

(last updated August 2024)

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE F. Responding to and Learning from the Pandemic (NEW)

BRIEF DESCRIPTION: As COVID-19 forced many schools and universities to engage in remote teaching and change many common practices so as to comply with social distancing for a significant period of time, it created an immediate need to help educators to deal effectively with these changes - and the LiDA Center was in a unique position to provide this support. We can also expect that the new solutions and practices experienced during the pandemic will have an even more enduring effect on education - as going back to the "pre-COVID normal" is not a likely outcome. Therefore, the LiDA Center also wants to be at the forefront of studying lessons learned from the pandemic and using this crisis as a catalyst for innovation to radically improve future student learning opportunities. Doing so will require refocusing some of our current initiatives as well as starting some new ones, and will contribute to our goals of supporting LiDA initiatives (Goal #1) and developing LiDA-related scholarship (Goal #2), as well as engaging our LiDA Community in meaningful dialogues around implications of the pandemic (Goal #4) and increasing our visibility (Goal #3).

(NOTE: hereafter, * indicates LiDA staff, and ** indicates LiDA Community members)

Supporting "emergency" remote instruction (March-April 2020)

As schools and universities were abruptly closed and had to quickly figure out how to deliver instruction remotely in March 2020, there was an immediate need to help educators at all levels in these efforts.

Within our institution, *Fredericksen, in his role of Associate Vice-President of Online Learning, played a critical role in a number of complementary ways. First, he immediately called for daily meetings of the University IT Governance Committee, including IT staff and faculty representatives of key units across the university, so this group could share challenges encountered and discuss possible solutions in real time, thus learning from each other and providing a vehicle to coordinate (or at least influence) important university-wide decisions.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, the faculty at the University of Rochester had to quickly transition to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) to support their students and help them successfully complete their courses for the Spring 2020 semester. At that moment, University leadership through *Fredericksen and **Brown stepped up to the challenge and supported faculty in this effort by focusing on "how" to translate in person classroom instructional activities and assessments to potential online counterparts. These efforts about "emergency remote teaching" helped instructors across the UR who had never taught online before (reaching several hundred UR instructors and staff). They also created a rich website for [instructors](#) and [students](#) for "just-in-time" learning and reference. Other LiDA staff also offered one-on-one support and facilitated debriefing sessions for Warner instructors. *Borasi and *Fredericksen were also part of discussions held within the Warner leadership team that led to an early decision of moving to fully online all our course offerings for Summer and Fall 2020.

As K-12 schools also closed, *Borasi and *Miller facilitated a few meetings with K-12 Digital Consortium district representatives to share and discuss the challenges they were facing.

Debriefing meetings were also held with the teachers participating in our two NSF-funded Master Teaching Fellowship programs, to provide some immediate support. These conversations were critical to inform later actions.

Preparing for Quality Remote Instruction (May 2020-August 2020)

As it became clear that instruction would not likely go back to normal for the next academic year, *Fredericksen and **Brown developed a “condensed” version of the sequence of courses at the core of Warner Advanced Certificate in Online Teaching. These efforts about “real” online teaching and learning included “why” the faculty might want to employ specific online learning activities and their advantages. And instead of *Fredericksen’s typical single summer course, ten sections of his course on Designing and Developing Online Courses were offered over summer 2020, serving more than 150 UR faculty and instructors. Most Warner instructors that had not previously taught online took this course. Several workshops were also repeated multiple times and were very well attended - including 20 in summer 2020 alone. Additional support was once again provided by LiDA staff to interested Warner instructors in the form of additional workshops, facilitated debriefing, and one-one-one support. These efforts led to redesigned fully online courses of high quality to be offered at Warner over the 2020-21 academic year -- as attested by the fact that course evaluations were on average the same as or higher than in previous years. They also influenced course redesign and delivery in other UR academic units that up to that point had been resistant to consider online instruction; in several cases, faculty teaching online for the first time with this support reported their surprise (and delight) about its effectiveness and acknowledged previous misconceptions about this mode of instruction.

In parallel to these initiatives, *Borasi and *Miller designed a series of online professional learning opportunities for K-12 teachers on remote teaching, including both synchronous and asynchronous components and equivalent to 2-3 full days of PD. These professional development offerings were informed by the conversations previously held with K-12 teachers and administrators, while also building on the LiDA Center’s experience preparing online instructors. Customized versions of this program were offered by *Borasi, *Miller and *Borys, with the support of other LiDA Community members, for East teacher leaders and administrators (involving a total of about 40 participants), and as part of a modified contract with AccelerateU for an existing grant (4 offerings serving a total of about 150 K-12 teachers -- see the [plan and selected artifacts](#) of one of these experiences as an illustration).

We also felt that the pandemic called for some redesign of the professional learning experiences originally planned for two current NSF-funded Noyce Master Teaching Fellowship (MTF) program cohorts. For one of these cohorts, focusing on developing 21 leaders for digitally-rich instructional innovations and at the time in the second year of the program, this translated in summer learning activities focused on redesigning high-quality lessons for remote teaching under different possible scenarios, and coming to a better appreciation of the potential of synchronous and asynchronous online learning for K-12 students (see [3-minute video showcasing some of these teachers’ experiences](#)). As the other group of 14 MTF fellows was just coming to the end of their 5-year program when the pandemic hit, we applied to NSF for a \$52,000 supplement to [Lessons Learned by STEM Master Teachers from the Pandemic](#) us to extend the program and complement it with a new focus on online teaching and learning. As this supplement was awarded, 9 fellows opted to participate in this extension, despite the new demands imposed on them by the

pandemic (see "[Lessons Learned by STEM Master Teachers from the Pandemic](#)" 3-minute video showcasing some of these teachers' experiences).

We also felt the need to reach more widely to educators we might not be able to reach through "live" sessions. This inspired a social media initiative led by *Lammers and *Borys, named the "Daily Dose," that involved sending daily Twitter messages with information about valuable resources or events for educators throughout most of the pandemic. *Borasi (with support from *Miller, *Borys and *Han) also created a new "LiDA eModule" on [High-Leverage Teaching Practices for Remote Teaching](#), consisting of a rich set of short videos and hyperlinked texts that interested teachers (at all level) could use as a resource; this eModule was posted on the LiDA website so as to be publicly available to anyone interested.

Supporting educators' long-term efforts during the pandemic (September 2020 to June 2021)

As the new academic/school year started in September 2020, *Fredericksen and **Brown continued their efforts to support UR instructors teaching a variety of courses (from fully online, to a "hy-flex" model involving face-to-face class sessions attended by a mix of in-person and remote students) by offering over 20 workshops on specific online tools and/or strategies, each attended by 20-50 participants (see lists for: [Summer 2020](#), [Fall 2020](#), [Spring 2021](#)). The IT Governance Committee continued to meet regularly (although with gradually lower frequency as the year progressed and the situation became more stable), providing a valuable vehicle for sharing and problem solving. LiDA staff continued to facilitate debriefing meetings with Warner instructors, and to be available for one-on-one support - but it is worth noting that the need for that support decreased significantly as the year progressed.

During the 2020-21 school year we were not called to provide additional professional development or other support for K-12 schools - as schools seemed to be overwhelmed by dealing with their day-to-day reality. However, we continued to have one-on-one conversations with administrators and teachers. We also provided one-on-one mentoring to the MTF2 fellows who participated in the grant supplement (which included 3 math teachers at East) as well as all the 21 MTF-DR fellows, and significantly redesigned year 3 of the current MTF-DR project to better respond to the current situation and more immediate challenges and opportunities faced by these teacher-leaders-in-training. We also continued our "Daily Dose" Twitter initiative.

Leveraging what was learned during the pandemic to better prepare teachers to use technology (July 2021 to date)

Renewed interest in professional development opportunities around leveraging technology in teaching came along as the New York State Education Department (NYSED) awarded three grants (two of which had been originally submitted before the pandemic and one submitted in early 2021) to the Greater Southern Tier BOCES, involving the LiDA Center and the Center for Professional Development & Education Reform as the sole professional development provider. We got permission from NYSED to slightly adapt the plans originally proposed for these grants, so as to include a focus on responding to and leveraging what learned about the use of instructional technology in the pandemic. As these projects will involve a total of over 350 K-12 teachers over the next 5 years, they provide great opportunities for impacting the use of instructional technology in a region that so far has been significantly under-served in terms of professional development.

Similarly, *Fredericksen and **Brown have continued to offer courses as well as 1-hour workshops on various aspects of online teaching during this second academic year after the pandemic hit. These learning opportunities have been very well attended, showing that experiences using technology during the pandemic raised the interest of many UR faculty members in becoming more proficient in teaching online.

While schools and colleges reopened to in-person instruction starting in September 2021, frequent absences due to students and teachers being sick or on quarantine made it necessary for many classes to use at least occasionally a "hy-flex" modality – that is, for the same class, having some students attending in person and some remotely at the same time. This made us realize the importance of studying how to best use this modality, so as to be able to support teachers at all levels when required to do so. In addition to organizing a debriefing session for Warner faculty and a LiDA Colloquium on "hy-flex", we were delighted that Warner faculty Kristen Love offered to take the lead in applying for an Educational IT Innovation mini-grant on this topic and sought the LiDA Center for support in putting together her application. This mini-grant has been awarded and work on it has already started by a group of faculty across the UR, led by Love and including *Borys.

Identifying lessons learned and potential implications of the pandemic for education (on-going)

Despite the immediate needs for support created by the pandemic, from the very beginning we realized the importance of devoting some of our resources to studying the potential long-term implications of the pandemic for education - so as to be able to leverage lessons learned to improve the quality of education, and also to better position ourselves to help schools and universities envision and prepare for the post-COVID "new normal."

First of all, we decided to devote our 2020-21 and 2021-22 LiDA Colloquium Series to providing opportunities for educators to reflect and engage in dialogue around implications of the pandemic. For the first time, these events were offered fully online, with each event consisted in a 1-hour Zoom session beginning with short presentations by 4-5 "conversation starters" and followed by facilitated small group discussions in breakout rooms. To expand the reach of these events, conversation starters' presentations and sharing from the small group discussions have also been recorded and later posted on the [LiDA Colloquium Series](#) page of the LiDA website. Over these two years, we organized total of 12 sessions focusing on complementary aspects, with attendance ranging from 20 to 50 participants in each session. Given the success of this new format, which also allowed more participation from K-12 educators as well as faculty outside the UR and other community members, we have decided to keep this format moving forward – although starting with September 2022 we will go back to choosing a greater variety of topics with relevance to Learning in the Digital Age.

To arise awareness and debate about the potentially dramatic changes the pandemic may cause for higher education institutions, *Borasi and *Miller co-authored with **Harris and DeMartino (RIT) a book chapter titled "[Could COVID-19 Be a Catalyst for Disruption in Higher Education?](#)", which was eventually published in early 2022.

To better understand and document challenges and opportunities presented by the pandemic for K-12 school, in Fall 2020 *Miller conducted a first set of 26 one-on-one Zoom

conversations with schools leaders within the K-12 Digital Consortium. Selected findings from these conversations were shared as part of a [2020 NYSCATE presentation](#) designed to facilitate more sharing and dialogue across K-12 educators. The initial conversations inspired a more systematic study of K-12 principals' experiences and lessons learned during the pandemic, which took place as a new series of 37 interviews that *Miller and **Cutt conducted in May-August 2021 and plan to continue over the following few months. Findings from both sets of interviews were reported in two presentations at the 2021 NYSCATE conference, held in Rochester in November 2021, and in an article published in a special issue of *The Learning Professional* in October 2021.

As we move forward, we plan to continue to identify and pursue opportunities to further study the short-term and long-term implications of the pandemic for both K-12 school and higher education. We will also proactively search for multiple venues to disseminate findings from this work, as well as other vehicles to stimulate reflections and dialogue within the education community.

LiDA Center staff has also played a proactive role within our own institution to leverage what learned during the pandemic to inform the strategic planning launched in 2021. *Borasi has been asked to serve in the university-wide strategic planning committee on "Reimagining Education", *Fredericksen has co-chaired the corresponding working group within the Warner School.