

# 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?

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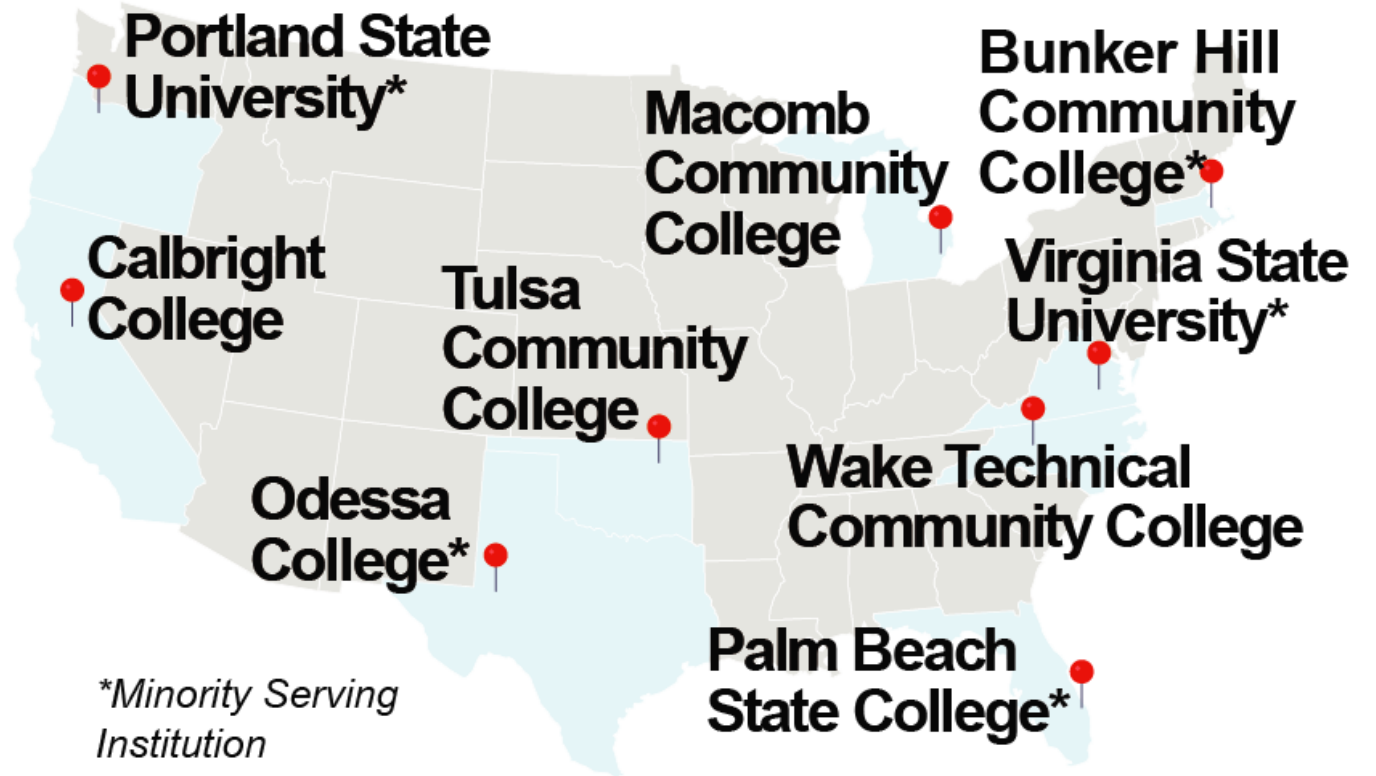
A research and capacity-building center that aims to study and improve how faculty **teach** and use **technology** to help students apply and strengthen **self-directed learning skills** to increase their success in **online courses**.

# Who is the Collaborative?

**SRI Education™**  
A DIVISION OF SRI INTERNATIONAL

**CCRC** COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
RESEARCH CENTER  
TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

**Achieving  
the Dream**



*\*Minority Serving Institution*

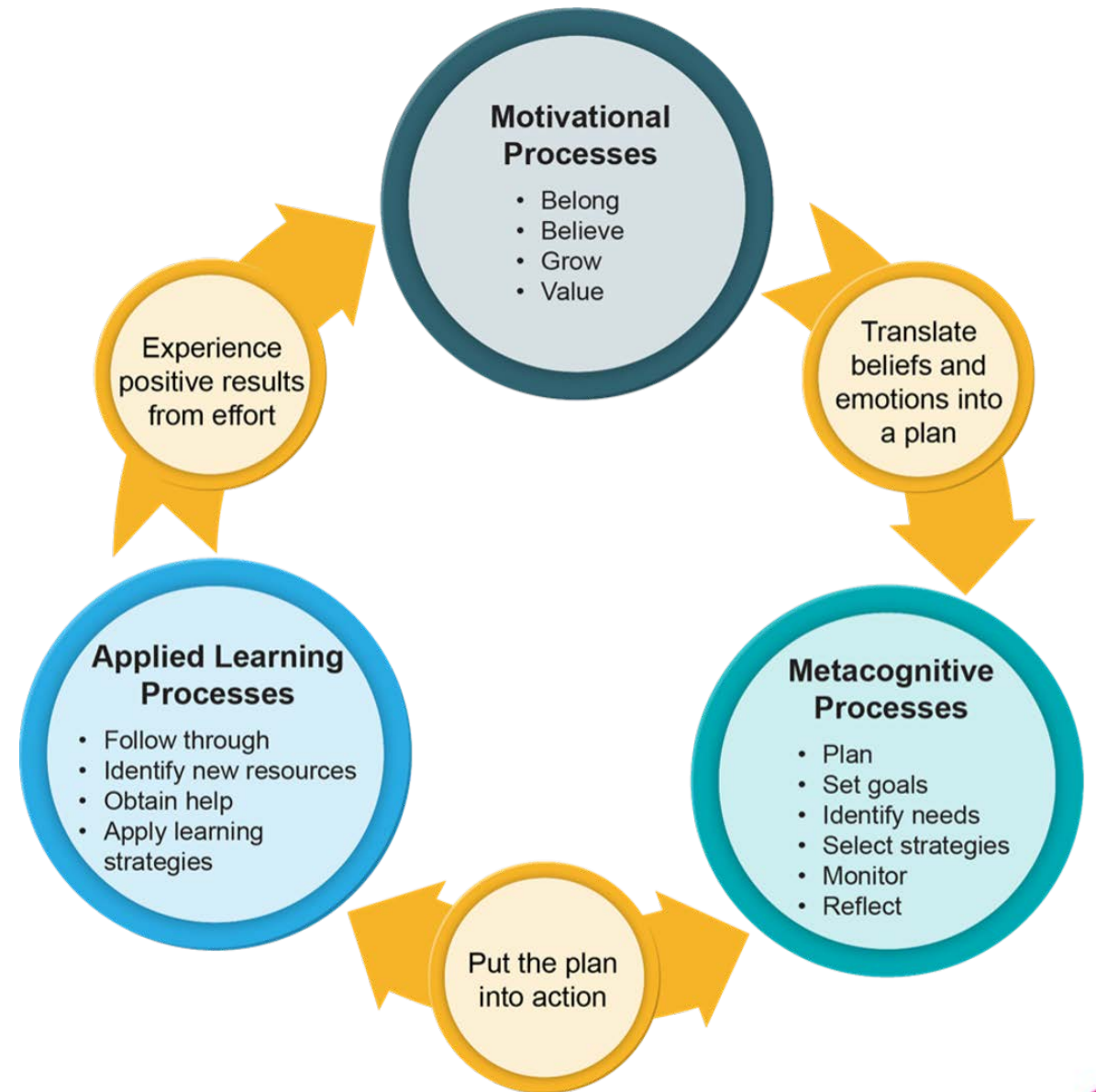
# This study



- 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.**

Institution	% of students in some/only distance education (IPEDS) Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021
Virginia State University (VA)	<1%	<1%	<1%
Bunker Hill Community College (MA)	23%	100%	96%
Palm Beach Community College (FL)	27%	96%	77%
Portland State University (OR)	35%	41%	48%
Macomb Community College (MI)	35%	64%	89%
<b><i>Average for all U.S. public 2-year institutions (IPEDS; 901 total institutions)</i></b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>66%</b>
Tulsa Community College (OK)	40%	80%	67%
Wake Technical Community College (NC)	51%	91%	77%
Odessa College (TX)	55%	68%	66%
Calbright College (CA)	100%	100%	100%

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## 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
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# 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

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- 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
  - SDL skill support is **more common** in online course orientations, student success courses, tutoring, and affinity group programs for targeted student groups
  - 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.

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- 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

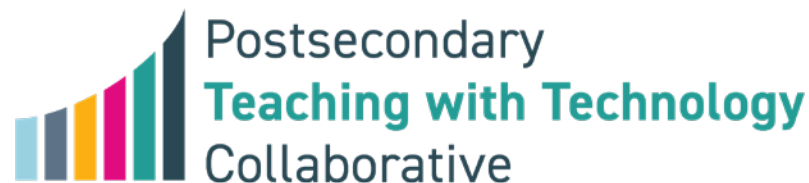


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