TOPcast Episode #147:
"Faculty Preparation" and More QA Insights from CHLOE 8

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(*Intro Music*)

Tom: From the University of Central Florida's Center for Distributed Learning...

Kelvin: And the University of Louisville's Delphi Center for Teaching and Learning…

Tom: I am Tom Cavanagh.

Kelvin: And I am Kelvin Thompson.

Tom: And you are listening to TOPcast, the Teaching Online Podcast. Or watching, as the case may be.

Kelvin: Reading.

Tom: Reading, yes. Interpreting through semaphore, or smoke signals, or interpretive dance. However, you are consuming this media. Welcome.

Kelvin: Welcome. I was thinking, I think it's interesting you always go for semaphore. I've noticed that before.

Tom: Yeah. Well, it's a fun word, and it's not used at all.

Kelvin: I always go for smoke signals. I go for those.

Tom: I used them both this time, I guess.

Kelvin: I know. Morse code, we didn't use that. [Imitates sound] Deet, deet, deet, dit, deet…

Tom: Morse code, yeah, jungle drums. Yeah. Radar pings.

Kelvin: Yeah, I can't. I was going to try to imitate a radar ping, but I don't think I can do it convincingly. [Chuckle]

Tom: Sonar pings, maybe it's sonar.

Kelvin: Something like that. Coffee bean grounds in the bottom of a coffee cup. Interpreting those.

Tom: Interpreting those. Yeah, almost like tea leaves or whatever. I didn't know coffee was the thing, but yeah, sure. Okay.

Kelvin: Let's do that. [Laughter]

Tom: Let's do that. I think we have to drink the coffee first, right?

Kelvin: I'm working on it. I'm working on it. [Laughter] You got a beverage over there Dr. Cavanagh?

Tom: Just one of my usuals, which is the San Francisco Bay Hazelnut. Non-thematic, but much enjoyable.

Kelvin: I have a cup of Einstein Bros. coffee in my hand. I mustache you what you think of my... [Chuckle] Because there's a mustache on the thing, which I guess you'd have to... I don't know.

Tom: That's right. Yeah.

Kelvin: And I thought this one was appropriate, the one I'm drinking for today's episode, because it's a go-to dependable coffee, especially this time of year. We had some family travel some years ago. It was actually my first time in an Einstein Bros. Bagel place. It was around this time of year, family trip, and I'm like, "Oh, I was really struck by that." They had a special blend that time of year, like, "Oh, I like that." And then I went looking for it every time of year afterwards. So, this time of year, I always think of Einstein Bros. coffee because it was a go-to, and it's dependable, and it's a positive thing this time of year. So, I thought it's tasty. Perhaps you might find a connection that I intended in bringing it up for today's episode topic.

Tom: I think I do. Sometimes, you'll leave me little breadcrumb hints in the show notes and things. Today, you did not. So, this is all on me.

Kelvin: Yes.

Tom: And I think it has something to do with this time of year, something you look forward to, and look for annually, and sometimes, even enjoy. [Laughter]

Kelvin: Sometimes, even enjoy. That's right. [Laughter]

Tom: Yeah. I'm a big Einstein Bros. fan. Just the coffee, and the food, and all of it. We have two of them on campus here at UCF. But yes, I don't think we're talking

about schmears. [Chuckle] But we are talking about some annual reoccurring stuff.

Kelvin: Yeah, that's exactly right. That was the connection that I was hoping for. And indeed, we're going to have a conversation around some of the insights gleamed from the recent CHLOE 8 report, which is subtitled, "Student Demand Moves Higher Ed Toward a Multi-Modal Future." Longtime TOPcast listeners might remember that we've discussed CHLOE reports a couple times in the past. I think maybe only twice. CHLOE 7 last year. It was in Episode #123, "Hybridity Predicted and More from CHLOE 7." And we based Episode #93 around CHLOE 6. We'll include links to those past episodes with all the show note links if you want to take a look at them.

Tom: Yeah, it's a great annual checkpoint for how are we doing in the online education space? What's changing, what's evolving, what's staying the same? What's getting more, what's getting less? All of that. The last couple of years were interesting because of the anomaly of the pandemic that was so reliant on online learning. It is probably worth saying what CHLOE stands for. So, if you're not familiar, it's C-H-L-O-E, but it's an acronym. It's the Changing Landscape of Online Education; began in 2017. But I think it's the successor of the old Babson Studies that were done annually by Jeff Seaman and others. I think it's continued on the legacy of those annual updates that have always been so useful for us as we look at our bigger landscape of online higher education.

Kelvin: Yep, all that. I like looking at it, it's thoughtful summary of responses from chief online learning officers across the United States, numerical quantitative summaries. But thoughtful analysis of those summaries, I think it's been really good. And it's helpful to compare your experience with a more aggregated view from the horizon, or on the horizon, that kind of thing. I think that's helpful.

Tom: Yeah, and I've found them over the years, at least validating of our experience that's more local, but that others across the country are also seeing the same things that we are seeing here on campus. You don't feel so weird. [Laughter]

Maybe in some ways, in some categories, I would say UCF is probably more so than some schools, particularly with things like hybridity and blended. I think that we've been maybe on the edge of that, but we're seeing a lot of other schools experiencing that same thing. And so, that's been interesting and reassuring in some ways.

Kelvin: Yeah. Yeah, I agree. I don't mind saying that in this particular one, one of the things that, I don't know, I am going to sound like Johnny One Note here, but maybe you see what you're looking for or something. But one of my takeaways was that – which is I don't think an intended takeaway from this report – was that terminology is still a problem in our field. And so, I'm not bashing the authors or editors of the CHLOE report, but I think it's just representative of where we are, I

think, right? For instance, terminology used in the CHLOE 8 report, mixed-mode instruction is defined as "combining synchronous and asynchronous," presumably online. That was left implied. Hybrid courses was defined as "in-person and distance learning." Blended shows up, not as a definition, but in charts as "Blended/Hybrid."

So, with blended/hybrid programs with no definition given. But we're seeing all these mutations in various publications and community forums, where "hybrid" is used increasingly I see, in ways that allude to pseudo-HyFlex approaches that we've sometimes characterized as dual mode simulcasting of classroom experiences. So, for the casual reader, that might be a little confusing. There's some nuance there. So, that struck me. And then of course, the term "Multi-modal" is right in the title of the report, and that seems to be the preferred term to signify an umbrella-style of combining online in-person and various other modalities in institutional context. That's one of the big takeaways. Multi-modal, there's a bunch of stuff going on, but then within that, mixed mode, asynchronous and synchronous, hybrid, in-person, and online. So, that was interesting to me.

Tom: You're right, I don't think those terms are used consistently, universally across every institution. We use the term, "mixed mode" here to indicate blended courses, courses that combine distance learning and synchronous classroom instruction. But the online portion could be either synchronous or asynchronous. We don't necessarily have a lot of definition around proportions of each modality. Then I've heard people talk about blended learning, meaning blended programs. Some of the courses are online, some of them are face-to-face, and you can pick and choose. Well, that's different than a blended course because you may not have a blended course in a blended program. And then as you said, hybrid and HyFlex, there's some conflation going on there, too. So, when people are answering some of these questions, so it's almost like, "Well, are we all talking about the same thing?" It's a good question.

Kelvin: Yeah. Maybe a shout-out here to our friend of the podcast and past guest, Dr. Nicole Johnson. She has a fairly new report out from WCET that she was the lead author on. It was called, "What to Do When the Modality of a Learning Experience is Unclear: Guidelines for Creating Multidimensional Learning Experiences." We'll put a link in the show notes for that.

Tom: Cool. Well, you mentioned the annual check-in nature of CHLOE, and I will say that I find it useful because it is a reliable benchmark that does build from year to year, and I think it can be used in having conversations on campus. Especially with, potentially leadership, who may or may not be skeptical of what's happening in the online space. It's like, "Well, look at the percentage of students that are taking at least one online class, or that are taking mixture or whatever the metric is." This is a reliable source that is recognized, and you can cite it.

Kelvin: Yeah, I think that's exactly right. And speaking of some of those comparison data, consistency from year to year, I think one of the things that stood out to me is that it was reported in CHLOE 8 that a... Well, I guess two conversely position things. One, only 6% of the entire CHLOE 8 sample indicated that at their institutions the focus remains on serving an in-person student body, and that they see no evidence of online demand among their own students. So, 94% of respondents say that, "Yeah, multi-modal." [Chuckle]

Tom: Yeah, yeah. I mean, it's true. Looking at the summary, they even highlight some of that on the webpage, at the Quality Matters webpage. For example, 57% of chief online officers reports stagnant enrollment of face-to-face programs, 57%. And 24% actually report declining or sharply declining face-to-face numbers. Yeah. That's in that... What is it, 94% that you just cited?

Kelvin: Yeah, yeah. I also thought maybe because of that, I thought it's got to be somewhat COVID era influenced. But a higher proportion of faculty, full-time and part-time than ever before in past CHLOE reports, are quote "prepared to develop and teach online and hybrid courses." Now, that's still not the majority of faculty at the institutions of the respondents. Less than a quarter of respondents said that the majority of their faculty are experienced in designing online courses, let alone formally prepared to do so. But still that prepared is a higher proportion than has been seen in prior reports. So, that's an indication of something.

Tom: Yeah. Yeah, definitely. Well, certainly a recognition that, maybe not enough so, but a recognition of the importance of faculty preparation to teaching online. I think a lot of people were colored by their experience in the pandemic, where people were just thrown in with no notice to teach these virtual classes, remote classes. I'm intentionally not saying online classes.

Kelvin: Good for you. [Chuckle]

Tom: And they struggled, right, naturally, because who wouldn't under those circumstances? And notwithstanding all the other craziness that was happening at that time with public health and everything else. So, the idea that while we ought to be intentional, and deliberate, and train, and prepare our faculty, and set them up for success, I think is a growing realization in a lot of places. Although I would like to see a number, more than 25% of a majority of faculty being prepared, but it's going to take a while for people to get that number up.

Kelvin: Yeah, no, that's right. I didn't go back and compare this, but you correct me if you remember differently. But I don't recall faculty incentives being talked about a lot in prior CHLOE reports, but in this one, in CHLOE 8, there was a little bit of a zooming in on that. What's the nature of faculty incentives for both online design and development and for teaching online? Financial incentives of some sort were the dominant incentive for development online, but "remote work," or it was clarified, "reduced campus presence," was the dominant incentive for online

teaching. There were other things as well, but those two things were the dominant ones. I thought that was interesting. I just don't recall incentives being mentioned a whole lot before.

Tom: I'd have to go back and look at them again. I don't recall it either, but it's possible. But certainly, I don't think it was underscored…

Kelvin: Like this.

Tom: Yeah. But I don't remember definitively enough to say one way or the other. Regardless, I think it's a reality now as this report is discussing. And it's been a conversation I think we've had for years, not just within UCF during your time here, but also with colleagues around the country about, "Well, how do you get faculty to build online courses?" Either you have them do it as part of their load, as course prep, or you pay them to do it as extra work on top of what they already do. It seems like that's a part of it. And then do you pay them for the faculty development, the training, or not?

Kelvin: That's right.

Tom: It seems to me that if you want them to do well, you need them to go through the training, and you may need that kind of an incentive to do that.

Kelvin: That's exactly where my head went too, Tom, because my reading, maybe I misread, but my reading of the CHLOE 8 report is these incentives were for the online design and development, not for the preparation. I was thinking, "I mean, maybe that's a non-typical approach," but you and I both know exactly what you just said, that the investment in some formal preparation for effective online design and teaching is going to pay off. So, you might as well invest and incentivize there, rather than in some kind of, this course development, that course development, because that doesn't scale.

Tom: Right, yeah. A little tangent away from the CHLOE report for a second, but yeah, I would say you do one or the other. You either pay for faculty development or you pay for faculty to build courses. And I agree with you, I think the better investment is you pay for faculty development. Not only is it probably a better investment for the university because you're not paying for every course that gets developed, but it's better for the faculty because you're helping them. You're investing in them and their knowledge and skills and everything else. It just makes their lives maybe a little bit easier and makes their experience teaching online more successful and hopefully more enjoyable.

Kelvin: But it's interesting. I won't throw anybody under the bus, but I had a conversation within the last week, where we were talking a little bit about financial incentives, and there was a grudging acceptance that maybe in the short term that was okay, but really shouldn't professional development really be in the realm of every

faculty member, and shouldn't they just do it? And I'm thinking, "Man..." Yeah, I mean, individual faculty have a lot on their plates already, and they've got scholarly commitments, and professional development in their disciplines, that don't necessarily lead them to prioritizing what are probably scarce travel funds, or books, or conference, or course funds to go do something on their own, or their time, effort, and energy. So, I think we grease the skids a little bit with financial incentives.

Tom: Yeah. It depends on how important it is for you as an institution that you move a lot of bodies through training. [Chuckle] If it's all voluntary, then you're going to get what you get.

Kelvin: You're going to get what you get. That's exactly right.

Tom: Should we talk a little bit about the data contained in the CHLOE report? That's one of the more interesting things. I like the narrative, too, but the data are always interesting to look at. One of the things that was highlighted was about quality assurance. In the notes here, you've highlighted that more than 50% of respondents in each category are not currently tracking various kinds of QA efforts. That's interesting.

Kelvin: It was, yeah. I don't know, there's four or five different types, and I think they aligned a little bit with things that were talked about last year. Some of that is, of course, standards-based practices, and student services, and whatnot. But I thought that was interesting as well. I mean, you want to look at the little graphs that show how much is being done, but when you look at what's not being done, it's more than half of respondents. But I was fascinated by the reason given for why that is, which the authors summarized as lack of institutional interest in the data around quality assurance. [Chuckle] Or infrastructure for the data gathering, and analyzing, and reporting, as well as the absence of capable staff. That's what were identified by the majority of respondents. The chief online learning officers as the reason they don't track or report quality assurance related data, at least the ones that compare online and face-to-face.

Tom: Yeah, I guess I relate a little bit just because we operate at a certain scale, and it is almost impossible to put eyes on every section that gets produced. It's hundreds and hundreds of sections every semester. It's not to say we don't, as you know, do quality assurance, we just do it in different ways and lean into formative quality assurance and spot checking on other things on the backend. But I get it, although I do say I'm a little surprised, especially coming out of the pandemic, where there's been so much criticism of the quality of that remote learning experience, that you would think people would be maybe overcorrecting for that a little bit by putting more emphasis on quality assurance.

Kelvin: Yeah, that's right. Just I guess to be clear for our listeners, some of those QA dimensions were even around institutional data that are leveraged for this purpose,

that are counter poised with our more close to home online learning support efforts, like final course grade comparisons and end of term student evaluations. That was the biggest chunk, as I recall, end of term student evaluations. That was the biggest chunk that respondents said, "Yeah, we don't have those data." And that's new here in some institutions where it's more decentralized and more traditional. Here at my new institution, there's not a standard form across all academic units, across the entire institution. And then even if there was, the data stay in those academic units. So, it's harder to have that holistic view if you don't have a standard lexicon and if all the data aren't in one place. [Chuckle]

Tom: Well, I mean a couple of other little data points. The one that is probably the headline most of the time is that online and hybrid enrollment's growing and it grows pretty much every year. So, online has grown 36% and hybrid 20% respectively, year over year. That's a lot and it continues to go up. And that 50% of chief online officers confirm that their current strategic plans and resource allocations support a greater emphasis on online and multi-modal learning. So, that's something, that it seems like it's getting integrated more and more into institutional strategic plans, which was not always the case. But many face resource constraints in doing so. And another 36% say that a reconsideration of strategic priorities is currently underway, presumably to include some of this stuff. I find that very encouraging.

Kelvin: Yeah, I didn't dig into this, but I remember some of our comments last year about CHLOE 7 and then the respondents... Because we clamped down on this a little bit, that blended is the future now more than ever message, that the respondents last year said... And I think it's wrapped up in this multi-modal construct of CHLOE 8, but that most respondents last year said, "The mixture of in-person/online will continue to grow." And the respondent said that the exclusively in-person and the exclusively online in the not-too-distant future, I want to say they framed it as five years or something like that, would not be as prevalent as it is today. But clearly, as you just recounted, we're still seeing the growth in the online and in the hybrid blended space, both.

Tom: You mentioned respondents. Do you want to say anything about the response rate? We were talking about that before we hit record. [Chuckle]

Kelvin: Yeah. I mean, I don't want to beat up on anybody, but I think there's a certain reality check. And I don't know why I never paid attention to this before, but I'll just say I was particularly struck this year by looking at the response rate of the CHLOE 8 responses on the reports based upon, 6.7%, so we'll call that seven. So, 93% of the folks contacted, aren't represented here. Now, I like to think that the field is maybe more homogenous than it isn't. But I mean, you have to ask, is something not being represented in the people you didn't hear from?

Tom: Yeah. Yeah, you don't know. Although I will say just from a surface validity standpoint, the numbers feel right to me, at least. The trends definitely feel right to me.

Kelvin: I agree with that.

Tom: Look, the response rates going to be what it is. Surveys are always challenged by that. I have another little nitpick, which is their use of the acronym COO for Chief Online Officer. [Laughter] Because I came out of industry and COO is Chief Operating Officer. And in fact, there are institutions that have Chief Operating Officers now, too. It's rarer, but sometimes that's a title that the CFO gets at an institution. So, I just think calling the Chief Online Learning Officer, which in some places it's called a COLO as the COO, is just creating confusion unnecessarily. So, I don't know if I have any influence, and maybe I will make that suggestion. But for anybody who might be listening, who's involved, just FYI. That's a thing.

Kelvin: There you go. Tom's coming for you. [Laughter] I know we need to wrap up, but one maybe last thing for me that I thought was really interesting is, with all the quality assurance stuff, there were the practices of quality assurance, but then I don't remember this ever being addressed before. I thought it was fascinating. The idea of closing the loop with stakeholders on what you're doing and what you're finding with regard to quality assurance, especially students. That was interesting. The doing of quality assurance practices would be in excess of 50%, and respondents were like, "Oh, yeah, we're doing lots of good stuff." But when it comes down to communicating, we'll say with students, it's somewhere between 11% and 32% of respondents say, "Yeah, yeah. [Laughter] We tell people how that turned out." And then I thought, "This was fascinating, somebody was thinking." And then the last final step is like, "And do you use that as a recruiting message?" Like, "Our stuff's really good. Here's what the data say about how good our stuff is." Very, very, very, very few people do that. I thought, "Well, that's a nice light shined into a dark corner."

Tom: And it's one way for some institutions to rise above, who may not have huge brand recognition or a hundred million dollars a year in marketing or whatever, to at least communicate their value and what they have to offer. To lean into that as opposed to just our football team won X or whatever.

Kelvin: [Laughter] That's right. Well, sir, shall I try to put this plane on the runway?

Tom: You should.

Kelvin: So, by way of summary, we might say that comparing our individual institutional experiences with those of a larger group of colleagues helps us avoid becoming myopic. And the CHLOE report is an important part of continuing to raise our

gaze as we seek to do what's best for our institutions, students, faculty, and communities. How's that?

Tom: That sounds great. Awesome. Well, thank you for reminding me of the goodness of Einstein Bagels and Coffee, Kelvin. [Laughter] So, until next time, for TOPcast, I'm Tom.

(*Outro Music*)

Kelvin: I'm Kelvin.

Tom: See you.