Spring 2024

The Practices of Instructional Design at Community Colleges: A Post-Qualitative Study of the Mutual Invisibility of Work

David Robert Niebuhr Tod
Old Dominion University, david@carter-tod.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/efl_etds

Part of the Community College Leadership Commons, Educational Technology Commons, Higher Education Commons, and the Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons

Recommended Citation
Tod, David R. "The Practices of Instructional Design at Community Colleges: A Post-Qualitative Study of the Mutual Invisibility of Work" (2024). Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Dissertation, Educational Foundations & Leadership, Old Dominion University, DOI: 10.25777/x0gs-f593 https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/efl_etds/319

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Educational Leadership & Workforce Development at ODU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Educational Leadership & Workforce Development Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ODU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@odu.edu.
THE PRACTICES OF INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES: A
POST-QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE MUTUAL INVISIBILITY OF WORK

by

David Robert Niebuhr Tod
B.Sc. 1989, University of Bristol, UK
M.A May 1994, Virginia Tech

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
May 2024

Approved by:
Laura Smithers (Co-Director)
David Ayers (Co-Director)
Robin Isserles (Member)
Mitchell Williams (Member)
The work of instructional design in community college settings is woefully understudied. This study documents that work in three community colleges in the southeastern United States while placing it in the theoretical context of neoliberalism, and in line with that theoretical context, takes a post-structuralist stance in its methodological approach.

It is in the discourses of instructional quality, online teaching, and design that instructional designers and faculty engage with each other. In contrast to the more well understood working relationship in a four-year institution, the power relationships between these two groups have not been examined in a community college context. Therefore, the research questions for this study were:

1. What practices do instructional designers and faculty employ in negotiating the boundaries and responsibilities of teaching and design in a community college context?
2. How do power/knowledge relations produce instructional designers’ and faculty’s multiple subjectivities as they engage in the development and teaching of online courses?

To investigate these questions, instructional designers, managers, and faculty were interviewed, with the instructional designers being interviewed multiple times over a number of months in the first half of 2023.
One of the findings of the study was that instructional design as a practice is making institutional space for itself by unbundling the role of faculty, and the definition of what a course is. In this process, Quality Matters as a certifying organization has emerged as a mechanism by which instructional designers identify themselves as professionals within institutions, with areas of specialized expertise.

Among the curiosities that emerged from this study, the *mutual invisibility of work* appeared to function in keeping people apart and in tension with one another. Everybody was busy, unappreciated, and unacknowledged, but “others,” particularly faculty, were characterized as not “good workers” or out of touch and living in a dream world. This suggested that an intentional orientation toward hopeful futures through speculative fiction (hopepunk) might offer a way forward.
Copyright, 2024, by David R. N. Tod, All Rights Reserved.
This dissertation is dedicated to my family and friends, without whom none of this would be possible. It has taken me a long time to get here, but this has been fun. This is my second go around at a PhD, so if you’re ABD, know that all hope is not lost. It can be done, even if it’s 25 or 30 years later!

Thank you to…

My parents in particular, who tolerated the insanity and hilarity of five teenagers at the dinner table and were always willing to engage in complex discussions. They have always had faith in all of us, and have consistently shown me what kindness really means.

My friends, for their constant support and encouragement, and without whom I would not have (re)started this journey. I am reluctant to name names for fear of forgetting someone, but my cohort, and in particular, Emily Moore and Wendy Cook, are a major part of the reason I was able to do this. They are inspiring and supportive in equal measure.

Dr. Sheri Prupis and Dr. Sue Ann Curran, who both encouraged me to follow them on this path through such a well-designed program. There were other graduates too, who showed me that it was possible, inspired me, and spoke so highly of their experience.

My kids, who somehow still think I am okay. I am still not sure it’s a good thing to be a “cool dad,” but I am proud of them both and I love them very much. I just wanted to put that in writing for posterity!

My wife, for her patient intelligence, and loving support.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my committee for their work and support. In addition to their serving on my committee, I had the good fortune to take classes with Dr. Williams and Dr. Ayers. Those classes were excellent, thought-provoking, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity. When I read Dr. Isserles (2021) book, *The Costs of Completion: Student Success in Community College*, I was instantly struck by how much it aligned with what I had learned in my classes, and how much it aligned with the direction of my research. I am similarly very fortunate that she has served on my committee.

It is difficult to express how much I owe to Dr. Laura Smithers (https://laurasmithers.net/), who has been my dissertation chair. She has been incredibly generous with her support, time, and attention. Perhaps it was because she lured me over to the philosophical mazes of post-structuralist thought and qualitative research, but really, she is simply both intellectually generous and rigorous, and she is unstinting in her belief in people and their capacity to do good work. I hope I have lived up to her expectations.

I would be remiss if I did not thank my participants who gave so generously of their time. In particular, the three instructional designers who I met with over an extended period were very kind, understanding, and tolerant. I have done my best to represent your work, and any errors or omissions are mine and mine alone. I am very grateful to the group at one of the colleges that I met with over an extended period of time. The experience was fascinating. Again, all errors and interpretations are mine. I am similarly grateful to the many other interviewees, who were uniformly kind and thoughtful.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF TABLES</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTRODUCTION: HOW DOES INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN WORK?</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical and Conceptual Framework for the Study</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of the Study</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LITERATURE REVIEW</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neoliberalism, Democracy, and Community Colleges</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Ownership of Instruction</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Work of Instruction</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary and Conclusions</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>METHODOLOGY</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Research Design and Rationale                    | 66   |
| Role of the Researcher                           | 69   |
Us and Them ............................................................................................................... 268
Futurism, Hope, Fiction .............................................................................................. 271
REFERENCES ............................................................................................................... 282
APPENDICES ................................................................................................................ 327
Appendix A Recruitment Emails ................................................................................ 328
Appendix B Informed Consent Document (Observation) .......................................... 331
Appendix C Informed Consent (Faculty) ................................................................... 333
Appendix D Informed Consent (Instructional Designer) ............................................ 335
Appendix E Interview Protocol (Instructional Designer) ........................................... 337
Appendix F Interview Protocol (Faculty) ................................................................... 340
Appendix G Interview Protocol (Administrators) ...................................................... 342
Appendix H ODU IRB Approval ............................................................................... 344
VITA ............................................................................................................................... 345
LIST OF TABLES

Table                                      Page

1. Extract from QM Rubric................................................................. 154
2. Course Map Template................................................................. 156
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: HOW DOES INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN WORK?

This study springs in part from observations and experiences over my career as someone working both as an instructional designer and adjacent to people who practice instructional design. It also springs from a curiosity about the work of instructional design and online learning in the community college context. While there is literature describing practices of instructional design in four-year, research institutions, as I began my research I became keenly aware that research rarely touched on practices in community colleges. This is despite the fact that community colleges often have been pioneers in online learning, in part because by their nature they are commuter institutions with students constrained by other commitments on their time and by their ability to get on campus.

I have found that instructional designers are passionate about their work, and at the same time often express frustration and anger at faculty who they can sometimes characterize as lazy or inept or simply poor teachers. On the other hand, I have met dedicated and similarly passionate faculty who express frustration with their workload, the demands placed upon them, and the patronizing attitude they perceive from instructional designers. Instructional designers, in my experience, too often find themselves identified by faculty and administrators as technical support for instruction, rather than the roles for which they thought they had trained. Full-time faculty, who in the community college context, are professional teachers, may not look to instructional designers for guidance on how to do their work.

When the COVID-19 pandemic threw many institutions of higher education into full-time online learning, many of these tensions came to the fore (Crawford et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2021), while at the same time federal regulations (Downs, 2020) such as Regular and Substantive
Interaction (RSI) appeared to shift the balance of power between faculty and instructional designers some of whom have, over time, been taking on quality monitoring of online instruction. In the context of never-ending educational technological solutionism (Clark, 2023; Williamson & Komljenovic, 2022) and the neoliberal restructuring of higher education (Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) it seemed that potential allies were set at loggerheads by forces beyond their control.

This study asks how instructional design functions in the specific institutional context of the community college. In doing so, it engages in a post-structuralist power/knowledge analysis based on the work of Foucault (1978, 2008). At a simplistic level, this means identifying the practices through which the commonsense understandings of instructional design and online learning are produced, maintained, enforced, and questioned. How does the work of instructional design make sense, what are the dynamics of how knowledge and power construct the work of instructional design, and how are the identities of instructional designers produced within the institutions they operate? Similarly, how does the work of teaching make sense in the context of instructional design practices, and how are the boundaries produced between faculty, instructional designers, the technologies they deploy, and the other forces that look to define what teaching is, what learning is, and what quality is?

This chapter begins with a brief summary of the research on neoliberalism in higher education, faculty control of instruction, and lastly the state of research on the practice of instructional design in higher education. Following this summary, the chapter then identifies the specific research problem, the purpose of the study, and how the nature of the study meets that purpose.

**Background**
**Neoliberalism**

The challenges of the work of instructional design, educational technology, and online learning in the community college context include the deprofessionalization of faculty, the unbundling of the work of the academy, issues of datafication, learnification, and a characterization of education as training for employment. These patterns are emblematic of the contemporary logic of neoliberalism as initially characterized by Michel Foucault (Audier & Behrent, 2015; Foucault, 2008). Beyond his own work, many scholars have applied his insights to examine education (Ball, 2012, 2019), technology (Ball & Grimaldi, 2022; E. Grimaldi & Ball, 2021; K. Lee, 2020), and their relation to contemporary democracy (Brown, 2015; Koopman & Matza, 2013). However, as Lee (2020) noted, there are fewer studies than one might expect at the intersection between these topics in educational technology.

Although Foucault (2008) traced neoliberal thought to the late 1940s in Germany and the United States, historically, neoliberalism can be broadly understood to have begun with the supply-side economics of the Chicago School, monetarism, and the application of those policies in the global south in the early 1970s (Brown, 2015). In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan applied what they characterized as free-market reforms by not only privatizing public services, but also by extending the rhetoric and logic of neoliberalism to other spheres, such as the family and education (“Margaret Thatcher,” 2013). Foucault (2008) characterized this as “the inversion of the relationships of the social to the economic” (p. 240), in other words, social forms became subordinate to and organized by their economic characteristics.

Brown (2015) and other scholars have been clear that neoliberalism is more than an economic reaction to Keynesianism or a political reaction to democratic socialism, it is a mode of reason that produces a specific kind of subjectivity and set of values. Gildersleeve (2017)
summarized Foucault’s analysis of neoliberalism as “hyper-individualism, hyper-surveillance, economic determinations of productivity, and competitive entrepreneurialism” (p. 287). It has become the common sense of the age. Consequently, the same logic could be adopted by Bill Clinton and subsequent Democratic leaders in the form of the “Third Way” (Giddens, 2013) and what Apple (2013) termed conservative modernization.

Brown (2015) identified four specific characteristics of neoliberalism that have restructured thinking around higher education: (a) education is considered a private good benefiting the individual, rather than a public good with positive externalities, (b) democracy and related concepts such as equality and freedom are identified in economic terms, (c) individuals are conceived of as investing in themselves as human capital, and (d) knowledge, thought, and training are valued “for their contribution to capital enhancement” (p. 177).

Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) in their foundational work characterized the deployment of neoliberalism in higher education as academic capitalism. They identified many ways in which this played out, but a high profile one is the way in which tuition has increased and student support has shifted from grants to loans. This shift has conceptually reconfigured education as a personal investment in one’s own human capital for the purpose of one’s own advancement, as opposed to a public investment that benefits the broader society.

Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) also identified the pattern by which faculty were forced into an academic entrepreneur role within the institution. One dimension of this is the datafication of academic work through productivity scoring (Gildersleeve, 2017). The problem of data is that metrics define what can be known, and what is considered to be important (Hoskin, 1996). This makes invisible those things which cannot be easily measured, and increases the importance and value of those things that can be (Macgilchrist, 2017; Williamson
et al., 2020). The data that can be produced shapes categories, aims, goals, and behavior, and is fed into algorithms that reinforce their own importance.

At the community college level neoliberal logic has led to a questioning of the comprehensive mission of colleges that have been recast as economic engines of growth that should steer students towards degrees and certificates that train them for specific careers (Kuntz et al., 2011). Although this economic mission has long been a component of the community college mission, this vocational rhetoric has emerged strongly under recent federal and state administrations of varying political hues (Giroux, 2014; Kuntz et al., 2011). Levin (2000) identified this shift in community colleges in the 1990s as their mission reduced emphasis on community social needs in favor of economic needs and what he characterized as globalization. He noted that despite the rhetoric that aligned with the traditional democratic view of the community college mission, the practices of the colleges indicated otherwise, aligning free markets and global competition with democracy. Levin and Aliveva (2015) also noted the disconnection between traditional rhetoric and neoliberal practice. Additionally, individuals within institutions were praised for more entrepreneurial behaviors, with a focus on productivity. Significantly for this discussion, technology and distance education were identified as a source of tension and a potential avenue for productivity improvements (Levin, 2000). A broad brush cannot be applied to individual behaviors however because of the wide variety of backgrounds, programs, and employment conditions of people within community colleges, as well as their local focus when compared to research institutions (Levin, 2018; Levin & Aliyeva, 2015).

Brown’s (2015) primary thesis is that democracy is threatened by neoliberalism and carefully identifies the ways in which neoliberalism operates, through the work of Foucault and Brown’s extension of it. Brown (2015) argued that neoliberal logic’s presence in everyday life
has had specific impacts on the framing of the functions of democracy in ways that Foucault did not anticipate. We have become taxpayers rather than citizens, and investors in the productivity of education as measured by economics rather than other values. In that light, liberal education is a critical bulwark against this framing, and the impact of neoliberalism on institutions of higher education should be resisted. Brown’s concern was that reframing the value of education as training performs an erasure of politics, collaboration, and deliberation in service of the governance of markets.

Like Brown (2015), Giroux (2014) was also certain that democracy and neoliberalism are on a collision course, and that higher education is a site for that conflict. Giroux (2014) looked for hope in a collective struggle to create new public spheres in which we can recognize the “plight of the other” (p. 226). In the community college context, those who engage with the idea of democracy in crisis, such as Harbour (2015) and Sethares (2020), have advocated for a re-embrace of the vision of community colleges as “democracy’s college,” in deed as well as mission. Like Brown (2015) both advocated that democracy is something that should be actively lived and engaged with at an institutional and local level. In Sethares’ (2020) case, this implies a reassertion of faculty governance and control of the curriculum.

**Faculty Ownership of Instruction**

One of the patterns that has evolved in distance learning over the past thirty years in particular is that course materials, course structures, and even course activities may be developed by non-faculty. Course materials may be co-developed between faculty and staff but also faculty may adopt, not always by choice and in whole or in part, packaged courses developed by publishers, specialist course developers, professional organizations, commercial companies, or by other faculty. These may impose costs on students, whether as a commercial product or even
if an open educational resource. In addition, course content, design, and even delivery may be vetted by non-faculty for course quality using rubrics such as Quality Matters (Quality Matters: Preparing for a QM Course Review, n.d.), institutional metrics of quality, or federally mandated metrics such as Regular and Substantive Interaction (Downs, 2020). One teaching model found in the extreme at institutions like Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) may have large numbers of adjuncts delivering courses developed and closely supervised by specialist teams (Phelan, 2016; Talab, 2007). This appears to be part of a broader pattern in the academy of increasing specialization and constriction of the scope of faculty responsibilities. This broad pattern has been termed unbundling (S. Gehrke & Kezar, 2015) and it complicates traditional assumptions around the ownership of course materials and even course delivery. Despite common assumptions by faculty, the law itself is ambiguous on the question of faculty ownership of classroom materials (Deflem, 2021), and the changing nature of course development and delivery has underlined this ambiguity.

To some extent the tensions emerge not only because the nature of course development and delivery are changing, but also because the lines between course design, content, and delivery are not as bright as some imagine them to be. Conventional understandings of the act of teaching as a solitary act in both development and action no longer are as applicable with online instruction, and with the neoliberal unbundling of roles and responsibilities (S. Gehrke & Kezar, 2015). The move from the “sage on the stage to guide on the side” (King, 1993) has sped up with technological changes and the deprofessionalization of the faculty role. In online instruction content, activities, and assessment are able to be created and presented to students without the intervention of any specific instructor, and so the instructor’s role may become more one of facilitating, mentoring, and monitoring. Educational technology providers avoid claiming that
the erasure of the traditional role of teachers is their goal but that appears to be the end point of their thinking (Andrejevic & Selwyn, 2023; Williamson & Komljenovic, 2022). Biesta (2012) characterized this recasting of education as learning as “learnification” (p. 36) and the disappearance of the teacher. Macgilchrist (2017; McGarr & Engen, 2021) noted the reduction of education to learning is evident in a focus on learning outcomes as revealed in data practices, and therefore as a feature of educational policy, not just of technological solution providers. This instrumentalist framing of education implicates the profession of instructional designers for whom learning outcomes and objectives are a sine qua non of their profession (Magruder et al., 2019). In a parallel reframing, instructional designers have been more recently cast in the literature (Saçak et al., 2022) and the profession as learning designers (e.g., Costello et al., 2022; Rotar & Peller-Semmens, 2021; White & White, 2016).

One of the arguments that a number of authors (e.g., Brown, 2015; Isserles, 2021; Williamson et al., 2020) have made is that changing understandings of the role of higher education in society have combined with changing technology to produce a commodification of teaching and online learning in particular. Under this argument, teaching materials have been standardized, and teaching itself can be standardized to become a product in which higher education institutions have a stake and a claim to the intellectual property they represent (Downing, 2005; Isserles, 2021; Strauss, 2011). The rapid growth of SNHU with its highly standardized and enforced course delivery suggests that there is some truth to this claim. On the other hand, the apparent failure of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) indicates that teachers cannot be disentangled from instruction as easily as the rhetoric suggests (Reich & Ruipérez-Valiente, 2019).
Technology has facilitated the fixing of teaching in concrete forms, even to the extent of recording extemporaneous lectures (Deflem, 2021). Historically, the content of lectures was more ephemeral and required the physical presence of students taking notes, although they and others nevertheless looked to commodify that lecture content as technology made that more possible (e.g., Abernethy v. Hutchinson, 1825). As technology for recording lectures ended up in the hands of students, they were quick to take advantage of them, and scholars owe some debt, for example, to those who recorded Foucault’s lectures on biopolitics (Foucault, 2008).

As technology has enabled the recording of lectures, instructional designers have actively facilitated the incorporation of pre-recorded content into the design of online learning courses. The idea of a teacher as a producer of content or a deliverer of content abstracts them from teaching, and under neoliberalism dispossesses teachers of their intellectual property and autonomy (R. Hall, 2016). This has troubled understandings of the control and ownership of what happens in teaching and learning. Often this has taken the form of contests over copyright.

Many of the key historical cases around copyright have revolved around the recording and fixing of lectures in commodifiable form, and the faculty struggle to define their intellectual property rights. The California Court of Appeal in Williams argued that “[t]here is a clear distinction between what is taught and how it is taught” (Williams v. Weisser, 1969, n. 4) and that what was at stake was the form of expression. The 1976 Copyright Act identified the expression of ideas in concrete form as the moment of copyright. Although historical cases typically revolved around notes and transcripts of lectures, the ability of contemporary technologies to quickly and easily fix the form of expression of the classroom has changed the landscape of teaching and intellectual property (Deflem, 2021).
Finn (2020) argued that academic freedom protects instructors from negative repercussions arising from controversial classroom content, but that it does not and should not grant freedom in teaching methods. Specifically, Finn (2020) argued that instructors have a professional responsibility to choose methods that are demonstrably effective in helping students learn course material. Part of the implicit argument in Finn (2020) is that teaching should be considered a science and a research profession in its own right with its own set of truths, and therefore is not an expertise of university professors in other disciplines. This argument suggests that in this view an institution has the right to dictate forms of expression in the classroom.

Euben (2002) on the other hand argued, on behalf of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), that teaching methods are protected under the First Amendment as long as the speech is germane to the subject matter. An unspoken issue in this discussion is whether content and methods are in fact as separable as these authors suggest, or necessarily entangled with one another, and this is a question that online instruction and educational technologies specifically raise.

In 2020 the U.S. Department of Education released final rules on distance education (Distance Education and Innovation, 2020) which included requirements for regular and substantive interaction (RSI) in online learning (U.S. Department of Education Issues Final Rules on Distance Education and Innovation, 2020). Failure to comply with these requirements could impact accreditation and federal funding. This specifically means that instructors are required to initiate interaction with students and not vice versa, that those interactions should be frequent and consistent (for example, weekly discussions, announcements, or review sessions), and those interactions should be focused on the course subject rather than course mechanics such as deadlines or grading without feedback (Distance Education and Innovation, 2020). Many
institutions have employed the RSI regulatory requirement to increase oversight of faculty
teaching methods as expressed in the online classroom. This seems to support the idea that
institutions have both a right and an obligation to control the expression of faculty in a classroom
context and are creating policy to assert their ability to do so.

In an era in which teaching can be commodified, and the expression of teaching in
technological forms permits the replacement of skilled disciplinary faculty with precarious
adjunct faculty and staff, institutions are creating new policies and practices that erode traditional
assumptions about classroom content and methods. In this arena and context, instructional
designers find themselves at a nexus of concerns about policy, quality, ownership, and the
control of instruction.

**Instructional Design**

Although historically faculty worked by themselves on their course design and
development, as online learning grew institutions of higher education began to employ
instructional designers specifically to support their work (Intentional Futures, 2016; Lieberman,
2017). While their widespread presence in higher education institutions is relatively recent and
can be attributed to the growth in distance learning and the internet since the mid-1990s (Reiser,
2001), the role of these instructional designers has changed as they have become more
established and as the policy and strategic context has changed for distance learning.
Nevertheless, there is a sense that the positions of instructional designers can be vulnerable and
liable to be cut when budgets are tight, in part deriving from an ambiguity about what people in
these roles actually do (Altena et al., 2019; Fyle et al., 2012).

There appears to be a gap between the competencies that instructional designers train for,
and the actual functions that instructional designers perform (Magruder et al., 2019). The
institutional context may be a significant factor in this regard (Kumar & Ritzhaupt, 2017). White and White (2016) argued that part of the challenge is that instructional designers fit Whitchurch’s (2008) definition of a *third space* professional, i.e., someone who exists outside of the conventional boundaries of either faculty or professional or staff. People performing this function bring both professional and academic responsibilities to their roles, and typically are required to collaborate and communicate across these boundaries.

The instructional designer role has been described as precarious and subject to tension (Cowie & Nichols, 2010; Keppell, 2007; Mueller et al., 2022a). One source of that tension may be the quality control and evaluation function of instructional designers (Knowles & Kalata, 2008; J. C. Richardson et al., 2019). Faculty may also perceive instructional designers as support staff of much lower status than the faculty, and this can have complicating impacts on the collaboration between them (Bawa & Watson, 2017; Bessette, 2021; J. C. Richardson et al., 2019). It may even be the case that instructional designers feel “powerless to create meaningful change” (K. Campbell et al., 2009, p. 655) as a result of their status.

Collaboration and communication have been identified as critical skills and functions of instructional designers (Bawa & Watson, 2017; Pan & Thompson, 2009; Sugar & Moore, 2015) and this seems tightly connected to the tensions around the boundary role which they occupy (Gérin-Lajoie, 2015; Hixon, 2008). However, research is broadly lacking on working relationships, and specifically lacking in terms of the faculty experience and in specific institutional contexts (Chen & Carliner, 2020; Pollard & Kumar, 2022). Given that issues of status and role are critical for these third space professionals (White & White, 2016), it seems all the more important to examine them in contexts where faculty roles and status may operate differently. Most notably, in a non-research institution like the community college, issues of
research and tenure may well not apply, full-time teaching faculty may be of different status, and adjunct faculty may operate differently.

A location where tensions and conflict can manifest is in courses in a learning management system (LMS) because it is here that the form of instruction is fixed by instructional designers and their collaborators. A blueprint, template, or master course is an attempt to control what and how faculty teach, often taking the form of the instructional materials chosen by a full-time faculty member and others included in the development process. Typically a blueprint course attempts to limit the ways in which the non-designer instructors, typically adjuncts, are able deliver the course (Morgan, 2019; J. C. Richardson et al., 2016; Silva et al., 2021). This standardized course may include an integration of third-party publisher content and assessments.

Ovetz (2017) argued that the modern LMS is teaching students a hidden curriculum of neoliberal surveillance and atomized task completion. Ovetz (2017) further suggested that it is increasingly the case that faculty operate within this same context as their actions are monitored and surveilled and they are treated as contingent replaceable elements in the delivery of instruction. One function for instructional designers may be to act as architects of these surveillance technologies.

Similarly, Andrejevic and Selwyn (2023) characterize institutions as having offloaded their “infrastructural imaginary” (p. 10) to the private sector, by which they mean that our ideas of what education can be in a platform era have been subsumed by the commercial platforms institutions have adopted. In effect, this is outsourcing the mission of the institution (Lynch, 2019). This includes automation and hyper-individualization that constrains the idea of what education can and should be. Williamson et al. (2020) note that the risk is that “pedagogy may be
reshaped to ensure it ‘fits’ on the digital platforms that are required to generate the data demanded to assess students’ ongoing learning” (p. 358).

Many hail the move toward master course templates, standardization, the separation of design from delivery, and the surveillance of students and faculty as a positive move for both institutions and students (e.g., Grincewicz & Simunich, 2021; Phelan, 2016; Tucker & Neely, 2010). Typically, the argument for this model is framed in terms of institutional consistency and cost control, partly because higher education has struggled with the productivity challenge of Baumol’s cost disease (Archibald & Feldman, 2008), which is more or less that there are no economies of scale in teaching. These are recognizably neoliberal frames that focus on specific definitions of efficiency, the use of data, and the productivity of faculty as measured in that data (Gildersleeve, 2017; Macgilchrist, 2017; Williamson et al., 2020).

In the modern community college, there is a sense in which instructional designers, full-time faculty, and adjunct faculty suffer from similar vulnerabilities of status and role ambiguity. The growth in the number of adjunct faculty has been at the expense of full-time faculty (Kezar et al., 2019), and instructional designers, as relative newcomers to community colleges, are still finding their place (Intentional Futures, 2016).

Community colleges are classically considered as teaching institutions, and their reach is broad. In 2020-21 about 33% of all undergraduate students were enrolled in public two-year colleges, or about 7 million students (Community College FAQs, n.d.). Of those, about 70% took at least one distance education course in the Fall 2020 semester, bearing in mind the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Community College FAQs, n.d.). Their students are often historically underserved populations including first-generation students, working class, and racial and ethnic minoritized students (Gonzales & Ayers, 2018). Yet, despite their reach, their critical role in U.S.
post-secondary education, and the sheer numbers, research on community college faculty has been lacking (Gonzales & Ayers, 2018; Martinez, 2019; Twombly & Townsend, 2008). The end of the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty in 2004 removed a useful source of data on community college faculty. For example, contemporary data on faculty teaching loads is hard to find but Townsend and Rosser (2007) found the typical load to be five 3-hour courses per semester. Scholars caution though that one should not oversimplify the work of community college faculty, nor paint them with a broad brush (Levin & Aliyeva, 2015). Community college faculty and the quality of instruction at community colleges are often looked down upon by 4-year and university faculty (Twombly & Townsend, 2008), but there also appear to be status variations within institutions, and Twombly and Townsend (2008) advocate for research that “goes beyond the received, and often unquestioned, story that community colleges are teaching institutions and that therefore, by definition, their faculty members are good teachers who produce learning” (p.19).

Zimmerman (2020) recounts the history of the evergreen complaint that faculty do not know how to teach and that something must be done. Familiar tropes persisted over the 20th century and into the 21st: the mind-numbing lecture, the charismatic professor, unengaged students, theatrics, popularity in tension with rigor, misaligned incentives, grade inflation, technology replacing teachers, and the lack of training for college instructors. Zimmerman (2020) does not consider the community college as an institution uniquely focused on teaching, and more broadly paints a picture of instruction taking two-steps forward with one-step back. His conclusion is that peer review might yet hold out promise, but notes that faculty have not signed on to the idea. A core claim is that “as more and more of American higher education came under the bureaucratic umbrella, teaching mostly remained outside of it” (Zimmerman, 2020, p. 3), but
peer review is built in to evaluation rubrics such as Quality Matters (Quality Matters: Preparing for a QM Course Review, n.d.), and one could argue that instructional design and related quality processes and policies are yet another attempt to bring instruction under the bureaucratic umbrella. Nevertheless, Zimmerman (2020) remains on the side that claims that “teaching is a deeply personal and even spiritual act that defies rational organization, which accounts for much of its magic as well as its miseries” (p. 234).

As they interact with each other, instructional designers and faculty should be conscious of these issues, but also the role of the technologies and practices that they deploy. These technologies and practices embed specific conceptions of teaching and learning, and when evaluating them, those implicit ideologies are frequently obscured by educational technology solutionism (Castañeda & Williamson, 2021).

In summary, recent work has identified specific gaps in the literature around the work of instructional design. There is limited research into faculty perspectives on instructional design (Chen & Carliner, 2020; Mueller et al., 2022a). Similarly, there is a lack of research into power, and conflict between roles (Chen & Carliner, 2020; Mueller et al., 2022a; Pollard & Kumar, 2022), and lastly there is limited research into the specifics of collaboration between instructional designers and faculty (Chen & Carliner, 2020; J. C. Richardson et al., 2019).

This research study proposes to place the work of instructional design into the broader context of the technologies and milieux within which instructional design, online learning, and the community college are entangled.

**Problem Statement**

Working relationships between faculty and instructional designers have not been widely researched, and the research that does exist tends to consist of reports focused on practical
strategies for promoting collaboration between faculty and instructional designers (Chen & Carliner, 2020; Rotar & Peller-Semmens, 2021). Studies tend to reflect the point of view of instructional designers, there is limited insight into the details of collaboration, and there is limited insight into issues of status and the power dynamics involved. Furthermore, much of the research is conducted in large research universities with full-time faculty, and therefore reflects that particular institutional context (e.g., C. M. Campbell, 2015; Chao et al., 2010; Knowles & Kalata, 2008). As a result, there is a lack of research when it comes to the interactions of instructional designers and professional teaching faculty in community colleges.

A specific goal of this study is to place that work within a specific theoretical context, rather than the atheoretical studies focused on strategies and techniques that tend to predominate in the literature (Chen & Carliner, 2020; Pollard & Kumar, 2022; Tight, 2004). One potential explanation for the patterns of ambiguity around instructional design roles and status is that college administrators employ the logic of neoliberalism to decenter and deskill professional teaching faculty through the work of instructional design (S. Gehrke & Kezar, 2015; Ovetz, 2017, 2021), while simultaneously not elevating the status of non-faculty instructional designers. This accomplishes an “unbundling” of the role of faculty (S. Gehrke & Kezar, 2015) by removing a responsibility that they have historically been accountable for, i.e., the design of courses, and handing it off to a new administrative professional. From a theoretical perspective, both instructional designers and faculty inhabit multiple subject positions or subjectivities as they perform different roles and slip into different responsibilities (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). These are not definitive nor causal, and are ambiguous expressions of power rather than stable identities.
At the same time, federal policy and accreditation requirements relating to the quality of online instruction are creating more compliance challenges for instructional designers and leaders (Downs, 2020). These requirements may come into direct conflict with the desires of faculty and their professional identities, and at the same time may enhance the status of instructional designers within institutions. Beyond this, it is far from clear that faculty and instructional designers agree on what is design and what is content (Halupa, 2019). In this ambiguity there is a contest for professional recognition.

It is in the discourse of instructional quality, online teaching, and design that instructional designers and faculty engage with each other (Naz, 2021). In contrast to the more well understood relationship in a four-year institution where the instructional designer is typically of lower status than the full-time faculty member, the relative status of these two groups has not been examined in a community college context. How members of these groups interact around teaching, learning, and technology is the working of discourse, and also may suggest moments of escape from the trap of neoliberalism.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to identify the practices that constitute the work of instructional design in a community college context, and what kind of assemblage is produced by practices of knowledge and power.

**Research Questions**

1. What practices do instructional designers and faculty employ in negotiating the boundaries and responsibilities of teaching and design in a community college context?
2. How do power/knowledge relations produce instructional designers’ and faculty’s multiple subjectivities as they engage in the development and teaching of online courses?
Theoretical and Conceptual Framework for the Study

Conventional approaches to research and inquiry require particular ontological and epistemological positions (whether acknowledged or not). However, post-structuralism argues that ontology and epistemology are inseparable and therefore it is more accurate to take an ontoepistemological stance (St. Pierre, 2021). To a certain extent this arises out of the insights of quantum physics and the discovery that the state of particles depends on being measured (Barad, 2007; Xu et al., 2022). More precisely, the tools of inquiry and the researcher are an entangled part of the phenomena they are investigating, and are actively producing and produced, intra-acting within the phenomena (Barad, 2007).

This means that inquiry creates the world. Our attempts to understand the world make the world, and ethics therefore are embedded in method rather than applied to predetermined, prescribed, mechanical method (Kuntz, 2015). For this reason, for example, a survey of people about neoliberalism (re)produces post-positivist neoliberalism by virtue of its methodology, since it reduces complex impermanent relationships to extractable, measurable data, to that which can be quantified (Hoskin, 1996). It is inconsistent with the very assumptions of discourse to ignore the implications of method for ethical research.

Post-positivist methods assume a world of subjects and objects that the researcher can stand outside of and take a *view from nowhere* to produce truths. Social constructivist methods take a *view from somewhere* and contextualize the researcher through positionality statements and bracketing (Vagle, 2018), but the *view from somewhere* nevertheless assumes that there is an underlying truth and reality (Pillow, 2003) and still, as Kuntz (2015) terms it, requires a logic of extraction.
The post-structuralist perspective on inquiry is also in part a response to neoliberalism in the academy. Brown (2015) noted that the problem of *best practices* impacts the practice of research and can be used to avoid consideration of the political implications of methodological choices, putting methods beyond debate. This is to encounter the problem of the neoliberal datafication of subjects through the standards of research. Standard research methods systematize, instrumentalize, and become taken for granted, and in so doing deprive inquiry of its creative potential (Gildersleeve & Guyotte, 2020).

Methodology and the narrative of research are necessarily political (Macgillchrist, 2021b). Transparent language and standardized methods are, by definition, those things which are taken for granted (Lather, 1996) and considered the common sense of the academy. It is common sense itself that, through both their focus and their method, post-structuralist inquirers seek to reveal and create alternatives to. A goal of post-structuralist inquiry then is to avoid being “predictive and predictable” (Gildersleeve & Guyotte, 2020, p. 3) in both method and form, to test the limits of research in ways that productively create escape (Lather, 1996). By virtue of its onto-epistemological stance, post-structuralism denies the existence of pre-existing truths waiting out in the world to be found and organized for consumption. The world is instead always being recreated in every moment through the active entanglement of bodies, matter, and minds. This immanent creative nature of experience also means that a post-structuralist inquiry has the potential to be something new. In the terms of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) these are lines of flight that escape the discourse of common sense. Because truth is not something to be found, it is neither irrelevant nor unconsidered, but rather truth is produced both in the research context and by the researcher as an active participant in that production. Inquiry then becomes the opportunity to create something new rather than reproduce what already is.
A role for critique is resistance through the imagination of new practices and forms of knowing (Macgilchrist, 2021b). As Kuntz (2015) frames it, “critical work encourages ethically laden creative alternatives to normative rationalities and normalizing practices, a critical insubordination to traditional ways of knowing and coming to know” (p. 25). St. Pierre (2021) advocates for “experimentation and creation of the new” (p. 6). This is risky and requires parrhesia, the willingness to speak truth in political contexts and risking normative ways of knowing and being (Kuntz, 2015).

This is not to say that traditional approaches are not useful, but that they have the potential to be dangerous because their prepackaged approaches risk ignoring local, relational, and material considerations (Gildersleeve & Guyotte, 2020). For Foucault (1983b), the danger is that all choices (including traditional ones) involve risk and decisions about which risks are worth taking. Solutions beget problems and new dangers.

My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism.

(Foucault, 1983b, pp. 231–232)

The purpose of inquiry is to get at the world that produces us, and this is present not only in the unusual, but in the everyday, the mundane, the silences, the exclusions, and the common sense we operate by, to “make visible that which we do see” (Mascaretti & Foucault, 2018, p. 192). Foucault's purpose was to:

…show how the coupling of a set of practices and a regime of truth form an apparatus (dispositif) of knowledge-power that effectively marks out in reality that which does not
exist and legitimately submits it to the division between true and false (Foucault, 2008, p. 19)

The term *apparatus* (in French *dispositif*) refers to a concept similar to *assemblage* (in French *agencement*) which is associated with Deleuze and Guattari (1987), and these “can and should be thought together” (Legg, 2011, p. 128). Rose and Miller (2010) urge us “to study the humble and mundane mechanisms by which authorities seek to instantiate government” (p. 281). Studying the humble and the everyday avoids what Macgilchrist (2017) calls heroic stories. Instead, we can choose to tell “carrier-bag stories” which embrace multiplicity and complexity, and which can reveal how systems and discourses are enacted in everyday practices.

For Foucault discursive practices are the practices of discourse that bridge the material and the symbolic and should not be understood to refer to solely to language (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014). Discursive practices are practices of knowledge formation that define what can be said, so Foucault’s interest was in not what *was* said, but what *could* be said, what can be “true” or “real” (Naz, 2021). An infinite number of things can be said, but practices and rules of knowledge discourse define those things that can be said to be true. Discursive practices form the apparatus that make it possible to say certain things and so are a focus of inquiry. This idea that the "real" is produced connects to Barad’s (2007) concept of “*intra*-action” that similarly keeps language and the material world in the same space (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014). Bacchi and Bonham (2014) give the example of “… population pyramids [that] activate registrations of births, deaths and border crossings, clinical observations, census collections and compilations of national statistics together with the sites, practices and things through which each of these statements is enacted” (p. 184). Both Koopman (2019) and Hacking (1990) have undertaken just this kind of historical and genealogical analysis. Another more directly relevant example can be found in Naz (2021)
where the author examined the production of knowledge in the context of quality improvement in further education and the relations between knowledge and power that work with each other.

The consequence for this study’s analysis and methodological approach are to place data, theory, and values in equitable conversation with one another in order to say something about the assemblage that produces online learning and instructional design in the modern community college. In practice, this means that the everyday practices of instructional design and online learning point to a regime of truth that produces specific understandings of the nature of education and learning in contemporary life.

**Nature of the Study**

This study applied ethnographic methods to focus on the discourse of instructional design and online learning in a community college setting. In order to identify this discourse and the practices that produce it, the research was a post-qualitative inquiry into the administration and deployment of educational technology. In line with the theoretical assumptions, there was no attempt to generalize, nor to reflect or represent the data collected as representative of community colleges or instructional design more generally. The goal was a diffractive reading of the data through theory in line with Barad (2007) and Kuntz (2015, 2019). The intent in this “thinking with theory” approach (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014) was to provoke the possibility of something new, that may be more than the neoliberal cage in which we find ourselves, that allows for different ways of thinking about the work of instructional design in ways that reinscribe the importance of education in the broadest sense of the word.

Data was collected from three community colleges in a Southeastern state. One reason for the choice of multiple sites was to respect the anonymity of participants. Since the community colleges were likely to have very few instructional design staff, if the study had been conducted
at a single site, it would have been virtually impossible to keep the identity of the participants confidential while still being faithful to the data collected. In line with the deprivileging of voice (Roulston, 2010), multiple sources of data were used, including interviews, but also document analysis. Documents included the content of online chats, policy and training materials, and the schedules of the instructional designers.

**Scope**

The study was conducted in the Spring of 2023. Because the focus of the study was not bound to the regular academic schedule, the timeline did not depend on the start or end of semesters. The study was conducted at three community colleges in a Southeastern state, and the participants were instructional designers, faculty, and administrators at those colleges who were involved in the practices of educational technology. Faculty involved both full-time and adjunct faculty. Transferability was not an aim of this research.

This study took place at three community colleges in a Southeastern state that employed people with responsibilities defined as instructional design. Given resource constraints at smaller institutions there are people who are not employed as instructional designers or do not have that specific title, but who nevertheless have those responsibilities. Therefore, participants could have included those whose formal title does not include “instructional design” per se. The scope was restricted to a single state and community colleges in part in order to focus on the practices of those working under the same employment regulations.

**Significance**

By conducting this study, I was looking to make two contributions. The first contribution was to document the work of instructional design in a community college context, which is an unstudied area. In doing so, I hoped to document some of the complexities and challenges of the
work in a way that might engender more understanding by different institutional actors of the work that instructional designers do. The second contribution was a methodological one. The work of instructional design within institutions is undertheorized and theory is notably absent from the literature. I look to bring theory to bear and conduct this work in a spirit of post-structuralist creative experimentation, a goal of which is to both point out the produced common sense, the practices that produce it, and the potential for alternative imaginaries that offer community colleges a different way to think about online learning.

**Summary**

In Chapter 2, the literature supporting this research is reviewed in more detail. I make the case in more depth that instructional design work in the community college context is barely studied, and that this research should be understood as an opportunity to think about the intersections of neoliberal rationality and technology in higher education.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The goal of this study is to bring the theoretical framing of neoliberalism to bear on the practices of instructional design and online learning as well as the working relationships between faculty and instructional designers in the community college context. Weaknesses in the literature on the work of instructional design are that it tends to be atheoretical, focused on practitioner advice, and that the community college context is rarely, if ever, examined (Chen & Carliner, 2020; Pollard & Kumar, 2022).

Neoliberalism, Democracy, and Community Colleges

The 1946 President’s Commission on Higher Education laid out a vision for higher education rooted in its foundational importance for democracy:

It is an investment in social welfare, better living standards, better health and less crime.

It is an investment in a bulwark against garbled information, half-truths and untruths, against ignorance and intolerance. It is an investment in human talent, better human relationships, democracy and peace. (Zook, 1947, p. 27)

At the time this ambition was recognized as “far-reaching,” “startling,” and “idealistic and impossible” (Russell, 1949, p. 508), but the post-war expansion of public education and the establishment of community colleges were the fulfillment of that ambition (Vaughan, 2006). The connection between democracy and higher education became self-evident and could be assumed by the Supreme Court in that “[n]o one should underestimate the vital role in a democracy that is played by those who guide and train our youth” (Sweezy v. New Hampshire, 1957, p. 250). It is difficult to imagine the current Supreme Court making such a statement in 2022, and that is in part due to the permeation of neoliberalism in contemporary politics and society.
Neoliberalism can be broadly understood to have begun with the supply-side economics of the Chicago School, monetarism, and the application of those policies in the global south in the early 1970s (Brown, 2015). Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan came to power on the back of the oil shocks of the 1970s and applied free-market reforms in not only privatizing public services, but also extending the rhetoric and logic of neoliberalism to other spheres, as partially captured in Thatcher’s (2013) statement that “there’s no such thing as society…and people must look after themselves first” (para. 7), or Reagan’s (1981) that “government is the problem” (p. 2). This logic was adopted by Clinton and subsequent Democratic leaders in the form of the “Third Way” (Giddens, 2013) and what Apple (2013) termed conservative modernization.

Brown (2015) and other scholars have been clear that neoliberalism is more than an economic reaction to Keynesianism or a political reaction to democratic socialism, it is a mode of reason that produces a specific kind of subjectivity and set of values. In the early parts of the 20th century, prior to the deployment of neoliberal frames for acting, capitalism was understood as a way of ordering markets only; but subsequently it has become understood as a fundamental way of ordering all human relations and activity. In Foucault’s (2008) idiom homo oeconomicus has replaced homo politicus (Brown, 2015). In making this distinction between subject positions, scholars have relied on Foucault’s (2008) early analysis, as in for example Giroux (2014) and Kuntz (2019). For both, Foucault offered both a way of understanding the challenge presented by neoliberalism, but also a method to meet that challenge. Gildersleeve (2017) summarizes Foucault’s analysis of neoliberalism as represented by “hyper-individualism, hyper-surveillance, economic determinations of productivity, and competitive entrepreneurialism” (p. 287). Brown (2015) identified four major characteristics of neoliberalism that have specifically impacted higher education:
• The notion of a public good is not available.

• Democracy and related concepts such as equality and freedom become economic signifiers.

• Subjects are conceived of as self-investing human capital.

• Knowledge, thought, and training are valued “for their contribution to capital enhancement” (p. 177).

Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) characterized the deployment of neoliberal thinking in higher education as academic capitalism. This pattern has played out in many different areas of the academy, the highest profile one being the way in which tuition has increased and student support has shifted from grants to loans. This has conceptually reconfigured education as a personal investment in one’s own human capital for the purpose of one’s own advancement, as opposed to a public investment that benefits the broader society. The contention over the ways that these financial shifts have been explained points to the challenges presented by neoliberalism. Scholars have devoted years of research to explaining higher education costs as due in part to reductions in state support and productivity constraints in the form of Baumol’s cost disease, but have to contend with more facile, but popular explanations like the Bennett hypothesis (Archibald & Feldman, 2008; Feldman & Romano, 2019) which makes a supply-side argument about the presence of tuition support.

Similar patterns apply to patent policy as changed in the 1980 Bayh-Dole Act (Bremer et al., 2009), to more recently, performance-based funding (Dougherty & Natow, 2019; Umbricht et al., 2015). Both patent policy and performance-based funding have recast academic productivity as data tied to economic action. Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) also identified the pattern by which faculty were forced into an academic entrepreneur role within the institution.
Representing academic work through datafication is a key way in which their productivity is scored and ascribed significance (Gildersleeve, 2017). At the community college level this logic has threatened the comprehensive mission of colleges that have been recast as economic engines of growth that should steer students towards degrees and certificates that train them for specific careers. This vocational rhetoric has emerged strongly under recent federal and state administrations (Kuntz et al., 2011).

Scholars are not always careful about their theorization of neoliberalism. The concepts that many scholars focus on are the degradation of the idea of education as a public good, and the reduction in importance of a liberal education (Tight, 2019). The concept provides a backdrop for scholarly work, but in many ways is presented as the inevitable discourse within which the scholar works, rather than a produced common sense that can be challenged. For some this is a pragmatic decision when faced with the challenges of higher education, and their analysis and recommendations could be said to fall at the level of tactics rather than strategy. For example, Goldrick-Rab (2016) has written powerfully and carefully about the cost of college, but neoliberalism is simply the ideology within which she must operate. As a result, Goldrick-Rab’s solutions have tended to be more technocratic, for example, advocating for programs to provide money to students in need. In some contrast, Kezar et al. (2019) explicitly connected the adjunctification of the academy to neoliberal policies and practices, and their proposed solutions have tended to be more systemic, for example, unionization of faculty.

For others, like Sethares (2020), neoliberalism is a core focus of their work but the analysis still resides in the economic context and in the relations of workers and management, e.g., in faculty governance. Nevertheless Sethares’ work stands in contrast to a book like Social Justice and Community College Education (Reece, 2021) which sounds on the face of it as if it
would recognize the challenge of neoliberalism, but in fact does nothing of the sort. In fact, this work accepts neoliberal framing in a focus on college completion, academic capital, and best practices, the last of which Brown (2015) spends considerable space excoriating as a kind of soft power governance that removes whole domains from debate. In other words, as Gildersleeve (2017) characterizes it, neoliberalism deploys best practices as the creation of common sense that makes some truths possible and excludes others as unknowable.

There are then scholars who pragmatically accept the neoliberal context, others who challenge neoliberalism as an economic form, but still others who have extended their analysis to the restructuring of the discourse of higher education and democracy more broadly. Harbour (2015) for example advocated for the democratic mission of community colleges from a Deweyian frame and acknowledged the challenges of neoliberalism, but did not consider the two to be opposing or incompatible forces. Harbour (2015) rather framed the problem as one of culture, vision, values, and leadership. Brown’s (2015) thesis is that democracy is threatened by neoliberalism and carefully identifies the ways in which neoliberalism operates, through the work of Foucault and Brown’s extension of it. Giroux (2014) is certain that democracy and neoliberalism are on a collision course.

In the sociological literature one avenue for analysis is to connect Durkheim’s concept of *anomie* to neoliberalism (Courpasson et al., 2021; Johnson & Duberley, 2011). Robert Merton reformulated anomie and popularized the concept in sociology as caused by gaps between goals and norms (Deflem, 2017), with a more technocratic and instrumental focus on managing deviant behavior (Deflem, 2017; Johnson & Duberley, 2011). However, another way to understand anomie is as a product of neoliberal individualizing and isolating competitive frames that dissolve the solidarity of morally bound groups and their shared values and goals.
(Courpasson et al., 2021). One possible reaction to the dissolution of social bonds is anxiety and anger, but Courpasson et al. (2021) advocate that researchers pay attention to the ways in which groups naturally form in reaction to and in subversion of anomic neoliberalism in the workplace, taking the form of secret or hidden communities with friendship ties and shared values. While Durkheim claimed that the division of labor was a necessary outcome of post-industrialization, certain forms and movements of the division of labor could lead to the conditions of anomie, and indeed, Durkheim criticized the obsession with progress on those terms.

As soon as men are inoculated with the precept that their duty is to progress, it is harder to make them accept resignation; so the number of the malcontent and disquieted is bound to increase. The entire morality of progress and perfection is thus inseparable from a certain amount of anomy. (Durkheim, 1897/2005, p. 331)

Scholars emphasize that anomie is a social condition and not an individual one (Deflem, 2017) and as such, there have been attempts to connect Durkheim’s thinking to the recent turn to affect (Barnwell, 2018). The idea of anomie as produced by particular forms of social organization is in line with the idea of affect as a social precursor to individual emotion.

Birnbaum (2000) argued that academic management has adopted the logic of neoliberalism within which business and industry are models to which higher education should aspire, but in doing so, the narrative and discourse of higher education has been degraded. Ginsberg (2011) makes a similar point. A parallel literature that has identified and analyzed this logic is that on new public management and leaderism in the United Kingdom (O’Reilly & Reed, 2010; Wallace et al., 2011). One dimension of this literature is that managerialism is identified as an ideology used to justify specific kinds of changes in governance that reorient public services for the citizen-as-consumer. A methodological framework that many of these productive research
approaches share has been termed critical discourse analysis (Lester et al., 2016). This framework has been explicitly adopted in, for example, Crevani et al. (2015), who noted that hybrid academic management cultures can emerge through “confirmation, re-formulation and rejection of discursive influences” (p. 1).

In a parallel analysis, Mumby (2015) characterized neoliberalism as post-Fordist work arrangements in which workers have become venture labor. Mumby (2015) advocated that scholarship should focus on the “ways in which communication processes and power relations intersect to construct identities in the context of post-Fordist work arrangements” (p.35). It is this focus on communication processes and power relations that a number of scholars have taken up in critical discourse analysis (Gándara & Jones, 2020; Gildersleeve & Kleinhesselink, 2017; Lester et al., 2016), although as Anderson and Holloway (2020) noted, research characterized as discourse analysis is not always theoretically and methodologically consistent.

**Contemporary Neoliberal Policy**

McClure (2016) noted that change advocates frequently require crises in order to make the case for what they wish to happen. The last decade and a half has not disappointed them, but if one is lacking there seems to be a permanent presidential retirement crisis and the enrollment cliff is a constant and productive threat (Campion, 2020). Clearly the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID pandemic are crises. Policy makers responded in different ways to these crises, but in ways consistent with neoliberalism.

One of President Obama’s first education initiatives was the American Graduation Initiative (Harbour, 2015; Kuntz et al., 2011). The initiative was a 10-year plan focused on community college workforce development and training, and college graduation rates, but the proposed policy was overshadowed by the politics of the Affordable Health Care Act and the
recovery from the financial crisis. Nevertheless, out of this period emerged the Completion Agenda focused on students gaining credentials from higher education (Harbour, 2015). Components of this agenda evolved to include the Guided Pathways movement (Bailey et al., 2015) which focused on increasing the efficient consumption of education by students. These efforts were more often than not sponsored directly by private foundations such as the Lumina Foundation or the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Drummer & Marshburn, 2014; Zachry Rutschow et al., 2011), and relied on research sponsored by those same foundations. These powerful foundations set a higher education agenda reflective of their sponsors’ priorities and function as a kind of quango in the highly permeable borders of government and private industry.

Other related characteristics of the Obama presidency were changes to satisfactory academic progress regulations (Schudde & Scott-Clayton, 2016), the implementation of gainful employment regulations (Guida Jr & Figuli, 2012), and a focus on reigning in the failures of for-profit colleges to graduate students, particularly online ones (McMillan Cottom, 2018). Kuntz et al. (2011) showed that many of these kinds of reforms deploy utilitarian assumptions about the relationship between higher education, capitalism, and democracy. Kuntz et al. (2011) also connected these concerns to issues of surveillance which is another pattern of the past decade that has emerged strongly in higher education (Jarke & Breiter, 2019). Neoliberal students, faculty, and staff members are not only producers and consumers within the market, but also datafied ones whose online behaviors are taken to represent who they are (Whitman, 2020) and are themselves a product to be sold (Pasquale, 2015). Higher education is deeply implicated in these patterns (Perrotta, 2020).

Under President Trump, various Obama-era regulations were attempted to be rolled back, including regulations on for-profit colleges such as gainful employment (Program Integrity,
2019), but one of Trump’s notable rhetorical flourishes was to claim that he did not know what *community college* meant (Benen, 2018). Of significance to this discussion of neoliberalism however is that Trump went on to say that vocational or technical was a better description. Another regulation implemented by the Trump administration was on accreditation which allowed institutions to switch accreditation agencies (*Student Assistance General Provisions, the Secretary’s Recognition of Accrediting Agencies, the Secretary’s Recognition Procedures for State Agencies*, 2019). This has yet to be undone by the Biden administration, and the implicit logic of this regulation created competition between accrediting agencies, which now risks institutions shopping for more lenient governance bodies if allowed by state law (Whitford, 2022). This is exemplary of what Brown (2015) characterized as the “economization and tacticalization of law” (p. 66) by which a purpose of government is to govern for markets rather than rights or public goods.

A signature policy of presidential candidate Biden became the *America’s College Promise Act* (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021; Committee on Education and Labor, 2021) which was intended to provide free community college as a first-dollar program. First-dollar programs provide funds to students before any other grants or funds and are bureaucratically simpler. Notably this initiative has not come to fruition and as things currently stand there is simply a proposal to expand the Pell grant (Smalley, 2022), which is a last-dollar program, and therefore more complex. This is emblematic of a technocratic neoliberalism that eschews systemic solutions in favor of solutions focused on more individualized and targeted approaches. One can make a similar contrast between the broad-based desire for loan forgiveness (Woodward, 2021) contrasted with the specific, more targeted loan forgiveness currently
underway (U.S. Department of Education, 2022) which fits the ideological requirement that consumers of debt somehow be deserving (Gándara & Jones, 2020).

Piketty (2017) suggested that the post-World War II period was an aberration, an exception that proves the rule. In this analysis inequality and the dominance of capital is inevitable. Scholars of neoliberalism suggest that when compared to pre-World War II periods, there has been something distinct about the ways in which neoliberalism extended economic logics into social spheres. The persistence of democratic socialism in Europe might argue that neoliberalism is not hegemonic, but this may only hold true if restricted to economics (Brown, 2015). If searching for counterevidence, it is certainly the case that for all of Silicon Valley’s embrace of a kind of libertarianism, there are voices to be found online advocating for broad-based and systemic changes in government’s relationship to its citizens. It may also be that the ideological purists who wish to eliminate norms and precedence such as the Chevron doctrine (Kim, 2017) may sooner or later run up against the neoliberal requirement for a strong governmental hand that guarantees and governs for markets.

If we look to the recent debates about free college one can see at least one side of this debate play out. There has been a level of ambition and scope in the movement that seemed unexpected. Neoliberal technocracy appears to have won this round as the initiative has been pared back to enhanced Pell grants and limited loan forgiveness, and even that is not guaranteed (Raymond, 2022). However, there is certainly a sense in some quarters that the extremes of inequality (Piketty, 2017) may have reached a breaking point, and that democracy is teetering towards failure and fascism (Giroux, 2014). Part of the critique offered by critical discourse analysis is to not simply accept the terms of the debate, and to point out the discourse assumptions deployed in neoliberal frames (Gándara & Jones, 2020).
In a move reminiscent of Freire (1996), Sethares (2020) suggested that community college faculty seek alliances with the communities that they serve. Kezar et al. (2019) suggested that academic workers ally with one another and work towards more broad-based unionization. There may be a place for pragmatic research that tinkers within the status quo, but many scholars express an urgency about the state of higher education and democracy, and the need for radical research in response (e.g., Kuntz, 2019; St. Pierre, 2021). We can perhaps see the outcome of more innovative and ambitious research in the circulating ideas of free college, loan forgiveness, and basic income. Community college scholars should look to be both ambitious in their aspirations, and careful about the discourse which they embrace. It is essential that scholars not simply accept the terms of the debate they enter but question the very assumptions upon which the debate begins.

One of the crises that has pushed issues of neoliberalism in the academy to the fore is the COVID-19 pandemic, but many have argued that this has merely raised long-standing issues that have developed over time (e.g., American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2021; Deflem, 2021; Pollard & Kumar, 2022). The ways in which the pandemic has interacted with distance education, faculty working conditions, and the place of faculty in the academy align with the ways in which online instruction in particular has been commodified under neoliberalism (Clark, 2023).

**Faculty Ownership of Instruction**

In March 2020, as institutions responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and American Association of University Professors (AAUP) issued a shared statement on principles for the higher education response (American Federation
of Teachers & American Association of University Professors, 2020). Two of the itemized principles specifically focused on intellectual property, #20 on contracts, and #19 as follows:

Institutions should not take this opportunity to appropriate intellectual property to which they would not otherwise have had access; teaching materials moved online because of the onetime emergency created by COVID-19 are not the property of the institution for future use. (American Federation of Teachers & American Association of University Professors, 2020, pt. 19)

Other principles in the statement included faculty compensation for moving courses online, and various items touching on the quality of online courses and the expectations of faculty. These concerns and their development over time align with the history of neoliberalism as it has impacted intellectual property and faculty working conditions.

One of the patterns that has evolved more strongly in distance learning over the past thirty years in particular is that course materials, course structures, and even course activities may be developed by non-faculty. Course materials may be co-developed between faculty and staff, but also faculty may adopt wholesale packaged courses developed by publishers, specialist course developers, professional organizations, commercial companies, or by other faculty, whether as a commercial product that students have to pay for or as an open educational resource. In addition, course content, design, and even delivery may be vetted by non-faculty for course quality using rubrics such as Quality Matters (Quality Matters: Preparing for a QM Course Review, n.d.), institutional metrics of quality, or federally mandated metrics such as Regular and Substantive Interaction (Downs, 2020). Additionally, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1998) and various titles of the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 1990) have been interpreted as applying to internet technologies
with broad applicability both in higher education and other contexts. These statutes have been leveraged by instructional designers in the shape of *universal design for learning* (Armour, 2021; CAST, 2018).

One teaching model found in the extreme at institutions like Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) has large numbers of adjuncts delivering courses developed and supervised by specialist teams (Phelan, 2016; Talab, 2007). There is a broader pattern in the academy of increasing specialization and constriction of the scope of faculty responsibilities. This broad pattern has been termed *unbundling* (S. Gehrke & Kezar, 2015) and it complicates traditional assumptions around the ownership of course materials and even course delivery. The law itself is ambiguous on the question of faculty ownership of classroom materials, and the changing nature of course development has underlined this ambiguity.

Long-standing custom, policy, and tradition mean that institutions of higher education have generally negotiated with faculty what copyright law says about *work for hire* belonging to the employer. As evidenced by the AFT and AAUP statement, and with the onward march of educational technology, there is clearly tension and ongoing negotiation in this area, and the law around intellectual property in the digital age is constantly under review.

To some extent the tensions emerge not only because the nature of course development and delivery are changing, but also because the lines between course design, content, and delivery are not as bright as some imagine them to be. Conventional understandings of the act of teaching as a solitary act in both development and action no longer are as applicable with online instruction, and with the neoliberal unbundling of roles and responsibilities.

One of the arguments that a number of authors (e.g., Brown, 2015) have made is that changing understandings of higher education have combined with changing technology, which
has led to a commodification of teaching and online learning. Under this argument, teaching materials have been standardized, and teaching itself can be standardized to become a product in which higher education institutions have a stake and a claim to the intellectual property they represent. The growth of SNHU might suggest that there is some truth to this claim, although the apparent failure of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) argues the opposite (Reich & Ruipérez-Valiente, 2019).

These technological changes and the related changes in higher education have been identified under the concept of neoliberalism. The *Copyright Act of 1976* (Copyright Ownership and Transfer, 1976) and the *Bayh-Dole Act of 1980* (Patent and Trademark Law Amendments Act, 1980) are both significant statutes that changed how institutions worked with intellectual property and should be understood in the context of and as part of these broad social changes. Many have argued that *Bayh-Dole* has been an engine of innovation as institutions were allowed to commercialize the results of government-funded research (Bremer et al., 2009; R. Grimaldi et al., 2011), but others have contended that the Act itself has been partly responsible for the reconfiguration of higher education under the logic of neoliberalism, managerialism, and commercialism, and has shrunk the public domain (Downing, 2005). Some have also argued that *Bayh-Dole* has not been as effective from a social welfare perspective as its proponents claim (Ouellette & Tutt, 2020). Downing (2005) argued that in the context of *Bayh-Dole*, academic freedom has become enmeshed with the concept of intellectual property, such that “those who have the most academic freedom are those who own the most intellectual property” (2005, p.58).

The concept of academic freedom and the AAUP can in part trace their legal history to the firing, for his expressed political views, of Edward Ross at Stanford in 1901 (Mohr, 1970). The 1940 AAUP statement (American Association of University Professors, 2006) and the 1970
modifications are, however, more pertinent to the current discussion. Most relevant, is the second item on academic freedom in the classroom, which states that “[t]eachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subject” (American Association of University Professors, 2006, p. 14).

Part of Downing’s (2005) argument is that neoliberalism has cemented the idea that knowledge work should be marketable, and that meritocracy underpins the academy. The problem this creates is that when courses are standardized under this impetus, they are no longer a copyright protected expression, and can be construed as the property of the university. This also drives the lowering of wages of those who teach because teaching is not considered the creation of intellectual property. One can see this narrowing of the scope of intellectual property and the teacher exception in Strauss’ (2011) argument that the teacher exception should in fact be an academic exception which explicitly excludes teaching.

**History of the “Teacher Exception” in Copyright Law**

There is not as much case law on teacher intellectual property rights as one might expect. One of the earliest cases establishing teacher rights in the classroom involved a student, Hutchinson, publishing transcriptions of a surgeon’s lectures in England (*Abernethy v. Hutchinson*, 1825). An injunction was ultimately granted against Hutchinson, but it is not clear from the historical record whether it was granted on the question of a breach of trust rather than one of property (Deazley, 2008). One of the earliest cases in the United States dealing with lectures specifically was in the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia where an army instructor had his work printed in a pamphlet by the military without his permission (*Sherrill v. Grieves*, 1929). The court ruled that the teacher owned the copyright to the pamphlet containing
material from a textbook he had written on military sketching and map reading. The court’s reasoning in the case was primarily based on policy, institutional tradition, and regular practice (Strauss, 2011).

Copyright law in the United States primarily derives from Article 1, Section 8, Clause 8 of the constitution: “To promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries;” (U.S. Const., 1789). Until the 1976 Copyright Act, copyright protection was a matter of both state common law and federal statutory law. The first Congress enacted a federal copyright Act, which notably was fully titled “An Act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, Charts, And books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned” (Copyright Act of 1790, 1790). The Act granted authors copyright for 14 years with the option to renew for another 14. Since then the duration of copyright has been repeatedly extended, so that the current law (Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act, 1988) establishes copyright as the life of the author plus 70 years, and for corporate works as 120 years after creation or 95 years after publication. Some have characterized these repeated extensions as an enclosure of the public domain (Boyle, 2002), but challenges to these extensions have failed (Eldred v. Ashcroft, 2003).

Prior to the 1976 Copyright Act, the case critical to copyright and lectures was Williams v. Weisser (1969). In this case, Weisser was doing business as Class Notes, paying students to attend classes, take notes, type them up, and then those notes would be sold. Williams, an Assistant Professor at UCLA, sued Weisser under California’s common law, requesting an injunction and damages for both property infringement and reputational damage by using his name in connection with the poor quality of the notes. Weisser’s argument was that the
university held the copyright to Williams’ lectures relying on a work for hire provision of the California Labor Code (Holmes & Levin, 2000). In part due to a letter written by the university to the faculty advising them that their lecture notes belonged to them, the court held for Williams. In doing so it cited both Abernethy and Sherrill, asserting that the professor held the common law copyright to his lectures. Fundamentally, Williams established the teacher exception, on similar grounds of policy and tradition, stating that “[i]ndeed the undesirable consequences which would follow from a holding that a university owns the copyright to the lectures of its professors are such as to compel a holding that it does not“ (Williams v. Weisser, 1969, p. 734). Straus (2011) noted that the court described lectures as *sui generis*, a unique kind of intellectual product, and as such “should not be blindly thrown in the same legal hopper with valve designs” (Williams v. Weisser, 1969, p. 735).

The 1976 Copyright Act established copyright as federal statute replacing common law. A number of significant changes were incorporated into the Act. These included identifying the moment of creation as when copyright was applicable and establishing that the moment of creation as when a work was fixed in a tangible medium of expression, thereby extending copyright to unpublished works. The Act also codified fair use in terms of what are known as the four factors: the purpose and character of the use, nature of the copyrighted work, the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the whole, and the effect of the use on the potential market. In addition, the act allowed for the development of new technologies by extending copyright to mediums of expression “now known or later developed” (Copyright Ownership and Transfer, 1976, §102).

The Act also codified *work for hire* (Copyright Ownership and Transfer, 1976, §101) and since it did not explicitly cover the teacher exemption established by Williams, there was a
general assumption in some quarters that the exemption no longer existed (Garon, 2014), although others consider it implicit (Deflem, 2021). Some cases have tested that boundary, and assumption.

Two key cases on copyright in the context of higher education after the 1976 Copyright Act were authored or co-authored by one of the most notable jurists of the 20th century, Richard Posner, who served on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. Perhaps significantly, he was also a scholar and professor himself and this may have influenced this thinking.

The first of these cases was *Weinstein v. University of Illinois* (1987) which revolved around the order of authorship on an article in an academic journal. Weinstein believed he had an agreement for first-authorship and was looking for a new job when the paper was published. When he was not listed first on the article, Weinstein filed a due process claim for deprival of property. Since the defendants argued that Weinstein had no property interest in the article, at issue was whether this was a work for hire or fell under some traditional exemption. The federal district court held that the university owned the article’s copyright because it was a work for hire. The Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals found that the article was Weinstein’s property under an exception to the 1976 Copyright Act due to academic tradition.

In *Hays* (*Hays v. Sony Corp. of America*, 1988), two high school teachers created a manual for the business courses that they taught on how to use DEC word processors. When the school district purchased a Sony product, the district gave the manual to Sony, who subsequently created a manual very similar to the teachers’ work. The plaintiffs subsequently registered their copyright and sued Sony. The trial court dismissed the case. The appeals court also dismissed the case in an opinion authored by Judge Posner, but he discussed at length the merits of the case and the applicability of the work for hire rule. In so doing, Judge Posner isolated academic work
as unique, strongly asserting that in his opinion the teacher exception was still in place and to remove it would create havoc, although he did “set to one side cases where a school directs a teacher to prepare teaching materials and then directs its other teachers to use the materials too” (Hays v. Sony Corp. of America, 1988, p. 416). The opinion also stated that if Congress had intended to deal with the teacher exemption, it would be in the congressional record, and since it was not, it was still in effect.

A number of principles emerge from both Hays and Weinstein. Firstly, there is a common assumption by both faculty and their employers that due to academic tradition, faculty own the scholarly works that they create. Secondly, as Judge Posner repeatedly stated, echoing Williams, in his opinion to decide otherwise would create chaos. Lastly, the fundamental nature of academic work and academic freedom would conflict with copyright law, in that institutions would be ill-equipped to supervise or exploit the academic writings of their employees.

Other cases have leant on the Hays and Weinstein opinions. In Pittsburg State Univ. V. Kansas Bd. Of Regents (2005) the Board of Regents did not meet with an employee organization representing some of the faculty of Pittsburg State University before adopting a policy with regard to the ownership of intellectual property. Part of the contention in the case involved the hearing officer and the lower courts’ interpretations of the work-for-hire doctrine and the teacher exemption. The court considered Williams, referenced Weinstein and Hays, and the fact that the Copyright Act did not include the teacher exception, but nevertheless supported the teacher exception to work for hire and ruled in favor of the faculty.

A similar analysis to Hays can be found in Bosch (Bosch v. Ball-Kell, 2006), which is specifically about the use of teaching materials after the plaintiff resigned from their position. The court held that Bosch owned their course materials, not the institution. Part of the evidence
in this case was both university policy and deliberations in the faculty senate with regard to intellectual policy. This went to the issues of tradition and practice within the institution, even though the 1976 Act stipulates the inverse, i.e., copyright rests with the employer unless there is a written document to the contrary. Interestingly in this case, the court held that the university was protected by the fair use provisions of the Copyright Act.

Typically, arguments about usage rights and classroom materials focus on the rights of individual faculty and their right to use materials when they leave institutions, but the court in Bosch made the inverse argument about the rights of the institution. Along these lines, Kang et al. (2020) argued that universities may be able to make a fair use argument for using faculty-developed course materials as long as they do not make a commercial profit from them. However, in Williams v. Weisser one of the claims was for damages to Williams’ reputation, which Kang et al. (2020) suggest might be a vulnerability for institutions which attempted to make repeated use of a faculty member’s course material.

The complexities of copyright and fair use explain why companies such as the Copyright Clearance Center (“Academia,” n.d.) offer services, and that one of the significant costs of developing open education resources can be copyright clearance. Congress attempted to address some of these challenges through the TEACH Act (Technology, Education and Copyright Harmonization Act, 2002). This Act was specifically designed to address issues about the use of copyright works in distance education. Lipinski and Brennan (2019) argue however that the complex requirements of compliance with the act lead most teachers to fall back on, or simply assume, fair use.

Other cases point in a different direction to these cases that support the teacher exception. For example, in Vanderhurst (Vanderhurst v. Colorado Mountain College Dist., 1998), a fired
teacher made a copyright claim on a course outline that he had prepared. The court however, identified this as a work for hire using the reasoning identified in Community for Creative Non-Violence v. Reid (1989), and as such belonging to the college. In Molinelli-Freytes v. University of Puerto Rico (2010) the Court also did not support the teacher exemption for work for hire as applied to the creation of a program proposal.

In Edwards v. California University of Pennsylvania (1998), Edwards alleged that the university deprived him of various rights by restricting classroom materials, criticizing his teaching and suspending him. The Court found no First Amendment right to decide what could be taught in a classroom, in part relying on Rosenberger v. Rector and Visitors of University of Virginia (1995) and that the university was entitled to insist on a standard syllabus.

**Technology, Tradition, and Policy**

The court in Williams argued that “[t]here is a clear distinction between what is taught and how it is taught” (Williams v. Weisser, 1969, n. 4) and that what was at stake was the form of expression. The 1976 Copyright Act identified the expression of ideas in concrete form as the moment of copyright. Although historical cases typically revolved around notes and transcripts of lectures, the ability of contemporary technologies to quickly and easily fix the form of expression of the classroom has changed the landscape of teaching and intellectual property. To some, teaching can now be thought of as a product that can be widely distributed in a commercially viable way creating incentives for institutions to assert their rights where previously there was none (Kang et al., 2020). Deflem (2021) argued that even the oral expression of a lecture constitutes an expression subject to copyright, but most obviously the now commonplace ability to record lectures means that which was once ephemeral is now set through technologies such as Zoom, and also on platforms like Canvas and Blackboard. The
companies that create these platforms are careful however to make no content or copyright claims on the content produced on their platforms (School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2017), despite the expressed concerns of some faculty (Marachi & Quill, 2020), and so, the contest for ownership still rests between institutions as employers and faculty as employees.

There is a commonly held belief that college professors own the copyrightable work that they produce, but in fact, the law is not clear on this. Generally speaking, under the 1976 Copyright Act works made during the scope of a creator’s employment belong to their employer. It is the teacher exemption which exists in tradition and policy rather than law that is the basis for this common belief, and case law is at best unclear and ambiguous on this front.

As a result, the majority of institutions of higher education have explicit policies on intellectual property, and some have policies explicitly related to the ownership of online learning courses. There are also explicit policies about the form of online courses, which some faculty argue, infringes on their academic freedom to teach in the way that they deem most appropriate.

Hoyt and Oviatt (2013) surveyed a number of doctoral-granting institutions, finding that many paid faculty to develop online courses, and provided professional development to do the same, and most institutions had intellectual property policies in place. They also noted that course quality was a key concern, to the extent that one of the institutions in their survey made faculty pay contingent on a measure of quality. Finn (2020) argued that academic freedom protects instructors from negative repercussions arising from controversial classroom content, but that it does not and should not grant freedom in teaching methods. Specifically, he argues that instructors have a professional responsibility to choose methods that are demonstrably effective in helping students learn course material. Part of the implicit argument is that teaching
is a science and a research profession in its own right, and therefore is not an expertise of university professors in other disciplines. This argument suggests that in this view, an institution has the right to dictate forms of expression in the classroom. Euben (2002) on the other hand argued, on behalf of the AAUP, that teaching methods are protected under the first amendment as long as the speech is germane to the subject matter.

In 2020, the U.S. Department of Education released final rules on distance education (Distance Education and Innovation, 2020) which included requirements for “regular and substantive” interaction (RSI) in online learning (U.S. Department of Education Issues Final Rules on Distance Education and Innovation, 2020). These regulations went into effect in July 2021. The fundamental core of the new federal regulations is that in distance education faculty should initiate regular interactions with students that are frequent, predictable, scheduled, and substantively about the academic content of the course (Distance Education and Innovation, 2020, p. 294). Additionally, colleges should have relevant policies and procedures, as well as systems for monitoring compliance. Many institutions have employed the RSI regulatory requirement to increase oversight of faculty teaching methods as expressed in the online classroom. This seems to suggest that institutions have a right to control the expression of faculty in a classroom context or are creating policy to assert their ability to do so.

Flaherty (2020) noted the example of Purdue University which, in October 2019, issued an intellectual policy for online courses that identified them as “Commissioned Copyrightable Works” (Courseware and Online Modules (S-19), 2019) and as such, Purdue’s intellectual property. The policy recommends authors enter into a formal agreement with the university, and also grants the university usage and update rights to the content. Indeed, many institutions seem to have variations on the theme that faculty own the copyrights to course materials they create,
unless there is some specific separate agreement with the institution (Triggs, 2005), or some distinctive use of institutional resources (School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2017; University of California - Santa Cruz, 2020).

Employee organizations, in addition to the AAUP and AFT, have also asserted their intellectual property rights in contract negotiations with institutions. For example, the University of Illinois at Chicago labor union asserted their position with regard to intellectual property and academic freedom as it applied to the control of teaching and specifically with regard to the decision to record (or not) a class session (University of Illinois at Chicago, 2021).

Returning to the AAUP and AFT statement on the response of higher education to the pandemic, it can be seen that because intellectual property in the classroom in particular has a precarious legal status, the admonition to faculty to exercise caution, and to not give away their rights, springs from the status of such rights as bound by tradition and policy, but little else. Multiple authors have suggested that the teacher exception be codified in law. Kang et al. (2020) suggested using patent regulation as a model, although this seems to throw up our hands in surrender to academic capitalism. It might however codify what is effectively current policy at institutions of higher education. Strauss (2011) suggested that the teacher exception be codified as an academic exception applying only to scholarly works, not classroom work, and in higher education but not in K-12 education. Deflem (2021) argued for codifying the teacher exception in law as derived from principles of academic freedom, and additionally suggests that teachers should be able to sue students who post their content without permission. Downing (2005) called for the reassertion of academic freedom through collective bargaining, and it is this that the AAUP and AFT support in effect.
The cumulative effect of this history means that the teacher exception to the work for hire principle in copyright law lives on in custom, tradition, and policy, rather than in the law, despite the commonplace assumptions by faculty. In an era in which teaching can be commodified, and the expression of teaching in technological forms permits the replacement of skilled disciplinary faculty with precarious adjunct faculty and staff, institutions are creating new policies and practices that are eroding the traditional assumptions about classroom content and methods. It is this trend that the AAUP and AFT were eager to highlight and warn against in their statement of principles at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020.

In this arena and context, instructional designers find themselves at a nexus of concerns about policy, quality, ownership, and the control of instruction. Typically, instructional designers are not faculty and function as a kind of *third space* professional (Whitchurch, 2008).

**The Work of Instructional Design**

Since the establishment of the world wide web in the early 1990s student enrollment in online courses at public two-year institutions has been on a steady but gradual growth path, and in 2020 this enrollment dramatically increased as many institutions were forced to deliver the majority of their classes online due to the COVID-19 pandemic (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.; Xie et al., 2021). Although historically faculty worked by themselves on their course design and development, as online learning grew institutions of higher education began to employ instructional designers specifically to support their work (Intentional Futures, 2016; Lieberman, 2017). While their presence in higher education institutions is relatively recent, the role of these instructional designers has changed as they have become more established and as the policy and strategic context has changed for distance learning. Nevertheless there is a sense that the positions of instructional designers can be vulnerable and liable to be cut when budgets
are tight, in part deriving from an ambiguity about what people in these roles actually do (Altena et al., 2019; Fyle et al., 2012).

**What do Instructional Designers Actually Do?**

A number of scholars have attempted to understand the functions that instructional designers perform in higher education by looking at job postings (Nworie, 2022; Wang et al., 2021). Alternative primary references for scholars attempting to understand the role of instructional designers are professional standards such as those of the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI), but the specific competencies required vary by sector (Wang et al., 2021). Building on earlier research, Ritzhaupt et al. (2021) identified the following core competencies for instructional designers in the higher education context:

- strong communication and soft skills
- instructional design models and processes
- learning theories and instructional strategies
- technologies in instructional designer practice
- project management in instructional design
- formative and summative evaluation
- faculty professional development and support
- change management and leadership. (2021, pp. 3–5)

There nevertheless appears to be a gap between the desired competencies and the actual functions that instructional designers perform (Magruder et al., 2019), and the institutional context may be a significant factor in this regard (Kumar & Ritzhaupt, 2017). White and White (2016) argued that part of the challenge is that instructional designers fit Whitchurch’s (2008) definition of a *third space* professional, i.e., someone who exists outside of the conventional
boundaries of faculty or professional or staff. People performing this function bring both professional and academic responsibilities to their roles, and typically are required to collaborate and communicate across these boundaries.

Although Whitchurch (2008) suggested that some third space professionals may use the boundary areas where they reside to build strategic relationships across cultures, these relationships are not without risk. They can break down (Stoltenkamp et al., 2017). The instructional designer role has been described as precarious and subject to tension (Cowie & Nichols, 2010; Keppell, 2007). One source of that tension may be the quality control and evaluation function of instructional designers (Knowles & Kalata, 2008; J. C. Richardson et al., 2019). Faculty may also perceive instructional designers as support staff of much lower status than the faculty, and this can have complicating impacts on the collaboration between them (Bawa & Watson, 2017; Bessette, 2021; J. C. Richardson et al., 2019). It may even be the case that instructional designers feel “powerless to create meaningful change” (K. Campbell et al., 2009, p. 655) as a result of their status. Similar status concerns appear to occur with librarianship (McCartin & Wright-Mair, 2022) which it could be argued also fits the designation of third space professional.

As noted, one particular responsibility of instructional designers may be professional development and support. However, this responsibility can devolve into a focus on the technologies of instruction rather than the methods and principles, whether in conducting organized training, or built into training courses (Andrews & Hu, 2021; Shattuck, 2015), or in one-on-one concierge service (McCurry & Mullinix, 2017). When it does come to design, the professional training that instructional designers bring to their work with faculty may be with linear traditional models like ADDIE (analyze, design, develop, implement, evaluate) where
every element of a course is complete before the course is delivered for the first time (Fyle et al., 2012). However, these models can conflict with the way that teachers think about and approach the design of instruction (Bennett et al., 2017; K. Campbell et al., 2009, 2012; Kali et al., 2011), and so one of the sources of tension in collaborations is that instructional designers and teachers come to the table with different mental models of what it means to design and deliver a course. Typically, teachers are more intuitive, iterative, and incremental, building the next component of their course while delivering the current one (Lohman, 2021).

Chen and Carliner (2020) conducted a systematic literature review on the working relationships of faculty and instructional designers and found a notable lack of research. Gray et al. (2015) found a similar gap around the practice of design and Richardson et al. (2019) report the same gap in the literature. It is also the case that the literature contains many reports of applied work. In fact, when it came to a focus on working relationships in their review, Chen and Carliner (2020) were only able to find 29 publications published between 2000 and 2017, 22 of which were either case studies or experience reports. For the purposes of this discussion, it is also worth noting that none of the 29 publications were about community colleges. Other gaps in the published research were that it tended to focus on the experience of instructional designers and not that of faculty, and separately that it failed to define what was meant by collaboration (Chen & Carliner, 2020).

Pollard and Kumar (2022) more recently made similar findings from a review of the literature between 2000 and 2020. Key among those is that “misconceptions, underutilization, struggles in relationships, and lack of status or influence in an institution persist” (Pollard & Kumar, 2022, p. 8), and that can be broadly characterized as issues of power and agency for
instructional designers. Their review aligns with Chen and Carliner (2020) in also finding that faculty perspectives on working with instructional designers are broadly missing.

In summary then, collaboration and communication are deemed to be critical skills and functions of instructional designers (Bawa & Watson, 2017; Pan & Thompson, 2009; Sugar & Moore, 2015) and this seems tightly connected to the tensions around the boundary role which they occupy (Gérin-Lajoie, 2015; Hixon, 2008). However, research is broadly lacking on working relationships, and specifically lacking in terms of the faculty experience and in specific institutional contexts (Chen & Carliner, 2020). Given that issues of status and role are critical for these third space professionals, it seems all the more important to examine them in contexts where faculty roles and status may operate differently. Most notably, in a non-research institution like the community college, issues of research and tenure may well not apply, full-time teaching faculty may be of different status, and adjunct faculty may operate differently.

Adjunct Faculty

The role of adjunct faculty is significant because of the growth in their numbers in teaching (American Association of University Professors, n.d.; Kezar et al., 2019). There is evidence to suggest that specific contractual forms, institutional context, and even discipline affect student outcomes (Ran & Xu, 2019), but what is consistent is that adjunct faculty report feelings of isolation and lack of integration into institutions (e.g., Dolan, 2011; Gazza & Shellenbarger, 2010; Miles, 2017). This may take the form of being uninvolved in curriculum planning and design, being hired as the semester starts with less time to prepare for teaching, not receiving support or recognition from administration, a lack of respect from full-time faculty and staff, lacking a physical space on campus, a lack of employment security, unusual schedules, and
the financial discrepancy with full-time faculty in terms of salary and lack of benefits (Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Kezar et al., 2019).

Dolan (2011) identified three areas of concern specific to adjunct faculty teaching online, namely “(a) inadequate frequency and depth of communication, regardless of the means used, whether online or face-to-face; (b) lack of recognition of instructors’ value to the institution; and (c) lack of opportunities for skill development” (p. 62). In the pandemic context these issues have been highlighted and exacerbated (American Association of University Professors, 2020; Flaherty, 2022), but it is also the case that instructional design staff have been under significant pressure (Prusko & Kilgore, 2020; Xie et al., 2021). This implies that when the two roles meet complex forces may be in play.

**Standards and Standardization**

Full-time faculty are more likely to be involved in the development of the written curriculum than are adjunct faculty and instructional designers. Adjunct faculty are more likely to be recipients of that curriculum and responsible for what is taught, but one of the recent trends in online instruction is for institutions to be highly prescriptive about what is taught through the use of course templates (S. Gehrke & Kezar, 2015; Ovetz, 2021).

Regional accrediting bodies may have extremely detailed written curricular requirements that include not only goals and objectives, but also activities, implied or prescribed (Onyura et al., 2021). Many states, including the one in this study, have adopted variations on the Common Core at the K-12 level (e.g., Virginia Department of Education, n.d.). Recent efforts sponsored by a state-level agency have led to the development of common course descriptions, goals, and objectives between community colleges and four-year institutions in the state. One goal for these standards is to facilitate transfer of credits from the two-year institutions to the four-year
institutions and therefore these have been co-developed by full-time faculty at both kinds of institution.

At the individual teacher level, the written curriculum includes the course syllabus, but many elements of syllabi are dictated from the institutional and supra-institutional level, including specific goals and objectives. Adjunct faculty and instructional designers have not been part of these standardization efforts. Instructional designers may be involved in the processes of producing course templates that conform to these standards, but when it comes to delivery of courses, their roles may shift more to technology training and surveillance (Ovetz, 2017; Ritzhaupt et al., 2021).

Nathalie Gehrke et al. (1992) noted that a simple question about what schools really teach hides a myriad complications. As much as anything the what implies the how of instructional strategies and it is at this intersection point that the issues of the LMS and the online classroom become salient. Choppin et al. (2020) identified that whether or not faculty implement the curriculum as written is due to the specifics of the instructional materials they are provided with.

In online learning the boundaries of the classroom are both less obvious in the sense that a student can leave at any time, but they are also defined in software and in decisions not necessarily made by faculty. Developers of LMS have created functionality to manage these kinds of written standards, and include state standards within their product by default (Blackboard, n.d.; Instructure, 2020b). This functionality generally takes the form of a hierarchy of courses and goals that have subordinate objectives or outcomes. These objectives can be attached to rubrics, and to assignments of various kinds. These outcomes can then be used by
faculty in a learning mastery approach to their courses, and also reported out to academic administrators.

Additionally, elements of courses, characterized as learning objects, can be shared across and within institutions (Instructure, 2020c). Other functionality that offers the potential to standardize courses is the use of blueprints and templates (Instructure, 2020a), but instructional designers can also control the look of courses and the tools available to faculty. In Canvas and more recently in Blackboard, faculty discretion to change the look of courses is curtailed and controlled, primarily in the name of standardizing what students experience but also as a product design decision by the vendors. Abbott (2018) suggested that this limited standardization enforced by vendors and institutions is in line with the requirements of accrediting bodies and benefits both faculty and students. What this perspective elides is that technologies have affordances (Norman, 1999), so that in the same way that the physical structure of a lecture hall implies a certain pedagogy, so too in standardizing the LMS experience institutions may be risking the equivalent of bolting the chairs to the floor (Farag et al., 2022; Hansen & Komljenovic, 2022).

A blueprint or master course is an attempt to control the taught curriculum, taking the form of the instructional materials chosen by a full-time faculty member and others included in the development process, and attempting to limit the ways in which the non-designer instructors, typically adjuncts, deliver the course (Morgan, 2019; J. C. Richardson et al., 2016; Silva et al., 2021). This standardized course may include an integration of third-party publisher content and assessments. There is no necessary linkage between what is taught and what is assessed whether that assessment is created by the instructor, a publisher, a third-party certification body, or a licensing body. However, one approach to instructional design called backwards design starts by
translating the learning objectives into assessments, and then working backwards to build the experiences and instruction that would allow students to successfully complete those assessments (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005a). This implies that designers and faculty should be conscious of the implications of adopting third-party assessments because their design decisions would be driven by those assessments.

**What Happens in the Online Classroom**

What students actually learn despite, or because of, a teacher’s best intentions, is nonetheless open to question. Students are not vessels into which knowledge, values, and skills are poured through a banking model of education (Freire, 1996). They are not anonymized objects but rather individuals with complex lives and histories, and they may not do what they designers and teachers expect them to do, particularly when it comes to learning strategies and activities (Onyura et al., 2021).

Ovetz (2017) argued that the modern LMS is teaching students a hidden curriculum of neoliberal surveillance and atomized task completion. He also suggested that it is increasingly the case that faculty operate within this same context as their actions are monitored and surveilled and they are treated as contingent replaceable elements in the delivery of instruction. One function for instructional designers is to act as architects of these surveillance technologies.

Faculty will resist and adapt prescribed curriculum, and simply because objectives are prescribed does not mean that faculty will not prioritize and adjust them, particularly if they fear threats to their autonomy, but also depending on their time, role security, personal pedagogical beliefs, subject matter knowledge, perceptions of student needs and readiness, cultural expectations, and their values (Onyura et al., 2021). Faculty may also need to respond to learner resistance to the curriculum. As a result, there may be a significant difference between what is
prescribed in pre-packaged, templated online courses and what students actually experience. There are technologies to monitor the ways in which this written curriculum is enacted by non-designer instructors in the taught curriculum and some institutions do just that. In other institutions there are not the resources or technical capabilities (yet) to monitor faculty behavior in online courses.

Many hail the move toward master course templates, standardization, the separation of design from delivery, and the surveillance of students and faculty as a positive move for both institutions and students (e.g., Grincewicz & Simunich, 2021; Phelan, 2016; Tucker & Neely, 2010). A notable example of this model is Southern New Hampshire University (Blumenstyk, 2018). Typically, the argument for this model is framed in terms of institutional consistency and cost control, partly because higher education has struggled with Baumol’s cost disease (Archibald & Feldman, 2008).

However, online teaching and learning does not appear to scale (Reich & Ruipérez-Valiente, 2019), and information technology in general is subject to the “IT productivity paradox” (Ortagus et al., 2018). In colloquial terms, online learning can be “good, fast, and cheap…pick two,” or in more formal terms there is an iron triangle of time, cost, and quality that are inevitable tradeoffs (Pollack et al., 2018). However, in learning, speed is not typically a meaningful variable, and a single instructor cannot be made more productive of education. Alternatively, adding more instructors cannot make students learn more rapidly. Large lectures or MOOCs require resources and people that erode any apparent productivity gains, and so the iron triangle has instead been reframed as access, cost, and quality (Ryan et al., 2021). It is not clear however that access operates the same way as the time variable in the conventional iron triangle.
It should also be noted that models like that of Southern New Hampshire University rely on splitting the functions of teaching into component parts. Content is treated as separable from activity, separable from assessment, separable from design, and separable from the person teaching, as if these elements were not deeply implicated and entangled in one another. In this model the full-time faculty member is identified solely as a subject matter expert (SME), the course designers and developers can have significant control over the design of the course, and adjuncts are relegated to tightly controlled course delivery. One of the risks for instructional designers is that they in turn can be relegated to technical support and monitoring functions (Kumar & Ritzhaupt, 2017), and not necessarily involved in course development, especially if courses and course content are imported from third-parties. Kuntz (2019) identifies this as a segmentation and “particularization of faculty activity” (p.120) that goes hand-in-hand with the quantification of individual work. Another instance of this is the linguistic recasting of *education* as the more consumer-focused *learning* in literature and job descriptions (Knox et al., 2020). Biesta (2012) characterized this as “learnification” (p. 36) and the *disappearance of the teacher*. In the professional language of instructional design a parallel trend has been to recast the *instructional* designer as a *learning* designer (e.g., Costello et al., 2022; Rotar & Peller-Semmens, 2021; White & White, 2016). These patterns have created tensions and conflict in the professional boundaries of teaching and design which remain underexamined (Mueller et al., 2022b, 2022a).

There is a sense in which instructional designers, full-time faculty, and adjunct faculty suffer from similar vulnerabilities of status and role ambiguity in the modern community college. The growth in the number of adjunct faculty has been at the expense of full-time faculty (Kezar et al., 2019), and instructional designers, as relative newcomers to community colleges, are still
finding their place (Intentional Futures, 2016). As they interact with each other, they should be conscious of these issues, but also the role of the technologies and practices that they support. These technologies and practices embed specific conceptions of teaching and learning, and when evaluating them, those implicit ideologies should not be uncritically adopted.

**Gaps in the Literature**

Recent work has identified specific gaps in the literature around the work of instructional design. There is limited research into faculty perspectives on instructional design (Chen & Carliner, 2020; Mueller et al., 2022a). Similarly, there is a lack of research into power, and conflict between roles (Chen & Carliner, 2020; Mueller et al., 2022a; Pollard & Kumar, 2022), and lastly there is limited research into the specifics of collaboration between instructional designers and faculty (Chen & Carliner, 2020; J. C. Richardson et al., 2019).

**Summary and Conclusions**

Working relationships between faculty and instructional designers have not been widely researched, and the research that does exist tends to consist of reports focused on practical strategies for promoting collaboration between faculty and instructional designers (Chen & Carliner, 2020; Rotar & Peller-Semmens, 2021). Studies tend to reflect the point of view of instructional designers, there is limited insight into the details of collaboration, and there is limited insight into issues of status and the power dynamics involved. Furthermore, much of the research is conducted in large research universities with full-time faculty, and therefore reflects that particular institutional context (e.g., C. M. Campbell, 2015; Chao et al., 2010; Knowles & Kalata, 2008). As a result, there is a lack of research when it comes to the interactions of instructional designers and professional teaching faculty in community colleges.
A specific goal of this current study is to place its work within a specific theoretical context, rather than the atheoretical studies focused on strategies and techniques that tend to predominate in the literature (Chen & Carliner, 2020; Pollard & Kumar, 2022). Costello et al. (2022) seems to be the exception that proves the rule, but McDonald et al. (2021) have also noted that the literature should expand beyond a focus on skills, competencies, and activities of instructional design. This study seeks to explore the working practices of faculty and instructional designers in the context of neoliberal discourse and its impacts on community colleges. As a term that is often used in contemporary politics, neoliberalism should be understood as more than a set of specific economic policies that are a reaction to Keynesianism and democratic socialism (Brown, 2015). Rather neoliberalism is a logic and discourse that has reconfigured the purposes and relations of critical institutions in many countries since the early 1970s (Foucault, 2008).

While there has been significant growth in the employment of instructional designers as online courses have expanded (Intentional Futures, 2016), Eddy and VanDerLinden (2006) identified that distance learning and learning support leaders were less likely to be considered as campus leaders and less likely to see themselves as campus leaders. In a similar vein, research on the work of instructional designers has identified challenges with role ambiguity when working with faculty (Bessette, 2021; Chen & Carliner, 2020; Stoltenkamp et al., 2017) and a lack of power (K. Campbell et al., 2009).

One explanation for these patterns of ambiguity around roles and status is that college administrators employ the logic of neoliberalism to decenter and deskill professional teaching faculty through the work of instructional design (S. Gehrke & Kezar, 2015; Ovetz, 2017, 2021), while simultaneously not elevating the status of non-faculty instructional designers. This
accomplishes an “unbundling” of the role of faculty (S. Gehrke & Kezar, 2015) by removing a responsibility that they have historically been accountable for, i.e., the design of courses, and handing it off to a new administrative professional. Adjunct faculty may simply be handed pre-packaged content and pre-packaged activities (Ovetz, 2017). One of the tensions in this dynamic is that it is a convention of instructional design practice that faculty are termed Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) when it comes to their discipline (Bratton, 1983), but in a community college context faculty may consider themselves experts at teaching. Being identified as an SME rather than an expert teacher may lead to faculty resistance to the work of instructional designers. However, at the same time, federal policy and accreditation requirements relating to the quality of online instruction are creating more compliance challenges for instructional designers and leaders (Downs, 2020). These requirements may come into direct conflict with the desires of faculty and their professional identities. Beyond this, it is far from clear that faculty and instructional designers agree on what is design and what is content (Halupa, 2019). In this ambiguity there is a contest for professional recognition.

It is in the discourses of instructional quality, teaching, and design that instructional designers and faculty engage with each other. In contrast to the more well understood relationship in a four-year institution where the instructional designer is typically of lower status than the full-time faculty member, the power relations between these two groups have not been examined in a community college context. How the two groups understand teaching and learning and how they interact around those activities may reveal the workings of neoliberal discourse, but also may uncover strategies for both groups and for leaders that chart a different path forward.
Neoliberalism is a system that denies its systemic nature. Brown (2015) framed this as “structuring markets it claims to liberate from structure, intensely governing subjects it claims to free from government” (p. 49). It does this as a governmentality that defines the commonsense parameters of behavior as individualistic capitalist competition, so that there is no way to behave otherwise. It defines, in Foucault’s terms, the “«conduire des conduites»” (Foucault, 1994, p. 227) or the conduct of conducts, so that “[t]o govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others” (Foucault, 1982, p. 790). Neoliberalism extends the logic of capitalism and individualism into all forms of social life, including education (Brown, 2015). In education one manifestation is in the unbundling of the traditional roles of faculty (S. Gehrke & Kezar, 2015), but another is the unbundling of institutional services, as both roles and functions are separated and frequently outsourced to vendors under a logic of cost saving, accessibility, and affordability (Becker, 2021) that never manifests, but is always advertised as within reach (Williamson & Komljenovic, 2022). This splintering of services complicates both the student experience and the work of those who support them. In a circular kind of logic, technological solutionism always suggests another option (Becker, 2021). Dashboards, for example, are presented as an attempt to tame the chaos, but in their own way create a narrative of individualism, datafication, and education as investment (Jarke & Macgilchrist, 2021) that relies on the grammar and vocabulary of system application programming interfaces (APIs) as designed by third-party vendors that foreground efficiency and prediction (Perrotta, 2020).

Within the assemblage of online learning, instructional designers and faculty are produced by and in turn reproduce the logics of neoliberalism. This is evident, for example, in
the working conditions of adjunct faculty in particular who are underpaid, vulnerable, isolated, and live precarious lives subject to the same kinds of dynamics as those in the gig economy (G. Hall, 2016; Kezar et al., 2019), where they may be called to teach at the last minute, or may lose a teaching assignment just as easily (Anthony et al., 2020; Eagan et al., 2015). These employment patterns create pressure on institutional actors to remove the responsibility for developing and designing courses from adjuncts so that they can be handed a complete course ready to go on the first day of the semester (Blumenstyk, 2018). A related pattern that is also part of increasing specialization and erosion of faculty responsibilities is the employment of instructional designers as staff rather than faculty (Pollard & Kumar, 2022). Kuntz (2019) identifies this as a segmentation and “particularization of faculty activity” (p.120) that goes hand-in-hand with the quantification of individual work. The work of faculty, and staff, are made visible through the production of tuition, graduation rates, and measures of student satisfaction, and so the complex relationship between teaching, research and intellectual work is reduced to those things that can be measured.

A related symbol of this is the recasting of education as learning, which Biesta (2012) characterized as “learnification” (p. 36) and the disappearance of the teacher. In the professional language of instructional design a parallel trend has been to recast the instructional designer as a learning designer (e.g., Costello et al., 2022; Rotar & Peller-Semmens, 2021; White & White, 2016), or even a learning engineer (V. R. Lee, 2022). In this learning-centered language, the relationship of the student appears to be an isolated one, in relation with content, activities, and assessment as measured in quantifiable data, rather than a more complex one with each other or with their teacher. These emerging patterns have created tensions and conflict in the professional
boundaries of teaching and design which remain underexamined (Mitchell et al., 2017; Mueller et al., 2022b, 2022a).

The quickest way to express what is at stake here is to say that the point of education is never that children or students learn, but that they learn something, that they learn this for particular purposes, and that they learn this from someone. (Biesta, 2012, p. 36, emphasis in original)

We can perhaps add to Biesta’s framing, that students learn somewhere and at certain times and these are not inconsequential in online learning. All of these concerns are at stake in online learning and control over the who, what, when, where, and how are not set in stone, but rather always in motion and contested. In this context, the work and framing of instructional design sits at a nexus of power relations.

A specific goal of this study was to place its work within a specific theoretical context, rather than the technocratic studies that tend to predominate in the literature (Mueller et al., 2022b; Pollard & Kumar, 2022). Therefore, this study sought to explore the interactions between faculty and instructional designers in the specific context of neoliberal discourse and its impacts on community colleges.

**Research Design and Rationale**

Post-structuralist and other qualitative research traditions such as narrative research are comfortable with the idea that research questions, roles, procedures, and analysis are constantly in flux and in negotiation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Freeman, 2017; Maxwell, 2013). With that caveat, the questions which were the subject of exploration in this study are:

1. What practices do instructional designers and faculty employ in negotiating the boundaries and responsibilities of teaching and design in a community college context?
2. How do power/knowledge relations produce instructional designers’ and faculty’s multiple subjectivities as they engage in the development and teaching of online courses?

Qualitative inquiry is a big tent (Denzin, 2017) and the forms it can take will vary by virtue of the researcher’s epistemological and ontological assumptions. Given neoliberalism and Foucault’s conception of power/knowledge as the frame, this study takes seriously the ontological turn in the social sciences (St. Pierre, 2016) and the crisis of representation (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). A critique of neoliberalism in higher education cannot exclude research, inquiry, and method. Post-positivism as a research paradigm is a “regime of veridiction” (Foucault, 2008, p. 35) that is the common sense of the social sciences, with claims to objectivity and rationality as transcendent and value-free that post-structuralism does not accept (St. Pierre, 2004). Within post-structuralism rich interaction simply cannot be reduced to transcripts nor to themes nor to word counts in order to render it data out in the world (Kuntz, 2015; St. Pierre, 2013; St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014).

The same democratic crisis brought on by neoliberalism as identified by Brown (2015) implicates scientific knowledge and the methods by which it is produced (Denzin & Giardina, 2018; Kuntz, 2019). The very idea of best practices as the common sense of research attempts to put methodology beyond debate (Brown, 2015). According to Kuntz (2019) alternative methods imply a rejection of negative critique, synthesis, and representationalism, but also that if methodology is conceived as technical proceduralism, then regardless of how experimental it may be, it will reproduce the logic of neoliberalism and the humanist subject. There is an obligation to resist, test, transgress, and unsettle (Denzin & Giardina, 2018) and escape cartesian binaries towards the rhizome of “and…and…and…” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25).
Post-structuralists in particular intentionally work at the limits of what is comfortable, embracing creative methodological and analytical experimentation, and in so doing embrace risk (St. Pierre, 2021). This is the truth-telling risk of *parrhesia* identified by Foucault (1983a, 2010), that disrupts ontological and epistemological norms (Kuntz, 2015), that “chances the very political relations that inform our identities” (Kuntz, 2015, p. 29), and that by its nature risks the citizenship of the researcher in the governance of the academy (Kuntz, 2019).

The ontological claims of post-structuralism imply that method cannot be prescribed and that to prescribe method would be antithetical to a post-structuralist stance (St. Pierre, 2016). Neither Foucault nor Deleuze and Guattari privileged the speaking subject, nor even method. Foucault wrote that he did not use a methodology as a preexisting design that was then applied to research and Deleuze and Guattari were deliberately anti-method (St. Pierre, 2021).

It is important to recognize that “[d]ata collection of all forms is always already mediated—nothing stands outside of this” (Smithers et al., 2022, p. 4). This includes the traditional tool of qualitative research, the interview, which is frequently framed by specific assumptions about subjectivity and about the subject as static and singular. The critique brought on by the crisis of representation is paralleled in the literature on autoethnography which places the researcher within the research intentionally (Ellis et al., 2011; Rambo & Ellis, 2020), although the post-structuralist stance is that the researcher could be nowhere else. Autoethnography immerses the researcher in the research as an intentional act in response to the critique of post-positivist, colonialist traditional ethnographic research, but post-structuralist researchers start within the inquiry as entangled within the research from the start.

The voices of interviewees and researchers are not unmediated and present data that are “partial, incomplete, and always in a process of re-telling, and re-membering” (Jackson &
Mazzei, 2012, p. ix). Kuntz (2015) asserted that the traditional interview is entangled with technologies of power, and cautions about the logic of extraction that reproduces the status quo, and similarly, St. Pierre (2016) noted that the interview is often a privileged method in conventional qualitative inquiry because it appears to feature the “authentic voice of the individual” (p. 79). With those caveats, post-structuralist researchers take inspiration from the examples of other researchers, although Roulston (2010), Jackson and Mazzei (2012), and Mazzei (2004) suggested that there is a place for the interview in post-structuralist inquiry without privileging it over other forms of engagement. In this study, I conducted interviews, but also examined artifacts of the LMS, as well as conducted document analysis, including content of online chats, policy and training materials, and the schedules of the instructional designers.

**Role of the Researcher**

In the literature review for this work, I cited a number of researchers who indicated that in their view democracy was either in crisis or on the cusp of a crisis (Brown, 2015; Giroux, 2014; Harbour, 2015; Kuntz, 2015). When I wrote these words in mid-2022, the United States Supreme Court had just overturned decades of precedent not only with women’s rights but also with legal and religious rights. The former president appeared guilty of attempting a violent overthrow of American democracy. Some politicians seem to take the hallmarks of fascism as a to-do list rather than something to reject. Kuntz (2015) claimed that “educational research, stripped of material contexts and governed by principles of extracted technique, fails any political project for change” (p. 119). In this light a methodological approach that attempts a “view from nowhere” seems irresponsible in that it does not engage with or create space for alternative visions for what may be, but simply reproduces what is, and endorses a post-positivist
ontological framing. What does it then mean to engage in research in education that has something to say about our present moment?

Part of the post-structuralist theoretical perspective is that creative experimentation is necessary to escape the current trap democracy finds itself in. This means perspectives that do not attempt to solve the problems as they are presented, but instead for researchers to question the definitions and assumptions that frame the problems to be solved, but also to look to find the gaps and boundaries where possibilities for a different future may leak out.

In this study, I employed the methods of ethnography, namely interviewing participants, and collecting documents, video, and other materials, but this was not an ethnographic study, it was a post-qualitative one. It is more accurately considered bringing an ethnographic sensibility to a post-qualitative analytical lens (Macgilchrist, 2017). I situate myself as someone who has worked as an instructional designer in a community college setting, although that is not my current role. This research sprang in part out of my own successes, failures, and frustrations, but also from my professional encounters with others in the same role. When I was in this role, I struggled to understand what I had to contribute instructionally, and drifted into the technical support part of the role. I always felt caught between academics and technology, neither one nor the other, but feeling inadequate in both. I have taught undergraduate English as a graduate student and also as my “other duties as assigned,” as well as English as a Foreign Language in other countries, and in that time, I have had moments when I felt like I knew what I was doing. There have been times when I did not, and I am not sure I ever was completely convinced that people I knew as instructional designers did very much of what they had trained to do. As numerous researchers have found, instructional designers do not spend a significant portion of
their time actually designing instruction in higher education environments (Pollard & Kumar, 2022).

As an instructional designer I have been referred to as a technician, and as a technician I have advocated for design. These multiple identities and shifts are inevitable, and even more so in those that find themselves entangled with technology and teaching. I continued to observe these same tensions and contestations in the work of others in this role even as the nature and status of the work has evolved over time. It was also clear that recent regulatory changes and the COVID-19 pandemic had brought some of these underlying tensions to the attention of wider audiences. That, in particular, made this research timely.

At the time of the study, I worked outside of any particular college within the community college system in question, and I was therefore not in a supervisory relationship with any of the participants. My role was as the learning management system engineer within the information technology services department of the central office of the community college system. I did not have any authority over any of the people I observed and interviewed, although I did have a professional, collegial relationship with some of them.

Mode of Inquiry

This study was a post-qualitative study of the administration and deployment of educational technology in a community college setting, specifically three community colleges in a Southeastern state. In line with my theoretical commitments, the research could not follow the prescribed recipe of a known tradition, but used established methods of ethnography.

In conducting a study that applied ethnographic methods to the working of educational technologies through a neoliberal lens, the study took inspiration in part from Grimaldi and Ball (2021) where the authors conducted a case study of a specific K12 school in order to make an
argument about the impacts of neoliberalism in the digital classroom. In so doing, this research explicitly takes up the authors’ call for future research in this area. However, methodologically, my commitment to post-qualitative research and the critique of extractive logics in research methods diverged from their approach.

Participants

The instructional designers at the three community colleges in question constituted the key participants in this study. Through them I solicited the participation of faculty, administrators, and staff. Faculty and staff were recruited via snowball sampling asking the instructional designers to recommend faculty with whom they interacted and in turn asking those faculty to recommend other faculty and staff. I sent a document to the faculty describing the study, which included consent letters (see Appendices A, B, C, D). Participants other than the instructional designers were interviewed only once following a semi-structured protocol (see Appendices F, G). Three instructional designers were included in the study, as well as seven full-time faculty, one part-time faculty, and five administrators.

At two of the institutions three faculty members each were interviewed, and two faculty were interviewed at the other institution, for about one hour each, for a total of eight faculty interviews. Additionally, two administrators at each institution were also interviewed for about the same length of time. One of these administrator interviews was with the direct supervisor of the instructional designer at that institution. The other interview was with someone who had a working relationship with the instructional designer, or someone deeply involved in online learning.

The intent was to interview both direct supervisors of instructional designers and members of more senior leadership, although in practice the other administrators were of similar
seniority. The purpose of interviewing these administrators was to consider the gaps and tensions in understanding of the instructional designer role and function (K. Campbell et al., 2009; Magruder et al., 2019; Whitchurch, 2008) and what practices those administrators employed in defining their understanding of the purposes of the role.

**Engagements**

Depending on availability, convenience, and the public health context, participants were interviewed remotely using web conferencing and in person. The majority of interviews were conducted remotely using Zoom. These interviews took place in the Spring of 2023. Initial interviews with participants were semi-structured (Roulston, 2010) and focused on the discursive practices of online teaching and instructional design. Subsequent interviews, if they occurred, were unstructured.

Allen and Wiles (2016) advocated that researchers are ethically obliged to engage participants in choosing pseudonyms and that this can facilitate participant respect and self-recognition, but also further insight into the research itself. Therefore, participants were offered the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms. In practice, while some participants engaged with the idea, the pseudonyms were not sufficiently anonymous to be useful in the study.

Both faculty and instructional designers were asked to provide a guided tour of a course in the LMS, or courses, with a view to documenting the ways they expressed what goes into building a course or a template. How the participants explained their use of templates and their incorporation of third-party content was a specific focus of the tour. The purpose of this guided tour was to document how the practices of instructional design take form in the LMS, the role of the LMS in shaping courses, and the way that faculty and instructional designers worked with the constraints of the LMS while putting their teaching into practice. This is not to say that the
machines of the LMS and related technologies are determining, but they are of interest “...because they express those social forms capable of generating them and using them” (Deleuze, 1992, p. 6).

I engaged with the instructional designers in the study over a longer period. The initial interaction was a semi-structured interview (see Appendix E), but in addition to a guided tour of the LMS and their use of course templates, I met with the instructional designers once a week over a period of four months. The instructional designers were each interviewed at least eight times starting in February 2023. The interviews were typically once each week, however, due to other obligations, vacations, and conflicts, a few weeks were skipped and so the overall duration of the interview period was more than eight weeks. Interviews began in February 2023 and the last interview with an instructional designer was in May 2023. The very last interview of the study was with a faculty member on June 5, 2023.

The purpose of these extended unstructured interactions was to build a longer-term relationship that gave more insight into the everyday, normal events and activities that they engaged in, as opposed to the highlight reel that a single interview might have provided. As part of this they were asked to share their calendar in order to have a representation of how they formally spent their time and how that related to their work as instructional designers.

**Documentation**

Prior to the interviews I conducted document data collection (Prior, 2003) through the instructional designers. All documentary analysis required the use of paraphrasing in analysis and discussion as a mechanism to preserve the anonymity of the institution. Documents collected included newsletters that they created, handbooks for faculty, policy documents, faculty certification processes, and documentation related to various quality initiatives at the colleges in
question. It also included access to course templates, configurations, and third-party vendor integrations in the institutional LMS with a view to connecting those constraints, processes, and design elements to the broader discourses of compliance and quality. Some publicly available documents were also retrieved from the internet, for example, documentation from the Quality Matters (QM) organization on their processes.

**Research Memos**

Throughout the data collection and analysis, I kept a digital journal for field notes and memos to function as another data element contextualized by the time and place of data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The journal was both reflective in personal and social terms and described my thoughts, emotions, and reflections, and also the events that I saw in the gathering of data. In Barad’s (2007) terms, I was intra-acting with the site and phenomena, and a part of the assemblage both as a researcher and a colleague of the participants within the institutions. I was actively producing through my research activities the things that I was interested in.

**Videos**

In addition to interviews and documents, the approved design for this study was to request access to recordings of training events conducted by the instructional designers for their faculty, and to observe relevant training events as they happened. Additionally with the consent of faculty, I would request the opportunity to observe consultations between individual faculty and instructional designers as they worked through issues of course design. The goal in these observations and recordings was to examine the ways in which trainers framed their work and faculty responded to those framings. In practice, recordings were not provided, nor did observations happen, mostly because these were a rare occurrence. While I was present for some
ad hoc interactions with faculty, I did not have the faculty members’ explicit permission to include those interactions in the study and therefore those interactions were not included in the data collected and analyzed.

**Policy Discussion – Committees**

Many institutions have formal committees or advisory bodies that are specific to the practices of teaching and learning, and often specific to online learning. Within the state system, there was a system-wide e-learning and educational technology advisory committee that advised policy bodies, and many institutions paralleled this structure within their institution. These committees typically work on issues of instructional quality and policy related to online learning. As part of this research, I requested access to observe one or more of these meetings in order to document the priorities of the group, and how the participants engaged with each other in discussions of practices.

I was invited to attend a series of regular meetings at one of the colleges in the study. While I did attend another meeting at one of the other institutions, it was not an interactive one, and of limited use. However, at the college where I did attend a series of meetings, I attended eight multi-hour meetings between members of a team of instructional designers. The recordings of these meetings were transcribed and analyzed as part of the study, and constitute a substantial portion of the data collected.

**Data Management**

All documents, recordings, transcripts, and digital materials were kept on a cloud-based drive that was backed up and protected by multi-factor authentication. Transcripts had names replaced with pseudonyms for individuals, institutions, and other identifying information. A paper record was kept separately identifying the relationship between pseudonyms and real
identities. This record of pseudonyms was kept in physically locked storage. Video recordings were retained for the duration of the study and were permanently deleted at the completion of the study. Where possible, recordings were initially made in the Zoom cloud, but after downloading and storing on the cloud-based drive, they were deleted from the Zoom cloud. Automatically generated transcripts were reviewed and edited for accuracy and completeness, and notes were made on visible behaviors and contexts. For example, an effort was made to document the physical environment within which instructional designers work in particular, including whether they worked remotely or in the office and what the physical environment was like. After each interaction, interview, or other event, a research memo was written within 24 hours that was a reflection by the researcher relative to the research questions and theoretical concerns of the research as noted above.

The interviews were transcribed using the built-in Zoom transcription option. Recordings and transcriptions were downloaded from the Zoom cloud and saved on a Google drive secured by multi-factor authentication. I wrote code to convert the Zoom .srt transcripts to a more readable format that kept the same speaker together. Zoom transcripts had some particular idiosyncrasies, including misattributing speech, odd capitalization, and unpredictable punctuation that did not reflect speech patterns.

Video or audio without delivered transcriptions were initially uploaded to Canvas Studio and captions were generated using the built-in captioning tool in that system. The transcript was then downloaded. However, this transcription process did not include diarization (speaker attribution), and so I wrote some code to facilitate collapsing selected sections into coherent paragraphs. Additionally, the Canvas Studio transcripts were somewhat unpredictable and inaccurate, so the final transcripts were run through the Whisper AI transcription tool, more
specifically the faster whisper-ctranslate2 (Mas, 2023/2023) variation of the tool using the medium model.

This meant that the raw .srt files that were produced by the various automatic transcription tools were converted to plain text files and then to Google Docs, which allowed for annotation, commentary, and highlighting. All videos were rewatched with some transcript correction, but primarily focused on picking up on those things that glowed (MacLure, 2013a).

Approximately 50 hours of video and audio were recorded over 47 interviews and observations. During the initial pass through the videos and transcriptions, I created a “mind map” using the freely available Xmind (2023) tool. This allowed me to map out various ideas and concepts that arose in the data collection period including their relationships to one another. This included related ideas that arose out of discussions and conversations outside of the data collection process, for example, a reading group that I was part of, and watching various webinars and recordings from the Centre for Research in Digital Education at the University of Edinburgh, UK.

**Data Analysis Approach**

Organizing, coding, identifying themes, considering issues of validity, reliability, and interpretation are considered in conventional qualitative research to be standard to analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2016). However, these are concepts and practices that “are bound to logical positivism, empiricism, objectivism, and realism” (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 224), and practices such as coding “… cannot save the researcher from the messiness and complexity of the material world” (Childers, 2014, p. 819).

Post-structuralist researchers acknowledge that this creates challenges for analysis and representation, while at the same time explicitly refusing to provide guidelines or maps
(Freeman, 2017). In a sense, “anything always goes until someone draws a line” (St. Pierre, 2021, p. 7) and this is acknowledged to be both risky and confusing. Roulston (2010) suggested looking to examples of post-structuralist research as inspiration. As already indicated, one model for this study was the work of Grimaldi and Ball (2021), but this study also looked to Jackson and Mazzei’s (2012) interview analysis for methodological inspiration.

Jackson and Mazzei’s (2012) analysis means that theory is plugged into data and data into theory. Additionally, the intention is to become attuned to data “hot spots” that “glow” (MacLure, 2013a) representing a kind of affective intensity (Ringrose & Renold, 2014, p. 778) within the assemblage of online learning. In this context affect is considered a kind of social emotion that cannot be quite defined (Clough, 2018). Affect is tentative, speculative, impulsive, and yet unstated (Berlant, 2011). Freeman (2014) suggested that “…if a wink raises questions for us, the something caused us to pause and wonder” (p. 829). Berlant (2011) characterized noncommunicative gestures such as silence, grimaces, or nonresponse as indicative of affective moments that create potential escapes from the impasse of the present. In the interview or the observation this literally involves paying as much attention to what is not said as to what is said (Mazzei, 2004), but the same can hold true for document analysis. For Maclure (2013b), wonder exists in a similar space between the data and the researcher, and can be produced unexpectedly when researchers grow “tired of the banality of our own, conventional ethnographic attitude” (MacLure, 2013b, p. 229). In simple terms, the goal is to pay attention to what “exceeds or evades the action of coding” (MacLure, 2013a, p. 167) and so threatens conventional representation and reproduction. In terms of my research questions, affect is found in the fragments that emerge between the rationalities and rigidities of the practices of teaching and instructional design and are expressed in the disordered logic of power/knowledge relations.
An initial approach to data analysis was to write code to extract my own comments and highlights from the various Google documents and put them into a spreadsheet for analysis and consumption. This I subsequently referred to as doing all the wrong things before approaching the right things, and while successful and personally satisfying from a technical and creative standpoint, this process deprived the comments and highlights of any generative context. Consequently, I discarded that work, and began by reviewing the interviews of the instructional designers in order to identify characterizations of their work and their history in order to build profiles of each.

The profiles of the instructional designers were very different from one another, and their work contexts were very different. This made the initial intention to create composite profiles problematic, since there was no way to align or merge such different life experiences and activities. At the same time, the unique nature of those life and work experiences made anonymization challenging. Pseudonyms are used for all participants, as they are for institutions. Place names have been changed, and roles have been obfuscated. Disciplinary affiliations have also been changed or omitted, although, if relevant, the broader contexts, e.g., Arts, Sciences, have been retained.

It is impossible to ignore race and gender although neither was an explicit focus of the study, and the recruitment strategy did not consider either. As it turned out, all participants were women, except for four of the five managers interviewed who were men. Two participants were from non-White historically underrepresented groups. This representation did not strike me as unusual and worth addressing during data collection, although on reflection, it was somewhat curious. By way of background, Frye and Fulton (2020) conducted a longitudinal analysis of the distribution of non-faculty professional staff in higher education between Fall 1993 and Fall
2011 and found a doubling of professional staff in that time period across institutions. In their analysis of gender and race/ethnicity from 2016 they found that approximately two thirds of professional staff were women, and separately that two thirds were White. Their study provided additional evidence that women were overrepresented in staff positions and progressively underrepresented in higher rungs of the academic ladder. They also found evidence that historically underrepresented groups were employed in higher proportions in two-year colleges.

**Issues of Trustworthiness**

This study took place at community colleges which employ people with responsibilities that were formally defined to include instructional design. The scope was restricted and makes no broad claims, nor did the study attempt to sample specific kinds of colleges, nor provide a comprehensive overview of a specific set of institutions. This is consistent with the theoretical commitments of post-structural research, and looks to produce a coherent analysis that has the potential to be productive of something new. This study attempted to think with the data and theory in order to document the working of instructional design in the assemblage of online learning at community colleges.

Richardson (2005) suggested that rather than triangulation, post-structuralists engage in crystallization:

I propose that the central imaginary for “validity” for postmodernist texts is not the triangle—a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-di-mensionalities [*sic*], and angles of approach. (L. Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963)
An alternative conception is *diffraction* as espoused by Barad (2007) and Haraway (Jenkins et al., 2021), which looks for patterns of interference that reveal difference patterns. In contrast to the conventional distance of representation and interpretivism, Jenkins et al. (2021) hold that the standard is found in a researcher being “accountable to and response-able for the worlds which their research contributes to materialising” (p. 980). In other words, as a creative and productive inquiry, I am responsible, as an entangled researcher, for what I create (Ellis et al., 2011) rather than what the form of the research is.

**Ethical Procedures**

Some participants in potentially vulnerable employment conditions (e.g., adjuncts) may be cautious about sharing their perspectives. Creswell and Poth (2016) suggested that creating composite participant profiles can help with this, and accordingly, this is the approach this study planned on taking. In practice, this did not happen, in part because the diverse nature of the primary participants’ roles and backgrounds made it impossible. Of particular note were the instructional designers themselves and significant efforts were made to respect their pseudonymity and the anonymity of the institutions.

All data was kept on a password-protected networked drive which required dual-factor authentication to access.

**Summary**

Kuntz (2015) emphasized that a situational ethics sits at the center of the work of a responsible methodologist, and St. Pierre (2021) urged that researchers have an ethical obligation to do something different. As a practical matter, this begins with a Foucauldian “shift from ‘questions of what’ to ‘interrogations of how’” (Kuntz, 2015, p. 139). The literature suggests that neoliberalism operates in higher education, but the specific operation of neoliberalism within
teaching, learning, and the practices of instructional design has not been studied. This is particularly the case within community colleges. The study here does that by examining this under-researched and under-theorized dimension of the modern community college that touches on the heart of teaching and learning and the future of our institutions.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

In the discussion of my findings in Chapter 5, I advocate for the use of speculative fiction in research contexts. This arose as a response to the work of a number of researchers, including Selwyn (2023), Bayne (2023), Macgilchrist (2021a), and Costello (2022), but it was also an explicit response to framings of the future made by participants in my study. As a result, I have intentionally included quotes in this chapter from the work of Terry Pratchett, a British satirical fantasy writer. The goal in doing so was to reinforce the idea that fiction can represent complex ideas of alternative ways of being in ways that millions can find accessible and comprehensible. It also demonstrates that theory, discussion, and data do not live in tidy boxes, but are necessarily entangled with one another in productive ways.

Technology, Data, and Soccer

I was born in 1967, one year after the England men’s team won the soccer (football) world cup in London, and as a boy growing up, I played soccer. I have played most of my life, and although I have never been particularly good or talented at the game, continue to enjoy playing. As a fan and player, I had never given much thought to referees, but not long before the pandemic, I began refereeing soccer games as a way to stay in touch with the game, earn some money (after all, everyone must have a side gig as many of my participants did), and account for my knees and ankles being less willing than the rest of me to play the game.

Refereeing soccer is far more challenging than players and fans realize, and involves hundreds of decisions in every game with no opportunity at the level I operate at to review decisions, and no ability to watch replays. Nevertheless, everyone has an opinion about every decision. The longer I have refereed, despite my deepening understanding of the rules of the
game, the more I have learned that refereeing, like teaching, is about relationships, judgement, reading people, and doing the best you can with incomplete knowledge. I know I will make mistakes and I will miss making decisions in every game, and I know that the emotional tenor of the game will affect the decisions I make, sometimes for the better and sometimes not. It is also true that second-guessing, abuse, and fraught emotions surface from people at all levels of the game, and it is a challenge to control my own emotions when that happens. At the grass roots, partly because of the levels of abuse, it has become difficult to recruit and retain people who might want to become referees.

This continues to be true at the highest levels of the game, despite the introduction of technologies and processes that are promised to make game officials more accurate. In a profile of contemporary soccer refereeing in the Premier League (Ralston, 2023), the Guardian followed a single referee documenting the stresses and strains of their job. The laws (Laws of the Game, 2023) are detailed, and referees make as many as 300 decisions in every game, but a core emphasis of the piece is that there are no simple decisions, and that experience and personality are as important as anything else in managing a game. The public narrative however is that referees are not fit enough, nor smart enough, nor well trained enough, nor good enough, and that refereeing is in perpetual decline. However, the story continues, more technology and better data can save it. The parallels with the rhetoric surrounding teachers, teaching, and education are hard to ignore.

Since 2019, the Premier League has used virtual assistant refereeing (VAR) to review decisions during matches. When a referee makes a decision (or fails to make a decision), in some contexts, the action may be reviewed by another referee who is offsite in London watching all the currently playing games remotely. That referee may recommend that the on-field referee
review video of an incident in order to validate their decision. This always happens when a goal is scored. For many, this has affected their enjoyment of the game negatively, slowing it down, delaying celebrations, and impacting the decisions referees make. For example, a referee might be more reluctant to make a decision on the field and lean on the VAR system to make the hard decisions for them, but also the system creates precision where previously there was none (e.g., whether an ankle was offside when a ball was played).

Beyond this, referees are evaluated themselves. Anonymous analysts watch silent videos of matches and mark every decision. An evaluator then checks each decision, and then a report is sent to a panel of five people who review those decisions, scoring them based on factors like difficulty and pitch location. The final report has a percentage accuracy score and is given to the referee for feedback. This score controls their place in a merit table, which controls which games are subsequently assigned to the referee. While part of the argument is that datafication is both evidence for and a mechanism to professionalize refereeing, this datafication and abstraction from the game context is also problematic for referees, who often describe making decisions that are technically incorrect, but appropriate for the game context and the emotional state of players. Some have argued that technical accuracy is possible with changes in the rules and parameters of sports, but in fact is undesirable for just this kind of reason (Bordner, 2019). For referees, it is in fact, the emotional management of games and the decisions made in that context that give them some of the greatest satisfaction and pleasure.

…what makes datafication—the transformation of information about people into a commodity—wrongful. What makes datafication wrong is not (only) that it erodes the capacity for subject self-formation, but instead that it materializes unjust social relations: data relations that enact or amplify social inequality. (Viljoen, 2021, p. 573)
Or as Granny Weatherwax said:

“There’s no grays, only white that’s got grubby. I’m surprised you don’t know that. And sin, young man, is when you treat people as things. Including yourself. That’s what sin is.”

“It’s a lot more complicated than that . . .”

“No. It ain’t. When people say things are a lot more complicated than that, they means they’re getting worried that they won’t like the truth. People as things, that’s where it starts.”

“Oh, I’m sure there are worse crimes . . .”

“But they starts with thinking about people as things . . .” (Pratchett, 2008, p. 278)

Or as Kuntz (2019) put it:

Thus, when Foucault (2007) writes, “to govern means to govern things,” (p. 97) we need not read this as reducing all things towards a governable stasis. Instead, there is an important element here where governing means to turn humans, relations, matter, into things that are calculable—a quantification of relations that include affective states—sensations, fears, interests, etc. (p. 115)

One can read this pattern in the application of numerical scoring to course quality under QM, in course evaluations, in student use of Rate My Professor, and in the deployment of technologies which, more often than not, fail to address complex human problems in advising and scheduling.

**Infrastructure and Empathy**

But that wasn’t the only thing I’d forgotten. Philosopher Ivan Illich worried in 1978 that “innumerable sets of infrastructures in which people coped, played, ate, made friends, and loved have been destroyed,” leaving a barren social landscape of “huge zero-sum
games, monolithic delivery systems in which every gain for one turns into a loss or burden for another, while true satisfaction is denied to both.” (Odell, 2023, p. 265)

In *Protocol* (2004), Galloway makes an argument from Foucault that the rules of discourse control what can be said. At a high level, under Foucault’s telling, we have moved from a sovereign society to a disciplinary society to a biopolitical society, which is the set of techniques for the control of populations through normative discourse. The mechanisms of biopower include surveillance and bureaucracy, but also the alignment of technologies and knowledge. Galloway’s discussion primarily was about network protocols such as TCP/IP, DNS, HTTP, and the layering of protocols which define the possibilities of network relationships. For example, the TCP/IP protocol is fault-tolerant and routes around failure by design, but DNS is more of a centralized protocol with a top-down hierarchy that is vulnerable due to that design (Ariyapperuma & Mitchell, 2007).

Standards and protocols like DNS and TCP/IP are established by internet organizations such as IETF, W3C, and ISO which define the protocols both for the internet and other technical domains. This governance by regulation is accepting of compliant and conformant participants, in that applications and services that implement protocols according to the standards automatically become part of the network, and so there is always potential for growth. Distributed networks governed by protocol represent a different kind of power relationship to centralized hierarchical power. They perform control by virtue of their definitions of the language, vocabulary, and grammar that machines, and the people who use them, can speak.

As Doctorow (2023) has noted, voluntary standards organizations can be coopted by corporations who are able to pay “volunteers” to play key roles on committees, and concentrate decision-making into small numbers of individuals. Microsoft themselves acknowledged that
their strategy with regard to competition in the browser market was to “embrace, extend, and extinguish” internet standards (Antitrust Division, 2015, sec. 91.3.2). Open standards that threaten the hegemony of centralized power on the internet are either sidelined or coopted by those seeking to maintain power, more recently for example, with Digital Rights Management in HTML5 (Porup, 2017). This seems to be a strategy found with monopolists whose dominance is threatened. Market concentration has been encouraged by government policy and can be found in the Learning Management System (LMS) market as much as any. Doctorow (2023) describes this overall pattern as the emergence of weak institutions, in areas such as antitrust, elections, and other related forms of public participation. As he puts it, "the world is full of weak institutions that have become the locus of contests that used to be waged on real fields, [formerly] overseen by skilled referees who were accountable to real laws and courts” (Doctorow, 2023).

Another side to this coin is the privatization of regulation and law. Many parts of the regulatory state are created and managed by private or semi-private organizations and incorporated by reference into law (Incorporation by Reference, n.d.). Such material is often not freely available and so there are barriers to public access to effective law and regulation (Malamud, 2013; Poritz, 2023).

One of the lesser known standards bodies was for most of its existence known as IMS Global Learning Consortium, although it rebranded as 1Edtech in 2022 (1EdTech Identity, 2023). Similarly to other standards bodies, this organization is supported by vendors and consumers of educational technology with differing levels of membership, and differing levels of financial contributions charged depending on the size and type of the member organization. In addition to establishing technical standards for learner analytics, course and question
interoperability, and education-related APIs (among others), this organization certifies and vets tools for those that are willing to pay a fee. Probably the most well-known and widely implemented standard is the Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) standard which facilitates third parties integrating into LMS’s like Canvas and Blackboard. In particular in this study this protocol shaped the use of publisher material by faculty, and the degree to which they might take students out of the LMS context.

In Galloway’s (2004) conclusion his discussion turns briefly to speed bumps as protocol as opposed to speed limits and surveillance. His point in identifying speed bumps as protocol is that they define the boundaries of what can be done, as opposed to posted limits which do not change the possibilities of the physical environment. Here, protocol aligns in part with Donald Norman’s (1999) notion of affordances and what an environment makes it easy or “sensible” to do (Galloway, 2004, p. 245).

There is a connection here that Doctorow (2023) makes also. Our physical environments define the possibilities of how we can relate to one another, and as a result, the communities and relationships in built environments are the outcome of both weak or captured institutions, and regulations that emerge from them. There are vast quantities of government regulation about urban design and safety, but an argument made by urban activists is very much that planning codes and regulation have created the urban experience that many currently experience, and that regulation forestalls other ways of imagining urban space. For example, single family zoning creates class segregation and urban sprawl, setback requirements create larger city blocks, road design standards create overly wide streets, parking regulations subsidize car usage (Climate Town, 2023; Shoup, 2005), and the definition of jaywalking as a crime prioritizes cars in urban spaces. This is also of course found in redlining and documented in Koopman (2019), but is
more pervasive and far more extensive than most people understand. Churchill (*Churchill and the Commons Chamber*, n.d.) put it this way in 1943, “we shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us” when advocating for keeping the design of the Commons chamber when it was being rebuilt, with the specific idea that the shape of the space facilitated the existence of two opposing political parties, and the limited capacity forced its members to get close to one another to get a seat (Kissane, 2023).

One of my own interests is urban design and very much related to that, cycling, but like one of my study participants, I find cycling to be too dangerous to do on any regular basis. Enthusiasts for the fifteen-minute city and walkable cities often share their experiences in North American cities, as well as in contrast, in European cities, one of the more common comparisons being with the Netherlands. As has been documented, the livable, walkable Dutch city did not simply happen, and in fact was nearly curtailed at birth by proposals to demolish neighborhoods, and fill in canals in order to build highways (“De Fiets Is Niets,” 2023). There was significant resistance to the Dutch model, including in the Netherlands itself. The point that emerges from this urban design enthusiasm is that these changes are not natural, nor inevitable, but are the product of specific policies, practices, and ways of knowing. Beyond this, it is the case that it is easier than it ever has been to become aware of other ways of living (Adam Something, 2023; *Not Just Bikes - YouTube*, n.d.), and critique current policy (Yet Another Urbanist, 2022).

This is a roundabout (see what I did there) way of saying that it matters who belongs to standards organizations, what roles they play, and that if protocols are not politically neutral, then the infrastructures and protocols that are standard in learning technologies are also not neutral. APIs are a particular expression of ways of knowing, reflecting assumptions about people and learning (van der Vlist et al., 2022). Similarly, it matters who belongs to
organizations like Quality Matters (QM), which have come to define what it means to design online learning.

**Surprise and Complaints**

The world is made up of four elements: Earth, Air, Fire and Water. This is a fact well known even to Corporal Nobbs. It’s also wrong. There’s a fifth element, and generally it’s called Surprise. (Pratchett, 2001, p. 5)

Somewhat akin to wonder (MacLure, 2013a), surprise and the unexpected can function to both unsettle and reinscribe normalized practices.

In a resistance to this default, I challenge qualitative researchers to ask questions such as, “Are my research processes creative or innovative in ways that they push me off to other direction and toward the unthought?” “How often do I get surprised when conducting research studies?” “How often does my research surprise others?” “How do my methodological approaches create analytical surprises?” (Koro-Ljungberg, 2012, p. 808)

In this study, unpleasant surprises in the form of students’ complaints were often identified by instructional designers, managers, and faculty as a trigger for systemic changes, for knowledge, and for action.

“…like yesterday, when my first email from the college was directly from [the president] at 7:50 in the morning because a student sent them an email complaining about an instructor, again, the fact that the instructor had not graded any assignments for the entire five weeks of the Accelerate course. And of course, we’re at the end of that five weeks right now.”
“...their course is a train wreck, we’re taking them off any online courses, I’m going to put them in a brick-and-mortar classroom and see how they do this, because that’s strike two. We’ve had two students go straight to [the president] about issues with them, so can’t do that anymore.”

The student in this situation had also sent their email to others in the academic leadership of the college, and it should be noted that this concerned one of the courses in the accelerated program which is discussed at length later in this chapter. One dimension of the response to complaints was to increase surveillance that would not otherwise have happened. Alex, one of the primary instructional designers in the study, indicated that she was not confident that department chairs visited the online classes of the adjuncts that they supervised, but if there was a complaint, she was sure that they would certainly do so. Similarly, Emily, an administrator, said that her criteria for knowing whether someone was a good teacher was that she did not get a lot of complaints about them. Faculty, like Maxine, indicated that whether or not students complained was something they paid attention to.

At the college where Anne was an instructional designer, every so often a student would find their way to the distance learning offices asking for help, and these were typically unusual and unexpected issues. Sometimes these would raise a more far-reaching concern, such as an instructor who was not communicating with students or one who was violating FERPA policy or one that had not updated the dates in their syllabus from year to year. Generally, though, at Anne’s college neither she nor deans would enter faculty courses without permission. They also relied on complaints to prompt intervention, “unless there’s a complaint, we don’t know.” However, at her college, this was less likely to lead to systemic changes.
The pattern appears to emerge that the unwelcome surprise of a complaint was a trigger to both knowledge and action, as otherwise there was no incentive to create and maintain awareness of what faculty might be doing in classrooms. However, once surveillance of faculty behaviors was initiated, it appeared to function as a one-way ratchet with no reverse. Furthermore, even if no-one is paying attention, the fact of surveillance changes the way that people behave (Foucault, 2008). The other dimension to surveillance is that it is rarely qualitative in nature, but more often than not constitutes making behaviors subject to calculation such as through learning analytics and educational technology solutions (Jarke & Macgilchrist, 2021).

The Auditors fluttered anxiously. And, as always happens in their species when something goes radically wrong and needs fixing instantly, they settled down to try to work how who was to blame. (Pratchett, 1999a, p. 315)

In Pratchett’s Discworld fantasies the Auditors seek to eliminate human belief and imagination, and ultimately to stop time so that everything might be measured and stay in its place, but they are always confounded by the messiness and unpredictability of life.

**What We Want and What We Have**

But this is the difference between, like, a community college and a university. A university exists on its own. It’s its own bubble. It does its own thing. It has its alumni. It has its own culture. It’s meant to be kind of its own thing. [Our local university] Exhibit A, but a community college is meant to be invested, involved in working with the community in which it resides, representative of the community which it resides. So that, I think, is the most important thing to remember in these kinds of situations, in the types
of people that we invite in, is that we need to make sure that what we are doing is representative of the community we have, not the community we want. (A member of the “Vegas” group)

In a separate conversation with Alex with regard to designing courses, she expressed a similar sentiment that faculty did not build courses for the student population as she understood it: “the problem is using the tools that we have, and figuring out a way to make it easier for faculty to customize their courses for the students that they have, not the students that they wish they had [emphasis added].” There are several implications behind the ideas expressed here. One was also expressed in the form that described faculty as academics who want to live in “a world of unicorns and rainbows” that they somehow had inherited from their own university experience.

This sentiment also implied that universities represent a different kind of education from community colleges, and connected to this is a second idea that the student population of community colleges is set in stone and assumed to be of a certain nature, that some things are negotiable, and some things are inevitable. Default assumptions about “what students need” and what is inevitable then become a safe way to avoid conversations about the broader purposes of education, or at least identify what is negotiable in the work of education.

If one accepts this framing of things as they are right now, and disavows the opportunity to imagine different worlds, then the kinds of education that community colleges should provide students becomes inevitable as well. Education has to be this way, because people are this way, and it is not the work of community college staff or faculty to change systems or change the way that education works. The sense is that democratic (and democratically run) institutions that
deliver a comprehensive, liberal education becomes a romantic fantasy that we (colleges, society, faculty, curriculum) can no longer afford.

And, while it was regarded as pretty good evidence of criminality to be living in a slum, for some reason owning a whole street of them merely got you invited to the very best social occasions. (Pratchett, 1997, p. 83)

At the same time, community colleges must be flexible and efficient in response to social conditions as they are. Colleges must provide social services like food pantries rather than questioning what leads to people going hungry. Precarity is assumed for both students and employees by virtue of the gig economy (Kezar et al., 2019) rather than questioned. It is an accepted fact that students have no time and so colleges must be more flexible. Faculty and staff are acutely aware that many of their students live precarious lives. Sally was shocked when she started at the community college, asking with regard to students, “how do you come here and do anything under those extraordinary circumstances?” At the same time, doing anything about these conditions was beyond her control except to the extent she could work more hours and extend individual care in teaching to her students. This was true of a number of participants in the study who took on work and care for students as their individual responsibility. One of the problems was that care was substantially immeasurable and could not have resources allocated to it, but coercive practices like surveillance could be facilitated through technology and statistical data.

The framing of inevitability also emerged in conversations and disagreements about AI, and technology more broadly. Instructional designers like Erica and Alex were enthusiastic about
AI, but this partly was because they assumed that AI was inevitable and the permeation of AI into their work was inevitable. Similarly, Martin, a manager, expressed the idea that “I guess we’ll see what happens…we’re here for the ride at this point,” and Anne that accepted that “we better embrace AI in some way, shape, or form.”

Noelle, a faculty member, met the instructional designer at her college through her service on a committee and they shared a common interest in AI. She already had students using it, and was trying to “stay one step ahead” of them. Her hope was that some kind of policy could be established, but there was still broad ignorance among faculty about the capabilities of the technology. She believed that “this is a disruptor” and “this is going to change everything, and it’s already started.” It was both exciting and terrifying to her, but it certainly could not be ignored. AI, in the form of large language models that work using prediction based on past data, was framed as inevitable, but also efficient and fast.

One of the persistent tensions in these discussions across colleges was in terms of what real students really need, what real students want, what a good course was, and what a good student (as product) was, with all the caveats that the definitions of “real” and “good” were assumed. An unstated conflict existed in terms of who could claim to best understand and identify these tropes and what the common sense of them was. Faculty could be characterized as out of touch by virtue of their education and discipline, administrators could be characterized as disconnected from the “real world,” and instructional designers could be characterized as out of touch with real students. People in different roles know students in different ways, with statistical data living in tension with everyday experience and personal knowledge of individual students.

Faculty saw the student population changing as they came through the classroom and came out of the pandemic experience. The default assumption for managers and instructional
designers, and some faculty, was that students needed speed and efficiency in their learning, that they needed credentials awarded more quickly than before, and these values emerged in initiatives such as badging, micro-credentials, and short session courses. A statement by Tom, the faculty member in charge of the Accelerate program, captured some of this:

But I also know that I’m not going to wait. I don’t. I don’t have the time. [The program] is a huge program. I don’t have time to waste, and at the end of the day, whatever is going to benefit the students and benefit the program, there’s the direction I’m going to take.

As far as the practice of instructional design is concerned, standardizing course structures and using master courses enables efficiency and a common experience for students. It also enables specific kinds of hiring and certification practices for faculty oriented around delivering courses rather than developing them. This is presented as common sense because it is both an efficient use of faculty time, and because it standardizes the student experience.

**Urgency and Inevitability**

At the same time, the underlying sense of urgency was exhausting and trying for all participants. They frequently referred to being overwhelmed with new projects and initiatives that consumed their time without necessarily improving their daily lives. Despite their own desire to be “more nimble” they expressed frustration with the never-ending pace with no time to slow down. Yet again, though, this was considered to be inevitable and unavoidable, and was applied to teaching as much as anything. Courses that had been compressed from a two-course sequence to one course were described as “laughable” and “you’re just running through it as fast as you can.” Nevertheless, the two-course sequence, and the content in 15-week sessions were both described by some as luxuries that students and faculty could no longer afford.
Instructional Designer Profiles

In contrast to the data generated with other participants, the profiles of the instructional designers are presented in whole below. This is in part because the most time in the study was spent with these instructional designers, as each was interviewed at least eight times over an extended period, whereas other participants were interviewed once. It is also the case that their working experiences and current roles were very different from one another. This lack of a common experience supports the proposition that the purposes and roles of instructional designers are still ambiguous in community colleges.

Anne

Anne came to the United States in the late 1990s. She completed her undergraduate degree in English literacy overseas, after which she taught English at a college in her home country for three years. It was after that that she came to a university in the Midwest where she completed two master’s degrees, both related to technology and training. While there, she applied to a university on the east coast for a PhD in Instructional Design and Technology, where she was a research assistant and had a full scholarship. She completed her PhD before joining her college. She was the sole instructional designer at a mid-sized community college in a small city.

She started in a part-time position at the college, staying in the area partly because of her family, although she had an opportunity to work elsewhere. After several years working part-time, she was ready to leave, but the college created a full-time position for her. She had stayed at the college ever since, as much as anything because it suited her family situation, and she was relatively happy at the college. She worked from home on Fridays, and that was when we met online using Zoom, but she otherwise worked in the office.
She firmly believed that she had not advanced in her career due to her background and ethnicity, that if she were a white female with the same qualifications (two master’s degrees and a PhD), her career trajectory would have been different. She felt that her knowledge and skills were the same as others, but possibly her lack of career advancement was also due to her family circumstances. Being married with a child had also limited her career movement and she had not been willing to uproot them in order to advance. She acknowledged that her English proficiency might also have been an issue, but that was not reflective of her intelligence. She was very careful when writing still so as not to make mistakes and embarrass herself.

When she first started, she was under the impression that people did not really know why they needed an instructional designer and she mainly performed instructional technology support, particularly for the LMS at the time, which was Blackboard. This involved some technology training for related tools like a video content system and an online test proctoring system, but not much work that could be called instructional design.

Around 2014 the college hired an instructional technologist who took on learning management system support and was now the primary support person for that. In 2019, the system moved to Canvas instead of Blackboard. Since 2014, Anne’s focus had shifted so that she was backup on the learning management system and now had more instructional design and faculty development responsibilities. She still supported the video content system and the proctoring system, but characterized her work as 70% course design. She and the instructional technologist had offices next door to one another and both reported to the Dean of Online Learning and Learning Resources. As is not unusual, that dean was also currently serving as the interim Dean of another department, so it could be hard for the two of them to get his attention.
One of the reasons she appreciated being the instructional designer rather than the LMS support person was “I don’t have to answer email at night.”

During the pandemic she conducted online training, but also one-on-one Zoom sessions with faculty. These days faculty tended to email or call with issues and questions, and rarely came to her office, “I would say 0%, you know, will walk to my office and sit down with me, and say, ‘Can you help me design my course?’ It never happens.” She might have very brief conversations, but she indicated that there was not a culture of consultation on course design, nor were there mandatory requirements to do so, "it’s all up to them. We can give them recommendations, but really there…nobody says you have to do it this way.” As an example of this, the college was looking at teaching courses over shorter sessions, and her department had not been consulted on the design implications for online courses. She was skeptical about this trend, because in her view, sometimes “learning just needs time.” Despite this, the favorite part of her job was dealing with faculty. If she could help faculty, and “they really get what I’m talking about,” and went back to their course, updated it, and the students did better, that was the most rewarding part of her work.

She felt that she played an encouragement and moral support role for faculty, as opposed to any kind of oversight function, i.e., “I’m not the police.” One symptom of this is that her office had no insight or access to the course evaluation results for online courses, which were completely handled by the college’s institutional effectiveness department. She was not even sure what questions were asked that might reflect issues with online courses specifically. Similarly, she would not access a course in the LMS without faculty permission first, and would not go looking for compliance with policy and regulations like Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI).
Over the course of an academic year the focus of her work shifted. In the Fall semester, it tended to be more focused on faculty certification to teach online and faculty training, whereas in the Spring she coordinated Quality Matters (QM) certification for a handful of courses. In the summer, her department often organized training and other programs. The funding for paying faculty to attend these in recent years came out of the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF). They also used Perkins money to support faculty going through the QM process. It should be noted that the college mostly conducted a custom QM process. In this process, the college used internal faculty reviewers instead of external ones, but they did use the QM online tools. Course review was voluntary, for specific courses rather than for master courses, and both reviewers and the submitting faculty were paid. In the Spring semester they put five courses through an internal review and found money to put two through an external review process. She acknowledged that the internal review would not be as robust as an external review, but it was nevertheless a good baseline for courses.

When she first started at the college, she was part of an effort to mandate peer review for online courses. There was, however, a lot of push back from faculty and the faculty senate, so the effort did not come to pass. It is only in recent years that they had gradually started bringing in QM as an optional process for faculty to take part in. She had been advocating to her dean recently for using master courses, but they had not taken up the idea yet.

Like any parent with young children, a typical week could be complicated by childcare duties, or simple childhood behaviors like not wanting to go to bed. Her daughter was also at an age where she can bring home a cold and be unable to go to school and there were teacher-parent conferences to attend, as well as extra-curricular activities like ballet and language lessons.
Although she did not characterize herself as a “tiger mom” she did give her daughter homework beyond any that the school might assign.

I met with Anne during the Spring semester, so she was primarily occupied by organizing the QM reviews, which involved recruiting faculty, orienting them, entering them into the QM system, configuring the system with the college rubric, setting up their courses, scheduling meetings, and keeping their process on track to complete before faculty contracts ran out at the end of the semester. During this semester, there was one faculty meeting with her that I attended, which was the orientation to the QM review process for that semester. Anne spoke for virtually the whole meeting with only two follow-up questions from faculty. The meeting lasted just over thirty minutes. She was very well prepared and careful in her presentation, in some contrast to the more freeform conversations that we had during the semester. Her emphasis during the meeting was on the specific processes and their timing that participating faculty would have to undertake, including how to use the QM web site to conduct their course review.

She was subscribed to various instructional design mailing lists and a portion of her time involved staying up to date with those. She attended webinars on specific technologies or applications of technologies to instruction, for example, the video content system. She would collate material on topics like using discussion boards into a module in a course that she maintained. These mailing lists would occasionally bring new technologies or tools to her attention, which she would experiment with. She would also share significant training opportunities through the college faculty bulletin. She noted in this regard that she had observed that:

When you introduce any tool, a group of faculty, they’re really interested. They will use it intensively, and the rest just ignore it. And then, when you have training or they attend
training, they say, “Oh, I didn’t know we had that, we can do that.” But really, we have had it for years. They just never really try it. And but I don’t blame them, because if I am teacher, I was a teacher before, I know, I’m pretty busy. I don’t want. If I don’t have to learn something, I won’t.

This quote captures some of the issues of initiative fatigue, divided attention, technology solutionism, and workload that emerges in other parts of this study.

There was also an online student orientation course that she sometimes updated and in which she would sometimes have assignments to grade. The course was not required, so this workload was unpredictable.

The college had an internal certification for teaching online, and faculty were required to either complete this or the equivalent every five years as part of their evaluation process. This certification was delivered via a couple of Canvas courses, one of which was focused on the design components of an online course, such as backwards design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005b), course structure, and accessibility. The other course was more of an orientation course for the LMS. Some of the same content was covered in a new online faculty handbook which Anne and the instructional technologist were working on during the Spring semester. This handbook was developed with the advice of a governance committee that included faculty from each of the primary schools at the college, and broadly split into the practicalities of teaching online, and separately instructional design considerations. The two of them split the work.

In the Fall semester she was typically more focused on the online certification, although she noted that in the Spring she was still working with a faculty member who was completing assignments from the previous summer. Faculty did have to submit assignments as part of this course, which she reviewed and provided feedback on. Her criteria for good courses include the
clarity of instructions for students, and the frequency of communication with students. She was clear herself that content per se, such as attached files, was not adequate for an online course, and also that publisher materials were often insufficient, needing supplementation by faculty.

Looking at the list of courses that she was affiliated with in Canvas revealed a spectrum of courses, some pulled from the Canvas Commons and covering topics like blended learning, learning objectives, backward design, accessibility, QM, hybrid course design, faculty presence, equity and culturally responsive online teaching, regular and substantive interaction policy and practice, universal design, as well as other system-related courses. Meetings included those with staff responsible for video classrooms and rooms specifically configured for HyFlex classes. She was also on the board for a local non-profit that supported refugees. She and the instructional technologist met with the dean regularly to coordinate their work, although less frequently since he was serving in an interim position as well when we spoke.

Other routine work included planning future professional development or in-service presentations, writing up internal grant proposals to fund software purchases, and presenting on program planning with the college’s institutional effectiveness staff and a faculty member at a regional conference. In the semester of the study, the Quality Matters organization asked her to be part of an external review team for another institution. She was already certified with the Applying the QM Rubric (APPQMR), the Peer Reviewer, and Online Facilitator certificates, and was thinking about certifying as a “Master” Reviewer with QM.

Anne was quietly confident about her work. In her own words, “I don’t need to prove myself anymore” and at another time, “I feel like instructional design is not hard. I’ve been doing this is a long, long time…I know what I'm doing…I'm not scared to do things, and I like learning new things.” She characterized herself starting at the college as more of an independent worker,
but said that she had grown over time in her ability to work as part of a team, and in her relationships with faculty. While she was not as up to date with technology as she used to be, her focus was very much on issues of course and instructional design.

**Erica**

Erica was the sole instructional designer at a large metropolitan community college. We met during the Spring 2023 semester via Zoom on multiple Fridays. In the end we met more than the planned eight times, between February and May, in part because she enjoyed the meetings, found them cathartic, and she enjoyed the opportunity to talk and think about her work.

She worked from home on Fridays, and would have liked to have at least one more day a week there, since as she said, “I don’t see anybody in my office, and no one comes to see me, and 99% of my communication is via email or a phone.” There were some meetings with her supervisor that she found energizing and fruitful in person.

She grew up in a military family, moving frequently. She initially struggled to find her way in college, switching her major multiple times and even being kicked out of school for academic reasons. She did eventually finish after reapplying to get back into the same school. After graduation, she worked as a credit counselor for a while, and enjoyed the college atmosphere. Consequently, she returned to her original college to complete a Master’s in Education, graduating with a degree related to college student personnel. After graduation, she did some nonprofit work and then worked a part-time job at a for-profit school as an admissions counselor, which she admitted was a question of getting potential students to sign on the dotted line. She then found a job at a local university as a part-time advisor, subsequently becoming a director of undergraduate advising for a college at that university.
After a few years in that position, she moved to become a director of asynchronous programs in her institution's distance learning department, which included directing undergraduate advising and working with students. This involved liaising between students and faculty, which piqued her interest in the whole field. The way she phrased it was that “I just knew that I wanted to help those faculty with designing and developing their online courses, and I had no idea what that meant, and because they were struggling.” This led her to quitting her full-time job to start and complete her PhD in instructional design and technology.

She found the program to be more theoretical than practical, which was a common observation from instructional designers in this study. On reflection she wondered whether she would have learned more from an EdD, although she recognized that it would not carry the same weight with some people. After completing her PhD, she worked for a government contractor as an instructional systems designer, but lost that job due to federal budget issues, and subsequently ended up at the college where she was now, working with veterans and military education. In a refrain that became familiar in my talks with instructional designers, she said that “they had no idea what to do with me” and as a result she completed a lot of training and certifications for herself, including QM certifications. For her these trainings and certifications helped connect the theory she had learned in her PhD to actual practice with faculty, “you can read all about it all day long, but you know, unless you’re applying, you know, you’re not really...there’s no bridge there.”

At the time, the college was organized differently with what was called a department of elearning with “elearning developers,” which was functionally similar an instructional design role, but somewhat more technical. From her perspective reorganization seemed to be a habit for new leaders, particularly when enrollment changed, and this seems to be borne out in the
literature (Baker & Cullen, 1993; Elcock et al., 2010; Maynard-Moody et al., 1986). At some point, she came to the attention of the chief academic officer who dissolved where she had been working, moved her first into faculty professional development, and then when that was dissolved, moved her into distance learning. She worked in that department for several years, which she loved, in no small part due to the particular leader in that department (who was interviewed as part of this study), but also due to the fact that she was able to work closely with another instructional designer. The lack of resources at many colleges means that this kind of collaboration is a rare experience for many in this role.

When a new president started at the college, a new department with a new associate vice president (AVP) was formed, one half of whose responsibilities was a new Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). Erica and her colleague were moved into that Center and out of Distance Learning, although her colleague decided that this was a good time to leave the college.

Naomi and I were yanked out of his department and moved under the Center for Teaching and Learning, and then that just fueled Naomi to say, “I’m out.” And because she really wanted to work more with policies and standards, which Martin was, you know, he would always incorporate her into the bigger projects he had going on with [the college], the policy and accreditation type of things, and NC-SARA, all the things, all the different branches that we have to be aware of and, and, follow. And at any rate. So, it just totally changed everything when that happened.

She had been in the CTL for over a year now as she and the AVP had established their processes, committees, and purposes.

One of her duties was facilitating (notably, she did not call it teaching) a “Teaching and Learning Online” course in Canvas for faculty certification to teach online at the college. The
course was required if faculty were not considered qualified to teach online in some other way such as by having an external certification. In addition to this certification course, faculty were mentored by an instructional technologist in the distance learning department during their first semester teaching online. The course was intensive, and she consistently characterized it as a “50-hour course.” Faculty were required to produce three of their own course modules during the course, and she graded the various assignments that they submitted. In terms of how she facilitated the course, she noted that she made a point to model responsiveness in terms of how quickly she graded submitted assignments, and to model a variety of modes of responding to faculty, such as video, speed grader, rubrics, and comments. This included responding to faculty submissions even while she was on vacation.

From her perspective the course was intense, with appropriate theory and research backing up the activities, which all also tied back to the QM standards.

It’s very robust. It’s very intense, but it gives the theory and research behind why you’re doing certain things in the online environment. We’re not just telling you to do this because it’s gonna work. It’s like it’s based off of, you know, research, and it’s based off of theories, and it’s very based off of frameworks, and you know, that’s based off quality matters and OCSQR (*OSCQR – SUNY Online Course Quality Review Rubric*, n.d.).

Most faculty passed the course, although some of them could take months to do so and required significant back and forth on completing the assignments to her standards. She did occasionally recommend to the AVP for distance learning that individual faculty not be certified, and evidently some faculty took it more seriously than others. It could be exasperating and frustrating: “I’ve got an IT person right now trying to build out his 10-week course, and it’s just PowerPoint, and I’m like oh, my God! Stab me!” For her, such an approach bypassed the
multiple possible ways of presenting content, and the variety of activities possible in an online course that would engage students, in favor of faculty convenience and represented the least amount of work a faculty member can do.

I’m strictly on the faculty end of everything. But I mean, with that said, you know, ultimately, we want to be better, so that our students are more successful. So, I always try to frame it, you know, when we’re doing strategies, we’re doing these certain strategies, so that your students are successful, so that your students are engaged, so that your students are motivated to want to come and participate and actively learn.

However, it could be difficult to engage with faculty and to get them invested.

You can definitely tell the ones who are resistant of going through this program, bare minimum, crappy work, and…compared to those who are just really relishing online learning. ‘Yes, this is what it’s all about,’ and their work is, like, totally like off the charts. But faculty can be the worst when it comes to being students.

The college did not put courses through the QM process by default, although some courses that were part of a particular statewide online program were required to do so. Erica was QM certified, and they had looked at a QM process for the college a few years ago. It was time-intensive, however. There was also previous academic leadership that had attempted to push QM standards on courses, but that ended up being actively resisted by faculty. She did not feel that she “should be laying down the law” on course design, but was much more interested in “let’s hold hands.” However, in her mind “the previous administration was very much we’re going to regulate you,” and that had left a bad taste in the mouths of faculty who were upset about the intrusion into their courses. Currently oversight was the responsibility of the deans, but in her eyes, “they have got so much on their plate.”
She produced a weekly and a monthly newsletter for faculty. The weekly newsletter was more an events-type newsletter, where the monthly one was more narrative and included more about different services available to faculty, not only in the department, but from other parts of the college as well, such as accessibility services or the library. One challenge she faced during the time we talked was converting these newsletters to be delivered via a cloud service. This involved a number of technical challenges, exemplifying the kind of activity that can end up taking more time than an outsider might think. She sometimes prepared the weekly newsletter over the weekend because she knew that she would not have time to work on it during the week. Additionally, her supervisor, the AVP, could be quite detail-focused, and also could ask her to drop what she was doing to focus on something else. When her supervisor was busy, things tended to quieten down for Erica.

One of the primary activities in the Spring was a series of 36 different faculty workshops offered over a couple of months and organized collaboratively by the Distance Learning department and the CTL. The sessions were recorded, and attendance was tracked, so that digital badges might be awarded to faculty. This created some time-consuming technical challenges, and I was able to facilitate rebuilding the attendance records in both my Zoom administrator role and Canvas system engineer role. This was not the only technical issue that I helped a participant resolve or address during the study. I also helped another college with an analysis of students who were taking short-session courses, that led to a significant reevaluation of the program those courses were part of. Another function Erica performed for these seminars was the management of the recordings and uploading them to Canvas.

The CTL invested time in both building advisory groups, and conducting surveys with faculty about the utility of what they offered, as well as what they might offer. Organizing and
conducting the surveys required coordinating with the college’s office of institutional effectiveness. Erica characterized this process overall as needs analysis and reporting, and spent significant time writing reports on the results of these surveys, and on the participation by faculty in the seminars. These reports would be validated with the advisory groups and passed up the administrative chain to the chief academic officer.

Digital badging was an initiative that originated in the Distance Learning department, but came with Erica when she transitioned to the CTL. This was a college initiative to provide only faculty (at least initially) with documented professional development certifications that they could include in their annual evaluations, print as certificates, and even share externally, for example, on LinkedIn. The college purchased a digital badging product that was integrated into the Canvas LMS. She had been responsible for administering that system, as well as building tracks and badges for the various tracks of the faculty seminars. A technical challenge she had faced in this process had been designing the badges, since she laid no claim to be a graphic designer. The distance learning department did have a graphic designer, but access to their time was subject to gatekeeping.

Erica’s expression about this was that it was yet another thing that she did not have the time to learn: “It’s a matter of creating those badges and I never find that I have enough time to just be creative, to design something. So that’s very frustrating for me...you know, everybody’s in the same boat.” The lack of time was a consistent issue for her: “There’s so many things that I would like to develop. But I don’t have the time necessarily to dive deep and actually do it.” One of her duties related to badging was to generate a ten-page standards report for her AVP and a digital badging committee to review, describing the technologies involved and identifying the procedures for awarding badges at the college.
It could be a struggle to engage with faculty. As she characterized it, “I have put myself out there every which way of saying I, you know, I can be your second eyes on your online course. Let me help you.” However, from her perspective, only a handful of faculty used her. Some would ask questions and respond enthusiastically to relatively simple suggestions, but, if I were at a university, it would be different. But it just, I don’t know what it is, but it is like beating my head against a rock to get faculty to understand the value that I can, that I have to give them.

When she did get a chance to look at some courses with faculty permission, she could be shocked: “I’m like, ‘Oh, my God!’ like, no wonder your students are having such a hard time finding stuff. I mean, because it’s horrible.” Unfortunately, in her mind, the faculty who needed the help did not know they needed it. “I think that’s where I’m falling short of helping faculty see a connection between well-developed online classes and student satisfaction.”

Once in a while a faculty member might be sent her way, sometimes unwillingly, by a dean, and ask to work on course objectives and outcomes. Her experience with outcomes and objectives specifically was that often faculty did not create assessable, measurable ones, and instead used generic words like “understand” and “know.” This connection between outcomes and assessment was one that emerged in a number of different contexts:

You can’t really assess them on understanding. I mean you can, but you have to choose an appropriate verb, action verb, like “describe” or “explain” or “produce” or “create.” And so that’s the type of thing that they need help with defining, you know, figuring out because you also have to think about assessing those outcomes.

When she was working with faculty directly, she recognized that sometimes she simply could do something for them, rather than “teaching them to fish,” because they were busy and may not
want to spend the time to learn some technology. She hoped that when she did this kind of thing for faculty, that they saw for themselves the benefit and invested more time in their courses. She believed that she could make their lives less complicated, and occasionally faculty would tell her that.

In addition to the certification course, she maintained a CTL course in Canvas. In my own experience, staff and administrators often use a learning management system as a mechanism to publish materials to a wider audience. This is often because access to publishing on the college web site and the college intranet is restricted, or publishing presents too many hurdles and takes too long to complete in those environments. This CTL course was separate from a similar Distance Learning course which she and her colleague created when they were in that department. She linked to that course from hers and tried to maintain the dividing lines in terms of responsibilities. She noted that she had to be cautious about offering anything that might be construed as Canvas training because that was considered a technical task that was the responsibility of the distance learning department. She collated materials and links to external resources around topics related to her role. During the study, for example, she developed a deep interest in AI and the implications for teaching and learning and consequently, created a section in the CTL course about that. More broadly, however, the site represented the services that the CTL offers, in addition to sets of resources on key topics such as accessibility, copyright, RSI, student engagement, and teaching strategies.

She noted that she had been discussing, with her former supervisor in Distance Learning, breaking the certification course into component parts. This might enable them to offer elements of the course separately to faculty who were in need of refreshing their training without them having to complete the full course. Some of those elements such as HyFlex instruction or RSI
were represented in the resource course which was available to faculty, but there were no assignments in that course and nothing in that course that could be required of faculty.

Another responsibility that she had kept, or had moved back into managing, was for a particular piece of software for discussion boards in online learning. She believed that it was more effective than the default discussion board in Canvas at engaging students, but like other initiatives and software purchases, after an initial enthusiasm, it had suffered from benign neglect, without internal support and encouragement to faculty. This paralleled Anne’s experience with the different software that she supported. Erica considered it her duty to advocate for, and push information about it out to faculty, but “we’ll probably pull it because we just don’t have, the numbers aren’t sustaining… And so, you know, and then, and then those faculty who are really using it are then left out in the cold.”

As noted, she missed her former colleague and the working relationship they had, “she would come up with all these ideas, and I’m like, ‘Oh, my God, that’s fantastic! Yes, let’s do that.’” She recently became more connected to other instructional designers within the state, which she felt exposed her to new perspectives and ideas. There was a committee of elearning and instructional designers that she was now serving on. The role had formerly been held by someone more technically oriented and Erica characterized the communication about the committee as non-existent prior to Erica taking on the role. She also noted that as a technical person the previous representative was not bringing an instructional designer’s sensibility to the role. In addition, she had joined a chat group of people involved in elearning across the system, which she relished.

I am so thankful to be on that Slack channel, I blow everybody up, but those are my people, you are my people, like, I, oh my god, thank gosh, I have that, and thank God for
[the Director of Teaching and Learning Technologies], and you know, giving me on there, and being a part of that. It’s just yeah, yeah, it’s hard, and I don’t have that other person like I don’t have a second me where I can sit down and go. Oh, my gosh! You know what? What should we do? Let’s collaborate.

Related to this, she expressed during our interviews that our discussions felt like counseling. I had shared my own experience of feeling that the instructional designer role can be quite isolating and lonely, and she agreed, “I don’t talk to anybody.”

It’s wild. All the questions that you ask me. I kind of stare at you with, deer in the headlights, because I don’t get asked these questions, and I don’t have a colleague to sit around and have conversation with, you know, of these topics, so it’s been great, having these meetings with you.

There had been a shift in both college course offerings and in work expectations since the pandemic was deemed to be over. Faculty were required to come back to campus and there was a focus on face-to-face classroom instruction at her college. She noted that the communication around the requirement to come back to campus had created a lot of pushback and misunderstandings from faculty.

She served on a governance committee related to online learning and technology at her college that researched technologies as faculty expressed interest in them. An example of the work of the committee was reviewing classroom equipment to support HyFlex instruction (where students can choose to attend any given class session in different modes), and aligning classroom equipment configurations with the state system’s definitions for HyFlex instruction. This included recommending support for faculty in terms of learning materials for those classrooms.
Other charges to that committee included supporting the adoption of open education resources and also facilitating the alignment of online courses with system attendance policy revisions.

Her interest in AI had been a little bit of a double-edged sword. Because she had been so active and had done some presentations, she was invited to present nationally to a professional organization. At the same time, she signed up for a meeting AI service, which was designed to join meetings which she had on her schedule, record them, and provide generated meeting notes and highlights. This automated service unintentionally attended and recorded a meeting without her awareness, including private faculty conversations after the meeting had effectively ended. Needless to say, this was not well received and she was chastised for it. During the semester she collaborated with faculty on a presentation about AI and ChatGPT, and also with another faculty member on theories of teaching and learning. Interestingly for someone in her role, she claimed to dislike presenting.

Another project she became involved in was with the college’s library services designing instruction to facilitate the standardization of tutoring across campus, as it was recentralized and was being made more coordinated across the multiple campuses of the college. This was in addition to redesigning the library’s OER training for faculty, which she described as “true instructional design” because it involved learning objectives with assessments tied to those objectives. This echoed the experiences of other instructional designers that they rarely do what they consider “true instructional design” in the sense that they learned, but also indicates the markers of what they consider to be instructional design, and provides some explanation for the popularity of the QM framework.

The CTL was also responsible for faculty technology spaces on each campus, which they had tried to staff with faculty. The faculty had to be formally interviewed, which took time, as
did the potential hiring of another instructional designer, which eventually failed to materialize. Erica had also rotated around the campuses in a week. These spaces were supposed to be locations where faculty could come for technical advice and support as need be. However, in her experience, few, if any faculty ever came to these spaces, or even made use of the spaces for other purposes like meetings.

She also expressed a desire to create what the system calls a “two-minute tech tip” for the elearning group. These videos were shared to all faculty across the system and had been well-received, but there was an ongoing need for more of these “tech tips.” This was one of those things that she had ideas for, but did not have the time, because, as she said, “I just don’t have the time to sit down and like, bang out like a two minute because it won’t take me two minutes! It’ll take me…. [trails off].” Reading between the lines and based on my own experience, a well-produced effective 2-minute training video can take half a day to produce even if relatively elementary.

Most weeks included her attending a webinar or two for her own professional development or for research purposes. A common activity was evaluating technologies and services. For example, one week she was looking at a YouTube channel as a way to deliver videos to faculty, and what the implications and challenges of such a channel would be. This might include things like what visibility was best suited for videos, but also making sure to use a YouTube Brand account for the channel which is a special kind of account shared between multiple people. Another week, she was looking at the Turnitin AI tool which was designed to detect student use of AI in their papers.

This highlights one of the roles of instructional designers more broadly, which is as a bridge between information technology groups and academics or business groups within
institutions. Instructional designers often have the curiosity and inclination to experiment with and investigate new technologies (such as AI), and also an ability to explain those technologies to those who might make policy or decisions about them. Instructional designers can also become advocates for specific educational technologies and approaches, which can contrast with some information technologists who may not get involved in advocating for specific technologies and focus instead on execution and support of technologies. This is, of course, often a point of contention, because instructional technologists recognize and come into conflict with the implicit value judgements of putatively agnostic technology decisions.

Alex

Alex was a former K12 teacher, who in addition to her duties as an instructional designer, continued to teach as an adjunct for the college. She worked at a mid-size college that was growing its enrollment against broader trends and aggressively competing with a larger nearby college. At the time we spoke the college president was very actively supporting the work of the instructional design department. In contrast to other colleges of a similar size, her college could be characterized as actively supporting a role for instructional design. While good-humored and patient, she did not tolerate fools gladly, and could be direct and outspoken.

Alex was happy to talk and laugh, and often had a story. She was enthusiastic about technology and had a variety of Zoom backgrounds. She had turned a hobby unrelated to work into an unusual professional occupation that had her spending time with and mentoring current and former students. Her custom background for our first interview was a cozy wooden room with a fire burning and snow outside, but was typically different in every interview we had.

Her email signature contained a number of badges and icons indicating her various certifications, including QM and the responsibilities that she had, such as an administrator for the
Zoom web conferencing platform, and for the college’s syllabus management tool which allows administrators to standardize components of course syllabi, enforce templates, and publish syllabi for public consumption. She was also a Canvas certified educator. She was always experimenting with new technologies and tools, whether it was TikTok or ChatGPT or something else. She characterized it as messing around, playing, and being willing to break things sometimes.

Like other instructional designers in the study, she was quick to note that actual instructional design (as characterized by the application of a model, and the use of objectives to guide assessments) did not occupy that much of her time: “I don’t know, and that’s the other thing is, you’re going to find out that instructional design is just a tiny bit of my day or my week.”

A driving concern of her department when we were meeting was a long-term college project oriented around the delivery of online courses in a short-session format, i.e., compressing the standard 15-week session down to seven or five weeks, so that students take fewer courses at any one time, and also complete their degree within one calendar year. In this study, this is referred to as the Accelerate program. The members of the program met weekly for a couple of hours in a Zoom session which faculty might turn up to as needed, but otherwise operated as a confidential space for the group to talk through issues, often, but not always, related to instructional design and the project. There was a sense in which this space was a safe space for venting frustrations, often about faculty, and she considered this function to be important to the group. The work of this group is documented more extensively in the “Vegas” part of this chapter.
One of the things that I will say is that everybody needs to have a safe space, safe
whatever. So, we use our Zoom, we use Zoom chat for our little department. And you
know, and that is it, it, you have to have a safe space. And I don’t think people
understand the value of having a safe space.

She identified a number of contexts in which this kind of secured space was important to groups
that she was part of, and noted that if people were not provided with those kinds of spaces, they
would find or create one. In the case of the instructional design group, it was a place to talk about
faculty personalities and behaviors.

And you, you, just sometimes you just, you know, you, [pause]…and Barry Evans is an
idiot, I mean. He will tell you 9,000 times that he’s been, he, “Well, when I was at
Stanford.” Well, you know what, buddy, you aren’t at Stanford anymore, and if you make
one more course copy in your course that you’ve done 4 times, we’re probably gonna just
wipe the whole thing out again. But anyway, he tells us all the time that he was, and I
wish you will go look at his profile. And when you know when you click on your account
in Canvas, he has his whole CV in there.

This way of speaking about faculty was not unique to Alex, and was a source of humor rather
than anger. In practice, when working with faculty she and the other instructional designers were
supportive, kind, and respectful of faculty concerns. This discussion is revisited later in this
chapter.

You can’t avoid, stupid is a lot like death. You can’t avoid death, and you can’t avoid
stupid. It’s like, yeah, that’s it, that’s faculty right there.

Issues would arise out of these sessions, or in other ways, which she and the others had to
address. For example, a student complaint might lead them to having to review a faculty
member’s course and raise an issue with their dean, or they might have to review all of a faculty
member’s recorded videos for FERPA violations, or they might review all of a department’s
courses for compliance with college policies around distance learning. In addition to the
meetings related to the QM processes, faculty might be referred to the department by deans or
department chairs. These incidents could generate copious emails, but might also prompt the
creation of new policy and procedures to avoid similar situations in the future.

This could be challenging. She believed that “faculty have way too much pull” which
contradicted what administrators claim about the college being focused on students. Outside of
the accelerated program, faculty could say, “Well, I don’t want to do that” and they would not
have to. She connected this both to student complaints and the need for master courses.

This is why you need templated courses, so that when adjuncts get hired, who really
don’t have any clue what they’re doing, they don’t create a disaster for students. Because
to me, when you get student complaints, the first thing they do is they go right to Rate
My Professor. And they write a horrible review. They’re not going to put it on the
evaluation in the course. They’re just going to go to Rate My Professor and all of the
students are going to tell you the first place they go when they sign up for courses is Rate
My Professor.

She believed that her college was “trying to make faculty accountable for what students should
be learning,” by collecting data on grades, instructors, and course delivery modes. She wondered
whether this could be true of other colleges which were less well staffed. She expressed the view
that they probably were not checking on student learning.
At her own college, she was particularly infuriated by a faculty member who changed the templated courses that they had been given to teach from. In her view, the courses were ready to teach, and teaching meant communicating with students.

In my opinion, that’s basically insubordination. You’ve been handed a course to teach. You’ve been given all of the content. You are to personalize it, and you are to spend your time communicating with the students, providing them feedback, and teaching what’s in the course, not adding additional things. And you didn’t ask, you did it. And now we all have to create a policy because you’re a dumbass.

Alex worked as a K12 teacher for a couple of decades before coming to this role, so, in her words, “I had the teaching hands down.” She got her master’s degree in technology and curriculum in 2004, “on a dial up no less…which was that was before instructional design was even, but hardly a thing.” She then worked for another college teaching online, which she identified as part of her learning process and being substantially self-taught as a designer of online instruction, on top of the experience that she had in the classroom before that.

There’s a lot of instructional design that for me that I’ve learned along the way, kind of self-taught, but the basics of it come from teaching in a classroom, and understanding how students learn and understanding students and what motivates students. And that, I think, is the there’s the bigger picture of what an instructional designer does, and how you can get the students to stay engaged and be engaged to learn the material. That’s the whole point of them actually taking a class. Not just for the college to make money.

This was an intriguing characterization because it in effect describes the same thing that many faculty who are not instructional designers do. This seems to imply that instructional design is a set of techniques, and a specific attitude to teaching. The significance of attitude
emerged as she also drew a contrast between the work of instructional design and the approach that “normal tech” people take to problems.

You can’t be a tech person… that’s the one thing that an instructional designer has to be able to do is, it’s the flexible piece. It’s never going to be a one-way path for anything.

It’s never, it’s never a one size fits all.

She also identified the bridging function earlier described with Erica characterizing it as translation in both directions, translating technology for faculty, but also translating faculty concerns for “normal tech” people.

Hiring processes were a not insignificant part of her work, although obviously on an intermittent basis, and the college culture often supported not hiring when they did not perceive a fit. As an example, the new instructional designer took three failed searches and a year to hire. A major part of the concern was hiring people who had more than technology skills, but in parallel, part of the struggle was an unwillingness by others to advertise the position as remote. When it was advertised in that way, they were able to hire someone who lived in another state. Remote work was a bone of contention, but since she was administrative faculty not classified staff, she was not compelled to come to campus, and she drew a line in the sand on the topic:

I don’t have an office anymore. They’ve taken all of my offices, and when people started coming back on campus, I basically said, look, I have worked from home for almost 3 years. I work longer days and weekends. If you tell me that I have to drive 2 hours and spend 10 hours a week on the road, then I’m not touching my computer when I leave the office. It will stay in the office, and there will be no evening, no weekend, no extra, no, no, no, no other help. I’m done. “Okay, never mind, then you then you’re good. Thanks.” Because otherwise there’s a big old letter resignation typed.
She was also asked to serve on searches for other roles such as a key Dean search, in part it appeared for her willingness to draw lines and say “no” even when others were not. That hiring process had also seen three failed searches, but she was not willing to hire someone simply because others appeared to be tired of interviewing people.

She served on a system-wide elearning committee and also had attended meetings to which that group was advisory, such as the system vice-presidents and the technology advisory group. This could be exhausting because the committee she served on had been quite effective, but she was concerned that it would not be in the future due to the lack of others willing or able to step up. Of those who she considered good candidates, she characterized most as overloaded with duties with no time to contribute. This was a theme that arose in other contexts, such as when she and a handful of other instructional designers from different colleges developed a faculty training course to address a policy change. From her perspective, other colleges did not support the effort, and as a result were not owed access to the resulting course. Her role also plugged her into policy discussions around topics such as publisher subscriptions for students and AI, and also meant that she was involved in procurement processes, reviewing formal Requests for Proposals for software solutions. She did not have a lot of faith in many leaders in these areas however:

…it’s really funny. Because when you sit in these meetings with these people who are so far removed from the classroom (VPs) and some deans, it is utterly amazing to me that they listen to faculty like they speak nothing but the Gospel truth. And it’s like, y’all buying swampland from in Arizona from them too? Because they could evidently sell it to y’all.
Because she was passionate about students and serving them well, she would often push others on issues she considered important, and become involved in things outside of what might be thought of as the role of an instructional designer. As an example, she became very adept with Zoom, and as a result wound up facilitating college meetings, and having a Zoom administrator role (“Don’t be good at anything, because if you’re good at it, you’ll get stuck at continuing to do it”). This arose out of her frustration when things were not done that could be done, or in her mind, should be done. She admitted that she would take things on, because if she did it, she knew it would be done right.

This in fact, mapped to my own experience, as someone peripherally involved with Zoom, who became a de facto expert and administrator of the system, because it was suffering from (in my opinion) otherwise benign neglect, a lack of responsiveness to concerns and requests, and not being used to the extent it should have been. This neglect and lack of responsiveness was, in my opinion, impacting the experience of faculty and students which was a key motivation in my stepping forward. Similarly, she became involved in getting an accessibility software product working correctly, castigating the IT department about iPads that were not deployed, and pushing IT staff to get some expensive nursing software working that had been bought and paid for, but was not working.

I love the fact that, you know, people are like, “Oh, we’re so busy. Tech services is so busy. We’re just overwhelmed.” Do not say that. Nope, nobody wants to hear you say that everybody is busy. Just shut up and do your job.

…
Everybody is busy. In my mind, I understand everybody is busy, but I don’t want to hear you tell me you’re too busy. You’re not too busy. Everybody is too busy. But you have to figure out how to. You have to figure out how to prioritize.

Looking at her calendar, she regularly attended webinars, and presented webinars (for example on video editing, or on AI and ChatGPT in education), and had ongoing meetings about work-based learning, the LMS, departmental office hours, with the IT department, and about the student advising platform. She would also say that she spent a fair amount of her time putting out fires. She was reluctant to be cast as a “jack of all trades” however, because she would, I think, characterize herself as both a “jack of all trades” and a “master of (at least) one.”

As with Erica, Alex became very interested in learning about AI and ChatGPT in particular. She attended webinars, conducted training herself, and experimented with a wide variety of services, and found it to be suited to supporting her work in a number of ways. Of course, ChatGPT crept into the offerings of several vendors, including the discussion board vendor, which was a feature that she and the workforce instructional designer were going to beta test for the company. She was uninterested in the conversation around students cheating with AI, seeing it as an unstoppable fact of life, and was most interested in ways it would change the way people work.

Because of her long experience with students and with administration, she performed that translation and communication function that other instructional designers also do. For example, she was the trusted, but informal, academic advisor of a specific group of students and would frequently reframe in more practical terms some of the more arcane and idiosyncratic language of the institution. She had a strong belief in her students’ intelligence and creativity, but believed that the college often did not speak to them in ways they could understand easily. She would
advise them on courses to take, for example, framing the short session courses as “bingeing” a
course as they might a television series. She advised them all to stop taking fifteen-week courses
because they were “not successful.” She also had the ability to translate the requests of less
technically informed administrators into technical requirements that made sense to the
instructional technologist and other information technology staff.

Her versatility and willingness to learn different technologies means that when it came to
working with others, particularly faculty, her technical facility was the way into conversations
about instructional design. In our discussions, this became characterized as instead of
conversations about “how to do something” having them about “why to do something.” This was
common for many instructional designers in their professional development function, where the
“how to” was a way to get to conversations about appropriate and instructionally sound choices
about “when to” use a tool:

So those are when you use the teachable moments. So, understanding the technology
piece is what gets my foot in the door for them to, for me to be able to say to them, “Hey,
why don’t you try doing this?”

…

So, a lot of times, them breaking technology, or just being the village idiots that they are,
allows me to give them good instructional advice or examples of things they should be
doing, as far as design goes, without them making an appointment to ask for help.

She continued to teach as an adjunct. In her own courses she was constantly revising. On
one occasion she was assigned a course at the last minute and “had to build the plane while it
was flying,” but then went back later to revise the course and assignments. One of her design
goals was to keep students in the LMS rather than redirecting them to external sites and publisher
resources. This was in part because she thought it disrupted the seamlessness of the experience. She felt that she had the freedom to be creative within the constraints of the standard template that they used. Her own positive experience taking courses at an online institution which took the same standardizing approach was part of her justification for this approach at the college. “You just had to worry about what you were supposed to be doing in the course and not where things were.”

In addition to teaching as an adjunct, she at one point served as a different college’s interim LMS administrator when their previous one left. Having an extra job (or more) was not unusual in her own life experience, and there were certainly other instructional designers in the system who also adjunct, and might take on jobs and contractual work outside of their colleges. Curiously, this was something that she and others in her department complained about when it came to faculty.

I mean, I don’t know any K12 teacher who doesn’t have multiple jobs. Yeah. They all, I mean that’s just the nature of working in public education. You just have multiple jobs. I mean. There were times when I had 4 or 5 jobs at a time…I worked all day long at school, and then I would teach aerobics classes at night. And I would adjunct at one college. So, and then I did piano lessons and harp lessons. Yeah. And had my daughter. Had a kid.

Even though she no longer worked quite so many jobs, she did continue to work outside of normal hours, and was perpetually busy. She was unlikely to turn down opportunities. For example, at a regional conference, she presented four times on different topics. She characterized herself as constantly fighting fires, having no time, and unable to take even a week’s vacation. This was in part a peril of working from home, in that the office was always a few feet away, and
there was always work to be done. She enjoyed working from home and solving people’s problems, but sometimes just had to leave the house in order to not work. Her work ethic she attributed to her mother, but it had been challenged at times.

A constant source of tension for her was what she called the “alphabet letters” after her name. Despite the fact that she had a master’s degree, many years of experience, and continued to teach herself, she had been told that her views were not as valuable because she was “not faculty” and did not have a PhD, “the correct number of alphabet letters after your name.” At that point, she noted that she could just have taken the paycheck doing the bare minimum, but her status in the college changed when she became friends with one of the deans, who had since become a vice-president. That dean did not make an issue of Alex’s academic status and was willing to listen to her. The second turning point was the hiring of the instructional designer who was now the interim dean. This appeared to be one of those moments when things could have gone a different way, but that person had been very effective in building the credibility and influence of the department. It should be noted that he did have a PhD.

If there is an impression of Alex as someone who was set in their ways, that would be incorrect, not only because of her willingness to learn technologies, but also because of her willingness to consider new ideas around instruction. For example, when I was talking to the instructional design group, they were engaging with the idea of ungrading (Kohn & Blum, 2020), in part driven by a book club sponsored by the Quality Matters organization. She was herself intrigued and looking to redesign at least one of her courses using the idea. Similarly, she consistently stressed the importance of variety in teaching and meeting students where they were, in terms of the different ways in which they might learn: “as an instructional designer my job is, whatever the program it is that is being offered, it needs to be made in a way that any student can
be successful.” In many ways, she did not care how students got to their goals, as long as they were able to. Similarly, she was not hard set on a college education as the solution to all problems, recognizing that in its current form, it did not suit many people.

Alex articulated the purpose of instructional design as “helping students” and not about faculty per se, but about helping faculty understand how students learn. She saw faculty, by virtue of their own educational experiences and backgrounds as less aware of what the variety of students needed in order to learn. The following extended quote was her own summary of how she saw the purpose of instructional design and how she considered faculty thought about courses, particularly with regard to the different requirements for building online courses.

But the purpose of instructional design is to help faculty understand how students learn and how to design courses that are best to develop the students’ knowledge and content and make it palatable. And so, I think the purpose of the instructional designer in working with faculty is to help them with their understanding of how students are learning. Because they are the content area, the content, subject matter experts, they’re the SMEs. But how they learn is not how our students learn now, and I’ll be honest with you, even how they learn isn’t how their peers probably learned.

And nobody’s probably ever sat down, and really explained that to them, or had an in-depth conversation of why it’s important, why is universal design important, and how does it improve the students...and how does it help all students, and not just those who may or may not have a disability. And that conversation is something that faculty either, not that they don’t want to hear it, but oftentimes they pretend not to have time for it, because it is a lot of work. And it’s uncomfortable for them, because it’s out of their wheelhouse, because it’s not how they learn, and they want to teach how they were
taught because that’s easier. And the online learning space is a place where many of our faculty have no experience in being the student, and so they try to make it their face-to-face experience in an online world. And we both, we all know that that just does not work.

However, in order for faculty to put credence in instructional designers, she asserted that they needed support from their administration to “acknowledge their expertise,” and that was not always present. One strategy her department took to address this was to present at national conferences to gain an implicit “stamp of approval” and build credibility for the instructional design function.

**What Happens in Vegas**

At one of the colleges, the one where Alex worked, there was a group of people responsible for a specific program of courses offered online in short sessions of five to seven weeks (referred to as Accelerate in this study). This program was new and had only been in existence since the beginning of the pandemic. The program was structured with designed tracks such that students could complete an associate degree in only one academic year rather than the standard two-year community college degree, by taking these short session courses simultaneously and back-to-back, and in a prescribed sequence.

All courses that were part of these tracks and part of the program had to pass a QM review by outside peer reviewers in order to be offered. Those courses were then considered master templates, which should not be substantially altered when faculty taught using them. Some faculty had made significant changes, and this had been a bone of contention. If a master course needed to be altered beyond a certain threshold, for example, due to a new textbook, or new outcomes dictated by an external agency, then the course was required to be recertified
through the QM process. These master courses were often structurally similar to one another, with modules aligned with weeks, and those modules containing standardized specific elements, typically including an introductory overview page, readings and other instructional content, discussion, assignments, and a summary page at the end of the module.

This accelerated program was staffed by Alex, the instructional designer who was a participant in this study, as well as others. This included an instructional technologist who in addition to their regular LMS duties was responsible for the technical support of the Canvas system, and the technical implementation of the accelerated program, creating courses, and adding reviewers. A second instructional designer was hired into the department and was subsequently serving as an interim dean. That person was fulfilling that role, in addition to instructional design responsibilities and program responsibilities. It should be noted in passing that interim positions and responsibilities were not unusual with participants in the study, and this overloading of roles is one explanation for why people were always reporting that they and others were busy with too much work to do. Another instructional designer who was hired in the workforce side of the college also took part in the program, facilitating coordination and communication between the credit and non-credit parts of the college. For example, there was discussion of students taking cybersecurity courses under the non-credit workforce area, but connecting those students and the certifications they earned in the non-credit area to this credit program. Other related conversations were about credit for prior learning, micro-credentials, and badging which can occur in both credit and non-credit domains.

During the time that I was observing this group’s meetings, a third instructional designer was hired for diversity, equity, and inclusion responsibilities, and they also became part of this group. The person responsible for the accelerated program overall was a faculty member who
was an associate professor, the co-chair of the of a couple of academic programs, and chair of the Accelerate program. In addition to this, this faculty member owned their own business. In fact, having another job in addition to their regular position was not unusual in this group, since three of them also taught as adjuncts (one of them nine hours a semester), and at least one of them had a personal consulting business (in addition to teaching as an adjunct). Lastly, the college had an advisor dedicated to the program, although she did not typically take part in the regular meetings that I attended.

In addition to regular communication in chats and email, this group met weekly on Zoom for a couple of hours. During this time, faculty involved with the program were welcome to drop in and ask questions about what they were working on. Typically, faculty drop-ins were at the beginning of these sessions, and only for ten to fifteen minutes. Questions were typically about the requirements of QM and the course revision process. Outside of this faculty participation, the group socialized, but the primary focus was on tasks related to the program, and this time was an important touch point with the faculty member leading the program. I was able to attend eight of these sessions and primarily observe, although I was occasionally brought into discussions where my expertise might apply. For example, they asked if I could identify students who were taking short session courses, but were not identified by the college as being affiliated with the program. I wrote a database query against the student information system, which to the surprise of the group identified hundreds of students who fit this criteria, who, in their terms, had self-advised into the program without the group’s knowledge.

This identification led to a number of implications about what success means both in program terms, but also for students. The group wanted to both recruit these newly identified students into the program in order to support them with advising and in order to bolster the
perceived success of the program. However, they also did not want to recruit those who might affect perceptions of the success of the program: “We need to weed out the ones that should not be there…because if we’ve got students in there but are going to have low success rates in [the program], that’s going to skew our numbers for the worse.” The other implication read into this identification was that students did want shorter session courses, which contradicted what the group was hearing from some in the advising area of the college. As one of the group pointed out, these students “aren’t even talking to advisors” likening the challenge to when they survey students, but only get responses from certain kinds of students rather than the ones whose answers they really need. This also revealed something about the way they thought about these less visible students.

…the students that are responding to them [the surveys] are the students that are already in Canvas that are already paying attention. We’re not talking about the students that are just taking one or two classes every semester just because they’re slowly working on it and trying to do the best they can.

This suggested to the group that one model might be to prevent students from self-advising and blocking them from enrolling unless they talked to an advisor, but this ran into the college’s prescription of never creating “a barrier to enrollment” and in turn the dilemma of having either “success or enrollment.” This tension between enrollment which drives funding, and success which appeared to be defined in terms of completion, is a perennial one.

I also wrote some code to generate summary outlines of the content and assignments of a set of courses in the LMS to facilitate the group reviewing those courses for compliance with college policies. This surveillance and compliance work marked the work of this group at this college as quite different from other colleges, where compliance with policy was completely a
matter for deans and program chairs. This group did report their findings to deans and program chairs for the purpose of enforcement, but the level of their involvement was unusual. This was possible because of their role in organizing and being accountable for the accelerated program of courses, as opposed to other regular online courses.

“Okay, alright, here’s what I need right now. We need to pull up every single course that in that department that’s being taught right now…I’m making a spreadsheet right now…But this is my attempt at being proactive rather than us discovering crap, and then figuring out how to figure out how to fix crap. I want to go ahead and know where the crap is right now, not wait for it. For a student to be like, my course doesn’t work. And then we realize, oh, yeah, that’s true, your course does not work.”

Often at the institutions in this study, deans and program chairs had neither the time, inclination, nor even permission to look at what faculty were doing in the LMS unless there were complaints from students. The role of student complaints is not insignificant, since they often seemed to trigger intervention and action by college leadership, but this impulse to identify “crap” also sprang out of a desire for courses to function in certain ways for students taking them. This appeared to be as much a matter of comprehension and clarity for students in terms of what they needed to do, and when in the course they needed to do things. This clarity of course flow was a key value for instructional designers in the construction of quality courses.

That aside, the very existence of the group, and more than a solitary instructional designer at any college was unusual and due to explicit leadership support for their work, as the college leadership saw shorter sessions and online learning as ways to compete with other community colleges, particularly those geographically nearby, and also with private institutions with high online enrollment such as Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU). It should also
be noted that outside of this specific accelerated, short session program at the college, there were no compliance reviews or quality requirements for online courses, nor for regular courses with a presence in the LMS. In their words, “we can do a lot more with this program because we’re allowed…we’re given the access, and we’re given, I won’t say the responsibility, but the freedom to be able to make design decisions and say, ‘This is terrible.’” The president of the college had explicitly stated however that she saw the program model as the way forward for other courses at the college.

“He is a jerk.”

One of the features of the group’s discussions was that they would explicitly call out certain comments as “Vegas” in the sense that what was said would not be shared outside of the group. I was allowed to be part of those discussions, primarily listening as they tended to be about specific individuals, personalities, and departments at the college, and the interactions that members of the group had with them. In my separate conversations with the instructional designer, she emphasized that in her view everyone should have their own confidential space to vent with friends about work and the challenges of daily life. There are lines of tension throughout this study in terms of the visibility of work, trust, surveillance, and the need for these confidential, less emotionally constrained conversations.

Quality Matters

The topic of this dissertation is not Quality Matters, although the organization and its standards featured in conversations with all the instructional designers and some faculty. Clearly the name of the organization can be read in several ways, not least that quality is important, but also that the organization is concerned with issues of quality. However, “quality” itself is a nebulous term somewhat like “success” in that you can read into it whatever you wish. It
functions like a mirror of desire, but these ambiguities work to everyone’s advantage by enclosing a wide spectrum of meanings if not of practice. What is clear is that instructional designers saw the QM processes as articulating a professional practice of instructional design, and as a result, the certifications and association served to put a stamp of professionalism on the role of instructional designers in colleges. These processes give instructional designers a language that frames for faculty and administrators what instructional design can be, and where instructional design can fit in institutional hierarchies.

This particular college was alone in using external peer reviewers for their quality assurance process, i.e., faculty from other colleges. The others used their own faculty as peer reviewers, while using the QM tools to manage the process. A QM paid membership entitles a college to use the rubric and online tools that the organization has created to facilitate conducting the peer review process. They will also recruit peer reviewers and manage the external review for an extra fee, although this college chose to contact and manage the peer reviewers themselves, nevertheless using the online tools provided by virtue of their membership. Other colleges in the study were also QM members and used the same online tools. The argument made at this college was that external reviewers were more dispassionate whereas internal reviewers would be reluctant to criticize their colleagues.

In order to be a peer reviewer and in fact to take part in the process, the college required faculty to take and pass the APPQMR course, which is an introductory course that educates participants on the fundamentals of the core rubric. They had found that this reduced misunderstandings about the focus of the rubric and the process more generally. Faculty received a stipend to develop courses, but only received that stipend when the course was finished and passed the QM review. It should be noted that in Summer 2023, the QM rubric was revised,
partly to include new federal requirements for RSI. This kind of work was noted by Alex to be a benefit of outsourcing the rubric to experts rather than trying to develop their own, which they would not have the time to do properly and would probably end up as “another failed initiative.”

Some college review processes were put on hold as a result of the QM rubric revision, and the group had elected not to conduct any reviews in the Fall semester, waiting until the Spring when they would have had time to take on board the changes and apply them. Some faculty expressed anxiety about elements of the peer review, but the program group members would take pains to reassure them that it was an iterative certification process, and that they (the group) would pre-screen courses before submitting them for review, in order to catch any potential issues early on.

Alex noted that when faculty took the APPQMR course and actually undertook a review, the process tended to set their minds at ease.

We had 33 reviews one semester, and all of the faculty came back with the same thing. “I didn’t think it would be, I didn’t think it would go as well as it did. I’m very glad that I did it. Yes, it was hard. Yes, it was a lot of work, but the feedback that I received was very helpful.” For the most part. There were a couple that were…we won’t use those reviewers again, but that’s you know, that’s, I mean, 33 reviews. That’s not bad. Not a bad return on investment.

Members of the group, and other participants at other colleges, were aware that faculty initially identified QM as a coercive and punitive process rather than what instructional designers characterized as a collaborative and iterative one, and in faculty interviews, faculty often expressed that they had initially misunderstood the function of QM. In fact, every single college in the study had experience of a failed QM implementation, typically about ten or so years previously. In those failures, instructional designers and some academic leaders had seized on
QM as a way to enforce compliance with the standards and met strong resistance from faculty who saw the process as punitive and infringing on their academic freedom. Subsequent efforts reframed the QM process as collaborative, focused on revision, and improvement, and were implemented less aggressively in terms of college compliance.

Faculty

“Are they the dumbest motherfuckers that ever walked?”

This narrative has begun to circle around issues of trust, the mutual visibility of work, and empathy. Like so many people who work for community colleges, many of the participants were passionate about their mission and the students they served. As noted, many community college students live lives of precarity and vulnerability. Instructional designers may sit at a place where many different functions of the college overlap, and bridge technical understanding with an understanding of a wide variety of college processes, and so feel that they have particular insight into student challenges. It is not wrong to say that they can be passionate about their work.

This takes us back to the very beginning of this dissertation and a question asked in the first pages, which is what produces the passion, frustration, and occasional anger expressed by both instructional designers and faculty.

“No, I’m not I’m not free to call you…. You can respond to email like everybody else that is in higher ed. You can’t do that, and you don’t need to work here.”

One of the dimensions of the tension lies in facility with technology. Typically, instructional designers were comfortable with the technologies of teaching and easily adapted to changes. That is not to say that faculty were not also capable of being comfortable and
sophisticated with technologies, but perhaps that what marked out an instructional designer was being someone comfortable in the bridge between technology and instruction.

“Y’all yo, yo, yo! This dumb ass…there are eight ‘Start Here’ modules…this is not rocket science.”

From an instructional designer perspective, the old saw that faculty are not trained to teach was sometimes conflated with their lack of sophistication with the LMS and with computer technology more generally. As alluded to earlier, if instructional designers are to be considered experts in teaching online through an LMS, a curious intermixing of content, activity, feedback, technology, and what it means to teach emerges.

It was not unusual to hear variations on “faculty members are not course designers, they are subject matter experts, and so they can do content, but they can’t design a course.” Similarly, comments on problematic courses that faculty constructed included comments like “Look at this mess!” and “Like, at this point, I want to get every single one of these instructors in a room and tell them here is your crash course in how to teach because apparently y’all missed it?” This last comment in particular was revealing of the conflation of online teaching with the content and structure of an online course. Faculty in this construction should provide content, by which instructional designers meant documents, presentations, videos, and assignments. Separately, faculty were responsible for feedback and grading, which was where much of the teaching function seemed to be meant to occur. Instructional designers, however, could be responsible for course structure, the student experience of the content, and ensuring consistent relationships between course outcomes, course objectives, content, and activities. In this view, a good course is an experience and a structure around content and assignments. The following snippets demonstrate these ideas:
“She’s telling me again that I’m mistaken, that her [online] course doesn’t need content and doesn’t need to be published, even though it started Monday. People just don’t understand.”

“Her classes are not teachable at the moment.”

“Can I assume the other three are correct also?”

“No, because she’s a village idiot.”

“We will go ahead and give them five [modules in the course template]. And say, please put information in the appropriate spaces, [sarcastically] because I know duplication can be difficult.”

“We actually put a YouTube video on how to create a course schedule because we have faculty who don’t know how.”

“You just have to look at that at the faculty perspective, from the perspective of our faculty are stupid.”

As an outsider, the sting in the tail to the various venting about faculty, was that on occasion, typically after the venting, one of the group noted a particular hardship a particular faculty member had experienced. For example, after a prolonged discussion of something a faculty member had done that was not in line with expectations, someone noted that they had recently had two strokes after four rounds of COVID, which had affected their memory and cognitive processing. A department whose members presented particular challenges had had a rotating set of interim chairs over multiple years. For another faculty member who had been discussed as being difficult, someone noted that they had not been the same since their child died from a drug overdose a couple of years previously.

It is difficult to know how to discuss this. A close relative of mine lost their child to
suicide over eight years ago, and the impact on them continues to be deep and long-lasting. One is also reminded of the aphorism to “be kind, for everyone is fighting some kind of battle” ascribed to John Watson (O’Toole, 2010). Members of the group displayed a degree of compassion and empathy for these faculty, but there seemed to be some kind of line when it came to the workplace. In the workplace people needed to perform to a certain standard regardless of what might be happening in their personal lives: “it doesn’t mean he gets to not do his job.” It is not clear what were the logic and the institutional structures that supported this.

My own experience has been that people can forget what it is like to struggle. People who are comfortable and further along in their career, which I would count myself among, are a long way from the stresses and strains of, for example, parenthood, particularly single parenthood. Younger employees can be emotionally, physically, and financially stressed in ways that some older employees are not, or some that have not faced the same challenges. There is a connection here to income inequality, wealth inequality, the necessity of dual incomes, the lack of leisure, the lack of vacation, the lack of pensions, and the precarity of jobs in the modern American economy. The attitude that Alex expressed in her one-on-one interviews is not uncommon. From her point of view, she worked multiple jobs as a single parent because she was brought up with a work ethic, and she did what she had to do. We can contrast this with Anne, who had a young
child, a fully employed partner. and had made the intentional decision not to have a “side gig.”

Alex described the person who lost their child as someone who used to be a good, reliable worker, who became something else when they started teaching (at the time their child passed away). He used to be “Johnny on the spot…you got an answer. You got things fixed.” However, now that he was teaching, she described him as having lost his work ethic. Her analysis was that “he saw that he can get away with it…three or four years into teaching, he’s like, this is the cushiest job I could ever possibly want to do. So now I’m going to do the bare minimum. And that’s literally what they’re all doing.”

**Figure 1**

*Invisible Work*

“He’s like, this is the cushiest job I could ever possibly want to do. So now I’m going to do the bare minimum. And that’s literally what they’re all doing.”

Instructional designer about faculty

“Students try to see if [I am] going to be awake at four in the morning [and I am].”

Faculty
This frame was used to characterize many faculty, that they did not want to work, that they only did the things that were going to be measured, i.e., faculty asking “What are you looking to see if I am doing?” rather than “Are you going to see if I’m actually doing my job?” This focus on the measure is, of course, the curse of surveillance (“Goodhart’s Law,” 2022). The instructional technologist connected this back to the nebulous concept of student success: “…there’s no understanding of the reason why we want you to do these things is because it leads to student success.” Another instructional designer picked up the thread that faculty became lazy because “they’ve seen what other people have been able to do and other people have been able to get away with.”

Similarly, Alex indicated that they got frustrated with faculty and other staff “because we’re doing your job and our job, and we don’t have time for that.” In terms of specific faculty members, she noted that “he really doesn’t deserve the kindness that we often give him” and “I don’t get paid enough for you to treat me like shit.”

Curiously, this group expressed their own need for empathy and understanding from others that they did not always appear to extend to others, which seems like a classic case of fundamental attribution error (L. Ross, 2018). When collaborating on composing an email to a faculty member, there was this exchange (with no sense of the irony of the comments), not that many minutes after a vigorous discussion complaining about the tone of an email that the group had received.

“It doesn’t sound snarky at all.”

“Well, you know, people like to read tone. People do like to, you know, assume tone.”

There is an intersection of this discussion with what some characterize as the limitations of both online learning and remote working. A lot of the communication can be through
mediums which lack context, particularly email. Paradoxically, the boom in synchronous
learning through video conferencing which does have more of that context, and its own
limitations (Smithers et al., 2022), was being deprecated at the colleges in favor of asynchronous
learning. At the same time, some managers and leaders were urging an end to remote work,
because they contended that something ineffable happened in physical environments that could
not, or did not happen in online and remote work. Bear in mind that remote work and working
from home was a point of contention for many participants in the study with them desiring to
work from home and them noting that they rarely saw any particular benefit from being in the
office. It was also an issue for faculty who were being compelled to come back to campus, but in
the view of the instructional designers, appeared to be seeking to teach online in order to not
have to spend time on campus.

Control

One response to perceived faculty weaknesses was to seek to increase control. As it
stood, the template courses used by the program were not locked down, so faculty were able to
add, change, and adjust them, often to the frustration of the instructional designers. In the same
vein, sometimes faculty did not do those things that they were supposed to do, such as substitute
their own personal text in boilerplate components of courses. Faculty could therefore do too
much or too little to a course.

“Well, wouldn’t it be nice if they couldn’t hit publish until those things [were done].”
“If they don’t have certain requirements completed, you can’t publish the course.”
“How many adjunct courses I go into and there’s just red text there.”

Staffing and Adjunct Faculty
Another proposed solution that would increase the control over the course delivery in the program was to hire adjunct faculty directly under the program, rather than through academic departments. This received an ambiguous response from the college leadership, on the one hand indicating that they were fully supportive of this approach, but on the other hand, in other conversations, indicating that only full-time teaching faculty should be teaching in the program. Faculty themselves had firm opinions about whether or not adjuncts should teach these courses, arguing that adjunct faculty would not devote the necessary time to engage with students in the compressed format, and that full-time faculty had a better understanding of that need. The group were not convinced of this argument, circling back to arguments about faculty work ethic and focus.

“I don’t know that’s always true. Right. I kind of disagree as well. But they were saying that adjuncts have other priorities than teaching for the college. And I’m like, well, you know…”

“Our full time sometimes have other priorities and teach.”

“I one hundred percent agree.”

Faculty contracts at the college said that they had to teach 50% of their credit load face to face. The group talked through the staffing implications suggesting that as long as that contractual obligation was met, then they could use full-time faculty to the extent it met the rest of their credit load, and then use adjuncts who they themselves hired. A core issue then became that those adjuncts would be hired for the program specifically and would have to report to someone. As it stood, adjuncts were somewhat caught between the chair of the accelerated program with the specific requirements of that program, and the discipline chair to whom they reported and were accountable.
“I need to make sure that department chairs understand what their role is, and the…versus what our role is in the program, because I think this is a confusion and there is overlap. …the program chairs have got to play a role. They have to play a role, and they’re going to have to work collaboratively with the program to do it.”

At least one of the group was assertive about adjuncts reporting to the accelerated program chair (who was also faculty), and the instructional designers mediating communications with department chairs. On top of this, this approach would be an avenue for more required training and for closer surveillance of faculty teaching those courses:

“Are you being timely with your grades? Are you being timely with your communication? And so, every week, we’re going to be checking your courses to make sure that that’s happening. If that’s not something that you want, that’s fine. You don’t have to teach in the program.”

This requirement was tied to both the intensive nature of the classes, but also “because of the level of complaints that have come out of particular courses that are going to the president directly.” This was the same person who had indicated that the oversight role for the group during the pandemic had created challenges in their relationships with faculty and a “culture of mistrust.”

The program chair noted that a core challenge was simply the growth of the program and the lack of resources supporting the program. They themselves were only running the program as part of a number of other duties on top of their own teaching. This program growth they attributed to the proliferation of initiatives and the program being a kind of dumping ground for meeting the goals of those initiatives.

**The Mutual Invisibility of Work**
We each are working 50 plus hours a week in our chair duties. Forget teaching. It’s, it’s, it’s gotten to that point and it’s just and we can’t even identify why it’s like this. It’s just that every time we turn around, it’s another meeting, another initiative, that we need to do this, you’ve got to do this. You’ve got to make this program change. You need to add a course, here you need to do this over there. And it’s just like. Y’all got to let us breathe.”

The problem of individual workloads, overwork, unending new initiatives, and the proliferation of duties and roles came up repeatedly. Instructional designers consistently indicated that they did not have time to do certain duties, but also that the work they did do was not always recognized.

“[We] got kudos today for doing nothing. I like that.”

“Well, that works because you don’t get kudos for doing lots of things, so, so, it evens out.”

Separately Alex at another time remarked that she can tell people that she conducts technical training, but that the other parts of her job were difficult to communicate.

That’s the easy part of the job. But understanding the other part of the job nobody gets, and I think that’s the bigger problem is that they have no idea what we do. No, and I think I honestly, I think the title itself is wrong… But I don’t know what the title should be.

So, you have educators who don’t know what you do, and you have tech people who don’t know what you do. Nobody knows what you do.

The mutual invisibility of work pervades this study. It is not only in those things that are not recognized, but also in those things that are recognized. It also can be found in the
discussions about data and surveillance, in the discussions of remote work, and in the discussions of what it means to teach and learn online. Making work visible, and its corollary, trust, underlie these points of contention. However, some kinds of work may never be measurable or capable of being surveilled, and as a result, remain invisible and unvalued, as if they literally do not exist. Typically, this invisible work is relational and emotional and borne by women. It cannot be measured in assignments created, lectures recorded, papers graded, or classes taught.

One of the paradoxes already discussed is that faculty were often deemed to be lazy and not willing to do the right kinds of work. Some people appeared to be given credence in their claims to be overworked, but others did not.

“Now we know what he does in his spare time. That, and complain that he’s overworked.”

“I know exactly what they did because they said, how can I do this the easiest way possible without, with causing the least amount of work for myself and the most amount of work for my students. I know exactly what they did.”

An alternative explanation is that the work that faculty do is not visible to instructional designers. Faculty such as Fiona described responding to student emails at three a.m. and Sally described herself as having no life and so responding to students at all hours. Other faculty prioritized responding to students as quickly as possible, and prioritizing students over administrators and staff requests.

In contrast, the instructional designers identified themselves and some others as overworked and having no time.

“I have no time.”

“We’re in a serious time crunch.”
“But she has no time, you know.”

“No, she has no time.”

In another conversation with Alex:

“We have a gazillion things to do. I don’t really know…how some other colleges get anything done with the number of people that they have doing one job. I don’t.”

The issue is that certain kinds of work are recognized as work, and others are not. This is often gendered, with emotional, relational work performed by women being both not recognized and also considered as optional, as for example in healthcare fields (Oliver, 2023). It may be that the relational parts of teaching are not considered or recognized as work worthy of people’s time, but the instrumental, technical parts of teaching are.

To a certain extent this is due to the immeasurability of relational work, and perhaps a reluctance to consider relational work as work. Because incentives align to that which can be measured, resources are not allocated to work that is relational, and it is considered necessary to optimize processes at the technical and functional level without considering the complexities of emotions and relationships (Farrell, 2023). We can see this emerge in the prioritization of technical solutions to what might be broadly termed business problems (Williamson et al., 2020), but in fact, might be better termed as relationships. Technical solutions can function to make previously invisible work visible and therefore make it measurable. That which is measurable can then be valued.

There were similar tensions with remote work in this study where the requirements to return to campus can be read as a way to make the performance of work visible to surveillance. Similarly, invisible learning is made visible through assessments and proctoring which serves to address the anxiety that students were not really doing the work of learning. There were times when some kinds of “cheating” were allowed, however.
So, Abby, we’re all the four of us, Jem and Alex and Caspar and I are all in this professional development thing that the president encouraged all of us to participate in. That’s this culture of belonging training that’s in…it’s going to be forever, but you had to apply for it, and you had to write like an essay as to why you wanted to participate. So, Caspar asked ChatGPT why we wanted to participate and all four of us submitted the exact same essay from ChatGPT.

This was a source of amusement to the group because, from their view, this qualification process was merely performative for the external organization that was running their professional development, and not actually significant, so it was reasonable to take this approach. To a certain extent, what mattered was not that the work was done, but that it was seen to be done. This is perhaps the threat that ChatGPT and AI presents to traditional work and learning, that people might appear to be working when they are not. This is also the wager that students can make when they “cheat,” that it matters more to the institution that they appear to have done the work, to check the box, than that they actually learn.

From an instructional perspective, that this requirement was meaningless was also an indication that the external organization was not paying attention to the work that was being submitted, and so it became a box to be checked. For an instructional designer, particularly ones focused on optimized learning over short time periods, this was evidence of a lack of consideration for learners, i.e., it was make-work with no meaning.

**Instructional Design**

This professional development course was interesting for a number of reasons, one of which was that it prompted a discussion of what the group considered its instructional design and technical failings, and through that, expressions of instructional design philosophies by the
group. The paradoxes do not ever seem to end though because this course was in theory about college culture and the relationship of “belonging” and yet the group considered that by being asked to take it, “we’re just being punished for some reason.”

The instructional design concerns were in part around the quantity of material and the way it was presented. Each module in the course had hours of videos embedded in it, there were many downloadable files with significant content, and multi-page checklists of things to do. In their words, it was “a mess” and a source of horrified amusement. The course required them to choose content aligned with their role at the college, which created challenges because they each wore a number of hats, including as teachers: “I figured out I’m only an instructor. I’ve decided I’m nothing else in life, only because I can only think I don’t want to watch any more videos.” Part of their strategy as students was to work out how to complete the work as efficiently as possible: “they tell you Reflection One will take you 30 minutes, and Reflection Two will take you like an hour and a half. And I’m like, well, who’s picking Reflection Two?”

Another assignment was a “Note to your future self” to which the reaction was “Y’all, I ain’t never coming back to this course when I’m done!” In sum, the critique was in part the overwhelming amount of content, and the organization of the course, but also the assignments that did not align with the constraints and needs of the people required to complete them. This instructional design frustration was encapsulated in the following observation: “Don’t you hate when you design courses and then you have to take a course designed terribly?”

One more insight from this course was an explanation of the difference between formative and summative evaluation, which is a key concept in many instructional design models, i.e., assignments designed to support learning, and assignments designed to evaluate how much a student has learned. This explanation identified that with formative assignments it
was reasonable to know who the student was and so be able to support their specific needs, but for a summative assignment:

Not that I do it, but it would be good if I graded anonymously first, because that would remove my knowledge of how well they have done on other things or how poorly they have done on other things and why that is. It would remove my sympathy and it would remove my bias all at the same time.

In this framing, sympathy and knowledge of students is best removed when it comes to summative assessment.

**Outcomes, Objectives, and Maps, oh my!**

As noted, the QM process starts with a course map. This course map asks faculty to take the objectives for a course and map them onto outcomes for the modules in a course, and from those module outcomes onto assignments. The QM standard rubric (Boyd, 2023) sequences it like this:

**Table 1**

*Extract from QM Rubric*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Standards</th>
<th>Specific Review Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Objectives (Competencies)</td>
<td>2.1: The course-level learning objectives describe outcomes that are measurable. 2.2: The module/unit-level learning objectives describe outcomes that are measurable and consistent with the course-level objectives. 2.3: Learning objectives are clearly stated, are learner-centered, and are prominently located in the course. 2.4: The relationship between learning objectives, learning activities, and assessments is made clear. 2.5: The learning objectives are suited to and reflect the level of the course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Standards</td>
<td>Specific Review Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment and Measurement</td>
<td>3.1: The assessments measure the achievement of the stated learning objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Materials</td>
<td>4.1: The instructional materials contribute to the achievement of the stated learning objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Activities and Learner Interaction</td>
<td>5.1: The learning activities help learners achieve the stated objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Technology</td>
<td>6.1: The tools used in the course support the learning objectives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The language can be ambiguous. Course “objectives” were sometimes referenced as “competencies” or “outcomes” depending on the speaker, but also depending on their perception of the adequacy of the element. The course map that faculty were required to generate insisted on objectives being specific and measurable, with reference to Bloom’s taxonomy (Krathwohl & Anderson, 2009) and on the use of specific verbs to align with the levels of the taxonomy. Additionally, objectives, under the QM standard, were supposed to be framed from the student point of view, although that rarely seemed to be the case in practice. Statements that did not fit those characteristics of being specific and measurable with the right verbs were more likely to be characterized as “outcomes.” A course map, then, took this form:
Table 2

Course Map Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Module Objectives (CO alignment)</th>
<th>Learning Materials</th>
<th>Formative Activities</th>
<th>Summative Assessments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>M.O. 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M.O. 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over the few years prior to the study, new course outcomes and objectives had been generated through a state-wide process designed to align courses between two-year and four-year institutions. The process had put together groups of community college and 4-year faculty in different disciplines across the state to standardize course outcomes so that courses could be guaranteed to be accepted for transfer at the 4-year institutions. In this context, course-level objectives were more likely to be referred to as course outcomes, and were less likely to be measurable.

From an instructional designer perspective, the state-wide course outcomes could be potentially problematic, complicating the distinction between outcomes and module objectives. Caspar noted that the course outcomes could be defined too granularly, and if there were sixty-seven objectives, then whoever was writing them did not understand what an objective was: “course objectives are big overarching things that that need to direct all of those other pieces.”

This standardization and alignment process had also condensed certain courses from two-course sequences to a single course, so that for example, World Literature became a single course rather than a two-course sequence, but was guaranteed to transfer to four-year institutions. This process had consequently generated new course outcomes for these revised courses, and had also driven the development of programs that made use of these transferable courses: “I’m
hoping that she’s trying to create that schedule based on [the course standards], because everything’s going to be [in that program]. There’s no sense in setting up a track if it’s not already under [the program].”

One of the challenges from an instructional design perspective is that the faculty working on these course outcomes had used variable terminology and approaches that did not align with the instructional designers’ understandings of how objectives should be expressed and built: “…this is one of the Chemistry with the 75 freakin’ objectives...It just hurts me, it hurts me.” Although 75 objectives was a degree of hyperbole, it is here that the language of “outcomes” and “objectives” can become mixed and confused.

Oh crap! Carol! I’m sorry. “Students will master literary terms and elements relevant to studies of literature.” That is not measurable. “Students will be quizzed on recalling and defining them and applying them by discussing the texts.” No. “Students will recall and define.” No, no.

Here there was insistence on the language of measurement for a module objective to qualify as such. The group of instructional designers took these module objectives and rewrote them in the course map, substituting their approved verbs like apply, recall, define, discuss, and demonstrate. However, even the instructional designers recognized that some of these verbs were flexible, even vague, rephrasings, as the following snippets from the conversation demonstrate.

“How do you know if someone has recalled something?”

“‘Recall’ to me is something like ‘know’.”

“Am I incorrect on that, ‘write,’ as a task, it’s not an objective?”

“‘Create’ is an objective, so I’m not sure.”

“Why don’t we just do ‘analyze’?”
This insistence (and struggle) with student learning being defined in measurable terms parallels the issues with the visibility of remote work, and the desire to track work by faculty and others. Nevertheless, one can see how the statewide alignment initiative connected to course level standardization which connected to the QM process and the standardized course development led by instructional designers.

**Master Courses**

Although the accelerated course program used master course templates, when those templates were made available for teaching faculty, they were not locked down. This allowed teaching faculty to adapt them and add their own assignments, “It’s not locked down because you may want to personalize some of the assignments, some of the discussions, and that’s why we don’t lock them.”

Some perceived this as a double-edged sword, and at least some faculty and instructional designers believed that the content and assignments in a course should be unalterable by the faculty who taught the course. On occasion, when faculty altered courses in ways that the instructional designers did not approve of, they found themselves in conflict with administrators and faculty over control of course content and academic freedom. Once again, student complaints functioned as a trigger for policy and practice changes:

…no one should have touched it. It was given as a template, as a master course for everyone, […] to teach. It was not locked. And we had to, for whatever reason, I believe a student complaint or something, we had to go and look at some courses. And when we did, we found there were some instructors who did exactly what you’re talking about, went in and changed assignments, added assignments. And so now the other discussion is, which is the question, why did a) the faculty do it and b) the question now is, is there a
policy? Well, now we have the dean has thrown back at us, well, there’s no policy that says you can’t change the course. Well, our question was, well, it’s a master course, you shouldn’t have been allowed to change it. But the dean, the administration, the administration is saying to us, there’s no policy that says you can’t change it.

The response within the accelerated program was to write a policy, although at the time of the research data collection, it was not clear what the outcome of that process would be. There was clearly a disagreement with faculty in terms of what the function of a master course was, and the goal of the instructional designers was to constrain faculty’s ability to change the master course. This was tied to the idea of academic freedom, which the instructional designers considered did not apply to teaching.

We thought that if it is a master course, then people understood you did not have the, I’m going to use this word very loosely, academic freedom….

…But we also know that that “academic freedom” word gets thrown around a lot. The academic freedom to change what was given to you. And now we’ve found out that that isn’t the case. So, now we’re going to have to go and write policy that very clearly defines what you can and cannot do in a master course.

It is clear that “academic freedom” for this group did not entail the freedom to teach, or rather that it did not include the freedom to alter the content and assignments in these kinds of courses. From their perspective, in this context faculty were responsible for the delivery of the course in terms of student interactions, grading, and feedback.

These challenges in terms of who was responsible for what arose specifically with a department that had not created master courses for the accelerated program and were being
directed to do so. The focus of the group was on obtaining the content of the course from faculty that they could then fit into the master template.

I don’t care if the devil himself designed that course to purposefully make students fail. She has identified it as the template course, which gives us the content. I just need that content in a sandbox course, and I can argue with [the department chair] to help us redesign it…

…Once we get those sandboxes built, that gives me and us a little bit more control to be able to say [that] I’m not going to allow this to become a blueprinted course for every section of this particular class until it is ready…

…Really all I need is a course map now. If they’ve got the content in the course and they’ll write me a course map, we can build those courses and they ain’t got to touch them.

Once again there was an emphasis on the core role of the course map, and the function of faculty as content providers (or screeners) and deliverers of courses, but not as the designers or architects of courses. This was instructional designers identifying their design role and delineating the faculty role to exclude that function.

**Approving Courses**

If a course had been peer reviewed through QM, the certification would no longer be valid once a certain amount of the course had changed. This meant that a textbook change, or new course outcomes and objectives (which in turn triggered a textbook change) would trigger a new course review process. “These changes aren’t her fault. It’s the publisher’s fault. [sarcastically] We love them.”
The initial process for developing an accelerated course at the college included generating a course map, building the course to the template requirements, an individual faculty member teaching the new course twice (this is a QM requirement), having the course validated by the internal design group, and then running the course through the QM review. Faculty who wished to make changes to master courses had to submit formal requests to do so, so that the group could review those changes, and see if they would trigger a new review process or not. If a new review was triggered, the current version of a course was taught until the review was complete.

Given the relatively small size of the program however, it was often the case that the faculty member who designed courses was also the primary person teaching those courses. As a result, course revisions would primarily be triggered by the original course designer. “I don’t think we really get feedback from the people teaching from it very often. But there aren’t a whole lot of people that aren’t the designers who are teaching them.” There is an implication from this observation that non-designer instructors have limited opportunities for feedback about course design.

Workforce

One of the tasks the group would take on was working with program chairs on constructing new tracks (course sequences) that would enable students to complete their degrees in one year. Sometimes there might be crossover with courses and credentials that the non-credit (workforce) part of the college might teach. For example, information technology training might enable a student to obtain an industry credential such as CompTIA A+. One of the challenges identified by the college leadership on the credit side of the college was that courses and programs were not leading to students obtaining these industry credentials even though they
were claimed to do so. Additionally, college leadership wanted faculty teaching the courses to have obtained the credential themselves and the current faculty did not all have those credentials.

In addition, coordination and communications issues led to the accelerated program advertising an information technology related track that was not actually a degree that had been through the college curriculum committee to be approved, nor had the master courses for the track been developed.

We’re promoting a degree that doesn’t exist…There is even a program guided pathway for the degree in the catalog, but we don’t have the courses developed. And that’s, that’s the craziness of it.

These challenges led to a discussion of meeting these needs through workforce courses and allowing industry credentials to be used to fulfill credit requirements.

The other dimension to this was that people who wanted to teach a workforce course could be fit into a model where they were not responsible for designing the courses, nor the program for those courses, so the instructional designers could prepare fully developed courses and hand them off to qualified people, who were neither faculty nor adjuncts, to teach. The value of this approach was framed in terms of speed and responsiveness.

Right. And if we have someone who’s got industry credentials and they are just wanting to teach there, not wanting to come in and design a program, they’re wanting to come in and teach a class and get paid. So, if we can do the design work for them, then that frees us up to actually hire probably a lot faster and get things moving a lot quicker.

The credentials and workforce conversation also touched on naming credit courses after the industry credential they were supposed to prepare students for. This practice is common in workforce courses, but not in credit courses which tended to be named more generically. This
suggestion was tied to the college’s initiative to present workforce and credit courses to students as a single offering.

   Why, if we are giving, if this is “one door,” why don’t we have a class called what you just say? That thing was called Micro what?
   “Microcomputing Essentials” or something
   And we automatically translate that to “A Plus.” Why is that class not called “A Plus?”

   This idea was repeated several times, and in the conversation became an issue of framing the language of the college in terms that students should be able to understand. This impulse to use language that was more comprehensible to students was in part in sympathy with the challenges that college processes created, but also connected to enrollment.

   We’re translating this amongst ourselves. What are the poor students doing? Not taking our classes. That’s the answer to that problem.
   Well, that that was exactly what I was thinking too. If it’s taken us this much trouble, what is the student going to have to go through?

This challenge was also discussed by Alex with the group of students that she mentored, in terms of how she had to translate the language of the college, but also facilitate administrative processes that the students did not understand, such as applying for graduation.

**Per Ardua Ad Astra**

   One of the struggles the instructional design group worked through was creating course sequences that aligned with sessions and semesters, and aligned with the degree paths of guided pathways (Bailey et al., 2015). This informed conversations about designing the appropriate sequence of courses in line with different session lengths. One concern was student workload. A
ten-week course might be overlaid with two five-week courses, but this plan might change depending on whether a student started in the Fall semester or the Spring semester.

Another dimension to this was that courses could be seven weeks or five weeks in length, and that might depend on how difficult the courses were perceived to be. Faculty might also argue that the degree tracks were too intensive for students with too many difficult courses taken simultaneously, but the group’s perspective was that students could be advised about how intensive a track might be and the decision would be theirs. This all made for more complexity in building tracks and complexity in advising.

"They’re all intensive, you know, two years’ worth of college education work in 12 months or less. It’s going to be intensive."

“We don’t offer students choices in [the program], we tell them what to do.”

This complexity would be overlaid with the issues around developing master courses, and the validation and approval process for those courses. In addition, because the accelerated program was aimed at students finishing in one year, some of the courses were recommended to be shortened in duration over the preferences of faculty, who were inclined to want to deliver courses over longer ten-week sessions.

And the biggest problem we have with the way that that advising track was laid out, the one that goes horizontal, was that they dumped a bunch of 10-week stuff in the summer, which when you switch from a Spring, a Fall cohort to a Spring cohort, you would end up taking those things out of sequence because they are only built as 10-week courses, which is why I started immediately saying we need all [these] courses to be at a maximum of seven weeks and we really need a mix of five and seven. We cannot have those tens because we have to flip them now. And we’ve got, my biggest problem is
nobody is telling me if things are looking out of sequence. When I look at these course numbers, I see things out of sequence and I’m like, what? What things should they take? Even if it’s not a prreq, what should they take before other things?

Course scheduling is notoriously complex (Fischer et al., 2020; Imran Hossain et al., 2019) and clearly interacted with pathways, finances, and the academic calendar. There were multiple dependencies in how courses might get scheduled, and a concern was whether courses would “make” (have enough students to allow it to run). This is the chicken and egg problem of scheduling courses, and played into the instructional designers’ concerns about the speed with which the college responded to community and student needs.

“They will never make if they’re not already part of a pathway that we can advertise, and that financial aid can cover.”

“So, we’re not scheduling those classes that we could. But…so the second part of the story is this guy wants us to create an actual certificate in [discipline]. A [discipline] certificate, yes. OK, well, I can’t take that through curriculum committee that’s already closed for the fall catalog. It’s not going to catalog until Fall 2024.”

On top of this was the impulse that program tracks in the accelerated program had to serve a specific purpose for students:

“What’s the point of a student going through this track? What are they preparing for?”

“In all of our tracks, it should be. It should be leading to something specific.”

Yet another layer of complexity was that the college was in the process of adopting scheduling software that was supposed to ease the process of scheduling courses and to align student demands with the courses being scheduled. This project to adopt this software fit into the “yet another initiative” category that consumed people’s time and energy while not actually solving
the problems that they were facing. Like many educational technology solutions, it was sold as
one thing that was impressive and solved problems, but created different kinds of problems
(Concannon et al., 2023; Williamson & Komljenovic, 2022).

“…it’s a neat tool.”

“Will it solve all our problems?”

“No.”

“Is it going to do what they said it’s going to do? Or is it just some tool that we’ve
purchased because they said it was going to do something and now, they’re like, eh
maybe you can do this, but maybe it won’t?”

The faculty chair of the accelerated program identified the core problem as a human one
that cannot divine student wants or needs. There is a thread here with other dimensions of
college work that resist datafication and measurement, and are vulnerable to vagaries of human
behavior.

“There’s one huge missing element and that’s human. That’s, I mean, it’s a logic system
based on the past. I mean, it is even creating simulated students to try to give you
projections and I’m like, it’s still…. And she said, she flat out said, so she goes, we still
don’t know what the students want. It’s never going to look like what the student wants.
It’s only going to reflect what’s been in the past. And that’s what we’ve been saying.”

A manifestation of the software prediction problem is the reliance on the past, and this reliance
was predicated on the past being consistently uneventful, in order to predict an assumed-to-be
uneventful future.
“Well, and the current data projections are so skewed because it’s relying on COVID numbers of being completely online. So, I’m like, I, I can’t trend anything from 2020 and 2021 because we’ve been online for two years.”

“… Yeah, it just doesn’t make any sense. And she said, she goes. She goes. It’s not going to make any sense for a while, OK. OK, good.”

The instructional designers expressed awareness of the opportunity cost and financial cost of these kinds of initiatives, expressing that awareness in cynicism, skepticism, and sarcasm.

“So much money to do exactly what we’ve done. Okay.”

“Another fabulous tool”

There was a paradox because instructional designers themselves are often enthusiasts for technology tools and serve to bring those tools into the college with a degree of technological determinism in their thinking. However, from their perspective, their analysis and experience was more effective and accurate because they understand students, faculty, and staff in ways that others do not. This sense is in tension with technical solutions that appear to hold more promise than they deliver.

“What it’s trying to do is kind of cool. But it’s, you know, it’s only as good as what we feed it and we’re kind of feeding it extraordinary events. You can’t rely on an extraordinary event.”

For the accelerated program in particular, this solution had some serious weaknesses. One of these was that it was not designed to understand guided pathways, and the ways in which a student would sequence particular courses. The other was it could not understand how short sessions within a single term would function:
“It also has limitations, serious limitations. One, it doesn’t discern the difference between 15 week, 12 week, seven week, so if I have a seven week one, seven week two, back to back, it sees it as a conflict.”

The vendor response was to recommend that the college staff “trick the system” and ignore its recommendations until the abnormal data of the COVID pandemic had expired from the prediction model. One of the concerns from this was the impact on enrollment, particularly as administration wanted to “drive students to campus” by scheduling in person classes, which the group considered would risk students taking online classes from other colleges instead.

A similar pattern emerged with regard to another software initiative related to the human resources system. The group was well aware that the instructional technology they were responsible for, and that they used, sometimes did not work and that things break. However, when these breakages were outside of their area and nevertheless affected them, they could be vociferous about it and the departments responsible. This contrasts somewhat with the forbearance that they ask of and expect from others with the technology that this group was responsible for, where they had a higher tolerance for breakage and unpredictability, and easily adapted to change.

15 Weeks

The core ethos of the accelerated program initiative was that the standard fifteen-week semester was too long, and that the college needed to embrace shorter sessions in order to compete with for-profit colleges in particular. As a kind of skunkworks set of innovators (Gwynne, 1997), they saw themselves as fixing an old and broken system that was being supported by faculty who were not in tune with what students needed.
“If we’re going to redo or if we’re going to fix a system that is old and broken because it is, then why are we still trying to make 15-week classes fit?”

“Because we have faculty who insist that they …”

“I don’t give a shit. They need to find a new job.”

“I understand. But that’s what the Faculty Senate is going to tell the administration, that there are courses that cannot be taught in less than 15 weeks.”

A core tenet was that courses could and should be taught in less time, but that those compressed schedules required faculty to be more focused, and so discard what the instructional designers characterized as unnecessary make-work from courses. Those who had taught shorter session courses expressed that they preferred them.

“I don’t ever want to teach it again in a 15 week, ever, ever, ever. I won’t teach it again in 15 weeks. It’s too long. I hate it. I, I, I’m week eight and I’m like done. Is it over yet?”

Despite this, a sting in the tail was that the president had become concerned about the success rates as defined by grades in the accelerated programs and had asked if some could be considered to be done in 18 months instead.

“She also wants a complete DFWI [drop, fail, withdraw, incomplete] comparison between these course and courses in the other sequence. It goes to show where we’ve got some success or not success.”

Side Gigs

Despite the fact that they themselves had other jobs, including as adjuncts, the instructional designers were skeptical of faculty who did the same. Faculty were supposed to report credit hours taught at other institutions, but some of the instructional designers were not sure if that was happening. Alex indicated that she thought faculty “overextend themselves by
teaching at multiple colleges, which is a problem,” and further that while it was a good side gig for the faculty, “it is not a good side gig for the students.”

Teaching is a thankless job. If you ever thought you were going to get paid for what you do, you went into the wrong profession. Yeah, it was a bad idea. You shouldn’t have ever considered being a teacher, and if you’re trying to make your paycheck equal your time, it’s never gonna happen. You’re gonna burn yourself out, because that’s all you’re going to try to do, is continually try to pick up extra classes, because that’s the only way you can make ends meet. Because it’s hard. It’s hard work. I mean, trying to juggle all that. And the students are the ones who suffer.

Paradoxically, given their concerns about faculty taking on extra work outside of the college, the instructional designers at this institution also taught as adjunct faculty. Interestingly, this did not appear to earn them credibility with faculty nor admittance to faculty spaces such as the faculty senate. The marginal place of adjunct faculty is well documented (Kezar et al., 2019), but it seems feasible to suggest that staff who also teach are a particular segment of the adjunct workforce, perceived by full-time faculty as part of the administrative structure of the institution rather than the teaching structures. Once again, the bridging, liminal role of these instructional designers in particular placed them in an ambiguous position.

There is an apparent paradox of faculty both taking on too much work, but also being “lazy” and their jobs being “cushy.” It is worth recalling that Alex is the person who described having multiple jobs when she was younger as a necessary virtue, and like other instructional designers also had other work outside of her primary job during the study. This is not to say that this perspective was hypocritical, but rather that faculty were perceived as being able to do parts of their work in ways that did not require a lot of effort. A related paradox is that master courses
were a way to reduce the scope of some faculty work, at least that is for those that did not
develop those courses.

Faculty presented this extra work differently, but also shared that some of the work they
undertook was unpaid. For example, faculty who took part in the statewide course alignment
initiative were not paid for their work. Carol in her career had very much enjoyed collaborating
with people from other colleges, but at the moment she was “trying to resist volunteering [for the
project]. They don’t pay for that work. It’s volunteer work.” She did previously work on the
project in her main discipline area and found it “fun” in part because there were not that many
faculty in her area, and some of the group were from the four-year institutions in the state. Other
participants also enjoyed the collaboration with other colleges and faculty.

In addition to teaching at the college, Carol also taught at a four-year private institution
and online at one of the other community colleges. From her perspective, she was a single
mother for a long time and (like Alex) got into the habit of “hustling” and staying busy. Brianne
also taught for other institutions and expressed that she learned a lot from their courses and the
professional development she received at those institutions. Naomi, as an adjunct, taught for
multiple institutions as well. Multiple faculty participants were also working on completing
advanced degrees online and reflected on that experience when discussing their own teaching.
Many faculty participants had also worked as department chairs in the past and most presented it
as thankless and exhausting, particularly during the pandemic.

Credentials and Badging

“If they achieve the learning outcome, we should take it.”

The focus on learning outcomes translated into the merging of workforce and credit
learning experiences, and an idealized version of what the accelerated learning group felt was the
best way to serve students, i.e., by being accepting of different kinds of learning experiences, as long as the outcomes were met. Additionally, from their point of view, because students were being prepared for technical workforce careers, the more academic activities such as writing papers were less relevant and not required to demonstrate competency. Competencies and their relationship to outcomes were at the core of this way of thinking about learning and credentials. This in turn aligned with the technology of badging.

What I want is I want to be able to take the competencies [and] push them out as badges that can be earned in multiple classes, and we just need to be able to say here’s how students could earn this. … So, like, if I wanted to do a communication badge, you know, this gives me behaviors, but the criterion over there was “to clearly and effectively exchange information, ideas, facts and perspectives with persons inside and outside of an organization.” Well, there’s fifteen thousand ways that I can do that, and I could do that in probably every single class. What we need to be able to do is say to earn this badge, here’s what students need to be able to do. And then they can graduate from [the] College with a digital badge in communication, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers. And then that’s something that goes on their resume and that makes them more marketable, because, when you, it’s different from saying in an interview, “Hey, in my communication class, I had to give speeches,” to saying, “Hey, I actually turned into a, actually graduated with a badge in the communication skill.”

There are various impetuses at play in this vision. It certainly aligns with the vision laid out by vendors of badging solutions, but it also aligns with the key idea that students will be more marketable to employers and so, more likely to get the jobs that they apply for. This sense
that the ability of students to get jobs and to progress quickly and efficiently through their education expressed key values for this group.

Another proposed efficiency arising out of badging, also sometimes called “micro-credentials,” was that they would represent to teachers what the skills of students were at the beginning of their classes. As one of the group noted when discussing this option, they were “speaking to the choir” in expressing this vision of how badging could or should work. It is worth noting that none of the faculty involved in the study mentioned badging or micro-credentials in their interviews.

**Advising**

Part of an expressed concern of the group was that for the college, practice had become policy over time, and some policies needed to be re-examined. The workload of advising was one area in which that was the case, with one campus of the college in particular overloaded with students, to the extent that they did not have time to schedule online appointments because students were lined up outside their doors for in person appointments. The cost of this practice was that advisors were “stressed out” and “broke down crying” because they:

…can’t even go to the bathroom in the middle of the day, because you have to walk out there in front of all the students who want to eat you for lunch, because they’ve been sitting there for three hours waiting for you.

The accelerated program had a dedicated advisor, who also suffered from similar workload challenges, which was expressed as “I don’t even know how she does what she does.” Advisors at the other campus did not have this workload issue and struggled to understand their colleagues who did. At the same time, technology did not necessarily make their lives easier.
because it made demands on time they did not have, but also was used as a metric of job performance.

Everybody’s getting slammed because they’re not completing their [advising system] meeting notes every time they meet with a student, but they’re like, do you know how many people are standing in line outside waiting to see me? I don’t have time to write all of this crap after I see every student.

The advising system was similar to the scheduling system in that the vendor promised updates, changes, features, and functionality that had not been delivered, and there was a mismatch in practice with what advisors actually needed. One person responsible for advising was reported as framing it as “I have nothing positive to say. And you know what? I’ve just decided that I’m not going to speak if I can’t find something nice to say.” This reminded the group of yet another failed product related to web conferencing. From their user perspective, it seemed like wasted money and time. For the instructional designers a solution to these challenges was more coordinated communication across colleges in the system.

Many of the stories told about advising often came back to personal relationships and conversations with people who made a difference. The faculty chair of the accelerated program had had his life changed by an advisor at the college who sat down with him at a time when he was anxious and terrified, and compassionately enabled him to get his life and career on track. When he shared this story with the advisor in question, who was still working at the college, she started crying.

**Outsourcing**

More than one college in the region had outsourced some instructional design functions to consultants and external firms that specialized in providing instructional design services to
colleges. Conversations around this trend revealed more of the challenges that instructional designers face as far as their relationships with faculty were concerned. There is a sense in which no-one is a prophet in their own land, and the expertise of instructional designers was not acknowledged. Colleges seem more comfortable spending money on services rather than salaries because they have more discretion about stopping payment for those services as their financial position changes. Faculty and others complained about the use of external services and the lack of immediate support. The instructional designer perspective was that administrators did not want to give them more authority and did not respect people without the “alphabet letters” of a PhD.

**Cynicism**

The use of outsourcing led to discussions of college priorities and in the minds of this group, one interpretation was that it all came down to finances: “To some degree, it’s all about the students, but the higher up you go, a lot more about politics and the money.” This division with administration and management was identified in terms of values and the lives of students, with stated values being masks for actual values of money: “a lot of things that are really about money and politics are sort of made to sound like they’re about students.”

The instructional designers foregrounded their own values in terms of “the students” with the idea that those values were truer than others: “It’s the people on the ground who truly feel it’s about the students because it can’t be about the money, because the pay is not enough.” Their own conversations documented previously identified student success (often defined in terms of grades) as something they valued in their work, but:
“We say it’s about student success and it’s about enrollment, because enrollment means dollars. We couch everything in lofty goals, and everything is really happy. But when you really start looking at things, it’s only about money every single time.”

In a sense this conversation identifies some of the key tensions in the work of education. There is little doubt that someone in administration would insist that caring about enrollment is critical because it ensures the financial stability of the institution and the persistence of the institution. The institution must persist in order to serve the needs of students. This is the outcome of funding models and the policy environment that creates these tensions. The instructional designers cared about students and student success, which they defined in terms of grades, graduation, and jobs for the people who were students.

800 Words

Many of the threads above were woven into an issue that arose with a faculty member who was new to the accelerated program. One of the issues that continually arose when it came to short courses was the student workload. The instructional designers were generally of the opinion that course content could and should be taught with fewer, more focused, and pared down assignments. In a parallel sense of a technical change forcing a cultural change, a driving idea was that there was typically unnecessary content and there were unnecessary assignments in courses that were not critical to students learning the key content of those courses. The argument went that the technical change to short sessions such as five weeks forced faculty to confront this fact, and so redesign their courses. This kind of technological determinism was also in play when the college switched LMS a few years prior, with the argument that the mere fact of transitioning to a new system would force faculty to rethink how their courses were constructed.
This perspective on short sessions and workload came to the fore when a faculty member made a proposal to develop a Humanities course as a five-week course. Their proposal had students writing a paper of at least 800 words in the first week, and in the last week, 1500 words. The reaction to this proposal was a chorus of incredulity:

“Who, in their right mind? … An eight-hundred-word minimum essay. Hopefully, that’s a whole semester thing…Jesus, take the wheel!”

... 

“No, no, no, no!”

...

“I get that this is humanities class and we’re going to be touchy-feely. I’m an English major. I got you. But, like, that’s too much in one week, even for a 15-week class.”

This was in part framed as a pragmatic grading problem for the faculty member, given a requirement (imposed by the college) that assignments be graded and returned in three days, but fundamentally, it was framed as an enrollment and success problem: “I can tell you that this class will not be successful and students will not be taking it” where success was identified in terms of student grades or retention: “I would drop this class…I would take one look and be like, ‘No’.”

The response to the proposal then was to not approve it for the accelerated program, i.e., this group running the program had the ability to reject a faculty proposal and course map.

This was followed up with conversations with the faculty member as members of the group worked to persuade her to change the approach. The faculty member’s objections to changes were expressed in terms of the course being comparable with a fifteen-week course covering the same content and with the same objectives. In the designers’ view, the faculty member’s objections in part came from their conversations with colleagues who were new to the
college, and therefore, in the group’s view, too wrapped up in their own ideas of traditional courses. The underlying argument the designers made was both practical in terms of grading, but also that it was possible to assess learning in other ways that were more time-efficient for both the teacher and the students in the class.

And the problem that will be what they brought up, which is sort of a valid statement, was, well, it’s what I do with my 15-week. Well, that’s fine. But this isn’t a 15-week class. It’s five. What you need to figure out is how to assess your students so that they have met the objective. But they shouldn’t have to write you eight hundred, a thousand or fifteen. And that was on top of like two discussions and quizzes and whatever, all in one week. And we were like, we literally asked her, just forget about the students. How are you going to give quality feedback in such a short time period on such long essays? And they said, “I cry a lot.”

This last statement points at an emotional dimension of teaching that as previously noted cannot be measured.

Ultimately, the faculty member was persuaded by the group using “all the lovely educational words” that the course should have “a cumulative assignment at the end that builds and scaffolds…and they bought it hook, line, and sinker.” Additionally, they were persuaded that the course should be taught a couple of times before putting it through the QM process in the following year. The designers also expressed their empathy for the teacher’s workload in the way the course had been proposed, and that their goal was to make things better for them as a teacher. Despite the apparent framing and tone that suggested that they had persuaded or even hoodwinked the faculty member against their better judgement, these expressions were all genuine beliefs and concerns from the group, not only founded in a degree of concern for the
faculty member, but founded in the impact on students who would (not) take the course as constructed.

“I think they don’t realize what it’s going to be like. And the other thing is, I think when you go back and you review like course evaluations and you start looking at DFWI rates, I think it’s going to change.”

“No, with that much writing, the DFWI rate is going to be high.”

“Well, and that’s kind of unfair to the student. If we allow that to happen. That’s really unfair to the students.”

Once again, a concern for student success in terms of grades was a priority for the group, and their perspective on faculty was that they were not grounded in those kinds of concerns, but rather were too idealized in their focus on academic learning: “You know, I wish I lived in a world of unicorns and rainbows like they do, but, you know, sometimes you just need a dose of reality.”

In terms of the compressed session length, their concerns were framed in terms of what was sustainable for faculty and students, which faculty might interpret as “watering down” course requirements. From the group’s perspective this was not what they were doing, but rather they were saying that the “assessment modality is not sustainable in a condensed course, so find another mode. We’ve all kind of had to do that when we’re thinking about [the program].” So rather than merely compressing the schedule with the same content, which they framed as an easy choice, the progression from a course map using objectives and activities mapped to those module objectives reinvented the course for the shorter format. The mapping process enabled faculty and instructional designers to “get rid of anything extra” and “clean house” of “time fillers.” Beyond that, some claimed that the objectives themselves were unnecessary for students
or duplicative and had been added to courses because they were “cool” rather than because they aligned with the purposes of the course.

**Management**

As part of this study five managers were interviewed, although it should be noted that some of the faculty interviews were with department chairs. Scheduling these interviews was challenging due to their workload and responsibilities.

“I'm sure we can pull together, sir.”

Lord Vetinari raised his eyebrows. “Oh, I do hope not, I really do hope not. Pulling together is the aim of despotism and tyranny. Free men pull in all kinds of directions.” He smiled. “It’s the only way to make progress. That and, of course, moving with the times.”

(Pratchett, 2001, p. 340)

There is a sense in which contemporary college management sits in tension with traditional notions of faculty governance and community colleges as institutions of democracy. Over time, the role of faculty has been unbundled and parsed out to many different people that administrators now managed.

Last but not least, the major enemy, the strategic adversary is fascism (whereas Anti-Oedipus' opposition to the others is more of a tactical engagement). And not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini—which was able to mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively—but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us. (Foucault, 2009)
Who’s the Boss?

Manager attitudes towards the control of courses and faculty varied at different institutions and depending on the context. Those involved with the Accelerate program, Caspar and Tom, were more interested in controlling and monitoring faculty and courses, whereas at Erica’s college where Martin and Emily worked, faculty were considered to be decision-makers and neither Martin nor Emily expressed an interest in control. At Anne’s college where Tim worked, this same deference and respect for faculty existed, although he gave more of a sense that they needed to be managed and could be fickle.

Caspar previously worked in another state for a college where the elearning department controlled faculty, qualification requirements, and hiring, so that in contrast to his current situation, he considered that there were not as many issues with department chairs and deans, and there were fewer politics: “There was one person who made decisions, and that was that.” In his mind this was the right way forward for online learning courses at his college.

From Caspar’s perspective, if the college leadership wanted the Accelerate program to be “amazing” then they needed to “centralize it a little bit so that we can be more nimble” and avoid multi-day email chains about small decisions. The program itself he characterized as “spoken into existence” through the “visionary ideas” of college leadership, and he and his coworkers had had to work out the logistics of making it happen. Tom firmly believed that the Accelerate program represented the dominant future mode of operation for the college, even if not necessarily for all courses: “we all need to get on board, and we need to work on the same page. You know we all need to work on the same page, and for the same goal.”

At Anne’s college, Tim thought that his background as a tinkerer and fixer of things parlayed into how he worked as an administrator, because he was always asking how processes
could be better and more efficient. Additionally, concepts like quality assurance were familiar to him, so he applied that to “how we deliver our product.” As an example, he was looking at credentials and badging to certify that students have taken an orientation to online learning, or have completed library instruction. This would be more efficient in ensuring that students were not asked to complete these orientations more than once.

Like Tom, Martin was a graduate of the community college at which he worked and had progressed from being a work study student to the position which he now occupied. He credited this progression to both opportunities and mentorship, and found it rewarding to be able to give back to the college. In particular he credited positions in which he worked with faculty and students as where he really built relationships with faculty. His philosophy of administration focused on personal relationships with faculty in all his work. Like Tim at Anne’s college, Martin was intentional about meeting with faculty and consulting with them. The vicissitudes of budgets and reorganizations, which all interviewees at his college noted, had impacted his department over time, however, and had made that kind of intentionality harder to accomplish.

Be Nimble

Managers connected issues of control to issues of efficiency, responsiveness, and speed. One of the challenges in Tom’s current role was communicating with chairs and deans, because of his limited authority over faculty and their assignments. He had been accused of not being “collaborative or collegiate,” but believed he had made progress in working with them.

But I also know that I’m not going to wait. I don’t. I don’t have the time. Accelerate is a huge program. I don’t have time to waste, and at the end of the day, whatever is going to benefit the students and benefit the program, there’s the direction I’m going to take.
This framing in terms of students and urgency was common, not only from him, but from others associated with the program, and broadly speaking, they believed that this was how the college should operate, that it should be quick to adapt and change, and should be responsive to student needs. As Caspar framed it, they should “be more nimble.”

Tom and Caspar still negotiated with faculty and departments, particularly when faculty asserted that some courses were too complex, or too much for students to complete in five or seven weeks, that “we’re not going to be able to produce good students.” For example, a ten-week Math course might be coordinated with two five-week courses in other subjects. Although Tom noted that this did not align with their theory for the accelerated program, they might just have to do it in the future, or at some point not offer certain programs in the accelerated format.

When it came to offering courses over shorter time periods, Martin’s college was working on it to a certain degree, but he also emphasized the role of faculty in providing input on what could and could not be done. He saw the potential for five- and seven-week courses taken sequentially, but was concerned about the accreditation implications. The college’s plan should, in his view, depend on both enrollment and achievement, on “what the students want, and then we’ll also look and see based on their enrollment. But then we’ll also look at their achievement and try and try and glean something from that as well.”

Tim also had some ideas about streamlining college operations to be more efficient, for example with a “one door approach to onboarding students” and fully integrating workforce courses with credit courses. Attempts to be more efficient could, however, run into workload problems as is evident from the earlier discussion about scheduling software.

No time
Many of the managers in the study were fulfilling multiple duties. Tim was serving his college in an interim position, like other administrators fulfilling multiple duties during a time of transition. His regular position covered both libraries and online learning. Caspar was also serving in an interim position. Emily was performing two substantially unrelated roles in her position. Tom, who was the faculty member leading the Accelerate program, had inherited the role from someone else who had too many responsibilities, and it was similarly only one of his many duties. He had taken on the role as a short-term duty, but “nothing happens just for a while” although he was quick to say that he did enjoy working with the team.

Tim expressed a sense that faculty did not understand the workloads of administrators and staff and could have unrealistic expectations about their time, for example, wanting a break between short sessions. While there were advising and “student success” reasons for doing so, the idea that faculty should also have a break did not align with his own experiences.

They come up to you, and they ask you, ‘Oh, did you have a nice break? What did you do? Did you go to some place for your Spring break?’ and I, yeah, you just, you, you do not understand what I do, do you?

At the same time, he had experience teaching, and recognized the workload that grading imposed, “it’s a massive amount of work.” He also recognized that adjuncts performed work that they may not be compensated for, such as course design, but that nobody really knew how much of that was happening. Caspar thought that faculty were inclined to consider the easiest way to get information in front of students, not “the best,” in part because time was the greatest constraint that faculty and instructional designers faced. He also expressed concern about faculty who, from his perspective, over committed themselves by teaching at multiple institutions, and were not “policed.”
One of the conversations Caspar and I had was about grading and feedback in the context of ungrading (Kohn & Blum, 2020), which he identified as a potential model to solve the “problems of education,” and would be more like real life and the kind of iterative feedback that happens with good managers in employment situations. He drew a contrast between iterative continuous feedback and something like an annual scored performance review. It would however require both a mind shift and a design shift, which would take a lot of work, which he saw no time to do.

And from what I’ve seen in the Higher ED system we never allow ourselves to actually do things, because we’re constantly having to prepare for the next thing. So, there’s never that space where you could actually really redesign and really rethink because you have, what, two weeks between Spring and Summer, and then maybe a month between Summer and Fall, if you’re lucky. That’s not enough time to actually think through redesigning things, and you can’t do it while the plane is in the air, because you’re trying to keep the plane in the air. So, we continue to propagate bad systems.

He suggested an approach to change that might be more incremental and avoid trying to make big shifts, and that also applied to teaching and instructional design. You can change one thing at a time. “It really is about playing the long game. It’s not about redoing everything overnight.” In an echo of the initiative fatigue that others had noted, Tim remarked somewhat sardonically on a new initiative and technology platform, “because we need another technology platform, because, you know, we just do not have enough on our campus right now.”

Martin expressed concerns around faculty professional development, “but it can be difficult, you know, I mean, I know everybody’s busy, but get them to refocus and breathe and
take time to learn something.” Tim had turned the credentials project over to the college’s instructional technologist because, as he puts it, “I’m up to my ass in alligators right now!”

Tim’s workload meant that he had had to identify a number of projects like this and identify which ones could wait until he returned to his regular duties from his interim position, and this also included master courses. He saw this idea as one that would benefit the college where adjuncts were tasked with teaching courses and where there might be only one full-time faculty member teaching the course. The current arrangements seemed to be ad hoc in his view.

**Faculty**

Caspar frequently saw a sharp distinction between adjunct faculty and full-time faculty, particularly full-time faculty who had been at the college for some time, in terms of how they responded to the Accelerate program and the use of master courses.

Adjuncts, new faculty, are 100% on board. They are, they are excited, they are thankful, and they really don’t ask questions or rock the boat too much honestly. They are more concerned with, you know, “Hey, this looks great. What do you need me to do here? How, how can I make? How? What are my other requirements?” kind of thing, but our full-time faculty that have taught for themselves, taught their own classes, and can do their own things…and then they turn around and come into the program, they see the benefit very quickly, but also are very quick to say, “Here are things that need to change” to match their instructional style.

Similarly, Tom noted that adjuncts, especially new ones, had not had any issues with this approach. They were, in fact, grateful. He contrasted this to what would happen historically where an adjunct might be “handed a book and told, ‘There’s your classroom’” and if they were fortunate, they might get a copy of someone’s syllabus. Where he was “winging it” when he first
started teaching, now the college could have the instructional design of courses built out. This did mean that “you have to start asking the question: are you teaching, or are you facilitating the course? And I think that’s what the program feels like to a lot of instructors, as it feels more like facilitation rather than teaching.”

He expanded on this idea that teaching and facilitation were distinct activities, that there was a need for faculty to interact with students who “don’t just want to watch videos.” However, he saw this as a cultural change that “legacy instructors” who have been teaching for a long time struggled to understand as a positive change. Emily maintained a distinction between content, design, and delivery of courses, but in her mind they did overlap: “my expertise and the content impact the design, but it also impacts the delivery. I don’t think they’re discreet.”

Tom thought about instructional design as partly a matter of taking “the student’s perspective…I start with what it looks like to them, not what it looks like to me. It’s very much about flow.” Like some others in the study, he had taken courses online and that experience very strongly informed how he thought about online courses at the college and the program he was responsible for. Practical experience, particularly as a student, was important for him. The courses he took at an institution with a large online presence were completely templated.

And it was really about a flow…I found that extremely easy to use, and the best thing about it, in my opinion, was that I had zero expectations that things were going to change from class to class, because all classes were built the same.

For students at his college, he considered template courses and consistency critical, because his experience was that students get into classes, “and they don’t know what to expect.” He saw this as important in particular for older students. When the Accelerate courses were
started within the QM framework, he fully endorsed the approach, and expected that eventually
the approach would make its way into face-to-face courses.

A key hurdle, however, were the “legacy instructors” who were used to doing things a
certain way. Tom addressed the issue of freedom as “creative freedom” to design around the
template while removing the barrier of expectations from students. For him, it was about student
expectations, but faculty and instructors did not always understand this. He also observed that
compliance with the QM certification process could be a challenge with faculty who wanted to
change templated courses: “when faculty change the content in the course, it can no longer be
identified as QM-certified, which is considered a problem.”

In terms of their relationships with faculty, an issue for Caspar and Tom’s college was
that during the pandemic, instructional designers were partly asked to monitor faculty in the
LMS, which “built a little bit of a culture of mistrust.” Caspar’s response was to build trust by
being “in faculty spaces” such as Faculty Senate, since he worked as an adjunct instructor, and to
take on other opportunities like committees where he could build relationships outside of his
instructional design work. Building relationships was critical in his opinion, and provided
opportunities to ask gentle questions of faculty and what their thinking about their courses was.

However, “it’s not always around in my mind, around being a problem solver. Part of the
problem with that is helping faculty see there actually is a problem.” He gave the example of the
faculty member with the weekly 800-word writing assignments. He framed that situation for the
faculty member in terms of the workload that would create for her, and suggested that the writing
be coordinated across the weeks of the course as cumulative rather than as separate assignments.
This approach turned it into “rallying around a problem that we can now solve. And now this
idea. And what about that? Oh, this sounds really good. And it turned into that moment that we actually like as instructional designers.”

Martin’s college’s faculty senate was very active. As an example, a former Vice President had attempted to institute an online course review rubric and that was met with very strong resistance from the Faculty Senate. This was a common pattern across colleges, that there were earlier attempts to enforce course review rubrics that failed to materialize due to faculty resistance.

As with Martin’s large urban college, the faculty voice at Tim’s college was a strong one, so when it came to certifying faculty to teach online, “it took us a year to, you know, vet it and get it through Faculty Senate, and make the changes that were necessary, and … get it stood up.” The broad outlines of the certification process included one general orientation to online learning, one course for online course design, and a recertification every five years. Faculty also had the option to be funded to get training elsewhere, and in line with eschewing an oversight role, the deans were in charge of validating any training and keeping track of certifications.

The faculty senate in his view could be unpredictable in what they choose to pay attention to, so they might immediately sign off on some changes, but required multiple meetings to approve the ways in which student engagement hours (previously known as “office hours”) would be listed. Similarly, the faculty senate spent a year arguing about whether the college should have a syllabus template with required elements. He expressed some incredulity about why that could be such a sticking point.

He attributed the power of the faculty senate in part due to the ousting of a previous academic vice-president, but like others, was quick to say that faculty should play a strong
leadership role on the campus. However, he suspected that a minority of faculty can drive the agenda.

They absolutely should. And I’d like for them to be engaged. But what often takes place is a semblance of representative democracy or representation in those in the Faculty Senate, when in reality it’s just, they it’s four to five of the loudest voices on campus. Not representing the faculty as a whole by any stretch of the imagination.

Related to this the instructional designer had worked with others on an online teaching handbook that collected both policies, procedures, and best practices together for faculty. There had been no feedback from the Faculty Senate on the handbook at all, although this might have been attributable to faculty involvement in creating it.

**Instructional Design**

One of the first remarks out of Tim’s mouth when I described my interest in how the college’s instructional designer spent their time was a humorously expressed “you may know more than I do, then!” Managers supported the idea that the purpose of instructional design was not fully understood or valued at their colleges.

Emily noted that as far as the role of the instructional designer at her college was concerned, a challenge was that “faculty need to value instructional designers so that their expertise is sought out.” As a result, “something that we are working on is helping faculty understand the value of an instructional designer, what they really can do, how they can help you. That the resource is here.” The culture of their college was that faculty were autonomous and would ask for help if they felt they needed it, but otherwise would not.

The Accelerate program at Caspar’s college was somewhat of an outlier because outside of it, they “constantly have to market ourselves to faculty,” and in addition they tended to be
thought of as technology specialists and not as instructional designers. They also had to coordinate professional development with other departments. As others noted, providing technology assistance was often a stalking horse for instructional design work, but within the short-course program they had an explicit mandate to oversee the design and development of courses: “those are the real design conversations. We rarely get to do that outside of the program.”

Caspar had been hired at his college as an instructional designer, although the position had previously been designated as an instructional technologist. The difference between the two in his mind was pedagogy and represented the technology versus design tension that exists in their work, “I think an instructional technologist is a person that you go to because you want to figure out how this works, whereas a designer is, you’re actually figuring out how to make this and this fit together and accomplish a goal.”

His vision for instructional design was that faculty should understand that instructional designers were not administrators, and did not come up with the rules by which faculty need to operate. This stood in contrast to statements he had made in other contexts about surveilling faculty work, checking courses, and checking engagement in the Accelerate program in particular. He noted that, ideally, faculty would “really understand … the value and the role that we bring.” From his perspective, the value an instructional designer brought was not knowledge of technological tools, nor of the LMS, but the learning science. Instructional designers in this construction were not technology problem solvers, but were trained to think about how people learn and how the structure of classes works for students to learn. As far as he was concerned faculty could get too caught up in their discipline and “stop viewing themselves as an educator
first.” This then meant that they tended to bring up discipline-specific objections to instructional designer suggestions, e.g. “That doesn’t work in math.”

Institutionally, instructional designers could be framed by administrators as problem-solvers in response to conditions, or policy changes, and because they were not considered faculty (despite teaching as adjuncts), they were seen as separate. Another part of the reason people did not know what instructional designers did was because they did so many different things. They were used to solve problems, and they were used to monitor job performance by faculty, so “it’s like instead of us coming in to fix all of the horrible teachers, [I would prefer questions like] how can we make good teachers better? But that also requires faculty to say I could be made better.” He did not encounter this attitude very often, but appreciated it when he did. He saw this as an individual trait rather than a product of any system.

That’s a personality thing. That’s not a faculty thing, that’s a person thing. There are some faculty who we speak to, probably once or twice a semester, who just stopped by to say “Hey!” like, “I was thinking about doing this. Can you help me think through that.” Yes, I can. And I love those particular people and those interactions. Then there are other faculty that show up and say, “This is broken. You need to fix it.” I didn’t break it. I can tell you how to fix it. So let me, let’s, let’s change our dynamic…I think 90% of the instructional design faculty issues are not actual instructional design or faculty problems. They’re people problems, they’re issues with communication, they’re issues with personality, they’re issues with how people view power and role and how they view perspective.

Martin agreed that instructional designers faced particular challenges in being perceived as colleagues and partners with faculty, rather than technical specialists, and that this perception
was not only from faculty, but also from administrators. He believed that administrators often “don’t really understand the value they can get out of these designers...If we had twenty, we wouldn’t have enough.” In an ideal world (or as he noted, in four-year institutions), instructional designers would be well staffed and part of teams with other technical people working with faculty. As it was, he did not have the internal resources to train faculty or to support them beyond the technical operation of the various tools available to them, leading him to outsource some of the training elements to a third-party service.

For Emily, her unit was still “figuring out how we can best support faculty” and it might depend on how faculty came to them, whether they were directed there, or chose to approach them of their own accord: “there are times that we ask faculty to take a look at their course and kind of consider places to redesign. And I think that’s where our instructional designers can be a huge asset to our faculty, who could use a toolbox of thinking about things differently.” Asking instructional designers to take on a quality control function was not, in her view, the most effective way to work with faculty, but rather they could be more effective when innovating and bringing a new lens to a course.

Caspar articulated relationship-building as the most challenging part of the role. Specifically, if instructional designers were considered to be administrators, that impeded robust relationships with faculty.

They want to listen to a peer. And so one of the hardest jobs is overcoming that administrator-to-peer hump and being able to be present with faculty and be accepted by faculty in terms of we are here not just to help, but we are here to actually support and do with you what you want to do, instead of being used as the administrative police force.
The challenge was that this required instructional designers to be in “faculty spaces,” but they were often treated “as the separate entity that doesn’t really fit as an administrator or a faculty.” Consequently, instructional designers may have better relationships with student support staff than faculty. This observation aligns with the literature that refers to instructional designers as third-space professionals (Stoltenkamp et al., 2017). This was true regardless of the fact that all the instructional designers at his institution, including himself, taught as adjuncts. Because they did not have the faculty role, they were reminded that they were not faculty and Caspar felt that their opinions were dismissed. He suggested that the underlying reason for this was a system that created an “us versus them” dynamic. The only way around this would come from leadership who were managing too many issues to care about this dynamic, and may themselves not understand what instructional designers do: “No matter if you’re in higher ed or not, instructional designers have to constantly reassert what we do, and why it matters.”

When pressed on the causes of this, he suggested that it was “because in some ways an instructional designer is a band aid to a bigger problem. Instructional designers are a band-aid to a problem of faculty not really knowing how to teach.” Older faculty were set in their ways and focused on their subject, and so could be unwilling to change. Nevertheless, he was positive about the profession and role and saw partnerships with faculty developing, although not systematically within the institution.

He believed that instructional designers needed to be assertive about what they bring and their impact specifically on “student success by helping faculty teach better” and that student success translates into Federal dollars that support the institution. Instructional designers needed to market themselves better than they currently did, but he noted that in fact, there really were
not that many people who were full-time instructional designers in the community college system. Many people who wore that hat also wore many other hats.

One option would be to contract for instructional design services, but that involves compromises and, in his opinion, loses the relationship component in the practice of instructional design. External services also risked making them less flexible or able to “pivot quickly.” External services can impose requirements and build templates, but they cannot establish relationships. If instructional designers lost the element of the relationships, they might as well work in industry where they can get paid more.

**Course Quality**

For Caspar, a good course was “streamlined, easy to navigate and it accomplishes what it says it’s supposed to accomplish…I know where to go. I know exactly what to do. It’s easy to move from thing to thing. I see how everything connects, and when I get to the end of that course and take that final assessment, I feel well prepared for it, based on the work that I’ve done.” One of the common elements that participants identified was structural consistency across courses as a way to facilitate student understanding of what they needed to do.

He maintained that communication and engagement can be designed into courses, but it was not a major part of what they worked on in instructional design, because their focus was on content, not instruction, and design (aligned with QM) not delivery. The implication for the way that master courses worked was that he framed them as having fixed design elements that can be enhanced by additions from faculty and through instructional delivery choices.

And so that’s why we have the conversation, and we try to have the conversation often, like the master course doesn’t mean that you can’t do anything, like, put your fingerprints on it, make videos, add things too. You can always add to, but you can’t take away
from….and we also don’t want you to add assignments, so you can add instructional content all day long. But leave the assignments, leave the objectives, leave the way the course is structured alone.

As far as policies like RSI were concerned, Tom’s college was much more assertive than other colleges were, which in part he attributed to the instructional designer team, but also to the support of college leadership. The concern with non-compliance was losing federal funding, and the college was actively auditing instructors and courses for compliance with their RSI policy. Although the short session courses were fully built and, in a sense, could be “set it and forget it,” the RSI policy required that there be student engagement in those courses, and that was one reason he paid close attention to success rates defined in terms of DFWI grades. The college was looking at the level of individual instructors and specific sections of courses to make sure that the level of engagement met their requirements.

The instructional design team created a course for instructors to learn about RSI, and he identified this as a source of tension with faculty who were inclined to ask, “Why do you think you have the ability to teach me?” This was an issue that reached beyond just this policy, but he noted that the instructional designers were also active teachers in addition to their professional experience and qualifications. However, teaching the teacher was simply professional development from his perspective and as such, teachers should be open to it: “If you can’t be taught, then then you lack an attitude of continuous improvement, and that becomes a problem, because you know…we have to be adaptable, and we have to, we have to be able to improve and understand.”

As with the large urban college, Tim’s college had not been aggressive about RSI, but had incorporated it into their training and he felt confident that faculty did it, although they might
struggle to prove it. He believed the likelihood of an RSI audit was low, but they had taught faculty to use their advising tool to flag students with an early alert should they be concerned about a particular student’s participation.

While Martin’s department ensured that faculty were qualified to teach online, it did not conduct the course-level quality assurance that some other colleges did. From his perspective, this was the responsibility of the deans, even if his department was communicating about regulatory compliance like RSI. He felt that the system-level initiatives on RSI were a “little heavy-handed” and that faculty should have been doing activities that met the requirements of RSI all along, while being overseen by their responsible deans. They made sure faculty were aware of the regulation, but “didn’t get very intrusive.” In a similar way, he saw new distance learning program review regulations as activities the college should already be doing because of the alignment with standard accreditation requirements. In other words, as a broad statement, his view was that online courses were simply another kind of course that academic leadership was as responsible for as any other.

Emily saw models like SNHU as demonstrating important principles such as having faculty mentors for adjuncts who can guide and share with them, plus “consistency in course design and delivery which we would hope might led to effectiveness.” However, she saw some risk in limiting “creativity and innovation, unless the course was assessed frequently for modifications and updates and reflection.”

A good course by Martin’s definition was about the alignment between learning outcomes, instructional materials, assignments, and assessments, along with clear communication of expectations to students. The outcome then was that students could demonstrate that they have learned the skills, but the idea of clarity also defined what a good
course was from a student perspective, i.e., a course was intuitively designed and navigable. Another dimension was variety in interactions and variety in the ways in which students can show their competency.

As far as master courses were concerned, Martin also saw the value, particularly for people who “are not necessarily trained in the art of teaching” and for adjuncts who were coming in at the last minute. It also potentially sped up the college’s instructor certification process because course design and alignment could be omitted from the certification requirements and the college could train adjuncts in a more focused way on engagement strategies. His department had built some master courses in the past, but did not currently, and in his view, the college was a long way from mandating their use. He believed faculty were, in most instances, competent and capable of building their own courses. There was a period when the department built courses in the more structured kind of way, but a change in college leadership had led to a change in support for that approach.

The history at Tim’s college as at others was that there was a failed attempt to implement a kind of quality control through QM in the past by the distance learning and instructional design staff, but “their approach was confrontational. It was, ‘You guys don’t know what you are doing!’ That’s what it felt like to faculty.” He felt like the pushback from faculty could be attributed to the way in which the idea was framed, so the current approach was to rely on the deans for quality control and completely separate any online course review process from anything that looked like evaluation, i.e., “This is purely an improvement process and a support process.” They had started to look at approval processes for new online course offerings and programs, but those did not yet exist. The processes would not be onerous however, mostly
regarding faculty certification and a willingness to participate in the online course review process.

The online course review process that the instructional designer ran did use the QM tools and approach, and Tim was drawn to it in part because of his engineering background.

You don’t get to pull it off the assembly line and do your 5 tests on it and determine whether it meets the standard or not, right? But it is the reason I do like something like Quality Matters that you know feels a little bit like that, you know. You’ve got your eight set of standards with all, you know, 32 sub standards underneath each one…the way they score it and the way they look at it’s very objective.

…

It can also be the weakness in it, because it doesn’t get at the, it doesn’t get at some of the important parts which is actually the delivery, the teaching, the engagement of the online course, which is as important as good course design.

In terms of the distinction between the design and delivery of courses, he recounted some of the history of QM that he had learned that led to it being focused on course design and not delivery, “because it allowed them to stay neutral as an outside observer.” He believed that other standards like OCSQR (OSCQR – SUNY Online Course Quality Review Rubric, n.d.) were better with regard to engagement and teaching.

**Changing Students**

With new students with every high school graduating class, Tom believed that colleges have to be adaptable to a changing student population, to what those students want, and the way they learn. At a practical level this meant that students expected to have access to online classes. He identified students as “customers” for whom colleges have to work out what they want.
Emily echoed some of the tropes of the pandemic in terms of “learning loss” but also that students were somehow different now: “we can’t keep teaching the way that we taught before, because they’re not learning the same way.”

From Martin’s point of view, at his college the pandemic accelerated trends that were already coming, such as the increase in synchronous classes, and faculty needing skills and competencies to teach at distance. Students were also moving in that direction, “flexibility was what students were looking for,” and it was hard for institutions to “put the genie back in the bottle.” He found it interesting, however, that people did not develop more awareness of the importance and resource requirements of quality distance education.

Tom expressed a familiar tension between what might be characterized as workforce skills and how work was managed in classrooms. Students were often characterized as lacking maturity and lacking communication skills when they enter the workforce, but he believed that colleges offer too much flexibility in meeting deadlines, which did students no favors. The tension was, however, with administration that saw a lack of flexibility as a “barrier to success” with the net result, in his opinion, that students were not learning important soft skills.

One of the questions I found myself asking people was what courses they remembered from their own undergraduate experience. Outside of his discipline, Tom identified English and Sociology courses as ones in which he learned a lot about himself, and where he started to think more and develop culturally. He recognized that losing those kinds of courses could be a disservice to current students, “but, you know, times change.” Like others, he lamented the loss of those kinds of courses, but saw the changes as inevitable.

I think it’s because these newer generations are not given the opportunity to have respectful debate and understand that there’s different viewpoints. It seems like
everybody thinks that their viewpoint is the right one, and don’t tell me anything different. That’s, that’s a bad, that’s a bad way to approach life and it’s a bad way to be a community. And that’s a little scary.

Martin characterized “student success” as students achieving whatever goals they may have for themselves, whether it was transfer, career skills, or self-interest, and he connected that to the college mission in terms of “access and affordability.” For his department, ensuring that quality online services were available to students was important, and “then just generally supporting the training and the development to ensure that they’re getting a good high quality education course as well.” Emily identified “student success” as one of those terms that people can struggle to define, but that in student terms, success meant different things to different students, whether it was completing a course, progressing in their program, or learning a new concept or skill. This connected in her mind to retention and progression, but “student success is encouraged or supported when they are in a learning environment that allows them to reach their potential. And that might look different for different students.” In terms of the courses that Caspar taught he framed what he did in terms of student success: “It’s always a matter of what’s going to help my students be more successful, and listening to that feedback and growing from there.”

My conversation with Tim ended with an intriguing discussion of “student success” which he had been thinking about, in part because of a presentation at a conference he went to. The argument in the presentation was that colleges might be focusing on the wrong thing with students when they emphasize individual success and individual responsibility.

What rang true to me was that those students aren’t motivated necessarily by their own achievement. But they’re giving back. They’re giving back to their family, contributing
to their family, contributing to their community, and those are the things that really motivate and drive them when you, when you ask them some of these questions. And so, I started hearing the messages that we were sending all the time to students about learning, about success, and they are really geared towards this individual achievement piece.

He suggested that instead of tapping into that perspective, that one way to frame education was as giving back to your community and not only being self-serving. This kind of perspective was rarely found in coursework, but could be brought about by getting students focused outside of textbooks and videos in online courses in particular. In online learning students were not connected in physical classrooms, but could be connected to people where they live.

…actually getting out and working with people that they interact with. That’s where learning takes place. Even in Math we I saw some great math activity that some of our adjuncts put together that got people out talking statistics with their, with their employers, or with their community, or with their churches, wherever they were. And I thought, “Wow! That is exactly the message that this guy was trying to deliver about.” We’re talking past students when we talk about motivation and learning and goal setting and …

And look how we measure [student success], right? It’s all based on individuals, not what they’re doing in their community, or how they’re helping their family.

He connected this idea to online learning and online proctoring assessments as poor options relative to alternative assessments and project-based learning, as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives that were “all about community and context and experience.” He would like
to see more of that at the college, and find a way to institutionalize faculty development that worked along those lines.

“We want to be seen, valued, heard, and loved”

Outside of work, Caspar was a counselor, and when I asked about the relationship of that work to instructional design, he identified relationships and communication as key, that people “want to be seen, valued, heard, and loved.” In instructional design, this meant listening and providing solutions, and if people did not get that, they would distrust others. He saw the change process as an articulation of this approach, but also identified similar patterns in teacher-student relationships, that students appreciate those who listen and who communicate constantly.

Martin placed a strong emphasis on building relationships with faculty and academic leaders and was proud of being able to do so. He recognized that everyone had natural insecurities about things that they create and work with, not only with regard to courses, but also with technology more generally. Faculty wanted to be seen as “competent and in control.” He connected the idea of listening to faculty to having a common goal, and the idea of “student success” as defined by students. He framed this as a single direction and connected to ideas of productivity.

They want to be heard. They want to know that we’re working together, and that’s always the goal anyways, right? We’re all trying to work toward the same goal, which is, you know, student success and whatever that means to the student. But while supporting the mission to college, and as long as we’re all moving in that direction, I’m, you know, yeah, we’re usually pretty productive about that.

Martin’s institution still leant heavily on the role of deans in terms of oversight and course reviews, and he was glad that was the case, because it enabled his department to forgo a
regulatory role and so be seen as supporting faculty instead. As a result, “we get a lot more progress through relationship building than we do when they think we’re just trying to check boxes and looking over their shoulders.”

From Tim’s perspective at Anne’s college, one could build relationships intentionally and he looked to a model department on campus that did that, that “puts teaching and learning first.” The initial situation with the instructional design department had been more antagonistic and the current instructional designer had to be almost reprogrammed to learn to work alongside faculty. You had to “bring value and add value to what a faculty member is trying to do” and the first thing was to listen.

You’ve got to understand where they are, meet them where they are, understand what their needs are, and figure out how you can best help them. They [the instructional designer] got a lot better at that when we made that our intention. And they did a remarkable job after a few years of learning and coaching. This implied that listening to faculty and working to understand their needs was something that could be taught and could be improved. The result of this intentional process on his part was that “our trainings got better, our relationships got better, and the more faculty that went and did one-on-one consultations with them, the better their reputation became across our campus.”

In parallel, Tim worked to reintroduce the QM rubric after the initial failure and sought to get faculty to buy in to some of the standards of the rubric. He then built on that support and buy-in and made sure to remove any mention of it from evaluations, focusing on simply improvement. They shared research and eased into their current situation, where “we were having a different conversation at that point.” They had moved over time from partial adoption of the rubric to full-on adoption of the rubric, but purely as something that faculty could elect to
take part in. They also found champions in the faculty who would talk about the process with other faculty.

Martin continued to emphasize with his staff the slow process of building relationships with people “one person at a time” and being “willing to listen to them.” He had had his occasional struggles working with more technology-focused people, who might in contrast “communicate to end a conversation.” He had had to work to “get around different silos, different interests, different groups,” but his focus was always on continuous improvement. The lack of awareness of what his department did raised its head here too: “people think that we do a lot of things that we don’t do.”

Emily stressed collaboration through an advisory council and iterating on work when they did something new. This included reflection and assessment. She also focused on building relationships with faculty through dialogue. In terms of relationships between instructional designers and faculty, she noted that trust was important and may require “courageous conversations.” The way in which these conversations were conducted was critical, however. The approach was important, so “it’s not that somebody’s right or wrong, it’s that there’s just another way that maybe this could be done.” Faculty might not have teaching experience when they were hired, but instructional designers might not understand the content, so “it’s got to be a reciprocal shared collaboration.” Trust could be developed through respect, honesty, civility, and time. As noted, at her college, shared governance seemed to be a common value and important. Similarly to Caspar drawing a parallel between instructional design and teaching, she saw teaching coming back to relationships, mutual knowledge, and trust: “I think a good teacher connects with their students. I think they see their student for who they are as an individual,” and also, “a good teacher looks at the whole scenario.” A key skill or attribute was empathy, and “a
good teacher also is able to manage diversity of thought in a respectful environment, so that everyone feels heard. Or at least respected.”

One driver of the loss of humanities courses was the state course standardization effort focused on transfer between two-year and four-year institutions. As a program chair, despite the goal of streamlining transfer, this created new challenges for Tom because electives that fit specific institutions had been removed from program sequences, and students now had to go through administrative course substitution processes depending on which institution they were transferring to. This was frustrating to Tom because it created more work and impacted advising. He had come to believe that advising was too technically complex for faculty to take on because of these kinds of subtleties, and that program advising should be done by professional advisors who understand the implications of course choices for transfer, for financial aid and for satisfactory academic progress (SAP), with faculty instead taking on the role of career mentors to students in their discipline.

This perspective aligns with the notion that roles continue to be unbundled in the academy, but the corollary of that division of labor was that communication and collaboration become more important and more challenging. Tom observed that attending a “summit” about advising at the college was a way in which he became more aware of what advising entailed.

We have to work together. We have to work together, and there is a lack of good communication between the different sides of the house. I don’t even like to say there’s a side of the house, but there is, and I feel like there shouldn’t be. I, you know, we have these faculty meetings, and faculty, and they’re complaining about, you know student services, and I’m like, you know what? Why don’t we have a meeting with all of us in the same room? Why aren’t student services in here? Why, aren’t we, why aren’t we
communicating with each other, and telling each other what goes on. Best thing I did this year was that I sat in on the student services advising summit at the college, and got to hear what it is they do, and the stuff that they have to deal with it. Opened my eyes to what they have to do. I’m like, everybody needs to hear this.

Brief Manager Profiles

The following profiles serve as a review of the manager participants, and also capture small elements of the manager interviews which did not quite fit elsewhere, but seemed worth noting.

Caspar

Caspar had a doctoral degree which was part of the reason that he was asked to serve in an interim role at his college. His degree was taken mostly online, and was where he learned the theory of instructional design, but like Erica and Alex, he claimed that he had picked up the practicalities and technologies of the work along the way, and had taught himself.

Reflecting on how technologies can shape what was done with them, he believed that the LMS did shape how they thought about online courses and “dictates a lot of the design decisions that they can make.” An example of this was the organization of content into modules. He also made a distinction between community college courses and graduate level courses whereby the primary mode of instruction was in conversation at the graduate level, but in undergraduate and community college courses in particular, he saw Canvas as a way to dictate work. It defaulted to functioning as a work management system that could be forced to allow for conversation, but more often was not, at least in asynchronous courses. This was true, he believed, particularly in the 100-level courses that he characterized as a bridge between high school and college.

Tom
Tom was a community college graduate who worked after college, but came to enjoy teaching others how to understand the elements of his profession that they encountered in their lives. He started by working as an adjunct faculty member, teaching six or seven classes a semester, and at multiple colleges, before the Affordable Care Act (Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, 2010) led to adjunct hours being curtailed so that they would not qualify for benefits. He was hired into a full-time position at his current college within the past five years. One of the reasons that he taught was that:

There’s a charge that you get when you, when you see the light go off, you, you know, So, it’s, it’s really when, when you know that you’ve been successful at transferring knowledge to someone, and that they’re going to do something with it.

As a teacher, he recognized that his students were often “scared to death” when they come into his class, but that he had the ability to pass his knowledge on effectively, “at least that’s what my evaluation results tell me, is that they get it.” He thought that his effectiveness as a teacher of online asynchronous courses can be tracked back to instructional design, which he framed in technical terms, connected in part to his interest and background in computer science and his ability to pick up new software programs easily. His interest in design meant that he was also invested in the QM processes. He recognized the contradiction that in asynchronous online courses he does not “get to see the light bulb” nor does he “stand in front of the students anymore,” but he balanced that by noting that he did engage and interact with some of them via email and web conferencing.

Martin

Martin worked at a large community college in an urban area overseeing distance learning. He was quietly spoken. We started our conversation in part by commiserating about the
lack of time, the unlimited meetings that people in his role have, and the many hats that he had to wear.

His thinking about the future of education had him wondering whether “deep integrations” between educational applications may in time allow AI companions to help students through their academic lives, and be closely customized to particular student needs. His attitude to these technologies was that “we could be at a very interesting turning point, but I don’t know. I guess we’ll see what happens…we’re here for the ride at this point.”

Emily

Emily was the direct supervisor of the instructional designer at a large urban community college. She was energetic, but was cautious about the interview process. Her current role had multiple diverse responsibilities, and she had a long history in academic leadership roles. One of her current responsibilities was as the leader of a faculty-focused professional development program, a new initiative that was part of the college’s strategic plan. Historically, there had been a variety of models of faculty professional development which had gone dormant, so this new program was seen as a way to “reimagine” that function. The instructional designer was the staff member for this program, and there was both an advisory council and a governance committee.

What marked this initiative as different in her mind was the focus “on teaching excellence, as well as student learning and providing them with high quality experiences.” She saw the program as a hub to connect faculty to internal and external resources, and a place to communicate, collaborate, engage, and innovate.

Like other administrators she came to teaching and to the college through relationships with people she knew. Her particular background in public service before joining the college also played into how she thought about the mission of the college and how she approached her
leadership role. She saw the college as an “economic engine” and a “catalyst for our community” that could provide both a qualified workforce and an educated citizenry, so the mission was not only about people meeting their academic and career goals, but their personal goals as well. In her mind, community colleges play “a role with developing the whole person, all the parts of their development, the social and emotional, the physical, the psychological, but [also] the knowledge and context.” This included mental health, self-confidence, self-esteem, as well as students developing an awareness of who they were, and what their strengths and talents were.

She framed the benefits of initiatives like the statewide course alignment project in the way it created equity between colleges across the state, and equity in terms of transfer to four-year institutions. This removed “unintentional barriers” that colleges can create for students. At the same time, the broad coverage of some courses might mean that some faculty focused on some outcomes at the expense of others.

In terms of technology enthusiasms like AI, she saw it as “hard to ignore” but something to be understood and perhaps “another tool in the toolbox.” She believed that the program had the permission to evolve, experiment, and adapt, but it was important to focus on guiding principles that came from faculty, rather than from technology or administrators.

Tim

Tim was an engineer by trade, and enjoyed fixing things in his spare time. To a certain extent this influenced how he thought about course quality. Like Caspar he was serving in an interim role with additional duties in addition to his regular role, and as a result was very busy.

Part of the policy for qualifying to teach online at Tim’s college included some budget for compensating adjunct faculty in particular for going through the training now that it was a requirement. Within the past few years, the college had identified a number of programs that
could be offered fully online, they brought in a consultant to advise on the process, and that led to the new certification process for faculty.

**Faculty**

The faculty in this study spent a lot of time thinking about their teaching, and a lot of time connecting with their students. Their workloads were heavy. Eight faculty were interviewed as part of this study, each for approximately one hour via Zoom. One of the faculty members was an adjunct, and the others were full-time. A number of the full-time faculty either were or had been the heads of their departments or programs, and so some of their perspective reflected that leadership role. At least two faculty were interviewed at each of the three colleges participating in the study. All were women, but this was not an intentional decision, and simply an outcome of the recruitment process.

**Teaching with Intention**

For the faculty in the study, the *design* of the courses they were teaching could be intimately tied to the *delivery* of the courses that they taught, and a number indicated that they adapted the design and student requirements of their courses as they were teaching them. They were intentional and thoughtful about their approach to teaching, and referenced literature and pedagogical concepts in doing so. Sally, for example, identified a level of interaction and depth that comes from having a teacher who was engaged, and “not just teaching what’s in a can like Southern New Hampshire does.” She revealed that her approach to teaching online courses was both personal and iterative, so that she did not design the whole class from the beginning of the semester, but rather she waited until she had a feeling for what the students in the class were capable of. She used a variety of diagnostic methods “until I get all of them sorted out and see where they stand with [the subject] and then start designing the coursework for them.”
Another defining feature of Sally’s practice was that she thought about pedagogy as a department chair specifically when hiring adjuncts, and specifically that required that potential hires could describe both a philosophy and the practice that resulted from it.

I guess really my answer to everything is pedagogy. Learning how to teach. Having a philosophy, and being able to back it up. It’s one of the first things I ask adjuncts when they come in here. How do you teach and why, how?

In contrast, “if you come in with just a list of assignments and things you’re going to do, I don’t think that makes any sense, but that’s what we’re encouraged to do.”

Other faculty had their own idiosyncratic approaches in building their courses that might not necessarily be easily adapted or adopted by others. A unique feature of Sean’s teaching was an approach known as Process-Oriented Guided-Inquiry Learning or POGIL (Barthlow & Watson, 2014; Hanson, 2006) which she had learned about at a previous institution. Her discussions were typically structured using this approach which focused on how the students solved their problems rather than whether they got the right answer. It was an approach she adapted from her in person courses for use in her online courses.

One of Maxine’s degrees had an education focus, and she was similarly reflective about her teaching practice, aligning course activities with both synchronous and asynchronous activities, and aligning with the publisher product that her program used. In an echo of statements by other participants, she noted with laughter that “the students don’t complain about it!”

I try to design my courses so that I am meeting the needs of all different types of learners. You know, because the ones that, that get the information from the lecture, I have it for
them. The ones who get it through reading, I have some for them. The ones who get it through application, I have some for them, and then I have reinforcements.

She attributed her attitude and approach in part to her formal education, but also to her own learning experiences. She was constantly tweaking things that she felt could be improved, even occasionally, like Sally, during the semester, “I will change course during a semester, especially if I find out that something just is not, it’s either costing the students way too much stress, or it’s just not working the way that we had hoped it would work.” She described her own approach to teaching as somewhat “flipped” or “scrambled” (Barnett, 2014; Gorres-Martens et al., 2016). She found that younger students were comfortable with this approach, but more mature ones could be less so. She also found that the pandemic had impacted her students and their expectations, “they expect a lot more concessions.” This perception of changes in the student population was a common one and is discussed further in the next section.

Brianne similarly used language from the instructional design literature in characterizing her approach to building courses as “backwards design” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005b) although she did not recall where she learned about the approach. Noelle used the language of “scaffolding” with her course design. When Noelle built courses she started from the official outline, “because we have to meet all those objectives” and “we would get our hands slapped” if they left anything out. She did use publisher materials and guided activities in the courses, which included a variety of activities, including discussion boards and quizzes.

So, we tried to structure it so that we’re looking at scaffolding. We’re looking at the student being able to, if they say, “Well, I’m not a good test taker,” they can actually show the applied skills. And if they get stuck at any point, they’re able to go back to the lesson, click on that task.
Part of her rationale for using publisher materials, and a rationale that was used by others with reference to adjunct faculty was that prepackaged content allowed her to focus on student engagement. The publisher activities could be automatically graded which freed her up to spend time with students who got stuck: “I can spend a lot more of my time doing those sorts of activities and answering email questions rather than going through the tedium…” As with a number of the ideas in this study, there were views that aligned with conventional wisdom and views that were orthogonal to convention. Faculty could be idiosyncratic about their course design, and at the same time they could value having prepackaged content. For their own purposes and when there was time, they might not feel the necessity for standardization. They also highly valued the time spent on interaction and feedback with their students, using language of care and love about those interactions.

**Student Focus**

Faculty broadly noted that they were highly responsive to students, but they also expressed a view that the contemporary student body was different from previous generations. Sean noticed that more students seem to be getting sick, and “they don’t necessarily know how to study like they did before.” Carol echoed Maxine and others who noted that contemporary students have presented different challenges to previous generations, specifically those who had to go through high school during the pandemic. Carol had taken a lot of her online work and incorporated it into her face-to-face courses, and it had worked very well for her until this set of students entered her classes. She found them “struggling every step of the way. And I’ve had to, like, lower that expectation.” She thought it was because these students lacked the necessary social skills, self-regulation, and self-confidence, which she thought led to them having anxiety and depression. In this context, she expressed an appreciation for an older student in one of her
classes who was giving the younger ones a model and being a positive influence. She was finding that students either showed up, or did the work in the LMS, but not necessarily both.

It’s not working. I have some who are going to fail, and they’ve been sitting in my class for 15 weeks. And, you know, how many alerts can you do, and advising, and how many times can you message them? … And then they come crying. You know there’s a lot of a lot of that, of course, but this semester yeah, more than ever.

Many faculty and administrators in the study had themselves been community college students and that was part of their motivation for working in a community college. Sean’s background as a community college student, and her own dedication to the student population were why she sought out a position at a community college. She liked:

…encouraging the ones that actually maybe don’t know what they’re doing…, to help them develop study habits, to get some confidence, and…just basically kind of help them along, like play my little part in helping them get their lives in a good place, career wise.

Like Tom, Maxine expressed that the best part of being a teacher was the lightbulb moment when students connected knowledge to application, but she also connected this idea to the students’ places in the world.

I tell them something, and I see everything just click into place, and they make that switch from understanding the information to applying the information and being able to use it. That to me is like the best reward. Because I’m like, great. This student has finally got it, and they are going to go out in the world and do amazing things, right?

Sean gave a lot of feedback to students, but she intentionally did not participate in discussion boards, because she intended for the students to teach each other how to study and understand concepts. Like others, she prioritized students above all:
I feel like it’s important that I’m there. But they know I’m there and then also that, you know, their emails are going to be answered quickly too because that’s…I always prioritize emails. I tell my colleagues in the administration. It’s like, you guys are last.

In short session courses communicating with students quickly was critical, “if they get behind by a week, it’s ugly.” It was not unusual for several students to drop after the first week, but she was aware that some of her students were also working many hours and an intense short course just would not fit for them. Faculty were sensitive to the challenges that students faced.

Sally connected the idea of changing student populations to part of the disconnect between staff, like instructional designers, and faculty. This gap between teachers and the people working with them might be closed if “everybody teaches. Everybody has that experience. Teach a class.” She would extend this to administrators too who she believed were not in touch with the kinds of lives that students live.

I don’t have any respect for somebody piling on policies when they don’t do that work.

And realize how it changes so often you know as cultures change, the generations change, their needs change, what the students have been through in terms of COVID, they don’t see any of that. They don’t see where these students come from in terms of which high schools they come from. The preparations. The different privileges.

It was, in her mind, “akin to telling somebody how to raise their child.”

Similarly, part of the reason that Brianne had been an enthusiast for OER because “it makes it easier for the students. A lot of our students can’t afford books.” Her department struggled historically with students not purchasing books, despite there being scholarships to purchase them, and with publishers producing textbooks that cost well over $250. She considered it the “number one barrier to student success.” They had to constantly pay attention to
how much publishers were charging, and now OER gave them “more control over content and price.”

**Master Courses**

As far as course content was concerned, Sally said that “we share all the time, but nobody says, ‘You must do this.’” This approach was common. She was happy for adjuncts to adopt and adapt her materials and use them as they wished. However, her response to the idea of an SNHU “course in a can” was that she would quit, “I couldn’t do it, because they’re each individuals to me.” As previously noted, she intentionally adapted course content to the needs of the specific students in her courses, and would not separate the design of the course from those needs.

Many faculty thought about course content in terms of sharing materials and ideas. Some eschewed prepackaged materials from publishers. Most of Fiona’s course content was her own and she did not use that much publisher material. She was happy to share her course materials with adjuncts, but if there was a course that she did not teach, she would reach out to other faculty members to see if they were willing to share.

Carol had shared her courses with others and with the Accelerate program, where it was now being taught by an adjunct. Again, she enjoyed the collaboration process and was positive about the way the adjunct took her materials and made the course her own. She had also adopted other courses at other institutions. When she first started teaching online, she was handed a course two days after the course had started, but fortunately she had been able to ask the faculty member who designed the course about aspects of it when she ran into issues. It is worth nothing that the implication of that scenario is that the design of the course was entangled with the assumptions and approach of the designer.
Sometimes it’s nice not to have to do all the heavy lifting. Sometimes it’s not. Sometimes I look at the, you know, what they did and go, like, what the heck did you think, like, what is this, like, why would you do it that way?

From a chair’s perspective it could be a boon.

It’s great when you’re a chair and you have brand new adjuncts, and you’re desperate, you know, you’re like, eleventh hour, got nobody to take this new class that the administration decided to slap on a schedule, and so you have everything to give to those adjuncts, and can work with them to just adopt it really fast easily. You know, that’s a good thing. It’s a really good thing.

The implication of this statement, which was not uncommon, is that this way of thinking about prepackaged courses could in part be tied to employment practices. Brianne had served as a department chair historically. As others noted, having standardized courses made it much easier if they were hiring an instructor at the last minute. “The adjuncts love it. The adjuncts think it’s great,” and “it’s a way to make sure that they’re teaching what needs to be taught too.” She characterized this as a form of quality control.

Brianne’s department had developed their own way to use standardized courses for the courses that they taught at her college, although faculty were told that they could make changes if they wished to. This was an approach distinct to her department. She thought that full-time faculty might make changes to these standardized courses, but that this did not happen as much with adjuncts, of whom there were about twenty or thirty in her department. These standardized courses included different sample schedules for the various session lengths that courses might be delivered over. In addition, the courses indicated to adopting faculty what was normally done in courses, but there was room for adjuncts to adapt and add their own assignments or pick and
choose specific assignments. In her discipline, she noted, “the adjuncts don’t get paid that much,” and “you’re hiring them in particular for their subject matter research, their subject matter, not for their, I don’t know, organizational skills, your course creation skills.”

Maxine believed that her department should get instructors “on the same page” as to how to teach their courses, and that “we can sort of get on board with what is best practice.” This could then be aligned with standardizing a course layout that would be “so much less confusing for our students.” This statement echoed what some others had said about standardizing course layouts and design as a way to have courses align with student expectations. As a program chair, she hired new faculty, and this was part of the impetus for standardizing courses. She noted that faculty in her discipline could be transient and had many options available to them. When we talked, she had to hire eleven new faculty before August and being able to give those faculty a pre-built course would make her job much easier. However, she was still persuading her remaining faculty that this would be a good approach.

Because instructors in her department had non-standard career paths into teaching, they did not necessarily have expertise in course design, and so these kinds of approaches were not easy for them. They were also bound to different professional standards, which potentially could conflict with the goals of the college, such as enrollment. She took those professional standards as sacrosanct, and so if push came to shove, she had to defer to the professional standards.

Noelle raised the issue of academic freedom on her own when she was asked about giving pre-built courses to adjuncts. She saw a “fine line between commonality and academic freedom.” She asserted that full-time faculty claimed “academic freedom” when really “they don’t want to do the hard work.” She appreciated that the new administration had supported master course templates, although there was “no way to enforce it.” As a result, some adjuncts
might make significant changes and not use the delivered material. She did not see a way, however, for a dean to check every assignment in every course to make sure that faculty were fulfilling the course objectives as defined by the statewide course standardization process. From her perspective, faculty choosing which objectives to fulfill was not a matter of academic freedom. “As a concept [course standardization] is great, but in practice we’re still finding it difficult to…ensure that faculty are following it.” This expression marries surveillance with standardization.

**Standardization – The Exclusion of Fantasy**

Multiple faculty were positive about the statewide course alignment initiative both in terms of the outcome, and the process if they were involved in it. Sally described them as “the course outcomes and course outline [that] are done by professionals in that content area with some oversight from the other powers.” From her point of view, the statewide course alignment changes were good, and as long as faculty addressed the elements of the official course outline, they could do it in any way that they wish. The other side of the coin on this process was her devastation at the combining of what was previously two comprehensive courses into one:

We just cut off one of the legs of it. Only one is now required for the Gen Ed degree…two semesters is a push; one is just laughable. You’re just running through it as fast as you can and you can’t hit even all the periods, let alone the background material that really fills in what each student takes away from that class.

Others were more sanguine about this specific kind of change, expressing that students had not been taking the course sequences anyway. Carol put the two-course sequences in the humanities into the category of “luxuries” that they and students cannot afford.
Sean took part in the statewide course alignment process for her discipline, both as a writer and a reviewer, and described the process and outcome as “really great,” noting that they were now working on a set curriculum for the first two years which she also thought was a good idea. She recognized that standardization was a mixed blessing, and identified labs as the major source of contention between four-year institutions and two-year institutions. In her opinion, the circumstances of many two-year students were very different, which makes coming onto campus for labs challenging. In a parallel echo of the statements by instructional designers that community college faculty live in a “world of unicorns and rainbows,” Sean considered that the four-year faculty “live in an alternate reality, and the rest of us live in reality.”

Noelle had a course that she had made available to other colleges in the system, but had run into challenges with the statewide course alignment process which updated the outcomes for that course, and in her view, created a “mammoth” course outline for a course that constituted fewer credits than historically. She felt that this came from four-year institutions. They “just gave this really ridiculous list of things, and we have to jump through the hoops in order to play nice, and it doesn’t necessarily make sense.”

This “They live in a fantasy world” criticism was a curious critique to emerge between different groups in the study. It seemed to be based partly on the mutual lack of understanding of the work that groups did, and the nature of the people that they worked with, despite the fact that they were collaborating with one another. It was also based on assuming that fantasy was unacceptable, and that the purpose of education was to meet the needs of “real” students as they were, not as people might wish them to be.

The Purposes of Education
Faculty were sensitive to the changes to the curriculum and their implications, relating them to pressures from enrollment and finances. For example, Sally decried the loss of humanities requirements that arose from course content changes, and that arose from time compression. The significance of this speed was that in her experience it was these kinds of classes that really “fills out their lives” and “changes them as people,” but that effect was “hard to quantify.” She picked up on this more broadly as “getting people through college faster and cheaper” which she connected to enrollment pressures and a mindset of “designing for the customer.” She did not really know how “we could do something that’s satisfying enough to push back against the pressures of money and numbers.”

At Noelle’s institution, she believed that the faculty voice was not as strong as it used to be, and things that had been taken to the Faculty Senate had not gone anywhere.

And it was devastating to watch what they’ve done to that program, and how, how the way that they’ve managed, or lack of management, has caused the majority of the faculty to just check out. They’re using the term quiet quitting. 90% of the college has quietly quit. They’re hanging on to retire.

She was finding similar sentiments at other colleges, and “it’s spread like a disease.” Like Sally, she traced this back to finances: “we’re no longer doing what’s best for the students or best for the faculty. We’re doing what’s best for the money, and that is a disservice, and it’s very disheartening.” It seemed that she attributed this in part to a specific initiative at her college, but also to a restructuring of the administration. There was a sense of faculty not being kept informed until some urgent crisis arose, or immediate feedback was required.

Noelle felt similarly about compressed sessions. For the same course, the college was asking them to teach it in three-week sessions. “Students aren’t going to comprehend anything,
but apparently that’s what the students want. So, they’re doing it. I refuse to do it. I refuse to teach anything less than 7 weeks.” She saw this as coming from the new administration, forcing the faculty to teach this way in “underhanded” ways. She was, however, “tired of fighting.” She was aware that there was a department that appeared to be currently teaching some courses in three weeks. She believed that the rationale might have come from an attempt to compete with for-profit schools.

Sean was a supporter of compressed sessions. Other faculty in Sean’s discipline were “not fans of the idea of the accelerated courses.” Those faculty believed that students need more time, but she noted that in a fifteen-week course, things may be more likely to happen in a student’s life that would upend their progress and lead them to not finishing. However, the nature of faculty work changed in compressed sessions. She admitted that she had to be “really hands-on” for students to persist in the accelerated courses: “I don’t wait until, you know, the twenty-four hours goes by because I know that that’s like one seventh of their week.” For her, being available to students was critical: “you can have the best course in the world, but if they don’t hear from you, see you, you know, in any way. Then it just looks like, ‘Hey? I’m just working through this on my own.’” She indicated that she had heard of courses where students felt that the instructor relied on external resources, and “didn’t even put any effort into teaching it themselves.” In her mind then, teaching meant being available, responsive, and visible to students.

Sally’s college had tried to persuade faculty that short session courses should be what they should do, but in her mind, as with other initiatives, the argument was undercut by the person making it. They did not present it well, and “they kept trying to present studies with 12 people in the study.” She could see that it might work for some courses, but for her discipline, it
would be like trying to grow a plant twice as fast by adding more fertilizer. She believed that it just takes time to learn to research and write papers.

Carol’s college was offering some compressed, short session courses, but would continue to offer alternatives. In that regard, she thought workforce (non-credit) courses “served as an example of how this could move forward.” She did not have a problem with it per se, except to the extent that students might not be prepared for the different course length.

When she started teaching shortened courses, she found that fifteen weeks was a “luxury sometimes” and she had been “dragging stuff out.” She likened a five-week course to boiling down a stock. She was very clear with her students on how these courses were organized, and was always willing to shift students into longer session equivalents if they struggled. Like Sean, a different level of attention was required from her when she taught these courses. She had to “administrate carefully and not let them tank.” These compressed course sessions then required faculty to change the way that they worked and how available they had to be to their students.

**Workload and Love**

The faculty in the study were often quick to admit that they spent a lot of time working with students, and responding to them outside of regular work hours. Even outside of course structures like compressed sessions, faculty worked long hours. Sally framed this in economic terms as neither “cost-effective” nor “time-effective,” but rather springing in part from her own life circumstances. “It means that you’ve got an old teacher at home who has nothing else to take care of but herself. Well, it’s the truth. It’s the truth. I’m available all the time.”

Multiple faculty connected the many hours they worked to the care and relationships that they wanted with their students. Every faculty member in the study expressed a love of teaching, and that they cared about their students whose lives they have the opportunity to impact. Fiona
said that “I love teaching. I love my students. It brings me joy to be part of education, and I work 24/7.” This was not an understatement. She would respond to emails at three a.m. if she saw them, and her students seemed to like that. “They try to see if [I am] going to be awake at four in the morning.” She considered her students to be her children that she should take care of, and they always came first for her.

Because of her many responsibilities Fiona was always ahead of schedule and planning to complete tasks before they were due, because at any moment she could be saddled with a new responsibility, as when an adjunct passed away and she had to take over their class. She drew a line connecting this work to her own expertise but also to her care for her students.

Somebody had to step in, and that someone had to be me because I was the one that knew the content, knew the class well enough, was able to utilize resources I had, because it was [my subject] class, and to assure these students that they were going to get through this semester.

Carol loved teaching: “I really love this. I love teaching at a community college, and I love teaching my subject” and “I really feel like it’s my calling.” She was aware when she joined the community college that the student body was from “a whole spectrum of ages and background. I just found it way more interesting.”

In addition to teaching at the college, Carol also taught at a four-year private institution and online at one of the other community colleges. She was a single mother for a long time and got into the habit of “hustling” and staying busy. It helped now that she had intentionally stepped back from some administrative duties, which were particularly taxing during the pandemic: “the pandemic was like dog years, like being a chair in a pandemic year was like seven years. Yeah, it was excruciating, and we just burned out.” She felt that she had more time now to plan and
strategically build her online classes. She had been able to undertake multiple QM reviews for short session courses and had “so much more creative time.”

At the college, she considered that the administration was quite demanding compared to other institutions, and required a lot of participation by faculty in governance and professional development, but the faculty were hard-working and committed. The administration could be a little “initiative happy” and this was in tension with messages of self-care.

You get tired as a faculty member, hearing like, ‘Oh, self-care!’ You know, ‘Have boundaries! Have self-care!’ And then meanwhile, they’re pelting you with things that you have to do. And so, there was a lot of pushback on that.

Sometimes, she felt that the administration “stacks the deck” with initiatives:

The worst thing the administrators do is say, drag in a couple of faculty, they tell them what they’re going to do, and then they say, “But we have faculty input. Like, what do you mean? We have faculty input.” I’ve been on those committees where we’re the faculty input, and it’s not. We’re just told. “This is what’s going to happen.”

Unlike many participants in the study Sean did not have a “side gig” and did not teach outside of the college. One reason was that she served as a department chair for many years, but another was “since the pandemic there have got to be so many initiatives that I just felt like I was kinda, just...it was just too much.” She felt that the faculty did have more of a voice than they used to, although the administration sometimes responded with “too bad, so sad,” but she was comfortable with that.

It had taken her a lot of time to move one of her courses online during the pandemic, and she recorded hundreds of short videos for that and a subsequent course. She focused on short
videos to avoid overwhelming students, and had even bought her own equipment to make the process of making the videos easier.

A couple of faculty were taking further education while teaching full-time. Noelle was working on getting her PhD at a completely online university in an information technology field. She had not been able to find an option geographically close to where she lives that met what she wanted to study. Maxine was taking online classes for a doctorate and noted approvingly that all her classes “look the same.”

Maxine spent a lot of time working on updating her courses, and giving grading feedback, and her workload was high. Her next class was going to have over ninety students. In addition to her full-time position at the college, Brianne also taught as an adjunct for an online institution, and had filled in for another institution as an adjunct.

The online institution where Brianne taught structured its courses as eight-week rolling sessions, with, in her case, OER materials, but nevertheless a prepackaged course that she was responsible for delivering. In those courses, her role was to participate in discussions with students, and give feedback on assignments. She thought this worked well, and she had used things she had learned from their professional development in her home college courses. Her participation at that college was not necessarily monitored in the way that SNHU monitors their adjuncts, but they did require comments for every student assignment, and did require grades to be submitted within seven days, but “I do that anyway at my college.” She had always found it interesting and educational to collaborate with colleagues at other institutions as it exposed her to different ways of teaching her discipline. “I think I’m a better instructor, having taught elsewhere, because it just gives, you know, you tend to get very myopic.”
Noelle did express a desire for ways to improve her courses, but indicated that she did not have the time. “They’re not hiring replacements for faculty who are retiring. I’m doing the job of three people. Do I have time to improve my course? Not really.” She connected this lack of staffing to what she sees as connected to faculty disconnecting from the institution. “We’re so overloaded. It’s why we’re checking out…. And there’s no appreciation.”

You know what they gave me for my 25 years? A paper certificate. That’s it. Not even in a frame like my ten year, not even with a little pin like my five year. They gave me a damn paper certificate. 25 years.

In this light, overwork appears as a norm with emotional labor overtones, but also a product of hiring practices in tension with faculty’s commitment to their students, and their genuine love of what they do. Gregg’s study of knowledge workers characterized this “corporatization of intimacy” (Gregg, 2011, p. 172) as “the bind of today’s white-collar professional is to be invested in work as and when required but without the reciprocal assurance from employers that commitment will be rewarded” (Gregg, 2011, p. 165).

**Quality Matters**

Faculty attitudes towards any QM processes that their college adopted were mild, rather than enthusiastic. As previously noted, all the institutions involved had had failed QM initiatives historically. Sally believed the QM process that the college was adopting was good, but “it’s just something you buy,” and it was undermined in her eyes by the fact that the person running the process did not meet the standards of the process.

Fiona attributed the historical failure of the QM process at her institution to faculty fear of interference and certification. She more recently took the QM review course at the same time as another instructor and found that “the experience was a powerful one” but this was in part
because she could collaborate with the other faculty member. She also acknowledged that it made her “more confident in how I was putting my courses together. And knowing that I could help others do the same thing.” Many faculty were nervous when first taking part in QM processes. Fiona found it “really scary having my course review” the first year that she took part in the new QM process at the college.

I was terrified that they were going to find all kinds of things that were not right, but at the end, I only had lost 2 points out of the total 100, and it was not one of the essential standards, so my course was in good shape. And so I used that then to make sure all my other courses were set up pretty similarly, so that I would be doing what I thought QM thought was right.

Fiona’s college used internal faculty to review courses, and as a reviewer of courses, she found it a lot of work and a challenge to write up reviews in ways that would encourage other instructors and not be critical. She approached this differently after she took the training course, and tried to include more evidence and more concrete examples of what she was trying to communicate to them.

Sean characterized the QM process she went through for the courses as “a pretty decent experience” although some elements she found overly explanatory. Once she had done one review, she entered the next ones with “those i’s dotted, and t’s crossed.”

Carol had been a reviewer and done a lot of training for others, and still fundamentally believed in the concept. However, she thought the rubric was “a little bit insane” and the training provided by the QM organization did not meet its own standards. Internally at the college, the use of a template made it easier to align materials with the QM rubric. She did not necessarily feel that she was getting new ideas out of the process, but they were “giving me the QM stamp.”
Carol thought it ironic that the name of the organization was “quality matters” because she found the word “quality” to be nebulous, “a little bit elitist, and…nonsensical.” She preferred the term “effective.” To her, effectiveness was a much more important concept than quality. She characterized this attitude on her part as “That’s my rebellion.” In her mind the difference was that “effectiveness is measurable.”

An interesting feature of these various observations was the extent to which faculty characterized QM in terms of scores and numbers and checklists, rather than how it impacted their instruction. In addition, the credibility of the process could be undermined by the people in charge of the process. Many clearly saw and placed value in the process, but rather like their own students, they could end up focused on the grades rather than the process.

**Instructional Design**

Sally recognized that there had been a “contentious relationship” between faculty and the instructional design group, but “you can tell sometimes when she’s doing workshops or just delivering information, you can tell that she just does not have that background behind her.” She was friends with and respected the instructional designer, but identified specific elements in the designer’s training such as timing and presentation that she appeared not to possess. Rather, the instructional designer went “by the book” and did not adapt her training for the people she was training, which in contrast was something that Sally did with her students.

Fiona professed a high opinion of the college’s instructional designer, who she considered to be supportive of instructors: “she’s never critical like, ‘Oh, we can’t get this done.’ She’s always, ‘Let’s just see how we can make this happen.’” She attributed the contemporary comfort with QM processes to the way that the instructional designer worked, but also suggested that not everyone was aware of the value the instructional designer brought to the college.
I think they are like one of those treasures that people don’t know that we have. Unless you really are excited and energized about changing your courses or doing something with QM, you may not be aware of the expertise that they have.

Fiona suspected that faculty believe that a course designer or developer might take over their courses, but “that’s not the case at all...she just wants you to tell her. ‘What is it you have questions about, or how can I help.” She considered the instructional designer an overlooked resource. She agreed with me when I suggested that this characterization might be true in a number of areas of college operations, not only with instructional design.

In terms of Carol’s relationship with the college’s instructional designers, there were aspects she appreciated, such as when they offered ideas and suggestions in ways that acknowledge that she had her own teaching style and materials.

I love when they let me use things I want to use like [software], when they give me my way. You know, I love when they bring us stuff like little gifts and say, how do you like this? Would this be great? What would you do with this? Does this work for you? How you teach? For what your course material is? For what your outcomes are? Would this, you know, is this a good thing? Would you like this? Without bombarding us with, we’re getting this! And we’re getting this! And you suck it up and learn it! … I love when they’re very collaborative and accessible. If they’re not collaborative and accessible, and, God forbid, they are condescending [emphasis added], then that’s a problem.

Carol’s response when this happened was to attempt to be diplomatic and focus on what she wanted to know in the situation. She was well aware when instructional designers got frustrated with faculty, because “that shows.” In her mind instructional designers were like
administrators in that “they have very good ideas of what they think we should be doing without actually finding out whether we think it’s a good idea, or if it even works.” At the same time, she explicitly recognized that instructional designers were in a kind of “middle management mess” where “they are stuck between the administration and the faculty.”

You’ve got the pressure from above going: “Make them do this, make them do this, and don’t let them do this, and don’t let them do that.” And then you know the faculty going too, like, “Hey? Knock it off! Get off my back. I don’t want to do that. That’s stupid. Leave me alone,” you know. So, I understand that they’re in a tough position dealing with faculty, and you know, I know not all faculty, that I mean, I was in a chair a long time, different departments. I know all faculty are not easy to deal with, and some of them are just jerks, and you know some adjuncts have no idea what they’re doing, and we hired them because we’re desperate, and you know, you get them in and they’re a nightmare, and they never do anything that the instructional designers tell them to do and they screw up Canvas.

Sean was very positive about the instructional designers at her college. She tended to attend technology-focused training because she just liked technology, and she found the templating process easy to adapt to. She felt that she had enough control over her course content that she could personalize the courses in ways that facilitated her connection to her students, yet she appreciated the template to the extent that she used the same approach in courses outside the Accelerate program. This was because:

It just made it even more clear to students, and that’s what I have always wanted. I just want students to be able to open it up and say, ‘Okay, this is what I need to do’ without, you know, wondering where things are or where do I find the lecture.
As far as interacting with the instructional designers, “they tell me what to do, and then I do it. And then, if I have questions, I ask them.” She had noticed that other faculty chafed against the template, but since she was able to put in her videos and assignments, she could treat it as a framework, and if all courses in the program look similar, “it’s a lot less mental energy and barrier for the students to figure out what they’re doing in a given course.”

Her attitude towards the instructional designers was that she tried to be collaborative and actively chose to consider them as being collaborative. As long as the students were happy and what she was doing was defensible, she did the best she could, but ultimately, “you do your thing.”

**Professional Development**

When it came to being certified to teach by the college, Sally literally held her nose, and indicated that it was too generic and not in line with her own philosophies of teaching, but fundamentally she did not think that the instructional designer was qualified to teach faculty, “you’ve got somebody teaching you that…who doesn’t teach. That bothers me.” She would have more respect for the training if the trainer was an experienced adjunct, but broadly speaking, “people here complain about our professional development all the time.” This was because the people who were delivering training did not know what they were talking about, or they had purchased some canned product. “They’re not teachers, and they’ve not tried it out. They’ve just bought it.”

When it came to compliance with policies like RSI, Fiona felt that the training supporting those policies had become more serious, and faculty had been discussing how they met the standards. She was positive about the college’s professional development in that regard. Sean thought that “we’ve gone bananas” with the college’s prescriptive approach to RSI training and
requirements, and as a good teacher, she met the requirements anyway. She did find that she was not able to do it the way that the faculty were trained. “I can’t get it all done and work with my students the way that I want to. So, I kind of just do it my way now.”

Carol likened professional development to the challenges of teaching a broad range of students and suggested that “the smart ones recruit faculty to help them reach faculty.” Faculty did feel intruded upon by the RSI training that the college required of them and “felt disrespected, like they’re being told that they don’t know how to do their job.” She expressed a sense in which all faculty were tarred with the same brush. The Faculty Senate at her college made an issue of this to the administration, “You’ve got to stop aiming everything to catch the worst people. Because it makes the rest of us feel misunderstood, unappreciated…Don’t spam us like we’re all bad actors because we resentment that.”

**Collaboration – Nothing Pays Off**

Faculty echoed the pleasure that instructional designers took in collaboration, like Sally who was positive about faculty “colloquies” that her college used to support. Fiona’s experience with QM training was significantly enhanced by the collaboration with another faculty member. Faculty also enjoyed the process of the statewide course alignment initiative which gave them opportunities to work with faculty from other community colleges and universities. For the instructional designers, Erica expressed satisfaction and excitement when she had another instructional designer who she could bounce ideas off, but also when she connected to instructional designers at other colleges. Alex had regular interactions with other instructional designers at other colleges as well, and other instructional designers in the study described the pleasure when they got to interact with faculty.
At Sally’s college, there were colloquies where faculty would share about their teaching practices, and have extensive, “dynamic” discussions of ideas about teaching. This would lead to cross-disciplinary collaborations. However, the college no longer provided money to support this kind of professional development (as opposed to buying professional development training). Participating in these events used to be part of faculty annual reports, “and used to really pay off, [but] now nothing pays off.” With regard to these events,

People say all the time how much they miss that, that camaraderie, that we don’t even see people across the street. We see them in In Service. It kind of gets heated up at In Service and then school starts. Everybody gets busy.

People get busy, they are overloaded with work, and nothing pays off, which is to say that there appears to be no work-related incentives for collaboration. Expressions of misunderstanding seem to abound, but there are no obvious solutions. Sally thought that collegiality might be improved if “you actually talk to people and listen to them and sometimes that’s what’s missing.” This seems to echo the manager perspective that people “want to be seen, valued, heard, and loved.”

**Brief Faculty Profiles**

Broadly speaking, the faculty participants were less cautious than the managers in the study. As a result, their interviews were more idiosyncratic.

**Sally – I love it**

Sally was a department chair in the humanities and was interviewed partly in her leadership role, but also as a faculty member. She was close to retirement. She worked at all hours, and she recognized that not everyone can do what she did when teaching online, but “I love it.”
For students there were many challenges, in particular, “we’ve got all these acronyms for all these things that students don’t know what you’re talking about.” This could include delivery modalities like hybrid classes, but sometimes students were not even aware of the duration of the session of courses that they were signing up for. This critique echoes comments by the instructional designer, Alex, and her role in interpreting for her students. It also points to the potential gap in terms of administrators understanding student lives.

Sally pushed back on the rigidity of the paths that colleges put students on “colleges now force you to get on a path and you’re in it, and you know, you don’t look right, left, or up or down, you stay in that path, because it’s gonna cost you if you don’t.” Nevertheless, students do disappear, but that was often due to external factors beyond her control.

Although she had lived in the region for many years, “when I came here, I mean, I had no idea people lived like this.” She admired the resilience of the students, but remained shocked by some of their lives and her previous ignorance. “How do you come here and do anything under those extraordinary circumstances? And I never knew that. I never knew people lived like this…. And you can’t unsee it.” She saw “unfairness all the way down the line” in terms of the resources allocated to different high schools in the area and the way that manifested in the students that she taught.

Her role in hiring qualified adjuncts was challenging, and she recognized the economic imperatives behind it, “we’re you know trying to teach as many classes as we possibly can and not hire anybody full-time.” One challenge in particular she faced was that pedagogical coursework for potential adjuncts did not count towards their qualifications to teach in a particular discipline. “I don’t even know how we get adjuncts. I mean why anybody would want to do that.” She was careful not to overpromise to new hires.
I say this is a great training ground or a great place to be, to learn, and, you know, you’ll get so much out of this, and learn so much about people and how to teach, but as far as jobs opening up, that’s not gonna happen.

Fiona – responding to students at 4 am

Like Sally, Fiona was a program chair, which meant that she hired and oversaw adjunct faculty. She worked in the social sciences. She believed that teaching was a calling as a profession, and saw her task as being to “nurture and help students grow and become the best they can be.” She had a PhD, and went to her current college herself as a younger student. Because of her chair responsibilities she did not teach as much as she had previously, but her current teaching was all online.

She thought that she thrived in the face-to-face environment more, but got a “rush” working with students regardless of the environment, even without direct interaction. Because of her background and her own educational experiences, she used a lot of discussion in her classes.

She often found the experience of evaluating adjuncts to be satisfying, thought-provoking and something that challenged her to become a better teacher. She had no interest in sites like RateMyProfessor, but did, unlike Sally, pay close attention to student course evaluations. For asynchronous online courses, she asked adjuncts to submit a module of content for evaluation purposes, or she was allowed into their courses to review one module.

Students have told her that her courses were well organized, and they appreciated her feedback and how quickly she responded to them. She was constantly thinking about ways to reorganize and improve her courses, however. The best part for her in teaching was the student “light bulb moment.” She recognized that students come into her classes with very different skills and experiences, and so for her the idea of student success did not only encompass her
discipline, but other more general skills beyond the officially defined course-specific learning outcomes.

…it’s not only that we are trying to master those outcomes of the course, we’re trying to make sure they’ve got the life lessons and the other components sometimes.

Her approach to her discipline was that it touched on everything, and consequently, she could and did personalize “the experience in the classroom” by relating it to students’ life experiences and interests.

Her courses were highly structured with an abundance of detail for students about the mechanics and organization of the course. All the course materials were made available as attachments, and modules were typically accompanied by a discussion. She tried to tie discussions to the students’ lives: “they love that discussion for them because it gives them a chance to really think about who they are and how they look at these kinds of things.”

**Carol – a duck paddling furiously**

Carol taught in the humanities in two different disciplines, but primarily in one. Before she came to the college, she was teaching online for a college out-of-state. Now as full-time faculty, she taught half face-to-face and half online, but in fact a number of her classes were hybrid, and she also used Zoom.

For her a good course was like a seminar, that was exploratory, active, and students feel safe and supported in getting involved. Sometimes her colleagues thought her courses were easy because her students liked them, but she claimed to be more like a duck paddling furiously to keep her students engaged, to make the courses interesting, and to “overcome whatever their barriers are to success.” She thought she was “secretly rigorous.”

**Sean – a kind of a weirdo**
Sean taught in the sciences and so one of her challenges when teaching online was with laboratory work for students. Like many others that I talked to, she herself started at a community college (as a non-traditional student) before subsequently completing her undergraduate and graduate work, and like others, she loved teaching.

She taught mostly online and some face-to-face, but acknowledged that her discipline “is full of dinosaurs” and she was “a kind of a weirdo” in her discipline for teaching online. You could, in her opinion, teach her discipline online as long as the course was well supported, and had “lots of videos and lots of interaction.”

As far as labs in online courses were concerned, she had researched the topic and found that students in simulated labs do just as well in subsequent courses as students who were in hands-on labs. She attributed this in part due to the potential dynamics of working with a lab partner in a real lab, and the opportunities for review and rework when conducting a lab online. She used a publisher product for the simulated labs, and publisher products for some homework, but she also used OER materials and a low-cost textbook.

She was both the developer and deliverer of the short session courses in her discipline. There were no adjuncts using them yet, which implies that any potential issues with treating those courses as templates for other faculty had not yet been encountered. She had used the template provided by the instructional designers and adapted it somewhat.

Maxine – a professional

Maxine taught in a healthcare field, after a long career as a practitioner. She was glad she made the move to teaching partly as a better life choice, but also as a way to give back to her profession. Like others, she herself went to the community college she currently taught at.
The nature of teaching in healthcare was that she was closely involved with keeping an eye on students, evaluating course content, and keeping activities in line with accreditation requirements. She was also used to having a standardized curriculum, but a challenge was making sure teaching styles were aligned and there was “adequate progression from one class to the next.”

Ultimately, due to the nature of her field, she considered the definitive measure of their success to be their licensure pass rates. The idiosyncrasies of the program’s accreditation and the importance of the program to the college meant that sometimes what worked for other parts of the college did not work for them. This could include policy changes, but also technology changes as well.

Professional accreditation standards also meant paying close attention to all components of courses and their alignment to professional standards. This included lab simulations, and making sure that learning objectives were being met and aligned with both course and program outcomes.

Brianne – OER enthusiast

Brianne taught in a business-related field at a large urban community college. She taught both in person and online, but her program had a strong online focus, and a particular focus on using OER materials. She enjoyed higher education because students “for the most part want to be there” and she had a PhD.

The pandemic was stressful because of the move to web conferencing, and students did not have the resources to take part in courses when that happened. At the same time, her colleagues started a group chat that continues to this day, in which they got to know each other, discussed issues, were able to “complain and bitch,” and socialized. They “found it was very
good for our sanity” but also it was a space where they could ask about classroom issues they ran into. The function of this group appears to echo the “safe space” of the Vegas group of instructional designers.

She considered the current LMS, Canvas, to be easier to use than the previous one, “it’s just common sense.” A good course, in her opinion, was engaging, met the learning outcomes, was easy to use, and students knew what was expected. She had not worked that much with the college’s instructional designer, although she did have some release time to work on a specific project with her. She believed that professional development should focus on using technologies to address the different modalities that students were learning in.

She was interested in the current enthusiasm for AI and LLMs and saw some potential applications for it. She was not hostile to the idea of students using it in their education, nor to technology in general. She liked “being the sage on the stage… I mean what a power trip, right? You know, I’m really smart, and I’m gonna you know. I’m gonna give you my smartness.” She saw a future role for teachers as helping students navigate knowledge and work out “what’s garbage and what’s not.” She did however frame AI as an inevitability, that “we better embrace AI in some way, shape, or form.”

In terms of the general direction of the community college system, she was a strong supporter, but asserted that the system had “lost some focus as a system, trying to be all things to all people.” She thought it could be more operationally efficient, while allowing “each college to play to their strengths,” but that would be a difficult balancing act.

Noelle – the funding model must change

Noelle became a teacher almost by accident when a professor asked her to fill in for a class, and then she taught during her masters. She also taught in multiple countries through the
military, and she ended up where she was now substantially by chance. She was working on a PhD when we met.

During the pandemic she taught synchronously online, “and that was really popular and really successful, but we need to have butts in seats physically.” As a result, the college had removed the synchronous sections, and she taught both online and face-to-face. She felt that this change had been “a disservice to the students,” and was due to the funding structures that require occupancy in buildings. While students preferred asynchronous online courses (and the classes stayed full), the synchronous ones worked well for those students who needed a bit more support. Meanwhile, there were a small number who preferred face-to-face courses. However, the college had forced faculty to go back to face-to-face courses and taken the synchronous ones off the schedule. “We just built a parking garage…that nobody parks in. We have buildings and buildings that nobody’s in, even when we’re forced to go back face-to-face. So, the funding model is gonna have to change.”

She thought that the relevance of the community college to its local geographic community remained true in the trades, particularly those that could not be done online, but also in the partnerships with businesses and other academic institutions. On the other hand, students would rather email her than meet on Zoom or in person.

Like others in the study, she had previously served as a department chair, but stepped down as the administration changed. As it was, she taught five classes in both Fall and Spring semesters, plus a full overload in the Summer semester. She also served on committees and runs some grant projects. One of those projects had her coordinating transfer from the college to local four-year institutions, and it had been “wildly successful.”
When she was a chair, “it was never my responsibility to make sure that they were actually teaching what they were teaching,” but she did respond to complaints and refer issues to her dean. Her approach was to mentor adjuncts. She believed that approaches like QM were necessary because otherwise people who do not know how to teach were being tasked with teaching.

Nobody taught me the best way to build a course. We don’t have to meet with the instructional designers to see that maybe we’re building our course in the best way or in the prettiest way. So, it goes back to that quality matters oversight. I think that that input might be helpful. But then, faculty have big egos like, I don’t want [the instructional designer] to come in and tell me that my course isn’t good.

**Naomi**

Naomi was the last of the faculty I interviewed and one of my favorites. Our interview was fun, and she was full of laughter. When I was reviewing my interviews, I was deeply struck by the generosity and care of all my interviewees as well as their dedication to their students, and it seems appropriate to end with someone who in my mind exemplified those attributes. She stands out in part because she was an adjunct teaching in the arts, teaching at a couple of institutions. At the time of our interview, she was teaching seven classes at three different institutions. She became a teacher because she liked it, and had had a lot of “very terrible” professors herself.

When I started doing teaching, when I was in my master’s degree, I got to actually break these things down for people who are in the field like, have no frame of reference for this. And when I saw the response that I sort of got from that, I realized, yeah, this is something. This is something I could probably do. This is fun. I like this.
Her choice to teach at community colleges was in part to make her discipline accessible to people who might never go to a four-year college.

Her approach to teaching was that what works for her own learning was not necessarily what works for all students, so she intentionally taught asynchronous courses built with the flexibility for students to learn in different ways. She had taught synchronously and face-to-face courses too. For example, she allowed students to continue to resubmit assignments up to the due date, “because otherwise they didn’t learn anything, just me saying ‘you did this wrong.’” She described this flexibility as a kind of empathy that comes from “putting myself in someone else’s shoes.”

She took the required professional development course to teach online at the large urban community college, the one mentored by Erica, the instructional designer at the college. She found it very helpful in terms of structuring the course and making the expectations clear to students.

It was great. She was wonderful. Honestly. And she really, she’s probably, that her and that class, are the reason that I feel as confident as I do in my online now, because she showed me that you can have a class that is self-paced. but still structured, and still has feedback. Because she was on top of feedback. I was like, “Oh damn.”

She had fun with her teaching and her assignments to students. Her students enjoyed the assignments, and she enjoyed reading them. She had been challenged by the statewide course alignment revisions that required more focus on research papers because her inclination was to “grade very hard on research papers,” but she restructured her classes to build towards the research paper and that worked. She was also pragmatic, as others had been, about the compression of two course sequences down to a single course, “because students were never
going to take 102.” She structured her courses more in terms of concepts rather than canon, and she saw her discipline as one way in which students learned critical thinking and general skills rather than content specifically focused on careers.

She did not use publisher materials, but relied on OER and her own writing. She considered the textbooks in her field a waste of money and not focused on the broad spectrum of her field: “So we have three chapters from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century in Italy, and three pages on an entire continent. Make it make sense. You can’t. You can’t. So, I just didn’t. I didn’t bother.” She built courses around the major concepts, but for her, assignments usually came first.

In terms of collegiality, at one institution there were meetings for adjuncts, but at her community college she was largely left alone, “We don’t have a chair.” At the four-year institution at which she taught she did discuss assignments with others and what choices they make in teaching. She taught in a shorter session of eight weeks at one college, and in those courses, she focused on the main concepts that would carry the narrative of the class, “they only get the main beats.” She was currently teaching in a five-week session, and was taken aback when she first saw the class dates. They said, “Figure it out! I said, ‘Okay.’” She did not mind the grading load because she enjoyed reading the assignment submissions.

Her four-year institution was “very chaotic,” and she was happy not to be involved in university politics. At that institution, she was provided with a sample class after she had been teaching for a while, and “I said ‘I’m not doing that’ because it was awful. It was awful, like it wasn’t, it was a terrible class.” The course was a copy from one of her colleagues who she considered a good teacher, but as an online class it was not well structured and was mostly articles. For a good course, she thought that it had to be clear about what students should expect.
“You have to give the students the structure, while at the same time showing that, like, hey, there’s still someone behind here pulling the strings directly who knows what they’re doing.”

She tweaked and experimented with her courses, and her students “seem to love them.” She actively sought out feedback from students both during and at the end of the semester, and her institutions seemed to trust her. In a familiar refrain, she noted the significances of complaints: “I guess they trust me…until someone starts complaining about me, they just assume I’m doing the correct thing.” She articulated her attitude to her students and to her teaching as follows:

I give a trigger warning at the beginning of all my classes, where I tell them, “So, [my subject] is indicative of life. Life is messy. Life is wonderful, and life is offensive, and that’s just sort of how it works. If would like an authentic engagement with [my subject] on a level that is non-academic, and at the same time, like, relatable and useful, then we can do that, but, you guys,” I literally say, “You guys are all adults. You can handle me saying ‘fuck.’ You can. We’re going to be talking about things that make people uncomfortable. We’re going to be talking about sexuality. We’re going to be talking about gender. We’re going to be talking about race. We’re going to be talking about famine. We’re going to be talking about a lot of crazy stuff.” And I tell them “So if that is not what you want, if you would like a more professional understanding of [my subject], then we have a number of professors who do that, and they’re great,” and I’ll just say all the professors we have here are wonderful. “However, if you think you want to see this through, then, please, I would love to have you.” and I have not had a student drop the class yet.
This chapter ends with this particular statement from Naomi and her profile because she conveyed a joy and dedication in her work that reflected how many participants spoke. She was idiosyncratic, thoughtful, and intentional about her teaching and how she constructed her courses. The chapter also ends this way because her perspective indicates how many elements of the educational experience are ineffable and immeasurable. At the same time, her interview indicates that instructional designers do matter, not only in terms of what they build, but also in terms of how they interact with faculty.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

As of 2024 it was still the case that research into the practices of instructional design in higher education in the United States tended to be in four-year institutions with dedicated instructional design staff, and into dedicated teams of instructional designers. Research in community college contexts continues to lag. For example, Mancilla and Frey (2023) looked to “benchmark the workload of online instructional designers” (p. 1) but only at four-year institutions "offering a ‘white-glove’ service model for course development” (p. 1). In their study they suggested that instructional designers were no longer invisible parts of the workforce. One of the gaps that this current study sought to help address was awareness of the practice of instructional design in community college settings, and the findings in Chapter 4 do that. In this community college context, the invisibility of work and of instructional design appears to be more nuanced, and certainly varied, across institutions. Instructional designers may be found performing a variety of duties and on occasion struggling to find opportunities to do what they were trained, or hired, to do. In addition, the invisibility of work is not exclusive to instructional designers, it is a mutual invisibility that impacts multiple roles in institutions. The following discussion applies a Foucauldian power/knowledge analytical lens to work with the questions raised by the data, and subsequently turns to the role of hope and fiction in research and practice as a way for potential escape.

Democracy and fascism

Part of the post-structuralist theoretical perspective developed in Chapter 1 indicates that creativity and experimentation are necessary to escape the current trap democracy finds itself in. Brown (2015), for example, extended Foucault’s analysis and identified that the neoliberal
reframing the value of education as training performs an erasure of politics, collaboration, and
deliberation in service of the governance of markets. From a methodological perspective,
Chapter 3 identified the approach of MacLure (2013b) of paying attention to wonder, glow, and
what “exceeds or evades the action of coding” (MacLure, 2013a, p. 167). In colloquial terms,
these moments of glow are curiosities and oddities (MacLure, 2013a). Responding to these
theoretical, political, and methodological challenges requires taking on perspectives that do not
attempt to solve the problems as they are presented, but instead question the definitions and
assumptions that identify those problems. It also means looking to find the gaps and boundaries
where possibilities for a different future may take flight.

Kuntz (2021) made the explicit argument that how we approach inquiry has specific
implications for resisting fascism, focusing to a certain degree on mundane daily instantiations of
fascism that are easily overlooked and normalized. The “role of the truth-maker amid fascism is
not to reveal deceptions in our midst, but perhaps instead the means by which our ways of being
collude to enable a fascist perspective, the momentum of which it is difficult to stay” (Kuntz,
2021, p. 499). It may seem odd to write about fascism in the context of research about
instructional design and community colleges, but part of the argument is that fascism manifests
and is sustained in our daily normative behaviors. If one thinks about community colleges as
institutions that both enable and perform democracy (Sethares, 2020), this connection makes
sense. The sometimes tense relationship between instructional designers, management, and
faculty in terms of academic freedom and faculty governance in the context of teaching can seem
like a storm in a teacup, but as an expression of democracy in everyday spaces, it may be critical.
A focus on research and practice as purely technical functions, arising from a focus on
efficiency, effectiveness, and “what works,” avoids questions about norms, values, judgement,
and desire in educational contexts, and by virtue of that avoidance can be interpreted as a threat to democracy (Biesta, 2007). Brown (2015) made the same argument in terms of “best practices” that similarly avoid questions of values.

It is this focus on what works at the expense of what we may desire that manifests in the discussion about “the students we have” as opposed to “the students we wish we had” in Chapter 4. This framing of a gap between what we want and what we have raises several questions. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) are clear that power in Foucault’s work is not simply repressive, but is productive and relational, and can be positive in effect. A key question is what power does and how it manifests moving in networks of relations, specifically when those relations are unstable, unequal, and in flux. Individuals are both vehicles and effects of power. Consequently, one can read activities and statements about what we want and what we have as power relations that express both control and freedom, and in Hacking’s (2002) terms, make up people.

Foucault came up with the claim that “I have never written anything other than fictions” (quoted in Michel Foucault: Power, Truth Strategy ed. Morris and Patton) and the idea is that his investigations of modern society are not meant to provide a prescriptive analysis but rather, to lay bare a version, one story about the mechanisms of power. Possible truth value is not the issue but the power effects of knowledge, a true relativist, post structuralist quest. (Royall, 1993, para. 14)

This discussion will return to the importance of stories in the second half of this chapter, but for now the question is what story can be told here, and how does power/knowledge operate in the gap between what we want and what we have?

Firstly, how do we know what we have? To put it another way, who is allowed to define the state of things as they are? It appears that shared understandings of problems and the
definitions of problems do not necessarily exist, and an unspoken, unacknowledged tension can exist in terms of how knowledge of problems moves. Framing course design, development, and delivery as separate activities creates the institutional space for designers, developers, and facilitators, where previously there were simply faculty. Standardization of the student experience within the learning management system (LMS), which instructional designers might identify as a problem to be solved, is not necessarily something that faculty typically concern themselves with, for example. However, by identifying standardization as a problem, instructional designers lay claim to elements of course construction and experience as their domain of expertise. Quality matters as a rubric, organization, and process does the same thing in part through datafication of what a course can and should be.

A second question is perhaps more fundamental, namely who can claim to know community college students and what they want or need? Of course, in practical terms the missing participants in this current work are the students who attend community colleges. The study did not set out to research student experiences of instructional design nor of their community college experiences more broadly. However, students manifest in the study as a kind of cipher that different people can lay claim to understanding and whose desires they are representing. Two of the instructional designers in the study did not have much contact with students, but other instructional designers in the study also taught, and advised students (if informally). This marked them out and gave them knowledge that they leveraged in discussions with others as a form of authority over who students were and what they wanted. Faculty, by virtue of their teaching role, typically represented themselves as closest to students and their needs. Participants of all kinds, who were taking courses or had recently done so, used that experience to make arguments and claims about the student experience at their own institution.
A third question to consider is whose future are we working towards? What do we want (and who are we in this framing)? A thread runs through the study in terms of an instrumentalist understanding of the purposes of a community college education as preparation for careers. Many participants reflected upon what should be meant by student success, but the humanities and the traditional comprehensive role of a community college education were cast by the majority as luxuries that had limited relevance to the workforce or the communities that colleges serve. Even if expressed with some regret, this was often framed as inevitable.

The first two questions with regard to knowledge are considered below in the context of the original research questions. The third question about the future, who “we” are, and what we want is considered in the second half of this chapter.

**Practices and Boundaries**

The original research questions that were identified in Chapter 1 focused on the practices and roles of instructional designers and faculty in a community college context. The first research question was:

1. What practices do instructional designers and faculty employ in negotiating the boundaries and responsibilities of teaching and design in a community college context?

There are many elements in Chapter 4 that represent recognizable elements of neoliberalism. Participants expressed a need for efficiency and speed both in terms of student progression to a degree, but also in terms of their college responding to perceived student needs. The unbundling of roles manifested in separating course designers from course deliverers and course content developers from course facilitators, but also in restraining the scope of faculty advising. Technological change was a critical element in facilitating this unbundling. The use of course templates facilitated the hiring of adjuncts who were focused on delivering prebuilt
courses. Standardization of course content sought to make education more scalable, efficient, and effective. Urgency and crisis were rife, and technology was taken as a given that we are simply beholden to.

To a certain extent the question about practices and boundaries can be answered very pragmatically. There are power/knowledge contests over policy where the relative strength of the faculty voice in the administration of the college has historically made a difference in the adoption of quality assurance processes such as Quality Matters (QM). It seems significant that at every institution in the study initial attempts to adopt QM failed. This was typically because of a perception by faculty of a loss of control and the perception of an extension of oversight into faculty responsibilities and academic concerns that should be outside the purview of instructional design. Nevertheless, QM and the corresponding practices of course peer review, standardization, and scoring have made their way back into institutions, often through the work of college instructional designers. It is instructive that subsequent QM initiatives have been more subtle and more graduated in their deployment, focusing on specific kinds of courses or within a specific program context or by virtue of being voluntary. This is a negotiation of the boundaries of knowledge and yet it appears that instructional design is creating a space for its practice. It is also the case that in some cases QM has been gladly accepted by faculty as a way to think about and standardize the structures of their courses, in a reflection of a positive and productive form of power.

Similarly, debates over the use and role of master courses and templates persist, but here too some (not all) faculty and administrators express pleasure in their deployment. There are both faculty and instructional designers who see templates as a source of economic efficiency when it comes to hiring new faculty and adjuncts, a way to enhance instructional effectiveness
through the standardization of course content, and a way to disconnect or unbundle the functions of course design and course delivery. All faculty were willing to share course content and designs, but not necessarily as part of a more coordinated program of templating and control.

It is also the case that technology can be a stalking horse for procedural changes and the increase of oversight through data practices. The functions of the learning management system (LMS) facilitate certain course structures, but also facilitate the tracking of faculty behavior and of the ways in which they build and deliver courses. The facility of instructional designers with technology also appears to be a way in which they create space for their profession within institutions. Discussions about how to use specific technologies can be used to initiate discussions about appropriate instructional uses of those technologies.

At the same time, technological determinism in the form of technological tools forcing cultural change is overstated, and always incomplete. The migration to a new LMS, a new advising system, and a scheduling system all bore hallmarks of this logic, but also revealed resistance and an inadequacy in terms of what people actually do in practice. In this context, Macgilchrist’s (2019) interpretation of Berlant (2011) in terms of education and technology supports the argument that the belief that education can change social inequalities is a kind of cruel optimism of an unattainable, exhausting, yet sustaining fantasy, such as “when hardware and software are being financed as the means to close the achievement gap, protect privacy and expose inequalities, this often passionate attachment to technological solutions blocks interventions in historically rooted, structural inequalities” (Macgilchrist, 2019, p. 16).

Statewide initiatives and standardization facilitate uniformity in course structures, outcomes, and objectives, and in so doing, align teaching with progression from credentials to careers and to four-year institutions. The urgency and sense of ongoing crisis, perhaps enhanced
by regular reorganizations and endless new initiatives, justifies speeding up the pace of learning and the reduction of “luxuries” like the humanities, or luxuries like the simple matter of time to learn. Those same new initiatives justify changes for their own sake and exhaust resistance. A manufactured fear of certain kinds of futures, often framed as inevitable, as with AI, can justify a sense of urgency (Massumi, 2015). Student precarity and meeting local employer needs was one specific reason for the heightened pace of the Accelerate program, for example.

This sense of crisis is called to mind when politicians identify a lack of skilled labor as an education and training problem (Kuntz et al., 2011), often in the health professions. Alternative explanations such as low wages and poor working conditions are not entertained, despite any stated faith in free markets. The sense of urgency and crisis pervades the move to shorter sessions for course work, although this is also framed as a way for students to be more “successful,” by focusing their energy and attention. One of the arguments for shorter semesters is that students are less likely to encounter a derailing event during a shorter semester, whereas over a longer semester, life events can upset a student’s progression. The counter argument is that if a derailing event happens in a shorter semester, there can be no recovery from that event, whereas in a longer semester, that might be possible. Neither argument touches on what those derailing events might be, why we are not surprised when they happen, and what might be done to preempt them or even allow for them in the ways courses and semesters are structured.

A common thread to splitting course design from course delivery, as well as to the statewide standardization effort, and in fact to alternative session lengths, was an assumption that structure exists independently of content. Structure was just a way to be organized and efficient. The same was said of the LMS. It is just a tool to help structure course delivery. This is to a certain extent the argument rebutted in the discussion of infrastructure through the work of
Galloway (2004) in Chapter 4. Infrastructure does shape the possibilities for action. This was an expressed point of tension with instructional designers and faculty in the study, although a number of faculty were persuaded by the argument for structural consistency. One product of this splitting, and similarly of the use of master course templates, was that roles and jobs could be unbundled so that different functions could be performed by different people, i.e., structure to instructional designers, and content to faculty.

**Who Knows? The Mutual Invisibility of Work**

Unbundling then is not only a product of power/knowledge practices, but also produces power/knowledge practices. When roles were unbundled, distance was introduced between previously entangled functions. One of the ways in which that distance subsequently manifested was in terms of who made claims to really understand and know things as they are, which again was a knowledge claim that expressed and produced power. This took form when a speaker described themselves as living in the “real world” as opposed to a “world of unicorns and rainbows.” The latter was ascribed to community college faculty by both administrators and instructional designers, and also took form in the claim that faculty did not know how to teach. This claim was not borne out by the content of the faculty interviews where faculty showed careful thought about their teaching. Nevertheless, the claim was aimed by instructional designers at some full-time and adjunct faculty. On the other side of the coin, some faculty cast instructional designers as lacking authority by virtue of not teaching, and even if instructional designers taught as adjuncts, their status as both adjuncts and staff seemed to undermine their credibility to faculty. Similarly, administrators were cast as out of touch because of their distance from the student experience. In a parallel reflection of this kind of claim, some community
college faculty described four-year university faculty as living in a dream world, which directly impacted their authority to define what a course should contain.

This estrangement between people was, per MacLure (2013a), a particular curiosity that emerged in this study, and I have termed it as the *mutual invisibility of work*. By this phrase I mean that participants did not understand or recognize the work of others. This took a variety of forms beyond claims about living in the “real world.” For example, multiple participants in different roles expressed that others did not understand what they themselves do. This perspective was especially true on the part of instructional designers and extended in their case to what they *could* do, i.e., a lack of knowledge of the purpose and capability of an instructional designer role. This sentiment was particularly expressed by instructional designers, but also by others who were somewhat familiar with their role. As Alex said, “no-one knows what you do.” That role could only be defined in terms of what people in the role did, and as the participants remarked, instructional design was often a small part of their responsibilities.

Another dimension to this mutual invisibility of work was the tension between a desire for recognition and desires for privacy and autonomy. One way in which this manifested was in tensions over remote work, and over faculty teaching online. Managers and instructional designers expressed a sense that remote workers, including faculty teaching online, sought such work in order to avoid oversight. Datafication of work, and of teaching, was one response to that perceived lack of visibility, for example, by counting activity in online courses. Managerial concerns about whether remote workers were really working was a clear anxiety, and requiring people to be on campus was a way to make them perform work in visible ways. Faculty and instructional designers pushed back against this, asserting that they did the same work whether
they were on campus or not. One can read concerns about online cheating in similar ways, such that work should be visibly performed in order to count.

One way in which a desire for privacy emerged was in the need for exclusive spaces, which were typically collaborative online spaces where managers were not (continuously) present, and where more unrestrained and frank conversations could occur. These spaces were liminal ones where social and work lives overlapped in ways that Gregg (2011) identified, but situated within a work context. Within such spaces, participants could communicate about the work they did and expect others to understand and recognize that work. As a counterpoint, there were both faculty and instructional designers who did not identify such spaces in their work lives and this aligned with expressions that their role could be isolating and lonely, and lacking in collaboration with others.

Notably, managers did not express the same need for a similar kind of private space. This could simply be because they kept their professional identity to the fore during their interview, or alternatively, because the network of power around the managerial role does not allow for transgressive deviation from norms. Another explanation might be that managers have explicit relationships with those that they supervise, in the same way that teachers have relationships with their students, and in both cases those relationships provide them with at least some limited solace, connection, and a sense of recognition of their work that others in different kinds of roles do not have.

In this context it is salient to note that in asynchronous online instruction the faculty relationship with students can be flatter and less rich than other forms of instruction. Student and faculty interactions are mediated primarily through the LMS and their mostly textual representations in that space. More generally, faculty rarely get opportunities to collaborate with
one another as a matter of course. As one faculty member indicated, after in-service activities were finished, they became wrapped up in their teaching. Likewise, instructional designers can be isolated by virtue of the rarity of their role within any particular institution. Both instructional designers and faculty expressed a desire for collaboration and expressed the pleasure they gained in their rare collaborative activities.

It is something of a truism (Webber & Zheng, 2020) that information silos are inherently problematic in organizations, but if one reads the existence of restricted information flows in terms of power/knowledge, their presence in the form of mutual invisibility can start to fit a kind of logic. By controlling the flow of knowledge, individuals and groups can control the expressions of power, and so information silos both control and make manifest the flow of power. This casts into question what would change should work become fully transparent in ways that evangelists advocate. This would clearly conflict with people’s need for privacy and autonomy. Instead of an either/or, is it possible that mutual invisibility can be considered, in technical terms, both a bug and a feature?

A curiosity of the study related to the mutual invisibility of work was that virtually all participants in the study claimed to have too much work to do and not enough time to do their work. While this is perhaps not a particular surprise, at the same time some made explicit claims that others were lazy and that not everyone worked hard, nor was a “good worker.” These claims about hard work seemed to express and reinforce this mutual invisibility of work in terms that cast working hard as an unrecognized and unappreciated virtue. In the next section of this discussion, it will be argued that the “hard/good worker” is a product of precarity, a product of the estrangement caused by unbundling, and a particular subject position that emerges in the neoliberal regime.
Subject Positions

The second research question in this study was:

2. How do power/knowledge relations produce instructional designers’ and faculty’s multiple subjectivities as they engage in the development and teaching of online courses?

Building on the work of Foucault, Hacking (2002, 2006) argued for a theory of *dynamic nominalism*, by which he meant that classifications of people can define what people can become and the ways they express themselves. This establishes a common sense of what a person may be and functions in a kind of feedback loop. These kinds of people, these ways of being, do not necessarily preexist as things to be recognized, but rather are invented by the acts of definition, and continue to be invented and established by the acts of people so recognized or willing to be recognized in those ways. In terms of the sociological staple, suicide, Hacking (2002) claimed that “…the systems of reporting positively created an entire ethos of suicide, right down to the suicide note, an art form that previously was virtually unknown apart from the rare noble suicide of state” (p. 121). Koopman (2019) put this approach to work in identifying infopower and the informational person as a new way of being, that is, a person who is represented by and represents themselves as their data as captured in information systems and statistics. This representation of people through statistics is one of the ways in which Foucault’s biopower operates.

One can rephrase this research question then in terms of what kinds of people or subject positions are being created, defined, embraced, and resisted in this current study, and through what mechanisms. Hacking (2006) actually identified a number of engines by which “making up people” occurs. Some of these fall under the contemporary umbrella of datafication: counting,
quantifying, correlating, and norming. Other relevant engines appear to be the identification of
deviance, and bureaucratizing. Macgilchrist (2019) noted that data functions within systems by
becoming visible and creating an obligation for action, that “the visibility of data has an
ontological function: it brings problems into existence” (p. 14). We can also say through Hacking
(2002) that data brings people into existence. I would also like to suggest that problems bring
data into existence in a dynamic way.

This is one of the curiosities from my data, namely the role of complaints in bringing data
into existence. In other words, complaints demanded a response which had to initially be
addressed with data/knowledge, and that data then created obligations for action. This could
function in a similar feedback loop to Hacking’s (2002) dynamic nominalism, as the data itself
reinforced the characterization of behavior as problems, such as with the tracking of faculty
adoption of course templates. Jackson and Mazzei’s (2012) Foucauldian analysis of the faculty
members in their study in fact took up the issue of complaints and how they functioned through
students as expressions of power, to which the faculty members were obligated to respond. In
addition, in their analysis they noted how course evaluation scores produced particular subject
identities of the faculty involved. Because complaints create instability in the relationships
between people (Foucault, 1982), they make the flow of power within the college network
visible, tugging on the net that pulls back those that seek to exceed, escape, and transgress. One
can read in the datafication of course development through QM, and in the surveillance of
faculty behavior, and broadly in unbundling of functions, ways in which new subject positions
are being created where they did not exist before.

Subject Matter Expert (SME)
As noted in earlier chapters, an SME is a term from the broader design literature that identifies someone as having expertise in terms of the content of courses, but no teaching expertise. This term did not appear outside of conversations with instructional designers and as such was not a role that faculty or others were willing to embrace. However, in some disciplines where faculty required professional expertise, there was some self-identification in this capacity, and in particular for adjuncts. In other words, participants observed that due to the difficulty of hiring faculty with professional qualifications required in, for example, healthcare fields, having certified content expertise was the primary qualification, rather than expertise as a teacher. This was also driven by the difficulty of hiring faculty with these kinds of necessary professional qualifications, driven by accreditation requirements. From an instructional design perspective, an SME was a role during instructional design processes, and did not exist outside of that, except in cases where the ability of faculty to teach was being critiqued, i.e., the observation that the faculty member was an SME and so not qualified to express opinions on instruction. Casting faculty as an SME was a way to create space for the instructional designer to insert themselves into the course design and development process because it reduced the faculty role and eliminated their teaching expertise from the course development process.

**Course Facilitator**

Although this was not a term that in itself emerged particularly strongly in the study, it was expressed, and the role and function was specifically expressed as a way to characterize teachers. With the development of master courses and course templates, the function of faculty teaching such courses was focused on feedback, evaluation, and student guidance. Some faculty embraced this possibility since it was the part of the work that they particularly enjoyed and so they could focus on that, but some others pushed back against the idea of a “course in a can” that
they were responsible for delivering. In fact, the idea of “delivery” encompasses a number of functions that do not necessarily seem to be well defined. It was explicitly stated by the Vegas group that faculty were expected to customize their courses within limits, although it was not clear how much this happened in practice. Adjuncts often were reported as being enthusiastic about these limits and this facilitating role since it reduced the amount of work required of them. However, the one adjunct in the study, Naomi, was clear that she built her own courses to her own standards, and pushed back when a course that was foisted on her did not meet those standards. As with the SME role, it seems quite possible that adjuncts in different disciplines respond differently to these kinds of framings due to their professional context. Additionally, identifying the narrower function of course facilitation created space for the idea of course development as separate from course delivery.

Course Developer

The course developer role is one that primarily, but not exclusively, was taken on by full-time faculty. Those developing courses were typically the ones delivering those courses, but course development as a separate activity from delivery enabled the ideas of course adoption and course facilitation. Even where master courses and templates were not deployed, standardized content might be developed, or faculty might share syllabi and previously developed course materials with one another. Sharing and adoption of content was not considered problematic per se, but when identified as a discrete activity, course development was intimately tied to ideas of standardization. A challenge was related to how course content was entangled with ideas for how the course would be facilitated. Faculty built courses with specific delivery ideas in mind, but as one faculty member noted when inheriting a course from another faculty member, those delivery ideas were not always entirely clear. Some of the instructional designers in the study also
developed courses in their adjunct faculty role as extra paid work, or even as part of their instructional design identity, but this course developer function required content expertise, or at least pre-existing content with which the instructional designer could work.

**Faculty/Teacher**

Many faculty expressed a love of teaching. They did not necessarily express a love of being faculty. In fact, some of the duties of faculty such as leading departments were considered onerous, difficult, and exhausting. It is not clear that faculty really identified as such. Nevertheless, some expressed frustration with governance of their institutions and policy concerns, so to the extent that those concerns impacted their teaching, they might be vociferous. One issue previously noted, and this might itself be another subject position created through technology and policy, is the function of teachers in asynchronous courses. This function appears to be more emotionally distant from students, although students are reported as preferring this more transactional relationship (Prupis, 2023). In the study synchronous courses were being deprecated in favor of asynchronous ones, and in asynchronous courses, where the content is less intimately tied to interaction, thinking of teachers as facilitators becomes more possible.

Identifying faculty as faculty rather than teachers enabled managers and instructional designers to obscure faculty teaching experience and expertise, i.e., the statement that faculty do not know how to teach becomes possible, whereas the statement that teachers do not know how to teach is a clear paradox. Some of the tension in the study lay in identifying faculty as “not-teachers,” but it was very clear that faculty substantially identified themselves as teachers before anything else. The degree to which they identified themselves as faculty, and were identified by others as faculty, was tied to their institutional role and the degree to which they were involved in the governance of their institution.
It seems very clear that instructional design is not an established function in all community colleges. This implies that it is a vulnerable, precarious position to be in, which is borne out by the experience of at least one instructional designer in the study. If one defines instructional design as working with SMEs to build courses based on outcomes and objectives, people in these roles do much more than this. The emerging definition of the practice of instructional design in the context of this study appears to be in terms of the traditional model promulgated by QM. In fact, QM appears to be playing a role in defining for both instructional designers and others what the function of instructional design is. This is the kind of feedback loop that Hacking (2006) identified under dynamic nominalism, and the datafication of course development is one way in which the instructional design role is itself being datafied and made more concrete. The extent to which people identified as instructional designers embrace this particular feedback loop marks the emergence of the definition of the role. In fact, one might argue that one path to establishing the instructional design role in institutions would be to embrace datafication and standardization.

As noted above, for instructional design to exist, course delivery, course development, and course design need to be thought of as separate functions, and increased specialization and unbundling of expertise needs to persist. To a certain extent, this is one place where the technology of the LMS, and other supporting technologies facilitate unbundling. If a course can be built using specific technologies, those technologies define the shape and possibilities of what a course can be. Additionally, if a course can be considered as a self-contained entity, that conceptually supports the ideas of development, design, and delivery as separable functions. This
implies that by establishing a common understanding of what a course is, instructional design practices reproduce themselves.

*A Course is a Course, of Course, of Course!*

Therefore, a corollary to the emergence of the instructional design role is an ongoing emergence about what a course is. Courses are their descriptions and outcomes formally defined by the state, but also the objectives, the content, and the assessments that emerge from those. Beyond this courses are their delivery, the experience of the course for all those involved. These seem to be all very different things, but to the extent that they are being datafied, what a “course” may be, at least for institutions, is being circumscribed by the data that describes them. This appears to be becoming a mold that may be institutionally hard to break. The use of standard course structures through the use of master courses, templates, and the uniformity of student experience all reinforce this particular idea of a “course,” and establish predictability as a key characteristic of a “good” course. I do not consider this idea of a course as a subject position, so much as a manufactured commonsense that enables subject positions.

**Good Workers**

As noted in the previous section, everyone in the study indicated that they were perpetually busy and did not have enough time. This frame interacted with a desire for recognition and appreciation, framed in terms of being unappreciated and in terms of others not understanding one’s work. It seems true, as one participant noted that “we want to be seen, valued, heard, and loved.” However, at the same time, the frame of being recognized also interacted with desires for privacy and autonomy. This frame further interacted with the casting of others as lazy and it not being clear what they do. This odd set of contradictions I term the *mutual invisibility of work.*
Gregg (2011) noted that “the autonomy of salaried work comes at a price: to constantly prove responsibility” (p. 13). Gregg also noted that the language of love had made its way into the workplace, and this was certainly true in this study, particularly when it came to teaching and to students. This kind of emotional attachment extracted work from faculty and from instructional designers. With students living lives marked by precarity, faculty in particular saw their only options as individuals was to work harder and extend more care to their students. The specific motivations might vary but were expressed as a “work ethic,” as a parental relationship, as part of their professional identity, as dedication, and as simply, “not having a life.”

This hard work, in all roles, was cast as a necessary individual virtue rather than a product of any kind of system, and led to behaviors that can be characterized as being the entrepreneur of the self (Foucault, 2008). Layered with this was the development of one’s own individual capital through the attainment of credentials, as a number of participants were engaged in study for higher degrees. In addition to participants taking on extra work in study, many participants had some kind of “side-gig” (sometimes more than one) whether that was more teaching, or some other less directly related profession. This might be read as a reaction to or prophylactic against precarity, particularly in the case of adjuncts and instructional designers. As previously noted, one reinforcer of precarity was the intermittent reorganization of institutions under new leadership.

Being a good worker was typically equated with being a hard worker (not necessarily an efficient worker) and working more than was required. Of course, by definition, being a hard worker created the possibility that others were not. It was not sufficient and in fact deemed some kind of betrayal to the students and to the institution to not perform work in these ways. There were, however, a couple of participants in the study who appeared to be less invested in this kind
of framing, who simply did their jobs and no more. This was either because they had become disillusioned, or because their priorities were elsewhere, such as with their family, but it is worth noting that in an explicit counterpoint to Gregg’s (2011) observation about having to prove responsibility, one of them remarked that “I do not need to prove myself.”

Us and Them

It is here that the discussion begins to turn to what is meant by “we” in the questions that began this chapter. There is a sense in which precarity forces people to over-invest in their work and identify with it, but within the workplace groups can be exclusive, like the Vegas group, and a sense of “we” as the institution or anything wider than that seemed rare. Often “they” are the problem, whether they live in a dream world or they are not hard workers. A separation of us and them becomes possible when we take on these subject positions, but we are deceiving ourselves.

And then he realized why he was thinking like this.

It was because he wanted there to be conspirators. It was much better to imagine men in some smoky room somewhere, made mad and cynical by privilege and power, plotting over the brandy. You had to cling to this sort of image, because if you didn’t then you might have to face the fact that bad things happened because ordinary people, the kind who brushed the dog and told their children bedtime stories, were capable of then going out and doing horrible things to other ordinary people. It was so much easier to blame it on Them. It was bleakly depressing to think that They were Us. If it was Them, then nothing was anyone’s fault. If it was Us, what did that make Me? After all, I’m one of Us. I must be. I’ve certainly never thought of myself as one of Them. No-one ever thinks of themselves as one of Them. We’re always one of Us. It’s Them that do the bad things.
While this is a critique that notes that we are all implicated in the systems within which we operate, and that we are not separable from them, the opportunity expressed in this sentiment is that we are all in this together (Braidotti, 2011). We are entangled with one another, but a framing of “us and them” works to undermine a collective, collaborative approach. We are also complex and in relationship with more than our work, or we would be if we were not so exhausted by that work. There is a sense in which over-investment in work and the mutual invisibility of work keeps us apart from one another, and undermines other ways of relating to one another. It certainly undermines the kind of communal solidarity found in unions, for example, but perhaps also limits the impact of faculty governance. In this context, a refusal to work, and a willingness to be “lazy” is one way to push back (Gildersleeve, 2017), but this is an individualized solution. The organization of work is endemically unhealthy (Berlant, 2011) in ways that cannot be resolved by individualized solutions.

Other ways of relating to one another may be apparent if one pays attention. At least one participant in the study was engaged by the idea that learning is not always an individual endeavor undertaken for individual reasons. Students might be learning for others, in order to contribute to communities of which they are members. In this participant’s observation, the messages sent by the colleges focused on student success as an individualized achievement, despite the fact that students themselves voiced goals related to their families and their communities.

Perhaps it matters that the phrasing about “the students we have” actually came out of a discussion about religious accommodations, which at the time seemed highly tangential to the
study, but can be read as a statement about who we consider the other when it comes to who we consider ourselves to be, and who education is for. The contrast with “the students we want” also seems to make a statement about the inadmissibility of desire, that within a system focused on “the students we have,” efficiency and effectiveness are legitimate goals, but not much else. Making this kind of division seems like a kind of pessimism that limits what a community college can be and limits who a community college is for.

Pessimism is a hallmark of neoliberalism and overwork. Berlant (2011) noted the limited perspective of contemporary living as “the structural position of the overwhelmed life intensifies this foreshortening of consciousness and fantasy. Under a regime of crisis ordinariness, life feels truncated, more like desperate doggy paddling than like a magnificent swim out to the horizon” (p. 117). This phrasing recalls the faculty member who described how her teaching resembled a duck paddling furiously under a smooth surface. In her phrasing, the work, once again, was mostly invisible and was read by others as non-work and easy.

A counter to pessimism, individualism, and a limited sense of who “we” are is to embrace hope as an affirmative, collective project. Braidotti (2011) specifically argued for a collective politics of affirmation focused on hope. Such a politics is a collective approach to transformative politics that:

…takes on the future as the shared collective imagining that endures in processes of becoming. The ethical-political concept here is the necessity to think with the times and in spite of the times, not in a belligerent mode of oppositional consciousness, but as a humble and empowering gesture of coconstruction of social horizons of hope. (p. 295)

In her view, the collective nature of the project is critical because “‘we’ are in this together” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 297).
The methodological approach taken in this study makes no claims to representationalism (Kuntz, 2019). There is no grand unifying narrative nor problem to be solved, but rather the rhizomatic unsettling of synthesis and representationalism (Denzin & Giardina, 2018). In that spirit and in response to Braidotti’s (2011) entreaty above to take on the future as a shared collective imagining, this chapter now turns to speculative fiction to engage with the third question about “what we want.”

**Futurism, Hope, Fiction**

Deleuze, however, turned that around, suggesting that we first think possible worlds in which we might live differently. The test of his philosophy, then, isn’t determined by judgment of true knowledge but by the kinds of lives it allows us to live. (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 225)

> Fantasy is an exercise bicycle for the mind. It might not take you anywhere, but it tones up the muscles that can. (“Terry Pratchett in Quotes,” 2015)

In Chapters 4 and 5, I have made use of a number of quotes from the British author Terry Pratchett. Pratchett’s body of work was varied but he was most well-known for his satirical fantasy series set on the Discworld ([Discworld & Terry Pratchett Wiki](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discworld), n.d.) and his works sold over 100 million copies worldwide. As the quote above suggests, for Pratchett, fantasy and fiction were ways to think about alternatives both individually and collectively, and his work expressed both politics and philosophy in an accessible way for millions of people. After Pratchett fell ill, his friend and collaborator, Neil Gaiman (2014), wrote that Pratchett was not the just the genial personality that some might think based on a surface reading of his work, but
rather there was a deep, angry humanism to his work. One of his most iconic and beloved characters, Granny Weatherwax, might well be characterized by her phrase that “good ain’t nice” and that she was often angry in a focused, yet compassionate way. The same might be said of another character, Sam Vimes, who raged against injustice and poverty, captured in part in his theory about how costly it can be to be poor (“Boots Theory,” 2024). Anger and optimism can live in productive tension (Houlden & Veletsianos, 2022). We can be angry about the precarity of the lives of students, of adjuncts, and other workers in community colleges, and we can be angry at the common sense of systems that keep us strangers to one another, and that anger can be focused toward hopeful futures.

In *Utopia as Method* Levitas (2013) argued that utopia as a concept is a tool to think with rather than a specific destination. She also argued that our current neoliberal social situation rests on implicit utopian assumptions about the kind of society we are working towards. The approach this current study consciously identified was to identify and unsettle those implicit commonsense assumptions in the context of the community college, particularly with regard to the practice of instructional design. We take the aforementioned precarity for granted, as well as the forms of work that it engenders. We accept the credentialist, employer-focused framing for the work of teaching, and we accept the ways in which technology and unbundling are deployed in support of one another. There are implicit framings of student success in terms of grades and graduation, and we accept the form and shape of courses that arise from course quality initiatives. Student success as individual accomplishment is the predominant framing for the work of community colleges.

For Levitas (2013), utopia as method attempts to make those kinds of assumptions explicit and thereby allow for alternative visions and alternative futures. As such, it is, in her
words, “intimately related to sociology” (p. 217). She did not claim to have invented it as a method, as much as make it visible and explicit when people think about the future and more specifically make choices with regard to it. How we think about and explore the future is intimately tied to the concept of hope, as Levitas (2003, 2004) identified when discussing Harvey’s *Spaces of Hope*, and Halpin’s *Hope and Education*. In her review of the latter, she noted that:

…the utopian hope with which the book opens is ambushed by pragmatism and reduced to managerialism. Halpin says that ‘to be extravagantly utopian is mere fancifulness’ (p. 60). But it is that fancifulness, imagination, desire for a different life, ability to see beyond the constraints of the present, and hope for a better world that characterises utopianism. For the argument to be taken out of the agenda of the Third Way and into a potentially radical future, we all have to understand that if we do not demand the impossible, all we will get is more of the same. (Levitas, 2004, p. 273)

It is the “Third Way” (Giddens, 2013) that encapsulates the kind of technocratic managerialism that focuses on efficiency, effectiveness, and *student success* defined in the narrowest of ways in contemporary community colleges. It is worth paying attention to what we currently choose to frame as impossible. The 1947 Truman Commission on Higher Education was positively described by some as “far-reaching,” “startling,” and “idealistic and impossible” (Russell, 1949, p. 508), but it is hard to imagine such an extravagant characterization being applied to contemporary visions of what a community college education might be, unless it were to dismiss them.

The ways in which we relate to one another in the contemporary moment are often framed as inevitable (Amsler & Facer, 2017), and they certainly were so in this study.
Contemporary capitalism is identified as a natural state, and yet risks undoing democratic forms such as those within and related to community colleges (Brown, 2015). In addition, hope is foreclosed, and there is a “contraction of the space of political possibility” (Amsler & Facer, 2017, p. 2). Freire (2014) similarly identified the challenges of political pessimism, “when it becomes a program, hopelessness paralyzes us, immobilizes us. We succumb to fatalism, and then it becomes impossible to muster the strength we absolutely need for a fierce struggle that will re-create the world” (p. 16). Massumi (2015) suggested that the threats of the future can be used to construct a current sense of indefinite crisis. This affect drives behavior in the present, bringing about the future predicted. A recent and concrete example of this kind of analysis of future-oriented framing driving current policy can be found in Straume Bussesund, Engen, and McGarr (2023) where the authors analyzed the ways in which the Norwegian Qualification Framework for teachers represents and brings about the future, finding that:

Firstly, it constructs a digital future for education, where the digital environment becomes the key factor for pupils’ learning. Secondly, it uses the language of professionalism to represent teachers as ‘the problem’ in relation to the fulfilment of this constructed digital future. (Straume Bussesund et al., 2023, p. 6)

Similar patterns can be found in this current study in Chapter 4 where community college teacher certification and “problems” with teachers were represented in terms of specific visions of the future of teaching online, and specific visions of the purposes of a community college education. The specific technology of AI as promulgated by commercial entities was identified as something that colleges simply had to adapt to. Institutional changes and technology adoption will always be driven by the “enrollment cliff” (Campion, 2020) or some other inevitable, soon-to-arrive crisis.
Macgilchrist (2021a) along with her colleagues (Macgilchrist et al., 2023; Suoranta et al., 2022) noted that visions of the future of education are often driven by intergovernmental organizations and national initiatives. To this we might add, at least in the United States, plutocratically-funded foundations and commercial entities. In this study, there were several technology initiatives that appeared to be undertaken because of the specific future and specific problems that the companies selling those solutions predicted. These companies need to sell a problem before they can sell a solution, and they take the work of foundations as their lead. The practice of instructional design itself in terms of master courses, course facilitation by adjuncts, and compressed schedules, has been an explicit reaction to the education represented by entities such as Southern New Hampshire University, which are at pains to represent themselves as the inevitable future of education.

As a response, Macgilchrist and others (e.g., Bayne, 2023; Bayne & Gallagher, 2021; Bengtsen & Gildersleeve, 2022; Costello, 2022, 2023; Selwyn et al., 2020; Williamson & Komljenovic, 2022), have advocated for embracing speculative fiction in research contexts as a way for laying out different visions of the future of education. Ross (2022) argued that working with future-oriented speculative methods offered an explicit counterpoint to the uncritical framing of the pandemic years in terms of loss and struggle. Macgilchrist (Suoranta et al., 2022) wondered “if (and if so, how) a social science fiction methodology can interrupt ‘success’ as a guiding frame for many higher education scholars, practitioners, and activists in the twenty-first century” (p. 229).

An author commonly referenced in this context is Ursula Le Guin who has argued that:
We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art, the art of words. (Our Changing Climate, 2023)

Works such as those collected by Hrastinski and Jandrić (2023) and Conrad and Wiebe (2022) express some of those visions. However, there is the risk of pessimism in speculative fiction (Hrastinski & Jandrić, 2023), with some justification. Many visions of the future are dystopian and bleak and not without reason. The ecological and social cost of AI and computing technology have been well documented (Altenried, 2020; García-Martín et al., 2019; Siddik et al., 2021), but there are also concerns about democracy, fascism, and authoritarianism with regard to the specific technologies of AI (McQuillan, 2022). One of the arguments that McQuillan made is that fascist movements rely on ideas of naturalized difference, or as noted previously, “us and them,” and that technologies that continue to fragment, divide, and unbundle experience should therefore be resisted. It is clear from this study that this impetus to divide, fragment, and unbundle in community colleges exists, although in tension with the traditional function of faculty. The technologies of online learning play their part in this, and one can read the enthusiasm for AI on the part of some participants in terms of this tension.

Zembylas (2022) argued that a response to the pessimism of both the contemporary moment and of negative critique is a consciously affirmative critique based on ideas such as beauty, respect, attention and care:

To engage in affirmative critique is not limited to resistance against an argument or a position, but rather pays attention to the ‘not-yet’, namely, to what could be different and transcend the present (Rebughini, 2018, p. 10) – e.g. what could be done differently in the fight to save the environment from human-made destruction? (Zembylas, 2022, p. 4)
This approach is built on the work of Foucault, Barad, Haraway, and Braidotti, and explicitly
connected to Butler’s consideration of Foucault and *parrhesia*, which is the same thread
articulated in Kuntz’s (2019) work. Costello (2022) and Macgilchrist (2021a) similarly
advocated for an affirmative critical pedagogy based on ideas such as love, caring, and positive
relationships. In this vein, Zembylas (2022) argued for “pedagogical spaces in which teachers
and students can become response-able to each other and *offer alternative options to us/them
categorizations*” (p. 12), and that affirmative critique is an ethical practice that
enables resistance to the kinds of subject positions identified in the first part of this chapter.

Zembylas’ (2022) concern was with pedagogy, teachers and students, but the argument should
certainly be extended to the relationship between instructional designers and faculty. In
institutions characterized by mutual invisibility, and formulaic approaches to instructional
design, there may be a place for empathy and humility as some participants explicitly identified,
but the common sense of unbundling works to reinforce us/them categorizations.

Zembylas’s (2022) concern with the environment is not unusual. One of the
characteristics that Selwyn (2023), Bayne (2023), Macgilchrist (2021a), and Costello (2022) all
noted is that ecological approaches to technology like “rewilding” are the opposite of taming
technology, and do not attempt to be sustainable in any sense that implies growth (Amsler,
2019). Rather Macgilchrist (2021a) has argued for deceleration and degrowth (see also Kallis,
2018). This would require a different way of critical thinking about technology in education, and
although instructional designers are careful not to characterize themselves as technologists, they
do act as enthusiastic interpreters of technology to the less technologically adept. At the same
time, instructional designers were not the only ones in the study to wish for more time and to
wish to be less overwhelmed with new initiatives and change.
These ideas around affirmative critique, deceleration, and degrowth also imply slowing down (Gildersleeve, 2017), which Nørgård (2022) identified as aligned with the characteristics of hopepunk. Nørgård (2022) engaged with the idea of speculative design that “thrives on imagination” (p. 160) and functions “as probes for research, philosophy and thinking otherwise” (p. 170), connecting the literary genre of hopepunk (Romano, 2018) to speculation, expanding on these ideas in a webinar for the Center for Research in Digital Education (What Comes after the Ruin? Designing for the Arrival of Preferable Futures, 2022).

Briefly, hopepunk is typically a genre of science fiction and fantasy that sits in contrast to pessimistic fiction such as (“grimdark”) post-apocalyptic stories and dystopian space opera, instead focusing on personal relationships, and kindness in more everyday, even uneventful, contexts. A closely-related genre is solarpunk, which has more of an ecological bent, laying out futures within which humanity’s ecological challenges have been resolved. Hopepunk is consciously affirmative and positive (Houlden & Veletsianos, 2022). Contemporary examples typically include works by Becky Chambers, T. J. Klune, Katherine Addison, Victoria Goddard, and Terry Pratchett, and some would also argue that some elements of Tolkien, or even Star Trek, within which economic survival is not even a question, contain elements of the genre. As such, hopepunk is a genre of speculative fiction that gives form to a utopian future worth working towards (Levitas, 2013), and to the argument that Zemblayas (2022) and others make for affirmative critique founded in both positive relationships and ecological concerns.

While some have argued that hopepunk has had its day (Mancuso, 2021), the connections of the ideas of hope, futurity, and speculative fictions persist as a method of radical imagination for rethinking and exploring educational futures (Houlden & Veletsianos, 2022), not in an
instrumentalist scenario-based fashion (Erskine et al., 1997), but in a way that brings alternative futures into the present as something worth fighting for.

In building on the work of Le Guin (2020), Macgilchrist (2021b) has noted Le Guin’s caution about telling hero’s stories, and applied this insight to research reporting. We should rather be telling “carrier bag” stories (Le Guin, 2020). The bag holds “these everyday, apparently banal things [that] are precisely the things that hold us together, that are worth looking at more closely, and that may gently surprise us” (Macgilchrist, 2021b, p. 391), and the bag itself is made from a textured fabric suggesting a network of stories that broaden the horizon of what can be considered to matter.

In this study, I have attempted to tell those kinds of stories, and through the lens of Foucault’s concept of power/knowledge suggested the kinds of practices that hold the network together. Ultimately though it is my sense that telling the stories of what is happening now is insufficient. An explicit response is required to the forms of neoliberalism that have students, faculty, staff, and management living in permanent crisis beholden to technocratic visions of the future. To that end, I suggest, with many others, that intentional, hopeful speculation about better futures is our obligation.

To return to Braidotti (2011):

Hope is an anticipatory virtue that activates powerful motivating forces: countermemories, imagination, dream work, religion, desire, and art. Hope constructs the future in that it opens the spaces onto which to project active desires; it gives us the force to process the negativity and emancipate ourselves from the inertia of everyday routines. It is a qualitative leap that carves out active trajectories of becoming and thus can respond
to anxieties and uncertainties in a productive manner and negotiate transitions to sustainable futures. (Braidotti, 2011, p. 297)

I frame the challenge as that we collectively have to imagine a better future; otherwise, we walk in lockstep towards the one imagined for us. We should again embrace the ambition to be as “far-reaching,” “startling,” and “idealistic and impossible” (Russell, 1949, p. 508) as our post-war predecessors.

“I want a school, sir. I want a school here on the Chalk. I’ve been thinking about this for a long time – in fact for longer than I had worked out the name for what I wanted. There’s an old barn on Home Farm that isn’t being used right now and I think we could make it quite acceptable in a week or so.”

“Well, the travelling teachers do come through every few months,” said the Baron.

“Yes, sir, I know, sir, and they’re useless, sir. They teach facts, not understanding. It’s like teaching people about forests by showing them a saw. I want a proper school, sir, to teach reading and writing, and most of all thinking, sir, so people can find what they’re good at, because someone doing what they really like is always an asset to any country, and too often people never find out until it’s too late.” She deliberately looked away from the sergeant, but her words had caused a susurration around the room, Tiffany was glad to hear. She drowned it out with, “There have been times, lately, when I dearly wished that I could change the past. Well, I can’t, but I can change the present, so that when it becomes the past it will turn out to be a past worth having. And I’d like the boys to learn about girls and I’d like the girls to learn about boys. Learning is about finding out who you are, what you are, where you are and what you are standing on and what you are
good at and what’s over the horizon and, well, everything. It’s about finding the place
where you fit. I found the place where I fit, and I would like everybody else to find
theirs.” (Pratchett, 2010, p. 336)
REFERENCES


Abernethy v. Hutchinson, 1 H. & TW. 28 (1825).


Adam Something (Director). (2023, July 1). Why free parking is bad for everyone. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKoiSPDxsso


https://doi.org/10/gcp6bv


https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2014/02/14/flipping-classroom-isnt-answer-lets-scramble-it-essay


https://doi.org/10.1177/1468795X17702917


https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2023.2262382


https://doi.org/10.1177/14782103211026446


https://doi.org/10.1080/10986065.2020.1855376


Climate Town (Director). (2023). *Parking laws are strangling America.*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUNXFHpUhu8


https://doi.org/10.22554/ijtel.v7i1.116


Costello, E. (2023, November 29). AI is destroying education but we have one chance to stop it. *Medium*. https://medium.com/@eam0/ai-is-destroying-education-but-we-have-one-chance-to-stop-it-c93d3b93ca88


https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2022.2074452


*Courseware and Online Modules (S-19).* (2019, October 15). University Policy Office - Purdue University. https://www.purdue.edu/policies/academic-research-affairs/s19.html


De fiets is niets. (2023, April 4). *99% Invisible*. https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/de-fiets-is-niets/


https://doi.org/10.1086/448181


Giroux, H. A. (2014). *Neoliberalism’s war on higher education*.


https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v28/n16/ian-hacking/making-up-people


https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eswa.2019.02.026


Instructure. (2020c, July 31). *What is Canvas Commons?* https://community.canvaslms.com/t5/Canvas-Commons/What-is-Canvas-Commons/ta-p/1788

https://intentionalfutures.com/work/instructional-design


https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-022-00389-y


https://ojdla.com/articles/instructional-design-staffing-for-online-programs


https://doi.org/10/gg9b8q


http://ir.ua.edu/handle/123456789/3359


National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *Student Enrollment—What is the percent of students enrolled in distance education courses in postsecondary institutions in the fall?* Retrieved February 21, 2022, from https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/TrendGenerator/app/trend-table/2/42?trending=row&valueCode=4&rid=1&cid=85


Our Changing Climate (Director). (2023, April 7). *Why we need more than solarpunk.*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fxbDhoYlh8


https://doi.org/10/gh7bbp


https://doi.org/10/gig8qc


Prupis, S. L. (2023). *LMS problem-posing academic relationships between faculty and students: A post-intentional phenomenological study of dialogical relationships in asynchronous online courses* [Old Dominion University]. https://doi.org/10.25777/06YH-G036


https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosa082.pub2


https://philosophynow.org/issues/6/Foucaults_Fictions


https://doi.org/10.2307/2263592


https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1679763


https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2023.2285831


Student Assistance General Provisions, the Secretary’s Recognition of Accrediting Agencies, the Secretary’s Recognition Procedures for State Agencies, 84 Fed. Reg. 58834 (2019).


https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-021-00260-6

https://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=10026374859124601238


https://doi.org/10.1080/0729436042000276431


https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552108319538


U.S. Const., Art. 1 § 8 (1789).


*What comes after the ruin? Designing for the arrival of preferable futures*. (2022, December 7). https://media.ed.ac.uk/playlist/dedicated/79280571/1_6u9a41zh/1_goykdu7m

https://doi.org/10/gjknbm


https://law.justia.com/cases/california/court-of-appeal/2d/273/726.html

https://doi.org/10/gg9b8p

http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17508487.2022.2081587


https://xmind.app


Yet Another Urbanist (Director). (2022, March 1). *Painted bike lanes are atrocious & here’s how to fix them*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6QKY9_AOyI

https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2031257


APPENDICES
Appendix A

Recruitment Emails

Instructional Designer

<ID Name>,

As you know I am working on my dissertation in the Community College Leadership PhD program at ODU. My study is on the practice of instructional design at community colleges, and I am looking for participants to interview. For instructional designer participants the participation is a bit more involved than an interview.

Is that something you might be interested in taking part in? If so, I can send more details so you can make a more informed decision, but I wanted to sound you out for your interest. Let me know if you would like to chat about it.

Thank you for considering this.

Instructional Designer Follow-up Email

Thank you, <ID Name>.

I want to say up front that I will not be offended in the slightest if you decide not to do this and you can of course say so at any time.

Here is a high-level outline:

With you:

1. A couple of interviews with you as an Instructional Designer
2. Brief weekly meeting with you for about 8 weeks – the goal is to get a sense of what you do in the normal course of events
3. If possible, observe you and a faculty member in a design session
4. If possible, attend/observe a relevant committee meeting (not sure what your college has)
5. If possible, get copies of relevant documentation and policies for instructional design, e.g. quality, RSI, etc.

Also:

6. Interview a couple of faculty about their design thinking

7. Interview your immediate supervisor and someone else in administration about how they think about the ID role

I know that’s a lot, but my goal is more of a case study approach at three colleges rather than casting a wide net. If you need me to clarify anything, please let me know.

Thank you for considering this.

If you agree, in terms of next steps, do you want to check with <ID Supervisor>? Also, can you direct me to the IRB process at the college?

Thanks again.

Faculty

<Faculty member name>,

Thank you for considering taking part in my doctoral study of the practice of instructional design in community colleges. This study has been approved by the college and if you have any questions related to that, you can contact <local college approver>.

I would like to interview you about how you think about the process of building a course and how you interact with <ID name> in that process. I am also interested in how that relates to issues of quality and compliance with college and other standards.

This interview is expected to take about 1 hour. Should you agree, I will forward the informed consent form for your review, and we can schedule the interview at https://calendly.com/dtod at your convenience.
Thank you. I look forward to talking to you.

Administrator

<Administrator name>,

Thank you for considering taking part in my doctoral study of the practice of instructional design in community colleges. This study has been approved by the college and if you have any questions related to that, you can contact <local college approver>.

I would like to interview you about how you think about how you think about instructional quality and online learning, and the role that instructional designers play in that process.

This interview is expected to take about 1 hour. Should you agree, I will forward the informed consent form for your review, and we can schedule the interview at https://calendly.com/dtod at your convenience.

Thank you. I look forward to talking to you.
Appendix B

Informed Consent Document (Observation)

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: The Practice of Instructional Design in Community Colleges

INTRODUCTION
The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES. The title of this research is “Instructional Design in Community Colleges”

RESEARCHERS
David Tod, Doctoral Candidate in Community College Leadership
Laura Smithers, Ph.D., Assistant Professor – Higher Education, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, Darden College of Education and Professional Studies.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY
Several studies have been conducted looking into the practice of instructional design in higher education. Few of them have looked at instructional design in community college settings. None of them have explained the practices of faculty, staff, and instructional designers in the online course design process.

If you decide to participate, then you will join a study involving research on the practices of instructional design at a community college. If you say YES, then your participation will include observation and recording of meetings related to the practice of instructional design at the college. Approximately 20 faculty and staff will be participating in this study.

EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA
You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this study.

RISKS AND BENEFITS
RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. As with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

BENEFITS: There are no foreseeable benefits in participating in this study.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS
The researchers are unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

NEW INFORMATION
If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The researchers will take reasonable steps to keep private information confidential. The researcher will remove identifiers from all identifiable private information collected. Audio and/or video recordings will be stored on password-protected computers. Identifiers will be removed, and de-identified information used for future research without additional informed consent from you. The results of this study may be used in a dissertation, reports, presentations, or publications; but the researchers will not identify you. Of course, your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE
It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time.

**COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY**

If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of illness or injury arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact Dr. Laura Smithers at 757-683-3165, Dr. John Baaki, the current chair of the Darden College of Education and Professional Studies Human Subjects Review Committee, Old Dominion University at 757-683-5491 or jbaaki@odu.edu, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-3460 who will be glad to review the matter with you.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT**

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them:

Dr. Laura Smithers 757-683-3165
David Tod, 540-200-8630

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. John Baaki, the current chair of the Darden College of Education and Professional Studies Human Subjects Review Committee, Old Dominion University at 757-683-5491 or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at 757-683-3460.

And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject's Printed Name &amp; Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**INVESTIGATOR’S STATEMENT**

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investigator's Printed Name &amp; Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix C

Informed Consent (Faculty)

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: The Practice of Instructional Design in Community Colleges

INTRODUCTION
The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES. The title of this research is “Instructional Design in Community Colleges”

RESEARCHERS
David Tod, Doctoral Candidate in Community College Leadership
Laura Smithers, Ph.D., Assistant Professor – Higher Education, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, Darden College of Education and Professional Studies.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY
Several studies have been conducted looking into the practice of instructional design in higher education. Few of them have looked at instructional design in community college settings. None of them have explained the practices of faculty, staff, and instructional designers in the online course design process.

If you decide to participate, then you will join a study involving research on the practices of instructional design at a community college. If you say YES, then your participation will include up to two interviews via Zoom or in person about your experience with the practice of instructional design at the college. Approximately 20 faculty and staff will be participating in this study.

INCLUSIONARY CRITERIA
You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this study. You must be employed at the community college and have worked with, or supervised an instructional designer, or be in an administrative role with policy responsibilities related to the quality of instruction.

RISKS AND BENEFITS
RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. As with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

BENEFITS: There are no foreseeable benefits in participating in this study.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS
The researchers are unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

NEW INFORMATION
If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The researchers will take reasonable steps to keep private information confidential. The researcher will remove identifiers from all identifiable private information collected. Audio and/or video recordings will be stored on password-protected computers. Identifiers will be removed, and de-identified information used for future research without additional informed consent from you. The results of this study may be used in a dissertation, reports, presentations, or publications; but the researchers will not identify you. Of course, your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.
WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE
It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time.

COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY
If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of illness or injury arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact Dr. Laura Smithers at 757-683-3165, Dr. John Baaki, the current chair of the Darden College of Education and Professional Studies Human Subjects Review Committee, Old Dominion University at 757-683-5491 or jbaaki@odu.edu, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-3460 who will be glad to review the matter with you.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT
By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them:

Dr. Laura Smithers 757-683-3165
David Tod, 540-200-8630

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. John Baaki, the current chair of the Darden College of Education and Professional Studies Human Subjects Review Committee, Old Dominion University at 757-683-5491 or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at 757-683-3460.

And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject's Printed Name &amp; Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

INVESTIGATOR’S STATEMENT
I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investigator's Printed Name &amp; Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix D

Informed Consent (Instructional Designer)

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: The Practice of Instructional Design in Community Colleges

INTRODUCTION
The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES. The title of this research is “Instructional Design in Community Colleges”

RESEARCHERS
David Tod, Doctoral Candidate in Community College Leadership
Laura Smithers, Ph.D., Assistant Professor – Higher Education, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, Darden College of Education and Professional Studies.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY
Several studies have been conducted looking into the practice of instructional design in higher education. Few of them have looked at instructional design in community college settings. None of them have explained the practices of faculty, staff, and instructional designers in the online course design process.

If you decide to participate, then you will join a study involving research on the practices of instructional design at a community college. If you say YES, then your participation will include up to two initial interviews via Zoom or in person about your experience with instructional design at the college, followed by brief weekly interviews for eight weeks. Overall approximately 20 faculty and staff will be participating in this study.

INCLUSIONARY CRITERIA
You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this study. You must have responsibilities including the design of instruction and online learning at the community college.

RISKS AND BENEFITS
RISKS: If unauthorized individuals access the recordings there would be a risk of your identity being revealed. The Confidentiality section below describes procedures for deidentifying recorded information, and all recorded data will be protected via passwords and multi-factor authentication. Pseudonyms for both colleges and participations will be used in transcripts and research. As with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

BENEFITS: There are no foreseeable benefits in participating in this study.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS
The researchers are unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

NEW INFORMATION
If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The researchers will take reasonable steps to keep private information confidential. The researcher will remove identifiers from all identifiable private information collected. Audio and/or video recordings will be stored on password-protected computers. Identifiers will be removed, and de-identified information used for future research without additional informed consent from you. The results of this study may be used in a dissertation, reports, presentations, or publications; but the researchers will not identify you. Of course,
your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.

**WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE**
It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time.

**COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY**
If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of illness or injury arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact Dr. Laura Smithers at 757-683-3165, Dr. John Baaki, the current chair of the Darden College of Education and Professional Studies Human Subjects Review Committee, Old Dominion University at 757-683-5491 or jbaaki@odu.edu, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-3460 who will be glad to review the matter with you.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT**
By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them:

Dr. Laura Smithers 757-683-3165
David Tod, 540-200-8630

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. John Baaki, the current chair of the Darden College of Education and Professional Studies Human Subjects Review Committee, Old Dominion University at 757-683-5491 or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at 757-683-3460.

And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject's Printed Name &amp; Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**INVESTIGATOR’S STATEMENT**
I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investigator's Printed Name &amp; Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix E

Interview Protocol (Instructional Designer)

Thank you for participating in this interview about your experience with instructional design.

Before we begin, I would like to confirm that you received the study description and the consent form. Did you receive it?

The purpose of this study is to look at how faculty, staff, and instructional designers conduct the practice of instructional design, and how that relates to teaching online, as well as issues of quality and compliance. I am interested in many things, but among them I am interested in what it means to be faculty when courses are standardized or from a publisher, but also what it means to be an instructional designer as you are working with faculty.

I have your signed consent form. Before I begin recording, I want to go over the process.

I will be asking you a series of questions about your role in teaching and the design of courses.

I will record our conversation so that I can transcribe it for my research. I will delete the recording after I defend my dissertation. At any time during the interview, you can stop participating or ask me to stop recording.

Your identity and your college will be kept confidential. I will use aliases for all participants and the school.

Do you agree to participate in this interview today?

Do you have any questions?

Background

- What would you like your pseudonym, your alias, in the study to be? Why?
- How would you describe your role at the college?
- How did you become an instructional designer?
- What is the purpose of instructional design from your perspective? How does that operate in a community college?
- What is the mission of the community college in your view? Does that affect how you think about your work?

Main Questions

- Some people talk about learning design rather than instructional design? Do you? What is the difference between them?
- What new thing did you learn most recently? How did you learn it?
What was your most recent *formal* learning experience?

- What does it mean to be educated?
- Do you teach? Why? How does that affect how you think about your work as an instructional designer?
  - Could you talk me through a course you teach? Explain your thinking behind the structure and assignments?

Could you talk me through a course you have designed?

Could you describe a typical day? What kinds of work do you do in practice? What consumes your time?

- What longer-term projects are you working on right now?

When you work with faculty, how do you get started? What does your process look like?

- How do you build trust with faculty and other employees?

Who is responsible for the quality of online courses? Who defines what “quality” means?

Do you support the adoption of prepackaged courses, e.g., from publishers? What kinds of challenges and opportunities do those present?

What is the most challenging part of being an instructional designer?

Do you work with adjuncts? What kinds of things do you do?

What, from your perspective, is the driving concern of instructional design in a community college?

If you could get rid of one educational technology, what would it be?

What gives you joy in your work?

**Closing**

- Is there anything else that you would like to share that I haven’t brought up?
- Can you recommend some other people that I might talk to about this?
• Do you have any questions for me?

**Conclusion**

Thank you for participating today. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions. I will be sharing a transcript of this back with you and welcome any follow-up thoughts you have.
Appendix F

Interview Protocol (Faculty)

Thank you for participating in this interview about your experience with instructional design.

Before we begin, I would like to confirm that you received the study description and the consent form. Did you receive it?

The purpose of this study is to look at how faculty, staff, and instructional designers conduct the practice of instructional design, and how that relates to teaching online, as well as issues of quality and compliance. I am interested in many things, but among them I am interested in what you do as a teacher when courses are standardized or from a publisher, but also what an instructional designer does as they are working with faculty.

I have your signed consent form. Before I begin recording, I want to go over the process.

I will be asking you a series of questions about your role in teaching and the design of courses.

I will record our conversation so that I can transcribe it for my research. I will delete the recording after I defend my dissertation. At any time during the interview, you can stop participating or ask me to stop recording.

Your identity and your college will be kept confidential. I will use aliases for all participants and the school.

Do you agree to participate in this interview today?

Do you have any questions?

Background

- What would you like your pseudonym, your alias, in the study to be? Why?
- What do you teach?
- How did you become a teacher?
- What kinds of courses do you teach? Asynchronous? In person? Zoom?
  - How are they different? Similar?

Main Questions

- How do you spend a typical day?
- When you are teaching online courses, what occupies most of your time? Do you involve others in the teaching of your courses?
- Could you talk me through a course you teach? Explain your thinking behind the structure and assignments?
Do you use publisher materials, and do you use a course template, or pre-built courses?

- How much of your course is handed to you?
- Does using prepackaged content change how you think about your role as a teacher? How do you define the work of a teacher? What is teaching when the content is given to you?
- How do you prepare to teach?
- When you are preparing a course, who do you involve in that process? Is it a solitary thing, or collaborative?

Have you worked with an instructional designer?

- What was that experience like? What did you do? What did they do?
- Were there specific challenges? Unexpected parts to the process?

What new thing did you learn most recently? How did you learn it?

- What was your most recent formal learning experience?

What does it mean to be educated?

What is a “good” course?

- From your perspective?
- From students’ perspectives?

Are there quality processes at the college? Do they help? Do they reflect what you actually do? Who is responsible for those processes?

What’s the best part about being a teacher? Are there moments that make it really rewarding and worthwhile?

What is the mission of the community college? Does that affect how you think about your work?

Closing

- Is there anything else that you would like to share that I haven’t brought up?
- Can you recommend some other people that I might talk to about this?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Conclusion

Thank you for participating today. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions. I will be sharing a transcript of this back with you and welcome any follow-up thoughts you have.
Appendix G

Interview Protocol (Administrators)

Thank you for participating in this interview about your experience with instructional design.

Before we begin, I would like to confirm that you received the study description and the consent form. Did you receive it?

The purpose of this study is to look at how faculty, staff, and instructional designers conduct the practice of instructional design, and how that relates to teaching online, as well as issues of quality and compliance. I am interested in many things, but among them I am interested in what faculty do when courses are standardized or from a publisher, but also what an instructional designer does as they are working with faculty.

I have your signed consent form. Before I begin recording, I want to go over the process.

I will be asking you a series of questions about your role in teaching and the design of courses.

I will record our conversation so that I can transcribe it for my research. I will delete the recording after I defend my dissertation. At any time during the interview, you can stop participating or ask me to stop recording.

Your identity and your college will be kept confidential. I will use aliases for all participants and the school.

Do you agree to participate in this interview today?

Do you have any questions?

Background

● What would you like your pseudonym, your alias, in the study to be? Why?

● Would you describe your position and role as you see it?

● How did you get into your current position?

● What is the mission of the community college in your own view? Does that affect how you think about your work?

Main Questions

● What in your mind is the purpose of the instructional designer role at the college?
  ● What challenges from your perspective there are for the role?

● Thinking about how your role overlaps with the role of the instructional designer, what consumes your time in that regard? What do you spend time on?
  ○ When was the last time you interacted with the ID?
● What new thing did you learn most recently? How did you learn it?
  ● What was your most recent formal learning experience?
● Have you taught? Do you teach?
  ● How did you become a teacher? Why?
● What is a “good” course?
  ● From your perspective?
  ● From students’ perspectives?
  ● From faculty perspectives?
● Assuming you have a role with regard to course quality and compliance, how does the college approach this? Who is responsible for it?
  ○ Are there challenges with your current approach? How would you like to change it?
● Are you familiar with Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU)? Does their model of many adjuncts teaching rigidly designed courses appeal to you?
● Who owns the courses that faculty teach at the college?
● Do you think much about the learning management system, Canvas? Do you think it shapes how faculty and students think about learning?
● What are the most challenging parts about your current position?
● What is the best part about your current position? Are there moments that make it really rewarding and worthwhile?

Closing
● Is there anything else that you would like to share that I haven’t brought up?
● Can you recommend some other people that I might talk to about this?
● Do you have any questions for me?

Conclusion
Thank you for participating today. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions. I will be sharing a transcript of this back with you and welcome any follow-up thoughts you have.
Appendix H

ODU IRB Approval

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH

Physical Address
4111 Monarch Way, Suite 203
Norfolk, Virginia 23508

Mailing Address
Office of Research
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia 23529
Phone (757) 683-3460
Fax (757) 683-5902

DATE: January 26, 2023
TO: Laura Smithers, PhD
FROM: Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee
PROJECT TITLE: [1996747-1] The Practice of Instructional Design in Community Colleges
REFERENCE #: New Project
SUBMISSION TYPE: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
ACTION: Decision Date: Exemption category #2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact John Baaki at (757) 683-5491 or jbaaki@odu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee’s records.
VITA

David Robert Niebuhr Tod
Old Dominion University
Darden College of Education

Professional Experience

Virginia Community College System
Information Technology Analyst 2004 – Present
Instructional Technologist 2003 – 2004

Wytheville Community College
Associate Professor (Administrative), Instructional Technologist 1997 – 2003.

Virginia Tech
Instructional Technologist 1992 – 1997
Faculty Development Institute
Graduate Assistant
Graduate Teaching Assistant

Education

Doctor of Philosophy, Community College Leadership
Old Dominion University Norfolk, VA (2024)

Master of Arts, English
Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA (1994)

Bachelor of Sciences, Economics & Sociology
University of Bristol, Bristol, United Kingdom (1989)

Teaching Experience

Virginia Tech (English) 1992-1994
Japan (English) 1990-1992
Italy (English) 1989-1990

Publications