reported as follows.
1. *How would instructors describe the course development process?*

Quantitative findings showed that six instructors felt supported during the course development process and seven said they did not. That discrepancy can be only partially justified by the earlier mentioned differences between those that underwent Quality Matters Training and those relying on long term experiences, which might have been as successful as those supported by QMT professional development. One instructor, although satisfied with his overall successful experiences with online teaching, clarified,

I stated I did not feel supported during the design process of course -mainly because I was an early adopter to online when the university did not have much support - they are now able to provide a lot more support with new classes.

The instructor went on to explain that standards such as Quality Matters have helped aid the course development process for many new instructors.

The qualitative findings show that instructors take different approaches to course development depending on their experience teaching in traditional classrooms, teaching online courses, taking online courses, and their teaching style in general. Based on findings course development can look different depending on the instructor, but some similarities exist. For example, the interview findings show that instructors value being informed by the research about online learning, educational theories of online learning, and hearing about other instructor’s experiences with online learning. These three aspects have been used by instructors to help with their own course development.

2. *What do instructors considered the most important steps in implementing an online course?*

The quantitative analysis resulted in 46.15 percent of instructors feeling supported in the delivery process of their course, but 53.85 percent stated that they did not feel supported.
The qualitative findings further examined what instructors considered to be the most important steps in implementing an online course. In an interesting way, one of the instructors captured important steps of the course implementation based on students’ abilities to complete the task, to analyze and reflect in order to reach an understanding of the task. His response started by, “If I need students to be able to do X, Y, & Z and be able to think about X, Y, and Z and be able to analyze X, Y and Z, then I need to be able to create the course based upon those things.”

An instructor attempted to explain how imposing Quality Matters Standards as a measure of determining quality of online courses was a process that has become easier over time. He/she stated,

I was an early adopter to [University Name] classes and so before they had online support in the School of [School Name] they brought in, kind of sort of started developing we brought in a couple experts that helped us develop somewhat, but the best thing that helped was when there was really no standard at the time or we didn't have access the standards. So, it really was helpful was when [University Name] was able to actually get the Quality Matters Standards. I had an outline of that that was sort of the unofficial no detail. So once you could get access to that and see expectations for the class it was very helpful to try to figure out what I meeting, what I'm not meeting, [and] what I still need to improve on.

Qualitative findings also illustrated that positive students’ attitudes as well as instructors’ positive relationships with their students are helpful in effective delivering of an online course. Here is how one participant talked about it,

I would say establishing some sort of relationship with each of the students. And one way I facilitate that is to ask them each to introduce themselves to the other people in the class. And also, I get to learn a bit more about each one. And then we can start conversations that take into account whatever their background is. I think maintaining a relationship with each student during the course is important. You can't sort of just treat them like robots on the end of the internet connection.
Both quantitative and qualitative findings show that instructors are concerned about the amount of time that online learning requires both students’ and instructors good time management skills. Based on quantitative findings, twelve out of the thirteen instructors mentioned that online learning time commitments exceeds or far exceeds their expectations in terms of time commitment. Qualitative findings also showed that instructors view online learning as a significant time commitment. This concern was also mentioned while reviewing current literature (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006 De Gagne and Walters, 2009).

3. How is the effectiveness of their class determined and how much value do they place on that process?

Findings from both sources of evidence, quantitative and qualitative data, indicated that all instructors were concerned with how the effectiveness of their class was determined (using EVAL) and the low value they place on that current process was evident. Unlike findings in current literature (Bawa, 2016; Frankola, 2001, & Diaz, 2002) which state that a course’s effectiveness are determined by student successfulness which is determined by student attrition, the results for both the survey and the interviews concluded conflicting results. Ten out of the thirteen survey participants ranked student attrition as either extremely or very important to determining the effectiveness of their course. Next, nine out of the thirteen survey participants ranked student grades as either extremely or very important to determining the effectiveness of their course.

However, the interview findings showed that instructors determine their effectiveness of their course primarily through student evaluations, EVAL, which some of them did not recognize as a valid instrument and expressed disaffection with those being summative versus some
formative input during the semester. Several instructors mentioned how it was more important for students to meet the standards or course objectives and used formative evaluation of class to gauge how/whether if their facilitating progress is satisfactory.

Instructors also voiced that they found it challenging to place much value on these evaluations since the response rate is so low. For example, in this past semester, School based EVAL system had a 75 percent response rate in face-to-face classes while online had a 35 percent response rate (Social Lab, personal communication, April 25, 2019). Also, instructors voiced a concern about the validity of course evaluations, which give at times conflicting results. For example, how can one student evaluation call the course disorganized and a mess and another state that the course is the most organized class they have ever taken. The validity of course evaluations has also been called into question in current literature (Uttl, White, & Gonzalez, 2017; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016).

Due to the low response rate, many instructors mentioned that they have developed their own form of evaluation systems. Instructors also stated a concern, with the timing of the student evaluations, which are only given at the end of the semester. Therefore, many give their own versions of the student evaluation system, at mid-terms in order to figure out what is working in the course and what needs to be adjusted.

The two main challenges discovered through both the quantitate and qualitative findings was:

1. The workload online learning creates
2. The validity of the current EVAL system

A success briefly mentioned in both the quantitative and qualitative findings was how there are now more standards to base online learning on, and new technology has made communicating online easier.
Also, a similarity between the literature review and the interviews is the issue of students communicating more aggressively with professors (Caris, Ferguson, & , 2002, p.66). This would be an interesting subject to explore because it impacts not only the sphere of education but also the workplace. Although this finding cannot be considered relevant to the overall findings at this time, perhaps with more research, this concept may tie in with the size of the workload that instructors mentioned.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides several areas to look more into when it comes to online learning. The research supported previous studies in the literature review that found that online instructors suffer from “work intensity” and online evaluations are not as effective as they could be. A implications for this study is that more research must be done to discover why instructors do not feel supported in the design and delivery aspects of their courses and what can be done to address this challenge. Some questions to further explore include:

How does technology support or lack thereof impact the way an instructor feels about the support they get in design and delivery?

How does an access to standards impact instructors’ feelings about their course?

Also, all instructors were in agreement that the evaluation system, EVAL, needs to be changed to more effectively evaluate course and instructor quality as well as increase student participation. Only through more research, can online instructors share best practices, successes, and challenges as online learning becomes a more common form of education.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

“About.” Quality Matters, www.qualitymatters.org/about. [accessed date: March 31, 2019]


Frankola, K. (2001). Why online learners drop out. Workforce, 80 (10), 53-59


BIBLIOGRAPHY (continued)


Welcome to the research study!

If you decided to participate, you will be asked to complete a short survey that will approximately take about 5 to 10 minutes. Participants will also have the option to participate in a short interview (15 minutes) about their perspectives about online learning in Corbin 205 or videoconferencing. The interview will take 15 minutes to complete and the interviewer will request to record the audio of the interview in order to review the audio at a later time for the study.

There are no personal benefits or anticipated risks to participating in this study. However, if you feel uncomfortable with a question, you may skip it. We will make every effort to keep your survey responses anonymous. However, you will be asked to provide the following information: the college you teach in, whether you are familiar with or have taken Quality Matters Online Training, and the number of years you have been teaching. Participation is voluntary and you can stop taking the survey at any time.
If you have any questions, please contact Chantelle Klaassen at capritchett@shockers.wichita.edu or Dr. Mara Alagic at mara.alagic@wichita.edu. For questions about the rights of research participants, you may contact the Office of Research and Technology.

APPENDIX A (continued)

Transfer at Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, and telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. By selecting "Yes" below, you are indicating that

* You have read (or someone has read to you) the information provided above and agree to participate.
* You are age 18 or over.
* You are aware that this is a research study.
* You have voluntarily decided to participate.

Q1
- Yes
- I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

Q2 Would you like a copy of the consent form emailed to you?
   Yes       No
APPENDIX B

A. INSTRUCTOR SURVEY

Q3 Your home college is?

Q4 In what year did you start teaching graduate courses?

Q5 In what year did you start teaching online graduate courses?

Q6 What is the highest level of education you have attained?
Post- Undergraduate Doctoral Master's Post-Doctoral Post-Master's

Q7 Have you taken Quality Matters Training?
Yes. No

Q8 Are the classes you teach synchronous or asynchronous?
Synchronous: require student and instructors to online at the same time. Lectures, discussions and presentation occur at a specific hour. All students must be online at that specific hour in order to participate. Asynchronous: allows you to take a course on your own schedule. Instructors provide materials, lectures, tests, and assignments that can be accessed at any time. Students may be given a time frame - usually a one-week window - during which they need to connect at least once or twice. Overall, students are free to contribute whenever they want.

Q9 Do you feel supported during the design process of your course?
Yes No

Q10 Do you feel supported during the delivery of your course?
Yes No

Q11 The lack of face-to-face communication affects my ability to communicate with students?
- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q12 If you wish, please elaborate on your response to face-to-face communication. (Maximum 500 characters)

APPENDIX B (continued)

Q13 How would you describe the time commitment it takes to teach online?

- Far exceeds expectations
- Exceeds expectations
- Meets expectations
- Short of expectations
- Far short of expectations

Q14 If you wish, please elaborate on your response to time commitment above. (Maximum 500 characters)

Q15 How important are each of the following in determining the success of your course?

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<td>Student Attrition</td>
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</table>

Q16 Your comments about evaluating the course. (Maximum 500 characters)

Q17 Comments about student grades. (Maximum 500 characters)

Q18 Comments about student attrition. (Maximum 500 characters)

Q19 Anything else that you would like to comment on related to your experience with online teaching and learning? (Maximum 500 characters)

Q20 If you would be willing to participate in a follow-up short interview (15 minutes) about teaching online, either in- person in Corbin Room 205 or over video conferencing.
APPENDIX C

B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1.) Based on your experience, how would you describe developing an online course?

2.) What do you consider as the most important steps in implementing an online course?

3.) How is the effectiveness of your class determined and how much value do you place on that process?

4.) Do you have anything you would like to add about online learning?
APPENDIX D

D. INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Wichita State University Institutional Review Board Approval #4333 01/23/2019 – 01/22/2020

Interview Consent Form

Purpose: You are invited to participate in an interview researching faculty opinions on online graduate learning. This study will examine some of the implications online teaching has for graduate faculty work and contribute to better understanding of online teaching and learning.

Participant Selection: You were selected as a possible participant in this interview because you responded in the initial survey that you would be willing to participate in an additional 15-minute interview.

Explanation of Procedures: If you decided to participate, you will participate in a short interview (15 minutes) about their perspectives about online learning in Corbin 205 or videoconferencing. The interview will take 15 minutes to complete and the interviewer will request to record the audio of the interview in order to review the audio at a later time for the study. Here are a few sample questions

1.) Based on your experience, how would you describe developing an online course?

2.) What do you consider as the most important steps in implementing an online course?
3.) How is the effectiveness of your class determined and how much value do you place on that process?

**Discomfort/Risks:** There are no personal benefits or anticipated risks to participating in this study. However, if you feel uncomfortable with a question, you may skip it. We will make every effort to keep your interview responses information: the college you teach in, whether you are familiar with or have taken Quality Matters Online Training, and the number of years you have been teaching. Participation is voluntary and you can stop the interview at any time.

**Benefits:** Your participation will help add to the body of knowledge about online learning and faculty’s opinions on teaching online. **Confidentiality:** Every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, in order to make sure the study is done properly and safely there may be circumstances where this information must be released. By signing this form, you are giving the research team permission to share information about you with the following groups:

Wichita State University Institutional Review Board Approval #4333 01/23/2019 – 01/22/2020

**Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies; The Wichita State University Institutional Review Board;**

The researcher may publish the results of the study. If the results are published, the researcher will only discuss group results. Your name will not be used in any publication or presentation about the study.
Audio-recording of the interviews will be kept on a personal, password protected computer for the duration of 5 years and then destroyed.

**Refusal/Withdrawal:** Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

**APPENDIX D (continued)**

**Contact:** If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at: Chantelle Klaassen at capritchett@shockers.wichita.edu or (316) 258-2646. You can also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Mara Alagic at mara.alagic@wichita.edu or (316) 978 – 6974. NOTE: If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research and Technology Transfer at Wichita State University, 1845.

**You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that:**

- You have read (or someone has read to you) the information provided above,
  - You are aware that this is a research study,
  - You have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to your satisfaction, and
- You have voluntarily decided to participate.
  - You agree to have your interview’s audio recorded for research purposes.
You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

________________________________________________
Printed Name of Subject

Wichita State University Institutional Review Board Approval #4333 01/23/2019 – 01/22/2020

___________________________________________________________
Signature of Subject

______________________________
Date

___________________________________________________________
Printed Name of Witness

______________________________
Witness Signature

______________________________
Date

APPENDIX E

TABLE 1

FREQUENCY OF ONLINE CHALLENGES BEING MENTION IN INTERVIEWS

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APPENDIX G
Figure 3
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### SURVEY YES/NO QUESTION FREQUENCY

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APPENDIX H
Figure 4

63
### FREQUENCY OF LIKERT SCALE QUESTIONS

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<td>How important are each of the following in determining the success of your course?</td>
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