

Strategies to Support Self-Directed Learning in Online College Courses

Webinar Transcript – July 16, 2026

Hannah Cheever:

So welcome to this webinar hosted by the Postsecondary Teaching with Technology Collaborative, where we're really excited to share and explore our newly released Self-Directed Learning instructional model.

My name is Hannah Cheever and I'm a senior education researcher at SRI. I have been on the project since its start and I'm so excited to be able to share with you today the culmination of over five years of work.

I'm joined by quite a few of my colleagues from CCRC, SRI, and Achieving the Dream. You'll hear from Amy Brown at CCRC soon and she can introduce herself then. There are also some collaborative staff in the audience. So colleagues, please feel free to introduce yourself via the chat. And they can help answer some questions throughout the session so you may see their names pop up again as we go through.

So today we have three main goals. So we're going to introduce the Self-Directed Learning and instructional model, including its three core strategies and the resources we've created to support implementation. We will review the research and evidence behind the model, both the research and evidence that informed the development of the model and also our evidence audits impact. And finally, we're going to hear directly from the faculty and the student who implemented the model and they can share their perspective.

So at the bottom of your screen, you should be able to see a resource tab. If you click on that, you'll be able to see the two guides that comprise the instructional model in PDF form as well as a link to our website, which has even more resources and information.

So throughout our session, please feel free to put questions into the Q&A and any kind of reflections in the chat. We'll have time for audience Q&A at the end where we'll answer your questions in real time. If we run out of time to answer your specific questions, we will be sharing our contact information at the end, so feel free to reach out to us directly.

So what is the Collaborative? The Collaborative is a research and capacity building center funded by the US Department of Education's Institute for Education Sciences. And it's a five-year center that aimed 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 STEM courses. So we'll go into more depth in a moment about what we mean by Self-Directed Learning skills. But the Collaborative is a partnership between SRI Education, the Community College Research Center, CCRC, Achieving the Dream, and nine broad access institutions, which you can see on the screen here.

So now we'll turn it over to Amy to describe the what and the why of the Self-Directed Learning in general as well as our model specifically.

Amy E. Brown:

Thanks so much, Hannah. My name is Amy Brown. I'm a research associate at the Community College Research Center. And like Hannah, I've been on the project since the beginning, so this is a really exciting time for the project and for us to engage with all of you and share what we've been learning.

So I'll start by introducing our rationale for a focus on online courses, and then I'll introduce what we mean by Self-Directed Learning or SDL. It may sound like we're downplaying the important role of

instructors in course design, but in fact, this framework recognizes the interplay between students, faculty, and the learning environment.

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So many of you likely have had direct experience with online learning either as a faculty member, an instructional designer, a student, and you may have experienced the unique challenges of teaching and learning in online and hybrid courses. While these modalities broaden access to higher education, students in these formats frequently report feeling isolated and disengaged. And with less face-to-face contact with faculty and peers, online courses can place greater demands on students to manage their time and their learning processes.

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So for this center, we largely focused our activities in the collaborative in STEM courses because previous research and our partners reported additional unique challenges in these disciplines, including heavy content demands and stronger belonging uncertainty experienced by students. So our goal was to develop strategies that could increase course success to broaden the pipeline to STEM degrees and careers. While our research context was STEM courses, you'll see that the Self-Directed Learning instructional model was intentionally designed to be applicable to any discipline and course type, and it has that flexibility built into it.

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Now I'll introduce the framework for Self-Directed Learning, which has served as a foundation for the Collaborative's research and development work. So we developed this framework early on in the five-year project. The framework integrates several bodies of overlapping research to illustrate relationships between three reciprocal learning processes, all of which have strong evidence of improving post-secondary student outcomes.

So at the top, you'll see motivational process, which include foundational emotions and beliefs that energize students' approach to learning. So that could include sense of belonging, self-efficacy, agency and growth mindset. Metacognitive processes translate those emotions into an action plan as students set goals for their learning, identify their learning needs and learning strategies, monitor their progress and reflect on what's working. Then students put that plan into action through a set of applied learning processes, which includes selecting appropriate study strategies and seeking help when needed. The cycle continues as students' learning experiences influence their motivation. We have a resource in that QR code and on our publications tab in our website that explores the development of this framework in greater detail.

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So now I'll move into what we call the Self-Directed Learning instructional model. So we used this basis of research and the framework that I just described to develop a set of classroom interventions that we call the Self-Directed Learning instructional model, and this was what was just recently released on our website.

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So I really want to start with emphasizing the wide array of partnerships that we were able to develop across the five years. So the research team at SRI and CCRC is really grateful for all the insights, efforts, and support that our partners provided to develop and continuously improve this model. We engaged with faculty who co-designed and tested the model as well as experts at Achieving the Dream who provided critical insights to advance its design and students who offered feedback over several iterations.

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The Self-Directed Learning instructional model is a set of three evidence-based strategies to help college students manage their learning in any content area course. I'll describe the strategies in just a small amount of detail, and then Hannah will describe them in a little more detail but we encourage you to visit our website for further detail and materials about these strategies.

So the first strategy we call SDL videos. It's a set of three 10-minute videos that focus on sense of belonging, growth mindset, and time management. Each video includes a corresponding set of closed and open-ended reflection questions on those concepts. The second strategy we call SDL prompts. It's a series of prompts that can be administered at key points during a course. Those prompts can encourage students to reflect on their workload, understanding and learning needs during the current week. Instructors can use an assessment wrapper around a major assignment or exam, and there's a final reflection at the end of the course that's in the form of a letter or video to a future student. The final strategy we call SPIN, which stands for student peer interaction and networking. And that strategy includes two parts. First, instructors use an introductory questionnaire to get to know students in the class and to help them get to know each other. And then students engage in content-related collaborative activities that include a reflection tool.

So across all three of these strategies, there may be components of them that sound familiar to you, but what we've done here is try to bring them together in an organized fashion and think about the ways that they can be implemented at different time points during the course.

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So this visual helps to show how the strategies are designed to reinforce the three SDL processes to tackle key challenges in the online learning context. So videos and SPIN help develop a sense of belonging that builds social connections and motivation. Prompts and videos encourage students to plan time for coursework, reflecting on their progress to develop confidence and self-efficacy. And SPIN and prompts encourage students to understand when and how they need to seek help. Those are among some of the ways that they build on Self-Directed Learning processes. There are further ones as well.

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So I'm going to share just in brief how we got to the point of releasing this Self-Directed Learning instructional model. And there were a series of activities where we were able to use research and practice to inform the design. So we conducted a series of iterative research studies to design and refine the instructional model between 2021 and 2025. And this instructional model is grounded in research and real world problems of practice featuring evidence-based strategies designed for online learning co-developed with faculty, instructional leaders, students, and other experts.

In our early phases of research, that work affirmed that these skills are really important for student success in post-secondary settings and that many students need support to develop these skills. And then the three strategies themselves were adapted from evidence-based interventions that were documented as effective in the literature and the collaborative worked with co-design partners to adapt them for use in online courses.

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I'm going to share just a couple key findings from our research and our publications share further findings in greater detail. So first, faculty found the instructional model feasible to implement. So this instructional model is freely available, flexible, and easy to implement. It offers adaptable materials, low effort strategies for faculty and students and plug and play content that can be used in any LMS, learning management system. The collaborative conducted three studies that all included a focus on whether the strategies and model would be feasible to implement. Faculty in the studies taught a range

of course types and modalities, including fully asynchronous, hybrid, and varied course lengths ranging from four-week summer terms to traditional six-week terms and everything in between. In surveys and interviews with faculty, they reported that for the most part, the strategies were easy to implement. You'll note that SPIN is the outlier here with only about half of faculty reporting that it was easy to implement.

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Second key finding that we wanted to share is that the Self-Directed Learning strategies are valuable to both instructors and students. So the pilot study that we conducted most recently shows that this model delivers real value. There's high student participation and actionable insights that instructors were able to use to adjust their courses in real time. So they were able to use student responses to inform their understanding of what students could understand or were having challenges with, and then that informed their teaching moving forward in the term.

So in interviews, even some students reported that the strategies that may not have been valuable to them personally could be valuable to other students. And nearly 90% of faculty respondents felt that SPIN was valuable even though it was perceived as the most challenging to implement.

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So I'm going to share our most recent research publication, which is a research brief that shares findings from our pilot study. There were 24 instructors that participated in the pilot study, including the faculty member who is on the panel today, and they came from four different community colleges and one university. Activities in this pilot study included interviews with faculty and students as well as administrators, surveys of faculty and students, and an analysis of course outcomes. And the study found that faculty and students perceived the instructional model as valuable and distinct from typical practice in online courses.

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So there are even more research publications that go into these findings with more detail. We have work that shares about the Self-Directed Learning framework and reviews evidence-based Self-Directed Learning interventions and publications that feature faculty and student experiences, findings from rapid cycle evaluations that preceded the pilot study and more publications on the way. So we will be sharing them via our listservs and they will appear on our website in the coming weeks. I'm going to turn it back to Hannah.

Hannah Cheever:

Great. Thank you, Amy. So now we're going to take a little bit of a deeper dive into the instructional model itself and the resources that we've created to support implementation, including a course implementation guide and a campus resource guide. So as a reminder, you can find these using the resource button below as well as the links that are in the chat as well.

So the first resource is the course implementation guide, and this is a resource that's really targeted at faculty to help them plan to implement and actually implement the instructional model in their course. So it includes an overview of the model itself and then detailed instructions for faculty to integrate the strategies into online courses and includes ready-to-use text implementation supports and optional adaptations for different course links and types.

Within the course implementation guide, we also include resources to structure when you should implement these strategies as the activities are best administered during certain parts of the course. So for example, the SPIN questionnaire and those first two videos, the SDL series on that sense of belonging and time management, they work really well at the beginning of the course. It really helps to set the

foundation around motivation to support students in building the sense of belonging and community in a class. Throughout the term, the growth mindset video really sets the stage for being resilient in the face of challenges, perhaps the first major assessment, and building their confidence and self-efficacy. The assessment wrapper engages students in metacognitively evaluating their performance and considering different learning strategies to improve their performance. The final message to a future student really serves as a culminating activity and it supports motivation, specifically growth mindset for both the students writing the message and those potentially receiving it if faculty share it with future students.

And you can see that throughout the course we have this flexible reinforcement of the SPIN collaborative activities and the reflective prompts, and they really reinforce the habits of metacognitive processes and progress. So checking and adjusting their learning strategies, self-reflection, and then the applied learning skills of really following through on those selected learning strategies and seeking help from peers when maybe those selected learning strategies aren't the most effective and how they can change course.

Faculty. We have this detailed pacing guide, but faculty have flexibility based on the context of their course. For example, add drop periods or course length. Really the goal is just to have your students exposed to all of these strategies across the course of a term. The model has been implemented in four week, five-week, and eight-week courses and other course durations. And faculty can adjust based on their course length. So as I mentioned, we have detailed suggested pacing guides in the course implementation guide as well as a template planner that you can use to fill in with your specific course content to map out how the strategies align with your course content.

And so we have created these strategies as an integrated model, but also you can pick and choose which strategies are most effective that you might want to start with based off of needs of your specific students as well.

So as a reminder, the first strategy is these three SDL videos each aligned with a specific skill. So it really aims to build students' awareness about proactively developing a sense of belonging to combat that imposter syndrome that is often present in online and often present in online STEM courses. And it really builds the understanding of a growth mindset and that intelligence is not set in stone so that through challenge and hard work, you can improve that.

The other video really focuses on the importance of developing a system for time management. It's not just regular time management, but really understanding how to space out your learning and based on an honest assessment of what you know, what time you have available, what you need to know and what you need to do to learn effectively.

So each of the videos are similarly structured, so they're about 10 minutes long and they have those reflection questions that Amy mentioned at the end. So in the course implementation guide for each video, we not only include a link to the video itself, which is on YouTube. We also have recommendations for alignment with course pacing, a transcript for each of the videos if for accessibility reasons you want to share just the transcript. And then the reflection questions that can be assigned via discussion board, actual assignment or survey, and instructions that you can copy and paste directly into your LMS. And so we develop these instructions in collaboration with our student fellows so that they can be really accessible to your students. So we provide a wealth of resources around the videos.

So the second strategy as a reminder are three types of prompts. And so the first are reflective prompts, and then we have an assessment wrapper and then a final reflection in the form of a message to a future student. So students can answer the prompt questions in short paragraphs that aim to really increase their metacognition, really thinking them and prompting them to evaluate their own performance and adjust their learning strategies. The reflective prompts should be administered at least

twice in the course, or at least that's what we recommend. And the assessment wrapper is around a major assessment and the final message at the end.

In the course implementation guide we include text and instructions for the prompts that again, you can copy and paste directly into your LMS. And we also include some guidance around potential customizations or adaptations around the prompts and the specific language in the prompts so that you can adjust them to meet the specific needs of your students in your course. And we've gathered these from conversations with faculty who have participated in our research.

So the final strategy is SPIN. SPIN has two components and the course implementation guide provides resources around both. So the first is that introductory questionnaire. And this asks students to share non-academic information to help get to know each other better, find shared experiences, and promote a kind of feeling that they can bring themselves, their full selves to a course.

So the guide includes a bank of ready-to-use questions that you can again, copy and paste directly into your LMS. And these are questions like, "What are your hobbies? What are your activities? What time of day do you usually do schoolwork?" And the guide actually provides examples for how you can use those responses. So for example, faculty can summarize common interests or spotlight a wide range of special talents in the course, but you can also use the questionnaire data to inform instructional activities. So for example, by creating groups based off of what time do they usually work. If there's a group of folks that tend to work at Friday evening because that's the only time they can, maybe you put them in a group together so they can have more opportunity to collaborate.

The second part is SPIN are the Collaborative activities, and they provide students an opportunity to work with peers in a meaningful shared academic task within the course. And so we know that assigning group work and online courses is often a challenge. So we have specific examples of activities for online work as well as guidance on best practices to support how to set up and have those group activities be successful. So in addition to the actual activities, it also includes a collaboration reflection tools. And this is a tool that students view before they begin working together. And then they actually complete it afterwards so that they can reflect on their work together as a group, not just content-related, but also in their group norms and habits. What worked well, what didn't, what can you improve moving forward in other group work?

And this also allows them to connect it to an idea of working together in general, which is a skill that students will need beyond just the courses. So again, the guide not only includes the ready-to-use text, but also recommendations for how to design those activities and specific examples of group activities from our research.

So the second resource is the campus resource guide, and it's really focused on institutional leaders. And this guide has three main parts. So the first is the science behind Self-Directed Learning, and this is really going into more depth around the research and theory behind the strategies and their impact on student learning. There's some tips for college leaders for how to adopt the model into online courses within and across departments. So a little bit more at scale than just one course.

And then finally, we have resources for educational developers. So these are practical tools and resources for staff who support professional learning to introduce the faculty of the model. So it includes an introductory workshop for a training session, introducing the model and how to implement it, an optional guide for a PLC for a more intensive and sustained professional learning experience, and three additional touchpoints for faculty to build community and support for integrating the SDL strategies into their courses. So it not only helps the faculty implement the model, but also provides supports across the course and the term to build a community of faculty who are implementing it so they can learn from each other, figure out best practices together.

So as part of the Campus Resource Guide, we have created these two additional slide decks. And the first slide deck is what I mentioned. It's kind of a introductory workshop with supporting materials to give education developers the tools to facilitate a workshop or it can actually be assigned asynchronously. So if you want to just send it out, people can review the slides and the notes to know how to implement and then integrate the three strategies into their courses. So like I said, it's intended to be used as a full length hour-long workshop, but it can be adapted for shorter meetings. So there's modular format. So maybe you just do 10 minutes at one session, 10 minutes at another session.

So the second slide deck really provides the background, the rationale, and an overview of the model. So these slides are for more institutional leaders to introduce the Self-Directed Learning instructional model and really make the case for its adoption. So it shows why it's important, how you can implement it into your institution specifically.

And so now we're excited to share voices from the fields, which is what I'm sure that you guys are all actually here for. So we want to hear from a student and a faculty member who participated in the pilot study and implemented this model. So if I could ask Chey and Nikki to come on video.

So I just want to say thank you so much for joining us. Nikki is a pathway coordinator and an associate math professor from Odessa College. And she's joined by a student Chey Natividad from Odessa College as well. So we have prepared a few questions for them, but feel free to put your own questions into the Q&A and we'll have time for audience questions after.

And so I want to start with a question about, can you really tell us how you use these instructional strategies? We'll start with you, Nikki. How many courses did you use them in? How did you implement them? What was your experience?

Nikki Handley:

Sure. So I was approached to do the pilot about a year ago. And even after 25 years of teaching math, I'm still looking for ways to improve and make my courses better. So I jumped at the chance to do the pilot. It was extremely easy to implement. All the resources were there. It was literally a copy and paste and to figure out my pacing of it, like you said, the intro would be at the beginning. So once that I figured out how to put it in, I've used it every semester since then. I typically teach eight courses a semester for in-person and for online, but the ease of using it was the best thing for me. So I would just copy and paste. It all benefited the students. In the past, I've done different types of discussion boards. I would even put in review questions as a discussion board. I teach math. But I realized this information was more important and useful for my students long-term than one of my review questions or the other things that I was using.

I noticed also that these questions seemed to go a little bit more in depth. I'd always done an intro discussion board, but having students talk a little bit more about themselves, their background, are they working, do they have kids, do I have athletes, to me, that helped my web students make better connections as well as my face-to-face students, better connections with students in the class to realize that they're probably going to take other classes with these students with the same majors. So I really appreciated the little bit more in depth that these questions went.

The wrap up, a letter to future students, I have changed that to what advice you would give to future students. And that tends to be one of my favorite ones to go back and read. I did a session today for my new online web class and I brought that up, "This is the piece of advice last term students are given to you so look at what they said" and hopefully they'll use some of it. But I liked the idea and it was very easy to implement and I still use them.

Hannah Cheever:

Great. Yeah, it's great with the message to a future student or advice to a future student to bring that to your others next course as well. Show them the voices of the students.

So Chey, what course or courses did you use the strategies in and what activities did you engage in?

Cheyenne Natividad:

So I first used it with Ms. Handley in her math class. I have carried it into other courses that I've taken since taking her class, there was a prompt and it was something along the lines of, "What do you feel like you mastered this week and what do you feel like you need a little bit more help with?" And I feel like that really helped me to manage my time and plan my week to know, "Okay, I'm already doing pretty good on this. I don't need to focus that much on this, but this other idea needs a lot more work so I can plan accordingly and maybe not procrastinate so much," you know?

Hannah Cheever:

Yes, I think we all struggle with procrastination.

Amy E. Brown:

Chey, I'm going to follow up with another question. Just curious, did you take any online courses before this math course with Ms. Handley? And then also, how was the online course experience different when you were using these strategies versus before?

Cheyenne Natividad:

Well, I had not taken a class in years, and then I had jumped right back into school and I was with Ms. Handley. I think that actually helped me a lot because I was jumping right back into it and I wasn't used to being in school anymore. So having these resources to help me in these strategies, it helped me so much to set my goals and actually reach them. So I had taken a class, an online course where I was just a hot mess in there. I wasn't planning accordingly. I was kind of just all over the place. And so looking back on that course, what I've learned from this, it would've helped so much in that class because it really does help you manage your time better and you can actually plan your tasks accordingly and make sure that you're getting your things done.

Amy E. Brown:

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

Nikki, I just wanted to ask how things changed in your courses when you started using the strategies. And you touched on this a little bit, and I'm wondering if you saw any short-term or long-term changes for students or for your own experience as an instructor.

Nikki Handley:

I think the biggest impact was what it made on the students and how it was going to help the rest of their college classes. As one of my final discussion boards, it's, "What did you like the best about the class? What would you change and what's your advice to future students?" And a lot of them liked getting the strategies, learning how to manage their time, a little bit more information on meeting people in the class, learning how to study, doing the pre-assessment instead of just asking students, "How did you study? How do you plan to study?" It gives a lot of prompts and I could tweak it to match what we have here at Odessa College. "Did you work with a tutor? Did you go to the STEM center? Did you do the review? Did you do a study group?" So it not only asks them how they prepared, but then it

puts in other ideas I feel like to help them prepare. And students can only benefit from this for now and for all of their courses in my opinion.

Amy E. Brown:

I appreciate you bringing up how the strategies encourage a proactiveness. Yeah, it's great.

Hannah Cheever:

And so you both sort of touched on this, but I'd love to dive a little bit deeper into thinking about what have you taken away from your experience using these strategies and thinking specifically, is there anything you now do differently or are there impacts or impressions that you've carried on into other classes or other courses? And we'll start with you, Chey.

Cheyenne Natividad:

So I have taken a few classes since having Ms. Handley's class and learning these strategies. I think that one prompt really stuck with me, it just helps so much for me to reflect on everything I've learned throughout the course. And I can identify that I'm doing really good on one thing and maybe not so great on something else, and I know that I need to work on that. And if I need to ask for help, I don't feel shy or embarrassed about it because you're already kind of in that growth mindset. So yeah, I feel like that just has really stuck with me and I've been able to carry that throughout the rest of the courses that I've had since taking her class. So I manage my time so much better and I get assignments done so much more effectively.

Hannah Cheever:

Great to hear. I will say that even in the development of the strategies, I feel like I have better time management now. I practice some of those best practices as well.

So same question for you, Nikki.

Nikki Handley:

I'm sorry, repeat the question.

Hannah Cheever:

The question is really what have you taken away from your experience in using these strategies? Is there anything you do differently now or that you've carried into your other courses?

Nikki Handley:

I use some of all the strategies in all of my courses. Like you said, the group one is the most difficult to implement, especially in a web class. But time management and quickly getting to know your students and the students getting to know each other is critical. Our college runs on eight-week terms, so time management is critical for my students because eight weeks just flies by. But I love the strategies. They are so easy to implement. I still use them in all my classes. I have them in our master's shell so that when they're copied, they're there, and they're easy to tweak.

Amy E. Brown:

Great. So in somewhat of the spirit of the message for the future student, I'm curious what recommendations you might have for others, both students and instructors who might consider using these strategies.

So Chey, is there anything that you learned using these strategies that you would want to communicate to other students for them to know or maybe do differently when they're taking courses online?

Cheyenne Natividad:

I think different things work for different people, of course. So that one really stuck with me and I'm sure that some of the other ones stuck with other people. So I feel like they're all kind of important and they can all work for somebody different.

I think you also have to know your crowd, right? So they have to be open to wanting it, but just putting the opportunity out there for them to take it I think is the first step, sort of. So again, the time management and being able to reflect and everything like that, I think that is something that I would heavily push out to future students and even to educators to plant that seed and let them take it and run with it. Like, "You know what? Maybe evaluate what you've got going on." And then you can understand, like, "Okay, I can do this and I can do that," and it makes such a big difference.

Amy E. Brown:

Thanks so much.

Nikki, do you have any advice or recommendations for faculty who might be looking to improve engagement or student skills in their online courses?

Nikki Handley:

Well, I would recommend try it. You're not hurting anybody, you're not hurting anything. These strategies will only help your students. If it doesn't reach every student, just helping a small group is better than not helping them at all. But like Chey said, some people need more help with their time management skills, some people need more help or some students need more help with their pre-assessment, getting ready for a test. Post-assessment, think about how you did on the test. Do we need to reevaluate how you prepared before the test instead of doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results? But I just don't understand why you wouldn't try some of these because like I said, they are very easy. It is copy and paste and your students in the end will truly appreciate the knowledge they gained from it.

Amy E. Brown:

Thank you, Nikki and Chey, for sharing.

We're going to turn now to questions that folks are submitting using the Q&A function. So if you would like to submit a question regarding anything we've discussed today, please do so now using the Q&A button at the bottom of the Zoom window. We'll try to get to as many of your questions as possible. And we'll also put our contact information in the chat, so please feel free to reach out to us if you have any questions or feedback following today's webinar.

So I'm going to start just with the questions we have in the Q&A currently. And again, please add more as you think of them. So Karen Stout is wondering if there are any barriers to using these strategies in eight-week shortened academic terms. I know Odessas teaches most of their sections this way. So I wonder, Nikki, if you could speak to that.

Nikki Handley:

Yes, absolutely.

Karen, you just want to have it all lined out before your term begins because eight weeks goes so quick, like you mentioned, that you definitely need to plan where you're going to put them in. But I already did discussion boards, so it wasn't as if I was adding extra items into my schedule or my calendar. I just edited what I was doing and put these, replaced it with these.

Hannah Cheever:

Yeah. And I think there's also inherent flexibility in the model itself. If you can only do the reflective prompts one time in an eight-week course as opposed to twice, we allow for a lot of flexibility in the model itself.

And Chey, I actually have a question for you. You mentioned really knowing your students and getting them on board. So what advice do you have for faculty for how to incentivize their students to engage with this? I think you were like, "This will build your metacognitive skills," I mean, students won't be like, "Let's go." So how would you suggest framing these strategies?

Cheyenne Natividad:

I got really lucky with who my professor was because she is just so loud in the best way possible. Okay, Ms. Handley teaches math class. I am not good at math. And the subject can be interchangeable, whatever class for whatever student you have. But I was not going into her class looking forward to what I was about to learn, but she made it so fun and so interesting. And she made lots of little jokes and stuff like that and things that still stick with me now that I've had her class already so long ago, but I still think about these silly little math jokes, but they helped me and they worked and they got me through her class.

So I think just making it fun, making it engaging and having little tips and little tricks that will linger in the back of your student's mind, whether they want it to or not, but they're going to think about it a year from now and be like, "Oh, I remember when my math teacher said something about a dog." Just make it fun, make it interesting, and it's going to stick.

Amy E. Brown:

Great.

Nikki, I'm going to follow up with a related question about engagement and then we'll jump back to the questions in the Q&A. So wondering about the pros and cons that you're seeing in terms of implementing the strategies using discussion boards versus assignments that students have to complete or other methods you might be using.

Nikki Handley:

I predominantly use them as discussion boards and I have my students reply to my prompt and they have to also reply to classmates with multiple sentence answers. So it wasn't very time-consuming on my end or the student's end really in my opinion. So it was easy to do that.

The growth mindset, I did that one as a journal, so it would just be between the student and I instead of the discussion board. Some of the others I think lend themselves to the discussion board so everybody can get to know everybody's information, but those I did as a journal.

And I see the question from Louise about using some of those strategies gave you new insights. It did. The time management is probably the biggest one. Students come into our classes really not being used to the eight-week format and a lot of our students work, so it's really important that they learn how to manage their time so that they can be successful and on top of their game.

Hannah Cheever:

Kind of a follow-up question for you, Nikki, on that as well, in terms of, can you speak to the insight into your students that you're getting from these strategies that you wouldn't normally have? So you're getting a wealth of information from your students about their learning processes, their plans. Did you feel like that was helpful?

Nikki Handley:

Oh, definitely. You're used to students giving you excuses. You get the emails all the time and you're kind of like, "Okay, here's another one. Here's another one." But after you go back and you read their introductory discussion board and you realize that they are taking care of children, they're taking care of an elderly parent, they're working, and you kind of feel more connected to them. I try to have a relationship that my students are honest with me and I'm honest with them. So that to me really, really helps know my students and be able to understand where they're coming from.

Amy E. Brown:

I'm going to bring up the question that Karen asked about efforts at Odessa to help more faculty gain access to these resources to use them beyond the pilot. And I know Brian Jones, who's an administrator at Odessa, did give a response about the instructional leadership team working on utilizing these strategies beyond the pilot and also in the workforce CTE programs.

I didn't know, Nikki, if you had anything to add about what the use of the strategies has looked like at the college among any of your colleagues that you might be aware of. And then... Yeah, go ahead. Sorry.

Nikki Handley:

We had several people across disciplines do the pilot. So a lot of different departments have been exposed to it and we're going to continue to do more training on those probably this fall semester as well.

Amy E. Brown:

Hannah, I just wanted to ask a similar question to you, if you had anything to share about across the various research studies, what you've observed in terms of faculty using the strategies across multiple terms or what might change between the first time they use it versus using it in subsequent terms.

Hannah Cheever:

Yeah, I mean, I feel like we've had a lot of faculty who have participated, have participated in multiple semesters, which we always take is a good sign. And I think that you learn more about your students for your specific course. So even if the introductory questionnaire might seem redundant between multiple courses, you're still learning more about the students in your specific course and building the community within that course as well.

And a lot of the prompts are often just best practices to self-reflect throughout a course. So it's best practice to have students reflect on that every week regardless of the course, so across all the courses.

So it definitely is a value add to have the community, both for students to feel like they have a sense of community in their own courses, but also for faculty to learn from each other. I feel like we found a lot in the research studies that faculty really enjoyed being like, "Oh, that's how you set up the LMS for the prompts? Can you send me the course shell?" And sharing practices. So it was very much a economies of scale once multiple faculty started implementing it.

And we have another question about advice for faculty who feel like they don't have time to use these strategies in their classes. As we know, many faculty have a lot of competing demands and especially with STEM when they're such content-heavy courses, it's really hard to fit in another kind of activity or assignment.

Nikki Handley:

I can answer that one. Like I said, I teach math. In the past, some of my discussion boards were math-related. I would assign every student one review problem to work and post explaining how to work it. But I just feel some of these discussion board prompts could easily replace that one. Yes, they were working a review question. They still have to work the review. We're just not making that a discussion board activity. And so to me, it benefits my student more to use this particular discussion board activity. It doesn't take extra time because my students have a discussion board every week so it's not anything different that I did before this pilot that I'm now doing afterwards.

As far as extra work, I just replaced one of mine with these. So it's easy to implement if you are willing to switch out a few things. Most people in a web class have some sort of introductory discussion board. So just taking some of their topics in their intro and looking at how you can relate their intro topics to what your student population is, it's easy to mesh those together.

Hannah Cheever:

And we intentionally design the strategies to be light lift and they can be integrated and embedded into the activities that faculty already have in their courses. So the main shift isn't necessarily adding another assignment, but as Nikki said, it's reframing some of the assignments that you may already do or adding one extra question to the assignment that you already do to be more intentional about, "Okay, this is the point behind this. We are doing this introductory questionnaire" and then sharing the response out so students see the value in it and understand why they're doing it and building their own self-directed skills.

So I'm not sure if anybody has any other questions. Wait for the teacher wait time. Well, okay. So then thank you all. Thank you, Nikki and Chey for joining us and sharing with your insight. All of your input as well as all students and the faculty across the five years has been priceless to creating these strategies that we have.

Amy E. Brown:

Yeah. There's one more question we can-

Hannah Cheever:

Oh, apologies.

Amy E. Brown:

I'll read this. So Mary's asking, "If I have to teach all types of learners with tons of learning to cover, would it be more helpful to use these strategies to keep the students engaged?"

Nikki, would you like to jump in?

Nikki Handley:

Yes, I think so. I think your students would appreciate. I know my students would rather take a look at time management versus doing a math assignment any day or quickly do a pre-assessment or a post-assessment. I think I will also break up your subject content if you're just talking about history every day and then they get to go online and do something different for the moment, I think it will help keep them engaged most definitely.

Amy E. Brown:

I was going to add to what Nikki shared, and I think it's connected a little to Chey, your comment that students are going to come to the strategies with what they're looking for. And there may be some students that encounter strategies and they might think, "Oh, I understand this already. I'll do the activity, but I don't need additional practice." And there may be students that really dig in and approach it as, "This can really be a great learning opportunity for me in the moment and for me looking ahead." And these strategies were implemented in co-requisite course sections, so we've also seen these strategies implemented with a wide range of students who are enrolling in those courses. And any of these courses that we're talking about are going to have a wide range of students given that they're being implemented in open and broad access institutions. So I think that there's some piece of students engaged differentially with the strategies and hopefully in ways that feel meaningful to them individually, but it might look different for different students.

Hannah Cheever:

We just want to thank you all again so much for joining and Nikki and Chey for being here and sharing your insight. We just want to close by sharing a document that we're actually currently working on finalizing. And so our work has contributed much to the field's understanding of how to support college students, learning habits specifically in online courses, but also more broadly, but it also raised a lot of new questions, identified gaps and sparked ideas for future direction for research. So we are creating this learning agenda and it really shares insights from the Collaborative's research and development efforts, but also identifies those kind of critical knowledge gaps and then prioritizes questions for investigation beyond the center. And they're aligned with four major themes. So design and development, implementation, measurement, and then impact.

So for example, under design and development, some of the questions that we have are around, how can we better leverage advanced technologies to personalize the Self-Directed Learning strategies? So for example, when we started developing these strategies, it was five years ago, AI was just starting, we don't really integrate those. How would that support this?

For implementation, how can we reach those students who might need the Self-Directed Learning supports the most? Are there more supports needed in incorporating these collaborative activities in online settings, specifically asynchronous? So how can we further explore the impact of the instructional model? Given our sample sizes, we were somewhat limited. So how can we explore if the strategies were more effective for particular students or others? Why are particular strategies by instructors and particular students more impactful than other iterations?

In terms of measuring the SDL skills, what are the strengths and limitations of using these self-report surveys to measure Self-Directed Learning? We just scratched the surface around LMS clickstream data. How can we use that to measure other ways and other ways that these strategies may impact student behavior?

We will be finalizing this and posting it soon. What's next for you? Please, we will share out the webinar video as well as the resources that we provided. Here are some QR codes to the links that we have been posting throughout the session, including the first one is to the instructional model on our website. And that includes an overview plus pages specific for faculty as well as leaders, and then a little bit more about the science behind it, so the research. And then we also have so many research publications that we were only able to share a very high level in this session. So please check out our other research publications to learn more about the details of the impact and a little bit more into the studies as well as that are aligned with each of the components of our model in our research study.

So thank you all for joining. The last kind of pages here are our email. If you have any questions or wonderings, thoughts, anything, please don't hesitate to reach out and email us for any further questions. We're happy to share anything else that you would be interested in. Thank you all for joining us today.