

It Took a Village: A Demonstrated Need of Institutional Support for Successful Online Teaching

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Abstract

While many language instructors were encouraged throughout the pandemic to rethink their teaching methods, instructional modalities, and course design in order to successfully pivot from in-person to remote learning environments, it quickly became clear that the burden of pandemic teaching could not be sustained by individual faculty members. Instead, successful instances of emergency remote instruction were often aided by pre-existing online curricula and extensive institutional support in the form of additional funding, training, and shared expertise. This chapter outlines the type of resources and support available to support the teaching and learning of languages during the shift to emergency remote instruction and beyond.

Keywords: *online course design; pandemic pedagogy; professional development*

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented disruption in education, requiring a rapid shift in the role of distance learning from a supplementary role at many institutions to a necessity for nearly all instructors and learners. For many institutions, the shift to emergency remote teaching not only presented a learning curve—adjustments on behalf of faculty, administrators, and students—but also the need to address the longstanding reluctance of many faculty members to embrace educational technology and even basic functionalities of their Learning Management System (LMS), such as electronic gradebooks and discussion boards. As traditional face-to-face teaching became unviable almost overnight, faculty and administrators had to quickly establish uniform guidelines for synchronous, asynchronous, hybrid and HyFlex modes of instruction delivery. As a result, many instructors were rushed through the process of converting face-to-face courses to an online format, with lim-

ited expertise and assistance other than crash courses or short videos demonstrating the basic tools offered by their institution's LMS.

Our physical return to the classroom has surely revealed, and rightfully so, a blend of old and new practices gleaned from the past year. A March 2021 survey of faculty and administrators by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* outlined some of the "pandemic" teaching practices that a majority of faculty and administrators hope will stick around. Supiano and McMurtrie (2021) reported findings from this survey, highlighting the continued need for (1) the increased use of virtual office hours; (2) professional training around effective course design and teaching practices in online environments; (3) the increased use of virtual academic supports for students (e.g. tutoring, advising); (4) teaching and learning communities where instructors can share best practices; and (5) increased use of virtual co-curricular activities (e.g. research, service, internships).

During the 2020-21 academic year, many language instructors without previous experience or training in online teaching faced unique challenges as they transitioned away from emergency remote instruction toward a more robust, sustainable, and effective method of online teaching. On the other hand, language departments that had already developed tech-enhanced, online, or hybrid curricula prior to the COVID-19 pandemic were better positioned to rapidly adapt their courses (Supiano & McMurtrie, 2021). With respect to many other disciplines, foreign language course design had already been at the fore of instructional technology, and many language instructors were already accustomed to using rich media content, authentic material, and technology to access resources in the target language. The history of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), with roots in the 1960s, has had clear and consistent implications on the development of educational technology for language teaching (Davies et al., 2012), and most foreign language curricula have been technologically enhanced for a long time (Bax, 2011), given that developing proficiency in the target language requires students to practice skills such as speaking, listening, and viewing. The integration of audio-visual tools, *realia*, and (when possible) real-world interactions has also meant that many instructors were accustomed to using technology outside of class time to introduce linguistic and cultural content, which also offered greater opportunities for flipped learning, in which students prepare and practice the material before meeting in the classroom, an integral part of language course design ahead of many other disciplines.

This article is co-authored by four foreign language faculty from Southern Methodist University (SMU), a private, four-year university with an undergraduate enrollment of approximately 7,000 students, in Dallas, Texas. Our World Languages Department successfully navigated pandemic pedagogy, in large part due to its development (starting in 2016) of a series of online language courses that had been designed with the support of the Provost, Dean, Department Chair, Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) and Academic Technology Services (ATS). This paper focuses on key areas that allowed their department to successfully apply shared principles of online course design and delivery across their curriculum. A comparison of departmental shared principles of online course design before, during, and after the pandemic reveals key areas identified and described as (1) institutional and technical support for online course design, (2) professional development, and (3) university-sponsored initiatives to build faculty community and collaboration.

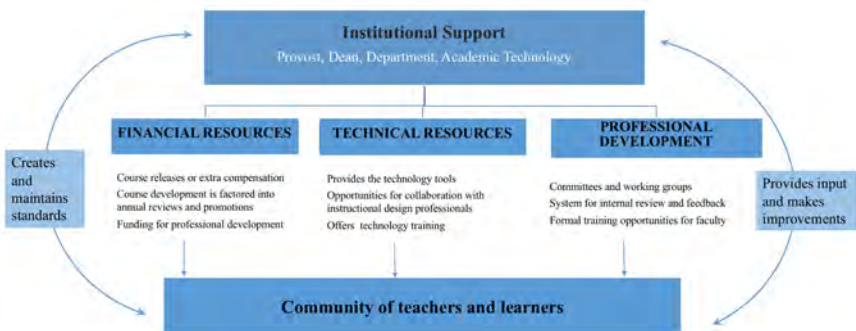
Given the growing demand for short-term, online course offerings, the Department of World Languages and Literatures at SMU began developing five-week, fully online courses in 2016. Faculty were given a course release to follow a nine-month course development timeline under the supervision and guidance of the Center for Teaching Excellence and Academic Technology Services, following a two-part online course designed to prepare instructors to teach in hybrid or fully online formats. The course was required not only for course designers, but for any faculty members interested in teaching an online course for the department. By Fall 2019, 50% of the department’s full-time faculty had completed the Online Teaching Faculty Training (OTFT) and thus, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, found themselves well-equipped with a myriad of tools to rapidly shift to online instruction.

The successful online teaching during the pandemic at SMU cannot be attributed to individual instructors alone, but rather to the institutional network of support. Specifically, the relative success of the department, measured qualitatively in the positive feedback received by student evaluations, and quantitatively by the maintenance of sustainable enrollment numbers in almost all language areas, can be articulated through key elements that created supported quality: Institutional Support, Technical Support, Professional Development, and Collaboration and Community.

- Institutional Support defined as an intentional effort from the administration to provide funding and guidelines to facilitate the development of online learning (distance learning).
- Technical Support as assisting faculty by providing technology (from LMS to funding for devices such monitors, videos, cameras, etc.), and professionals to help with instructional design and technical elements of teaching.
- Professional Development as providing training and expertise to create and maintain the quality of online courses (distance learning).
- Collaboration and Community as guidelines, communication, and procedures that enable the community of teaching as a community of learner as well, gives faculty a clear sense of agency and control, and creates a functional line of communication between the administration and the faculty focusing on quality of the courses.

Figure 1

Institutional Support to Create a Community of Teachers and Learners



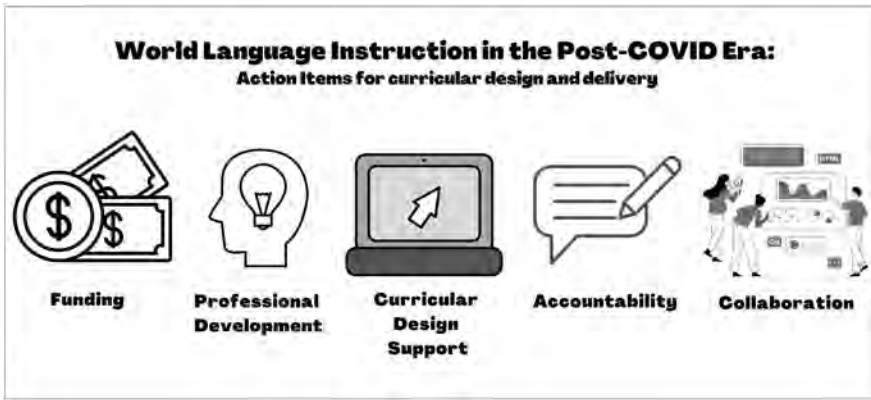
By focusing on these aspects, the purpose of the paper is to reflect on best practices that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic and to offer practical applications for the future.

This framework not only allowed faculty in the department to be pandemic ready, but also guarantees a solid structure for quality courses that can grow while maintaining high standards of the institution and providing new approaches and more clearly defined student learning outcomes. The experiences of this department led to the development of several specific practical applications and the following action items for the future that may be of use to language departments and educational technology units on various campuses:

1. **Funding:** Provide a system that gives time to and compensates faculty for professional development, course development, coordination, and improvement; compensate faculty for online curriculum design via course-load reductions, monetary compensation, and incentives for online course design projects (e.g., counting these activities toward promotion); provide compensation for online course coordinators for maintaining and improving shared courses.
2. **Professional Development:** Create and support opportunities for professional development (conferences, training, working groups, certifications, workshops).
3. **Curricular Design Support:** Provide LMS templates and training and opportunities for collaboration with instructional designers throughout the course design process to create a uniform, consistent brand aligned with institutional learning outcomes; ensure that faculty have a basic knowledge of the tools offered by their LMS and how they can be integrated in their courses, in order to create a uniform experience for students.
4. **Accountability:** Create procedures and systems of communication where roles and expectations are clearly defined, faculty have agency and control over the content of the course, but also are reviewed and supervised to maintain standards; when a course is offered in a variety of modalities, ensure that all students are able to achieve the same objectives regardless of the modality.
5. **Collaboration:** Create groups and procedures for faculty and technology departments to collaborate and interact; create groups for faculty to share resources, encourage collaboration; when multiple sections of a course are offered, share online material with colleagues (if available, copy shared course from Canvas Commons); provide channels for soliciting feedback via surveys, meetings, or presentations, about shared material and procedures and give an opportunity for faculty to offer suggestions.

Figure 2

World Language Instruction in the Post-Covid Era: Action Items for Curricular Design and Delivery



The Landscape and the Framework: The Need for Institutional Support in Online Learning

What lessons have we learned, and where do we go from here? How has this experience affected attitudes toward online learning, and how will it change the role of online learning after the crisis has passed? These are some of the questions about online teaching practices proposed by the most recent edition of the annual *Changing Landscape of Online Education* (CHLOE) report, *CHLOE 6: Online Learning Leaders Adapt for a Post-Pandemic World, The Changing Landscape of Online Education* (Garrett et. al, 2021). To understand the rapidly evolving landscape of post-pandemic iterations of in-person, hybrid, and fully online courses and the kind of technical support that is most needed and beneficial for faculty, it is necessary to consider pre-pandemic resources and the degree of training that language faculty had already received prior to the shift to remote teaching. According to the CHLOE 6 Report, although most institutions “responded quickly and well to the increased and immediate need for faculty development in online learning” (Garrett et. al, 2021, p. 41) most were underprepared. Prior to Spring 2020, many institutions offered only “optional faculty development for online teaching (54%), online course design (59%), LMS/technology training (64%), and quality assurance for online learning (55%)” (Garrett et. al, 2021, p. 41). Moreover, private four-year institutions emerged as “the least prepared for the quick shift to online learning, as 11% offered no options for online teaching, 12% did not offer training in online design, and 27% did not offer training in online quality assurance prior to Spring 2020” (pp. 41-42). Accordingly, nearly half of the world language instructors started the experience of emergency remote instruction already at a disadvantage, given their lack of familiarity with online learning modalities. Finally, resources that emerged to aid faculty in the shift, while excellent (such as the interactive tool for “Transitioning from Remote Instruction to Online Teaching and Learning,” published in Spring 2020 by *FLTMAG*, IALLT’s free practice-oriented online magazine dedicated to language technology), were often directed at individual

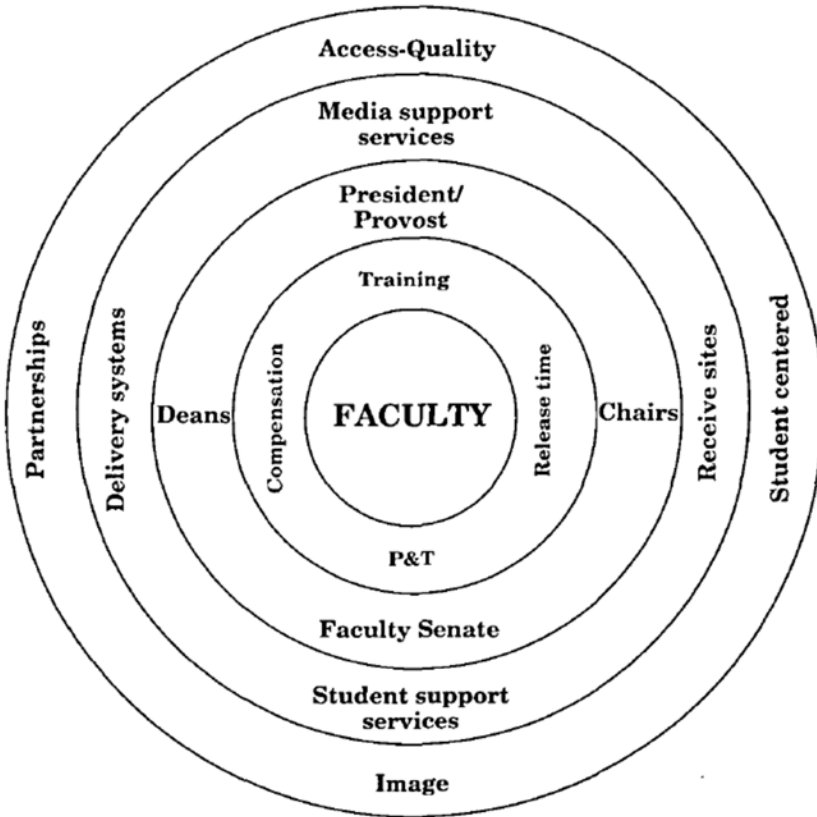
instructors who were called upon to educate themselves and redesign their courses independently from their colleagues and without institutional support.

Why were faculty so often left to their own devices? On one hand, as the 2021 CHLOE 6 report indicated, very few colleges and universities sought external assistance from third parties, instead preferring in-house technology and faculty development. On the other hand, a physical and methodological chasm often separated faculty from their own in-house resources. In a recent article published by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* on “disappointing digital teaching tools,” Jenae Cohn (2021), director of academic technology at California State University at Sacramento, identified a series of common causes for the disconnect between faculty, staff, and administrators with regard to educational technology, including poor channels of communication, lack of faculty representation on online teaching committees, and instructors who “go rogue” instead of adopting institutionally supported ed-tech tools. For Cohn, a large part of the problem is simply that “faculty and the staff operate in separate spheres on most campuses” and on any given campus educational technology staff might be siloed in IT departments, campus teaching centers, academic affairs offices or even as “part of a distinct online-learning division” (Cohn, 2021, par. 6). Cohn proposes a straightforward, two-pronged solution for better integrating research, teaching, and administration: 1) Joint faculty-administrative appointments that would allow instructors to be directly involved in decisions regarding educational technology; and 2) The direct involvement of educational-technology professionals in online teaching and research.

The notion that institutional policies (or a lack thereof) pose barriers to the active participation of faculty in post-secondary distance learning is certainly not new. In their 1995 study, Olcott and Wright outlined various obstacles preventing faculty from more actively participating in distance learning initiatives, including: Faculty attitudes related to educational technology and its effect on their control over the curriculum and their role in the classroom; structures related to compensation, training, and incentives for faculty; lack of departmental support, institutional incentives, appropriate compensation, and time; and technical difficulties (Olcott & Wright, 1995). In order to overcome these barriers, Olcott and Wright proposed the following framework:

Figure 3

Institutional Faculty Support Framework (Olcott & Wright, 1995)



While faculty are at the center of Olcott and Wright's (1995) framework, it is clear that instructors cannot participate in the process of effectively designing or delivering an online curriculum without full institutional support in the form of collaboration, compensation, training, and course releases.

A Case for Institutional Support in Developing Online Curricula

The somewhat unique case of SMU's World Languages and Literatures department (one of the largest departments in the college, with just under sixty full-time faculty members and major and/or minor programs in American Sign Language, Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Ancient Greek, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Russian, and Spanish), offers a potential model for other departments insofar as its pandemic practices were already aligned with Cohn's (2021) vision for the future and Olcott and Wright's framework. For nearly a decade, the department has fully sponsored a delegation of instructors to attend the annual ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) Convention. These delegates, in exchange for receiving departmental support for their attendance, are asked to organize and participate

in an end-of-semester roundtable in which they share best practices, new tools, and key takeaways from the convention with other members of the department. Over the past five years, not only has the number of departmental delegates grown, but there has been a marked shift from convention attendees to convention presenters (at the 2019 ACTFL convention, all but one of the delegates was a presenter) and an increase in the number of official ACTFL roles occupied by the departmental delegates, many of whom now serve as officers for special interest groups, raters, and reviewers, as a direct result of having received funding for their convention attendance. The ripple effect of this kind of institutional support is evident, as the annual roundtable is attended by nearly the entire department, and the department views its investment in ACTFL participation as extremely worthwhile in terms of professional development, visibility and image, faculty climate and moral.

At the institutional level, starting in 2016, all SMU faculty became eligible to apply for a six-week Online Teaching Faculty Training (OTFT) course developed by the Center for Teaching Excellence to prepare instructors to teach hybrid or fully online courses. The course allowed faculty to experience being online students in an environment that modeled research-based best practices for online instruction. As those who had not undergone such a training prior to the pandemic learned firsthand only in Spring 2020, transitioning from in-person to distance learning is not a “plug-and-play” process. Rather, learning to design, develop, and deliver content online in order to meet specific, targeted learning objectives takes time. Faculty training is useful for breaking down the false dichotomy between “face-to-face” and “online” environments by introducing instructors to diverse categories of online course formats and delivery method.

Table 1
Course Classifications (Allen, Seaman, & Straut, 2016, p. 7)

Proportion of Content Delivered Online	Type of Course	Typical Description
0%	Traditional	Course where no online technology used—content is delivered in writing or orally.
1 to 29%	Web Facilitated	Course that uses web-based technology to facilitate what is essentially a face-to-face course. May use a learning management system (LMS) or web pages to post the syllabus and assignments.
30 to 79%	Blended/Hybrid	Course that blends online and face-to-face delivery. Substantial proportion of the content is delivered online, typically uses online discussions, and typically has a reduced number of face-to-face meetings.
80+%	Online	A course where most or all of the content is delivered online. Typically have no face-to-face meetings.

As presented to faculty during the Online Teaching Faculty Training, the essential difference in design is not in learning outcomes, assessments, or learning paths, but in the development of communicative activities. The course facilitator, an Instructional Designer from the Center for Teaching Excellence, emphasized throughout the course that while not all interactions that occur in a face-to-face classroom can be translated into an online environment, it is possible to adapt and transform many activities to produce similar outcomes. In essence, in a face-to-face language classroom, the time dedicated to spoken, verbal interaction is usually more substantial, but it is possible to develop oral skills and promote interactions in an online environment as well.

Faculty enrolled in the Online Teaching Faculty Training gained both theoretical and practical knowledge before starting to develop their courses, and spent time reflecting collectively on how to maximize the online environment for teaching and learning their respective languages and to create effective communicative activities in an online environment. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than half of the World Languages department had already completed this training, and more than one-third had already had the opportunity to teach a fully online course for the department. The department had begun to implement an in-house online curriculum starting in 2016, creating an online sequence through which students could complete the university's proficiency-based Second Language Requirement in four of its language areas (Spanish, French, German, Italian or Latin, with additional online courses developed in Arabic, Chinese, and Spanish for Healthcare). Each course was developed by a faculty member over the course of nine-twelve months with the training, support, and evaluation of the World Languages & Literatures Online Advisory Committee, the Director of the World Languages Teaching and Technology Center, the Center for Teaching Excellence, and Academic Technology Services. In order to be certified to teach online and propose a course for development, faculty members had to obtain approval from their Area Chair via a formal Recommendation to Teach Online, co-signed by the Department Chair and Director of ATS, and complete a two-part training series (housed on Canvas, comprised of both asynchronous and synchronous components, and developed by administrators and Instructional Designers from the CTE and ATS). Faculty completed the entire training series prior to beginning their development project, during which they followed college-specific guidelines for online course development and department-specific course components (which included baseline requirements for synchronous meetings and virtual office hours).

During the one-year design process, faculty designers collaborated on the development of what Russell and Murphy-Judy (2021) have described as meaningful and open-ended activities spanning all three modes of communication, using their LMS to house a combination of synchronous texting, chatting or teleconferencing activities and asynchronous activities using discussion boards and tools such as VoiceThread (Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2021). During the development phase, a lot of innovative work went into creating activities through which students could engage academically with the material and with each other in the target language (including discussion board activities, asynchronous and synchronous video chats, auto-graded self-tests, scaffolded TalkAbroad assignments, interactive Playposit lectures).

Making the learning path more visible to the students, building performance-based assessments and rubrics into Canvas, and recording instructional videos required considerable time and effort in the development and implementation phases of the program. Once completed, all courses underwent an internal review by an Instructional Designer, the Director of ATS and the Director of the Teaching and Technology Center, followed by a period of revision and resubmission, and finally the submission of an Online Course Readiness Form completed by the designer.

Preparedness and Readiness through Institutional and Technical Support

Prior to the pandemic, the Online Teaching Faculty Training began with a self-paced, technical *Introduction to Canvas* developed by Academic Technology Services. All new course developers were assigned an instructional designer and were provided with a course template in their LMS that allowed for a uniform, streamlined process for creating electronic syllabi and modules in their online courses that clearly outlined institutionally adopted ed-tech tools (and their respective accessibility and privacy policies) that would be used for content delivery (LMS, synchronous meeting tools, tools for content creation and storage). At the departmental level, the World Languages Online Advisory Committee and Teaching and Technology Center provided an intermediary system of support and accountability, offering a series of course design workshops and creating an archive of shared materials in Canvas Commons and in shared folders online.

Online course design and management is considered a constant work-in-progress that requires input from instructors and course designers alike. Since 2017, after each iteration of their online courses, online faculty designers and instructors provide feedback via a department-wide Qualtrics survey regarding their experience with online, blended, and hybrid instruction. Survey questions include, but are not limited to, questions about faculty satisfaction with the quantity and quality of the training and pedagogical and technological support they received before and during the term, the amount of time they dedicated to course design and implementation compared to face-to-face courses, the resources they utilized for design, teaching, and assessment, and the accuracy of time-on-task estimations and other components of the online course template.

Moreover, to ensure that all World Language students enrolled in courses designed to satisfy the Second Language Requirement are able to achieve the same objectives regardless of modality (online, face-to-face, or through six-week intensive courses taught abroad), the Teaching and Technology Center oversaw a department-funded comparative study of OPI results taken from a sample of French and Italian classes over the course of multiple terms in all three modalities. Preliminary results of the study, which were presented at a session of the 2019 ACTFL Convention sponsored by the Distance Learning Special Interest Group, indicated that students who completed their Second Language Requirement in fully online courses achieved only slightly lower speaking proficiency (and slightly higher writing proficiency) compared with students in face-to-face environments. With the aim of closing this gap, further adjustments were made to the online course curriculum to integrate more opportunities for both synchronous and asynchronous speaking practice (Cabot, 2019). This was important given that the department not only has a proficiency-

based second language requirement, but all languages taught (with the exception of Latin and Ancient Greek) share the same student learning outcomes, and it is essential that the core components of the online curriculum be aligned with their equivalent face-to-face courses. All courses, regardless of their format, utilize Canvas for the assessment of the Second Language Requirement and other Common Curriculum outcomes using a set of rubrics designed by faculty-led committees under the guidance of the Provost's Office. Informal survey results from online faculty in the department over the course of four years (2018-2021) showed that in any given term, 75%-89% of our instructors felt that the level of proficiency obtained by students in our online courses was either comparable to that of students in face-to-face environments, or lower in some areas but higher in others.

Finally, to make sure that the online curriculum is treated as a dynamic, evolving program rather than a static, "one and done" set of online courses, an Online Course Coordination program and compensation model was developed and approved by the department and college to ensure that online course designers are fairly compensated for the ongoing work required to maintain, improve, and coordinate multiple sections of the courses they designed. Whereas course instructors receive the same salary regardless of modality (online or face-to-face), online courses are managed by a designated faculty member who is compensated for handling certain routine course maintenance tasks (such as updating assessments, rubrics, due dates, reading activities, etc., in the LMS for each term) and is eligible for additional course enhancement stipends for larger projects (such as the adoption of a new textbook or online platform). This model of compensation was developed to be analogous to our face-to-face multi-section courses, which are supervised by course coordinators who receive extra compensation or course-load reductions for their additional responsibilities.

This is the backdrop against which faculty from this institution faced the pandemic with a relative sense of preparedness for the shift to emergency remote instruction. Across the university, under the COVID-19 operational model, the Office of Information Technology (OIT) led the implementation of a HyFlex model of instruction for courses that were not fully remote, and instead required in-person instructors who could provide instruction to a combination of remote and in-person students. Alongside the OIT, the Center for Teaching Excellence offered workshops and training sessions related to instructional design and educational technology.

Creating and Supporting a Village through Professional Development

In addition to the training and financial support needed to design their online courses, faculty within their department benefitted from a range of professional development opportunities. The Center for Teaching Excellence offered workshops, such as *Flipping Your Classroom with Just-in-Time Teaching*, and a series of *Partner-Up Grants* that provided monetary compensation to small teams of full-time faculty members from various academic units and disciplines who collaborated in faculty-led learning pods focused on priority areas and served as a nexus for faculty to enhance their own pedagogical knowledge while sharing with colleagues. As stated on the CTE website, the grants were created "to support faculty helping one another with pedagogy; disseminate ideas more broadly across the academic year; and make

more visible the ways that faculty navigated the 2020 year.” With assistance from the CTE, OIT, and the university library system, each pod determined its own strategy for sharing the ideas and resources it produced, such as publishing materials on the university’s *Keep Teaching* website, conducting workshops with the CTE, curating short videos, or giving presentations to colleagues. Finally, the CTE and Academic Technology Services continued their pre-pandemic practice of offering a pre-semester Teaching Effectiveness Symposium (dedicated in 2021 to remote instruction) and of offering small Just-in-Time-Teaching (JiTT) grants to faculty across campus to acquire specific technology or materials for their courses. Within World Languages, such grants were used for myriad activities during the pandemic, including virtual cooking classes and museum visits. Students completing a unit about Italian professions were able to interview an Italian *pizzaiolo* and attend a virtual pizza-making lesson and dinner with their classmates; intermediate Spanish students were able to practice their language skills using interactive websites, such as Kahoot, Thinglink, and Flipgrid; and students discussing their Spanish-language internships in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex were able to use podcast equipment to create high-quality presentations.

At the departmental level, the World Languages Pedagogy Committee (PC), comprised of volunteer faculty from all language areas, met bi-weekly throughout the pandemic to address a set of tasks provided by the department’s Executive Committee pertaining to curriculum development, student learning outcomes, and the online curriculum. The support of this committee in discussions related to distance learning – such as how to address questions of academic integrity or how to assess global engagement in virtual environments – provided faculty from different language areas with a platform to share examples, best practices, and ideas, and establish uniform guidelines related to diverse matters, such as how to assess participation in virtual courses.

Support and Growth through Collaboration and Community

More than in other semesters, during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and throughout the 2020-21 academic year, cooperation among colleagues across different language areas and the creation and promotion of collaborative learning and teaching environments was a key element in the success of academic programs, the maintenance of a strong community of learners, and the capability of instructors to use institutional resources effectively and synergistically to adapt to remote, hybrid, and HyFlex models during the pandemic. Using enrollment as a metric of success during the pandemic, our preliminary data shows that student interest in world language majors and minors actually grew during the pandemic. A comparison of the number of majors and minors in 2018 versus 2021 reveals maintenance or growth in all areas except for a decrease in the number of French majors (from fifty-two in 2018 to thirty-eight in 2021, a direct result of the cancellation of study abroad programs for two consecutive summer terms), which was nonetheless counterbalanced by explosive growth in the number of French minors (from twenty-three in 2018 to fifty-one in 2021).

Because the World Languages department had already been characterized by a strong commitment to collaborative learning and teaching and building a strong

community of learners and teachers, instructors and students were well-equipped to navigate the changing face of academic life during the pandemic. Drawing on this department's model, this section will offer some possible trajectories and tips for a successful post-pandemic era for all world language instructors. At the risk of stating the obvious, it is worthwhile to reflect on the influence that a cooperative and collaborative environment has on the experience of teaching and learning, as both are inherently social processes. The absence of a shared physical space, the requirement of social distancing, and other preventative measures aimed at limiting the diffusion of COVID-19 on campus challenged these principles, but also affirmed that physical spaces are only one channel for social and linguistic interaction. It has long been suggested that Computer Mediated Communication/Collaboration can enhance and stimulate the creation of a strong community and that a community of learners and instructors should not be defined by physical constraints; however, the pandemic offered valuable opportunities to put those beliefs to the test and harness resources to turn a period of crisis into an opportunity to reinvigorate our sense of community and curricula.

In the specific case of SMU, the three communicative strands associated with the world language classroom were also those of the working environment: Cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and interaction (Oxford, 1997). Faculty applied Olsen and Kagan's (1992) definition of *cooperative learning*, according to which learning "is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others" (Olsen & Kagan, 1992, p. 8). Contextually, faculty worked towards a shared goal of *cooperative teaching*, likewise organized so that teaching becomes "dependent on the socially structured exchange of information" between instructors and in which all instructors are held accountable for their own learning/teaching and are motivated to increase the learning/teaching of others. While such "socially structured exchange" pre-dated the pandemic, the sustained effort to maintain and create venues for faculty collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic helped to reinforce that sense that "if we want teachers to teach collaboratively, they must first be exposed directly to collaborative learning contexts and experiences" (Hughes Wilhelm, 1997, p. 527).

The World Languages Teaching and Technology Center, while physically closed for the 2020-21 year, continued to offer a venue for professional development opportunities in the form of online workshops and webinars, course design, technical support, the supervision of the online curriculum, and equipment loans. In Spring 2020 and Spring 2021, the department focused its annual, faculty-led symposium, or Inter-linguistic Pedagogical Exchanges (ILPE), on *Making Language Teaching Happen During a Pandemic* and *Assessing Without Testing*, respectively. Another faculty-led initiative that continued to serve as an important professional development tool throughout the pandemic was a series of informal monthly workshops, *Taste of Teaching*, in which faculty share their firsthand experiences and discuss and reflect on specific aspects of teaching methodologies and approaches.

A final example of a pre-pandemic program that has continued to thrive under COVID-19 operations is found in the university-sponsored, faculty-led research clusters. World Languages faculty members served as conveners for four different

research clusters funded by the university's Interdisciplinary Institute on the topics of *Critical Literacies for the Digital Age*, *Global Literacy and Languages for Specific Purposes*, *Hispanics at Work: Business and Cultural Matters*, and the *Global South*. The activities of these clusters, while moved to a virtual format due to the pandemic, provided important opportunities for collaboration and professional development, such as a two-week, hybrid ACTFL OPI familiarization workshop for World Language faculty that was fully funded by the Global Literacies research cluster in May 2021. Taken together, these initiatives represented a major contribution to the overall well-being and success of the department before and during the pandemic and many of the unique ideas that arose from these events highlight how the crisis became an opportunity to re-evaluate and revise beliefs and practices about online teaching, learning, and assessment.

Due to the extensive training to teach online prior to the pandemic, the SMU World Languages faculty were able to rapidly shift to online instruction and focus their efforts on more sustainable, long-term changes to the curriculum during the 2020-21 academic year, whereas other institutions remained stuck in the *emergency remote* holding pattern (Samuels, 2020). Consequently, the Pedagogy Committee could take advantage of the fully-online instructional mode to pilot options (discussions about which had begun in 2019) for permanent blended and hybrid third-semester language courses as a means of better meeting student needs and of achieving multiliteracy and self-directed learning skills. Under the new model, in order to facilitate language acquisition and achieve institutional curriculum goals for this language level, all third-semester courses would be modified through the addition of a one-credit online lab in lieu of a credit hour that had previously been fulfilled in the classroom. During the redesign process, the Pedagogy Committee provided a rationale for the development of the hybrid course and examples of non-language-specific assignments that could be adapted for various languages and levels to foster opportunities for communication in meaningful contexts and that could be used in an online lab. Some of the assignments proposed by the Pedagogy Committee include student-curated websites, portfolio assignments, class blogs or podcast channels, digital literacy projects, and weekly partner chats. Meanwhile, the Center for Teaching Excellence offered consultation sessions with an Instructional Designer.

The pandemic provided the ideal circumstances for piloting this new model, and during the 2020-21 academic year, the department offered one third-semester French course using the new model (three credit hours taught synchronously and one credit hour delivered asynchronously via two weekly sessions). To facilitate practice in the interpretive mode, the course integrated a selection of films available in streaming (via Kanopy or Digital Campus, two streaming platforms available through institutional subscriptions), whereas the conversation platform TalkAbroad was used for synchronous interpersonal speaking activities. Presentational speaking and writing skills were developed through activities using Canvas tools. Student responses to a mid-semester survey and their feedback at the end of the semester were positive and encouraging, but the success of the pilot was a result not only of the faculty-led, re-design process, but also of the institutional support offered by various units on campus. In the mid-semester survey, students commented that they liked the course model and found it easy to navigate, and that they were progressing

(learning with quizzes and scaffolded content). In the end-of-semester course evaluation, students commented positively about their online experience, and that they benefited from the daily course structure (the independent work done two days a week, the flipped classroom model used three days a week).

Conclusions: Looking Back, Looking Ahead

The availability of institutional and technical support, professional development, and opportunities for faculty collaboration were essential to the success of the World Languages department during the pandemic and will remain so moving forward. Although the experiences and expertise gained during the disruption has fundamentally changed faculty attitudes toward distance learning and hopefully made all of us better teachers, an institutional commitment to fostering greater synergy between administration, staff, and faculty will be necessary to continue to make critical improvements to online course design and delivery. Faculty training and cross-campus collaboration must be prioritized to make continued improvements not only to online and distance learning curricula, but also to prepare instructors to approach face-to-face teaching with a new lens, and to allow faculty to explore new approaches, assessment methods, and ways of making sure that teaching and learning environments utilize the technological tools at their disposal to their full capacity.

In conclusion, the presence and strategic interaction between the four elements discussed in this paper – Institutional Support, Technical Support, Professional Development, and Collaboration and Community – are all necessary to create the conditions for success in the classroom and to offer a system of support for instructors that includes funding, professional development, curricular design support, accountability, and opportunities for sustained collaboration. As we look toward the future of world language curricula in online, hybrid, and face-to-face environments, it is evident that the success of a program cannot rely solely on the readiness and preparedness of individual faculty members and departments. It will also necessitate the development of an intentional, long-term investment on the part of the institution as a whole, and one that rises above typical pitfalls caused by diverse objectives of faculty, staff and administration, who must instead create and strive for a set of common objectives.

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