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# Factors Influencing Participation in Professional Development to Promote Online Course Excellence and the Impact on Faculty Confidence and Teaching

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Factors Influencing Participation in Professional Development to Promote Online Course  
Excellence and the Impact on Faculty Confidence and Teaching

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine factors influencing participation in professional development designed to safeguard online course excellence and the impact on confidence and teaching. This purpose was achieved through a convergent mixed-methods investigation of faculty viewpoints of online course delivery and professional development offerings at a Midwestern state university. To support continued academic success in an increasing online market, the university implemented Quality Matters professional development to promote excellence in online course design. Analysis of data collected from a survey, in-depth interviews, and a focus group revealed faculty perspectives regarding the effectiveness of online course delivery, benefits and challenges, the effect of and importance placed on professional development targeting online course design, and the impact of Quality Matters on faculty confidence and teaching. While an undertone of concern regarding the effectiveness of online course delivery was evident in this study, these views did not appear to influence participation in the professional development. Time was reported as the biggest factor impacting the decision to participate, followed by a lack of incentives and scheduling difficulties. Faculty who had chosen to participate reported that their ability to design a quality online learning environment was positively impacted through participation in the training and was felt not only in the online environment, but in the traditional classroom as well.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine factors influencing participation in professional development designed to safeguard online course excellence at Eastwood University (EU). Across the United States, more than 33% of the total number of students in higher education are receiving online instruction (Allen & Seaman, 2015). During the 2014 - 2015 academic year, 2,437 undergraduate and 1,452 graduate students enrolled in hybrid or fully online courses at EU. This online enrollment produced nearly 9,000 credit hours in the spring 2015 semester, representing a 150% increase in online enrollment over the past three years. With a growing movement toward online learning comes many questions regarding the quality of these courses and the need for higher education institutions to ensure the requisite level of academic achievement (Robinson & Hullinger, 2008). As opportunities expand, focus must be placed on how to support learning, achievement and student success in the online environment (Finchman, 2013). Eastwood University implemented Quality Matters (QM) training to promote excellence in online course design. Promoting faculty participation is imperative if the university hopes to achieve this goal.

### **Problem Statement**

In order for Quality Matters professional development to impact the design of online course offerings at EU, faculty members must be actively engaged in the process. Experiences influencing faculty perspectives and program involvement must be examined in order to promote and ultimately increase participation.

## **Focus on Instructional and/or Systemic Issues**

A common concern voiced by faculty and administration at EU is the need to maintain a requisite level of excellence and student achievement in online courses. Academic leaders across the country echo this need to examine the quality of online instruction (Allen & Seaman, 2013). To address this trepidation, EU recently initiated a faculty training program based on the QM peer review process. Introduction of the program was designed to provide faculty with the information necessary to develop and sustain effective online teaching. As a result, slow adoption of the QM improvement process is of critical concern to EU's success. Demand for quality online instruction is tied not only to continued success, but also to accreditation. This accreditation is central in maintaining the alignment of the academic community's commitment to quality higher education and to public accountability for student achievement (Council for Higher Education Accreditation [CHEA], 2010).

## **Is Directly Observable**

Since the program's inception at EU, approximately 12% of all faculty members have participated in QM training. Of those training participants, less than half have gone on to complete preparation required to act in the role of peer reviewer for QM course evaluations at EU. While this is a voluntary program, the ultimate goal is for all faculty members to participate in the training and, at a minimum, all online instructors to redesign and submit at least one course for review. This goal is designed to promote quality online instruction and to place EU at the head of the pack in the increasingly competitive online university market. If the goal is to be realized, increased participation in both the initial training and peer review preparation will be necessary.

## **Is Actionable**

Students have a wide variety of choices for completion of online programs in today's competitive online market. EU Quality Matters training focuses on ensuring an online environment that promotes student success through effective design. Participation in the QM training process can help faculty successfully create and sustain a valuable online learning experience for their students. The program has shown a significant impact on learner satisfaction in QM aligned courses. Research regarding student satisfaction with reviewed courses in comparison to non-reviewed courses indicated that the level of student satisfaction was significantly higher in online courses which had been reviewed using the QM rubric (Aman, 2009). In a 2011 study, Ward found that QM training participation and the course design improvement process had a positive effect on other areas of online teaching and learning. Uncovering factors that influence involvement in the training will allow EU to leverage factors that foster participation as well as address any obstacles or misconceptions associated with this effective improvement effort.

## **Connects to Broader Strategy of Improvement**

Improving the quality and value of existing educational programs through faculty development is an area of focus targeted by the current EU strategic plan. In support of this objective, EU implemented a Faculty Support Center to provide sustainable professional development to share resources and offer sustainable professional development to support excellence in teaching. Not only will investigation of perceptions influencing participation support endeavors to promote wider faculty involvement, the study will further serve to inform future professional development offerings. Ensuring quality instruction that promotes student

satisfaction and success will support the mission of EU to provide transformational experiences for all students.

### **Is High Leverage**

The mission of EU is to provide transformational experiences for its students and the community. To support this mission, it is crucial that a quality learning experience is provided for all students, even those students who do not physically come to campus. Providing better access to institutional academic programs is the fundamental purpose of university distance education programs (Miller et al., 2013). Without these online offerings, many students would not have access to this transformational experience. The QM initiative supports EU efforts in maintaining an exceptional online learning experience as well as sustaining their mission to provide all students with an environment where they are equipped with the tools necessary to become productive citizens and contributors to their respective fields of expertise.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the current EU environment and review of literature informing the problem, this study proposed to answer the following questions:

- What perceptions, attitudes, and experiences influence faculty participation in EU professional development opportunities targeting online course design?
- How has participation in QM professional development impacted faculty confidence in their ability to design a quality online learning environment?
- How has participation in the QM professional development influenced other areas of their teaching?

## **Overview of Methodology**

To fully uncover faculty perceptions, attitudes, and experiences influencing participation, as well as participation impact, this study employed a convergent mixed-methods design. Utilizing this approach made use of data sources including a broad range of faculty perspectives to provide a more complete understanding of influential factors and individual perspectives. Quantitative methods were used to gain information concerning faculty viewpoints regarding participation in QM professional development. Surveys were distributed electronically to all EU faculty who currently teach or taught an online or hybrid course within the past academic year. SPSS statistical analysis software was used to analyze survey results. In addition, a qualitative research method was employed to collect, analyze and interpret data from interviews and a focus group conducted with participants and non-participants in the QM training. Resulting interview and focus group data were carefully analyzed to identify emerging patterns and themes to provide insight into faculty perspectives on EU professional development, QM program implementation, and impact of QM program participation on faculty confidence in their instructional ability with online, hybrid and traditional course delivery. Results from each method were merged to provide a more comprehensive look at perspectives influencing participation and impact on faculty confidence and other areas of teaching. These methods served to provide an opportunity for representation of faculty involved in all facets of online instruction at EU, as well as establishing greater credibility in conclusions drawn from research findings.

## **Positionality**

Identifying my opinions as a researcher was a key component in attempting to uncover any potential bias in data collection and explanation of results for this research. Attitudes and



experiences regarding EU, professional development, and online course delivery that have influenced my perspectives from this positionality.

### **Researcher's Role**

As a current faculty member at EU, I am charged with delivering instruction, advising, and supporting online educational technology masters students located across the country. Over the past four years I have participated in numerous professional development offerings at EU, including the QM course redesign and peer reviewer training, and have served as a QM peer reviewer for EU on several occasions. As the researcher in this investigation, I collected and analyzed all data utilized in the study including completing the interviews, focus group, and qualitative analysis of those results.

### **Assumptions**

Over the past ten years I have participated in online course delivery as both student and instructor. While many of the courses I took were valuable and engaging, others were difficult to navigate and no true connection was made to the content, my peers, or the instructors. As a faculty member teaching in the online learning environment, I know the difficulty of ensuring students' ability to easily access materials and make valuable connections, as well as providing course objectives and assessments appropriately aligned. I believe participation in training designed to increase the effectiveness of online course design can significantly impact the effectiveness of online course delivery and ultimately, student success.

I also believe there are specific perceptions, attitudes, and experiences that inhibit faculty participation in professional development. For example, if a faculty member has had negative experiences in past professional development, they may perceive a lack of value in professional development in general, and as a result, are less likely to participate in future offerings. In

addition, if faculty do not truly support online course delivery, they would likely view participation in professional development targeting this delivery method of little worth. Identifying and addressing faculty perceptions, attitudes, and experiences could help facilitate increased future participation.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following operational definitions were used:

**Accreditation.** Accreditation is an evaluation process of colleges, universities, and other institutions of higher learning. It involves the capacity of an institution to assure its own quality and contains an expectation that the institution will provide evidence thereof (Higher Learning Commission, 2015).

**Asynchronous Course/Instruction.** Learning that occurs at different times and in different locations.

**Course Redesign.** The examination and revision of course learning objectives, alignment, evaluation, instructional strategies, and choice of technologies used in course delivery.

**Distance Education.** Instruction that occurs between a learner and instructor, held at different times and/or places (Moore, Dickson-Deane & Galyen, 2011).

**Online Learning.** Learning that occurs through access using technology.

**Hybrid or Blended Course/Instruction.** Courses that employ both traditional course components and synchronous or asynchronous course instruction.

**Professional Development.** An endeavor designed to improve teacher effectiveness in instructional delivery to support student achievement and satisfaction.

**Synchronous Course/Instruction.** Learning that occurs at the same time, but not all participants are in the same location. This includes courses that meet virtually through learning management systems or online meeting programs.

**Traditional Course/Instruction.** Instruction that takes place in real time in a face-to-face environment on campus.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter one of this study introduces the purpose as well as the problem of practice investigated. It includes research questions addressed by the study and identifies key terms. A brief overview of the methodology and researcher positionality is also included.

Chapter two contains a review of the literature including a brief historical perspective of the demand for quality in online course design and key findings relating to the need to guarantee excellence in online instruction. It provides background information on the QM professional development program and further investigates theory behind faculty participation or non-participation in professional development opportunities designed to support effective online course design.

Chapter three includes a description of the design of the study including information regarding the rationale behind the methods utilized and thoroughly describes EU and its history with online course delivery. Information regarding participant selection, methods used and analysis is also provided. In addition, threats to and limitations of the study are identified.

Chapter four describes the major quantitative and qualitative findings from the survey conducted including characteristics of participants, survey results and statistical data. Major qualitative findings from interviews and the focus group conducted are presented by theme based

on the coding process. Finally, results of the survey, interview and focus group data are merged in a side-by-side comparison and examination of similarities and differences.

Chapter five includes a discussion of results by research question including interpretation through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior. Limitations and delimitations of the study are revisited followed by implications for practice and future research.

## CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine factors influencing participation in professional development designed to safeguard online course excellence at Eastwood University (EU). A search of ProQuest and ERIC databases yielded numerous research articles with a higher education online learning or professional development focus. Literature reviewed for the purposes of this proposal used a variety of sources as presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

*Types of literature and number reviewed*

Type of source	Number reviewed
Peer reviewed articles	41
Scholarly books	7
Dissertations	5
Scholarly websites/blogs	8
Other scholarly work	9

As presented in Table 2.1, these resources included other scholarly work such as educational research reports and presentations specifically addressing the topic of professional development and higher education online course delivery. Many resources reported a growing trend in online course and program offerings at the university level and identified a need to ensure quality in the online environment. To facilitate a focus on the study's purpose, key words were used including "online/distance course quality," "online/distance education faculty participation," "higher education professional development," "faculty training," and "online/distance education hurdles," while specific models such as Quality Matters were used when seeking examples of implementation success.

## **Review of the Literature**

To understand the issue of ensuring quality in online course design through faculty professional development, review of the literature explored various aspects related to this problem of practice: demand for quality in online instruction, essential elements of quality online instruction, Quality Matters professional development, and faculty perceptions regarding professional development and online course delivery.

### **Demand for Quality in Online Instruction**

Distance education is an integral part of the mission and vision of today's universities (Betts & Heaston, 2014; Hillman & Corkery, 2010). With enrollment numbers for students taking at least one online course across the U.S. increasing to over 7 million, higher education leaders concur that online learning is a critical component of the university's long-term strategy and success (Allen & Seaman, 2015; Russo & Benson, 2005). Allen and Seaman (2014) indicated "ninety percent of academic leaders believe that it is likely or very likely that a majority of all higher education students will be taking at least one online course within the next five years" (p. 5). Institutions of higher learning must work diligently to provide quality online instruction to meet the needs of their student population and effectively engage them in the learning process (Robinson, 2006). As these online opportunities expand, focus must be placed on how to promote knowledge, achievement, and student success in the distance environment (Finchman, 2013). The future of universities may depend on blending the strengths of online education with traditional engagement and student-centered delivery methods (Bonvillian & Singer, 2013).

**Accreditation.** The demand for quality online instruction is tied not only to higher education's success, but also to its accreditation. Higher education accreditation is central to

safeguarding the alignment of the academic community's commitment to quality and to public accountability for student achievement (Council for Higher Education Accreditation [CHEA], 2010). Eastwood University is currently accredited through the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). HLC is a regional accreditation agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education for college and universities who confer degrees (HLC, 2015). This accreditation process evaluates the quality of an institution holistically and on various aspects ranging from academics to administration. It applies not only to on-campus characteristics, but extends to any distance learning opportunities provided as well. Five main categories are identified: Mission; Integrity; Ethical and Responsible Conduct; Teaching and Learning: Quality Resources and Support; Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement; and Resources, Planning and Institutional Effectiveness (HLC, 2015). In addition, HLC adopted guidelines for evaluating distance education created by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) identifying nine hallmarks of distance education quality (C-RAC, 2011).

**Student needs.** Creating an effective learning environment that not only meets the accreditation needs of the university, but also meets the needs of a diverse student population is critical. University student populations have changed dramatically over the past several years and now include a variety of demographic and socio-economic characteristics (Betts & Heaston, 2014; VanDorn & VanDorn, 2014). These students expect learning environments that not only conform to their need for flexibility, but provide creative and interactive experiences (Russo & Benson, 2005; Guri-Rosenblit 2009, Finchman, 2013). Using online learning to deliver instruction matched to the learning preferences of today's digital generation can benefit both students and institutions of higher learning (Dede, 2005).

The goal of higher education is to develop knowledge and skills necessary for students to become productive citizens and contributors to their respective fields of expertise. Equipping students with the necessary 21st century skills as well as the ability to effectively transfer those skills into today's competitive job market is a priority (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). Institutions must provide students with opportunities to master the effective use of technology along with developing a strong sense of why it is beneficial to do so (Kirkwood & Price, 2005). A successful online learning environment can provide students with the ability to successfully transition from higher education into their future employment ("Education Commission", 2009).

### **Essential elements of quality online instruction**

Defining the essential elements constituting a quality online learning environment can be difficult. A study completed in 1998 by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) identified the need for the development of quality standards for online education (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998). This study was followed by a second investigation commissioned by the National Education Association (NEA) and Blackboard® identifying seven categories of quality in online instruction: institution support, course development, teaching/learning, course structure, student support, faculty support, and evaluation and assessment (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000).

Continued relevance of those categories was established in a 2011 study affirming the enduring viability of the original quality indicators. Two additional categories, technology support and social and student engagement, were identified as necessary for effective development and a "scorecard" designed to measure and quantify the quality of online higher education programs was created (Shelton, 2011). The scorecard uses a three-point scoring guide ranging from "not observed" to "meets criteria completely" and is used to evaluate each



indicator. A score of 90-99% results in delineation as an exemplary online education program with little improvement necessary. Programs scoring at the 80-89% range are acceptable with some improvement recommended. A score 70 – 79% produces a marginal result indicating significant areas of improvement needed in multiple program areas. Programs receiving a score of 60-69% are considered inadequate with many areas of improvement needed throughout the program. A score of 59% and below is unacceptable.

Another framework designed to support online quality is the quality framework created by the Online Learning Consortium (formerly the Sloan Consortium), an organization dedicated to improving the quality of online education. It identifies five pillars of quality online education, dubbed “the building blocks which provide the support for successful online learning” (Quality Framework, 2016, para. 2). These pillars include learning effectiveness, scale, access, faculty satisfaction, and student satisfaction. It is meant to be used by institutions to identify online learning goals and to measure their progress in achieving them.

Both the original standards, subsequent standard score card, and the quality framework were focused primarily on the assessment of an existing online course or program’s quality. Each was designed for administrator assessment use. Blackboard®, California State University, Chico, and Quality Matters are organizations that have developed rubrics designed to provide guidance for faculty in the development of the quality of online courses along with providing a means for quality assessment of individual courses. A description of each of the rubrics created by these organizations follows.

**Blackboard® Exemplary Course Program.** Blackboard® developed an Exemplary Course Program (ECP) designed to identify and disseminate best practices in the development of high quality online courses (Blackboard®, 2015). This rubric is available for use not only by

individuals utilizing the Blackboard® Learning Management system, but is available under a Creative Commons license to any individual wishing to utilize it as a part of the development of their own quality online course assessment tool. It includes four categories for review: course design, interaction and collaboration, assessment, and learner. Courses are evaluated in each category and designated as exemplary, accomplished, promising or incomplete.

**Quality Online Learning and Teaching.** California State University, Chico (Chico), faculty, administrators, staff and students recently worked together to develop a rubric designed to “create or evaluate the design of a fully online or blended course” (California State University, Chico, 2014). The Quality Online Learning and Teaching (QOLT) rubric, used by Chico as both an evaluation and development tool, provides a systematic process for online course redesign to promote high quality online instruction. It contains six categories including learner support and resources, online organization and design, instructional design and delivery, assessment and evaluation of student learning, innovative teaching with technology, and faculty use of student feedback. Examples of baseline, effective and exemplary descriptors are provided.

**Quality Matters professional development.** Quality Matters (QM) is a nationally recognized, faculty-centered, peer review process of continuous improvement designed to certify the quality of online courses and online components (Quality Matters [QM], 2011). It was originally developed by the MarylandOnline consortium, a voluntary, non-profit association consisting of two and four year higher education institutions in the state of Maryland. The consortium was committed to expanding online educational through financial support provided by the U.S. Department of Education’s Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. The research-based program they created consists of three primary components: the QM rubric, the peer review process, and the QM professional development process (Legon & Adair, 2013).

The program is focused around eight standards guiding the creation of online courses. These standards include course introduction, learning objectives, assessment, instructional materials, learner interaction and engagement, course technology, learner support, and accessibility (QM, 2011). A rubric based on the standards is used to review courses. Subscription to the program allows access to standard annotations providing course reviewers specifics on what to look for when completing a course review. The Quality Matters program currently has more than 850 subscribers across a broad spectrum of universities, four-year and technical colleges, and other academic organizations located in the United States and six different countries (Legon & Adair, 2013).

The Quality Matters program is complemented by the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework. The CoI framework was developed in an effort to inform difficulties arising out of the introduction of online programs (Swan & Ice, 2010). CoI is a constructivist approach grounded in the use of social, cognitive and teaching presence to create a multifaceted and meaningful online learning experience. Social presence focuses on the connections made in the online learning environment during course delivery. Cognitive presence is grounded in the need for students to continually reflect and construct knowledge based on course interactions. Teaching presence refers to the ability to create and sustain an effective learning environment. This framework connects course improvements to student learning through the design, organization, and facilitation of the course and the interaction between the instructor and the course elements (Hall, 2010). Quality Matters' emphasis on designing an interactive, supportive learning environment where students feel connected to their instructor, their peers, and the course content supports these components of the CoI framework. As a result, through application

of the Quality Matters rubric, a community of inquiry can be supported throughout the online course experience.

In research regarding student satisfaction with QM reviewed courses in comparison to courses which had not completed the review process, Aman (2009) found that the level of student satisfaction was significantly higher in online courses reviewed using the Quality Matters rubric. In addition, a 2011 study found that participating in the training along with the process of improving course design had a positive effect on other areas of online teaching and learning (Ward, 2011).

### **Faculty perceptions regarding professional development and online course delivery**

Faculty commitment to online education is essential for the success of any online learning program (Berg, 2002; Betts & Heaston, 2014). Many barriers to this commitment have been identified. These include the lack of perceived value, autonomy, increased time commitment and lack of incentives, and concern regarding technological skills and support.

**Lack of perceived value.** Although online course participation in higher education continues to increase, many faculty members still do not believe learning outcomes in online environments measure up to those delivered through traditional course delivery, nor do they believe their organizations have sufficient tools in place to measure the online course quality (Allen, Seaman, Lederman, & Jaschik, 2012). In their 2016 online report card, Allen and Seaman reported that chief academic leaders of U.S. institutions of higher education believe less than thirty percent (30%) of their faculty members recognized online education as a valuable and legitimate form of learning (p. 6). This lack of confidence can impede individuals from participating in online delivery (Kofi Badu-Nyarko, 2006) as well as training efforts focused on the quality of course delivery in the online environment (Ward, Peters & Shelly, 2010). These

faculty attitudes are often grounded in a lack of experience with online education (Betts, 2014). Faculty who have at least some personal experience with online education present a more positive attitude toward online course delivery (Allen, Seaman, Lederman, & Jaschik, 2009). In contrast, faculty who have no online education experience often communicate a negative attitude centered on perceived barriers (Betts, 2014). Results of a 2012 study by Lloyd, Byrne, and McCoy supported these findings indicating that faculty with little to no experience in an online education environment exhibit greater resistance to online course delivery.

**Autonomy.** Faculty in institutions of higher learning have long been viewed as conveyors of knowledge with students being the beneficiaries. They have traditionally been viewed as authorities in their subject areas housed in a culture of academic autonomy (Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, 2006; Mitchell, Parlamis & Claiborne, 2014). As experts in their fields of study, some may view training in instructional design as being unnecessary or of little worth, resulting in little motivation to engage in the training provided (Brownell & Tanner, 2012). In addition, questions have been raised about the ownership of faculty-created course materials in the online course environment (Lape, 1992). Many faculty members feel a growing need exists for institutions to implement policies that protect and support the academic freedom customarily afforded university faculty (Loggie, Barron, Gulitz, Hohlfeld, Kromery & Sweeney, 2007).

**Commitment and incentives.** Another obstacle that can prevent faculty participation in activities designed to enhance instructional delivery is the time commitment necessary to be dedicated to involvement. In a recent study, Lian (2014) found that time was a contributing factor to faculty participation in professional development opportunities. Faculty member workloads continue to increase and their ability to participate in training that requires a

substantial time commitment is limited (Kofi Badu-Nyarko, 2006). With what can be viewed as a substantial time commitment required to make necessary pedagogical changes, many faculty believe compensation for participating in professional development to ensure quality online course delivery should be provided (Brownell & Tanner, 2012). Lack of monetary incentives as well as administrative support presents substantial barriers to participation (Stenfors-Hayes, Weurlander, Dahlgren & Hult, 2010). Although some research indicates offering extrinsic rewards could potentially increase faculty participation, intrinsic motivation is a better indicator of ultimate success (Betts, 1998). Even if they choose to participate due to outside pressure, individuals who are not fully committed to the learning process as a result of their own motivation often fail to be willing to exercise the effort necessary to bridge the gap between professional development and implementation (Fullan, 2006).

**Technological skills and support.** Online learning utilizes technology for the delivery of instruction and this use of technology can be overwhelming for individuals who lack experience. As a result, many faculty members are not comfortable utilizing technology in instruction, whether in the traditional classroom or online delivery, and may resist integrating its use (Tabata & Johnsrud, 2008). They may be unsure of their capabilities to learn and/or perform the desired behaviors, and can further question the availability of necessary support to overcome this hurdle (Pearsall, Hodson-Carlton, & Flowers, 2012). This lack of efficacy in the ability to utilize technology in instruction could impede faculty members from participating in online instruction (Berge, Muilenburg, & Haneghan, 2002).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Students have a wide variety of choices for completion of online programs in today's competitive online market. Nearly all colleges now offer some courses through an online mode

of delivery, and many programs are moving to fully online. As universities continue to expand their offerings in this area, accreditation agencies will be increasing their focus on ensuring that the quality of these courses matches or exceeds the quality of courses offered through traditional delivery methods. It is imperative for universities to support faculty in meeting the demands of developing and sustaining effective online course delivery (Higgins & Harreveld, 2013).

The main goal of Eastwood University's adoption of the Quality Matters (QM) program is to develop and sustain effective online learning by providing faculty with training and ongoing support. The current QM program is managed by the University's Faculty Support Center (FSC) which was established to support faculty members in delivering exceptional instruction. The FSC leads faculty training and provides support throughout the implementation process. Since the program's inception, cohorts of approximately fifteen faculty member volunteers have been trained each year in applying the Quality Matters rubric to an existing online or hybrid course. That course is then submitted for review by teams of internal (peer) University reviewers, each of whom previously participated in the program and have successfully completed formal reviewer training. Submitted courses are reviewed using the QM rubric and participants are provided with feedback and given an opportunity, if necessary, to revise and edit their course to meet the standards. Once a course achieves a rating of 85% or greater based on the rubric, it passes and is designated as a successfully reviewed Quality Matters course. Participation in training and course review is not utilized in any manner in faculty evaluation or promotion. While successful training and course review completion is noted on the FSC University web page and commonly included in faculty vitae, no other denotation of a successfully reviewed course is made within the University class schedules or other publications.

The current study contributes to our understanding of faculty participation in professional development by examining perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding participation in professional development at the university, and more specifically, the Quality Matters initiative. Specifically, one aspect of this study identifies beliefs of EU faculty members regarding the value of online learning, and how perceptions, attitudes, and experiences influence participation in the initiative. Some faculty, myself included, view online learning programs in higher education as effective. We support continued development of online courses and programs, and believe they have the ability to offer a quality learning environment. Other faculty resist this movement, often citing skepticism regarding the ability to deliver quality instruction in an online learning environment. While professional development offerings can significantly influence faculty opinions regarding online education (Garza, 2009), I believe this lack of confidence in online delivery impedes faculty participation in training focused on improvement.

In addition, the study sought to expose faculty beliefs concerning University administration expectations regarding participation in the training initiative. When participation in an initiative is perceived as being supported and promoted by individuals in positions of authority, faculty may be more inclined to take part in the training (Bower, 2001; Wolcott, 2003). In turn, unwillingness to participate can occur if they feel administration fails to see the value in the offering, and they are less likely to put forth the required effort. Participation in the QM training requires a substantial commitment of time. Some faculty members are unwilling to devote the time and effort necessary to participate in training and prepare a course for review without an offering of financial compensation or at a minimum, reduction in workload to support full participation and development of a quality online course (Cook & Ley, 2004).



Furthermore, the study pursued the identification of obstacles related to faculty concerns regarding technology skills required in the effective development and delivery of an online course. Online learning utilizes technology for the delivery of instruction. The use of technology can be overwhelming for individuals who lack experience. As a result, many faculty members are not comfortable utilizing technology in instruction, whether in the traditional classroom or online delivery, and may resist integrating its use (Tabata & Johnsrud, 2008). Many faculty members have voiced insecurity regarding their technological abilities. This often impacts implementation of technology within their courses, as well as influencing participation in technology-related initiatives. They are unwilling to take risks when incorporating technology in the delivery of instruction, whether in a traditional or online course setting (Johnson, Wisniewski, Kuhlemeyer, Isaacs, & Krzykowski, 2012). This lack of expertise can further cause them to shy away from participation in opportunities that could easily expose their lack of skills. They may be unsure of their capabilities to learn and/or perform the desired behaviors, and can further question the availability of necessary support to overcome this hurdle (Schifter, 2000). If they believe they can successfully learn to incorporate the required skills and trust they will receive the necessary support, their confidence in performing the behavior will increase (Venkatesh, Morris, & Ackerman, 2000).

### **Chapter Summary**

The number of students receiving online instruction in higher education is rapidly increasing. As a result, greater focus has been placed on determining the quality of these offerings and the need for higher education institutions to ensure the requisite level of academic achievement (Robinson & Hullinger, 2008). To ensure continued academic success and accreditation, online course quality at Eastwood University is imperative. Professional

development designed to impact this area can only be effective if faculty members participate in training and implement the knowledge and skills acquired. This study sought to uncover factors that promote faculty involvement in the professional development initiative, as well as factors that impede participation. It also sought to reveal viewpoints regarding program impact on faculty confidence and instructional design. By investigating factors affecting participation along with the confidence level of those individuals who have participated in the Quality Matters training, the study serves to inform future program and professional development offerings.

Chapter three contains specifics regarding the design of the study including the methods used, the rationale behind these methods, and Eastwood University's history with online course delivery. It provides information regarding research participant selection and analysis, as well as identifying any perceived threats to and limitations of the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE – INQUIRY METHODS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine factors influencing participation in professional development designed to promote online course excellence at Eastwood University (EU). A convergent mixed-methods approach was used in an effort to uncover faculty perceptions, attitudes, and experiences that affect participation. This mixed-methods approach made use of data sources that included a broad range of faculty perspectives. Using this convergent approach to examine both qualitative and quantitative data sets independently and then integrating the results provided a more complete understanding of the problem than either form of data in isolation (Cresswell, 2014).

To gain information related to overall faculty viewpoints regarding participation in EU-sponsored professional development and more specifically the QM training, quantitative methods were used. A survey containing likert-scale and open-response questions requesting information regarding the perceptions, attitudes and experiences influencing participation in all university professional development, and more specifically, QM professional development, was distributed electronically to all EU online or hybrid faculty who were currently teaching or had taught at least one fully online or hybrid course within the past academic year. Survey results were tracked in Qualtrics with yes/no and likert-scale items then imported into SPSS statistical analysis software for analysis of survey results. Open-ended question responses were analyzed and interpreted to identify emerging patterns or themes providing insight into faculty perspectives on EU professional development and QM program implementation.

In the qualitative portion of the study, interviews were conducted with both faculty participants and non-participants in the Quality Matters training. In addition, survey

respondents were given an opportunity to self-select participation in a semi-structured interview which, due to a large number of responses, resulted in the utilization of a focus group to garner these perspectives. Results were collected, analyzed, and interpreted to identify emerging patterns or themes providing insight into faculty perspectives on EU professional development and QM program implementation. By using a convergent mixed-method approach targeting both participating and non-participating faculty members, greater credibility was established in conclusions drawn from research findings.

After individual data analyses were complete, both data sources were merged to provide a more complete understanding of factors influencing participation in and impact of QM professional development. Relationships between quantitative and qualitative findings were demonstrated through creation of a data analysis matrix depicting the interaction between the two data sets.

The following questions guided this study:

- What perceptions, attitudes and experiences influence faculty participation in EU professional development opportunities targeting online course design?
- How has participation in QM professional development impacted faculty confidence in their ability to design a quality online learning environment?
- Has participation in the QM professional development influenced other areas of their teaching?

Chapter 3 includes rationale for the research and methodology utilized as well as an in-depth description of the problem of practice under investigation. A detailed description of research data sources, collection, and analysis methods are included. Threats to validity are discussed along with limitations and delimitations of the research conducted. The chapter

concludes with a comprehensive synthesis of all aspects of the design of this study.

### **Rationale**

To fully uncover perceptions, attitudes, and experiences influencing faculty participation in professional development targeting online course delivery, and more specifically the Quality Matters program, this study employed a convergent mixed-methods approach. The decision to utilize this method capitalized on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research to gain a better understanding of the problem than would be provided by either method alone. This will allow representation of different perspectives drawn from data sources and will include both faculty who have and have not participated in the Quality Matters training. Since participation in the program is currently voluntary, it will be important to uncover factors influencing faculty choice. In order to understand the factors that drive the decision to participate or result in potential barriers, it will be necessary to reveal the individual background and experiences with regard to online course delivery, professional development, and program value. It will also be necessary to uncover any perceived institutional roadblocks.

One way to investigate potential barriers to participation in initiatives to improve online course design was to apply the theory of planned behavior. The theory of planned behavior relies on identification of factors influencing three beliefs that serve to guide an individual's intention to engage in a specific activity. Behavioral, normative, and control beliefs work together to influence an individual's intention for performance, or lack of performance, of a specific action. If this intention is highly grounded in a favorable attitude, there is a greater likelihood the intention will turn into action (Ajzen, 2002).

Behavioral beliefs center on specific attitudes toward a desired behavior, including intrinsic/extrinsic motivation and evaluative viewpoint. Faculty attitudes toward the overall

effectiveness of online course delivery could play an important role in a decision to participate in professional development targeting this form of instruction. According to the theory of planned behavior, behavioral beliefs along with motivational factors can either support or diminish the ultimate decision to participate in a specific behavior. If faculty do not believe online learning is effective, or a lack of motivational factors present, likelihood of participation is diminished.

Next, normative beliefs focus on pressure to engage in the behavior including consideration regarding approval of peers, individuals of importance, and the larger social context. The theory of planned behavior suggests that peer and administrative support for participation in professional development could help to support positive normative beliefs. In turn, if faculty feel the initiative is not supported by administration or their peers, they could be less likely to engage in the professional development activities.

Finally, control beliefs are based on the individual's perceived viewpoint of the simplicity or complexity of performing the behavior and beliefs regarding whether they possess the power to carry out performance. The necessary use of technology in the delivery of online instruction can prove to be a challenge for some faculty. If there is concern that they may not be able to successfully meet this challenge, or that the necessary support will not be available, this may result in a feeling of lack of control over the outcome of participation in the professional development offerings. This perceived lack of control over outcomes can result in a reduced intention for participation.

The current study contributed to our understanding of the factors contributing to faculty participation in QM professional development by examining faculty members' behavioral, normative, and control beliefs regarding professional development offerings, and in particular, the Quality Matters initiative. Specifically, one aspect of this study sought to identify the

behavioral beliefs of University faculty members regarding the value of online learning and participation in the initiative. In addition, the study sought to expose faculty normative beliefs regarding the expectation of peers and University administration regarding participation in the training. Furthermore, the study pursued the identification of faculty control beliefs regarding obstacles and supports to gaining skills for ensuring quality online course delivery.

### **Problem Setting/Context**

The number of students receiving online instruction in higher education is rapidly increasing. This is evidenced by a 150% increase in Eastwood University's online enrollment over the past three years. Ensuring academic excellence in online instruction is imperative for EU in their efforts to provide students with a high quality online learning experience, as well as remaining competitive in an increasingly saturated market.

The inclusion of online learning opportunities has been part of Eastwood University's course offerings for the past fifteen years. Initially these opportunities were limited to specific courses within graduate programs. This changed a few years later when the University's first hybrid online programs, the Master of Science in Educational Technology and the Master of Science in Engineering Technology, were introduced. Since that time, online offerings have increased to incorporate all areas of academics including online and hybrid courses in both graduate and undergraduate programs, a fully online graduate program in nursing, and numerous other fully online graduate programs.

EU recently introduced a faculty training program based on the Quality Matters peer review process. The main goal of the University's adoption of the QM program was to provide faculty with the information necessary to develop and sustain effective online learning. The current QM program is managed by the University's Faculty Support Center (FSC) established

to support the delivery of exceptional instruction at EU. Implementation and responsibility for all costs involved, including the costs of cohort trainings and financial support for reviewers is provided by the FSC. Each year cohorts of approximately fifteen faculty member volunteers have been trained in application of the QM rubric and have applied that knowledge to an existing online or hybrid course. Once a course has been modified, it is submitted for peer review by faculty having previously participated in the training and completed formal QM peer reviewer training. Feedback is provided and faculty are given an opportunity to make any necessary revisions to ensure the course meets QM standards. Courses receiving an overall rubric rating of 85% or greater are then designated as a successfully reviewed Quality Matters course. Program participation and course review is not utilized in any manner in faculty evaluation or promotion. However, successful training and course review completion is noted on the FSC website and commonly included in faculty vitae. No denotation is currently made on University class schedules to indicate courses which have been successfully reviewed.

Quality Matters is a voluntary program, but submission of at least one course for review by all online faculty members is the ultimate university goal. This objective is intended to ensure quality online instruction. As a result, adoption of the QM improvement process is of critical concern to University success. Uncovering factors influencing participation in the QM program will allow EU to address obstacles or misconceptions associated with this improvement effort. Increasing faculty engagement in QM training will help provide online students with the best possible learning environment and promote excellence in all online courses.

### **Research Sample and Data Sources**

The population utilized for this study was faculty members teaching one or more online or hybrid courses at Eastwood University. Since the goal of this investigation was to provide



information to increase participation in professional development across all EU disciplines, it was important to include a wide range of opinions to adequately represent various demographics.

### **Quantitative Research**

The quantitative portion of this study employed a purposive, diversity sampling in that the population targeted by this research is online or hybrid teaching faculty at EU. The goal of this method was to gather opinions across a broad range of backgrounds and experience in higher education online instruction providing results relevant to the research questions presented.

Demographic survey data were examined to determine if results received were representative of EU online and hybrid teaching faculty. The survey delivered was completely anonymous in that responses were not in any way associated with faculty email or IP addresses and participation was voluntary. Only respondents who chose to provide contact information for further interviews were identified. By providing this anonymity, faculty may have been more inclined to participate in the study.

### **Qualitative Research**

The qualitative portion of the study employed a purposive sampling strategy to identify volunteers with a broad range of backgrounds and experience who were willing to share their viewpoints on the topic of professional development targeting online course delivery. The goal in utilizing this type of sampling was to “ensure that the conclusions adequately represent the entire range of variation, rather than only the typical members” (Maxwell, 2013). Specific individuals representing a variety of experience with both online course delivery and professional development were interviewed. In addition, survey respondents were afforded the opportunity to provide information for future contact designed to result in a personal interview on the topic. Due to the large number of responses, all volunteers were invited to take part in a

focus group. Seven individuals representing three of the four colleges at EU participated. A mix of experience was represented with all individuals having some experience teaching online, and more than half having previously participated in QM training. Utilizing interviews and a focus group to uncover more in-depth information surrounding influential factors provided a broader, more holistic representation of faculty perceptions and involvement in the professional development process when integrated with the quantitative results.

One concern arising out of the sampling population was ensuring a representative sample across all disciplines and levels of participation. The study sought to uncover perspectives across several demographics including discipline and experience; thus it was important to have a broad range represented. Individuals more likely to be active participants in EU offerings may also have been more likely to participate in the research survey and subsequent interview when given the opportunity. These individuals have demonstrated confidence in professional development offerings and as a result, may be more inclined to voice opinions regarding value.

Another concern results from the autonomous atmosphere of the collegial setting. Faculty members may have believed that even though their responses would remain anonymous, the impact of results could affect their ability to demonstrate choice in professional development participation. If individuals believed that University officials might utilize results to require future involvement in professional development activities, they could have been less likely to participate in the research survey.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The convergent mixed-methods approach employed by the design of this study utilized surveys, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group. This method included data sources representing online and hybrid faculty across various disciplines and backgrounds, with varying

levels of experience. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods provided greater knowledge and insight into the topic than would be achieved by separately utilizing either approach (Landrum & Garza, 2015). A diagram of procedures providing an overall picture of the research design can be seen in Figure 3.1.

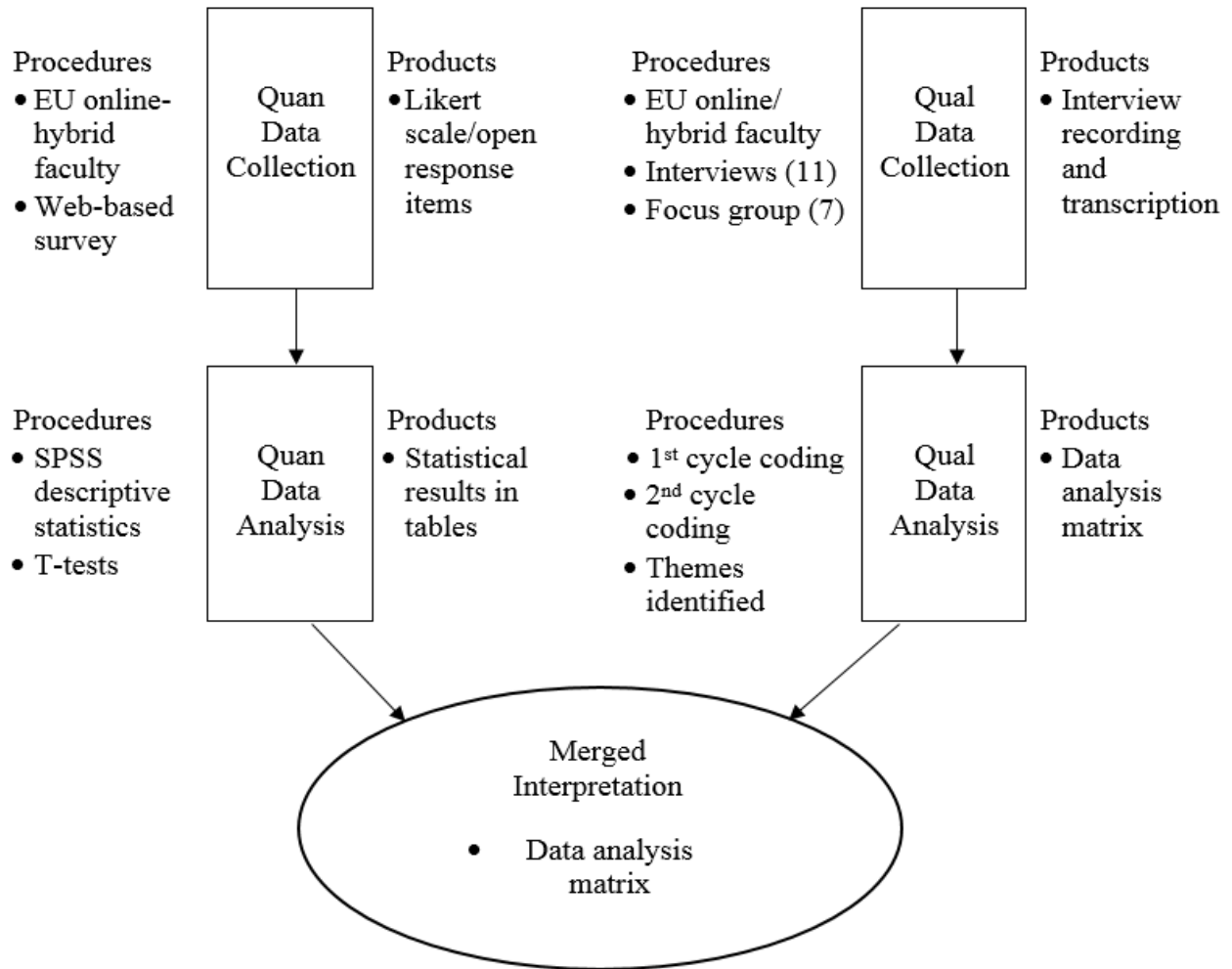


Figure 3.1. A Convergent Design of the Mixed Methods Study of Faculty Participation in Professional Development Targeting Online Course Delivery.

### **Measurement Instruments: Survey**

To begin data collection, a web-based survey was forwarded to all faculty members who are currently teaching or have previously taught an online or hybrid course at Eastwood University with an available university email address. With permission from the original author, the survey instrument used was based on a survey instrument developed to identify faculty perceptions, and attitudes regarding professional development at two universities in the Northeastern United States (Pesce, 2015). This survey consisted of 18 questions including demographic inquiry, multiple-choice answers, and short, open-ended questions (Appendix A).

The online survey and analysis tool, Qualtrics, was utilized for survey delivery. Demographic questions included gender, age (range of years), tenure status, and discipline. Depending upon answers to specific questions, some respondents received more or less than 18 questions based on their option choice. In the introductory email included with the survey (Appendix B), I identified my current position at the university and the survey purpose. In an effort to avoid possible confusion, a working definition of professional development programs for survey purposes was included. Utilizing this type of inquiry helped to provide insight into factors influencing participation in EU professional development opportunities targeting online and hybrid course delivery.

### **Measurement Instrument: Interview Protocol**

During this portion of the research, data were collected through interviews with faculty who self-selected to participate, as well as specific individuals targeted as a result of their participation or non-participation in the Quality Matters training and peer review process. Interview completion utilized a protocol designed to uncover faculty background, online experience, perspectives on professional development, and the QM implementation (Appendix

C). The protocol began with inquiry into general background information and current method of teaching designed to facilitate a comfortable setting and establish rapport with the subject (Cresswell, 2014). These introductory questions were followed by more specific questions to provide information regarding past and future participation in EU professional development offerings, and specifically, the Quality Matters initiative and its impact on their confidence in the delivery of instruction. Utilizing this type of inquiry helped to provide further insight into participation in QM professional development and its impact on faculty satisfaction in online teaching.

#### **Measurement Instrument: Focus Group Protocol**

In addition to the selected interview participants, survey respondents were given an opportunity to self-select participation in a semi-structured interview. A total of 17 respondents indicated their willingness to participate in the interview process. Due to the large number of responses, all volunteers were invited to take part in a focus group. Seven individuals representing three of the four colleges at the university participated. Focus group completion utilized a protocol designed to further support data collected by examining how faculty acquire online teaching skills and their views on professional development targeting online and hybrid course design along with solicitation of ideas on how to improve participation in these offerings (Appendix D). A mix of experience was represented with all individuals having some experience teaching online at the university, and more than half having previously participated in Quality Matters training.

#### **Data Analysis Methods**

Resulting survey and interview/focus group data were analyzed separately. In that the survey completion was prior to the participant interviews, this data was utilized to guide and

inform the focus group conducted. Once all interviews were completed and that data analyzed, both sets of data were integrated to uncover any existing patterns and relationships.

### **Survey Data Analysis**

Survey results were tracked in Qualtrics with data then imported in SPSS in order to view descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistics including frequencies, means, and standard deviations for all survey questions utilizing Likert scale or yes/no answers are presented in Chapter 4. Independent T-tests were conducted on data for the closed-ended survey questions regarding attendance at professional development, teaching confidence, online teaching confidence, and general effectiveness of online and hybrid course delivery comparing responses by demographic groups including gender, age range, and tenure status. An alpha level of  $\leq .05$  was used in determining statistical significance of results. Open-ended survey questions were carefully analyzed to identify emerging patterns and themes using the same process utilized for interview data analysis. Together these results provided an overall picture of online faculty viewpoints regarding professional development targeting online or hybrid course delivery at EU.

### **Open-ended Survey Questions and Interview Data Analysis**

Open-ended survey questions and interview data were analyzed separately to identify any emerging patterns or themes. Using the grounded theory approach, data were coded and organized using an open coding method (Saldana, 2013). Throughout the coding process memos were constructed to assist in continual analysis of data collected. Focus coding was then used to identify relationships among codes generated and to identify patterns that existed (Charmaz, 2014). Finally, themes emerged from the organization of codes into categories. This process is illustrated in Figure 3.2.

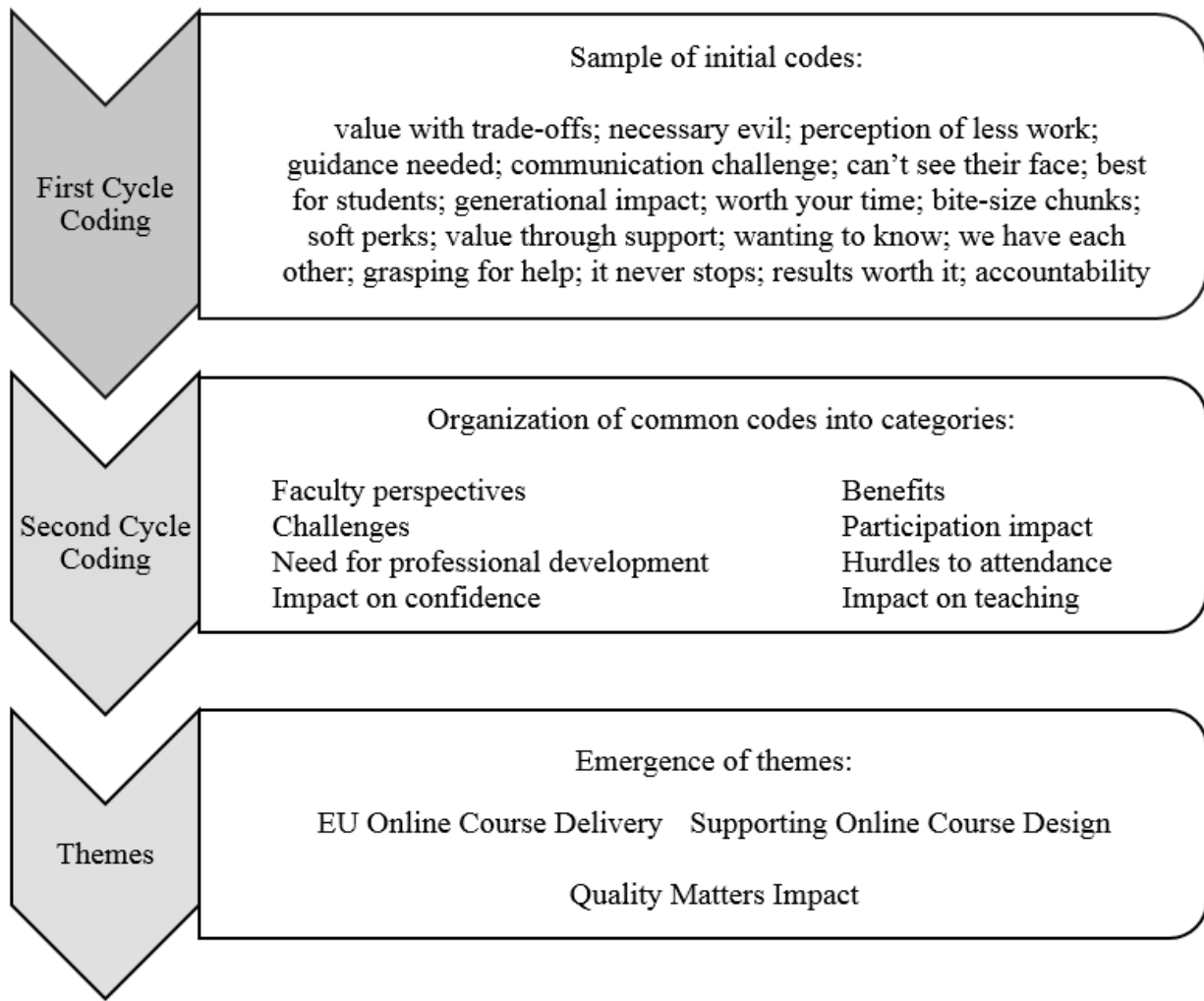


Figure 3.2. Qualitative Analysis Process.

Analysis of open-ended survey questions and interview data allowed creation of a data analysis matrix to assist in painting a straightforward representation of data collected (Saldana, 2013). This overall delineation of qualitative analysis provided deeper insight into faculty perspectives on professional development, and more specifically, the Quality Matters initiative and its impact on faculty confidence. Integration of the three means of data collection was important to create a broad picture of faculty background and perspectives along with how these

influence participation in professional development offerings targeting online or hybrid course delivery. Relationships between quantitative and qualitative findings were demonstrated through creation of a data analysis matrix depicting the interaction between the two data sets using a side-by-side joint display.

### **Trustworthiness**

Possible threats to validity of the study included lack of overall response to survey questions, sample bias, concern over anonymity, and potential repercussions of participation. Each of these had the ability to significantly influence the credibility of research results. To address these potential threats, several strategies were utilized to mitigate possible impact.

Obtaining adequate response to survey dissemination was critical for accurate representation of the targeted population. In order to increase the chance of participation, various deans and program coordinators were contacted to facilitate encouragement of participation prior to delivery of the survey. In addition, the online delivery as well as structure of the survey instrument were strategically utilized in an effort to make participation less burdensome.

Representation across various demographics, particularly discipline and online experience, were vital to the credibility of research results. Historically, participation in professional development has been concentrated within a handful of disciplines. To identify potential incentives and barriers to participation and eliminate sample bias, it was necessary to obtain a broad variety of perspectives as well as discipline representation. Results demonstrated a wide representation range within the areas of gender, age, and tenure. The survey results received from each discipline area mirrored the sampling frame percentages.

Concerns regarding the potential for identification of participant responses can significantly influence the choice to participate in information-gathering surveys. The use of



anonymous response settings in Qualtrics helped to relieve anxiety in this area. While respondents were able to opt-in to providing contact information, this was not a necessary component of survey completion.

To increase the validity of research results, inclusion of varying perspectives and a broad range of data sources were utilized. Cross-analysis of survey and interview data provided a better representation of faculty perspectives than either used in isolation. In addition, a thorough review of the personal perspectives and potential bias of the researcher was addressed. Transcription of all interviews was completed and interview and focus group data were gathered across multiple sources and utilized all levels of faculty involvement.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

In that this study targeted only faculty members at Eastwood University, generalization of results to faculty at other institutions may not be effective. In addition, only those faculty members who chose to participate are specifically represented in the research results. Difficulty in obtaining an adequate representation of a cross-section of disciplines and experiences was also a concern. Further, by utilizing an anonymous, online survey to collect overall perspectives, follow up was not possible with faculty who choose not to provide identifying information.

Only faculty who are currently teaching or have previously taught online or hybrid courses were included in delivery of the survey instrument, subsequent interviews and the focus group. This choice was based upon the fact that they are the intended audience for the Quality Matters professional development programs offered at EU.

## **Summary**

This research centered on examining factors that influence participation in professional development designed to support online course excellence at Eastwood University. With the number of students receiving online instruction in higher education rapidly increasing, ensuring academic excellence in online instruction is imperative for the University in their efforts to provide students with a high quality online learning experience as well as remaining competitive in an increasingly saturated market. Examining factors that influence faculty participation in professional development will assist EU in creating or modify existing offerings as well as develop possible incentives to increase faculty participation. In addition, the research may have served to increase campus awareness concerning the QM professional development offerings specifically. This increased knowledge and awareness could potentially serve as a catalyst for broader faculty participation in the future.

## CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### Introduction

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine factors influencing participation in professional development designed to safeguard online course excellence at Eastwood University (EU) and its impact on faculty confidence and teaching. The following research questions informed this study:

- What perceptions, attitudes, and experiences influence faculty participation in EU professional development opportunities targeting online course design?
- How has participation in QM professional development impacted faculty confidence in their ability to design a quality online learning environment?
- How has participation in the QM professional development influenced other areas of their teaching?

An online survey, semi-structured interviews, and focus group were conducted to address these questions. The first section of this Chapter 4 describes the major quantitative and qualitative findings from the survey. Characteristics of respondents are followed by remaining survey results and statistical data.

The second section of this chapter combines major qualitative findings from both the interviews and focus group. An open coding method was used to analyze and interpret emerging patterns or themes. Results from this analysis are presented by theme based on the coding process.

The final section of this chapter merges the results of the survey, interview, and focus group data. A side-by-side comparison of results is utilized to provide a more comprehensive view along with an examination of similarities and differences.

### **Survey Results**

The survey (Appendix A) was delivered to current faculty members at Eastwood University who had taught at least one online or hybrid course within the previous academic year (n = 165). The total number of completed survey responses received was 72 for a response rate of 43%.

#### **Characteristics of Respondents**

Survey demographic data regarding gender was evenly divided with 53% (n = 38) of respondents being male and 47% (n = 34) being female. This result closely reflects the population of the total sampling frame consisting of 51% (n = 84) male and 49% (n = 81) female. The question of age range was divided into four categories with under 40 years old representing 13% (n = 9), the lowest number of respondents. The balance of respondents were evenly distributed between the three remaining age ranges as shown in Table 4.1. In that the age of faculty members is not a publically available statistic, it is difficult to determine if this is an accurate reflection of the age range of the sampling frame. However, the representation of the three categories other than under 40 was evenly divided, and under 40 years old would be expected to represent the smallest number of respondents based upon traditional faculty demographics. A majority of respondents reported as tenured, with the remainder evenly divided between tenure track and non-tenure track.

Table 4.1

*EU Faculty Demographics*

<u>Demographic</u>	<u>Responses</u>	<u>Response Percentage</u>
Male	38	55%
Female	34	45%
Under 40	9	13%
40 – 50 years	24	33%
51 – 60 years	21	29%
Over 60 years	18	25%
Non-tenure track	15	21%
Tenure track	14	19%
Tenured	43	60%

All four colleges at the university were represented by the sample including Arts and Sciences, Business, Education, and Technology. As shown in Table 4.2, the representative sample percentage received from each area mirrors the sampling frame.

Table 4.2.

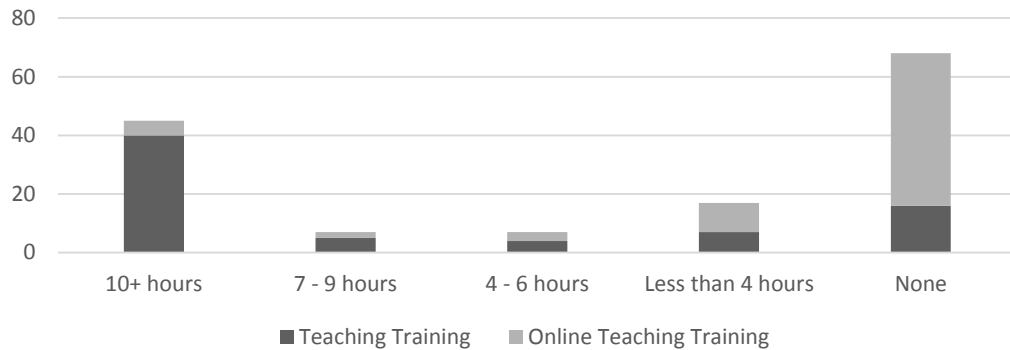
*Academic Disciplines*

<u>College</u>	<u>Percentage of Surveys Delivered</u>	<u>Representative Percentage of Survey Responses</u>
Arts and Sciences	40%	38%
Business	11%	13%
Education	32%	33%
Technology	17%	17%

**Experience**

Survey respondents were asked to indicate how much training in the area of teaching they received during their time in graduate school. As depicted in Figure 4.1, nearly 80% (n = 56) of

faculty reported experiencing some teaching training during their graduate programs with more than half receiving 10 or more hours of training. Conversely, 72% (n = 52) indicated they receive no training for teaching online or hybrid course design within their graduate coursework.



*Figure 4.1.* Teaching Training Received During Graduate School.

When asked about experience as an online student, 33% (n = 24) of respondents indicated they had participated in a least one online or hybrid course during their graduate work. The remainder indicated they had no experience as a student in an online learning environment during their course of study.

### **Teaching Confidence**

Faculty were asked to rate their confidence in teaching, both in general and specifically teaching online. A five point scale was used: 1=very confident, 2=confident, 3=neutral, 4=not very confident, and 5=not at all confident. While 51% (n = 37) of respondents reported they were very confident in their teaching (M=1.54 , SD= 0.63), this category dropped by more than half to 20% (n = 14) when asked about their confidence in online or hybrid teaching (M=2.00,

SD=0.72). Although not to the same level, the majority of respondents still indicated they were confident in their ability to teach online or hybrid courses as shown in Figure 4.2.

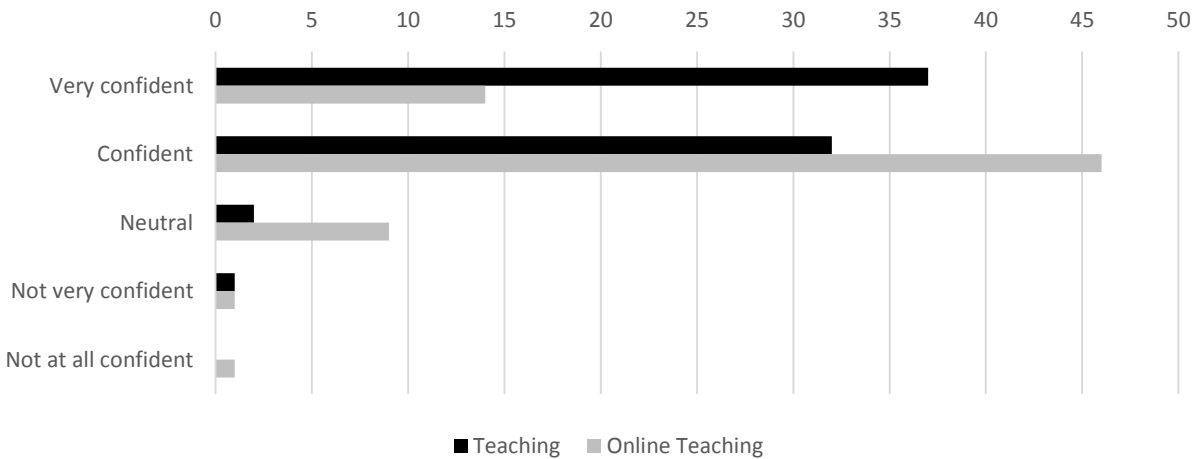


Figure 4.2 Confidence in Teaching.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to evaluate if teaching confidence was significantly different based on age group. Respondents were divided into two groups with 33 survey respondents in the 50 and under age bracket, and 39 respondents in the 51 and above age bracket. Of these age groups, respondents who were 50 and under ( $M = 1.79, SD = .696$ ) on the average had lower results when compared with the respondents who were over 50 ( $M = 1.33, SD = .478$ ). Results of the independent samples t-test,  $t(72) = 3.270, p = 0.002$ , showed a statistically significant difference between the two age groups in the level of their teaching confidence, assuming equal variances. These results indicate that survey respondents over 50 are more confident in their teaching than those 50 and under. However, it is important to note that the data was not robust enough to meet the assumption of normality in distribution and therefore reliance upon these results should be limited. T-tests showed no significant difference between these age groups in regard to online teaching confidence ( $p = .186$ ).

An independent samples t-test was also conducted to evaluate whether teaching confidence was statistically significant based on tenure status. Of the 72 survey respondents, 15 reported non-tenure status. The test was significant,  $t(72) = 2.855, p = .006$ . Tenured and tenure-track respondents ( $M = 1.44, SD = .567$ ) on the average scored higher than the non-tenured respondent ( $M = 1.93, SD = .704$ ). These results indicate that tenured and tenure-track respondents are more confident in their teaching than non-tenure respondents. It is again important to note that caution should be used when relying on these results in that due to the nature of the data, adequate distribution was not achieved. T-tests showed no significant difference between these groups in regard to online teaching confidence ( $p = .224$ ).

Independent samples t-tests were further conducted to evaluate if teaching confidence or online teaching confidence was significantly different based on gender. Neither of these tests were found to be significant indicating that gender did not play a significant role in teaching confidence or online teaching confidence.

### **EU Online Landscape**

Three survey questions focused on viewpoints regarding the online learning landscape at EU. Faculty were asked to rate their perception of the importance placed on online or hybrid programs as well as teaching development for those programs, and how much importance they feel should be placed on these programs at the university. Three choices were provided including underemphasized, the right amount, or overemphasized. Slightly more than 50% of respondents indicated they felt that the university placed the right amount of importance on online and hybrid programs and online course delivery. Less than 30% of faculty indicated they thought the university overemphasized its importance. When asked to use the same scale to rate the importance placed by EU on teaching development for the design and delivery of online or



hybrid courses, a slightly larger percentage indicated they felt the right amount of emphasis was placed in this area. Only 6% felt the university overemphasized its importance.

Table 4.3.

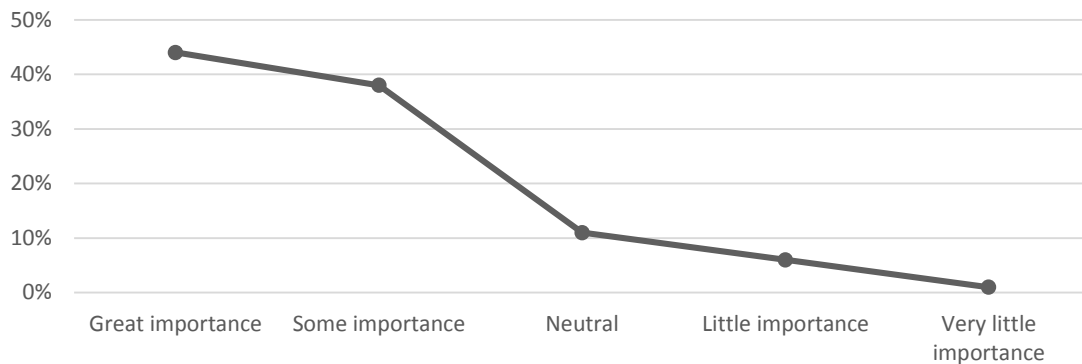
*Importance Placed on Online Delivery/Online Teaching Development*

Online Delivery	Frequency	Percent
1-Underemphasized	14	19
2-The right amount	38	53
3-Overemphasized	20	28
n		72
Mean		2.08
Standard Deviation		0.69

Online Teaching Development	Frequency	Percent
1-Underemphasized	24	34
2-The right amount	43	61
3-Overemphasized	4	6
n		71
Mean		1.72
Standard Deviation		0.57

Respondents were asked to choose from five options regarding how much importance they felt should be placed on professional development programs for teaching online and hybrid courses at EU. These choices included great importance, some importance, neutral, little importance, and very little importance. More than 80% of faculty members felt importance should be placed on these programs with over half of those indicating great importance as necessary ( $M=1.82$ ,  $SD=.94$ ). Of the remaining respondents, 7% was divided between those choosing little or very little importance, with the remaining 11% remaining neutral.



*Figure 4.3.* Importance Placed on Teaching Development for Online/Hybrid Delivery

### **Perceptions of Online Course Delivery**

Survey respondents provided a wide variety of opinions on the benefits, challenges, and effectiveness of online course delivery.

**Benefits.** Survey respondents identified several benefits to online course offerings. Flexibility in scheduling for both students and faculty was reported as an advantage. For students, this included the ability to access course content and work on assignments outside the scope of a traditional class schedule. Non-stop access to course content where students can retrieve it “whenever and wherever they want throughout the semester” was reported as useful in enhancing their understanding. Greater access was also recognized as a benefit in that individuals do not have to be located within the general vicinity of campus in order to further their academic endeavors. Several respondents further highlighted the ability for online course offerings to increase overall university enrollment.

**Challenges.** To further explore perspectives impacting participation in professional development opportunities, an open-response question was posed regarding the greatest challenges to teaching online or hybrid courses. These qualitative responses were coded and organized into themes discussed below.

*Attempts at simulating classroom experiences.* Concerns were expressed regarding the attempt to simulate a classroom experience in an online environment. As one respondent remarked, “My greatest challenge is to achieve the unrealistic goal of creating a simulated classroom experience. It does not happen and never will in the online format.” Several faculty emphasized that online courses are a very different type of learning environment and focus should be placed on a quality student learning experience instead of replication of a traditional classroom setting. An understanding that these courses are not going to be close versions of traditional classes and focus should instead be placed on “creating a unique learning environment that makes students think, not just trains them in memorization or lower-order thinking skills, but delivers new or improves existing skills.”

*Communication.* Effectively communicating with online students was reported as a significant challenge in the online classroom. Being able to ensure that the written word is read in the same manner as was intended can be an elusive goal. Even though the instructor believes they have provided an explanation of course material which makes sense to them, it may not make sense to the students. As one respondent replied, “Sometimes things make sense to me but they don't to the user.” Another concern over communication expressed was the difficulty in conveying sentiments in the manner they were attended. “Sometimes typed messages are misinterpreted and the compassion that we may have for students going through personal issues, isn't always conveyed,” stated one respondent. Being able to infuse tone and emotion in written communication can be a difficult obstacle to overcome.

*Interaction.* Survey respondents stressed the challenge of interacting with online students to establish working relationships. Many articulated a struggle in attempting to get to know their online students in the same manner they get to know those in the traditional classroom setting.

Building relationships with online course students can be difficult in that the opportunity to “really get to know them” by engaging in conversation is generally limited. One respondent commented, “The greatest challenge in teaching online courses is getting to know the students as well as you are able to through face-to-face classes.” Although difficult, it is possible according to another respondent who pronounced, “They don’t understand everything that can be done online so that you get the interaction..., but you have to have a dedicated faculty and you have to have the student who wants to engage.”

*Academic honesty.* Academic honesty was mentioned by respondents as one the greatest challenges to online course delivery. Some respondents felt it was impossible to determine who is completing assignments in an asynchronous learning environment. Even though measures have been implemented by the university to impede cheating in the online environment, respondents felt that it was difficult at best to “make sure students are really mastering the material versus taking shortcuts and cheating to get the work done.” A concern that students are simply using other devices to gain answers and, as a result, are not truly engaging with course content when presented in an online environment was evident.

*Content design and delivery.* Developing ways to design and deliver course content was cited by several faculty as a significant challenge. Being able to provide the same class rigor as in a traditional environment can be difficult. As one respondent remarked, “Understanding that these classes are not close versions of face-to-face classes is important,” adding that the greatest challenge can be “creating a unique learning environment that makes students think, not just train them in memorization or lower-order thinking skills, but delivers new or improves existing skills.”

*Engagement and interaction.* More than half of all respondents identified student engagement and interaction as a significant challenge in online course delivery. Encouraging students to engage and interact with the content, their peers, and the instructor were all reported as concerns. “For my course, the greatest challenge is getting students to read and interact with my feedback,” commented one respondent. Having students only engage at a minimal level with course discussions “even when the dialogue is engaging and could be ongoing” was also mentioned as more difficult in an online course environment.

**Effectiveness.** The survey asked respondents to rate the general effectiveness of online and hybrid course delivery using a five points scale: 1=very effective, 2=effective, 3=neutral, 4=ineffective, and 5=very ineffective. While 64% (n=46) of faculty believe it to be effective, approximately half as many indicating they feel neutral on the subject. Only 4% felt that these courses were ineffective (M=2.31, SD=0.76).

An independent samples t-test was conducted to evaluate if ratings of general effectiveness of online and hybrid course delivery was significantly different based on gender. Of the 38 male and 34 female survey respondents, males respondents ( $M = 2.47, SD = .797$ ) on the average had slightly lower results when compared with the female respondents ( $M = 2.12, SD = .686$ ). Results of the independent samples t-test,  $t(72) = 2.02, p = 0.047$ , showed a statistically significant difference between male and female respondents rating of the general effectiveness of online and hybrid course delivery, assuming equal variances. These results indicate that female survey respondents find online and hybrid course delivery more effective than male respondents. Additional t-tests were conducted regarding the general effectiveness of online and hybrid course delivery based on the demographics of age and tenure. None of these tests were found to be significant.

Respondents were asked to explain their choice of response regarding online course effectiveness. A majority acknowledged the necessity for online opportunities in the current educational environment and, as a result, the need to ensure effectiveness. However, concerns were raised as to whether it is as effective as traditional course delivery. Responses explaining these ratings were categorized into themes and are discussed below.

*Student learning experience.* EU faculty shared a wide range of viewpoints regarding student learning experiences in connection with the effectiveness of online courses. Both positive and negative outlooks were expressed ranging from a belief that online courses are the “strongest form of future learning” to a belief that students can never “have an experience even similar to what we accomplish in person in the classroom.” Positive outlooks pointed to successful navigation of future courses as an indication of the effectiveness of online learning and continued access for students to course materials and resources. Those expressing concerns focused on the inability to provide hands-on experience or the same level of guided practice in an online environment.

*Implementation.* Implementation was identified as an important factor in the effectiveness of online courses. Several faculty highlighted a dependence on the instructor to provide a conducive learning environment. This reliance upon effective teaching was highlighted by one respondent:

The effectiveness is completely dependent on the instructor’s ability to build a course that engages students differently and allows them to experience the material authentically. It takes time and effort to align all of the components into a cohesive stream that will yield student understanding. There is NO SHORTCUT to doing effective teaching.

Concerns regarding implementation of an effective online environment seem to focus not only on the design of the course, but also the delivery and reliance on effective teaching strategies.

*Student responsibility.* Student motivation and commitment were mentioned by many respondents as a driving factor in the effectiveness of online course delivery. A dependence upon the individual student's ability to be self-disciplined in staying engaged in an online course was repeatedly highlighted. Others felt it was no different than traditional classes in that students are going to "get out of their classes what they choose to put in."

### **Professional Development Targeting Online and Hybrid Course Design**

Survey respondents were asked to indicate their awareness of professional development targeting online and hybrid course design offered by the university. Nearly all survey respondents indicated an awareness of these offerings and 79% ( $n = 57$ ) denoted they had previously attended this type of offering at EU. Respondents were also asked to provide opinions as to the usefulness of these programs and to predict how often they would plan on attending. Finally, respondents were asked to provide ideas to encourage higher participation.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to evaluate if previous attendance was significantly different based on gender. There were 38 male and 34 female survey respondents. Males survey respondents ( $M = 1.21$ ,  $SD = .413$ ) on the average had almost identical results when compared with the female survey respondents ( $M = 1.21$ ,  $SD = .410$ ). Results of the independent samples t-test,  $t(72) = .048$ ,  $p = 0.96$ , showed no significant difference between male and female attendance, assuming equal variances. Results indicate that gender resulted in no statistically significant difference in previous professional development attendance. Additional t-tests revealed no significant results regarding previous attendance based on the demographics of age and tenure.

**Usefulness of professional development programs.** Respondents rated usefulness of professional development activities targeting online or hybrid course design offered on campus.

A five point scale was used: 1=very useful, 2=somewhat useful, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat useless, and 5=very useless. A total of 79% (n = 57) of respondents expressed a belief that professional development activities targeting online or hybrid course design would be beneficial to them (M=1.85, SD=0.94).

An independent samples t-test was conducted to evaluate if gender resulted in significantly different ratings of the usefulness of professional development activities targeting online or hybrid course design for male survey respondents when compared to their female counterparts. There were 38 male and 34 female survey respondents. Male survey respondents ( $M = 2.05$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) on the average rated attendance usefulness lower than female survey respondents ( $M = 1.62$ ,  $SD = .739$ ). Results of the independent samples t-test,  $t(72) = .199$ ,  $p = 0.50$ , showed a statistically significant difference between male and female respondents, assuming equal variances. These results indicate that female survey respondents find professional development activities targeting online or hybrid course design more useful than male respondents. However, reliance upon these results should be limited in that the nature of the data did not meet the assumption of normality in distribution. Additional t-tests were conducted regarding the usefulness of professional development activities targeting online and hybrid course design based on the demographics of age and tenure. None of these tests were found to be significant.

Respondents who had previously attended campus professional development activities were asked using the same scale to rate how useful they had found the offerings in improving their online or hybrid course design. A total of 42% (n = 24) indicated they found the offerings very useful in improving their online or hybrid course design followed by 46% (n = 26) who found them somewhat useful (M=1.75, SD=0.83). Respondents were also asked to provide ideas



for improving the usefulness of these professional development offerings. A wide variety of ideas were offered including making them more discipline specific, hands on or one-on-one instruction, varying the availability by including online offerings available on demand, ensuring continued support for implementation, and providing time for instructors to have conversations about teaching online. Table 4.4 provides a summary of the responses.

Table 4.4.

*Summary of Open-Ended Responses Regarding Improving PD Usefulness*

	N	%	Quotations
(1) Discipline specific	10	30.3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discipline specific would be better</li> <li>• Course specific instruction</li> <li>• More by subject area</li> <li>• Less cookie-cutter template</li> <li>• Application to use in course disciplines</li> </ul>
(2) Varying availability	9	27.2%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide availability online</li> <li>• Ability to participate on own time</li> <li>• Offer same programs at 2 different times</li> <li>• Offering them on a variety of days/times</li> <li>• Accessibility off campus</li> <li>• Bring them to our school</li> <li>• Do it during faculty meeting times</li> </ul>
(3) Continued support	6	18.1%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow up with individual staff members</li> <li>• Staff to troubleshoot</li> <li>• Small groups formed for support</li> <li>• Assure that tech support is available</li> </ul>
(4) Interactive/individualized instruction	3	10.0%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More individualized tutoring</li> <li>• Direct application of the techniques</li> <li>• More one-on-one assistance</li> </ul>
(5) Peer sharing	3	10.0%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get together to talk about what we are doing</li> <li>• Quality Matters graduates providing assistance to the rest of us</li> </ul>

**Plans for Attendance.** Respondents were asked to indicate how often they would plan to attend future professional development targeting online or hybrid course design if programs suiting their interest were offered on campus. Four choices were provided: 1=once a month, 2=once a semester, 3=once a year, and 4=never. Attending once a semester received the highest response with 51% (n = 37) of faculty indicated this choice as their preference followed by once a month which was chosen by 29% (n = 21), and once a year chosen by 13% (n = 9). Only 7% (n = 5) respondents indicated they would never plan to engage (M=1.97, SD=.84). These survey respondents were then given an opportunity to provide the main reason why they would choose not to participate. A preference for face-to-face courses, ease of access/availability, and lack of usefulness were reasons cited. In addition, two respondents indicated impending retirement as the determining factor.

**Increasing the Likelihood of Attendance.** The survey provided respondents with an opportunity to identify what they felt could be done to increase the likelihood of future attendance. A total of 52 respondents answered this question indicating a variety of ideas to boost enrollment. The largest percentage relayed a need for the university to offer some type of incentive for attendance due to the increase in faculty workload. Providing opportunities that are discipline specific and offered within the confines of the individual colleges, supplying greater availability of offerings, varying ability levels, increasing program visibility, and requiring attendance were also recommended. A handful of respondents suggested continuing with the current state of affairs.

Table 4.5.

*Summary of Open-Ended Responses Regarding Increasing PD Attendance*

	N	%	Quotations
(1) Offer incentives	20	38.4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Release time for course development.</li> <li>• Increase salary/lower teaching load</li> <li>• Compensation</li> </ul>
(2) Discipline specific	8	15.3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diverse discipline applications</li> <li>• Relevant to what we are doing</li> <li>• Shorter, targeted sessions.</li> </ul>
(3) Greater availability	8	15.3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More offerings in the summer</li> <li>• Multiple dates to attend</li> <li>• Variety of days and times</li> </ul>
(4) Different levels	7	13.4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer more advanced courses</li> <li>• Providing different levels of training</li> </ul>
(5) Continue as currently provided	5	9.6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep offering them.</li> </ul>
(6) Increased visibility	3	5.7%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased visibility of times/program content.</li> </ul>
(7) Require it	1	1.9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think QM should be required for faculty teaching online</li> </ul>

**Quality Matters**

The survey asked respondents to identify whether they had taken part in Quality Matters training, with 47% (n=34) indicating they had participated in some manner. Survey results regarding QM impact on confidence and other areas of teaching are addressed under separate headings below.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to evaluate if attendance at Quality Matters training was significantly different based on gender. The test was not significant,  $t(72) = .912, p = .365$ . Male survey respondents ( $M = 1.58, SD = .50$ ) on the average had similar results to female male respondents ( $M = 1.47, SD = .87$ ). These results indicate that gender resulted in no statistically significant difference in attendance at Quality Matters training. Additional t-tests revealed no significant results regarding Quality Matters attendance based on the demographics of age and tenure.

Respondents indicating they had not attended QM training were asked to describe why they have elected not to participate. Seven choices were presented along with the ability to choose more than one response. Of the 38 responses received for this question, none indicated a lack of support for online learning. Time was the deciding factor for a majority of respondents along with interest, encouragement, incentives, and a lack of knowledge regarding program availabilities.

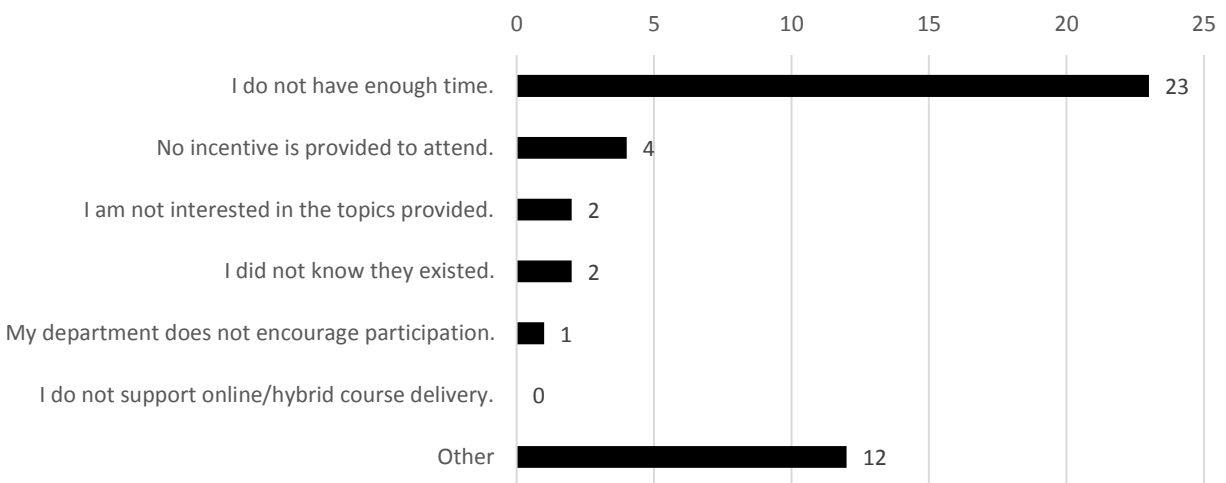


Figure 4.4. Factors influencing nonparticipation in QM training.

Individuals choosing “other” as a response were given the opportunity to more fully describe their participation choice. A few of these respondents indicated retirement as a deciding factor, with the majority again emphasizing the time commitment required.

**Impact on confidence.** Respondents identifying as participating in Quality Matters training at EU were asked to describe the impact on confidence in their ability to design a quality online learning environment. Nearly 90% (n=34) of respondents who attended QM training felt it had increased their confidence in the ability to design a quality online learning environment. As one respondent revealed, “I feel more confident with teaching online and have been working on making my asynchronous online courses more interactive.”

**Impact on other areas of teaching.** Over 70% (n=24) of respondents who identified as participating in the QM training believed it influenced other areas of their teaching. In describing this impact, many indicated a heightened awareness in their approach to meeting student needs. Responses were analyzed and organized with four major themes emerging: (1) Course organization, (2) Alignment, (3) Assessment, and (4) Traditional courses.

*Course organization.* Various responses indicated impact of QM training on course organization in both online and traditional learning environments. “I find myself approaching teaching other classes in a more methodical manner. QM has provided some excellent guidance in delivery and the utilization of Canvas” stated one respondent emphasizing the effect of QM on the use of learning management systems in course delivery. Furthering this line of thought regarding course structure, another respondent acknowledged that even though the training does not actually promote creation of a course maps, it prompted the “rethinking of the organizational structure” and implementation in all classes they teach.

*Alignment.* Course alignment was identified by many respondents as another area influenced by QM training. For some who did not come from an educational background, the concept of alignment through course objectives was unfamiliar prior to the training. Although several indicated prior knowledge regarding alignment, a majority indicated an increased awareness of the importance in ensuring all course components work together to support students in achieving stated objectives. As one respondent stated:

The more and more I participate in and take part in the sessions, I see clearer connections in everything I teach, on and off campus. Alignment is key in everything we do, from structuring our objectives, to matching them to activities that allow the student to show what they have learned.

This alignment was reported as crucial in the development of activities and assessments to support student success.

*Assessment.* A number of participants reported a greater awareness of the purpose and importance of carefully selecting course assessments. QM training and the review of other courses in the process helped them to ensure that their courses met the prescribed standards and “that those course objectives are being assessed” through course activities. Several respondents mentioned becoming more succinct regarding assessment and “trying to be more concise and specific about expectations from students for assignments.”

*Traditional courses.* Nearly half of all QM participants indicated unexpected impacts of training on their traditional course delivery. As one respondent shared, “I find that I use ideas from the QM training in all of my courses...not only those that are online or hybrid.” Several responses attributed the QM training with an increased awareness of the use of the university learning management system to support all courses, as well as the positive influence on traditional course alignment and assessment. Highlighting integration of QM components in

other classes, one respondent shared, “I try to incorporate many of the online features that I would use in an online class into my face-to-face classes, even if they are only there as a supplemental material.” Another respondent reported that the ability to use QM features in traditional course delivery is “an unexpected advantage” resulting from training participation.

### **Interview and Focus Group Results**

Individual interviews were conducted with 11 EU faculty members and a focus group consisting of an additional 7 EU faculty members was also completed. All participants were faculty members at EU who had taught a minimum of one online course at the university over the past year with a variety of experience with professional development targeting online or hybrid course design.

#### **Participant Selection and Characteristics**

Participants for the interview portion of this study were selected as a result of their experience with online course delivery. This experience varied from participants having limited to substantial experience with online learning as instructors, to participants that have experienced online learning from both the student and faculty member perspectives. Each of the four colleges at the university were represented in the interview process. Of the 11 individuals interviewed, 5 had previously participated in the Quality Matters eLearning Academy, one had participated in limited Quality Matters training, with the others having no Quality Matters experience.

In addition to the selected interview participants, survey respondents were given an opportunity to self-select participation in a semi-structured interview. Use of a focus group allowed seven individuals representing three of the four colleges at the university to participate. A mix of experience was represented with all individuals having some experience

teaching online at the university, and more than half having previously participated in Quality Matters training.

Two different interview protocols were utilized. The first (Appendix C) was used during individual faculty interviews. The second (Appendix D) was used with the focus group. These interview protocols were designed to provide insight into faculty background, perspectives on online course delivery and EU professional development, and QM program. Field notes were composed during the interview process, but no physical documents were collected.

Interview and focus group data were carefully analyzed using initial coding methods that included in vivo and process coding. Codes were then sorted into natural categories and reviewed to identify emerging patterns or themes. Using these themes, the data were organized to provide insight into faculty perspectives on professional development targeting online course design and its impact on faculty confidence and teaching.

Throughout the interview and focus group process, participants revealed their experiences with and perceptions regarding online course delivery in higher education institutions along with motivating factors and barriers to participation in professional development designed to ensure online course quality. In addition, participants who had participated in Quality Matters training revealed its impact on their confidence in and teaching of online courses. Three main themes emerged from analysis of these interviews and focus group results: 1) EU online course delivery; 2) Supporting online course design; and 3) Quality Matters impact. While some data overlapped between the themes identified, final placement was determined through a logical approach with data being placed within the theme that represented the soundest fit.



## **Theme 1: EU Online Course Delivery**

Several categories emerged from responses regarding Eastwood University online course delivery. This theme is divided into three sections based on data analysis: (1) faculty outlook; (2) benefits; and (3) challenges.

**Online vantage point.** A mix of views were expressed by faculty regarding the outlook for online learning at EU. When asked about the general university consensus regarding online course delivery, most interviewed participants reported what they believed to be a wide range of perspectives across campus. As one participant shared, “Some are willing to do the online model to accommodate the students, and some will just not teach online. So it’s a mixed bag.” Another emphasized the financial implication for the university, stating “I think everybody sees it as a necessary tool and, even the reluctant adopters, see it as the only way we’re staying in business and students are not revolting against it.” Further clouding viewpoints was the uncertainty of the university message regarding online offerings. As one participant shared:

I don’t think the university knows what to do with the online courses here. I think they are pleased that we have them, but I don’t think that they understand the needs of the students or what could be done with online programs. I think it is something that has been at times encouraged and at other times not encouraged.

These perspectives were supported by the focus group whose members also characterized the overall university perspective as a “mixed bag” and lacking in solid direction in the future of online course offerings.

Some interview participants voiced concern over the impact of online learning on the future of higher education. Others offered an optimistic perspective stating that the university is making strides toward ensuring online course offerings meet the expectation of excellence. Even those who prefer traditional delivery, a majority of those interviewed (55%), indicated an

understanding that online courses have become the norm and that as a university there is a need to ensure we do whatever is necessary to continue to provide students with a quality learning environment. While everyone interviewed communicated an understanding that its inclusion is most likely undeniable within the higher education landscape, several expressed apprehension at the possibility of sacrificing course quality in an effort to “stay in business.”

**Advantages offered.** Three main benefits to online learning were cited during the interview process. The flexibility provided by online course delivery was mentioned by 36% of faculty. This flexibility applied to both faculty members and the students. As Cindy revealed, “I think it is wonderful for the students and faculty. It gives them the ability to be where they need to be when they need to be there.” Providing the opportunity to achieve educational goals for those that might not otherwise be able to attend was also mentioned. As Celia relayed “I think it opens the door for a lot of other students, nontraditional students, but even our traditional students who have to work to support themselves more. It just gives opportunities to some students that didn’t have opportunities.” Another benefit referred to was the ability to have an engaging class discussion without the concern of interruption. Harold pointed out “if it’s an engaged online discussion, there’s less worry that you’re going to interrupt somebody if there is typing going on. So there can be, the discussion can keep going on, so it is not even a physical space that you’re filling, but you’re filling the time with more content and interaction so the more of that you can get, the more learning.”

**Challenges.** Challenges to online course delivery were on the mind of all faculty, both for themselves and students at the university. These challenges were categorized into eight areas: (1) student/teacher interaction and communication; (2) quality; (3) time; (4) student readiness; (5) academic honesty; (6) class size; and (7) technology skills.

Table 4.6.

*Challenges to online course delivery.*

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
(1) Student/teacher interaction and communication	13	72.2
(2) Quality	11	61.1
(3) Time	9	50.0
(4) Student readiness	7	41.1
(5) Academic honesty	6	33.3
(6) Class size	3	16.6
(7) Technology skills	3	16.6

*Student/teacher interaction and communication.* A majority of interview participants along with several focus group members indicated their concerns over being able to effectively interact with students in an online learning environment. As John shared, “it’s different when you demonstrate something and you can look around and see facial expressions and understanding...and then there is guided practice and I am making corrections as they do it that you can’t do online.” This sentiment was reiterated by Jill who went on to add “I think that human contact is so important and know that the instructor is a real person that really cares.” Ensuring students are receiving the intended message in an online environment presents a unique hurdle. As Cindy commented, “You know online when you type something, they can perceive it differently.” Celia expressed the same concerns adding, “I think things can be misconstrued, you know in emails and things.” Along those same lines, Yolanda identified “less of a filter” in communication received from students and a feeling of more “disrespect and attitude.” John expressed his concern with “missing” communication, sharing that he often does a type of “triage” when he receives emails from students to determine how and when to address their

requests, as well as making sure he has some way to keep track of communication he may read but to which he isn't able to immediately respond.

*Quality.* Concern over quality received significant attention with over 60% of participants indicating its importance. Being able to provide a meaningful learning opportunity was considered difficult in the online environment, with specific guidelines and training for success indicated as essential. Bernice revealed, "I am worried about the quality of the online course delivery for our students. I think that, well let's just say in general, the quality in general because we know that just like with face to face classes sometimes teachers are more effective than others." Further underscoring concern for online course quality in an ever-increasing online market, Cindy shared:

I think people for the most part are afraid that we are going to lose that educational importance of being in a brick building, that we can't be able to deliver the same quality overall online. I think there are so many online classes at a variety of institutions that there is no quality control. It seems like any college anywhere can just slap things online and then say read this and take this little test and you have a degree. It is watered down and you are going to get a generation of students who haven't had a decent education.

Quality Matters participants felt concerns and misconceptions over the ability to deliver quality in an online environment could easily be addressed through the QM training.

*Time.* Time was specified by more than half of interview participants as one of the biggest challenges to teaching online courses. This sentiment was resoundingly echoed by all members of the focus group. These focus group members felt that to do an effective job in designing and delivering a quality online course, the time requirement can be overwhelming. All participants, those interviewed and focus group members, expressed their belief that online course design is more time intensive than traditional class preparation "if you are going to do it right." Cindy focused on the difference in the creation of online courses, disclosing:

I know it takes a long time to create a face to face course and I've done both, but somehow when you know that you are not going to be able to explain things immediately to people, you've got to put a lot more forethought into what you're doing and how you're doing it. I think others who've had the experience...once you do it, you know what it takes.

Trina shared what she believes is a misconception regarding the time necessary for design and continual support of online courses:

I think we have a real big challenge across the university because people perceive online as less work and it's like its more work...especially before the class starts. So you use half the summer for launching it and they think it's done. Well no, you get it all on and then it's the weekly discussions and quizzes I have all these things and they email you all weekend and you are constantly working so like it never stops.

Addressing this misconception was identified as a key step in creating a supportive university environment.

*Student readiness.* Student readiness was highlighted by more than 40% of those interviewed as a challenge to online courses. These participants discussed the need for self-motivation and responsibility, sharing their concern that not all students who enroll in online courses possess these attributes and, as a result, can “flounder” in that environment. Further complicating the subject matter, a common student misconception regarding the ease of online courses was cited. Cindy shared “I think students have a perception that it's going to be easier, but in my perception from both teaching them and taking them, I think they're harder.”

*Academic honesty.* Cheating in the online environment was considered a challenge for 33% of faculty interviewed. All communicated a focus on not “knowing who is doing the work.” Jill shared that she felt “as far as their inclination to be dishonest,” the online environment doesn't have the same accountability as a face to face environment. She went on to add that she is aware of tools provided by the university to help in this area, but felt like learning and using these tools would require a great deal of time which she had not yet investigated. On the other

side of this issue, Harold indicated he knew there was a great deal of concern across campus regarding cheating, but that he was going to “assume that the students are doing their own work.”

*Class size.* Approximately 27% of faculty interviewed suggested keeping class sizes small despite a perception that as many students as desire should be able to enroll presents a stumbling block when offering online courses. All felt that to be able to effectively engage and assess these students, the class size should be kept small. A concern over the possibility that keeping up numbers in these classes to maintain university enrollment was voiced as well.

*Technology.* A small percentage (16%) discussed the challenge of technology skills, specifically in the case of nontraditional students who may not possess the same level of expertise as traditional students. These participants indicated an awareness of campus resources designed to meet the needs of these students, but indicated that most often students see instructors as the first line of defense in addressing technology issues. This reliance on faculty for troubleshooting, even immediately redirected to the appropriate resource, still consumed significant time and attention. None of the interview or focus group participants relayed concerns regarding faculty technology skills.

## **Theme 2: Supporting Online Course Design**

Three categories emerged from responses regarding the need to support faculty in developing and designing an effective online course. This theme is divided into four sections based on data analysis: (1) need for professional development; (2) participation impact; (3) hurdles to attendance; and (4) motivating faculty.

**Need for professional development.** Professional development for all faculty, especially those teaching online, was cited as necessary by a large percentage (72%) of those interviewed and the entire focus group. Indicating that everyone, no matter their profession, has to complete

training to stay current for their employment, Bernice went on to add “if a person wants to grow professionally, then they have to do some kind of professional development.” An expectation that faculty should be “life-long learners” was a common sentiment expressed. Ongoing professional development was referred to as “critical” for educators, especially those in online environments where delivery methods and options change frequently. Highlighting the need for continual learning, Cindy added “I think if we want them to be accountable for their learning, we have to be accountable for how we are delivering material.”

**Participation impact.**

Several benefits to participating in online course professional development were mentioned by both faculty interviewed and the focus group members. These included the interaction and support of peers and the improvements they were able to make as a result. As Cindy mentioned, it is “great just to hear what other faculty on campus are doing, just learning things to make our lives easier as faculty or easier for the students.” The message that online instructors face the same challenges and the necessity of supporting each other by sharing ideas and successes was evident in the focus group conversation. Networking afforded by this type of setting was so important to focus group members that a substantial period of time was spent discussing how to facilitate more opportunities on campus.

**Hurdles to attendance.** Two challenges to attendance at professional development for online course design were examined by interview participants and focus group members. The most commonly mentioned challenge was convenience. Five interview participants (45%) indicated conflicts in scheduling and limited offerings made attending these opportunities difficult. They expressed a desire for having professional development offerings brought to the individual colleges to make attending more convenient. A suggestion discussed by the focus

group was the creation of online course professional development modules that could be accessed at the convenience of faculty. The other challenge cited was a lack of relevance in the offerings. While participants expressed appreciation for the efforts of the Faculty Support Center, a need for more focused opportunities targeting specific academic disciplines and content areas, as well as having the opportunity to have a voice in topics were also mentioned.

**Motivating faculty.** Responses regarding motivation for attending online course design professional development can be classified as intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsically motivated factors were identified by more than 50% of participants and were centered on faculty members' need to improve their own course design to become a better instructor. Participating in the professional development was based on wanting "to be able to deliver the course content in a manner that's appealing and accessible to students." Cindy shared this perspective stating, "I'm motivated to make my courses better. I want the students to get the best experience. If it's something that is going to impact my delivery of content or my job in some capacity, then I would be open to going to it." Harold shared his desire to continually want to increase his knowledge and the satisfaction received in volunteering to participate, adding "I just feel good about myself and when I show up on time and go to one that's required, I still feel good about it but it's not the same."

Extrinsic factors identified by participants as potential incentives for participation in professional development targeting online course design included workload or monetary incentives, encouragement and modeling from department chairs or deans, and recognition.

*Workload/monetary incentives.* While money was never mentioned as a determining factor of attendance at professional development, approximately 40% of interview participants indicated it would be a welcome incentive. As Linda commented, "I know it is not all about the



money, but doing reviews does take quite a bit of time.” Workload relief was also mentioned during more than 30% of interviews as a way to encourage attendance. Cindy shared “I think faculty just feel overwhelmed, so maybe if they are doing it, they could get workload relief, because you are going to put time in it.”

*Encouragement/modeling.* Over 30% of faculty mentioned the influence of encouragement from colleagues and administration on their decision to participate in professional development offerings. However, mandating attendance was identified by the same percentage as an ineffective method to promote participation. As Linda shared:

Hearing about how valuable it is and how helpful it is to the students makes a difference. Mandating, I think, would put up a critical wall and make people defensive, but just mentioning that they would like them to and being personally involved would make a difference.

Demonstrating that involvement is important to administration by not only encouraging participation, but by actually attending the training as well was also highlighted as a strong motivational factor in faculty attendance.

*Recognition.* Recognition for participation was mentioned by more than half of interview participants as impacting their motivation to attend. “You know, just those small things, just the little, small pats on the backs make a difference,” revealed Linda, who added “and it’s nice, you know, when those things are noticed in your performance appraisal, I think that’s nice as well.”

### **Theme 3: Quality Matters Impact**

Of the 11 faculty interviewed and 7 focus group members, a total of 10 had participated in some form of Quality Matters training. Those individuals were asked to discuss QM training, its impact on confidence in designing a quality online learning environment, and any influence on other areas of their teaching. All of these participants voiced support for the QM program and

indicated they would recommend it to their colleagues. Cindy shared “I thought it was wonderful. It gave me great ideas. I felt like the next time I delivered that course afterwards it was smoother for the students as well as for me.”

**Impact on confidence in quality online course design.** Each QM participant expressed a feeling of increased confidence in their ability to design an effective online course environment that meets the needs of students following participating in the program. While several added that they “certainly did not feel like an expert in the area” and continually needed to learn how to improve their online and traditional courses, they felt the training provided a strong foundation on which to build. Some participants indicated that although they felt fairly confident in their online teaching abilities prior to the training, the training increased this confidence. From ensuring accessibility to aligning course assessment and objectives, all felt that the knowledge gained allows them to feel more secure in the educational value of their online courses, as well as increasing their ability to engage students in quality learning environment. Emphasizing QM impact on confidence in effectively presenting course content online, Linda shared:

When I started teaching I had no training in that area so it just evolved over time. I am sure I wasn't great in the beginning and it took a long time for me to feel like I even knew what I was doing. I knew my content, but I really wasn't sure how to present it. With the QM training, I feel like when it comes to my online courses I not only know my content, but I know how to present it in a way that works for the me and the students.

Increased confidence in the ability to meet student needs was echoed by all QM participants.

**Influence on other areas of teaching.** All participants acknowledged the influence of QM training on other areas of teaching, including course organization, assessment, alignment, and a significant impact on traditional course design and delivery.

*Course organization.* Course organization was mentioned by a majority of both interview and focus group participants as being an area strongly impacted by participation in QM training.

Participants felt training in this area allowed them to present all course information in a manner that facilitates student access and eliminates confusion, especially when using the university learning management system. As Betty conveyed, “I think awareness of course organization that comes with the QM training makes it easier for students to find what they need and overall just makes the flow of your courses better.” Improved course flow along with an interesting perspective on organizational impact was suggested by Cindy who added, “Quality Matters helps with the organization of the course in order to make sure that the course itself doesn’t interfere with the learning.” Ensuring unobstructed access through course organization based on QM helps her promote student success.

*Alignment.* Alignment was also an area of impact discussed by both interview participants and the focus group. Many suggested this could be one of the most important pieces of the QM rubric in that it requires them to consider and ensure that they are “teaching what they say they are going to teach.” Looking carefully at what they are presenting, how they are scaffolding learning, and how they are assessing it causes faculty to be more strategic in content and assignments they include in their courses. This provides a more cohesive and successful learning environment for students and makes certain they are able to meet course objectives.

*Traditional courses.* All interview and focus group members who participated in Quality Matters training indicated a significant impact on other courses, specifically those who also taught traditional courses. Yolanda shared, “Yes, I think I changed things in my classroom just as much as I have changed online with objectives and alignment. I think overall it just makes the flow of your course better. It doesn’t have to be strictly online classes because I do believe there are benefits for your face to face courses as well.” The impact of the training was felt well beyond the scope of the course submitted for review during the QM process for all involved.

## Survey, Interview and Focus Group Results Integration

In order to compare survey and interview/focus group results, joint displays containing the major findings from each were created. These displays are organized by research question and include data from both quantitative and qualitative findings, followed by a discussion highlighting the differences and similarities.

### **Research Question #1: What perceptions, attitudes and experiences influence faculty participation in EU professional development opportunities targeting online course design?**

Combined results highlighting online benefits, challenges, nonparticipation, and ideas for increasing usefulness and future participation are displayed in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7.

#### *Research Question #1 Results*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Survey Results</b>	<b>Interviews/Focus Group Results</b>
<b>Online Benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flexibility in scheduling</li> <li>- Nonstop/at will access to course content</li> <li>- Wider audience</li> <li>- Increased enrollment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Student and faculty flexibility</li> <li>- Opportunity to achieve educational goals</li> <li>- Engaging uninterrupted class discussions</li> </ul>
<b>Online Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating a simulated classroom</li> <li>- Communication</li> <li>- Interaction</li> <li>- Academic dishonesty</li> <li>- Designing effective content</li> <li>- Engagement/interaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can't deliver same quality</li> <li>- It's more work</li> <li>- Knowing instructor is a real person who cares</li> <li>- Effective communication</li> <li>- Who is doing the work</li> <li>- Keeping #s manageable</li> <li>- Student technology skills</li> <li>- Lack of guidance/expectations</li> </ul>

<b>Theme cont.</b>	<b>Survey Results cont.</b>	<b>Interviews/Focus Group Results cont.</b>
<b>Reasons for nonparticipation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time (61%)</li> <li>- No incentive (11%)</li> <li>- Not interested in topics (5%)</li> <li>- Not aware of existence (5%)</li> <li>- No encouragement (3%)</li> <li>- Other-retirement/time (32%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inconvenient time/</li> <li>- Location/topic offered</li> <li>- Lack of relevance to discipline</li> <li>- Lack of encouragement</li> </ul>
<b>Ideas for improvement in professional development opportunities to increase likelihood of attendance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Offer incentives</li> <li>- Discipline specific offerings</li> <li>- Greater availability – more/variety of dates &amp; times</li> <li>- Different levels of offerings to accommodate skill level</li> <li>- Increased notification</li> <li>- Require attendance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Monetary incentives/</li> <li>- workload reduction</li> <li>- Discipline focused opportunities</li> <li>- Online at-will modules</li> <li>- Providing an opportunity for a voice in topics needed</li> <li>- Administrative encouragement</li> <li>- Recognition</li> </ul>

When recognizing benefits to online course delivery, both data sets identified flexibility for students and faculty as well as the ability to reach a wider audience. Survey results also highlighted the benefit of being able to have continual access to course materials. An interesting benefit identified by interview participants was the ability to engage students in class discussions online without concern for interruption. Concerns surrounding uncertainty regarding the quality of online course delivery were present in both data sets, along with effective communication and interaction with students through a digital environment. Both voiced concern over potential academic dishonesty. Additional concerns identified by interview participants focused on a lack of student technology skills and keeping numbers in an online course manageable and effective. Interview and focus group participants also mentioned concern over a lack of guidance in university expectations regarding what makes a quality online learning environment.

Both data sets identified the large time commitment required to participate in the Quality Matters training and its impact on an already busy schedule as a major factor in nonattendance.

In addition, both mentioned an absence of incentives and lack of relevance in topic offerings. A majority of the same ideas to increase the likelihood of future professional development attendance were also present including incentives, focused offerings, and greater availability. Interview and focus group participants also voiced a need for encouragement by administration and highlighted the value of administrative recognition of the sacrifice and time required to participate.

**Research Question #2: How has participation in QM professional development impacted faculty confidence in their ability to design a quality online learning environment?**

Combined results highlighting Quality Matters impact on faculty confidence in their ability to design a quality learning environment are displayed in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8

*Research Question #2 Results*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Survey Results</b>	<b>Interviews/Focus Group Results</b>
<b>Impact on confidence in ability to design a quality online learning environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 88% acknowledged impact</li> <li>– Making courses interactive</li> <li>– Creating objectives, design and assessment</li> <li>– Overall confidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 100% acknowledged increased overall confidence</li> <li>– Provided great ideas/made course delivery smoother</li> <li>– Increased feeling of security in the educational value of courses</li> <li>- Awareness of what is necessary</li> </ul>

Responses from both data sets strongly indicated a positive impact from QM training on confidence in their ability to design a quality online learning environment. Nearly all participants acknowledged an increase in awareness of the necessary components to support student success through online offerings and increase security in the value of online course delivery.

**Research Question #3: How has participation in the QM professional development influenced other areas of their teaching?**

Combined results highlighting Quality Matters impact on course organization, alignment, assessment, and traditional course delivery are displayed in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9

*Research Question #3 Results*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Survey Results</b>	<b>Interviews/Focus Group Results</b>
<b>Course organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More methodical approach</li> <li>- Excellent guidance in using LMS</li> <li>Improved organizational structure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Made flow of all courses better</li> <li>- Helped with student navigation in other online courses</li> <li>- Makes sure that the course itself doesn't interfere with the learning</li> </ul>
<b>Alignment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clearer connections</li> <li>- Structuring objectives to match activities/assessments</li> <li>- Increased awareness of importance of alignment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alignment of course objectives with what is being taught</li> <li>- Thinking about alignment now "very important"</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Better at meeting standards/being sure they are assessed</li> <li>- Awareness of need for students to understand connection between objectives/assessments</li> <li>- More concise about expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Minimal mention of assessment impact by qualitative participants</li> </ul>
<b>Traditional (face-to-face) Courses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More mindful of use of LMS for traditional classes</li> <li>- Impacted alignment/assessment in traditional courses</li> <li>- Approach traditional classes more methodically</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 100% reported impact</li> <li>- Impact on organization of traditional classes</li> <li>- Traditional class approach more focused on objectives and alignment</li> </ul>

## **Summary**

The influence of QM training on course organization was supported by each data set. Both groups felt it allowed them to create a more cohesive setting where students could easily access course materials to support their learning. Alignment was also identified as an area strongly influenced by QM participation as well as a greater awareness and increased effort in ensuring alignment in course content. Survey respondents focused on an increased confidence regarding assessments and the need to ensure they are in line with the standards being addressed. Only minimal mention of assessment impact was voiced by interview and focus group members. QM training impact on traditional course design and delivery was prevalent in both sets of data. This included a more methodical approach to these courses and a greater focus on alignment of objectives with activities and assessments.



## **CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine factors influencing participation in professional development designed to safeguard online course excellence at Eastwood University (EU) and its impact on faculty confidence and teaching. EU enrollment in online courses continues to grow and focus on improving the quality and value of all programs offered is a key component of the university strategic plan. To assist faculty in developing quality online learning environments, EU implemented the Quality Matters program. The goal of this volunteer program is to support all EU online faculty members through participation and submission of a course for the internal review process. At the time of this research, approximately 12% of university faculty members had participated in the training, and less than half of those individuals having completed certification as a university peer reviewer. Determining factors that influence faculty participation could allow EU to promote attendance and ultimately provide faculty with the necessary skills and peer review support to continue to design quality online learning experiences.

Research questions guiding this study were:

- What perceptions, attitudes, and experiences influence faculty participation in EU professional development opportunities targeting online course design?
- How has participation in QM professional development impacted faculty confidence in their ability to design a quality online learning environment?
- How has participation in the QM professional development influenced other areas of their teaching?

To address these questions, this study employed a convergent mixed-methods design. Online faculty members were surveyed to uncover the perceptions regarding online course delivery and professional development designed to enhance its quality. This was followed by interviews with participants who were selected based upon online experience as well as college representation, and a focus group conducted with online faculty member volunteers. These data sets were analyzed and merged to uncover similarities and differences and to establish a greater credibility in research findings.

Chapter five includes a discussion of results by research question including interpretation through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior. Limitations and delimitations of the study are revisited followed by implications for practice and future research.

**Research Question #1: What perceptions, attitudes and experiences influence faculty participation in EU professional development opportunities targeting online course design?  
Online Education**

The success of any online learning program is reliant upon faculty commitment to online education (Betts & Heaston, 2014; Betts, 1998). Even with substantial growth in online offerings and student enrollment in higher education over the last ten years, skepticism among faculty regarding the value and validity remains high (Allen & Seaman, 2016). While 64% of faculty rated the overall effectiveness of online course delivery as either effective or very effective, an undertone of concern was evident in all colleges across the campus. The basis for opinions regarding effectiveness and faculty identification of challenges was difficult to determine. In that only slightly more than a third of faculty had participated as a student in an online learning environment, these opinions may be based upon experience teaching in online environments, the opinions of colleagues and administration, or on the research of others in the field. Betts (2014)

found that the majority of faculty who had previously participated as students in distance education had a positive attitude toward these programs. Without some previous experience as a student using this method of instruction, it could be difficult to form a well-rounded opinion as to the effectiveness of this type of learning environment and to accurately identify what challenges may be faced. Individuals who have not participated in online courses as a student may lack the insight required to determine if this form of education is effective.

When asked to explain their choice regarding the effectiveness of online and hybrid course delivery, survey respondents identified several benefits and challenges to this instructional method.

**Benefits.** Faculty members value the flexibility inherent in online course delivery, both for themselves and for the students they serve. The ability to reach a wider audience allows participation by those who may not otherwise be able to achieve their educational goals. The ability to provide broader access to academic programs is the fundamental purpose of university distance education programs (Miller et al., 2013). Not only does this flexibility allow a greater impact on access, it also allows the university to reach a wider audience thereby potentially increasing enrollment.

**Challenges.** Challenges to online course design and delivery were also acknowledged. Providing a quality learning environment where students can realize the same level of achievement as would be attained in a traditional learning environment was a major concern expressed. Faculty questioned the ability to engage students sufficiently to promote content mastery in an online course, with one faculty member adding “it does not happen and never will in the online format.” This aligns with Allen and Seaman (2016) who reported concern by some academic leaders that learning outcomes in online offerings are not equal to traditional

instruction. Of note is the fact that faculty who participated in the Quality Matters training did not report a concern for their ability to provide the same level of academic achievement. This may be a result of the increased confidence in designing online courses expressed by nearly all QM participants.

Another concern on the minds of faculty pinpointed the difficulty in establishing effective communication with online students. Developing relationships with students through course interaction and communication in an online environment was reported as a difficult hurdle to overcome. As Cindy shared, “In a classroom you can tell students are looking at you with a totally confused face, ‘we don’t know what she is saying.’ Online you have no idea how they’re going to perceive something.” Facilitating communication with students in this environment could take a different skill set than would be needed in traditional classrooms where you can see the faces of the individuals with whom you are communicating. The QM framework connects course improvements to student learning through the design, organization, and facilitation of the course and the interaction between the instructor and the course elements (Hall, 2010).

Several faculty reported concerns regarding academic honesty and the inability to effectively determine who created assignment submissions. This aligns with literature that points to ongoing faculty concerns in online courses since students are not under the direct monitoring of an instructor (Kennedy, Nowak, Raghuraman, Thomas, & Davis, 2000; McGee, 2013). Some shared worry that student “inclination to be dishonest” was stronger in an online environment. However, research points to no difference in student disposition for cheating between online and traditional course participation (Spaulding, 2009; Watson & Sottile, 2010). Faculty did report an awareness of tools provided by the university to address this concern. However, some felt these

measures were extreme and were not comfortable with their use adding, “If I find plagiarism, I’ll take it on, but I assume that students are doing their own work.”

### **Professional Development Targeting Online Course Design**

The overall faculty viewpoint regarding the need for professional development targeting online and hybrid course design was encouraging. The majority of faculty indicated support for placing importance on this type of training with 80% indicating they had previously attended training. An overwhelming majority stated these offerings were useful in improving their online or hybrid course design. More than 90% of faculty indicated an intention to participate in some form of future professional development for their online teaching.

Challenges to attendance focused mainly on the time required for participation. Even though faculty expressed support and need for these offerings, attendance still requires a commitment of time. This concern regarding time commitment is a contributing factor to lack of faculty participation in professional development opportunities in light of increasing workload commitments (Kofi Badu-Nyarko, 2006; Lian, 2014). Participation in the Quality Matters eLearning cohort requires a year-long commitment that includes monthly attendance at cohort meetings. Given that time was identified as the biggest hurdle to attendance, this requisite commitment could be a determining factor in faculty decisions to become involved in the QM program. Faculty suggested release time or workload reduction be offered in conjunction with their commitment to participate in professional development programs. This type of offering has yet to be implemented by the university.

### **Theory of Planned Behavior**

As mentioned in Chapter 3, one way to investigate the results relating to the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences influencing faculty participation in professional development targeting

online course design is to apply the theory of planned behavior. The theory of planned behavior relies on identifying behavioral, normative, and control beliefs that work together to establish an individual's level of intention to engage in a specific activity. If these beliefs constitute a favorable attitude, there is a greater likelihood intention will turn into action (Ajzen, 2002). In this case, the activity in question is participation in professional development designed to improve online and hybrid course design at Eastwood University.

*Behavioral beliefs.* Behavioral beliefs focus on an evaluation of the outcome of performing a specific behavior, including consideration of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors to engage in a specific activity. This evaluation is impacted by the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation of the behavior of interest. If an individual has a favorable viewpoint and motivating factors are present, they are more likely to perform that behavior.

An overwhelming majority of faculty at Eastwood University believe a need exists to provide continued support for the design of quality online learning environments and a large majority of faculty believe that professional development targeting online learning would be beneficial to them. A majority of survey respondents (88%) and all interview and focus group participants indicated that prior attendance at these types of offerings had proven beneficial to them in some manner to their online course development. However, over a third of faculty are neutral regarding the effectiveness of online and hybrid course delivery and a majority voiced concerns over the challenges to this method of instruction. These viewpoints could influence the overall perception of online instruction and impact the behavioral intention to participate in the professional development offerings (Ward, Peters & Shelly, 2010).

Research results revealed both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors affecting participation in professional development offerings. More than half of participants indicated an intrinsic desire to improve their abilities in designing a quality learning environment for their students as a determining factor in participation. As Cindy shared, “I’m motivated to make my courses better. I want the students to get the best experience. If it’s something that is going to impact my delivery of content or my job in some capacity, then I would be open to going to it.”

A desire for some type of extrinsic motivation was also identified by many faculty as influencing professional development attendance. A lack of this motivational factor could play a role in the ultimate decision by faculty regarding involvement (Brownell & Tanner, 2012; Cook & Ley, 2004). Since time was recognized as the biggest concern for participation, providing some type of incentive in this area could create a stronger behavioral intention to participate. Monetary support was also proposed as a motivational factor to increase the likelihood of attendance. Incentives of this nature have varied from year to year, with some attendees receiving funds for other types of professional development offerings including conference attendance and purchase of support materials, and others receiving hardware or software to assist in their online course delivery. Interview participants identified a desire for recognition from administration that these programs are valued as well as recognition of the commitment required to participate. A few relayed that they are encouraged by the “small pats on the back” offered by their department chair or dean. In that motivational factors can influence intention to perform a behavior, offering these types of incentives could serve to increase the likelihood of participation.

*Normative beliefs.* Normative beliefs focus on an individual’s beliefs regarding whether peers or individuals of importance will approve or disapprove of the behavior. It also includes

beliefs regarding the customary behavior of the social group surrounding them. When asked about the overall attitude toward online learning at the university, a majority of interview participants reported it as a “mixed bag” further indicating that opinions were divided regarding its value as part of the instructional practices at the university. In addition, thirty percent of survey respondents indicated they were neutral regarding the effectiveness of online course delivery. In contrast, over 80% of faculty indicated they felt professional development targeting online course design was useful with the same percentage indicating their intention for some form of future participation. All of these social group outlooks could serve to impact faculty normative beliefs regarding participation in professional development intended to improve online course design. If a faculty member feels the social construct surrounding them would be supportive of their participation, these viewpoints could serve to support a strong intention for involvement (Bower, 2001; Wolcott, 2003). If, in turn, they do not feel participation is valued by peers and administration, they could be less likely to be willing to participate in professional development targeting this method.

*Control beliefs.* Control beliefs focus on an individual’s perceived presence of factors that could impact their ability to successfully perform a specific behavior. These beliefs can include the level of difficulty anticipated as well as knowledge regarding the presence of support necessary for success. Although technology skills have been identified as an obstacle to faculty involvement in online course delivery (Johnson, et al., 2012), no mention of a concern over the use of technology was reported. While 51% of survey respondents reported being “very confident” in their teaching, this category dropped to 20% when asked about confidence in teaching online. If a faculty member does not feel they can experience the same level of success in an online environment as they do in their traditional courses, they may be less likely to risk



exposure by submitting a course for peer review. Faculty also identified a variety of challenges to providing a quality online learning environment. Concerns over various aspects involved in creating a quality learning environment, including the time necessary for participation and subsequent course revision, were prevalent. If faculty perceive these challenges to successful design as too difficult to overcome, this could impact their intention to voluntarily engage in professional development targeting online course design.

Behavioral, normative, and control beliefs collectively impact an individual's intention to perform a specific behavior (Ajzen, 2002). Faculty who possess a positive viewpoint toward involvement, who feel supported by the social groups surrounding them, and who believe in their ability to successfully participate in the professional development and online course design would experience the highest behavior intention.

**Research Question #2: How has participation in QM professional development impacted faculty confidence in their ability to design a quality online learning environment?**

Faculty who previously participated in Quality Matters training were asked if the training had an impact on their confidence in the ability to design a quality online learning environment. All interview and focus group participants along with 88% of survey respondents who had participated indicated increased confidence. They felt better able to facilitate smoother ongoing delivery and felt secure in the educational value of their courses. As one participant acknowledged, "It forced me to learn more about what's important for setup and the design of a course, and especially the objectives and aligning those with the material being taught." This confidence was not limited to online course design, but was reported by all to impact traditional course design and delivery as well.

**Research Question #3: How has participation in the QM professional development influenced other areas of their teaching?**

Faculty who previously participated in Quality Matters training were also asked to identify if they felt the training had impacted other areas of their teaching. In a 2011 study, Ward found that participating in Quality Matters training along with course redesign had a positive effect on other areas of online teaching and learning. The responses of over 70% of survey respondents and all interview and focus group participants appear to support Ward's study indicating an influence on other areas of their teaching as a result of the training. Several faculty shared details about how the training had influenced their teaching. The biggest impact reported was for those faculty members who also teach traditional course offerings at the university. All interview and focus group participants indicated a change in their approach to face-to-face course offerings ranging from organization to a stronger alignment of course objectives and assessments used.

I feel like I can take everything I gained from the QM training for my online course and apply it to my other courses. My students have said they appreciate the way my classes are organized now using Canvas (learning management system) and that they can see how their assignments help them meet expectations for the course. That totally came from the Quality Matters training.

Other impacts were noted in the areas of alignment and assessment. Faculty felt they were better at conveying their expectations for course assignments for students, and were more aware of the need to provide tools to help students know how to be successful in their courses. In addition, although QM focus is on the design of quality learning environments, faculty also repeatedly emphasized an awareness of impact on their delivery methods in all instructional settings.

While prior research indicated an increase in student satisfaction with QM reviewed courses (Aman, 2009), this study revealed increased faculty satisfaction as well. Based on these results, it is evident the overall impact of Quality Matters training is positive and reaches beyond the online setting. Many of the challenges to online course effectiveness and design identified by faculty are areas of concentration in the QM rubric and the professional development. Even though QM participants voiced concerns for many of these challenges, the majority felt confident in their ability to meet those challenges.

### **Limitations/Delimitations**

In that this study included only faculty members teaching online at Eastwood University, generalization of results to faculty at other institutions may not be effective. Sample bias is also a concern in that email invitations to participate in the survey may have only been completed by those who were most interested in the topic of professional development targeting online or hybrid course design. As a result, only those faculty who chose to participate will be specifically represented in the results. Further, since the survey results were anonymous, it was not possible to follow up with faculty to clarify individual responses. Finally, limitations as to reliability of statistical testing were present in that survey data did not meet the assumption of normality in distribution. This result could be due to the homogenous nature of the research sampling frame and the choice to participate highlighted above.

### **Implications**

With approximately half of all faculty teaching some type of online course delivery, continued support in this area is necessary. This is especially crucial since faculty expressed a desire for continued or even increased university emphasis on professional development targeting online course design and delivery.

**Implications for practice.** Research results support several recommendations for promoting attendance at professional development activities targeting online and hybrid course design and ongoing support for the Quality Matters program.

**Release time/workload reduction.** The biggest identified challenge to attendance was time. Faculty feel stretched in their current teaching and service obligations and the idea of adding anything to this workload can be overwhelming. One way to address this issue would be to provide release time or workload reduction for faculty participation in light of the substantial time commitment of the Quality Matters eLearning cohort. Although a University financial commitment would be required, providing this time for instructors to become knowledgeable about the QM rubric and application would allow the university to reap the rewards of additional QM trained instructors, an increased review team pool, and a higher number of QM reviewed courses.

**Incentives.** Even if administration is unable to relieve faculty commitments through release time or workload reduction, they can make every attempt to ensure that time committed to professional development is recognized by providing incentives for attendance. Incentives requested by faculty include additional monetary support as well as an increased acknowledgment of value and administrative recognition of time spent.

**Expansion of technology resource center.** To meet the potential increase in faculty demand, expanding the reach, capabilities, and staffing of the technology resource center is recommended. While faculty expressed appreciation for the support provided by the technology resource center, its very small staff is charged with supporting an entire university. Increasing this staff would allow implementation of additional sessions meeting the request of faculty for more offerings in summer, multiple dates and times for attendance, and different levels of

offerings to meet the needs of beginner to advanced instructors. Increasing this staff and implementing a foundational system within each college would benefit QM implementation and demonstrate administrative support for the program.

**Improving usefulness.** Implementation of faculty ideas for improving usefulness could encourage the likelihood of future participation. Faculty suggestions for offering discipline specific training to increase application usefulness could facilitate stronger buy-in for program implementation. Tailoring the training to individual colleges may promote a more sustainable support system within academic disciplines and could be particularly useful for those colleges or departments delivering a large number of online offerings. This suggestion goes hand in hand with the recommendation of bringing the trainings to each college for convenience rather than hosting all professional development at the technology resource center.

**Collaboration.** While building support systems within discipline areas will lay the groundwork for application of the Quality Matters program, providing opportunities for online instructors to meet and discuss successes and concerns would further enhance program usefulness. Faculty highlighted a need for the opportunity to share experiences in an informal group setting where ideas and challenges addressed collectively. Facilitation of scheduled meetings for online course faculty at varying times throughout the year could address this desire. It will be important to offer these meetings at various times and locations since this was an issue identified as a roadblock to professional development attendance during the research process.

**Getting the word out.** A majority of the concerns and challenges to online course design that were identified by faculty are specifically addressed by the Quality Matters program. In addition, many faculty experienced increased confidence in the design of online courses and a greater sense of satisfaction in online course delivery. Even though most faculty are aware of the

program, opportunities for highlighting these successful personal experiences have been limited. Utilizing campus resources to spread a positive message that shares personal accounts of the impact from QM participation and implementation could be beneficial in supporting increased attendance.

**Expanding program reach.** Research results indicate a strong impact on not only online offerings but traditional course delivery as well. Expanding the reach of the Quality Matters program to include faculty who do not currently teach online courses could afford several advantages. Providing support in the continual improvement of all course offerings at the university by promoting quality design through QM components such as alignment and accessibility would be beneficial. Further, by participation in these offerings, effective use of the university learning management system by all faculty would be facilitated providing a more cohesive university learning environment. Finally, through participation in the QM training, faculty viewpoints regarding participation in and the quality of online course delivery could be influenced. With the increasing demand for online offerings, building skills and knowledge in the effective design and delivery of online courses would be beneficial for any future expansion of online programs at the university.

**Focus beyond design.** The Quality Matters program focuses on the design of quality learning environments. Throughout the results of this study, faculty repeatedly emphasized an awareness of QM impact on delivery and its importance, whether in an online or traditional setting. The interrelationship of these two components appears difficult to separate when reflecting on instruction using any method of instruction. Seamless integration of these two components is necessary to support a successful learning environment. Simply designing a quality course cannot in and of itself promote student success. Excellence in delivery while using

a quality design is essential. Developing a method for supporting effective delivery of a quality-designed course would assist the university in their mission to provide transformational experiences for all students.

**Implications for research.** Research results also support several recommendations for future investigations regarding professional development targeting online and hybrid course design.

**Broader vantage point.** The current research gathered only online faculty opinions regarding the effectiveness, benefits, and challenges of online learning as well as impact from the Quality Matters training. Future research to include student viewpoints could provide a more comprehensive overview of these issues, including perceptions regarding the difference between QM and non-QM courses. In addition, broadening the scope to include all faculty instead of focusing solely on online teaching faculty could potentially uncover the basis for underlying university attitudes regarding online offerings and professional development targeting them. This broader sampling frame could also provide more robust data to support stronger statistical results.

**Environment delivery impact.** One question not investigated during this research was the difference between perceptions, attitudes, and experiences in delivering synchronous and asynchronous online learning environments. Since the synchronous environment more closely mirrors a traditional classroom, uncovering differences in viewpoints regarding delivery methods could provide a more comprehensive overall picture of faculty perspectives. Further, no distinction was made between undergraduate and graduate teaching experiences. Future research separating these levels of instruction to determine if differences appear would be beneficial to decisions regarding the support of online learning environments.

**Relationship of design and delivery.** Results of this investigation revealed a strong association in faculty views regarding the impact on both design and delivery from the Quality Matters training. Although QM is focused solely on the design of a quality online course, it can and most likely should impact delivery. Future research to reveal this level of impact and to inform development of supports to bridge the gap between quality design and quality delivery would be advantageous in supporting faculty in their efforts to provide an effective student learning environment.

### **Conclusion**

While literature and the results of this research indicate an understanding of the growing presence of online course delivery in higher education, an underlying concern for quality continues to be evident (Allen & Seaman, 2015). Regardless of what has laid the foundation for concerns regarding the ability to provide a successful learning experience through online course offerings, addressing these concerns, providing support, and ensuring quality is imperative for online options to continue EU excellence in course delivery across all learning platforms. With the positive impact of the Quality Matters professional development shared by faculty, continued university support of this program is important. Program influence on confidence and other areas of instruction along with a stronger belief in the ability to provide an effective learning environment could help ease concerns as well as support university goals of continuing to improve the quality and value of existing educational programs.



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## APPENDIX A: Survey Instrument

This brief survey is part of a dissertation project conducted by a doctoral candidate at the University of Arkansas.

All survey answers will be kept anonymous. The responses will not be correlated to your name or IP address in any way.

There are **18 questions**, and it should take you about **5-6 minutes** to complete. Your help is greatly appreciated!

### **Demographics:**

Gender:

- male
- female
- other

My age range is:

- under 40 years old
- 40-50 years old
- 51-60 years old
- over 60 years old

My tenure status is:

- non-tenure track
- tenure track
- tenured

My academic discipline is:

- arts and sciences
  - Art
  - Biology/Chemistry
  - Communication/English & Modern Languages
  - Family and Consumer Sciences
  - History, Philosophy, and Social Sciences
  - Mathematics
  - Military Science
  - Music
  - Physics
  - Nursing
- business
  - Accounting and CIS
  - Economics, Finance & Banking
  - Management & Marketing
- education



- HHPR
- Psychology & Counseling
- Teaching & Leadership
- Teacher Education
- technology
  - Automotive Technology
  - Engineering Technology
  - Graphics & Imaging Technology
  - School of Construction
  - Technology and Workforce Learning

For the purposes of this survey, the term “professional development programs” refers to **any event on campus designed to improve the teaching skill set of faculty**. All questions refer specifically to Eastwood University.

1. Are you aware of any professional development programs targeting online or hybrid course design offered on your campus?

These can include, but are not limited to: workshops, orientations, training, one-on-one support, semester or year-long programs, and cohort-based support groups.

- yes
- no

2. Have you attended any professional development programs targeting online or hybrid course design on campus?

- yes
- no

2a. If yes, how useful do you feel these programs impacted your online or hybrid course design?

- very useful
- useful
- neutral
- useless
- very useless

2b. What could be done to improve the usefulness of these professional development programs? (open response)

3. Have you participated in Quality Matters training?

- yes
- no

3a. If yes, please indicate participation in any of the following:

- Quality Matters standards workshop
- Quality Matters eLearning cohort
- Quality Matters Applying the QM Rubric training
- Quality Matters Peer Reviewer training

3b. Has this training increased your confidence in the ability to design a quality online learning environment?

-yes

-no

3c. Has this training influenced other areas of your teaching?

-yes

-no

Please describe (open response).

3d. If no, please describe why you have not elected to take part in these programs (please choose all that apply):

-I do not have enough time

-I am not interested in the topics provided

-my department does not encourage participation

-no incentive is provided to attend

-I did not know they existed

-I do not support online/hybrid course delivery

-other: (please explain)

4. What could be done to increase the likelihood that you would attend future professional development programs targeting online or hybrid course design? (open response)

5. How often would you plan to engage in some form of professional development targeting online or hybrid course design if programs that suited your interests were offered on campus?

-once a month

-once a semester

-once a year

-never

5a. If you answered “never,” please briefly explain the main reason you would not participate.

6. How useful do you believe professional development activities targeting online or hybrid course design on campus would be for you?

-very useful

-useful

-neutral

-useless

-very useless

7. In general, how much importance do you think should be placed on professional development programs for teaching online or hybrid courses?

1= great importance

- 2 = some importance
- 3 = neutral
- 4 = little importance
- 5 = very little importance

8. How confident do you feel in your teaching?

- very confident
- confident
- neutral
- not very confident
- not at all confident

9. How confident do you feel in your online/hybrid teaching?

- very confident
- confident
- neutral
- not very confident
- not at all confident

10. What do you think are the greatest challenges to teaching online/hybrid courses?  
(open response)

11. How would you rate the effectiveness of online and hybrid course delivery?

- very effective
- effective
- neutral
- ineffective
- very ineffective

11a. Please explain.

12. How much **teaching** training (courses, mentors, workshops, discussions, etc.) did you receive during your time in graduate school?

- 10+ hours
- 7 – 9 hours
- 4 – 6 hours
- Less than four hours
- None

13. How much **teaching** training targeting online or hybrid course delivery (courses, mentors, workshops, discussions, etc.) did you receive during your time in graduate school?

- 10+ hours
- 7 – 9 hours
- 4 – 6 hours

- Less than four hours
- None

14. Were any of the courses in your undergraduate or graduate work delivered online?

- yes
- no

15a. If yes, please indicate all that apply:

- fully online delivery
- hybrid delivery

15. How would you rate the importance placed on online or hybrid program or course delivery at Eastwood University?

- underemphasized
- the right amount
- overemphasized

16. How would you rate the importance placed on **teaching development** for design and delivery of online or hybrid courses at Eastwood University?

- underemphasized
- the right amount
- overemphasized

17. Do you have any additional thoughts on faculty professional development for teaching online or hybrid courses?

18. Would you be willing to participate in a 60-minute follow-up interview to provide more context for the aggregate survey results? If so, please [click here](#), and a new screen will open for you to leave your email address so that it is not associated with your survey responses.

Thank you very much for your participation in this survey. Your help is greatly appreciated! If you have any other advice, comments, or suggestions regarding this topic, please email me at [\(link\)](#).

## **APPENDIX B: Modified Consent (Survey Email)**

Dear EU Online and Hybrid Faculty,

My name is Elizabeth (Liz) Mascher and I am an instructor in the College of Education and a current Ed.D. candidate at the University of Arkansas. I would like to invite you to take part in my dissertation research study centered on factors influencing faculty participation in professional development targeting online and hybrid course design.

As part of the study, I am sending out a survey to all full-time faculty at PSU who are teaching at least one online or hybrid course. There are 18 questions and it should take you only about 5 – 7 minutes to complete. All information will be kept anonymous. Your responses will not be associated with your email address nor your IP address in any way.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this project and you will receive no compensation for your participation. Please understand that your participation is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. You also have the right to discontinue the survey without penalty. If you discontinue the survey, your results will not be used.

Your participation in the survey indicates that you understand the above information, and voluntarily consent to participate in the project. To access the survey, click the following link or cut and paste it into your browser:

Follow this link to the Survey:

*(link)*

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this project, you may contact me or my faculty advisor whose contact information is listed below. You may also contact the University of Arkansas Research Compliance office listed below if you have questions about your rights as a participant, or to discuss any concerns about, or problems with the research.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

## APPENDIX C: Interview Protocol

Confidentiality Statement: Signing of Informed Consent document

Introduction: I am interested in hearing your thoughts about professional development targeting online or hybrid teaching on your campus. I'm specifically asking about professional development initiatives aimed at enhancing online or hybrid teaching. These can be based in your department, the FSC, or anywhere else on campus.

**To begin, I'd like a little general information.**

What is your

discipline? Tenure

Status/Title? Years

Taught?

1. Tell me about the career path that led you to this position. What influenced you along this path?
  - a. How long have you been with Eastwood University? How long have you been in higher education?
  - b. What degrees and certifications do you have? When did you get them? Where?
2. Were any of the courses in these programs delivered online (either hybrid or fully online)?
  - a. Graduate or undergraduate level?
  - b. Describe your online learning experience.
3. What is your experience with teaching online?
  - a. Graduate or undergraduate level?
  - b. Fully online or hybrid?
4. What is your overall perception of the value of online/hybrid courses?
  - a. What benefits do you see to online learning?
  - b. What concerns do you have with online learning?
5. What do you believe to be the overall faculty perception of the value of online courses?
6. What do you think are the greatest challenges to teaching online courses?

7. Tell me about any professional development activities targeting online or hybrid teaching on your campus? (Prompts: What have you seen advertised/offered? Approximately how often do you think they are offered? As far as you know, who is responsible for these activities on your campus?)
8. If you have gone to any of these activities, would you please describe them to me?
  - a. If you have gone, how often have you gone?
  - b. What prompted you to go?
  - c. Do you feel that the time you spent at these activities was rewarding? In what ways?
  - d. Do you feel that the time you spent at these activities was rewarded? (Prompts: In what ways? Did the administration recognize this? Was this counted towards your tenure/promotion process?)
9. Have you participated in the Quality Matters training?
  - a. What factors motivated you to participate (or not to participate) in the training?

QM participants:

    - i. What QM courses have you completed?
    - ii. Have you had a course evaluated? If so, describe this experience.
    - iii. Have you participated as a reviewer? How did this impact your view of the Quality Matters program?
    - iv. What changes have you made to your online/hybrid courses as a result of participation?
    - v. How has this participation impacted your non-reviewed courses (whether they are online or face-to-face)?
    - vi. How has this participation impacted your confidence in delivering a quality online or hybrid course experience?
    - vii. Do you believe the QM rubric is a good tool to assess the quality of online/hybrid courses?
      1. What specific benefits do you see to implementation of the QM rubric?
      2. What concerns do you have regarding implementation the QM rubric?
    - viii. Would you recommend the QM training to other faculty? Why or why not?
10. Describe your experience with professional development for teaching (or teaching training) during your time in graduate school.
11. Describe your experience with professional development for teaching online or hybrid courses during your time in graduate school.

12. How are professional development activities communicated to you as a faculty member?
13. How would the means of communication affect your likelihood of participating?  
(Prompts: Does it matter if the notification comes from your department chair, the department admin, the Provost's Office, etc.?)
14. Are any professional development programs ever required by your department or by the administration?
15. How would required versus not required affect your perception of professional development programs?
16. How important do you perceive professional development for online and hybrid course design to be to your department?
  - a. To your administration?
  - b. How do you know?
17. How important, if at all, do **you** perceive professional development for online and hybrid courses is for online faculty members?
18. How, if at all, do you believe professional development for online or hybrid delivery could help your teaching? Your students?
19. What could be done to encourage you to go to professional development programs for online and hybrid course design?
  - a. What could your department do to demonstrate to you that they value teaching development for online and hybrid course design?
  - b. What could your administration do?
20. To conclude, is there anything I have missed or you would like to follow up on?



## **APPENDIX D: Focus Group Protocol**

Good morning and welcome to our session. Thank you for taking time to meet today.

My purpose in meeting with you today is to discuss your thoughts, feelings, and experiences with regard to professional development targeting online and hybrid course design and delivery. Your insights will be used to enrich data previously collected.

Anything you discuss here is confidential. Nothing you say will be personally attributed to you in any written document that results from this focus group. Your participation in this focus group is totally voluntary.

To get started, let's find out more about each other by going around the table. Tell us your name and the department where you teach.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. How did you learn how to teach online?
2. How do you get better at teaching online and how do you know you are getting better?
3. You have just received a Mr. Bulk-E about an opportunity for professional development – what do you do?
4. Think about your best professional development experience and your worst professional development experience. How do those experiences impact your likelihood of participation in professional development now?
5. Based on our conversations, what are your recommendations for improving any of these areas?