
Narrator: What will your future look like? The job you do today could be different than the jobs of tomorrow. Some see this as a challenge. At UCF, we see opportunity, a chance for you to grow your knowledge, and strengthen your skills from anywhere life might take you. With in-demand degree programs and resources for your success, UCF Online can help you prepare for the future and all the possibilities that come with it.

(musical transition)

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

Kelvin Thompson: And I am Kelvin Thompson.

Tom: And you are listening to TOPcast: the Teaching Online Podcast. Hi, Kelvin.

Kelvin: Hey, Tom. It feels like 2020 all over again.

Tom: It does. Spring 2020. Summer 2020. So, for those that may be listening and cannot see the video, we are both kind of [in] respective remote locations today, although I have a virtual background because my background’s really boring. It’s like a white wall. But yeah, we’re both at home today for a change.

Kelvin: Yeah. So, we’ll see. I mean, who knows? It’s just nostalgia, right? I mean, that the whole connection could fall apart. Who knows?

Tom: Who knows? Anything could happen in this topsy turvy world?

Kelvin: That’s right. That’s right. But I hope in your topsy turvy world, you provided your own coffee because I didn’t drive to your house to bring you any.

Tom: No, and in fact, I’m going to switch it up on you, Kelvin, here.

Kelvin: Oh my…you’re drinking scotch.

Tom: I have tea. The reason I’m home is because I’ve caught my first cold in like two years. So, I’ve decided to work from home so I don’t make anybody in the office—the few of us that are in the office—sick with the sniffles. So, I got some Celestial Seasonings’ Lemon Zinger herbal tea with some squeezed lime and honey in it.

Kelvin: Ooh, that’s quite nice. Quite nice. It’s quite nice. quite nice. Very exotic, very particular. Do you have a connection to today’s topic in your in your cup?

Tom: No. (laughing) Sorry.
Kelvin: That’s okay. Well, I’ll tell you about mine. My beverage is coffee in the cup here. And this coffee is a single origin Colombia—which we’ve had Colombias before—from a new-to-me local shop called San Julian’s Hills Coffee. This particular coffee is a Geisha varietal. We’ve talked about varietals before, and while this varietal originated in Ethiopia a long time ago, Colombia is one of the places where it’s grown now. And this particular coffee is honey processed, which is a concept we talked about I think maybe a few years ago. Both of those, interestingly, are supposed to be kind of a result in a sweetish kind of a taste, the varietal and the processing. But the end result is a very specialized coffee, which I suppose is why the coffee shop packaged it up as a limited time offering. So, I’ll just say I can find connection to today’s coffee in my cup and yours.

Tom: Yeah, well, yours is honey processed, is that when you said?

Kelvin: Yeah.

Tom: And I actually squeezed some honey in my tea, so we’ve got that going for us.

Kelvin: Yeah, well, that’s true.

Tom: I don’t know, Kelvin. You have to take me by the hand. Maybe it’s all the cold medicine in my head. It’s fogged my ability to come up with a connection.

Kelvin: Well, I was thinking of this. I was thinking, we are each in our unique locations. We each have our unique beverages. Your unique beverage is very specialized and particular to you. You’ve added a few things to it. Mine is very limited time, very specialized, unique combination of processing and varietals and roasting and all that, and together, we have a unique set of circumstances. But as we combine, we can make some general observations about our beverages. So, I thought that kind of resonates with me with today’s topic where you have particular contexts that are combined to form a more general perspective.

Tom: Okay.

Kelvin: How’s that?

Tom: I see it now. Yeah, okay.

Kelvin: So, you gonna tell people what we’re talking about today?

Tom: Yeah. So today, we’re taking a bit of a dive into the CHLOE 6 report that has recently been released that looks at the previous year’s trends and activities in the great world we call online learning.

Kelvin: Yeah, and if folks don’t know, CHLOE is a series of reports with a longer name: Changing Landscape of Online Education. Nicknamed CHLOE. Starting in 2017, I think, these reports have documented the evolution of online learning and higher ed. Each year, they kind of focus on a certain dynamic, and the current report focuses on our emergence from emergency ad hoc remote instruction, and
our anticipation of a post-pandemic world. You want to tell folks about the population of interest in this survey?

Tom: Yeah, it’s pretty much what are called chief online learning officers or chief online officers. And of note, our colleague and previous TOPcast guest, Dr. Eric Fredericksen is credited as a contributing editor, perhaps because of his status as the keeper of the list, right? Of these chief online learning officers: all their contact information all around the around the country. There’s more information about that in TOPcast Episode 36, “Finding Online Learning Leaders: ‘Fredericksen’s List.’” It’s actually a great episode. I would encourage everybody to go take a listen. The report is also co-directed by Richard Garret and Dr. Bethany Simunich, and the senior editor is Dr. Ron Legon—formerly of Quality Matters, I believe—and the report is co-sponsored by Quality Matters and Eduventures. So, it’s got lot of names and credible people on it and associated with it.

Kelvin: It’s been interesting to see kind of the evolution of these CHLOE report as they’ve come out over the last few years. I kind of look forward to them.

Tom: Yeah, I do, too. I do participate in them. I answer typically for UCF, and look forward to getting the results every year and this one in particular, because it had to do with the COVID year and took a look at how all of the institutions that responded, you know, dealt with that highly unusual situation that relied so heavily on what we do.

Kelvin: Yeah. Well, I think we thought we might just pick up some themes that stood out to us from this. It’s a lengthy report, right? I think you said a while ago when we were talking before hitting record that it’s nearly 70 pages long this report. So, we’re not going to go through the whole thing. We’ll put a link in the show notes. You should go download it, read it yourself. But we thought we’d pick up some themes.

Tom: I thought I would just sit here and read it to everybody. That’s all. That’s [what] the whole podcast is going to be, right? “Storytime with Tom and Kelvin.” No, there are a number of themes that you’ve been very helpful in kind of pulling a few of those out in our notes. Maybe we could just sort of start from the top and dig in. The first one is a real emphasis on faculty development and how important that is and how important it was for the various institutions across the country as they started to deal with the pandemic and the possibility of having to go to 100% remote instruction, particularly for a whole bunch of faculty who had never done it before.

Kelvin: Yeah, I agree with that. It was interesting to me. I think the value of faculty development being recognized is great. Maybe I’m reading it too closely, but I kind of thought that the idea of focusing only on online teaching and kind of these design standards, it kind of reflects to me, a bit of expediency, which is understandable during the COVID year, compared to say, investing in faculty ability to design well for online. I’m parsing kinda closely, but that latter thing, right? Investing in faculty ability to design well for online. That’s been something that’s been near and dear to our hearts at UCF for a long time.
Tom: Yeah, I mean, it’s sort of at the core of our philosophy. We’re not necessarily certifying individual courses, but we’re kind of trying to work through the faculty. So, that definitely resonates with me. And I think it’s worth noting that some of the numbers that kind of looking forward, the chief online officers did identify online teaching at like 42% and meeting minimum standards for online quality (40%) as the single highest priority going forward. I’m kind of glad to hear that because it speaks to less about, you know, just scale and adoption and more towards quality and experience.

Kelvin: Yeah. Agreed. Agreed. What do you want to do next?

Tom: I was thinking maybe instructional designers, because that was a theme that popped out and certainly has been one that I’ve experienced in conversations with colleagues around the country, different committees that I’m on. I imagine you’ve had the same conversations that there’s suddenly a brand new appreciation for the value of instructional designers, and you can see it actually in the job market now, too, where there are more and more ID positions listed, more and more fully remote ID positions listed, because there’s such demand for them and their services now. And I think it’s a good thing, because again, it points towards that quality.

Kelvin: I agree with that. I thought it was interesting, though, right? That I’ve seen those same kind of trends that you have. You see the remote positions. You talk to people. Instructional design is really a thing. But maybe it’s the way that it was asked about in CHLOE, but what surfaced was that the hiring of instructional designers ranked lower in priority for the respondents than some of the other things, and that’s kind of understandable—exigent circumstances of the pandemic—but it’s interesting that as much as we think everybody was talking about instructional designers, it’s not the very top thing. It came down. But it was clear that the idea of a need or a desire for instructional designers was prevalent, as was the comment that “I’d love to hire some if I had a budget to do it.”

Tom: Right. Yeah, well, I guess the only thing I would say is you better find that budget. If you want to be in the online learning game, you’re gonna have to prioritize for it. And that means making an investment in instructional designers and the other kinds of resources—human and otherwise—that will ensure quality. You want to go to the next one? You want to start this one?

Kelvin: Sure. We’ve talked about this, I think, a bit. This anticipated complexity, we might say, emerging from the remote instruction era. Complexity of modalities and variations in what online teaching and learning means and what it looks like. We’ve certainly seen that at our institution at UCF. We’ve already tweaked our modality structure, and now have new flavors of certain modalities, like we are talking about live or synchronous versus flexible or asynchronous. We’ve talked about that in months past. Some episodes that come to mind are Episode 83, “Rethinking Synchronous for Post-COVID Era” and 85, “Blended is the Future. (It’s Not Just Courses.).” We’ve talked around some of those things. But I think the report kind of shows that that’s not just unique to UCF, but others are finding that dynamic as well.
Tom: We’re all struggling with the complexities of the new modality reality that we’re kind of all faced with. And for us, it’s been the recognition that synchronous just is not going away. The pandemic fundamentally changed that, and so, for us, it’s like, if we’re going to do it, then how can we do this really well? In fact, you and I were part of a meeting earlier today with a bunch of people talking about that very subject. So, other schools are in the same boat that we are in discussing, and not just necessarily with synchronous, because some schools have been doing synchronous, but I imagine they’re probably also struggling with the “Okay, how do we deal with asynchronous now where our model may have been more of a lecture capture model? How do we do the other things in the online learning portfolio that our students are going to need if we’re going to have an intentional online strategy?” I think there’s going to be a bit of a shakiness for a period of time while we all sort of, you know, find firm footing on the modality question going forward. But, you know, I think we’ll get there, and we’ll probably get there sooner than we fear, which is sort of a transition into the next one, which is kind of future looking. And maybe it’s related to the modality question because as the modalities kind of expand, it does, in some ways, imply an expansion of online learning in general. So, it’s not just the kinds of online learning, which is the modality question, but just the number of people taking online learning. There were all kinds of students who were exposed to online learning in the past year who maybe had not been particularly exposed to it or maybe were coming out of high school into the post-secondary world and ended up doing their whole senior year online. Now, they’re maybe not as reluctant to try an online class or two even if they’re going to a residential college experience. There’s an anticipation of growth across the whole sector, and that was reflected in the CHLOE report. In fact, only 6%—and I want to know who they are—predicted any decline in online undergraduate enrollment kind of going forward. Maybe they’re very specialized kinds of schools? I don’t know. But I can’t imagine it going down.

Kelvin: Yeah. Maybe that gets us right into the next theme that we talked about, right? Like, who are those 6%? I don’t know that it’s an apples to apples comparison, but I was fascinated by the comment made right toward the end of the report, that while the pandemic experience with online learning will influence change across a wide swath of post-secondary institutions to the benefit of students, faculty, and institutions, it may still fall short of transformational change. CHLOE will need to track institutional—get this—snap-back to accustomed practices. So, maybe the 6% is in there represented somehow or maybe it’s more woven in? There’s this sort of this conservativising, “Hmm” kind of kind of theme that’s being talked about there, maybe.

Tom: Yeah, I mean, it’s an interesting point. Maybe you’re right. Maybe it’s those who predicted that sort of snap-back, which is one of your themes that you pulled out, are the ones who are the 6% that are saying that there may be some decline in the number of students at the undergraduate level. And I can see that. We’ve actually talked about that on the previous podcast, about this sort of pendulum swing back. And it’s a fear I have as a reaction to what I have felt has been a sub-optimal experience by some students in some contexts—particularly in the K12 context—that they’ll avoid it, both students and potentially administrators or policymakers. So, maybe that’s a factor in it as well. But I don’t know. I think if there is a snap-back, I think it’s just a temporary course correction and then we’re
going to get back on our growth. And those snap-backs may be localized into particular contexts or institutions.

Kelvin: Yeah. I don’t mind saying—although it may sound obnoxious—but I don’t mind saying that some of the institutions who dig in on a traditional face to face exclusive campus-based experience, value proposition, some of those will survive. And others probably not.

Tom: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, there are some where that’s their whole value proposition, right? At some liberal arts, you know, highly entertaining, engaging experience. And that’s cool, if that’s your thing. But not everybody can claim that or compete in that space.

Kelvin: No, no, no.

Tom: Cool. All right. Do you want to see if you want to land the plane? Or do you want me to try to put a bow on it?

Kelvin: Put a bow on this plane as you try to put it down on the runway, Tom.

Tom: Okay. All right. So online and digital education, we believe, is at an inflection point as higher education emerges from remote instruction. Aggregating unique perspectives into themes and trends helps us to better understand our field and to better anticipate how our local contexts may be impacted by outside forces.

Kelvin: Yeah, yeah, I agree. Value of the CHLOE report. You think we have time for a little plug?

Tom: Yeah, I think so! You want to do the plug?

Kelvin: So, in a true confession moment, sadly, we only recently recognized that since Apple Podcasts has an interface for each country, there are reviews and ratings we never saw because we were only looking at the US version of Apple Podcasts. So, our apologies for being so US centric. Our data have told us that we’ve had international listeners for years but we just missed that some of you have been rating and reviewing on separate versions of the platform. We’ll do better about checking the broader listing of ratings and reviews. So, TOPcast listener, Mahmood Hosni from Oman shared the following review a while back. He says, “I very much enjoy listening to the valuable conversations about digital learning and the intricacies within by some fun, professional, and engaging folks from CDL at UCF. Keep it up, Tom and Kelvin! I’m always inspired by your talks!” And that’s a generous comment, because he called us fun and professional and engaging. So, thanks, Mahmood. We appreciate you listening and sharing those kind words.

Tom: Yeah, that is very nice. And I’m thrilled we have somebody in Oman listening and so engaged. So yeah, thank you so much.

Kelvin: So, wherever you’re listening on whatever platform and in whatever part of the world, please consider leaving a rating or a brief review. It helps the algorithms
connect new listeners to this podcast, and hey, we might just read your review in a future episode.

Tom: How true. So yeah, please feel free to, you know, be in touch. Let us know what you think. Any coffee suggestions. Kelvin, I’m sorry I wasn’t able to participate in your coffee today, but the tea is helping. I’ve been holding back various coughs and sniffles and various things throughout the episode. So, thank you for bearing with me. And I guess until next time for TOPcast, I’m Tom.

Kelvin: And I’m Kelvin.

Tom: See ya!

(musical outro)