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Preparing for the unexpected in a COVID-19 world: The teaching dilemmas of a mid-semester faculty change

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Abstract: Despite the perceived rarity of mid-semester faculty changes, there is a shortage of literature to guide administrators and faculty on best practices for handing the dilemmas associated with mid-semester faculty changes. This is particularly concerning given the uncertainty of situations like the COVID-19 global pandemic and recent research that finds that future extreme epidemics are likely to happen. This paper seeks to answer two questions (1) What can faculty and administrators do to prepare students who are experiencing a mid-semester faculty change, and (2) What procedures and processes are in place to assist the incoming faculty? Data were collected through a survey of students who had underwent a mid-semester faculty change and interviews with administrators who deal with personnel issues like this one. The data suggest faculty should *first* meet with students to assess their progress before jumping into an established lesson plan (the opposite of how faculty normally prepare to teach a class). Clear communication about expectations, organization of the course materials, and instructor flexibility was identified as keys to student success during a teaching disruption. These findings align with decades of research on teaching and learning. Administrators should create contingency plans that go beyond the personnel transaction and that help faculty quickly prepare for a transition that is student focused. More research is needed to identify the best administrative processes and procedures to assist faculty in a smooth transition when taking over a course mid-semester.

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I. Introduction

This paper seeks to shed light on a narrowly defined teaching dilemma–the mid-semester faculty change. The authors acknowledge the rarity and sensitivity of these occurrences yet these are the very reasons that makes a paper such as this one, useful. For the purposes of this paper, 'mid-semester' is used to refer to any in-progress course at the post-secondary level. This applies to any class format (semester, term, quarter, etc.) or delivery option (on-campus, hybrid, online, etc.). Specifically this paper seeks to answer two questions so that students, faculty, and administrators can better prepare for the unexpected mid-semester faculty change: (1) What can faculty and administrators do to prepare students who are experiencing a mid-semester faculty change, and (2) What procedures and processes are in place to assist the incoming faculty?

Considerable research over the past few decades exists which has investigated the underlying causes of turnover in academia.[1,2,3,4] While this study focuses on the United States, turnover in higher education has also been studied in Australia,[5] Latin America,[6] Europe,[7,8] and the United

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[1] Mark H. Conklin and Shane P. Desselle, "Job Turnover Intentions among Pharmacy Faculty," *Am J Pharm Educ* 71, no. 4 (2007): 62–62, https://doi.org/10.5688/aj710462.

[2] Ronald Ehrenberg, Hirschel Kasper, and Daniel Rees, *Faculty Turnover at American Colleges and Universities: Analyses of AAUP Data* (1994).

[3] Lasun Gbadamosi and Nwosu Jonathan Chinaka, "Organizational Politics, Turnover Intention, and Organizational Commitment as Predictors of Employees' Efficiency and Effectiveness in Academia," *Proceedings of Informing Science & IT Education Conference* (2011): 305–14, accessed June 15, 2021, http://proceedings.informingscience.org/InSITE2011/InSITE11p305-314Lasun205.pdf.

[4] Yonghong Jade XU, "Faculty Turnover: Discipline-Specific Attention Is Warranted," *Research in Higher Education* 49, no. 1 (2008): 40–61, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-007-9062-7.

[5] Saima Ahmad, Syed Muhammad Fazal-E-Hasan, and Ahmad Kaleem, "How Ethical Leadership Stimulates Academics' Retention in Universities," *International Journal of Educational Management* 32, no. 7 (2018): 1348–62, https://doi.org/10.1108/ijem-11-2017-0324.

[6] Yaquelín Puebla González, José Luis Almuiñas Rivero, Euclides Catá Guilarte, and Aníbal Isaac Silva, "EnTorno Al Dilema De La Fluctuación Laboral Del Personal Docente Universitario / around the Dilemma of the Fluctuation of the University Teaching Staff," Estudios del Desarrollo Social: Cuba y América Latina, accessed August 2, 2022, http://www.revflacso.uh.cu/index.php/EDS/article/view/261/239.

[7] Saima Ahmad, Syed Muhammad Fazal-E-Hasan, and Ahmad Kaleem. "How Ethical Leadership Stimulates Academics' Retention in Universities," *International Journal of Educational Management* 32, no. 7 (2018): 1348–62. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijem-11-2017-0324.

[8] Miroslava Federičová, "Teacher Turnover: What Can We Learn from Europe?" *European Journal of Education* 56, no. 1 (2020): 102–16, https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12429.

Kingdom,[9] for example. Despite turnover being fundamentally acknowledged as 'a practical research concern...due to the costly monetary and academic consequences that the institutions have to bear,[10] essentially no research has focused specifically on the academic consequences of mid-semester emergency-related turnover.

The hallmark work of Windschitl[11] on dilemmas in teaching underscores the need to acknowledge that the art and science of teaching and learning is not a neat process. Lohr and Ursyn[12] aptly describe education as more complicated than rocket science. This has much to do with the fact that education is a process which has many different stakeholders who contribute to an endless number of complex challenges.

Though not well documented because of legal and/or privacy reasons, faculty turnover resulting in a mid-semester faculty change *can and does* occur. This type of faculty turnover results in the urgent need to quickly find a replacement for the unexpected departure of the faculty member assigned to teach the course. Conventional wisdom suggests the quick decision-making lies with the department head[13] and the incoming faculty must quickly create and execute a plan for teaching the course. Meanwhile, the students enrolled in the course need to continue the course with a new and unexpected instructor. In the best of circumstances, planned transitions like maternity/paternity leave and voluntary separations occur at a semester break or at another logical point within a course. Conversely, emergencies such as illness, accidents, death, or suspension are unpredictable, but this does not negate the responsibility of contingency planning for such occurrences. Rare as a mid-semester faculty change was perceived in the past, the recent global pandemic brought uncertainty to almost all aspects of life, particularly university life.

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[9] Rob Gandy, Patricia Harrison, and Jeff Gold, "Talent Management in Higher Education: Is Turnover Relevant," *European Journal of Training and Development* 42, no. 9 (2018): 597–610, https://doi.org/10.1108/ejtd-11-2017-0099.

[10] Yonghong Jade Xu, "Faculty Turnover: Discipline-Specific Attention Is Warranted," *Research in Higher Education* 49, no. 1 (2008): 40.

[11] Mark Windschitl, "Framing Constructivism in Practice as the Negotiation of Dilemmas: An Analysis of the Conceptual, Pedagogical, Cultural, and Political Challenges Facing Teachers," *Review of Educational Research* 72, no. 2 (2002): 131–75, https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543072002131.

[12] Linda Lohr and Anna Ursyn, "Visualizing the Instructional Design Process: Seven Usability Strategies for Promoting Creative Instruction," *Design Principles and Practices: An International Journal* 4, no. 2 (2010): 65–75.

[13] Haydn Mathias, "The Role of the University Head of Department," *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 15, no. 3 (1991): 65–75, https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877910150308.

The overarching objective of this research is to provide insight on this circumstance to better guide administrators and faculty members who are faced with mid-semester faculty change so that students can still succeed. The paper will examine the literature on teaching dilemmas, discuss the research methodology used to address the two research questions, and conclude with the results and practical advice for faculty and administrators.

II. Dilemmas faced in Constructivist Teaching

This aim of this study it to explicate the challenges of the mid-semester teaching change from a teaching and learning perspective. The scope of teaching dilemma research varies from frameworks of teaching dilemmas to the dilemma's faculty face in different aspects of their teaching.[14] Teaching dilemma research also varies from country to country and has been studied worldwide.[15,16,17,18]

Unlike other dilemma frameworks, Windschitl[19] provides a *teaching* framework from which to examine turnover and defines four frames of reference for conceptualizing the dilemmas faced in constructivist teaching: conceptual, pedagogical, political, and cultural. Conceptual dilemmas are those that relate to 'grasping the underpinnings of cognitive and social constructivism.[20]

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[14] Şeyda Selen Çimen and Şevki Kömür, "Dilemma Situations in Teaching Practice: What Do Student Teachers Reflect?" *Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences* 18 (2019): 168–77, https://doi.org/10.21547/jss.599356.

[15] Kristina Hansson and Per-Olof Erixon, "Academisation and Teachers' Dilemmas," *European Educational Research Journal* 19, no. 4 (2019): 289–309, https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904119872935.

[16] George Z.F. Bereday, "The Social Dilemma in the Education of Teachers in Western Europe," *Journal of Teacher Education* 7, no. 4 (1956): 293–303, https://doi.org/10.1177/002248715600700403.

[17] Stephen Harvey, Christopher Cushion, and Paul Sammon, "Dilemmas Faced by Pre-Service Teachers When Learning about and Implementing a Game-Centred Approach," *European Physical Education Review* 21, no. 2 (2014): 238–56, https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336x14560773.

[18] Karin Scager, Sanne F. Akkerman, Albert Pilot, and Theo Wubbels, "Teacher Dilemmas in Challenging Students in Higher Education," *Teaching in Higher Education* 22, no. 3 (2016): 318–35, https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2016.1248392.

[19] Mark Windschitl, "Framing Constructivism in Practice as the Negotiation of Dilemmas: An Analysis of the Conceptual, Pedagogical, Cultural, and Political Challenges Facing Teachers," *Review of Educational Research* 72, no. 2 (2002): 131–75, https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543072002131.

[20] Mark Windschitl, "Framing Constructivism in Practice as the Negotiation of Dilemmas: An Analysis of the Conceptual, Pedagogical, Cultural, and Political Challenges Facing Teachers," *Review of Educational Research* 72, no. 2 (2002): 133.

Pedagogical dilemmas focus on how to balance the importance of allowing students to think for themselves against remaining true to the theoretical concepts of the subject matter and managing discussion, facilitation, and discourse in the classroom. Political dilemmas are those that 'confront issues of accountability with various stakeholders.'[21] Finally, cultural dilemmas are rooted in perceiving, acknowledging, and understanding the culture that exists in each class–such as discourse patterns and 'the local knowledge of students with varied cultural backgrounds'.[22]

The dilemma of mid-semester faculty change situations crosses between Windschitl's[23] political dilemma and cultural dilemma. Faculty members in this situation must weigh the needs of administrators whose goal is to quickly (and often quietly) replace a faculty member who had an established presence in the classroom, against the classroom culture created by that same faculty member. This dilemma is further complicated by the often unplanned (and discreet) nature of the situation, which makes it difficult to collect data about these occurrences.

II.1. *The political dilemma: Turnover, termination, and unexpected leaves*

Identifying the extent to which the mid-semester faculty dilemma is faced by students and faculty on a global scale is complicated given the vast number of country specific agencies that report on higher education trends and statistics.[24] In addition, higher education or post-secondary education is defined differently by different countries.[25]

The United States National Center for Education Statistics publishes a report every 10 years that compares U.S. education to the 20 countries in the G-20 including: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany,

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[21] Mark Windschitl, "Framing Constructivism in Practice as the Negotiation of Dilemmas: An Analysis of the Conceptual, Pedagogical, Cultural, and Political Challenges Facing Teachers," *Review of Educational Research* 72, no. 2 (2002): 133.

[22] Mark Windschitl, "Framing Constructivism in Practice as the Negotiation of Dilemmas: An Analysis of the Conceptual, Pedagogical, Cultural, and Political Challenges Facing Teachers," *Review of Educational Research* 72, no. 2 (2002): 133.

[23] Mark Windschitl, "Framing Constructivism in Practice as the Negotiation of Dilemmas: An Analysis of the Conceptua, Pedagogical, Cultural, and Political Challenges Facing Teachers," *Review of Educational Research* 72, no. 2 (2002): 131–75, https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543072002131.

[24] Gudmund Hernes and Gabrielle Gottelmann-Duret, Rep. *Organization of Ministries of Education*, Paris, France: International Institute for Educational Planning, (2001).

[25] Gudmund Hernes and Gabrielle Gottelmann-Duret. Rep. *Organization of Ministries of Education*, Paris, France: International Institute for Educational Planning, (2001).

India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The report indicates there are 321 million students in the G-20 ages 19-29 studying in a formal higher education program in 2011; data were unavailable for China and Japan.[26] Conventional wisdom suggests that even if a mid-semester faculty change only affects 5% of the G-20 university population, more than 16.5 million students are affected by a mid-semester faculty change every year. Though mid-semester faculty changes may occur in different ways or for different reasons across the globe, the fact remains that mid-semester faculty changes are a global challenge.

The literature suggests there are three categories for why a faculty member might be replaced mid-semester: (1) typical reasons for voluntary departures (e.g. better opportunities, more prestige, etc.), (2) extenuating motivations (e.g. changing family dynamics, unexpected death, health issues, working conditions, etc.), and (3) punitive catalysts for departure (performance issues, criminal activity, etc.). The foundational work addressing faculty turnover in higher education by Ehrenberg[27] looked primarily at the impacts of compensation, rank, and duration of employment. In a qualitative study, Ramasamy and Abdullah[28] explored individual reasons for faculty resignation, identifying seven themes: employer image, availability of external job opportunities, social media bullying, unfair performance measurement, unfair compensation, work overload, and job insecurity. In the United States COVID-19 has contributed a new reason for voluntary departures for example, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reports that 35% of faculty in higher education have seriously considered a planned career change to leave higher education because of the global pandemic.[29] The aforementioned factors encompass reasonably well the variety of reasons one might voluntarily leave a position in any given field.

Possible reasons for voluntary and involuntary turnover in individual faculty cases range broadly. Examples may often include extenuating

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[26] "Comparative Indicators of Education in the United States and Other G-20 Countries: 2015," National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Home Page, a part of the U.S. Department of Education, (2015), https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016100/index.asp.

[27] Ronald G., Ehrenberg, ed., *What's Happening to Public Higher Education?: The Shifting Financial Burden,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

[28] Vijayan Ramasamy and Nor Hanzana Abdullah, "Faculty's Turnover in Private Higher Learning Institutions: A Phenomenal Inquiry," *Business and Economic Horizons* 13, no. 2 (2017): 169–81, https://doi.org/10.15208/beh.2017.13.

[29] Alina Tugend, "On the Verge of Burnout: Covid-19's Impact on Faculty Well-Being and Career Plans," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2020) https://connect.chronicle.com/rs/931-EKA-218/images/Covid%26FacultyCareerPaths_Fidelity_ResearchBrief_v3%20%281%29.pdf.

circumstances unrelated to the work itself, such as death, personal or family health needs, a change in family structure, or the a direct or underlying COVID-19 reason.[30] The *Chronicle of Higher Education* also reports that faculty are mentally exhausted and feeling far more stressed since the onset of the pandemic. Moreover, the effects of the pandemic have not been felt equally– "The stress that women, Black, brown, gay, nonbinary, and disabled faculty members face in more normal tines to proves themselves is greatly heightened; faculty of color also often come from or have family or friends in communities with high rates of COVID-19."[31] Certainly, the global pandemic has created circumstances in which faculty may have to unexpectedly leave, and not return, for a semester.

An additional category could be summarized as performance-driven or punitive, depending on precise nuance. This category may include concerns with performance, allegations of inappropriate activity or activity that does not align with institutional conduct policies, criminal investigations, or other similar circumstances.[32]

Even though there is a stated or unstated agreement that faculty members are committing to teach a course in full, these individuals may end up departing from their commitments for the same reasons that any employee at any organization might depart from an employment commitment. Conventional wisdom suggests that sudden, 'no advance notice' circumstances create fewer desirable outcomes for mid-semester faculty changes than do pre-planned, 'some notice' circumstances, since these latter experiences provide more time for careful contingency planning.

II.2. *The cultural dilemma: Established classroom practices*

A key cultural dilemma of a mid-semester faculty change relates to classroom culture and classroom practices. 'From a cultural perspective, teaching is more than addressing content, it is also about bringing all students to a shared understanding of what a lesson is and how to participate it in'[33]

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[30] Samad, Ataus, Michael Muchiri, and Sehrish Shahid, "Investigating Leadership and Employee Well-Being in Higher Education," *Personnel Review* 51, no. 1 (2021): 57–76, https://doi.org/10.1108/pr-05-2020-0340.

[31] Alina, Tugend, "On the Verge of Burnout: Covid-19's Impact on Faculty Well-Being and Career Plans," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2020), 5.

[32] Donna R. Euben, "14th Annual Legal Issues in Higher Education Conference," In *Termination and Discipline*, 1–18, (Burlington, Vermont: AAUP, 2004).

[33] Mark Windschitl, "Framing constructivism in practice as the negotiation of dilemmas: An analysis of the conceptual, pedagogical, cultural, and political challenges facing teachers. *Review of Educational Research* 72 (2002), 150.

Much research has been conducted on the culture of the classroom. For example, work done by Bruner[34] Mehan,[35] and Rogoff[36] all examined how faculty contribute to, and are influenced by, the culture of the classroom. Research by Schupak[37] addresses the modern-age challenge of how to bring together students in the classroom who come from diverse religious, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. Research conducted by Joseph[38] examined (1) how the power relationships between students and faculty members can influence classroom culture and (2) the influence of what behaviors are prized and rewarded and which are not. Bledsoe and Baskin's[39] research on identifying student classroom fear (and how to handle it) is certainly of note, given the certain fear students feel when an existing instructor is replaced with a new instructor in the middle of a semester.

Other research has focused on the educator's historical experience as a student and how those past experiences guide him/her in instruction.[40,41,42,43] Still more has been written on the use of specific teaching strategies to sculpt specific outcomes in terms of class culture. For instance, Kremenitzer, Mojsa, and Brackett discuss how strategies such as having high and positive expectations for learners, demonstrating high visible caring for learners,

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[34] Jerome S. Bruner, *The Culture of Education* (Cambridge, Mass, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2003).

[35] Hugh Mehan, Gordon C. Chang, Makeba Jones, and Season S. Mussey, *In the Front Door: Creating a College-Going Culture of Learning* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[36] Barbara Rogoff, *Apprenticeship in Thinking: Cognitive Development in Social Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[37] Esther B. Schupak, "Listening Rhetoric in the Diverse Classroom: Suggestions for Praxis," *College Teaching* 67, no. 3 (2019): 196–204, https://doi.org/10.1080/87567555.2019.1614899.

[38] Pamela Bolotin Joseph, *Cultures of Curriculum* (Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 2000).

[39] T. Scott Bledsoe and Janice J. Baskin, "Recognizing Student Fear: The Elephant in the Classroom," *College Teaching* 62, no. 1 (2014): 32–41, https://doi.org/10.1080/87567555.2013.831022.

[40] C. W. Kennisonn, "Enhancing Teachers' Professional Learning: Relationships Between School Culture and School Teachers' Beliefs, Images, and Ways of Knowing" (PhD diss. Florida State University, 1990).

[41] Hugh Munby, and Tom Russell, "Reflective Teacher Education: Technique or Epistemology?" *Teaching and Teacher Education* 9, no. 4 (1993): 431–38, https://doi.org/10.1016/0742-051x(93)90009-6.

[42] Freema Elbaz, "The Teacher's 'Practical Knowledge': Report of a Case Study," *Curriculum Inquiry* 11, no. 1 (1981): 43–71, https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.1981.11075237.

[43] Kenneth M. Zeichner and B. Robert Tabachnick, "Are the Effects of University Teacher Education 'Washed Out' by School Experience?" *Journal of Teacher Education* 32, no. 3 (1981): 7–11, https://doi.org/10.1177/002248718103200302.

developing standard routines and procedures, constructing more formal expectations for behavior such as a class charter, and modeling emotional intelligence can aid in sculpting an emotionally intelligent classroom culture.[44] Tal and Kedmi engaged in research encouraging a pedagogical 'shift from a traditional content-based and value-free approach, to a sociocultural approach' that can foster an expectation for more active participation in dialogue and decision-making in the classroom culture.[45]

It seems even the tools a faculty member selects can have an impact on the classroom culture. Adams specifically examines how the use of Microsoft PowerPoint software and the constraints of its related templates can create default patterns in both the sharing and receiving of information as part of the classroom culture.[46] An example would be that a reliance on bullet-pointed lists of information suggests a teaching style focused on transmission that can stymy more complex and inquiry-rich models of information acquisition.

Thus, it is certain that mid-semester faculty changes create a dilemma for classroom culture because the incoming faculty member has not had the opportunity to foster classroom culture as one might do from the onset of a class; e.g., perhaps through an ice breaker exercise, reviewing the syllabus, the introduction of students and faculty, or by making key choices about tools and teaching methodology. Instead, the culture, whether good or bad, was previously established by the outgoing faculty member, and it becomes the burden of the incoming instructor to quickly join, navigate, and adjust to that culture as necessary.

III. Methodology

This study was conducted in the context of an actual unexpected mid-semester faculty change at a mid-sized North American university. Two research questions evolved from this event (1) What can faculty and administrators do to prepare students who are experiencing a mid-semester faculty change, and (2) What procedures and processes are in place to assist

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[44] Janet Pickard Kremenitzer, Justyna K. Mojsa, and Marc A. Brackett, "Creating an Emotionally Intelligent   Classroom Culture," In *Emotional Intelligence: Theoretical and Cultural Perspectives*, edited by R. J. Emmerling, V. K. Shanwal, and M. K. Mandal, 191–207 (New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2008).

[45] Tali Tal, and Yarden Kedmi, "Teaching Socioscientific Issues: Classroom Culture and Students' Performances," *Cultural Studies of Science Education* 1, no. 4 (2006): 615–44, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11422-006-9026-9.

[46] Catherine Adams, "PowerPoint, Habits of Mind, and Classroom Culture," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 38, no. 4 (2006): 389–411, https://doi.org/10.1080/00220270600579141.

the incoming faculty? To answer these questions, this study adopted a mixed-methods research design. Specifically, data were collected using a two-pronged approach that included (1) surveys administered to students who had undergone a mid-semester faculty change and (2) short structured interviews conducted with administrators at seven peer institutions who had also experienced mid-semester faculty changes.

Given the sensitive nature of this topic, neither sets of faculty members (the departed faculty or the incoming faculty) were included as participants in this research. Collecting data on sensitive topics is not new to researchers and there is a bevy of research on defining exactly what a sensitive topic is and how to research sensitive topics.[47,48] The literature generally defines a sensitive topic as any topic that can pose a risk to the participant or the researcher. Research that poses a risk to one's personal privacy, employment or career, medical or mental health, or the risk of legal exposure are examples of research topics that are considered sensitive.[49,50,51,52] Institutional review was not required for this study because no identifiable private information was collected from the respondents which is one of the threshold requirements for institutional review at the mid-sized North American university where the study was conducted.

III.1. Prong one: Students

III.1.1. Participants

A convenience sample of 61 students (sophomores and juniors) in 2 sections of an introductory business class whose instructor was placed on an emergency administrative leave during the fifth week of a 16-week semester,

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[47] Barbara Johnson and Jill Macleod Clarke, "Collecting Sensitive Data: The Impact on Researchers," *Qual Health Res* 13, no. 3 (2003): pp. 421-434, https://doi.org/10.1177/10497 32302250340.

[48] Raymond M. Lee, *Doing Research on Sensitive Topics* (London: Sage, 1993).

[49] E A Davies, S M Hall, C R Clarke, M P Bannon, and A P Hopkins, "Do Research Interviews Cause Distress or   Interfere in Management? Experience from a Study of Cancer Patients," *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of London* 32, no. 5 (1998): 406–411.

[50] Sue Cannon, "Social Research in Stressful Settings: Difficulties for the Sociologist Studying the Treatment of Breast Cancer," *Sociology of health & illness* 11, no. 1 (1989): 62–77.

[51] Carol Komaromy, 2020. "The Performance of Researching Sensitive Issues," *Mortality* 25 (3): 364–77, doi:10.1080/13576275.2019.1635104.

[52] Teresa Sandra Perez, "In Support of Situated Ethics: Ways of Building Trust with Stigmatised 'waste Pickers' in Cape Town," Qualitative research : QR 19, no. 2 (2019): 148–163.

was used.[53] Neither the incoming faculty member nor the students were made aware of the reason for the leave. Prong one was designed to answer the first research question: what can faculty and administrators do to prepare students who are experiencing a mid-semester faculty change?

III.1.2. Procedures and materials

Students were asked to participate in a five-question exploratory survey. Survey questions were designed to (1) determine how frequently students have experienced a mid-semester faculty change, (2) evaluate student perceptions of their learning and performance in the mid-semester faculty change, and (3) solicit student recommendations for faculty members taking over a class mid-semester. The survey questions are found in the results section of this paper. Students were offered 20 extra credit points (3% of their final grade) to participate in the anonymous survey. Forty-two students responded resulting in a 68.8% response rate. Students who did not want to complete the survey were given the option of completing an alternative extra credit assignment that would take about 8 minutes of their time. Two students completed the alternative assignment.

III.1.3. Analyses

The authors analyzed questions 1-4 using descriptive statistics in an excel spreadsheet. The student responses for question 5 of the survey were imported into NVivo software and content analysis was used to analyze the data. Content analysis, a qualitative approach to analyzing data, was used for this study by importing the data into NVivo software version 11.3.2 (QSR International, Melbourne, Australia). The three main types of content analysis are conventional, directed, and summative.[54] Summative content analysis is an appropriate research method when the main concept is known to the researcher and when the analysis does not stop at key word searches but instead tries to understand the contextual meaning of the concept.[55,56] A

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[53] Joseph F. Hair, David J. Ortinau, and Dana E. Harrison, *Essentials of Marketing Research* (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 2021).

[54] Hsieh, Hsiu-Fang and Sarah E. Shannon, "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis," *Qual Health Res* 15, no. 9 (2005): 1277–88, https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687.

[55] O.R. Holsti, *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969).

[56] Nancy L. Kondracki, Nancy S Wellman, and Daniel R Amundson. "Content Analysis: Review of Methods and Their Applications in Nutrition Education," *J Nutr Educ Behav* 34, no. 4 (2002): 224–30, https://doi.org/10.1016/S1499-4046(06)60097-3.

summative content analysis approach was used to analyze 2,273 words of data collected from students.

We used a text search query to identify themes in how students responded when asked 'What advice would you give to a faculty member who is taking over a class mid-semester'. This technique was chosen in order to better identify patterns and related meanings in student responses, as explained by the hallmark work of Berelson[57]. Berelson lists 17 uses of content analysis including 'to describe trends in communication content'[58] and 'to reflect attitudes, interests, and values (cultural patterns) of population groups'.[59] Similarly, Krippendorf contends that content analysis 'is a technique that allows researchers to analyze unstructured data in view of the meanings, symbolic qualities, and expressive contents they have and of the communicative roles they play in the lives of the data's sources.'[60]

III.2.2. Prong two: University administrators

The authors conducted short interviews with university administrators for the second prong of data collection so that we could better understand how common mid-semester faculty turnover is, the way the circumstances surrounding it are handled, and if any commonalities exist. More specifically, to answer research question two: what procedures and processes are in place to assist the incoming faculty who takes over a class mid-semester?

III.2.2.1. Participants

The second prong of data collection consisted of short interviews with university administrators from peer institutions to better understand how common mid-semester faculty turnover is, the way the circumstances surrounding it are handled, and if any commonalities exist. Twenty-five university administrators were contacted for interviews by phone; 14 declined to be interviewed for privacy reasons (e.g. my employer might not want me to talk about this) further highlighting the difficulty of collecting data on this topic. No identifiable private information was collected from the

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[57] Bernard Berelson, *Content Analysis in Communications Research* (New York: Free Press, 1952).

[58] Bernard Berelson, *Content Analysis in Communications Research* (New York: Free Press, 1952), 28.

[59] Bernard Berelson, *Content Analysis in Communications Research* (New York: Free Press, 1952), 30.

[60] Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2013), 40.

administrators, all respondents were assured their responses would remain anonymous and that their university name would not be disclosed as a participant in the research. Four university administrators did not respond to the inquiry for a short interview. The administrators consisted of staff from various operational areas such as eLearning/online education, teaching and learning, information technology, and office of the registrar. Because of the sensitive nature of the interviews (e.g. administrators divulging personnel decisions), the interviews were not recorded however 12 pages of handwritten notes were taken and the notes were manually coded using the same summative content analysis coding method as was used on the student's open-ended survey question.

III.2.2.2. Procedures and materials

A short script and list of questions was prepared in advance of the structured short interviews. Structured interviews were chosen over unstructured or semi-structured interviews because the research topic was narrow.[61] Researchers wanted to limited the discussion to mid-semester faculty changes and not deviate into other forms of turnover. The interviews were opened with a short description of the purpose of the interview and all respondents were asked permission for the interviewer to take notes. Respondents were reassured that personally identifiable information would remain confidential and no private information was collected. The respondents were asked 5 questions during the interview. Probing and follow up questions were asked when appropriate (e.g. "can you give me an example," or "can you tell me more about"). The 5 questions include:

1. How often does your university experience a mid-semester faculty change?
2. Does your university formally track mid semester faculty changes and if so how?
3. Does your university have formal procedures on how to handle mid semester faculty changes?
4. What resources, if any, are there for faculty who take over a class mid-semester?
5. Can you think of any other formal or informal policies, procedures, or resources that are available at your university to assist in a mid-semester faculty change?

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[61] Jaber F. Gubrium, James A. Holstein, Amir B. Marvasti, and Karyn D. McKinney, *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research : The Complexity of the Craft*, Edited by Jaber F. Gubrium, James A. Holstein, Amir B. Marvasti, and Karyn D. McKinney, Second edition (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2012).

III.2.2.3. Analyses

Open coding of in the margins of the handwritten notes was first completed to break the notes up into discrete parts.[62] Selective coding was then performed to group the open codes into themes.[63] While the low participation rate could be a limitation to this study the results suggest there are commonalities across participants. Seidman and others suggests that the saturation point, the point at which no more interviews are necessary, is reached when no new information is gained through further interviews.[64,65] After the point of saturation, interviewing 1-3 more participants 'for insurance' is recommended.[66] While this study didn't have the benefit of an additional 1-3 'insurance' interviews, Cober and Adams (2020) suggest that "the number of people one plans to interview is not the first question to be answered," the first question to be answered is how many *differing* opinions can there be on a topic?[67] Saturation was reached as evidenced by the commonalties across the participants and the topic is narrow suggesting that fewer opinions (interviews) are acceptable.[68]

IV. Results and discussion

IV.1. *Prong one: Student survey results*

Table 1, Figure 1, and Table 2 respectively, show the results from the first prong of this study. Table 1 provides a tabulation of the students' responses to the first four survey questions while Figure 1 shows the NVivo qualitative output for the open-ended survey question. Table 3 shows the themes that emerged from the open-ended survey question (question 5).

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[62] Juliet M. Corbin, and Anselm Strauss, "Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons, and Evaluative Criteria," *Qualitative Sociology* 13, no. 1 (1990): 3–21, https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00988593.

[63] Juliet M. Corbin, and Anselm Strauss, "Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons, and Evaluative Criteria," *Qualitative Sociology* 13, no. 1 (1990): 3–21, https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00988593.

[64] Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research : a Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* 4th ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013).

[65] Julius Sim Saunders, Tom Kingstone, Shula Baker, Jackie Waterfield, Bernadette Bartlam, Heather Burroughs, and Clare Jinks, "Saturation in Qualitative Research: Exploring Its Conceptualization and Operationalization," *Quality & quantity* 52, no. 4 (2017): 1893–1907.

[66] William Cober and Betty Adams, "When Interviewing: How Many Is Enough?" *International Journal of Assessment Tools in education* 7, no. 1 (2020): 73–79.

[67] William Cober and Betty Adams, "When Interviewing: How Many Is Enough?" *International journal of Assessment Tools in Education* 7, no. 1 (2020): 76.

[68] Timothy Teo, *Handbook of Quantitative Methods for Educational Research*, Edited by Timothy Teo (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2013).

The results in Table 1 show that the majority of the students in this class had experienced a mid-semester faculty change at least one time in their college experience, while 22% had experienced a mid-semester faculty change twice. The sample size of this study was small and so caution should be taken generalizing the results however, it is surprising that almost a quarter of sophomores and juniors report having experienced a mid-semester faculty change twice. Time was of the essence in this study but with more time and financial resources a larger study involving multiple institutions should be conducted to confirm these results. If true across the wider college population, the results suggest that administrators should have policies and procedures in place for the incoming faculty and for students who experience this disturbance in their studies.

Ninety-one percent of students thought they would learn more from the instructor change and 83% of students believed their grade would improve. The results suggests that the incoming instructor successfully managed to contribute to student learning. More research into this aspect of the study is warranted to examine what specific teaching tools and strategies help bridge the gap between the outgoing and the incoming instructor.

Finally, the majority of students (59 percent) don't seem to care if an administrator introduces the new faculty member or if the new faculty member just assumes the faculty role with no formal introduction. Still, 8 students (24 percent) felt some form of communication about the change from an administrator would be beneficial. In this situation, the outgoing faculty member's circumstance was not revealed to the students or the incoming faculty member.

Table 1

Student survey results

	Student Responses [Section 1] (31)		Student Responses [Section 2] (30)		Total Student Responses (61)	
	n=23	%	n=19	%	n=42	%
1. How often in your college life here at XYZ University or elsewhere, have you experienced a mid-semester faculty change?						
Once	17	74%	15	79%	32	76%
Twice	5	22%	4	21%	9	22%
Three	1	4%	0	0%	1	2%
Four or More	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	23	100%	19	100%	42	100%

	Student Responses [Section 1] (31)		Student Responses [Section 2] (30)		Total Student Responses (61)	
	n=23	%	n=19	%	n=42	%
2. As a result of the faculty change this semester, do you feel you learned more, less, or about the same?						
More	21	91%	16	84%	37	88%
Less	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
About the same	2	9%	3	16%	5	12%
Total	23	100%	19	100%	42	100%
3. As a result of the faculty change this semester, do you feel you will earn a final grade that is better, about the same, or lower?						
A better final grade	19	83%	14	74%	33	79%
About the same final grade	4	17%	4	21%	8	19%
A lower final grade	0	0%	1	5%	1	2%
Total	23	100%	19	100%	42	100%
4. Would the transition to a new faculty have been better if you received some form of communication about the faculty change from an administrator?						
Yes	8	35%	2	11%	10	24%
No	2	9%	5	26%	7	17%
Does not matter to me	13	57%	12	63%	25	59%
Total	23	100%	19	100%	42	100%

The data from Figure 1 shows the results of the NVivo text search query for the survey question 'What advice would you give to a faculty member who is taking over a class mid-semester:' Five themes emerged from the content analysis. The largest number of student comments focused on the theme of the 'previous instructors' performance' (29.2 percent of all responses). This may be because the students were shocked by the mid-semester faculty change event itself, or simply needed to vent about their experience. The second most common response theme to 'course materials' (for the incoming instructor) with 12 (25 percent of all responses). The themes also suggest that students' value 'clear communication' with 10

responses (20.8 percent of all responses) and 'patience and flexibility' with 6 responses (12.5 percent of all responses).

Students also suggested that incoming faculty 'assess the current situation' with 6 responses (12.5 percent of all responses). This may suggest that the outgoing faculty member's teaching ability, organization, and style may weigh heavily on the success of the incoming faculty member. In the case of this specific class, the previous instructor appeared to struggle with course content and organization.
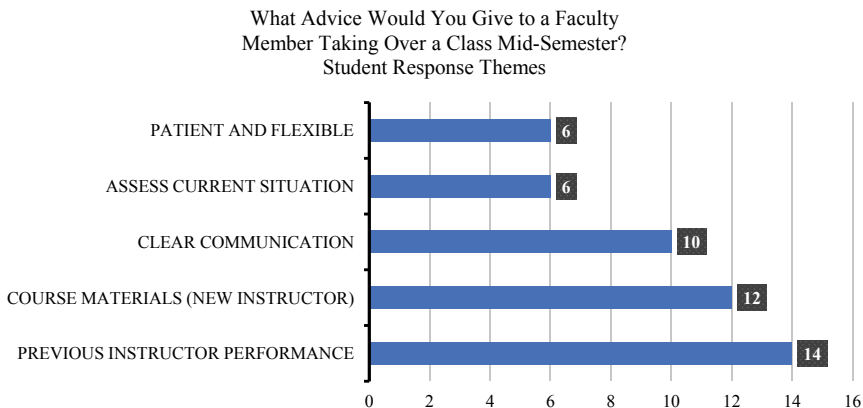
What Advice Would You Give to a Faculty Member Taking Over a Class Mid-Semester? Student Response Themes

Theme	Value
PATIENT AND FLEXIBLE	6
ASSESS CURRENT SITUATION	6
CLEAR COMMUNICATION	10
COURSE MATERIALS (NEW INSTRUCTOR)	12
PREVIOUS INSTRUCTOR PERFORMANCE	14

Figure 1

NVivo content analysis results of survey question five

It is not surprising that the results align with many research articles that have focused on the positive relationship between teaching practices like effective course organization and preparation, instructional clarity, and feedback on student academic outcomes like increased knowledge, content mastery, and growth of cognitive and intellectual skills and the data.[69,70,71]

[69] Ty M. Cruce, Gregory C Wolniak, Tricia A Seifert, and Ernest T Pascarella, "Impacts of Good Practices on Cognitive Development, Learning Orientations, and Graduate Degree Plans During the First Year of College," *Journal of College Student Development* 47, no. 4 (2006): 365–83, https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2006.0042.

[70] Ernest T. Pascarella, Tricia A. Seifert, and Elizabeth J. Whitt, "Effective Instruction and College Student Persistence: Some New Evidence," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, no. 115 (2008): 55–70, https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.325.

[71] Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini, *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

The results from the open ended question, 'What advice would you give to a faculty member who is taking over a class mid-semester' also align with previous research.

Table 2

Sample of student feedback organized by themes

Previous Instructor Performance	Course Materials (New Instructor)	Clear Communication	Patient and Flexible	Assess Current Situation
14 references coded, 18.21% coverage	12 references coded, 15.95% coverage	10 references coded, 15.40% coverage	6 references coded, 9.60% coverage	6 references coded, 5.29% coverage
Talk with the students to figure out what did and did not work with the last instructor and model the class after what did work while putting your own spin on the class.	I would suggest taking a full day to review/ cover all of the material we were expected to learn up until that point. The professor could maybe even give a short ungraded quiz to see what the students know and have learned this far.	The initial week of taking over is crucial. It is important to discuss all class changes and assignments and to immediately get on track with the course. This helped me stay on top of things and better adapt.	Be patient in the beginning; be forgiving when someone forgets an assignment because we were used to the previous professor's structure and had to be thrown into a new class structure unexpectedly.	I liked that the new professor reviewed a bit of what the older professor taught, and then picked up where he left off.

Table 2 shows the NVivo output with the corresponding themes, the data coded under each theme, and an example of student responses to the open-ended survey question. The responses are organized by the five themes derived from the NVivo text search query (as shown in Figure 1). It is not surprising that the majority of students (14 and 12 respectively) suggested that the incoming faculty should not jump right in to the existing syllabus. Instead students suggest that the incoming faculty should take some time to

determine what students *do* know and to make time to review material that they *should* know. Yet semesters are finite and faculty may feel pressured to jump right to the assigned lesson so that all of the required material is covered. It may be counterintuitive to go into a mid-semester faculty assignment with a mindset that all of the required material might not be covered, but remaining flexible is important.

About a third of students (10 and 6 respectively) reported that clear communication and remaining patient and flexible is important to reassure students that they can succeed in the class. The insecurity felt by nearly everyone during the global pandemic has caused higher education to look more closely at the ways in which faculty can manage flexibility both inside[72,73] and outside[74] of the classroom. Flexible teaching strategies include adopting more novel assessment tools like open book exams, offering content using different types of media (audible books and podcasts), adopting an active learning or flipped classroom experience, or offering students an opportunity to choose their own pace, content or sequence of material.[75]

IV.1.2. Prong two results: Short interviews with administrators

Table 3 shows the results of the emerging themes of the 12 pages of notes taken from interviews with 7 university administrators who are familiar with mid-semester faculty changes. The two emerging themes were 'policies and practices' and 'course modality.' The results of the content analysis is consistent across the 7 interviews suggesting that additional interviews were unlikely to yield new information.[76,77]

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[72] Sayem Ahmed, Hasin Md. Muhtasim Taqi, Yeasir Iqbal Farabi, Mohiuddin Sarker, Syed Mithun Ali, and Bathrinath Sankaranarayanan, "Evaluation of Flexible Strategies to Manage the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Education Sector," *Global journal of flexible systems management* 22, no. Suppl 2 (2021): 81–105.

[73] Sir John Daniel, "Education and the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Prospects (Paris)* 49, no. 1-2 (2020): 91–96.

[74] Trena Paulus and Jessica Nina Lester, *Doing Qualitative Research in a Digital World* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022).

[75] Seshasai, Srinivasan, Juan Antonio Lopez Ramos, and Nasim Muhammad, "A Flexible Future Education Model–Strategies Drawn from Teaching During the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Education sciences* 11, no. 9 (2021): 557–567.

[76] Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research : a Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* 4th ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013).

[77] Benjamin Saunders, Julius Sim, Tom Kingstone, Shula Baker, Jackie Waterfield, Bernadette Bartlam, Heather Burroughs, and Clare Jinks, "Saturation in Qualitative Research: Exploring Its Conceptualization and Operationalization," *Quality & quantity* 52, no. 4 (2017): 1893–1907.

Table 3

Short Interviews with Administrators

Policies and practices	Course modality
1. Lack of formal procedures on how to handle a mid-semester faculty change 2. 5/7 have no specific pedagogical advice/instruction for the incoming faculty 3. No official tracking of mid-semester faculty changes 4. Yearly occurrences of mid-semester faculty changes happen	1. All 7 report that mid-semester faculty changes occur in both online and in-person courses 2. Six of 7 institutions report they have online courses where the online class is created by one faculty member and then used by other faculty at the institution 3. One institution reports that the online classroom is the sole intellectual property of the faculty creator

The feedback received from the interviewees revealed with consistency that there was a lack of specific information or procedural detail within any single institution. None of the respondents were able to provide definitive information about the frequency of mid-semester faculty replacements. The most precise estimate was 5-10 times each year at a school operating more than 10,000 course sections annually. Some indicated approximations of 'a few times' each year, while others stated they lacked information because administration is decentralized and addressed within the affected academic department. Despite the absence of exact numbers, all seven institutions reported the occurrence of yearly mid-semester faculty changes.

The lack of procedure or formal practice to prepare faculty for a mid-semester faculty change was also a consistent concern for nearly all of the institutions. The majority of respondents (6/7) indicated that faculty are not required to complete training for online instruction or any other circumstance (e.g. stepping in mid-semester). Of course the feeling of a lack of preparedness was never more real than during the global pandemic. A recent study by the McKinsey Institute reports that while faculty are eager to prepare for adopting new classroom technology, they need more institutional support to do so.[78]

An unexpected finding was that the course modality matters particularly for online courses where intellectual property can have an effect on the

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[78] Cladio Brasca, Charge Krishnan, Varun Marya, Katie Owen, Joshua Sirois, and Shyla Zaire, "How Technology Is Shaping Learning in Higher Education" (McKinsey & Company, June 15, 2022).

classroom itself (normally an online course shell). While the majority of the institutions (6/7) use the course enterprise model, one university does not and this can create complications. The course enterprise model is a model for designing one online course for multiple users.[79] In other words one faculty member creates a course shell and gives the university permission to share their intellectual property with other faculty assigned to teach the course. Only one of the seven universities does not use the course enterprise model and when a mid-semester faculty change happens in an online course, the original instructor must agree to allow the incoming faculty access to the class (because the course shell is their intellectual property).

In summary, the data suggest that on the one hand students depend on an incoming faculty member who is organized and prepared yet on the other hand, administrators appear to agree that they don't have formal procedures to help faculty to get organized and prepared. While the mid-semester faculty change is not a 'standard' problem faced by faculty or administrators the recent global pandemic has demonstrated that contingency and succession planning is even more important in today's educational environment.

IV.2. *Limitations of this study*

Care should be taken with the findings of this study and more research should be conducted to substantiate the findings. The elusive and sensitive nature of the mid-semester faculty change makes it difficult to identify and collect data on this topic. However, the need for succession planning in higher education was made evident during the recent global pandemic[80] and the probability of future endemics.[81] Future research on the departed and incoming faculty who are involved in a mid-semester faculty change would further inform this topic particularly as it relates to succession planning.

A probability sample design of students who have faced a mid-semester faculty change would make an ideal dataset from which to explore the mid-

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[79] Shihua Liu, Hao Zhang, Zhanxiang Ye, and Gang Wu, "Online Blending Learning Model of School-Enterprise Cooperation and Course Certificate Integration during the COVID-19 Epidemic," *Science Journal of Education* 8, no. 2 (2020): 66, https://doi.org/10.11648/j.sjedu.20200802.16.

[80] Alina Tugend, "On the Verge of Burnout: Covid-19's Impact on Faculty Well-Being and Career Plans," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2020) https://connect.chronicle.com/rs/931-EKA-218/images/Covid%26FacultyCareerPaths_Fidelity_ResearchBrief_v3%20%281%29.pdf

[81] Marco Marani, Gabriel G. Katul, William K. Pan, and Anthony J. Parolari, "Intensity and Frequency of Extreme Novel Epidemics," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 35 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2105482118.

semester faculty change dilemma.[82] However, time, funding constraints and a global pandemic were hurdles faced by the authors conducting this research. The results of this study suggest that finding and qualifying students who have faced a mid-semester faculty change is an obstacle, but not an unsurmountable one (22% of respondents indicated they have faced this situation two times in their college experience). With time and appropriate funding a survey could be created and administered to students across multiple universities and countries, creating a robust sample size.

Faculty were not included in this research because of time and funding limitations. A survey of faculty who have taken over a class mid-semester would certainly add to the lack of literature on this topic. The institutions that were interviewed for this study did not track data on mid-semester faculty changes and were unable to provide exact numbers of occurrences. This may suggest that identifying and qualifying a large enough faculty dataset may be too difficult of a hurdle to overcome.

The small sample size is limitation of this research. While the survey data collected in this study cannot be generalized to the entire population of college students in higher education this study does provide some initial evidence that mid-semester faculty changes may not be as rare of an event as once thought.

The number of institutions who were interviewed for this study is a limitation on one hand, but on the other hand the data were consistent across all of the respondents. Future research is warranted perhaps in the form of a survey which might yield higher participation rates than interviews because of the sensitivity of the topic. Future research on how mid-semester faculty changes are addressed in other countries would also add to the literature. Conventional wisdom suggests that cross-cultural communication and values might differ across countries.[83]

V. Recommendations

While there are limitations to this study the results fall in line with conventional wisdom and previous research on student learning. It is broadly accepted in the academic literature that faculty members play a pinnacle role in student learning and that their teaching practice has significant impact on

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[82] Joseph F. Hair, David J. Ortinau, and Dana E. Harrison, *Essentials of Marketing Research* (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 2021).

[83] Geert H. Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences, International Differences in Work-Related Values* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1984).

student persistence and retention.[84,85,86] A mid-semester faculty change is a multifaceted situation but still, the objective of higher education is to educate students so they can lead productive lives and have meaningful careers even in atypical situations. So, it is incumbent on faculty and administrators to effectively prepare for interruptions like the mid-semester faculty change. The literature on student learning suggests there is a correlation between effective practice and positive student and academic outcomes.[87,88,89,90,91,92] Effective teaching practices and procedures should be created so that a mid-semester faculty change disrupts student learning as little as possible.

V.1. What can faculty and administrators do to prepare students who are experiencing a mid-semester faculty change?

Clear communication about expectations and organizing the course materials so they bridge the gap between the incoming and outgoing faculty

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[84] Nicholas J. McCormick and Marva S Lucas, "Student Retention and Success: Faculty Initiatives at Middle Tennessee State University," *Journal of Student Success and Retention* 1, no. 1 (2014): 1-12, https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/505e/672a24d557d486ddfae77233179327da21da.pdf.

[85] Vincent Tinto, "Research and Practice of Student Retention: What Next?" *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 8, no. 1 (2006): 1–19, https://doi.org/10.2190/4YNU-4TMB-22DJ-AN4W.

[86] Paul D. Umbach and Matthew R. Wawrzynski, "Faculty Do Matter: The Role of College Faculty in Student Learning and Engagement," *Research in Higher Education* 46, no. 2 (2005): 153–84, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-004-1598-1.

[87] Ty M. Cruce, Gregory C Wolniak, Tricia A Seifert, and Ernest T Pascarella, "Impacts of Good Practices on Cognitive Development, Learning Orientations, and Graduate Degree Plans During the First Year of College," *Journal of College Student Development* 47, no. 4 (2006): 365–83, https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2006.0042.

[88] George D. Kuh and Shouping Hu, "The Effects of Student-Faculty Interaction in the 1990s," *The Review of Higher Education* 24, no. 3 (2001): 309–32, https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2001.0005.

[89] Ernest T. Pascarella, Ty M Cruce, Gregory C Wolniak, and Charles F Blaich, "Do Liberal Arts Colleges Really Foster Good Practices in Undergraduate Education?" *Journal of College Student Development* 45, no. 1 (2004): 57–74, https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2004.0013.

[90] Ernest T. Pascarella, Tricia A. Seifert, and Elizabeth J. Whitt, "Effective Instruction and College Student Persistence: Some New Evidence," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 2008, no. 115 (2008): 55–70, https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.325.

[91] Ernest T. Pascarella, Mark H. Salisbury, and Charles Blaich, "Exposure to Effective Instruction and College Student Persistence: A Multi-Institutional Replication and Extension," *Journal of College Student Development* 52, no. 1 (2011): 4–19, https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2011.0005.

[92] Ernest T., Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini, *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

are important first steps in preparing students for a mid-semester faculty change. In addition, preparing to set aside time to foster community in the classroom will also enhance student success.

The data collected from this study suggest that clear communication is important to student success when students are faced with a faculty change mid-semester. The research bears out this finding. For example, Komarraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya[93] validated earlier research suggesting that approachability, respectful nature, and availability for frequent communications of faculty can strengthen student academic and psychosocial outcomes. A study that examined answers on student evaluation surveys determined that clear and specific communication and clear and specific content organization are the two most frequently cited areas from students for how to enhance the practice of teaching.[94] Conventional wisdom suggests clear and specific communication about expectations is even more important when there has been a disruption in the classroom.

Rhetorical behaviors in faculty communication like clarity, humor, nonverbal immediacy, and caring have also been shown to enhance student outcomes such as learning, satisfaction, and motivation.[95] Opening the class with a little humor like "Well, it's week 5 and we finally get to meet," or "Hey everyone, I'm now the pilot of this plane, don't pull the parachute out just yet" will lighten the mood and provide a segue to "So, let's get started, we're in this together!" Though organizational policies, issues of legality, respect for personal privacy, or lack of knowledge about the circumstances may leave faculty without many details, communication, transparency, and humor about these constraints are valued by students.

The data in this study also suggest that the incoming faculty should assess the students' perception of the outgoing faculty performance and adjust their own course materials to address gaps in learning or content. This implies that the incoming faculty should first meet with students and *then* create a plan of action for the remaining weeks in the semester. This is the opposite to how faculty typically prepare for a course. In this teaching

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[93] Meera Komarraju, Sergey Musulkin, and Gargi Bhattacharya. "Role of Student–Faculty Interactions in Developing College Students' Academic Self-Concept, Motivation, and Achievement." *Journal of College Student Development* 51, no. 3 (2010): 332–42, https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0137.

[94] "Student Evaluations of Teaching," *Vanderbilt University*, Accessed September 15, 2021, https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/student-evaluations/.

[95] S. A. Myers and Alan Goodbye, "College Student Learning, Motivation, and Satisfaction as a Function of Effective Faculty Communication Behaviors," *Southern Communication Journal* 79, no. 1 (2014): 14–26.

situation faculty should prioritize and adjust course content and remain flexible about achieving the course outcomes instead of rigidly sticking to the course syllabus.

This finding aligns with many studies that suggest meeting the student's need for clear organization is crucial for success. Hundreds of research articles have focused on the relationship between teaching practices like effective course organization and preparation, instructional clarity, and feedback to student academic outcomes like increased knowledge, content mastery, and growth of cognitive and intellectual skills.[96,97] The more that students understand the alignment and conditional progression of the course holistically (and in individual sessions in terms of units, learning outcomes, milestones, and assessments) the more they understand how to be successful within these parameters.[98] Clear organization can alleviate stress and anxiety borne from uncertainty and change.

The global pandemic affected college enrollments in the United States and globally, but studies suggest that students who feel a sense of community in the classroom have a higher rate of attendance, participation, and persistence.[99,100] These findings were echoed in research that focused on the importance of community during the COVID-19 pandemic.[101,102] According to Elliot et al, there are four components to fostering community in college

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[96] Ty M. Cruce, Gregory C Wolniak, Tricia A Seifert, and Ernest T Pascarella, "Impacts of Good Practices on Cognitive Development, Learning Orientations, and Graduate Degree Plans During the First Year of College," *Journal of College Student Development* 47, no. 4 (2006): 365–83, https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2006.0042.

[97] Ernest T. Pascarella, Tricia A. Seifert, and Elizabeth J. Whitt., "Effective Instruction and College Student Persistence: Some New Evidence," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 2008, no. 115 (2008): 55–70, https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.325.

[98] Ernest T. Pascarella, and Patrick T. Terenzini. *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

[99] Dedreiana Elliot, Marlen Gamino, and Jenkins J Jennifer, "Creating Community in the College Classroom: Best Practices for Increased Student Success," *International Journal of Education and Social Science* 3, no. 6 (2016), http://www.ijessnet.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/5.pdf.

[100] Scott Principal Friedman, and Tiffany Fishman, "Covid-19 Impact on Higher Education," Deloitte United States, (May 29, 2020), https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/public-sector/articles/covid-19-impact-on-higher-education.html.

[101] Sarah Elizabeth Barrett, "Maintaining Equitable and Inclusive Classroom Communities Online during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Teaching and Learning* 15, no. 2 (2021): 102–16, https://doi.org/10.22329/jtl.v15i2.6683.

[102] Saleh Al-Omoush, Khaled, Maria Orero-Blat, and Domingo Ribeiro-Soriano, "The Role of Sense of Community in Harnessing the Wisdom of Crowds and Creating Collaborative Knowledge during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Business Research* 132 (2021): 765–74, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.10.056.

to Elliot et al, there are four components to fostering community in college

classes: creating a shared space, reinforcing openness and acceptance, helping students find common interests, and creating a sense of belonging.[103]

V.2. *What procedures and processes are in place to assist the incoming faculty with a mid-semester faculty change?*

The results of this study suggest that procedures and processes to assist faculty in quickly taking over a class mid-semester are lacking and the literature supports this finding. There is a dearth of literature on what procedures and processes should be in place to assist incoming faculty on how to take over a class mid-semester.

Faculty success relies to some extent on a supportive culture, including infrastructure, which can ease faculty transitions in cases where a new faculty member steps in mid-semester. Put another way, 'the ability of faculty to focus on improving their teaching and their ability to bring new ideas and knowledge into practice depends on the institutional context.'[104] Regardless of the reason for turnover, as noted earlier, such a situation is inherently challenging. Therefore, the success of the faculty member is more likely dependent on the support and availability of institutional resources.

This investigation of the mid-semester faculty change indicates an opportunity for institutions to do better. This includes not only doing better at supporting faculty as they take over in-progress courses but to also consider the quality of the experience for students. Doing so is not only appropriate but is also business-savvy, as undergraduate enrollments are predicted to continue declining for several more years.[105]

Institutions would be well-served by abandoning ad-hoc management of mid-semester faculty change to more effectively support faculty. Setting aside the potentially delicate circumstances which can surround a given situation, institutions should begin by acknowledging that these situations occur and that they occur frequently enough to merit constructing procedures

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[103] Dedreiana Elliot, Marlen Gamino, and Jenkins J Jennifer, "Creating Community in the College Classroom: Best Practices for Increased Student Success," *International Journal of Education and Social Science* 3, no. 6 (2016), http://www.ijessnet.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/5.pdf.

[104] William Condon, Ellen R Iverson, Cathryn A Manduca, Carol Rutz, Gudrun Willett, Mary Taylor Huber, and Richard Haswell, *Faculty Development and Student Learning: Assessing the Connections* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 8.

[105] Paul Fain, "Latest Data on Enrollment Declines." *Inside Higher Ed*, (2018). https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2018/05/29/new-data-enrollment-and-where-declines-are-greatest.

for consistently and effectively handling mid-semester faculty changes. While procedures would include some of those which already occur at some institutions; e.g., providing access to the course in the LMS, providing content, providing access to class rosters, etc., more meaningful actions would also be beneficial. For these additional actions, the authors recommend drawing from the instructional strategies shared earlier in this article and to determine the necessary support.

Where possible, technical support for adjusting materials housed in the LMS, replacing the course syllabus, addressing potential changes in required materials, could also be provided. Offices of the registrar and similar administrative offices, as units which are among the first to know of faculty changes, may be the best candidates to initiate the activities described above. As central offices managing faculty assignments, it may also be required of such offices to actively track and report on the actual frequency of mid-semester faculty changes.

Transparency is also key in effectively transitioning a course, mid-semester, from one faculty member to another. While, as noted earlier, certain privacy restrictions might prevent a department chair or other official from being entirely forthcoming about the circumstances surrounding a mid-semester faculty change, the degree to which open communication can occur may be valuable to buoy student motivation and engagement.[106] The authors recommend, when possible, that students receive a message in person or electronically from a department chair or other recognized authority to support the aim of transparency, to demonstrate a sense of professional respect for all parties involved, to offer an advance introduction to the new faculty member, and thereby to set the stage for success for students in the remaining weeks of the semester.

VI. Conclusion

This study sought to shed light on how faculty and administrators can help students succeed when they are faced with a mid-semester faculty change. What has historically been an atypical university classroom staffing problem may become more typical in the future. Couple the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic with the World Health Organization's recent declaration that Monkey Pox is a public health emergency, the likelihood for

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[106] S. A,. Myers and Alan Goodbye, "College Student Learning, Motivation, and Satisfaction as a Function of Effective Faculty Communication Behaviors," *Southern Communication Journal* 79, no. 1 (2014): 14–26.

future global pandemics may be on the rise.[107] "Faculty and staff members are leaving colleges and universities in droves," and higher education turnover is nearly at a crisis point.[108]

More research is needed to understand the best teaching practices to implement during disruptions in the classroom especially if these disruptions become commonplace. The data from this study suggest that the incoming faculty should first meet with students to assess their learning and then construct a plan to move forward with the semester. The students surveyed in this study reported that clear communication about expectations, organizing the course materials well, and remaining flexible were important to their success.

Further research is also warranted to identify those universities (if any) who have processes and procedures in place when a mid-semester faculty change occurs. It would also be useful to know if the mid-semester faculty change is managed in an ad hoc manner and/or to what extent the bureaucracy of higher education impedes this process. Best practices for administrators like department chairs, university teaching and learning centers, and human resources departments should be identified or developed so that universities are prepared for the unexpected.

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[107] Marco Marani, Gabriel G. Katul, William K. Pan, and Anthony J. Parolari, "Intensity and Frequency of Extreme Novel Epidemics," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 35 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2105482118.

[108] Doug Lederman, "EP.77: Turnover, Burnout and Demoralization in Higher Ed." Inside Higher Ed. Kaplan, (April 14, 2022), https://www.insidehighered.com/audio/2022/04/14/ep77-turnover-burnout-and-demoralization-higher-ed.

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