

WCET *Frontiers* “What’s Next” Interviews Spring 2020

Interviewer: Russ Adkins

Interviewee: Tom Cavanagh, Vice Provost of Digital Learning, at the University of Central Florida, discusses challenges that a large institution with solid digital learning infrastructure faces as remote learning is sustained.

As late as the early 90’s, the University of Central Florida was largely a commuter university, but has since tripled its enrollment in the last 30 years. A key component of that growth has been through a strategy to deliberately integrate digital learning into its footprint. Bill Gates has described UCF as a university “bucking conventional wisdom that argues higher education institutions can’t serve more students without sacrificing quality or raising costs.” Today, UCF enrolls more students than any other Florida state university, online and on-ground.

Three days to move everyone into remote instruction. Over spring break, the University moved nearly 5,000 face-to-face course sections, over 700 blended course sections, and 500,000 course credit hours to digital delivery. Fortunately, UCF has a very robust level of digital learning infrastructure, and faculty and student support services, to support this change. Tom advises that the biggest challenge was the time to make the transition: “Online learning had to already be at a certain penetration level, or this transition would not have worked as well as it has.”

Secure assessment challenges. UCF has utilized a home-grown passive remote proctoring application integrated into Canvas to support assessment in fully online courses. This application is not suited for adoption by faculty who have never assessed learning online, and thus enterprise-level remote proctoring options have been secured. For this term, the University must absorb proctoring expenses, as students cannot be charged a fee to maintain academic integrity, since there was no notification of this fee during enrollment. For an institution of UCF’s size, the costs associated with enterprise-level remote proctor solutions could be significant.

A summer term operating at scale with remote instruction. Departments that already have faculty prepared to teach online are being encouraged to offer additional sections. Professional development used to prepare adjunct faculty and graduate assistants to “inherit” previously prepared versions of an online course will be extended to additional faculty new to teaching remotely, assuming there is already a developed online course for them to inherit. Sessions on teaching with lecture capture using Zoom will be required for all summer term remote instruction faculty, with over 200 faculty already signed up. Tom feels that the University will be much better prepared for summer term.

Accessibility. Accessibility challenges were anticipated. UCF's provost has funded supplemental captioning and transcription solutions and additional support for the Student Accessibility Services office. An LTI integration has been created within the LMS and placed into specific courses where students have accommodation needs so that faculty can more easily and proactively request accessibility support.

On-going challenges related to hands-on instruction. Like most institutions, UCF is challenged to provide clinical and physical lab experiences for its students and faculty. The sheer size of the institution and the number of programs requiring lab instruction complicate quick solutions, as do recent enacted austerity measures. The Division of Digital Learning has charged a specific team with researching alternative lab options and they are currently working with several departments to identify and deploy solutions.