LEVERAGING LEARNING ASSISTANTS TO SUPPORT THE RAPID TRANSITION TO TEACHING ONLINE

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ABSTRACT

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, institutions of higher education have made a rapid transition to teaching online. At the University of Colorado Denver, most of our lower division science courses are normally taught in a face-to-face modality. Some of our core biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics courses are taught using Learning Assistants (LAs), who work as peer learning facilitators and help faculty transform the courses to be more student centered (Otero, 2006; Talbot et al., 2015). In these Learning Assistant supported courses, the move to online teaching and learning was supported by LAs. Data from faculty and LAs showed that the LAs shifted their role to support the transition, and that their support was valuable in the new online modality. Beyond their traditional roles, LAs' presence in an online course may generate a stronger sense of community within the remote course, facilitate virtual communication between the instructor and students, promote participation in and moderate online course forums, and advise faculty about students' technological barriers. As we move into the next academic year facing continued online teaching for many of these core courses, LAs will be integral in the design and support of online learning communities.

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