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**How Journalism and Mass Communication Schools Prepare and Support Instructors to
Teach Online: A Multiple Case Study**

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How Journalism and Mass Communication Schools Prepare and Support Instructors to Teach Online: A Multiple Case Study

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Abstract

Little research has been conducted into journalism and mass communications (JMC) programs delivered in online or blended environments. This multiple case study sought to explore processes implemented by JMC programs to train and support instructors to teach in online degree programs. Cross-case analysis revealed collaborative efforts involving instructors and instructional designers to design, deliver, support, and evaluate courses. Instructional designers also played a key role in the training and support of instructors, adding their pedagogical and technological knowledge to the content knowledge of the instructor. The findings have important implications for JMC schools who are offering, or planning to offer, online degree programs, and for journalism educators who may not understand the various roles of instructional designers.

Problem

The extant literature from two distinct fields within higher education — online teaching and learning, and journalism education — is robust. Online teaching and learning researchers have explored important questions on technology, asynchronous learning, massively open online courses (MOOCs), learning outcomes, pedagogy, instructional design, and more. Less research exists in this area specific to journalism and mass communications (JMC) schools. Castaneda (2011) found that 62% of accredited JMC schools surveyed were offering, or planning to offer, online courses, and 13% of those schools were offering, or planning to offer, online degree programs. Blankenship and Gibson (2016) examined community within closed-cohort structures for online graduate programs in a mass communication school. Henson (2012) reflected about the different perspectives that non-traditional journalism students can bring to the industry.

Within online teaching and learning, the roles of instructional design and instructional design units have emerged as a common theme in the literature. Instructors developing online courses are encouraged to collaborate with instructional designers. Instructional design “is a systemic process used to develop effective educational sessions and tools” (Turner, 2016, p. 478), and instructional designers are trained to utilize verified learning strategies that make “the acquisition of knowledge and skill more efficient, effective, and appealing” (Merrill et al., 1966, p. 6). Instructional designers can marry their pedagogical and technological knowledge and training with the content knowledge of the instructor (Bailey, Vaduganathan, Henry, Lavaerdiere, & Pugliese, 2018). Drawing upon expertise from those three areas is an evidence-backed approach to teaching with technology called the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge framework, or TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Recent research infers, however, that 75% of higher education instructors are not collaborating with instructional designers when developing an online or blended course. Of the instructors who did collaborate with instructional designers, 93% reported a positive experience (Jaschik & Lederman, 2018).

Professional development is critical for instructors to refine and improve their teaching craft. Betts et al. (under review) found that professional development is a predictor for awareness of evidence-based instructional practices. A Delphi study by Mohr and Shelton (2017) identified 68 themes for professional development programs for online instructors. Because teaching in classrooms is a different experience than teaching online, targeted professional development and training resources can help instructors adapt best practices for online instruction. This applies to journalism and mass communication faculty, who are in a constant state of adaptation. Journalism scholars are addressing critical issues related to the Fake News era, the rise and impact of social media, the First Amendment, and immersive technologies. However, there has been little research studying the intersection of these two fields (Castañeda, 2011), despite the continued growth of online learning (Seaman, Allen, & Seaman, 2018).

This study sought to explore processes implemented by JMC programs to train and support instructors, both full-time and part-time, to teach in online degree programs. A multiple case study approach was utilized to analyze three schools' individual processes. Individual case reports were constructed, and then a cross-case analysis was conducted to address two research questions:

RQ1: In what ways do JMC schools prepare and support full-time and adjunct instructors to teach online courses?

RQ2: How do instructional designers impact the processes of course development, course delivery, and course assessment in online courses at JMC schools?

Methods

Description of Cases. Three JMC schools at large, four-year public universities were selected for the multiple case study utilizing purposive sampling. Each JMC school was accredited by the ACEJMC and offered at least one fully online degree program. A case screening procedure (Yin, 2005) helped identify one full-time instructor, one adjunct instructor, and one journalism-oriented instructional designer at each school for interviews. Consent was obtained from all interview participants. The inclusion criterion to be interviewed was that each individual had to have taught or worked on online journalism courses at their institution for at least one academic year. Semi-structured conference call interviews were conducted with each individual. Documents and virtual professional development resources were sourced, observed and catalogued for analysis of the instructor training and support programs provided by each college or institution.

Data analysis. Interviews were transcribed and coded using the First and Second Cycle Coding method (Saldaña, 2013). The first cycle was conducted with open coding. The second cycle analyzed the open codes for thematic patterns. Lastly, the thematic patterns were compared to the five stages of the Online Human Touch framework (Betts, 2009) for training and supporting faculty to teach online. Case reports were written for each individual case, before cross-case analysis was conducted and synthesized in a cross-case report.

Findings

To answer the first research question, data analysis was conducted across the three cases. Several commonalities were found in how JMC schools train and support instructors to teach online:

- The JMC schools did not require instructors to engage in training. In certain cases, instructors were strongly encouraged, but not required.
- Tutorials on each school's learning management system were readily available to instructors.
- Schools encouraged instructors to enroll in online mini-courses covering online pedagogy. The instructors served as students, and the instructional designers taught these mini-courses.
- JMC schools utilized analytics to improve teaching and course and program delivery.
- Instructional design units were active at each school. An instructional designer was assigned specifically to each JMC school to work with instructors.

The second question sought to explore the role of instructional designers in course development, course delivery, and course assessment. Instructional designers played a significant role in course development, working directly with instructors and managing the course development timeline with update, review, and strategy meetings. At Case Study 1 and 2, this process was protocol. At Case Study 3, the instructional designer recruited instructors to work with her like they "were my clients." The role of instructional designers changed during course delivery, offering just-in-time support. They contributed analytical analysis when necessary and assisted on an evaluative course debrief process when a new course finished its initial run.

Implications

This research sought to explore the processes of JMC schools toward training and supporting instructors to teach in online degree programs. Because little to no literature is available on these processes at JMC schools, this multiple case study was intentionally designed to offer insight and theoretical backing without rendering judgment. This study's findings may (a) inform processes at other JMC schools who are offering, or planning to offer, online degree programs; (b) inform instructors of the different roles held by instructional designers, and how those roles contribute to online course delivery and evaluation; and (c) encourage JMC scholars to conduct additional research of journalism education delivered in online and blended spaces.

Conclusion

This multiple case study explored the processes of training and supporting instructors to teach online by three JMC schools at large, public universities. Journalism educators have been inundated with curricular change over the past two decades. As online learning continues to grow, JMC educators should consider collaborative opportunities with instructional design units to strengthen technology-based pedagogies, online course development, course delivery, and course evaluation.

Biography

Brian Delaney is a doctoral student in Educational Leadership and Learning Technologies, on the leadership track, and a Research Assistant in Drexel University's School of Education. His research foci include journalism and mass communication education, online learning,

educational technologies, the learning sciences (specifically Mind, Brain, and Education science), and instructional design. In February 2018, Delaney was selected Co-Editor of the Emerging Voices in Education Journal for a two-year term. He earned a Master's degree in Higher Education Administration with a concentration in e-Learning Technologies and Instructional Design from Drexel in 2016. His thesis, titled "Assessing the Compatibility Between Experiential Journalism and Online Education," explored how a journalism school at a four-year, public institution of higher education built experiential learning opportunities into its online program. Brian earned a bachelor's degree in Journalism from Ithaca College in 2004 and was an award-winning journalist in newspapers and radio over a career of 16 years. He spent five years as an adjunct lecturer at the Ithaca College Park School of Communications, teaching intro to journalism, news reporting and writing, and investigative journalism, and hosting workshops on interview strategies and leadership for student media organizations.

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