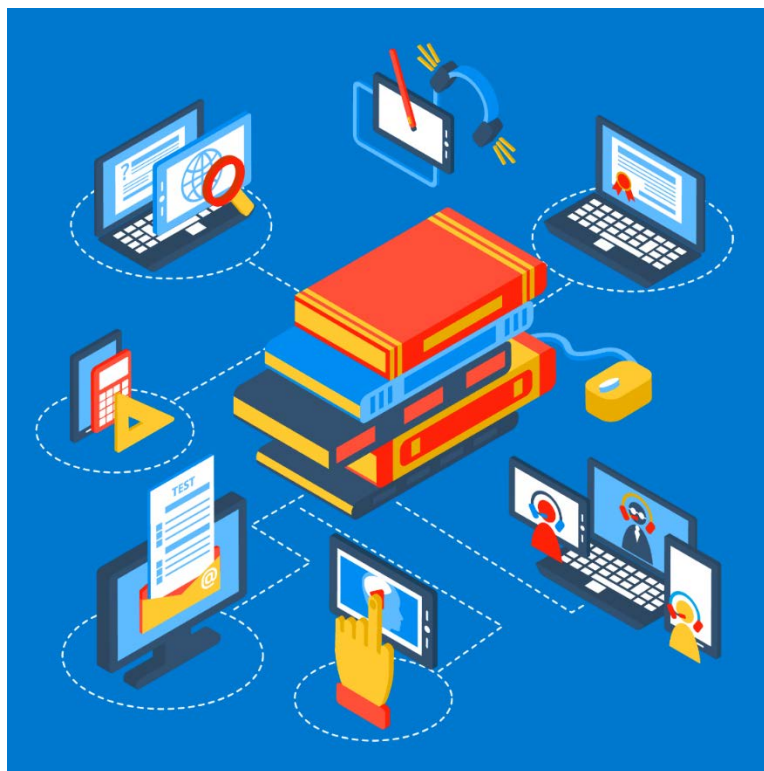




RESEARCH CENTER FOR DIGITAL LEARNING & LEADERSHIP

## ONLINE FACULTY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK



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## Foreword

As the leader in supporting quality digital learning initiatives, the Online Learning Consortium (OLC) is pleased to share the **Online Faculty Professional Development Framework**. The Framework takes into consideration best practices in online learning and faculty professional development to provide institutions with a comprehensive overview to support those faculty teaching in an online learning environment. In addition, the standards listed are applicable to the K-12 educator as well as those in higher education. With minimal adjustment, this tool also has the potential to serve as a foundation for the training needs of online learning professionals in industry.

The **Online Faculty Professional Development Framework** was developed using the Delphi research methodology. Through four rounds of surveys, a panel of experts came to consensus on the training content areas that are essential for an instructor to be successful in the online environment. The process began with 57 experts participating in the initial survey; however, there were 39 that continued through all four rounds. The majority of these experts had more than 10 years of experience in a leadership role related to online learning programs or faculty professional development. The training content areas they helped to identify through this study form the foundations of the framework and fall into four categories: faculty roles, classroom design, learning processes, and understanding legal issues in the classroom.

To maximize effectiveness, organizations using this tool are strongly encouraged to deploy this with other resources available at [OLCQuality.org](https://www.olcquality.org). Creating a quality online learning environment for students starts with course design using the OSCQR Course Design Review and extends to the classroom experience as evaluated through the OLC Quality Course Teaching and Instructional Practice (QCTIP) scorecard. To further support a quality online program, online learning leaders should use the Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Programs to ensure the necessary foundations are in place to support overall program success. With this combination of tools, institutions now have best practices at their fingertips to create an effective environment for their learners.

Special recognition for the development of this tool goes to Sandra Mohr who conducted the background research and led the Delphi methodology as part of her dissertation, under the supervision of her dissertation chair Kaye Shelton. Dr. Mohr then worked with Dr. Shelton to convert that research into the **Online Faculty Professional Development Framework**, which the OLC is pleased to provide as a resource to support institutions globally in their quest to improve quality in the online learning experience.

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Developing faculty members to teach online is a complex process that involves ongoing institutional commitment, time, and money (Barker, 2003). When faculty transition from traditional classroom instruction to online learning, faculty professional development is a critical component that allows faculty the opportunity to redesign and rethink their roles in the educational process (Ali, Hodson-Carlton, Ryan, Flowers, Rose, & Wayda, 2005).

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*The OLC Online Faculty Professional Development Framework identifies best practices for professional development and institutional resources for online faculty members.*

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As technology continues to enhance online educational experiences, institutions need to better understand factors that influence student success and provide effective development opportunities to prepare faculty for facilitation in the online environment (Kane, Shaw, Pang, Salley, & Snider, 2016), which should include formalized and regular faculty training along with frequent communication around best practices (Mujtaba, 2011). In addition, professional development should be an ongoing part of their teaching responsibilities (Fabrice, 2010).

The OLC Online Faculty Professional Development Framework identifies best practices for professional development and institutional resources for online faculty members. Effective use of these best practices involves connecting the elements to the institution's mission and the evaluation of implementation of the practices. The framework can be used by an institution to plan professional development opportunities for faculty throughout different stages of their online teaching career.

Institutions who develop carefully thought-out and well-developed professional development programs can increase faculty loyalty and satisfaction in the online classroom (James & Binder, 2012) and these programs may be a key component for the continued success of higher education (Elliott, 2014).

## Online Faculty Professional Development Topics

A critical component of successful online programs is preparing faculty to teach in the online environment (Kerrick, Miller, & Ziegler, 2015). Professional development provides faculty with the skills and understanding of when to use technology and to what degree to use it in the online learning process (Ouellett, 2010). With this in mind, higher education institutions need to prepare faculty throughout their teaching career for learning theory, technical expertise, and pedagogical shifts before, and while, they teach in the online environment (Shelton, Saltsman, Holstrom, & Pedersen, 2014). This research provided professional development topics arranged in related categories to help structure elements in this framework. The following four areas should be focused upon to better prepare faculty for teaching online: faculty roles, classroom design, the learning process, and understanding legal issues in the online classroom.

### Faculty Roles

Reforming faculty roles and student learning experiences requires guidance to provide faculty with the necessary skills, training, technology, and support to perform in the online learning modality (Lieberman & Guskin, 2003). Given that faculty members often teach as they were taught and that many distance educators have not taken online



courses as a student, they often do not have a benchmark model for online teaching (Schmidt, Tschida, & Hodge, 2016).

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*In addition, offering faculty the opportunity to learn online facilitation strategies is crucial to enhance their teaching presence online.*

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The online environment creates the need to reform faculty roles and requires major training and guidance from the institution to provide faculty with the necessary skills, training, technology, and support in the online learning modality (Lieberman & Guskin, 2003). In addition, offering faculty the opportunity to learn online facilitation strategies is crucial to enhance their teaching presence online. These strategies can also help students acquire knowledge, ensure participation of the learning environment, and contribute to overall student satisfaction (Garrison & Akyol, 2013).

The following professional development topics are essential for faculty to understand a shifting role for teaching online:

- Creating faculty presence in the online classroom
- Developing a teaching presence
- Managing an online classroom
- Faculty strategies to connect with online students
- Understanding the role of the faculty member in the online classroom

### Classroom Design

Designing an online classroom requires different methodologies than the traditional classroom-based course as faculty need to coordinate content specific practice with technology pedagogies to maximize opportunities for student learning

(Alexiou-Ray & Bentley, 2015). Even with assistance from instructional designers, faculty still need to understand how fundamental course elements influence the online student learning experience.

The following professional development topics are essential for faculty to understand how to design their online classroom:

- Planning, structuring, and organizing an online classroom
- Utilizing course objectives as the foundation for developing an online course
  - Alignment and coherence of key course design elements (learning outcomes, assessments, and learning activities)
  - Creating appropriate learning assessments for online
    - Adapting existing assessments/assignments for online
  - Developing effective online discussions
  - Faculty tools for discussion board management
  - Supporting a student-centered learning environment
  - Engagement strategies for students
  - Online feedback strategies
  - Importance of formative and summative feedback
- Managing the online classroom
  - Utilizing the learning management system effectively
  - Establishing a welcoming course environment
  - Online communication strategies
  - Guiding student learning
  - Online discussion strategies
  - Fostering online relationships and knowing students
  - Assisting with online students with disabilities



- Online grading strategies
- Upholding quality standards online
  - Course development standards and rubrics
  - Purposeful use of technology and tools online
  - Preparation to develop the course.

### Learning Processes

Education methods evolve over time to help answer society's needs (Lane, 2013) as shown by the popularity of online learning. Professional development should provide faculty insight on effective online pedagogical practices that can be built into their online classroom (Bailey & Card, 2009). In addition, faculty need to understand how students learn and how these processes can be utilized in the online environment to help create quality-learning experiences. Quality online learning experiences developed by faculty members help support students through the learning process and encourage deeper levels of learning (Reid, Sexton, & Orsi, 2015).

The following professional development topics are essential for faculty to understand the learning processes in the online classroom:

- Writing measurable course objectives
- Applying active learning strategies
- Adapting teaching pedagogy for the online classroom

### Understanding Legal Issues in the Online Classroom

In order to protect both the institution and faculty member, training should be provided on how various legal issues impact the online classroom. Given the increased use of technology, understanding legal issues and best practices is necessary during the design and delivery of online classes (Johnson & Groneman, 2003). Legal issues

often require special adaptation of resources for the online classroom.

The following professional development topics are essential for faculty to understand the legal issues within the online classroom:

- Copyright compliance and fair use
- FERPA guidelines
- ADA compliance guidelines
- Academic integrity

## Institutional Support for Online Learning

In addition to the professional development focused on online teaching components, faculty members require support in all aspects that interact with the online program (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005). Institutional leadership should build and foster a common vision around the role of online teaching that is passed along to the faculty and campus culture (Kaminskaya, 2006).

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*Additionally, institutions should support continuous faculty improvement.*

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Providing faculty with the organizational support that meets their needs helps them identify more with shared goals and become more involved in the process (Scott, Lemus, Knotts, & Oh, 2016).

Additionally, institutions should support continuous faculty improvement. To do this, faculty need data about their online courses to help improve their teaching practice and to ensure that changes made in future course offerings are data driven (Reid et al., 2015).

Research findings identified institutional support elements essential for online faculty members.



These support elements are arranged into three categories: supportive campus climate for online learning, institution specific expectations for online learning, and staffing support.

### Supportive Campus Climate for Online Learning

Careful institutional planning is essential to create an environment that supports online learning. This planning requires resource allocation for online programs and a way to measure program effectiveness and quality. Successful online programs have aligned goals of administration, faculty, and the institution (Velez, 2015).

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The following should be provided to support faculty teaching online:

- Support from the institution for online education
- Institutional culture supportive of online education
- Adequate resources for online programs
- Clear organizational structure to support online programs
- Institution coordination of quality assurance standards
- Time allowance for course material development and training
- Comprehensive student support – tutoring, advising, counseling, writing, etc.

### Institution Specific Expectations for Online Learning

Institutions need to develop expectations that are institution specific so that faculty and students

know what is expected from them in the online classroom (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005). Institutional expectations help faculty feel supported and serve as guides for professional development initiatives that are responsive to faculty needs (Elliott, Rhoades, Jackson, & Mandernach, 2015).

The following elements should be developed to help faculty understand expectations of the institution:

- Faculty mentoring
- Adequate professional development opportunities for the online teaching environment
- Strong orientation system for faculty that includes best practice resources and course design templates
- Policy
  - Teaching guidelines for the online classroom
  - Intellectual ownership of online classroom
- Online class evaluation process
  - Student evaluation
  - Faculty evaluation

### Staffing Support

The online environment creates a need for collaborative efforts among all stakeholders within higher education (Carpenter, Sweet, & Blythe, 2016). The online learning modality often requires faculty members to seek assistance from experts to improve learning experiences for their students (Weaver, Robbie, & Borland, 2008). Key elements for successful adoption of professional development around online learning include: support of the institution and senior leadership, training delivered by staff that has credible experience in the online environment, and flexible



and varied opportunities for professional development (Weaver et al., 2008).

The following support staff should be provided:

- Instructional designers/technologists to support:
  - Online course development
  - Accessible course material development
  - Online course evaluation
  - Ensuring faculty role in online classroom
- Technology staff to provide:
  - Faculty technical support through on-demand resources, tutorials, or personalized assistance
  - Troubleshooting of technical issues
  - Support for selecting technology for use in the online classroom
  - Support for creating accessible class media
  - Audio/Visual resource support
- Library staff support for:
  - Finding resources for the online classroom
  - Supporting faculty and students in the online classroom.





## Framework for Faculty Professional Development

### Faculty Roles

- Creating a faculty presence in the online classroom
- Developing a teaching presence
- Managing an online classroom
- Understanding the role of the faculty member in the online classroom

### Classroom Design

- Planning, structuring, and organizing an online classroom
- Utilizing course objectives as the foundation for developing an online course
- Managing the online classroom
- Upholding quality standards online

### Learning Processes

- Writing measurable course objectives
- Applying active learning strategies
- Adapting teaching pedagogy for the online classroom

### Understanding Legal Issues in the Online Classroom

- Copyright compliance and fair use
- FERPA guidelines
- ADA compliance guidelines
- Academic integrity



## Framework for Institutional Support

### Supportive Campus Climate for Online Learning

- Support from the institution for online education
- Institutional culture supportive of online education
- Adequate resources for online programs
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### Institution Specific Expectations for Online Learning

- Faculty mentoring
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- Policy
- Online class evaluation process

### Staffing Support

- Instructional designers/technologists
- Technology staff
- Library staff support



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