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My Story is in the Structure: An Autoethnographic Study by an Instructional Designer Working in a Centralized Academic Reporting Line

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to The Graduate School of the University of Missouri-St. Louis
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education
In
Educational Practice

May 2024

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Dedication and Acknowledgments

I thank my family, friends, and "Girl Squad" for making the dream of pursuing my doctorate come true. My gratitude towards my parents, sisters, daughter, professors, teachers, coaches, and mentors can never be repaid in a lifetime. I appreciate the time, encouragement, and dedication of my dissertation committee and supporters at work, at home, and in the communities to which I belong. Education is the family business; and it is a joy to see it pass down through the next generation of my family. Ollie, Morgan, and Joshua, the future is yours. Own it and make it better for the next generation.

This dissertation is in honor and celebration of my late grandmothers, Nadine G. Williams and Gertrude F. Shipp, and my mother, Jean S. Williams, and my father, the late Lincoln J. Williams. My parents (pictured below) met while attending Spelman College and Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia in the 1960s. Without their love and guidance, I would not be the mother, scholar, and educator that I am. I love you both and hope I have made you proud.

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Introduction

When a chaotic, emergent situation unfolds, there are cries for help and first responders are dispatched. First responders are trained in a variety of methods to assess emergent situations quickly and render immediate help to those in crisis until someone with more expertise and rank can take a report from them, and then reevaluate the circumstances and assume responsibility for comprehensively treating the person. Instructional designers are higher education first responders as evidenced during the rapid transition emergency remote teaching (ERT) during the COVID-19 pandemic when they helped “faculty to adjust in-person instructional plans, syllabi, assessments, and content for distance delivery” (Xie et al., 2021, p. 1). Such was the case for instructional designers at South Central American University (SCAU, a pseudonym), a medium-sized, predominantly White public institution in the midwestern United States.

Like 60 percent of respondents queried by the Occupational Information Network (O*NET), instructional designers at SCAU are required to hold a master's degree (National Center for O*NET Development, n.d.). Despite advanced education, they effectively serve as paraprofessionals supporting the roles and responsibilities officially held by faculty and administrators. While it is preferred that instructional designers consult with faculty and administrators prior to rendering support that directly impacts students, they routinely use their professional judgement to address situations expeditiously followed by informing and justifying their actions to the responsible parties who are often relieved that the problem has been resolved without their explicit involvement. The distribution of power and paraprofessional status of instructional designers is evident in the SCAU organization chart. At SCAU, generalist instructional designers work under the leadership and oversight of the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Information Technology and

Chief Information Officer, and Associate Director of Online and Blended Education. A trio of specialist instructional designers are employed by the graduate schools of nursing, education, and business.

While the specialist instructional designer qualifications are the same as the generalists, they work primarily within the graduate schools that fund their positions dedicating their time to the faculty and students at their respective schools. Generalists work on behalf of faculty, students, and administrators of the institution writ large. Working within the institution's structure can be challenging and empowering for instructional designers as informal online communities and literature document (Drysdale, 2021; Xie et al., 2021). Dynamics between generalist and specialist instructional designers can also present challenges as demand for and preferences to work with specific instructional designers varies at SCAU. Specifically, at SCAU, generalist instructional designers hold “on-call” shifts throughout the week where they answer any incoming calls and emails regarding instructional design and learning technology matters for faculty, staff, and students regardless of the caller's affiliation with one of the specialist graduate schools.

In his seminal piece on the higher education organizational structures that positively influence the work of instructional designers, Drysdale (2021) concludes that for “better advocacy and empowerment, better alignment with the pedagogical work of both designers and faculty, and less role misperception for instructional designers,” structures that are “centralized” with “academic reporting lines” are best (p.73). Using qualitative research methods, Drysdale presents findings from interviews with instructional designers, online faculty, and online learning administrators.

Practicing instructional designers may appreciate and identify with his conclusions, attesting that working in a centralized, academic reporting instructional design team is empowering by creating “more opportunities for leadership and advocacy” than their peers working in decentralized roles and teams (Drysdale, 2021, p. 72). While Drysdale's work is compelling to those fulfilling the role of instructional designers, his de-identified, highly sanitized report is inaccessible as a call to action for those unfamiliar with the first-responder-like challenges, opportunities, and conundrums instructional designers face. In fact, it took, me, an instructional designer, a while to determine and appreciate that I actually practice within the best organizational placement (centralized and academic reporting placement) to maximize my effectiveness and empowerment as instructional designer according to Drysdale. Subsequently, it is easy to infer that the professionals (faculty and administrators) I work under might also struggle to understand the implications and significance of his findings and appropriately situate the generalist instructional designers at SCAU.

To fill the gap and escalate the strategic empowerment plight of instructional designers, this seminal research study will examine and analyze the perceived benefits of working in a centralized, academic reporting instructional design and learning technology team.

Rationale and Purpose

Instructional designers at SCAU develop and infuse the institution's strategy for instructional excellence in all modes of instruction offered by its faculty. Charged by the administration, SCAU instructional designers navigate the two-party shared governance system as strategic paraprofessionals. While the shared governance structure at SCAU includes a hierarchy of administrators (with non-faculty support staff) and the faculty, instructional designers are neither faculty nor administrators. They report up through the administrator hierarchy and are at the table for discussion impacting accreditation, maintaining compliance with and eligibility for certain kinds of federal financial aid, and messaging for new instruction-related initiatives and actions. Instructional designers simultaneously work closely with faculty on the iterative design and refinement of their courses gaining insights into the challenges and passion faculty mitigate while teaching, researching, and serving the institution. As highly skilled educational partners of faculty and administrators, instructional designers have a unique awareness of what is at stake for the institution if instruction does not comply with best practices for student outcomes and regulations set by governing bodies such as accreditors (e.g., Higher Learning Commission) and the United States Department of Education (Online Learning Consortium et al., 2019; Online SUNY Course Quality Review (OSCQR), n.d.; Poulin & Davis, 2016). Instructional designers empowered by their institutions can facilitate meaningful changes and initiatives that benefit students, help maintain the institution's competitiveness, and amplify the capacity of the faculty and staff to carry out its mission (Drysdale, 2021; Pollard & Kumar, 2022).

Certainly, Drysdale (2021) demystified the work, challenges, and experiences of instructional designers practicing in a variety of organizational structures, but a study that provides a more candid, in-depth, autoethnographic description would help instructional designers and administrators design teams so they can dedicate more time to what he calls, “the primary work of instructional design: expertise in pedagogy and course design” (p. 72). Further, a study that dedicates more time to sharing and analyzing a practicing instructional designer's experiences would provide more context and support for the recommendations and conclusions Drysdale (2021) includes at the end of his study; specifically that centralized, academic reporting structures provide opportunities for “better advocacy and empowerment, better alignment with the pedagogical work of designers and faculty, and less role misperception for instructional designers" (p. 73). The power of autoethnography lies in the storytelling.

Autoethnographies compel action, engagement, and "reciprocity" between the vulnerability of the autoethnographer and the reader (Adams et al., 2022, p. 7). Passivity on the reader's or researcher's part is not an option when conducting or consuming autoethnographic research because "most autoethnographies espouse an explicit and deliberate directedness toward others" (Adams et al., 2022, p. 8). The researcher confronts themself and the reader in autoethnographic research. The autoethnographic dialogue is both internal and external, yet temporal and timeless. Instructional designers possess a range of knowledge, skills, and abilities that when optimized and empowered, or well-positioned, can transform institutions beyond the hegemony implied and communicated by organization charts and shared governance.

Like many fields, instructional design is becoming more competitive which presents opportunities and challenges for the empowerment of its practitioners. Common requirements include a master's degree and significant experience several years of consulting in educational contexts (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2023; National Center for O*NET Development, n.d.). This study's purpose was to explore the important role well-positioned instructional designers can play in advancing the work of their institutions.

Research Questions

As an extension of Drysdale's (2021) work, this study not only describes the organizational structure within which generalist instructional designers work at SCAU, but it illustrates how an instructional designer "participate[s] in the design, redesign, and evaluation of university courses and programs," and discuss how "faculty and administrators empower or disempower" her work "on online learning initiatives" (p. 62). Using an autoethnographic research design, this study also provides an account of the importance of three additional structural elements Drysdale's research study noted: staffing and scale, instructional design leadership, and positional parity [between instructional designers] with faculty. This autoethnography transformatively answers several of the research questions Drysdale explores by answering:

1. How does the organizational structure at SCAU, positively or negatively, influence the ability of an instructional designer to lead online learning initiatives in higher education?
2. What does a centralized, academic reporting line instructional design structure look like and feel like from within from the perspective of an instructional designer?
3. How does an instructional designer participate in the design, redesign, and evaluation of SCAU courses and programs?
4. How do SCAU faculty and administrators empower or disempower an instructional designer when collaborating on online initiatives?

Theoretical Framework

This study aims to provide candor regarding my reality as an instructional designer in the coveted centralized, academic reporting instructional design team who values appreciative inquiry (AI) (Drysdale, 2021). Viewing the role of instructional designer as a higher education advocate for learners and instructors, the cultivation and valuation of professional, mutual respect and altruism for faculty and administrators is paramount.

AI as a theoretical framework for this research study became undeniable because it centralizes the best of an organization while aspiring more from it. The tenets of AI, which include "deliberately positive assumptions about people, organizations, and relationships" have helped me neutralize and deescalate conflicts encountered as I navigate working within my institution’s organization and shared governance (Cooperrider et al., 2005, p. 2).

Significance

This study adds richness and depth to the body of literature examining the strategic placement of instructional designers within the organizational structure of institutions of higher learning. Well-positioned instructional designers can bring consensus, clarity, and efficiencies to the policy-informed initiatives and work of their institutions, but their stories need amplification and analysis. Administrators, faculty, and other allied instructional professionals (e.g., instructional designers, technologists, and learning management system administrators) may find this study especially helpful as they use the subject's insights to inform the decisions about placing instructional designers within their organization given their unique set of skills and ability to collaborate and communicate with many units within the institution. Instructional designers may find this study helpful when advocating for themselves, the faculty they collaborate with, and the students who enroll in the courses and programs they work on. This study builds upon and adds to the body of research regarding the important role instructional designers play in higher education by providing a first-hand perspective featuring a first-person perspective which is uncommon to find in the literature.

Delimitations

This study provides an autoethnographic account of one instructional designer who is part of a centralized, academic reporting instructional design team at SCAU. While providing insights that may be helpful to other instructional designers, faculty, and administrators, the circumstances and applicability cannot be generalized to other institutions or other instructional designers. My experience is one of many and one of few. This research is more illustrative of the potential and the capacity for what empowered instructional designers can do. I do not intend it to be prescriptive.

Key Terms

Instructional Design as defined by the Association for Talent Development (2023) is:

> the practice of creating learning experiences to support learning. It is a systems approach to analyzing, designing, developing, implementing, and evaluating any instructional experience based on the belief that training is most effective when it gives learners a clear statement of what they must be able to do after training and how their performance will be evaluated. (para. 1)

Instructional design is an iterative process involving individuals or teams that may include subject matter experts (SMEs), which are often faculty in higher education settings, instructional designers, professionals who specialize in the disciplined approach to analyzing content, competencies, and assessment, and technologists, who specialize in learning and content management systems in addition to graphics, video, and audio tools.

Shared Governance is an organization structure predominant in institutions of higher education where academic and administrative processes are distributed between faculty and administrators. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) contends that a third party, governing boards, also play a role in fidelity to the institution's mission, financial stewardship, and "final decision-making authority," and oversight of the institution's administration (AAUP, n.d.). There is tension between the parties because responsibilities, consequences, and power are unequal and the administration, and by extension, governing boards, may not comprise faculty members (Ginsberg, 2011).

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an organizational development theory and process that focuses on an institution’s strengths to provide vision for what is worth striving for. Simply stated, “AI is based on the simple assumption that every organization has something that works well, and those strengths can be the starting point for creating positive change” (Cooperrider et al., 2005, p. 3).

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provides background information for the study. Chapter 2 is a review of the relevant literature, while Chapter 3 is a description of the qualitative, autoethnographic research methods employed. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the data collected. Chapter 5 includes a summary, conclusions, and guidance for future research and action.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This chapter is a review of the literature related to the origins of American higher education, the development of faculty and its administration over time, the concept of shared governance in higher education, and finally the introduction of instructional design, its practice and regulation within higher education contexts.

American Exceptionalism and the Origins of American Higher Education

The concept of American Exceptionalism is often used to refer to the unique origins, ideals, and values of the United States of America as compared to the nations, governments, and cultures that predate it (Pease, 2018). The nation's unique characteristics are also present in the development, administration, and structure of higher education from its origins in colonial America through modern times. Although American higher education drew inspiration from European institutions, “in the environment of the New World where privilege was suspect and individuals striving for self-improvement strongly encouraged, opportunities for a poor but ambitious youth to attend college and thereby advance himself remained open” (Lucas, 2006, p. 108). This does not negate the elitism and significant cost that has always been associated with higher education worldwide, but it does demonstrate that exceptionalism was part of every institution emerging in the American colonies and future nation.

The origins of American higher education represented a departure from the centuries-old institutions and administrations present in Europe. A discussion of the origins of American higher education often begins in an examination of the early days of the nation's oldest university, Harvard University. While most people think of colleges and universities as a collection of permanent or tenured faculty members, administrators, and students, that is not an accurate representation of the origins of American higher education which began during the colonial period.

Founded in 1636, Harvard University was exceptionally devoid of the modern trappings of higher education. According to Schuster and Finkelstein (2011), “college teaching” during the early years of Harvard, “could best be described as an odd job taken on by fresh graduates of baccalaureate programs” on their route to professional work in “ministry, business, law, medicine, government, or farming” (p. 5). The temporary status of colonial college teaching included supervising student behavior and academic tutoring which was a far cry from the engaged research and instruction characteristic of modern college teaching (Lucas, 2006; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2011). Confirming Harvard University's founding in 1636, Lucas (2006) adds that “[i]nstruction probably began in the summer of 1638, two years later” (p. 104). The reverence of faculty or professoriate is relatively new since the nation's value of entrepreneurialism shined brightest in the development of strong higher education administration prior to investment in permanent faculty and actual teaching.

In fact, aside from the board of trustees or directors, the president, or chief officer of colonial institutions, held all administrative power and responsibilities that modern colleges and institutions distribute through “subordinate functionaries such as deans, registrar, bursar, treasurer, and so on” (Lucas, 2006, p. 124). Eliot, one of Harvard University's historians succinctly concluded, “Gentlemen almost exclusively engaged in the instruction and discipline of youth are not... extremely desirable in the management of the exterior concerns of a large literary institution” (1848, p. 49). The leadership structure preceded the instructional staff and the distinction and friction between those parties remains to this day as evidenced by the scale AAUP (2021) used to determine “faculty role in decision-making,” which includes five categories: administrative dominance, administrative primacy, shared authority, faculty primacy, and faculty dominance (p. 85). The scale literally places administration on one extreme and faculty on the other.

Significance of the Evolution of American Higher Education

American higher education represented both a departure and re-imagination of the centuries' old institutions from Europe. Not all European ideals and characteristics translated well or held relevancy by those settling and building the American colonies and its early higher education institutions. Thelin (2007) noted several important distinguishing features of American higher education: the combination of college-controlled instruction and granting of degrees, relatively small donations from founders, lengthy campus development and construction periods, flexibility regarding the residential-nature of college, and a rejection of the opulence characteristic of Oxford University and Cambridge University during the colonial era. The emerging American system of higher education truly was exceptional, unique, and remarkable.

Preparing the Professoriate

Faculty development is a relatively novel field since the professoriate emerged as a path to professional positions as opposed to a career in its own right. As American higher education aged and evolved, so did the role, responsibilities, and professionalism of college-level teaching.

Historic and Modern Faculty Development

Because college instruction in colonial America began with the hiring of young tutors on their way to more distinguished professions, the origin of faculty development is mired in necessity and iterative, yet meaningful, change. Returning to the history of America's oldest institution of higher education, Harvard University, the first instructional staff were tutors who historically served young scholars for a relatively short period prior to entering professional positions (Burton, 2007; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2011). However, Burton (2007) remarks that, “Harvard was old enough to have the financial resources, stability, and student body to support permanent faculty in the early eighteenth century” (p. 93). In that period significant changes in the role, responsibilities, and length of service of tutors emerged. Tutors began teaching for longer periods of time and because of the turbulence during the path to the American Revolution, they also entered the system of university governance and administration (Burton, 2007). The age difference between tutors and their students also expanded. As tutors started teaching at an older age, they came with professional experience and expertise that the recent college graduate tutors of the previous centuries simply did not possess. Specialization led to discipline-specific professorships at Harvard University beginning in the 1720s that began the trend of releasing instructional staff from the residential responsibilities of cohabitation with and behavioral supervision of students (Burton, 2007).

With the professionalization of college teaching and the bifurcation of instructional roles, between professors and tutors, starting in the 1700s, higher education began the transition into the more modern system of today where faculty are integral to all functions of the institution’s business and service to students and the community. The nineteenth century closed with the Academic Revolution, a faculty-led shift from traditional programs of study which “required Latin and Greek and routines structured around three daily recitations” to a course of study that acknowledged “academic disciplines and student choice” (Geiger, 2015, p. 326). A harbinger of the changing tide and professionalization of university teaching was the founding of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in 1915. The AAUP focused primarily on “faculty-administrative concerns” which were memorialized with the inspiration to write and publish the Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure

(AAUP, 1915). The Declaration was deemed necessary given “the newfound sense of collective professorial self-consciousness and a sense of colleagueship” between faculty at several institutions (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2011, p. 11). The Declaration acknowledged the growing cadre of discipline-specific experts entering the profession after attending graduate school at the turn of the 20th century (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2011; Thelin, 2017).

Specifically, the Declaration defined academic freedom and tenure, besides describing the authority, nature, and function of colleges and universities. Regarding academic freedom, the AAUP determined faculty should have “freedom of inquiry and research; freedom of teaching within the university or college; and freedom of extramural utterance and action” (1915, p. 292). These freedoms were enumerated because of the control institutions’ governing bodies and presidents seemed to wield against professors for their research, publications, and public commentaries on controversial issues of the day. Prior to the founding and activism of the AAUP, professors worked without tenure or permanence of employment and at the whim of their institution’s administration. Faculty could “be dismissed at any time—without reason and without a hearing” (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2011, p. 13). While the AAUP successfully and succinctly stated the freedoms faculty should enjoy and exercise, they also outlined the three primary functions of the post-secondary institution: “a. to promote inquiry and advance the sum of human knowledge; b. to provide general instruction to the students; and c. to develop experts for various branches of the public service” (AAUP, p. 295). To live up to these ideals for teaching and learning at America’s institutions of higher learning, the governance and administrative structure also needed to undergo impressive changes.

In the period of the 1920s through the1940s, higher education administration grew to include professionals to support the “nonintellectual, nonacademic needs of college students...

featuring deans of students, counseling, student health services, career development, and so on" (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2011, p. 12). The expansion of administration and allied instructional staff, such as instructional designers and learning technologists, supplemented the instruction provided by the institutions' faculty. The inclusion of instructional design professionals and centers focusing on faculty development and pedagogy were also a part of the movement to support teaching and learning at the post-secondary level.

Modern Faculty Development and Allied Instructional Professions

Faculty development units, centers, and programs have a long and complicated history. Knowing that pedagogy plays a relatively insignificant role in the doctoral programs that produce new professors, faculty development has always been part on-the-job training and part emulation of the instructional methods, faculty advisors and mentors that produced the newest members of the professoriate. O'Grady (2017) opens his strategic playbook for modern faculty wanting to work with faculty development centers noting that "universities and colleges were institutions where disciplinary expertise was established and ultimately disseminated. But teaching—and the study of how students learn—was an afterthought" (p. 3). The Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) at the University of Michigan (U-M) prides itself as being "the first teaching center in the country" being established in 1962 (Regents of the U-M & CRLT, 2021, para. 1). O'Grady confirms the founding year of the CRLT and calls U-M "a pioneer in efforts to study and support the learning experience on campus" (p. 3). Three years later, Cook (1965) concluded that intensive professional development opportunities for graduate students, such as the novel programs he introduced as assistant chair in the English Department at Indiana University, would increase awareness that college teaching "is a conscious, serious intellectual activity, distinct from, although based upon, the study of literature [or other academic discipline]" (p. 118).

Allied Instructional Professionals

Besides faculty development centers, many colleges and universities have allied instructional professionals. Allied instructional professionals (AIPs) are non-faculty employees with expertise in instructional design, instructional technology, pedagogy, and andragogy. Individuals working in these roles may have familiar titles such as instructional designer, instructional technologist, and learning management system administrator, but many report their actual duties include design, management, training, and support (Intentional Futures, 2016). AIPs may work in a variety of locations within an institution with continuing education, academic affairs, information technology (IT) being the most common organizational placements (Intentional Futures, 2016). As higher education has developed alongside information communication technologies, such as learning management systems and videoconferencing and streaming applications, professors collaborate with AIPs to convert existing courses and intentionally design new courses for multiple modalities.

Challenges for Allied Instructional Professionals

AIPs have a myriad of successful faculty and administrator collaborations, but they also have major challenges and obstacles. While AIPs work to improve instruction at their institutions, they are not faculty, and they are not administrators. Although integral to the teaching and learning at their institutions, they are often excluded from faculty and administration governance and "they may not be positioned to lead" (Drysdale, 2021, p. 60). Top challenges include a lack of faculty buy-in, scarcity of time and resources, and institutional leadership and bureaucracy (Intentional Futures, 2016, p. 15). Despite 87% holding master's degrees and 32% holding doctoral degrees, instructional designers may have their expertise and role within higher education challenged and unwelcome (Intentional Futures, 2016, p. 6). In Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why it Matters, Ginsberg (2011) laments the increase of non-faculty administrators and staff at colleges and universities. AIPs would fall under the domain of what Ginsberg calls the “administrative imperialists” whose grand scheme is to usurp faculty control of academic responsibilities (2011, p. 35). Ginsberg alleges and concludes that the explosion of administrators and their non-instructional support staff dilutes the power and influence of an institution’s faculty by decentralizing their responsibility for the core curriculum, institutional governance, and student outcomes assessment in cahoots with “sycophant faculty members,” the federal government and accrediting agencies (p. 213). Ginsberg’s overall tone towards faculty displacement in so-called shared governance at institutions echoes sentiments and remnants from the colonial period of higher education in America.

Brief History of Higher Education Administration

Shared governance between faculty and administrators is currently the predominant organizational structure of American institutions of higher education, but that has not always been the case. Trow (2007) notes that for the burgeoning nation’s iconic institution Harvard University, which was established in 1636, “[t]here simply was not a body of scholars to be brought together to teach and to govern themselves” (p. 589). Pragmatically, the original organizational structure for American institutions was indeed exceptional and comprised with “the lay board, the strong presidency, a weak professoriate, the internal administration, the absence of a central ministry of higher education” (Trow, p. 589). The nation’s college teaching at the founding of its premier institution sharply contrasts with the role held by professors today, where faculty hold tenure and serve institutions as an end as opposed to merely a short time on their way to industry. This constellation of features contrasts with the characteristics of colonial America's European counterparts and inspirations. Administration, and not the professoriate, came first regarding American higher education organization. Administration, and not the professoriate, came first regarding American higher education organization. Consider that when John Harvard, namesake of Harvard University, died and left half of his estate and whole library to the fledgling institution, it "still awaited a teacher" despite having a 12-person Board of Overseers (Geiger, 2015, p. 2).

The formal organization and business operations of colleges and universities came first in the evolution of American higher education which seems at odds with modern sensibilities that emphasize an institution's faculty. However, it is important to remember that the colonists and all of their methods for structuring and organizing themselves (government and education, for example) had to be imported and re-assembled or re-imagined given the limited resources available. For the origins of Harvard, that meant an entanglement with the founding and "governance of both churches and the General Court" besides challenges "finding qualified leaders" (Geiger, p. 2) during the 1600s. Today, students attend colleges and universities to gain the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to be competitive individuals in academia, industry, and life. Seemiller and Grace (2016) found that Generation Z, students born between 1995 and 2010, view education as a means to personal success and an investment in America's future and social prosperity. Seemiller and Grace also found that Generation Z views America's education system as deteriorating and that access to quality higher education is limited. A scarcity mindset in the consumer base, or student body, means that institutions must remain competitive with academic programming, faculty employed, and the use of human and capital resources. An institution’s administration manages and monitors these matters, and these matters are of high consequence to faculty.

The tension between faculty and administrators in shared governance is palpable as the responsibilities, priorities, and liabilities of each party conflict and compete. The AAUP (2021) survey on decision-making captured faculty perceptions of having more control over academic decision-making, which includes grade assignment, program curriculum, and teaching assignments, which seems reasonable given their central role in the teaching and learning at institutions. The survey also demonstrated the perception of administration having dominance over administrative decision-making areas such as buildings, budgets, and strategic planning. Interestingly, and of major consequence to faculty, top personnel decision-making demonstrated the perception of administrator dominance over areas of salary policies and promotion and tenure decisions. Financial, legal, and operational activities of an institution include matters of employment, admissions and financial aid, accreditation, and compliance with laws and overseeing agencies (AAUP, 2021). It is understandable there would be conflict between the two parties when there is a stark difference between responsibilities and impact.

The necessity of and suspicion within institutions of higher education further exemplify the inherent tension that currently and has always existed; but AIPs, and in particular, instructional designers, can help mitigate these administrative struggles. Because AIPs are a third-party within the two-party shared governance structure, they can consult with administration and faculty comprehensively both to appreciate the work and plight of the institution while “think[ing] institutionally,” which Heclo (2008) considers invaluable and rare in a time of “legitimate distrust and inescapable need for institutions that we feel in our lives” (p. 45). Instructional designers are well-suited for this role “because of their ability to couple technical and conceptual skills while working collaboratively" (Shaw, 2012, p. 1). At SCAU, the instructional design team is often referred to as "the publicly-facing arm of ITS," as we possess the technical skills to communicate effectively and with precision with our more technical colleagues (e.g., database and system administrators) and know that dynamic messaging for particular end-users matters for providing comprehensive customer service that deescalates learner, instructor, and administrator frustrations and encourages community members to reach out for support.

History and Function of Instructional Design in Higher Education

Reiser (2001) defines instructional design and technology as encompassing "the analysis of learning and performance problems, and the design, development, implementation, evaluation and management of instructional and noninstructional processes and resources intended to improve learning and performance" (p. 57). By including technology in the field's title, he aptly asserts that the tools are inseparable from the practice of instructional design. The practice of instructional design in a post-secondary context affects the work and learning for all members of the institution because practitioners interact with and advocate on behalf of faculty, staff, and students. Instructional designers must cultivate relationships with faculty and administrators to effectively complete their highly collaborative work (Drysdale, 2021; Pollard & Kumar, 2022).

Brief History of Instructional Design

Many attribute the origins of instructional design to World War II when there was a need to train a workforce efficiently (An, 2021; Molenda, 2022; Reiser, 2001). Disciplined inquiry of training programs and trainee pre and post training performance informed the screening and selection of suitable candidates for various pivotal roles and responsibilities for wartime (Molenda, 2022; Reiser, 2001). The successes of wartime instructional design and technology tools such as “training films, film projectors, and overhead projectors” transitioned well to other industries such as workforce development (An, 2021, p. 3). The earlier wartime research of educational psychologists such as Robert Gagné, Leslie Briggs, and John Flanagan continued to impact training and instruction post-war leading to the discipline’s permanence within all levels of education, training, and development (An, 2021).

Instructional Design and Modern-Day Higher Education Administration

With the ubiquity of the internet, “the information superhighway” radically changed the exchange and distribution of information in terms of efficiency and ease of access for those generating and consuming content (Ramsey & West, 2023). For higher education, this led to the development of online learning management systems, such as Blackboard, Moodle, and Canvas, as hubs “where students can view the syllabus, submit assignments, replay lectures, access PowerPoint slides, and view their current grades” (Bundy, 2022, p. 127). Shaw (2012) believes despite instructional designers’ professional qualifications, which include instructional expertise, ability to think critically, and communicate and implement “a shared vision with stakeholders...including administration, information technology support, faculty,” and other ISPs (p. 2), they “remain in the background” and are “not called upon to provide leadership” (p. 4). Shaw encourages instructional designers “to come out of the woodwork to provide the influential leadership...necessary to move organizations into the 21st century” (2012, p. 4). The influential leadership that instructional designers can provide higher education administrators and faculty is timely, given the industry’s regulatory climate and impact on shared governance, liability, and consequences.

Instructional Design and Current Distance Education Regulation

Through the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Spring 2020 semester through the current abatement phase that began in Fall of 2021, issues of shared governance and unequally shared liability between administrators and faculty have dominated coverage of higher education. Specifically, the new language and clarifications, as part of 34 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Parts 600, 602, and 668, better known as the Distance Education and Innovation (2020) regulations, provided more guidance on how the US Department of Education distinguishes distance education from other forms of technology-mediated instruction and the attributes that make it eligible for Title IV federal financial aid. The Distance Education and Innovation (2020) regulations also clarify that there are institution-specific and instructor-specific responsibilities for institutions affirming their intention to provide compliant distance education courses. The Distance Education and Innovation (2020) regulations went into effect on July 1, 2021, and institutions valuing their eligibility to accept Title IV federal financial aid funds for their distance education courses had decisions to make regarding how to work within their systems of shared governance to ensure faculty awareness and inclusion of instructional activities to ensure institutional compliance especially since liability for non-compliance included consequences such as financial aid chargebacks and a loss of federal financial aid eligibility for institutions.

SCAU initially opted to require faculty teaching distance education courses to undergo administrator-mandated online teaching certification emphasizing the role of “regular and substantive interaction” (RSI) as the distinguishing factor between distance education and correspondence education per the Distance Education and Innovation regulations. This was a welcome position for SCAU to take since the Department of Education’s stance on quality indicators in distance education will also become a part of accreditation oversight, for SCAU that comes from the Higher Learning Commission, and a part of compliance with interstate distance education contracts through the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA). Although SCAU faculty used technology to navigate the period of “emergency remote teaching” (ERT) during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the instruction provided during that period was not intentionally designed to meet distance education requirements (Hodges et al., 2020; Williams, 2022). After an initial period of certification training development, the Associate Provost of Accreditation, Assessment and Academic Planning quickly determined and communicated to the SCAU instructional design and learning technologies team that requiring certification was being perceived as a violation of faculty academic freedom and autonomy. The Associate Provost’s initial recommendations and actions stemmed from maintaining “a defensible position” with respect to complying with the Distance Education and Innovation regulations under the advice of our compliance officer. Compliant or non-compliant instruction, as determined by the US Department of Education regulations for post-secondary education, is delivered by the faculty, yet accounted for by the institution’s administration (Kerensky et al., 2021). Ultimately, the online teaching certification was rebranded as an online teaching compliance (OTC) module over the summer of 2022 with a go-live date for Spring 2023. Even with a small pilot and relatively positive faculty feedback, the OTC module roll-out for all distance education faculty was put on hold—indefinitely—out of concern for faculty backlash. Faculty had endured a considerable amount of trauma due to the COVID-19 pandemic which led to “opportunistic exploitations” across the higher education industry such as workforce reductions (including tenured faculty), salary caps, program and department closures, and worsening “conditions that had been festering long before COVID-19” (AAUP, 2021a, p .2).

With Sincere Appreciation: Appreciative Inquiry and Shared Governance

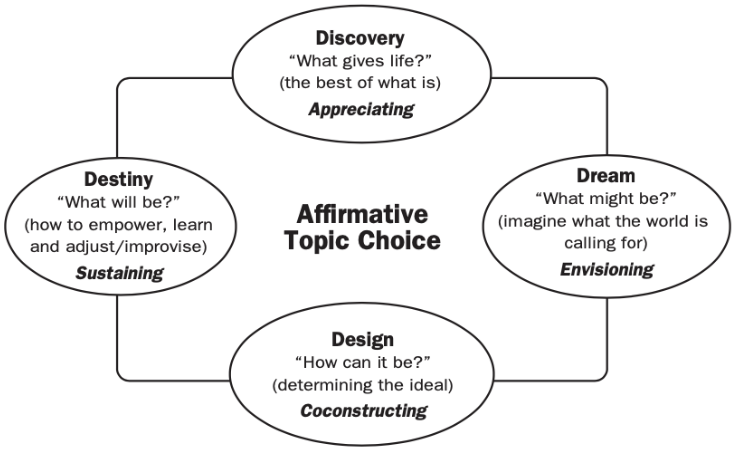
I served as the lead instructional designer for the online teaching compliance (OTC) module at SCAU. I transitioned into that role shortly after being hired to support SCAU faculty, administrators, and students while distance education was still the primary instructional modality during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am also the only Black female instructional designer on my team. This research study does not explicitly explore my race and gender's impact on my work as an instructional designer, but I am not ignorant of their impact on the roles, relationships, and my effectiveness working alongside faculty and administrators. My transition to and preparation for designing the OTC module began with my appointment to the provost's Best Practices in Distance Education working group where I was first exposed to the checks and balances associated with shared governance practices at SCAU. Navigating and negotiating between the administrative concerns and responsibilities and faculty rights and instructional obligations while developing, piloting, and ultimately shelving the OTC module had a lasting impact on me professionally and personally. In the meetings and conversations that I had with faculty and administrators, a concern for and lack of appreciation for faculty became a common theme. My curiosity led me to explore the meaning of appreciation and I found its definition connoted favorable judgment, appraisal, awareness, and valuation (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). A sensitivity to the unforeseen instructional circumstances the pandemic thrust upon faculty would be central to the OTC project as it would be constructed upon and be critical of the emergency remote teaching many had grown accustomed to during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Appreciative Inquiry

Related to my exploration of the meaning of appreciation was my retrospective identification of appreciative inquiry (AI) as a theoretical and practicing framework for my role as an instructional designer. AI is a strengths-based modality that assumes institutions have “distinctive competencies,” or positive attributes that can lead to positive change (Cooperrider et al., 2005, p. 3). By starting with an organization's existing strengths, competencies, and assets, the goal or aspired state may seem more attainable. Upon reflection and anticipation of this autoethnographic study, the “4-D” AI Cycle (Figure 1), which includes discovery, dream, design, and destiny, was present in my past and current experiences as an instructional designer practicing in a centralized, academic reporting instructional design team (Cooperrider et al., 2005).

Figure 1

Appreciative Inquiry “4-D” Cycle


Discovery
“What gives life?”
(the best of what is)
Appreciating
Dream
“What might be?”
(imagine what the world is calling for)
Envisioning
Design
“How can it be?”
(determining the ideal)
Coconstructing
Destiny
“What will be?”
(how to empower, learn and adjust/improvise)
Sustaining
Affirmative Topic Choice

Note. Starting with Discovery and moving clockwise, the AI 4-D Cycle examines the status quo, what is possible, how to achieve what is possible, and how to advance toward the ideals for an organization. From Appreciative Inquiry Handbook: For Leaders of Change, by D.L. Cooperrider, D. Whitney, and J. M. Stavros, 2005, Crown Custom Publishing.

The altruism of AI motivates me to keep working within the organizational structure at SCAU despite the challenges I must overcome. Shared governance has a long history within American higher education and my experience as an AIP operating within it is masked in existing research that aggregates our experiences. For this reason, my study will be different. I view myself as well-positioned because I am employed in what Drysdale's study notes is the most effective place for instructional designers: a centralized, academic reporting unit.

Summary

The history of American higher education started with administration and organizational structure as priorities. The tension between institutions as organizations was a priori to the development of the modern faculty and shared governance that persists to this day. The transition from European colonies to an emerging and distinctive country was reflected in American higher education from the beginning. Constantly responding to the change in the nation and its students' needs, higher education and shared governance dynamically advance education with world-wide impact.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This research study focused on the experience of one generalist instructional designer who works in a centralized, academic reporting line at Southern Central American University (SCAU). The study aimed to provide a more candid description of the phenomena described by Drysdale (2021) to inspire administrators and AIPs to consider their strategic placement within institutions. This chapter reviewed the qualitative methodology used to complete this autoethnographic study.

This study's purpose was to explore the important role well-positioned instructional designers can play in advancing the work of their institutions. By recording and analyzing the experiences of one well-positioned instructional designer, this study hoped to compel other instructional designers and higher education leadership to consider the current placement and potential strategic use of instructional designers within their organizations. The research questions for this study were:

1. How does the organizational structure at SCAU, positively or negatively, influence the ability of an instructional designer to lead online learning initiatives in higher education?
2. What does a centralized, academic reporting line instructional design structure look like and feel like from the perspective of an instructional designer?
3. How does an instructional designer participate in the design, redesign, and evaluation of SCAU courses and programs?
4. How do SCAU faculty and administrators empower or disempower an instructional designer when collaborating on online initiatives?

Rationale for the Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methods were the most appropriate for a study of this nature. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) affirm this by stating that, “the nature of the research problem[s] and questions that will be asked to address the problem” (p. 11) lead the researcher to the appropriate method. This study possessed many of the qualitative research characteristics outlined by Creswell and Guetterman (2019). Specifically, this study explored a problem with the goal of developing a more detailed understanding of phenomena, included open-ended research questions that relied on the participant’s experiences, and included an analysis process that sought to identify themes including reflective processes by the researcher (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This research study could also be classified as autoethnographic as the researcher was also the research participant.

Autoethnographic Design (Type of Design)

Adams et al. (2022) state that autoethnography comprises a trio of essential characteristics: the self (auto), the culture (ethno), and the story or experience (graphy). Without all three components, a study does not establish itself as autoethnography. This research study contained all three components as it featured the researcher-participant describing her experiences working as an instructional designer within a particular organizational structure (shared governance at an institution of higher education). Adams et al. further posit that autoethnography fills a critical gap within more traditional forms of research study design as it prioritizes and values subjective epistemology, animates the “sensemaking process” its practitioners undertake, adds to existing bodies of research, challenges established research practices and methods, and “engage[s] and compel[s] action from the reader” (p. 4).

In their chapter, “Community Intersectionality, and Social Justice in Critical HRD,” Monaghan and Isaac-Savage (2023) posit that individuals with diverse, underrepresented intersectional identities such as mine, (I identify as a Black woman), “often lack support and access” to opportunities even when seemingly welcomed within an organization (p. 309), yet advocate for an “outside third party” (p. 317) to ask the hard questions that may illuminate the social injustices within an organization in an effort to protect vulnerable individuals. Third parties can be helpful for exposing inequity within an organization, but autoethnography is self-advocacy and self-empowering for individuals, like me, who are missing and overlooked within a field, industry, or institution. This is not to say that allies cannot be supportive with disclosing the hardships and injustices that underrepresented people face, but through autoethnography, I can speak for myself despite knowing the risks and consequences for doing so. Telling my story using autoethnography in the face of injustice was (and continues to be) a revolutionary act that demonstrates courage and altruism that my voice will and can be heard simply because it matters.

Additionally, although I identify as a Black woman, I opted not to foreground my race and gender in this study as I sought to foreground my professional identity (instructional designer) within the shared governance structure at my university, SCAU. This decision may not be popular or common with some as race and gender are foregrounded in most of the contemporary social justice and diversity-related discussions and research, but it was the right decision at this time for me. While I absolutely and unapologetically identify as a Black woman, for this study, I focused on my membership within the growing group of what Kumar calls “non-traditional academics,” higher education professionals who are neither faculty nor administrators yet deeply involved in the teaching and learning at their colleges and universities (2021, p.1012). While my race and gender are important, the space I occupy within higher education that does “not conform to traditional academic vs. administrative binaries” needs to be shared, studied, and validated as an “academic identity” (Kumar, 2021, p. 1012). Instead of limiting herself to the traditional autoethnographic styles, namely evocative and analytical, Kumar describes her style of autoethnography as *systematic* after “the structured method…used to identify, create, organize, and review data” (2021, p. 1013). Kumar’s *systematic* approach to autoethnography echoes the *professional* autoethnographic approach of Hernandez et al. (2010). “The professional autoethnography involves the writing up of an account that includes all the actions and events related to our academic career just as each of us experienced them, and locating them in specific coordinates of time and space” (Hernandez et al, 2010, p.189).

Data Sources

Data sources for this research study included videotaped, transcribed responses to an adapted version of the original Dedicated Instructional Designer Interview Protocol developed and included in Drysdale's study (2021) (see Appendix A). More specifically, interviews were conducted.

Instrumentation

This study modified the Dedicated Instructional Designer Interview Protocol (Drysdale, 2021) (see Appendix B). While Drysdale’s research was referenced in the literature regarding instructional designers’ placement and effectiveness within organizations, I did not find a study based on his protocol for interviewing instructional designers. The modifications I made to Drysdale’s protocol included excluding questions irrelevant to my study’s research questions, merging questions that were redundant or closely related, and grouping his questions to fit my study’s four research questions. For example, I omitted the questions the history and restructuring of my institution’s organizational chart (i.e., When was the last time your institution restructured its online learning and instructional design teams and resources? What were the reasons?), and how my institution determines or evaluates student growth regarding courses and curricula (What system or model do you use to evaluate student growth on learning outcomes and the quality of your courses and curricula?). Those questions were irrelevant to my research study which focuses on my experience as an instructional designer within my organization's current structure. I sorted the remaining questions to correspond to the four research questions for my study and added one set of background questions that provided an opportunity for me to introduce myself and professional experience as an instructional designer. The background questions included:

1. Please share with me your position title and an overview of your typical responsibilities in that role, including any major tasks, projects, or initiatives that would help clarify your role.
2. Why did you choose to pursue a professional interest or career in online learning for higher education?
3. What are some of the most important initiatives that your university is pursuing, from your own perspective as a professional?
4. What is your experience working as a dedicated instructional designer? (see Appendix B)

Drysdale stated the question protocols in his study were field-tested "to ensure relevance and validity" prior to inclusion in his study.

Like Drysdale, I am well-versed in the "culture" of my case site. Unlike Drysdale, as an autoethnographer, I embrace the biases I have as I am both researcher and participant. I am mindful and aware of those biases, but the nature of my research methodology is unapologetically subjective. Some of my biases include limited experience teaching adult students and my relatively short tenure at SCAU. I can empathize with the challenges administrators and faculty face, but I have not held either role. My perspective is steeped in a supportive capacity. As a current graduate student, I can also empathize and identify with the challenges and frustrations students experience in the traditional and online classroom. Starr (2010) states that “autoethnography is not the literal study of the self but the space between self and practice” (p. 2). In sharing my experiences in relation to my position within the institutional structure, I provided “a focal point from which a new understanding of the culture in question is revealed” (Starr, 2010, p. 3). Stories can inspire change and action because they are more accessible than more traditional representations of research.

Data Collection and Techniques

I recorded myself responding to the five semi-structured interview protocols between December 2023 and January 2024 using Zoom Video Communications, Inc. (Zoom) video teleconferencing with the record to cloud option. Each semi-structured interview had a set of questions that corresponded with the four research questions of this study. To provide context and a brief introduction, I added a set of questions related to my position, professional experience, and expertise (see Appendix B).

Each semi-structured interview was designed to take no more than thirty minutes to one hour. I recorded myself responding to the interview protocol for each of the five sessions. My goal was to record the sessions over a two-week period with a maximum of one session recorded per day. I opted to place some boundaries and flexibility within my data collection because I needed to pace myself as a newly single mother juggling full-time employment, a busy teenager’s social life, and doctoral scholarship. I took comfort in my methodology’s investment in “creating accessible, readable, and evocative stories that relate to peoples’ experiences” and felt empowered to take the time I need to do just that (Adams et al., 2022, p. 6). Because I chose to record the interviews, I was able to focus on responding to the questions as opposed to taking notes.

Procedures for Managing and Recording Data

At the conclusion of each of the five semi-structured interviews, the video recordings were stored in my University of Missouri St. Louis (UMSL) Zoom account using the record to cloud setting. UMSL Zoom meetings recorded to the cloud are then transferred to Panopto, the institution’s video streaming server for long-term storage, editing, and distribution capabilities. Both my UMSL Zoom and Panopto accounts were password-protected using University of Missouri System multi-factor authentication (MFA).

Data Analysis Procedures

I reviewed and edited the auto-generated captions for accuracy prior to exporting the transcripts and conducting a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was a good fit for this research study because of its flexibility and ability to be used in a variety of qualitative research designs. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as an iterative, six-phase process that includes:

1. data familiarization
2. initial generation of codes
3. searches for themes
4. reviews of themes
5. definition and naming of themes
6. writing the report based upon the data analysis (p. 87).

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) concur with Braun and Clarke that the analysis of qualitative data is multi-step, iterative, and non-sequential. Though I conducted an inductive thematic analysis of my interview content, I wondered how my results would compare to Drysdale's. Drysdale (2021) presents several important themes that might have been present in my findings so a brief, yet deductive thematic analysis was included as part of this study. Specifically, Drysdale concludes "organization structure strongly affected the role perception, professional advocacy, empowerment, and leadership opportunities for instructional designers" (2021, p.72).

Data Familiarization

Shortly after recording each of the five interviews, I watched each video and reviewed the auto-generated captions to ensure accuracy. After reviewing the captions with the video recordings, I read each interview transcript at least twice to prepare myself for generating codes of interesting, insightful, and remarkable statements within each interview and across them as a combined data set. The iterative process of reading and re-reading the transcripts increased my familiarity with the data which benefitted me later in the data analysis process when I noticed commonalities across them.

Generation of Codes

To begin the thematic analysis coding process, I opted to use Taguette, which is "a free and open-source qualitative research tool" (Taguette, n.d., para. 1) that I have used previously for a thematic analysis project. I imported the transcripts for the five interviews and then coded them noting interesting statements and observations. I reviewed each of the transcripts twice in Taguette because each initial review was more of an independent review of the transcript for that particular research question. With each subsequent review of transcripts, I considered the codes I used in the other transcripts to help me code additional statements that I may not have included in the first review of that interview data.

Strategies to Establish Credibility and Dependability

Ensuring rigor, credibility, and dependability can be challenging when undertaking autoethnographic research. The researcher was engaged in the research, so objectivity was not possible nor an ideal as it functions in traditional research where boundaries are established and actively pursued between the researcher and the participants. Le Roux (2017) proposed five criteria for establishing rigor in autoethnography: “subjectivity, self-reflexivity, resonance, credibility, and contribution” (p. 204). Le Roux’s criteria emphasize the importance of an autoethnographer’s self-awareness, commitment to ethical research to “extend knowledge, generate ongoing research, liberate, empower, improve practice or make a contribution to social change” (p. 204). Establishing credibility and dependability when undertaking and evaluating autoethnographic research can be challenging because the line between researcher and participant is nonexistent. I could have had one of my colleagues review and critique my recollections but was concerned that the validity of my perspective and truth may be minimized based upon past experiences where our shared experiences evoked very different responses. I considered some additional ways of validating my work, but ultimately decided to trust my integrity and lived experiences as the means to convey my reality working as an instructional designer in a new or emergent way.

Adams et al. (2022) state that “autoethnography embraces how personal experience is infused with cultural norms and expectations” and its practitioners “engage in rigorous self-reflection…to identify and interrogate the intersections between self and social life” (p.3). My interviews and the thematic analysis that follow take up the challenge to critically assess my experiences in the specific context of SCAU, the higher education institution where I am employed, and more generally within the origins and current state of the industry in the United States of America. Adams et al. (2022) also share that ultimately, autoethnography helps those of us called “to create compelling and useful research” in five ways: foregrounding particular and subjective knowledge; illustrating sensemaking processes; making contributions to existing research; challenging norms of research practice and representation; and engaging and compelling responses from audiences” (p. 4). These five ways that autoethnography helps researchers and academics like myself are active, iterative, and social which are recurring themes throughout this study. As the story of my institution’s structure emerges so does my story, my observations, and conclusions.

Limitations

This autoethnographic research project has limited applicability because it included the experiences and insights of one instructional designer in a specific circumstance. Stories are powerful, but they belong to their owners. While I shared my stories and insights as a practicing instructional designer employed in a centralized, academic reporting team through my autoethnographic research study, their generalizability to instructional designers working in different circumstances is quite limited. I hope to provoke other instructional designers, administrators, and faculty to consider the impact of their organization’s structure on their instructional designers and other allied instructional professionals, but each institution and administration is different with unique leadership and operational needs.

Ethical Considerations and the Protection of Human Subjects

Research that involves humans and their personal data needs to be mindful of the risks and potential for harm. Even though autoethnography uses the experiences and artifacts provided by the researcher, steps should be taken to adhere to ethical practices for research. This study used a pseudonym for the participant's institution, names, and other non-essential information (official office names and employees) have been masked to protect individuals not participating in the study. The University of Missouri St. Louis Institutional Review Board reviewed this proposed research study to confirm adequate protection of human subjects.

Conclusion

Because this study aimed to illustrate and analyze what it means to work as an instructional designer in a centralized academic line reporting team as presented by Drysdale (2021), the qualitative interview protocol for instructional designers included in his study (see Appendix A) served as the basis for the adapted protocol included in this study. Modifications included the condensing of similar and related questions, the elimination of certain questions deemed nonessential to my research questions, and addition of questions that considered empowerment and self-perceived efficacy of myself as participating instructional designer. In addition to replicating and providing candor to the conclusions posited by Drysdale's study, this study showed the capacity and potential for innovation and effectiveness when instructional designers work in a centralized, academic reporting unit.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter includes a description of my findings. Content includes the codes, themes, review, and definition of themes, and finally the report on the responses to my research questions based upon the data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

Themes

As I reviewed the codes (i.e., instructor advocacy, cooperation, points of pride) (see Appendix C), I consolidated them into themes representative of trends within the data. From the 30 codes, seven themes were developed:

1. Advocacy and Social Justice
2. Analogies and Jargon
3. Collaboration and Consulting
4. Controversial and Core Beliefs
5. Instructional Designer Identity and Expertise
6. Organizational Impact
7. Strategic Instructional Design

They are discussed below.

Advocacy and Social Justice

For my study's purposes, I defined advocacy and social justice in terms of my work championing the needs, challenges, and concerns of the faculty, students, staff, and administrators I engaged with as an instructional designer. I interacted with all stakeholders at SCAU and being able to appreciate, articulate, and convey their intersecting and competing priorities was something I prided myself upon. The Advocacy and Social Justice theme contained remarks related to my colleagues' and my own work on behalf of faculty, staff, and students. The excerpts with this code and theme represented work, beliefs, and activities related to anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in student success and retention, hiring practices, teaching and learning, and administration of the institution. Major instances of the Advocacy and Social Justice theme in my interviews included my insights about higher education’s investment in hegemony and preemptive suspicion of academic dishonesty despite the cultural shift towards equity, inclusivity, and increasing student and talent retention.

In a cultural moment that regularly uses buzzwords like, “inclusivity,” “transparency,” and “diversity, equity, inclusion, and antiracism,” I routinely encounter course-specific policies that exude a general mistrust of students as skilled plagiarists, cheaters, and liars. I understand that plagiarism and other academic integrity infractions do occur, but belaboring those points in the syllabus does not bode well for creating a mentoring relationship between the faculty and the new class of students. Refusals to provide slide decks or other helpful tools for students to use to follow along in class are often justified by, “Well, no one gave me notes or slides, so my students shouldn’t have access to them either.” The reluctance to provide scaffolding resources to students helps perpetuate the hazing faculty experienced while students and does little to make students feel like they belong at our institutions, and that they absolutely should ask for what they need to be successful.

My institution also subscribes to Blackboard Ally, which indicates how accessible course content is and unless my team is building or collaborating with an instructor on their course design, the course content can remain as inaccessible as the instructor permits, which is unfortunate for students. Retrofitting accessibility is something my team can assist with upon request and/or in conjunction with our accessibility (disability) services team, but it would be great to have an institutional standard that course content reach a minimum level of accessibility for students' best interest. Interestingly, the accessibility scores are only visible to faculty and learning management system administrators. Students cannot see the learning management system's accessibility score—they just click on the document and see what has been provided by their instructor in whatever condition it was supplied. The lack of transparency for students with respect to accessibility scores of course content is something I am beginning to speak out about because it is disingenuous for them not to see it, especially when the customers and workplaces they will join, or start will expect it of them.

The shared governance model at SCAU was comprised of "pyramid, top down" structures with relative power increasing as roles move up and closer to the top (Research Question 1, p. 1). This was present on the administrative side of the structure and within the faculty tenure and promotion structure where adjuncts, lecturers, and instructors have less power and job security than assistant, associate, and full professors. Furthermore, when reviewing syllabi and other course artifacts in preparation for a course re/design consultation with faculty, I noted that I frequently came across course policies and grading systems that resembled "academic hazing" that were counter to "making changes that are rooted in student success" (Research Question 1, pp. 28-29). I shared that, "[S]ome of this investment in replicating hardships, academic hardships, academic hazing... it's got to go" for higher education to embrace and reflect the ideals of this current cultural moment (Research Question 1, p. 29). These observations were not shared to discount instructors' experiences and autonomy for how to deal with "a student who took advantage of a grading loophole or a student who was highly disrespectful," but they were shared to demonstrate what kind of messaging was prominently displayed to new students at the start of courses. Messaging that was developed for the next group of students, in the form of subsequent semester’s syllabi and assessment prompts, were grounded in previous students’ academic dishonesty and misconduct.

For example, some instructors initially (and conclusively) refused to provide lecture slides for students to follow along with for lectures. Occasionally, I would have instructors want to “hide” homework questions or short assignments within prerecorded lectures without notifying students that crucial information was contained within specific lectures. Overly complicated late work and revised work policies also seemed punitive in nature to me. Some late work and revision submission policies were often worded to convey distrust for student’s judgement, little empathy for unexpected challenges, and zero tolerance for students making extraordinarily normal mistakes as they adjust to college-level scholarship and the independence that comes with it. This was especially true in gen-eds and other introductory level courses targeting first- and second-year students. The rationales for such policies included that was what a specific professor experienced when in undergrad and so their students should have the struggles that shaped their academic experiences for better or worse. The “perceived” benefits that come from not providing students with slides and notifications that homework or assignments are embedded within prerecorded lectures and content are amplified by replicating the educational struggles the professor experienced. I always pushed back and had success with administrative paid build courses (sometimes called “paid builds” or “paid course builds”) where faculty signed a contract to receive compensation for serving as the subject matter expert on a course build, but instructors who sought independent course consultations were at liberty to proceed as they wished.

In a social period where institutions of higher education, like SCAU, prioritize and publicize their commitment to antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI), it is shocking how much academic hazing is tolerated as a rite of passage for students. I understand a professor’s desire to have students read course content and watch the lectures for successfully completion of assessments, but setting traps by embedding essential course information in the middle of lectures and refusing to provide slides referenced in the lectures is not equitable nor congruent with the ADEI principles articulated and memorialized in an institution’s strategic plan. These instances of academic hazing are not rites of passage that bode well for student success, retention, and persistence.

Story Time: Advocacy and Social Justice. Thursdays are my dedicated weekly support day where I provide primary support for incoming support requests for the educational technology tools my institution provides, supports, and subscribes to. The support requests can be in-person walk-ins, phone calls, emails, or after-hours support tickets that come in through the official information technology services help desk. The support requests can be from students, faculty, and administrators and can include emergent matters (“My students are supposed to be taking an online test and they can’t get in!”) or less emergent concerns (“I have to make a video presentation for class, and I need help choosing a method of recording and editing it.”). One of the on-going issues my colleagues and I encounter is testing that auto-submits once a student starts the exam. If for any reason the student’s internet is disconnected, the exam will no longer be available to them, if the instructor has enabled the auto-submit feature. In my team’s outreach and consulting with faculty, we try to convey that while it is entirely reasonable to want students to complete a test in one sitting, the auto-submit feature in our learning management system is not the best way to approximate that testing environment. We also recommend students take exams using a hard-wired internet connection because their internet connection is less likely to be interrupted and cause an auto-submit of their exams before they are finished with it. Our official recommendation is to use the timer as the trigger for submitting tests. We recommend that the timer, with a five- or ten-minute buffer added to it, is best to avoid the situation that is described below. So, for a 60-minute exam, we would recommend a 65- or 70-minute timer to allow for internet connection hiccups, a bathroom break, or even a computer restart. The timer, and not the internet connection, controls when the test auto-submits.

Not all students have access to a location where hard-wired internet connected devices are available. Many students use Wi-Fi to connect to the internet and their course websites. Regardless of why there is an interruption in internet connection, the following steps tend to occur when students experience any kind of interruption when auto-submit is enabled.

1. Student logs into the learning management system, accesses their course website, and begins the exam (or quiz—I will use exam in this example, but quizzes function the same when auto-submit is enabled).
2. Student experiences an interruption in their internet connection.
3. Student refreshes the page and tries to reopen the exam.
4. Student sees that their exam has been submitted and begins to panic—I know I would.
5. Student may or may not reach out to the professor—especially if they are taking the exam over the weekend.
    a. If the student reaches out to the professor, the professor often tells the student to reach out to ITS to have us “fix it.”
6. The student’s auto-submit experience is somehow reported to ITS (by either the professor or the student) and the issue is routed to my instructional design team—likely a couple of days after the exam was due—especially if the exam period included a weekend.

7. An instructional designer will log on to the learning management system, access the course website, and review the exam settings to confirm that auto-submit was enabled.
8. The instructional designer will confirm that the exam has auto-submit enabled and ask the professor if they want to provide an additional opportunity for the student by resetting their attempt; but, if the student reported the issue, we will ask the student to reach out to their professor to see if they will reset their attempt so they can complete the test. We let them know either the professor must reset the attempt, or the professor must reach out to our instructional design team directly to provide consent to reset the student's attempt.
    a. Instructional designers will not reset an attempt without the express consent of the professor and some professors do know how to reset the attempt on their own, but many do not.
9. Most of the time professors will permit an additional attempt of an exam, but there are occasions where they just say no.

Just imagine these steps occurring for just one student who has an internet disruption during an exam. Now, imagine this happening in a large gen-ed course with 75 or more students! If five percent of students have an auto-submit problem, that is at least 3-5 students who will have somewhere between 2-5 emails, phone calls, and interactions with the help desk to get the matter resolved. The students are anxious, and many times intimidated about speaking up for themselves. The professors get frustrated by a flurry of panicked emails that require individualized attention through manual test attempt resets. Then my team gets involved with emails coming in overnight or over the weekend. Full disclosure: my team is available between 8 am and 4:30 pm and we do not work over the weekend. Auto-submit causes a lot of unnecessary worry, anxiety, and confusion for professors and students alike. Resolving the matter can take days depending on when and how the problem is reported.

As instructional designers, we can make recommendations because we know the cascading aggravation, anxiety, and hardships experienced by all parties just by using one seemingly helpful setting on an exam, but we cannot force faculty to adopt them. I am relieved when a professor consents to a reset but am saddened when these occasions are reported at the end of the semester when weeks or months have passed and now, with the student noticing a very low grade in the course, they report issues they had with exams and quizzes. Students are always at the mercy of their professors when auto-submits due to a disconnection in internet connection occur, but they do not often realize the urgency of reporting these problems in a timely manner. In many courses there are several low stakes quizzes in addition to more substantial exams. A fair shot at completing all of them should be a shared goal and the settings professors select make that more and less possible for some students. Speedy resolutions for students are always the goal, but communicating over email and trading phone messages does not always make that a reality given everyone’s work/life balance and working hours. Advocating for the student is something I routinely do in these situations, but outcomes can be mixed, especially if the student has had more than one exam reset in a particular course.

Analogies and Jargon

One of the benefits of autoethnography, the methodology of this study, is that I can lean into the practice of storytelling which, I absolutely enjoy. My colleagues at SCAU would tell you I have special terms of endearment and humor that are often steeped in comparisons to other experiences, contexts, and circumstances. The Analogies and Jargon theme contained niche terminology and vivid analogies helpful for explaining and illustrating phenomenon I experienced while working as an instructional designer. Examples of analogies and jargon included in this study were line jumpers, shared governance operating like a sewing machine, and working with an instructional designer is like working with a nutritionist.

Line Jumpers. Line jumpers were people who, from previous experience with an instructional designer, jump straight to that person rather than going through our instructional design team's "traditional help matrix" (Background Questions, p. 14). Because my colleagues and I were the primary "public-facing" branch of information technology services (ITS), "[faculty, administrators, and students] may come straight to us" (Background Questions, p. 14). Accommodating line jumpers varies because while, "I do try to keep a portfolio of professors that I work closely with... there are times when I do have to refer people to our...standard protocols, which is to submit a support request...and then we will work with our team to try to figure out who would be the best person to work with [them]" (Background Questions, pp. 14-15). As a generalist instructional designer, my line jumpers who belonged to a college that employed a specialist instructional designer sometimes caused misunderstandings with that specialist instructional designer. Line jumpers reach out to the instructional designer of their own choosing and usually it is because of past experiences—both positive and negative.

Sew What? As a long-suffering and perpetual beginner sewer, I was familiar with how elaborate the process of threading a sewing machine and getting the tension just-right to be able to make progress on any sewing project. Getting the tension just-right on a sewing machine was compared to the tension between administrators and faculty within shared governance. "[E]verybody wants to get the stitch going, right? And wants [the needle, thread, and fabric] to catch, but it takes a lot of different parts, and it takes that just-right tension...[O]ne of the things I would say about the relationship [between administrators and faculty], there's always a...there's always an intention to...to rethread the machine. And I think that’s the optimism that I think that runs through those of us who are passionate about education...[W]e’ll keep trying...We’ll get it right. We’ll come back. We’ll re-thread the machine. We’ll get the tension just-right" (Research Question 2, pp. 20-21). The struggle for progress in higher education was compared to the arduous task of getting my sewing machine out of storage and setting it up properly to prevent the thread from snapping with too much tension on the line. This process was complicated and frustrating, but when set up properly, I could and have made some interesting articles and products.

Some of the changes SCAU has on the horizon will need the precision of threading the machine and getting the tension between faculty and administrators just right to make progress on repairing and even creating something new for the institution. These new initiatives that require a delicate balance between the faculty and administrators include early major determination for incoming first year students, reconsidering the gen-ed course load, growing incoming classes of students, and retaining existing students. The adversarial relationship often leads to the thread snapping which, I have noticed and can personally attest, can cause projects to be delayed indefinitely since getting all of the required people assembled and in the right frame of mind (solutions focused) to “rethread the machine” is difficult. It takes a level of willingness that being overworked, frustrated, and annoyed often precludes. Because of this, there are often multiple working groups with slightly overlapping membership and similar administrative charges. When energy fades within one group, there is usually another group just assembling to tackle similar matters. SCAU wants to solve its problems, but the tension between faculty and administrators leads to fatigue and seemingly minor and incremental changes.

CPG as a Food Diary. When completing administrative paid builds, where faculty earn extra compensation for collaborating with an instructional designer to create an online version of a course, there were many techniques and tools used, but none more detailed and time-consuming for the faculty than the course planning grid (CPG). I shared in my recorded interview, that the CPG forces faculty to think critically about all course content, learning activities, and assessments. “Why do you have homework? Are you gonna grade it?...Why should students come to your class?...What competencies and the skills and knowledge do students need at the end of this course in order to do well for what comes next?” (Research Question 3, p. 10). “[I]t’s almost like, you know, when you see a dietician and they want a food diary...and you’re reluctant to fill that out. Because, of course, you’re having 5 servings of vegetables and eat lean protein” (Research Question 3, p. 10). We usually provided an overview session on completing the CPG independently and over a couple of weeks, but many times I worked collaboratively with faculty just to complete it. When I reviewed CPGs with faculty, like analyzing a food diary’s micronutrients, we noticed that some long-standing assignments were not leading to “the outcomes we’d want” for the course and where students are headed next in a course sequence (Research Question 3, p. 16). While tedious to complete, the academic version of a food diary, or the CPG, played a vital role for ensuring course components, goals, and outcomes were aligned. The CPG gave me an artifact to reference over the course build and course review process.

Story time: Analogies and Jargon. When it came time to develop a training module for informing faculty about the requirement of regular and substantive interaction in our distance education courses per the Higher Education Act (1965), I decided on an air travel theme to diffuse some of the apprehension toward yet another “administrative ask” of the faculty. I compared our faculty teaching online to various types of flyers (frequent, first-time, and anxious, for example) to convey that there is a range of comfort with respect to confidence, ability, and attitude. I had a lot of fun with that theme because I could relate the regular and substantive interaction to the nearly constant updates flyers receive in the airport terminal and while onboard the aircraft. The types of information may be related to local or destination weather, anticipated turbulence, delays, and safety. The announcements are regulated by the Transportation Security Administration and Federal Aviation Association (among other government agencies) whether we tune them out as experienced flyers or listen to each intently as new or anxious flyers. The announcements are made on a schedule and at strategic points given where flyers are within their travel experience. The announcements are also made by important people in the air travel process. We regularly and routinely hear from airport security, the Department of Homeland Security, pilots, flight attendants, and airline ticketing and gate agents. I was able to make the case that our students are no different in their need to hear regularly from the important people in their academic courses—the faculty and teaching assistants. Some need the regular and substantive interaction more than others, but per regulatory agencies, the announcements and interactions are required for everyone’s awareness and orientation to what is happening in busy, complex situations.

Collaboration and Consulting

The Collaboration and Consulting theme was prevalent throughout my interviews because instructional design involves faculty subject matter experts working in conjunction with allied instructional professionals skilled in the planning and sequencing of learning content and assessments. Depending on the goal of the interaction, I may meet once or several times with a faculty member. In the case of an administrative paid build, my project manager would normally hold a project launch meeting where they would review the standardized project plan, course planning grid, and estimated course build timeline with all the instructional designers and subject matter experts (faculty) for a given semester. Once the project launch meeting occurred, I would begin working independently with the appointed faculty member with the course planning grid being the first deliverable due within the next two to four weeks after the launch meeting. Typically, the first one-on-one meeting with a faculty member on an administrative build would be to go over the course planning grid in detail. I always read the course planning grid closely prior to those meetings because that would normally be the first opportunity I would have to ask probing questions regarding their teaching philosophy and style in addition to what they liked and disliked about teaching the course. Consultations due to voluntary instructional design requests often started out with a more conversational and friendly tone because there was question or concern that caused the faculty member to reach out to my team. Working, communicating, and making non-binding recommendations were common references in either scenario. Non-binding recommendations I could make included suggesting the amount of viewing time students enrolled in a history of theatre and film course should expect to dedicate on a weekly basis to help them plan their time like they might plan for a text-based course's reading assignments.

Both sources for undertaking course design projects involved meeting regularly and speaking candidly with faculty members to get a thorough understanding of their ideas, concerns, and goals for the course design project. Admittedly, I stated that I preferred voluntary consultations "because the instructor is seeking out our thoughts...[i]t's a very creative type of meeting" in comparison to those associated with administrative paid builds (Research Question

3, p. 5). Self-initiated course consultations were more flexible with timing because there were not any contract-specific deliverable dates or program launch dates to accommodate.

Administrative paid builds were initiated by SCAU administrators to meet a “mission-critical” [academic] connection to the...strategic plan” or in many cases our “online degree completion program” for those with “some college,” but no degree (Research Question 3, p. 8). Faculty were compensated for collaborating with my instructional design team via a contract. Sometimes those collaborations went smoothly and other times it was more challenging to complete due to misunderstandings of the scope and sequence of work. A common misconception for faculty participating in an administrative paid build was that the course was somehow in relation to their contracted faculty teaching and research responsibilities. Administrative paid builds are in addition to the affiliated faculty’s teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities, if any. The majority of administrative paid build courses were selected to help SCAU attract adult, non-traditional students, who have some college, but no degree. These courses were selected to help those individuals be able to complete their bachelor’s degree with online, asynchronous courses. In cases where there were misunderstandings, I would reference the terms of the contract the faculty had entered with the administration to try and keep the course build on track for successful completion. Escalations of issues that persisted were escalated to my team’s project manager and director. Examples of issues that may be escalated included a refusal to provide slides, record video lectures, and a general lack of progress on the course (ignoring emails, instant messages, and phone calls, and missing scheduled meetings without notice or rescheduling promptly). Escalations usually resulted in a conversation between the faculty member, my project manager, and me to try and reiterate expectations and design a workable plan to complete the project.

While there was room for creativity with all course design projects, because of the contracts associated with administrative paid builds, the course designs were normally for "asynchronous" delivery and I often referred to the process as "'canning,' because we want[ed] to make a shelf-stable version of the course and the course content" (Research Question 3, p. 8).

Special projects that I had the opportunity to work on while infusing my expertise as an instructional designer included a system-level inclusive language guide to offer "helpful support on language we might want to use, language we might want to rethink using" (Background Interview, p. 12). The inclusive language guide was completed at the system-level as SCAU is one campus within a larger network of public institutions of higher education. Working on instructional design projects beyond the classroom scope made me "really proud to work with one of my colleagues, who, I believe, is a stronger technologist than I am" (Background Interview, p. 12). That project afforded me the opportunity to work within a new content authoring system that I ordinarily would not use. It also enhanced my working relationship with my colleague because we attended several meetings and held working sessions to complete the project.

Story time: Collaboration and Consulting. One of the most rewarding collaborations and consultations I had the opportunity to be involved with was for an assistant professor going up for tenure. As part of their dossier, they wanted to demonstrate their ability to think critically about the design of one of their specialized, upper-level courses. This consultation was enjoyable since the faculty member was receptive to student feedback from previous semester evaluations and my feedback on course policies and assignment prompts. I suspect a willingness and capacity to incorporate student and pedagogical feedback was part of this assistant professor's department's criteria for tenure and promotion, but regardless, their interest and investment in students’ experiences with their course seemed genuine. The longer we spoke and the more course artifacts I reviewed to make recommendations and suggestions, I sensed there were some unresolved issues for the instructor with respect to student behavior in previous semesters. Evidence of this included syllabus statements claiming if students had a problem with them as the leader of the course, they might want to drop the course as challenges to their authority would not be welcome. I took a chance and asked the professor to tell me the story behind the syllabus statement. I feel incredibly honored the faculty member was willing to be vulnerable and explore what motivated their emotionally charged syllabus statement. There may be several reasons they felt comfortable speaking with me. I pride myself on asking questions and follow-up questions when collaborating with faculty and recognize that sharing your course syllabus, and assignment prompts is deeply personal and professional. I have encountered defensive, frustrated, overwhelmed, confident, and award-wining faculty members seeking consultations voluntarily and as part of administrative builds. The faculty member up for tenure was relatively early in their career and just wanted to be respected by their students and esteemed by their colleagues. We were able to soften the tone of their messaging regarding roles and mutual between them as their instructor for the course and the students as learners in this upper-level course. The softer tone conveyed the faculty member’s expectations without castigating the incoming cohort of students for previous semester’s students’ disrespect.

Controversial and Core Beliefs

A fulfilling career working in instructional design in a higher education setting like SCAU required tenacity, a belief in iterative change in people and policies, mutual trust with senior administrators, and a commitment to the strategic plan of the institution. This tall order came with some Controversial and Core Beliefs that motivated me to stay in my position despite the challenges of navigating shared governance. Excerpts in the Controversial and Core Beliefs theme stressed foundational principles my industry and I personally champion. These beliefs included empowering students as consumers, a belief that if students were admitted there ought to be a path to graduation, and reverence for and deference to academic freedom and autonomy for faculty. These beliefs were deeply held and present throughout my remarks.

Early in my time at SCAU, I was named to a working group charged with ensuring faculty awareness of the Higher Education Act (1965) requirement to include regular and substantiative interaction in their distance learning courses. That positive experience led to the creation of a job aid that outlined the specific content and instructional requirements the institution and the federal government would be looking for in SCAU distance education courses. “I advocated for and I’m proud that...we were able to produce... a corresponding checklist for students” (Research Question 3, p. 20). I regularly used the language of consumerism in my professional work and “I firmly believe that they’re [students] paying for their education...scholarship funds, loans, independent wealth...so it pays to be an informed-consumer" and shared that if we are telling faculty what to include, “we should give students a list of what they should be looking for” (Research Question 3, pp. 20-21). I felt it was disingenuous not to provide a corresponding list for students in the interest of equity and transparency.

Furthermore, one of my core beliefs about college student admissions, persistence, success, and graduation was *WIWO* or “a way in, a way out” (Research Question 1, p. 29). Like my commitment to social justice and advocacy in higher education, “[i]f we are truly admitting students with the goal of them graduating, then some of this investment in replicating hardships, academic hardships, academic hazing...it’s got to go” (Research Question 1, p. 29). I have routinely heard higher ed professionals, iconically, lament that students are just not ready for college, but find that woefully inadequate of an excuse for dismissing them when our admissions offices welcomed them to our community in the first place. A strong belief in WIWO meant that my instructional design consultations would focus on providing a path to successful completion of courses. Students do not have to earn an A or exemplify A work in order to “jump over the hurdle” and keep progressing toward their degree. Ensuring faculty remember that and students and their families knowing that is important for persistence year-to-year and through graduation. It is not going to be easy all of the time and students will struggle with some course content whether in their major or gen-eds. Normalizing “the struggle” for faculty and students could potentially assist them in putting student performance and needs in perspective.

As instructional designers and technologists, I shared that we generally have full access to course websites to collaborate and troubleshoot issues with users. We carefully navigate the trust and faith faculty have in us by “err[ing] on the side of deferring to the professor with respect to decisions” even ones that penalize students unjustly (Research Question 3, p.5). “[W]e work very closely with professors, and because we...really respect the academic freedom and the academic autonomy that comes with being a professor” as a core principle to the advocacy work we do on behalf of students (Research Question 3, p. 6). Deferring to faculty is a double-edged sword because I do not (yet) have close working relationships with all the faculty who reach out for assistance. I find they want my team to look at learning management system records to help substantiate student’s claims about missing deadlines or having technical difficulties. I can only report on the data recorded and must let the faculty member make their conclusions on whether to permit a late submission or another attempt at a test. Sometimes what they decide seems reasonable and occasionally a bit harsh.

I am unapologetically pro-student and will do everything I can to advocate for their best interests and redemption. To be clear: I will not lie for a student, but if there is a glimmer of hope or a positive light to shine on their situation, I will find it and communicate it with their faculty member with their consent of course. My professional success as an instructional designer was not measured in the number of course builds per academic year. “In order to truly be successful as an instructional designer and technologist, I have to know that students are getting a quality education and that faculty feel supported in their use of the learning technologies” (Research Question 1, p. 35). When it comes to supporting students, “we’re gonna go down the rabbit hole with [them] because we advocate for whoever shows up for help. And I think that...is why my success is student success...” (Research Question 1, pp. 35-36). Because of the work that I do and the high school and college ages of my daughter, niece, and nephew, I frequently give them gems of advice such as, “Don’t turn a late-work problem into an integrity problem” or “You had a problem submitting your work…now stop talking.” These gems come from experiences where I wish a student had stopped sharing details after stating their chief issue. The more unsolicited information students overshared made it increasingly difficult to find the positive light and path to redemption for their given situations. Students would be surprised by the data that is and is not retained by learning management systems. Equally surprising to students are the kinds of follow-up questions faculty ask me—your advocate—especially when they insist on specific details that go way beyond their chief issue. Suddenly a problem submitting a paper last night (perhaps even slightly after the due date and time) becomes an integrity problem when a student absolutely insists they clicked submit before the due date and time and the system shows they have not logged on to the system—let alone the specific course website—within the past week.

Story time: Controversial and Core Beliefs. I frequently use the language of consumerism and marketing in my day-to-day work and public speaking as an instructional designer with mixed responses from faculty and administrators. I firmly believe higher education is a product that our potential and current students are evaluating for not only value, but quality and customer service. SCAU has a lot of competition and needs to concentrate on making its programs and opportunities distinctive among its peer institutions. The hesitancy to lean into the language and tools of consumerism with higher education in the post-pandemic landscape of higher education will be detrimental to institutions that cannot set themselves apart from competitors. With the so-called “enrollment cliff” or reduced number of college-aged students becoming an ever-present threat, we simply cannot ignore the supply and demand curves that we can impact through increasing the quality of instruction and attractiveness of living and learning in the SCAU community (Basko, 2024).

Instructional Designer Identity and Expertise

My centralized reporting team of instructional designers was comprised of generalists and specialists. While there were several similarities between the two instructional designer groups, there were also some significant differences that sometimes led to conflict. The main difference between specialist and generalist instructional designers was the primary population served by the person. Specialists' salaries were paid for by their unique college (education, business, and nursing), so the funding source’s students, faculty, and administrators were their primary focus. Generalists served the entire campus with the ability to refer people to their specialist instructional designer, if necessary. I usually referred people to their specialist instructional designer if their needs seemed complicated or potentially something that could become an on-going project. The Instructional Designer Identity and Expertise theme highlighted this main distinction between the instructional designers and then emphasized the shared values, competencies, and protocols of the role iconically.

While I, as a generalist, was “not so focused on who I’m serving” that was not the case for some specialists who could “get a little territorial over their faculty or their staff, or the students” working with me or another specialist—especially if they were available (Research Question 1, p. 4). My work on behalf of specialist-sponsoring colleges’ students, faculty, staff and administrators was not an effort to somehow undermine the work of my specialist colleagues nor was it to cause my specialist colleagues’ positions to be reconsidered. If the person asking me for assistance directly is a line jumper, they likely had a previous interaction with me, which is why they may have chosen to reach out to me specifically; equally likely, the person’s support request may have come in on my support day—which is outside of my control. I never started a support request by identifying whose client someone was. My focus was on the person’s stated problem or concern. Succinctly stated, “I just want to serve” (Research Question 1, p. 5).

Story time: Instructional Designer Identity and Expertise. As an instructional designer who prides herself in engaging with as many teaching and learning workshops, working groups, book clubs, and administrative initiatives to support faculty development, I have developed working relationships and friendships with faculty and administrators across campus and within the colleges that have hired specialist instructional designers. If you spend enough time tackling institutional challenges with faculty and administrators, you are bound to cultivate close relationships which may lead to line jumpers who reach out directly to you because of your working relationships. If you know someone within my unit, it can mean faster issue resolution and less time wasted on triaging your problem. I had one encounter where a faculty member with whom I had cofacilitated a faculty development group reached out to me personally for a course website related matter. This faculty member and I had worked closely for several months and when the specialist instructional designer discovered I had assisted this professor, they became defensive and accused me of taking work from them. The specialist instructional designer then sent an email message to the faculty member reminding them that they were their dedicated instructional designer and that they had the same responsibilities, knowledge, and skills that I had.

While what this specialist instructional designer said in her email to the faculty member was true, it ignored the relationship between the faculty member and me. Line jumpers reach out directly to an instructional designer because of pre-existing relationships and comfort with the person they reach out to. Ever since that encounter, I have been more cognizant of the fact that not everyone on my instructional design team values existing relationships over a person's placement within the org chart.

Organizational Impact

Because instructional designers had the capacity to transform an institution through consultations, tools, job aids, and cultivating relationships, they had tremendous organizational impact. Excerpts that were coded with the Organizational Impact theme included the work I have done to assist SCAU with instructional compliance, creating buy-in of the strategic plan, and developing influential messaging for various audiences.

The longer I worked at SCAU, the more time I spent interpreting instruction-related regulations' impact on what our faculty do in their classrooms. The ability to translate and integrate new Department of Education requirements related to the Higher Education Act (1965) into course design consultations—whether self-initiated or administrative paid builds—was critical for SCAU. Stopping at administrative awareness was not enough of a defensive stance because compliance with instructional practices, such as regular and substantive interaction in distance education classrooms, was dependent on faculty follow-through and buy-in. Instructional designers—specialists and generalists—routinely collaborate and "almost mediate between the parties [of shared governance], because at the end of the day, when it comes to instructional compliance and compliance with what our accreditors are looking for, the institution is the real...responsible party" (Research Question 1, p. 23-24). The strong relationships instructional designers cultivated paid dividends when spreading the news about institutional priorities and values to faculty.

With respect to regular and substantive interaction in distance education, "if we don't have faculty compliance, we have institutional consequences" which could include the loss of SCAU's "ability to accept federal financial aid for their distance learning classes" (Research Question 1, p. 25). In a post-pandemic world, institutions like SCAU rely on distance education being a staple in its portfolio of instructional modalities. Compliance is not optional; it is vital to the longevity and financial solvency of the institution.

Story time: Organizational Impact. Ever since joining SCAU in Fall 2020, I have worked closely with the managers of compliance to develop ways of ensuring faculty awareness of distance education requirements. One of my proudest accomplishments is the regular and substantive interaction compliance module that I collaborated with another generalist instructional designer to develop for faculty. Relatedly, I made some modifications to the course planning grid for use when designing distance education courses. The modifications included accounting for instructor-initiated teaching behaviors to consider including in the class on a weekly basis. While the learning module we designed has only been piloted, I am optimistic that when the administration deems it to be a good time to announce it as a requirement for distance education teaching eligibility, it will be ready to go.

Strategic Instructional Design

The coordinated efforts my instructional design team and I have made at SCAU involves the strategic development and intentional use of specially designed resources, tools, contracts, and job crafting to support teaching and learning at the institution. Collectively, these instructional designer-led efforts to support teaching and learning comprise Strategic Instructional Design, which was the final theme identified in this study. Excerpts that embodied this theme included examples of how I, as an instructional designer, used resourcefulness to find ways of integrating my values, priorities, and expertise into the work of SCAU.

Instructional design tools such as the terms within administrative paid build contracts, the usage of the course planning grid (CPG) and the OSCQR course quality rubric used to evaluate courses, in addition to invited membership on important working groups kept my colleagues and me quite busy. I also reported regularly studying the organizational chart and reporting structure to have a better sense of how the dynamics and personalities that shaped the strategic plan will handle “the responsibilities and obligations of the institution” (Research Question 1, p. 22). I have been intentional with attendance at strategic plan related programs and building relationships with my campus’ thought leaders. In our instructional design team meetings, I try hard to connect my suggestions for new initiatives or existing services to the new strategic plan because those are the institution’s priorities and where financial investments will likely be made. Working in a role that has no path for professional development or promotion, it is important to look for opportunities to market my knowledge, skills, abilities, and interests to keep my role from stagnating.

Personally, I shared my involvement with "the online learning working groups, student success working groups...[and] a diversity equity, [and] inclusion symposium" (Research Question 4, p. 11). These activities have led to job crafting or redefining my role as an instructional designer at SCAU "because once you're hired in as an instructional designer and technologist, that's where you are. There's no like 1, 2, 3, or senior instructional designer or instructional design manager, or anything really beyond that" (Research Question 4, p. 17). The relationships fostered in working groups and in course consultations—regardless of origin—have been my main way of transforming my position and developing new responsibilities beyond the role I was originally hired to fill.

Story time: Strategic Instructional Design. Like many institutions of higher education, SCAU is struggling to recruit, retain, and graduate students. As an instructional designer, I carry those pain points with me as I consult on course builds, engage with the faculty senate's faculty development committee as an ex officio member, and consider ways to increase my team's visibility as part of the institution's community of experts. With major administrative changes (a new chancellor) and their new five-pillared strategic plan, I see the best way forward to maximize my team's impact on the institution as aligning our work with the pillars (pillar names have been slightly modified to conceal the institution's identity):

(1) increasing student access and opportunities to attend post-secondary institutions,

(2) increasing student success and persistence through graduation,

(3) increasing faculty, staff, and administrator diversity and excellence,

(4) increasing student-industry-community collaborations for authentic learning, and

(5) excellence in financial stewardship and sustainability.

I actively connect what I do with the strategic plan to help share the talents, interests, and expertise that my colleagues and I can apply to the institutional challenges and requirements. I also encourage students who call in for support to reach out again in the future if they have problems with the learning management system which affirms their self-advocacy.

Research Question Results

In this next section, I provide a succinct response to the four research questions in addition to a brief discussion of my background questions interview. A more comprehensive analysis of the responses to my four research questions appears in Chapter 5.

Background Questions

I have worked in instructional design since 2007 when I began my master's degree in human resources education while working on an HR/Payroll systems processing project for a large public institution system. My current title is instructional designer and technologist, so I work with administrators, faculty, staff, and students in their use of the educational technology systems and subscriptions the institution maintains. I quickly realized that there was no progression path for the instructional designer role at SCAU, so I began to build relationships and affiliate myself with the problem-solving initiatives happening on campus and within the industry. Those efforts have led to me becoming an equity advisor for higher committees to serve as a resource for ensuring the institution's and system's priorities for antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion are reflected in the hiring processes.

I am the only Black woman instructional designer on my team, and I intentionally decided not to explore those aspects of my identity in this research study because that is not the lens from which the research questions and interviews were developed and recorded. I will add that I am from New Hampshire originally which has been a protective advantage for me as I interact in more diverse environments as an adult professional and researcher. While I am quite comfortable discussing the role that my race and gender play in many contexts, this dissertation is not one of those places I have chosen to do that. My “academic identity” and responsibilities are the auto or self I explore within the ethno or context of shared governance dynamics between faculty and administrators at SCAU (Kumar, 2021). It is tempting to lean into my race and gender as a primary lens for this project, but it would not be living my truth with authenticity by limiting my observations and experiences to race and gender. Growing up as one of very few Black people in my town and schools, I have learned to be a vocal, critical thinker with race and gender being a part of my tool set, but not necessarily my first or go-to lens of analysis for any given situation.

The best part about being an instructional designer at SCAU is that I do not have to teach and figure out instructional technology like I did in my previous position as an adult education instructor for a community college and local school district. Working to support faculty who are handling teaching and their instructional design needs has been fulfilling and encourages me to keep working in between the gears of shared governance because that is where the growth of the institution happens. “I have a strong belief that [SCAU] could be better…[a]nd that’s why I stay in my position….because there’s work to be done here” (Background Interview, p. 28). I come from a long line of educators who have worked in challenging settings and during times of great civil unrest. “I don’t want to be somewhere where [the institution] works like clockwork. I need problems to solve and solve iteratively” (Background Interview, p. 29). In their article, “Becoming University Scholars: Inside Professional Autoethnographies,” (2010) Hernández et al. describe their process for a collective initiative to write the “professional autoethnography” as a kind of “habitus” or representation of how a person interprets and engages with the world around them in addition to “how scholars establish a dialogue, resist, adapt themselves to or adopt changes, and construct their professional identities” (p. 188). This research study foregrounds my professional experiences and identity as opposed to integrating or emphasizing my social identity as a Black woman working as an instructional designer.

Research Question 1

How does the organizational structure at SCAU, positively or negatively, influence the ability of an instructional designer to lead online learning initiatives in higher education?

Because the organizational structure at SCAU was “a traditional kind of pyramid, top down, with a Chancellor, and then a suite of vice chancellors, associate chancellors, assistant chancellors and so on” that support the senior leadership’s strategic plan and institutional administrative priorities, my work as an instructional designer was both supported and challenged (Research Question 1, p.1). My position was in the information technology services (ITS) division which provides services throughout all levels of the institution.

Positive Impacts. A Positive impact of SCAU’s organizational structure on my work was that “our reporting structure” goes “pretty quickly…all the way to the Chancellor’s Office” (Research Question 2, p. 21). I worked under the institution’s chief information officer who reports to the provost; the provost reports to the Chancellor. Reporting proximity to the institution’s top leadership offices was “exciting” and “overwhelming because of how dynamic the [institution’s] priorities can be” (Research Question 2, p. 3).

Additional positive impacts were noticeable within the internal structure of my instructional design team. While there were three instructional design specialists that primarily served their assigned colleges (nursing, business, and education respective), I was empowered and expected to serve anyone at the institution as a “generalist” as opposed to a “specialist” instructional designer. Specialist instructional designers focused their work on the faculty, staff, administrators, and students at their respective colleges (Research Question 1, pp. 2-3). As one of many generalists, I reported satisfaction with responding primarily to a community member's identified need—not their organization chart placement or college affiliation.

Negative Impacts. Related to the specialist and generalist designation of instructional designers on my team, there was occasional conflict or tension when I, as a generalist, served someone from a school that employed a specialist instructional designer. With my role being connected to the centralized administration of the institution as opposed to a subpopulation of the institution, "sometimes people [got] a little territorial over their faculty or their staff, or the students" and "like their position [was] a little more fragile because they [had] a smaller audience they're serving" (Research Question 1, pp. 4-5). I distinguished my professional philosophy as a generalist instructional designer succinctly: "I tend to not focus on who I am serving. I just want to serve" (Research Question 1, p. 5).

I also reported conflicted feelings regarding the power and influence of my recommendations as a consultant because of the perceived lack of "administrative power or teeth" when it came to the decision to implement them or not (Research Question 1, p. 9). More than once in my interviews I referenced deferring to faculty academic freedom because directives and policies must come from administrators, and the freedom to choose instructional courses of action fell to faculty ultimately. Something else that is neutral-to-negative is my ability to impact when an instructor is paid during an administrative paid build. I populate and track the course build's progress in a project management system that signals the administration to release a portion of the collaborating faculty's pay as certain percentages of the course have been developed.

Organizational Structure and Leading Online Learning Initiatives. With respect to leading online learning initiatives, the organizational structure was both a positive and negative influence for me as an instructional designer. Like many schools, SCAU used shared governance to provide checks and balances between faculty and administration control over the institution. Instructional design and technology services impacted the quality, modality, and variation of instruction, but its practitioners, like me, were not party to the institutional governance processes or decision making. I reported the limitations of not having "explicit powers" to compel faculty or administrators to follow our recommendations and research-based practices even when those were based in regulations and service agreements (Research Question 1, p. 7). I expressed that I deferred to faculty out of respect for academic freedom and autonomy, despite it not always being in the best interests of students. The best interests of students are ultimately tied to the maintenance of a research-based, defensible stance with respect to external governance requirements (e.g., federal, state, accreditor, and associated oversight agencies). I routinely meditate on what courses of actions can the institution take or adopt that will not leave it at risk for litigation, in jeopardy with its interstate instructional obligations, or vulnerable for the Department of Education to request repayment of financial aid dollars.

Research Question 2

What does a centralized, academic reporting line instructional design structure look like and feel like from within from the perspective of an instructional designer?

I reported that as an instructional design practitioner, operating within a centralized, academic reporting line, my professional recommendations and expertise felt at-will and often optional because my role fell outside of the two partied shared governance model.

Having close relationships with senior administrators, I acknowledged that requiring additional training and “demands on [faculty] time with respect to trainings and other obligations” especially in light of the radical shifts in responsibilities and competencies through the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, made the administration hesitate to issue faculty professional development mandates–even if they were in the best defensible position for the institution. (Research Question 1, pp. 40). It was “disappointing” to have my work tabled in light of shared governance politics, but I acknowledged that the administrators I worked with saw more of the big picture and what was at stake for the institution in a way that I may not have appreciated.

To help me be strategic in my work with faculty and administrators, I learned to study and tie my efforts to the institution’s “strategic plan and the [organizational] chart to help me figure out how to be most effective” (Research Question 1, p. 49). I expressed that by

> understanding who reports to whom and how instructional design and instructional advocacy or the needs of the instructor, the needs of the students, and then the…responsibilities of the institution… [I had to consider] how …we [wove those strands] together… and [kept] the work of the institution moving forward. (Research Question 1, p. 22)

Research Question 3

How does an instructional designer participate in the design, redesign, and evaluation of SCAU courses and programs?

As an instructional designer, I shared there were two major ways I participated in the design, redesign, and evaluation of SCAU courses and programs: instructor-initiated or voluntary consultations and administrative paid course builds where faculty were compensated by administrative funds to be the subject matter expert on a course build. Paid builds were completed and compensated "in addition to a professor's teaching load" and just part of my regular duties as an instructional designer (Research Question 3, p. 8). In that interview I shared that I prepared to work with faculty in both circumstances by reviewing currently available course websites and posted content. I described my role in both major ways of collaborating with instructors on course design as a strategic partner looking to maximize "what makes them excited" and minimize "what makes them a little more anxious or apprehensive" about teaching the class (Research Question 3, p. 7). With respect to evaluating courses, I shared that my instructional design team uses the State Universities of New York (SUNY) Online Course Quality Review (OSCQR) rubric which was "pretty rigorous" and included evaluating courses for accessibility, inclusivity, regular and substantive interaction (RSI) and the presence of learning objectives (Research Question 3, p. 22).

Preference for Instructor-initiated Course Consultations. Instructor-initiated course consultations usually involved faculty submitting a consultation request on my team's instructional design website. In that request, faculty share their contact information (name, email address), school or college affiliation, the purpose of the consultation request, any supporting documentation the instructional designer should review (such as syllabi, rubrics, or assignment instructions), whether the course was a new (never taught) or existing (regardless of instructional modality) class, and finally times they could meet, and any pertinent details relating to the request. Purposes included course format change, building, and review, feedback on course content, customized discussion or workshop, or learning technology integration.

I stated my preference was for instructor-initiated course consultations because there is something to consume and process collaboratively and enhance for the next iteration of that course, assignment, or assessment. In this kind of consulting relationship, “I’m able to kind of have a little bit more freedom” to match the energy and urgency of the consulting instructor (Research Question 3, p. 6). Comparatively, completing paid builds were “more time-consuming” and deemed “mission-critical” due to their “connection to…the strategic plan” (Research Question 3, pp. 7-8). Part of the contract included deliverables, deadlines, and percentages of course development completion that triggered partial faculty compensation when they meet those indicators. I shared that while I was aware of the terms of the contract between the faculty and the administrator compensating them for their work, I did not have authority or empowerment to enforce the terms beyond making recommendations to the faculty member.

Research Question 4

How do SCAU faculty and administrators empower or disempower an instructional designer when collaborating on online initiatives?

Empowerment. My interview emphasized the importance of positive working relationships with administrators and faculty. I shared that “[my] administration’s commitment to pursuing academic excellence and refining the courses and quality of courses” offered to our students made me feel empowered. I explained that I felt fortunate to have access to artifacts (the strategic plan) and champions (influential faculty and administration leaders) to anchor my work and the institution’s work in the student success space (Research Question 4, p. 2). I stated that I felt empowered because my institution’s new senior leadership was invested in data-driven decision making. I remarked that while I did feel disempowered in the moment, at times, working with faculty who were reluctant to use the tools and procedures outlined in their course build contracts, I knew that my administration would be “responsive” to concerns raised at some point in the future (Research Question 4, p. 25). While the feedback loop between the administration and me was long, due to the length of time a paid build takes from start to finish, its very existence provided a measure of empowerment for me as the instructional designer, even if delayed. Changes in wording in the contracts are part of the iterative review practices for administrative paid builds. Keeping track of difficulties, misunderstandings, and tension has led to updates to the contract and course design kick-off meetings with the collaborating faculty members. Updating the progress of the project plan was also something I was responsible for, and faculty received payment for their work at specific benchmarks that I had to sign-off on to trigger. The benchmarks being attached to partial payments to faculty was one example of a contractual change that the administration made in response to our feedback as instructional designers. Parsing the work and payment helped keep projects moving forward because there was a financial incentive to complete the next scope of work.

Disempowerment. Not being party to the paid course build contracts between the administration and faculty members was disempowering when it came to addressing conflicts that arose during the design cycle. I mentioned that as merely a service provider listed in the contract, I could be dismissed as tech support or clerical help since consulting faculty could use me as much or a little as they wanted and at times with contempt since we used highly detailed design tools, such as the course planning grid (see Appendix H), a project management plan, and an OSCQR course quality review that were all part of the administrative paid builds and technically non-negotiable. While it is quite possible that additional social characteristics may have impacted my experiences and interactions with collaborating faculty, for the purposes of this research study, I have foregrounded my professional identity and role working in the space between shared governance between faculty and administrators.

Chapter Summary

In summary, the experience of being an instructional designer in a centralized, academic reporting unit had its challenges with respect to navigating shared governance between the dominant parties, faculty and administrators, and opportunities to lean into the strategic plan as documented by senior leadership within the organization. Strategic collaborations between faculty and administrators have been the hallmarks of my work as an instructional designer as recounted in my interviews.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study was designed to provide additional first-hand accounts of what it is like to be an instructional designer in a centralized academic unit as an extension of the findings of Drysdale (2021). Drysdale found that instructional designers working in centralized academic reporting units were more empowered to lead and while I agreed, I felt that an autoethnography would help bring his findings to life. This study's purpose was to situate my professional role and responsibilities as an instructional designer within shared governance as that is the most common administrative structure in American institutions of higher education. To achieve the goals of my study, I posed the following research questions using autoethnographic research methods:

1. How does the organizational structure at SCAU, positively or negatively, influence the ability of an instructional designer to lead online learning initiatives in higher education?
2. What does a centralized, academic reporting line instructional design structure look like and feel like from the perspective of an instructional designer?
3. How does an instructional designer participate in the design, redesign, and evaluation of SCAU courses and programs?
4. How do SCAU faculty and administrators empower or disempower an instructional designer when collaborating on online initiatives?

I recorded myself answering a protocol designed to answer the four research questions along with one interview focused on my personal and professional background. This background interview provided additional information regarding my identity, professional career, and qualifications as an instructional designer. The interview protocols were based upon the protocol Drysdale (2021) used in his study. I adapted the questions to be applicable to my position as an instructional designer at SCAU, a medium-sized public institution in the Midwest.

Summary of Key Findings

Working in a centralized, academic reporting instructional design team has been challenging and dynamic with my effectiveness contingent upon the positive working relationships I sought and maintained with the administrators and faculty who engage in shared governance. Although I reported feeling like an optional expert, suited up and ready to go on the sidelines of the tense game of shared governance, I found some measure of satisfaction being invited to weigh-in on the best courses of action even if my advice was not acted upon ever, or immediately, or without compromises that could weaken the defensible stances embedded within them. I frequently referenced the connection between instructional design and my institution's instructional compliance in my interviews. I counted my persistence with and tolerance of being a third-party to shared governance as a victory for the students served by SCAU because my professional work and the work of the institution is cyclical and even dynamic between iterations (semesters, fiscal years, and accreditation periods, etc.,) due to changes in regulations and oversight. If the tension between faculty and administrators were jammed gears, I shared that "instructional designers and technologists are kind of a grease that keeps that stuff moving" (Research Question 1, p. 22). If a recommendation is not implemented now, there will always be a next semester, next academic year, or other aspirational interval on the horizon.

This study aimed to explore and communicate how it feels to be an instructional designer in a centralized, academic unit. Its findings demonstrated that navigating relationships and pain points between shared governance and a fundamental trust toward the administration were paramount to my effectiveness and willingness to remain in this important role. My self-perception and radical acceptance that I was literally a third-party to shared governance and contracts between faculty and administration helped me to mitigate feelings of disempowerment and ultimately to find alternative ways to feel empowered despite my day-to-day circumstances.

Themes in Context

I completed a thematic analysis of my findings which resulted in seven major themes related to my experiences as an instructional designer in a centralized academic reporting unit. The seven themes were:

1. Advocacy and Social Justice – for students, faculty, staff, and administrators
2. Analogies and Jargon – to help illustrate dynamics and phenomena
3. Collaboration and Consulting – instructional designers are not individual contributors working in isolation
4. Controversial and Core Beliefs – the mindset and motivations for sticking with the industry
5. Instructional Designer Identity and Expertise – how instructional designers distinguish themselves from one another and instructors
6. Organizational Impact – the profound effect instructional designers can have when well-positioned and empowered
7. Strategic Instructional Design—what occurs when instructional designers are well-positioned, empowered, and equipped with the tools, resources, and relationships

These themes were helpful for contextualizing and exploring my actions and recommendations at SCAU considering the literature reviewed in preparation for completing this study.

My investment in the altruism of my institution’s administration echoes Heclo’s (2008) admonishment for an institution's employees to think institutionally or beyond individualism and self-interest. The Advocacy and Social Justice, Controversial and Core Beliefs, and Strategic

Instructional Design themes speak to this notion of an institution’s work being greater than the individuals completing that work. Related to this, my experience and sensibilities as a generalist instructional designer also demonstrated my commitment to the institution and its students as opposed to the individuals within a specific college. My professional use and instructional design team’s commitment to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and the more recent updates to it in the Universal Design in Higher Education (UDHE) Framework (Burgstahler, 2021) represent openness to accommodating and welcoming learners of diverse backgrounds, abilities, and educational experiences. The UDHE Framework includes “the scope, definition, principles, guidelines, exemplary practices, and processes (Burgstahler, 2021, p. 22).

My identity and expertise, which was discussed as a theme with that name, are rooted in serving those who need help which transcends the distinctions made between “ownership of” or “responsibility for serving” certain faculty, administrators, students, and staff at my institution. I prioritized collaborative relationships to meet the goals of my institution’s new administration and strategic plan. These goals included increasing graduation rates and student persistence with their academic programs at the institution. To be successful at fulfilling my role and responsibilities with respect to those goals required that I carefully navigate the top-down administrative structure by thinking, acting, and communicating strategically and in ways that others could relate.

My usage of specialized terms and analogies demonstrated the earnest effort I expended to think critically and from multiple perspectives about how others could potentially find common ground in our collaborations or parallel experiences to foster a sense of empathy for the range and variation of work we do at institutions of higher education. The Collaboration and Consulting and Instructional Designer Identity and Expertise themes combined with the

Analogies and Jargon theme demonstrated my belief in my role as an allied instructional professional who was well-positioned to lead. This finding challenges what Drysdale (2021) and Intentional Futures (2016) conclude with respect to the negative effects organizational placement and perceived self-efficacy of instructional designers.

The importance of developing a sense of empathy for one another's' roles and responsibilities was not just important for my collaborations with faculty and administrators, but also for working and collaborating within my instructional design team since there was a mix of generalists and specialists. This was also a theme present in Drysdale's (2021) study from which I modeled this research study. Appreciation for one another's placement within the organization's structure and the corresponding implications and vulnerabilities was also present in my interview content. In fact, completing this research study has inspired me to be more mindful of and compassionate toward my specialist colleagues' positionality within the organization. The job crafting I have done to align myself with those working to make progress on the new strategic plan increases the number of meaningful and strategic relationships with faculty, administrators, and staff which directly offsets the specialist-specific concern of supporting a subset of the institution.

My work as an instructional designer is iterative which coordinates well with my reliance upon Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a theoretical framework. Despite reporting feeling as though my professional recommendations were optional for implementation, I contextualized and made positive meaning from disempowering experiences in terms of there always being another opportunity to hone the incremental progress made in any given course consultation or paid build. My appreciation for the limited resources and unending demands on my institution provided solace for times when important initiatives were dropped or delayed due to a shift in administrative priorities. Appreciative Inquiry as a foundational framework for my professional practice as an instructional designer was confirmed. I choose to be optimistic and assume the best intentions of the people I work for, with, and on behalf of (Cooperrider, 2005). This positivity makes a difference for me as my role lies in the space between faculty and administrators engaged in shared governance.

As noted in my review of the literature, American higher education iconically has always been evolving with administration being the older and more powerful of the two parties that comprise shared governance. To think that evolution would ever stop would be contrary to its origins and nature. So, as institutions of higher education continue to evolve and grow with the number of professionals employed and engaged, the organizational structure and distribution of power continues to matter and be a source of tension (Thelin, 2017). Thelin (2017) notes that within each institution's version of shared governance, "there are structures and customs of deference and cooperation" present at all levels and for all constituencies (p. 123). The more I work on special teams assembled by administrators to address issues of instructional compliance and student success, the more aggressively my recommendations have become laden with the defense of the institution's accreditation, compliance, integrity, and reputation in mind. Thinking institutionally (Heclo, 2008) or beyond my role and department, has led me to prioritize the preservation of my institution precisely because I believe we have good intentions and are capable of better.

Referring to the early years of American institutions of higher education, Lucas (2006) remarked "in the environment of the New World where privilege was suspect and individuals striving for self-improvement strongly encouraged, opportunities for a poor but ambitious youth to attend college and thereby advance himself remained open" (p. 108). In my professional experience and this first iteration of autoethnographic research, I desperately want this to remain true and have relevancy for today’s students. In my capacity as an instructional designer, I can and do work one-on-one with faculty to discuss the design of their courses and to critically evaluate their pedagogy, assessments, and fundamental beliefs about students. There are indeed opportunities for poor and ambitious youth to undertake and graduate from post-secondary institutions, but they also need opportunities that foster their sense of belonging at our institutions—something the faculty play a major role in conveying.

Implications

Instructional designers should feel empowered to speak up and out about their working conditions and networks as a profession and as professionals within institutions of higher education. By publishing more candid accounts of the variation in projects of significance, capacity for strategic planning, and mediation between administrators, faculty, and students, like this one, instructional designers can and should convey their value to their institutions and the industry. Popularizing our experiences and expertise could lead us to more official roles within shared governance, if so desired. Furthermore, increased awareness of our presence on our campuses and within the industry may lead to increases in course quality, increased pedagogical development of faculty, and better student outcomes.

Administrators and faculty should carefully consider where instructional designers are present or even absent within their institutions. Their inclusion or exclusion from administration, particularly senior administration, could be the difference between remaining competitive or even financially solvent given the enrollment and fiscal challenges facing the industry. Instructional designers are strategic partners and champions of teaching and learning and should be included within cross-functional teams and trusted advisors to senior administrators. They can also serve as subject matter experts and problem-solvers as many have vast networks of colleagues at other institutions, organizations, and industries with valuable insights to adopt, adapt, and consider for implementation. Inviting instructional designers to hold administrative roles is also a way that administrators can empower those with instructional designer experience as they have meaningful knowledge, skills, and abilities to contribute to an institution’s leadership, strategic plan, and educational programming.

Future Research

Because I worked in a team of specialist and generalist instructional designers, it is recommended that a follow-up study including my colleagues or other instructional design teams would be ideal to see if my findings are similar or in conflict with their experiences working at other institutions of higher education. It is not easy to work within a rigid, tradition-steeped organizational structure, but that is the role of instructional designers at SCAU and within higher education iconically. Ginsberg’s (2011) suspicion of an administrative takeover of higher education is a valid concern, but one that should not be subject to debate. American higher education began with administration, so the fear of administration overreaching its role and usurping the responsibilities of faculty is not new, but a fact of plot. The tension between faculty and administration is ever-present and the hallmark of American higher education. In my role adjacent to administrators and faculty, I have found strategic instructional design to be the best path forward for my professional circumstances and would welcome the opportunity to see if others concur or have an alternative way of progressing in this growing field. I have experience as an online and face-to-face student and can empathize and relate to the faculty and administrators I collaborated with. I have a strong sense of obligation to the students and communities served by SCAU.

In closing, I know that my gender and race have important intersectionality and implications for my career in higher education, but for the purposes of this study, I chose to foreground my professional identity. As noted in my literature review, like most instructional designers, I hold a master's degree in education. This decision to not assertively address race and gender was not one I came to with ease—I have an undergraduate degree in Women's Studies earned in the early 2000s. Race, class, and gender analysis as a primary lens for academic analysis has been a part of my work, but I felt compelled to speak from my professional identity for this project. I would welcome the opportunity to complete a follow-up study that does discuss my race, gender, and professional experiences as an instructional designer in higher education. Several times throughout this study, I mentioned my work as an instructional designer is iterative and aspirational and I believe my academic research and writing will be too. Pacing and timing are important for the success of my professional and academic work. There will be future and related studies on this topic completed by myself and hopefully other graduate students and scholars.

Furthermore, my identity as a Black female instructional designer impacts my experience of working within a centrally reporting academic unit in ways not currently represented in the literature. I opted not to undertake an in-depth analysis of that aspect of my work in the interest and reverence for those of us working in the field without much representation in the literature. When I do explore that aspect of my relative empowerment and self-efficacy as an instructional designer, I want to give it the time and attention it deserves. I did not believe it was essential to the research questions of this study but do believe in its worthiness for future consideration. While at the time of writing this dissertation I did not feel that it is solely my responsibility to pursue studying the role that race and other intersecting aspects of a person's identity in the work of instructional designers, I did find myself thinking and asking myself rhetorically that although “I try to infuse my instructional design practice with diversity, equity, inclusion, [and] antiracism…if I don’t, I don’t know who will” (Research Question 4, p. 22). Will you join me?

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Appendix A: Dedicated Instructional Designer Interview Protocol-Original

Dedicated Instructional Designer Interview Protocol (Drysdale, 2021, p. 78)

Thanks for your willingness to participate in this interview. By consenting to this interview, you agree to answering the questions honestly, but may choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. All responses and recordings will be de-identified and kept confidential to protect your identity.

1. Please share with me your position title and an overview of your typical responsibilities in that role, including any major tasks, projects, or initiatives that would help clarify your role.
2. Why did you choose to pursue a professional interest or career in online learning for higher education?
3. Does the organizational structure that your university operates within contribute to your success within the organization? In what ways?
4. Does the organizational structure that your university operates within inhibit your success within the organization? In what ways?
5. What are some of the most important initiatives that your university is pursuing, from your own perspective as a professional?
6. How clearly defined are the roles for online learning administrators and dedicated instructional designers at your institution?
7. Are the relationships between administrators and faculty at your institution positive? If so, why?
8. Are the relationships between administrators and faculty at your institution negative? If so, why?

9. When was the last time your institution restructured its online learning and instructional design teams and resources? What were the reasons?
10. Would you like to see anything change in regard to online learning at your institution? If so, what changes would you like to see?
11. Why did your organization choose to structure your instructional design and online learning resources the way that they did?
12. From your perspective, who should have primary decision making authority over online learning initiatives?
13. What kind of leadership role do your administrators, faculty, and dedicated instructional designers play at this institution?
14. How does your organization make decisions regarding curriculum?
15. What system or model do you use to evaluate student growth on learning outcomes and the quality of your courses and curricula?
16. How do dedicated instructional designers at your institution work with faculty on courses and curriculum?
17. What is your experience working as a dedicated instructional designer?
18. What are the most challenging parts of working with your administration?
19. What are the most challenging parts of working with your faculty?
20. Do your administrators work to ensure the dedicated instructional designers have an equal seat at the table for major decisions around online learning initiatives? If so, what in particular do they do?
21. Does collaboration happen between administrators, faculty, and dedicated instructional designers when creating a new online program? If so, how would you characterize it?

22. What do faculty and administrators at your institution do that empowers or disempowers you?

Appendix B: Dedicated Instructional Designer Interview Protocol-Adapted

Questions adapted from Drysdale (2021)

Background Questions

1. Please share with me your position title and an overview of your typical responsibilities in that role, including any major tasks, projects, or initiatives that would help clarify your role.
2. Why did you choose to pursue a professional interest or career in online learning for higher education?
3. What are some of the most important initiatives that your university is pursuing, from your own perspective as a professional?
4. What is your experience working as a dedicated instructional designer in higher education?

Research Question 1: How does the organizational structure at SCAU, positively or negatively, influence the ability of an instructional designer to lead online learning initiatives in higher education?

1. Does the organizational structure that your university operates within contribute to your success within the organization? In what ways?
2. Does the organizational structure that your university operates within inhibit your success within the organization? In what ways?
3. What are the most challenging parts of working with your administration?
4. What are the most challenging parts of working with your faculty?

Research Question 2: What does a centralized, academic reporting line instructional design structure look like and feel like from within from the perspective of an instructional designer?

1. From your perspective, who should have primary decision-making authority over online learning initiatives? Why?
2. What kind of leadership role do your administrators, faculty, and dedicated instructional designers play at this institution?
3. Describe the relationships between administrators and faculty at your institution. What contributes to these relationship dynamics?

Research Question 3: How does an instructional designer participate in the design, redesign, and evaluation of SCAU courses and programs?

1. How clearly defined are the roles for online learning administrators and dedicated instructional designers at your institution?
2. How do dedicated instructional designers at your institution work with faculty on courses and curriculum?
3. Does collaboration happen between administrators, faculty, and dedicated instructional designers when creating a new online program? If so, how would you characterize it?

Research Question 4: How do SCAU faculty and administrators empower or disempower an instructional designer when collaborating on online initiatives?

1. What do faculty and administrators at your institution do that empowers or disempowers you?
2. Do your administrators work to ensure the dedicated instructional designers have an equal seat at the table for major decisions around online learning initiatives? If so, what in particular do they do?
3. Would you like to see anything change in regard to the role of the instructional designer at your institution? If so, what changes would you like to see?

Appendix C: Codes and Themes

Code	Theme
ADEI	Advocacy and Social Justice
Instructor Advocacy	Advocacy and Social Justice
Student Advocacy	Advocacy and Social Justice
Analogies	Analogies and Jargon
Jargon	Analogies and Jargon
Collaboration	Collaboration and Consulting
Cooperation	Collaboration and Consulting
Paid builds	Collaboration and Consulting
Controversial Beliefs	Controversial and Core Beliefs
Core beliefs	Controversial and Core Beliefs
Personal Insights	Controversial and Core Beliefs
Generalist Instructional Designers	Instructional Designer Identity and Expertise
Instructional Designer Expertise	Instructional Designer Identity and Expertise
Points of Pride	Instructional Designer Identity and Expertise
Responsibilities	Instructional Designer Identity and Expertise
Role	Instructional Designer Identity and Expertise
Self-perception	Instructional Designer Identity and Expertise
Specialty Instructional Designers	Instructional Designer Identity and Expertise
Territorialism	Instructional Designer Identity and Expertise
Conflict	Organizational Impact
Disempowerment	Organizational Impact
Empowerment	Organizational Impact
Faculty Resistance	Organizational Impact
Organizational structure	Organizational Impact
Shared governance	Organizational Impact
Job crafting	Strategic Instructional Design
Mediation	Strategic Instructional Design
Regulation and Compliance	Strategic Instructional Design
Strategy	Strategic Instructional Design
Tools	Strategic Instructional Design

Appendix D: Research Question 1 Representative Findings

How Does the Organizational Structure at SCAU Positively or Negatively Influence the Ability of an Instructional Designer to Lead Online Learning Initiatives in Higher Education?

Positive Influences

“And so those [paid builds] are courses that have…there... There's some funding to help compensate the faculty member to work as a subject matter expert into developing an online course with us. So, where we have teeth is in the terms of those contracts. And so that's kind of where we try to embed some of those best practices. Because if people are working with us, we have to have an understanding of who's doing what and what are the deliverables? And when? When's the launch date? And all these things. And in there we can also specify certain quality standards that we are non-negotiable on” (Research Question 1, p. 10).

“That’s where we really get our power from...because if people sign a memorandum of understanding, or they sign some sort of contract, and it has different…different deliverables, or…or a description of what we're looking for...we [instructional designers] can always refer back to that document. But at the same time that contract really isn't between us and the faculty. It's more so between the faculty and the admin--administrator who is funding those builds” (Research Question 1, p. 11-12).

“[I]nstructional designers, while we can work on courses, many of us have taken courses in organizational development, organizational change...And a lot of what we're doing is changing perspectives, ways of operating, and implementing change. Most of the time, the change that we're implementing comes from accreditation or something related to Department of Ed…” is (Research Question 1, p.17-18).

“And because we have that [pyramid] structure, some people feel constricted by a very hierarchy, you know, top-down based structure. But for me it's about finding a way, anyhow. It's about finding where the pragmatism that I, that I, kind of pride myself on, how I can infuse that within the structure. So really taking time to cultivate relationships with faculty and administrators. And also students... advocating for the students. And so, the structure sometimes presents a challenge, but again, I'm…I'm in my third year in this particular environment. And I regularly interact with all levels of the institution. And I really have used the administration change, so we have a new Chancellor...and his new strategic plan as kind of my roadmap, as "How do I advocate for the kinds of work I feel are super important? and that the institution sees a super important?" And.. and then my talents...and then, if I don't have those talents...marketing the talents of my colleagues, because I work with some pretty talented folks that have strengths that I don't have. And so making sure that the right people get plugged in for the right jobs and needs of the institution. So the structure does help. But it's also sharpened and honed my ability to…to find a way.
And it's almost like...it's like water... coming down a mountain. You know, it's gonna…it's gonna…find the...the easiest, the easiest route to get to the to the sea. So it…it's... it may meander, you know. It's gonna have, you know, trickles...and then it's gonna get deeper and

deeper and wider, and then boom! Suddenly we end up the ocean! And I realize that can be thousands of miles, you know, and turning into, you know, rivers and all sorts of fun things. But that's the beauty, I think, in some ways of higher education administration and...and working the…the org chart... Understanding who reports to whom and how instructional design and instructional advocacy or the needs of the instructor, the needs of the students, and then the…the responsibilities and obligations of the institution. And how do we...how do we weave that together? And I think instructional designers and technologists are kind of a grease that keeps that stuff moving. And if it's not moving, and…and we…we can get some talent there... we usually can get...get the cogs to engage and…and keep the work of the institution moving forward” (Research Question 1, pp.19-22).

Negative Influences

“I think that because we [instructional designers] are in a service role that sometimes we aren't given the explicit powers, and I hate to use that term, but the explicit powers to enforce some of the best practices that we hold dear to our hearts” (Research Question 1, p. 7).

“We want to make sure that all content is accessible to our students. And we also don't like to retrofit accessibility. So, we'd like to start with accessibility in mind. And so again, we don't have that administrative power or teeth to…to really hunker down and there's one exception that I should say; it's when we are doing what we call an administrative build” (Research Question 1, pp. 9-10).

“So, in the case of regular and substantive interaction [in distance education courses], what faculty are doing in their classrooms impacts the institution's ability to accept federal financial aid for their distance learning classes. So, if we don't have faculty compliance, we have institutional consequences. And then we've got that shared governance. You know, faculty…faculty having, you know, primary responsibility for the instruction, research of the institution...But then we also have that institutional guidance from the administrators and any other governing bodies. So, it's this interesting tension between the 2 that makes life exciting. But also can sometimes inhibit success, because, especially with like administrative, pardon me, organizational changes that impact academic units and areas where the Faculty Senate has to consent or vote, send things out to committees… It can take a long time to get a change through. But in some ways that's by design” (Research Question 1, pp. 25-26).

“Education, higher education, changes pretty slowly regardless of you know what you hear about it being, you know, very liberal. It's got its procedures…and you know, Robert's Rules of Order, and things have to go to committee...and committees only meet so many, you know, times a year. There's... there's definitely a…a structure that is at best it, it contemplates decisions and changes... and it engages...it engages all--all of the institution, although the power is unevenly distributed. Because I'm not even, you know really a part of the shared governance. Right? Because I'm not an administrator. I'm not faculty, but I work with both, and I work with students. So--so the administration is very important to me. And I--I do feel like I have good working relationships with the administrators that are over the areas that I tie my success, too. And so I think that that has…has been...when I was first getting started, more of an inhibition, and now

I--I think of it as strategy...and strategic to…to have a sense of what's going on at the institution, and to get plugged in” (Research Question 1, pp. 42-43).

Appendix E: Research Question 2 Representative Findings

What Does a Centralized Academic Reporting Line Instructional Design Structure Look Like and Feel Like from within from the Perspective of an Instructional Designer?

“[A]s a generalist instructional designer, it is really important that our reporting structure does go pretty quickly up the ladder... all the way to the Chancellor's Office. So, at my institution, my--my team falls under the associate vice chancellor for information and technology services, who is also our chief information officer, so our CIO...And right after that is the…the provost for the institution, and then she reports to the Chancellor. So very quickly we get to the top of the institution on my team, and so I think that it can be at times a little nerve-wracking, because by the time we hear something, or if…if there's like a new change coming, or like, for example... I know we're having an accreditation visit soon, and I say soon, within the next wanna say 3 semesters, so with respect to getting our, you know, instructional and programmatic ducks in a row... that's soon because higher ed doesn't move very quickly. Just saying it's not unique to my institution. However, it's...it feels great at times when there are exciting new projects to …to work on, but other times it …it can be a little overwhelming because of how dynamic the priorities can be” (Research Question 2, pp. 1-3).

“We are, you know, wanting to increase student success, persistence, and degree achievement. And so it...it's a busy place to be…” (Research Question 2, p. 6).

“I routinely seek out opportunities to work with the senior administrators on big picture projects. And so, one of the things that I appreciate is being able to dive into my institution's strategic plan and really try to link my work, my practice, as an instructional designer, to that” (Research Question 2, p. 7).

“I think that because of the imbalance of who actually is liable for what faculty do in the classroom, with respect to instructional compliance on the institutional levels. I think that that's…that's one of the biggest contributing factors for that--that strained relationship. But the other thing I would like to say is that you know, many administrators are former faculty members. And so even within that I think there…there is a level of compassion and also appreciation for what irks some faculty members with respect to administrative priorities or administrative directives. And so I think again, you've got that tension of administrative--some administrators, remembering what it was like to be in the higher ed classroom. But when you're at a level of seeing, like, all of the parts of the institution that have to be choreographed and the various governing agencies that are going to swoop in at any given time, even though there's that, you know, choreography happening...and--and what those oversight agencies are looking for, or the types of reporting that we have to do...Or the institutional priorities....How do we? How do we bring it all together? and I think that it's kind...of the …the tension is necessary. It's almost like a sewing machine, right? You know, if you don't have the tension right? Or you don't have, you know, all of the strings just right...it's not gonna...you're not gonna catch. And I say that with--with the deepest sincerity. Because I...I--I have a sewing machine, and I know how frustrating it is. At least for me, the biggest part is…is setting it up, and like, I may set it up, and it's like it's up for a while. I don't even set it up unless I know I have a long time, or I can get back to it soon, because that tension and threading those needles and everything, it takes me forever. And I--I think that everybody wants to get the stitch going, right? And wants to catch, but it takes a lot of different parts, and it takes that just-rate tension. If it's too tight, right? The thread snaps...and…and we see that. But one of the things I would say about the relationship, there's always a...there's always an intention to...to rethread the machine. And I think that that's…that's the optimism that I think that runs through those of us who are passionate about education. There's always this iterative like, we'll keep trying. We'll...we'll get it right. We'll come back. We'll re-thread the machine. We'll get the tension just-right, so that we can make progress" (Research Question 2, pp. 18-21).

Appendix F: Research Question 3 Representative Findings

How Does an Instructional Designer Participate in the Design, Redesign, and Evaluation of SCAU Courses and Programs?

“There are really 2 major ways that I, as an instructional designer, participate in the design, redesign and evaluation of courses and programs at my institution. The most straightforward way is through voluntary or sought-out consulting. So, an instructor, who is doing either a course redesign or they're starting up a new course, or just recently, I worked with a professor who wanted to pitch a new course...and so they will go to my team's website and they will use the consult--pardon me-- do the consultation request...the consultation request. Pardon me, and it will be talked about amongst my team. Most of the time, as I said before, I have a support day. So, if it comes in on …on a Thursday, which is my support day, if my schedule permits, I'll go ahead and integrate that support request into my workload” (Research Question 3, pp. 2-4).

“Now, the second way, which is the more time-consuming part of my job is with our I call "paid builds." So they're administratively-funded builds. So, they usually have some sort of mission-critical connection to the--to the university, the strategic plan. So, courses that I have been working on most recently, like within the last academic year, have to do with our online degree completion program. So, people who have some college, but don't have the degree. So, working to get a lot of the gen eds or core programming, you know the initial writing, you know, history, social sciences, you know, hard sciences, you know, basic math...that kind of stuff; getting those courses online and even getting some of the humanities... I--I should say, humanities, social sciences. So, so working to get those in online delivery formats. So usually, they're going to be asynchronous. So, meaning that the lectures are, usually I like to think of it as "canning," because we want to make a shelf-stable version of the course and the course content. And so these are largely contract-based. So, they're in addition to a professor's teaching load, they will serve as a subject matter expert on one of these administrative paid builds...” (Research Question 3, pp. 7-9)

“So, it's a contract between our online learning, kind of, administration team and us to do the instructional design work. So, I wanna make sure that it's clear that, sorry, the contract isn't so much with me. My services are contracted out through the administrators, so I work with the professors on completing what's called a course planning grid, and it's a very, very detailed document, where we identify the goals for the course, the objectives for the chunks, if you will, of the course, whether that is going to be more of a traditional 16-week course or an accelerated pace in an 8-week course, depending on what the instructor and the administration has worked out. We will, I will build the course according to the terms of the contract. So that usually has a pretty long timeframe. I would say at least 4 to 6 months depending on the working relationship.

The course planning grid is the most labor-intensive part of the course, but what it does is... it-- it outlines, "So the why are we here? Why are students taking this class? What? What are they supposed to get out of the course?" It's thinking big picture...we often talk about, you know, in 5 years, when you're at Target and you run into your student, "What do you want them to remember about sociology 101? Or what do you want them to remember about that biology class that they took with you?" Kind of big picture. So, it can be the most time-consuming part. It's

…it's almost like, you know, when you see a dietician and they want a food diary... and you're reluctant to fill that out. Because, of course, you're having 5 servings and vegetables and eat lean protein, right? This course planning grid really asks professors to think about why are we writing these papers? Why are we having these quizzes? Why do you have homework? Are you gonna grade it? You know. Why should students come to your class? or, you know, be in your seat? like, or, you know why? What... what's the motivation here? Is it to prepare them for kicking it up a notch, you know. Are they going from a 100 level to a 200 or 300 level? What competencies and the skills and knowledge do students need at the end of this course in order to do well for what comes next? And, in particular, for the gen eds, if you will, or the core programming... I think it's really pivotal that we embed the High Impact Practices....That we embed some of the workplace skills, soft skills... so communicating...and being candid with professionalism" (Research Question 3, pp. 9-11).

"So filling out that course planning grid and realizing that, you know, maybe some of the stuff that's in the course could potentially be busy work. Or we're doing it because it's always been that way... It really causes some conversations between the subject matter--faculty--subject matter expert and …and me. We, we have some conversations about the symbolism of certain projects versus, you know, the substance because sometimes there are things, there are exercises in courses that, that, might not serve the purpose that we, we think they serve. So by figuring out what it is we want students to be able to do by the end, or do when they start the next level... and thinking about, you know, do students do well? Do they perform well in the next level? And if not, where--the where are the holes? I like to think of it as like Swiss cheese. Where are the holes when they are ready to kick it up a notch, and in particular with gen eds" (Research Question 3, pp. 12-13).

"I also get involved through administrative asks. So, I was part of the group that looked at regular and substantive interaction, when I was first hired at my institution. So, one of the tools that we made was…was a job aid essentially for faculty. And we looked at what to make sure you have in your… your distance ed courses. Now, we made, a really big effort to convey that best practices for online courses are pretty much best practices for our traditional or on-ground courses. So, but one of the things that that I advocated for, and I'm proud that, proud to say that we were able to produce, was a corresponding checklist for students. Here are the things that you need to be looking for in your course, and if you can't find them, talk to your professor. Again, that doesn't mean to be rude or disrespectful, but like, if you can't find the learning objectives, or if you don't know how to contact your instructor for virtual office hours, or even in person office hours...that's, you know, that's a problem. So, ask if you don't see due dates. If you don't see the resources that you need, like... If the readings are supposed to be online. And the online, you know, chapters aren't there, or they're inaccessible, speak up...Again, you've, in these interviews, you've heard me talk about the students as a consumer, and I firmly believe that they're paying for…for their education, you know, again, whether that's their scholarship funds, loans, independent wealth. You know if a family can pay out of pocket, that's great! But, someone is paying for, for, the education, and a lot of times loans are involved. So, it pays to be an informed-consumer. So, I felt very strongly that if we're gonna give a list for faculty of things that are legit and worthy of, you know, explicitly, including in your course, then we should give students a list of what they should be looking for. It's kind of like a receipt, right? So, if I, if I'm supposed to leave with 5 items, I only have 4, I am within my rights to, you know, ask an associate, you know, "Hey? I thought I had 5. There's 5 on my receipt; here are the 4, I seem to be missing one item," you know. "Can you help me with this?" It doesn't have to be rude and confrontational, but it's like, no! Buyer beware! And so, I think it's helpful for faculty to know what the government and what accreditors and other compacts and contracts we've signed...what we will do for our students; and for our students, what they should be looking for" (Research Question 3, pp. 19-21).

"As part of the paid administrative builds, we do what's called an OSCQR review. It's the SUNY online course quality rubric. And so, it's pretty rigorous. 50 components, inclusive universal design principles, also, and making sure that learning objectives are there, making sure that content is accessible... We use Blackboard Ally to make sure that course content is in the green zone, so that it's good...good to go. And, you know, we try very hard to make sure that that all course content is accessible. So structured documents, captions, transcripts, alternative versions" (Research Question 3, pp. 22-23).

Appendix G: Research Question 4 Representative Findings

How Do SCAU Faculty and Administrators Empower of Disempower an Instructional Designer When Collaborating on Online Initiatives?

Empower

“I'm empowered by the administration's commitment to pursuing academic excellence and refining the courses and the quality of courses that students have in order to support our goals, which are to increase graduation rates, increase retention rates, and to also boost overall enrollment in the school. So, the fact that our…our administration is…is very invested in making sure that courses are available when they need to be available, you know, for sequencing in order for students to graduate on time, you know, we have to offer the courses that are necessary for a degree to be completed. But also that our current administration and with our new leadership, as well, is very data-driven. So, I feel very empowered by what I'm seeing from the top, and what I'm seeing trickle down through the leadership structure.
(Research Question 4, pp. 1-3).

“…[W]e work closely with the director of the Faculty Development Center as well...and she is very supportive of opportunities for faculty to--to hear from us on a variety of issues, and I think that that is also very empowering as well to have a strong working relationship the Faculty Development Center and…and then, of course, the--our senior administrators” (Research Question 4, p. 10).

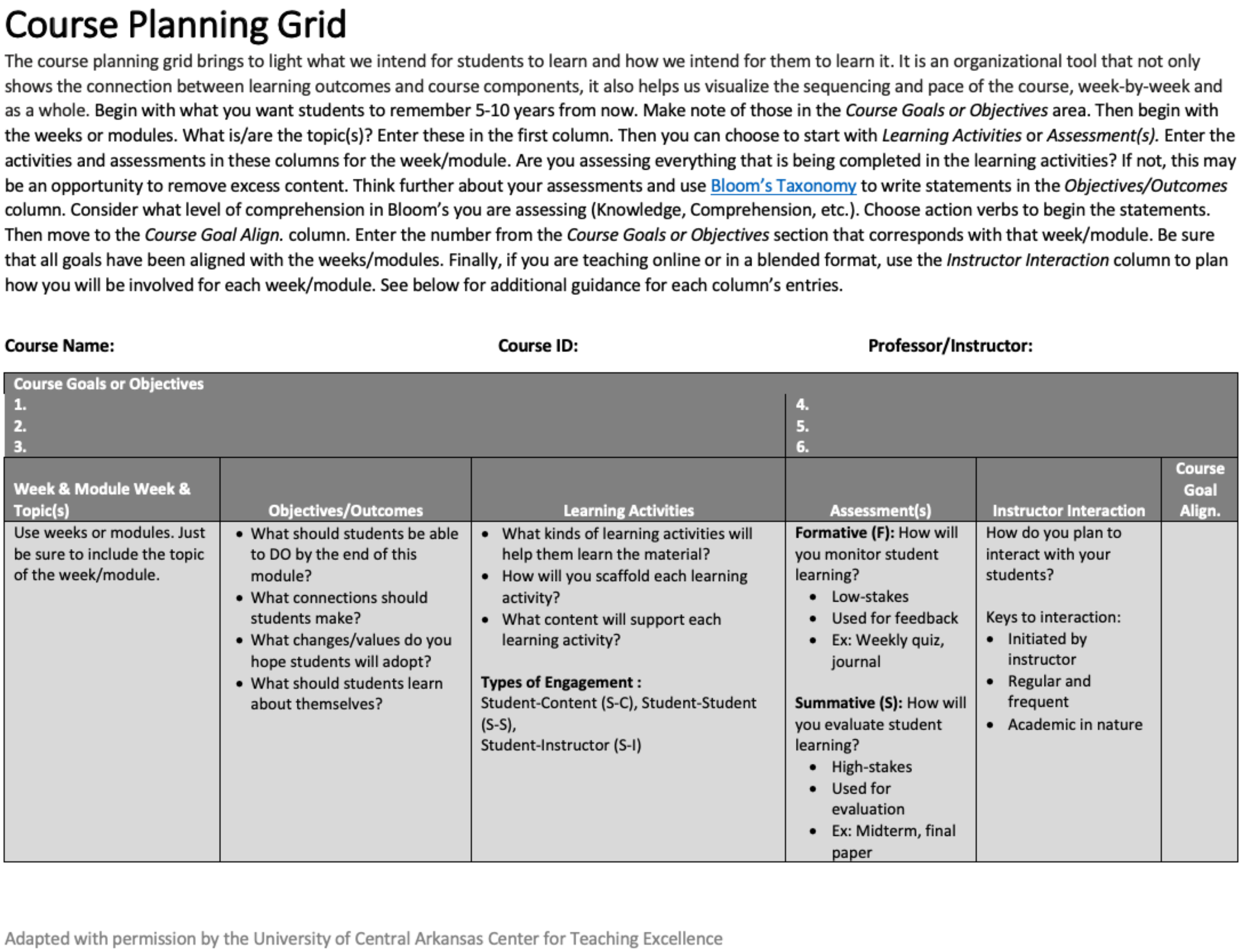
“I can say that my director, who, part of his responsibilities are the online and blended learning opportunities at my institution, is involved in a number of meetings... committees. And I know that…that's something I am strongly interested in as well. So, I have definitely been a part of the online learning working groups, student success working groups...We have a diversity, equity, inclusion symposium that I have been empowered to go to because that's something that as an African American woman working in higher ed...The equity piece...and diversity piece is huge for me. I--I want all students to be successful, and I know there are some particular challenges for underrepresented and underresourced students. And so that's one of the reasons why I'm so passionate about higher ed, because of the impact that education has had on my family. And so, with that being said, I love that I have been encouraged to seek opportunities to infuse myself and my perspective on higher ed on different working teams.
(Research Question 4, pp. 10-13).

Disempower

“As far as disempowerment, I would say that because I am not an administrator, and I am also not a faculty member, that sometimes leads to some tough spots. Because there may be things that I might advise or encourage, or may think is a good idea, given what research on teaching and learning and higher ed and student success literature says, is…is a good practice.. and caveat: I will say I'm not a huge, huge, fan of the language of ‘best practice.’ I've…I've used these and used that term in these interviews for kind of just sound bites, like keep it moving kind of purposes, but overall, it's just because there's too many variables to make a best practice, really, a truly universal concept. It's more of an effective strategy. Maybe the more or potential strategy or hopeful strategy. But anyway, getting back to disempowerment... so, not... not having the teeth as…as a consultant in order to...to say that this is the course of action that we're going to take in this course because it's in the best interest of their students" (Research Question 4, pp. 3-4).

"I might not have the direct ability to say, like, 'This isn't working, and I need this change right now,' but having responsive administrators who have the students' best interests in mind--and not saying the faculty don't--because I do believe they do; I have not met a faculty person who doesn't have that drive--to--to want to see students succeed, but I will say, in my moments of disempowerment. I have faith, and I trust in my...administrators' willingness to listen to what it is that I have to say... what it is my colleagues have to say... what it is my director, my boss, has to say about how instructional design projects, courses, reviews...how that's going. And that means a lot. Because having the administrators' ear to be able to advocate for changes or advocate for what we need and knowing that if it's-- if it's fairly reasonable and substantiated we usually see some sort of response or affirmation that what it is we're doing or advocating for or our course of action that we're, we're following with respect to how we're interacting, collaborating faculty, will be supported. And that means a lot" (Research Question 4, pp. 7-9).

Appendix H: Course Planning Grid



Course Planning Grid

The course planning grid brings to light what we intend for students to learn and how we intend for them to learn it. It is an organizational tool that not only shows the connection between learning outcomes and course components, it also helps us visualize the sequencing and pace of the course, week-by-week and as a whole. Begin with what you want students to remember 5-10 years from now. Make note of those in the *Course Goals or Objectives* area. Then begin with the weeks or modules. What is/are the topic(s)? Enter these in the first column. Then you can choose to start with *Learning Activities* or *Assessment(s).* Enter the activities and assessments in these columns for the week/module. Are you assessing everything that is being completed in the learning activities? If not, this may be an opportunity to remove excess content. Think further about your assessments and use Bloom's Taxonomy to write statements in the *Objectives/Outcomes* column. Consider what level of comprehension in Bloom's you are assessing (Knowledge, Comprehension, etc.). Choose action verbs to begin the statements. Then move to the *Course Goal Align.* column. Enter the number from the *Course Goals or Objectives* section that corresponds with that week/module. Be sure that all goals have been aligned with the weeks/modules. Finally, if you are teaching online or in a blended format, use the *Instructor Interaction* column to plan how you will be involved for each week/module. See below for additional guidance for each column's entries.

Course Name: **Course ID:** **Professor/Instructor:**

Course Goals or Objectives	
1. **2.** **3.**	**4.** **5.** **6.**

Week & Module Week & Topic(s)	**Objectives/Outcomes**	**Learning Activities**	**Assessment(s)**	**Instructor Interaction**	**Course Goal Align.**
Use weeks or modules. Just be sure to include the topic of the week/module.	• What should students be able to DO by the end of this module? • What connections should students make? • What changes/values do you hope students will adopt? • What should students learn about themselves?	• What kinds of learning activities will help them learn the material? • How will you scaffold each learning activity? • What content will support each learning activity? **Types of Engagement :** Student-Content (S-C), Student-Student (S-S), Student-Instructor (S-I)	**Formative (F):** How will you monitor student learning? • Low-stakes • Used for feedback • Ex: Weekly quiz, journal **Summative (S):** How will you evaluate student learning? • High-stakes • Used for evaluation • Ex: Midterm, final paper	How do you plan to interact with your students? Keys to interaction: • Initiated by instructor • Regular and frequent • Academic in nature	

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