

Evaluation of Best Practices for Teaching Online

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### **Introduction**

#### **Organization Information**

Dallas College is a community college established in 1965 in Dallas, Texas. This institution serves Dallas County and the surrounding areas. The college's mission is to transform lives and communities through higher education. Their overall purpose is "to ensure Dallas County is vibrant, growing and economically viable for current and future generations." This institution offers a wide variety of certificates and associate degrees and is beginning to offer a bachelor's degree in early childhood education.

#### **Program Information**

Best Practices for Teaching Online (BPTO) is a competency-based online faculty professional development program. BPTO prepares faculty to implement quality course design practices, supporting an informal course development process (non-evaluative). The course is openly accessible (public), and there is no cost associated with participation, consideration, or adoption. BPTO was launched in June 2019 and has seen over 2000 faculty participate in the program from over 240 institutions across 43 states and nine countries. A few institutions have adopted successful completion of BPTO as a requirement for faculty to be able to teach online courses.

This course was developed by Mountain View College in late 2018 in collaboration with the National Institute of Organization Staff Development (NISOD) and its member institutions. The eLearning Work Group at Mountain View had completed a year-long study investigating best practices for teaching online, culminating in a Best Practices for Teaching Online Faculty Checklist. At this time, NISOD was interested in developing Community College 101 faculty

professional development program. Both organizations decided to work together to adapt the checklist into what became Best Practices for Teaching Online. The course is intended for any faculty member that teaches an online course. Course participants included members of K-12 and higher education institutions. There is no history of formal evaluation of the program. Data is compiled monthly and sent to Dallas College (formerly Mountain View College) and NISOD.

### **Evaluation Rationale**

This program was initially established at Mountain View College in partnership with the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD). The recent reorganization of the Dallas County Community College District to one college, Dallas College, is forcing an evaluation of the program to determine its future. Potential options include maintaining the BPTO program in partnership with NISOD, deploying it as an Open Educational Resource (OER), or sunseting it. The BPTO audience comprises faculty members across higher education who wish to improve their courses by implementing best practices. The key stakeholders include the Office of Learning and Development within Dallas College and NISOD.

### **Purpose**

The project has two goals to evaluate the Best Practices for Teaching Online (BPTO) faculty development program. The primary purpose is to determine if Dallas College should continue to offer BPTO or terminate the program. This type of evaluation is best suited as a summative evaluation. Patton states that this type of evaluation judges the "overall effectiveness" of the program (p. 115).

While Dallas College is considering whether to continue offering the program, Mr. Sosa and Dr. Leach are considering replicating the program into a Best Practices series. Patton describes judgment-oriented evaluations as summative evaluations focused on the effectiveness

of a program and whether it should be “replicated” (p. 115). Considering the dual purpose of the evaluation, then summative evaluation with a judgment-oriented approach would be the project's primary purpose.

The only other type of evaluation that could fit the project would be monitoring. This type of evaluation ensures that managers are provided data regularly that lets them know how the program is performing (Patton, p. 122). This type of data would support the evaluation outcome but incorporating this into the evaluation is unnecessary. BPTO is already monitored monthly. Data is collected about program participants, their institutions, and course completions. This data will support the outcome of the summative judgment-oriented evaluation without the evaluator needing to worry about incorporating monitoring as a type of evaluation for the project.

Enhancing shared understandings is a process use that could be incorporated into the project. Communication and knowledge are vital in an organization, not just within an evaluation project. Patton states that feedback is a way to integrate shared understanding into the project (p. 147). Each person will have different perspectives on the subject. Suppose each participant in the evaluation provides their understanding of the program's question, purpose, or outcomes. In that case, it will show a bigger picture of what is happening in the program. Suppose administrators in Dallas College can provide their perspective about what they expect from the program, partnership, and continued development of the program. In that case, the evaluators will have a clear picture of what they are looking for.

The benefit of enhancing shared understandings is that everyone is like-minded about the program resulting in resources supporting the program priorities. The challenges could include a hasty conclusion that does not allow for all options and administration pushing their views on everyone involved (Patton, p. 164). The best way to address these challenges is to have the

administration give their feedback and interpretations after everyone else has done so. This process will keep those in power from influencing others' participation.

### **Audience(s)**

On a large scale, the primary stakeholders— high power, high-interest group—are Dallas College and NISOD. Dallas College must decide if they want to continue to endorse the program and commit to staffing to maintain it. They do not have a specific budget set aside to fund the program. The staffing to maintain the course and collect data is about 8 hours per month. NISOD's benefit of supporting the program offers an award-winning faculty development program to the public. It adds value to their member institutions because they can earn a nationally recognized certificate of completion. The production and mailing of the certificates are NISOD's only expenses, and I do not have access to those figures.

The low power, high-interest group are the secondary stakeholders in the evaluation. This group includes Jennifer McGuire, the BPTO course facilitator and data analyst, and the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), the department that manages faculty development for Dallas College. CETL could be influential in using the evaluation because if they do not see value in the program or the evaluation, they could influence the tertiary stakeholders—the high power, low-interest group (the final decision-makers)—to continue or terminate BPTO. Members of this group include the Chief Human Resources Officer, The Provost, and the Senior Vice Provost of Academic Services of Dallas College.

The evaluation's primary intended user (PIU) will be Mr. Steve Sosa, Senior Director of Learning and Development at Dallas College. He represents the personal factor in this evaluation. Patton states that the people who care about the evaluation outcome make up the personal factor (p.62). He has been a part of the program from inception and will be impacted by

the evaluation outcome. Mr. Sosa also clearly understands the program's goals, enhancing the evaluation's final design and methods. He will work with the evaluator throughout the process, representing all levels of stakeholders.

As Senior Director of Learning and Development at Dallas College, Mr. Sosa is responsible for identifying development programs that contribute to the organization's goal to promote a culture of learning. As mentioned above, he has a personal connection to the program since he was vital in its creation; however, his position at the college requires him to consider programs based on data and how the program will fit into the newly restructured organization. A decision must be made whether to continue the program or not. Therefore, he is fully invested in the process and committed to using the evaluation.

### **Key Questions (about 1~1.5 pages)**

Best Practices for Teaching Online (BPTO) faculty development program has been developed and implemented over the past four years. During that time, the program has gone through the first four tiers, according to Patton (p. 174). The program was actively evaluated through the first four tiers ensuring that the program was designed well and functioned properly, the pilot cohort tested the program and provided feedback for praise and improvements, and implementation of the program included pre-and post-surveys from participants in the course to provide their background information (so we understood who was taking the course) and their feedback for praise and improvements. Tier 4 implementation included monthly data analysis reports that gave stakeholders, Mountain View College (pre-reorganization to Dallas College) and NISOD, information about participation in the program, including participant location, institution, and NISOD membership status; results of advertising efforts; and program completion rate.

This evaluation will focus on tier 5, evaluating the program to judge if the program should continue and be replicated into a Best Practices series of courses for faculty, staff, and administration in higher education. This stage of development will have questions that focus on the effectiveness of the program and the value to the organization to continue allocating resources to maintaining the program and the possibility of expanding it. Keeping this program phase in mind, the following priority evaluation questions have been chosen for this project and reviewed for clarity.

Implementation Questions:

1. To what extent is the program amenable to implementation elsewhere? What aspects of implementation were likely situational? What aspects are likely generalizable?
2. What has been learned about implementing this program that might inform similar efforts for a series of programs using this as a base model?

Summative evaluation questions that lead to overall judgments of merit, worth, and significance:

3. To what extent and in what ways does the program meet participants' needs?
4. To what extent have intended outcomes been attained?
5. What are unanticipated outcomes and impacts, if any?
6. What have been the more significant impacts of the program?
7. Is this an especially effective practice that should be continued and expanded as a base model for other areas of Best Practice?
8. How does the program's continuation compare to the options of termination or expansion? Does continuation or expansion of the program add value to the organization?

Formative, program improvement-oriented questions:

9. What are the program's strengths and weaknesses? What works and what does not?

10. What implementation processes need to be improved, if any?
11. How are participants reacting to the program? What do they like and dislike? What do they find valuable? What do they resist? What factors seem to be affecting program completion?
12. How do different subgroups in the program respond, that is, what works for whom in what ways and under what conditions?
13. What are program staff reactions? What are their perceptions of what could be improved?
14. Where are opportunities for improvement? How can outcomes and impacts be increased? How can quality be enhanced?

Knowledge-generation questions:

15. What principles can be extracted across results to inform practices and models in new settings?

These questions were chosen to analyze the program's worth for continuation and possible expansion. Answers to these questions, paired with data collected from the program over the past three years, will help the PIU provide the secondary and tertiary stakeholders with enough information to decide the program's future.

### **Evaluation Design**

The design of this evaluation will use a methods decisions framework. This framework focuses on the questions of what, why, when, how, where, and who. According to Patton (2012), these questions will keep the evaluation focus on gathering the appropriate data that will answer the evaluation questions that have been identified using the accessible resources and time (p. 272).

- What? Should Dallas College continue to offer BPTO and possibly expand the program?



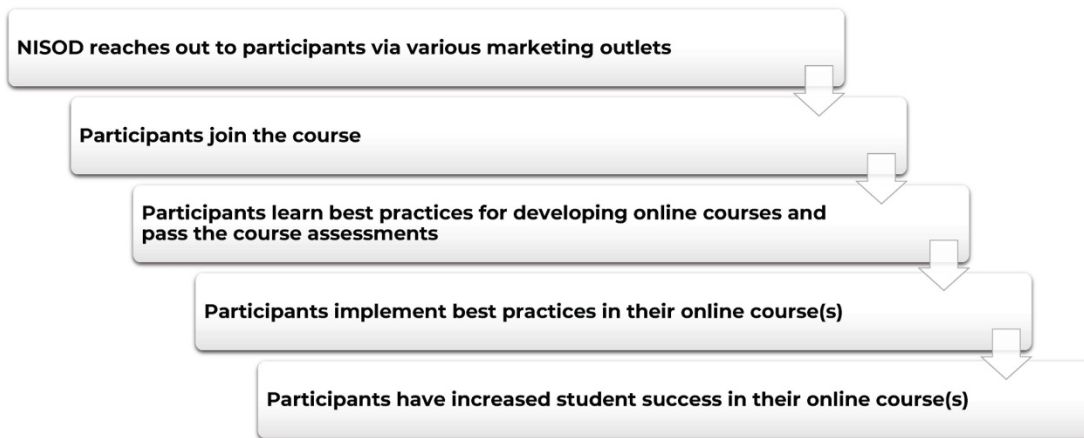
- Why? Mountain View College developed the program before the reorganization, and Dallas College needs to know if they want to put its name behind it.
- When? A decision needs to be made before the beginning of the new academic year.
- How? This information can be gathered by reviewing monthly data reports, pre-and post-surveys, and participant feedback.
- Where? The information is available in the program archives.
- Who? This information is for the Senior Director of Talent Development and the Chief Human Resources Officer. The information should be collected from the BPTO program administrator.

### **Evaluation Methods**

This evaluation will use a mixed-methods design that will provide measurable qualitative data and quantitative data in the form of participant feedback. Patton (2012) states that using a “variety of methods” allows the evaluation to be “responsive” to the various questions and ensures a variety of stakeholders' needs will be met (293).

### **Change Model**

Patton (2012) states, "new information leads to attitude change, and attitude change affects behavior" These are the validity assumptions that numerous education programs, like BPTO, are constructed (p. 239). This evaluation design will utilize a theory of change framework by mapping a linear cause-effect sequence that will follow the premise "program participation leads to knowledge change which leads go attitude change which leads to behavioral change which produces the desired outcome" (p. 245).

**BPTO Linear Cause-Effect Program Logic Model**

The linear cause-effect theory of change framework will be most helpful for this evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation is to recommend if the program should be continued and possibly expanded to other topics. This framework shows the sequence of cause-effect actions that lead to the desired outcome of increased student success, which targets Dallas College's mission to transform lives through higher education.

**Potential Issues**

According to Patton (2012), the primary intended user and evaluator work together to form the design and make decisions for the evaluation (p.264). The issues to anticipate for this evaluation because of involving a primary intended user include (4) identifying design strengths and weaknesses, (5) making explicit criteria for judging methodological quality, and (8) increasing users' capacity and supporting their learning (p.265). Each of these issues will require transparent conversations with the primary intended user.

Another possible issue is the evaluator's bias due to their role as administrator of the BPTO program. The evaluator does not have a personal stake in continuing the program. The

evaluation results will determine if they continue to administrate the program, work on the expansion, or have free time to pursue a new task.

The threats to anticipate for this evaluation include "poor stakeholder understanding of the evaluation generally and findings specifically" and "perceptions that the evaluation is unfair or that the evaluator is biased or less than impartial." (Patton, 2012, p. 278) The threats can also be addressed with transparency. The stakeholders will be thoroughly informed of the evaluation process and findings. Communication is critical in any situation, and stakeholders need clear communication.

### **Data Collection and Analyses**

As stated earlier, the program collects both quantitative and qualitative data monthly. The quantitative data will be analyzed to provide insight into the various participants and the program's success. The qualitative data will be analyzed to provide insight into the participants who completed the program.

#### **Data Collection**

##### Access to Data

- Qualitative data is collected via a post-course survey, and participant interview documents are continually collected. The focus of the survey and interview is participant satisfaction and feedback.
- Quantitative data is collected via a pre-course survey and course reports. Data collected includes total participants in the program, total participants per institution, total participating institutions, total participants per state or country, advertising statistics, NISOD membership status, and time spent in the course.

##### Responsibility/Authority

- Steve Sosa and Jennifer McGuire have the responsibility and authority to perform the evaluation process. The evaluation results will be reported in an executive summary that the Dallas College Leadership Team will review.

#### Budget

- The evaluation is an internal process; therefore, no additional budget is necessary.

#### Data Gathering

- The data has been gathered monthly from the beginning of the program and stored on the department cloud drive. The program facilitator will update the program data and statistics and add them to the cloud drive by May 31, 2022.

#### Data Storage

- Program data collected, analyzed, and reported previously is stored on the Learning and Development department OneDrive. No participant identifying information is reported.

#### Facilities

- The Learning and Development offices equipped with computers and internet access will be used to conduct the evaluation.

#### Data-Gathering Schedule

- The qualitative and quantitative data previously mentioned have been collected monthly from the beginning of the program. This existing data will be analyzed and compiled into the final executive summary.

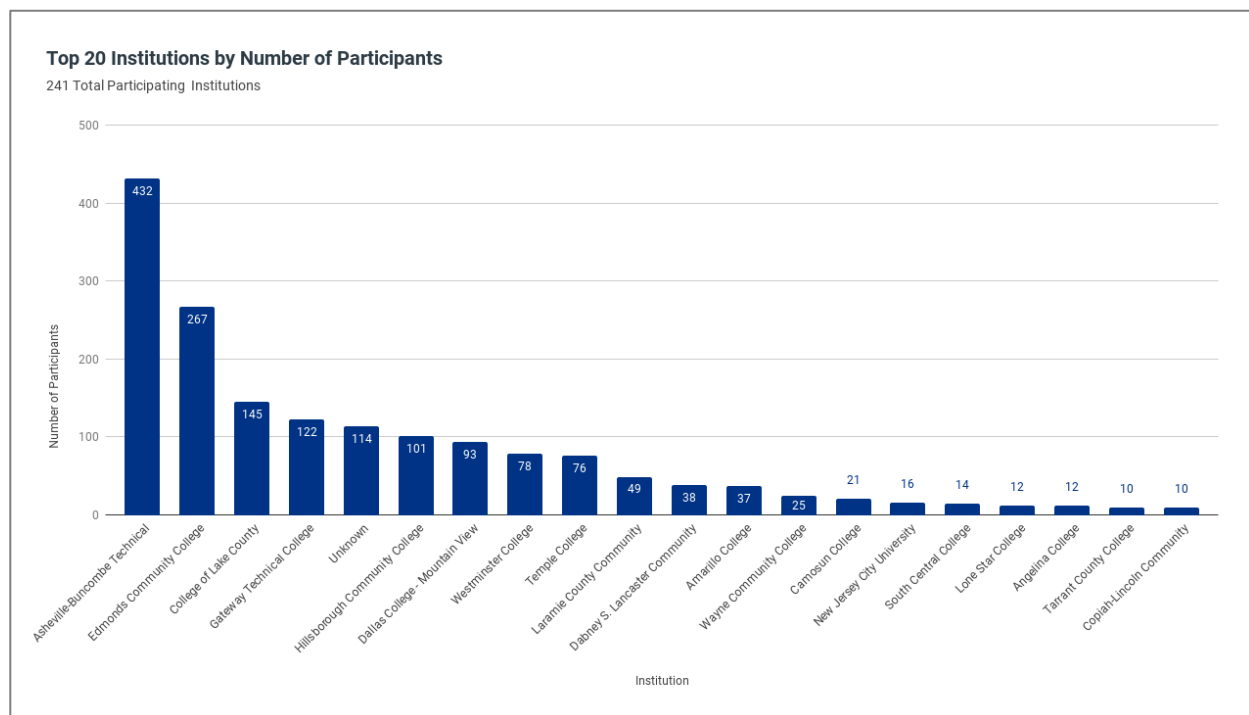
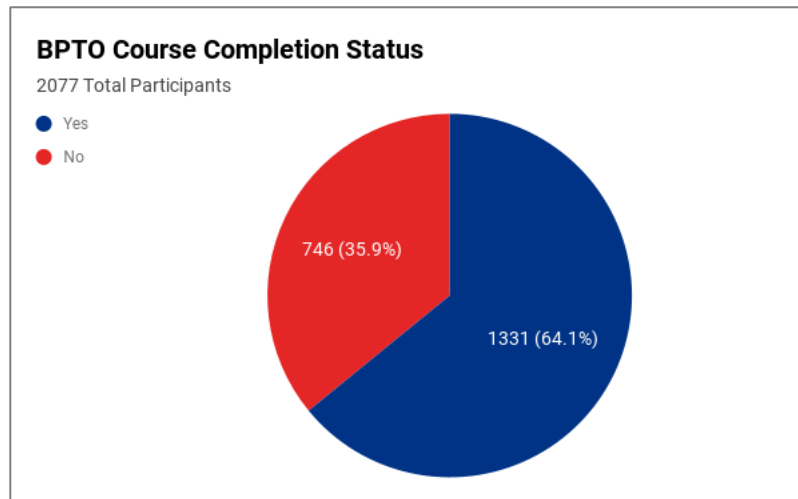
#### Reporting Schedule

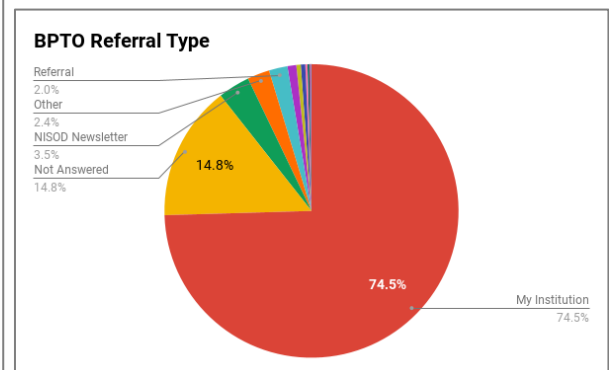
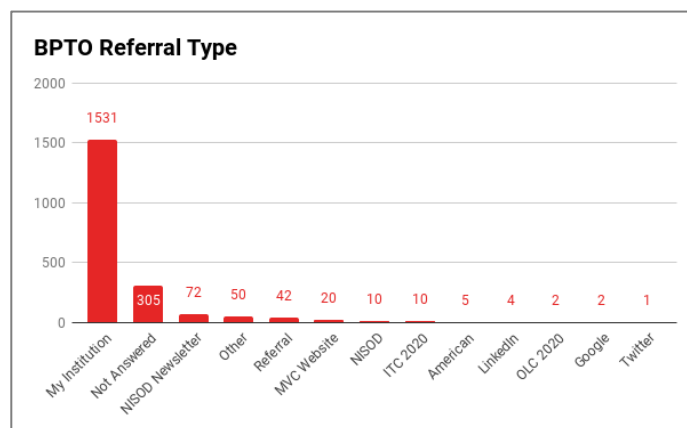
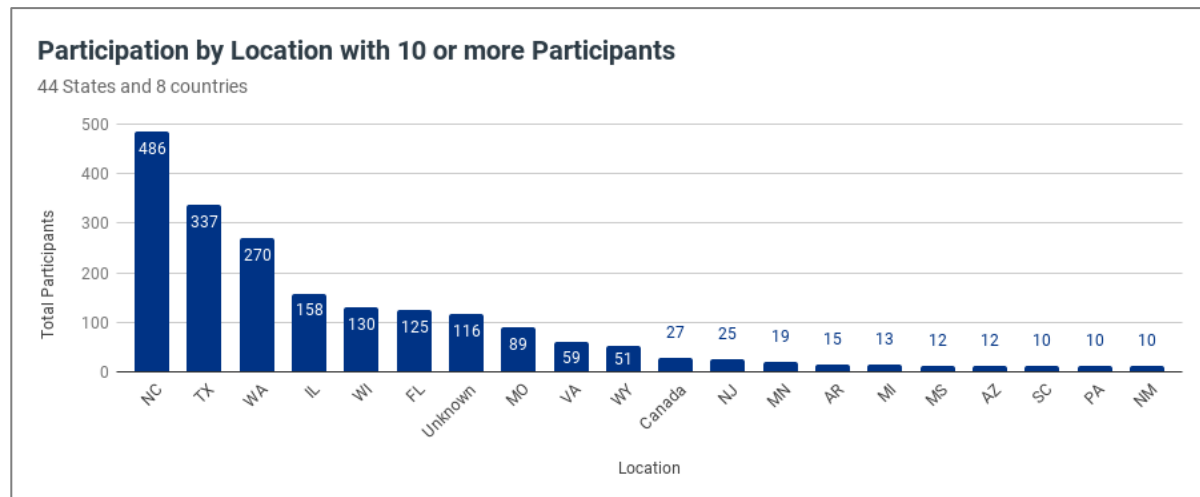
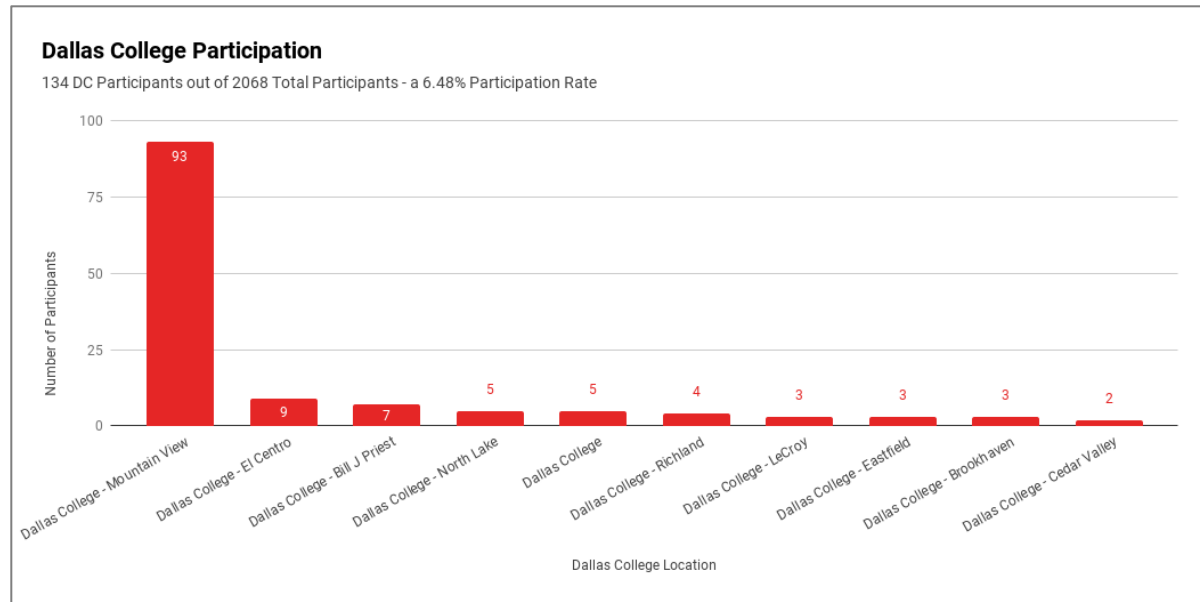
- The evaluation findings will be compiled into an executive summary and presented to the leadership team by June 30, 2022.

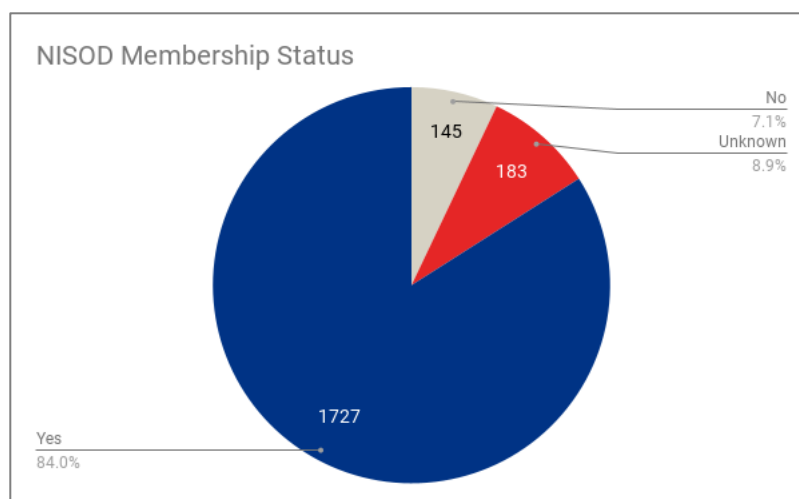
#### **Data Analyses**

The BPTO faculty development program has been operational since June 2019. Both qualitative statistical data and quantitative data in the form of post-course surveys and participant interviews have been collected over the life of the course and compiled for this evaluation. The following data has been compiled from each of those sources.

### Quantitative Data







### Qualitative Data

<i>Post-course survey results are combined into three categories: agree, disagree, or neutral.</i>			
<b>Likert Scale Questions</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
I found the video interviews, providing both faculty and student perspectives, helpful.	74%	8%	18%
I found the downloadable PDF worksheets helpful in creating personalized content.	86	3	11
I believe the Faculty Checklist (the basis for this program) is a thorough collection of teaching and learning best practices.	91	2	7
The additional resources provided (at the end of each indicator) are relevant and useful.	89	3	8
The overall course contained a good balance of instructional materials, video interviews, and engagement opportunities.	89	3	8
I plan to implement the practices identified and utilize the Faculty Checklist in the courses I teach.	93	2	5

### Open-Ended Survey Questions

The post-course survey includes four open-ended questions that allow participants to give feedback regarding their experience completing the course. The top ten results that were not duplicates are listed below.

The most valuable aspect of the Best Practices for Teaching Online program is...

- (1) The tone and vibe of the faculty videos within the course and those linked to the course. (2) The section on accessibility.

- A clear and concise summary of good practices for online learning, including a valuable collection of resources
- A lot of useful tips and suggestions for online teaching.
- Aligning SLO with Learning Objectives
- All aspects are valuable
- All modules were valuable for someone who has never taught completely online.
- All the additional resources and video testimonials of students and teachers
- Clear layout (good model for Canvas course), assessment, and additional resources for further development.
- Detailed information on SLO's and how to build successful rubrics
- Discussion about learning objectives and how they should direct course content.

One area of improvement could be...

- 5<sup>th</sup> module needed more information.
- A bit confusing at the beginning with the “badges” as they don’t refresh right away
- A bit more variety
- A few more templates – they were all excellent
- A few of the links are broken in the additional resources sections
- An interactive teacher who would give us examples (visuals) of what kinds of feedback and courses that are best
- All of the quizzes have language that indicate that they pertain to Module 1 – this needs to be updated
- All of the videos and contents were clear and easily understandable. I do not have any suggestions to change anything at this moment.



- Can't think of anything.
- Change the lead in for the videos; it was the same each time.

If asked by others about my experience, I would describe it as...

- It is hard for me to answer this because I already knew this material before beginning. It is useful and it is really helpful, but I didn't really go through the course as I already knew this material from other PD I have done and from my own schooling.
- A big waste of time; a single bullet list in an email would have sufficed
- A bit overwhelming but rich in information. I don't know, but I hope this course will remain available to me even now that I've finished it so that I can refer to the resources when I have more time in the future.
- A good introduction to online teaching
- Beneficial – the forums at the end of each module is good resource material
- Better than I expected...well worth it
- Comprehensive
- Definitely go through the training. It really has a lot of great information that can be applied quickly and easily.
- Depending on your experience with teaching online, this is a very good OVERVIEW course for faculty.
- Easily accessible and I could do at my own pace. Good information both in the course and as additional resources

My motivation for participating in this professional development program was...

- \$200
- To help students

- ...moving all classes online in Spring 2020, so getting refreshed in best-practices and updated with technology
- A desire to help students to see the light bulb come on!
- A desire to learn effective strategies for making my online course more effective.
- A requirement to complete in order to teach online
- After everyone went online the last few months, I wanted review and new ideas, I indeed got this.
- All faculty at our school is completing it as preparation for more online classes due to the pandemic and new trends in learning.
- Being paid to take the course.
- Career enhancement

### **Interview Reporting**

Mr. Steve Sosa, Senior Direct of Learning and Development at Dallas College, was interviewed regarding the BPTO program and the established evaluation questions on May 4 in his office at the Mountain View campus. Since its inception, Mr. Sosa has been a vital part of the program and has a clear picture of its daily operation. Participants—faculty across higher education institutions—have various unique needs. They come from institutions that do not necessarily have dedicated funding for faculty professional development, formally established programs relating to online effectiveness, or a method of recognizing faculty beyond their institution. BPTO serves all these needs through an openly available, without cost, faculty professional development program recognized by an external/national entity (NISOD).

As evidenced by the data compiled, BPTO has exceeded all initial expectations. Over 2000 participants from over 240 institutions across 44 states and eight countries have

participated. Compared to other openly accessible programs, BPTO has an impressive completion rate of 64%. The data shows that participation has been primarily in NISOD member institutions—84%. This statistic is supported by the 74% rate for institutional referral to the program.

BPTO addressed a void across the field of higher education. There is tremendous potential for any program to be collaboratively developed with external entities and made openly available (without cost). This need will continue to be a potential, especially when budgets are reduced.

### Findings

An average of 690 participants joined the course each year since BPTO was launched. Over half of the participants completed the program. The feedback from participants is positive, and they find the information and resources useful. The lowest scoring aspect of the program was the video interviews. While 74% of the participants agreed that the video interviews providing both faculty and student perspectives were helpful, some feedback stated that they did not like the humanizing personal questions at the beginning of the videos. Reasons for taking the course included improved student success, institutional requirements, and being paid by their institution to take the course.

### Interpretation

The high participation and completion rates support the success of the BPTO program across higher education. Institutions choosing to adopt the program as a requirement for teaching demonstrate acceptance across the industry. The program's strengths include competency-based, self-paced, externally recognized, with no cost to participate, and collaboratively developed

across higher education institutions. The program's main weakness is that it is not widely accepted at Dallas College. The qualitative data shows that 134 of the 2077 total participants are from Dallas college. That is only 6.48% of the total participants. BPTO was initially developed through the Mountain View location, which has the most significant number of Dallas College participants. Institution adoption of the program as a requirement to teach online shows higher education institutions' positive reception of the program. Marketing efforts are inconclusive. Most participants learned about the program from their institution (74%), so it is difficult to determine if NISOD's marketing efforts are effective or if member institutions are aware of their NISOD benefits.

### Judgment

The successes listed above demonstrate the value of the program to higher education. The launch of BPTO before a global pandemic increased the program's reach. More faculty and institutions sought solutions for moving courses online. This need and exposure contributed to the success of the program. Further expansion of the program could be well-received from the higher education community because of the positive experience participants and institutions have experienced with BPTO.

### Recommendations

BPTO has excellent potential for further development as a "Best Practices" series. If Dallas College were to explore this, they would need to ensure the continuation of the key elements of BPTO, including NISOD partnership, open access, and continued collaboration with other institutions. BPTO strengthened Dallas College's partnership with NISOD, which is willing to continue exploring future development opportunities as a result. The continuation of

BPTO and expansion to a series of “Best Practices” development programs serve the mission of Dallas College to transform lives through higher education.

### **Report/Dissemination, Follow Up, and Conclusion**

#### **Reporting and Dissemination.**

The results of this evaluation will be a summative report submitted as an executive summary that will include key tables, graphs, and data summaries provided to the PIU. The content will focus on data collection and interpretation, patterns, themes, and results. The evaluator will compile the report and will be from the evaluator's perspective. This report will be provided to the PIU to then present to the stakeholders at Dallas College (Patton, 2012, pp. 366-367)

Utilization-focused reporting principles are used to make reporting useful. Patton (2012) lists five reporting principles that this evaluation report will utilize. First, reporting will be intentional. The evaluator knows the purpose of the report and will follow that purpose. Next, the report will be user-focused—the PIUs priorities and questions will be the focus of the report. Graphics and visual aids will provide a clear picture of the data results. Evaluation findings are a combination of positive and negative findings. It is best to prepare the context for negative results so users can learn what these results mean for the evaluation rather than judge them. The final principle is to “distinguish dissemination from use” (Patton, 2012, p. 375). Dissemination, or distribution, is simply sharing the evaluation among other audiences, which does not ensure the evaluation will be used. Dissemination of this evaluation will be formal and planned to include the executive leadership team at Dallas College. Informal dissemination will include Dr. Edward Leach from NISOD. They are stakeholders; therefore, they should receive the information even though they hold little influence over Dallas College's final decision.

**Post Evaluation Plan and Conclusion**

Patton (2012) states that use is the purpose of an evaluation; therefore, a post-evaluation plan is an essential step in enhancing use (pp. 380-382). The post-evaluation plan will include adapting findings for different audiences and championing the use of the findings but not becoming a champion for the program. The initial report will be for the Dallas College executive team, but the leadership at NISOD will be interested in the report, and it may need to be presented differently. Another team that might be interested in the results will be the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Dallas College. They are responsible for faculty professional development, and they might find different data more valuable than the executive team. As a staff member at Dallas College, the evaluator can champion the use of the findings without championing the program. The evaluator does not have a personal stake if the program continues, expands, or is sunset; therefore, they can be a champion for the evaluation rather than a particular outcome for the program.

This evaluation of the Best Practices for Teaching Online faculty development program is intended to provide information regarding the program's success, or lack thereof. Data analysis shows that the program has exceeded the expectations of the original development team. Participant feedback is positive overall and is supportive of the program. This evaluation can help decision-makers determine if the BPTO program should continue and possibly be developed into a "Best Practices" series of professional development programs.

### **Project & Course Reflection**

This entire process has been a challenge. I have never formally evaluated anything outside my job performance, which was a very different process. I learned a lot about the program I evaluated. I was a significant partner in the development and implementation of the program, but this process made me look at it from a different perspective. I have a deeper appreciation for looking at a program without personal judgment (which was the most challenging part of this entire process).

This course terrified me initially because I did not have a clue what would be expected of me. This class has been one of my more challenging classes, but I enjoyed it. The challenge made it more interesting. The reading was a bit difficult for me. I must hear the book as I read it, and Vital Source's built-in reader was difficult for me to follow. I read each chapter two or three times, leaving me less time than I liked to complete assignments.

- How has your knowledge and thoughts/attitude about program evaluation changed before and after the course?

Before the course, I had no idea what evaluation truly meant. After the course and completing an evaluation, I understand what UFE is, and I have a new appreciation for the process and profession. Now that I have completed the course and an evaluation project, I feel equipped to participate in a program evaluation where I work.

- What was most useful?

The discussion assignments were most useful. They allowed me to complete my evaluation project in small pieces and receive feedback from my peers to improve my project.

- What was least useful?

I cannot think of anything that was least useful. Every assignment had a purpose and helped me to complete the final project.

- What would you suggest for fellow students who will take this course later (or to the instructor)?

I would suggest they read the chapters early for future students to give them plenty of time to complete the assignments. You cannot skip reading the chapter. The information in the chapters is what you need to complete the assignments and understand what you are doing.