



***“Back to the Future:”  
A Qualitative Study of How Higher Education Faculty  
Navigated the Transition Back to the  
Post-COVID Classroom***

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“What Lies Ahead?” Quality, Engagement, and Student Voices  
in Online Learning

## What Prompted Our Study

- (1) Our 2022 research on faculty and student adjustment during COVID lockdown
- (2) Curiosity about return to post-COVID classrooms and in-person instruction:
  - what did students prefer?
  - what did faculty prefer?



# Research Methods and Procedures

- Individual interviews with 9 faculty in a college of education
- Variety of education content areas (e.g., curriculum and instruction; leadership)
- Variety of experience in online teaching



# Question #1: Experiences with Moving Suddenly to All-Online Teaching

- Already online (individual courses; entire bachelor's and master's degrees)
- Always incorporated technology into teaching
- Harder for internship-type courses
- Students wanted direct interaction
- Had to prepare other faculty as well as students



# Question #1: Experiences with Moving Suddenly to All-Online Teaching, con't.

- Had to get creative re: learning activities  
(e.g., governing board assignments and interviews  
with principals via Zoom for internship students)
- Workload quadrupled in move to all-online
- Building trusting relationship with students
- "Nightmare;" I'm an "in-person teacher"
- Zoom classroom "like a funeral"
- Zoom was "stilted environment"
- My students helped me through it
- Fellow faculty helped me through it



## Question #2: How Did You Adjust to All-Online Teaching?

- More small-group meetings  
(e.g., breakout rooms on Zoom)
- Used Zoom polling feature to  
identify where students need help
- Frequent check-ins with students
- Listened to what students needed
- Got rid of busy work



## Question #2: How Did You Adjust to All-Online Teaching?, con't.

- Gave students my personal email and cell phone number
- Google folder with forms, documents, and current week's work
- Put up chart board of what's being discussed
- Students and faculty pulled together:
  - "They prepared me as much as I prepared them"
  - "We helped each other figure it out





# Question #3: What Were the Challenges?

- reading the room:  
“Hollywood Squares” screen
- can’t establish physical proximity (walk around room to see who’s paying attention)
- “some students fake attentiveness” (easier to do online)
- balancing health, family, and job-related concerns by students
- practicum challenges:  
“teaching students still an in-person thing”  
  
learn to teach from in-person modeling by master teacher





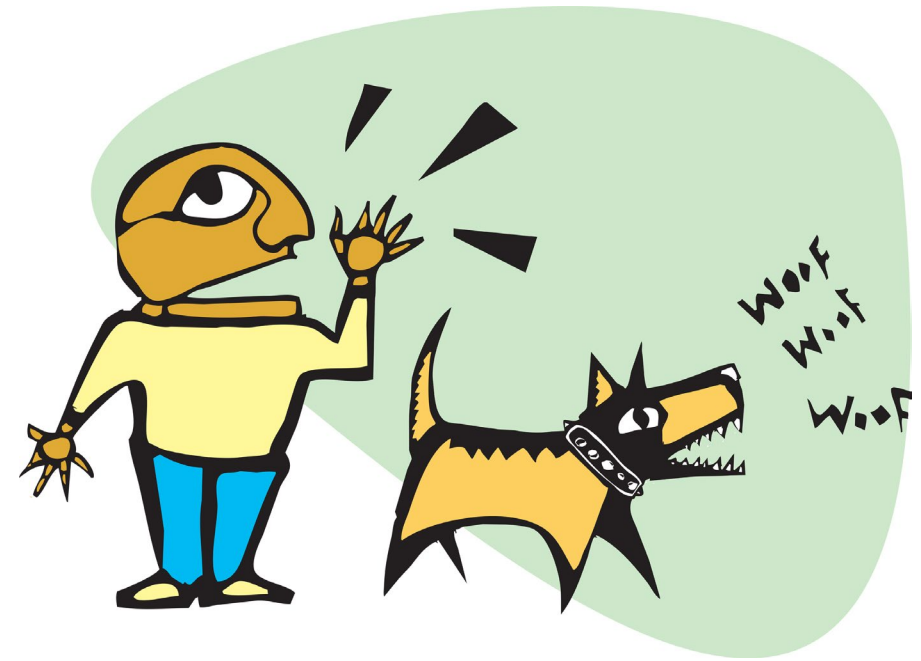
## Question #3: What Were the Challenges?, con't.

--technology issues:

Internet connectivity  
Microphones

--Optimal online study  
setting:

Need a quiet spot  
No children crying  
No dogs barking



# Question #4: Feelings about Returning to In-person Classroom?

\*\*\* Mixed bag of results \*\*\*

- Some students preferred convenience of online learning
- \* Didn't want to get dressed up to come to live class
- \* Didn't like three-day all-day weekend classes live and in person
- \* Wanted to avoid commute
- \* Safety concerns returning to face -to-face classroom (mask mandates, physical distancing)



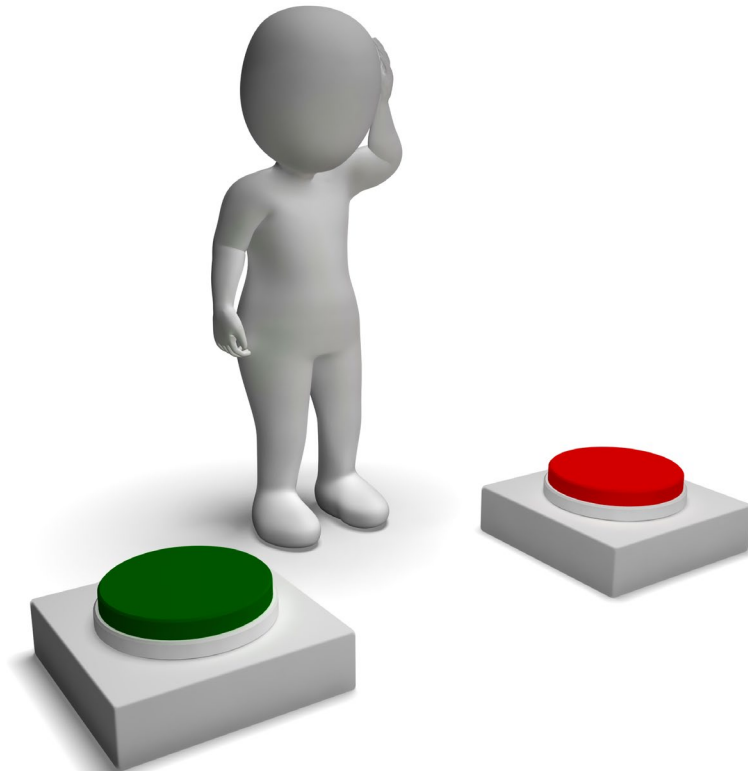
## Question #4: Feelings about Returning to In-person Classroom?, con't.

--Other students preferred the face-to-face classroom:

- \* missed real-time interaction with classmates
- \* “Zoom not so bad but prefer face to face”

--Some faculty valued the online instruction:

- \* Saved on commute time
- \* Easier to coordinate meetings with small classes at different locations



## Question #4: Feelings about Returning to In-person Classroom?, con't.

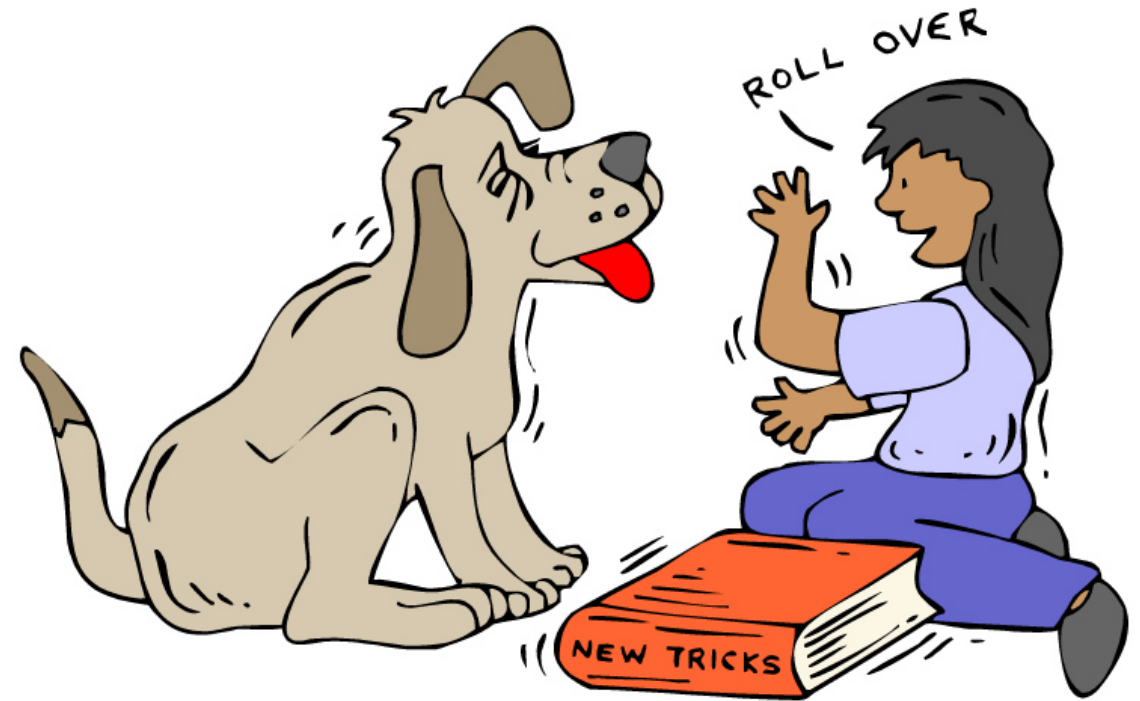
- Other faculty preferred the in-person classroom:
  - \* Student accountability easier
  - \* Can walk around the room and check for students' understanding
- > Overall, "A little bit torn"



## Question #5: Final Reflections

→ Also a mixed bag:

- More interactive with students from home office than commuting to face-to-face classroom
- Can describe my online students as well as face-to-face students
- "Taught an old dog new tricks"
- Added to technology skill set
- "Piqued my interest in online teaching"
- Greater courtesy in faculty communications in person vs. via Zoom



# Some Conclusions

--Trade-offs of in-person vs. online classroom

- \* Convenience and flexibility

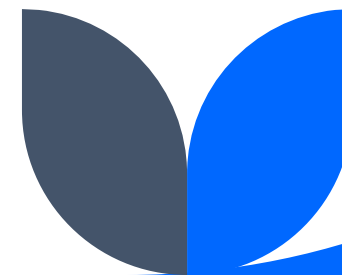
- \* Loss of in-person interaction

--Students and faculty need to understand this trade-off

--Depends on the subject matter (practicum-type courses are more challenging to teach and learn online)

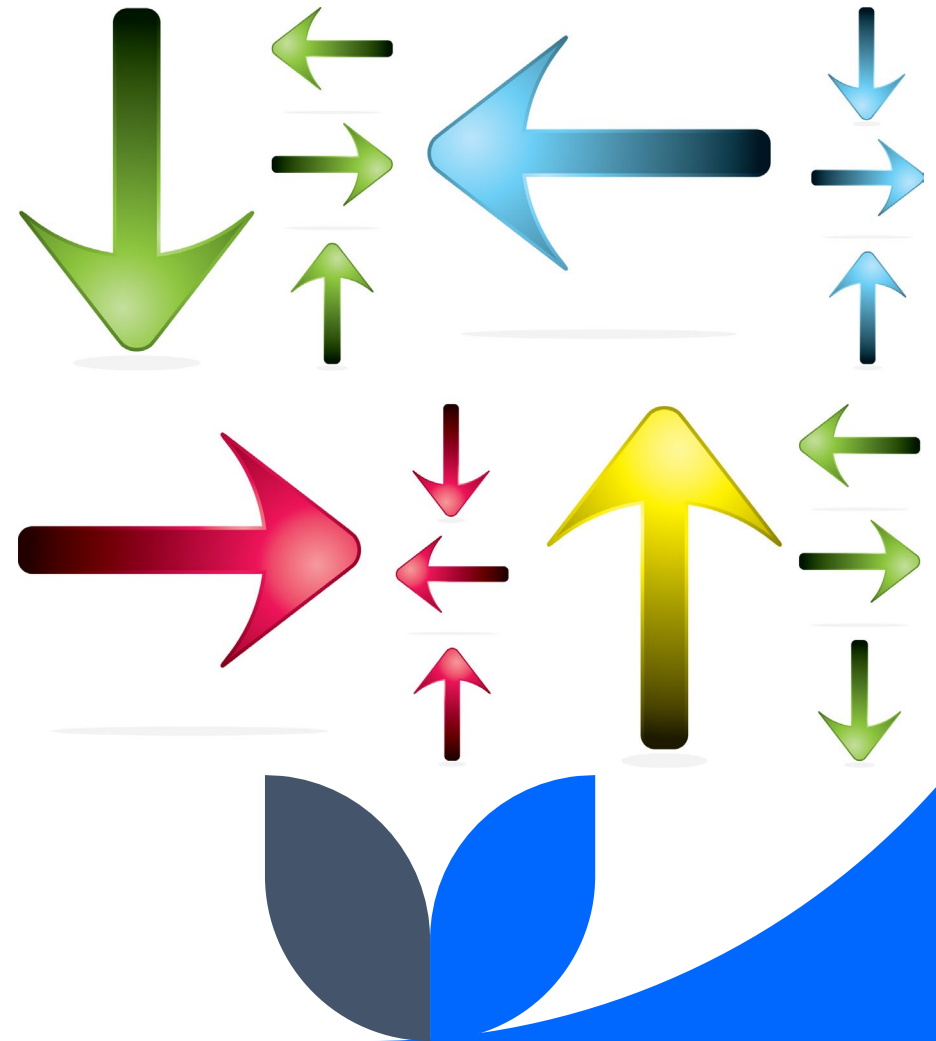
--Depends on prior faculty experience with (and attitude about) online teaching)

--Depends on prior student relationships (harder for intact cohorts)



# Future Research Directions

- tracking adjustments in return to in-person instruction across time
- relationship of faculty preference for classroom structure to students' adjustment
- relationship of students' readiness to learn online to student attitudes
- relationship of specific course content to student and faculty adjustment to classroom structure





## In Conclusion...

““In any given moment we have two options:  
to step forward into growth or step back into safety.”

— Abraham Maslow

