

COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT ARE KEY - ACADEMICS' VIEWS OF OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES WITH FULLY ONLINE ASYNCHRONOUS TEACHING

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Abstract

In this paper, we present findings from surveys and interviews of academics teaching in asynchronous, fully online courses at an Australian university, which highlight challenges and opportunities with this delivery mode. These include communicating and engaging with students and effective facilitation of asynchronous online discussions (Cohen & Donaldson, 2021). The usefulness of professional learning and support to help develop new, and transfer existing, skills to effectively teach in a fully online asynchronous learning mode was also acknowledged. Examples and insights from interviewees add to the research on effective online learning and are valuable for researchers and practitioners alike.

Communication and Engagement are Key - Academics' Views of Opportunities and Challenges with Fully Online Asynchronous Teaching

Student expectations about learning anywhere and anytime (Hussin, 2018) have led to an increase in asynchronous online learning (AOL). However, there is little research focusing on academic experiences of working in these courses (Earnshaw & Al-Sharif, 2024). Asynchronous, fully online delivery has the additional constraint of no live communication with students and a reliance on other communication modes, mainly discussion boards. In this paper, we present findings from surveys and interviews of academics teaching in fully online, asynchronous courses at an Australian university, which highlight challenges and opportunities with this delivery mode. Understanding how academics adapt to teaching in an AOL environment is important for assisting them to effectively teach in this delivery mode. The work reported in this paper aimed to gain insights and practical examples to add to the research on effective online learning, with a specific focus on the challenges and opportunities the AOL mode offers.

Asynchronous Online Learning

The experience of remote learning during COVID has embedded online delivery in the higher education landscape, including asynchronous online learning (AOL), defined as learning through the internet “where students engage with instructors and fellow students at a time of their convenience and do not need to be co-present online or in a physical space” (Singh & Thurman, 2019, p. 302). A common structure for these asynchronous online courses is described by O’Connor (2022) as units (or subjects) that are based around weekly learning objectives and targeted activities which scaffold toward the assessment. Learning activities can include written content, videos, and discussion boards (Reichgelt & Smith, 2024).

The asynchronous and fully online courses offered at the university where this work was conducted follow a similar format to that described above. These courses were a new venture seeking to expand the University’s online footprint and involved setting up a new central team dedicated to the design and delivery of those courses. The role of the faculty was to provide content and teach. Units for these courses are developed under an in-house Online Program Manager (OPM) model (Nguyen & Gilmore, 2024), by a central team within the university. A range of learning professionals, including learning designers, learning technologists, graphic designers, editors, and multimedia experts, work with academics to develop units based around a design template. The template includes learning activities such as short videos, online quizzes, readings, etc. In all these units, students are expected to undertake activities and to also engage in weekly discussion activities moderated by online tutors. Academics do not have editing access in the units either during the design process or when the units are delivered. As a result, there is a heavy reliance on announcements and discussion boards by those teaching a unit in AOL mode to establish teacher-presence and communicate and engage with students.

With this type of templated unit design, referred to as “duet-design” (Chase, Ross & Robbie, 2017, p. 3), academics provide the curriculum, the central group does the design of the unit in the learning management system (LMS) and the academic does the final sign-off. Delivery of the units is undertaken by academics from the faculty – sometimes these academics have also worked on the unit development, but often they have not. They are also often staff on casual teaching contracts with the University. Although not the focus of this paper, OPMs and their derivatives, such as the one at our university, have been criticized for using processes that differ significantly from other forms of academic work, resulting in what has been called the “unbundled academic” (Ivancheva & Courtois, 2024), where traditional roles are broken into components, some of which are undertaken by non-academics. These OPM arrangements have also been criticized because much of the teaching is done by precarious academic workers unable to find secure university employment (Ivancheva & Courtois, 2024).

Given these concerns, and because this online venture, with its very different development and delivery model, was new (and very unfamiliar) to our university, academics involved in the delivery of these asynchronous, fully online units were supported during the first time they taught a unit. This support included a self-paced online course which modelled the unit template design and style of delivery, including learning activities, videos, readings, quizzes, and asynchronous discussions. The course introduced academics to the delivery model and gave them the experience of what it is like to be a student in one of these AOL units. In addition, during their first time teaching a unit, academics participated in a mentoring/coaching program and community of practice with other academics also new to this delivery mode. Participation in this professional learning and support, though not compulsory, was strongly encouraged and incentivized by being included in the academic's workload and/or remuneration.

Access to professional development and support is one of several factors that have significant implications for online teaching and student learning (Perrotta & Bohan, 2020). Academic staff teaching in online modes need support to develop their practices (Stone, 2017; Watson et al., 2023), the lack of which may result in academic teaching staff reproducing their practices from other modes (Cohen & Donaldson, 2021) even though these practices may not be appropriate for online learning. As such, the provision of professional development for online teaching is now an expected standard in higher education. However, provision of professional development and support does not address all the challenges that have been identified with online learning generally, or asynchronous online learning specifically, which is discussed next.

The Challenges of Asynchronous Online Delivery

Various challenges with online learning are identified in the literature which fall into several broad categories. These include accessibility and technical issues (Cahyani et al., 2021); not wanting to teach online but having to (Pomerantz & Brooks, 2017); concerns about student engagement, participation and enjoyment (Cahyani et al., 2021); doubts about the effectiveness of online learning for comprehension and topic mastery (Cahyani et al., 2021), and misconceptions about the effectiveness of online learning for students' learning (Pomerantz & Brooks, 2017). Access to professional development and support in the form of coaching or mentoring, how connected faculty feel to the campus community, and academic freedom and curriculum control also have significant implications for online teaching and student learning (Perrotta & Bohan, 2020).

All of the above challenges apply to AOL. In addition, a significant challenge with teaching in an AOL environment is connecting with students, in particular how to do this compared to face-to-face teaching and the impact this has on supporting

students in their learning journey. Teacher- and social-presence in an asynchronous online course, particularly where discussion boards are the main method of interaction with students, is known to impact student satisfaction and retention (Gassell et al., 2021). Watson et al. (2023) note that, in asynchronous online courses, higher rates of perceived learning and better learning experiences are associated with stronger teaching presence. In their study of students enrolled in a capstone course in an MBA degree at a U.S. university, they found students value teaching presence in the form of recorded content lectures, detailed performance feedback, and quick responses to their queries. However, teaching in an AOL environment can be challenging as it requires adjusting to a new way of teaching, which involves a shift from teacher-centred to student-centred pedagogies (Perrotta & Bohan, 2020). Furthermore, many academics may not know how to teach online or may prefer to teach as they were taught. In particular, there are specific skills needed for effective facilitation of asynchronous online discussions (Cohen & Donaldson, 2021) which may not come naturally (Gassell et al., 2021), both of which further underscore the need for support and professional development for academics to effectively teach online.

The inclusion of discussion boards in AOL courses is typical and often the main means of communication between students and between students and teachers. In their systematic review of 35 papers relating to asynchronous online discussions in higher education, Fehrman and Watson (2021) found that, although these online discussions are ubiquitous, there is little consensus on how they should best be used and scant research on alternatives to asynchronous online discussions. From their review, they note that, in the absence of face-to-face interactions, asynchronous online discussions need to “provide community, instruction, and participation for students” (p. 203). They also note that there are benefits for students to be gained in terms of their learning, from interaction with peers and teachers. However, the quality and effectiveness of asynchronous online discussions is variable, with the need for structure being agreed upon in the literature as being critical for effectively engaging students and guiding their learning (Fehrman & Watson, 2021).

Online discussions clearly play an important role in providing opportunities for interaction with peers and teachers, which in turn can lead to enhanced learning outcomes. This importance is underscored by research that shows, for an asynchronous online course with no interaction with an instructor or with others in the course, students’ performance decreased compared to that of students in the equivalent in-person experience (Jensen et al., 2022). Faulconer et al. (2022) note that tasks associated with asynchronous online discussions, such as reading and responding to peers’ posts and synthesizing material from multiple sources, have high cognitive load for students. Similarly, reading, responding to and moderating discussion board posts can have a high cognitive load for teachers, as well as being quite time consuming (Fehrman & Watson, 2021). This contrasts with teaching in

a face-to-face environment where student queries can be responded to in real-time, without the need to formulate a response as a discussion post or email. Given the important role asynchronous online discussions have in connecting with students in an AOL environment, and the lack of consensus relating to how discussion boards should best be used, it is likely that connecting with and engaging students via discussion boards could be the main challenge that academics face when teaching an AOL course.

Based on the above research findings, there are multiple challenges for those teaching online using an asynchronous delivery model. A significant challenge is how to engage students and promote interaction and participation, particularly when asynchronous online discussions are the main way students communicate with one another and the teacher. How to assess whether (and what) students are learning in an environment where students are not “seen” is also a challenge, as is transitioning to more student-centred teaching practices. Developing the necessary skills and being supported to teach online is also critical for academics engaged in teaching in AOL environments. Understanding the extent to which these challenges are present and how they impact on academics’ experience of asynchronous online teaching is important in supporting those teaching in AOL environments, particularly for the first time.

Research Aims

Our research aims to investigate the experiences of academics at our university teaching units as part of a new AOL initiative, where many teachers experienced this mode of delivery for the first time. So, our aim was to better understand factors that help or hinder their effectiveness as teachers and how they can be supported in their roles as online facilitators, beyond the professional learning and support already provided. Survey responses and interview transcripts provided by academics teaching subjects delivered in an AOL unit were analysed to address three research questions. The first related to their perception of teaching in an AOL environment based on their experience. In particular, given most had not previously taught asynchronously online, we were interested in how they adapted their teaching practice, particularly in regard to communicating and engaging with students via announcements and discussion boards, to this new learning environment. The second concerned what factors facilitated or inhibited their experience of teaching in an AOL environment. Lastly, based on their experience, we wanted to know how well supported they felt in their role and what improvements or enhancements could be made.

Method

The original data in this paper was obtained from an ethics-approved research project. The project had two aims. The first was to understand the experiences of academics teaching units of study in AOL environments and their experiences of the Professional Development (PD) designed to support them to teach, which is the focus of this paper. The second was to understand the experiences of academics developing units for this delivery mode. There were two methods of data collection. The first was a short online survey consisting of eleven questions, several of which were focused on teaching, with two of these requiring a short answer response. Those who received the survey were also invited to undertake an interview.

Participants

The survey was sent to 108 academic staff who had undertaken teaching of at least one unit in the AOL format as part of the University's new online venture and who had also participated in the professional learning provided to academics who were teaching in the AOL delivery mode at the university for the first time. As described previously, this Professional Development included a self-paced, online course that modelled the student experience and teacher role in the asynchronous online units, together with a coaching program/community of practice where academics met regularly during their first term of teaching in the AOL mode to discuss their experience, ask questions, share resources and support one another.

Academic staff who had both undertaken teaching and participated in the professional learning were selected using "purposeful sampling [whereby] the researcher specifically seeks participants who meet a set criteria" (Croxford et al., 2019, p. 4). In addition to these two criteria, academics also needed to have taught units of study delivered in the AOL mode over the past four years. We received 15 responses to the survey, with six respondents agreeing to be interviewed. Further, we randomly selected 30 academics from a list of 131 who had undertaken unit development, knowing that there would be a crossover with some who had also taught. A further three participants for interviews were recruited from this method, making nine interviews in total.

Data Collection

Data were collected using two methods: survey and interviews. The survey consisted of nine items which respondents rated using a 5-point scale (1=very dissatisfied, 2=dissatisfied, 3=neither dissatisfied nor satisfied, 4=satisfied, 5=very satisfied). Two items on the survey were relevant to teaching a unit in the AOL delivery mode, while there were three items relating to the Professional Development they received in their first term of teaching an AOL unit. There were

also two open-ended items on the survey. The first asked them to describe their experience of the Professional Development (i.e., the online course and coaching), while the second asked them about their experience of teaching in the AOL delivery mode.

The interview questions were developed using research on AOL and our own experience having worked on these units as academics based in the central unit team. The interviews were undertaken on Microsoft Teams, took approximately forty minutes, and were recorded. The interviews included several questions related to the experiences of teaching, such as timelines, workload, satisfaction and autonomy. As these were open-ended interviews, much arose about the experiences of teaching outside of the scripted questions. We followed relevant themes when they arose. The interviews were transcribed, reviewed, and sent to the interviewees for clarification. The data were then analysed for recurring themes “through careful reading and re-reading of the transcribed data” (Dawadi, 2020, p. 62). These themes were reviewed and revised with the second author. For the purposes of this paper, participants were given anonymous identifying initials such as AE, MA, and CS, and the university has been de-identified.

Results

Data used to address our research questions came from two sources. The first was responses to relevant items in the survey, including responses to open-ended questions. The second source was analysis of transcripts of interviews with academics who had also completed the survey. Survey results are presented first, followed by the interview analysis.

Survey Results

A total of 15 responses were received to the survey. As the survey was designed to collect data for the ethics approved project, survey items asked about experiences with developing asynchronous online units, as well as experience teaching these units and the professional development and support received. Two items were relevant to the experience of teaching a unit in the AOL delivery mode. As shown in Table 1., survey respondents tended to agree ($M=3.6$, $SD=0.9$) that they were satisfied they understood the requirements for teaching their unit in the AOL mode, while they tended to be neutral about whether or not they were satisfied with the experience of teaching the unit ($M=3.1$, $SD=1.0$). Respondents also tended to agree that they were satisfied with the two items relating to the online course ($M=3.8$, $SD=0.9$ and $M=3.6$, $SD=1.2$ respectively) and the experience of coaching ($M=3.7$, $SD=1.0$).

Table 1*Count of Responses to Teaching-related Items on Survey*

Statement	Response Count (N=15)					
	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Understanding the requirements for teaching for asynchronous delivery	0	2	4	7	2	0
The experience of teaching the unit in AOL mode	0	5	4	5	1	0
Assistance provided when undertaking the online modules	0	1	3	6	3	0
The content of the online modules	0	3	3	4	4	0
The experience of coaching	0	2	3	5	3	0
<i>Note.</i> 1=very dissatisfied, 2=dissatisfied, 3=neither dissatisfied nor satisfied, 4=satisfied, 5=very satisfied						

Overall, more respondents agreed they were satisfied or very satisfied with these statements than dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, although only marginally so for the item about their experience teaching the unit in AOL mode. Looking at the responses to the open-ended items, for the five respondents who indicated dissatisfaction with their experience of teaching the unit, four provided responses to the open-ended question about their teaching experience in the AOL delivery mode. The reasons for this dissatisfaction varied. Challenges with lack of interaction with students, finding it hard to motivate and support students, and the amount of time teaching in an AOL mode took up was a negative part of the experience for one respondent. Another said their experience teaching the unit “felt more like an IT role than a teaching/facilitating role” while the experience for another was described as “mixed”. For one it was frustration with not being able to edit content in the unit, which was also noted by a respondent who indicated that they were satisfied (score of 4 for the item) with their experience of teaching the unit in AOL mode. The responses provided by respondents who were satisfied or very satisfied with the teaching experience included that it was an enjoyable learning experience and that their unit was well structured and easy to follow.

A similar pattern of results was seen for the items relating to the professional learning and support they experienced, with more respondents being satisfied than dissatisfied. Overall, these academics were satisfied with the support they were provided while completing the online course, the content of the modules in the course, and their experience of the coaching/mentoring they received. Looking at their satisfaction rating for the item about understanding the requirements for

teaching for asynchronous delivery, it appears that the online course provided a solid introduction to, and information about, what was required in teaching these units.

Analysis of Interview Transcripts

Three broad themes emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts, each of which is discussed next.

Online Compared to Face-to-face Teaching

A number of the interviewees commented that teaching online was very different to teaching face-to-face, giving a range of examples as to why they believed this. For CS, teaching online was “way harder” as it required extensive preparation and a “level of precision and depth” different to face-to-face teaching, and this was a challenge from a workload perspective. LL described themselves as being “unprepared for the differences that were required for teaching asynchronously online”, stating that their discipline is “very face-to-face”. This academic referred to face-to-face teaching as being “the normal way” in their school.

Another difference noted between teaching face-to-face and online which presented a challenge was the content being taught. DM said that he was sure “there’s others, other academics that are trying to teach content that might not be as suited to the online format, and I’m sure they have issues and complaints.” MA expressed similar concerns noting that they have colleagues who don’t want to teach in the AOL delivery mode again and others who said they would not teach in this mode even though they have not experienced it. PK also noted that their colleagues don’t want to teach in the AOL mode due to concerns about workload and negative student evaluations.

One interviewee (MA) said that teaching in the AOL delivery mode, “just doesn’t feel like teaching.” Reasons for this included not really feeling connected to the students, feeling that all they were doing is responding to questions and discussion posts, but not necessarily getting to know them, their strengths and weaknesses, the gaps in their knowledge. RS made the point that “You know, we didn’t become teachers to sit in front of a computer screen. We became teachers to teach people.” LL did not feel comfortable teaching some of the units in AOL mode, not because of the mode per se, but because it was not their field and so they didn’t “feel comfortable doing it”.

Several of the interviewees indicated that teaching in the AOL mode had helped them develop professionally. PK said that teaching the unit again and making changes helped develop their confidence, while RS took up the teaching of their

unit because they are “always looking to improve my practice and, you know, learn something myself.” SP observed that when teaching their AOL unit, they were “responding to the environment I’m working in, whereas when I’m in a classroom, I’m driving the environment.” This academic noted that online teaching is “really confronting to a lot of academics” because of the need to change from a teacher-centred to a student-centred approach.

Communication, Engagement and the Discussion Boards

Although a number of interviewees acknowledged the importance of student autonomy in an AOL course, there were concerns expressed about the level of engagement with students and the ways of communicating and interacting with them in the unit. For example, D described themselves as “somewhat removed from that engagement with the student” but said that “we’re still the teacher” and need “some level of engagement”. SP indicated that “there is a little bit of an over-reliance on discussion boards” and that students, contrary to the reason for having them, “don’t use the discussion boards for the learning, they use it to say I’ve done it.” Similarly, MA felt that “there’s quite a disconnect ... between the lecturer or the online facilitator and the student” because they were just “answering questions and discussion forums or confirming what someone has said”. SP noted that in the AOL environment, the teacher is “receiving what’s coming from the students. So therefore I am actually waiting for what’s happening.” When students don’t ask questions, this creates problems according to SP. When students did engage, RS found the experience enjoyable, saying it was “really informative” meeting with students online.

The AOL units at our university are marketed to students as having no timetabled, online sessions, but including the option to have a non-compulsory, online, consultation session weekly. These synchronous sessions were mentioned as an opportunity and means to engage with students. In addition to these weekly drop-in sessions available to all students, some academics offered additional synchronous sessions for students. For example, LL indicated that they had done some “small Zoom meetings” with students on an individual basis. This academic, along with MA, indicated that a regular, weekly meeting would have been beneficial, but noted that workload made this difficult. SP also indicated that they conducted at least two online sessions during the unit, which were designed to answer students’ questions about the content and assessment tasks. For MA, a live forum was seen as a “really good way to build rapport with students, but also to connect with them”.

In contrast, RS tried to encourage students to come along to “the drop in session” but “didn’t really have the buy in from students.” This academic noted that after having taught a unit in AOL mode several times, they could see that students were

“missing certain things” and tried to work out how to “put that in there”. For them, not teaching face-to-face made it more challenging to show students who they were, as “that perception of you as the teacher obviously comes across quite differently in the online mode.” They indicated that they were recording extra videos and announcements to help address this and as a supplementary communication channel for connecting with students.

Having experience as an online student is valuable for understanding how to teach in an AOL delivery mode according to LL, who said “I think it is a very important remit ... for lecturers and online facilitators to know how to engage with ... and how to keep people motivated”. Prompt and regular online presence was also mentioned as important for keeping students engaged. CS noted that students appreciate prompt responses to their queries, even though they are studying asynchronously and often late at night or on the weekend. This creates workload issues which are “not necessarily explicitly understood”.

Support and Professional Development are Important

A number of the interviewees specifically mentioned the professional development and support they received. RS noted that the “things that have been the best about my experience have, I would definitely say, was in the first iteration having a mentor.” This was because the mentor’s role in supporting first time teachers “was absolutely key to helping me understand what I was doing and just having a sounding board”. LL also appreciated the professional development they received but said that having this just during the first time an academic taught in AOL mode was not “enough to sustain the academics”. For RS the coaching that was provided helped them to connect with another colleague who was teaching a similar unit in the AOL mode. This became a close professional relationship, where they supported one another and shared their experiences.

Discussion

Survey results and interview transcripts provided by academics teaching units delivered in an AOL environment were analysed to address three research questions. Generally, the results showed that these academics experienced many of the challenges that have previously been identified in the literature relating to online learning generally. They also specifically noted challenges associated with the AOL mode of delivery, as discussed next.

The first research question related to how these academics perceived AOL based on their experience, with a focus on how their teaching practice was impacted given the reliance on announcements and discussion boards for interacting with students. There were mixed views on this from both data sources. But regardless of whether

the academic felt the experience was positive or negative, there was agreement that workload could be a significant issue and that teaching in an AOL environment was very different to face-to-face teaching. The reliance on discussion boards and announcements for communication and the lack of immediacy that face-to-face teaching provides were significant challenges that academics said they needed to adapt to when teaching in the AOL mode, which also contributed to their concerns over communicating with and engaging students. Various strategies to address this were described, which notably involved synchronous, online sessions which could be said to model the face-to-face teaching mode. This is problematic as a key feature of this new online venture is that these courses are promoted to students as allowing them to study anytime and anywhere. In addition to describing challenges, some of these academics also indicated that they enjoyed the experience and that there were benefits to having this experience. Interestingly, teaching in the AOL mode did not seem to have a good reputation amongst their colleagues. However, a number of academics did mention the positive benefits of teaching these units, including building their confidence and professional practice.

Our second research question related to what factors facilitated or inhibited their ability to teach effectively in an AOL environment. The inhibitory factors were most numerous and included aspects of the delivery model, adapting to teaching in the AOL environment, and challenges with communicating with and engaging students. Issues with the delivery model included not having editing rights over the content in the unit, which was frustrating when mistakes were identified or when the academic wanted to change or add something. Not having regular, timetabled online sessions that students were expected to attend was also seen as a significant drawback of the model. These academics also felt that the model had the potential for a high workload if not managed. The reliance on discussion boards and announcements for communication and the lack of immediacy that face-to-face teaching provides were significant challenges that academics said they needed to adapt to when teaching in the AOL mode, which also contributed to their concerns over communicating with and engaging students. Various strategies to address this were described, which notably involved synchronous, online sessions that could be said to model the face-to-face teaching mode, which as mentioned previously is not consistent with the model for this new online venture that promises no scheduled classes.

The final research question was about how supported these academics felt in their role and what improvements or enhancements could be made. Responses in the survey and interviews indicated that these academics felt quite supported while teaching their unit in AOL mode the first time, both through their mentor and networking with others. However, at least one academic indicated that this support was needed beyond the initial teaching experience. The online course that was designed to prepare academics for teaching an AOL course was rated positively

and appeared to help them understand the requirements of teaching in this delivery mode, even if they were not particularly satisfied with the experience. So, while the online course helped with preparation for teaching, it did not prepare academics for the practicalities of teaching in an AOL environment, even though the course modelled all aspects of the delivery model, including the use of announcements and discussion boards for communicating with and engaging students.

Overall, the results indicate that while the professional development provided to these academics was helpful in preparing for the requirements of the delivery model, the actual experience of teaching in an AOL environment presented some challenges. Specifically, the need to have real-time interaction with students as a means for communicating with them, and engaging and motivating them, was a common theme amongst these academics. As a result, there were mixed views about the experience. While these academics noted many of the challenges already identified in the literature, their concerns about communication and engagement seem to be amplified in the AOL environment due to the lack of opportunities to interact with students synchronously.

Limitations and Future Directions

These results are consistent with findings reported in the literature relating to online learning generally. There is also close agreement between the survey and interview results. However, the sample size for both is quite small and so these results should be regarded as preliminary. Further data collection, using both surveys and interviews, is needed to confirm these findings. Data reported in this paper was collected as part of a larger study and these results suggest that a more detailed investigation of the teaching aspect of these new AOL units at our university is warranted. In particular, understanding how to extend the professional development these academics receive initially to support them whenever they are teaching in the AOL mode, is an important area for future research. Another important area to investigate is how to reconcile the academics' need to synchronously meet with students when these courses are promoted to students as not requiring students to be online at specific times. Many of these academics struggled with the discussion boards, but every unit had at least one weekly discussion topic as part of the design. How to address this requires further investigation – discussion boards play an important role in AOL, so understanding how to use them effectively, both as part of the unit design and its delivery, is critical. Whether there is a need to make the design template less dependent upon them and, if so, how this could be achieved, is an important question yet to be addressed.

Questions about whether the AOL model used in this new online venture at our university needs to be changed, and whether academics need to modify their practice, or both, require further investigation. In any case, the importance of, and

challenges with, communication and engagement with students in online learning environments is persistent, especially for AOL environments.

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