TOPcast Episode #79: The 2020 TOPcast & Friends Holiday Special

(holiday-themed musical transition)

Kelvin Thompson: From the University of Central Florida’s Center for Distributed Learning, I’m Kelvin Thompson.

Tom Cavanagh: And I’m Tom Cavanagh.

Kelvin: And you’re watching or listening to the TOPcast & Friends Holiday Special! Woohoo!

(applause and cheering)

Kelvin: Alright.

Guest: Hot dog!

Kelvin: Way to go! That was good. Just on one take, that was pretty good.

Tom: That was pretty awesome in an amateurish unrehearsed way. So, as we prepare to wrap up the year that was 2020, and many of us turn to holiday celebrations with family and hopefully, you know, happier times, we thought that this would be a great time to celebrate as a community of online education professionals that we are almost—this close—through what I think everyone would agree has been a very challenging year.

Kelvin: Yes, and inspired by the seasonal television specials of yesteryear, we hope to bring a bit of whimsy and fun to our substantive reflections on the impact of the year 2020 on our field and to our hopes for the year ahead.

Tom: We can only hope this may be as good as the Star Wars Holiday Special of lore.

Kelvin: Maybe.

Tom: Maybe, yeah. So, we are recording live with some of our regular listeners as a real time remote audience and supplementing the two of us, Kelvin and I, as the hosts, we are joined by a few of our much appreciated past TOPcast guests. Sort of a “ghosts of TOPcast past.”

Kelvin: Ooh, yeah. Yeah, that’s good. So, we’ll give you a little rundown roll call introduction to our guest panel for today. And feel free to give us a “hello” back and bring the Zoom focus to yourself and show off your festiveness. So, Dr. Bonni Stachowiak is Dean of Teaching and Learning and Professor of Business at Vanguard University, and host of the popular podcast, “Teaching in Higher Ed.” And Bonni was a guest back on Episode #27 of TOPcast: the Teaching Online Podcast. Her episode was “Humanizing Online Learning.” Hi, Bonni!
Bonni Stachowiak: Hello! So glad to be here with everyone. I’ve got my hot cocoa and marshmallows.

Tom: How awesome. All right. Dr. Kelvin Bentley is Vice President of Learning Strategy at Six Red Marbles and a prominent voice in our field on social media. I follow him. Dr. Bentley was a guest on Episode #60: “Growing as Leaders in Our Online Learning Field.” Good to have you back, other Kelvin.

Kelvin B: Yes, thank you for having me back. Great to see everybody.

Kelvin: Or maybe I’m the other Kelvin. Maybe you’re the original. I don’t know. It’s hard to say. It’s all timey-wimey. Yes.

Kelvin B: Very much so.

Kelvin: Yes. Dr. Deb Miller is Assistant Vice President for Digital Learning and Innovation at the University of North Florida and a leader within the state of Florida’s efforts to assure high online course quality. Deb was a guest on Episode #50: “Conveying Online Quality: One Way to Better Inform Stakeholders.” Glad you’re here, Deb.

Deb Miller: Hey, thanks for having me. Happy Holidays everyone.

Kelvin: Indeed. Happy Holidays.

Tom: Happy Holidays, Deb. Dr. Susan Wegmann is Associate Dean for Digital Learning and Innovation at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Texas. While Susan was a guest on Episode #55, “A Journey from Faculty Member to Digital Learning Leader,” she was last heard, quite recently, on Episode #76, in which she made a cameo appearance as the “mystery woo.”

Susan Wegmann: Woo!

Tom: Thanks for coming back, Susan!

Kelvin: Boy, that was right on cue, Susan. That was awesome!

Susan: (laughing) And if you missed the outtake, you got to listen all the way through to get the outtake. Happy Holidays everybody. Thanks for having me back.

Kelvin: (laughing) Indeed. And Dr. Shubha Kashyap is Director of Online Learning Design and Innovation at the University of Michigan’s College of Engineering, and she is also notably a faculty member in the Online Learning Consortium’s Institute for Emerging Leadership and Online Learning (IELOL), which was the basis for her appearance on Episode #74: “Connecting the Dots: Lessons for Leadership,” during which she inadvertently originated the “mystery woo.” So, hello again, Shubha.

Shubha Kashyap: Happy to be the founder of something cool, right?
Tom: Yeah.

Shubha: Kelvin and Tom, thank you so much for having me back and being part of this fun opportunity.

Kelvin: So glad you’re here. So glad all of you are here, and all the rest of our guests who we’ll see on screen a little bit later. So, here’s a little bit of rules of the road here: in our live recording, we plan to provide two opportunities to our guest panelists to respond to a couple of prepared prompts, and then we’ll turn to today’s live audience and hosts for some question-and-answer discussion on today’s topics, the podcast, any of the work of our guests—really, anything that you want to ask people is fair game. You’ll just put them on the spot, and we’ll see how well they tap dance. If you’re with us as a live member of the audience, please be thinking about what you might want to ask our guests and hosts.

Tom: And unlike our regular TOPcast episodes—if any of them could be classified as “regular”—with today’s holiday special, we do plan to do a bit of post-production and add in a little magic and pizzazz, and maybe even a little extra fun content, maybe an Easter egg or two in this special holiday special. So even if you are here—

Kelvin: I don’t know.

Tom: Pick your holiday of choice. So, even if you are kind of watching this live now, plan to check back when the recording is released to see all of that postproduction magic from Tim, our elf in the workshop, who will fix everything.

(musical transition)

Narrator: 2020 started optimistically enough on TOPcast.

(static transition)

Kelvin: And might I say, Happy New Year.

Tom: In the year of our Lord, 2020.


Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: We’re going to have fun with that all year long.

(static transition)

Narrator: Little did they know, they would not.
Tom: So, we thought we would potentially increase the frequency of our TOPcast episode distribution for 2020. And so, the idea is that we would release two episodes a month.

Kelvin: So, it’s going to be double the TOPcast for 2020. Double for 2020.

Tom: *(chuckles)* I gotcha.

Kelvin: It’s almost like we planned that.


Kelvin: Well, that’s true.

Narrator: As in previous years, episodes featured topics central to the work of online education professionals, such as faculty development.

*(static transition)*

Kelvin: Online, we aspire to prepare and support faculty to design quality courses and to teach them well. We do that in our field, and that’s beyond what we do in higher education, generally. That’s why this work is so crucial; you don’t do this kind of sustained work across the industry for face-to-face courses.

Tom: I think that’s probably true.

*(static transition)*

Narrator: And early in the year, the whimsy of a colleague suggestion had us assuming a straight path to the end of the year and the winter holidays.

*(static transition)*

Kelvin: Our colleague here in the state of Florida, the Executive Director of Florida Virtual Campus Distance Learning Student Services area, John Opper said recently that he thought we ought to have an album where we had different thematic song selections related to digital learning and the LMS. I said, “Well, we talked about the ‘Dulcet Gurgles Christmas Album’ and didn’t quite make it in 2019, but maybe 2020.”

*(soft acoustic music)*

Narrator: But in March, our attention shifted to serious matters that while foreshadowing what was to come, seemed a world away at present.

*(static transition)*

Tom: You know, at the time we’re recording this, the world is dealing with the outbreak of the Wuhan Coronavirus.
Kelvin: Yeah, scary stuff.

Tom: And by the time this comes out to—when it’s first released, that will not have been resolved. We have a colleague here who’s from Wuhan, and she told me that her relatives—she’s got cousins and folks who are still living there—they’re all quarantined. They can’t leave their home.

(soft acoustic music)

Narrator: As April unfolded, what had seemed distant only a month before was now a present personal reality. The Field Reports on remote teaching and learning began.

(static transition)

(piano)

Kelvin: This is weird, right?

Tom: It’s a little weird.

(static transition)

Narrator: It was weird.

(static transition)

Tom: So, we ought to describe the scene for the listening audience. Usually, we’re in the bunker, right?

Kelvin: Mhmmmm, so what’s different this time?

Tom: We’re not in the bunker.

Kelvin: (laughing) That’s true. We’re in our own two different remote work—in my case, home—locations, and we’re doing this because we’re in this remote work status because of the ongoing COVID-19, coronavirus here in 2020. Since we’re in two different home locations, it is BYOC today, Tom. Bring your own coffee.

Narrator: It seemed that TOPcast could add some value to our community by drawing attention to needs and resources relevant to remote teaching and learning while advocating for continued high expectations of online teaching and learning.

(static transition)

Tom: You know, we’re in the middle of this widespread emergency remote teaching, using online tools and techniques, and the impact of this, what everybody’s calling “unprecedented, shared experience,” will likely be felt for years, so
continuing to share successes and failures will help us all to carry on productively, right?

Kelvin: Yep. And so, that’s where we pick up this second Field Report. And if I might, I’ll say, as we record this episode today, we are slightly more than one month into remote instruction—maybe about four and a half calendar weeks at this point—and for several weeks at our institution, we’ve been well into planning for Summer term 2020, while also doing contingency planning for the Fall term.

Narrator: Months passed.

(static transition)


Tom: We call it “BlendFlex.” (echoing)

Kelvin: Today’s sixth Field Report. COVID, hurricanes, locusts—

Tom: Murder hornets, fire tornadoes—

Kelvin: Sure.

Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: All that.

Tom: All that.

(static transition)

Narrator: All that.

(static transition)

Kelvin: This, dear listener, is your little oasis. Your little island of serenity amidst the craziness of the world. Welcome to TOPcast.

(lighthearted piano music)

Narrator: As Autumn 2020 arrived, higher ed’s pandemic response continued with yet another semester being planned.

(static transition)

Tom: Numero dos.

Kelvin: (chuckles) Who would’ve thought we’d be doing this many of them? This is Field Report #7.
Tom: We thought this Field Report thing would be just a little temporary miniseries within the world of TOPcast, but it looks like there’s no light at the end of the tunnel right now, at least as far as how we’re teaching. I guess as long as we have something to say about it, we’ll keep doing it.

Narrator: 2020 played out a bit differently than originally expected, but as the year end looms, those of us at TOPcast invite our entire community to step back and celebrate our successes, appreciate one another, and reflect upon ways to move forward wisely in 2021 and beyond.

(piano fades)

Tom: That was a brief recap of the year that was 2020 and its effect within online higher ed. through the lens of our podcast, through TOPcast. So now we’re going to ask our panelists to build upon this recap with some reflections of their own on the past year. It was funny. I hadn’t seen that retrospective before. I watched my shirts change from month to month to month, and my location change from home to our old office to our new office. So even amongst all the various crazy things we’ve been dealing with, we’ve had an awful lot of change, just kind of in the normal course of events, and I imagine that’s the same for each of our panelists, too. So, Kelvin, you want to kick us off with our first question?

Kelvin: Yeah. So broadly, dear guest panelists, as you think back on the year 2020 with all that has unfolded, what aspect do you think is having the least talked about impact on the field of online education? The least talked about impact on the field of online education. Just because I happen to see you first, Dr. Miller, could we start with you?

Deb: Sure, Kelvin. So, I was thinking about this one aspect that I think that we’re seeing the effects of now but that I think will also be more durable than that, is that we have a larger and more diverse population of faculty participating in online teaching and learning, right? You know, at different institutions, we are more or less segregated, more or less faculty participate in it, but right now, everybody’s dipping their toe in the pool to some degree, right? And I think that broadening of the group brings in, you know, a variety of disciplines, perspective, needs, and it’s resulted in some really interesting approaches. I think we’re seeing an increase in innovation: things like faculty building virtual escape rooms using prerequisites in Canvas. And I hope that this diversification of pool of folks bringing new ideas and approaches will extend beyond COVID and have some positive net effect for online learning generally.

Kelvin: That’s good. It’s good. Dr. Wegmann?

Susan: Yeah, thank you. I absolutely had a really similar thought because our students, you know, have benefited so much from this what I perceive as individual attention, because they’re online so much more. And our faculty that—those that were reticent before, were forced into it in the spring, to teach online. And now, because we did a whole session of training in the summer months, they had a much more thoughtful approach for the fall, yet they were doing a similar, you know, high-blend model. And so, it was interesting for me to see their
perspectives, and I think there’s a lot of folks that that are probably five or six years ahead from where they would be otherwise. So, I’m hopeful that, you know, my office [does] all of the online course creations—and I say do. We work with faculty to do that and our instructional designers assist the faculty to do that. But I’m really excited to see, you know, some of the innovations, as Deb was mentioning, and how this different pool of folks that may not have ever, you know, considered it before because they have tried it now, are thinking “Huh, I think we could do this.” So, I think this is something that we really haven’t talked about or we haven’t seen written about a whole lot. I really want to be careful, though, to say that, you know, what we experienced in spring and what we’re experiencing in the fall is probably not optimal online teaching, but it certainly is moving toward that end.

Kelvin: Thanks, Susan. Dr. Stachowiak, I always worry I’m going to say your last name wrong. I hope I said it right.

Bonni: You always do it so well. (chuckles) Your question made me think quite a bit, and as I thought about the least talked about things, the number one thing that came into my mind that really hasn’t been talked about hardly at all is pivoting.

Kelvin: Hmm.

Bonni: And I’m entirely kidding, because pivoting seems to be all we’ve been talking about (laughing).

Kelvin: In new and wonderful ways, every day.

Bonni: (laughs) Yes, a lot of these buzzwords came into mind. And in all seriousness, one that hasn’t come up enough—both for me as an ongoing learner, but also in our society—is around broadband access. I know that we certainly talk about it at the individual level. Our hearts go out to those students who don’t have access to broadband to facilitate their learning. We look at it often at an institutional level, and as I voraciously read Inside Higher Ed, The Chronicle, we’ve seen lots of articles and lots of people trying to do things around that. What I hear about less is more at the systemic level, and so many other countries have already figured this out, but definitely for us here in the United States, looking at access to broadband as a social justice issue and being able to have that thought of in a systems perspective at a national level is something that I hope we will have a lot more conversations about, and also one that I know I need to learn more about, because it isn’t discussed very often. You know, I’ll just occasionally hear about it from people who are looking more at the system’s levels of things. But imagine what a difference that would make if we actually had a national strategy and a national solution for that.

Kelvin: That’s good. Thank you for that. Dr. Kashyap, or Kashap? I mutilate your last name, also, I apologize. I said it both ways that you said were acceptable, so I probably screwed them both up.

Shubha: I think it depends on which side of the family you ask, right?
Kelvin: Okay.

Shubha: It doesn’t, you know—everyone’s got their own.

Kelvin: Yes.

Shubha: This is a question I’ve been thinking about quite a bit lately, is “where do we go now?” and “where do we see the hope for what’s coming up next?” And for me, I think we’re so getting to the point where we just need to—We’re focusing on getting students content and getting them broadband access and accessibility. The piece that I’d like to spend more time talking about is the students are just as heterogeneous in their needs and their experiences as the faculty who are teaching, and that becomes even more elevated in COVID when they aren’t necessarily in the location or in the housing that they had expected to be in. And so, I think that for the next year, I’d like to think that we’re going to spend a little bit more time on the very evolving and heterogeneous needs of our learners.

Kelvin: That’s good. And last, but not least, Dr. Bentley?

Kelvin B: Yeah. So, you know, one of the things, I mean, I think when we read or hear about the pandemic and its impact on higher ed, it’s almost like we talk about it in terms of at least two major camps, right? Students, faculty. I don’t think we’ve spent enough time talking about is the students are just as heterogeneous in their needs and their experiences as the faculty who are teaching, and that becomes even more elevated in COVID when they aren’t necessarily in the location or in the housing that they had expected to be in. And again, I know that instructional designers, instructional technologists are not going to always be able to—I mean, they’ll make suggestions, but they’re not going to always—their advice may not always be valued or used by a faculty member. So, I feel like we need to flip things, you know, kind of change the channel a little bit, talk about how instructional designers, instructional technologists, and other support staff—the people who support digital learning—what impact has there been on their day-to-day? What are they struggling with in terms of meeting the needs of the institution? What funding do we need to reappropriate, so that they are more well-funded, better staffed? Not just to deal with a pandemic, but then also moving forward, as the school really thinks strategically and tactically about how they will actually offer digital learning at scale within their institution and not just for those who have just signed up for online courses, let’s say, as part of an online degree program. So, I’m worried about those folks, because I think in some ways, many schools have valued them kind of like the old school Maytag repairman commercials. You know, I’m a 70s kid, and I remember watching those, where, you know, in some ways we talked about higher ed as, you know, it’s the best quality and you know, and instructional designers are almost seen as kind of the hired help. We don’t really see instructional designers as true partners. Maybe some of them are like, you know, kind of left to their own devices until a faculty member needs them. And now, things have flipped, so that we need them now more than ever. And so how can we flip the model and say, you know, instructional designers, technologists accessibility folks need to be brought to the table as true partners in this thing that we’re calling higher education?
Kelvin: That’s good. Tom, I wonder if you had any follow up comments or questions for the panel on this topic before we move on?

Tom: I had a comment. I thought these are really, really good answers and you know, all things that that are potential impacts, or will be impacts. One that I have been thinking about is just this extension of synchronous learning in a way that probably hasn’t been quite as ubiquitous. Like, what will synchronous learning look like? Many of us, I don’t think we’re doing it quite like we’re doing it now. It was sort of thrust upon us. Most of us who’ve been in the online learning game for a while have been doing asynchronous, you know, well designed courses, where now we’ve had this asynchronous world thrust upon us, and there are things in it that are kind of working. And so, what can we learn from that? How can we change our practice? How can we move into new areas? And as a corollary to that, but maybe more of a subset to what Kelvin was just talking about, you know, the impact on staff. A lot of people have talked about the pandemic’s impact on the workforce with remote work, but what will it mean for the staff and faculty of institutions? I think we’re going to have to grapple with that because most of the institutions that we all work at are situated in a physical space. We all kind of work at a university that has a footprint and a physical plant in classrooms and staff that come to work, but what we found is that we’ve been able to pretty much do our jobs remotely. Does that change how we do our work going forward? I’m not sure we’re going to have instructional designer and faculty consultations in the same way that we used to have them. I think most of them, I think, the default will be Zoom now as opposed to sitting in a room side by side like we used to do. So, I don’t know what that means. Maybe it also expands the workforce. Maybe we can hire people who don’t necessarily live in the city that you are working in, or faculty or other things. I think there’s a huge domino effect from this that may change all kinds of things around the edges.

Kelvin: Thanks for that. Thanks all of you. We all probably have plenty of additional thoughts on the year 2020, and hopefully when we get to our open discussion in a few minutes, we can crack those open and do some follow ups. And we probably are all rather happy to look forward to 2020 fading from view in our rearview mirrors.

(holiday-themed musical transition)

Narrator: The classic sounds of the holidays. In 2020, they’re needed more now than ever before. And finally, they can be yours. In an exclusive compilation tailored for online education professionals, TOPcast: the Teaching Online Podcast presents the “Dulcet Gurgles Holiday Extravaganza,” a timeless collection direct from our very own house band. We’ve got all your favorite songs including “We Three Profs of Synchronous Zoom,” “Canvas Got Run Over by a Reindeer,” “Light One Brightspace,” “Oh, Little Lab of Virtual,” “Jingle Bell MOOC,” “Deck the Hall with No More Lecture.” The whole collection can be yours for just three easy payments of $9.99 for two CDs, or $7.99 for two cassette or eight-track tapes. But wait, there’s more! You’ll also get “ADDIE the Snowman,” “Rudolph the Red-Nosed ID,” “Remote Navidad,” “Proctor Around the Christmas Tree,” “Jolly Old Asynchronous,” “COVID, COVID, COVID (We Wish You’d Go Away),” and “It’s Beginning to Look a Lot Like Quarantine.” This deal is so
exclusive, it’s not sold in stores. In fact, it’s not sold anywhere. It’s not even real! Definitely do not send a check or money order to your friends at TOPcast. If you do, you’ll get nothing in return. It’s the “Dulcet Gurgles Holiday Extravaganza!”

(holiday music fades)

Kelvin: Let’s, just for a moment, turn our attention to what is ahead beyond 2020. Dr. Cavanagh?

Tom: Yeah. So, as you all kind of look ahead into the year 2021—or maybe even let’s include 2022, because I think we have a sense at least of what spring is going to be like—and you had the power to bring it into being with a magical wand one aspirational hope. If you could do one thing for online education in the year or a year and a half ahead, what would that be? And I’m not talking about like, a vaccine or something, because everybody hopes for that. But within the world of online education, what would you kind of bring into being? Maybe I’ll kind of go randomly around my Hollywood Squares here. Bonni, why don’t I call on you first?

Bonni: Mine goes back to something that Kelvin Bentley shared, just around some of the challenges with leaving people out of the picture, and I think my hope is really that we continue to all both have the feeling that we’re truly in this together. That sense of solidarity. I know for myself, when I, on a rare occasion, may experience some frustrations and feeling discouraged in my own work, I don’t have to go very far but to sort of take my eyes up a little bit from my current circumstances and just look around me. And so many of you here today I’m meeting for the first time and you’re already inspiring me, you’re bringing life to my day, and you’re bringing me encouragement. And that to me, as I think about people who had only ever taught traditional in-person classes previous to the pandemic, just to be able to see the kind of rich relationships that are possible, never having sat in a room with the person, but truly feeling the same if not more of a connection than is feasible when we are in person together, I just think that brings me a lot of hope because we need each other, and we don’t just need the people who we’re going to pass by at our own institutions, but when we think about serving students at large and part of the broader picture, it just brings me a lot of hope. And I love to see all these examples of people working across institutions across different kinds of roles and really being able to live up to that kind of solidarity together.

Tom: Thank you. Kelvin Bentley, do you have an aspirational hope for the near to midterm?

Kelvin B: Oh, yeah. I have a lot. To borrow from what Bonni just mentioned, I think solidarity is very important. I still think that, you know, there still needs to be more work to where institutions are sharing more about good practices. And so, my hope is that the work that we’re doing now, that we will be able to actually do more pedagogical research, you know, whatever that actually looks like. And not necessarily to put it in a journal anyway, but to document what’s working and what’s not working so well with the pivot, as it evolves. Whether it’s, you know, synchronous online, remote, teaching and learning, digital learning, how it’s
evolving. So, I think we need to find a way to kind of collect that information, share it across our institutions so that schools that are really kind of struggling to figure out how to meet the needs of their students through digital learning will have examples. Hopefully, peer institutions, or maybe not even institutions that they would consider peers, but just to be able to help their faculty see rich examples of how this work is being done. Because we’re still so siloed, that’s very difficult to do right now, because there’s not really a centralized place to collect that data. And so, my hope is for that, and I’ll just quickly add, another thing that I hope is that schools will take a very hard and close look at funding around digital learning initiatives. I think, again, there’s a very big gap—lots of assumptions that technology is very, you know, at scale, can be very cheap. And so, I think we need to do more to find ways to actually, you know, budget accordingly, so that we can provide a lot of digital learning resources to both faculty and students, you know, within our institutions, and not just for those who are completing, you know, full online degree programs.

Tom: Yeah, good point. Thank you. Deb, how about you?

Deb: Yeah, I think kind of right along those lines, I just hope we really remain flexible in our thinking as we move past 2020—I’ll just say as we move past COVID, whatever year that happens in. You know, we’ve tried a lot of different things that maybe we wouldn’t have tried last year, and we’ve brought in a bigger group of people. So, I hope we continue to be a larger and more diverse community and that we continue to really experiment, whether it’s synchronous online learning or other kinds of things that we’ve tried because of need, that we have a chance to look at more thoughtfully and work together to explore.

Tom: Thanks. Shubha, why don’t you go next?

Shubha: Thank you. The two thoughts I have related to this is that I hope that as we move forward, we continue to spend a little bit more time when we talk about delivering courses, not just on what we’re delivering but how we’re delivering it. I know for many people, this was the first time they had thought maybe with intentionality about how they deliver their content. I know there’s a lot of emphasis on the content itself, but course navigation or structure or delivery was maybe a new concept for many people, or it’s one they hadn’t spent enough time thinking about. So, my hope for next year is that everyone takes a little bit more percentage of their time to think a little bit more about that. There are some people are ahead of the game, but for some it’s still a baby step. So, a little bit more intentionality around that and whatever resources are available to you as a team or as an instructor. And then the other piece is I hope—and I don’t know if there’s a silver bullet for this, and I think that’s why this is so tough—is in general, across the board, the instructors and the faculty and staff are coming forward with good will, with strong intentions, want to be there for the students, want to be empathic teaching and learning right now, but they don’t necessarily know how. And they don’t—because the needs are evolving and changing, people are not sure. They want to help their students. They want to create options and flexibility but they’re not always clear what that means. And I hope we start to get more clarity and best practices on how to help students, especially when they, now more than ever, need empathic learning environments.
Tom: Yeah, yeah. Good point. And Susan, you want to clean up with your aspirational hope?

Susan: Yeah, absolutely. And so, I will talk about some of the same themes. And Bonni was talking about, I think, more broad relationship issues among various institutions. And my thought was, “Yes, absolutely.” And the more personal relationships between—and Tom mentioned this as well—the instructional designers and the faculty, and how those relationships, I would hope, would become much more cemented in best practices. And as Shubha and Deb and Kelvin also mentioned, just knowing that, you know, there are some fantastic best practices out there and we know how to engage students online. And again, I want to say we’re walking this really tricky, kind of middle ground between online learning and face-to-face learning. And so, in my institution anyway, we’re trying to try to be “all things to all people,” and the risk that we’re running is that you know, we’re really not teaching online fully asynchronous in some cases. And so, what I’m trying to do is help—in all of our professional enhancement sessions—help our faculty see that, “Yes, we can do that.” And we can develop these online courses, and that’s fantastic. However, what you’re doing, and Tom alluded to this, we’re doing some synchronous online courses, and that’s a brand-new field for us. So, my hope is that we can develop those relationships with our instructional designers that, you know, it’s a much more, you know, as we need—as they need help, you know, in the moment, give them a call, let’s do some brainstorming, and then help faculty and help us all really grow this field. And so, I’m really hopeful that that’s going to happen, and, of course, we fall to our Online Learning Consortium and other organizations to help us do that but are really helpful for that.

Tom: Great, thank you all for sharing those. Kelvin, you want to add any?

Kelvin: In the interest of time, I will not, other than to say, maybe just to synthesize, I hope that we will just continue to be learner-focused, right? Several people commented on various aspects of the student experience, and I think we need not to be so homogenous, you know, cookie cutter. There are students and you know, they’re out there somewhere, but realize that students have unique needs of all sorts. And that’s hard, but I think we’ve surfaced so many needs this year in 2020. I think we need to stay attuned to those kind of things. Thanks for that. Alright, so now we’re in a lightning round that we call “Promoter Resource.” So, we’ve asked each of our guests to share a resource they have created or that they endorse that would be of value to our TOPcast audience. So, a resource they have created or that they endorsed that would be of value. So, each guest will have just a few seconds to share the resource, the rationale, like, “Why do you think that thing?” and how to access it. Like, if you’ve got—bonus points if you’ve got, like, a little short URL somehow. So, I’ll call on each panelist by name, so save time, panelists, by unmuteing now if you’re muted. And we’ll kind of go down the line here. Kelvin Bentley, how about you first?

Kelvin B: Sure. At the company that I work for, Six Red Marbles, we build digital learning content for colleges and schools and various organizations. We created a site called [www.sixredmarbles.com/faculty-success](http://www.sixredmarbles.com/faculty-success). And so, it’s a series of modules that faculty can basically complete for free within our Canvas environment. It
talks about best practices and, you know, designing and building, facilitating your online course. And so, it’s a free resource we wanted to make available not just during the pandemic, but then also moving forward.

Kelvin: Outstanding. Dr. Miller, how about you next?

Deb: So, I’m going to attribute or recommend a resource that was put out by the Online Learning Consortium, I think in cooperation with a number of other groups. And it’s called “Delivering High Quality Instruction Online Due to COVID Faculty Playbook,” and it’s just really well organized and designed. It addresses issues like equity for students, and we’ve found it a good resource overall, and you know, to pull particular pages from and share best practices. So, if you haven’t looked at that one, you’ll want to go to onlinelearningconsortium.org and look under “Tools” for the faculty playbook.

Kelvin: Awesome. Thanks so much, Deb. Dr. Wegmann?

Susan: Yes. Book—Small Teaching Online.

Kelvin: Book. I’ve heard of this technology. I have not seen one in a while.

Susan: I know. It has pages—no (laughs). Applying Learning Science and Online Classes. And I love the authors. The lead author’s named Flower Darby, but James Lang was the author of the original Small Teaching, and so the story goes that she saw him at a conference and said, “Hey, we need to do an online version.” Anyway, I heard her speak at another conference. And so, what I like about it is that it’s very student oriented. And Kelvin, you set it up just a minute ago, because—

Kelvin: (sighs)

Susan: Yeah, there’s a lot of things that we know about good teaching. And good teaching is still good teaching. Things like the growth mindset, giving students autonomy, using discussion boards well—which is our research interest—helping students develop their own personal learning inventory, so networks. And so, giving students time to reflect. All those good things that we know about learning and teaching. So, Small Teaching Online. Flower Darby and James Lange.

Kelvin: Thanks, Susan. Dr. Kashyap?

Shubha: Hello. So, one of the things that we did early into the pandemic and revised on a weekly basis is the faculty resources page. It’s designed to help the College of Engineering faculty and instructors and staff with timely updates, resources and feedback and to tie that, we also established a weekly blog. So, this is the reason why I love this: it’s targeting our faculty, our specific needs, it’s open to anyone who wants to check it out, it’s available asynchronously, it leverages the expertise of our own staff, and addresses our specific needs. And I think this is something that any institution could band together and produce to address their immediate needs during this transition. So, it’s a homegrown resource. We leverage existing resources and develop new ones and keep it up to date and do
outreach efforts using it. And it comes in very handy during our faculty consultations when we have a reference to show them exactly where to go to follow up.

Kelvin: All right, and last but not least, Dr. Stachowiak.

Bonni: If anyone listening has any bandwidth to listen to an additional podcast, and you don’t already, I would love to share about the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast. It’s been airing since June of 2014 and addresses the art and science of facilitating learning. We also talk about productivity approaches so we can have more peace in our lives and be even more present for our students. And that’s at teachinginhighered.com or on any podcast, catcher, player, app, thingamabob. Search for “Teaching in Higher Ed” and you’ll find it.

Kelvin: Yeah, plus one, recommended, thumbs up, all that. Bonni’s podcast, great stuff. Over to you, Tom, for the next segment.

Tom: Yeah. All right. So, thank you all for sharing that. We’re going to now open the floor to our live audience to make some comments or maybe ask some questions related to maybe what we talked about today, or past episodes, or anything that they want to say to our guests or even our hosts. Our moderator will be queuing up each audience member who has posted something in the chat, and if you’re able to unmute and make the comment yourself, you may. So, I see that we do have some in the chat now. We can start with April, I believe.

April: So, my question has to do with the experiences of K-12 students with remote learning, and I’m curious to know how you think that’s going to impact institutions of higher education in the next two to five years.

Kelvin: Any takers on that? Anybody? We probably won’t be able to hear from every single panelist and host on each of these questions, but anybody just dying to answer that question or respond to it?

Susan: I mean, I’ll take a stab at it. My background is K-12 education, and, you know, it’s long been troubling to me, honestly, to think about K-12 students learning exclusively online. However, what I’m seeing in the K-12 landscape is amazing, and I’m seeing teachers do things that I would never have expected in terms of engaging with students, in terms of the activities they’re having students do. And you know, teachers are an amazing group of folks. K-12, especially. And so, I think what we’re going to find is that, you know, we’re going to have global citizens now, and our K-12 learners now, they’re going to, you know, growing up, they’re going to have some skills that, frankly, our students now in college never had because they didn’t have this experience of, you know, remote teaching. So, I’m hopeful that this is going to be a positive thing. I do know also, and I’m listening to Bonni’s comments and Kelvin as well about, you know, the broadband access in some cases has been so troubling that it does become an issue of social justice, and it becomes an issue of, you know, our K-12 population that doesn’t have the same kind of access. And so that immediately means there’s some issues, there’s some problems, but for the most part, I’m really excited by it. So, I’m so glad you brought that up, because that’s a huge issue, April.
Kelvin: Anybody else want to glom on to that or have a contrary perspective? Contrary perspectives are welcome.

Shubha: I think that depending on this issue, but depending on how long this goes on, I agree with you, Susan. I too, am sort of looking at what’s happening and wondering if they’re actually handling this better sometimes than others, maybe. But it gives me pause to see what the long-term implications are for higher ed institutions where they may have different needs when they start looking at universities that are primarily residential. And they may now expect more student services online, even at a residential campus, and some other evolving needs. So, you know, it’s hard to predict now, but I think that this is accelerating some of the conversations. It’s just hard to know what’s next, though.

Kelvin: For my part, I would say I think it’s a cogent question, April. And I sometimes tilt dark and negative sometimes, and I worry about the negative experiences that our K-12 students have had during remote instruction because I know there have been some. Susan highlighted some of the positives. If you’ve had a really bad experience, you know, what’s the old axiom? Once burned, twice shy? You may not want to engage in digital learning in college. You’re like, “No, no, no, I tried that before. Thank you very much.” Or to put a little bit more positively, maybe you become a more savvy shopper. So, I think it behooves all of us to speak to the value proposition of intentionally well-designed online courses, and intentionally well-designed blended courses, and intentionally well-designed any kind of digital learning, and for that matter, Dr. Stachowiak, intentionally well-designed, just teaching and learning in higher ed. Tom, other comments?

Tom: Yeah. Why does intentionally well-designed have to be restricted to digital learning, right? I agree, though, I think that there has been an awful lot of emergency instruction that’s probably less than stellar that has unfortunately painted with a broad brush all of online learning for students who hadn’t experienced anything else, particularly in K-12. And I think K-12 teachers are doing the best that they possibly can, but they’re sometimes put in really hard situations where they’re trying to teach to a classroom of a couple of students and students online, and it’s really hard to serve both of them well, and then students in both ends say, “Well, gee. Online learning’s terrible.” Well, that’s not online learning, right? So, I think that we may have some education to do as an industry as some of these students come out the other side of this.

Kelvin: Yeah. That’s good.

Tom: Alright, so the next question is from Carmin. Carmin Chan, would you like to ask that yourself, Carmin?

Carmin Chan: Hey. You guys already started to preview it, but for those of us that are coming from traditional institutions in higher ed with traditional campus climates but who now have growing online populations, I really hope that our campuses will continue to commit to offering virtual campus access to resources and student services and just the student experience and its many facets that we provide in these traditional settings because what we’ve experienced at the University of Arizona is that many of the things that seemed impossible in the past were
collaborations that were sort of untouchable before are now really strong partnerships and where we really want to ensure that we have commitment to continue to offering access to our online and distanced campus students beyond the pandemic.

Tom: I’ll offer one comment. I totally agree. So, we all migrated, right, within a week all of our face-to-face and blended courses to a fully remote environment. Less than a week, and we did ours over spring break. Half of it was spring break. If we were going to do—if we had approached the faculty or the administration under normal times and said, “I’d like to take every class the university and make it online.” Even if they would entertain such a preposterous—

Kelvin: It’s been nice knowing you, Tom.

Tom: Yeah. We’d still be talking about who should be on the committee to talk about that, let alone actually be able to have a meeting to talk about it, and then do it. But we did it, so, you know, the previous impossible is definitely, I think, broken a little bit. And I sure hope you all at University of Arizona figure it out. You just bought Ashford. (laughing) You better figure it out. I’m just kidding.

Deb: I just want to say, hear, hear. I think that’s been really exciting seeing all the student services pivot quickly and for the most part, rather successfully. For us, before we had, you know, for students that were really, really fully online, sometimes we had to outsource some of those services for them because they weren’t available the way they needed it. So, I’m super excited about the future and, you know, integrating more native institutional services to be available for students that are working and need access at night and online and this and that and the other thing. So, I think that’s a bright spot in the future.

Tom: All right. And we have one more question in the chat, and that is from Steven Crawford.

Steven Crawford: You know, I want to kind of just—a nice little follow up from this previous question, because we know that a crisis can jumpstart evolutionary change, but let’s talk about it from the other side of the coin. What are some things that we have been doing regularly prior to 2020 that we hope that we’ll either stop doing, or we just don’t restart doing it ever again?

Tom: What a great question.

Kelvin: That was a good one.

Tom: Anybody want to comment on that?

Bonni: Instantly, what came to my mind when I saw your question pop in there was just how, at least at my institution, so much of when we get together to meet is thought of generally as a one-way conversation. You’re going to receive information, but yet those faculty colleagues I have who live one to two hours away from our campus should be expected to get in their vehicles, drive all the way in to have information in a one-way setting shared. And I am excited about
the possibility that now, rather than just us saying, “Wouldn’t it be great if we could better accommodate people who live longer distances away or people who teach in our evening programs and aren’t generally around?” etc., but they’ve actually seen how that could work. I mean, they’ve seen the possibility, they’ve experienced it, so can we please, please, please have that part stay? I love it at the level of institutional, but I also just love it where, “Hey, you know, do you want us to get together and talk about this real quick?” And rather than—I mean, sometimes we’ll get on the phone. I love going for walks with people when we’re not actually walking together, but we’ve got our headset in and we’re getting a little bit of physical activity, which just really, to me, really breaks up the day a lot and brings forth a lot better conversation. So that’s something I’m really, really hoping both stops and stays around, depending on how you phrase it.

Shubha:  
I agree, Bonni. I think that’s one that you know, before it was, “This is where the meeting is,” and there weren’t remote options. Now we have families who are working at different schedules, different times. Flexibility is something I think we should continue. It increases access to all important conversations. And I think in the past, many groups are marginalized because they couldn’t participate due to schedules and lifestyles and distance, and their voices went unheard. And now there’s an equal opportunity to participate. I know that here at Michigan engineering, one of the pieces that is becoming a more prevalent conversation is around modularizing content and sort of creating assets that can be used in different ways for different populations and helping students, helping the faculty kind of create content that allows them to use it across multiple faculty members. But more importantly, you know, guest speakers, you can only get them once or twice ever. How do we create an asset that many students for the future can benefit from that? That’s something that I think more people are open to now more than ever, and I love that, and then I guess the last piece that I would just say is that as students—this is tying back to what you’re talking about—is students, you know, we’re always told, “Well, if you want to service, you have to come here. Come to Career Services. Come to here. Come to…” And now we’ve made that possible for them to do that wherever they are, and that’s going to create more opportunities. So, I hope we continue that. I think that meeting students where they are, and now literally meeting students where they are is just a great opportunity.

Tom:  
I’ll add one more of something that we should stop doing. And I’m—this isn’t even the case at UCF, but I know it is at elsewhere. Particularly, smaller schools that viewed online learning as fringe—this was alluded to earlier—or some sort of, you know, extra, or if it was even, you know, thought of at all, you got maybe one and a half FTE or somebody to kind of run the online program, and mostly they were an LMS administrator. But if that’s what you were doing before, you better not be doing that again going forward because, you know, if anything, this has just sort of exposed the fact that online learning can be part of the solution set for any institution. Whether you—even for residential liberal arts schools, where you should privilege the on-campus experience, that doesn’t mean that you can’t take full advantage of digital learning and the strategic ways. I also think that even though I think a lot of the students are being served by the remote instruction are those that are maybe a little more traditional students that had to—to use Bonni’s word—“pivot” to an online environment. I think it’s also opened the eyes of a lot of people that there are an awful lot of nontraditional kinds of
learners out there that need this kind of flexibility that—in those of us on this call, we all know about them. But I think there are a lot of policymakers and institutional leaders that just forget that there are 35-year-old single moms trying to go back to school. Not everybody’s an 18-year-old coming out of high school, going to college. In fact, the majority of them are nontraditional. And this is how we’re going to serve them, through these kinds of digital needs.

Kelvin: Well said. And maybe we’ll give Carmin the final word. She made another little post there, riffing on something Shubha said. She said, “I hope that professional organizations continue to offer virtual access to conferences. Having virtual access has opened up professional development opportunities for many more folks who might not have been able to travel or attend otherwise.” Yeah, that is so true, and may help make professional development possible, even with budget constraints after the pandemic. I mean, it’s not unlike what we just talked about on the actual formal learning side within our institutional context, but it’s a challenging thing for our professional associations, right? Because they’ve got to sustain themselves. Like, they’ve got to be able to pay for things, and that is challenging to make all virtual, but maybe we’ve pushed the envelope on what’s possible with virtual professional development more so than we have in the past.

(holiday music transition)

Narrator: TOPcast listeners—and really anyone involved with teaching and learning in higher education—should check out the weekly podcast Teaching in Higher Ed, hosted by Bonni Stachowiaik, in which she and her guests explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. The Teaching in Higher Ed. podcast. Available wherever you get your podcasts or online at teachinginhighered.com.

Kelvin: So, I’m watching maybe not the coffee, Tom, dwindled down out of our cups like normal, but certainly the minutes dwindled down out of the hourglass.

Tom: I have unidentified clear liquid in my beverage container.

Kelvin: It’s scotch? Vodka? Deconstructed coffee?

Tom: (muffled) It’s a holiday special.

Kelvin: (laughing) That’s right. Well, as we head toward the finish line here, let me just say thanks again to our guest panelists who have been so generous with their time today. And thanks also to those of you who have joined us in real time. And thanks to those of you who are listening to or watching the more highly produced recording. We appreciate all of you.

Tom: So, I don’t know, maybe it was quite as good as the Star Wars Holiday Special.

Kelvin B: (laughing) So much better. So much better.

Tom: Maybe a reference to the old Carol Burnett Show—I’m a child of the 70s as well, Kelvin—where she used to come out and tug on her ear and say, “So glad we had
this time together.” I’m not going to sing it, but we do. We appreciate all that everybody’s been going through this whole year. It’s easier to go through it together. And it’s important that we celebrate the successes that we’ve had behind us, as well as the opportunities before us and to learn. We should always learn from each other, especially as a community about how to make our field even better, and I’ll echo what Kelvin Thompson said, kind of keeping students always at the forefront.

Kelvin: Indeed. And we are thankful to all of our TOPcast listeners, our regular listeners, and our extended friends of TOPcast for the work you do and for your kind attention to us. And if you’ll indulge us for just a moment longer, this is also a good time to express our gratitude publicly for the broader TOPcast team working usually unsung behind the scenes: audio video producer, Tim Reid, who’s on the Zoom room today making things happen; our web strategist Jon Pizzo, who makes sure that we’re all pointed in the right direction web wise; project manager and editor of the TOPcast Insider newsletter, Bren Bedford; Jackie Compton, who transcribes and captions each and every episode of TOPcast manually; Samantha Richardson, who composes all the summary content Tweets if you like, kind of get that, there’s little nuggets at topcastnow. That’s all Sam. And finally, Janette Rivera, who creates trackable short links for our show notes for each and every episode so that we can see whether you’re clicking them or not. So, thank you, TOPcast team. We couldn’t do this work without you. And thank you for that very appreciative, good modeling, all of you on the call today.

Tom: And I want to thank everybody who’s ever sent us coffee.

Kelvin: Yeah! That’s true.

Tom: We’ve gotten a lot. In fact, we’ve still got stuff to brew and drink.

Kelvin: But don’t let that stop you from putting some in the mail now.

Tom: That’s right. Yeah. Those who have handed it to me at conferences or that have shown up magically in the mail with bags of coffee. We really do appreciate it, and we do drink it all, so thank you so much. So, for 2020, until next time for TOPcast, I’m Tom.

Kelvin: I’m Kelvin.

Tom: See ya.

(holiday-themed musical outro)