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The transition of an oral communication course from traditional face-to-face to the online format: A faculty perspective

Cydney A. Lovell
University of Northern Iowa

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THE TRANSITION OF AN ORAL COMMUNICATION COURSE FROM

TRADITIONAL FACE-TO-FACE TO THE ONLINE FORMAT:

A FACULTY PERSPECTIVE

An Abstract of a Thesis

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Cydney A. Lovell

University of Northern Iowa

December 2015

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine instructor experiences regarding their transition

from the face-to-face teaching format to the online format of a basic oral communication

course. Qualitative interviews were conducted with ten instructors who have transitioned

their basic oral communication class to online. Participants were recruited using the Basic

Communication Course Directors List Serv and NCA's CRTNET. Interviews were

conducted face-to-face and over the phone using a set of twelve semi-structured interview

questions. Participants were instructors from both community colleges and universities.

This qualitative study explores all aspects of the transition, including levels of instructor

training, the importance of building and maintaining community in the online classroom

as well as various challenges experienced by the instructors as a result of the transition.

Instructors shared the view that institutions should offer formal training for those who

wish to teach online. The study also uncovered that instructors feel it is extremely

important to strive for community in the online classroom. Finally, this study revealed

unique challenges experienced by instructors including the overall uniqueness of online

instruction, the resistance of some peers to teach online, lack of consistent accountability

with online instruction and the overall perception of rigor with the online format.

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Has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts

_____   _____
Date   Dr. Melissa Beall, Chair, Thesis Committee

_____   _____
Date   Dr. Joyce Chen, Thesis Committee Member

_____   _____
Date   Dr. C. Kyle Rudick, Thesis Committee Member

_____   _____
Date   Dr. Kavita R. Dhanwada, Interim Dean, Graduate College

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Alan, and my three children, Jayden, Brody, and Charley. They have been fully supportive throughout this process and waited patiently for me to complete this degree.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I need to express my gratitude to my academic and thesis advisor, Dr. Melissa Beall throughout the time it took me to complete this project. Her encouragement and knowledge has been appreciated. I am also grateful to my thesis committee, Dr. Joyce Chen and Dr. C. Kyle Rudick who have generously given their time and talent to better my work. I am also thankful for the time and effort given by Dr. April Chatham-Carpenter who served as an initial committee member for my thesis, prior to her departure from UNI in the summer of 2015. Her continuous encouragement was greatly appreciated.

I need to give a very special thanks to Dr. C. Kyle Rudick for his unprecedented guidance in my final few months of Thesis revisions. He encouraged me and kept me on a strict timeline to completion. I am forever grateful for his positive attitude, understanding, time and encouragement throughout this entire process.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

<u>My Story</u>

I started my graduate career in the fall of 2010 and considered myself extremely capable to take on the world of graduate school. Our family had spent a couple of years saving money so I could go back to school and everything had fallen into place for me to pursue a degree that would allow me to teach at the college level. I was excited, to say the least. There were still priorities that needed to be lined up – after all – I was a mother, a wife, a full time employee and soon to be…a college graduate student. I remember explaining to people that I did not know how long I would be able to wear the multiple hats representing my many responsibilities. Nonetheless, I forged ahead. The first semester of graduate school was refreshing. I only took one class, but that one class contained so much passion for the field of higher education that I felt I had several teachers in the class. There was energy in the classroom. The students learned from each other and engaged in discussions that kept us talking for hours on end. Graduate school was a new experience and it was awesome!

Due to the positive experiences I had in the fall, I registered for two classes in the spring semester. Although I admit that semester was a bit of a whirlwind and many of the days were foggy and full of reading, research, and thinking, I was still learning so much. This second semester quickly proved to be a bit more than I expected. The rigor of the course load was challenging and draining.

As I moved into the third semester of school, I did not want to let up. I knew I had overbooked myself in the spring, but wanted to forge ahead and continue toward my goal. I began to research possible online classes that might help me continue to knock off required credits, but avoid making the hour drive each way more than once a week. I uncovered the possibility of an online course. I thought, "Everyone is taking online courses these days," so I decided I would give it a try. Online technology and the Internet was not new to me, but the concept of an online facilitated class was something I had never experienced. At the conclusion of this class, I decided on a probable research topic for the end of my graduate career–online education.

I recall the fabulous text book required for the online course that was full of exciting teaching strategies, but there was something missing. There were online discussion boards where students were required to share their thoughts on different topics, but it did not feel the same as the face-to-face courses I had previously completed. My excitement began to diminish, and I wondered if this type of learning environment was really for me. As the weeks went on, I found myself begrudgingly logging on each week, at the very last minute, to share my forced thoughts with my online classmates. I did not look forward to formulating my responses because I really did not think anyone cared. There was no relationship between me and other students in my class. There was a common course number each of us registered for, but that was it. I did not know about any of the hopes and dreams of my classmates I had come to know in other face to face classes. Things seemed less exciting and more robotic.

When students shared their thoughts and opinions in a face-to-face class, there were always students who nodded their head in agreement, and, as a student, it made me feel like someone was on my side. There was comfort in having someone on my side. The immediate nonverbal feedback is refreshing. If online learning was not for me, how could it be a format that everyone should consider? I made one single trip to campus that semester to give my final presentation to the instructor of my online class. I was asked to perform a teaching segment on a topic of my choice. I definitely spent a good amount of time in preparation for this final project. As I sat down in the office of my instructor, we proceeded to have a conversation about my career at Kirkwood. He knew of colleagues of mine, and we chatted for about 30 minutes. At the end of the conversation, he said I did not even have to give my final presentation. I am certain my jaw dropped in disbelief. I never expected to *not* give my final presentation that afternoon. Almost immediately, I felt like I was getting off easy. By not presenting my final project, I would not receive valuable feedback from my instructor. I felt I deserved this feedback as a part of taking the course. After all, I was enrolled in graduate school to learn and receive feedback. I longed to learn from my professors, whether the format was online or face-to-face. This particular class left me feeling like something was missing and I wanted to further explore the online format of teaching.

<u>Need for Study</u>

Morrison (2003), defines online learning as gaining skills and knowledge through synchronous (i.e., real-time) and asynchronous (i.e., delayed) learning applications, which are written, communicated, active, supported, and managed with the use of internet

technology. Computer-enhanced technology has changed the way individuals in higher education teach and learn. According to The 2010 Sloan Survey of Online Learning (Allen & Seaman, 2011), nearly 5.6 million students took an online course in the fall of 2009.The high number of students enrolled in online courses makes it essential to take time to understand the experiences of various instructors and the story behind how their class came to be offered online. In order to enhance the experience of both the instructor and the student, it will be helpful to hear about the good, the bad and the ugly when instructors transition from teaching a traditional classroom to a new online platform. Instructors should have the opportunity to share their views on what has worked well and what has not worked well in this new teaching environment.

As an advisor and faculty member at Kirkwood Community College, not a day goes by without a student coming into my office to ask if a particular course is offered online. Often, these students are not able to fit a traditional face-to-face course into their busy schedules, leaving online courses as their only option. As a department, our applied science faculty are encouraged to consider moving classes to more of a hybrid format (i.e., blending online and face-to-face instruction), in order to attract more students. Enrollment at the community college level has been in a decline and, in part, it is our job to make sure we still have students attending our classes (Miller, 2014). However, as the push for online instruction grows, instructors within our department are concerned about the pedagogical value of transitioning face-to-face classes to an online format.

More than 30% of the students in higher education in the United States of America participate in online learning activities (Allen & Seaman, 2011). The online

format offers convenience and flexibility that a traditional brick and mortar class cannot. Picciano (2002) claims courses that can be taken at any time or at any place have a good deal of appeal. More and more students demand the flexibility because they are not only students. Students today are also parents with full-time jobs and responsibilities who want the opportunity to return to school. The only way some of them can take college classes is if they do not have to be somewhere at a specific time. I cannot help but wonder if we rush into online instruction and possibly overlook important feedback. Not everyone prefers the format of online learning even when they sign up to take an online course. Just today, I had a student burst into my office and say "I cannot teach myself chemistry. Will it be offered in the classroom next semester? I just do not want to take it online." He cannot possibly be the only student on our campus to hold that opinion.

<div align="center">Purpose of Study</div>

The purpose of this research project is to take a closer look at how instructors talk about making the transition from face-to-face to online instruction in the introductory oral communication course. I chose this course because it did not seem logical to have an online option for a class where students were expected to deliver presentations in front of an audience. Converting an oral communication class to online can be problematic because of the emphasis on oral, rather than written, skills. In a report on fastest growing careers, the U.S. Department of Labor (Career projections, 1995) states communication skills will be in demand well into the next century. Exceptional communication skills build self-confidence and enable people to take more control over their lives. Our educational methods of teaching these communication skills must be second to none.

The overall purpose for this study is to understand the experiences of instructors as they transition from the brick and mortar classroom and into the virtual classroom. Computer-mediated and internet-based technology for information processing and communication has radically revolutionized and transformed teaching and learning (Jorgensen, 2002; Murphy & Laferriere, 2007). Students who never had the ability to attend school in the past, now have greater access than in previous decades.

Murphy and Leferriere (2007) feel that some of the advantages and demerits of online asynchronous communication would include increased opportunities for reflection, equality of participation, easy archiving of communication, loss of non-verbal clues, possible decrease in social presence, lack of interaction, and lack of spontaneity and immediacy in communication. These researchers recognize the value and obstacles that come with taking an online class. Students considering an online class should consider these above characteristics of an online class prior to enrollment.

Employers also embrace the movement toward online learning (Barnes & Blackwell, 2004; Schweizer, 2004; Tesone, 2004). Colleges and universities continue to increase their online course offerings to attract audiences such as working adults, who otherwise, have limited access to higher education (Haugen, LaBarre, & Melrose, 2001; Liaw & Huang, 2002; McEwan, 2001). Some students may feel online courses do not disrupt their normal work or home life to the extent a traditional face-to-face class does, thus creating an incentive for its continued implementation.

One consideration that should be given to the online platform is whether or not the transition from face-to-face to online is an equally beneficial learning environment or

experience for students. Do we sacrifice anything when we offer the online course? As educators, we need to be convinced that these students are learning what is necessary, regarding the skill of communication or public speaking, when we send them out to get a job. Becker and Eckdom (1980) list several studies which indicate that speaking skills are more important to job success than specific technical skills. Mosvick and Nelson (1996) state that about one-third of a person's time on the job is spent working in groups or teams and attending meetings or preparing for meetings. Being a skilled communicator is necessary in the every workplace in order to interact with co-workers and supervisors.

Through in-depth interviews with faculty members who have made this transition, I hope to add to scholarly knowledge about online education as it applies to an oral communication class. Instructor feedback, on personal experiences, can offer insight to new instructors considering the transition to online.

Whether in traditional or online education, one thing seems to be clear, learning involves active engagement and, brings about an increase in skills, knowledge, understanding values, and the capacity to reflect (Karaliotas, 1998). Technology allows students, even though they may be geographically separated, to interact and engage in a meaningful real-time learning environment through the use of computer technology (Arah, 2012). Barnes (2003) noted that when the physical characteristics and nonverbal cues are eliminated, "people encounter each other only through the words they exchange" (p. 273).

He also goes on to say that online anonymity – or, in this case, perceived anonymity – can encourage speech that might otherwise be stifled. The ultimate goal would be to provide meaningful, real-time communication through the use of technology in an online course.

Continued research is necessary in order to be sure higher education offers students a valuable education when using the online platform to teach students in an oral communication class. Although many classes across college curriculums are a perfect fit for the online format, the assumption that all classes are a perfect fit, would be in error. Sometimes the medium of teaching directly impacts what is being taught.

Faculty perspective and insight is necessary in order to ensure future success of courses moving forward from the traditional to the online format. Interviewing instructors who have reformatted their course to a new platform have found themselves in uncharted territory. Research gathered from this study can play a significant role providing advice to future instructors who wish to make the transition from face-to-face to online instruction. Furthermore, this study can provide ways for administrators to best support instructors as they make their transition.

The popularity of online education is here to stay. It is necessary to "self-check" our teaching platforms to be sure we are meet the needs of a variety of learning styles. We need to remember that everyone learns in a different way. Instructor feedback about their transition from face to face to online and overall classroom experiences can help us understand one piece of the puzzle. In order to proceed, it is necessary to consider the history of the basic communication course as well as the history of distance education.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

<u>History of the Fundamentals of Oral Communication Course</u>

In order to fulfill the state of Iowa general education requirements at a community college, students need to take nine total credits in communication. Typically, these courses include Composition I, Composition II and either Fundamentals of Oral Communication or Public Speaking. Colleges incorporate a written and oral communication course into a set of Liberal Arts requirements in order to assure those fundamental skills are learned prior to entering the workplace. Harrell and Harrell (1984) stated that no skill is more important to a successful career in business than good communication. These general education courses are designed to give college students a firm grounding in the areas of knowledge they will use for a lifetime (Diaz & Kempson, 2009). Good communication skills can fuel self-confidence and allow individuals to take more control over their lives. Becker and Eckdom (1980) list several studies which indicate that public speaking skills are more important to job success when compared to the specific technical skills. They assert that employers today are often disappointed with the level of communication skills that students possess when first entering the workforce. Students new to the workplace fail with simple acts of communication such as direct eye contact or sending a professional email to a supervisor. Employers long for improvement in these areas.

An introductory oral communication course, in many cases, includes historical foundations of speech and rhetoric, listening, language, non-verbal communication,

public speaking, voice and diction, interpersonal communication, problem solving, group dynamics and leadership (Emanuel, 2005). Morreale, Osborn and Pearson (2000) state, "Communication education is most appropriate and effective when it is taught by faculty trained in the discipline and in departments that are devoted to the study of communication." (pg. 21) In order to effectively teach the introductory oral communication course, the instructor must have a thorough understanding of the communication field including its history, theory, research and techniques. A well-trained communication professional is needed to lead students through the various contexts and applications of communication (Emanuel, 2005).

Communication enables us to get along with others and to interpret and exist within our environment. Communication is a learned skill. In my eight years of teaching the "Oral Communication in the Workplace" course, each term there are students who seem to possess a talent for public speaking. With little preparation, they are able to draw their audience into their topic and make us believe they have done their research. Natural public speaking talent, however, is not the case with most students.

Although most people are born with the ability to speak, there is no guarantee they will learn to communicate effectively. The ability to speak clearly, expressively, and efficiently has, for centuries, been recognized as the sign of a well-educated person. In ancient Greece, classical rhetoric emphasized the need for a student to become acquainted with logic, human motivation, principles of language, and performance.

The ethical responsibilities of the orator were also important. The study of rhetoric continued into the Roman era and beyond, when it was one of the original seven liberal arts considered necessary for a good education (Emanuel, 2007).

A critical goal in the discipline of communication studies is to improve one's ability to communicate in a variety of contexts, including publicly, interpersonally, within a group, and amidst conflict. No other discipline makes human interaction its unique focus. The communication discipline considers the when, where, how and why of human interaction (Emanuel, 2007). This focus gives the communication discipline its unique purpose within the academic landscape.

Most people would acknowledge the critical role of communication over the course of time and in today's culture. An overwhelming amount of research points to the importance of effective communication and communication training for success in both our personal and professional lives. From drawings on cave walls, to email, texting and Skype, to political debates, and just trying to get along in middle school, communication has enabled people to define themselves, record their history, and tell their story. But do today's college students receive the kind of training and education they need with regard to communication skills?

Good communication skills are essential in nearly all aspects of our lives. These communication skill sets are so important that administrators and educators require all students to participate in them prior to graduation.

As stated earlier in this section, it is important that consideration is given to who teaches the basic oral communication course. In addition, with the continued record growth of technology, institutions continue to allow more and more courses to be offered in the online format.

<div align="center">History of Online/Distance Education</div>

In spite of its apparent recent adoption, the method of distance education can be traced back more than a hundred years to the 19th century when improvements in postal services paved the way for correspondence courses (Clardy, 2009).

According to Taylor (2001), distance educational methods can be categorized into five different types. The five generations are:

1.   Correspondence Education was based on print and postal delivery. In this method, students complete their work and send it through the mail for their instructors to evaluate. In turn, instructors would turn around and send the feedback or grade back to the student through the mail. Although this allowed for flexibility in time and place, advances in technology quickly made this generation of distance education fade due to the lag time between completion of assignments and feedback.

2.   A Multi-media model was text, which combined print, audiotape, videotape and computer-disc technologies. Learners/students purchased the material, then read and completed any required activities on their own. An example might be learning a foreign language by playing a tape in the car radio player with a workbook included.

3.   The Tele-learning model of synchronous communication used available technologies, like videoconferencing and audio teleconferencing, to provide educational

programs. This stage in distance education did not offer the flexibility of time and place. Students and their instructors had to decide ahead of time when and where their communication would take place. In some cases, the class was broadcast via the television with the instructor at one location and the group of students meeting at another destination. To offer an example, several years ago, there was one group of graduate students who took a class over the ICN (Iowa Communications Network) at Kirkwood Community College. The instructor was at another institution and the class met in one building on the Kirkwood campus.

4. The Flexible Learning model that uses interactive media delivered through the Internet. This format includes computer-mediated communications.

5. The current, fifth generation is the Intelligent Flexible Learning model.

The Intelligent Flexible Learning model builds upon the previous four generations. In many of the above models, the immediate feedback/discussion was impossible. So, although distance learning is not a recent happening, the ease of creating synchronous out-of-class instruction is. One of the most significant impacts of the fifth generation, is its ability to lower costs associated with institutional processes and tuition. With all of the potential automation in the fifth generation learning model, it has the ability to notably transform the on campus student experience (Taylor, 2001).

According to the 2010 Sloan Survey of Online Learning of more than 2500 colleges and universities nationwide, approximately 5.6 million students were enrolled in at least one online course in the fall of 2009. Even more impressive, that number is up almost one million students from fall 2008 (Allen & Seaman, 2011). Consideration

should be given to the future of higher education as it continues to experience this extreme growth. On one hand, it is possible students have decided that the online, "work at your own pace" learning platform is a good fit for them. On the other, there is the possibility that because more courses are being offered online, it simply allows a larger number of students to enroll.

According to Parker, Lenhart and Moore (2011), "Over the past ten years, enrollment in online courses at colleges and universities around the United States has grown at a greater rate than overall higher education enrolment" (p. 4). According to surveys conducted by the College Board and Babson Survey Research Group (Allen & Seaman, 2011), the number of students at degree-granting postsecondary institutions taking at least one online course increased by 21% from the fall of 2008 to the fall of 2009. Over that same one-year period, total enrollment increased by only 1.2%. Although there is no ignoring the rapid growth of online education, there is very little known about the effectiveness of online courses of community college students. Scholars and instructors in higher education should conduct more research about online courses before adopting them as a normal pedagogical practice.

The Community College Research Center (Jaggars, Edgecombe & Stacey, 2013) discovered that instructors expected online students to be independent learners who are self-motivated with strong time management skills. However, students agreed that although these traits and skills are necessary, they also expected their instructors to help them with time management and to motivate and inspire them through active engagements in the teaching and learning process. In short, the expectations of the

instructor were different from those of the student regarding their roles and duties in the online classroom.

In a relatively short amount of time, many courses have been transitioned to an online format. Expectations within the online classroom are not yet fully understood – by either instructors or students. Although the online oral communication class seems contradictory to many people considering the public speaking requirement, institutions have pushed onward to transition this class online.

<div style="text-align: center;">Structure of Online Communication Class</div>

Distance education involves the delivery of teaching materials with student learning occurring through mediation or enhancement of media technology. In most cases, students and teachers do not meet in-person (Conrad, 2007; Holmberg, 2005). Technology allows students, even though they may be geographically separated, to interact and engage in meaningful synchronous or asynchronous communication in the virtual world through the use of computer technology.

Arah (2012) argues that traditional instruction emphasizes the teacher giving voice lectures from the front of the classroom and students listening in their seats, taking notes, and regurgitating the lecture notes to pass examinations. However, in online instruction, both students and teachers depend on reading, written responses, and interactive information communication by the use the computer technologies. In distance education, the roles of the instructor have been modified to become mediators, facilitators and e-moderators.

Through an online search through Google, I found ways instructors structured their online introductory communication courses. One instructor stated the following in the opening paragraph of her syllabus: "One of the obvious challenges to an online COMM 101 class is the presentation of public speeches. In order to deal with this, some VERY SPECIFIC procedures must be followed." I was surprised to see an instructor begin her course information by directly stating there is an obvious challenge to conducting an online Fundamentals of Oral Communication course.

The instructor explained that speeches must be presented in a formal environment. Her suggestions included a classroom, a boardroom, a break room at a place of work, and, a group meeting hall. There would be no speeches presented in a person's living room, with audience members relaxing on the couch, and a TV on in the background. If a student gave their presentation from the comfort of their own home, it would not be accepted. In a more formal setting, away from the home, the student/presenter would be able to demonstrate a greater range of nonverbal delivery skills. This would be more conducive to the use of visual aids and create a more controlled environment. The following disclaimer was listed at the bottom of the instructor's page:

> Speeches without acceptable audiences (demographics and situation) will be returned with a zero grade to the sender. Audience development and adherence to situational rules is a vital and unavoidable part of the course. Speeches that do not adhere to these rules will not meet the requirements for the assignment.

In some ways, students enrolled in an online oral communication class actually have to meet higher expectations than a face-to-face course. They have to find a real audience and may not include their peers.

Although the basic course competencies and educational goals remain consistent with both formats of teaching, the delivery is different. In the face-to-face section, there may be a greater chance for instructors to use lecture methods, possibly supplementing that lecture with visual aid, such as PowerPoint. For an online section, the PowerPoint (any visuals) would be uploaded onto the learning management system with possibly an audio attachment. Rather than turn in an assignment directly to an instructor for a face-to-face course, students electronically upload their assignment into the system to be graded. With online learning, students are often not restricted to class attendance at specific times or places set by the institution, thereby allowing them to meet both employment and family commitments while attending to their educational responsibility (Stillman, Alison & Croker, 1999).

Schwartzman (2007) points out that many objections to online courses, specifically online introductory communication course, stem from misconceptions about online communication pedagogy or from poor course design and delivery. He goes on to say that blaming the technology conveniently shields critics from reflecting on their own pedagogical practices or their reluctance to incorporate new technological resources. Quite simply, they may not be interested in changing their style of teaching.

Online education is not for everyone. For example, learning in this format may not be ideal for a student if they are not comfortable with computers, strongly prefer to learn in a lecture environment or if they are unmotivated. The same may be true for the instructor of an online course. If the instructor is not motivated or interested in moving to the online format, it may not be the best fit. However, as technology continues to be more

and more a part of education, society may start to see newer instructors move into

education that actually feel more comfortable teaching the online format as opposed to

the face-to-face format. Their strengths may be most visible when facilitating an online

class.

Based upon the information above, the online oral communication class is no less

a class than the face-to-face class. The students are still expected to achieve the same

competencies and skill sets by the end of the term, regardless of whether the class is

taught in the face-to-face or online format. Until instructors are faced with making the

transition to online, it is understandable there will be uncertainty and doubt. There are

several challenges the instructor may encounter when an opportunity to teach online may

arise.

<div align="center">Instructor Challenges</div>

Vanhorn, Pearson, and Child (2008) conducted a study that yielded seven

categories of frustration from instructors when teaching an online communication course.

Those categories included: the course, time management and workload, technology,

students, communication, support and teacher motivation. These instructors commented

on the overall difficulty of transforming the face-to-face course to an online course. They

were concerned about their ability to include the same amount of content in the online

course as they did with the face-to-face course. The idea of transitioning to online was

described by some faculty as a daunting task. Instructors in this same study were

concerned they would not be able to make the information within the course as

interesting, creative or complete for their new online audience. One interesting point

made by this same group of faculty was their disclosure that they themselves might present the greatest impediment because of their preference to teach face-to-face.

The sheer amount of time instructors need to spend on the computer comes with its own amount of shock value. Instructors discussed how overwhelming it was to learn the technology, respond to emails, write the lessons and grade papers and respond to even more emails. They often found themselves playing catch up with their students and more time was spent monitoring discussion boards than any actual teaching. Some students taking the course expected these online instructors to be online 24/7. They felt glued to and completely dependent on their computers (Vanhorn et al., 2008).

Instructors mentioned student challenges such as lack of motivation, retention, students' perception of difficulty and disengagement. They felt students disengaged more easily in the online communication course and often forgot deadlines and did not fully read the instructions provided by the instructor (Vanhorn et al., 2008). Instructors also pointed out that (in some cases), they found students had registered for their online course, yet were not computer-savvy and barely knew how to turn on their computers (Vanhorn et al., 2008).

Most instructors new to online teaching begin with little to no training or preparation specific to this delivery mode (Fish, & Wickersham, 2009; Gabriel & Kaufield, 2008). With proper professional development and training, postsecondary instructors have been shown to hold high expectations and adjust their teaching to proper online teaching strategies (Schrum et al., 2005). In a study conducted by Gabriel and Kaufield (2008), their instructors reported working on insufficient equipment, leading to

wasted time and frustration.

In one study, 70% of the faculty members describe their institution's support for online instruction as average or below (Seaman, 2009), and nearly 20% of all institutions do not offer support to faculty teaching online (Allen & Seaman, 2011). The more than one-third of faculty members who have developed or taught an online course profess that developing and teaching online courses takes much more work than traditional courses (Seaman, 2009).

Over the years, faculty has argued that the synergy, discussion, examples, and group activities in communication courses cannot automatically be replicated in an online environment. Assignments must be recreated and modified in order to make them appropriate for the new teaching format. In some cases, entirely new assignments will have to be created (Brandau-Brown, 2013). Modifying the format of a course is essentially creating a new course.

The transition to online may seem overwhelming to some instructors. They are uneasy about the amount time and effort it will take to make the transition. They are also skeptical their newly formatted class will meet their expectations in the end. Instructors are concerned about student engagement and whether or not the online class will present as much interaction as the face-to-face class. Finally, instructors do not feel as if they are fully trained to take the leap into the world of online education. These are all examples of the challenges faced by instructors who are considering the transition to online. In this next section, I will review the learning outcomes of online education.

Learning Outcomes in Online Education

While 97% of two-year colleges offered online courses in 2008, only 66% of all postsecondary institutions offered courses in the online format in that same time (Parsad & Lewis, 2008). Despite the popularity and growth of online education, the effectiveness of online courses for community college students is still unknown. The Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Columbia University has attempted to close the gap by administering studies of online course outcomes.

The explosion of online offerings raises the question of whether the educational quality and learning outcomes of online instruction are similar compared to the face-to-face instruction (Allen, Bourhis, Burrell, & Mabry, 2002; Coates, 2005). Ken Hartman (2007) cites a 2005 survey of human resources representatives in which more than 62% of employers have a favorable opinion of online instruction. The survey respondents also view online learning as an equal or superior mode of instruction compared to courses taught face-to-face. However, Adams and Defleur (2006), who also conducted a survey of potential employers, found graduates with online degrees are less likely to be hired than applicants who received their degree through coursework delivered in either a hybrid or face-to-face format. Therefore, it appears employers accept online education only in moderation.

Researchers have found that the majority of the students feel they receive a comparable educational experience in terms of academic rigor and skills from the online version of a Public Speaking course (Linardopoulos, 2010). An overwhelming number of students in one study believe they learned the same or more than they would have in the

face-to-face version. These same students also stated they would re-take the online version of the course if they had a second chance and would also recommend it to a friend (Linardopoulos, 2010). However, there appears to be a lack of evidence that explain how instructors perceive the success of an online Public Speaking class.

Bristow, Shepherd, Humphreys, and Ziebell (2011) conducted a study that found nearly 32% of the students who had taken an online course considered online learning a poor educational choice. Certainly, these findings have important implications for higher education. They go on to consider that as administration continues to move higher education toward online learning, what happens to the one-third of the student population who are negative concerning online learning? Will institutions of higher education not recruit or retain these students? Or, will they downgrade them to a lesser-quality learning outcome?

The voices and views of faculty have all too often been missing from the conversation of online learning. There has been missing information on how faculty members perceive online learning, with few cross-institution examinations of their opinions and practices (Allen, Seaman, Lederman & Jaschik, 2012). A consistent finding in the annual Babson Survey Research Group is that chief academic officers tend to not have very many reservations about quality of learning in the online classroom. They do, however, have a large part in the decision making of where resources are allocated within their institutions. Professors, overall, do not have a positive view of the learning outcomes for online education. Nearly two-thirds (66%) say they believe the learning outcomes for an online course are inferior or somewhat inferior to those for a comparable

face-to-face course (Allen et al., 2012). The gap between the faculty and chief

administrator's perceptions of the quality of online learning is significant and the topic

should be considered for further research.

According to a 2011 survey by the Pew Research Center, over 50% of college

presidents believe online courses offer an equal value compared with courses taken in a

classroom. However, that same study revealed only 29% of the general public had

confidence that online was equal to face-to-face. Research findings in this study may

expose the difference in perception of value in online education with regards to upper

college administration and the general public.

The above findings lead us to believe that there is still uncertainty revolving

around the rigor and learning outcomes of online education. Although many have stated

they believe online education to be somewhat more rigorous, others are still skeptical.

The studies mentioned above reveal a significant disconnect between administrator and

faculty perceptions of online education.

<div align="center">Rationale and Research Questions</div>

Porter (2004) outlined five principles for developing an effective online

curriculum that help an academic institution execute successful online programs and

lessens the fears among faculty and administrators about the quality of online curricula

and education. These principles include: (1) Recognize that the ways courses or programs

may be created can differ, but the resulting product should be equally high quality, (2)

Value on-site and online faculty equally, (3) Avoid playing off on-site classes against

online classes, (4) Create equally credible online and on-site courses and degree

programs, and (5) Set up a dialogue between on-site and online faculty—if they are different groups of faculty. However, there is minimal existing research regarding instructors who teach online classes. For example, I have watched an entire program at a large, midwestern community college transition some of their course offerings from face-to-face to online. As a staff member in this program, I participated in some of the discussions that led to the transitions, but the discussions were minimal. From what I recall, it went something like this: "It is time we start to transition some of our classes to online in order to ensure we have students each semester." Although I understand the concern of losing students from specific programs, because the online offering is not available, it cannot be the only thing considered. Not all course curriculums contain coursework adaptable to the online format. In some cases, it is very difficult to transition the overall instructions from a face-to-face to online delivery of the basic course.

The research questions prepared for this study considered perceptions of faculty who have made the transition from face-to-face to online with the basic communication course.

RQ1: What are the procedures or processes for the transition from teaching in the face-to-face setting to the model of teaching online?

RQ2: What elements facilitate a smooth transition to teaching the Basic Communication course in the online format?

RQ3: What obstacles are commonly experienced in transitioning from a traditional teaching model to a new mode of delivery?

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The methods portion of my research focuses on the importance of the qualitative approach and explains why and how this study uses qualitative methods for collecting data. This chapter will also provide an overview of the participants and the study procedures, including data collection and data analysis.

Qualitative Methodology

This study is a qualitative study of faculty perceptions of their transition of teaching models. Although extant research shows that online education courses will continue to be offered for the foreseeable future, there is little scholarship that explains how instructors are adapting to this new format or their level of satisfaction with this teaching method. Schwandt (2007) asserts, "Qualitative inquiry deals with human lived experience. It is the life-world as it is lived, felt, undergone, made sense of, and accomplished by human beings that is the object of study" (p. 84). This study was conducted to better understand the subjective experiences of instructors who transitioned their courses from face-to-face to online format through qualitative formats.

Conducting qualitative interviews with instructors of online communication courses can help researchers more deeply examine their behaviors, feelings, and attitudes regarding the teaching format. Exhaustive interviews are an especially effective tool for studying emotions and attitudes (Rubin, Rubin, & Haridakis, 2010). Attitudes towards online education can play a critical role in the outcome of these experiences. For example, if an instructor who has been teaching an oral communication class in the

face-to-face format for the past 15 years is suddenly asked to transition to the new online format, their attitude may not allow for a smooth transition.

One possible limitation or drawback is the small number of instructors who have taught the basic communication course (Oral Communication) in both face-to-face and online formats. Online is a relatively new format of education and not all classes nor institutions have made the transition. The Basic Communication Course Directors' list serve and the National Communication Network's (NCA) CRTNET were used to recruit participants. Thus, I used a convenience sample. Although convenience samples are rather easy to execute and low cost, they are not representative of the large population (Rubin et al., 2010). Also, the results of a convenience sample are often difficult to replicate. My hope is to gain perspective of instructors who have actually made the transition, rather than only taught the online format.

Participants

After obtaining IRB approval (Appendix A), I recruited participants through the Basic Communication Course Director's list serve and CRTNET (see Appendix B and C). I interviewed ten participants. Interviews took place in faculty offices. Both full time faculty and adjunct faculty participated in this study and they were able to share their stories of making the transition to online. Participants taught at large and medium sized Midwestern universities and community colleges.

Procedures

Interviews were utilized as the method of data collection. Potter (1996) defined interviewing as a "technique of gathering data from humans by asking them questions

and getting them to react verbally" (p. 96). Interview questions for this study were semi-structured (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Discussions were scheduled in advanced and audio recoded. Each interview lasted approximately 50-60 minutes. Open-ended questions were sent to the instructor in advance of the interview regarding their teaching experiences with both online and face-to-face introductory oral communication courses. The interviewers' names were kept confidential by the use of pseudonyms when transcribing and reporting results.

All interviews took place in a faculty office or on the phone. I took basic steps to ensure open and honest responses from my participants. I did this by engaging in small talk during the first few moments of our conversation in order to develop a certain level of trust and also to show my appreciation for their participation. Although all participants were willing to be contacted after the initial interview, no follow up emails or phone calls were necessary. There were a total of twelve, open ended questions asked during the interview (Appendix D). Each of the interviews were audio recorded.

Data Analysis

Following data collection from the ten participants, the interviews were fully transcribed. Although this process, at times, became frustrating and time-consuming, it proved to be a worthwhile task to complete on my own. I was able to review the interviews from my participants and familiarize myself with the data a second time.

I was able to uncover my themes for this study by using thematic coding. Coding is the process of categorizing and organizing the data found in qualitative research. The function of coding is to notice related experiences; collect examples of those experiences;

and analyze those experiences in order to find unity, differences, patterns and formations (Seidel & Kelle, 1995). "Data distillation" was a term used to describe the eventual outcome of qualitative analysis, suggesting that the large body of data did not become smaller and manageable during the analysis process because there was less information, but was the result of interpretation and organization (Tesch, 1990). I organized coding columns to better interpret the data shared by my participants by pulling direct quotations out of the transcribed data. Through the process of categorizing the transcripts, I generated themes related to my research questions.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the participant interviews had concluded and the information was organized, I generated several themes in relation to my research questions. Specifically, I sought to address my research questions by understanding (1) the procedures or processes that characterized the transition from teaching in the face-to-face setting to the model of teaching online, (2) the elements that would facilitate a smooth transition to teaching the introductory oral communication course in the online format, and (3) the obstacles commonly experienced in transitioning from a traditional teaching model to a new mode of delivery. These questions were forwarded in order to identify the best practices that characterized the transition and to provide advice for future teachers and administrators who wish to explore the possibility of moving their face-to-face class to an online format.

Through my analysis, I generated three major themes. Participants described types of formal training for online teaching helpful during their transition. Next, they explained the importance of class community building when trying to create a smooth transition from face-to-face to an online format. Many of them also recounted how they found it difficult to maintain the same level of community found in their face-to-face courses. Additionally, participants felt that online instruction presented unique challenges. Those unique challenges included the time and effort it took to transition from face-to-face to the online format, the lack of immediate feedback, and the difficulty in keeping the class fresh and exciting for students. Finally, participants described how resistance from peers about making the transition, overall accountability for online courses/instructors and

misconceptions about the rigor of online education proved to be significant obstacles to negotiate when making the transition from face-to-face to online teaching. The results section will lend more detail to each of the items mentioned above.

<u>Formal Training is Key to a Successful Transition</u>

Most people who decide to be teachers cannot just wake up one morning and be a quality instructor without proper training and preparation. Training a teacher to teach in a new format, prior to the start of a class, seems logical. Formal training, for purposes of this research paper, is any type of organized training offered by a trained professional in the area of online teaching.

Several of the participants had the opportunity to participate in different types of formal training. The types of formal training described in this section include Quality Matters, institutionally led seminars, optional workshops, and Blackboard LMS training. Participants' responses showed that institutionally-provided training was an important component of transitioning from face-to-face to online instruction. Furthermore, they characterized the training as time-intensive, suggesting that the transition required effort and dedication.

One option for formal training mentioned by many of the participants was Quality Matters training. Lucy said:

> I developed the course over the summer and did a lot of work with Quality Matters. Quality Matters is basically a forum that makes sure that best practices are held when teaching online. They ensure common expectations. Making sure it is a quality offering and meeting the same expectations as the face-to-face sections.

Lucy also stated that it was not a huge undertaking because she felt prepared by the

Quality Matters workshops. Some participants stated that their institutions often paid for

their instructors to be QM certified. Lucy went on to say:

> They also offer an additional (individual) stipend if you take your individual
> course through Quality Matters. That is having an external review board go
> through and review your course-everything from the instructional design, the
> content, clarity – all of those things. Our course is QM certified and it was
> definitely a process working through and making updates and changes and
> documenting all of our learning outcomes and how they connect to assignments.

Quality Matters (QM) is a peer review process designed to certify the quality of online

and blended courses. Community and technical colleges, and various other academic

institutions utilize QM as a way of maintaining standards in their online courses

(www.qualitymatters.org/welcome). It serves as a guideline and can assist instructors

throughout their transition.

The amount of training that an instructor experiences can vary depending on their

place of employment. At one university, instructors must attend a 4-½ day seminar before

they can ever teach an online class. Amy claimed:

> I went through training – LMS/online teaching. We have a really good support
> system – The Center for Scholarship for Teaching and Learning at our University.
> They offer training all the time –workshops. Very supportive to the faculty at the
> university. I went to all of the training that they had- just about online teaching –
> and I also went through the Quality Matters process.

Another participant took advantage of all training offered by his institution. Not all

instructors will take part in optional training, which means instructors are beginning to

teach in the online format with various types and degrees of training. Dylan offered:

> There are faculty development programs - both informal/formal workshops
> sponsored by the teaching and learning center. There are faculty development
> cohorts that they can apply to be a part of. It is a year commitment and you are

part of a faculty learning-community, etc. That is at the institution level. With the varying degrees of training offered by the institutions represented with my participants, it was apparent that there were various levels of commitment among the institutions. Some wanted to hurry and get online classes offered to keep student enrollment high, while others slowed down the pace and hired personnel to train their instructors to create a quality course. Amy shared:

> I went to all the training that our university had to offer – I had kind of a shell of an online course that had been offered, but I really started over. This was cool that I had the freedom to develop this, and I began doing this in Spring of 2013 and have been teaching full time ever since. It helped with my employability.

There have been researchers who make the claim that it is important to train faculty for the online classroom. Instructor training is particularly needed to support faculty in a field that is rapidly changing (Crumpacker, 2001; Diaz, 2001; Rockwell, Furgason, & Marx, 2000; Torrisi-Steele & Davis, 2000). Training instructors about new technology and ways to teach is essential to help them effectively deal with change (Lick, 2001). When an instructor's professional growth needs are met, student learning can be enhanced (Lockard, 2001). Instructors must be trained to use the designated software, managing online course, integrating web sources, and interacting with students through the web (Ko & Rossen, 1998). Faculty members who teach in higher education, are key players in the success of online learning. Support and professional development programs, therefore, are critical for assisting faculty "[e]ngage in pedagogical problem solving and discovery about online teaching" within their disciplines (Kreber & Kanuka, 2006, p. 122).

Although many of the faculty I interviewed mentioned their access to training, not all of them were given that advantage. For some of them, they did not have enough time

to take part in either formal or informal training. In order for a quality class to be created and taught online, there should adequate time available for an instructor to make the smooth transition. In addition, there should be multiple training options for instructors to take advantage of, prior to teaching. It is essential for institutions to provide ongoing faculty guidance and support (Appana, 2008) through professional development opportunities that help instructors navigate the current technologies and associated software (Evans & Champion, 2007).

<div align="center">The Transition is Made Smoother by Building Community</div>

In this section, participants discuss their thoughts and experiences related to the sense of community in their online classroom. Although many of them stated that they wanted to create a sense of community in their online course, some of them said they felt frustrated when trying to do so. They described how they had to work consciously and strategically in order to build and maintain a community in their online courses. They stated that, in many cases, they had to work harder to build community in the online classroom versus their face-to-face classrooms.

Instructors State Community is Important

All of the participants agreed that it was important to cultivate a sense of community within their online classrooms. The giving and receiving of feedback among students and the instructor can lead to a connection and (ultimately), trust. Tammy said, "Being able to give them [students] feedback was difficult and so important." Many participants mentioned their struggle with both giving and receiving feedback regarding their students. Shelly made the following claim:

> Of course, there is the challenge of creating community online and it is so important for students to interact with one another. They learn so much from each other that they do not necessarily learn from the instructor. Encouraging them to interact with one another when they are not working on their assignments at the same time was challenging.

Although each of the participants felt community was important, they also felt that it was difficult to achieve. Tammy also went so far as to say, "I don't enjoy it [teaching online] as much as face to face. I want the interaction." An overall feeling of belonging in an online class can foster student participation and motivation to contribute.

Existing research has shown that building a sense of community can foster student learning. Yuen (2003) claims that a learning community can help individual learners "achieve what they cannot on their own" (p. 155). Eastmond (1995) makes the point that students' feelings of being alone can be overcome when students in online communities unite together and support one another. One case study explained how some students felt disconnected from others in the online (anytime/anywhere) learning environment, citing lack of facial expressions and other features common to a traditional classroom environment (Bullen, 1997). Many of the participants in my study mentioned that it was difficult to attain the same level of community and connection in the online class in comparison to the face-to-face class. Participants in this study missed the typical interaction they had with their students in the face-to-face class.

<u>The Barriers to Community</u>

The following claims from participants revealed their frustration with the barriers they had to navigate while attempting to build community in the online classroom. Participants wanted to get to know their students, but struggled to find the best ways to

build those relationships. Although the instructors realized that online interactions would be different from face-to-face interaction, their feedback suggests they just did not understand, until they experienced it, how different (or minimal) that feedback would be.

Participants stated that building a sense of community when one is not in direct physical contact with a group of people on a regular basis was difficult. The instructors interviewed described many of the barriers they experienced during the transition to the online classroom. Lucy said:

> I do not get this type of interaction/relationship with my students in the online sections. I do not ever hear about what is going on with their personal lives unless it is directly related to involvement in the course - just quick emails. In the face-to-face –I get that student to share with me constantly. I have more of a connection with my face-to-face students and it just makes sense that it would be that way.

Forming relationships with students is expected because research shows that these types of student-teacher relationships foster learning outcomes (Berger & Braxton, 1998). Don stated, "The challenge was not getting to interact with students." Limiting one's interaction with students didn't come naturally to instructors and it was a learning curve they uncovered during the transition. Don added:

> It is difficult to get the student to respond to you. In face-to-face they have to respond. Here [online] – we are waiting for them to reply to an email. They may never reply. Just getting the interaction outside of the classroom to make sure they are staying up on their work.

Participants lamented that they were left to wonder whether or not the student fully understood course material because of the lack of connection. Many participants stated that students asked fewer questions in the online as opposed to face-to-face class and wondered if this lack was due to students' lack of connection.

Many participants commented on some of the limitations they face when there is no face-to-face interaction with the student. Sherry said "Online makes it harder to do some of those more interactive components." When an instructor does not have a set time of class each week, the interaction among students and instructor needs to be planned, scheduled and executed differently than face-to-face classes. Dylan said, "I think the asynchronous really limits some of the interactive things you can do." In the online setting, students are sometimes never going to come into physical contact with one another. New ways of interaction need to be explored. Findings from one study claimed that improved learning outcomes were achieved by including face-to-face tasks in an online class. This study also revealed the effectiveness of a blended learning environment when follow-up, hands-on assessment took place (Chandler, Park, Levinc & Morse, 2013). Lucy stated:

> One challenge is that often times I give a lot of feedback and I do not get any response from the student – where in a face-to-face class when you are discussing something with a student there is always that feedback you would get.

Finally, Tammy spoke about his overall relationship with his online students by stating, "One thing I really do not like- is not getting to know my students.

Also, related to that, it is difficult to accurately decode some of their emails." Relationships are fostered by interaction between the student and the instructor. When these relationships are formed, trust is built and learning can take place.

Because most faculty are trained in face-to-face teaching, they have to face the challenge of very little interpersonal contact with students, and they have minimal contact or feedback to monitor the clarity of their communications (Bower, 2001). Whether

teaching face-to-face or online, building community is a key component for successful

teaching and learning (Brown, 2002). Brown (2002) also mentioned that instructors could

use online discussions to build community by keeping their online class discussions

informal. Shea, Sau Li, and Pickett (2006) focus on the important role that community

plays in academic achievement and persistence in higher education.

How Instructors Build Community

Although the sense of community in the face-to-face classroom was not directly

discussed with these participants, one can assume that the sense of community comes

more naturally in that instructional format, in large part, because they have visual contact

multiple times per week. The realization that it takes more time and effort to build

community in the online platform was both overwhelming and disappointing to some of

the participants. They were forced to consider new ways to explain their curriculum or

demonstrate a skill. Many of the instructors interviewed mentioned their efforts towards

building community in the online classroom.

Tammy stated, "It is the issue of being a community and figuring out how to do

that. Doing things beyond just multiple choice exams. That's just not enough." One

participant, after teaching online for multiple semesters, introduced a requirement that

students meet with her physically. Shelly described:

> I require my online students to conference with me twice a semester. Once at the
> beginning and once before their big speech – just to see how things are going and
> get feedback about the class – see if they have any recommendations on what
> could be done differently. I think that it helps them see me as a real person. It
> gives me an opportunity to hear all of their perceptions about the class that I don't
> know otherwise.

Shelly felt that joining her students in live discussion helped her better understand her

students' reaction to the class. She asserted she was able to make changes or

modifications where necessary and increase value in her online course. Shelly felt that

students appreciated this opportunity to give feedback and share concerns. Charlie

claimed:

> To keep the students engaged – I think it is necessary to give them prompt
> feedback. When they email with a question at 2am –they are looking for an
> answer at 2:15 am. Maybe that is extreme – but at 10:00 pm at night, when I get
> an email – I try to answer back within a few minutes. My phone helps me keep in
> touch. I try to make myself as accessible as possible, within reason. If a student
> emailed me and had to wait two days for a response – they would disconnect from
> the class.

With the ability to communicate almost instantly in today's world, there is a higher level

of expectation to get an immediate answer. When students have a question or concern

that they feel is important, many of them want the other person involved to share that

sense of importance. Students in a class expect that their teacher cares about them and

wants them to succeed. When they have a question or concern about something in class,

they prefer that the instructor get back to them in a relatively short amount of time. One

study revealed that students felt that instructors modeled community by giving frequent,

timely, and constructive feedback. Students that participated in this same study identified

instructors' availability to discuss course concerns and personal concerns via e-mail, chat

rooms, or discussion boards were ways to demonstrate community (Vessely, Bloom &

Sherlock, 2007).

A sense of community is more than a feeling of connection between a student and

instructor. There is also the aspect of building relationships between the students. In a

face-to-face class, students encounter each other multiple times per week and build

relationships and even friendships because of how much time they spend together.

Participants felt this same dynamic did not come naturally in the online course. Tammy

argued:

> Trying to foster more communication between the students is needed. I use discussion forums that will get them to both use their text but also use personal experience. They want to talk about themselves. It is okay that they talk about themselves. Personal experiences are important. Making sure they get to know me. I feel like I really try to get to know them.

Giving students an opportunity to talk about themselves in a class discussion forum is a

way for them to introduce themselves and build community. Finally, one Shelly

expressed their concern with the transition to online by stating:

> We were trying to foster a community online, so we were very worried of the course when we transferred to online that there would be disconnect and our students wouldn't be communicating with each other and practicing these communication skills. We were asking them to use and how do we assess that? How do we know if they are really learning when we cannot observe them? We had a lot of research to do and a lot of trial and error along the way as well.

The participants implemented different strategies to build a sense of community in their

online classrooms.

In a study conducted by Dikkers, Whiteside and Lewis (2012), one instructor

explained that he/she graded papers daily and left clear and involved comments about

student work. This instructor stated that they emailed students daily and tried to

encourage students to do their best. This same instructor created announcements each

day, called every student at least once a week, allowed student contact anytime the

instructor was online, and created community announcements. Another instructor in the

same study explained how important it was for students to recognize the instructor as a

real person who cared about their success in the course. Students want to know the

instructor is working just as hard as they are towards their overall success (Dikkers et al., 2012). Many of the participants in this study commented on the amount of time they spent reaching out to their students. One instructor stated that it was crucial to get back to students in the online course as soon as possible in order for the student to feel as though the instructor was invested in their learning. Another instructor mentioned that if a student emailed late at night, he would do his best to get back to that student right away.

Although participants stated that it was more difficult to create an online sense of community than in a face-to-face class, researchers have explained there are tools that will help them create connections with students and build a sense of community in the online class. Stern suggested two different tools she had been experimenting with in her online classes. Wikis allow groups of users to create and edit a webpage using the browser of their choice and have proven to be helpful in creating student content online. Furthermore, she experimented with VoiceThread. VoiceThread is a collaborative multimedia slide show whereby group conversations occur through a variety of formats. Students have the option to upload a photograph and then choose to leave their response or comment via text, audio, or video.

Nearly every instructor interviewed for this study mentioned the importance of building community with their online classes, and also that it was not something to be achieved easily. As instructors continue building community in their online classrooms, they need to be willing and open to modify their current teaching techniques practices.

<u>The Transition is Inhibited by the Challenges of Online Instruction</u>

Participants stated they were surprised by the unique challenges that were presented when transitioning to teach in the online format. They identified several unique encounters they have experienced when preparing to teach online. An awareness of some of these unique challenges, can be helpful for instructors who have not yet made the transition to online. Instructors who have made the transition have much to offer those who are considering a transition to online.

<u>Instructors Characterize Online Instruction as Unique.</u>

There was a general consensus across participants' responses that an instructor could not just transition to teaching the online Oral Communication course by simply uploading their current face-to-face course content to an online format. Tammy said, "It still needs to be engaging and I want to be able to put my real teaching philosophy into practice." Participants felt it was just as important for the instructor to feel satisfied with the new class as it is the student. Tammy went on to say:

> I recreated everything. I created a video series that are specifically created for online communication. I still use them now in my face-to-face class as backups for students that miss a course. It is a totally different approach with different materials.

The transition is a process and it is difficult to get things perfect the first time. Trying new ways of teaching curriculum can benefit both the online section and the face-to-face section. She continued:

> I would just say that what I transfer online has to be more visual and also chunking information. I would not do a whole video - just a visual aid video - just an outline video. Just a video on logos, pathos, logos. Things need to be chunked into digestible portions. Their attention span is so short. If you are just counting on them sitting and looking at a computer screen for hours and hours…..all videos

are under 8 minutes.

The transition time came as a surprise to many of the participants. There are many

components that need to be planned and organized in the new online classroom. Dylan

commented, "It is not simple by any stretch of the imagination." It takes time to transition

a course to online. Tammy referred to the amount of effort that is initially put into the

creation of the online section, "It is never going to feel exactly like a face-to-face class,

but I think you can make it feel MORE with more effort." It is an entirely new course and

more effort is necessary to make the class feel like an interactive classroom. Some

instructors had the transition thrown upon them with a limited amount of time for

turnaround. Dylan commented:

> My boss came to me and said:
>
> "We are now going to teach this online". It is April and I want to do it this summer. It should not be that big of a deal. You are just going to record some things and we will take turns recording things and they will take some quizzes and that is what they will do. And so – "are you up for it?" Sure – that sounds good – how hard can it really be?

This comment represents the possible misconception, by administration, that the time

involved in the transition is minimal. Not allowing faculty the necessary time to transition

the course can end up creating more work in the end. Administrators should understand

the value of providing faculty sufficient time to create a quality online course.

Participants stated they felt there were misconceptions about the work that needed

to go into transitioning courses from face-to-face to online. Charlie explained:

> I think people go into teaching an online class thinking it will be much less work than a face-to-face class – if anything it is completely the opposite. You spend so much more time communicating with students emailing back and forth answering questions and visiting the discussion boards. I think it is more work than a face-

to-face class. You do not have the transit time down to campus and that sort of stuff, but the accessibility takes time.

Participants stated the importance of understanding that the online class is different from the face-to-face class. Participants commented they had to be accessible to their students, more often in online than in a face-to-face class. Dylan commented, "It is understanding full well that you cannot just take what you have taught and drop it online." It is not the same course and although there may be a template for creating a course, each class will have different needs. Finally, Casey stated, "It takes a lot more work to put together an online class and to do it well."

In the online class format, participants shared that the class needed to be ready to go, long before the first day of class. Tammy pointed out, "Structure is important. You must be organized on paper and online. And making sure what you do before the class even starts is organized." Participants claimed they had to prepare to try new things with the online format and be willing to make changes along the way if necessary. Casey commented, "For online, you have to be organized and be challenging yourself to try new things. I have to check in regularly. I always try to think: What can I do differently?" Participants emphasized their online classes needed to be maintained on a daily, sometimes hourly, basis.

Participants' responses revealed they believed online courses require special effort to ensure they are interesting and engaging. For example, Dylan said, "You have to really be intentional. This is the word of the day. You have to be thoughtful." Teaching an introductory oral communication course online might present some logistical problems. After all, how are these students going to deliver their presentations? Casey

stated, "I do not know if it is "naturally" well suited [for online] – I do not think it is one of those things that is like peanut butter and jelly. It is a tense relationship sometimes." Participants shared that their online students still have expectations of their instructors. Although an online oral communication course may not be a natural fit, most participants agreed it was a course that could work in this new format.

Participants shared their frustrations with lack of feedback from their students in the online class. Lucy claimed:

> One challenge is that often times I give a lot of feedback and I do not get any response from the student – where in a face-to-face class when you are discussing something with a student there is always that feedback you would get.

Even small gestures, such as students nodding their head in agreement with a statement an instructor makes, helps the instructor know that students understand what has been taught. This is not the case with online classes. The only way for an instructor to be sure a student understood a lesson is for the student to email or share on the discussion board that they understood the information imparted by the instructor. Don stated, "It is difficult to get the student to respond to you. Face-to-face – they have to respond. Here – we are waiting for them to reply to an email. They may never reply." When an instructor has only taught face-to-face classes, the absence of interaction is noticeable.

Transitioning to the online format takes time. Tammy referenced their experience with technology:

> The thing is – finding out new technology is so time consuming – even to explore the options. You cannot just wing it. It is not like face-to-face – you devote so much time to figuring out how to use it and how to teach the students how to use it. Every activity or technology is a big investment that you have to be willing to do. This is why it is not for everybody. Things might not work the first time. That does not mean it is never going to work.

The point this participant makes is that just like online is not for every student, online is not for every instructor. Tammy added, "I knew it was going to be a lot of work. I wanted it to be great right away. No class is great right away. Accepting that was hard." Many instructors who spent years teaching face-to-face have perfected many of their teaching techniques and strategies. When they go through the transition, in some cases, it is like starting all over again. Instructors need to be patient with the transition and realize it will take time, as well as, trial and error. Casey explained:

> I find that I spend a lot of time on my online classes because of the sheer amount of emails that I get. The first semester I was floored with the amount of emails I was getting which is part of the reason I ended up with such a large course manual. Now my answer is that is in the course manual –please check it.

Even the simplest email answer or the short conversation between a teacher and student can take more time than a live conversation. Finally, Casey added, "It is always a mixed bag because there is so much maintenance and work ahead of time." Although there have been obstacles along the way, it should be noted that many of the participants also shared that their face-to-face classes have benefited by going through the transition to online.

When an instructor cannot watch their students perform the work, as they do in the face-to-face class, they begin to doubt the effectiveness of their teaching.

> She added:

> If you really start to think about it –you wonder if someone else could be doing the work – you really end up coming to terms with the fact that you cannot be a police officer and you set up the class in a way that you see those students on the roster. People can cheat etc.-it does not matter if they are in your face-to-face or online class.

The reality is, if they are not doing the work, it will eventually unravel and the student is the one who loses in the end. Tammy claimed, "You cannot force. You cannot monitor

everything they do." Giving up some of the control once held in the face-to-face class is a natural part of the transition to online. Sherry said, "Letting go of some control and letting them know I was a resource for them – was hard." In the online format, the instructor takes on a supporting role. The instructor needs to create a supportive online atmosphere where their students view them as approachable.

Current research supports the fact that there are unique challenges that go along with online teaching. According to a recent survey report, faculty members believe there is more time and effort involved with teaching online, and there is lack of support and incentives provided by the institution. (Seaman, 2009). Additionally, aspects of successful online teachers include self-discipline, facilitation of individual and group learning, and prompt feedback to students (Dawley, 2007). The above claims regarding the lack of institutional support and the abundance of work to transition to online are intimidating and overwhelming.

Once an online course is set into motion, it stays in motion. There are typical question and answer sessions between students and instructors similar to a face-to-face class, but now the questions are asked and answered in a new format. Stein (2014) points out that online instructors need to be actively involved in their course discussions and lead them forward, as well as maintain steady contact with students via e-mail and class announcements. Likewise, they need to provide thorough and prompt feedback to students, particularly on exams and other key assignments. Stern (2015) noted one of the major challenges facing an online instructor is the duplication of the face-to-face interaction of the physical classroom. This new form of communication in the online

classroom, between instructors and students, requires an adjustment for both the student and the instructor.

<div align="center">Peer Resistance</div>

Participants revealed that nearly every institution had at least one faculty member not interested in making the transition to online. They felt as if many of their colleagues did not feel positively about online instruction for reasons such as lack of trust in administration and struggling with whether or not the online format was suitable for an oral communication course. Although it can be difficult to uproot the instructional practices one is familiar with and take on the challenge of adopting a new teaching format, some participants felt that peer resistance made their transition even more difficult. .

Participants commented on the lack of motivation by some instructors as well as their lack of trust in administration. Tammy stated, "We have older faculty here that do not want to teach in this format and they do not have to because their career is not going to depend on it where mine is." Sometimes instructors do not feel that everyone is looking out for their best interests. She went on to say, "Instructors are threatened by administration. No trust. They do not believe that administration auditing your online class means they are trying to help." The feedback from participants in this study shared that there was always at least one faculty member opposed to the transition of the Oral Communication to the online format. Casey offered:

> My understanding, from my discipline, is that they went kicking and screaming. They did not want to do it. They did not think it was an appropriate venue for the class. They were up against the fact that people wanted it.

Teaching an online oral communication class, where students are required to give

speeches to an audience, raises questions regarding plausibility. Shelly said, "We had one

faculty member who had been here for 27 years who was very concerned about being

able to teach online - very resistant that it would be effective." This is not surprising

given the amount of years many instructors have devoted to traditional face-to-face

education. Finally, she noted:

> We only have one who is not on the bandwagon and thinks it is terrible for us to not have students in the classroom and I think we all agree that we prefer to have our students in the classroom with us…..but we are in an ever-changing world and we have to be there for our students in a way they need us.

Institutional support, incentives, training and collaboration can aid in changing some of

the attitudes of skeptical faculty.

Current research points out that a significant obstacle to the development or

expansion of online education is faculty resistance (Herman, 2012). Faculty members

who have never taught an online class are more likely to perceive online instruction as

substandard for student learning (Appana 2008), and they tend to be more resistant to

creating or teaching online courses. Additionally, faculty members are frustrated with

incentives available for online instruction: 70 % of faculty members described their

institution's support for online instruction as average or below (Seaman, 2009, p. 34).

Institutional support in the form of training and compensation is essential to change the

existing faculty perception of online classes.

<u>Accountability</u>

Administrators evaluate their faculty in their face-to-face environment by visiting

their classroom and observing them while they teach. Administrators give feedback to

their faculty in hopes of polishing some skills, adding new content and offering overall

support. At the same time, administrators have a standard expectation for their faculty.

Participants were unable to identify how administrators currently monitor online classes,

but indicated that was necessary.

Participants in this study declared there was not enough accountability for the

courses they had created. Many of them pointed out how much time and effort they put

into the transition and they want be sure others are putting in the same amount.

Tammy stated:

> There is no training. NO accountability. No one appears to care what is in it or if I am doing a terrible job. I do not even get student emails here. I could be doing a terrible job. I could do a horrible job and still get paid. Students would be fine with taking a self-graded exam each week and watching a power point I get from the book. We have instructors that do that.

As much as instructors do not always welcome the input from their

administrators, feedback and evaluation are critical. Some of the participants spent

countless hours preparing to teach an online class, with little to no compensation other

than the feeling of satisfaction with the creation of a quality course. Don said, "They have

not mandated any training for the 100% online course which I feel is unfortunate. It

would be possible for a faculty to roll into teaching an online class without much

training." Offering a quality online course is the desired outcome and offering training

can be a benefit to instructors who decide to take on this task. Shelly said, "It would help

if the institution had some sort of standard – across the board." Caplan (2005) claims that

developing effective instructional materials depends on a great deal of planning and

collaboration, and concerted efforts from many people skilled at using the right tools.

This collaboration may include an instructional designer, graphic designer, web developer and subject matter expert (Caplan, 2005). Tammy says, "We need to be held accountable for producing a quality course." The long-term effects of offering poor quality online courses could be detrimental to institutions of higher education. Finally, Casey shared, "My thought is that if they are going to be teaching online, they should go through a mandatory best practices class for online teaching."

Faculty at Eagle University pointed out that through training, mentoring, and evaluating, it is possible to limit student problems and complaints. It is not adequate to train instructors without conducting follow-up evaluation of their performance (Schulte, Dennis, Eskey, Taylor, & Zeng, 2012). In several institutions, instructor training is minimal and faculty evaluation occurs only through student evaluations at the conclusion of the term (Schulte et al., 2012). Additionally, faculty evaluation systems can indicate to faculty that their institutions are committed to their ongoing professional growth (Mandernach, Donnelli, Dailey, & Schulte, 2005).

Instructors that strive to create a high quality online course realize not all instructors follow in their footsteps. Participants were frustrated that not everyone was held to the same high standard. As seen in the literature, some institutions see the importance of setting a standard and following up and evaluating instructors that teach online. In order to ensure that student learning is taking place, institutions must hold their online instructors accountable.

<u>Students' Perceptions of Rigor</u>

Participants agreed that student misconceptions of online class rigor existed. They

felt that until a student experienced an online course, they could not fully understand

course expectations, time commitment or the need for self-motivation. Participants

thought that although their institutions tried to adequately to describe their online classes

to the student body, there was still a learning curve for first time online students.

Furthermore, they believed many students did not fully comprehend the intensity they

will encounter. Lucy stated:

> I do not think they think they will get out of doing the speeches – but they think the online format will be easier speaking in front of their family members or friends. Ironically, it is more difficult. I have had people comment on this many times. It is a lot harder speaking in front of your own family.

Public speaking fear is real and many do not realize that they may experience increased

fear when speaking to a group of people they already know. Charlie stated, "I think

sometimes students think it is going to be easier and then are surprised when it's the same

level of work as a face-to-face class." This statement addresses the fact that institutions

may need more explanation of what is involved in an online class. Dylan pointed out, "I

think in the beginning [students felt this way] and I think I have learned that students

have a perception of online courses being kind of read my stuff, three tests and I am out."

His insights suggest that institutions may need to work harder to fully disclose the

expectations of an online learner. Casey suggested, "I think we need to have more

counselors/advisor meetings etc. I've heard some students say that their advisor told them

to take the course and that it would be easy." These advisors may have never taken an

online class and are simply passing along the information they are hearing from others.

Finally, Shelly commented:

> With a communication course, it is particularly tempting to take it online because

they think they will record themselves over and over again until they get their (speech) perfect – but I will not have to be in front of people. I think they are surprised that they not only have to speak in front of an audience, but they have to recruit that audience. I think they are shocked this is just like a face-to-face course.

Research shows about a third of academic leaders perceive online outcomes to be substandard to face-to-face classes and that faculty members have hesitations about online classes. (Allen & Seaman, 2011). Youngberg's (2012) commentary in the Chronicle of Higher Education contends the number one reason online education will not replace college is "it is too easy to cheat." There is still work to be done. The above research indicates there is more to just training an instructor to teach online. There are still instructors that need to be convinced that the online method of teaching will be a quality option.

It is important to disclose a full description of the online course design. When students register for online courses under the misconception the course may be easier than face-to-face it can be problematic. While an online course may be convenient for a student who does not want to commute to campus, it does not mean that the course is going to have lower standards and require less time.

In summary, it will be helpful to revisit the proposed research questions outlined in Chapter 2.

RQ1: What are the procedures or processes for the transition from teaching in the face-to-face setting to the model of teaching online?

RQ2: What elements facilitate a smooth transition to teaching the Basic Communication course in the online format?

RQ3: What obstacles are commonly experienced in transitioning from a traditional teaching model to a new mode of delivery?

Participants shared stories and experiences that explained the procedures and process for the transition, and more specifically, what made for a smooth transition. The instructors also stated there were obstacles they faced before, during and after the transition to online. Participants agreed that the transition was far from simple, and for many of them, it took longer than they anticipated. They felt it was important for instructors to understand that a face-to-face class cannot be dropped into an online format. The results of this study speak directly to these research questions.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Introduction

With more than 30% of the students in higher education in the U.S. participating in online learning activities (Allen & Seaman, 2011), it is essential to understand the dynamics facing instructors wishing to transition from face-to-face to online. As participants' responses revealed, this transition is not a simple task, especially as it relates to the curriculum contained in a basic oral communication course.

Although instructors' understanding of the transition is just one piece of the puzzle, it can offer guidance to institutions in their quest for high quality online education. Thus, I hope this study contributes to scholarly knowledge concerning online education with specific insight to the online oral communication course. Below I review the major findings of my study before then discussing their implications for instructors (particularly those who wish to transition their course to an online format) and administrators (particularly those who wish to facilitate that transition). I conclude by describing the limitations of my study and offering possible avenues for future scholars who may be interested in studying the transitional process.

Summary of Findings

The research results are best understood by revisiting the themes uncovered during the interviews. Several key factors play a role in the transition of teaching in the face-to-face format to teaching in the online format. Offering formal training in online teaching, encouraging online instructors to build community within their online class and

realizing, ahead of time, the unique challenges one may encounter, can all contribute to a smooth transition.

<div align="center">Formal Training</div>

The participants in this study revealed that many institutions often have varying degrees of training offered and/or required of their faculty. Although most institutions require training for their faculty, some simply make it available. In this section I will discuss the importance of formal training as it relates to participants' responses and extant literature.

Formal training for teachers making the transition from face-to-face to online classes can offer insights on subjects, including technology tips, communication with students, and managing your online classroom. Although instructors may be experts in their content area, it is not guaranteed they will be experts regarding technology, online course design or corresponding with students in an online course. Some institutions require their faculty go through extensive training while other institutions offer optional workshops or no training whatsoever. A few of the participants' institutions put their instructors and courses through Quality Matters certification, which helps ensure a quality online class. In some cases, this Quality Matters certification was voluntarily completed by the instructor, where other institutions compensated their faculty to complete this certification. Some participants in the study claimed that pursuing some degree of training in online education made them more employable. Many of them also stated they felt it was important to be trained to address the unique aspects of online pedagogy (e.g., technological details) that are often not a concern in face-to-face classes.

An online oral communication class is not the same class as the face-to-face oral communication class.

Faculty who are asked to transition their introductory oral communication class from face-to-face to the online format should have the opportunity to learn best practices to assist in that transition. Training faculty for the online classroom is essential to help them effectively handle the change of format (Lick, 2001). In regard to technology, instructor training is needed to support faculty in rapidly changing field (Crumpacker, 2001; Diaz, 2001). Institutions need to be diligent about offering instructors comprehensive training and resources to prepare them for the online classroom.

<div align="center">Building Community</div>

The participants in this study revealed that building community within the online class is an essential part of a quality online course. They went on to say that creating community was a challenge, at times, and having a strategy in place was crucial. In this section I will discuss the importance of building community as it relates to participants' responses and extant literature.

Nearly all instructors interviewed for this study made some mention of the sense of community within their online classroom. A sense of community has been described as feelings of belonging, value, mutuality, and involvement among members of a group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Because students learn so much from their peers through classroom collaboration it is important to encourage students to continue to work together in an online class. Cavanagh (2011) concluded cooperative activities help students understand content better because they are more actively involved. In fact, cooperative

learning leads to deeper learning and improved critical thinking (Millis, 2010). In a recent study, Sacco and Ismail (2014) found that participants in the face-to-face interaction condition reported greater basic social needs satisfaction and positive mood compared to both virtual interaction and no interaction condition participants. Overall, extant literature supports the notion that building community in the online class is an important component of instruction. Another related issue is found in some participants' feelings of lack of community or isolation from other colleagues in their departments. Several suggested their colleagues had little understanding of online teaching and learning and, furthermore, distanced themselves from online classes, leaving participants feeling a lack of collegial support and community.

Participants stated they learned the importance of establishing a community presence in the class early in the semester. These instructors described feeling uneasy about the lack of community in their online classes and knew it was critical to maintain in the online environment. They explained how they had to work strategically to maintain a sense of community. Drawing on the meaning of sense of community provided above, one can expect to become more comfortable with classmates and the instructor in a face-to-face class. Participants felt that opportunity to naturally build community is missing in an online class because there is not necessarily immediate feedback and there is no way to hear the tone of a student or instructor on an online discussion board.

In order to maintain a sense of community in the online classroom, instructors encouraged regular discussions between classmates through weekly discussion boards or scheduling "conferences" throughout the semester where the student and instructor had

the opportunity to talk over the phone. During this conversation the instructor and student should create the opportunity to discuss projects or share concerns. Participants believed this practice helped students see the instructor as a real person. Some participants felt that timely responses to email with little to no delay, was vital to keep the student engaged. Participants in this study wanted their online oral communication class to be more than just multiple choice exams with a checklist of things to complete. The importance of building and maintaining a sense of community within an online course was mentioned more than any other finding among the participants in this study. Building community is an extremely important component to be mindful of during the transition from face-to-face to online.

<div align="center">Unique Challenges</div>

The participants in this study identified unique challenges they experienced during their transition from a face-to-face oral communication class to the online oral communication class. In this section I will describe some of the unique challenges outlined by the participants in this study. Although some of the unique challenges came as a surprise to the participants, they faced these challenges with a positive attitude and worked even harder to make the online classroom a valuable and worthwhile learning environment.

It can be helpful for instructors to better understand the challenges they may encounter as they prepare to transition their own class from face-to-face to the online format. Many of the participants in this study were surprised by the challenges they encountered during the transition and stated they wish they had been aware of the

possible roadblocks in advance, to alleviate hassle during the preparation. Participants cautioned instructors not to assume the amount of work and preparation that goes into building an online basic communication course is the same as the face-to-face communication course. One participant within the study made the bold claim that the online oral communication class was a completely different course than the face-to-face oral communication class. Other participants described being intentional in online teaching, claiming it is essential in making sure the class remains engaging and interesting. The natural feedback expected in a face-to-face course is not as easy to achieve in the online section. Finally, instructors do not always get the students to respond immediately, as they do with a face-to-face class. Research suggests that faculty members are worried about the amount of time and effort involved with teaching online, and the lack of support and incentives provided by the institution (Seaman, 2009).

<u>Peer Resistance</u>

The participants in this study mentioned that not all of the faculty at their respective institutions were in favor of the transition from face-to-face to online instruction. Whether it was uncertainty about the amount of time they would need to invest in the transition or the disinterest of offering an oral communication class online, there was opposition. In this section, I will explain why participants felt certain faculty resisted the change to online and discuss the implications of their resistance to online oral communication curriculum.

Participants explained how peer resistance to changing from face-to-face to the online format inhibited their ability to transition to the new medium. Instructors that teach

the introductory oral communication course are hesitant to assume the curriculum for a public speaking class is well suited for an online platform. Given that one of the requirements of the oral communication class is giving an oral presentation, it seems difficult to understand how this requirement remains in the online platform. In addition, technology is still unfamiliar to many teachers. According to Frey and Donehue (2002), "technology is rapidly changing the dynamics of the community college learning environment, presenting both opportunities and challenges to faculty and administrators" (p. 3). Several participants mentioned at least one faculty at their institution who was against the oral communication transition to online. Finally, participants stated that many faculty members who oppose the transition do not trust their administrators who are encouraging them to teach online. In previous research, it was stated that faculty who have never attempted an online course, perceive the online instruction as substandard for student learning (Appana, 2008). It is necessary to consider why this perception exists and continue to look for ways to better educate faculty on the value of online education.

<div align="center">Perceptions of Rigor</div>

The participants in this study shared that, in some cases, both students and faculty had a misconception regarding the rigor of online education. Their assertion confirms past research that found nearly two-thirds (66%) of instructors say they believe the learning outcomes for an online course are inferior or somewhat inferior to those for a comparable face-to-face course (Allen et al., 2012). In this section, I will explain what these misconceptions are and how they impact the transition to online.

Participants stated they felt students often enrolled into online classes because they were more convenient for their schedules and less rigorous than a face-to-face course. Participants felt that, in some cases, online classes may require more time and commitment than the traditional face-to-face class. Participants in this study made the claim that, in some cases, creating and maintaining an online class is harder. Participants felt that many students, particularly those who have not experienced online classes, thought that an online oral communication class would be easier than face to face. In addition, participants stated that faculty colleagues often perceive the online oral communication course as less of a class and therefore are not motivated to transition to teaching in the online format.

Participants in this study observed a possible disconnect between both faculty and students regarding the genuine rigor of an online class. The overall consensus from the participants in this study is that, in some cases, the online section of an oral communication class may be even more rigorous than the face-to-face section. Thoroughly describing expectations of an online class, offering appropriate online orientations and establishing meticulous training for online instructors can help close the gap of this misinterpretation.

<u>Implications of Research</u>

The goal of this study is to contribute to the knowledge base regarding the transition of a face-to-face oral communication class to the online format. Ultimately, I hope the results of this study can be used to provide important advice for instructors who teach online and, in turn, create more quality online courses for our students.

This study offers insights regarding instructor experiences of transitioning a face-to-face oral communication course to the online format. The results of this study suggest there are steps both instructors and institutions can take in order to make the transition from face-to-face to online a smoother process. According to Schwartzman (2007), many objections to online courses, specifically online basic communication courses, stem from misconceptions about online communication pedagogy or from poor course design and delivery. Based on participants' responses, I offer three ways institutions of higher education can better support online pedagogy for the introductory communication course. These three areas are, (1), faculty who teach online need institutional support in the form of available technology training as well time management training; (2), institutions need to consistently evaluate courses that have been transitioned to online; and (3) instructors who wish to teach online need to consider the importance of building and maintaining community in the online classroom. Community building was identified by nearly every participant in this study. When an instructor's professional growth needs are met, student learning can be enhanced (Lockard, 2001). In the following section, I will address these three areas and offer ways that faculty and administrators can support an optimal transition from face-to-face to online instruction.

My first recommendation, based upon the participant feedback from this study, is for all institutions of higher education to provide training to their online instructors. Wolf (2006) found that faculty who have formal, structured training sessions are successful in online instruction and achieve positive student outcomes. Wolf also found a sound online training program should include suitable course delivery systems and appropriate

pedagogy. It may be beneficial to require a certain number of professional development hours in the area of online education, prior to being certified to teach an online course. Although many institutions of higher education agree that offering more online classes is necessary, not all of them offer the same level of support to their faculty with regard to training and preparation. Most instructors new to online teaching begin with little to no training or preparation specific to this delivery mode (Fish & Wickersham, 2009; Gabriel & Kaufield, 2008).

As participants' responses suggest, it is not enough for an institution to simply state they want to offer online classes. Administrators can show their faculty support by offering online training, faculty workshops, compensating instructors to transition a course to online and evaluating the courses once they have been transitioned. Ascough (2002) claimed the role of instructor in an online learning environment should be more of a facilitator or moderator due to less control of the class environment. He stated that because most instructors are likely to have been trained in traditional instruction, it is a somewhat foreign practice for them to design interactive components in course delivery, and adjusting their change in role from the lead speaker to that of a facilitator. Volery (2000) also suggested that the academic role of instructor should be transitioned from intellect-on-stage and mentor toward a learning catalyst because the level of interaction has changed in online delivery. Therefore, besides being a facilitator, the instructor should also serve as an instructional designer (Zheng & Smaldino, 2003). It is because of these instructional changes mentioned above that institutions should provide training for their instructors. By showing this support, administrators build trust with their faculty.

Although solid training for online teaching can assist institutions in offering robust online courses, follow up and evaluation is needed for these newly converted classes to be sure they are high quality.

Second, the results suggest the importance that online courses be given the same level of review and evaluation as the face-to-face class. Traditionally, administrators have evaluated instructors with an observation of their face-to-face classroom while they teach. Annual reviews with instructors allow the administrator to provide input on the instructors' strengths and weaknesses within the classroom. The participants in this study pointed out there was little training and accountability of the new online courses. Although some instructors spend a great deal of time preparing the transition of their course to online, not all courses are created equal. Not all instructors spend the same amount of time in the preparation. Faculty evaluations need to take place in both the traditional classroom and the online classroom. One group of researchers described the Online Instructor Evaluation System (OIES) created at their university (Mandernach et al., 2005). This evaluation system had a foundation in the best practices of online learning and was adapted to meet the dynamics of a rapidly growing online program. It served a dual purpose of mentoring and faculty evaluation. Feedback, regarding OIES, from new instructors was positive. They indicated an appreciation for the extensive guidance and the way in which the constructive reviews provided them with a measure of their overall performance as facilitators of learning online. One new instructor commented, "I love the constructive criticism and since this is my first time teaching online courses, it is greatly appreciated." Furthermore, new instructors felt the evaluation

was a collaborative process between them and the evaluator (Mandernach et al., 2005).

My third, and final, recommendation, as a result of the findings in this study, is to offer training to instructors who make the transition to teach online to help them identify the best practices for community building within the online classroom. The most mentioned finding in this study was the importance of building and maintaining community in the online environment. A great deal of extant research corroborates this finding, highlighting the importance of developing positive student-teacher relationships to foster positive learning outcomes (see Martin & Myers, 2010). Due to the unique challenges of teaching online (as shown through this study), it is unlikely instructors will know the specific behaviors they should use to cultivate community in online courses without rigorous training.

The results of this study are useful for other teachers and administrators who are interested in transitioning courses from face-to-face to online. The participants interviewed for this study all had clear descriptions of their transition to online and made strong statements regarding their experiences and what they felt was important to consider during the transition to online. Most of the participants in this study expressed a very positive attitude regarding the transition of a face-to-face oral communication class to the online format. Although there were varying degrees of training amongst participants, almost all of the participants agreed that training will help during the transition of an oral communication class to the online format.

Limitations

My study had several limitations. The small number of participants primarily limited this study. More participants, and, in turn, more institutions could have been represented in this study. Ideally, a larger number of interviewees would have provided a more even distribution of gender and number of years of teaching. In general, the participants represented a narrow range of ethnicity and ages. A larger pool of interviews, with more diversity, would have benefited the results. For example, there were no participants who had made the transition to online who had an overall negative experience, which may not be representative of the experiences of faculty at large.

In the end, all participants interviewed for this project had positive experiences with teaching the oral communication course online. Although many of them struggled throughout the transition, they were in favor of this format of teaching and expressed interest in continuing to teach online. Finally, two of the ten participants in this study had significantly strong technology backgrounds which may have contributed to their positive experience.

Ideas for Future Research

As stated earlier, the instructor perspective of transitioning a class to online is one piece of the puzzle. Equipping the online educator with feedback from not only experienced faculty, but also online students and administrators from various institutions, can contribute to a successful transition.

Interviewing administrators who offer online courses at their respective institutions can enhance the knowledge base surrounding the transition from face-to-face

to online. Administrators can explain how their institutions support their faculty who

desire to teach online and researchers can inquire about how their online courses are

evaluated within their different departments. Some possible research questions include:

- What communicative strategies do administrators in higher education

    employ when trying to convince instructors to transition a face-to-face

    course to an online format?

- How do administrators in higher education communicate their support as

    instructors' transition from face-to-face to online courses?

It is necessary to understand how administrators support their online faculty and be able

to compare it with feedback from faculty participants. If administrators feel they are

meeting the training and compensation needs of their online faculty and faculty do not

feel the same way, there is a gap that needs to be addressed.

Students are another valuable resource to instructors who are making the

transition to teaching online. Some of the participants in this study pointed out the need to

get feedback from their students in order to modify or improve the class in the future.

Qualitative interview research can give scholars and teachers a deeper understanding of

the student's experience in the online class. Some sample research questions for students

who have taken an online class might look include:

- What communicative strategies do students perceive their institutions using to

    describe online course design and rigor in comparison to face-to-face classes?

- How do students perceive the rigor of the online oral communication course?

One thing to consider when requesting feedback from students regarding their experience

in an online course is timing. There may be value in getting student feedback regarding their online course at the beginning, middle in order to represent the entire online experience; from registering for the course to final grade posting. Students could be interviewed or surveyed to gather feedback about their experience in various online courses. Sharing what went right and what went wrong, from a student perspective, can help instructors meet student expectations and move towards a strong sense of community in their online classroom.

Participants in this study shared some interesting information that was not directly related to my research questions. It may be helpful to conduct further research on some of the things mentioned. One participant mentioned that on campus freshmen were not allowed to sign up for online courses at his/her institution. Although I did not ask additional questions about this comment, there was probably a significant rationale behind this rule. Another participant stated the following, "I made the decision to teach this format because I wanted to keep my job." It would be interesting to look further into whether or not instructors decided to teach online due to administrative pressures.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Online course offerings are being implemented at record speed because of student demand, and (in some cases) instructors are sometimes thrown into transitioning these classes with little to no warning, training or mentoring. The participants acknowledged that higher education institutions do more to support them in their process of transitioning a face-to-face class to online. Online education allows students, who would not otherwise have the opportunity due to life circumstances the chance to obtain a college degree.

Institutions must proceed with caution as more and more instructors make the transition to teaching online. They need to equip their instructors with the appropriate amount of support, training, and mentoring that will result in a quality online course.

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

University of Northern Iowa

Human Participants Review Committee
UNI Institutional Review Board (IRB)
213 East Bartlett

Cydney Lovell
3151 Eagle Court NE
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402

Re: IRB 15-0129

Dear Ms. Lovell:

Your study, **The Transition of Fundamentals of Oral Communication from Traditional Face-to-Face to the Online Format: A Faculty Perspective** has been approved by the UNI IRB effective 12/17/14, following an Expedited review of your application performed by **IRB member, Helen Harton Ph.D.** You may begin enrolling participants in your study.

Modifications: If you need to make changes to your study procedures, samples, or sites, you must request approval of the change before continuing with the research. Changes requiring approval are those that may increase the social, emotional, physical, legal, or privacy risks to participants. Your request may be sent to me by mail or email.

Problems and Adverse Events: If during the study you observe any problems or events pertaining to participation in your study that are *serious* and *unexpected* (e.g., you did not include them in your IRB materials as a potential risk), you must report this to the IRB within 10 days. Examples include unexpected injury or emotional stress, missteps in the consent documentation, or breaches of confidentiality. You may send this information to me by mail or email.

Expiration Date: Your study **approval will expire on 12/17/15.** Beyond that, you may not recruit participants or collect data without continuing approval. We will email you an Annual Renewal/Update form about 4-6 weeks before your expiration date, or you can download it from our website. You are responsible for seeking continuing approval before your expiration date *whether you receive a reminder or not.* If your approval lapses, you will need to submit a new application for review.

Closure: If you complete your project before the expiration date, or it ends for other reasons, please download and submit the IRB Project Renewal/Closure form and submit in order to close our your protocol file. It is especially important to do this if you are a student and planning to leave campus at the end of the academic year. Advisors are encouraged to monitor that this occurs.

Forms: Information and all IRB forms are available online at http://www.uni.edu/rsp/protection-human-research-participants.

If you have any questions about Human Participants Review policies or procedures, please contact me at 319.273.6148 or anita.gordon@uni.edu. Best wishes for your project success.

Sincerely,

Anita M. Gordon, Ph.D.
IRB Administrator

cc: Melissa Beall, Faculty Advisor

APPENDIX B

RECRUITING EMAIL FOR PARTICIPANTS

(Initial Email/phone scripts sent to Basic Course List serve and known instructors:

BASIC COURSE LIST SERV:

You are invited to participate in a study regarding the transition of teaching
Fundamentals of Oral Communication in the Face-to-Face format to the online
format. I would like the opportunity to interview instructors who have taught both
formats of the class, to learn more about the experiences they encountered during
the transition. If you are interested in sharing your experience regarding this
transition, I would like to schedule a 1-hour interview to be completed at your
convenience.
If you are interested in participating in this interview, please email Cydney Lovell
at cydney.lovell@kirkwood.edu. Thank you in advance for your consideration!

FACULTY AT UNI OR KIRKWOOD:

My name is Cydney Lovell, and I am a current Graduate student at the University of
Northern Iowa working on my Thesis. My study is focusing on the experiences
that instructors have had when transitioning the Fundamentals of Oral
Communication course from the face-to-face format to the online format. I am in
search of faculty who have made this transition. I would like the opportunity to
schedule a 1-hour interview with you at your convenience.
Please respond back to this email and let me know whether you'd lie to participate
in the interview. Thank you in advance for your consideration!

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW

INFORMED CONSENT - TEACHER

Project Title: The Transition of Fundamentals of Oral Communication From Traditional Face-to-Face to the Online Format; A Faculty Perspective
Name of Investigator(s): Cydney Lovell
Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you made an informed decision about whether or not to participate.
Nature and Purpose: I am collecting data about perceptions of faculty who have made the transition of teaching the face-to-face Fundamentals of Oral Communication to a new online format.
Explanation of Procedures: Each participant in this study will take part in an individual interview which will be recorded for the sake of accuracy. I expect the interviews will take approximately one hour.
Discomfort and Risks: Risks to participation are minimal, primarily the amount of time it takes to participate in the interview. The questions may make you think about your experiences as both a face-to-face instructor and an online instructor. If at any time you are uncomfortable answering a question, you may choose not to answer.
Benefits and Compensation: Although you will receive no direct benefits from participation in the study, the results obtained may offer a better understanding of how the Fundamentals of Oral Communication course should be transitioned from face-to-face to online.
Confidentiality: After the interview recordings are transcribed, the recordings themselves will be deleted. The transcripts and any resulting publications which quote from the transcripts will identify participants only through the use of pseudonyms. The summarized findings may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference.
Right to Refuse or Withdraw: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, you will not be penalized or lose benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
Questions: If you have questions about the study you may contact or desire information in the future regarding your participation or the study generally, you can contact the researchers via email, as seen below. You can also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process. Cydney Lovell; 319-721-2476; cydney.lovell@kirkwood.edu

Agreement:
I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

_____   _____

(Signature of participant)   (Date)

_____

(Printed name of participant)

_____   _____

(Signature of investigator)   (Date)

_____   _____

(Signature of instructor/advisor)   (Date)

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) Can you tell me about your transition from teaching Fundamentals of Oral Communication in a face-to-face setting to the online setting?

2) As an instructor, why did you make the decision to teach the Oral Communication course in the online format as opposed to the traditional face-to-face?

3) As an instructor, how do you perceive the rigor of the online Oral Communication course in comparison to the face-to-face course?

4) Has your overall experience of teaching an online section of an Oral Communication course been positive or negative? Explain both challenges and benefits.

5) What type of characteristics should a student/learner possess when considering the enrollment of an online formatted class?

6) What are pedagogical differences you have experienced between the online and face-to-face classes of the Basic Communication course?

7) What type of preparation was put into the transition from the face-to-face to the online class? Where you provided any training in online course delivery prior to the transition?

8) Prior to teaching the online format of Oral Communication, what were your perceptions of that teaching method? How have they changed?

9) Were you given a choice to teach this course, or was it a

departmental/administrative decision that was enforced?

10) Is the subject area of Oral Communication well suited for the online platform?

Why or why not?

11) How can an institution provide more thorough information regarding the format

of an online course prior to a student getting registered?

12) It is suggested that students who take online courses be intrinsically motivated.

How can we test the motivation of a student prior to enrollment in an online

course?