An Analysis of Online Adjunct Faculty Perspectives of Institutional Support at Doña Ana Community College

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This needs assessment study used the theoretical frameworks of andragogy and social development theory to investigate the perspectives of online adjunct faculty from Doña Ana Community College in Las Cruces, NM regarding institutional support for online teaching. The purpose of this study was to uncover the needs and wants of online adjunct faculty and to learn from their voices about the experiences in teaching online and with the institutional support. This study provides valuable insight into the experiences of the online adjunct faculty, the challenges they face and their suggestions on how support for them could be improved.

Twenty online adjunct faculty from Doña Ana Community College volunteered to participate in this study. Five focus group sessions were conducted with each last approximately 1 hour. The primary findings suggest that 1. Online adjunct faculty feel isolated from the academic community, 2. Online adjunct faculty feel a great sense of anxiety from not feeling sufficiently prepared to teach online, 3. Online adjunct faculty encounter barriers in seeking assistance because of time limitations and their varied lives and careers.

The focus groups revealed a desire by the online adjunct faculty for recognition and appreciation for high quality online teaching and online teaching-related trainings and certifications. Participants also expressed a desire for high-quality support that includes improved guidance and mentoring. This study revealed that DACC would benefit by focusing attention on strategies to better support online adjunct faculty, and conversely, the findings revealed that online

course quality could become a negative factor in DACC's efforts to establish a successful online

education presence.

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1.0 Introduction to the Problem of Practice

Over the past decade online education at universities in the United States has been growing its presence and solidifying its foothold as an effective way of boosting enrollment numbers that have been at the heart of higher education challenges. Among scholars there is wide agreement about the growth of online education and the increasing demand for such programs (Allen & Seaman, 2016, 2017; Amirault, 2012; Burnette, 2015; Sandhoff, 2018). The relatively quick adoption and expansion of online education can be attributed in large part to the desire of institutions to be a part of the resulting enrollment increase. This enrollment increase is based on the premise that online education makes education more accessible and convenient to students.

In the report titled *Online Report Card: Tracking Online Education in the United States*, data show that during the first decade of the 21st century, online course enrollment has increased every year by double-digit percentage points with the exception being 2006 when the increase was 9.6% (Allen, et al., 2016). Allen et al. (2016; 2017) report online enrollment growth is outpacing enrollments in traditional face-to-face courses. In the same report, (2017) survey data show that in higher education, 29.7% of all students enrolled in at least one distance course. According to numerous reports including from the U.S. Department of Education and from *Digital Learning Compass: Distance Education Enrollment Report 2017*, distance education enrollment continues to grow (Allen et al., 2016; 2017; Poulin & Straut, 2015), while overall higher education, across all sectors, has seen multiple years of declining enrollment. These online enrollment trends are an important factor in presenting online education as a vital component of current university short-term and long-term strategies. Allen et al. (2015) reported that 70.8% of academic administrators stated online learning as being critical to their long-term strategy to maintain financial stability.

Another trend that is considered important to short-term and long-term institutional strategy is the hiring of adjunct faculty. In higher education overall, the hiring of adjunct faculty, also known as contracted faculty or part-time faculty, has regularly trended upward, a trend famously and specifically noted in the article "*Straight Talk About 'Adjunctification'*" published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Jenkins, 2014). According to the Digest on Educational Statistics (Dailey-Hebert, Mandernach, Donnelli-Sallee & Norris, 2014), nearly one-half of the 1.5 million faculty employed in the U.S. held part-time, contingent, or adjunct teaching positions. Adjunct faculty are attractive to higher education institutions because they allow institutions to reduce costs through lower compensation when compared to full-time faculty, little to no benefits and semester-to-semester contracts instead of full-time employment contracts providing flexibility to department directors on instructor teaching assignments (Dailey-Herbert et al., 2014; Magda, Poulin, & Clinefelter, 2015; Sandhoff, 2018; Shiffman, 2009).

Studies show this trend is growing when it comes to adjunct faculty instructing online courses (Ridge & Ritt, 2017). As online enrollments increase, institutional leaders are met with the following options: hire additional full-time tenured or non-tenure track faculty to teach the growing online course offerings or hire part-time adjunct faculty as needed (Ridge et al., 2017). Data reveals institutional leaders are deciding on the latter, employing more online adjunct faculty. According to a survey conducted by Magda et al. (2015), data shows the number of online adjunct faculty members has been consistently increasing at institutions, even as overall higher education enrollments have been declining for the past four years. It is widely expected that institutions of higher education will continue to rely on quality adjunct faculty prepared to teach online (Amirault, 2012; Burnette, 2015; Clausen & Swidler, 2013). Further survey results showed that more than half of institutions reported that their online adjunct population has grown over the last year

(Clausen et al., 2013). The percentage of adjunct faculty members who teach partially or only online is increasingly significant, contributing to the tremendous growth of online education (Magda et al., 2015). During 2015, 56% of institutions report that the percentage of adjunct faculty that teach online has increased at their institution, and 25% report that this number has increased by more than 5%. Magda et al. (2015) suggest that this growth trend is universal at all institution types.

1.1 Who Are Online Adjunct Faculty?

The growth in the number of online adjunct faculty is not only brought on by institutional need, but also by the individual motivation of each adjunct faculty. Studies show that adjunct faculty are motivated to teach by a variety of incentives. In a study titled *The Emerging Academician: The Rise of the Online Adjunct Faculty* (Shiffman, 2009), factors were identified regarding what led individuals to teach as adjunct faculty. While some adjunct faculty chose to teach with the ultimate goal of attaining full-time positions, others chose to teach because it fits their lifestyles (Shiffman, 2009). Most adjunct faculty teach as a supplement to their regular, full-time employment (Shiffman, 2009). In an effort to identify motivating factors, data were collected from 697 online adjunct faculty in two large virtual universities. Survey responses showed that 43% (n = 296) identified themselves as *specialists* (adjunct faculty who are employed full-time outside of their teaching, 27% (n = 184) as *freelancers* (adjunct faculty who choose to be employed in multiple part-time jobs), 9% (n = 61) as *career enders*, 8% (or 58) as *Aspiring Academics*, and 13% (n = 89) as *Other*. More survey data responses showed that adjunct faculty reported the top three motivating factors as: (1) the joy of teaching; (2) personal satisfaction; and (3) the flexible

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work schedule, whereas factors such as job security, advancement, and benefits (e.g. insurance) were the three least motivating factors. Financial compensation for teaching ranked as only a neutral factor for all adjunct categories with the exception of aspiring academics (Shiffman, 2009).

1.2 Problem Area

The practice of relying on the significantly more affordable adjunct faculty to teach increasingly profitable online courses, which, as previously stated, are outpacing traditional face-to-face courses in enrollment numbers (Allen, et al., 2016; 2017), presents a challenge to institutions concerning online course quality and the student learning experience in online courses. While students benefit from adjunct faculty members who are professionals in their fields, the ability to effectively teach online is a skill that varies widely (Mueller, Mandernach & Sanderson, 2013). University online teaching faculty support has traditionally been structured around full-time faculty who are typically present on campus and have a relatively easy ability to access faculty support almost instantly (Mueller, et al., 2013). This is supported in the research by Chad A. Maxon (2017) titled *A Question of Online Instructional Priorities Among Administrations, Faculty, Adjunct Faculty, and Students*. The colleges and universities involved in his research struggled to provide online adjunct faculty the same support and development as they did for full-time faculty. According to Maxon (2017), this was due part "because many adjunct faculty members worked for other organizations during the regular business day. Therefore, faculty development events held during the day often prohibited participation by adjunct faculty" (Mueller et al., 2013). Online adjunct faculty often find it challenging to access faculty support in the one-size fits all model that is common at university faculty support units, instead relying on a piecemeal

strategy to develop online teaching aptitude (Sandhoff, 2018). Furthermore, this poses significant struggles for new online faculty who lack teaching experience (Sandhoff, 2018).

Online adjunct faculty experiencing difficulties in developing online teaching aptitude, viewed from a larger perspective, pose an important and potentially critical long-term issue. The repercussions could impact the quality of the most important mission of universities: providing quality education to students. Maxon (2017) stresses the importance of online education quality, stating, "There can be no discussion of online quality without addressing the quality of the faculty who facilitate online instruction" (p. 45). Given the increase of online adjunct faculty, universities must focus on restructuring, adjusting and/or adding online teaching support better suited for the unique needs of adjunct faculty.

1.3 Student Learning Outcomes

The surge in the number of courses taught by adjunct faculty members has created debate concerning the relative effectiveness of adjunct versus traditional full-time faculty. While this debate is not new or unique to online education, the rapidly increasing number of adjunct faculty facilitating online classes fosters renewed interest in the issue (Mueller et al., 2013). While many adjunct faculty have teaching experience and some have training specifically in curriculum and instruction, i.e. pedagogical training, the majority of adjunct faculty who instruct online courses typically lack experience or professional skill in online instruction and online instructional design: two keys areas that promote high-quality online education (Shiffman, 2009). A key assessment that is common of the online course movement is student outcomes. With the documented increase in adjunct faculty teaching online courses, it is important to examine differences in student

outcomes between full-time faculty and adjunct faculty. In a study on student learning outcomes in online courses between full-time faculty and adjunct faculty, Bettinger and Long (2010) provided survey data showing a difference of roughly 10% in "successful completion rate" and "failure rate" by faculty type. Data from Mueller et al. (2013), show that students learning from full-time online faculty were more likely to successfully complete the course and were less likely to withdraw from the course. Students of full-time faculty received a slightly higher mean course grade and were more likely to continue their enrollment into the next course. Finally, student data showed that students taught by full-time faculty felt more satisfied with their online learning experience (Mueller et al., 2013). Missing from the literature are precise reasons for this difference; however, part of the reason for this may include full-time faculty teaching online courses generally work in close proximity to other faculty while online adjunct faculty are typically isolated. Tipple (2010) supports this notion, noting full-time faculty all teach their online courses from a unified teaching center and as such, the full-time faculty had a community of scholars present (both in time and location) while teaching. In contrast, adjunct faculty teach their online courses from varied physical locations as well as varied time schedules. It is possible that the community of teachers (all focusing on the same course) provided a network of ideas, resources, and/or support that facilitated the instructional process (Tipple, 2010).

The difference in student outcomes from full-time and adjunct-only faculty should be seen not as a criticism of the quality of online adjunct faculty, but instead it should highlight the disparity between full-time and adjunct online teaching support structures so that adjunct faculty can gain access to more effective support and training (Mueller et al., 2013). Tipple (2010) further noted that adjunct faculty are not typically mainstreamed into the traditional faculty body and may be demotivated by perceptions that the institution does not treat them with the same respect,

prestige, and investment as is granted to full-time faculty. Tipple (2010) writes that adjunct faculty challenges include a sense of isolation from the academic community in which they teach, frustration and lack of recognition are common feelings of adjuncts as they feel marginalized in the teaching profession.

Online course quality and the effects of it on student learning experiences are much-discussed subjects (Allen, et al., 2017; Thanaraj, 2017). Online teaching has largely been viewed as more difficult than the traditional face-to-face method of instruction and not as effective, often leading full-time faculty who teach online courses to decline future online teaching assignments (Ubell, 2016). Some of the contributing factors to this increased difficulty include the different online teaching methods, new technology needs, faculty development requirements, and the need to revamp support services for online students (Allen, et al., 2015). Eib and Miller (2006) echo similar sentiments, writing online faculty lack diversity in their instructional practices as the isolation of their position limits exposure to novel or innovative approaches.

1.4 Local Context

The land-grant institution of the State of New Mexico, New Mexico State University has been developing its online course program over the last decade along with its associated community colleges, including DACC. As the state of New Mexico contains many rural areas and regularly ranks in the bottom five in median household income in the U.S. (Suneson, 2018), extending online offerings is a way to reach potential students who likely would not enroll in college courses if not for the increased access provided via online enrollment. The poverty-access connections in the area include local libraries, DACC satellite campuses found in low-SES towns

scattered throughout southern New Mexico in addition to the two DACC campuses which provide free internet access and plenty of computer labs. Furthermore, students have the ability to check out laptops through the DACC Library. DACC, located in Doña Ana County in southern New Mexico, has historically focused its recruiting efforts on local students and typically lower-income students, with the average DACC student from what could be considered a low-SES household.

As DACC seeks to strengthen its current online course system as well as expand it, it is doing so on a constrained budget, making support for online faculty limited. Moving forward, the NMSU state system and DACC will seek to carefully invest resources, including funding, in online education with this enrollment strategy already benefiting this institution, as demonstrated by the enrollment increase in online sections and increase in the overall number of online sections being offered (Office of Institutional Analysis, 2019).

DACC has seen a steady decline in traditional enrollment in recent years, consistent with national trends. The latest data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2018) show that community college enrollments showed a 2% decrease over the past year amid a consistent decline since Fall 2015. In light of this, DACC leadership is in the process of making important long-term strategy decisions in several different areas, including placing increased value into online education.

As of the Spring 2018 semester at DACC, the number of online course sections was listed at 270, confirmed by Mary Beth Worley, Director of Institutional Analysis at DACC (personal communication, June 5, 2018). Ms. Worley also reports 24 academic programs offer online courses with programs currently in the process of adding online sections. It is expected that this upward trajectory will continue. The online course growth is highlighted by the fact that during the Fall

semester of 2016, 21% of total student hours were designated as online, and as of the most recent report for Spring 2019, 25.82% of total student hours have been designated as online.

Also consistent with national trends, as of Spring 2019, reports from the DACC Institutional Analysis Factbook (2018) show adjunct faculty are instructing more online courses compared to full-time faculty with the most recent numbers at 77 adjunct faculty compared to 62 full-time faculty.

A survey sent to all DACC adjunct faculty in January 2018 indicates that adjunct faculty desire more professional development when it comes to online teaching and learning how to teach online with the learning management system "Canvas by Instructure." This survey, titled *Part-time Faculty Convocation Survey* (2018), asked adjunct faculty, "Would you be interested in the following topics for professional development workshops during convocation? (check all that apply)". The four choices are listed below:

- 62% - Campus resources for faculty, including Canvas training
- 60% - Best practices in teaching and learning, including online teaching
- 44% - Campus Resources for students, including Canvas training
- 42% - Online Teaching

Because DACC falls under the guidance of the NMSU statewide system, policies approved and enacted by NMSU apply to the four community colleges in the state. NMSU, along with approval of the Vice Provost and the Faculty Senate recently approved a policy titled "Academic Rules for Distance Education", in which section D specifically communicates online teaching Faculty Expectations (NMSU Policy 4.69, 2017). This policy, titled *Academic Rules for Distance Education*, applies equally to the four community colleges, including DACC. Within this policy, Part 2, Section D is specifically influential and important to this research as it helps shape the inquiry setting by establishing written, agreed upon standards and expectations specifically related to 1) the hiring of adjunct faculty; 2) expectations of online faculty and; 3) expectations of online

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course quality. In addition, a long-standing policy at DACC directs that all faculty must have earned a masters in their respective fields.

In order to maintain the educational quality of all distance education offerings, faculty are expected to have experience teaching online. When appropriate, departments are encouraged to include online teaching experience in the evaluation of applicants for faculty positions. The department head or dean determines if faculty have or have not demonstrated appropriate experience. Faculty who have not demonstrated appropriate experience are expected to complete the following professional development activities prior to teaching an online course:

- Canvas Learning Management System training
- Short course for online teaching
- Applying the Quality Matters Rubric workshop (NMSU Policy 4.69, 2017)

Quality Matters (QM) is a nationally recognized, faculty-driven peer review process used to ensure the quality of online and blended course design. The Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric is a set of standards used to evaluate the design of online and blended courses. These standards were developed and revised based on research and established standards in the fields of instructional design and online learning.

At DACC, several departments, but not all, require instructors who teach online to be QM trained through the Applying the Quality Matters (APPQMR) workshop. QM is widely known among faculty at DACC, particularly among the online faculty community. In a QM training, instructors learn how to apply a quality rubric to various aspects of the online course.

In addition, all online instructors of record at DACC have access to attend training sessions provided by DACC, both synchronous, meaning existing or happening at the same time, and asynchronous, meaning not existing or happening at the same time, trainings. In addition, DACC

online faculty are welcomed to attend online teaching training workshops hosted by Instructional Innovation and Quality (IIQ) at New Mexico State University-Main Campus.

Furthermore, DACC enacts what is called the Basic Online Course Check (BOCC) once a semester to help maintain online course integrity and to avoid courses being taught as correspondence courses. A correspondence course is a course in which automatic assessments and content is available to students with little-to-none interaction with an instructor. Correspondence courses are against Federal law if the institution enrolls students who take out Federal loans. The BOCC is an NMSU initiative adopted by DACC, that started in the Spring of 2016 and was endorsed by NMSU's Faculty Senate. This task involves the DACC unit Virtual Learning and Instructional Technology (VLIT) staff accessing online courses of most online instructors to check for five standard and agreed-upon requirements. The requirements are the following;

1.) *Is there a current syllabus available in the course?* This is determined if a current-semester syllabus is found anywhere in the course.

2.) *Is there a stated clear turn-around time for when students can expect a reply from the instructor?* This is determined if a turn-around time for instructor responses is presented anywhere in the course that students have access to. There is no standard format for this.

3.) *Is the instructor active in the course?* This is determined by the amount of time in the course with at least three hours total by the 6-week BOCC and at least six hours total by the BOCC follow-up check six weeks later. The "hours active in a course" is available to view by the university's LMS administrators.

4.) Is the instructor using a variety of assessment methods? This is determined by the use of assessment tools in the LMS Canvas and includes assignments, discussions and quizzes.

5.) Does the course have assignments? This is determined by checking to see if there are any grades assignments, which include assignments, quizzes and/or quizzes.

The faculty support unit at DACC called VLIT, consists of a two-person department which is responsible for supporting both students and faculty in online education topics in addition to supporting the use of face-to-face classroom technology. As this team of two is responsible for the online and hybrid-style teaching support of up to 536 faculty, in addition to the support of more than 10,000 students per semester in online course and technology issues, it is easy to see that this department is severely understaffed. Additional help has been developed in the form of several DACC faculty unpaid volunteers to take on the online teaching quality certification and training program Quality Matters (QM) in certifying online courses as "QM Certified" and leading QM instructor-training certification courses, paid either by the instructor or the department. Even with these efforts, online teaching support at DACC has a serious need for improvements.

Some of the challenges involved include the relative commonness of making late hires to teach online courses due to faculty turnover. Late hires typically are exempted temporarily from having to take the QM trainings and supporting and preparing these late hired adjunct faculty, while available, has proven challenging.

Furthermore, while it is safe to say that adjunct faculty are experts in their respective fields, as supported by their earned master's degrees in those fields, they are typically not experts in online teaching pedagogy.

The goal of this current qualitative research study about the online adjunct faculty perspectives of institution support is to provide insights into what can be done to enhance online course quality at DACC. The findings of this study will be able to assist in guiding the DACC administration in critical decision-making in developing strategies for growing its online education presence.

This dissertation in practice will be of interest to administrators at DACC and possibly other peer institutions, department chairs and distance education stakeholders as online education continues its expansion and the trend of hiring adjunct faculty to lead these courses continues (Amirault, 2012; Burnette, 2015; Clausen, et al., 2013; Magda, et al., 2015). In the next chapter, the researcher describes the theories used to frame this dissertation in practice and reviews literature related to online adjunct faculty support needs.

2.0 Review of Literature

In this chapter, the theories that guided the research of this proposed study as well as provide supporting literature related to online adjunct faculty support needs. This study will closely examine the perceptions held by online adjunct faculty concerning the quality and effectiveness of faculty support for online teaching. The relevant recent literature on the topic will address research-supported challenges and solutions. The examples of literature are highly relevant to the proposed research, although some of the literature is based on various institution types, not specifically on community college institutions. However, the central mission of online adjunct faculty, and online faculty overall, is the same or similar at all higher education institution types; to provide quality learning experiences to students in the online forum.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study relies on two main theories to guide the research; andragogy and the theory of social development. These two theories and their implications on online teaching development for adjunct faculty will provide the underlying principles of professional development of adjunct faculty and online teaching.

2.1.1 Andragogy

Andragogy, which is also referred to as Adult Learning Theory, is a theory that follows a set of assumptions about how adults learn with an emphasis on collaboration and equality between the instructor and the learner. "The art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1980, p.24) It is described as a set of guidelines, assumptions or principles that fosters an understanding of how adult learners learn best (Sandhoff, 2018). The process of andragogy includes self-directed learning where adults take the initiative to learn—they determine what their learning needs are. Knowles (1975) states that the learner is active in "formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (p. 18).

In 1984, Knowles suggested four principles that are applied to adult learning:

1. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
2. Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for the learning activities.
3. Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life.
4. Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented. (Kearsley, 2010)

Each of these principles directly apply to the process online adjunct faculty go through in adjusting to online teaching. Knowles (1980) makes a point in the andragogy model that adults learn differently than children, thus teaching strategies that meet the needs of adult learners are critically important. It is based on self-directed learning, which is a common type of learning online adjunct faculty go through to develop their online teaching skills. Adjunct faculty, also adult learners, enter this process as they prepare to instruct online courses. Sandhoff (2018) adds that adult learners build upon their already-existing knowledge base and asserts that it is important for

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adult learners to understand why something should be learned. Meyer and Murrell (2014) concur, writing that accepting facts alone without an explanation of why or how the facts will be applied is ineffective when educating adult learners.

Andragogy has informed the development of the data collection protocol as adjunct faculty described their experiences in developing their online pedagogical skills, a typically unfamiliar realm for many new online adjunct faculty. Setting andragogy as the framework for this research helped develop not only the approach to the data collection protocol but played an important role in the focus group interviews in facilitating discussion and it helped frame the analysis of the data of this study.

2.1.2 Social Development Theory

Social development theory will be used to guide this research as well as frame how data will be analyzed. This theory, developed by Lev Vygotsky, stresses the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1978), as he believed strongly that community plays a central role in the process of "making meaning." Sandhoff (2018) agrees, asserting that social interaction is required for development to occur.

Social development theory, which has been often applied to student learning, also accurately fits in guiding and designing faculty development opportunities. In addition, Sandhoff (2018) asserts that this theory can be easily adapted to online adjunct faculty as they switch to the role of active learner in preparing to teach online (Sandhoff, 2018). Incoming or beginner online adjunct faculty who are experts in their respective fields, as supported by their earned Master's degrees in that field, undergo a substantial identity role change from being an expert in their field to being a beginning learner preparing to lead an online course (Thanaraj, 2016), which results in

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a significant identity adjustment. This same adjustment to social identity occurs when roles change and when new technology is introduced, which Thanaraj (2016) states often leads to increased anxiety among beginning online instructors.

From an administration perspective, social development theory can act as a guide for institutional leaders in designing faculty development plans that are useful, convenient, and connected for online faculty (Sandhoff, 2018). Applying the concepts of Vygotsky's theory of social development to the faculty development experiences can help in deconstructing the transformative experiences adjust faculty encounter when switching to the role of learner in faculty development.

Andragogy and the theory of social development are theories have helped this researcher better understand the problem that online adjunct faculty face in adjusting to online instruction. These theories guided this research in examining how adjunct online instructors adjust to instructing online and learning online teaching strategies and helped in understanding the complex transformation online adjunct faculty go through when they begin teaching online and as they learn quickly-evolving online teaching strategies. The theories provide the necessary framework to deconstruct the explicit and implicit challenges of supporting online adjunct faculty. The theories are also applicable in analyzing the institutional structure for supporting online adjunct faculty and helped understand how and why institutional support is structured to support online adjunct faculty. Furthermore, they have helped the researcher to conceive of this study and questioning strategy, helped analyze the data, and helped in developing recommendations.

2.2 Institutional Support for Online Adjunct Faculty

A growing number of higher education institutions have created and are in the process of creating faculty development programs specifically for their online adjunct faculty (Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013; Elliot, Rhoades, Jackson & Mandernach, 2015; Magda, et al., 2015; Meyer & Murrell, 2014). In a study, researchers highlight online adjunct faculty development as "one of the most important new directions for faculty development" (Austin, et al., 2013, p. 92). Faculty development is defined as activities and programs that are designed specifically to improve instruction (Elliot, Rhoades Jackson & Mandernach, 2015). Brannagan and Oriol (2014) said that the failure to invest in adjunct development programs "ignores the long-term expense of inadequately prepared adjunct faculty and their impact on student and faculty satisfaction, engagement, and retention" (p. 130). Professional development programs provide new adjunct online faculty an opportunity to improve teaching skills and enhance the student learning experience (Sandhoff, 2018). Backhaus (2009) reported that most "adjunct faculty members are hired on the basis of their professional experience and discipline knowledge" and that "it is unlikely that they have received any training in pedagogical methods" (p. 40). Multiple researchers have concluded that there is an urgent need for adjunct faculty development initiatives (Austin, et al., 2013; Backhaus, 2009; Dailey-Hebert, et al., 2014; Elliott et al., 2015; Maxon, 2017; Sandhoff, 2018).

New adjunct online faculty who have access to high-quality faculty development gain new perspectives of online teaching pedagogy (Austin, et al., 2013, Dailey-Hebert, et al. , 2014). Sandhoff (2018), a researcher whose principle research focuses on new online adjunct faculty and is grounded in empirical research, notes that while preparing to teach online, new adjunct online

faculty require understanding of the overall process of how online programs fit within an academic setting and how academic institutions function.

Unlike full-time faculty, adjunct faculty typically lack the collaboration with colleagues in an academic setting (Maier, 2012) and because of the physical distance between online adjuncts and full-time faculty, there is limited opportunity for any face-to-face meetings for dialogue (Maier, 2012). In addition to the physical distance, Sandhoff (2018) claims that many full-time faculty do not value the knowledge and skills adjunct faculty bring to the learning community. Another area in which adjunct faculty may feel a sense of isolation is through the lack of invitation to participate in faculty governance. Furthermore, as Maier (2012) writes that adjunct faculty may refer to themselves as silent faculty, or ghost faculty because many express a sense of being invisible to other full-time faculty and feeling lonely and isolated from their professional peers.

From an institutional level, an important first step to remedying this isolation of adjunct faculty, as Sandhoff (2018) highlights, is by including new online adjunct faculty in understanding how online courses and programs fit into the institution's mission and how academic institutions function. As higher education is adapting to difficult financial challenges by increasing online courses to attract more students, a trend that is seen by many scholars as continuing to grow (Seaman, Allen, 2018; Allen & Seaman, 2016; 2017), thus creating a need for adjunct faculty to teach those courses, it is important to provide online adjunct faculty guidance on how their role fits into the process. Sandhoff (2018) stresses that academic institutions that provide information to adjunct online faculty during orientation and faculty development activities foster a greater commitment to the institution and to their commitment to remain part of the organization (Meyer, et al., 2014).

In the late 2000s and early 2010s, many institutions that were in the beginning stages of offering online courses paid little attention to faculty development for adjunct faculty as they prepared to teach online (Daily-Herbert, et al., 2014; Sandhoff, 2018). Instead, they were expected to be self-directed learners and search books, online resources, webinars to find guidance. Sandhoff (2018) writes that online adjunct faculty face this unique challenge unlike adjunct faculty teaching traditional face-to-face class because those face-to-face adjunct faculty have a higher probability of finding opportunities to seek in-person mentorship from full-time faculty.

A study conducted involving 132 adjunct faculty was created with the objective of learning what adjunct faculty thought was needed to increase their satisfaction with the role as adjunct, for retention, and to ensure quality educational practices were being used (Forbes, Hickey & White, 2010). According to the findings, adjunct faculty expressed a desire for the following: 1) a better process where university expectations were consistently communicated; 2) a need for a formal orientation process that was supported by staff and experienced faculty; 3) an assigned faculty coordinator whose main responsibility was to guide and support adjunct faculty through the orientation process and be a supportive, dependable contact for all adjunct faculty; 4) online training modules that are short and concise and access to learning materials 24/7; and 5) available mentoring guidance that would also foster relationships for on-going informal support (Forbes, et al., 2010). The researchers concluded that developing strategies that facilitate the needs of adjunct online faculty are effective if training programs and faculty development activities are designed with input from adjunct faculty (Forbes, et al., 2010).

2.3 Faculty Professional Development Based on Student Feedback

Professional development of online adjunct faculty should not be limited to the standard training, various workshops and certification courses, but should include feedback from the primary stakeholder: students (Magda, et al., 2015). It is important, as Magda et al. (2015) state, that a focus on students must be considered in faculty development programs. Bailie (2015) writes in the study "What Online Students Want Compared to What Institutions Expect", that "examining student satisfaction and expectation has been noted as a key element to improving the quality of online programs" (p. 42). Online education decision-makers would greatly benefit from soliciting feedback from online students about the instructional practices of their adjunct faculty members. These decision-makers would benefit by achieving consensus about the expectations for competence in their adjunct instructors (Bailie, 2015). Bailie, in providing an example from her study, notes that students value receiving email communication from instructors one week before the start of class and found that these welcome emails were most effective when they introduced the student to the instructor, to the class, to the syllabus, to the text, and to the basic expectations of the course (Bailie, 2015).

2.4 Institution Challenges of Online Adjunct Faculty Reliance

In examining the challenges online adjunct faculty face in online teaching support, perhaps it is prudent to also examine the challenges of those responsible for providing such support. Three common challenges found in the literature include 1) recruiting qualified persons to instruct online courses, 2) turnover of online adjunct faculty and the cost challenges that come with it (Betts,

2008) and 3) faculty resistance, which is especially troublesome in the constantly evolving world of online instruction (Green, 2010).

Literature shows that finding qualified adjunct faculty to teach online has historically been difficult. For instance, online instructors at one small institution were chosen not because they were "well-suited for the task" but because they were simply willing to teach online (Lovvorn, Barth, Morris & Timmerman, 2009, p. 9). In other words, they were available.

This creates a concern of the level of online teaching preparedness, which is another challenge in itself. The lack of online pedagogical experience of online adjunct faculty has proven to be common. Backhaus (2009) writes, based on their empirical research, that most "adjunct faculty members are hired on the basis of their professional experience and discipline knowledge" and adds that "it is unlikely that they have received any training in pedagogical methods" (p. 40). The ability to teach effectively in an online environment has proven to be a trying and difficult skill to develop (Lovvorn, et al., 2009). One of the most daunting challenges that online adjunct faculty faced was how they were to develop online teaching expertise (Lovvorn, et al., 2009; Sandhoff, 2018). Lovvorn et al state, "Little preparation was devoted to getting the instructors ready for teaching online; they were just recruited based on their willingness to transfer their courses from one teaching paradigm to another (2009).

2.4.1 Adjunct Faculty Turnover

Another area of challenge comes from adjunct faculty turnover, a topic which researchers have not come to a consensus on. Betts and Sikorski (2008) write that the turnover of adjunct faculty in online teaching positions can be high as a result of a variety of factors including each individual's willingness to teach, fluctuating availability to teach, and general difficulty in online

instruction and online instructional design. As a result, academic departments and programs are frequently contracting new adjunct faculty members each semester creating a wide range of additional direct and indirect costs including faculty recruitment, application process, hiring process, orientation and training, professional development and ongoing support, including technology support (Betts, et al., 2008). However, Magda et al. (2015) paint a more positive picture by providing more recent survey data that show online adjunct faculty turnover has improved with 69% of respondents reporting a 10% turnover or less per year (p. 13). Further research on this topic will be needed for clarification on this topic. Magda et al. do not disagree however that online adjunct faculty turnover is a problem in need of solutions. Generated through their research, they provide the following recommendation:

> Offering training opportunities as well as strong support services can help retain online adjunct faculty term to term. Specifically, one institution reported sending out a monthly email with these opportunities listed as a way to entice online adjunct faculty to continue to serve the institution. (Magda, et al., 2015, p. 13)

2.4.2 Faculty Resistance

A common challenge experienced by university academic programs and by online teaching faculty support is faculty resistance (Green, 2010; Ubell, 2016). Some educators, especially those who have been in the teaching profession for some time, have deeply rooted methods for delivering content. "Faculty resistance" is listed as a leading impediment of institutional efforts to expand online education (Green, 2010, p. 5). Green identified factors that "impede institutional efforts to expand online education programs" (p. 1) and the top factor identified in the report is "faculty resistance to online teaching" (Green, 2010, p. 1). Ubell (2016) writes that faculty typically don't

hold a high opinion of online education and believe online education is not as effective as classroom instruction. As survey data from Allen et al. (2017;2016) show, faculty struggle with viewing online education as valuable and legitimate. Ubell (2016) presents a theory of why faculty resistance is so common in online teaching, writing, "In a number of studies, faculty members also express serious concerns about the lack of institutional commitment – chief among them poor technical and pedagogical support" (para. 7).

Not all faculty resistance is tied to online education personal beliefs. Past literature has found that academics resist changing their teaching approaches especially if there is a lack of time, support and training (Thanaraj & Williams, 2014). Relevant findings provide insight into the transition by face-to-face faculty to online teaching by noting three case study participant's initial reactions to teaching an online course (Thanaraj, 2016). Statements made by the study participants include feelings of worry, anxiety, a change in perception of what it means to teach and an unclear strategy on how to redesign materials and activities from face-to-face to be effective for an online environment. Additionally, Thanaraj (2016) found through feedback from case study participants that while "in-house staff development training was useful to an extent, seeing sample online environments, how they were set up and used went a long way in encouraging and instilling confidence" (p. 44) in the novice online faculty.

2.4.3 Online Adjunct Faculty Role Change

Maier (2012) conducted a study to explore how faculty roles change when teaching online and what online faculty need to know regarding building community online. Maier's research revealed that adjunct faculty experienced a sense of isolation while teaching online and noted that a lack of connections with other adjunct faculty decreased the potential for sharing teaching

strategies. Another example of this finding can be found in the research of Thanaraj (2016) in which adjunct faculty members were interviewed as they adjusted to online teaching. In this research, one participant explained that the challenge for her had been in making the transition from an academic who is seen as a highly qualified and a respected authority in her subject area whose role was to transmit their knowledge to students has been hampered by technological limitations. By transitioning to teaching online, this participant said that her role online was not that of "expert knowledge but facilitating self-directed learning and supporting social relations" (p. 46), a vastly new and different role (Thanaraj, 2016).

In a second study that Thanaraj (2016) conducted, she focused on three academics as they moved from face-to-face teaching to online teaching over a period of 20 months. From the findings of this study, the author recommended that for an academic to make an effective transition they must be supported effectively to embrace the changes to their role and to their practice and consequently to their identity. Thanaraj (2016) asserts that for an academic to make the transition from classroom-based teaching to online teaching, the transition extends further than only technical abilities; instead, a successful transition requires a thorough understanding of the nature of the online teaching platform, how it functions and the pedagogical models which can be employed to utilize the platform and learning materials most effectively (Thanaraj & Williams, 2016).

2.5 Modifying Support for Online Adjunct Faculty

Academic institutions of higher education will continue to rely on adjunct faculty to teach online (Amirault, 2012; Burnette, 2015, Magda, et al., 2015). As multiple scholars have

determined, improving support to these part-time faculty members teaching online is critical (Amirault, 2012; Burnette, 2015; Magd,a et al., 2015, Sandhoff, 2018). A critical part of improving support for adjunct faculty is inviting adjunct faculty to be a part of the university community and by offering an improved support structure (Buckenmeyer, Hixon, Barczyk & Feldman, 2013; Dailey-Herbert, et al., 2014; Ridge, et al., 2017).

Equally as important is developing a faculty development plan for online faculty that requires trainers and course designers have an understanding of what faculty new to online teaching want and need (Meyer et al., 2014). Sandhoff (2018) asserts that creating multiple faculty support paths is important, writing that the plan for new adjunct online faculty without any teaching experience should be different than more experienced faculty. The faculty support path for newer faculty should include topics that incorporate teaching pedagogy, course design, and the use of technology tools in course rooms (Sandhoff, 2018).

2.6 Summary

In closing, the literature on the current challenges online adjunct faculty face and the institutional support structure identified numerous common challenges along with several strategies at the institutional level to specifically improve faculty support for the part-time online faculty. The literature shed light on similar research and will be applied to this research as a guide. Learning from the perspectives of online adjunct faculty at a small community college functioning on a minimal budget will provide an opportunity to explore this topic in-depth and will help better structure faculty support for online adjunct faculty a small community college institutions.

3.0 Research Methods

The purposes of this study were to investigate how online adjunct faculty at a small community college perceive the effectiveness and quality of the online teaching faculty support structure provided by the institution, to identify challenges these adjunct faculty face in online teaching that influence them to seek online teaching support, and to examine the factors that have contributed to their online teaching fluency.

3.1 Research Questions

My inquiry was structured around the questions below:

1. What are the lived experiences of DACC online adjunct faculty regarding the support and faculty development provided by their institution?

2. What factors do online adjunct faculty consider influential in being able to offer quality instruction in their online courses?

3. What factors most influence online adjunct faculty to seek or not seek support?

4. What do online adjunct faculty perceive as lacking or needing improvements in the institutional support, specifically for online adjunct faculty?

3.2 Site

The inquiry was conducted at Doña Ana Community College (DACC), a two-year institution that is a part of the New Mexico State University (NMSU) statewide higher education system. DACC is one of NMSU's four community colleges across the state and is located in Las Cruces, NM. According to the DACC Factbook, as of the Spring 2018 semester, the student population was 10,644 credit-seeking students, and 135 full-time faculty and 401 adjunct or part-time faculty members were assigned as instructors-of-record. Additionally, during the Spring 2018 semester, the number of students enrolled in at least one online course was reported at approximately 3,200. There were 82 online adjunct faculty are listed as instructor-of-record of 125 online sections according to the spring 2018 DACC Factbook. The increasing number of adjunct faculty is expected to continue its growth.

While tuition and fee rates for the forthcoming "NMSU Online" student classification were initialized in January, these rates are different than the traditional in-state and out-of-state tuition of 2019. The DACC student tuition as of 2019 students include a surcharge $50 per-credit for online courses: this includes a $25 per-online-credit fee and a separate $25 per-credit Distance/Online Course Delivery Fee. The regular tuition rates are shown below:

Doña Ana County Residents: Full-time = $888; Per-credit rate = $74

All Other Counties in New Mexico: Full-time = $1,080; Per-credit = $90

Out-of-state or the U.S.: Full-time = $2,832; Per-credit = $236

DACC's main competition for students comes from New Mexico State University, although the main NMSU institution has a matriculation agreement with the four community college institutions that work as a funnel for students to earn an associate's degree from DACC before being admitted to NMSU. Other competition for students from within New Mexico for

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DACC has historically come from Western New Mexico University, an institution that is not a part of the state-wide New Mexico State University system. However, with DACC being a locally-focused community college, this competition has been a minor consideration.

This inquiry setting was chosen over the larger NMSU system because of the following factors 1) the size of institution, 2) the structure of the faculty support department as of 2019, 3) the expanding online course offerings 4) and the growing number of online adjunct faculty. The availability of cooperation from DACC academic departments, as well as DACC's Institutional Analysis department, have also influenced the selection of this inquiry setting.

3.3 Inquiry Design & Rationale

The framework of this study was structured as a needs assessment study. A needs assessment study is a systematic set of procedures that is used to determine needs, examine their nature and causes, and set priorities for future action (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). A needs assessment was determined to be appropriate for this research as this community college institution will continue growing and strengthening their online academic programs and as online teaching quality becomes a more important priority. Furthermore, with adjunct faculty as the instructor-of-record for over half of the online courses at DACC, this site served as a logical site. The objective of conducting a needs assessment at DACC is to uncover key challenges, key needs, obstacles, and potential solutions (Gupta, Sleezer & Rus-Eft, 2014) that exist for online adjunct faculty at Doña Ana Community College. Gupta et al. (2014) assert that a needs assessment can "set the direction for learning, training, development, and performance initiatives" (p. 26). An objective of this research study is to provide valuable data for DACC. A needs assessment can help in better

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understanding the unique faculty support needs of online adjunct faculty and provide a framework for improving online pedagogical support for adjunct faculty. Furthermore, this research has the potential to play a role in future faculty support and development strategies and models. This research study can be used at the institutional level in developing strategic academic initiatives and to identify gaps in faculty support programs for online adjunct faculty. Furthermore, the research study can be used by individual academic departments in making departmental decisions about online teaching policies as well as for inter-departmental efforts to better support online adjunct faculty for success.

3.4 Qualitative Research

In conducting this needs assessment, the researcher utilized qualitative research, using focus groups to find answers to the research questions. According to Sutton and Austin (2015), qualitative research can help researchers to access the thoughts and feelings of research participants, which can enable development of an understanding of the meaning that people ascribe to their experiences. As the researcher sought to understand the experiences and perspectives of online adjunct faculty members, qualitative research via focus group interviews proved to be the most appropriate research method in order to discover relevant answers to the research questions.

3.5 Focus Group Interviews

This study was conducted using the qualitative research approach of focus group interviews. Using focus groups to interview online adjunct faculty at DACC made it possible to bring together a group of faculty who have similar experiences but varying perspectives (Gupta, et al., 2014). This method, as supported by Cyr (2016), enabled the researcher to collect multiple reactions simultaneously and it helped to reveal group-level consensus on phenomena. Cyr (2016) asserts, "the primary objective of focus groups is to generate conversations that uncover individual opinions regarding a particular issue; they also reveal group consensus, where it exists, on the issue at hand" (para. 6). As perspectives were sought from the focus group participants, this method provided feedback to answer the primary research questions.

3.6 Sample

Brown (2002) writes that a needs assessment study should contain a representative sample of participants directly related to the organization and who have varying experience levels to create validity in the results. With this in mind, the study participants were drawn from an initial group of 77 online adjunct faculty at DACC. Each of the online adjunct faculty were online instructors for DACC during the spring semester of 2019.

In seeking voluntary participation, an email was drafted and sent to this group of adjunct faculty, as seen in Appendix A. This solicitation email briefly explained the purpose of the research, a request for participation in the focus group and information on why this research can be beneficial to them. In the Focus Group Guide published by the Center for Community College

Student Engagement titled *Faculty Sample Focus Group Guide*, a suggested strategy for encouraging people to attend focus groups is to present the interview topic clearly to those whom have a strong stake in the topic being discussed. With DACC adjunct faculty likely to benefit from their own input, this strategy proved successful in finding focus group participants (Community College Student Engagement, 2017).

3.6.1 Participation Recruitment

Invitations to participate in the focus groups were extended to faculty members who communicated a willingness to participate, found in Appendix A. With the goal of initially having 25 willing online adjunct faculty, 20 participants were ultimately selected based on the requirement that the online adjunct faculty must have instructed at least one full semester of an online section previous to the spring 2019 semester. Additionally, with the goal of achieving a diverse group of online adjunct faculty for the focus group interviews, as suggested by Brown (2002), an effort was made to select adjunct faculty from various academic programs. However, this effort was halted due to a limited group of participants; each of the 20 willing online adjunct faculty was included in the focus groups without regard to academic program affiliation.

The formal invitation, seen in Appendix B, was delivered to participants 10-14 days before each focus group meeting date as recommended in the *Faculty Sample Focus Group Guide* published by the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2017). The Focus Group sessions were conducted last January and throughout February. As recommended in the *Faculty Sample Focus Group Guide* (2017), in addition to the general invitation, participants were sent a personalized correspondence (see Appendix C) one week prior to the interview date, as well as a phone call to each participant the day before the focus group, reminding the participant of the

session, including directions to the location, and confirming attendance. Participants were provided coffee, tea, water and various pastries during each focus group session as a means to show gratitude for their time and efforts.

3.7 Data Collection

20 online adjunct faculty were split into five separate focus groups, averaging four participants per group. Each participant was provided a variety of dates and locations to attend. The two main locations were the DACC East Mesa campus and the Espina campus, two campuses within Las Cruces separated by 10 miles. The participants quickly replied their preferences and with that information the focus groups were organized and scheduled. In order to secure space for the focus groups, the researcher coordinated with the DACC Academic Scheduling office. Each of the five focus groups were held in various classrooms, depending on room availability.

The focus group method was guided based on a semi-structured format. Semi-structured interview formats allow the researcher to receive the same types of information from each participant yet allow opportunities for elaboration and further probing. This type of focus group interview is popular because it has proven to be both versatile and flexible (Pathak & Intratat, 2016). The main advantages of semi-structured interviews in focus groups is that this method has been found to be successful in enabling dialogue between the interviewer and interviewees (Galletta 2012); enabling the interviewer to improvise follow-up questions based on participants' responses and in allowing space for participants' individual verbal expressions (Pathak, et al., 2016).

The interview was aligned with an interview protocol, provided in Appendix D. The protocol consisted of main questions, probing questions, and follow-up questions (*Faculty Sample Focus Group Guide*, 2017). In the protocol, there were 11 questions overall including 3 background/warm-up questions. Each of the questions were written to align with the main research questions of this dissertation and helped the researcher learn about the participants' online teaching experiences, faculty support experiences and corresponding thoughts and opinions of specific needs. The majority of the questions were open-ended which allowed for a conversational nature of answers. The open-ended questions format helped obtain valuable information by allowing participants to follow through with their thought process of the various experiences.

The sessions occurred at the main DACC campus called the East Mesa campus location, in the Administration building in the main conference room directly across from the Office of Institutional Analysis, along with various available spaces at the DACC Espina campus location. Each session lasted 60-75 minutes.

Each session included myself as the facilitator. An iPad and an iPhone were employed as the main recording devices with the iPad being the primary recording device and the iPhone serving as the backup recording device. The recordings were transcribed from the audio recordings files through the free transcription application called "Otter Voice".

Each interview began with an opening statement from the moderator. This statement included an introduction from the moderator with the goal of creating a level of comfort among the participants. The moderator included a statement on consent and confidentiality and their freedom to halt participation at any time. The statement continued on to include reminders to participants of the value of differing points of view (*Faculty Sample Focus Group Guide,* 2017) and was followed by brief introductions of participants included general information, such as a)

name, b) how long they've taught at the college, including both face-to-face and online, c) academic department and e) experience outside the college. Subsequently, the interview moved onto the main interview protocol questions found in Appendix D. To conclude each focus group interview session, the moderator informed the participants of the expected turnaround time for when they would be provided with a summary report of the session and to reinforce safe and confidential handling of the recorded transcripts and notes. Lastly, they were thanked for their time.

3.8 Participant Occupation

The pool of participants was divided into categories according to their primary occupation. The categories included *full-time adjunct faculty*, *university staff member, full-time professional off-campus* and *retired.* The largest group were the online adjunct faculty who identified as retired. This group consisted of 35% of the participant pool. Next, at 25% each were full-time adjunct faculty and full-time professional off-campus. These were followed by university staff member at 10%.

Table 1. Participants' Occupations

	Occupation	Veteran Online Instructor or New (V or N)
Participant 1	Adjunct Faculty	V
Participant 2	Adjunct Faculty	N
Participant 3	Adjunct Faculty	V
Participant 4	Adjunct Faculty	N
Participant 5	Adjunct Faculty at Multiple Institutions	N
Participant 6	Adjunct Faculty at Multiple Institutions	V
Participant 7	DACC Staff	V
Participant 8	NMSU Staff	V
Participant 9	Off-campus professional	N
Participant 10	Off-campus professional	N
Participant 11	Off-campus professional	N
Participant 12	Off-campus professional	N
Participant 13	Off-campus professional	V
Participant 14	Retired	V
Participant 15	Retired	V
Participant 16	Retired	V
Participant 17	Retired	V
Participant 18	Retired	V
Participant 19	Retired	V
Participant 20	Retired	V
Totals		14 Veteran and 6 New

Note:
Veteran online instructor indicates more than 2 semesters of online teaching experience
New online instructor indicates less than 2 semesters of online teaching experience
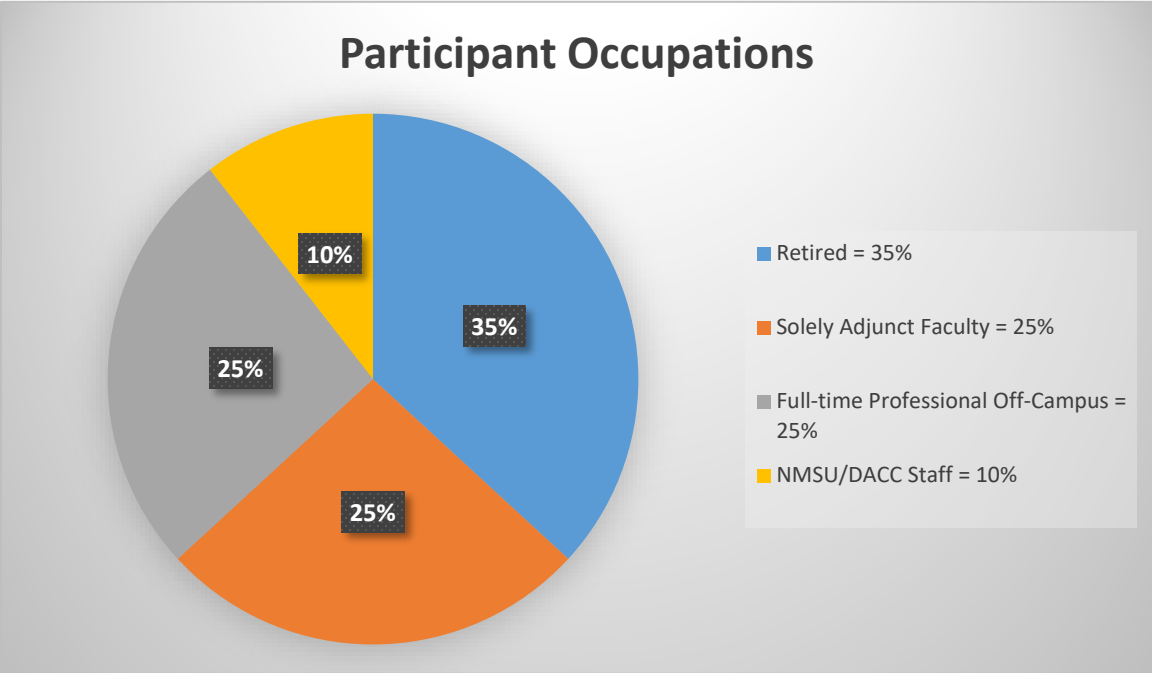
Figure 1. Participant Occupation by Procentage

3.9 Data Analysis

Inductive analysis was used in interpreting transcribed focus group conversations. Inductive analysis refers to approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts and themes through interpretations made from raw data (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). This afforded the researcher the ability to identify research findings as they emerged "from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data" (Thomas, 2006, p. 238).

After each focus group concluded, the researcher used the transcription software Otter Voice to transcribe the conversations. In order to accurately generate meaning out of transcribed focus group feedback, the transcripts were analyzed, with the researcher looking for patterns and

themes, seeing plausibility by looking for what makes good sense. This was done by inductively forming categories and iteratively sorting things into these categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

As part of inductive data analysis, the researcher employed thematic analysis as he sought to discover patterns and themes in subject feedback as they emerged from the data through careful examination and constant comparison (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016, p. 2) of the transcribed feedback. Categories were then created in order to employ coding schemes. Ryan and Bernard (2003) write that creating thematic categories is the first step in discovering themes. After the researcher created categories, he used the strategy of emergent coding in creating coding schemes in an effort to conduct data reduction, as Miles and Huberman (1994) encourage:

> Coding schemes, developed inductively or driven by research questions, are a critical data reduction tool. They may include descriptive codes, as well as second level explanatory (pattern) codes. They are intimately related to the storage and retrieval system used to manage qualitative data. (p. 25)

In using coding schemes in an effort to conduct data reduction, common words and phrases were identified and categorized according to their meanings and what they were in reference to. This reduced a significant portion of conversational banter and off-topic conversations and helped narrow the data to key words and phrases. Furthermore, these words and phrases helped generate that themes used in this research.

The data was stored digitally in the cloud-based storage software Box. These files include interviews transcripts, protocols, and coding files. The files are kept in a password protected Box account that is accessible only to the researcher. Further, notes taken during the focus group interviews are stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's personal office.

The process of sorting through thematic coding was conducted along with the theoretical frameworks of andragogy and social development theory. In completing the analysis while examining transcripts and conducting thematic coding, the researcher kept these two theories in mind to guide the findings as they related to andragogy and social development theory. This provided a value as this study is framed around these two theories and the focus group protocol was structured and aligned to these theories. Specifically, key words mentioned by participants were highlighted that related to andragogy or social development theory.

3.10 Credibility and Trustworthiness

In order to ensure credibility and trustworthiness of this study, several strategies were used. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described four general types of trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Among the procedures they described, those most applicable in performing data analyses for the research are the following: 1) member checks, also referred to as stakeholder checks, as part of establishing credibility, and 2) peer debriefings (Thomas, 2006, p. 243).

Thomas (2006) writes that member checks involve opportunities for people with a specific interest in the evaluation, such as participants, service providers, and funding agencies, to comment on categories or the interpretations made (p. 243). Member checks enhance the credibility of findings by allowing participants and other people who may have specific interests in the evaluation to comment on or assess the research findings, interpretations, and conclusions. Such checks may be important in establishing the credibility of the findings (Thomas, 2006, p. 244). Furthermore, Mertens (2015) recommends acquiring feedback on the draft report from

participants, who, in this case are also stakeholders, as a strategy to improve trustworthiness. This recommendation was employed by providing focus group participants with a brief summary report of the initial research, including emergent findings, to ensure credibility and trustworthiness. This provided an opportunity for interviewees to review the preliminary findings and an opportunity to include any final thoughts to the researcher. Nothing substantive came from this as the participants who responded simply said "Thank you".

Peer debriefings involve having colleagues and others with similar research experience review the findings and provide feedback (Thomas, 2006). This is an important step in ensuring credibility and trustworthiness as it provides additional opinions and suggestions. The researcher was in contact with fellow NMSU colleagues who have earned terminal degrees and completed dissertation defenses on similar topics related to online teaching and faculty support to receive their feedback on the study progress. The feedback received informed the researcher that the findings from the focus groups are consistent with colleagues' experiences and of generally known challenges.

Overall, the process of this research and the data found was confirmed as credible and trustworthy. Through member checks and peer debriefings, challenges in supporting online faculty were found, not just with adjunct faculty, but among all faculty who teach online. However, the challenges of supporting online adjunct faculty are magnified due to the varied schedules and locales.

3.11 Reflexivity

In 2008, as a new adjunct faculty member at DACC, I was fortunate to teach face-to-face courses in addition to my full-time job at the time in Student Services at New Mexico State University. In 2010, I was asked to take on two online courses with the requirement that I enroll in an "introduction" style training to learn about the Learning Management System, which at the time was Blackboard. I recall being confident, but not knowing fully what teaching online required in terms of instructional design, online presence, schedule discipline and overall online teaching. I was also aware that the teaching position for these online courses became available because my colleague, a fellow adjunct faculty, who had taught those sections declined the teaching assignment.

My first semester was filled with errors, poor instructional design and an overall lack of online pedagogical skills. Only after I sought help on my own did I begin to develop adequate skills of online teaching and online course design. I developed decent curriculum and pedagogical strategies, as assessed in my faculty supervisor evaluation. Seeking help, however, was not mandated by my academic program or the community college that employed me. It was strictly an individual endeavor.

Two years later, due in part to my online teaching interest and experience, I was hired as an online teaching instructional consultant, tasked with supporting online and hybrid faculty in online teaching. I encountered many adjunct faculty who were struggling in the same way I had struggled and I was able to build a rapport with these adjunct faculty to assist them in online teaching. Over the semesters, I observed a troubling common theme of newly hired adjunct faculty who were assigned to teach online having significant difficulties. These adjunct faculty would visit my department offices and lab seeking help to learn how to teach online, often a short time before

the semester began. I noticed there was a brief sense of urgency and then we would not see the adjunct faculty until the end of the semester or until the following semester. This became a cyclical observation as turnover of adjunct faculty for online courses continued, especially as the hiring of adjunct faculty at DACC increased.

I believe this study provides an important component to faculty support overall by offering information and recommendations to enhance support for online adjunct faculty, not simply faculty from an overall stance. A more nuanced, customized strategy for providing effective faculty support for online adjunct faculty has the potential to strengthen the overall quality of online courses at DACC. As DACC administration and academic programs seek to expand and/or strengthen online courses while simultaneously hiring adjunct faculty to instruct these courses, my goal is to provide research-supported information that can help direct the online academic presence and online course quality of academic programs at DACC, creating a lasting positive impact.

3.12 Researcher Role

I have worked with faculty at New Mexico State University, DACC and at the University of Pittsburgh with Pitt *Online* as an instructional consultant and instructional designer. The duties for these roles have included online faculty mentorship and general online instructional technical support. As of 2019, my focus again is on supporting faculty in teaching online, effectively using learning software, and generally assisting in my institution's overall goal of enhancing the quality of its online courses and online pedagogical quality. In conducting this research, I used my role to strengthen this research. Through my experiences, I was able to drive the discussions of the focus group sessions by having a thorough understanding of online adjunct faculty challenges. I have a

deep understanding of adjunct faculty time limitation, technical challenges and areas that are common challenges for adjunct faculty teaching online.

3.13 Reciprocity

The results and recommendations found in this dissertation was shared with DACC leadership with the objective of further informing the administration, academic departments and faculty support units of the challenges that adjunct faculty face in teaching online and possible methods of enhancing support for this group of faculty. An executive summary will be shared with the leadership of DACC. Additionally, the summary may be presented, pending acceptance, at a conference at New Mexico State University for Online Teaching and Learning in the Spring of 2020. I plan to submit proposals to present at various Online Teaching and Learning conferences as they will be terrific opportunities to reach various higher education institutions across the state of New Mexico.

3.14 Researcher's Epistemology

As I immersed myself in this study, I viewed it from the constructivist epistemology. I used this view based on the nature of my work, which my research extends from. Working in faculty development and training and conducting research in the same area, I was guided in developing a deeper understanding of my role based on my own experiences with faculty who hold vastly

different personality types, learning types, experiences and online teaching needs based on the topic and their individual online pedagogy.

In constructivism, knowledge is created as a direct interaction between the investigator and the object of investigation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Constructivism, also referred to as "naturalistic inquiry" by Lincoln and Guba (1985), fit my research based on the differing interactions I have had with faculty and the wide range of learning styles of faculty whom I work with. "From an instructional standpoint, constructivist approaches typically consider the learner to be active in the process of meaning-making and creating knowledge (Duffy, Muis & Foy, 2017, p. 268).

Supporting faculty is a non-linear practice, often unpredictable and unique in each interaction. Therefore, learning to adjust and make directional changes in guidance is necessary. This requires the faculty support professional to utilize self-regulated learning strategies. Duffy et al., write, "Self-regulated learning strategies, such as planning, monitoring and evaluating often find their way into constructivist accounts of learning" (Duffy, et al., 2017, p. 268). Moreover, adjunct faculty support involves new and constantly updating software programs which forces those providing the support to constantly, efficiently and effectively learn as a result of the continuous introduction of new technology and updates to existing technology. Duffy et al. (2017) asserts that those who adhere to constructivist beliefs typically believe that knowledge is tentative, complex, and contextual, and also believe that learning is a gradual and effortful purpose (Duffy, et al., 2017, p. 268).

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3.15 Limitations

This study has various limitations. There may be assumption bias on my part that adjunct faculty are not supported adequately and when gathering feedback from adjunct faculty who teach online, there is a chance this bias will appear. Additionally, this study was conducted at DACC, a small institution that has endured vast budget difficulties over the past five years. DACC has a relatively small online adjunct faculty population that varies semester-to-semester, ranging from 75-90. The findings of this research may only be applicable to other small community college institutions with smaller budgets, not to larger public universities will more resources.

4.0 Results

Chapter 4 presents the research findings of a needs assessment study at Doña Ana Community College. This chapter includes insight into the experiences of the online adjunct faculty participants, including in-depth opinions, experiences and perceptions related to their online teaching experience and their experiences with institutional support for online instructors. While the experiences, opinions and perceptions are just a sample of the entire online adjunct faculty group, participants provided insights from which distinct themes emerged. This chapter will include numerous examples and verbatim thoughts of participants. The objective of this needs assessment study, through thematic analysis of participant feedback, is to contribute to Doña Ana Community College and its leadership's assessment and strategy of its online education short-term and long-term strategy.

In summarizing the feedback of online adjunct faculty relating to the central research questions of this needs assessment study, themes emerged and were reported as they applied to the guiding research questions. Some themes emerged that were commonly mentioned, though may not have been extensively discussed. Other themes were extensively discussed.

4.1 Research Question 1

What are online adjunct faculty lived experiences of the support and faculty development provided by their institutions?

The first research question was developed with the intent to assess the perceptions held by DACC online adjunct faculty of their experiences in preparing to teach online, the support they have access to and the support they have received.

All 20 participants confirmed that they have completed the mandatory "Introduction to Canvas" course in accordance with DACC online teaching policy, to learn about the learning management system Canvas. Other faculty support activities online adjunct faculty stated they attended consisted of various Canvas trainings held by both the DACC faculty support department Virtual Learning and Instructional Technology (VLIT) and the NMSU faculty support department "Academic Technology" (AT). The majority of participants reported they completed self-paced module-based trainings built by DACC online teaching faculty leaders. The objective of these trainings is to introduce and familiarize those taking it with the basics of building a Canvas course and using a Canvas course to lead a class, either online or hybrid. This is mandatory for new online adjunct faculty and is monitored by VLIT staff.

The focus group participants expressed a mix of reactions about teaching online. The majority communicated and made reference to experiencing feelings of anxiety. The following is a sample of quotes from online adjunct faculty about their first semester teaching online.

- I was glued to my laptop trying to make sure I had all of my ducks in a row

- I was nervous because I had taught in class for years, but never online

- I received help and tried to stay as organized as I could

- I was able to use the course content from the instructor who taught before me. That saved me!

- I thought [online teaching] would be easier and convenient, but after a few weeks I realized it wasn't so easy

Sally, a retiree teaching online courses as an adjunct faculty, said that when she was hired, it was close to the beginning of the semester and she gained access to her course only two weeks before the semester started. "This was really stressful because I was really under a deadline to get my course ready. Other instructors told me that if I was stressed, 'you just need to stay one week ahead of your students during your first semester'."

Daniel, a full-time off-campus professional, said:

I had taken an online course before, but never taught online. I thought the [VLIT] online [self-paced module] course was helpful and it got me started. What made a big difference was I had access to the course from the previous instructor, so that helped.

Jean, who works full-time and teaches two online courses, commented:

I felt I was a little ahead because I had taken online courses and had observed another faculty member's online class. I knew where some of the important resources were to get started.

4.1.1 Theme: Comfort, Transition and Connection

Each participant expressed feelings of discomfort or stress related to the role of being an online instructor due to unfamiliarity of online teaching. This is closely tied to the social development theory in that instructors present themselves to students as experts in their respective fields, holding at least a master's degree in that field, but then feel exposed as novices in online teaching and course design. Participants expressed that this experience was uncomfortable or caused anxiety, although the use of the word "anxiety" was not used in the clinical sense.

Most participants described online teaching as difficult, specifically addressing the difficulty of juggling the combined tasks of 1.) building the online course, 2.) maintaining the online course's components such as assignments and files, 3.) avoiding potential technical issues or finding solutions to those issues, 4.) motivating student to become and stay engaged and finally, 5.) interacting with students and teaching the course content.

When the topic of social development was introduced, one of two theoretical frameworks this study was structured on, several participants joined the discussion, providing similar responses about how it was uncomfortable to go from expert in a topic to beginning learner of online teaching. Participants, including Greg, a retired adjunct faculty, noted that they take pride in having the knowledge and experience in a subject so that they can teach it. They added that they take pride in being good teachers in the traditional classroom and able to make connections with students. However, framed by the social development theoretical framework, specifically social identity change, teaching online is still somewhat of an unfamiliar exercise even after several semesters of online teaching.

Monique, a full-time off-campus professional, made a comment to this same notion:

I like teaching face-to-face. I actually wasn't thrilled with teaching an online course, but I was asked to and I wanted to give it a shot. It wasn't comfortable to begin with and it's still not comfortable. I actually find it really uncomfortable to make what are basically rookie mistakes. Not in the teaching part and connecting with students, but in the tech part of [using online learning tools]. I look like I don't know how to teach, but it's really just me still learning and adjusting. But that's not what my students see.

Monique's quote represents an accurate example of the social identity construct of social development theory. She describes that while she is comfortable teaching and connecting with

students even in an online environment, she experiences feelings of embarrassment when she has online teaching technical difficulties.

Beth, an adjunct faculty teaching a full-time-equivalent load of classes both face-to-face and online, said:

Online teaching is hard, OK? It's hard to keep students engaged. And for my course topic, it's even harder to do it online. How do you teach [this subject] class online? That was something I struggled with. I think I have a strategy to customize the topic to my students' specific interests, but it takes time and there was a big learning curve for me.

Gayle, an online adjunct faculty hoping to move into full-time faculty, agreed with the feelings of anxiety of teaching online, but said her experience has been OK. She said, "I have an extroverted personality and I'll ask for help immediately." She also said that she thinks because she's been an online student, a millennial and is familiar with social media interactions that she has adapted well to online teaching.

In the analysis of the focus group transcripts on the common topic of instructors feeling unprepared and causing feelings of "anxiety" as stated by participants, a noticeable difference was that the majority of online adjunct faculty who are retired expressed feeling more stress than the other online adjunct faculty types. The online adjuncts who work full-time, both on campus and off, expressed feeling anxiety, but this feeling is related to time limitations. Jean, a full-time professional who teaches two online sections, said, "I like teaching online. But when I have other priorities, my online [teaching] priorities get pushed back. So I have to really focus on setting aside time to teach and to ask for help." Jean's statement about her significant challenges of allocating time to receiving help for online teaching exemplify the problem-centered learning principle of

andragogy. Her statement reflects the overall responsibilities faculty carry and highlights the need for specific help on topics that have immediate benefits.

The newer online adjunct faculty made comments that online teaching is a challenge but did not find it as uncomfortable as those who are retired. The description of being uncomfortable with online teaching included feelings of stress and fear of being unprepared to teach online successfully. The newer online adjunct faculty participants expressed gratefulness for the opportunity to teach online. While they noted that uncomfortableness or "anxiety" is felt, each were happy to be teaching and held less pointed criticisms.

A retired online adjunct faculty named John stood out from other retired adjunct faculty members when he expressed a different mindset compared to the other retired adjunct participants. John said:

> I'm [in my mid-70s] so, you know, this wasn't easy for me. I know students like to interact and stuff online and do less face-to-face stuff and they always have a phone in their face so I had to change my approach to keep communication with them. This wasn't easy but I hung in there.

John mentioned that he found it difficult to connect with students in an online class. He said he found students not responding to Canvas messages or emails so in response he created accounts on social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter. He said he uses each one to reach students because "if it works better for my students, that's how we'll communicate."

4.1.2 Theme: Perception of Disconnect from Academic Community

All of the veteran online adjuncts revealed feeling that they were not a priority to the DACC administration. Each veteran online adjunct provided a unique experience of this same feeling. When asked if she felt included in the academic community, Beth raised her hand, paused, and then said, "I'm going to say no. I feel like we are to simply get through the semester and not cause a fuss." Greg, a retired adjunct faculty, pointed to his experience with a shared faculty cloud storage space called SharePoint in which full-time faculty as well as staff are able to find and use shared documents and DACC data. Greg said:

> For instance, with SharePoint. Most people who are an adjunct faculty cannot easily get on to SharePoint and be able to [learn of] things that are going on. Again, it just doesn't happen. And the only reason I could get on now is I had a program manager who decided I need to have access because I was creating too much stuff for them to do. And so she went back [and added me] so I could get on the SharePoint. But it needed a lot of pushing from me.

Alice, an off-campus professional, concurred, adding:

> There is a lot of helpful information out there on SharePoint, but most of us don't get why we don't have the right email to be able to get onto that. There's a little bit of criticism that, again, that you feel like a little bit isolated, or a little bit on the outskirts of what's going on with the academic community.

Juan, an NMSU/DACC staff member, said:

> Um, I feel like our jobs are to teach our students as best as we can, and I don't have a problem doing that. But I do feel like if we have any issues, we just get through them as best we can and fix them for the next semester.

Others, when asked about disconnectedness with the academic community, expressed similar feelings. All of the statements communicated on this topic ~~all~~ related to feelings of marginalization and being a lower priority. Statements from respondents included the topics of time and effort required and, paired with feeling marginalized, made the respondents for less valued. This is an important finding because it could mean that the online adjunct faculty offer less time and effort in leading online courses which could likely lead to a decrease in online course quality on a large scale.

4.2 Research Question 2

What factors do online adjunct faculty consider influential in being able to offer quality instruction in their online courses?

This question was written with the intent to explore participants' perceptions of areas that they believe have influenced their abilities to improve their online teaching ability.

In a discussion about these, common themes emerged that included previous experience as a student in an online course, previous online teaching experience, departmental guidance, the "Basic Online Course Check" (BOCC) and Quality Matters certification requirements.

4.2.1 Theme: Valuable Previous Experience in Online Courses

In conversations about what has influenced the online teaching experiences of participants, previous experience as an online student was referenced by 11 out of 20 participants. Sally, a retiree online adjunct, mentioned:

My experience as a student in [an online course] really helped me because it gave me perspective of what my students are currently and have been experiencing in my online course. I remember things that were frustrating, disorganized and just plain bad. I kept those things in my memory because I wanted to fix these areas or do better.

Daniel gave credit to his time in an online course as a significant influencer to his online teaching progress. He said:

So, when I took online classes about five years ago, things were still getting there and it could be rough at times. The instructors either didn't know how to do some things and then, um, let's say didn't like to be made aware of their mistake. Or they were just really hard to get ahold of. I mean, I would send messages about broken links and problems with our assignments and it would take days or weeks to get a reply! I use this experience in my online class to do better because I know what it's like and how helpful it is to have a teacher that replies in a timely manner.

Participants also mentioned previous experience teaching online has been highly influential, perhaps more so than previous experience as an online student. Of the 14 veteran adjunct faculty, all made note that previous experience teaching online has been influential in improving their online teaching abilities. Juan, a full-time DACC employee, highlighted this thought when he said:

Really, learning by making mistakes, some embarrassing mistakes, helped me. I would do some dumb things like how I had my course set up to … any number of things. As I worked with my online students and got some feedback, I realized that there were many things I could do better so I got help [from Academic Technology], read some of the resources and guides. I got better but I had to make some mistakes along the way.

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Greg agreed, expressing the same opinion, saying:

> I felt some pressure when I first started teaching online because I wanted to do well. When I realize I've done something wrong or stupid, I try to fix it right away. I've been teaching for a long time now and I still make mistakes, you know. I'm not perfect. That's how I get better though and it's probably one of the more impacting factors since we're talking about what has influenced us.

John, a retiree teaching online, said:

> I very much like teaching and interacting with students. It's a challenge but it keeps me going. I think we all make mistakes, especially teaching online. I like to keep my communication lines open with my students so they can let me know as soon as possible if something is wrong. I mean, if something is not working, I want to know. In fact, I offered my students extra credit to find problems, legitimate problems, with my course. It gives them an incentive to find stuff and it helps me correct those problems faster. I think it works for everybody! [inaudible and laughs] I hope that because of this, I'm a better teacher and I have less and less problems in my course.

Learning by mistakes emerged as a sub-theme regarding previous experience in teaching online courses. It is also a key principle in the adult learning theory of andragogy. A central tenant of learning at every level depends on making mistakes to propel learning (Benestad, Hygen, Dorland, Cook, & Nuccitelli, 2013). As the participants pointed out, including John, making mistakes has been key in learning how to improve online teaching strategies.

Used as a central theoretical framework for this research, andragogy emphasizes the principles of adult learning which are: 1) Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction, 2) Experience (including mistakes) provides a basis for learning activities, 3)

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Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to their job or personal life, and 4) Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented (Knowles, 1984). The participants frequently made statements that tie in with these principles, notably learning by making mistakes, showing a desire to learn about topics that have immediate relevance to their job and learning based on immediate problems rather than the overall content. Furthermore, offering training in shorter segments on topics that will be immediately beneficial to faculty will likely lead to improved faculty development in online teaching.

4.2.2 Theme: Departmental Guidance

Each of the participants were hired as adjunct faculty based on the fact that they are experts in their respective fields. However, none consider themselves an expert online instructor. In conversations about differences in departmental support, a common discussion topic centered on departmental guidance in how to teach online. Aside from the general requirement of taking either an hour-long "Introductory"-style training on how to use the learning management system Canvas, the online adjunct participants came to an agreed perspective that a sufficient support structure for new and veteran online adjuncts is highly influential. Participants also mentioned that department chairs that offer a structure and organized support for adjunct faculty can make a major difference. Specifically, participants mentioned departments that had full-time online instructors go through the online courses of adjunct faculty before the semester began with a custom checklist to provide feedback. The participants noted that they found this helpful.

Furthermore, department-coordinated mentor pairing received positive feedback from participants who had the opportunity to be paired with a veteran online instructor. The findings

about mentoring are discussed further in section 4.4.2.1. This does introduce the question of cost-effectiveness as departmental efforts require time and attention and likely some funding source.

4.2.3 Theme: DACC Institutional Standards

Within the last few years, DACC began conducting course checks of online courses. These checks included an agreed-upon standard checklist of items that should exist in each online course. This is called the Basic Online Course Check (BOCC). This has shown to be one of the more instrumental institutional processes to increase the content quality of online courses.

4.2.3.1 Basic Online Course Check

While incurring some pushback from faculty, the majority of faculty have accepted the BOCC process, as evidenced by focus group participant statements and this researcher's own experience in working with online adjunct faculty. Of the focus group participants, none had complaints about this process. Fernando expressed support for the BOCC as something that he said has helped motivate him and he said he has observed that it has motivated his fellow online adjunct faculty members. He added that he thinks this motivates online faculty to spend time in their online courses and ensure they have the content and activity to pass the BOCC. If instructors do not meet the criteria, an email with the missing items is sent to the instructor and to the department chair. Fernando said, "I think up until the BOCC, many online instructors felt nobody [besides their students] was viewing their courses and were kind of teaching on cruise-control. This sort of makes the course not as good as it should be."

Greg, a retired adjunct faculty, expressed similar views and said he was proud that he has passed the BOCC every semester. He said it was a good strategy in increasing the quality of the online courses because "With instructors now knowing somebody will be looking at their course, they are more likely to pay more attention." Several other participants agreed with Fernando and Greg.

Gayle, a new online instructor who hopes to become a full-time instructor, said about the BOCC:

I think it makes sense and I don't feel any sort of feelings of intrusion. In fact, I would be grateful if they let me know I'm missing something standard like that [the 5 standard requirements]. Let's be real, why would somebody have any problem with this?

Not all participants were satisfied with the BOCC process, however. Jean, a full-time professional, pointed out that the BOCC has caused some of her colleagues, including herself, some confusion and anxiety:

I'm worried that I may not get the information or updated information about what I need to have in the course. Other faculty have said the same. My courses have passed, but it causes a little stress.

Jean alluded to conversations she said she's had with colleagues about the standards being expanded or rumors about benchmarks being added to the standards. This was an interesting finding. While the standards are relatively clear and simple, Jean discussed rumors and myths about the standards being more complicated than they are or rumors about the standards expanding have some online adjunct faculty participants worried and stressed.

As Jean discussed her concern about the BOCC, others indicated related feelings. When asked for further discussion, they pointed out that they could relate to her description of stress, but they understood why the BOCC was implemented.

4.2.3.2 Quality Matters Certification

A common topic that was mentioned in each of the five focus groups centered on the course design and development guidelines QM (Quality Matters). In each focus group session, participants expressed varied support for the near institution-wide requirement that online instructors complete the APPQMR workshop. Most departments at DACC individually require those who teach online to be APPQMR trained, including online adjunct faculty. In the focus groups, the online adjunct faculty often highlighted the fact that they were required to attend an APPQMR workshop and successfully complete it, which requires many hours of personal time in the "QM course". Enrolling in each of the various QM courses requires a fee that is typically paid by the adjuncts' department or by DACC.

While the reception of the QM training requirement was generally positive, the criticisms brought up by various participants included the time involved, for which the participants noted that they were not compensated. Criticisms of the APPQMR training requirements included lack of pay for personal time spent in the workshop. Participants noted that the pay per credit for adjunct faculty was already "peanuts" and in order to earn their "peanuts", they had to not only build, design and teach their courses, they also had to successfully complete the APPQMR course. Sally, a retiree online adjunct, said, "I agree that it's a good thing that all online instructors be [APPQMR trained]. That's not my complaint. I think it is good. I just feel that we should be compensated for the time."

Daniel, a full-time off-campus professional, in a separate focus group session from Sally, had a similar sentiment. Daniel said:

Usually as a professional, if you are required to take a training course where there's a fee, your employer would compensate you for the time. That isn't true here. Don't get me wrong, I'm happy to be teaching online and I spent the time completing the QM course. That's all good because I was happy to teach. I just think it would have been a nice gesture from our administration.

Other criticisms related to the QM training requirement included a lack of acknowledgment. Greg, a retired adjunct faculty, said he felt that the instructors that gained additional levels of QM training, such as QM Peer Reviewer certification, should be recognized with pay raises and if not pay raises, some other form of recognition. Greg said:

It's a lot of work and sometimes I feel that nobody notices. If I do a really top-notch job teaching my online course and am available at the drop of a hat, it's good for my students. I like that. But my department and the leadership [of DACC] don't notice. If I seek out additional certifications through QM and spend the time, I don't think … anybody would take notice except for an 'attaboy' by my department chair.

Alice, an off-campus professional, supported Greg' notion. She pointed out that it would be nice to receive recognition:

I put in time to improve and get better by going through different trainings. I pay attention to my online teaching with focus, but at the end of the day, I feel like to the administration the difference between being an instructor who just goes through the motions of teaching and an instructor like me is negligible.

An important aspect of this finding is centered around the idea that participants feel unnoticed for their efforts. Recognition as a form of reward is a strong influence as expressed by the participants, however they feel their efforts go unnoticed. This should be concerning for stakeholders at DACC who value a strong online education presence. Possible consequences of this include lower quality online learning experiences. If online adjunct instructors feel efforts goes largely unnoticed, desire to improve may also be lessened. Ultimately, this would affect student success and student retention in addition to faculty retention.

Based on the feedback from participants for Research Question 2, the most prevalent factors that online adjunct faculty at DACC consider influential in being able to offer quality instruction in their online courses consist of 1) previous online experience as a student, teacher or both; 2) strong and quality departmental guidance; and 3) DACC Institutional Standards, which include the BOCC (Basic Online Course Check) and QM training.

Participants in each focus group session gave strong recognition to previous experience in online courses. Experience in online courses as both student and instructor was a central tenant in the factors that helped online adjunct faculty be quality online instructors.

Furthermore, departmental guidance was shown to have played an important role in the success or struggle of online adjunct faculty. If departments offered an effective and efficient online adjunct onboarding and continual support through methods such as mentor paring, the online adjunct faculty expressed gratitude and felt prepared. Conversely, if departments did not offer these support methods and placed on online teaching skill-building responsibility solely on the adjunct faculty, the participants stated that they struggled in their online teaching venture.

The third prevalent factor that online adjunct faculty considered influential to their online teaching abilities centered on institutional standards, particularly the BOCC and QM training.

Respondents gave credit to BOCC as an accountability measure; communicating that their online courses are not closed just to them and students but are instead examined for basic online course components. The QM training received appreciation from participants as an effective way to conceptualize on quality online course and a training that, had it not be required, would likely have not be revealed to the online adjunct faculty.

In summary, respondents' statements regarding factors influential to their online teaching success should bring into focus the efforts that are resulting in more effective and quality online teaching.

4.3 Research Question 3

What factors most influence online adjunct faculty to seek or not seek support?

This question was designed to address the influences of seeking or not seeking support. Some of the reasons for not seeking support had to do largely with self-motivation and intrinsic goals of giving quality online learning experiences. Rather than direct criticism of the support of the support available, faculty commonly stated that they are motivated to self-teach or receive help from a colleague. Some participants said they would attend trainings if they were struggling with an important component of Canvas, such as the Gradebook or the Canvas Quiz Tool. Two participants said that because they are retired, they are able to attend trainings often and they do so out of a desire to improve. Decisions to not seek support via trainings or phone calls had largely to do with time limitations.

Sally, a retiree online adjunct, said that the main support she has received has not been through the DACC institutional support unit VLIT nor through her department. She pointed out

that her daughter has taught online, which has been positive because she can ask for help from her daughter. She added that it is not common for online adjunct faculty to be in her position.

> I feel like [the VLIT unit] might be helpful, but I also have heard it's an understaffed unit. My daughter has been really good with this technology and teaching online so if I have a question or run into an issue, I'm able to get her help right away.

Alice's statements make a direct tie to the principle of andragogy in that she was seeking assistance in a specific area and concerned with time efficiency. Her statement indicated she had a question, so she sought an immediate remedy; so she asked her daughter.

4.3.1 Theme: Time

Concerns about time spent teaching an online course were common with participants. Many participants at some point during the focus groups pointed out that building and maintaining an online course while also trying to teach and connect with students in the online course is time consuming. Participants, such as Greg, a retired adjunct faculty, Meghan, a newer online adjunct faculty, and Rossana, also a newer online adjunct faculty and a stay-at-home mother, commented that if they can make little improvements and avoid "messing everything up and having students confused" they would do it themselves and also maybe ask colleagues for advice. Meghan said that she would like to attend some trainings "to learn a few tricks" but said she has too many other things going on and that "as long as my class feels like it's moving smoothly, I'm OK."

The online adjunct faculty who worked full-time jobs off-campus were deliberate in mentioning the issue of time. Jean made a point that the time she spends with her course and being present in the course usually occurs on the weekends, noting that her time during the week is consumed with work and family obligations.

Limitations in time were identified as factors by 11 out of 20 participants. However, Greg, a retired online adjunct faculty who lives over an hour away from the campus, stated he didn't have an issue with time. He added that while he feels he is "uniquely motivated" to improve his online teaching and maintain a quality online course, he will usually spend the time to learn from other resources such as the online-only Canvas Guides, an in-depth online repository of topic-organized guides for everything about Canvas, including features such as Assignments, the Canvas Inbox, Quizzes, Discussions and how to use Student Groups in Canvas.

A significant difference emerged in that, like Greg, the retired faculty participants had less issue about time limitations. Each of the seven retired online adjunct faculty mentioned their success in being readily available to their student inquiries. The nine online adjunct faculty who worked full-time or taught as an adjunct faculty a full-time equivalent course load, frequently mentioned time as a limiting factor and that it was a leading cause in creating feelings described by participants as anxiety.

4.3.2 Theme: Dissatisfaction with Adjunct Pay Levels

A common theme found by analyzing the transcripts of the focus groups was a general dissatisfaction with adjunct pay levels. Specifically, and as previously mentioned, participants mentioned the amount of time needed to create, maintain and teach an online course far outweighed the pay level. Several participants stated this was an impeding factor in going the extra step in improving the quality of the online learning experience for students or trying new strategies. Jean, a full-time off-campus professional, stated that she wants to do a good job and she's motivated to be a good online course instructor. However, she added that if she can learn or make an improvement relatively quickly, she will. She said:

The pay is so low and compared to the time I already put in to teach the course, I have other priorities that I just … won't dedicate that amount of time. I hate to say that because it sounds bad, but we really get paid very little here.

It was agreed upon by the participants that the low per-credit pay for online adjunct faculty plays a role in the amount of time spent building and maintaining the course as well as seeking out support to improve the educational experience of the students. It is a finding that suggests low pay may impede quality of online teaching. Pay levels were specifically mentioned by four participants as playing a role in deciding whether to "drive all the way to campus, find parking and attend a training". One participant said, "I'm teaching a two-credit [online] class that is very time-consuming and everybody here knows how little a 2-credit class pays. I have a job and kids that need my attention too." This participant went on to say they would rely on colleagues for help.

Overall, the participants of the focus groups communicated that they felt because of the low pay that the DACC administration does not see them as valuable and that the DACC administration simply wants to online courses delivered. Conversely, each agreed that they find teaching at DACC to be intrinsically valuable and are happy to teach.

An important finding is the link between pay and lower quality online instruction, as the participants either alluded to or directly stated, such as by Jean. Participants state that there is a direct impact of what they see as low compensation and effort in online course teaching. If online courses are considered by the DACC administration as important moving forward and an important strategic effort to increase enrollment, it should then be equally important to maintain and improve the quality of the online courses that DACC offers.

4.3.3 Theme: Influences and Motivations

Participants communicated varying influences and motivations for seeking out support or not seeking out support. The three common types of influences included intrinsic motivation, long-term career motivation and life-style motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to rewards that are personal and internal rather than some type of external reward, known as extrinsic reward, such as money, objects, career rewards, etc. (Cherry, 2017).

4.3.3.1 Intrinsic Motivation

Participants noted that the large majority of their influence or motivation to lead quality online courses, provide quality online learning experiences and seek help from faculty support was self-derived and personal. Self-motivation was a common theme with participants explaining that their objective is to be a good educator.

Fernando said his motivation to teach online and provide quality online learning experiences comes from the intrinsic benefits of playing an important role in his community at the college but also in the community of Las Cruces. He said when he first started teaching online courses that he didn't feel comfortable and he had challenges with his and his students' identities:

> I taught a class online for the first time and it was kind of nice because I'm not like a professional in communication verbally. My background is in writing. But I felt [in the face-to-face class] a little bit like an imposter in that class. It was like, it was like a class where, to me at least at the time, I felt this way because I was still learning and I didn't know how to make it an engaging course. For me, the online course just allowed me to be more straightforward and it eliminated any awkwardness. I ended up doing my dissertation on online pedagogy and online identity.

Fernando followed by saying he learned to build online courses and teach online courses and he took on the role of his department to lead inter-departmental informal guidance for adjuncts and graduate students. "I continue to teach online like I have pretty much every semester for the last seven years." Fernando also said his motivation includes a topic he completed his graduate dissertation on; Online Education and Student Identity. To summarize, he said that in an online class, students lose their identity as their identity is unknown to other students. Aside from what photo they use in their avatar, if they use a photo, there is a lack of identity among students and the instructor. He said his motivation was to lessen this as an issue by creating strategies to improve student-student and student-teacher interactions by using video conferencing and more valuable discussion assignments that use smaller groups.

4.3.3.2 Long-term Career Motivation

Cosette said she is motivated to become a quality online instructor partly because of her goal to eventually be hired as a full-time instructor. She said:

I'm really happy to be teaching and feel lucky to have the chance to teach online. If I don't feel confident in something I'm doing, or I think I could do something better, I'll ask my colleagues or go see Sonia [manager of VLIT]. Each of the four full-time adjunct faculty participants felt similar motivation.

A common theme among the newer online adjunct faculty was opportunity. The opportunity to get a "foot in the door" as Cosette, Meghan, Rossana and Daniel mentioned, played a big role in their motivation. The shared objective of using the online adjunct faculty experience to propel their careers or at least play a significant role in their future professional careers was highlighted by Rossana:

I like that I'm getting this experience because I think a lot of opportunities will open

up that teaching online will help me with. I don't think online is going anywhere.

Having this experience will hopefully be a big plus for me.

This finding represents a positive development for DACC. Providing career opportunity for those interested in teaching at the college level can be considered an advantage for both parties. This provides a uniquely strong influence for new online instructors to be trained and improve their online teaching before what can be described as lack-of-support fatigue that many veteran online adjunct faculty describe.

4.3.3.3 Lifestyle Motivation

John, Juan and Beth, among others, pointed to the fact that they are motivated to become quality online instructors and seek out support, in part because of the flexibility teaching an online course provides. John, a retired online adjunct faculty said, "I love the ability to travel and connect to my class wherever I am. The freedom is terrific." He followed up with, "I like this perk and if I'm a good online instructor, I'm doing OK. And I enjoy teaching and my interactions with students."

A contrast between the more experienced online adjunct faculty, specifically the retired online adjunct faculty, is the commonality that the retired faculty, as a group, showed their motivation to be to give back to students, stay busy and take on the challenge of keeping up with new and emerging learning technologies.

4.3.3.4 Theme: Student Feedback

The online adjunct participants discussed the influence of student feedback through routine dialogue with their students, through course-specific surveys, which are created by the instructors and typically used for instructor-only feedback, and through DACC official evaluations. The

student evaluations for online courses emerged as a particularly sensitive or influential factor in motivating online adjunct faculty to seek out support. Sally, a retired online adjunct faculty, mentioned that now as an online instructor her most valuable feedback comes from instructor evaluations. She said:

> As difficult as they are to read sometimes, the feedback can be really helpful. I'll know the areas I have to improve, so I can work on those by getting help from my daughter or going to [Academic Technology].

Kandi, a full-time adjunct faculty participant, expressed similar perspectives regarding the influence of student evaluations. She said:

> I find them useful because there are some things that I don't think are too bad, but when they come out in the evals, it makes me want to do something to fix them. Most [evaluations] are nice, but some can be rude. I try not to let them, you know, hurt my feelings so I made improvements. If they are bad, I'm usually asking my colleagues or support for help.

As discussed earlier, John, a retired online adjunct instructor, has a process for his students to help him make his course better. He does this by offering his students extra credit to find problems in his online course and find areas that are confusing or wrong. He said this helps him fix problems quickly and helps his students by awarding extra credit.

4.4 Research Question 4

What do online adjunct faculty perceive as lacking or needing improvements in the institutional support, specifically for online adjunct faculty?

This question was designed to gauge online adjunct faculty perceptions of areas that were lacking or needing improvements. This was the most discussed area by the participants. The common themes that emerged related to this research questions centered on the perception of a general feeling of apathy from the institution to online adjunct faculty members.

4.4.1 Theme: Perspective of Feeling Low-Value to DACC

Participants generally expressed feeling low-value to the institution. One reason for this expressed by multiple participants was a lack of recognition. Participants brought up the opinion that for online adjunct faculty at DACC, there isn't much recognition. John, a retired online adjunct, said:

> You know, I work on my courses and creating good courses for my students and spend a lot of time and effort. I completed advanced QM certifications and I take a lot on myself to do a good job. I don't feel like anybody recognizes this, I mean besides my students. I feel like the administration wouldn't care if the course was mediocre or average or if it was excellent like I think my course is. I just wish sometimes there was some sort of recognition for online adjunct faculty like a pay increase or being recognized with an award because a lot of us already feel on the outside.

> Alice, an off-campus professional, concurred with this sentiment saying that she feels like she goes above and beyond and provides good quality courses, but nobody seems to notice and "by the time somebody might notice through things like [student evaluations], we are already moving our focus to the next semester."

The findings related to this theme are important because there is a strong association between feeling valuable and spending time and effort to produce high quality online learning

experiences for students. Online adjunct instructors who view themselves as not valuable to the institution could have a direct effect on the quality of the online courses they teach. The data reveals as much with multiple participants mentioning the large amounts of time and effort dedicated to their online teaching yet receiving little appreciation or recognition. Furthermore, participants add they are on a semester-to-semester contract with little pay, no benefits and uncertain appointments.

4.4.2 Theme: Ways to Improve Adjunct Online Faculty Support

The focus group transcripts included several ideas and thoughts on this topic. The ideas were numerous. The commons areas listed below include a common resource page for online adjunct faculty, expanding the staffing levels of VLIT, and making available pre-built courses. In addition, the previously mentioned "mentoring" strategy had unanimous support as something that would help online adjunct faculty.

4.4.2.1 Develop Inter-Departmental Mentorship Pairing

Daniel, a full-time off-campus professional, shared his experience saying that he was grateful his department chair paired him with a full-time faculty member whom he could ask questions of about his online course. He said this was a department-specific effort of pairing new online adjunct faculty with veteran full-time online instructors.

While the veteran online adjuncts and the newer online had varying experiences with departmental guidance, with some paired with a faculty mentor and others not, both groups agreed that some form of faculty mentorship would be a positive influence in their online teaching

responsibilities. Cosette, Jean, Fernando and Daniel, all adjuncts teaching for the same department, described a faculty mentor pairing support initiative and other forms of support initiated by the department chair. Cosette, a novice online adjunct, described a positive experience. Cosette stated that in her department she was paired with a full-time faculty mentor. She attributes this pairing to a smooth initial online teaching experience:

> I feel that if I have any questions, my chair immediately answers and so she is so helpful with me in that. I am also coming in from graduate school and a couple of my cohort members are also currently teaching with me here, so we're in it together. But like I said, the mentor that I have is a full-time and he's always welcoming me to come along to research meetings and things like that. So they [academic department] are trying to get me involved any way they can. I've been very grateful.

The other focus group participants expressed resounding support for this and commented that this would have been very beneficial to have when they began online teaching and would be a smart move for all new online teaching adjuncts. Greg, a retired adjunct faculty, said the following:

> Just listening to you [Cosette], you had a mentor and we didn't. We did okay, and I did fine, but I look at myself back when I was starting to teach online that if I had a mentor my development would have been better. I started okay, but having a mentorship program, I think, is a really valuable thing and I don't know how that would work out practically across DACC, but I think it needs to be assessed.

Cosette responded:

> I agree about having a mentorship program in each department because I think there are
> other adjuncts who are like me. I'm a very shy individual and I don't like to ask for help. I
> don't like to seek help, you know? It was nice to have somebody who would informally
> ask me how my class is going and I could ask some quick questions. I think that could help
> people like me who are quieter. I have a friend [and colleague] who is a lot more outgoing
> and he likes to go ask for help, I'm just not like that. Not everybody has the same
> personality.

Cossette made a point to note that not all instructors are outgoing and that some are more
introverted and quieter and will often avoid formally asking for help. The advantage of a mentoring
partnership shaped as informal and conversational in nature is that those online instructors, as
Cossette states, who are not as outgoing as other instructors, may be more comfortable and thus
more likely to seek guidance. Overall, mentoring programs have been found to be critical in online
adjunct faculty success. Institutions which develop mentoring programs for online adjunct faculty
have found success in improving the preparation of the adjunct faculty member for online teaching
as well as lessening the levels of anxiety and feelings of isolation (Brannagan, et al., 2014;
Buckenmeyer, et al., 2013; Rodgers, McIntyre & Jazzar, 2009).

4.4.2.2 Common Resource Page

The adjuncts from the one department referenced a resource page found in the LMS Canvas
that all adjuncts have access to and a page where adjuncts can ask questions and have them crowd-
sourced to find answers. Other instructors had different opinions. Jean, a full-time professional,
said that resources are "spread out all over the place. I'd like one place to go to that had what I
need." Rossana, a stay-at-home mother, pointed out the importance of time efficiency, saying, "I

will spend a little bit of time looking at stuff, but I probably won't jump to a bunch of different web pages. It needs to be time efficient." Juan, a full-time DACC staff member, echoed the same opinion, saying that the resources are being spread out and need to be joined together in one place.

4.4.2.3 Increasing Staffing Levels of VLIT (Faculty Support Unit at DACC)

At DACC, the faculty online teaching support unit called VLIT is staffed by two staff members. With DACC having two campuses in Las Cruces, there is one full-time VLIT staff member per campus. Participants pointed out that in addition to supporting faculty with online teaching and learning technologies, VLIT also provides support and training for students. Juan, a full-time DACC staff member, said that because of a high workload, he feels his questions aren't heard. "Sonia [White] can be helpful sometimes, but she is so busy that she gets snippy with us. I usually end up calling [Academic Technology] for help or trying to figure things out on my own. Luckily I'm OK with tech so that it's not a really big deal." Others expressed similar criticisms, however they opted to not be descriptive.

4.4.2.4 Availability of Pre-built Courses Approved by Department Heads

When some of the participants mentioned that when they were hired, the department chair provided an already-existing course that had been "QM Certified", as quoted by participants. They all had similar positive statements on this. Cosette, who had a course ready for her, commented how she hadn't thought about having to design a course from nothing, but was relieved that the course taught semesters before would be loaded for her because, as she said, "There is no way I would have had time to design an online course and I wouldn't know where to start." Juan, a full-time DACC staff member, said that this would be a great relief to incoming instructors "because they would just teach and not worry about building a course from nothing."

Daniel, a full-time off-campus professional, thought this was a good idea:

> If there was a course that had all of the branding, home page, assignments and that all set up, it would save us time that we could focus on teaching and building relationships with our students. Connecting with students is one of the more important aspects to me and if I'm spending my time fiddling with my modules, assignments, then that takes my time to actually teach.

Meghan agreed:

> I would like to have some freedom to make some changes, but the idea overall is a good one and I think a lot of online instructors would like this. It might be complicated a bit, so I don't know how it would work if it was real, but the idea isn't bad.

The findings listed in this section represent the desire to have more high-quality support and reduce the amount of effort and work required by online adjunct faculty in course design and technology use, an area the participants generally feel they are not prepared. This would allow the online adjunct faculty to shift their time and energy to learning how to effectively teach online, connect with students and provide ample quality feedback. This also represents the theory this study was framed around; andragogy. The online adjunct faculty want to learn what they need to learn and do their jobs effectively in a time-efficient manner. This also brings into play the theory of social development; by reducing the amount of work required in an area the adjunct faculty are novices in, they are in part free from feeling exposed as a novice and having their 'topic expert' identity challenged.

Cultivating capacity of their online adjunct faculty would likely be a worthwhile investment and, according to the findings, be well-received by the online adjunct faculty.

Chapter 4 offers a catalogue of findings from this study and each of the findings aligned with the theoretical frameworks of this study. Based on the perspectives of the online adjunct faculty participants, it was revealed that there are many challenges in the current structure of supporting online adjunct faculty. These challenges include online adjunct faculty feeling underprepared, not connected to the academic community, and the perception of being compensated at levels far below what they believe their value is. Furthermore, the online adjunct faculty participants revealed areas which they feel helps them the most and what influences them to dedicate themselves to teaching online for DACC. A highlight of these findings should be the fact that while online adjunct faculty have a desire to be a high-quality online instructor, there are numerous challenges, one of which is the correlation between compensation and online teaching quality. Stated in a direct quote from a participant is the idea that time and effort put forth is aligned with what they feel is their current worth to the institution.

As aligned with andragogy, online adjunct faculty call for support that is problem-centered and time efficient. Moreover, social development theory, specifically a central topic found within this theory that highlights social identity struggles, plays a strong role in the challenging experiences online adjunct faculty undergo in teaching online. The identity struggle between being an expert in ones field while at the same time being a novice in online teaching, course design creates a struggle that brings about feelings of 'anxiety', as directly quoted by more than half of the participants and interpreted as a general sense of discomfort, and feelings of being unprepared. Participants expressed many solutions to assist in improving support including ways to build a community of adjunct faculty, recognizing online adjunct faculty for efforts in improving online teaching skills and abilities in either monetary methods or community recognition methods. In

addition, participants expressed what influences them to teach online for DACC and provide

quality online learning experiences for students.

5.0 Conclusions, Recommendations and Implications

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the perspectives of online adjunct faculty at DACC as they relate to institutional support for online teaching and what they perceived as helpful or lacking in faculty support at this institution. This study was designed as a needs assessment, centered on the perspectives and opinions of DACC online adjunct faculty participants.

The study was grounded in the theoretical frameworks of andragogy and social development theory and was conducted through semi-structured focus groups including 20 online adjunct faculty from Doña Ana Community College.

There have been many research studies that address the topic of faculty development for online teaching, the challenges of improving support for online faculty (Austin, et al., 2013; Backhaus, 2009; Brannagan, et al., 2014; Dailey-Hebert, et al., 2014; Elliott, et al., 2015; Maxon, 2017; Sandhoff, 2018; Shiffman, 2009) and the long-term value of investing in quality support for online faculty (Thanaraj, 2016). While studies exist on the general topic of faculty development for online teaching, few studies exist that are focused specifically on online adjunct faculty. Even fewer have focused on the perspectives of the adjunct faculty themselves. Certain research studies, including research by Austin, et al. (2013), highlight the need to strengthen support for adjunct faculty.

This chapter will cover the summary of findings in addition to as they relate to the theoretical frameworks employed, recommendations for practice and implications for future research.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The findings of this research are based on the researcher's interpretations of the perspectives of online adjunct faculty of DACC, including newer online adjunct faculty and veteran online adjunct faculty.

In the focus groups, some participants stated that they lacked teaching experience while others had previous teaching experience. However, all had stated that when they began teaching online, they had no previous training in online teaching, aside from the mandatory self-paced Canvas course. These findings mirrored the findings of Backhaus (2009) who wrote that most adjunct faculty members are hired on the basis of their professional experience and discipline knowledge and that it is unlikely they had received any training in pedagogical methods.

Throughout the focus groups, a common theme emerged of feelings of uncomfortableness and fear of unpreparedness that causes high levels of stress. This theme was prominent among online adjunct faculty focus group participants. Online adjunct faculty face stress related to feeling underprepared to teach online (Maxon, 2017; Sandhoff, 2018) and, among the findings from this study, factors that lessened this include the clear and simple guidance and support. Participants noted that previous experience in online courses, both as instructors and as students, played an integral role in their online teaching ability. They also made statements crediting experience teaching online as a key learning factor. Participants also point to departmental guidance as playing a significant role, for better or worse, in supporting their online teaching development. The topic of department-provided support varied among participants with some departments receiving recognition for providing terrific support and other departments receiving more critical remarks for a lack of support.

The lived experiences of online adjunct faculty at DACC about the institutional-provided support and faculty development were similar. Participants expressed the perception of a lack of priority applied to their support and development. More specifically, participants pointed to lack of guidance and inclusion. Additionally, participants noted what they perceived as low-staffing level of the faculty support unit of DACC called VLIT. Participants also expressed a feeling of separation from the DACC academic community. Discussions about this focused on feeling not included in the academic community and marginalized as temporary and not important enough to have the resources invested in their online teaching support and development.

Feelings of marginalization were common findings among the online adjunct faculty participants. While each participant stated their joy of teaching and gratitude to have the opportunity to teach students, participants expressed feelings of non-inclusiveness to the DACC academic community.

Furthermore, a general dissatisfaction with adjunct pay levels was a topic that was discussed in each of the five focus groups. The online adjunct faculty participants who were veteran online instructors attributed their dissatisfaction with pay levels to the amount of time and effort they stated were necessary to successfully lead an online course. Discussions included statements that teaching online is not the same as teaching face-to-face. It was stated that in the age of technology, there is more of a 24/7 nature of work (Austin, et al., 2013) and that lines of often blurred between professional and personal lives. A small number of participants noted that they would put in the time and effort "to a point" in order to be an effective instructor, but added that when the effort superseded the pay, they would focus on other areas of their lives.

This opinion slightly differed from the new online adjunct faculty participants who expressed less criticism of pay levels and only concurred when listening to veteran online adjunct

faculty. The new online adjunct faculty participants instead expressed gratefulness for the opportunity to teach online. This was an interesting finding because it suggests that the newer online adjunct faculty value the experience of teaching online as much, if not more, than money.

Furthermore, the differences between new faculty and veteran faculty and their perspectives toward institutional support emerged as a theme as it did in the research of Mueller et al. (2013). The analysis uncovered that the veteran online adjunct faculty were more critical of institutional support and more critical of the adjunct pay rate when compared to the time demands that online teaching requires. Conversely, the new online adjunct faculty were significantly less critical of institutional support; instead they expressed gratitude for the opportunity to teach. Just as the difference in criticism of pay between new online adjuncts and veteran online adjuncts, this finding also suggests that the newer online adjunct faculty view the opportunity to gain experience teaching online as significantly valuable.

The areas that online adjunct faculty suggest could be improved center on the perception of being a non-priority to the institution, reflecting the findings by Mueller et al. (2013) and Ridge et al. (2017). More specifically, online adjunct faculty participants expressed a desire for recognition of online adjunct faculty for achievements in online teaching. This would include recognition of online adjunct faculty who have achieved various online teaching certifications such as the QM certification, and/or displayed innovative online teaching strategies, and/or have consistently received exemplary student evaluations. Participants felt that going above and beyond expectations and applying time and effort toward improving the online experiences of their students does not get noticed from administrators. Perhaps more important was the perception that participants felt they could simply get through the semester without any major complaints and be deemed a successful online instructor. More specifically, participants felt the difference in how

they were perceived as an online instructor, great or average, was a wash since they were not granted acknowledgment of their online teaching accomplishments.

The participants overwhelmingly stated that the current solutions to adequately support online adjunct faculty need to be improved; however, the participants who actively seek assistance do so through personal motivation. The data revealed a significant influence for online adjunct faculty to seek support came through personal motivation. The influences or motivations expressed by participants include intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, including the desire to create a positive learning experiences for students (intrinsic) along with long-term career goals and lifestyle desires (extrinsic). Participants noted their personal motivations play a critical role in offering quality courses. However, participants also highlighted the challenges that counter their motivation.

While participants discussed areas that were lacking in institutional support of online adjunct faculty, they also described potential solutions. In addition to pay increases, participants highlighted the strategy of mentorship pairing for new online adjunct faculty. Mentoring programs aimed specifically at improving support for online adjunct faculty have been mentioned as particularly effective and important in recent studies (Brannagan, et al., 2014; Buckenmeyer, et al., 2013; Sandhoff, 2018). Institutions which develop mentoring programs for online adjunct faculty have found success in improving the preparation of the adjunct faculty member for online teaching as well as lessening the levels of anxiety and feelings of isolation (Brannagan, et al., 2014; Buckenmeyer, et al., 2013; Rodgers, McIntyre & Jazzar, 2009).

Participants made it clear that they valued the idea of being paired with a veteran online instructor. Participants from one academic program who had been paired with a veteran online instructor described the benefits of this. In each focus group, participants directly and indirectly communicated the value they felt a mentorship pairing has had, or potentially would have for those

who did not have this opportunity. In addition, participants stated a need a common resource page available online specifically created for online adjunct faculty, increasing the number of VLIT support staff. Furthermore, participated noted that offering pre-built and department-approved courses would be a considerably positive assistance. It is important to note some online adjunct faculty participants hesitated at the idea of having to use pre-built courses. However, it was unanimous among participants that having the option of using pre-built, department-approved online courses would allow online adjunct faculty to improve in other areas such as online course presence, creating relationships with students and, overall, focus on teaching.

5.2 Relation to Theoretical Framework

This needs assessment study employed the theoretical frameworks of andragogy and social development theory. Andragogy, which is also referred to as adult learning theory, is highly applicable to this research as each participant is an adult learner as well as an expert in their respective fields of study. The process of andragogy includes self-directed learning where adults take the initiative to learn—they determine what their learning needs are (Knowles, 1975). The findings of this research closely align to the principles of andragogy in that the participants overwhelmingly expressed a desire to be involved in their online teaching training and claim they developed quickest through experience and making mistakes. Additionally, participants communicated they were most interested in learning exactly what they need to learn in order to improve their online teaching skills, a key component of andragogy. Using andragogy as a theoretical framework assisted in developing the focus group protocol as well as guiding discussion in the focus groups. The findings reflected this theoretical framework in that the

participants frequently expressed their need to know exactly what they need to know in a small bite method rather than a longer, more content-intensive training.

The second theoretical framework that this study was based on is social development theory, which guided this research in a significant way. This theory framed the research as online adjunct faculty made statements indicating the experiences of an identity role switch, going from expert in their field to non-expert and, in many cases, a novice learning in online teaching (Sandhoff, 2018; Thanaraj, 2016). Through focus group discussions, it was shown that online adjunct faculty experience feelings of anxiety and frustration in teaching online and learning online teaching skills due in part to the identity role change. Using social development theory, specifically focusing on the identity aspect of this theory, helped frame the focus group protocol by helping participants feel understood in their shift from experts in their respective topics to new learner of online teaching.

5.3 Recommendations for Practice

Implications of this research show that DACC could benefit greatly from enhancing or improving support for online adjunct faculty based on the principles of andragogy and social development theory. By implementing an improved to orientation for new adjunct faculty and provide on-going high quality support for this faculty sub-group, would benefit all stake holders. Furthermore, research shows that creating a strong sense of community is critical to online adjunct faculty success and lessening sense of isolation and reducing anxiety (Ferencz, 2017). This faculty group plays an integral role in this institution's success in online education (Maxon, 2017; Mueller et al., 2013; Sandhoff, 2018; Shiffman, 2009, Thanaraj, 2016). With the continued growth of online

education and the trend of hiring adjunct faculty to teach online courses (Sandhoff, 2018; Seaman, 2018; Magda, et al., 2015; Maxon, 2017), this group will very likely continue playing an important role in DACC's success. The online adjunct faculty are also critically important to the online learning experiences of students, including student success, retention of online students, as well as in developing an institutional reputation of offering quality online courses (Magda, et al., 2015; Ridge, et al., 2017; Sandhoff, 2018).

Furthermore, adjunct faculty do not only benefit institutions by providing lower cost compensation and flexibility in course scheduling, they also bring an enormous amount of practical, real-world knowledge that students desire (Allen, et al., 2018; Mueller, et al., 2013; Sandhoff, 2018).

Based on what was found in this study, DACC should consider developing a robust support strategy for online adjunct faculty that is molded to the busy and diverse lives of its online adjunct faculty. The strategy, based on andragogy, should include guidance and support in small sections. A support strategy should be consistent at the institutional level, but adequately general across all departments to allow for flexibility for departments to make department-specific decisions.

In creating this strategy, the voices of these online adjunct faculty stakeholders must be a part of building and strengthening this strategy to help prepare new online adjunct faculty and support veteran online adjunct faculty (Maxon, 2017). Ridge et al. (2017) assert that online adjunct faculty are key stakeholders and including the voices of this group is critical in developing improved support for online adjunct faculty.

Furthermore, creating a community of online adjunct faculty with resources to reinforce a sense of belonging would lessen the feelings of isolation, (Ferencz, 2017; Ridge, et al., 2017) from the larger academic community of DACC.

Offering recognition for outstanding, high quality online teaching, as suggested by participants, would be an important step in creating an institution-wide culture of quality online education and influence more online adjunct faculty to improve efforts to improve their online teaching. More specifically, offering ways in which online adjunct faculty can, as a group, participant in an orientation-like welcome session both online or face-to-face, would help in this area. DACC employs roughly 80 online adjunct faculty members per semester. Welcoming this specific group together can create a sense of community and support.

Based on the findings, it would benefit DACC to leverage the online teaching knowledge and experience of full-time and adjunct instructors at DACC who have substantial online teaching experience and/or online teaching certifications. Doing so could be used to create a mentorship pairing for new adjuncts. Ideally, the mentors would be available for informal advising and guidance or even added as the user role "Observer" in the new online adjunct's Canvas course. Furthermore, this pairing would last two to three semesters until it is decided the new online adjunct has enough knowledge of course design and familiarity with teaching online to offer quality online educational experiences for students. In this set up, it may help to develop and offer incentives for the mentor, such as a title addition or pay incentive.

Additional findings suggest a consideration of developing a strategy to ensure new adjunct faculty have "approved" courses ready to drastically limit the amount of course design required. Findings showed that course design; the building of online courses; was a main source of anxiety. Participants expressed support for the option, instead of the mandate, to have courses built and approved by their respective department chairs.

Findings also show a desire by online adjunct faculty participants to restructure the adjunct faculty resources to a more centralized space with updated documents, timely pertinent memo's as

well as an FAQ discussion section. This would ultimately assist in strengthening the sense of community among faculty who have similar online teaching challenges.

Lastly, consideration of an increased per-credit pay structure for more experienced online adjunct faculty would be beneficial. A pay structure to increase the per-credit pay for those online adjuncts who 1) have taught *x* number of semesters online 2), acquired various online teaching-related certifications, such as QM Peer Reviewer, 3) become a DACC Canvas Coach.

5.4 Recommendation for Research

Current research on this topic of online adjunct faculty perspectives of institutional support has been relatively limited. The majority of studies related to this topic involve supporting all faculty in their online teaching duties. Fewer studies investigate the challenge of supporting the growing group of adjunct faculty who teach online. Based on the findings of this study, five recommendations for future research are 1. Include interviews of campus administrators; 2. Survey online adjunct faculty and department chairs to include quantitative data; 3. Examine student evaluations of online courses and conduct comparative analysis based on many variables; 4. Study institutions that have demonstrated high quality support systems for online adjunct faculty, and 5. Study student outcomes in online courses and compare student outcomes for full-time instructor and adjunct faculty.

Interviewing campus administrators may prove highly beneficial in future research. The participants of this current study expressed a relationship with campus administrators where they felt a non-priority or excluded from the academic community. Including the position of campus administrators would help improve an understanding of the institution and thus generate additional

insights into this study. Moreover, campus administrators would have the opportunity to discuss how their strategies. This would fill in important gaps of this study.

Furthermore, the outcome desired in investing in the capacity of online adjunct faculty is to improve student learning experiences in these online courses. Studying student outcomes in online courses using the variables such as instructor type, instructor experience, mentor access, and more would introduce critically important findings that could help identify specifically what support efforts, both institutional and departmental, are producing the best results.

5.5 Conclusion

Ultimately, establishing and strengthening a culture of support for online adjunct faculty can have positive short and long-term implications for academic programs (Austin, et al., 2013; Elliot, et al., 2015; Maxon, 2017; Shiffman, 2018) at DACC. This study highlighted the anxiety, challenges, frustration and sense of isolation that online adjunct faculty at DACC have felt and identified ways that participants suggested could improve the online teaching support. Developing initiatives designed to lessen the sense of academic isolation the participants stated and improving support can make these faculty types feel a sense of inclusion and priority. The more online adjunct faculty feel a priority and included in the academic community, the more likely their online teaching will improve (Ferencz, 2017), which will lead to the ability of DACC academic programs to strengthen and advertise their online course offerings. In the long-term, this will be a significant benefit to DACC in this institution's student enrollment, student retention and student success.

In this needs assessment study, I analyzed the perspectives and opinions of 20 online adjunct faculty at Doña Ana Community College of their experiences teaching online courses and

the support afforded by this community college institution. This study found that these adjunct faculty who teach online courses perceived the support at DACC as lacking in various areas. Through focus group discussions, this study found that online adjunct faculty felt a sense of anxiety in their online teaching ventures, a sense of isolation from the larger academic community at DACC, and a sense of low value to DACC. Participants clearly stated ways in which support at DACC could be improved. This study showed that online adjunct faculty at DACC feel less supported despite having the valuable responsibility of leading quality online courses. At DACC, online adjunct faculty are teaching over half of the online course sections and are a valuable group to an institution that is under a constant budget struggle.

Online adjunct faculty at DACC are an essential part of this institution's current and future success and play an integral role in the online education strategy. It is critical that the institution leaders ensure adjunct faculty are prepared and supported effectively to teach online. The quality of online courses at this institution should be considered a long-term interest. Online adjunct faculty have shown a need for improved guidance, structure and support in learning how to teach online. Further, they want to feel valued and recognized for quality teaching. The benefits to providing effective training and support for online adjunct faculty will be realized directly by students and will therefore have substantial positive short-term and long-term outcome for the entire institution.

As this institution moves forward, a focus on online adjunct faculty support would greatly benefit the adjunct faculty who teach online courses and, as a result, likely improve the online education quality for students at this institution. Steps to achieve this could include a number of strategies including increased pay. The majority of adjunct faculty participants of this study expressed that pay, while a factor, was not the strongest motivation. Instead, improved online

adjunct faculty inclusion in the academic community, more robust support including a well-organized mentor-pairing program, recognition for online teaching/online could design achievements and, if possible, pre-built courses, especially for late-hires. It has been stated numerous times that adjunct faculty are valuable to institutions because of the lower cost of adjunct faculty compensation, freedom from long-term contracts and the ability to cancel low enrollment courses taught by adjunct faculty. However, adjunct faculty are valuable because of their extensive practical, real-world experiences (Sandhoff, 2018). The value to students offered through the knowledge base and experience of adjunct faculty is enormously valuable and it has been shown that students value learning from these topic experts (Austin, et al., Mueller, et al., 2013; Shiffman, 2018). However, for DACC to maximize the impact of adjunct faculty, specifically in online courses, purposeful, quality support and inclusion for this group is critical to the long-term success of higher education institutions and must be taken seriously.

Appendix A Participant Recruitment Emails

Subject: Seeking online adjunct faculty participants for a study about institutional support for online teaching, specific to adjunct faculty

Hello,

You are receiving this email because you are currently an adjunct faculty instructor for Doña Ana Community College of online course(s). Your email address was acquired in coordination with the DACC Office of Institutional Analysis.

My name is Timothy Strasser. I am a former adjunct faculty instructor of DACC in the Education Program, instructing both face-to-face and online courses for 8 years. I am currently a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh. I am managing a study examining online teaching support for DACC adjunct faculty from *your* perspective as an adjunct faculty online instructor. This study will include your thoughts on the current faculty support strategies, including programs, institutional policies and departmental policies. I will be seeking your input about the successes and challenges you have experienced in teaching online courses as an adjunct faculty instructor for DACC.

Participation in this study will include spending a small amount of time in a focus group with other DACC online adjunct faculty. The focus group will be conducted in November 2018 and the one interview session will last approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. You will be asked to respond to questions regarding the NMSU/DACC institutional faculty support you have experienced and your opinions on the support, including the level of effectiveness, the level of access, and if the support has been appropriate in helping you lead quality online courses for your students.

If you are willing to participate in this study, as previously mentioned, you will be asked to participate in one focus group, lasting 45 minutes to 1 hour, in the main administration building (DAEM) at the DACC East Mesa Campus. The focus group will take place in the conference room, room 205.

If you are willing to participate, please contact me at tcs50@pitt.edu.

Thank you for your consideration,

Timothy Strasser

Appendix B Participant Formal Invitation

Subject: Invitation to participate in a study about institutional support for online teaching, specific to adjunct faculty

Hello,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study about institutional support for adjunct faculty in online teaching, as communicated in your reply.

Once again, my name is Timothy Strasser and I will be conducting this research study as a graduate student of the University of Pittsburgh and to be completed as a needs assessment study that will potentially be used by DACC leadership in structuring and/or improving faculty support specific to online adjunct faculty.

In order to briefly learn about you, I've created a brief survey using Survey Monkey. If you could take a moment to fill out this survey, it will assist me in organizing the focus group interview.

If you have any questions, please contact me at tcs50@pitt.edu.

I look forward to meeting you.

Thank you,

Timothy Strasser

Appendix C Participant Personalized Invitation

Subject: Online Adjunct Faculty Focus Group Date Next Week

Hello,
Please receive this email as a reminder of your participation in a focus group for my research study, January/February *x*, 2019. If your schedule has changed and may no longer be able to attend, please let me know as soon as possible. My email is tcs50@pitt.edu.

If you are able to attend still, I very much look forward to meeting you.

The focus group interview will take place at the DACC East Mesa campus in the main building (DAEM), room 205. Coffee, tea and pastries will be provided.

Should you have urgent questions, my cell phone is 915-526-0712.

Sincerely,
Timothy Strasser

Appendix D Focus Group Protocol

Pre-focus group survey questions

1. Y or N: have you ever taught online for other institutions, including currently?
2. What academic department do you teach for? _____
3. Approximately how far away do you live from the DACC East Mesa campus?

    A) Within 5 miles
    B) Within 15 miles
    C) Within 20 miles
    D) 20 miles or more

4. Approximately how far away do you live from the DACC East Mesa campus?

    A) Within 5 miles
    B) Within 15 miles
    C) Within 20 miles
    D) 20 miles or more

    Y or N: Does your distance from campus have negative effect on your ability to attend online teaching training sessions or seek support?

5. Roughly how many faculty support training workshops have you attended in the past year?

    A) 0
    B) 1-2
    C) 3-4
    D) 5-6
    E) 7+

    Y or N: Were these trainings helpful to your online teaching?

6. Of the following factors, which, if any, can you identify as influential in your online teaching experience?

Examples of factors could include:

a. previous experience as an online student,
b. previous experience instructing and designing online courses,
c. previous online teaching-related trainings, formal or informal mentorships with more experienced online instructors,
d. opinion of the value and quality of online education.
e. N/A

Focus Group Background/Warm-Up Questions

1. Provide your name, tell me about the courses you teach online, and how long you have you have

taught online at DACC.

     a. Have you ever been a student in an online course?
     b. How many years of experience do you have teaching online?
     c. Have you taken online courses as a student and, if so, do you find that that
        experience(s) has benefitted you as an online instructor?
          a. If yes, please explain

            _____
            _____

          b. If no, please explain

            _____
            _____

CENTRAL QUESTIONS

1. Do you feel an adequate level of inclusion within the DACC faculty community, including
your own department?

     a. Do you find it difficult to seek out and receive help for potential online teaching
     challenges/issues?

     b. Did you have a veteran faculty mentor that provided guidance to you regarding online
     teaching?

     c. Was this formally setup, such as within your department or was it informal?

2. Briefly describe the departmental expectations for online course quality regarding the
following

     a. Course design – is there a standard course home page? Is the course design aspect your
     responsibility or is it provided?

     b. Is there a minimum number of faculty training workshops that you have to attend
     before beginning online instruction and/or on-going training/certification?

3. Briefly describe your online instruction experience and the successes and challenges you've
had.

Potential prompts and follow-up questions

a. Specifically, what aspects of online teaching do you find satisfying and what aspects do you find challenging?

Institutional Policies for Online Teaching Faculty

4. Are you aware of any policies of your academic department regarding online teaching?
    If yes ...

    a. Do you think these policies are communicated sufficiently?
    b. Do you believe these policies affect how you teach online?
    c. Do you think these policies are meeting their intended goals?
5. Are you aware of DACC institutional policies regarding online teaching?
    If yes …
6. From your perspective, how have the DACC institutional policies fared in influencing you to improve online teaching experiences?
7. If you've taught online courses for more than two semesters, what improvements have you made since you first taught online?

Potential prompts and follow-up questions
a. How did you make those improvements? Were they self-taught or did you look for guidance?
b. If you looked for guidance, what type of guidance?

8. When you experience a challenge or issue in your online course, do you seek out help from DACC or NMSU faculty support? If so, in what ways do you seek out support?

    a. Do you find it difficult to find time to receive support?

Other Helpful Information

9. Is there anything else that you would like to add about your experience teaching online that you have not been able to articulate?

Conclusion

This focus group is one of four focus groups that I will be having here at this institution.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. Your answers are important in learning about the challenges that you, as online adjunct faculty, face in teaching online and are important in improving how you are supported.

Thank you again and I hope you have a great end to your semester and a great Spring

semester.

Appendix E Verbal Informed Consent Form

My name is Timothy Strasser and I am a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh in the Higher Education Management area of concentration within the School of Education's Ed.D program and I am working on my dissertation. I am conducting a research study on institutional support for online adjunct faculty at Doña Ana Community College. The purpose of this research project is to learn about how adjunct faculty online instructors are supported from your perspective and the challenges you face in teaching online courses.

The research will help me understand how DACC online adjunct faculty perceive the level of effectiveness of support for your online teaching duties and will potentially help, as a needs assessment, how DACC structures faculty support for online teaching specific to adjunct faculty moving forward as the online programs at DACC grow.

Today, you will be participating in a focus group which should take approximately 1 hour. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. Responses will be completely anonymous; your name will not appear anywhere in the final write up. There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this focus group. These risks include a breach of confidentiality should somebody other than the study team becomes able to identify subjects and subject responses. Furthermore, three to five other DACC adjunct online faculty will be present in this focus group, preventing complete anonymity. Taking part in this focus group is your agreement to participate.

You are welcome to share as much or as little information as you choose. If you feel uncomfortable at any time you can ask to be dismissed from the interview. The benefits to your participation are: 1) the opportunity to share your perspectives with a practitioner scholar; 2) the

opportunity to have your views and opinions expressed to the leadership of DACC; 3) the opportunity to improve upon and shape how adjunct faculty online instructors are supported in the future at DACC.

During the focus group, I will not be able to guarantee confidentiality because we will be discussing information as a group. Therefore, if you would feel uncomfortable with any of your statements being shared with others in or outside of the group, please do not share them during the process.

This focus group interview will be digitally audio recorded. I will be transcribing the audio files and they will not be used for any other purpose other than this study. The digital recordings will be kept on a password protected Cloud-based storage folder. The recordings will be deleted shortly after they are transcribed.

If you would like a copy of this letter for your records, please let me know and I will give you a copy now.

I am the principal investigator of this study. You may ask any questions that you have immediately. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact me via email at tcs50@pitt.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, or if you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board, at 1-866-212-2668.

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