Innovation in a Time of Crisis:
A Networked Approach to Faculty Development

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This article explores how one center for teaching and learning (CTL) rapidly designed and launched a Summer 2020 Course Design Institute in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the need to reach a significant number of faculty in a short period of time proved challenging, it also created an opportunity for our CTL to engage with faculty who otherwise might not have worked with us—not only on issues of teaching with technology but also on engagement, inclusion, and other key issues. We relied on a relationships-based cohort model to establish trust and faculty buy-in. Early results suggest that this approach may help spread innovative ideas about teaching and learning.

Introduction

There are few silver linings in the COVID-19 dark cloud, but one of them may be a willingness to reassess the way we teach and learn in higher education. Every college and university in the world was forced to adapt in response to the pandemic. While all faculty at our institution changed their practice by moving to remote teaching, some faculty and administrators have begun to innovate in response to the crisis and rethink the way we teach and learn in the long term. Just as faculty can innovate in response to this crisis, so too can centers for teaching and learning (CTLs) innovate in the ways in which they engage with faculty communities.

Georgetown University, like most universities across the country, switched to remote learning in March 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States. Faculty and students did their best to adapt quickly under the circumstances, but the university committed to iterating and improving the remote learning experience for students going forward into the Fall 2020 semester. Our CTL offered a series of cohort-based Course Design Institutes (CDI) where faculty and staff engaged with intertwined principles and best practices from inclusive pedagogy and online course design. The CDI model relied on a com-

bination of community building and evidence-based principles that facilitated the spread of teaching innovation.

As with so many other CTLs, we saw a rapid increase in faculty participation as instructors planned for Fall 2020 remote courses. We worked with over 1,800 faculty overall in Summer 2020, nearly 1,200 of whom participated in CDIs, including tenure-line, full-time non-tenure-line, and contingent faculty, faculty in administrative roles, graduate instructors, and new faculty hires. Georgetown has approximately 2,300 main campus faculty, so this number of participants represents a substantial percentage of our colleagues. Faculty attendance was encouraged by deans and department chairs but not required. By reviewing and comparing patterns in faculty and staff attendance at our workshop and cohort offerings pre-COVID and post-COVID, we show that our reach since March 2020 has not only increased but also structurally and qualitatively changed. Our broader reach advances the exposure of our university's teaching and learning community to innovation and pedagogical principles grounded in equity and social justice that are foundational to our university's mission.

This article asks how CTLs can harness a surge in faculty interest and move from crisis-driven changes to sustained teaching innovation. We draw on Granovetter's (1973, 1983) foundational work in network analysis and weak tie theory to explore how to leverage and spread faculty development efforts in the wake of COVID-19. We describe our CDI model and propose a relationships-based cohort model as a way to build on the strength of weak ties to generate trust while also drawing on research about online learning and inclusive teaching. In addition, we consider Roxå and Mårtensson's (2009) research suggesting that private conversations among colleagues have the greatest influence on instructors' decisions about teaching, which calls into question the efficacy of many training programs and workshops offered by CTLs. Personal conversations may be influential, but they are unlikely to spread innovation if they remain private and divorced from evidence. Early indicators suggest that our CDI cohorts are contributing to increased remote teaching effectiveness and the spread of teaching innovation on our campus.

The Power of Networks

Faculty tend to put more stock in the trust, privacy, and personal sensemaking of their conversations with close colleagues than in the many pedagogical training opportunities we have to offer them. A consistent challenge faced by CTLs, then, is how to establish significant relationships with faculty that will

allow the diffusion of new ideas, institutional mission-driven orientations to pedagogy, and research-based best practices in teaching and learning to a broader university faculty community.

Roxå and Mårtensson (2009) explore the concept of the faculty "significant network" for learning and development related to teaching, picking up on earlier work by Becher and Trowler (2001) that describes two networks in academic communication—a large one for citations and positioning of research within a field and a very small one (up to 10 colleagues) for testing and feedback related to ideas still in development. Roxå and Mårtensson show through an analysis of survey data and discussions with faculty that an average faculty member will have only a few colleagues with whom they feel comfortable having significant (influential) conversations about teaching and learning. Furthermore, they find that relationships making up the faculty "significant network" for conversations about teaching and learning hinge on three characteristics: (a) mutual trust; (b) privacy and a *backstage*[1] nature; and (c) personal and experience-based sensemaking (what Roxå and Mårtensson call "personal theories" about teaching and learning) rather than mainstream pedagogical theory.

The faculty significant network as a *network* is a fruitful area for further exploration. In sociological terms, a network is made up of ties between individuals. A familiar and trusting relationship between two individuals can be described as a "strong tie" (Granovetter, 1973). A group of individuals who all have strong ties with one another is a close-knit community that would appear as a cluster in a larger network. Frequency of interaction, trust, affinity, availability, and willingness to help have all been put forth as key characteristics of strong ties (Granovetter, 1973; Krackhardt, 2003; Levin & Cross, 2004; Marsden & Campbell, 1984). We suggest that Roxå and Mårtensson's "significant network" for significant conversations among faculty can be productively transposed onto the construct of a strong tie cluster within a larger network, the features of trust, privacy, and exclusivity that characterize a significant faculty relationship being evidence of the existence of a strong tie.

Granovetter (1973) finds that "the stronger the tie connecting two individuals, the more similar they are" (p. 1362), predicting a certain level of homogeneity of thoughts, beliefs, and practices in a network cluster of individuals with strong ties. It is not surprising, then, that faculty's significant networks could be, in Granovetter's (1983) words, "deprived of information from distant parts of the social system," "insulate[d] from the latest ideas," and "difficult to

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[1] Goffman (1978).

organize," and that, as a result, "new ideas will spread slowly" into them (p. 202).

In his foundational book *The Strength of Weak Ties* (1973), Granovetter points us to consider the flow of ideas, innovation, and cultural change into communities in terms of the presence of actors with weak ties in networks. Although weak ties are by definition not as socially close as strong ties within a given network, an individual with weak ties may also have links into multiple dense clusters of strong ties representing closely-knit communities. Individuals with weak ties into two communities can act as a bridge between groups, even across a vast amount of social distance. Where ties are weak and social distance is great, there is less possibility for total cultural and ideological homogeneity. The weak tie, therefore, is key to the transmission of ways of thinking, doing, and being between groups. Faculty in a significant network benefit from a significant conversation partner with even a weak tie to a CTL as an opportunity for transmission of new knowledge related to teaching and learning.

As early as 1928, Piaget described differences in relationships between individuals "where some do not alter the mental structure of individuals, while others transform at the same time the spirit of the individual and of the group," noting also that "among these, some lead to knowledge, while others do not" (p. 205). Although more recent management literature contests whether the cultivation of weak ties or strong ties facilitates more knowledge production and sharing in an organization, it is clear from many case studies (e.g., Hansen, 1999; Krackhardt, 1992; Levin & Cross, 2004) that a combination of both can spread innovation. The successful transmission of knowledge between individuals benefits from strong ties due to the benevolence-based and competence-based trust that accompanies such ties (Levin & Cross, 2004). At the same time, the existence of weak ties correlates to actor heterogeneity and, consequently, the opportunity for non-redundant knowledge production and sharing between communities.

In order for our ideas about best practices for inclusive and engaging remote teaching to permeate a larger university faculty culture in time for the Fall 2020 semester, we needed to figure out how to share new ideas with as many faculty as possible as quickly as possible in a way that facilitated successful knowledge transmission. To do so, we attempted to imbue our weak tie relationships with the trusting aspects of strong ties. We relied on two strands of trust identified in organizational network theory literature—benevolence-based and competence-based trust—in designing our CDI. Both of these trust dimensions are key affective elements of relationships without which the transmission of knowledge may be less effective (Levin & Cross,

2004). In other words, we cultivated both trust that we wanted what was best for faculty and trust that we had useful and relevant expertise on matters of teaching and learning.

In what follows, we describe the context and goals of the CDI as well as decisions about how to structure the work in ways that allowed us to leverage both our existing significant networks at the university as well as trust-infused weak ties to help spread evidence-based teaching principles. We detail our reach to faculty before and after our university transitioned to remote learning in order to illustrate the way in which we have been able to scale our relational approach to effective knowledge sharing, reaching faculty with whom we have not worked before. Faculty feedback from the experience and some early findings of improved student academic engagement in the Fall 2020 semester relative to the Spring 2020 semester suggest that the CDI programming may have been effective both in diffusing knowledge into faculty significant networks as well as in bringing about some cultural change in how department faculty communities think and act around teaching and learning in a remote educational space.

CDI: A Networked Curriculum and Format

Georgetown's Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship (CNDLS) took the lead in designing and delivering weekly CDIs to prepare faculty for flexible and adaptive remote teaching. CNDLS was poised to make such a move because of our 20-year history as a center that integrates teaching and learning, technology innovation, and research. We serve as the university's CTL but also design and support many of the university's online classes. Our combined efforts in these spaces positioned us to respond quickly to the shift to remote teaching. Our staff includes faculty developers, instructional designers, technology specialists, media producers, diversity and inclusion experts, and web developers. We knew we wouldn't be able to offer the level of support we provide for faculty who teach fully online courses, since the design process for a single course can take up to eight months, but we wanted to draw on our experience in instructional design and faculty development to support remote teaching across the university (thus we will continue to refer to Fall 2020 courses as remote rather than fully online).

The challenge we faced was how to prepare 1,800 faculty across multiple schools and campuses to teach flexibly in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic with approximately 20 CNDLS staff members and five graduate assistants (while both groups were also working on other projects). We wanted to deliver

more than a series of webinars and workshops but instead offer a deeper engagement to prepare faculty to be flexible and resilient even before they knew the mode in which they would be teaching. The pandemic offered us an opportunity to capitalize on the fact that more faculty than ever were willing to discuss issues of teaching and learning as they prepared to teach remotely. While most of our faculty have teaching experience, few had remote teaching experience, which allowed them to operate as novices. The number of engaged participants in our programming evidenced a greater openness to new ideas about teaching.

Faced with the challenge of preparing faculty to teach remotely in the midst of a global crisis, we wanted a model that allowed us to reach large numbers while still making room for significant conversations and evidence-based research. We settled on four learning goals for participants:
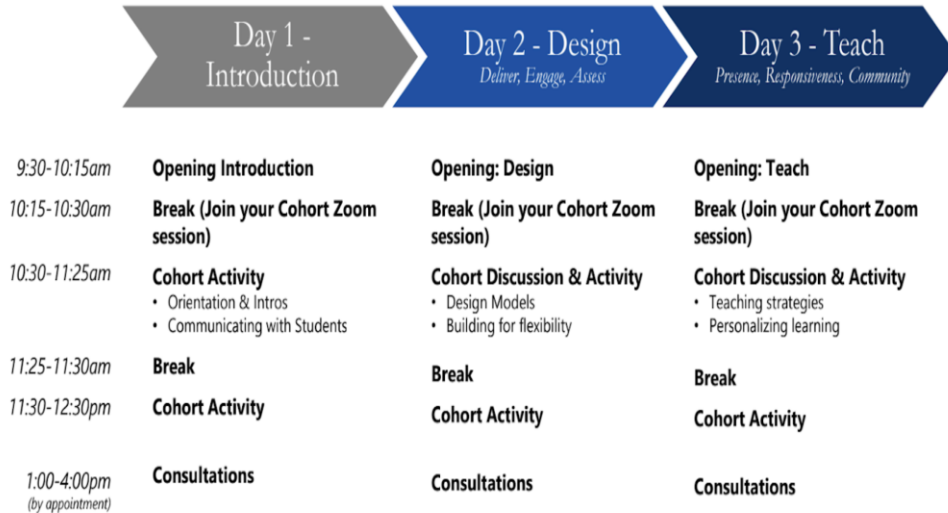
- Adapt their syllabus and semester plan for remote learning;
- Meaningfully integrate technology to give students a rich learning experience;
- Adopt intentional teaching practices that focus on engagement, responsiveness, community, inclusivity, and flexibility in an online environment;
- Consider what a signature Georgetown course looks like online.

Just as important as the learning goals was the format in which we chose to engage with colleagues. We settled on four key features: The CDI would be cohort-based, require a minimal time commitment, focus on flexibility, and emphasize evidence-based and engaged teaching. The decision to work with faculty in cohorts represents our attempt to balance the trust that faculty find in their small, significant networks with the need to make the work more public, evidence-based, and inclusive.

We knew that many faculty dedicate their summers to research (especially tenure-line faculty) or other commitments (contingent faculty often balance additional jobs in the summer), so it was important to ask for a minimal time commitment. We settled on a schedule of nine hours of synchronous meetings stretched over three days, with some additional asynchronous work and one-on-one consultations as needed. Each week we gathered approximately 100 faculty for three morning plenary sessions, after which they dispersed into cohorts of 15-20 for discussion and hands-on practice, as detailed in Figure 1.

Figure 1:
CNDLS Course Design Institute (CDI) Schedule

CNDLS Course Design Institute (CDI) Schedule

	Day 1 - Introduction	Day 2 - Design *Deliver, Engage, Assess*	Day 3 - Teach *Presence, Responsiveness, Community*
9:30-10:15am	**Opening Introduction**	**Opening: Design**	**Opening: Teach**
10:15-10:30am	**Break (Join your Cohort Zoom session)**	**Break (Join your Cohort Zoom session)**	**Break (Join your Cohort Zoom session)**
10:30-11:25am	**Cohort Activity** • Orientation & Intros • Communicating with Students	**Cohort Discussion & Activity** • Design Models • Building for flexibility	**Cohort Discussion & Activity** • Teaching strategies • Personalizing learning
11:25-11:30am	**Break**	**Break**	**Break**
11:30-12:30pm	**Cohort Activity**	**Cohort Activity**	**Cohort Activity**
1:00-4:00pm (by appointment)	**Consultations**	**Consultations**	**Consultations**

Figure 1: Course Design Institute Schedule (more information available at https://instructionalcontinuity.georgetown.edu/cdi/).

We chose to work with smaller facilitated faculty cohorts (approx. 20 people in each cohort) because of what we have learned about the importance of community in our history as a CTL. It would have been logistically easier to offer a series of workshops on key topics over the summer, but our experience running numerous cohort-based programs has shown us what can happen when faculty spend enough time together to develop trust, ask questions, and share teaching experience with colleagues. These cohorts are neither the backstage conversations nor the large frontstage formal conferences that one of Roxå and Mårtensson's subjects describes as more akin to "diplomatic conferences, where each word is carefully chosen, the truth is not always at the forefront" (553). Instead, these cohorts occupy a middle ground more akin to a rehearsal space. The groups are small enough to establish some level of trust but also open their doors to other colleagues. Many but not all of the cohorts were organized by discipline, so colleagues already knew each other before joining.

Although we spent time at the outset establishing community, we had to rely on established ties because of time constraints.

One advantage of the combined plenary and cohort model featured above is the opportunity to introduce research about teaching and learning into a smaller conversation of colleagues. By sponsoring these conversations, CNDLS was able to introduce research and evidence about inclusive pedagogy, active learning, and digital practices. Faculty still had the opportunity to share their personal experiences and perspectives, but they could do so in response to scholarly research rather than in a vacuum.

The CDI was open to all Georgetown faculty, regardless of rank. While the majority of CDI participants may already have had some trusting relationships with departmental colleagues, many had no previous relationship with CNDLS facilitators. Therefore, it was important for us to ensure the development of relational trust—both benevolence-based and competence-based—as we attempted to transfer knowledge of best practices for teaching online. The programming was designed for trust by being voluntary but department-based, including room for more private rehearsal space in Zoom breakout rooms, offering optional paired consultations with facilitators accompanied by a preferred faculty colleague in addition to one-on-one consults, and more. In addition to these design decisions, we also intentionally harnessed the strength of ties developed between our CTL and individual faculty colleagues throughout the Georgetown community across many previous years of work with faculty.

We needed to diffuse pedagogical concepts into department faculty communities quickly in preparation for a remote or hybrid Fall semester and did not have the luxury of time to develop strong ties at the scale of the entire university faculty. Our ability to operationalize our established contacts to help us to convey new knowledge in a way that was trusted by the knowledge receivers was critical, then, to reaching as many faculty in the university community as possible in the three month timeframe between the end of the Spring 2020 semester and the beginning of the Fall 2020 semester.

A pivotal figure in the CDI model was the faculty peer mentor. Each departmental cohort had a peer mentor who took on a role that bridged between their CNDLS facilitators and their department's faculty to transmit knowledge in a way that was useful and relevant to their significant networks through significant conversations. The faculty peer mentor was, in most cases, a faculty member of the department who had a preexisting relationship with CNDLS established through their participation in recent years of CNDLS programming prior to the beginning of the transition to remote learning in Spring 2020.

It was only through CNDLS's many years of work to reach out to individual faculty members in wide-ranging departments and schools at Georgetown that these trusting relationships between the center and these individuals could exist and be harnessed toward diffusing ideas to their departments.

Figure 2 models the stronger tie between CNDLS staff and the faculty peer mentor that facilitates the diffusion of knowledge to department faculty through the faculty peer mentor's own strong ties within their department, in addition to the weak ties between CNDLS staff and other department faculty.

Figure 2
Peer Mentorship Role in CDI
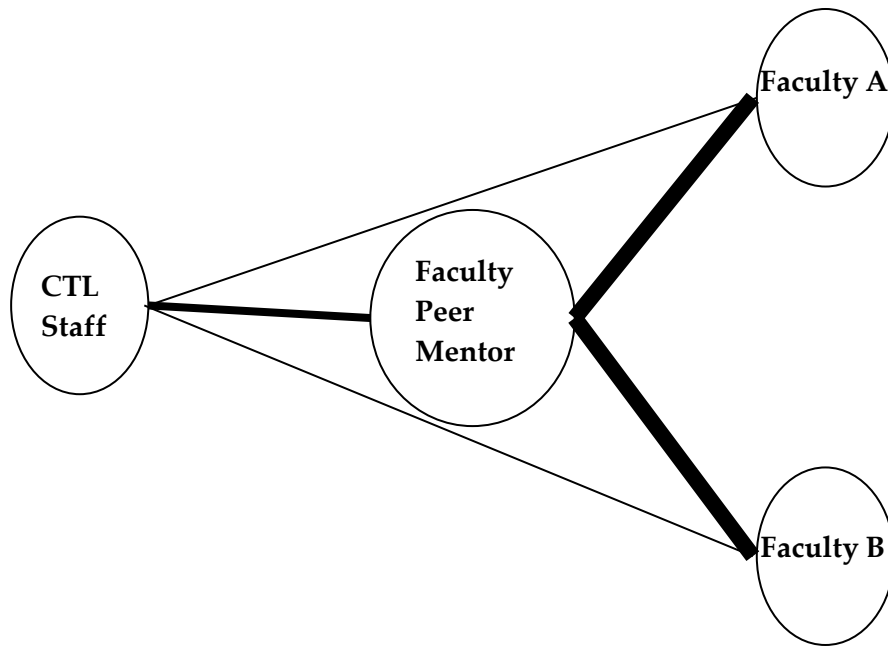
Figure 2: Diagram of Faculty Peer Mentor role in Course Design Institute (CDI) model facilitating diffusion of information from CTL staff to their department colleagues. Line thickness represents tie strength (stronger ties = thicker lines).

The faculty peer mentors met with CNDLS facilitators before the weekly CDIs to share information about discipline specific needs (mathematicians wanted to figure out how to write equations on a board in remote settings;

humanists wanted to be able to project a text on screen for close reading; musicians needed high quality audio sharing; etc.). The faculty peer mentor served the role of translating department needs to their CNDLS facilitators as well as building momentum to attend and good will to participate within their department, especially in the case that many faculty in the department were not familiar with CNDLS and may have been suspicious of the relationship between CNDLS and the Georgetown administration in evaluating faculty preparation to teach remotely in the fall. In addition to the translation role, the faculty peer mentor through their presence at the CDI sessions served the purpose of demonstrating the two dimensions of trust—benevolence-based and competence-based—in their relationship with their CNDLS facilitators. In this way the faculty mentors, with relatively stronger ties to CNDLS than their departmental colleagues with no history of interaction with CNDLS, influenced the new weak tie connection between CNDLS and the faculty we were attempting to serve with the relational elements of benevolence-based and competence-based trust.

The faculty peer mentor's continued participation in significant networks for significant conversations in teaching and learning located within their department faculty community validated and reinforced the conversations about teaching and learning beyond the initial week of department cohort participation. During the week of department cohort participation, peer mentors had lent the credence of an additional strong tie supporting our CTL's weak tie in the transmission of information to the faculty in their department. In the weeks following their department cohort participation, the peer mentors' strong ties within their department came to replace our weak one in ensuring the knowledge shared stayed relevant, useful, and present in continued significant conversations. Eighty-seven percent of participants who responded to an internal survey found attending the CDI to be either mostly or extremely helpful.

Meeting the Moment with Inclusive Teaching Practice

We sought to build on this moment to do more than show faculty how to use tools like Zoom and Canvas. Like many CTLs, CNDLS blends technology instruction with conversations about pedagogy. But we also wanted to engage with faculty around our institutional values, inviting them to consider what makes a signature Georgetown experience and how that could happen remotely. We were also mindful that faculty would be teaching in the face of dual pandemics of COVID-19 and systematic racism, not to mention the devastating effects of climate change and political rancor. As Bass has argued, our

work as educational developers "unfolds in the context of local and world events, social discourse, and even the existential threats of the coming decades" (2020). Now more than ever, it was essential that we incorporate a commitment to inclusive teaching into any CNDLS offering.

In addition to designing to the context of the existential threats of the current historical moment, we also designed the CDI to align with our university mission statement to educate students to be "reflective lifelong learners, to be responsible and active participants in civic life and to live generously in service to others" (Georgetown Univeristy Mission.) As a Jesuit institution with a primarily residential campus, we have a long standing commitment to an Ignatian pedagogical paradigm in which faculty get to know students as individuals and teach to them as whole people. We invited faculty to consider what *cura personalis,* or care for the individual with all their unique gifts, could look like online. In the COVID era, this took the form of faculty reaching out individually to students, via surveys, personal emails, texts, virtual office hours, and other discussions, to check in on students' wellbeing in addition to their access to technology, their ability to connect their learning to world events, and other needs. We also included students as partners in the weekly CDIs, featuring them as panel speakers and cohort coordinators to make sure their voices were heard as we considered the implications of course design choices.

We infused additional inclusive teaching practices throughout all three days of the CDI. Coming off a challenging spring semester, our students shared their desire (in panel discussions, cohort conversations, and surveys) for faculty to offer a blend of empathy and academic rigor. We invited faculty to consider what this blend might look like in their courses, which generated some guiding principles for remote teaching. These principles included increased opportunities for active learning, flexibility, and community building. We looked at the considerable body of research suggesting that active learning benefits all students but offers even greater benefits to those from underrepresented groups (e.g., Freeman et al., 2014). We used frequent active learning strategies like live polling, breakout rooms, Google jamboards, and other techniques as part of the CDI and then asked faculty to reflect on how it felt to use those tools and how they might adapt them in their own courses as tools for both engagement and inclusion. Similarly, we looked at flexibility around assignments and participation in an online class as another method for inclusion. We blended synchronous and asynchronous activities in the CDI to accommodate faculty schedules but also highlighted how this blend would be important

for students living in different time zones and with differing levels of broadband access. We also considered flexible but rigorous assessment strategies as an element of inclusion. Because some students no longer living on campus could be juggling additional responsibilities at home, including work, child care, or illness, we considered options such as take-home exams and labor-based grading to increase equity (Inoue, 2019).

Because our core institutional values include a commitment to social justice and community in diversity, we have offered programming on inclusive pedagogy for several years. Workshops on implicit bias, difficult discussions, facilitation, and inclusive assessment are staples of our CNDLS workshop calendar. Despite having a robust set of offerings related to diversity and inclusion, only a small subset of our faculty have participated in these offerings. Before COVID, our inclusive pedagogy efforts might reach an average of five to eight faculty members per workshop, most of whom were already committed to equity work. Focusing on inclusive classrooms in the CDI meant engaging with well over 1,000 faculty around these efforts.

Pre- and Post-COVID Support

In this section we lay out the differences between our reach to full-time faculty at the university in the twelve months prior to the COVID response transitioning to remote learning and our reach to full-time faculty through the CDI cohorts that took place throughout Summer 2020. Overall, we saw a 207% increase in full-time faculty participation in training events in a much shorter period—we had 211 unique full-time faculty participants in cohort-based and workshop-based training programming during the twelve months between May 2019 and April 2020 versus 648 unique full-time faculty participants in the three months of CDIs between May 2020 and August 2020.[2] Our greatest reach was to faculty in our largest undergraduate school, Georgetown College, which has approximately 500 full-time faculty members; we worked with 368 (or 74%) through CDIs that ran from mid-May through early August. In the previous 12 months we had worked with 123 of them, meaning our reach to College full-time faculty tripled in a quarter of the time.

Crucially, we did not see our reach to individual departments at the university increase (with some notable exceptions being other campuses of our university that engaged with us for training and support for the first time this summer). Rather, we reached roughly the same number of departments in

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[2] Counts from both periods exclude our large annual conference.

both the 12-month period prior to the transition to remote learning and over the period of three months after the conclusion of the Spring 2020 semester (40 departments vs. 42 departments).[3]

Although the reach to departments remained roughly the same in the three-month period of May 2020 to August 2020 in CDIs as it had over the twelve prior months of faculty training in May 2019 through April 2020, the reach to individual faculty members nearly tripled. This extreme growth in reach to faculty is shown at the department and disciplinary level in Table 1. Disciplines within the undergraduate college are shown along with the number of departments in those disciplines. In every discipline, the average reach in the May 2019 through April 2020 period was between roughly three and five full-time faculty members per department, with the highest average full-time faculty CNDLS participants in Humanities departments (5.1 full-time faculty) and the lowest in Social Sciences departments (3.3 full-time faculty). The CDIs increased this average reach to faculty per department in all disciplines, to between roughly 11 and 15 full-time faculty participants per department, some of whom in each department were our previous faculty participants with established ties to CNDLS who served as faculty peer mentors.

As the final column in Table 1 shows, for each of our preexisting faculty ties, we expanded our reach to between a disciplinary average of 1.3 to 3.5 additional faculty during the CDIs. Taking this number as a proxy for growth, we see that our reach to full-time faculty grew the least in the Languages departments (130% growth in reach) and the most in the Social Sciences (350% growth in reach), with the Humanities and the Natural Sciences in between at 190% growth in reach and 220% growth in reach respectively. In other words, our disciplinary average reach to full-time faculty more than doubled in all cases and in the case of the Social Sciences somewhere between quadrupled and quintupled.

Without the ability to work with our previous full-time faculty contacts as faculty peer mentors in each department, the task of preparing faculty to teach remotely in the fall at scale would have been much more challenging. It was meetings with faculty peer mentors that provided CNDLS facilitators insight into department cultures, perspectives, practices, needs, personalities, relationships, and histories. The faculty peer mentors' willingness to let us in on

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[3] Out of those departments, there were only two departments where we reached at least one full-time faculty member in training programming between May 2019 to April 2020 and did not reach with the CDI model in summer 2020, and there were only four departments where we reached full-time faculty with the CDI model during summer 2020 and had not reached any full-time faculty during the twelve months preceding the COVID-19 outbreak.

	Table 1			
Summary in Growth in Full-Time Faculty Reach by Department Discipline				
Discipline	**Number of Departments Reached**	**Avg. Full-Time Faculty Reached Per Department Pre-COVID**	**Avg. Full-Time Faculty Reached Per Department Post-COVID**	**Avg. New Faculty Contacts per Established Contact**
Humanities	7	5.1	15	1.9
Languages	9	4.8	10.8	1.3
Natural Sciences	5	4.8	15.4	2.2
Social Sciences	6	3.3	14.8	3.5

Table 1*: Summary of growth in full-time faculty reach by department discipline. Table excludes schools outside of the undergraduate college, where reach was more variable. The middle column shows the average number of full-time faculty per department reached by training programming between May 2019 and April 2020, and the column second from the right shows the average number of full-time faculty per department who participated in the Course Design Institute in summer 2020. The furthest right column shows, for each full-time faculty participant in May 2019 through April 2020, how many previously unknown full-time faculty participated in the Course Design Institute.*

some of the contents of their significant conversations in their significant department networks to help us prepare to facilitate training experiences for their colleagues was a sign of their benevolence-based and competence-based trust in us. And under a network theory perspective, their time and effort spent modeling engagement with us in activities and discussions during the week of their department's CDI signaled the strengthening tie we are still cultivating within our CTL's weak tie network of knowledge sharing to faculty across the university. The peer mentors' continued presence in their significant depart-

mental networks, where they participate and share advice in significant conversations around teaching and learning, continues to support, reinforce, and generate enthusiasm for knowledge originally shared by CNDLS through the earlier departmental Course Design Institute.

Between the Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 semesters, our university saw an overall increase in student academic engagement (see Figure 3), with initial institutional survey results showing between twice and four times as many students indicating they are "very engaged" in the Fall semester as did in the Spring semester (as few as 10% of students in Spring 2020 surveys and almost 40% of students in the first wave of Fall 2020 surveys), according to a blogpost shared by our provost (Groves, 2020). The chart below, from a weekly video address by the university president, shows the change in student academic engagement between the last wave of Spring 2020 surveys and the first wave of Fall 2020 surveys. The difference in student academic engagement between semesters is clearly visible in these results, with a far greater proportion of students reporting being very or somewhat engaged, and a far smaller proportion of students reporting being very or somewhat disengaged in the Fall 2020 semester relative to Spring 2020.

*S*tudent open-ended feedback shared on the Fall 2020 surveys has provided additional insight into what exactly has improved in their academic experience and affected their overall level of academic engagement compared to the previous semester. Students "expressed appreciation for the ways their professors have been communicating their expectations, creating opportunities for interaction with classmates, and building both asynchronous and synchronous activities into the class," according to a description on Georgetown's instructional continuity website (Georgetown University Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship, 2020). We are hearing from our close faculty contacts that much of what they and their colleagues have changed in their classes since the Spring 2020 semester is a direct result of their CDI participation.

From Engagement to Innovation

We know that greater numbers of faculty have been exposed to evidence-based principles of active learning, inclusive pedagogy, digital learning, and course design. Although it is too soon to tell whether our campus will embrace sustained innovation rather than just change in the wake of the pandemic, there are initial signs of promise. Early indications that the CDIs have begun to achieve Roxå and Mårtensson's goal to "fuse a culture permeated by schol-

Figure 3

Results from Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 Student Academic Surveys
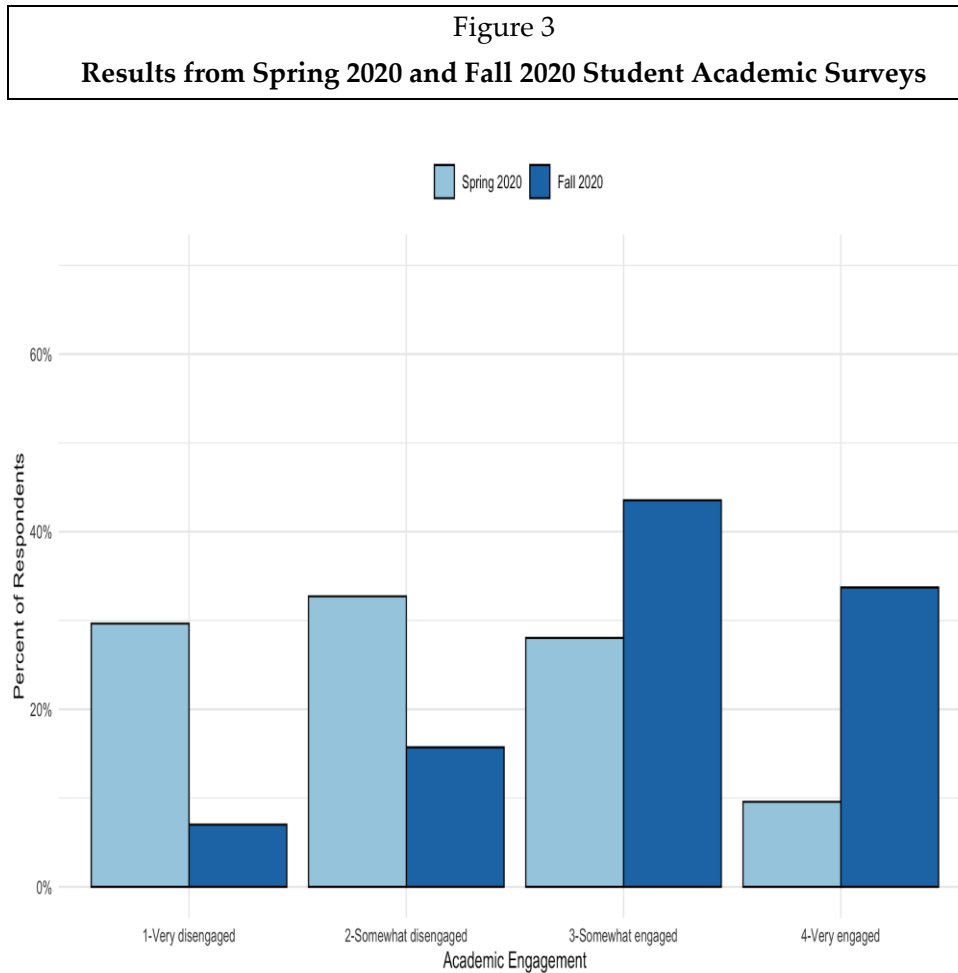
Figure 3: *Results from the student academic engagement survey distributed to students at our university in the Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 semesters. Image taken from university president video series "Georgetown This Week" (Georgetown University President Youtube channel, Oct. 5th 2020).*

arly attempts to improve teaching" (p. 557) include course redesigns, ongo-ingcommunities of practice around teaching, and a new commitment to working with students as partners. A STEM department is redesigning their large introductory class to include even more active learning elements after focusing on the challenge of building engagement in remote classes as part of the CDI. Other departmental cohorts have established their own teaching circles after

the CDI to build competence: They meet regularly over Zoom to practice with digital tools and discuss pedagogical principles. CDI groups are also continuing their work asynchronously, using the Canvas sites created for their cohorts as spaces to share syllabi, assignments, and other ideas for teaching remotely. A teaching circle of 15 faculty who teach some of Georgetown's largest lecture courses (courses of approximately 150-350 students) met recently to discuss some of the practices that they plan to continue using post-pandemic. Favored practices include virtual office hours, new assessment methods, increased active learning, and a greater focus on equity. It is too early to confirm whether these practices will be transformative, but the fact that so many of our students in large classes are being exposed to them suggests the potential for innovation to permeate our curriculum.

Benevolence-based trust and relationships around teaching also increased for some groups. One department chair reported that the CDI had served as a "place where people who don't normally work together got to connect, where needed conversations could happen, etc." Another participant commented, "[T]his CDI experience has allowed the faculty in the program to bond in ways they hadn't been able to before now." A third participant noted, "Besides sharing lots of great ideas and strategies, [the CDI] really opened up a spirit of collaboration and sharing in our department."

The Limits of Significant Conversations

Roxå and Mårtensson's (2009) groundbreaking "Significant Conversations and Significant Networks" establishes that significant conversations about teaching and learning are essential for academic development and strongly influence conceptions of teaching and learning. Yet aspects of these influential conversations run counter to many of the key elements of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). Felten describes five principles of good practice in SoTL: "inquiry focused on student learning, grounded in context, methodologically sound, conducted in partnership with students, [and] appropriately public" (p. 122). Whereas SoTL is public and evidence based, the conversations studied by Roxå and Mårtensson are private, exclusive, and rely on personal experience. We propose the CDI model as a way to bridge the gap between these influential discussions among trusted confidantes and extend them to establish a larger and more inclusive culture of evidenced-based teaching and learning.

Roxå and Mårtensson study "backstage conversations" that typically occur among small groups of colleagues and are characterized by "trust, privacy,

and intellectual intrigue." The authors stress the closed and secret nature of these conversations, which occur "in a sheltered place," in an atmosphere "where they cannot be overheard" (p. 555). One of their interview subjects describes the conditions for conversation with what seems like language (translated from Swedish) lifted from a Gothic novel: "We were sitting in X's office behind a closed door. It was not locked, but we knew that no one would dare to open it." Another respondent refers to a similarly enclosed space of conversation with a description reminiscent of a game of Clue, "with A in the car, on the highway" (p. 552). Although the authors suggest that these clandestine conversations could be linked across small networks, they don't explore how the discussions can spread more widely. They conclude by suggesting that "one might investigate how conversations about teaching and learning could be influenced...to fuse a culture permeated by scholarly attempts to improve teaching" (p. 557). The CDI represents our attempt to continue teaching conversations based on trust but extend them to a larger open network with the power to influence a university culture.

Roxå and Mårtensson observe that significant backstage conversations are not only private, but also grounded primarily in personal theories, which they note runs counter to SoTL literature. While personal conversations with close colleagues can provide an excellent starting point for inquiry into matters of teaching and learning, keeping the inquiry disconnected from a larger research community or body of evidence hinders innovation. Favoring personal experience over research may result in the spread of misinformation. For example, a recent PNAF study "Measuring actual learning versus feeling of learning in response to being actively engaged in the classroom" (Deslauriers et al., 2019). compared passive lectures with active learning using a randomized experimental approach in STEM classes. It found that students in the active classroom learned more, but they felt like they learned less (Deslauriers et al., 2019). Relying solely on student feelings as experienced by an instructor whose students prefer lecturing could result in continued lecturing without regard to the evidence for greater learning gains from more active methods. Launching each day of the CDI with a large group plenary and providing trained facilitators ensured that the small group conversation was informed by research.

Another relevant aspect of significant conversations concerns the question of equity and inclusion. If a professor's most influential conversations about teaching happen behind closed doors, they are by definition exclusive. Forty-one percent of those interviewed by Roxå and Mårtensson had fewer than five conversational partners in their circle; another 42% had just six to 10 partners. These small conversation circles are built on trust, but the numbers suggest

that many colleagues are excluded. Further demographic research is needed on what conversational partners look like. If those excluded from the conversation include contingent faculty, who do the majority of the teaching in U.S. institutions but are less likely to have offices and doors on campus, the conversations are incomplete. It is also worth exploring whether the conversational partners divide along lines of race, gender, age, sexuality, or other categories. Simply put, sticking with our own tribes doesn't spread good ideas. An open CDI model that includes faculty of varying backgrounds and ranks is more likely to promote equity and innovation.

Conclusion

The COVID crisis and resulting CDI presented fertile territory for the spread of ideas about teaching across networks. The emergency move to remote teaching was a kairotic moment in which many faculty were more receptive to conversations about teaching and learning because they were forced to pivot to using new teaching methods. Experienced developers understand the cultural barriers that keep many faculty experts from saying that they do not understand a concept. For some, the pandemic ushered in greater openness and willingness to discuss issues related to teaching and learning. It is possible, however, to take this moment as an opportunity to do more than just change teaching modes. Instead, CTLs have the chance to spread other kinds of innovation that put student learning, inclusive excellence, and evidence-based teaching at the center of our courses. Key to this effort is the move from private significant conversations to a more public networked model in order to spread ideas.

Social distancing and quarantining are essential tools in flattening the COVID-19 curve, but they are detrimental to the spread of teaching innovation. If there is anything we have learned from the pandemic, it is the grave danger of relying on personal anecdotes rather than expert research and evidence in making decisions. At a time when we must limit physical contact with those outside of our immediate family or chosen pod, we should redouble efforts to build trust across networks and make research about teaching and learning public and inclusive. This is the time for CTLs themselves to innovate with new methods of connecting and spreading research across networks of faculty, thereby accelerating teaching innovation. Doing so means spending as much time building relationships as we do offering workshops and other kinds of training.

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