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Assessment in the Age of COVID-19: Does Zoom help?

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In 2020, the arrival of the COVID-19 virus created a significant crisis in the educational learning environment in schools and universities. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared that COVID-19 was a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020). As a result, mandated school closures resulted in over 180 countries worldwide (Azevedo et al., 2021). These school closures, which peaked in April of 2020, caused nearly 1.6 billion children and adolescents to be out of school to stop the spread of the virus. The school closures affected over 90 percent of the student population worldwide (Tarkar, 2020). The school closures occurred as a means of trying to flatten the infection curve through “social distancing” or “physical distancing” in an attempt to decrease public interpersonal contact and community spread of the illness (Weeden & Cornwell, 2020; Rashid & Yadav, 2020).

The school closures negatively influenced learning for students. In effect, learning was paused or substantially reduced because of the school shutdowns (World Bank, 2020). As a result, remote learning became a standard worldwide (Azevedo et al., 2021). Home-schooling, due to the shutdowns, was a significant shock to students’ social lives and learning (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020). Parents of younger children were forced to become education moderators due to the school shutdowns. Consequently, parental productivity decreased because education moved online; parents became responsible for ensuring that their children completed online

assignments (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020; Tarkar, 2020). These shutdowns negatively influenced the necessary school instruction impacting student skill growth and learning (Tarkar, 2020).

COVID-19 generated significant challenges to education systems across the globe. Students and educators were forced to stay at home and adapt to new social distancing policies (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020; Tarkar, 2020). Schools had to adopt new educational technologies to continue teaching students who were unable to attend face-to-face instruction (Rashid & Yadav, 2020). Videoconferencing technologies, such as Zoom, was implemented by school districts to teach students who were socially distanced in their households (Njolomole, 2020). In higher education, many colleges and universities exchanged online assessment tools for the more customary in-person testing (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020). To ensure continuity in student learning, universities and colleges quickly adopted online teaching methodologies to ensure continuity in student learning (Tarkar, 2020). Many universities also implemented learning management software and open-source digital learning strategies (Tarkar, 2020). Zoom usage exploded because of the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns, making it one of the most widely used video calling software programs currently available (Njolomole, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has created many questions regarding long-term consequences on student education. Using technology, such as Zoom and online learning platforms to educate students in 2020 has created both opportunities and challenges. Many educators had to learn to implement new technology to provide instruction to their student populations, and students had to transition from seeing

educators weekly in the traditional classroom setting to online learning. For many students, this new technology was overwhelming and a little frightening.

Prior literature has found that attendance strongly correlates with grades and grade point averages (Wasan et al., 2021; Romer, 1993; Credé et al., 2010; Moore et al., 2003). The current study focuses on addressing how videoconferencing technology may have impacted assessment outcomes for college students. Specifically, the goal of the current study is to examine how attendance in two different formats can influence exam scores during COVID-19 among college students.

Literature Review

Regular class attendance has been found to increase learning and improve individual student grades (Credé, Roch, & Kieszczynka, 2010). Past research identified that student learning is associated with classroom attendance (Jenne, 1973), with higher grades related to attending class (Moore et al., 2003). Also correlated with academic achievement in the classroom is students' amount of time on academic tasks (Fischer et al., 1980; Stallings, 1975). In one meta-analysis study, class attendance in the college setting was determined to be the best predictor of academic performance and grades (Credé et al., 2010). Specifically, attending class was a better predictor for class grades and college grade point average (GPA) than student scores on standardized admissions tests, including the SAT, high school GPA, study habits, or study skills. Romer (1993) reported the difference between a student who sporadically attends class compared to a regularly attending student about an entire letter grade. A "very strong statistical relationship" was determined between absenteeism in class and academic performance (Romer, 1993, p. 173). Low levels of absenteeism and student

performance in class are positively correlated in research studying mandatory attendance at a college (Wasan, Skaradzinski, & Goby, 2021). Higher attendance typically results in greater scores on tests (Cohn & Johnson, 2006). Students who demonstrate academic weakness scored higher on exams when they attended class more regularly (Lin & Chen, 2006; Chen & Lin, 2008; Westerman et al., 2011). Students with minimal absences in the classroom scored between 5.4% and 7.4% higher on their tests than did the students who displayed only average attendance habits (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2003).

Prior literature has argued that class attendance contributes to student success for several reasons (Credé et al., 2010; Wasan et al., 2021). Specifically, class attendance influences information expansion, overlearning of material, distributed practice, and varied content and delivery modes (Credé et al., 2010, p. 273). Distributed practice learning occurs when a student regularly interacts and learns the course materials over a longer time period instead of attempting to condense the materials into a short time frame. Information expansion occurs when students are provided information or exposed to materials not included in online resources or the textbooks assigned for the class. Varied content and delivery modes are evidenced when professors teach their students using wide-ranging material delivered in unique ways to stimulate interest by the student. Overlearning occurs when students use various study materials to learn the course content. Overlearning can occur using exams and quizzes, homework assignments, group activities, discussions in the classroom, and other means to become familiar with the class material (Credé et al., 2010). Overlearning is

linked to improvement in the long-term retention of material for academic performance (Péladeau et al., 2003).

The pandemic has led to declines in school attendance (Gustafsson, 2021). This declining student performance and increase in absenteeism have concerned many universities worldwide (Sloan et al., 2019). Initial estimates of pandemic-related declines in attending school were in the region of 500,000. However, researchers actually had ranges of 600,000 to 910,000 students dropping out of school during the pandemic onset through 2021 (Gustafsson, p. 1).

Why is it important for students to attend class face-to-face? Past research has identified that extra schooling significantly increased scores on knowledge exams or crystallized intelligence (Carlsson et al., 2015). In a study in Sweden, researchers investigated how young males had a different quantity of days to study for significant exams. The variances were conditionally randomized to allow the researchers to appraise a causative result of schooling on individual learning. The investigators identified that even just ten days of extra education increased crystallized intelligence by 1% of a standard deviation (Carlsson et al., 2015).

Another study examined the influence on learning due to differences in instructional time among various countries (Lavy, 2015). However, nations often have significant dissimilarities regarding the number of teaching hours in a school week. Specifically, this study identified that the total weekly hours of education for science, mathematics, and language is 55% higher in Denmark than in Austria. These results become noteworthy for differences in exam score outcomes: one additional hour per

week of instruction over a school year in core classes increased exam scores by about 6% of a standard deviation (Lavy, 2015).

To reduce the impact of shutdowns, education systems worldwide transitioned to “emergency eLearning protocols” (Rashid & Yadav, 2020). These rapid shifts from face-to-face classes to online learning systems created new challenges. Using Zoom videoconferencing technology (Njolomole, 2020) and coursework online with distance learning platforms (Rashid & Yadav, 2020) was an attempt to utilize technology to further engage and educate students during an unprecedented pandemic. These changes created significant hurdles to student learning (Miliszewska, 2007; Rashid & Yadav, 2020). Face-to-face instruction and communication have been identified as more favorable for the process of student learning than the use of remote learning. This is partly because face-to-face teaching provides a better opportunity for students to ask for assistance from the instructor and is easier for knowledge sharing (Miliszewska, 2007). In addition, remote learning is less interactive and not as easily implemented as face-to-face classroom instruction. Students’ sense of belongingness and companionship are more challenging in remote learning situations. Individual students who have difficulty in self-regulation or autonomous self-study may struggle in remote learning settings. This is because the educator is less available and unable to provide in-person support. The remote learning use of discussion forums, online videos, or digital content may not provide a complete teaching-learning experience for students (Miliszewska, 2007).

Data and Methods

The current study utilizes data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Spring 2021 semester at a small, rural university. The courses selected for inclusion in

the study required face-to-face instruction. Two of the courses were part of the general education program, and two were major-specific courses. The two general education courses were Introduction to Biology (BIOL1043) and General Psychology (PSYC2003), and the two major-specific courses were Introduction to Criminal Justice (CRJU2003) and Introduction to Cyber Criminology (CRJU2013). Additionally, the current study received supplemental data from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, which collects information for the university to support accreditation, assessment, institutional research, and planning activities. This supplementary data provided additional information about each participant in the study, including demographic and educational characteristics. The study received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval before data collection. All students were asked to volunteer in the study and received an informed consent form.

Dependent Variable

The primary dependent variable consisted of exam scores for the Spring 2021 semester in each course. Since each course had a different number of examinations for the semester, the current study combined all of the scores of each exam to calculate a final exam score for the semester. However, some students did not complete an exam which may have underestimated their exam score for the course. The current study utilized the median exam score as the appropriate measure to account for this. Median exam scores are coded as a continuous measure.

Independent Variables

Given the nature of the research questions, the current study examined if attendance in-person or on zoom will positively affect exam scores for students in these

lower-level courses. However, some courses convened three days a week, while others only two days a week. The current study examines students' attendance in the course as a percentage of total class sessions to account for the differences in the total number of class sessions. For the current study, there are three main independent variables of interest.

Percent In-Person is coded as a continuous measure and is calculated as the number of times a student attended the class in-person divided by the number of classes in the semester (multiplied by 100).

Percent Zoom is coded as a continuous measure and is calculated as the number of times a student attended the class via Zoom divided by the number of classes in the semester (multiplied by 100).

Percent Absent is coded as a continuous measure and is the number of times a student was absent from the class during the semester divided by the number of classes in a semester (multiplied by 100). For the multivariate analyses, percent absent is used as the reference category.

Control Variables

Prior literature has examined several factors associated with influencing exam scores in college courses (Chen & Lin, 2008; Lavy, 2015). The current study used several variables to control for other factors that may influence the median exam scores using prior research.

Year

The year variable indicates whether the student was a freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior in these courses to account for their academic level. Year is coded as freshman = 1, sophomore = 2, junior = 3, and senior = 4.

PASS Class

The institution that was the focus of the current study utilizes an academic probation recovery course (PASS) to provide students with resources and guidance in their courses to improve their grades. PASS class was dummy coded, indicating if the student was enrolled in the probation recovery course or not during the semester (0=no; 1=yes).

Age

Age is associated with student success in college (Peiperl & Trevelyan, 1997). Age was coded as a continuous measure and indicated their age when completing the Spring 2021 semester.

Cumulative GPA and High School GPA

Two measures indicate their association with student success: collegiate cumulative grade point average (GPA) and high school GPA. Both variables, cumulative GPA and high school GPA, are coded as a continuous measure.

Course

Although the four courses used in the current study were selected due to their lower-level course number, there remains a difference in the assessment outcomes for each course. The current study uses the course they were enrolled in as a control variable to account for these differences. We coded the course variable as

1=Introduction to Biology, 2=General Psychology, 3=Introduction to Criminal Justice, and 4=Introduction to Cyber Criminology.

Analytic Strategy

This study examines the effects of attendance on assessment outcomes. Specifically, this study examines the effects of attending in-person and attending via Zoom on the median exam scores for students in a semester during COVID-19. The ordinary least squares (OLS) regression tested these effects. Least-squares regressions are largely considered the “Best Linear Unbiased Estimator (BLUE) of the population” (McClendon, 1994, p. 142). This means that the OLS procedure will produce the smallest standard error, predict the dependent variable at every independent variable level, and the average effects will be just as likely to overestimate the population parameters as an underestimate. Given the continuous nature of the dependent variable, OLS regression is the most appropriate analytical strategy for the current study.

RESULTS

The current study examines the effects of attendance, both in-person and via Zoom, on assessment outcomes among four introductory college courses during the COVID-19 pandemic and the current study results follow. The results of the current study are as follow. First, this study presents descriptive statistics. Table 1 (see below) shows that the average median exam score for the participants in the study is approximately 77 percent (76.98), with a minimum median exam score of 0 and the maximum score of 100 percent. The majority of the students in all four courses attended class in-person (63.98), followed by students attending class via Zoom (19.36), and

lastly, did not attend class (15.99). Additionally, the majority of the students were classified as sophomores (2.47), enrolled in General Psychology (2.35), about 20 years old (19.99), and only about 6 percent of the participants were enrolled in a probation recovery course during the semester. Lastly, participants' average cumulative GPA in college was 3.16, and their final high school GPA was 3.25.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	N
Median Exam Score	76.98	21.82	0	100	98
Percent In-Person	63.98	26.20	0	100	98
Percent Zoom	19.36	22.08	0	86.36	98
Percent Absent	15.99	15.35	0	73.68	98
Year	2.47	0.88	1	4	97
Course	2.35	1.03	1	4	98
Age	19.99	2.57	17	36	97
Cumulative GPA	3.16	0.69	0.37	4.00	97
High School GPA	3.25	1.01	0	4.22	97
PASS Class	0.06	0.24	0	1	97

Table 2

OLS Regression Examining the Effects of Attendance on Median Exam Scores

	Coeff. (SE.)	β
Percent Attend	0.44 (0.11)***	0.52
Percent Zoom	0.34 (0.13)**	0.34
Year	6.31 (2.08)**	0.25
Class	6.79 (1.66)***	0.32
Age	-2.33 (0.75)**	-0.27
Cumulative GPA	10.33 (3.24)**	0.33
High School GPA	-1.98 (1.79)	-0.09
PASS Course	6.39 (7.65)	0.07

Note: Coeff. = Coefficient; S.E.= Standard Error; Percent Absent used as a reference category.

N=97; R²= 0.54

*** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05

Table 2 (listed above) presents the findings from the multivariate regression, specifically OLS regression. The results indicate that the higher percentage of a student attending class in person was significantly associated with an increase in their median exam score by almost half a point (0.44, $p < 0.001$) compared to not attending class. Additionally, the higher percentage of a student attending class via Zoom was significantly associated with an increase in their median exam score by more than a quarter of a point (0.34, $p < 0.01$) compared to not attending. Thus, Table 2 shows that increased attendance by any modality will increase the median exam score compared to those not attending class.

Table 2 indicates that as the cumulative GPA increases, there is a significant increase in the median exam score by more than ten points (10.33, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, as you move away from general education courses to major-specific introductory courses (i.e., class), we see a significant increase in the median exam score by almost seven points (6.79, $p < 0.001$). Interestingly, as the student's classification increases, there is a significant increase in the median exam score by over six points (6.31, $p < 0.001$). However, as the age of the student increase, the median exam score decreases (-2.33, $p < 0.01$).

DISCUSSION

Literature examining the effects of attendance on assessment outcomes found that attendance has a strong positive relationship with grades and grade point averages (Wasan et al., 2021; Romer, 1993; Credé et al., 2010; Moore et al., 2003). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected several different aspects of life in ways that had seemed unimaginable, especially within the educational system in the United States. In

exploring this issue, researchers have documented the effect that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on both students and teachers (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020; Tarkar, 2020). This study provides further empirical evidence regarding the former by examining attendance in-person and via Zoom on exam scores in a small, rural university among four introductory college courses. This study is a unique context due to the examination of the issue during a global pandemic when videoconferencing technologies were used out of necessity.

Four introductory college courses were used to evaluate the effects of attending a face-to-face course in-person and via Zoom on the median exam scores for the Spring 2021 semester. The main findings of the study were clear. First, attending class in person has the strongest influence on increasing exam scores in an introductory course. Secondly, attending a face-to-face course using videoconferencing technologies is better for assessment outcomes among students who would have otherwise not attended the class period. However, while the findings may not seem robust, the study suggests that almost half a point, and approximately a third of a point, might make a difference in the overall grade in the course if it was decided solely by exam scores. This study adds to the previous literature using data across four introductory courses and during a time of a global pandemic to indicate that attendance does matter, especially in-person. However, videoconferencing technologies may mitigate any reduction in points on exams for a course for students who are unable to attend the class.

To be sure, the current study was unable to address certain factors given data constraints. First, current researchers did not have more information on the participants

included in the study that could influence their academic performance, and future studies should have more social and demographic information from their participants to measure this common issue ultimately. Second, data were only collected during the Spring 2021 semester in four introductory courses. Future studies should explore whether videoconferencing technologies may be more relevant to retention rates for general education courses and not also major-specific introductory courses. Given that retention rates are much lower among Freshmen and Sophomores enrolled in college, this may be an important marker for future studies examining how videoconferencing may better serve students and colleges.

On a policy front, universities, faculty, and students must consider and plan for how instruction modality is changing to serve a larger number of students better; videoconferencing technologies may influence recruitment and retention rates among small universities. Literature has found that online courses enroll more students than face-to-face courses, but online courses also experience higher attrition rates than traditional face-to-face courses (Terry, 2001). To the extent that it is feasible, university administrators should consider the positive features of offering a face-to-face course, with the option for students to maintain off-campus. However, some consideration should be given to the use of these types of technologies in the classroom regarding faculty instruction.

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Course Feedback: Creating a Culturally Responsive Learning Environment

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Introduction

The world of education is alive with talk about norms, beliefs, and behaviors that are passed down from one generation to the next. The “soft skills” are those things that might explain why a student might answer a question the way they do or why another feels uncomfortable looking you in the eye when speaking to him/her. Such instances of culture are among the most misunderstood in the teacher-student dynamic and are often things that cause misbehavior within the school system. Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) attempts to bridge the gap between teacher and student by helping the teacher understand the cultural differences that may cause a relationship to break down – which ultimately causes student achievement to break down as well.

In her book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (2016), Zaretta Hammond writes that “by third grade, many culturally and linguistically diverse students are one or more years behind in reading.” CRT is one way to empower students to find their way out of that achievement gap. Empowering students in various ways in the classroom means providing opportunities for student voice and power. Allowing students to share their lived experiences in the classroom early in the semester is one way to provide for student voice and power. This study investigated the use of Early Course Feedback in graduate education courses and its effect on student evaluation scores.

Review of Literature

Very little research has been conducted on the use of early course feedback in the past several years. In 1980, Peter A. Cohen's meta-analysis of studies on the impact

of early-course evaluations on end-of-term evaluations concludes, "Instructors receiving mid-semester feedback averaged .16 of a rating point higher on end-of-semester overall ratings than did instructors receiving no mid-semester feedback. In a more recent study at Brigham Young University (McGowan & Osguthorpe, 2011), the authors show that the impact of midcourse feedback on end-of-term feedback depends on what instructors do with the early course evaluation. Student ratings showed improvement in proportion to the extent to which the faculty member engaged with the mid-course evaluation. Faculty who read the student feedback and did not discuss it with their students saw a 2 percent improvement in their online student rating scores. Faculty who read the feedback discussed it with students and did not make changes saw a 5 percent improvement. Finally, faculty who conducted the mid-course evaluation, read the feedback, discussed it with their students, and made changes saw a 9 percent improvement" (McGowan & Osguthorpe, 2011). Additionally, Keutzer (1993) found five advantages to early course evaluation, which included:

- 1) Information can be used to make changes during the current course;
- 2) Students feel empowered to help design their own educational process;
- 3) It allows an assessment of specific behaviors rather than a global "quality of teaching" rating;
- 4) Instructors can ask for the information most pertinent to them-even, soliciting criticism without fearing any adverse consequences from the administration; and
- 5)The evaluations go directly to the instructor.

These findings support the use of early course feedback to make necessary changes that students have identified and discuss such changes with the students.

Types of Early Course Feedback

Ladson-Billings (1996) utilized a process called “pluses and wishes.” Students divided the evaluation sheet in half and placed all the positives about the course on one side and suggestions for improvement on the other. For the most part, students were satisfied with the course, but the one ‘wish’ identified was to increase student engagement. Another method called the “Minute Traffic Light Survey” allows students to write suggestions on what would make their class better. Red (Stop) indicated things that the instructor needed to take out of the course right away. Yellow (Slow Down) indicated things that the instructor could slow down within the course or lighten up for the students. Lastly, Green (Go) indicated things the instructor should continue in the course. Similarly, a K Q S Survey allowed students to give the instructor feedback on what he/she should keep doing, quit doing or start doing to help them learn. A second question focused on the student and what they should keep doing, quit doing, or start doing to promote their learning. These quick methods take very little time, give students voice and power, and allow an instructor to make necessary changes that seek to improve student learning and achievement.

Another type of early course evaluation utilizes a Likert scale in which students indicate the degree to which they strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree. Items included are:

- The instructor presents information clearly.
- The instructor’s presentations are easy to hear and understand.
- The instructor’s use of audiovisuals and the blackboard supplements the presentation.

- The instructor manages time well.
- The instructor is well-prepared for class sessions.
- The instructor relates course content to students' lives.
- The instructor conveys enthusiasm for the course.
- The instructor creates a non-threatening climate for participation.
- The instructor welcomes questions and answers them clearly.
- The instructor provides helpful feedback on student assignments.
- The instructor is fair in grading and carrying out the course policies.

Students are encouraged to write in comments or suggestions to enhance the quality of instruction during the remaining weeks of the semester.

Although both types of early course feedback (quick methods and Likert scale forms) are useful, an open-ended early course evaluation might provide more explicit information about things that students perceive as beneficial to their learning and achievement and those that impede learning and achievement. The United States Military Academy, Center for Teaching Excellence (2018) utilizes an Open-Ended Early Course Evaluation. The instructor can choose relevant items from the following list for students to complete. Items include:

1. The most important thing I have learned in this course so far is...
2. The most interesting new idea I have learned in this course is...
3. The aspect of this class that is the most helpful for my learning is...
4. The most challenging part of this course is...
5. The most challenging aspect of this course is...
6. The one thing I can do to improve my learning in this course is...

7. I would have an easier time learning in this class if I could...
8. The one thing I expect from this course that is not provided is...
9. I would improve this course by...
10. The great weakness of this course that I would correct is...
11. The part of the course that I have liked the most so far is...
12. I know the following techniques are used in other classes, and I believe they could be used effectively in this class...
13. I have the following questions or suggestions for you [class instructor]
14. I suggest that you [class instructor] make the following changes in the course between now and the end of the semester to help me learn better.
15. My recommendation for improving class participation and discussion is...
16. To help me learn, you [class instructor] should start doing the following things...
17. To help me learn, you [class instructor] should stop doing the following things...
18. I have the following suggestions on how you [class instructor] can use other media or other techniques in this course...
19. Please comment on how well the required readings align with class presentations, discussions, and small-group projects.
20. Please comment on how well each class session helps you synthesize the main ideas for the lesson.

The use of open-ended items allows the student to state precisely what they feel would increase their learning and achievement and offer suggestions to the instructor, which may or may not have been considered.

Processing Feedback

Whichever method one chooses for early course feedback, the instructor must consider how he/she processes the feedback. Karen Lewis (2001) says, "Perhaps the most important part of conducting a mid-semester feedback session is your response to the students. In your response, you need to let them know what you learned from their information and what differences it will make. Additionally, Buskit and Hogan (2010) suggest processing methods for the feedback from the evaluations.

<p>Throw out the off-the-wall comments that do not provide you with helpful information and forget about them</p>	<p>"She needs to update her wardrobe."</p>
<p>Set aside the positive comments that don't tell you anything specific</p>	<p>"Best class ever."</p>
<p>Divide the negative comments into two groups: those you can change and those you cannot change</p>	<p>Can Change: redistributing the points for different assignments because of the amount of work they perceived was required for each assignment.</p> <p>Cannot Change: let students out of class early rather than keeping them the entire period.</p>

Work on perceptions and learn to be explicit.	“She made us think. Dr. S. is a very influential teacher, but I did not come to college to be influenced.”
Savor the comments that are meant to be negative, but let you know you are doing your job.	

Having a method by which one processes the feedback allows for more intentional use of feedback, potentially increasing learning and achievement.

Method

Graduate courses for Job-Embedded Candidates and Initial Licensure students from 8 courses were used in this study. Each course had approximately 20 students whose average age ranged from post-bac to 60+ years. The courses were held in Fall and Spring in seven-week terms. All courses were held online asynchronously using Canvas as the LMS. Each course was an entry-level for the graduate program. The instructor chose five open-ended questions and asked the students to complete them at the end of Week 3. Below are the instructions and questions:

The purpose of this feedback is to gather input from you about the course. Your suggestions will help me improve the course and how it is taught and therefore help you improve your learning. I am the only one looking at your responses, and I will report to you on the feedback I receive. These are anonymous responses, and your name will not be attached, so please be honest!

- The most important things I have learned in this course so far are...

- The most interesting idea I have learned in this course is...
- The aspect of this class that is most helpful for my learning is...
- The most challenging part of this course is...
- The most difficult aspect of this course is...
- The one thing I expect from this course that is not being provided is...
- I suggest improving this course by...
- The one thing I can do to improve my learning in this course is...
- Please share any comments you may still have about this course...

Students completed the survey at the end of week three, and the instructor processed the information and discussed the results at the beginning of Week 4.

Results: Comments

Using the method indicated in Processing Feedback, the instructor downloaded the results. The results are below:

Comments: Set aside positive comments that don't tell you anything specific:

- I believe everything is going well. I have no concerns because you are open to helping me when I am confused.
- The one thing I expect from this course that is not being provided is I don't know because I came in expecting to learn, and that is exactly what I am doing.
- I expect feedback from the instruction which has been provided so far!
- My grades reflect the professor's feedback. The professor's feedback has been amazing and extremely helpful! The material is interesting, and I enjoy learning new applications in the classroom.

- I do believe I am keeping up as best as I can for not having taken online courses before

Comments: Things I can change

- I would require more videos so that it can feel like we are talking to each other. I work from home, and I get zero human interaction.
- Possibly opening up the coursework so we can work ahead. I find some weeks I am busier than others.
- Personally, I like when the added materials in the module include the short videos and not just lengthy readings.
- Again, I find the textbook to be very wordy and, at times, not reader-friendly because it seems to be very repetitive to the point that focus is lost.

Comments: Things I cannot change

- The interaction with the teacher is solely online and not in person. For me, it is the best situation to learn face to face. I do not have that available because I work full time. It is you independently working on your master's degree online, and I prefer seeing the content and information in person.
- I am struggling with getting everything done in a timely manner because I am working full time, have an eight-month-old, and my husband is on midnights (no excuses, though, lol). I am trying to work a little bit every day, but it isn't possible some days, so I get behind and then have to do EVERYTHING on the weekend (mostly Sunday night!).

- Take away the EdTPA (tongue in cheek), but I know that's not possible. I believe I can get through anything. This is the one thing that makes me sick thinking about.
- Have the assignment information connected/linked to the grades page, so there aren't as many places to click to look and find where the work is. Not sure if that makes sense.
- Savor the comments that are meant to be negative but let me know I am doing my job:
- I am concerned about evaluating my peer's lesson plans for fear of retribution. I do not like that we have to complete a rubric grade for a classmate's lesson plans. I think the comment section is a good idea, though.
- I have found it overwhelming at times because this is an entirely new course of study for me. I have found it challenging and eye-opening at the same time. I feel like I am learning a little more each day as the class goes on.

Results: Changes

After reviewing the comments from all students, changes were made to improve the course specifically for improved student learning and achievement. The edTPA lesson plan template was removed and replaced with a shorter version. The instructor also made a video explaining each component. In addition, a Supports for Lesson Plan Template with links to additional resources and information was created and placed into Canvas for further clarity. The instructor decided to share the research behind peer reviews and how peer reviews high-impact practices for teaching and learning. It was also made clear to students the peer review was completely anonymous. In addressing

the comment about the textbook, it was determined the textbook was not necessary for the course, and it was taken out of the course. This addressed the comment about “zero human interaction” and other comments regarding difficulties with online courses. Significant changes were made to the course with videos, resources, and a new discussion forum called ‘Harmonize.’ This discussion forum is similar to current media and allows students to use their phones to respond. These changes were implemented for Fall 2021.

As reported in the Performance Assessment documentation, Student Evaluation Scores increased slowly but steadily. Scores are noted below:

Fall 2018-Spring 2019 Average	4.53
Fall 2019 Average	4.54
Spring 2020 Average	4.52
Fall 2020 Average	4.63
Spring 2021 Average	4.70

In addition to the increase in Student Evaluation Score, there were notable decreases in emails for clarity. These results, along with the comments and changes made, seem to indicate positive effects on both evaluation scores and student learning in online courses when early course evaluations are utilized.

Conclusion

Early Course Feedback is an important tool one can use to help students engage in the learning process, whether meeting face-to-face or virtually. Early Course Feedback is essential if an instructor wants to allow students to share their lived experiences in the classroom early in the semester. Making changes based on the

feedback creates a culturally responsive learning environment and improves student learning and achievement. When students feel empowered to help design their own learning environment, they can remove the stress of the unknown and focus on learning. Additionally, students will score instructors higher on Student Evaluation Scores when they feel an instructor can hear their concerns and make necessary changes for the students' good.

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Evaluating Videoconferencing Platforms: A Checklist for Decision-Making

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Introduction

Many companies and educational institutions have become dependent upon videoconferencing to stay afloat during the Covid pandemic (Ali, 2020; Biswas et al., 2021; Schmitt et al., 2021). Because of the unexpected nature of the pandemic, platforms for videoconferencing, in many cases, were hastily chosen by companies. Companies may not have taken the necessary time to compare platforms since they were primarily focused on other needed logistics related to keeping their businesses operating. Employees, some of whom are not tech-savvy, have had to rapidly get comfortable with videoconferencing, which resulted in high levels of stress (Schmitt et al., 2021). Once companies chose videoconferencing platforms, platforms evolved, and new options emerged (Ali, 2020). Companies did not necessarily want to put their employees through the stress of changing platforms mid-pandemic, even if the platform they may have been using was no longer as efficient as newer videoconferencing options.

Now that most employees are back to work and can attend meetings in person, many companies have decided to continue offering videoconferencing. Videoconferencing has proven to be a convenient option for employees. For example, videoconferencing can enable employees to work from home while attending to a sick child instead of taking sick leave. It is also a cost-effective option since videoconferencing can reduce the necessity of paying travel expenses to employees

who previously attended meetings live (Biswas et al., 2021; Ghooi, 2020; Schmitt, 2021).

Because of the number of companies who wish to continue providing videoconferencing as an option, it may be time for companies to evaluate their current platform and investigate other platforms that may be a better fit for their needs. After months of videoconferencing, company employees may feel more confident about using the required technology. Since employees survived learning how to videoconference during the mandatory stay-at-home phase of the Covid pandemic, perhaps transitioning to another platform will not be as stressful for employees as it would have been prior to the forced platform adoption that occurred during the mandatory "stay at home" period.

There is much research on effective videoconferencing options (Biswas et al., 2021; Zou et al., 2020). Furthermore, there may be technology experts in companies who already know which platform might be best. Seeking their expertise is desirable, and identifying what research recommends regarding efficient platforms. According to Brame (2021), the best videoconferencing software for 2021 includes Cisco Webex, Intermedia AnyMeeting, Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Glip, GoToMeeting, and Zoho. EzTalks Meetings and StarLeaf are also suggested ("The 7 best videoconferencing software," 2020). Each platform has its pros and cons that must be carefully considered (Baftiu & Nuci 2021; Biswa et al. 2021).

Knowing what to look for when determining whether a platform meets a company's individual needs is valuable. To assist companies that are selecting an efficient platform, factors to consider when evaluating cloud videoconferencing platforms (which require only a webcam and an account) will be provided in this article

since these services are most relevant for remote users. The Appendix, titled "A Checklist for Evaluating Videoconferencing Platforms," offers companies a condensed list that can assist them when examining videoconferencing platforms. This article will also present a brief definition of features. The first factor that will be discussed is cost-effectiveness since it is a primary concern for companies.

Cost-Effectiveness

Videoconferencing platforms come at different prices, from easily accessible to quite costly. Some platforms have both a free version and a version with more features offered for an additional cost. Sometimes platforms offer incentives if their platform is chosen to be used by a company. Cost considerations include asking these questions:

1. How are users charged for the platform?
2. Are users charged monthly or annually?
3. Do users have a choice about their schedule of payments?
4. Is each user charged, or just the host?
5. Is there a reduced fee if a business purchases a company plan as opposed to users purchasing individual plans?"

Free platform options can be cost-effective, but many have limitations that prevent companies from selecting this type of platform.

Limitations of Free Videoconferencing Platforms

When exploring the efficiency of a free videoconferencing platform, it is important to consider the maximum number of participants able to attend a meeting. Also, is there a limitation regarding the length of time for which a meeting is scheduled? Will participants automatically get kicked out of a meeting once the time limit has been

reached? Furthermore, there can be a limit to the number of meetings held when using free platforms, whereas its use can be unlimited if a platform is paid for. Another limitation to check carefully is the type of security available in a free or paid-for platform.

Security

Many have heard news reports discussing the inappropriate disruptions uninvited guests have created during videoconferencing meetings. At the beginning of the pandemic, many users were entirely caught off guard by such troublesome behavior and had to quickly learn about security measures that could prevent these unwelcome occurrences. When evaluating a security system, companies should note that all platforms should have Secure Socket Layer (SSL) or Transport Layer Security (TLS) encryption, which means all information traveling between two devices (such as between a user's device and the internet service provider) is secure and private. Platform evaluators should determine if the platform is set up so that attendees must enter a password to attend a meeting and if there is an option where attendees can stay in a virtual "waiting room" in which the host selects only those invited into a meeting (Shilling, 2020). The host should easily control any images that are shared and whether individuals' cameras and microphones are on or off. Some platforms are so secure that guests cannot join a meeting unless they are members of the local area network. Even when a platform's security options are comprehensive, not all hosts will feel comfortable using a platform's security measures when scheduling a meeting or will remember to do so. Therefore, the platform must provide an easy way to kick off uninvited attendees, which is vital when determining user-friendliness.

User-Friendliness

When examining user-friendliness, it is preferable not solely to trust the technology experts of a company but to have the users evaluate this aspect themselves. Many platforms can be tried out on a free trial basis before a purchasing commitment is made to assess if a platform fits into an organization's setting. Some platforms offer free trials for 30 days, and many do not even require the use of a credit card, which means zero automatic charges at the end of the trial period. Some platforms also offer free demonstrations on how to operate features.

In addition, hosts can quickly kick unwanted guests out of a meeting if they forget to use security measures, as mentioned in the "security" section prior. Following are some other areas that can be evaluated to determine user-friendliness:

1. Is it easy to create a meeting and invite participants to attend it?
2. Are guests (who aren't a part of the company's directory) able to easily join meetings?
3. Are individuals able to join meetings quickly and without difficulty?
4. Are users frequently kicked out of meetings without explanation, and if so, is it easy for them to rejoin the meeting?
5. Can meeting hosts easily see when someone is trying to join a meeting?
6. Can users efficiently coordinate the platform with their current technological set-up, or is downloading the software necessary? Is it quick and easy to download the software if needed?
7. Are all features, such as turning on and off cameras and speakers, easy to use?

8. Is there online support available, and if so, what is their availability?

Some platforms also automatically coordinate with employees' online calendars. This feature makes it easy for meeting attendees to join a meeting by simply clicking on the meeting's link on their online calendar, which automatically appears when the host schedules meetings. This user-friendly feature and many other features can facilitate more active communication through videoconferences.

Features

In meetings where active discussion is the goal, interactive features can promote exchanging ideas amongst attendees. Therefore, it should determine which interactive features a platform offers, such as a screen sharing and polling.

Screen Sharing and Polling

Screen sharing is a feature that allows attendees the ability to see anything that appears on the meeting host's screen, such as a PowerPoint. It is also a feature in which other participants may be able to share their screens. Polling allows the meeting's host to survey attendees regarding their thoughts on a matter. Attendees can receive a link to a poll, or the link can arrive in a pop-up window. Users can then click on a response to a poll, and results can be posted, such as in a bar graph, so that everyone can see the results. Polling can be a handy tool for when meeting members decide, such as responding to a question like, "On which day next week would you like to schedule a meeting? Monday, Wednesday, or Thursday?" Another feature that enables participants to be more involved in a meeting is hand-raising.

Hand raising

The hand-raising feature allows attendees to click on an option in which a hand will appear in their tile (which is where they are pictured on the screen during a videoconference). This feature allows meeting participants to see when a specific attendee has a question or comment that he/she would like to share. When attending a videoconferencing platform, one learns quickly how hard it is to hear cues (one would hear in person more efficiently) for when it is a good time to speak during a conversation. The hand-raising feature helps provide a sense of the order of who wants to speak so that individuals do not talk over one another and, therefore, offers an opportunity for more interaction. On some platforms that offer the hand-raising option, users can even choose the color of their hand to match their skin tone. Having emoji options available is another desirable feature that helps participants express themselves.

Emojis

Emojis are digital image icons that symbolize an emotion, such as a smiley face. Some videoconferencing platforms have a sizeable menu of emojis that users can click on during a meeting to express various emotions. Users can also click on an emoji of hands clapping to congratulate somebody for an accomplishment, for example. When an emoji is selected, just like the hand-raising feature, the emoji appears in the user's tile on the screen. A chatbox, voice-over, and remote access are other interactive features available in some videoconferencing platforms.

Chatbox, Voice-Over Option, and Remote Access

A chatbox feature can be helpful because it allows attendees to send a message (which could be a comment or a question) to other attendees during a meeting. Attendees can type a message into a chatbox and select to whom they would like to send their message. They can send their message to an individual or all group members present in a meeting. On some platforms, the host can control a meeting so that no chatbox feature is available at all or so that all chats only go directly to him/her only or all members in the meeting. This option can be handy if the host is concerned that meeting attendees are chatting instead of participating in the meeting. Some platforms have an external chat mode, where attendees can have conversations while a meeting is not in progress. Also, an external chat mode feature may have an option to launch a meeting directly from a chat.

A voice-over (VoIP) option allows the host to change a phone call to a video call or initiate a meeting without disconnecting. The ability to use a scheduled and instant messaging option anytime can allow users to send a message between two or more parties when all members are connected on a common network. The ability to remotely access one another's desktops and/or exchange files can allow employees to share information quickly. Using breakout rooms is a feature that enables more active meeting participation as well.

Breakout Rooms

Groups can be broken up into smaller groups using breakout rooms. This feature can be used, for example, when groups are assigned a topic to discuss. The whole group can be divided into smaller groups, which can support more dialogue from each

member since speaking in a whole-group setting can be difficult and time-consuming. The meeting host may be able to assign members to specific groups or can choose to have groups randomly selected. The host can then select the desired number of groups and the number of people assigned to each group. Once attendees are all in their "breakout" rooms, the host can freely move in and out of rooms to check on the groups' progress and send a time warning or message to the groups, which pops up on the users' screens. Additional videoconferencing features include choosing a background, co-annotation, and the coordination of engaging games.

Backgrounds, Co-annotation, and Engaging Games Coordination

Participants can choose to use a background when videoconferencing from their homes rather than allowing the camera to, for example, display anything users may find to be unsightly or to protect their privacy. Some platforms require users to have a green screen for backgrounds to work effectively (which must be purchased separately), and others do not. There are even options to make a background fuzzy. Co-annotation or "whiteboarding" features allow attendees to contribute to notes taken live during a meeting, which can be saved and presented at a later meeting. New collaboration tools are being developed continually and can make a meeting come alive for participants. Many games such as [Kahoot!](#) and [Time to Climb](#) link up with platforms, for example, where participants can review content in a fun game-show format (Wang & Tahir, 2021). Another helpful platform feature allows meetings to be recorded.

Recording Meetings and Notes

Recording a meeting can allow absent employees to view a meeting later. How the meeting is recorded and stored should be determined. For example, a recording's

length limitations, as well as the maximum length of the recording that can be stored on the cloud before it is deleted, should be noted. There is even a feature on some platforms where a virtual assistant can transcribe meetings directly to a Microsoft Word document or PDF, translate notes to a desired language in the transcription process, save the notes on the cloud, and automatically send them to employees. Reviewing features like the ability to record meetings can be useful when choosing a platform and determining the compatibility of equipment already in place within a company, including the employees' homes who may tune in remotely.

Compatibility of Equipment, Environment, and Mobile Phones

It could be quite costly to replace systems if a chosen platform does not readily coordinate with the current systems available to employees. It is important to determine whether microphones, speakers, controls, cameras, and displays are well-supported. Also, some platforms integrate more easily with PC applications than with Apple applications. Choosing a versatile platform is most likely a better choice. It is also necessary to examine the size of meeting rooms. Some platforms work well when used for a meeting for a few attendees in a small room but will be inefficient when used by multiple attendees in a larger space. Determining whether a platform provides users with a feature that allows them to join by telephone (mobile as well) is extremely convenient for employees "on the move" to participate in meetings from any location. Some platforms even provide toll-free and global numbers for employees calling in to join a meeting. Screen sharing from mobile devices is now even possible, but it should first be determined if the platform supports Androids and iOS use.

Conclusion

Though videoconferencing existed prior to the Covid pandemic, its use boomed during the Covid pandemic since it provided employees and businesses who were mandated to "stay at home" with the invaluable opportunity to continue to communicate and be productive. Once employees were back to in-person work, it was shared that the Covid pandemic had most likely forever changed how businesses operate. Many businesses are still choosing to implement videoconferencing as a cost-effective alternative for employees traveling or staying at home due to illness, among other rationale (Biswas et al., 2021; Ghooi, 2020; Schmitt, 2021). Recommended platforms were presented. Next, since companies originally may have hastily chosen platforms, this article discussed that it might be time for companies to reevaluate their efficiency. The Appendix, "A Checklist for Evaluating Videoconferencing Platforms," is provided to companies to assist them as they examine various platforms.

An evaluation of variables followed, including cost-effectiveness, limitations of free videoconferencing platforms, user-friendliness, and safety. Last, a description of features was examined to provide better clarity for businesses evaluating videoconferencing options, including screensharing, polling, the hand-raising feature, emojis, chatbox, voice-over (VoIP), remote access, breakout rooms, backgrounds, co-annotation, the coordination with engaging games, and recording meetings and notes. Finally, the compatibility of equipment (including mobile phones) was shared, and the environment and meeting size were kept in mind when making platform decisions. Much has changed as a result of the Covid pandemic. It can be expected that

videoconferencing will continue to evolve in user-friendliness, safety, efficiency, features, and additional options in the future.

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Appendix

A Checklist for Evaluating Videoconferencing Platforms

Cost-Effectiveness

- Is it free? If so, what kinds of limitations does it have?
- If not free, what is the cost?
- How are you charged? Are you charged monthly, or annually? Is there a choice?
- Is there a charge for each user or just the host?
- Is there a reduced fee if a business purchases a company plan versus users purchasing plans individually?
- Does the platform offer any incentives if its platform is chosen?

Limitations

- How many participants can be included in a meeting?
- What is the maximum length of time in which a meeting can be held?
- Will users get kicked out of a meeting once the maximum length of time is reached?
- Is there a limitation on the number of meetings that can be held, or does the platform have unlimited use?
- Other limitations:

Security

- Is there Secure Socket Layer (SSL) or Transport Layer Security (TLS) Encryption?
- Can users be provided with a password for the meeting?
- Is there a virtual waiting room option for attendees?
- Can the host control image sharing?
- Can the host control cameras and microphones?
- Can a guest attend a meeting without being a member of the local area network?
- Can the host easily kick out uninvited guests?
- Other security features:

User-Friendliness

- Is there an option to try out a platform for a free trial before a purchasing commitment is made? If so, how long is the free-trial period? Does it require the use of a credit card? Will users be automatically charged at the end of the trial period?
- Is there a free demonstration available on how to operate features?
- Is it easy to create a meeting?
- Is it easy to invite participants to attend the meeting?
- Are individuals able to join meetings quickly and without difficulty?
- Are guests able to join easily?
- Are individuals easily able to use included features such as removing uninvited guests from a meeting?
- Are users frequently kicked out of meetings without explanation, and if so, is it easy for them to rejoin the meeting?
- Can the meeting host easily see when someone is trying to join the meeting?

- Can users efficiently coordinate the platform with their current technological set-up, or is downloading the software necessary? Is it quick and easy to download the software if needed?
- Are all features, such as turning on and off cameras and speakers, easy to use?
- Is there online support available, and if so, what is their availability?
- Does the platform easily and automatically coordinate with employees' online calendars so that employees can click on a link that appears in their calendar to join a meeting?
- Other user-friendly features:
- Overall, how user-friendly is this platform?

Features Offered:

- Screen sharing
- Polling
- Hand-raising
- Emojis
- Other features:

Chatbox

- Can the chatbox be controlled regarding who can see messages (the group and/or individuals) or turned off completely?
- Is there an external chat mode for having conversations outside of a meeting?
- Can a meeting be launched directly from a chat?

Voice-Over Option and Remote Access

- Is there a voice-over option to change a call to a video meeting without disconnecting?
- Is there instant messaging where users can send messages to each other when parties are connected to a common network?
- Is there a remote access ability to connect to other employees' desktops so that files can be exchanged and information can be shared?

Breakout Rooms

- Is there an option to designate whether attendees are assigned to a room randomly or purposely?
- Can the host send attendees a message while they are in breakout rooms?

Backgrounds

- Is a green screen required?
- Other background features:

Co-annotation and Coordination with Games

- Can participants contribute notes to a meeting that appears on a shared note-taking space?
- Can the platform coordinate with interactive games designed to help users learn material such as Kahoot! and Climb the Mountain?

Recorded Meetings and Notes

- Is there an ability to record meetings?

- Is there an ability to record notes?
- Is there a virtual assistant that transcribes meeting notes?
- Can notes be translated into a different language?
- How are notes stored, and for what length of time?
- Are notes automatically sent to employees?

Compatibility of Equipment, Environment, and Mobile Phones

- Does the platform readily coordinate with the current systems available to employees in the workplace and in their homes?
- Are microphones, speakers, controls, cameras, and displays well-supported?
- Does the platform integrate with both PCs and Apple applications?
- Can attendees join meetings from locations outside of the office?
- Is there a toll-free number provided so that employees can "call-in" from outside of the office if needed?
- Are global numbers provided?
- Does the platform support both Android and iOS use?
- Is screen sharing from mobile devices possible?
- Other issues:

**A Qualitative Study of the Attitudes of Self-Identified, Two-Year RN
Students and Their Perceived Value of Online Social Science Courses as Part of
Their Curriculum**

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Abstract:

This case study of community college students examines three years of data collected from nursing majors taking online social science classes at a community college in rural central Nebraska. It examines their self-reported perceptions of benefits gained from taking online social sciences courses as a part of their future career as a nurse. There is virtually no existing research on this topic. This research examines how 143 rural community college nursing students responded to a series of 13 demographic questions and one open-ended question. The open-ended question relates to the self-reported benefits of taking social science courses online for their future careers as nurses. Data for this project was collected from fall 2015 through fall 2018. The online social science courses used in this research include the following courses: Introduction to Sociology, Social Problems, and Gerontology. The purpose of the study is twofold. First, to assess the perceived value nurses experience by taking social science classes online for their future careers. Second, to examine the potential effects of the State of Nebraska Nursing Board cutting sociology out of its (Associate Degree of Nursing) ADN program beginning fall of 2019.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is twofold. The study examines online community college nursing students' perceptions of the benefits of taking online social science classes for their future careers. The second aim of the paper is to explore the potential adverse effects on both current and future Associate Degree of Nursing (ADN to RN) students due to a recent policy passed by the State of Nebraska Board of Nursing. The procedure reduces the number of classes ADN students need to take to graduate. The State of Nebraska Board of Nursing decided to cut three courses out of its curriculum beginning fall of 2019. Those classes include Anatomy and Physiology II, Organic Chemistry, and Introduction to Sociology. While all three of these classes have value to a future nurse, this paper will focus on the potential consequences of eliminating the sociology requirement for ADN students.

Statement of the Problem

In 2012, a mandatory psychology class that ADN/RN students took for years as part of their curriculum was cut from the nursing program, along with two other science courses. The reduction in courses was to have ADN students matriculate through the Nursing program quicker. Presently, seven years later, beginning in the fall of 2019, the mandatory sociology class that ADN/RN students have taken for years is now being cut from their program requirements. The elimination of the sociology requirement and its potential effects will be examined in this paper.

This paper seeks to answer two questions. First, how do nursing students pursuing their ADN (Associates Degree of Nursing) at a rural community college in central Nebraska feel about the importance of taking an online social science class for

their future career? Second, after collecting qualitative data from the nurses regarding their self-identified benefits of taking online social science classes, how might cutting out the mandatory psychology class seven years ago and the mandatory sociology class beginning in the fall of 2019 potentially affect nurses' ability to relate to their patients? For example, how might it impede their ability to: understand people from various cultures, be sensitive to their cultural practices, and ultimately understand the context of their future patients' behaviors? All of these things can be learned in both psychology and sociology classes. However, this research focuses solely on the removal of the sociology requirement.

Demographics of the College

During the 2017-2018 academic year, this rural Midwestern community college served a total of 21,406 students (9,156 were full-time or part-time credit-seeking students); 88.9% or 19,026 of the students were in the 25-county Service Area this college serves in rural central Nebraska (Enrollment Report, Central Community College, 2017-2018). The five most popular majors on campus as of the 2017-2018 academic year were: Academic Transfer, Business Administration, Nursing, Early Childhood Education, and Information and Technology Systems (Enrollment Report, Central Community College, 2017-2018).

College-wide, approximately 60.6% of the students were women, and 39.4% were men. Approximately 9,156 were credit-seeking students. College-wide, approximately 74.33% were White Non-Hispanic; 19.15% Hispanic/Latino; 2.37% Black Non-Hispanic; 1.47% Asian/Pacific Islander; 0.6% Native American; 0.34% two or more races; and 1.74% race unknown. This college has three primary campuses, a Learning

Center in Kearney, Nebraska, and several smaller satellite campus sites in the 25-county region of central Nebraska it serves (Enrollment Report, Central Community College, 2017-2018).

Demographics of the Nursing Students

This section is a brief overview of the demographic characteristics of the 143 nursing students surveyed during the fall 2015 – fall 2018 time period. There were 139 women respondents, which represented 97.2% of student respondents in the study. There were only four male respondents, who represented 2.8% of the study. The racial breakdown in the study showed that 87.4% of respondents were white, 9.1% Hispanic/Latino, 1.4% African American, 1.4% Asian American, and 0.7% Native American. Approximately 142 of the community college nursing students lived in Nebraska, and one lived in Colorado.

When it comes to parents' educational attainment, it is relatively equal between both the mothers and fathers of the community college nurses until college education is discussed. The mothers of the community college student nurses are more likely to have some college or be college-educated than their fathers.

As far as political affiliation is concerned for the community college student nurses, 35% claim to be Conservative (N=50); 18% claim to be Liberal (N=26); 31% claim to be Moderate (N=44); 16% claimed: "Other Affiliation" or "No Answer."

There is a wide array of income ranges from the 143 student nurses. They reported household incomes of: Less than \$10,000 (2.8%); \$10,000 - \$24,999 (21%); \$25,000 - \$49,999 (25.9%); \$50,000 - \$74,999 (25.9%); \$75,000 - \$99,999 (11.2%); \$100,000 + (9.1%); No Answer (4.1%).

Of the 143 community college nursing students, 60 (42%) were nontraditional students (over the age of 25).

Preliminary Findings

The majority of the 143 rural, online community college nursing students reported some sort of inherent value to the research question: "How is taking a social science class online going to benefit you in your career?" Many nursing students reported having a better understanding of people from different racial or ethnic backgrounds. An awareness of cultural sensitivity was reported. Having an awareness of social class was also reported. Numerous online nursing students mentioned that an online social science class would offer them a more worldly view. Some online nursing students stated that understanding why people act the way they do could help them better approach their patients and ultimately provide them quality care.

Additional benefits from taking a social science class reported by nurses include: knowing how to communicate better with patients and future co-workers on the job, gaining technical skills, and applying the information learned in this sociology class to everyday life. Later in this paper, a more detailed account of the aforementioned items will be discussed in the Findings section of the report.

Review of the Literature

The literature on this research topic is scant at best. In fact, it is virtually non-existent. Although there is a plethora of information on rural community colleges and rural community college students, there is hardly any literature related to rural, online community college nursing students pursuing their ADN to RN degrees. Further, no literature was discovered specifically on ADN students' perceived value of taking online

social science courses in their future careers. Instead, most of the literature focuses on RN students pursuing online Bachelor's and Master's degrees in a specific nursing field. Therefore, this section of the paper may overwhelm the reader. The researchers wish to point this out before proceeding. This research is unique in that it is exploratory in nature and attempts to gauge rural, online community college nursing students' perceptions of future career benefits of taking an online social class and how having this requirement cut from their nursing curriculum may impact them in their future profession.

Several attempts were made to locate relevant literature on this topic. Thus, the approach to this section of the paper will focus on the accessibility of online education for nursing students in rural areas. Xu and Jaggars (2014) suggest, "Online learning has the potential to be a democratizing force in higher education, but it to do so, it must support the academic success of students" (p. 634). Gregory and Lampley (2016) discuss the convenience online education has offered rural community college students over the last decade. They further state that online course offerings provide an inexpensive way to expand access and serve students with diverse needs. Like Gregory and Lampley (2016), Leist and Travis (2010) posit that students in rural areas can profit from the flexibility and convenience of online courses, which significantly reduce long daily commutes for a lecture class. Klaassen et al. (2013) suggest that online education provides a unique opportunity for rural nurses to continue their education while working and living in their communities. Distance learning programs also offer one solution to the access problem, with the potential to educate nurses across large geographic areas and at all levels of the continuum (Walker, 2015).

Sage (2016) states: "For decades, the Department of Labor has been tracking and predicting the growing need for registered nurses (RNs)" (p. 155). The availability of online education is helping meet this growing need, especially in the rural areas of the United States. In a recent article from the Online Journal of Nursing Informatics (2014), it suggests that it is dialogue, perception of knowing students in the online class, being known by others, and collaboration with peers that lead to the robustness of understanding the material being taught (No Author, p. 4). Further, specific to a nursing major, recognizing and maintaining these relational dynamics mentioned above can promote realism in clinical nursing situations and potentially prove useful in a nursing student's future practice (No Author, p. 4). Klaassen et al. (2013) suggest current research has shown that online educational experiences have demonstrated benefits such as increased self-reliance, improved cognitive abilities, and enhanced problem-solving skills.

Another important attribute mentioned in the article: "Learner Presence in Online Nursing Education" includes the emphasis on collaboration in the communication process and self-reflection in knowledge construction in an attempt to promote self-efficacy and facilitate more significant learning. Additionally, just as a future nursing student must be relational, social, and interactive with their prospective patients, an online nursing program must nudge the future nurse to be intimate, intentional, relational, social, and interactive with her or his peers in the online class (No Author, p. 5).

Methods

This research follows the case study method and is exploratory in nature. It uses data collected from 143 rural community college students majoring in the field of nursing over three years. The survey instrument is offered each semester to all online social science students in three different social science classes: Introduction to Sociology, Social Problems, and Gerontology. It is not a mandatory class requirement. Students can either elect to complete it or disregard it.

The study examines rural community college students' self-reported perceptions of benefits and challenges in taking online social science courses as part of their program curriculum. This study asks nursing majors how taking an online social science course will benefit them in their future careers. Data were collected over a three-year period.

Data were collected from three different community college campus sites, including a learning center (all three campus sites and the learning center were within one community college system at various geographic locations). At these locations, students were taking online social science and online nursing courses. Only one of the 143 online nursing student respondents was from a four-year college in the state of Nebraska. The three campus sites and the learning center are all operated by the same community college represented in this study. It covers a 25-county area in rural central Nebraska.

Students were administered a 23-item survey instrument in which they were prompted to answer 13 demographic questions and ten open-ended questions. Only one of the ten open-ended questions was used for this research, and it was only asked

for nursing students taking one of three online sociology classes. That question read: "How is taking a social science class online going to benefit you in your career?" The instrument was only administered to online social science students at the 100 and 200 levels at this rural community college in central Nebraska.

Some of the demographic questions from the instrument included questions such as the highest level of education they had completed, the highest level of education both parents had completed, (see demographic tables at the end of the article) a major area of study, gender, age, political affiliation, income, race, and mother and father's occupation. Only one of the ten open-ended questions was used from this instrument, and it is the guiding question for this research. Student responses can be located in the "Findings" section below.

Findings

As stated previously, the purpose of this research is twofold. First, to understand how rural online nursing community college students perceive the value of taking a social science class as part of their future career as a nurse. Thus, the guiding research question posed in this study is: "How is taking a social science class online going to benefit you in your career?" Second, as a result of the Nebraska State Board of Nursing's decision, effective fall semester 2019, to eliminate the sociology requirement for nurses pursuing an ADN to RN degree, what might be some of the future social consequences to nurses and their ability to relate to people in their future profession? This second point will be addressed further in the conclusion section of the paper.

It is essential to point out that 137 of the 143 community college nursing students reported some benefits to their future careers by taking an online social science course.

Only four of the community college nursing student respondents reported no benefit to taking an online social science course, and two of the nursing students did not even answer the question. Overwhelmingly, the comments were positive. In this section, only a sample of 30 nursing student comments will be used. It would be too cumbersome to include all 143 comments.

This section aims to demonstrate a solid representation of the community college student nurses' self-reported comments over the past three years from the three online classes used in this study: Introduction to Sociology, Social Problems, and Gerontology. For the sake of brevity and the realization that many of the 143 comments overlap, the researchers believe the 35 comments mentioned below best convey the community college nursing students' overall attitudes in this study toward the perceived value of taking online social science courses in their future profession. Their responses to the one primary research question in this study are typed out exactly as they appear on the instrument used in this study. There may be grammatical errors appearing in some statements made by the student respondents. The principal investigators of this research believe it necessary to not correct grammatical errors in the student responses below, as it could possibly take away "the effect" of what the student respondents were trying to convey in their answers to this question. The primary research question of this study follows.

How is taking a social science class online going to benefit you in your career?

Student 1: "By taking this course online, I can better prioritize my time between work, school, and my family. If I could not take this course online, it would take me

longer to complete my generals. This would also push back my start date for the program."

Student 2: "Taking a social science class online helps me to use my time to work and earn money in the summer while also learning about sociology on my own time. This learning method is more beneficial to me to go at my own pace. This helps me so I can learn more about people and how they interact so I can use it in my future career as a nurse."

Student 3: "It will better prepare me to take care of my patients to the best of my ability."

Student 4: "I will be better equipped to provide safe and efficient care to patients in my practice by better understanding the problems that are facing society."

Student 5: "It will benefit me in my career because it will teach me how our society works and how I even work at times. It shows me how to react to things properly and how other people may react to things as well. It helps show that even though many people may have different personalities and different religions, we're all very similar to each other, and I can use it to the best of my abilities when working with patients."

Student 6: "It helps me better understand the cultures and way of life of people."

Student 7: "This class is chosen so that we know how to communicate with people; understand different ethnic and cultural views, and so we can learn how to best treat people. This class was also chosen so that we can learn about the society around us. I also think this class will give me a view of the whole world beyond my community from a global perspective. I want to be a medical missions nurse, so this will be very

helpful to learn how other people respond to their environment and how I can adapt to meet their physical and mental needs."

Student 8: "This helps me understand individuals and different situations that can come up while I am a nurse. It is helping me be more rounded and have a deep connection to all individuals."

Student 9: "Having an understanding of the society around me. It gives me knowledge about the people I want to be of service to."

Student 10: "It will help me to be able to relate better to my patients."

Student 11: "By better understanding people and groups of people, it can help me to become a more compassionate, gentle, kind nurse."

Student 12: "I will learn more about different groups of people to learn how to approach and converse with them properly. I will learn to understand better how people act differently, which will help me know the best way to handle the person."

Student 13: "It helps nurses understand their clients better and understand why they do the things they do. Also, it helps understand different people's cultures and attitudes to everyday situations."

Student 14: "Helps me understand how people relate to health care. It also helps me understand the disease process in different cultures and societies. This class will help me relate to people of other ethnic groups and helps me understand their beliefs. Showed me more about how people interact with one another; from groups to the individual."

Student 15: "In nursing, I am going to run into all kinds of people and different cultures, so sociology helps with that area. This class teaches me what I need to know

about how things are perceived in the world. This class is also very beneficial in understanding a lot that I was unaware of."

Student 16: "It will benefit me in my career because I will have more knowledge about different racial backgrounds, and it will help me understand people. I will better understand people and where they come from."

Student 17: "I will have learned how to manage my time and stay organized as a nurse. I also believe it will help me to problem solve on my own and work through any problems."

Student 18: "I believe it helped me with time management and mapping out when I was going to finish assignments and tests in order to stay ahead or on time. In a fast-paced career like nursing, I will need to be organized and always know what my next move is."

Student 19: "Taking sociology will teach me how to deal with patients in the nursing field. It will show me certain problems that might come up and how to resolve their problems. Using the knowledge I learned from this class, it should be easy for me to solve my issues with patients."

Student 20: "I will be working directly with the public for the rest of my life. I hope to understand people a little bit more than I do. We are all so different that there will always be something to learn and understand about where an individual is coming from."

Student 21: "It will help me better understand how to appropriately communicate and interact with residents, doctors, patients, and families."

Student 22: "It will help me to relate to my patients better and understand what their norms are so I can take better care of them. It has just opened my eyes up to how different people are and helped me to understand what is important to them and also how lucky we are to live in a free country where we have choices and a clean environment. Some of my patients are not from the USA, and this class has helped me understand where they come from and why they may act indifferent, which has given me more patience and ways to better care for them."

Student 23: "Provides a greater basis of knowledge and potentially encourages problem resolution. Also, it provides me with the tools needed to understand better those that I am serving."

Student 24: "It's going to improve my technical skills."

Student 25: "I don't have a lot of computer skills at the moment, and this class has helped me start working with a lot more technology more often. I also struggle to learn things when they aren't right in front of me, which has helped me learn how to better adapt and teach myself things."

Student 26: "It will help me better understand my patients and residents. It will also help me better understand human behavior better."

Student 27: "It will give me a look into the different aspects of society, which could help me with patients from different backgrounds. Taking this class online is teaching me self-discipline. It will also help me with interactions with patients."

Student 28: "I will be able to empathize with patients better, from all different backgrounds and ways of life."

Student 29: "By taking this class, I will have more empathy towards all the different people I will meet, not only for my patients but also for my fellow employees. I understand that the way that I was brought up could be much different than the people that I will meet. This class has helped remind me not to judge."

Student 30: "It teaches me about time management and setting goals for myself to get everything accomplished in the amount of time that I have."

Student 31: "Taking a social science course online will benefit me as a nurse because it will help me to remember that not all cultures/religions/people, in general, have the same opinions about health care, modesty, or living in general. This will help me be more sensitive when treating all patients from all walks of life."

Student 32: "This course has taught me a lot about culture, racism, and health in society. Also, about birth and death rates."

Student 33: "In the nursing field, you will come in contact with many different groups of people. Understanding their beliefs and customs will assist in taking care of their needs in the best way possible."

Student 34: "This was a choice on the elective list for nursing school. I chose this social science course from that list of several different choices because I believe that it will apply best to my future career in nursing. I chose the Gerontology course because our elderly population is growing rapidly in this country and will soon make up a large number of the patients treated in hospitals and doctor's offices where I will be employed following completion of my degree."

Student 35: "Taking these classes is going to help me with the understanding of people, social problems, and geriatric issues."

No Answer/Negative/Unsure

Out of the 143 student respondents in this study, there was a variation in how many of the rural, online nursing community college students did not answer the only open-ended question guiding this study. The open-ended question asked: "How will taking a social science class online benefit you in your career?" Only three student respondents didn't answer the question.

There were six students out of the 143 respondents who reported either a negative or unsure response of how the online social science class was going to benefit them in their future careers. In this section, those six student responses will be shared. Answers have been typed exactly as students responded.

Student 1: "I'm not sure; this is my first online class."

Student 2: "I am not sure."

Student 3: "I can't give an exact example of how it is going to directly benefit my career. It will benefit me overall as a person, having a better understanding of people and how they are shaped by their surroundings."

Student 4: "Taking the course online may not benefit my career. I am going for nursing, so the understanding of sociology and other people's views and beliefs on life will help me understand other cultures."

Student 5: "I did learn a lot from the course, but I do not feel that it has added to the knowledge I will use as a nurse. It may when I have a very culturally diverse patient, but I have yet to experience that."

Student 6: "I do not think that it will truly benefit me, just make my education 'well-rounded.'"

Limitations

There are numerous limitations to this study. First, although there were four different campus locations included in this study, they are all a part of only one community college system. Second, this study focuses on only one rural Midwestern community college and its nursing students' attitudes toward how taking an online social science course will benefit them in their future careers. Thus, the results of this study cannot be generalized at the state level and certainly not at the national level. A third issue addressed in this paper is perhaps unique only to Nebraska at this time but could perhaps affect other states. The Nebraska State Board of Nursing continues to reduce the number of mandatory classes ADN to RN students must take in their nursing curriculum. This study also focuses on what the community college nursing majors may lose by not learning the content and skills offered in a sociology class or another social science course.

Students at a much larger community college in an urban setting or possibly in another state, for example, may not experience this issue. Also, rural, online nursing students at other rural Midwestern community colleges or other rural community colleges in other regions of the country may not be experiencing the elimination of social science classes from their curriculum.

Certainly, this case study could have been strengthened by including the other three rural community colleges and two urban community colleges affected by this policy change in the state of Nebraska.

Another limitation was gender bias. There were 139 women respondents, which represented 97.2% of student respondents in the study. There were only four male

respondents, representing 2.8% of the study. There was also racial bias in the study, as 87.4% of respondents were white, 9.1% Hispanic/Latino, 1.4% African American, 1.4% Asian American, and 0.7% Native American. The researchers would like to point out that the gender bias may be related to the predominantly female nursing field. Additionally, for the 2017/18 year at Central Community College, precisely 60.6% of the students were female, and 39.4% of the students were males (Enrollment Report, Central Community College, 2017-2018).

Other limitations of this study include: 1) It only surveyed rural, online community college adults studying nursing in this state. The other three rural community colleges and two urban community colleges in the state were not included in this study. 2) Permission was not granted for our research instrument to be administered in other online social science classes campus-wide. 3) Only three social science courses were permitted for this study. 4) If future research is conducted on this topic, the other rural and urban community colleges around this state should be included for better-generalized outcomes. 5) More variety in online social science courses which nursing students also take should be included in a future study. This should include courses from various fields such as psychology, philosophy, anthropology, and political science to strengthen future studies. 6) More student respondents would also strengthen future studies on this topic. 7) The study was also delimited to the same instructor collecting the data from these three social science courses within the fall 2015 - fall 2018 timeframe. (This was due solely to not being permitted by the administration to administer this survey in other online social science courses. The reason given for this is because it would confuse students in filling out the instructor's performance

evaluation at the end of the semester in these courses). 8) This study was also limited in the researchers' ability to gain additional clarity and depth through follow-up questions.

Conclusion

There are two purposes to this study. First, to show the value that two-year nurses at a rural community college self-reported when prompted with the open-ended question: "How is taking a social science class online going to benefit you in your career?" Overwhelmingly, the nurses reported the value of the online social science class they happened to be in, Introduction to Sociology, Social Problems, or Gerontology. Out of the 143 nurses answering the research question, two chose not to answer, and only four stated they were either unsure or saw no benefit. Collectively, the nurses discussed several critical pieces of knowledge they would gain from a social science class. Some of the main topics included: becoming more familiar with social problems in our society, learning about new cultures, and learning about different racial groups, ethnic groups, and religious groups. Other "soft skills" reported included: understanding human behavior, understanding behavior in groups, being able to feel empathy toward their future patients, understanding racism both in society and in the health care profession, and better communication skills with other co-workers in the workplace.

Other perceived useful skills reported by online nursing students in the online social science classes include enhancing technological skills, learning to work through technical problems when they arise in class and turning things in online. Additionally, students' confidence in navigating online material, gaining confidence in technology,

multi-tasking new learned material online, time management skills, and time management skills while simultaneously being at work and completing homework for one of the social science classes while at work.

The second purpose of the study is to speculate on some of the possible consequences of the Nebraska State Board of Nursing's decision to cut out the social science requirements in both 2012 (two psychology classes then) and beginning in the fall of 2019 (Introduction to Sociology). The researchers see several detriments to this decision. First, nurses encounter people from all walks of life, oftentimes under unpleasant circumstances. But, even if the circumstances aren't unpleasant, we believe that having a basic understanding of psychology and sociology would prove useful in any given situation. Nurses feel more relatable when they have a basic understanding of people from all walks of life. By taking these courses, they have a general understanding of behavior in individual and group settings. They also gain knowledge that ties in with their professions, such as brain functions and human behavior in psychology courses, and both group and societal behavior learned from sociology courses. Also, in sociology courses, nurses learn about structural factors that cause some of the major social problems in our society.

Another possible concern is verbalized by George Ritzer in his famous book published in 2004: *The McDonaldization of Society: An Investigation into the Changing Character of Contemporary Social Life*. In his book, he suggests that our society is becoming "McDonaldized," which is an uncomfortable way of saying that McDonald's' four corporate principles are infiltrating all of our societal institutions. The four principles include efficiency, predictability, uniformity, and control. The primary point is that just as

a McDonald's worker has all food and drink measured out, has a computer to take the order and give back the appropriate change to a customer without even thinking about it, so does the typical American worker at their job, no matter how well-educated they may be. Most jobs eliminate one's sense of creativity, choice, and control. This idea applies to this paper's discussion. Do we as a society really want our nurses not to be cognizant of their surroundings, understand various cultures and cultural practices and social problems, possess empathy for their patients, understand the basic characteristics of people from various socioeconomic classes in American society, and ultimately to be able to think for themselves while on the job? Do we want our nurses to serve patients as human robots who are as efficient as possible in their care but lack the empathy, reasoning, and problem-solving skills they could learn in a social science course? These are just a few of the consequences future nurses could encounter with the cutting of the two psychology courses in 2012 and sociology classes in fall 2019 from the ADN to RN program curriculum at all the community colleges in the state of Nebraska.

Another problem that presently exists in the nursing profession in the United States and has sociological significance is the underrepresentation of minority nurses. White and Fulton (2015) state: "For reasons that are not entirely clear, the nursing profession is not keeping up with the demographic changes in the United States. Without new recruitment strategies, the nursing profession will likely remain poorly diversified" (p. 167). Diefenbeck et al. (2016) discuss how the demographics of the nursing workforce have remained unchanged over the past decade despite a 25% increase in the minority population. To put this issue in better perspective, only 7% of

the nurses in the United States are African American or Hispanic. Although the topic of minorities being underrepresented in the nursing profession isn't the primary discussion point of this paper, it still shows how potentially valuable a psychology or sociology undergraduate course could be not only to nurses serving patients who are members of a minority group but also to their co-workers who are a minority as well.

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper is ultimately to generate dialogue on the topic of cutting social science courses from the ADN to RN programs in all the community colleges in the state of Nebraska. The researchers wanted to show the value that rural community college nursing students reported in these courses as it applies to their future profession. The other aim is to have a discussion or at least begin a discussion about whether or not we want future nurses to be like what George Ritzer describes, which is to be "McDonaldized," in which they don't have to think on the job and rely on automation and the four principles he mentions in his book about our culture becoming too reliant on automation and technology. Lastly, in his 2018 book, *Why Liberalism Failed*, Deneen states: "Present circumstances on college campuses have accelerated the demise of the liberal arts. A combination of demands for their "usefulness" and "relevance," along with shrinking budgets is going to make the humanities a smaller part of the modern university" (p. 125).

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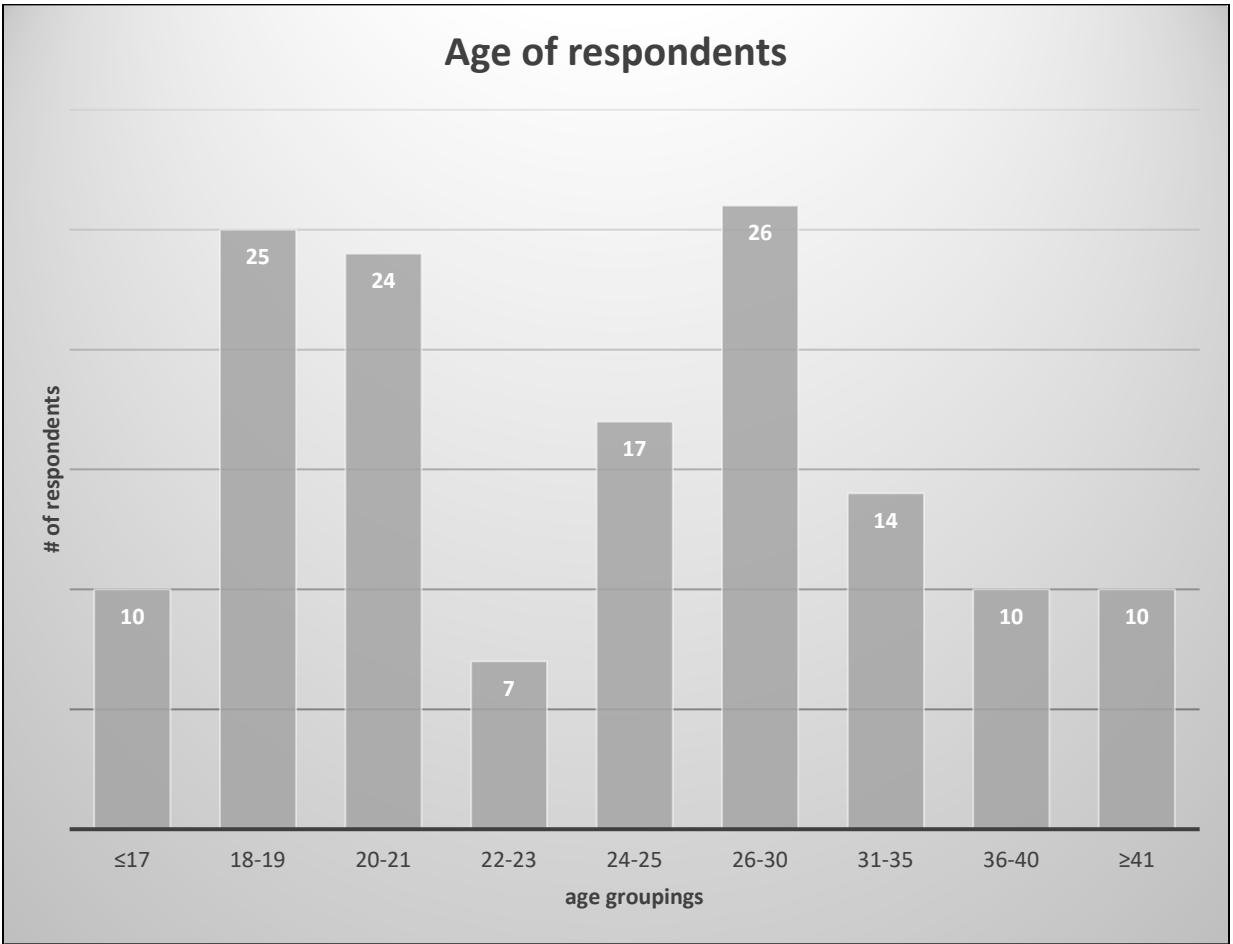
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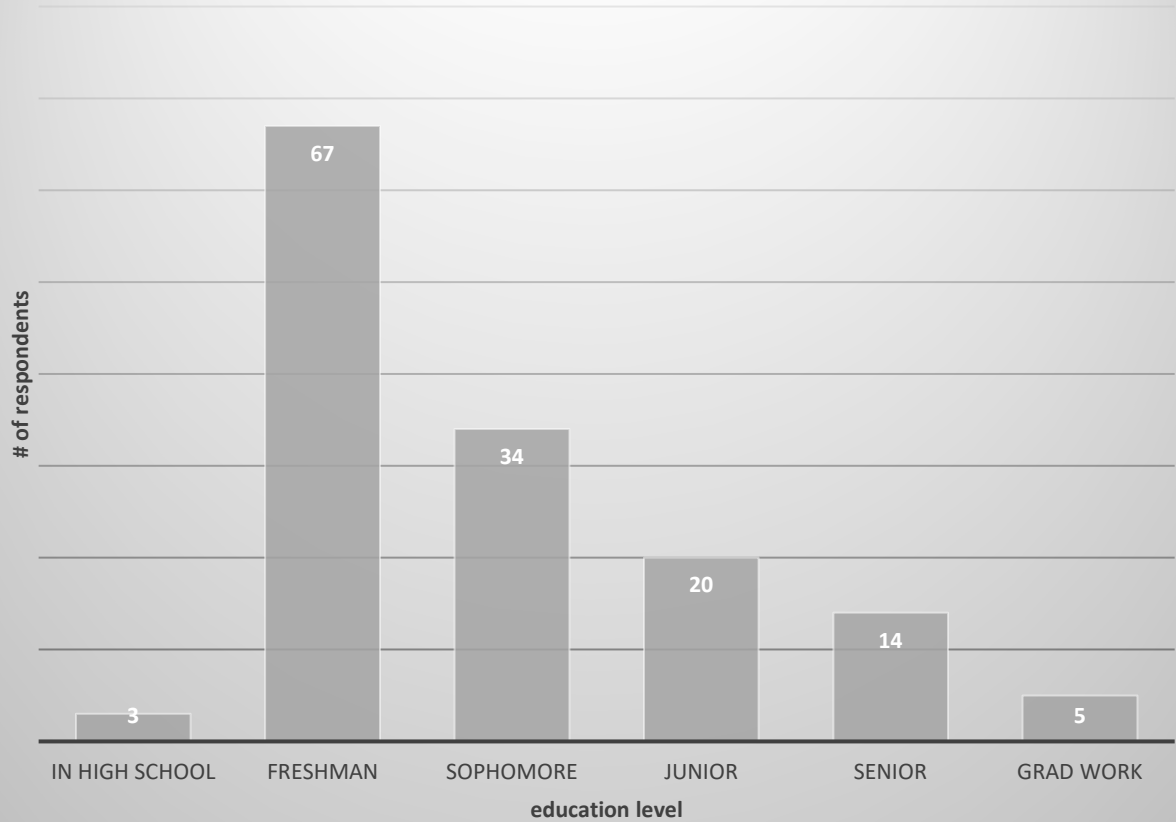
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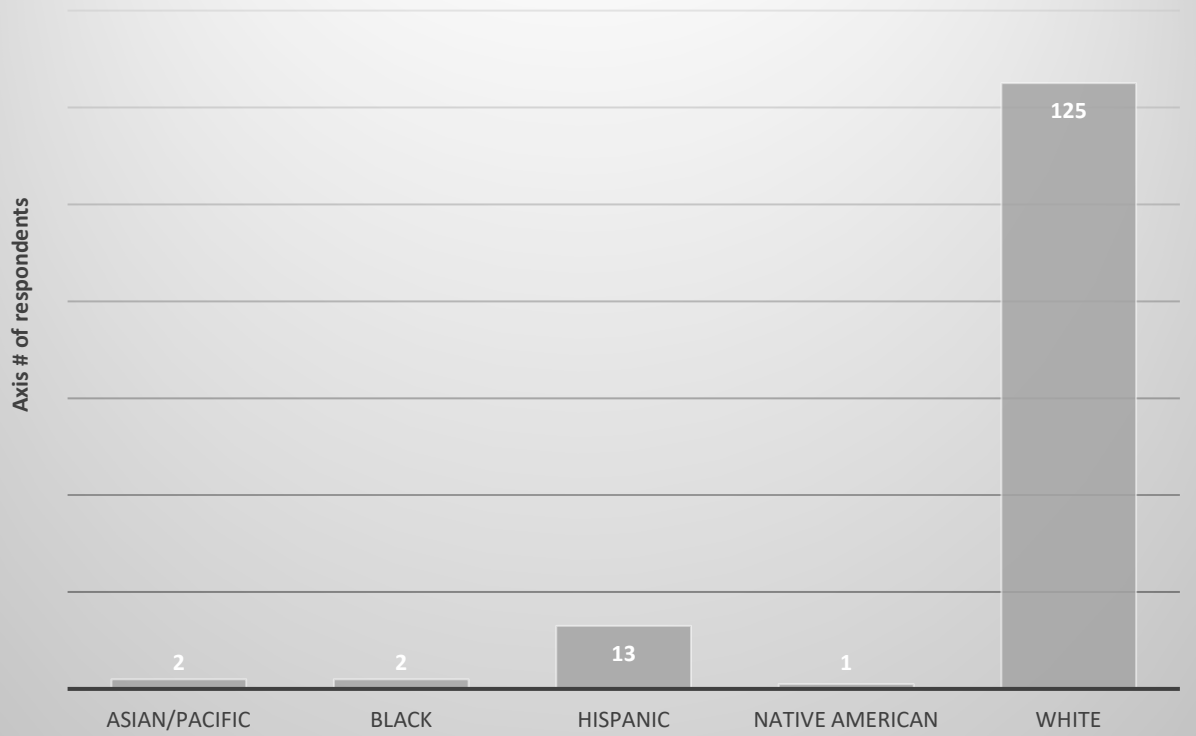
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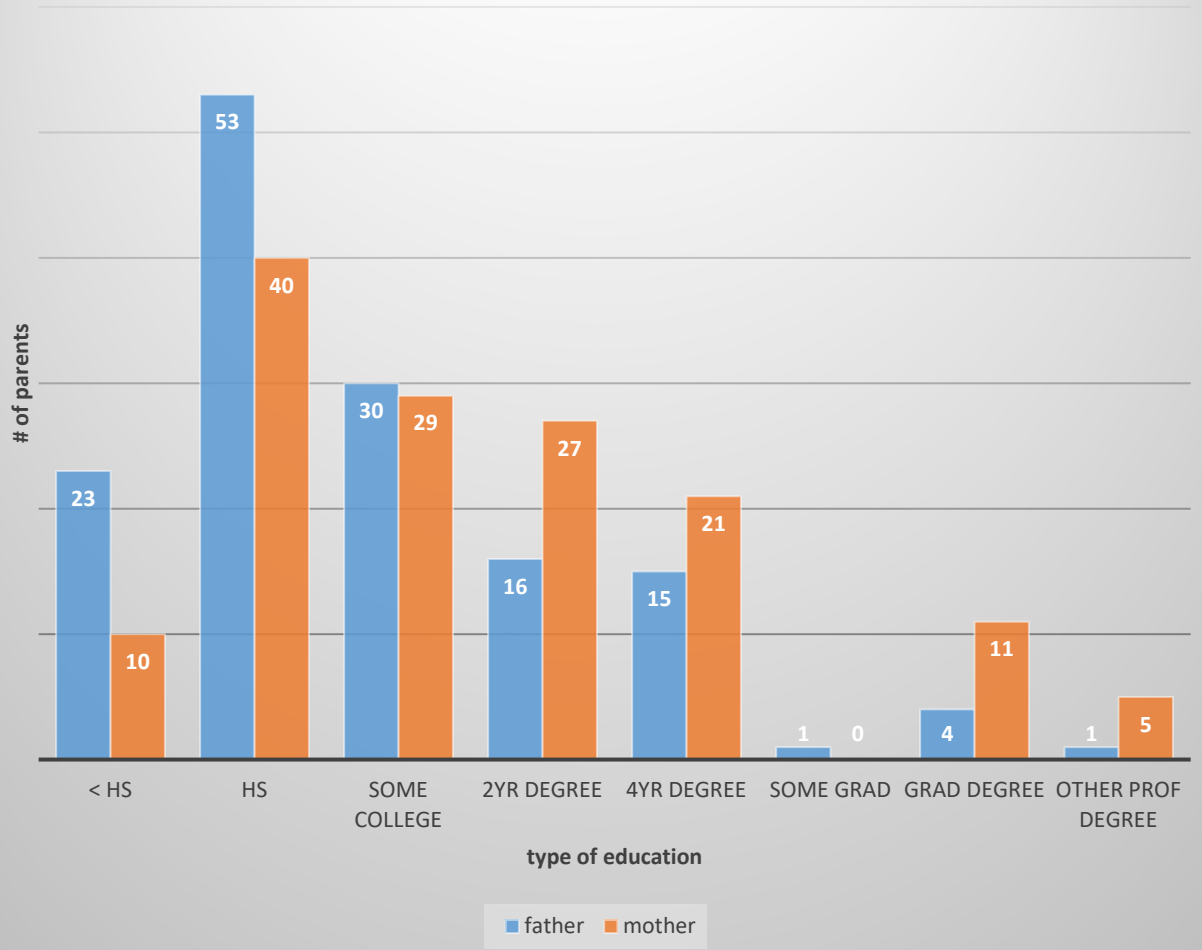
Education Level of Respondents



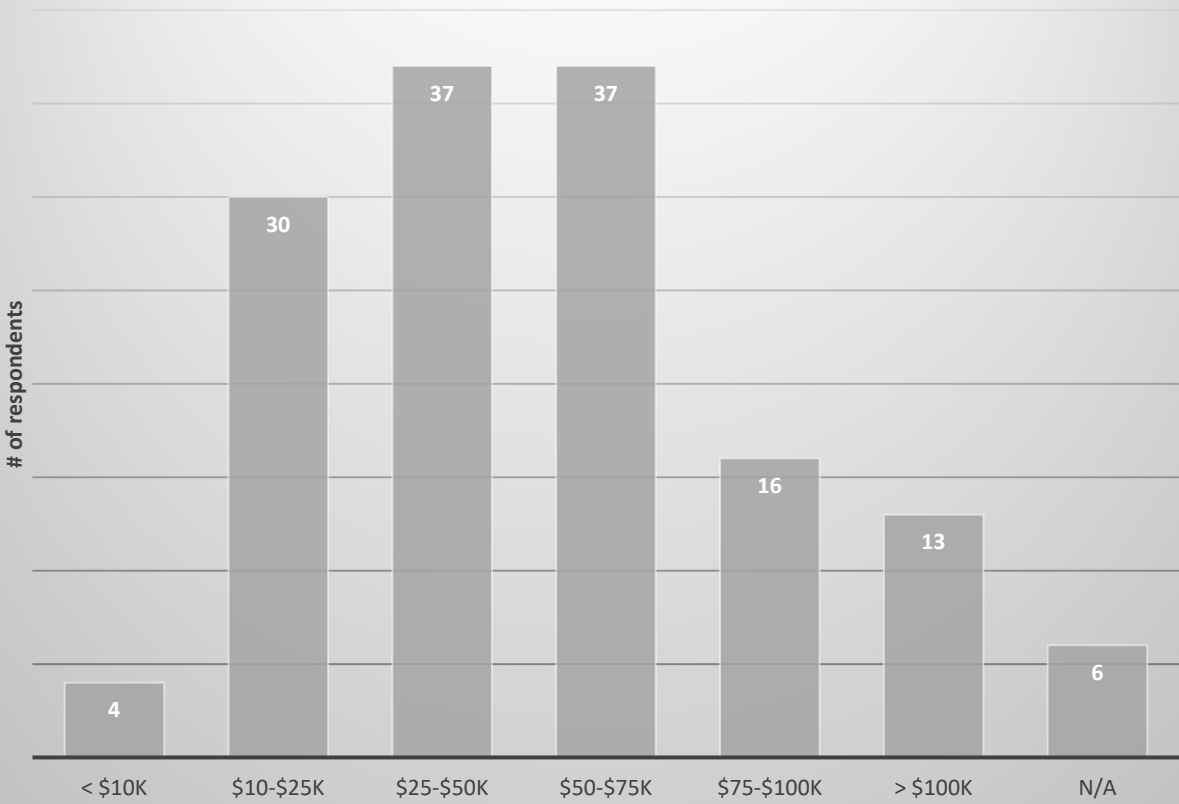
Ethnicity of Respondents



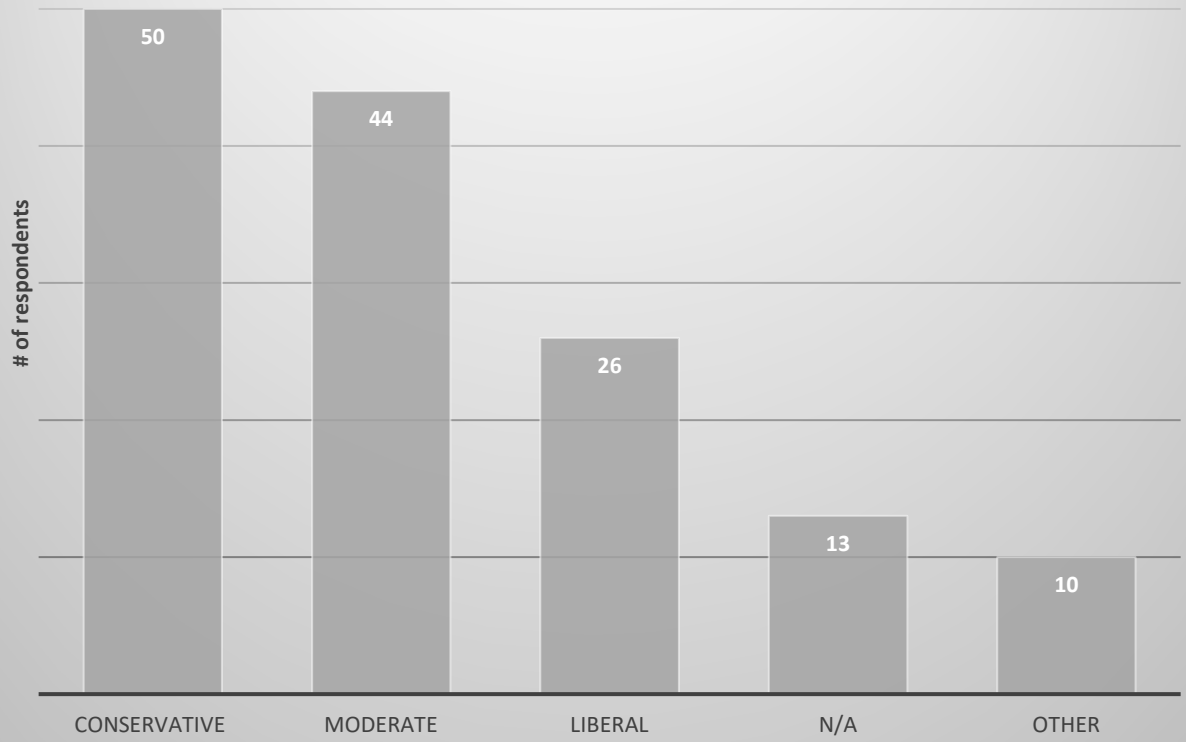
Parents' Education Level



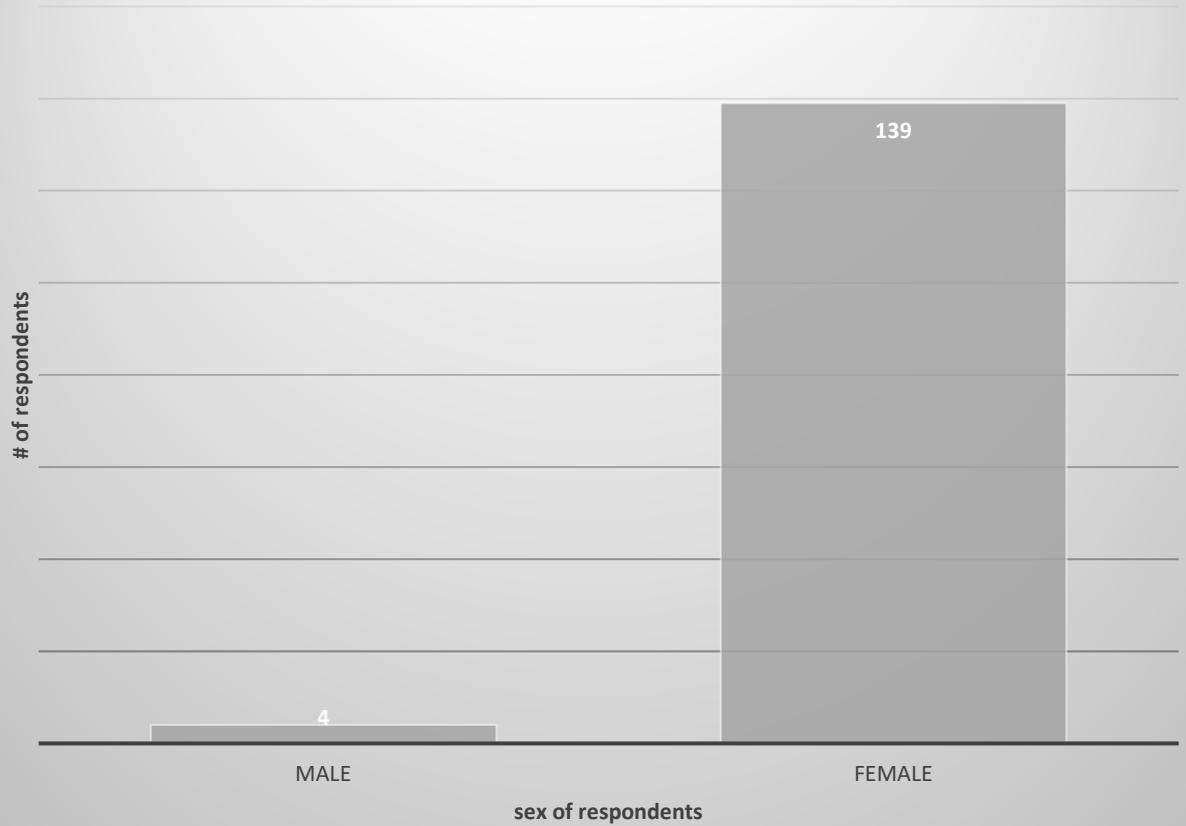
Respondents' Family Income



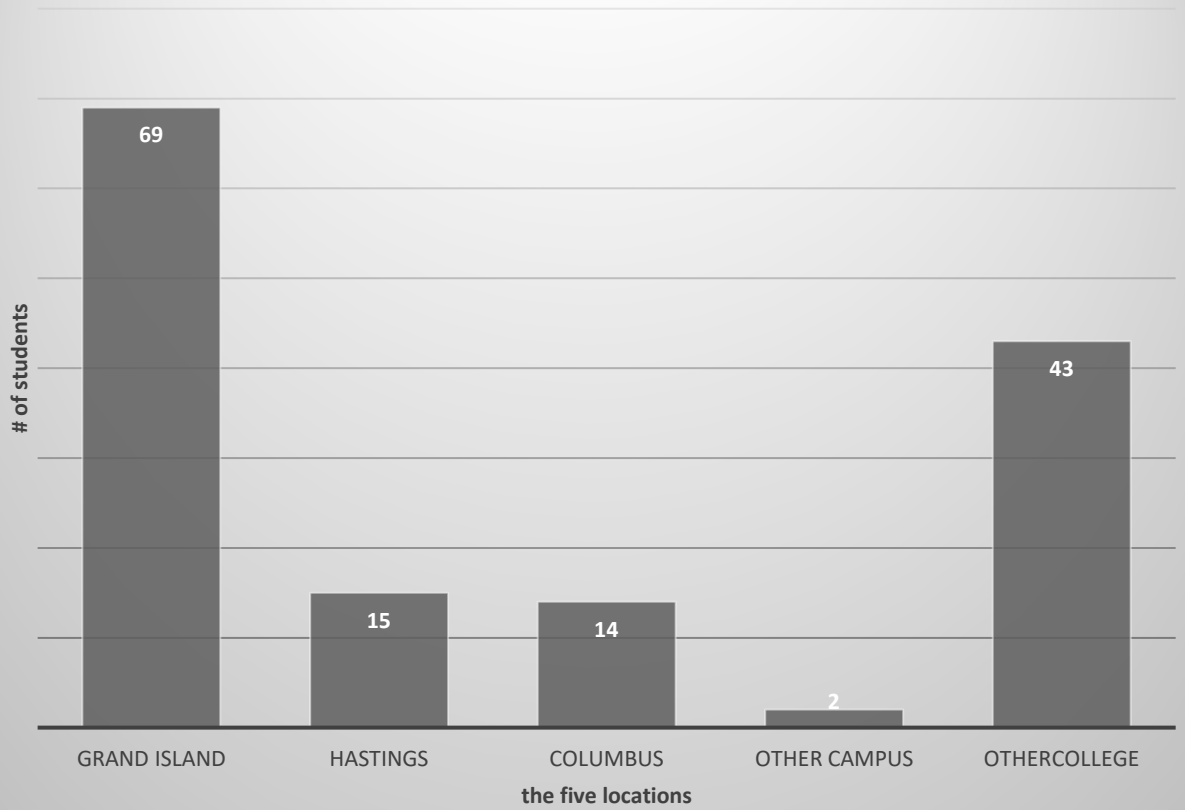
Repondents' Political Views



Respondents' Sex



Which Campus Are You From?



Reimagining the Amherst Project for Young Learners in the Digital Age

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Dr. Jeffrey M. Byford
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Abstract

The Amherst Project, created in 1959 and published in 1963 as one of the New Social Studies Projects, consisted of educator-authored lessons using an inquiry design envisioned by Van R. Halsey and Richard H. Brown. Elementary social studies comprise mandated content, state standards, and the National Council for the Social Studies ([NCSS](#)) C3 Framework. This article investigates the question: Can elements and characteristics found in the Amherst Project inquiry be implemented in classrooms to meet the needs of 21st-century learners? Although initially conceived as a high school curriculum, the Amherst Project inquiry design model applies to historical content with younger students. Furthermore, the availability of digital primary source collections allows teachers to use the Framework of the Amherst Project to customize lessons to meet their students' needs (Torrez & Waring, 2009). The activity *Lusitania, C.S.I.*, through digital primary sources, was used during a WWI unit for students to explore how the sinking of the Lusitania was perceived in 1915 and how that perception has evolved in the last 100 years.

Introduction

Most students are introduced to and experience elements of geography, civics, and history in elementary social studies. As lessons proceed along the timeline of history, the availability of primary sources, including documents, photographs, and artwork, increases dramatically. Digital archives provide teachers with extensive

resources to incorporate primary sources into their lessons. However, textbooks remain the most prevalent resource used in the classroom, limiting students' exposure to primary sources (Savage et al., 2021; Schug et al., 1997).

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) C3 Framework has four dimensions: developing questions and planning inquiries, applying disciplinary concepts and tools, evaluating sources and using evidence, and communicating conclusions and taking informed action (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013). The C3 Framework has been adopted by 23 states and adapted by other states as state standards (Hansen, 2022). For example, Tennessee has "Social Studies Practices" for each grade level mimicking the C3 Framework and its emphasis on inquiry learning.

However, the two state-approved social studies curriculum options for elementary schools are traditional programs consisting of a teacher's edition, student textbook, workbook, and worksheets. These materials do not meet the rigor set forth in the C3 Framework. For teachers to provide students with inquiry learning as required by the C3 Framework and state standards, they must incorporate supplemental materials such as the Inquiry Design Model (I.D.M.) The NCSS published a blueprint to help teachers transform content into student inquiries by providing them with a framework (Journell et al., 2018). They acknowledged the challenges teachers face in creating effective inquiries and stressed the importance of "strong design models" to help with development (p. 205). According to Weber (2014), the Amherst Project's emphasis on primary sources and student inquiry was a precursor to the Document-Based Question (D.B.Q.) used in Advanced Placement (A.P.) courses. Therefore, we decided to revisit the inquiry-based Amherst History Project elements in an attempt to align state-

mandated content and resources with the inquiry practices detailed in the C3 Framework. Using the elements of inquiry underpinning the Amherst Project model and the exemplar lesson *what Happened on Lexington Green?* as inspiration, a lesson was developed to teach WWI state-mandated content through an investigation of the *Lusitania's* sinking in 1915 by a German U-boat.

Purpose

This article aims to demonstrate how an upper elementary or middle school teacher can adapt the fundamental aspects of the Amherst Project, using selected or mandated content, to engage younger learners through historical investigations. The original Amherst Project activities, predating the digital age, were limited to reproductions of primary sources contained in the curriculum materials. However, today's classrooms have virtually unfettered access to museum collections, newspaper archives, historical societies, and the Library of Congress. Many of these sources provide digital tools to facilitate closer examination, including zooming features, language translation, and, in some cases, virtual or augmented reality.

The Amherst Project

One of 50 New Social Studies Projects funded in the 1960s and 1970s, the Amherst Project was an inquiry-based approach to history centering on humanistic growth, question-posing, and moral development (Resiman, 2012). The Amherst project was designed to be used as a supplement to teachers' existing curricula. This characteristic set it apart from other New Social Studies projects, many of which attempted to create "teacher-proof materials" which required minimal content knowledge and instructional pedagogy on the part of the educator (Brown, 1996). Using

post-holing techniques and thematic units, the Amherst Project sought to replace the rote-memorization instruction found in traditional history classrooms with lessons casting students in the role of a "scholar-inquirer" defined inquiry as an amalgamation of four essential components: curiosity, motivation, focus, and experience (Brown, 2018, p. 215). Units are structured around content derived from universal, open-ended questions, and subject matter focused on a historical event.

The Amherst Project consisted of individual pamphlets and workbooks primarily authored by classroom teachers instead of university academics (Weber, 2017). Lessons were designed to support the existing curriculum rather than replace it. Examples of teacher-created units included *Hiroshima: Imperialism and the Dilemma of Power*, *Korea and the Limits of Limited War*, *The Spanish-American War: A Study in Policy Change*, and *What Happened on Lexington Green? An Inquiry into the Nature and Methods of History* (Brown, 2012). Units included a teaching manual, student workbook, and curated primary sources presenting multiple perspectives and conflicting accounts of notable events in U.S. history. Topics were varied and thematic in contrast to the traditional chronological curriculum. Arguably, this distinction was either one of its greatest assets or tragic flaws. Reisman (2018) points out that "developers woefully under-estimated the intransigence of historical chronology as the organizing principle of classroom instruction" (p. 237).

What Happened on Lexington Green? An Inquiry into the Nature and Methods of History by Peter S. Bennett (1970) is considered one of the exemplar lessons from the Amherst series. Bennett's unit contains an introduction and three sections requiring students to determine the events and accounts on Lexington Green on April 19, 1775.

The introduction provides a current scenario with varying eye-witness accounts to engage students to prepare for historical inquiry. Section one comprises multiple primary sources, or "raw data," replete with contradicting information and guiding questions. Using inductive inquiry, section two narrows the scope by asking students to identify who fired the first shot on Lexington Green. Students are given articles written by British and American historians and excerpts from textbooks with differing accounts. The last section presents a fictional account of Lexington Green "to carry the question of what history is" and how "man apprehends reality" (Bennett, 1970). This deductive element shifts students from theorizing to testing their thinking.

Scheurman (2018) praised the Amherst Project for its constructivist approach to education. Richard Brown (2018), head of the Amherst Project, acknowledges a constructivist design stating, "the principal goal of history curricula should be teaching students how to learn from the past rather than transmission of bodies of knowledge" (p. 213). The Amherst Project units are designed with this in mind, tasking students with the responsibility of evaluating and justifying their conclusions. Reisman (2012) and Weber (2017) extol the value of the curriculum and specifically the *Lexington Green* unit for its document-based inquiry approach. Despite the New Social Studies projects, including the Amherst Project, which ended nearly 50 years ago due to a lack of government and private funding, their influence is still present in today's progressive classrooms, emphasizing document-based inquiries and interpretive research skills (Stern, 2010).

Findings

To recreate a lesson utilizing the Amherst Project inquiry design, two educators from a university laboratory elementary school created a lesson called "Lusitania, C.S.I." (Appendix A). This lesson is found in a larger unit on WWI. Before engaging in the activity, students were introduced to the tensions between German U-Boats and Allied vessels in the North Atlantic. Presented as a cold case to be solved, students are given basic facts about the Lusitania, including its route, the date of its sinking, passengers and crew on board, and the number of casualties. Students were shown a clip from the Smithsonian Channel's documentary "Why the Germans Torpedoed the Lusitania." This dramatization of events includes both the British and German perspectives. After students evaluated the evidence, they were asked to become investigative historians and solve the sinking of the Lusitania.

While working in partner pairs, students were given a folder containing: an encyclopedia summary of the sinking of the Lusitania, a sequential set of exhibits marked A-D, and a final report template. Each document in the case file had a correlating set of guiding questions carefully constructed to focus students' critical thinking. After reading the summary, students were asked to state their hypothesis about what happened to the Lusitania and who was to blame. Next, students begin to analyze the evidence presented using primary source exhibits. Exhibit A was a public notice posted in 1915 warning passengers of the dangers of trans-Atlantic travel. This exhibit contradicts the notion that passengers were unaware of the German threat. The teacher observed one pair of students reacting to this notice stating, "They knew! Why would anyone get on a ship that might be torpedoed!" Students were prompted to revisit

their hypothesis and make adjustments if needed.

Exhibit B included the front page of three American newspapers published the day after the sinking of the Lusitania. These headlines introduced the American perspective to the investigation. Students were confused about how the headlines focused mainly on the 60 American deaths as a separate and seemingly more substantial group. Exhibit C was propaganda created by the Navy League of Pittsburgh with an angelic lady asking, "Shall this continue?" while surrounded by drowning people and a Lusitania-like boat sinking in the background. Students used the zoom-in and out features in their browsers on Exhibits B and C to examine the images from the Library of Congress. Hard copies were located on a table at the front of the classroom.

The final exhibit consisted of two articles from 2018 revisiting the Lusitania 100 years later. Both articles presented secondary information not found in previous primary source material, one going so far as to implicate the possibility of a British conspiracy intended to entice the Americans into joining the war. The culminating task asked students to produce a report with their interpretation of what occurred, who was to blame (if anyone), and what effect the sinking of the Lusitania had on the war. During the "classified debriefing session," students shared their reports with the class. Of the 12 groups, six blamed Germany, three held the British accountable, and three felt both sides were equally culpable. Most students indicated, to differing degrees, that the sinking of the Lusitania was a key motivating factor for American involvement. During the debrief, one student asked, "Is this kind of like the Ukraine and Russia thing? Like, Russia is hurting innocent people, and Ukraine wants our help." Although the lesson was developed before the events in Ukraine, these types of connections are precisely

why the Amherst History Project's inquiry design is still relevant in classrooms today. The role-playing activity motivated students as they sifted through documents and accounts to conclude. Chris, a fifth-grade student, enjoyed being a detective and investigating different accounts of how the ship sank. He said, "This is different, and I feel like I am a history F.B.I agent."

Conclusion

Although the Amherst History Project was designed in the 1960s for secondary learners, its inquiry design consisting of curiosity, motivation, focus, and experience is a practical framework for engaging in meaningful social studies investigations in modern classrooms. Lexington Green teachers can use the exemplar lesson to create new inquiry lessons using selected or mandated content. Furthermore, these lessons incorporate all dimensions of the Inquiry Arc of the C3 Framework providing cross-curricular connections and integrating key literacy components. Lastly, students were excited to investigate a historical event and gained insight into how the past relates to current events. As project co-creator Richard Brown (1996) envisioned, "The polestar of the Amherst Project was the idea that students learn best when they are acting as inquirers, pursuing into evidence questions that grow out of their own lives" (p. 268). By adapting Brown's and Halsey's inquiry design, elementary social studies teachers can enhance their students' perceptions of history and guide them to make connections to the events happening in the world around them.

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<https://www-jstororg.ezproxy.memphis.edu/stable/44504540>

Appendix A
Materials and Questions
Video Introduction

Video: Why the Germans Torpedoed the Lusitania—The Smithsonian Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5z4I3aIn7E>

Basic Facts (Encyclopedia Article)

Lusitania—Britannica Kids

<https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/Lusitania/390044#:~:text=The%20Lusitania%20was%20a%20famous,World%20War%20in%201917>

- Most victims were not Americans. How do you think this affected the American public?
- Why did the Germans attack the Lusitania?
- After reading this article, what do you think happened (your hypothesis)?

Exhibit A

NOTICE!

TRAVELLERS intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies and Great Britain and her allies; that the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles; that, in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain, or of any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters and that travellers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.

IMPERIAL GERMAN EMBASSY
WASHINGTON, D. C., APRIL 22, 1915.

<https://www.firstworldwar.com/features/lusitania.htm>

- What new insight does this add to the Lusitania?
- How does this exhibit add or change your initial thinking?

Exhibit B

New York Times Headline

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

Vol. LXXV, No. 24,848

The New York Times

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, MAY 8, 1915—TWENTY-FOUR PAGES

THE WEATHER

For New York and vicinity, fair, with light winds, and a few showers of rain, with a temperature in the 50's.

LUSITANIA SUNK BY A SUBMARINE, PROBABLY 1,000 DEAD; TWICE TORPEDOED OFF IRISH COAST; SINKS IN 15 MINUTES; AMERICANS ABOARD INCLUDED VANDERBILT AND FROHMAN; WASHINGTON BELIEVES THAT A GRAVE CRISIS IS AT HAND

SHOCKS THE PRESIDENT
Washington Deeply Struck by Disaster and Fears a Crisis.

SENATORS BY BUREAU HOUSE
When News, Three Cheers, but in Silence at the Senate's Chamber.

FEELING OF CONGRESS CALL
Loss of Lusitania Results From Fate of Our First Warship in Germany.

CAPITAL FULL OF RUMORS
Rumors That U.S. Will Be the Next Victim of German Submarine.



THE LOST CUNARD STEAMSHIP LUSITANIA

Several Dead Taken Ashore
Several Hundred Survivors at Queenstown and Kinsale.

STEWARDS OF DISASTER
One Travels Down into the Bottom Layer's Room, Another into the Engine Room.

BOATS PROMPTLY LOWERED
But Ship Goes Down So Quickly Many Boatmen Were Unable to Officers Reported Board.

ATTACHED TO BOSTON SHIP
Remains of Lusitania, Sinking and How She Was Sunk, Was the First of Her Kind.

General Office Here Designated for News Fate of 1,916 as Lusitania Long in Doubt

Loss of the Lusitania Fills London With Horror and Utter Amazement

<https://www.thehistoryreader.com/military-history/lessons-from-the-sinking-of-the-lusitania/>

The Seattle Star Headline



<https://primarysourcenexus.org/2013/05/today-in-history-lusitania-lost/>

- What new information do you get from these headlines?
- How might these articles affect America joining the war?

Exhibit C

Shall This Continue? Propaganda Poster



<https://digitalcollections.hoover.org/objects/34667/shall-this-continue--join-the-navy--navy-league-pittsburgh>

- What do you see in the poster?
- What was the purpose of propaganda during WWI?
- How does it change your thinking?

Exhibit D

Mystery shrouds the Lusitania's tragic sinking, 100 years on

<https://www.france24.com/en/20150507-100-year-anniversary-sinking-lusitania-usa-britain-germany-first-world-war>

Was the Lusitania Britain's war crime? One thousand one hundred ninety-eight passengers died in 1915 when the liner sank - but was a German torpedo really to blame?

<https://www.seaford.k12.ny.us/cms/lib/NY01000674/Centricity/Domain/282/Was%20The%20Lusitania%20Britians%20War%20Crime%20%20copy.pdf>

- How do these articles, written 100 years later, change the story?
- What new information did you read? Is it valid?

Using the HyFlex Model in Teacher Education: Faculty Reflections and Insights

Dr. Bonni Gourneau
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University of North Dakota

Introduction

In the last two years, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted all facets of institutions in higher education (Hodges, 2021). University campuses had to adjust almost overnight when the virus first emerged. Hodges (2021) continued by stating this affected all functions, including available technology, internet access, infrastructure, bandwidth, teaching, learning, testing/grading, mental health, safety, and fundraising. Continuing teaching and learning and keeping all campus personnel safe became a primary focus as the fast-moving public health emergency grew daily. The pandemic presented an unprecedented challenge for faculty, some of whom had absolutely no experience or interest in teaching online. The abrupt move to remote teaching required faculty to pivot from face-to-face teaching to online. However, due to the shift in the delivery of instruction during the pandemic, new teaching methods emerged; some existing ones were enhanced in positive ways and others not so much. This paper focuses on delivery modalities of instruction, emphasizing Hyflex, and includes a university faculty member's experience with this type of course development.

Review of Literature

Brief Background

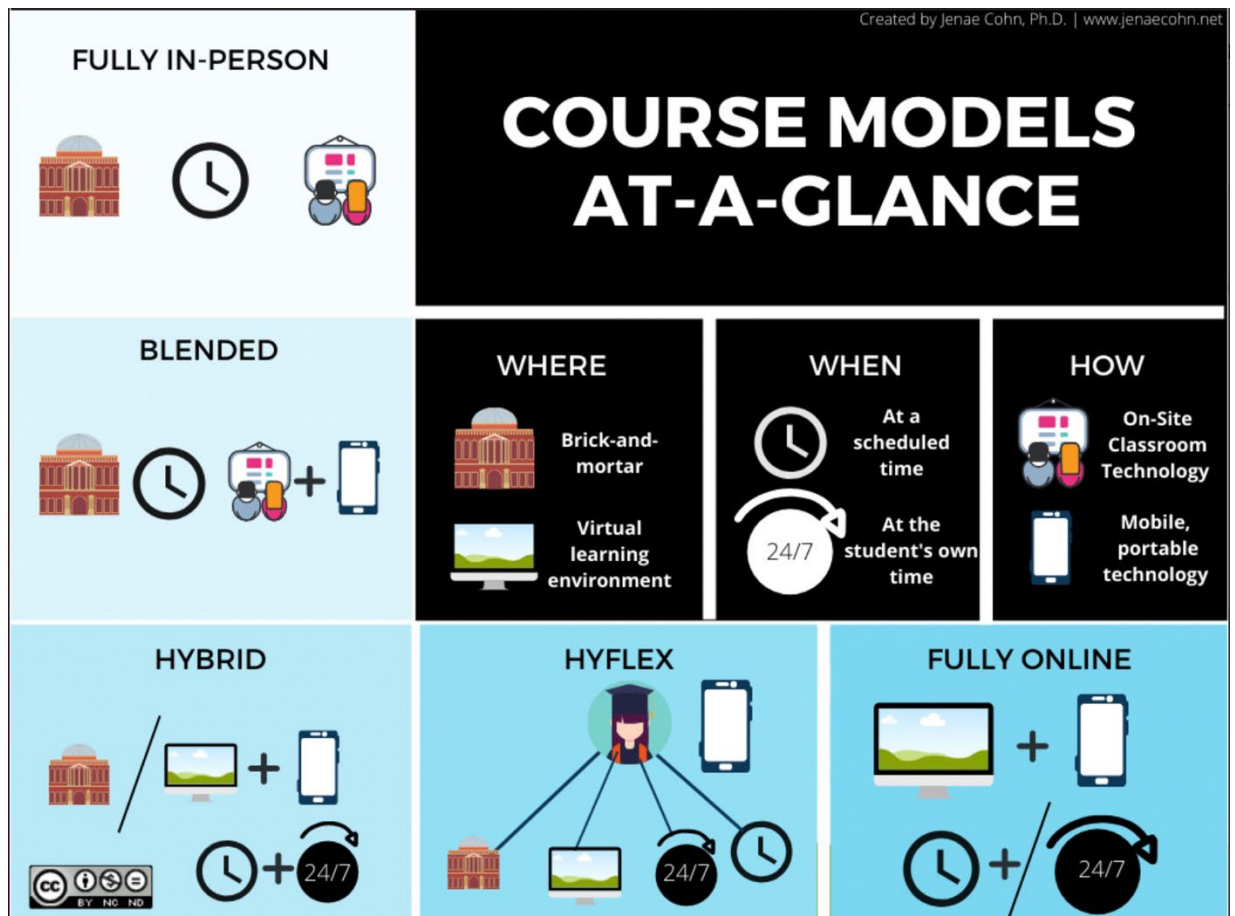
There has always been in-person learning where faculty and students are in the same room simultaneously. Distance education goes back over 100 years ago. It was text-based asynchronous learning that used tools such as mailed reading materials, handouts, and videotapes. This type of educational offering was typically termed correspondence study (Means. et al., 2010).

According to Irvine (2020), these simpler times of easily understandable modalities for delivering instruction ended in the 1980s. The invention of the World Wide Web (WWW) by Sir Tim Berners, a British computer scientist, in 1989 changed everything in education and research. By the late 1990s, when the WWW and the internet emerged, things changed significantly for education as technological advances opened opportunities and drove the growth of online education. A long list of early course delivery innovations using virtual learning environments emerged in the 1990s; some were homegrown by institutions, others by young startups.

The rapid evolution of course management systems (CMS) and ultimately the learner management systems (LMS) that many professors use today for teaching and learning in the many modalities emerged. Additionally, there are a plethora of terms, some new, that are used to describe teaching modalities (Irvine, 2020). It is essential for faculty to be aware of definitions at their specific institutions as these terms vary. The Glossary of Education Reform was the source for the general description of terms used to review the terminology except for the HyFlex definition (<https://www.edglossary.org/>).

Figure 1 by Cohn (2020) is a visual depiction of the typical course models in higher education and aids in quickly seeing the differences between them.

Figure 1. Course Models At-A-Glance



The following terminology briefly reviews the teaching and learning modalities of entirely in-person, asynchronous, synchronous, hybrid (blended), and HyFlex.

Entirely in-person is a term most are completely clear about and familiar with, also referred to as brick and mortar. In this situation, all faculty and students are in-person in real-time at the exact location simultaneously. Asynchronous is a term applied to the practice of learning that does not take place at the same time or in the same

location. The students complete their academic work on their own schedules. The teacher-student and student-to-student interactions happen in different locations and at different times. Synchronous occurs when teaching and learning are in real-time, but faculty and students are not in the same location. The term hybrid or blended combines components of in-person and online. For example, students attend class in person in a traditional classroom and independently complete other parts of the course outside of the classroom online. Cohn (2020) notes an important distinction of a hybrid is that students all do the same work online.

The Emergence of Hyflex

The origin of the Hybrid-Flexible (HyFlex) course design was developed in 2006 by the Instructional Technologies (ITEC) graduate program at San Francisco State University. The ITEC program faculty brainstormed on approaches to solve the challenge of increasing enrollments and providing new options to students in the program (Beatty, 2019).

According to Beatty (2010), the hybrid-flexible or HyFlex approach offers students choices on how they prefer or need to participate; entirely in-person, online synchronously at the same time as in-person, or asynchronously on their schedules. Essential to the design of a HyFlex course is the structure, construction of the content, and activities to allow students to participate both in-person and online.

"HyFlex courses are class sessions that allow students to choose whether to attend classes face-to-face or online, synchronously or asynchronously" (SFSU Academic Senate Policy S16-264) https://edtechbooks.org/hyflex/book_intro.

Learning is equivalent, regardless of the mode (Educause, 2020). In HyFlex courses, students have participation choices based on convenience, learning progress, social interaction preferences, or other factors necessary to them at the time. Students are not required to designate in which mode they will participate, and it can vary each class period or week, allowing for exceptional flexibility in their lives and schedules. On the other hand, faculty have challenges designing in-person and synchronous courses simultaneously during class and recording them for asynchronous learners. The faculty must plan and prepare both online (synchronous and asynchronous) and in-person classroom experiences to support student learning regardless of the delivery model.

Pillars of Hyflex

According to Beatty (2020), There are four pillars of the Hyflex, which are as follows.

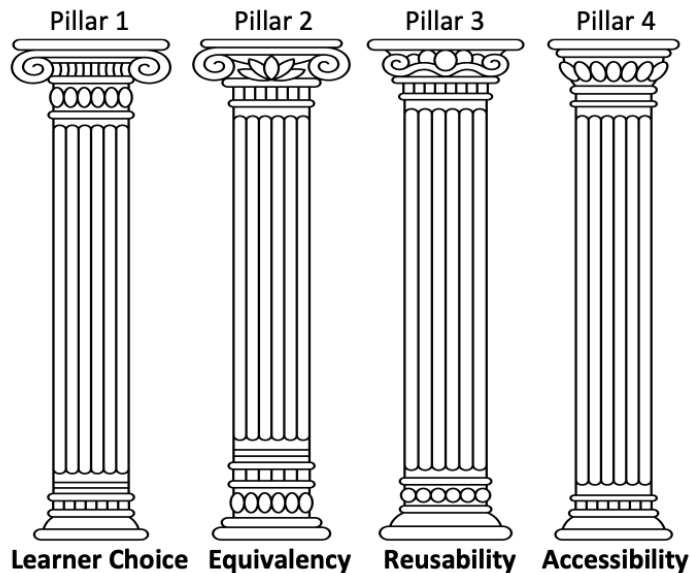
Pillar 1. Learner Choice: Provide meaningful alternative modes that enable students to choose between daily or weekly participation modes.

Pillar 2. Equivalency: Provide learning activities in all participation modes, leading to equivalent learning outcomes.

Pillar 3. Reusability: Utilize artifacts from learning activities as "learning objective" for students in each participation mode.

Pillar 4. Accessibility: Students use technology for equitable access to all participation modes.

Figure 2. The Four Pillars of Hyflex



Resources for Faculty Considering Transforming to Hyflex Teaching

Faculty considering moving to the Hyflex model must understand course planning for both the in-class student and those online. The course activities development may be a challenge in that the faculty must design activities that are engaging for both the students in the classroom and those connected synchronously. The recording of the class will serve the students preferring to participate asynchronously. A second major challenge for faculty may be becoming familiar with the layout of the Hyflex classroom at their institution, understanding the operation of the technology, and gaining confidence. It is always helpful for faculty to be aware of their institutional-specific resources, professional development opportunities, and instructional support staff for guidance. Preparing to teach a HyFlex course not only involves designing the course structure using the four pillars, preparing the online materials, rehearsing to teach with attention to both pedagogical and technology considerations, and never forgetting to develop a contingency plan. Many institutions

have resources for faculty and support in place for HyFlex development and delivery. Becoming familiar with the institutions-specific opportunities is vital; however, being aware of other institutions' approaches and resources may be enlightening. The curated list of links to the topic of Hyflex resources in Appendix A is by no means inclusive of all the excellent work occurring in higher education. Still, it offers a sampling to review and an opportunity to gain additional perspectives.

Faculty Experience with Developing a HyFlex Course

As stated earlier, the HyFlex format provides students choice and flexibility on whether they will attend in-person, online in real-time, or later on their own schedules. According to Beatty (2019), there are key principles with HyFlex, including students' being given a choice in how to attend any class session, learning activities being equivalent with the same objectives, having the needed technology, and faculty implementing authentic assessments. In short, HyFlex is about student choice, flexibility, and equal learning opportunities. This format seems ideal for students, but in comparison, what are the benefits for faculty when they are preparing one course to be delivered in three different formats? This was the question I personally pondered during the summer of 2021 when the faculty at our university were able to earn a \$5,000 stipend if they changed an existing course or developed a new course into a HyFlex format.

University Support and Resources for HyFlex Development

The University's Teaching Transformation and Development Academy developed a Blackboard site for faculty. There were many resources on how to implement HyFlex learning into a course, and at any time, individual and direct instruction could be

requested. The Academy provided information in various forms, including modules, handouts, workshops, webinars, videos, online training, and tutorials. Dr. Brian Beatty, the professor who pioneered the development and evaluation of the HyFlex course design model, offered online question and answer sessions to the university faculty. The faculty were instructed to use the Backwards Curriculum Design, where students actively apply their learning, practice skills, and demonstrate their abilities to achieve learning outcomes. The Blackboard Site informed the faculty of the required assignments and course development timelines. The first task was to develop a course outline with learning goals, evaluation methods, and resources for all three HyFlex learning environments. The syllabus and weekly schedule were followed by detailed course activities and assessments. There were checkpoints with instructional designers who assessed and graded the faculty with each process step.

HyFlex seemed overwhelming as it needed to provide equal learning opportunities for all students. It also became apparent that HyFlex is student-centered and includes a technology-focused modality that incorporates various educational technology tools into activities to support pedagogy strategies and encourages student interaction and collaboration (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2020). After this realization, the next time-intensive task was to learn how to effectively integrate technology into learning in equitable and just ways (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Roitscho et al., 2021). Assessments were also a significant component of this course development, and it required developing assignment rubrics, pre-assessments, and formative and summative assessments.

Importance of Faculty's Teaching, Social, and Cognitive Presence

Faculty have reported they have found it more challenging to ensure students are engaged in online environments than in-person in a classroom (Moore, 2016). As with any course, students must learn the content by being actively involved, motivated, engaged in lessons, and interacting with their peers and professors. Developing a caring and positive teaching presence encourages learning through various methods (Fiock, 2020). An equally important factor within any course is social presence for students to express emotions, work together, and freely express themselves within the community context (Garrison, 2016). All students must feel they have the ability to contribute to the learning activities, and this also involves establishing a cognitive presence. Serdyukov & Hill (2013) also shared online students must develop greater independence to be actively engaged with the content to be successful and to develop a higher level of academic performance (Oga-Baldwin, 2019). When designing weekly lessons, faculty need to seek ways to align the objectives with cognitive presence.

Undergraduate Teacher Education Course Transformed into HyFlex

Social Studies in Elementary Schools is an undergraduate methods course for early childhood, elementary education, and middle-level students who are seniors and one semester away from student teaching. Nineteen students were enrolled the semester the course was taught in a HyFlex format. The weekly sessions were conducted in a classroom on the university campus, one day a week, for two hours. These students were given the flexibility to attend in-person, online in real-time through Zoom, or on their own schedule for asynchronous students. The goal was for all students to be presented with the same information and instruction, no matter the

format. Through technology documents, all students could interact with each other during class or when they chose to watch the recordings at a later date.

Faculty Reflection and Advice after Teaching a HyFlex Course Flexibility for Students

A considerable strength of HyFlex is that students never miss a class because they can attend and participate anywhere or at any time. Faculty cannot question these individual choices or require any one type of attendance. Students made these decisions based on how they felt, how tired they were, other opportunities that suddenly came up, feeling sick, the weather conditions, childcare problems, transportation issues, or even the amount of gas in their cars, among many others. It was convenient for students who felt sick to have the option to stay home so they did not pass their illness to others. At home, if they felt well enough, they could still listen and learn from home. Students could also continue to work full or part-time jobs and raise a family while earning degrees. It also allowed students to spend more time with family and to complete assignments when they worked best within their schedules. Students appreciated the opportunity to make these decisions without penalty.

Connection, Communication, and Engagement: Students, Peers, and Professor

Students want to connect to their professors and get answers promptly when they have questions. Professors need to be very intentional with responding to emails, texts, and phone calls promptly, hopefully always within 10 hours. However, it was challenging to communicate with students who did not keep current with assignments and discussion forums. For a few students, the professor sent emails that were never answered. In these situations, professors need a plan to provide opportunities for all

students to engage with them; this relates to the perception of teaching presence. One specific suggestion would be to set up regular office hours and be available as needed later in the day for students who are working. Taking it a step further, you could require a minimum of two check-in appointments in a semester. Students who do not come to class may not feel involved in the classroom community. Faculty need to keep this in mind and reach out to these students. This course required online group collaborative work that resulted in presentations. Students needed to work cooperatively and find times to collaborate and plan. Let students know it is important to inform the professor before the presentation if group members have communication difficulties. If this information is shared for the first time on the day of the presentation, a negative dynamic occurs, and it can cause irreparable damage to students. The damage can destroy a sense of belonging and a feeling of safety in the classroom community, which relates to the component of social presence.

Another consideration for any HyFlex course is that it is too easy for online students to remain silent during discussions while sitting behind a computer screen. Instructional time can be lost waiting for someone to share or answer questions. Camera videos should be on and audio, not muted during conversations, to best model a typical classroom environment. The lack of engagement of synchronous students can even change the engagement of those present in the classroom. The face-to-face students notice the online students are not participating. Additionally, online students can easily be left out of discussions or feel uncomfortable not knowing when and if they should say something. Faculty must make a conscious effort to include all students.

Asynchronous Students and Self-Directed Learning

Faculty encourage and hope their students will take ownership and responsibility for their learning. A few asynchronous students did not watch videos or the recorded Zoom sessions. This became clear when they would email questions about assignments discussed in detail in the recordings. Students are expected to be independent and take responsibility when not participating directly in the classroom. At the beginning of each week, in addition to the Zoom recording, a short 10–12-minute welcome video was posted to give announcements, review the previous week's assignments, state new goals, share new assignments, resources, materials, and technology tools. The video ended with positive comments letting them know they can always request individual or group meetings.

Decision Making with Technology Tools and Apps

As with anything, you do not know what you do not know. Keeping up with the best teaching and learning technology apps was a challenge. Many resources were given, and students needed to review them and post reactions so they could learn from each other while in class, in discussion forums, breakout rooms, etc. Students could also use these strategies in meaningful ways when designing peer teaching lessons and teaching lessons in their field experiences. It was amazing to see the students create lessons using various interactive features such as polls, breakout rooms, Google Docs, Padlet, and Flip Grid, among many others. HyFlex teaching required much more creativity on everyone's part.

Summary

The only way for professors and students to experience success with the HyFlex format is for both to be willing to put in the time, effort, and energy to be actively involved. Professors need to be consistent with expectations and organization, and students need to set goals for themselves and stay current with assignments. Facilitating HyFlex courses does increase the teaching responsibilities of faculty as they need to have a campus-based and online presence for students. Technology adds an additional burden, and faculty need to be prepared with a backup plan when the unexpected happens. Each week, professors need to ensure all lessons, materials, and resources are available for all three formats, with videos and zoom sessions posted promptly. Professors and students must develop a relationship of respect and trust, and there must be multiple opportunities for peer interactions.

Given many campuses are beginning to return to face-to-face instruction, higher education has yet to see if another pivot is in the future. If so, institutions and faculty should be better prepared to successfully teach students if additional quarantine requirements return due to new variants. Although continuing concerns about enrollments, mergers, and closures continue to loom, it is essential to recognize there are select opportunities to move forward (Hodges, 2021). During this time of such uncertainty, HyFlex teaching became an opportunity for faculty and students to find a compromise, safety, and flexibility. A light at the end of this dark tunnel was that faculty could continue teaching courses, and students were able to continue advancing their educational goals.

Appendix A

Hybrid-Flexible Course Design, Implementing student-directed hybrid classes

Brain Beatty.

https://edtechbooks.org/hyflex&nav_pos=0

7 Things You Should Know About the HyFlex Course Model

<https://library.educause.edu/resources/2020/7/7-things-you-should-know-about-the-hyflex-course-model>

What is HyFlex, and how do I do it well?

<https://www.buffalo.edu/edc/AcademicPreparedness/HyflexModel.html>

Top Tips for Designing a HyFlex Course

<https://www.qualitymatters.org/qa-resources/resource-center/articles-resources/hyflex-course-design-tips>

Student Choice and Motivations

<https://rtalbert.org/research-report-experiencing-the-hyflex-model/>

Hyflex Teaching: One Class, Three Modalities

<https://academicaffairs.sps.columbia.edu/content/hyflex-teaching>

HyFlex Pedagogy

<https://www.uis.edu/colrs/hyflex-pedagogy/>

HyFlex Teaching

<https://cep.barnard.edu/hyflex-teaching>

Suggestions for HyFlex Teaching

<https://cep.barnard.edu/hyflex-teaching>

Staying Relevant: The Importance of Incorporating HyFlex Learning into Higher Education Strategy

<https://er.educause.edu/articles/2022/3/staying-relevant-the-importance-of-incorporating-hyflex-learning-into-higher-education-strategy>

Louisiana State University - This is a collaborative effort among faculty worldwide: contributions and feedback are welcomed.

<https://teachingandlearning.schulich.yorku.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Active-Learning-while-Physically-Distancing-Louisiana-State-University.pdf>

Teaching Tools: Active Learning in Multimodalities

https://www.celt.iastate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Active-Learning-in-Multimodalities_Nov2021.pdf

Teaching Tools: Active learning whole physically distancing.

This document was Initiated by Dr. Jennifer Baumgartner, Associate Professor at Louisiana State University, and continues to be updated with collaborative input from various groups, including LSU CxC, LSU LTC, POD Network Members, and discerning college teachers from across the world. Active Learning while Physically Distancing by Louisiana State University (LSU) is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License.

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Virtual Coaching: Empowering Future Leaders

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Why Virtual Coaching?

The most valuable resource that all teachers have is each other; without collaboration, our growth is limited by our own perspectives. - John Robert Meehan

Research on coaching has reported a wide array of benefits in various settings in the education field and other sectors. It is imperative to prepare future administrators (or principals since they may already be administrators) for the real world and give them opportunities to engage with veteran administrators who can provide valuable insight into the field and offer meaningful support, mentoring, and feedback. For principal candidates, coaching encourages reflective practices and critical feedback (Fink & Markholt, 2017). Coaching promotes student achievement in underperforming schools (Meddaugh, 2014) and supports leadership development through observations and feedback (Stevenson, 2016). In addition, coaching improves confidence (Hayes & Burkett, 2020) and self-efficacy among principal candidates (Lewis & Jones, 2016).

As more and more college students move to online learning, it is imperative that online learning closely resembles the real world. As we prepare future school administrators in a virtual world, virtual coaching is one way to achieve this goal. Seaman et al. (2018) used the data collected under the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education

Data System (IPEDS) Fall Enrollment survey (P.5) to track distance education in the United States. They reported that distance education enrollments steadily increased for the fourteenth year. Moreover, around 6.3 million students take at least one distance course, representing 31.6% of all students. As we prepare future administrators for the real world in a virtual environment, powerful authentic practices must be embedded in courses in meaningful and practical ways.

Virtual coaching is an effective way to engage future administrators in real-world scenarios. By supporting professional development with mentorships of highly skilled school administrators, the candidates experience authentic problems of practice while being mentored and supported in a virtual nurturing coaching environment.

Virtual coaching is a relatively new concept that has emerged over the last few decades. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many educational institutions had to transition to online learning, which also led to a shift from traditional to online coaching programs (e.g., Blumke, 2021; Keefe, 2020). King (2021) discussed her experiences with virtual coaching during the pandemic and stated that many aspects of virtual coaching have been successful even after schools primarily returned to face-to-face instruction and meetings. Regardless of the shift back to face-to-face classes, principal candidates and other educational leaders often have very hectic schedules and a lot of responsibilities, making virtual professional development such as coaching a viable alternative to traditional coaching methods.

Practical insights into virtual coaching strategies can be used to empower future school leaders. Problems of practice and implementation of a virtual coaching program in a university assistant principal licensure cohort program support future administrators

as they transition into their new role as building-level administrators. Two cohorts of students have participated in this program thus far. The 2020-2021 cohort comprised 67 principal licensure students and three coaches (one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school), while the 2021-2022 cohort included 110 principal licensure students and five coaches (2 elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school). The “Coaches” used in this virtual coaching model are carefully selected practicing administrators from high-performing school districts.

Planning for Virtual Coaching

In the principal licensure program, candidates are assigned to a coach based on their school's grade levels in order to provide targeted and intentional conversations and coaching that address the needs of their particular school. Each coach has approximately 15-20 students per group. The groups are further divided into smaller clusters of four to five students. Coaches are hired as online adjunct instructors and hold current full-time employment as administrators at P-12 schools. Candidates meet with their virtual coaches monthly throughout the semester. To prepare and coordinate topics of interest, the virtual coaches meet with the program coordinator and professors from the university. During these meetings, updates on candidates and coursework are shared and followed up with calibration sessions in which coaches prepare for their virtual coaching sessions. The goals of these meetings are to provide fidelity, personalization, and support for the principal licensure candidates in the cohorts.

Technological Tools

The virtual principal coaching program relies on three major technological tools: Google Drive and Google resources, [Zoom](#), and [AirTable](#). Google Drive is used for

communication, records, and presentations. The virtual coaches have access to an online handbook on Google Documents that provide structure and expectations on their roles. Additionally, coaches have a lesson plan prepared by the program coordinator on Google Slides to guide each coaching session. Coaches set up their sessions on a calendar and invite students and the program coordinator. Google Sheets are also used to provide coaches with the contact information for the students, their principals, district leadership, and other stakeholders. Additionally, one personal meeting with the mentor, principal, student, and coach occurs at the mid-point of the program as a way to guide each candidate's success for the remainder of the program. Another beneficial tool that is embedded in the virtual leadership program is Airtable, which is a spreadsheet-database hybrid and allows users to create a database, set up columns, and link tables together. Additionally, users can collaborate, send messages, sort records, and publish views to external websites. Coaches record information about the principal candidates, including rubric scores and notes. Students can access this information to see their progress.

Content of Coaching and Zoom Meetings

Candidates are given a case study to read before each coaching session. Each candidate emails their virtual coach with a problem of practice pertaining to a specific current problem in their school setting. Each virtual meeting is 90-minutes and is aligned to the content in each of the ten courses in the program. Each virtual coaching session includes the following:

- (1) 10 minutes: Community builder/warm-up,
- (2) 30 minutes: Discussion of a case or topic from coursework,

(3), 40 minutes: Problems of practice from participants, and

(4) 10 minutes: Reflection, capturing learning, and reflections for putting solutions into practice.

During these sessions, the coach has several responsibilities, which include: 1) taking notes on the participants' engagement, 2) writing down insightful points or questions for participants throughout each coaching session, and 3) recording each session to help with scoring or reviewing the session. The in-depth administrative experiences of each coach enable powerful content to be used as a springboard for critical discussions, feedback, and reflection from each member of the group.

Feedback

After the group coaching conversation, the coaches provide a participation score and feedback. After the virtual coaching sessions, the coach sends feedback to each candidate and the course professor. This feedback includes leadership strengths that are noted about each principal candidate, areas for improvement, and encouragement. The coaches provide scores for each principal candidate on quality, fidelity, intensity, and consistency.

Reflections

Participants in this virtual coaching program have reported various benefits through anecdotal stories and course and program evaluations. Some of the major benefits include being able to reflect and solidify learning with the support of an experienced principal. Participants repeatedly mentioned the ***value of their monthly coaching sessions and the associated case study work***, noting that the sessions “pushed them out of their comfort zones” and helped them apply their leadership skills.

Candidates report they are able to put feedback into action as they take on their new role as building administrators. Principal candidates also discussed a wide array of issues and solutions they currently face or may encounter in their schools. Additionally, they practice listening to, understanding the root cause of, and exploring solutions to complex problems. Moreover, students have reported benefits, including making connections with others across the state in similar school settings. Principal candidates also discussed the value of having personalized conversations and getting feedback from highly effective administrators and having opportunities to explore problems of practice in the principal candidates' own school. Participants noted that their ***coaching sessions*** ***“helped solidify their relationships with their fellow cohort members,”*** allowing them to connect with one another, learn about other school settings, get feedback, and develop lasting relationships. ***“This is a hard road. I’m glad I did it. I learned a lot, it was very valuable, but it wasn’t easy. And I couldn’t have done it without my cohort.”*** These virtual coaching sessions are catalysts for building collaboration and professional connections with other administrators from across other districts. At the university level, virtual coaching provides opportunities to explore course content and real-life principal scenarios with experts.

Future Directions

The virtual coaching program is still in its infancy; we are learning and refining this powerful practice by regularly examining data to make improvements. Results obtained from student surveys and through informal feedback are exciting and promising. We are also open to sharing ideas with other educational institutions so that we can improve and expand our virtual coaching programs.

Conclusions

Utilizing technology to deliver high-quality, personalized virtual coaching to principal candidates provides meaningful and practical opportunities for the students to develop as future principals and strengthen their leadership skills to thrive as school administrators in the real world. Students in the principal licensure program report that the virtual coaching feature was one of the program's most impactful and valuable experiences. The capacity to use technology to bring educators together is an efficient and effective approach to preparing future leaders. Moreover, university faculty have noted the benefits of extended virtual learning opportunities and the input of additional practitioner perspectives in delivering the virtual coaching program. As we continue with new cohorts in the coming years, we will continue to use the feedback from all participants to improve our virtual coaching program by implementing best practices that have been examined in other studies and critically reflecting on data obtained from our principal candidates mentors, and professors.

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