



TOPkit Report 2022

Chronicling Types of Support and Its Evolution for Quality Digital Learning in FL

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This TOPkit annual assessment offers preliminary findings of a research study conducted by Amanda Major, Aimee deNoyelles, and Roslyn Miller from the University of Central Florida. The aim is to chronicle types of support and its evolution for quality digital learning in Florida.

Faculty development for digital learning is an essential component of overall quality digital learning. TOPkit serves to inspire and disseminate best practices for faculty development across Florida. The findings from our research should be interesting to those who serve on the TOPkit Advisory Board. This report is provided with the request that it remains confidential until a more thorough and detailed manuscript can be published.

Background and Focus

- Inspiration from John Opper, Ph.D. and state commissioned reports (i.e. Ada Center and Commission of the States, 2021; Wilcox, 2021)
- Support for digital learning during the pandemic crisis (e.g., Deshmukh, 2021; Elumalai et al., 2020; Nwori, 2021)
- Quality assurance practices and policies (Adair & Shattuck, 2019; Brown, 2018)
- Quality assurance frameworks (Pedro & Kumar, 2020)



This research study was inspired by John Opper’s suggestion that TOPkit might conduct a study to collect lessons learned about quality digital learning during the pandemic. Recent reports provided insights into state’s quality digital learning frameworks, such the *ADA Center & Commission of the States* for the Florida College System (FCS) and Florida Student Success Center (SSC) and Ralph Wilcox’s (2021) *State University System Planning for a Post-COVID World*.

This purpose of this research is to examine the current and future models of quality digital learning. The aim is to describe, chronicle, and project the future of institutional support for digital learning due to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on transitions in higher education (e.g., Deshmukh, 2021; Elumalai et al., 2020; Nwori, 2021) to inform quality assurance practices and policies (Adair & Shattuck, 2019, Brown, 2018) as well as internationally-recognized online education program quality assurance frameworks (Pedro & Kumar, 2020).

Types of Institutional Support for Quality Online Teaching



Legend

Student support = Teal fill

Faculty support = Orange fill

Programmatic support = Gray fill

(Pedro & Kumar, 2020)

Pedro and Kumar (2020) reviewed 13 online education quality frameworks to identify the institutional support services that foster quality online teaching in higher education. Frameworks reviewed were nationally recognized quality standards for online programs, like the trending *OLC Quality Scorecard* and the classic *Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education*, as well as internationally recognized standards like the *Asian Association of Open Universities Quality Assurance Framework* and Australian *ACODE Benchmarks for Technology Enhanced Learning*. The types of support identified that impact **online teaching** were:

- Technical support for faculty and students
- Online course or program effectiveness/assessment data collection
- Guidelines/standards for online course design
- Administrative and academic support for online students
- Development and training for faculty in online course development and teaching
- Availability of online tutors or tutoring services
- Online library support
- Online student advising services
- Technical assistance for faculty in course and course materials development

- Instructional design support
- Support for online students with special needs
- Online program management support
- Intellectual property/copyright support
- Online student orientation to institution
- Online education research support
- Faculty recognition and compensation for transition to and engagement in online education
- Online student orientation to online learning/study skills
- Learning analytics support

For the purposes of this research, these types of support were organized into the broad categories of student support, faculty support, and programmatic support. (This organization is depicted by color on this slide.)

Research Questions

With respect to each Florida public higher education institution's distinct digital learning context and offerings, the overarching research questions are:

1. What are the types of institutional support for digital learning that emerged as critical during the pandemic?
2. What transitions occurred in the types of institutional support for digital learning during the pandemic?
3. How might types of institutional support for quality digital learning in higher education institutions evolve for the future, post-pandemic?



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Please note that the pandemic is defined as March 2020 – present.

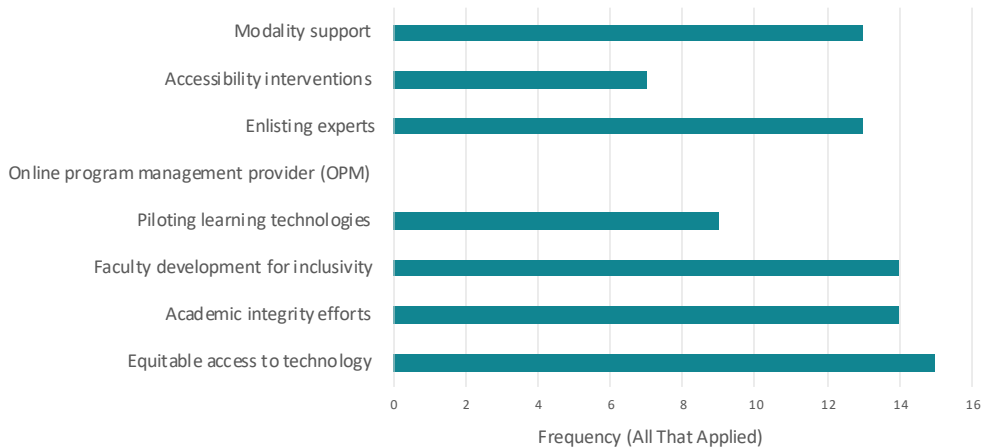
Participants comprised leaders in higher education digital learning in FL who represented their institutions. Each State University System and Florida College System institution was contacted for participation. This mixed methods study approach yielded descriptive and themed analysis from the following data collection methods:

- Survey in November 2021 (n=27, participation rate 64%, 27/42)
- Interviews in December 2021 (n=9)

- Focus group in April 2022 (n=7)

This participation rate was good.

Needs that Emerged as Critical During Pandemic



Leaders who participated in this study indicated that several activities emerged as critical during the pandemic. They responded by identifying these from a list of activities that were reflected in the literature as foci of HEIs and digital learning units for supporting the contextual dynamics of students, faculty, and programs during the pandemic. These critical needs are defined more completely in this bulleted list:

- Equitable access to technology (e.g., Internet connectivity support, WiFi hotspots, loaning mobile devices or computers)
- Academic integrity efforts (e.g., proctoring systems, faculty development about authentic assessments or multiple, various assessments)
- Faculty development for inclusivity (e.g., humanizing the online course design, creating a sense of belonging, flexibility with due dates, collaborative activities, checking stress levels of students)
- Piloting learning technologies (i.e. integrating learning software into courses or your institution's Learning Management System)
- Partnering with an online program management provider (OPM) (i.e. outsourcing all or part of digital learning support to an OPM)
- Enlisting those with online learning expertise (e.g., increasing reliance on experienced faculty, mentors, instructional designers)
- Accessibility interventions (i.e. setting up a process or method for digital courses to

comply with Americans with Disability Act (ADA) of 1990, Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act)

- Modality support (i.e. offering support for emerging modalities, such as Hyflex or Bichronous [Asynchronous/Synchronous blended course] with technologies or faculty development)
- Other

Note that no one indicated either “Other” nor “OPM” was critical need that emerged. The latter may be a result of state of Florida legislation or regulations about partnering contractually with a for-profit entity to offer services for delivering marketing, registration, coaching, faculty development, course development, or other services to support the digital learning functions at HEIs.

Student Support During the Pandemic

Exceeding or mostly meeting the need	Somewhat meeting or not meeting the need
Online library support	Learner readiness
Technologies and technical support	Student orientation to institution or program

Leaders participating in this study rated type of support from “Exceeding the Need” to “Not Meeting the Need at All” for student support for digital learning throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. *Online library support* and *technologies and technical support* exceeded and mostly met the need while *learner readiness* and *student orientation* to institution or program somewhat met or did not meet the need during COVID-19 for quality digital learning.

Student Support Transitions

Student support during the pandemic	Example(s)
Support to ensure student readiness to transition online learning	Online communities; student peer support; Canvas course created for students' technology readiness
Interventions and remediations for students falling behind	"Complete don't repeat" intervention
Addressing humanizing learning and the digital divide	Flexibility with attending courses in-person or virtually; hot spots in parking lots with proctoring services agreement

Participants were asked about the student, faculty development, and programmatic supports that were evolving during the interviews and the needs that were initially noted as "not met" in the focus groups. Responses reflecting how HEIs addressed these types of support for digital learning to reveal HEIs' transitions and leaders' projections for future support on the horizon. Responses were analyzed and themed with examples of each in the slides that follow titled as "Transitions" and "Horizons."

Higher education institutions (HEIs) engaged in several student support activities during the pandemic. Particularly, the student support needs for quality digital learning of *learner readiness* and *student orientation to institution or program* was reflected in participants' responses related to transitions occurring during the pandemic. Themes extracted from qualitative analysis include interventions to ensure student readiness, remediation, and human circumstance.

- **Supports to ensure student readiness to transition online learning** were relied upon or created. For example, at one HEI, a Canvas course was created so that students may practice technology skills and navigate proctoring software so that they would be ready to learn with those tools. Other examples are student online communities and student peer support.
- **Interventions and remediations for students falling behind** were instituted. An

intervention called “complete don’t repeat” program was created at one institution for students to receive extra tutoring to prevent their need to re-take a course due to D and F grades or withdrawing from the course.

- **Addressing humanizing learning and the digital divide** occurred. For example, digital access to the Internet with hot spots were created in the parking lot of one institution so that students may use this for completing their online coursework. The institution also created an agreement with their proctoring services for testing to occur in this location.

Evidence suggests that HEIs in FL created and extended their student support efforts during the pandemic.

Student Support on the Horizon

Currently emerging	Example(s)
Resetting students' expectations about online learning	Defining and communicating new course modalities
Offering learner readiness model or support	Piloting digital literacy orientation modules for first year students
Expanding current supports	Extended tutoring hours; online mental health services
Creating models for structured approaches to mentoring or coaching students	Program for employees to mentor students for retention

HEIs are building upon insights gained from continuity operations from the initial onset of the pandemic to plan for establishing expanded student support services. Themes related to the future of efforts of student support were identified.

- Institutions plan to **reset students' expectations about online learning** in juxtaposition from the emergency remote learning that occurred during the pandemic. This is evidenced primarily across institutions by defining and communicating new course modalities (e.g., flex and live).
- Many HEIs are **creating a learner readiness model or expanding their current support**. As an example, an HEI will pilot digital literacy orientation modules for first year students.
- HEIs will **expand current supports** to meet students' needs. Examples of this are extending tutoring hours to meet students' work/life schedules and offering mental health services online.
- Several HEIs are constructing models for **structured approaches to mentoring or coaching students**. One institution has already begun a program for faculty, staff, and administrators to mentor students. The goal of this program is to build connection with students and, ultimately, retention.

Faculty Development Support During the Pandemic

Exceeding or mostly meeting the need	Somewhat or not meeting the need
Technical support	Faculty incentives
Faculty development programs	Digital research support
Guidelines/standards for online course design	
Instructional design	

Participants rated faculty development support from “Exceeding the Need” to “Not Meeting the Need at All” for digital learning throughout the pandemic. From a comparison of the ratings across the faculty development support, the types of support *technical support*, *faculty development*, *guidelines/standards for online course design*, and *instructional design* exceeded or mostly met the need, while *faculty incentives* and *digital research support* (i.e. resources and support for faculty to conduct scholarship of digital learning) somewhat met or did not meet the digital learning need during the pandemic.

Faculty Development Transitions

Faculty development during the pandemic	Example(s)
Mentors, experts, instructional designers support	Faculty incentives for training completion continued; faculty peer-to-peer support; design consultations; course format best practices
Course modality support	More course design trainings; course development support; incentivizing training completion; reviewing teaching
Addressing academic integrity	Offered no-fee remote proctoring

The amount of faculty development support activity increased to meet the needs for digital learning during the pandemic. HEIs needing faculty development guidance during the pandemic relied on **mentoring and experts as well as instructional design support**. With limited instructional design supports, guidance was sought from peers. Instructional designers were needed for developing productive relationships with faculty for quality course reviews, design consultations, as well as providing technical guidance for course consistency. Recognizing that faculty began experimenting with modalities new to them, efforts for supporting the **course modalities** (e.g., live and flex) and tailored (or one-on-one) support occurred. Essentially, HEIs responded to the pandemic with increased trainings and course development as well as incentivizing training completion. In one instance, a new tool was adopted to review faculty teaching. Additionally, **addressing concerns about academic integrity** arose to the forefront. HEIs in FL increasingly used proctoring services for this purpose during the pandemic. Increased and a breadth of faculty development supports were the norm across HEIs.

Faculty Development on the Horizon

Currently emerging	Example(s)
Addressing best practices for emerging modalities	Offering training for live course format; equitably assigning faculty to teach courses
Defining the evolving role of instructional designers	Enhanced reputation; connecting with faculty in disciplines newer to online; sharing best practices in a variety of modalities
Facilitating avenues for faculty sharing of best practices for digital teaching	Conversations between teaching faculty and instructional designers

On the horizon, faculty development support will continue as skill-sets build and broaden. Leaders noted that their institutions will continue to **address best practices for emerging course modalities**. Many examples offered by leaders demonstrate how institutions plan to support faculty development to teach in online flex and live modalities. Plans are to offer faculty development training for the live course format and strive to equitably assign faculty to teach in course modalities based on preference and competence. Nevertheless, one institution has abandoned flex course modalities that did not adequately support quality learning at their institution to instead focus on supporting hybrid or fully online teaching/learning.

Many institutions will **re-define the evolving role of instructional designers**. Instructional designers in institutions across the state are earning “rock star” reputations. They are connecting with faculty in disciplines newer to online. Discovering and sharing best practices for teaching and learning in a variety of modalities with faculty, instructional designers will increasingly act as conduits for diffusing evidence based practice and influencing the adoption of learning technologies. Additionally, HEIs plan to increasingly **facilitate avenues for faculty sharing of best practices for digital teaching**.

Programmatic Support During the Pandemic

Exceeding or mostly meeting the need	Somewhat meeting or not meeting the need
Online program management support such as administrative procedures	Learning analytics support

In comparison of the three types of support for programmatic services, respondents rated *online program management support such as administrative procedures* as mostly meeting the need whereas they rated *learning analytics support* as somewhat meeting the need for digital learning through the pandemic. The other type of support, *digital program/course effectiveness or evaluation data*, was rated as meeting the need.

Programmatic Support Transitions

Programmatic support during the pandemic	Example(s)
Internal collaborations	Mentoring or collaborating with other units on campus
Macro policies/funding concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cares Act Funds • Transitioning back to campus/great resignation • Faculty union formation • Mythification of emergency remote teaching as quality online learning
Learning effectiveness data and analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success rates across modalities or at the next level from foundation courses • Piloted student advising dashboard

Leaders' participating in this research offered insights to programmatic support transitions during the pandemic. **Internal strategic collaborations** often supported programmatic activities. Mentoring and collaborating with between units at ensued to support continuity of services on campus (e.g., faculty development support, student support, shared governance, effective crisis/change management). Some information about efforts for using **learning effectiveness data and analysis** to inform decision-making was shared by leaders, for examples, DFW rates prompted student remediation interventions as well as using assessment information to enhance individual course effectiveness (e.g., comparisons of success rates across modalities or at the next level from foundational courses). One institution was beginning to pilot a student success dashboard. To meet digital learning needs for programmatic support during the pandemic, HEI employees formed collaborations and attempted to use data to evidence learning.

Macro policies and funding emerged as a programmatic support concern for leaders. Examples of their concerns include Cares Act Funds exhausting, transitioning back to campus after the severe waves of the pandemic, a faculty union forming, or others' misperceptions/confusions about remote, emergency learning. The impressions of institutions' continuity transition to remote teaching, contrasted with well-planned

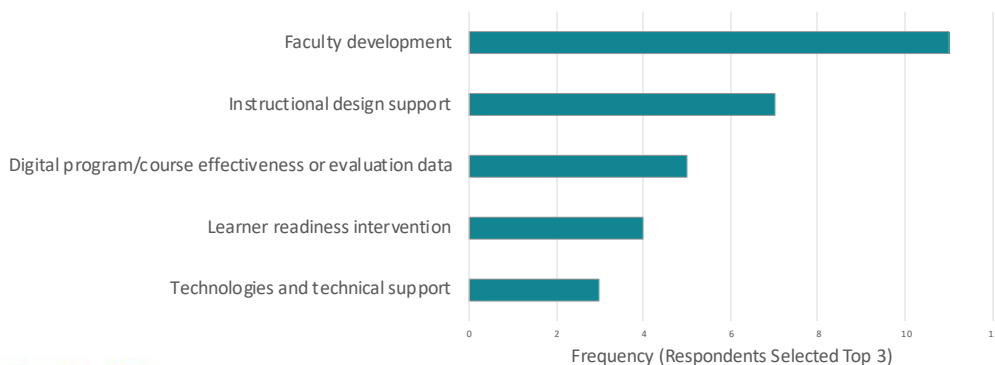
quality online learning, during the initial severe wave of the pandemic may have detrimental policy repercussions for HEIs.

Programmatic Support on the Horizon

Currently emerging	Example(s)
Aiming to provide well-resourced support	Hiring a learning analytics specialist or instructional designers
Reaching faculty, departments new to online	Approached about online programs previously not involved with online learning
Envisioning learning analytics mechanism to inform decision making at scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extending pilot of a learning analytics/student advising dashboard • Want to use analytics for learning engagement, success coaching • Canvas data sense-making

Expanded program support was reported as on the horizon for many higher education institutions in FL. Leaders aim to provide **well-resourced support** for digital learning. To offer examples, one leader plans to hire a learning analytics personnel and others plan to hire additional instructional designers. This indicates an emerging institutional realization of the value of digital learning services. Now the potential to **reach faculty and departments newer to online with these services is greater than any other moment in time**. As a result of dipping their proverbial toes in the water after the pandemic initiated remote, emergency online teaching experiences, a greater interest in teaching has emerged. A leader noted that they were approached about online programs by those who were previously not at all involved with online learning. Perhaps with the aim to capture and ensure learning success to sustain and increase supports, increasingly HEIs aim **to build a mechanism for learning analytics to inform decision making at scale**. Some examples of how this is manifesting at HEIs include an approval to build a dashboard learning analytics/student coaching; hopes of using analytics for learning engagement and success coaching; and an initiative to make sense of Canvas data.

Types of Support Most Important to the Future Success for Quality Digital Learning



The top 3 types of support most important to the future success for quality digital learning in FL are all related to the mission of TOPkit. These are:

- Faculty development (e.g., interventions and training for faculty who develop and teach online courses),
- Instructional design support, and
- Digital program/course effectiveness or evaluation (e.g., regular collection of data in online programs and courses to evaluate effectiveness, learning analytics support, faculty access to data).

Identified for future success for quality digital learning, these types of support followed in successive order of importance: learner readiness intervention, and technologies and technical support (e.g., assistance for faculty in digital course and course materials development), learning analytics support, guidelines/standards for online course design, availability of online tutors or tutoring services, technical support, faculty incentives, administrative and academic support for students, and several other types of support were not indicated as one of the top three most important to the future success for quality digital learning.

Initial Impressions: Types of Support on the Horizon

- ↑ New online courses, programs
- ↑ Academic and student support offered online
- ↑ Learning analytics
- ↑ Faculty development
- ↑ Instructional designers, expansion of roles
- ↑ Mentoring



From an analysis of the information gathered from digital learning leaders across the state of FL and our review of the literature, types of support for quality digital learning in the state of FL are increasing. A new appreciation for online learning is propelling cultivation of new online courses and programs. Consequently, other types of support must be in place for sustained success. These types of support, in particular, will continue to increase: academic and student support offered online, learning analytics functions, faculty development programs, and the number of instructional designers.

Academic and student support offered online will expand for increasing student retention and learning. During the pandemic services (i.e. tutoring, mental health, learner readiness, coaching, and proctoring) were offered online to reach students. These online services should improve and continue for successful academic program outcomes.

Learning analytics informs interventions to enhance students' experiences via student support services and coaching as well as course design and delivery effectiveness. This function is currently in a nascent state at many FL HEIs but should soon burgeon as many institutions realize its potential for offering nuanced information to intervene for students' success and enhance the quality of courses and programs as well as to inform institutional programmatic strategies.

Faculty development should increase in FL to guide faculty to apply emerging best practices in learning technology, learning analytics, and digital learning pedagogy (e.g. academic integrity, course modalities, Universal Design for Learning, humanizing learning). Guidance for emerging course modalities (e.g. flex and live) could enhance the quality of course design and delivery methods. Many instructional designers lead faculty development efforts. Consequently, not only will hiring of new instructional designers increase their presence for guiding digital learning best practices, but also their roles are expanding as leaders, connectors, mentors (for faculty and online services), and facilitators of digital learning best practices, including facilitating faculty professional learning communities, book readings and reflection, course quality reviews, and just-in-time learning. Faculty too can serve as guides or mentors for each other about best practices in digital learning. Mentoring did increase during the pandemic, and its sustainment post-pandemic would serve HEIs well in a variety of groupings (i.e., employees-students, faculty-faculty, faculty-students, units across campus for programmatic support and collaboration). If these types of support increase as projected across HEIs in FL, not only should the quality of digital learning follow, but also FL will increase its competitiveness in the national and global online learning landscape.

Further Explorations



What else should our explorations include for FL quality digital learning?

From a review of the data and analysis, questions to guide our further explorations were formulated that will serve as the basis for substantive recommendations. After these questions are informed via a review of the quality digital learning knowledge base, a set of recommendations for both HEIs and states' policies, practices, and future research will result. Questions are listed from the broadest, encompassing an array of recommendations, to narrowest, distinct recommendations for a specific types of support.

- The types of institutional support for quality online teaching framework (Pedro & Kumar, 2020) is confirmed. What other types of support for quality digital learning emerged, like an Open Educational Resources (OER) program, that might expand their framework?
- Where does FL's **quality assurance/program effectiveness** (including quality course reviews) practice and policies fit into this framework?
- Do **macro concerns** co-exist with the model (i.e. the Great Resignation or faculty restlessness; CARES Act Funding; rebuilding reputation of digital teaching/learning; inflation and looming recession)?
- Could **digital research support** work in tandem with **learning analytics** to boost course and program effectiveness? Could learning analytics models be used to offer just-in-time learner readiness interventions? Could this be tied to advising services and coaching services? Could a state solution be created, like an Open Analytics Service?

- Regarding academic and student supports, how should **student orientations and tutoring** be addressed?
- What is the best way to meet the needs for faculty and student **technological support**? Should emerging technologies support be included in the model?
- Will emerging supports needed for quality continue? How should **inequities** be addressed? How could **OER** interventions like Orange Grove expand **copyright/intellectual property support, online library support**, and supports to address the **digital divide**?

(Leave 10 minutes)

- What in our preliminary finding resonated with you?
- Did any of our preliminary findings surprise you?
- What questions do you have from a review of our research that we can investigate and incorporate into our recommendations about types of support for quality digital learning across the state of Florida?

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