

FLOC, Facilitating Learning Online Certification Workshop Part of the Micro-Credential series for online teaching certification



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Abstract

The pandemic has changed the way we look at our professional development opportunities. UNG's Distance Education & Technology Integration (DETI) made the decision to completely revamp our professional development options. In 2012 we first developed a self-paced fully online workshop to onboard new online/hybrid faculty quickly and efficiently. The Facilitating Learning Online Certification (FLOC) is a standalone self-paced workshop and is popular among our new hires as well as seasoned faculty. This presentation outlines the way we have incorporated FLOC into a new "menu" of professional development opportunities. Rather than a certificate for successfully completing individual workshops, now each workshop is awarded a micro-credential (badge), which when combined, cultivate to our UNG Online Teaching Certification.

Introduction

Per UNG's Faculty Handbook. 8.4.1

*All faculty teaching fully online instructors will be certified either through prior experience or through the **Distance Education & Technology Integration (DETI)** certification process; this includes a self-paced course on teaching online.*

DETI on-boards new adjunct online/hybrid instructors each semester as well as face-to-face instructors transitioning to teach online/hybrid. We continue to experience rapid growth in our student population and online course offerings. The DETI division manages all online courses offered through the academic departments and are able to sustain this rapid growth through continual hiring and training of new online faculty. The same highly qualified faculty who teach face-to-face classes at UNG can transition to teach online classes.

The role of DETI Professional Development is to educate new online/hybrid instructors in the best practices in online teaching and train them to use our D2L Learning Management System, LMS, and ensuring high quality online course offerings. FLOC serves as precursor to a series of future micro-credential courses in offering best practices of teaching online and instructional deliveries for faculty and professional development.

The FLOC self-paced workshop is a fully online experience and at the individual pace of the enrolled faculty. A facilitator is available through email and face-to-face, as needed. Each participant works at their own pace and typically completes the course within eight to ten hours. Our FLOC workshop is the only workshop faculty are required to attend. All others are voluntary. In support of this policy, we developed the professional development menu to meet our professional development goals. However, it goes beyond this, as UNG acknowledges that continued professional development is paramount in providing quality teaching to our students.

UNG has seen a dramatic decline in participation of our professional development opportunities, in both face-to-face and webinars. This decline comes from recognizing challenges of UNG faculty such as varying course workloads, scheduling conflicts, and other academic duties that prevents them from attending face-to-face workshops. However, our faculty seem more responsive to taking an online workshop that can be completed at their own pace. As a solution to meeting this dramatic decline, DETI refocused our professional development opportunities to building all our current offerings as well as future offerings into self-paced, online workshops. To support this new paradigm of professional development, DETI have instituted a new micro-credential badging system and a “menu” approach to achieving our UNG Online

Teaching Certificate, (OTC). Table 1 displays the menu system that allows the instructor to choose from multiple workshops in different tracks. This track process grants UNG faculty more autonomy in choosing specific online workshops by their own interests that culminates to their future OTC.

Micro-credentials at UNG

Current trends indicate that digital badges are prominent in higher education. In recognition of these current trends, we have updated the existing online certification workshop, FLOC, to award digital badges to our faculty for their completion of the FLOC workshop and the promotion of a series of workshops from a three-tiered menu that will culminate in a UNG online teaching certification. The FLOC will serve as precursor to a series of future micro-credential courses in offering best practices of teaching online and instructional deliveries for faculty and professional development.

Originally, the use of open micro credentials to indicate educational progress was adapted from youth scouting programs (Zhang & West, 2020). Zhang and West support the use of open badges for micro credentials in creation and issue for validating an individual's acquisition of a skill in training settings (Zhang & West, 2020).

In concert to Zhang and West's (2020) depiction, UNG-DETI encourages UNG faculty are required to successful complete the FLOC workshop as the first step in obtaining their UNG online teaching certification. The FLOC, in combination with additional courses, chosen by faculty, complete the required number of workshops and be awarded the certification.

Current trends of digital badges

Current trends indicate that digital badges are prominent in higher education and industry. For example:

- Technology, healthcare and finance have become some of the most popular topics in digital badges for the past three years (www.emergingtech.com, as cited in UPCEA, 2020).
- Companies such as IBM, Salesforce, and Ernst & Young have developed their own badging initiatives. IBM alone doubled the number of badges issued in 2019 (www.emergingtech.com, as cited in UPCEA, 2020).
- Academic segment has been elevating as the primary market for digital badges. This is largely due to an increase in promoting credentials as a way for teachers

and others to gain professional education in various topics

(www.insidehighered.com, as cited in UPCEA, 2020).

Based on two justifications for establishing this culmination are the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on universities and professional or faculty development.

Effects of COVID-19 pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, students were asked to remain home while their courses and many of their research and internship undergo a reconfiguration to online platforms (Baker & Lutz, 2021). The sudden increase involving faculty members to shifting their teaching and learning methods to online platforms remains to overwhelm them and instructional technologists and staff as well (Baker & Lutz, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis affected the traditional practice of education practices from its face-to-face setting to online learning. Basham et al (2020) identified the transition to online instruction as without any forewarning or training. Basham et al (2020) reported that 91.3% of global student population were out of school due to the pandemic and dramatically changed the face of the education system. However, the pandemic offered an expansion of digital technological tools for ensuring teleworking and distance learning. Bentata (2020) reported that the COVID 19 pandemic imposed education completely by distance on millions of students and forced institutions and countries to invest in and fully adapt, making distance learning one of the great challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

How professional development supports rapid growth

The role of DETI's Professional Development is to onboard/educate new and seasoned online/hybrid instructors in the best practices in online teaching and the use of our (BrightSpace/D2L) Learning Management System.

Research suggests that the quality of online programs in higher education are in concert with the professional development approaches in meeting online teacher needs (Baran & Correia, 2014). It is imperative to assist and encourage online teachers in building their capacity and quality for embracing the value of current online teaching and learning practices (Baran & Correia, 2014). They also note that the methods faculty members adapt to online teaching and their new roles and skills define their successful transition to online teaching. DETI continues to develop online workshops

(micro-credentials) to empower UNG faculty and staff with current online teaching and learning practices.

Baran and Correia (2014) supports the importance of providing a reward system to recognize extra effort and commitment to online education should be a part of faculty members' careers. "Rewards can range from leadership recognition/value towards tenure and promotion, financial stipends, release of time for course development to public acknowledgement (Chen & Chen, 2006; Maguire, 2005, Samarawickrema & Stacey, 2009 as cited in Baran & Correia, 2014).

DETI awards faculty members with digital badges upon the successful completion of a preset number of workshops, as recognition of obtained online teaching and learning strategy skills. As faculty members become motivated in acknowledging online learning as academically respected and recognized within the university, they become confident in teaching online and create high-quality courses (Baran & Correia, 2014).

FLOC

FLOC is the flagship of our newly designed professional development process. It is self-paced and provides faculty with the necessary competencies to teach an online course for UNG. It focuses on theory, concepts, and practices for effective online facilitation including UNG specific information. It also prepares our faculty in the skills related to the LMS (Learning Management System) or other software.

Table 1. Track system shows a menu of professional development (online, self-paced workshops).

Track 1		Track 2		Track 3	
PEDAGOGY		DESIGN		TECHNOLOGY	
1A	Modules Overview pages	2A	Content	3A	Advanced Presentations- PPT
1B	Learning Objectives (QM)	2B	Grades	3B	Blackboard

Track 1		Track 2		Track 3	
1C	Syllabus / Course Map	2C	Discussions	3C	Softchalk
1D	Rubrics	2D	Assignments	3D	Kaltura
1E	Creating Presence in your classroom & Feedback	2E	Quizzes	3E	Turnitin
1F	Best Practices	2F	Ally	3F	Proctoring
1G	Grading, Admin.	2G	Hybrids	3G	Zoom
1H	Quizzes, Admin.	2H	QMPOW		
1I	Virtual Meeting, Best Practices	2I	Groups		

The Process

- 1-** Each semester new online/hybrid faculty are required to complete the FLOC workshop before teaching online with UNG.
- 2-** Along with this workshop faculty have access to the professional development menu (see above).
- 3-** Faculty can now choose the six additional workshops they would like to attend. Two from each track.
- 4-** These workshops are in two formats, self-paced workshops or facilitated webinars.
- 5-** Each successfully completed workshop gains the faculty a badge.
- 6-** After successfully completing six workshops plus FLOC (seven total), faculty are awarded our UNG online teaching certificate.

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