

Case Study: Mott Community College Impact of the Switch from Traditional to Online Learning

Summary of the Case Study: Mott Community College – The Impact of Switching from Traditional to Online Delivery on Learners.

This case describes how Mott Community College (MCC) utilized User Experience Journey Mapping (a new tool to most higher education institutions and available on the platform) to track how the transformation from face-to-face to online learning affected learners' academic experience. Mott's research team used the mapping to: 1) portray the learners' initial fears and frustration, 2) capture how they gained experience and developed confidence and comfort with MCC's approach, as they were provided information and support. The Map captures responses pre-COVID, during the COVID-necessitated transition to online, and afterwards.

Why Read This? Completed UX Journey Map portraying the multi-faceted impact on learners of navigating COVID. This tool can be applied to any future disruptions to support decisive interventions and navigate crises.

The Case Study (Referenced in Chapter IV)

Mott Community College began its life as Flint Junior College in 1923. Over the years, MCC has undergone a variety of changes in name and function, being renamed in 1973 as Charles Stewart Mott Community College, in recognition of the impact on the institution of the leadership of Charles Stewart Mott, prominent businessman, philanthropist, and mayor of Flint. MCC grew to include extension centers across the region and a Culinary Institute, Workforce Education Center and Community Technology Center across the region.

Impacts of Major Events – the Great Recession and COVID

Flint and the State of Michigan have undergone substantial challenges since the Great Recession of 2008, which precipitated losses in the automobile industry and in the local and regional economy. MCC's enrollments peaked at over 10,000 students in the early days of the recession but have slipped since then. Twelve years later, the Coronavirus arrived, which also caused enrollment declines and necessitated widespread migration to online learning.

Coronavirus Hits Like a Ton of Bricks

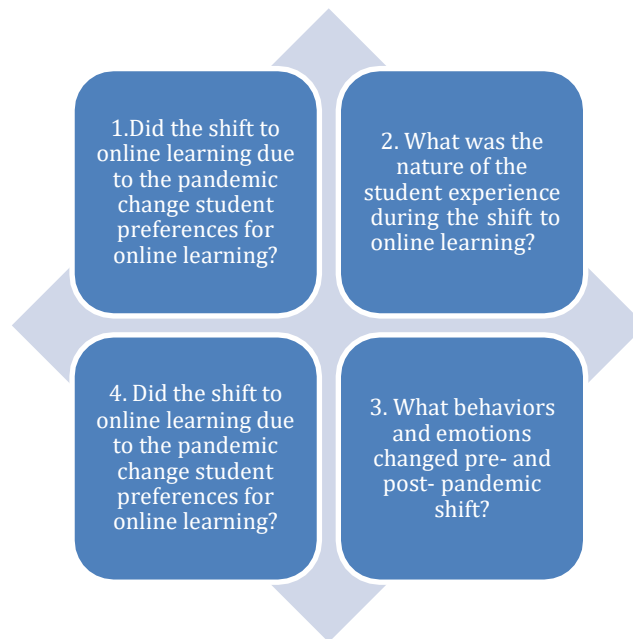
In March 2020 the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) rapidly spread across the country and hit Michigan especially hard. It not only affected the way Michigan residents lived, but, most importantly for K-12 schools and colleges, the virus affected the way children and adults experienced academia. Students who once traveled from their homes to institutional learning environments were suddenly catapulted into a new style of learning. This way of learning is recognized across the country as distance (or online) learning. For many

students this may not have been a new modality of learning; however, for many others online learning became a “new” way to learn.

Research Questions on the Impact on the Student Experience

Under the leadership of President Beverly Walker-Griffea, Mott Community College embraced this change by expeditiously transitioning the traditional model of learning to an online learning experience. Faculty and students were informed of this change, but very little was known how this rapid change affected both populations behaviorally and emotionally. Therefore, Dr. Walker-Griffea authorized a mixed-method research project to discover how the sudden transition to online learning affected students’ academic experience. Figure 1 showcases the four research questions that guided the inquiry.

Figure 1 – Research Questions Guiding The Inquiry



Research Design and Analysis

The research design focused on a set of courses that were offered at three periods in time:

- During the fall term before the pandemic and the consequent switch to online learning;
- During the winter term when the switch to online learning occurred; and
- During the summer term post-shift when courses were offered in an online format but while the effects of the pandemic were still present.

Qualitative and Quantitative Components. The research team examined records for courses that were taught in all three terms with a control for the effect of different instructors on grading by matching like courses taught by the same instructor in all three terms. *For the*

quantitative portion of the research the population of students for the study included those enrolled in courses that met the conditions noted above. *For the qualitative portion of the research*, the team conducted student focus group sessions, but of a special kind – the outcomes of the focus groups featured a combination of empathy and experience journey maps. *Empathy mapping and experience journey mapping* are relatively new research techniques that come from the world of innovation and design thinking. These methodologies are discussed in greater depth in Chapter XI. A full version of the Mott analysis is contained in our online resources.

Selecting Participants, Facilitating the Sessions, and Creating Maps. The research team scheduled randomly selected students from the population who participated in learning activities, before, during, and after the switch to online learning (Fall 2019, Winter 2020, and Spring 2020) into mapping sessions. Sessions were conducted virtually using a combination of Zoom and Miro technologies. Sessions were facilitated by Rob Brodnick and David Culton, innovation consultants who specialize in virtual design thinking, innovation, and mapping methods and technologies.

Empathy maps were built during the sessions where students responded to their *thoughts, feelings, actions, and observations* that occurred during the shift. The team also inquired about the *pains* and *gains* students experience during the shift. Pains represented the challenges, frustrations, and obstacles students experienced with respect to the shift; gains represented the hopes, aspirations, and needs. Additional data were collected in the form of a *map of the stages* – before the switch to online, during the switch to online, and after the switch to online. The team collected input on the students’ actions, thoughts, and feelings associated with each of the three stages. A fourth frame included input that students believe could have improved their experience given as opportunities for improvement.

Mixed-Method Analysis. The analysis of the results features a mixed-method approach. The quantitative results explored the effect of the shift to online learning on academic performance as measured by course grades. The qualitative analysis explored the results of the maps and the nature of the student experience during the shift to online learning with a special emphasis on behaviors and emotions that changed due to the pandemic. The qualitative portion also considered how the shift to online learning due to the pandemic potentially changed student preferences for online learning.



Results of the Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative portion, which assessed changes in grades across semesters, was largely inconclusive. Of the 231 individual correlations tested, only 28 (or 12%) correlations were statistically significant. There was no indication that the pandemic affected grades in classes offered across all three terms, nor was there evidence that course drop behaviors, or the new pass/fail option, were used more frequently after the pandemic as compared to before the pandemic.

The qualitative data, however, provided fruitful evidence on how the pandemic affected students academically and personally. These insights can be divided into four themes portrayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2 - Insights from the Qualitative Data



Fear about the pandemic. Respondents frequently discussed the ways in which the pandemic affected their ability to pursue their Mott education. When prompted to reflect on how they felt at the beginning of the pandemic, several participants noted how they thought the pandemic would not last long and that they hoped the pandemic, no matter how long, would not affect their studies. Once it became clear that the pandemic would be long-lasting and would substantially impact their studies, respondents shifted their focus to finding ways to mitigate challenges. This manifested itself in fear for how the pandemic could affect the health of themselves and loved ones as well as fear for how the pandemic would impact course and degree completion.

Resilience in the face of unprecedented challenges. The coronavirus pandemic required accommodations in order to succeed in challenging times. Respondents identified ways in which the pandemic required changes to the balance between their school and their home life, particularly as it related to caring for sick family members or for children unexpectedly home from school. Though respondents emphasized the challenges that were borne from the shift away from on-campus instruction, they also indicated that the new living and learning circumstances gave them the opportunity to experiment with new innovative ways to complete their courses and degree programs; online learning allowed them greater flexibility to explore what works best for them. This helped respondents recognize their own strengths as self-directed learners, which in turn improved their perspectives on their own abilities to be successful.

The move away from traditional academic experience has both pros and cons. Relatedly, respondents carefully laid out the facets of distance learning that were both positive

and negative. The positive features of distance learning are discussed above. But respondents were clear on the negative aspects of distance learning as well. The primary theme that arose throughout the sessions was the concern that the coronavirus pandemic would negatively affect course and degree completion. Students in programs that cannot be exclusively delivered online (i.e., programs that require hands-on instruction) felt this stress more acutely than those in lecture-based programs. Further, the changes to the classroom experience introduced fissures between students and instructors, where students required more guidance from instructors and the college but were often left without the help they needed. That said, most respondents indicated they were willing to continue online coursework independent of the pandemic.

High levels of frustration. Overarching all other themes was a palpable feeling of frustration among respondents. This frustration was directed towards two groups: the college and the world at large. Respondents reported dissatisfaction with the college's policies that moved instruction online, focusing primarily on inadequacies in the online course-taking infrastructure. Beyond this, respondents were frustrated about how the pandemic negatively affected their personal lives and the lives of their loved ones.



Conclusions and Implications

The Empathy and Journey Map is portrayed in Figure 3 on the following page portrays the results from Mott CC's qualitative analysis of its transition from traditional to online learning. The authors of the report on this research, Rachel McMaster, Janet Anthony, and Rob Brodnick, recommended that Mott invest in faculty development programs to use these techniques to improve social presence and empathy. A variety of other specific recommendations were offered to Dr. Walker-Griffea to improve transitions to online learning and provide for a mixture of learning modalities for different contexts.

In dissecting the elements of the Empathy Journey Map, the overarching observation is that this is a rich, and multi-layered tool and presentation instrument. One could imagine this becoming a critical element of the leader's toolkit in mapping the ongoing transitions and transformations that will continuously confront leaders of the next decade. Various applications of this tool can prepare leaders for the sorts of experiences they might encounter and for specific circumstances in a new transition that they map. The fact that it can be conducted, facilitated, and analyzed virtually is an additional bonus.

Figure 3 - Empathy and Journey Map
Mott Community College Students' Journey Through COVID

