Perspectives from Nine Institutions on the Role of Self-Directed Learning Skills in Online Courses

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Agenda

• The Postsecondary Teaching with Technology Collaborative and this study
• Changes made or accelerated during the pandemic to serve students online
• Institution- and classroom-level self-directed learning (SDL) supports
• Main takeaways
The Postsecondary
Teaching with
Technology Collaborative
What is the Collaborative?

A research and capacity-building center that aims to study and improve how faculty teach and use technology to help students apply and strengthen self-directed learning skills to increase their success in online courses.
Who is the Collaborative?

*Minority Serving Institution
This study

• Interviews with 139 staff, administrators, and faculty from 9 partner institutions conducted in Fall 2021 and Spring 2022

• We were interested to learn how our partners at broad-access postsecondary institutions
  – adjusted to online learning
  – perceive the needs of students in online courses, and
  – support SDL skill development in courses

• Report to be published in late spring on https://postseccollab.org/
SDL skills that students use to manage their learning
What changes did partner institutions make or accelerate during the pandemic to serve their students online?
Most two-year colleges saw large increases in the percent of students taking at least one online course during COVID-19.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Fall 2019</th>
<th>Fall 2020</th>
<th>Fall 2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Virginia State University (VA)</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunker Hill Community College (MA)</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palm Beach Community College (FL)</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland State University (OR)</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macomb Community College (MI)</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average for all U.S. public 2-year institutions (IPEDS; 901 total institutions)</strong></td>
<td><strong>36%</strong></td>
<td><strong>70%</strong></td>
<td><strong>66%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulsa Community College (OK)</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wake Technical Community College (NC)</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odessa College (TX)</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calbright College (CA)</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Opportunities and benefits emerging from the pandemic

• Improved use of learning management systems
• Increased professional development for instructors
• Improved physical tech infrastructure and expanded software licenses
• Development of student-facing online orientation materials
Challenges with online teaching and learning

- Poorer student performance in online course sections
- Lack of meaningful communication and engagement
- Increased demands for students to apply self-directed learning skills
- Challenges especially apparent in online STEM courses
How are stakeholders at our partner institutions supporting SDL skill development in online courses?
Our stakeholders' views of self-directed learning skills

• Most did not use the term "SDL" and instead discussed related skills, competencies, and dispositions
  – Examples include: growth mindset, confidence, reflective practice, advocating for oneself, college and career navigation, metacognitive skills, self-sufficiency
  – Most did not discuss SDL skills collectively/under a single umbrella

• One administrator felt that the term "SDL" misleads students about what happens in online courses

• Despite the use of many different terms and concepts, many faculty and staff view these skills as important for students and see a role for the institution to help students develop these skills
Institution-level SDL skill development supports

• Some institutional buy-in for supporting students' SDL skills, but
  o SDL skill support is more common in online course orientations, student success courses, tutoring, and affinity group programs for targeted student groups
  o SDL skill support is less common in courses and academic departments

Wake Tech’s EPIC, an Online Teaching and Learning Initiative

• Faculty training: 30-hour basic course, EPIC Master Online Teacher certification and peer mentorship
• Course quality: eLearning Quality Standards
• Student support: eLearning Introduction orientation
Classroom-level SDL skill development supports

• Limited/uneven explicit instructional support for SDL inside online classrooms and some faculty hesitation/caution to integrate support into disciplinary courses

• When present, common examples included:
  – introduction videos
  – proactive communication with and encouragement of students
  – reflection activities after exams
  – incorporation of diverse scholars in content to foster students' sense of belonging

Real-time Discussion in Asynch Physical Geology Course

• Instructor uploads lecture video to GoReact platform
• Students contribute to comment thread (text, video, audio, doc upload, links) as they watch the lecture
• Students connect with classmates, identify needs, monitor understanding, identify new resources, obtain help
Main takeaways
Institutions have strengths they can draw upon to more intentionally and fully implement SDL supports.

- Increasingly robust professional development related to online learning
- Highly knowledgeable student services professionals
- Existing resources dedicated to supporting facets of SDL (typically offered at the institution level)

With stronger connections between student services and academic divisions, institutions may be able to increase SDL skill support in online courses, in a contextualized, just-in-time manner.
Support for students' SDL skill development likely depends on efforts at multiple levels of the institution.

**Institution/Departments**

- Elevate and prioritize SDL skills
- Develop scaled student supports, online learning resources, and PD opportunities

**Faculty/Classroom**

- Integrate and contextualize skill supports into courses
- Use culturally affirming and responsive pedagogy and build relationships with students
Thank you

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