Evaluation Plan for the Office of Online Learning’s Online Fellows Program

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## Introduction

This document defines the processes that will be taken to evaluate the training program provided by the Office of Online Learning (OOL) for faculty members in the University of Georgia’s Online Learning Fellows program. This plan includes the background, purposes, stakeholders, questions and decisions, methods, instrumentation, sample, limitations, logistics, and timeline developed to evaluate the training.

This plan has been developed by four graduate students in the Learning, Design, and Technology graduate program at the University of Georgia (UGA) in order to fulfill the requirements for the graduate course e-Learning Evaluation and Assessment (EDIT 7350). The plan has been developed in consultation with staff from OOL including Karah Hagins, Flint Buchanan, James Castle, and Keith Bailey. The four authors of this plan are Stephen Bridges, Cheryl Despathy, Ben Hall, and Chris Nylund; they are the Mega Powers.

## Background

The University of Georgia’s Office of Online Learning (OOL), established in 2012, serves as a resource to faculty who seek to teach undergraduate and graduate courses online. Oftentimes, these faculty do not have prior experience with teaching online. Unfamiliar with the tools and design pedagogy necessary to teach effectively, they may fail to produce engaging and effective learning experiences for their students. The OOL established the Online Learning Fellows (OLF) program in 2013 in an effort to train UGA faculty how best to design online courses. This program has been through several iterations, including instances where the training takes place wholly online and another where training took place wholly face-to-face. While the OLF program offers some guidance in how to teach online, the primary function of the program is to train faculty in the fundamentals of online course design and associated pedagogies.

In January of 2016, the OOL launched a new OLF program. This program, with a total enrollment of sixty-one faculty broken up into nine cohorts, operated in a blended format with an online training course supported by four face-to-face meetings over the span of eight weeks. The online course is broken into 4 modules of instruction: Overview of Online Learning at UGA, Pedagogical Design in Online Courses, Creating Your Online Course, and Using Media in Online Courses. During the face-to-face meetings, cohort members meet with each other and their assigned instructional designer to discuss successes, potential pitfalls, questions, and to give feedback to one another on the creation of their individual online courses. The ultimate goal of the OLF program is for faculty to develop 25% of their course content by the completion of the program (March 2, 2016).

## Purpose

The purpose of this project is to provide our clients at UGA’s Office of Online Learning with a report outlining the efficacy and potential future viability of the newly redesigned, as of January 2016, OLF program.

## Stakeholders

The clients of this project are Keith Bailey, the director of the Office of Online Learning, as well as the office’s instructional designers: Flint Buchanan, James Castle, Karah Hagins, and Jean-Pierre Niyikora. Dan Ye, an instructional designer in UGA’s College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, is also helping to facilitate the OLF program. Primary stakeholders include the clients as well as the faculty participating in the program, the deans of the different colleges within UGA, and department heads of the respective colleges who have a vested interest in their faculty developing effective online programs. The future students of these courses are secondary stakeholders because they will be enrolled in what are (hopefully) engaging online classes.

## Decisions and Questions

The stakeholders will be looking to this evaluation to provide accurate information to support decision making on the following set of decisions:

1. Delivery options for the Online Learning Fellows will be established.
2. Modifications will be made to the Online Learning Fellows blended curriculum format to improve effectiveness and appeal.
3. Expansion options for the Online Learning Fellows will be established.

In order to make decisions informed by the best possible information, the following questions will be addressed during this formative evaluation:

1. What are the learner reactions to the program’s appeal?
2. What are the learner reactions to the program’s usability?
3. What are the learner reactions to the utility of content?
4. What corrections must be made to the e-Learning part of the program?
5. What enhancements can be made to the e-Learning part of the program?

## Methods

With the notion that qualitative and quantitative methodologies offer complimentary, instead of competing, approaches, a mixed method approach was used for this study (Rieber & Noah, 2008). Data sources included a quantitative survey of Online Learning Fellows (OLF) and two qualitative interviews of free form questions that provided more in-depth and robust data. Additionally, the team looked at how the faculty members’ performance scored in the Quality Matters evaluation process, i.e. determining if they met a certain percentage of the standards. By triangulating multiple sources of data, the team hoped to gain a fuller picture of the overall participant experience.

The primary method of data collection was conducted via a sixteen-question Qualtrics survey that was distributed by email to all participants from the January 2016 cohort. The first portion of the survey asked users to what degree did they agree or disagree with eight statements about course organization & objectives, time demands of the course, overall effectiveness, user confidence in their learning, content delivery, and instructor responsiveness. The second portion of survey asked users to rate, using a likert scale, the quality of the interactions with their instructional designer while enrolled in the OLF program. In the final portion of the survey, users were asked three open-ended questions that they were to answer in few sentences. The questions were as follows: 1. What feature of the OLF course did you feel was **most** beneficial to you as you participated in the cohort?; 2. What feature of the OLF course did you feel was **least** beneficial to you as you participated in the cohort?; and, 3. What improvements would you suggest that would improve the OLF experience?

The secondary method of data collection was through qualitative interviews of two participants who were willing to speak with a member of the team at the conclusion event. These free-flowing conversations were conducted to gather in-depth information about the user experience of the program. The interviews provided information that could not be collected in survey form and went behind the scope of the open-ended questions included in the survey above.

## Sample

A total of thirty-five OLF participants responded to the Qualtrics survey. Given the total enrollment in the course of sixty-one faculty members, there was a response rate of 57%, which was better than expected and more than sufficient for statistical reliability purposes. Two volunteer online learning fellows participated in the qualitative interview process.

## Instrumentation

To collect the quantitative survey data, the team decided to use Qualtrics, a powerful online survey tool that is available, free of charge, to UGA students, staff, and faculty. Team members simply needed to contact UGA EITS in order to gain access to a Qualtrics account. Reasons that Qualtrics was preferred over other free online survey tools, such as Google Forms or SurveyMonkey, was that the surveys have professional-looking UGA branding, the survey layouts are mobile device friendly, and the data analyzing and report generation tools are quite sophisticated. The link to the survey was distributed to OLFs at the cohort conclusion event on March 2, 2016 and via email. Qualtrics allowed the team to easily track how many surveys were begun and completed; thirty-six surveys were begun and thirty-five were completed.

## Limitations

There are many limitations to the data collected in this evaluation before questions can be answered and decisions can be made. One limitation is that the OLF participants may not have completed the 25% development of their online course and may be giving feedback at the end of the time rather than the completion of the program goal. Second, the data collection methods do not include comparing feedback to previous cohorts; the decision about methods for implementation may require additional information. Third, the learners provided estimations of hours spent engaged with the program but does not authenticate this data. Fourth, the data does not account for different instructional designers assigned to the various cohorts. Therefore, there may be one instructional designer improving or detracting from the effectiveness data in a way that serves as an anomaly but it is currently impossible to separate the data to determine this. Fifth, the survey does not evaluate if the learners volunteered to participate, or if the learners were directed to participate. This could impact the reliability of the data for purposes of decision-making about user appeal of the program.

Lastly, the evaluation is limited by the data collection. While two interview responses can hardly be viewed as representative of the whole — generalizability is not the aim of interview collection — rather, it was valuable to learn more about the nature of a participant’s overall experience with the OLF program. Further, since no observations of the cohorts or expert reviews were included the data is relying heavily on survey feedback and may suffer from an imbalanced triangulation of data.

## Logistics and Time Line

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Date | Task Due | People Involved |
| March 1st | Evaluation Plan update (in class) | Completed by: Chris, need assistance of all team members |
| March 10th | Introduction & Background | Completed by: Stephen Bridges |
| March 10th | Purposes | Completed by: Stephen Bridges |
| March 10th | Stakeholders | Completed by: Stephen Bridges |
| March 15th | Evaluation Plan draft | Completed by: Everyone. Submitted by Chris Nylund |
| March 31st | Decisions & Questions | Completed by: Cheryl Despathy |
| March 31st | Methods | Completed by: Ben Hall |
| March 31st | Sample | Completed by: Ben Hall |
| March 31st | Instrumentation | Completed by: Ben Hall |
| March 31st | Limitations | Completed by: Cheryl Despathy |
| March 31st | Logistics & Timeline | Completed by: Chris Nylund |
| March 31st | Budget | Completed by: Chris Nylund |
| April 6th | Evaluation Plan completed | Completed by: All |

## Budget

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Description** | **Hours** | **Hourly Rate** | **Cost** |
| Space rental fee | OLF Kickoff event | N/A | N/A | $200 |
| Evaluation Plan | Human Resource | 16 | $40 | $640 |
| OLF conclusion meeting | Human Resource | 4 | $40 | $160 |
| Travel to conclusion | Gas | N/A | N/A | $56 |
| OLF closeout refreshments | Food and drink for the event | N/A | N/A | $50 |
| Total |  |  |  | **$1106** |

## Bibliography

Rieber, L. P., & Noah, D. (2008). Games, simulations, and visual metaphors in education: antagonism between enjoyment and learning. *Educational Media International*, *45*(2), 77-92.