

Course Design

Global Efforts to Professionalize Online Literacy Instructors: GSOLE's Basic OLI Certification

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The Global Society of Online Literacy Educators (GSOLE), an organization that we describe more fully below, was founded in 2016 as “an international organization connecting those who teach reading, alphabetic writing, and multimodal composition as digital literacies in online educational settings” (GSOLE Website). Rather than this course design describing a student-facing course, the course design that follows describes GSOLE's Basic Online Literacy Instruction (OLI) Certification courses for *instructors* within our discipline (our Basic OLI Certification). Because the course is instructor-facing, and we recognize these instructors are our colleagues, we have chosen to use the word participant to name them (instead of calling them *students*, even those they hold the student role in the courses).

Course Description

GSOLE's Basic OLI Certification is open to GSOLE members and is designed to help online literacy instructors, tutors, and writing program administrators learn foundational principles, theories, and practices of teaching and tutoring writing online and apply those to the contexts in which they work or anticipate working. The certification consists of two courses that span an academic year. Both courses guide participants, who come to the experience with various levels of online teaching and/or tutoring experience, toward meeting the pedagogical and curricular standards established by experts of online literacy education as articulated by GSOLE.

Participants experience both courses within a learning pod, made up of one instructor-mentor and up to five participants. The first course introduces participants to online literacy education, to key concepts and theories (e.g., accessibility and inclusivity; asynchronous, synchronous, hybrid, online, and hyflex course design; and writing pedagogy) and to GSOLE's Online Literacy Instruction (OLI) Principles and Tenets (<https://gsole.org/oliresources/olip-rinciples>). As well, participants explore how the principles connect to the local contexts in which they work and the ways that digital technologies do and can affect writing pedagogies. The second course focuses on assignment and activity design for online writing instruction (OWI), whether that instruction takes place within a writing course, writing center, or writing-enriched course across

campus. Participants also develop strategies for assessing online learning experiences and justifying pedagogical approaches using OLI and OWI research.

Rather than participants working through a set of course objectives taken as a whole, this certification is designed around objective-specific modules. Each module includes the following:

1. Two to four essential readings with additional optional readings provided
2. A reading discussion prompt
3. An opportunity to engage in synchronous (e.g., video conferencing or phone) and/or asynchronous discussions within learning pods
4. The creation of an artifact chosen from a menu of options or created by the participants based on their professional goals and local context

Each artifact provides evidence of skills, experiences, and knowledge gleaned from that module. These artifacts are also placed in an ePortfolio along with a short personal reflection. At the end of the first course, participants draw upon their developing knowledge to produce a personal, evolving theory of OLI that communicates their OLI identity, approach to OLI, rationale for this approach, and examples from their practice. The theory of OLI should be informed by GSOLE's Principles and Tenets and readings from the first course. At the end of the second course, participants refine their theory of OLI and add it to their ePortfolio.

During the two courses, participants have multiple opportunities to receive feedback on their ePortfolio from their instructor-mentor, the two program administrators for the certification, and peers. At the end of the certification process, participants submit their ePortfolio for review for a pass/fail assessment by a GSOLE Certification Board of Evaluators, a board of GSOLE members who review the ePortfolio outside of the context of the course.

Context

GSOLE initially had a different name to fit a very different identity: ISOLE, with the "I" standing for "Institute." The original conception of the organization, which essentially came from Beth Hewett, was a professional organization that would validate the teaching practices of online writing teachers (later literacy came to replace writing). As far back as October 2015, Hewett envisioned that the first goal of such an organization would be a "Certification in Online Writing and Reading Instruction" (Hewett, pers. comm.). Those involved with the early conversations about ISOLE focused on the idea that online writing/literacy instruction required discipline-specific professional training and development. While, of course, all fields have their own

nuances and require (or at least should require) their own focused training, the GSOLE founders believed that the kind of strategy-driven pedagogy of online writing/literacy courses is substantially different from the generally presentation-driven pedagogy that is the focus of certifications provided by organizations like Quality Matters. Informed by disciplinary knowledge and values, participants move through the certification dialogically with peers and instructor-mentors so as to socially construct knowledge about OLI and link it to local practice—a design that is vastly different from static, self-paced professional development that often involves participants working through materials or modules in isolation.

The idea was that GSOLE would provide a meaningful, high-quality credential at multiple levels of OLI beginning with a Basic Certification and then moving into more specific topics in OLI, like OLI in international contexts, OLI across the curriculum, and fostering community in OLI courses. However, many issues—explained in greater detail below—made starting the certification design process a challenge.

- **Personnel.** The organization was first non-existent: just a thought then fledgling. In the beginning, a small number of people made up GSOLE, and they were heavily involved with getting the organization running. There were not enough hours for them to be instructors, course designers, and program administrators. Questions surrounding who would design and teach the certification loomed large.
- **Money.** Certification also hit a snag because of a fundamental inequity in higher education. Certainly, an organization like this was going to need money to operate, and the concept was very much a business model, with certifications supporting the organization. However, those most in need of certification were often contingent faculty and graduate students for whom paying for the certification would be most difficult. It was a catch-22 that derailed the process for several years.
- **Platform.** How would the course be taught? On what platform? As much as we might criticize Blackboard and similar learning management systems (LMSs), they do many things instructors and participants need in familiar ways, and these are often the platforms instructors would be using in their teaching. There are free platforms, but they can be glitchy or underpowered. If we used an institution's LMS, we would have to negotiate ownership of GSOLE's course material with that institution, which could make it difficult to control other decisions, especially the price point.

- How would the certification matter and to whom? A certification, of course, is meaningless unless others value it. Certainly, with only a few dozen members at its start, GSOLE did not have the kind of traction that would enable it to be highly regarded if it appeared on a job candidate's CV. We needed to figure out how to communicate the value of the certification to those outside of GSOLE and the discipline.
- Ownership of materials. Especially considering the low-budget-by-necessity initial efforts, the question of who owned certification materials was tricky: Could individual instructors take materials with them? Would the materials belong to GSOLE—a prospect that nobody overtly liked but that raised the problem of re-creating courses?
- Administration. Again, the idea of volunteerism loomed large. Would an army of volunteers simply run the entire certification process?

Because of these challenges, there were several false starts in trying to get a certification course up and running, and we decided to move away from the certification once GSOLE launched. Hewett had made agreements with one institutional department to develop the institute; however, upper administrators were not interested in this initiative. Furthermore, the organization was involved with other initiatives, such as developing conferences, a journal, and webinars; GSOLE has been quite successful—a topic for another publication—so much so that certification was pushed to the side. But, as we realized the enormous impact a literacy-concentrated pedagogical training structure could have, a GSOLE Certification Committee formed in recommitment to the certification in 2019. The curriculum for the certification was finalized in spring 2020 (just as the COVID-19 pandemic began) and a condensed micro-pilot was launched in the summer of 2020. The first full cohort was enrolled during the 2020–2021 academic year.

Theoretical Rationale

Longstanding calls for online literacy instructor professionalization have emphasized the need for preparation to be discipline-specific and theoretically informed (CCCC; GSOLE; Hewett and Bourelle; Hewett and Warnock). After all, effective OLI demands more than moving face-to-face learning materials online. Scholars in OLI recommend professionalization for online instructors include learning about different instructional modalities (Mick and Middlebrook; Snart), understanding how delivery formats and modalities can impact student learning (Boyd; Harris et al.), designing and justifying accessible OLI curriculum that leverages the affordances of the online space

(Cargile Cook; DePew; Nielsen; Oswal and Meloncon; Rodrigo), enhancing teaching practices to confront student retention issues that often surface in online learning (Borgman and Dockter; Harris and McCloud), and considering how OLI theory can be linked to local practice.

While many institutions offer training on using the technologies that mediate online education (namely, the LMS), few have access to the expertise and resources necessary to deliver the training described above (Hewett and Hallman Martini). These constraints are further complicated by the reality that online instruction is often taken on by contingent or part-time faculty, who may or may not be local to the institution at which they are teaching (Bedford; Mechenbier). For all these reasons, designing and delivering this much-needed professional development can be a challenge for institutions. General technology and LMS training do not necessarily help instructors design discipline-specific assignments and learning activities.

The need for discipline-specific online professional development only intensified when COVID-19 drove institutions across the world to online, or emergency remote, instruction with little time or resources to prepare faculty. GSOLE saw a capacity to fill this need and deliver theoretically rich, praxis-focused professional development. Building upon Hewett's vision, the GSOLE Certification Committee understood two principles about the certification's design:

1. GSOLE would not be using the certification to tell participants what practices they needed to adopt. The committee deliberately wanted to distinguish itself from other non-discipline-specific professional development opportunities, especially some popular programs that focus on online instruction generally that teach rules for online instruction but that neglect disciplinary specificity and local contexts
2. The certification had to balance and bridge theory and practice. Graduate pedagogy courses provided an aspirational model for striking such a balance.

The GSOLE Principles and Tenets became the core of the curriculum, and the certification was designed to guide participants in applying these principles and tenets to their local contexts. Readings from OLI scholars who practice in a variety of contexts—writing centers, WAC programs, first year composition programs, K-12 classrooms, and international contexts—are linked to each principle. Voices from antiracist writing pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, disability studies, and multimodality are also present as resources that participants should put in conversation with OLI scholarship and GSOLE's Principles and Tenets. The curriculum centers this work alongside the development of an OLI identity culminating in the creation of an

ePortfolio housing a coherent OLI identity, theory, and artifacts, which serve as evidence of OLI learning. To help participants do this work, learning pods (one instructor-mentor and five participants) engage participants with OLI experts and peers. Ultimately, participants exit the certification with artifacts that they can immediately put into practice and an ePortfolio that they can use to communicate their OLI expertise to others.

Critical Reflection

In this critical reflection, we first consider the feedback from our first cohorts of participants from summer 2020 and the 2020–2021 academic year, which significantly guides us in revising the certification for future years. Then, we move into the tensions and needs instructor-mentors, program administrators, and GSOLE leadership have raised during the first year of the certification. We conclude with our plans for revision and our reflections on the value of the GSOLE Basic OLI Certification.

Participant Voices

As part of preparing this course design, we informally interviewed five GSOLE OLI Certification course participants who were in the midst of certification or completed the micro-pilot in the summer of 2020 in efforts to collect programmatic feedback. We wanted to know what motivated them to take the certification and how they were using or planned to use its credential. Interviews were conducted via Zoom, usually with one or two participants per session. Sessions ran about 30 minutes to an hour (a more formal, IRB-approved study is currently underway).

From the interviews we conducted, we gained interesting insights. For many, the initial impulse to pursue the certification was a practical desire to know more about OLI theories and concepts. One participant indicated that pursuing the certification connected to his natural inclination to lifelong learning. However, even participants who expressed an innate desire to learn more about pedagogy also identified a specific motivation: to gain greater insight and a more solid theoretical footing in OLI. One participant, a writing center administrator, said, “I wanted to explore the best practices to make sure that we were offering the best online services that we could and that what we were doing aligned with the literature and best practices of the OLI field.” Another “was really interested [in] what’s available that’s coming out of writing studies as a discipline to help people teach writing online.”

Perhaps not surprising is the degree to which the COVID-19 pandemic’s effect on education writ large compelled many to focus on OLI in ways they had not done so previously. What was already a concern was made unavoidably acute by a global health crisis. Many participants said “timing” played a

key role in their interest in the certification, both as instructors and those in administrative capacities. As one interviewee asked, vis-a-vis their role as a writing program administrator during summer 2020, “What’s the first year writing program going to look like being taught remotely?” Another interviewee said that as their institutional role shifted from faculty to an administrative/full-time staff position, they became acutely aware of the need to establish a solid foundation in OLI as they took on train-the-teacher positions with greater peer oversight: “A huge part of my job now is to assess...and work with faculty who teach...writing in the disciplines and capstone courses.”

Another pattern that emerged was that while participants felt they already had some degree of technical training in general online teaching, and indicated that their respective institutions offered professional development for online teaching, a lot of that training was technical, not theoretical (i.e., focusing more on how to use the technology). It was about what buttons to click to make the LMS do certain things. While helpful for working efficiently in an LMS, such training, many observed, was often decontextualized from pedagogy and missed the nuance that characterized teaching in particular disciplines. One interviewee noted: “...everything [in the general training] was really about like, how do we test? How do we assess students?” There was little discussion about “writing process” or “peer review,” clearly central to OLI. Another commented that even when training turned to pedagogy, it felt like, “We were like ‘Yeah, I’m not going to be using a quiz in my class. That’s just not how I teach’—so it felt really kind of disconnected from my discipline.” Even participants with substantial existing online learning professional training (like Quality Matters certification, for example) remarked how beneficial the teaching focus on the demands, challenges, and opportunities of online *literacy* instruction is (as opposed to a technical focus).

Two other aspects that drew people to the GSOLE Certification are worth noting. The first is that many, though not all, participants were already connected in some way with GSOLE, either as existing members or, more often, as presenters at one of the GSOLE annual online conferences. So, when GSOLE began to advertise its certification course—via general listservs (like WPA) and to its existing membership—many people who chose to sign up already had some affiliation with and knowledge of GSOLE. That level of familiarity helped make the certification seem less intimidating. Second, a distinguishing feature of the GSOLE certification, in fact, is its high-touch, interactive nature, very unlike what one interviewee described their previous general professional development to be: largely checklist driven and “very quantifiable.” Along these lines, participants commented on the qualifications of those who were facilitating the certification, not just the level of engagement course participants had with facilitators (and each other). Participants felt as though they were getting

an almost individualized graduate class experience, but, as one participant said: “It really helped that it was \$75 and not, you know, like \$2,000.” So, we should not overlook the basic cost—or let’s say value—of the GSOLE certification, especially in comparison with other general online instruction professional development.¹ A number of certification course participants report being able to garner departmental or institutional support to cover costs (often not as likely when the price tag is \$1,000 or more). One interviewee mentioned they were able “to get the dean to pay for it, which was kind of amazing because they weren’t paying for anything at that time.”

With regards to how certification course participants are using the certification, there were a range of responses. Of course, there is the practical application of knowledge gained from readings, peer-to-peer interaction, and participant-to-facilitator interaction. One participant noted that the course “has helped to give me a lot of language, especially around areas of access and inclusivity and especially at the intersection(s) of access and technology.” While they may have been aware of and actively attending to broad concerns like equity and access, they had not, prior to the certification, had a concrete vocabulary or a disciplinary framework to ground those concerns. For some, especially those in administrative roles, having that strong basis for talking about access and technology has, as one interviewee noted, “given me some resources to kind of begin those conversations [about access, equity, and technology] on campus.”

Yet another interviewee working in an administrative tutoring center capacity, noted,

I used what I learned as part of the certification right away: I designed a new tutor training module for online tutoring. I was able to adjust my own online tutoring practices and also share new tips and suggestions with the peer tutors, and I took what I learned about accessibility in an online environment and used it to improve the online resources we had available for students.

Again, the application to local concerns was immediate and particularly impactful in regard to accessibility. One interviewee summed up a common refrain quite well: “I felt less like I was just trying things out and more like I was able to use the knowledge gained from the course materials, instructors, and my peers to formulate something really solid.”

In addition to practical application, we wanted to know if course participants were able to leverage the actual certification as a credential in some professional setting. One interviewee was frank in their observation that during a recent tenure review, the certification was nice to have but “I don’t know how much weight that [it had] ...they were glad I was doing it, but it didn’t

really add any weight or anything.” However, a full-time, non-tenure track participant mentioned, “I am ... proud to note that my department chair cited my ongoing efforts to complete the GSOLE Certification course in my reappointment letter to the dean. This effort, among others, she cited as evidence that I ‘exceed expectations in teaching’ for the department.” Others, however, reported quite the opposite. For example, one interviewee directly applied the certification course knowledge to teaching work in the remote/online classroom and as part of writing center administration. For that participant, the certification is “a formal program that allows me to actually, intentionally reflect on the things I’m doing ... it also provides me with a theory, a theoretical basis, for other things I’m doing [not only] as a writing Center administrator, but also as an instructor in the writing classroom.” This interviewee continued to say, however:

I also just interviewed not too long ago for a job, and they were very interested in my certification program...they asked me specific questions about [it]...my response was very much informed by the conversations we’ve had in the program...The certification program helped me to articulate a theoretical, but also very practical... response to the questions that they had. It made me come across as someone who knew what [I] was about as far as online teaching was concerned..I can actually point to concrete differences that the certification program has made for me.

In addition to the practice-based knowledge that can make participants’ immediate teaching and/or day-to-day administrative work better, the certification course further offers a broader framework within which to consider OLI and a vocabulary to articulate important ideas to others. It is in this sense of framing and vocabulary building that many participants found the certification so profound: it did not just allow them to become, individually, more effective, it gave them the tools to begin or strengthen conversations, processes, protocols that would make entire departments and programs more effective. Also, for at least a few of our GSOLE certification course participants, the certification is a professional credential that they have leveraged directly in professional settings like job interviews.

Successful course participants receive a digital badge created using the digital badging system called Badgr. While the badge might not be immediately recognized by an employer, it is an excellent conversation starter for someone who wants to discuss their background and expertise in OLI. Importantly, when the badge is awarded, the participant’s ePortfolio link is included, so a conversation that is initiated by the badge can easily move into discussion

and examination of the concrete products of GSOLE certification. With these benefits in mind, however, we still have several critical considerations driving curricular revisions in year two, which we discuss in further detail below.

Challenges to Delivering Faculty Development Online

The challenges we faced delivering the certification courses mirrored challenges that often arise in online learning environments. And, of course, many of these challenges were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which made it difficult to determine whether challenges were caused by the personal hardships and general strain created by the pandemic or features of course design. While our participants are not students, they are online learners. For some, this was the first online course they were taking. Initially, participants in the year-long cohort struggled to acclimate to Google Classroom (the LMS). We had been hesitant to use Google Classroom at first, but our summer micro-pilot participants generally liked it and told us in an exit discussion that it functioned well across different devices. Based on their feedback, we continued with it—aware of the constraints. However, the pilot cohort that followed struggled to adjust to an LMS that looked very different from their institutional systems.

A main limitation of Google Classroom is its lack of a traditional discussion-board space, making it difficult for asynchronous peer-to-peer interaction outside of the Class Stream (an announcements thread on the homepage). This puts a lot of pressure on the other opportunities for engagement. Learning pods were instructed to offer a synchronous and/or asynchronous meeting time every three weeks (one for each of the ten modules). Additionally, the two program administrators shared opportunities for the entire cohort to come together for synchronous workshops with all participants receiving access to the recordings (facilitated by instructor-mentors or GSOLE members). Without exception, every participant wanted more opportunities for synchronous engagement.

Logistically, working around full schedules and multiple time zones to meet this desire was challenging. Equally important, as OLI experts, we wanted participants to gain experience in asynchronous community building. OLI research recommends that online literacy instructors can design synchronous and asynchronous opportunities for learning (CCCC; Mick and Middlebrook). While some students might learn better in a synchronous format, synchronous meetings are not always possible when teaching online. We continue to consider how to balance synchronous opportunities for engagement with opportunities to practice asynchronous community-building.

Several weeks into the semester, we learned that some of the open-access publication websites we linked to for readings and assignments were blocked in a few African and European countries. Quickly, we had to create download-

able versions of these materials for participants and forward our concerns to journal editors. Two such publications were GSOLE's own *Research in Online Literacy Education* and the *Online Literacies Open Resource*, with restricted viewing relating to broader Weebly access issues. This challenge of establishing international access is considerable, as restrictions can emerge from platform providers or local or national internet restrictions. However, GSOLE, as a growing international organization, recognizes the need for globalized conversations in OLI. Consideration of how national context (which includes material things like internet speed and reliability) affects access is essential to developing international professional development, like the Basic OLI Certification (Rice and St.Amant).

Other online faculty development challenges were deeply tied to labor. We estimated the certification to be roughly equivalent to a graduate-level course and expected participants to spend between three to four hours each week engaging with readings, meeting in learning pods, and completing artifacts. However, participants were active writing instructors who had demanding teaching and/or administrative loads, and some participants held contingent positions across multiple institutions. Some participants had difficulty finding the time necessary to engage in the deep learning we had hoped to foster throughout the course. On top of the general stress of finding time, our participants were experiencing a pandemic, job insecurity, and the additional stress of having to care for family members and children. Unsurprisingly, attrition rates were high. Thirteen of the 37 individuals enrolled successfully completed the certification—meaning nearly two-thirds of our participants did not complete the certification.

While participant persistence issues were, to some degree, related to the unique circumstances of 2020, they highlighted a larger issue of access and inclusion. Even the most altruistic considerations of accessibility do not always work with the actual target audiences. This, of course, is an argument for user-centered design and usability testing. COVID-19 has intensified challenges that have always existed for some members of our academic community: susceptibility and fear of illness, caretaking responsibilities, job insecurity, assuming responsibilities for struggling colleagues, stress, and trauma. Therefore, we must reflect on attrition rates from the first cohort and ask how we can balance the amount of effort we believe is critical for meaningful OLI faculty development with the need to design and deliver faculty development in ways that are accessible and manageable for full-time professionals.

Instructor and Administrative Labor and Scaling

We were aware that a professional organization like GSOLE could more easily create OLI faculty development than any individual institution. First, as

mentioned above, local institutions often locate faculty development outside of disciplinary contexts within offices like teaching and learning centers. Second, few local institutions have robust enough online programs to house multiple OLI experts within the same department, which means the labor for developing and sustaining faculty development programs in online instruction often falls to a few individuals. GSOLE's community allowed us to tap into a pool of OLI experts who could serve as instructor-mentors and program administrators.

Aspirationally, GSOLE would like the certification to evolve into a sustainable program. To reach this goal, we must figure out how to compensate instructor-mentors and program administrators equitably while still maintaining an affordable certification program. In this first year, instructor-mentors were paid \$500 to lead a learning pod of five participants throughout the year—not nearly enough to compensate them for their time, labor, and expertise. Yet, we are hesitant to raise enrollment for the certification beyond the \$75. Several members of the pilot participants were contingent faculty across multiple institutions and others were graduate students—two often-exploited populations. As the participants stated above, some participants from these populations were able to get institutional funding because of the current price point.

Our justification for the initial cost of certification enrollment was to keep costs low enough that the certification could be obtainable to individuals without access to institutional professional development funds. However, GSOLE is currently losing money so that it can compensate instructor-mentors \$100 per participant (with neither program administrator being compensated). In reflection, we know that \$500 is not appropriate compensation for the time instructor-mentors spend giving feedback, hosting learning pod meetings, and sustaining one-on-one mentorship across the academic year. In future years, we must determine how we can charge enough to sustain the program and equitably compensate those whose labor drives the program, all while keeping the certification from becoming so expensive that it can only be accessed by full-time and tenured/tenure-track faculty. One potential option we are exploring is tiered registration costs with registrants paying a fee that is directly relational to their self-reported salary.

The Value of the Certification

We wanted the certification to provide participants with theoretical knowledge and online practices grounded in research so that the certification's value would be in its deep connection to the participant's connection to community knowledge of praxis, and demonstration of application. The certificate curriculum was designed to promote praxis and the ability for participants

to be able to communicate their OLI knowledge to those outside of GSOLE and the discipline. Every learning objective, reading, and artifact drives participants towards the creation of an ePortfolio. As a method of assessment, ePortfolios support integrative learning and the development of a coherent learner identity (Yancey). By placing the ePortfolio as the main output of the certification, we wanted participants to develop an OLI identity and use their developing expertise to connect their instructional practices back to theory and research, communicating that connection to others. Therefore, we emphasize that ePortfolios have utility across a variety of contexts: within the learning context of a certification, in the evaluation and review process at many institutions, and during the hiring process on the job market.

Curricular Revisions

After piloting this course with participants, we have identified several areas for meaningful revision across course design and delivery. These changes, we hope, respond to participant feedback while forwarding the tenets and principles GSOLE upholds for OLI.

Course Design

We will revise the timing, LMS, and course materials. As mentioned above, participants struggled to balance the responsibilities of the course with their professional and personal commitments. We understand this is a reality of delivering online professional development that overlaps with the academic year. However, we do not feel like a condensed version of the certification program would be as valuable. First, a shortened window will make it more difficult for participants to develop connections to others within the OLI community and develop an OLI identity. Participants need opportunities for ongoing interactive engagement and time to do that work. Second, for the participants, learning about online instruction as one practices online instruction creates a productive synergy between what they are learning as certification course participants and what they are practicing as online literacy instructors. Moreover, there is no interval of time that is outside of the academic calendar for all potential participants, who work according to various institutional calendars at institutions across the globe. For these reasons, we have decided to expand the timing for the certification by stretching each module from three weeks to a month. The expanded timeline will, we hope, allow for more flexibility in pacing for participants.

We will also be leaving the Google Classroom LMS in search of an open access LMS that has a more familiar interface for participants, who are using systems like Blackboard, Canvas, and D2L at their local institutions. We will continue to prioritize the need for the LMS to be accessible to participants

using assistive technologies, learning from smartphone devices, and accessing course materials from international contexts. As individuals well-versed in online learning, we understand that no technology or LMS is perfect. Yet, we are open to considering new LMS platforms because we understand the impact a technological barrier can have on learning and engagement. In leaving Google Classroom, we are choosing to prioritize the participant learning experience and more equitable access.

Because any curriculum should be regularly revisited and revised, we will also continue to update the readings and assignments for the certification. This past year, especially, has sparked important conversations related to OLI—conversations that we want to be represented within the certification materials. In addition to publications specific to OLI practice (e.g., Borgman and McArdle; Linder and Hayes), emerging scholarly conversations reflecting advances in writing instruction, student engagement, equity in learning, and writing across contexts will also be shared with participants and placed in conversation with online teaching practices (e.g., Kinloch et al.). While we do not expect the certification curriculum to ever be in stasis, updating materials to reflect research-based OLI pedagogy informed by COVID-19 is crucial.

Course Delivery

Aside from these course design revisions, we will also make changes to how the course is delivered to create a more consistent experience for participants. In this first year, pilot participants heard from three major certification voices:

1. instructor-mentors who led learning pods and gave feedback on artifact assignments,
2. other instructor-mentors who opened modules with introductory videos,
3. program administrators who shared regular announcements regarding whole-cohort events and reminders, reached out to participants as a form of intervention, and answered general questions regarding the certification process.

Participants told us that they often felt overwhelmed by the different voices representing the certification and that these voices lacked a coherent teacher presence. To create more consistency, we would like to streamline who talks to participants, narrowing that communication down to the instructor-mentor who is leading their learning pod and a general GSOLE account that can be used by multiple certification leaders to send updates, reminders, and introductory videos, as needed.

As the certification progressed throughout the 2020–2021 academic year, participants asked for more opportunities for whole-cohort, synchronous

events. In response, in the spring semester, the certification team provided numerous opportunities for participants to join optional synchronous tutorials about OLI technologies, developing their ePortfolio, and OLI instruction and practice. For comparison, the fall semester had four such opportunities, while the spring semester had eight. Though participants appreciated these additional opportunities, they were not evenly distributed across the academic year, and participants sometimes struggled to attend. In preparation for the incoming cohort, we plan to standardize these events so participants have access to an optional whole cohort event approximately once a month.

Conclusion

The pandemic had a peculiar effect on those dedicated to online learning. For many of us, online writing instruction has been a niche skill set or talent that could meet institutional demand in a variety of ways. Then, in the blink of an eye, everyone was teaching online—or at least teaching remotely. This fact led the committee who designed the course in the 2019–2020 academic year to ask ourselves: Do instructors and other members of our community still need something like this certification?

We believe the answer is a resounding “Yes,” for several reasons. First, we understand that most instructors who were suddenly forced to go remote were doing triage instruction. While the practices they were adopting were getting them and their students to the end of spring 2020, those practices were not helping students develop new twentieth-century literacy skills (Cope and Kalantzis). The certification course was needed to help instructors understand how to deliberately leverage the affordances of the digital technologies they were adopting and adapting to achieve their desired course outcomes (Cargile Cook). Second, we wanted to make sure that instructors and their students, who might have been disillusioned by that first foray into online instruction during spring 2020, understood that the experience of true online learning, as opposed to remote instruction, could be much more valuable and enriching. It was important to emphasize to instructors and institutions that online literacy/writing instruction is a field of study with a body of research and scholarship that should inform how instructors design their courses. When that research is used to shape pedagogy, the result can be meaningful and engaging for online-learning students. Third, returning to one of our original primary goals, the best people to prepare instructors for OLI are online literacy instructors, yet many instructors were being asked to adopt practices that were appropriate for more lecture-based or content-driven courses. What was needed was online experts who also knew the disciplinary content and goals of literacy courses.

The need for training, whether locally or through an organizationally supported group of OLI experts like the GSOLE certification course, is now

greater than ever. Indeed, it appears that the need for the GSOLE certification course will, if anything, only be increasing.

Notes

1. For example, member pricing for the Online Learning Consortium “Online Teaching Certificate” program starts at \$1,500 <<https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/learn/which-teaching-certificate/>>

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