

# A PROFESSIONAL PROFILE OF AN AWARD WINNING INSTRUCTIONAL TEAM

Shelley Evans, Wake Technical Community College  
 Cynthia Bowers, Wake Technical Community College  
 Chris Roddenberry, Wake Technical Community College

---

## ABSTRACT

*A collaborative effort between members of an instructional design team is the focus of this co-authored professional profile. The purpose of the collaboration was to design a unique and pedagogically sound online general psychology course, with the focus of promoting student engagement and retention. The instructional team prepared for the collaboration by attending professional development and coordinating schedules. Weekly brainstorming sessions were used to develop a course to meet the needs of diverse learners. The course was submitted to Blackboard Inc.'s Exemplary Course Program (ECP), and in March of 2018, the team received news of their exemplary award status. This profile highlights the preparation required and the methods used to collaborate to design an award-winning course.*

*Keywords: professional capstone, undergraduate, psychology, career preparation*

### STATEMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

This scholarly activity is the collaboration of an instructional team to design a unique gateway online psychology course, known as "Operation Graduating Gilbert." Operation Graduating Gilbert is a spy-themed gamified course in which students read weekly narratives about a multicultural cast of characters. Students apply course concepts to solve challenges that characters in the narratives face. The instructional team submitted the course to the Blackboard Exemplary Course Program (ECP) for feedback. The instructional team was composed of an Instructional Designer, Instructional Technologist, and a Subject Matter Expert (SME), the course instructor. The collaboration was part of Project C.O.M.P.A.S.S. (Constructing an Online Model to Promote At-risk Student Success), funded by the U.S. Department of Education First in The World Grant. The purpose of the grant is to increase student engagement and retention for students of color. Each member of the instructional team was invested in this scholarly activity and remained dedicated to their other professional

responsibilities, as well.

**Instructional designer responsibilities.** Dr. Shelley Evans, the instructional designer for the grant project, was interested in collaborating with this instructional team to develop an enriching course that learners would enjoy. Her goal was to support the mission of the grant to enhance student engagement by including real world activities, supplemental interactive materials, and clear expectations and objectives. She was interested in designing instruction for psychology, specifically, since this is her area of expertise, and she aimed to help students gain a better understanding of how psychology applies to everyday life. Shelley was also particularly interested in applying for the Blackboard Exemplary Course Program (ECP) because earning exemplary status would confirm the merit of the best practices and learning activities chosen for the course design, which she encouraged the instructors on her grant team to use.

Shelley's concurrent professional responsibilities included supporting 11 online faculty members who are part of the grant project. Shelley's role was

to coach these instructors and provide them with resources to increase student engagement in their courses through application of the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). Each semester Shelley offered consultations to the instructors and conducted follow-up meetings as necessary. Shelley created a repository for resources and course materials to share with instructors to enhance their online classes. The repository of resources is located within Blackboard, the learning management system (LMS) of Wake Technical Community College. This is an ongoing project in which she compiles best practices and course specific resources, and provides technology tools, copyright-free images of a diverse student population, and strategies for enhancing the three presences of the CoI framework (Garrison et al., 2000). Shelley also oversees the captioning of instructional videos, training the instructors on using Cielo, the team's chosen third-party captioning provider, and communicating with Cielo's customer service department as needed.

Shelley works closely with the instructional technologist and lead instructors for business and psychology courses. She gives suggestions on course design and makes agreed-upon changes within their Blackboard courses. She has created and edited materials for courses and assisted with writing assignment instructions, rubrics, and objectives. Shelley created SoftChalk lessons and achievement badges to use in Blackboard for gamification of courses. She also collaborated with the lead business instructor and the instructional technologist to replace the publisher's textbook in an introductory business course with an Open Education Resource (OER) textbook.

Shelley has presented and published research focused on course design and engagement. Shelley initiated research groups among grant treatment faculty members to research and write about the best practices and technology tools they are using in their courses. Shelley has completed over 200 hours of professional development including Wake Technical Community College's leadership training program and various courses on technology tools and teaching strategies. Shelley has also taken advantage of professional development offered through other hosts such as Blackboard, SoftChalk, Adobe, and the Center for the Integration of Research, Technology, and

Learning.

The scholarly activity fits into Shelley's overall agenda for scholarly engagement since it applies her knowledge of online instructional strategies and her subject-matter expertise in psychology. The activity is aligned with Wake Technical Community College's mission to provide quality and accessible educational opportunities to all adults. The course emphasizes real-world application and developing a growth mindset, which supports the vision of Wake Technical Community College to encourage students to become effective lifelong learners. Furthermore, the research she conducted related to course design has made a significant contribution to not only institutional knowledge, but also to the instructional design and online learning community.

#### **Instructional technologist responsibilities.**

The Instructional Technologist, Cynthia Bowers, was instrumental in the early planning of designing the Introduction to Psychology course with the goal of submitting the finished course to Blackboard's ECP. Cynthia hoped the course would be chosen as an exemplary course. This would be validation of high-quality course design, which is an accolade to any instructor and/or design team who designs and builds courses with the students in mind.

While engaging in the scholarly activity, Cynthia's other responsibilities as instructional technologist for the grant team included working with instructors on reviewing their course designs. During the reviews, recommendations were made for more efficient and intuitive navigation, improvements on written assignment instructions, and re-writing of learning outcomes to match content and assessments. Cynthia also created grading rubrics, created learning outcomes, and wrote assignment instructions and discussion prompts for instructors who requested those services. She met with instructors who needed assistance on utilizing accessibility-checker tools for documents and multimedia objects added to their courses. She provided technical support and troubleshooting for the tools and features in Blackboard. Cynthia facilitated the revisions of existing courses to meet Wake Technical Community College's required EPIC standards, and periodically reviewed courses to ensure continuity of quality standards. Cynthia also created instructional materials for instructors and her supervisor (such as infographics, slide

presentations, and instructions), and attended educational technology conferences and bi-weekly team meetings.

Cynthia participated in the research and implementation of an OER textbook as an alternative to a publisher's textbook in a gateway business course. For this project, she coordinated meetings and compiled an extensive list of OER resources for the business instructors. Cynthia continues to collaborate with others in her department who are working on a campus-wide initiative to adopt OER in many distance learning classes.

The scholarly activity fit Cynthia's overall agenda for scholarly engagement because in her position she can encourage, train, and mentor instructors to develop high-quality, visually appealing online courses that provide students with opportunities for authentic assessments and engagement with other students. Cynthia continues to promote the design of high-quality and engaging online courses using the ECP rubric and WTCC's EPIC standards for instructors who teach online.

#### **Subject matter expert (SME) responsibilities.**

Dr. Chris Roddenberry, Associate Professor and SME for this course design, entered the collaboration with four goals. His first goal was to demonstrate the power of collaborative course design by collaborating with a design team to create a more engaging class than he could build on his own. Like other SMEs with extensive online teaching experience, Chris had many ideas for developing a more engaging class. However, his full-time teaching load made it very difficult to make large, transformative changes to his class. His hope was that the design of this unique course, and the documentation of the process to develop it, would serve as a model for developing design teams at Wake Technical Community College. Chris' second goal was to build an inclusive online class to support Wake Technical Community College's minority and veteran student population. Wake Technical Community College has a diverse student population, and has multiple grants and initiatives aimed at serving different groups within this population. Furthermore, Chris wanted to build an online class that emphasized the growth mindset. The weekly narratives used characters to model growth mindset attitudes and behavior

to which students could relate. Finally, Chris was interested in fully utilizing the capabilities of the Blackboard LMS to develop a more creative course design.

In addition to participating in the current scholarly activity, Chris is an Associate Professor of Psychology in the Social Sciences Department at Wake Technical Community College. He is also the co-primary investigator on a 2.7 million-dollar U.S. Department of Education grant to improve minority retention and success in Wake Technical Community College's most popular online gateway courses. As the co-primary investigator of a large multiyear grant, Chris' responsibilities were a bit different from the typical full-time Wake Technical Community College faculty member. Whereas the typical teaching load in the psychology department was six classes per semester, Chris' teaching load during the grant was two classes per semester.

A great deal of Chris' time, aside from developing the "Graduating Gilbert" psychology course, was devoted to two other grant-related activities aimed at improving student engagement. His primary focus was the development and evaluation of a teaching protocol designed to improve the performance of minority students in online gateway courses with historically high enrollment and low success rates. Chris developed the protocol, trained instructors, then evaluated student outcomes to assess the quality of the teaching protocol. Also, to support minority students who participated in the research study, he developed a "live stream network" at Wake Technical Community College with culturally inclusive programming for online students.

Chris participated in annual benchmarking and professional development. Wake Technical Community College requires all employees to complete benchmark evaluations against other community colleges to maintain an orientation of improvement at the school. Chris had completed annual benchmarking projects and reports. He completed 30 hours of professional development annually, as required of all faculty members.

Chris believes that the difficulty of mastering multiple technologies and the time necessary to produce these highly engaging classes makes it difficult for SMEs to build the most engaging classes. In his opinion, collaborations among SMEs and instructional designers represent the future of

high quality course development. Wake Technical Community College is currently developing a strategic institutional plan for the future of online education, and he sees this particular collaboration with Shelley and Cynthia as a model for the future of course development at the college.

### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

**Shelley biographical sketch.** Shelley is the instructional designer for the First in the World grant team at Wake Technical Community College. Shelley holds a PhD in Psychology with emphasis in Cognition and Instruction and a master's degree in Special Education. Shelley has demonstrated scholarly engagement through writing, presenting, and acting as a peer reviewer. Shelley co-authored two articles on course design and gamification with the other members of the instructional team. She also previously published articles on the relationships between instructor personalities and student performance, as well as discussion board strategies. Her work has been published in the *Journal of College Student Retention and Engagement*, the *Journal of Educators Online*, *E-learn magazine*, and *Online Classroom*.

Shelley presented at conferences, including the Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education conference, Teaching Professor Conference, and the North Carolina Community Colleges Adult Distance Learning Conference. She is a peer reviewer for three scholarly journals and has served as a conference proposal reviewer for Online Learning Consortium, as well. Shelley also volunteers as a Blackboard ECP reviewer.

Shelley has been teaching online courses as an adjunct instructor at Grand Canyon University (GCU) since 2009. She teaches both graduate and undergraduate psychology courses, including topics such as lifespan development, social psychology, ethics, research methods, and neuroscience. She serves as a Dissertation Content Expert for doctoral learners, as well.

Shelley was a full-time online faculty member at GCU for over five years. During this time, she taught course subjects such as university success, critical thinking and problem solving, information literacy, teacher education, special education, early childhood development, and college algebra. As a faculty member, Shelley served as the Content Lead for critical thinking courses and was chosen

for the GCU Leadership Program. Shelley led the initiative to develop a training program for new faculty and acted as a mentor to new instructors. Additionally, she was a peer course reviewer and provided feedback to adjunct instructors regarding best practices.

In 2012, Shelley founded the first chapter of Best Buddies International at GCU, a club that pairs students at the school with an adult in the community who has a disability. Shelley received an Outstanding Advisor award for her dedication to the club. She also volunteered as a balloon artist/clown at the annual GCU Fall festival. She currently volunteers at the Holly Springs Food Cupboard.

**Cynthia biographical sketch.** Cynthia, a member of the instructional team, is the Instructional Technologist for the First in the World C.O.M.P.A.S.S. project. Cynthia holds a Master of Educational Technology degree from Boise State University with a Graduate Certificate in Online Teaching. Cynthia has co-authored two articles about gamification and a unique course design with the other members of the instructional team.

Cynthia has been teaching as an online adjunct instructor for City College of Montana State University-Billings for 14 years. She teaches a Medical Terminology course each semester to students in the Allied Health track. As part of her instructor responsibilities, she designs her own course in the D2L LMS. She creates ancillary instructional materials for students and multimedia content, including videos and podcasts specific to body systems and/or allied health careers.

Cynthia's professional experience includes over six years as a Blackboard Administrator and Technology Support Specialist for East Carolina University in Greenville, NC. While at ECU, Cynthia provided Tier 1 support for faculty, students, and staff. During her tenure at ECU, she took part in two Blackboard upgrades requiring extensive testing of Blackboard elements and close collaboration with her team leader and the campus Blackboard server administrators. Her responsibilities included training faculty in the use of Blackboard features. Additionally, she offered guidance and best practices in teaching with technology to faculty.

Cynthia co-presented with instructors at

statewide conferences such as NC Cause, and she volunteered as a reviewer for presentation proposals at NC Cause. She trained work-study students to improve their Blackboard troubleshooting and technical assistance skills, along with their customer service experience.

Previously, Cynthia worked as an Instructional Designer for the eLearning Department of the Savannah College of Art and Design in Savannah, GA. Her responsibilities included project manager duties, as she worked on several course design projects simultaneously. Those duties encompassed extensive editing of content supplied by on various topics such as art history, photography, illustration, and sequential art. Cynthia collaborated with SMEs to create assessments, such as authentic discussion forum topics. She followed stringent timetables for course design and collaborated with media designers to create multimedia that was pertinent, engaging, and consistent with Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

#### **Chris Roddenberry biographical sketch.**

Chris Roddenberry is an Associate Professor at Wake Technical Community College and acts as a co-principal investigator for the First in the World C.O.M.P.A.S.S. project. He holds a PhD in Social Psychology from UNC Chapel Hill, and he has been a full-time online teacher since 2009 with a specific interest in synchronous interaction. He was an early adopter of virtual reality environments for education, and he won a 2009 NISOD award for his virtual educational environment “The Neuromatrix,” which he created using the Activeworlds VRE product. In The Neuromatrix, psychology students logged in and created embodied characters, which they used to interact with content and other students in a five-story museum filled with YouTube videos related to each chapter.

He has presented his work on synchronous models of online education for numerous organizations, including The League for Innovation in Community College, The Association for Advancement of Computers in Education, the Instructional Technology Council, and the Association for Psychological Science. He published an article in 2017 for the *Journal of Educational Media and Hypermedia* about his work creating a virtual club community for online students.

Outside of grant and teaching duties, Chris

engages in other service activities. He represents Wake Technical Community College as a volunteer head coach for the local youth Miracle League, a baseball league for individuals with disabilities. He also organizes the social sciences department team “The Crowd” for the annual heart walk.

#### **SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY: COLLABORATION OF AN INSTRUCTIONAL TEAM**

The scholarly activity highlighted in this section is a collaboration between members of an instructional team to design a unique psychology course, known as “Operation Graduating Gilbert.” The team was made up of an instructional designer, instructional technologist, and SME. The team wrote an article about the course design and presented the paper at a conference. Another goal of the team was to submit the course for feedback to the Blackboard ECP. The team was named ECP winners and received encouraging feedback about their design.

#### *Goals*

Behaviors such as establishing a mission and setting goals are teamwork behaviors that occur in preparation for the scholarly activity (McEwan, Ruissen, Eys, Zumbo, & Beuchamp, 2017). The instructional team was established to design a unique online introductory psychology course with the goal to increase student engagement and retention as part of Project C.O.M.P.A.S.S. The focus of the team was to enhance teacher presence, social presence, and cognitive presence through application of the CoI framework. To fulfill this purpose, they integrated technology tools to enhance communication such as web-conferencing and texting tools. The team also created a spy theme with gamification features and a narrative about diverse college students into the course design. The team incorporated campus resources and journaling activities into the course with the aim to help students develop a growth mindset. Creativity was emphasized in this collaboration, with time set aside on a weekly basis to brainstorm and share ideas.

Another objective of the design team was to submit the course to the Blackboard ECP. The purpose of this was to ensure that the course included best practices in teaching and learning and receive validation for the design. The team used a detailed rubric provided by Blackboard,

Inc. to systematically incorporate best practices of online course design and identify aspects of the course that needed to be improved. They used the detailed rubric to fine-tune their course. The team looked forward to receiving feedback from peer reviewers on their course design. As part of the submission process, the instructional team evaluated their own work and reflected on areas they could strengthen. The idea of working toward an award was motivating for members of the team and this helped to keep their enthusiasm high throughout the design process.

### *Preparation*

Planning is a process vital to team success and effectiveness (Fisher, 2014). Before beginning the collaboration to design this course, preparations had to be made to lay a strong foundation. The complex multifaceted design process required an instructional team of experts in order to produce a high-quality course (Gedera, 2016). The collaboration between the instructional design team began in October of 2016 when Shelley, the Instructional Designer was hired by the college. Within the first two months of employment, Shelley completed the college's 30-hour EPIC certification program. EPIC is a professional development series on UDL, basics of using Blackboard LMS, and best practices for online teaching. Shelley attended a variety of other professional development trainings such as Captioning, Camtasia, Copyright, SoftChalk, and a Leadership series. She also attended workshops funded by the grant project about supporting the success of minority students.

Chris, the SME, also completed the EPIC training, as required of online instructors at Wake Technical Community College. He conducted primary research and completed several professional development workshops on minority issues in education. Chris attended both the American Psychological Association and Association for Psychological Science conferences, as well. He also reviewed papers authored by Shaun Harper about educational equity as preparation for developing an inclusive class. Chris attended Wake Technical Community College's National Endowment for Humanities grant-funded speaker series in Fall 2016. This was a series of six hour-and-half lectures designed to render more visible the experiences of military veterans and their

families by incorporating their perspectives into humanities courses. This series led to creating the class narratives with the character, Gilbert, a military veteran. Chris extended the narrative to include a multiethnic cast, and he completed background research on each characters' culture to provide greater depth to the storyline.

Shelley and Chris both held scheduled and impromptu brainstorming sessions at least once per week to develop ideas for a new psychology course design with some trial and error. Chris expressed interest in using Google Forms for a course module that included embedded videos and quizzes. He provided a sample module to Shelley, who developed a few more similar modules. Due to accessibility issues, Shelley was not satisfied with the modules and Chris did not feel they had the "wow" factor he was hoping for. They decided to do something completely different when they returned from winter break. This evolution of instructional activities and materials is an important part of the instructional design process (Ashfaq, Ajmal, Javed, & Tariq, 2017).

In January of 2017, the collaborative project was fully established when the Instructional Technologist (IT), Cynthia was hired. Shelley and Cynthia share an office, making collaboration very convenient. Cynthia completed the EPIC certification program shortly thereafter. Her years of experience using Blackboard (LMS) and working directly with faculty made the transition into her role go smoothly. As a previous member of the Blackboard Administrator Community, Cynthia was well aware of the Blackboard ECP and received communications about the program on a regular basis. The element of competition piqued the team's interest, but more importantly the knowledge that the course would be peer reviewed sustained the team's momentum of creating a top-quality course module-by-module.

Shelley and Cynthia familiarized themselves with the Blackboard ECP in a number of ways. They participated in the Blackboard ECP cohort, which included a series of five weekly webinars that provided details about the criteria to receive exemplary status, with a focus on the rubric. They printed copies of the rubric, which were used for quick reference throughout the

process of designing the course. Both Shelley and Cynthia signed up to be members of the Blackboard Community ECP cohort group to keep up-to-date on communications about the ECP and to be notified of updates and deadlines. Shelley also attended a conference presentation about the Blackboard rubric at the NC3ADL 2017 conference. Both Shelley and Cynthia reviewed several examples of ECP winning courses on the Blackboard website, which included video tours of the courses.

The instructional team set up regular weekly meetings to brainstorm and plan for the course design project. Even though the instructor, Chris, went to two different campuses, coordinating the day and time was fairly easy due to the flexibility he had with teaching online courses. The instructional designer set up a recurring calendar event using Outlook so that each person would have this meeting on his or her own calendar. On occasion, the team also invited the college's media production assistant, Sarah Rothman, to meetings to request graphic images to be made or for videos to be filmed and edited. The instructional team's creativity and enjoyment of this collaborative activity was evident in the titles of the weekly meetings such as "planning a totally cool course" and "top secret mission." The team also created spy-themed groups with absurd and comical names such as, "Chance O'Rayne," "Eve's Drop," and "Rocko Tuxedo." Rawlinson (2017) described brainstorming sessions as "fun" and mentioned they often generate enjoyment and laughter. Rawlinson's description fit this instructional team's brainstorm sessions. It was evident from the beginning of the collaboration that the team members shared the philosophy that work and fun could be combined.

The instructional team based the course design on the CoI framework (Garrison et al., 2000; Arbaugh, Cleveland-Innes, Diaz, Garrison et al., 2008), which was the foundation of the grant protocol that instructors were asked to implement in their courses. The CoI is a collaborative-constructivist theoretical framework that produces a meaningful learning experience through the development of three integral elements: teaching, social, and cognitive presence (Garrison et al., 2000). The instructor implemented web-conferencing, since this has been found to create

a community of practice (Stover & Pollock, 2014) and develop a sense of belonging among students (Delani & Gedera, 2014). The team included a collaborative assignment, as well, to increase student-to-student interaction. Each week of the course contained a homework "mission," which bolstered cognitive presence since each requires acquisition of higher-order thinking skills and application (Morueta, Lopez, Gomez & Harris, 2016; Yang, Quadir, Chen & Miao, 2016). Students were challenged to think critically to answer synchronous and asynchronous discussion questions, as well.

Early on during the course design process, the team decided to integrate gamification elements since empirical evidence supports that the use of game-based learning is advantageous to student persistence (Imbellone, Marinensi, & Medaglia, 2015). They included individual badges and an overarching group goal of getting, "Gilbert"—a character in the weekly narratives—to graduation. Students earned individual badges for completing course activities and assignments, which involved reading narratives about college students and applying course content to solve problems. The whole class received a status report each week to see how Gilbert was progressing toward graduation based on whole class performance with the goal of earning the status, "Mission Accomplished." Journaling activities and college resources were included throughout the course to foster a growth mindset among students.

There were some practical issues that needed to be addressed as part of this collaborative effort, but they were few. At times, the team did not agree on some minor details, such as grading or objectives associated with an assignment. Shelley and Cynthia would sometimes discuss topics in preparation of the meetings with Chris, the instructor, so they had a clear agenda at the start of the meeting. During the meetings, some topics or ideas that were considered to be of either secondary importance or worthy of further discussion at a later date were recorded to discuss at a future meeting. This was important to keep focused and not get side-tracked on items that would prevent the team from meeting weekly goals.

Although Chris does not have an instructional design background, he was always open-minded and respectful and would listen to Shelley and

Cynthia when they were discussing pedagogical and instructional design topics and best practices as they related to his course. The instructor is the one who would teach the course, so Shelley and Cynthia made Chris aware of any changes they wanted to make to the course. It was left up to Chris to decide whether or not he wanted to move forward with changes.

One noteworthy challenge was a technical difficulty that arose when the instructional team's shared YouTube account was suspended. Due to this situation, the team reached out to the media specialist who loaded all of the saved videos into another video storage platform. Within hours, the videos were once again available to the students.

Another practical issue for any effective process that involves collaboration is a dependence on trust (Mashek & Nanfity, 2015). Trust is important because it allows for a greater margin in decision making, allows for a greater clarity of roles, and it supports commitment to improving student success (Voogt, Pieters, & Handelzalts, 2016). Our team spoke about this openly. Fortunately, our regularly scheduled brainstorming sessions brought out the best in everyone. We agreed that no idea was a bad idea. Trust grew by the week as all members of the instructional team contributed suggestions for storylines, course navigation, and assessment ideas. The team often referenced the classic *Mission Impossible*, *Get Smart*, and *Rocky and Bullwinkle* television shows as they brainstormed storylines and video scripts for the course. The informal interactions between team members fostered a strong foundation for knowledge exchange.

### *Methods*

The instructional team engaged in effective teamwork behaviors such as communication, cooperation, and coordination during the process of completing tasks (McEwan et al., 2017). The team met weekly to brainstorm and divide up responsibilities for designing the course. The brainstorm sessions were very important in the design process since they allowed the team to generate new creative ideas and make decisions about what to include in the course. Contrary to the statement made by Toetenel and Rienties (2016), that when collaborating, it is difficult to share an idea "in your head" before it is fully developed, members of the instructional team

effortlessly shared ideas and worked together to develop them. There were also times when the team would brainstorm individually and share ideas at weekly meetings. This was a good strategy since, according to Deuja, Kohn, Paulus, and Korde (2014), participants who brainstormed individually generated more ideas than those who were part of a group brainstorm session.

The team organized the course into "episodes" that included a weekly narrative about typical college students throughout the course. The episodes were organized, and information was chunked into a weekly checklist, a "rally point" announcement, list of objectives, homework or "mission" folder, and supplementary materials. The navigation was carefully thought out by the team who put their heads together to think like a student, which is important for distance learning instructors to do (Draper, 1999).

The team decided to include a spy theme where the student taking the course acts as the spy, solving the problems faced by the college students in the weekly narrative as part of their homework assignment or "mission." Shelley experimented with PowToons to create a sample video version of the narrative, but the group agreed the depiction of the narrative was limited with this tool. Instead, the tool was utilized to create weekly announcements about what is expected of student, when a spy-themed template was discovered. As the SME, Chris played a more prominent role in the early part of the project involving the creative aspects of the course. Chris wrote the majority of the fourteen narratives and video scripts that provided the structure and thematic element of the course and he acted in the fourteen spy narrative videos that brought the character "Chief" to life. He also designed the content-driven interactive activities including the discussion board and the weekly webinars.

Chris created a shared Google sheet that included each week's episode title, objectives, book chapter, and basic outline of the assignments and narratives. The course outline enabled the team to visualize the learning activities and listed each module with the topic, homework assignment, journal prompts, summary of the narrative, and college resource that was highlighted each week. The use of visualization and an activity planner such as the outline can be helpful when evaluating



the quality of a course and when changes are needed to be made (Toetenel & Rienties, 2016).

At each weekly meeting, the team planned and divided responsibilities for building segments of the course. Formulating an action plan ensures that team members understand their roles in accomplishing tasks to reach goals and helps the team function effectively (McEwan et al., 2017). Each team member took notes and created checklists of tasks that needed to be completed. The team kept progress moving forward by setting goals periodically with deadlines indicated, such as the goal to “complete modules one through eight by Friday May 5th,” which was written in notes from a meeting in April of 2017. Team members also communicated with each other throughout the week via email to provide updates on progress, share resources, or ask clarification questions. These behaviors are performed during the execution of tasks that translate the plans into action (McEwan et al., 2017).

Chris taught the course while Shelley and Cynthia copied the course files into a new Blackboard shell and prepared it for the Blackboard ECP review. This was done to ensure that no student information was present in the course, to remain compliant with FERPA laws. All date and availability constraints of assignments and discussions were removed to allow reviewers to access this material. Shelley and Cynthia evaluated all modules using the Blackboard ECP rubric and critiqued each item that was present and made a list of areas that needed to be strengthened or added.

The ECP rubric has four categories: course design, interaction and collaboration, assessment, and learner support. “Course design” addresses course objectives, engagement, technology, and presentation of material. “Interaction and collaboration” focuses on communication, interaction, and developing a learning community. Criteria for “assessment” hones in on assessment design, expectation, and opportunities for self-assessment. The “learner support” rubric items emphasize supportive technologies, orientation, course and institutional policies, feedback, and accommodations for students with disabilities. The process of preparing the course for submission took approximately three months beyond the initial course design to make sure all elements of the ECP rubric were present in the course.

Shelley and Cynthia made several revisions to the course based on their initial self-review using the ECP rubric. They added goals to each week of the course and a rubric for each assignment and discussion question, and some of the assignment instructions were re-written for clarity. While the learning objectives for the modules were included in each episode folder, they added the specific learning objective to each assignment folder to more clearly align the assessment to the objective. They also revised the syllabus to include a course schedule, goals, and academic integrity policy. In addition, they split up the course modules and each proofread half of the course for grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors.

After checking off all of the Blackboard ECP rubric items, they went beyond the rubric requirements with a systematic review of the entire course for other design elements. They carefully considered accessibility of all documents in the course. They included alt tags on all images, and they provided video transcripts, captioning, and plain text URL’s for all links. They reviewed formatting, edited assessment instructions to be more concise, and included consistent wording for how to submit the files. They edited images, colors, and font for consistency throughout, as well.

Once Shelley and Cynthia felt that the course met the “exemplary” criteria for all areas of the rubric, they completed the application to submit the course for the ECP review. This process took a few days to complete. Examples of the instructors’ feedback to students were gathered, as well as anonymous student responses to the mid-course and end-of-course surveys. These items were placed in a folder for the reviewers since all student data was absent from the course shell. Cynthia proofed the course again while Shelley wrote the approximately 2,000-word justification essay that was required to highlight the best practices used for each of the main rubric categories and justify why the course was considered exemplary for each of the categories.

### *Results*

The results of the collaboration between the instructional team had a number of positive outcomes. One of the most notable results of this collaboration was designing a complete, unique 16-week Introductory Psychology course, which was selected as a winner of the Blackboard ECP.

Each member of the instructional team received a certificate (See Appendix A) and an engraved award that was presented to them by a Blackboard representative, who hosted a celebration for them and their colleagues. More importantly, the members of the instructional team received an exemplary rating score and feedback from all three peer reviewers. The reviewers pointed out strengths and areas of improvement for the course based on the detailed ECP rubric. Participating in the Blackboard ECP will allow the instructional team to guide other instructors to design exemplary courses. Shelley and Cynthia have plans to conduct a workshop at the next professional development conference about preparing an exemplary course during the upcoming college-wide professional development conference. In addition, they have both volunteered to be Blackboard ECP Reviewers.

The collaboration also resulted in additional scholarly activities. The instructional team wrote an article about the unique course design, which was presented at the 2018 Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education Conference by Shelley and Cynthia. The course design article was published in the conference proceedings and is under consideration for publication in SITE's edited book. The instructional team wrote another article about simple ways to gamify a course based on their experience designing the "Graduating Gilbert" course, which was published in *Online Classroom*. The presentation and articles all contribute to the current research on course design and increasing engagement in online courses.

The instructional team conducted student surveys for feedback and the results provide support that this course design contributes to solving the problem of student engagement in online courses. The majority of students found the weekly narratives engaging or very engaging (73%), and 82% of students were interested in helping Gilbert graduate (Evans, Roddenberry, & Bowers, 2018). When asked about the weekly webinars, 81% of students found these engaging and 23% of students mentioned the webinars on a free-response question that asked what they liked most about the course (Evans et al., 2018).

The instructional team decided to create a new version of this course called "Get to Graduation," based on all the student feedback received. For the new course, the team has developed stronger

narratives with options for the students to choose one of four multicultural character each week. Each character has a different assignment associated with him or her, which requires application of course concepts to solve problems the character faces, as a college student.

As a collaborative project, the design of "Operation Graduating Gilbert" demonstrates the integrative power of design teams involving SMEs and instructional design professionals. When instructors are part of a co-design team, this increases their professional development and expertise and can lead to further improvements in curriculum (Voogt et al., 2016). According to Voogt et al. (2016), participating in a design team can help increase instructor's pedagogical subject-matter knowledge, in addition to expanding technology skills. Collaborative design teams could be a strategy incorporated college-wide to develop higher quality courses and to provide increased faculty development.

#### *Presentation*

The scholarship of collaborating to design a unique course was made public in a few ways. First, Shelley and Cynthia presented the full paper they co-authored with Chris about the unique course design at the Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education 2018 conference. The presentation gave an overview of the engaging features of the course and the full paper was published in the conference proceedings.

The Blackboard Exemplary Program Award was made public in a number of ways. Cynthia developed an infographic (see Figure 1) to highlight this accomplishment. The infographic provided information about the award, which was distributed at the instructional team's bi-monthly grant team meeting the following week. A representative from Blackboard, Inc. provided the college with a press release (see Appendix B), which Wake Technical Community College published on the school website. The grant coordinator also emailed all members of the grant team and other individuals at the college to inform them of the accomplishment. A member of Blackboard, Inc. tweeted a link to this press release and emailed the link to all 13,500 members of the Blackboard Community who receive the weekly newsletter.

**PSY 150 | INTRODUCTORY PSYCHOLOGY  
A BLACKBOARD EXEMPLARY COURSE**



**Blackboard Learn  
a Global Education  
Community**

serving **90**  
countries

USERS **100**  
million  
2017 data

*Feedback!*

**INTERACTION &  
COLLABORATION**

"The weekly status report is fun and a strong point of the course."  
"Interaction logistics is one of the course's strongest assets."  
"This course goes above and beyond when it comes to interaction and collaboration."

**ASSESSMENTS**

"...numerous examples of application of learning to real life situations, with many requiring the student to think critically or analyze their own life using their gained knowledge."  
"One of my favorites was the assignment on Maria...they consider the events that happened to her in her life and offer help. Nice work!"

This material is based upon work supported by the U.S. Department of Education grant no. P160TSC0002.

### The Process

- Systematic self review of course using the categorical Exemplary Course Rubric
- Submitted PSY 150 Blackboard course to Exemplary Course portal with comprehensive justification essay
- Evaluated for best practices in 4 major areas by peer group of Blackboard clients utilizing the EDP rubric

**“creative, engaging, and easily navigated”**

**COURSE DESIGN**

"...is a model because of its organization and creativity."  
"...creativity and technology used for this course are undeniable."  
"...use of gamification with enough variety to retain student interest."

**LEARNER SUPPORT**

"...it appears Wake Tech addresses the (student) needs well and this course has incorporated access directly or given excellent directions on how to obtain assistance."

The PSY 150 course building and design was a collaborative project of Dr. Chris Roddenberry, Associate Professor; Dr. Shelley Evans, Instructional Designer; Cynthia Bowers, Instructional Technologist. Special acknowledgement to Sarah Rothman, Media Specialist for video production and editing.

For questions about the process:  
cobowers@waketech.edu  
sevans@waketech.edu  
coroddenberry@waketech.edu

Wake Technical Community College  
Raleigh, NC www.waketech.edu

**Figure 1:** PSY 150: Introductory Psychology A Blackboard Exemplary Course. This figure illustrates the process and feedback received for submitting a course to Blackboard's ECP.

Furthermore, Blackboard, Inc. mailed a formal letter to three administrators at Wake Technical Community College, who were chosen

by the instructional team, to inform them of the accomplishment. One of the administrators tweeted about the award to his network. Shelley and Cynthia also shared the accomplishment with their professional network on LinkedIn and their posts had over 750 views combined. Blackboard has posted the winners' names on their website, as well. A representative from Blackboard visited the college in June and hosted a celebration for the team members and their colleagues and the award was presented. The winners were also announced at the Blackboard World conference, but the team members were unable to attend.

### *Reflective Critique of Scholarly Activity*

Our course design was appraised by three peer reviewers who each rated our course as exemplary. One reviewer mentioned out that the creativity and technology used for the course are undeniable. The reviewer stated, "Students will not only learn the subject, but they will learn how to use technology in meaningful ways (general educational goal)." All three reviewers recognized the interaction and collaboration in the course as a course highlight. One reviewer pointed out that the face-to-face opportunities allowed for similar interpersonal experiences as traditional modalities, giving students the sense of being part of a learning community. Another reviewer predicted that "by the first week, students may feel as if they are on campus because of the constant and meaningful interactions." The reviewers also mentioned strengths such as numerous opportunities for application of learning to real-world situations and resources provided for students of all learning styles.

In addition, the reviewers provided some constructive feedback that the instructional team will apply to future course designs. They mentioned that while student feedback showed most students liked the spy theme, the genre may not be of interest to all students. They reminded the team that gamification is impacted by societal trends, so monitoring and adaptability would need to be in place. The feedback provided has helped the instructional team with developing a new narrative-based course in which they removed the spy theme and emphasized the challenges faced by college students.

The process of collaborating as an instructional team has been an enriching learning experience.

Each member of the instructional team agreed that this activity strengthened their professional relationships with each other and expanded their expertise in course design. Each team member learned about each other's strengths and discovered new strengths of their own. Through this experience, the team developed a new and improved mindset of utilizing best practices and lessons learned when starting new projects. They have refined their project-management skills after completion of the course submission activities. Examples of refinement include starting and stopping our meetings on time; having an agenda for each meeting; assigning tasks and duties to appropriate team members; and, most importantly, creating and maintaining an atmosphere of openness and creative thinking to foster active participation on a team or committee. This scholarly activity supports the conclusion that working collaboratively as an instructional team strengthens the process for online course design and redesign (Brown, Eaton, Jacobsen, Roy, & Friesen, 2013).

#### *Reflective Critique of Creating the Professional Profile*

The preparation of this professional profile was valuable to the instructional team because it highlights a significant accomplishment and demonstrates our scholarly engagement. A relevant skill set in process documentation was gained, which we can utilize as we undertake new projects or committee assignments, and we can promote the value of process documentation to colleagues to promote institutional learning.

This professional profile is useful because it contributes to our professional portfolios and documents a professional experience that may not be fully understood without the level of elaboration the profile provides. Since Shelley and Cynthia are part-time adjunct instructors, writing this profile provides detail to their peers about what their "other job" is like.

Wake Technical Community College has a rank system for instructors that allows them to progress from instructor through to senior professor. The rank evaluation puts a great deal of emphasis on the faculty member's scholarly and professional engagement. The creation of this profile will demonstrate Chris' scholarly engagement as an Associate Professor to contribute to his next

advancement.

The creation of this profile has allowed the instructional team to reflect on future scholarly activities that may be of interest. For example, this project has sparked an interest in all three team members to conduct additional research on course design. There is very little information on the impact that "story-driven" course might have on student outcomes, and the team would like to address this gap with future research. Next year, when the grant ends and Chris goes back to high-volume teaching, the team plans to run a more rigorous evaluation of the narrative elements of Gilbert in a quasi-experimental study. Shelley and Cynthia also have plans to conduct a workshop for Wake Technical Community College faculty to guide them on how to design and submit a course for the Blackboard ECP.

## References

- Arbaugh, J. B., Cleveland-Innes, M., Diaz, S. R., Garrison, D. R., Ice, P., Richardson, J.C., & Swann, K. P. (2008). Developing a community of inquiry instrument: Testing a measure of the Community of Inquiry Framework using a multi-institutional sample. *Internet and Higher Education*, 11(3), 133-136. Retrieved from <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/102586/>
- Ashfaq, M., Ajmal, M., Javed, M. I., & Tariq, Ch. M. (2017). A compact instructional design solves learning problems and creates learning opportunities. *Bulletin of Education & Research*, 39(3), 1-17. Retrieved from <http://pu.edu.pk/home/journal/32/#>
- Brown, B., Eaton, S. E., Jacobsen, D. M., Roy, S., & Friesen, S. (2013). Instructional design collaboration: A professional learning and growth experience. *Journal of Online Learning & Teaching*, 9(3), 439-452. Retrieved from <http://jolt.merlot.org/>
- Deuja, A., Kohn, N. W., Paulus, P. B., & Korde, R. M. (2014). Taking a broad perspective before brainstorming. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 18(3), 222-236. doi:10.1037/gdn0000008
- Draper, D. C., Laughlin, J., & Stammen, R. M. (1999). Capacity building of educators for distance education. *Journal of Family & Consumer Sciences*, 91(3), 104-111. Retrieved from <https://www.aafcs.org/home>
- Evans, S., Roddenberry, C., & Bowers, C. (2018). Operation Graduating Gilbert: Student perceptions of a unique course design. In E. Langran & J. Borup (Eds.), *Proceedings of Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference* (pp. 1452-1457). Washington, DC, United States: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE). Retrieved from <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/182720/>
- Fisher, D. M. (2014). Distinguishing between taskwork and teamwork planning in teams: Relations with coordination and interpersonal processes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 99(3), 423-436. doi:10.1037/a0034625.
- Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2001). Critical thinking, cognitive presence, and computer conferencing in distance education. *American Journal of Distance Education*, Retrieved from [http://cde.athabascau.ca/coi\\_site/documents/Garrison\\_Anderson\\_Archer\\_CogPres\\_Final.pdf](http://cde.athabascau.ca/coi_site/documents/Garrison_Anderson_Archer_CogPres_Final.pdf)
- Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education model. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 2(2-3), 87-105. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1096-7516\(00\)00016-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1096-7516(00)00016-6)
- Gedera, S. P. (2014). Students' experiences of learning in a virtual classroom. *International Journal of Education & Development Using Information & Communication Technology*, 10(4), 93-101. Retrieved from <http://ijedict.dec.uwi.edu/index.php>
- Gedera, S. P. (2016). Designing for learner success (D4LS) at Otago Polytechnic: From an E-learning designer's perspective. *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning*, 20(2), 55-65. Retrieved from <http://www.jofdl.nz/index.php/JOFDL/article/view/272>
- Imbellone, A., Marinensi, G., and Medaglia, C. M. (2015). Empirical evidence of the game-based learning advantages for online students persistence. *EAI Endorsed Transactions on Serious Games*, 1(4), e5. doi:10.4108/sg.1.4.e5
- Mashek, D., & Nanfito, M. (2015). People, tools, and processes that build collaborative capacity. [White paper] Retrieved from [http://www.teaglefoundation.org/Teagle/media/GlobalMediaLibrary/documents/resources/People\\_Tools\\_and\\_Processes.pdf?ext=.pdf](http://www.teaglefoundation.org/Teagle/media/GlobalMediaLibrary/documents/resources/People_Tools_and_Processes.pdf?ext=.pdf)
- Mason, J., & Lefrere, P. (2003). Trust, collaboration, e-learning and organisational transformation. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 7(4), 259-270. doi:10.1046/j.1360-3736.2003.00185.x
- McEwan, D., Ruissen, G.R., Eys, M. A., Zumbo, B.D., & Beuchamp, M. R. (2017). The effectiveness of teamwork training on teamwork behaviors and team performance: A systematic review and meta-analysis of controlled interventions. *PloS ONE*, 12(1), 1-23. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0169604
- Morueta, R. T., López, P. M., Gómez, A. H., & Harris, V. W. (2016). Exploring social and cognitive presences in communities of inquiry to perform higher cognitive tasks. *Internet and Higher Education*, 31, 122-131. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2016.07.004>
- Rawlinson, J. (2017). *Creative thinking and brainstorming*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Stover, S., & Pollock, S. (2014). Building a community of inquiry and analytical skills in an online history course. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 26(3), 393-403. Retrieved from <http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/current.cfm>
- Toetenel, L., & Rienties, B. (2016). Learning design—creative design to visualise learning activities. *Open Learning*, 31(3), 233-244. doi:10.1080/02680513.2016.1213626
- Voogt, J. M., Pieters, J. M., & Handelzalts, A. (2016). Teacher collaboration in curriculum design teams: Effects, mechanisms, and conditions. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 22(3-4), 121-140. doi:10.1080/13803611.2016.1247725
- Yang, J. C., Quadir, B., Chen, N-S., & Miao, Q. (2016). Effects of online presence on learning performance in a blog-based online course. *Internet and Higher Education*, 30(2016), 11-20. doi:10.1016/j.iheduc.2016.04.002

## Acknowledgements

This material is based upon work supported by the U.S. Department of Education grant no. P116F150082

## Appendix A: Sample Certificate



## Appendix B: Press Release

5/16/2018

Wake Technical Community College Team Honored with Blackboard Exemplary Course Award | Wake Technical Community College

AROUND WAKETECH

### Wake Technical Community College Team Honored with Blackboard Exemplary Course Award



---

**By:** Josh McKinney | **Web Posted:** 04/16/18 8:00am

---

RALEIGH, N.C. (April 16, 2018) - Wake Technical Community College is pleased to announce that three of its staff members have been named winners in Blackboard's **Exemplary Course Program** (<http://www.blackboard.com/consulting-training/training-technical-services/exemplary-course-program.aspx>) (ECP). The awards program recognizes faculty and course designers from schools, colleges, and universities around the world who develop engaging and innovative courses that represent the very best in technology and learning.

The team of Dr. Chris Roddenberry, Associate Professor of Psychology, Shelley Evans, Instructional Designer, and Cynthia Bowers, Instructional Technologist, won for their course "General Psychology." The course demonstrated excellence in four areas:

- **Course Design:** the elements of instructional design, such as its structure, learning objectives, and instructional strategies.
- **Interaction and Collaboration:** the level of engagement offered by the course and the level of student interaction and collaboration

## Appendix B: Press Release (cont.)

- **Assessment:** the evaluation of student work toward the achievement of learning outcomes and the quality and type of student assessments
- **Learner Support:** the resources made available to students, which may be accessible within or external to the course environment.

For 17 years, the ECP has recognized instructors and course designers whose courses demonstrate best practices. Since its founding, thousands of instructors, teachers, and designers have used the ECP to evaluate and improve their courses with recognized best practices. To be considered for the honor, applicants must be a user of the Blackboard Learn or Moodlerooms learning management systems. Submitted courses are evaluated by other course developers, instructional designers, teachers, and professors using the ECP Rubric.

"I'm proud to recognize Shelley, Cynthia, and Chris for their commitment to creating engaging, innovative courses that maximize learning outcomes," said Bill Ballhaus, Chairman, CEO and President of Blackboard. "We look forward to continuing to partner with Wake Technical Community College and other members of the educational community to drive student success."

Roddenberry, Evans, and Bowers will be honored alongside other outstanding recipients on the Blackboard website as well as in the Blackboard Community, a platform where the largest organized network of Blackboard users connect, collaborate and learn from their peers.

### **Acknowledgments**

This material is based upon work supported by the U.S. Department of Education grant no. P116F150082

To learn more about the Exemplary Course Program, visit

<https://community.blackboard.com/community/ecp>

(<https://community.blackboard.com/community/ecp>).

### **About Blackboard Inc.**

Our mission is to partner with the global education community to enable learner and institutional success, leveraging innovative technologies and services. With an unmatched understanding of the world of the learner, the most comprehensive student-success solutions, and the greatest capacity for innovation, Blackboard is education's partner in change.



## Appendix B: Press Release (cont.)

### **About Wake Technical Community College**

Wake Tech is North Carolina's largest community college, serving more than 74,000 adults annually, with six campuses, three training centers, multiple community sites, and a comprehensive array of online learning options. Wake Tech is accredited and offers more than 200 associate's degrees, diplomas, and certificates that prepare students for university transfer or immediate employment. The college offers non-credit continuing education programs that include customized workforce training, small business support, public safety officer training, basic skills courses such as English as a Second Language and high school equivalency preparation, and other courses for personal enrichment. Wake Tech also serves high school students at the Wake Early College of Health and Sciences, Vernon Malone College, and Career Academy, and North Wake College and Career Academy, in partnership with Wake County Public Schools. For more information, visit [www.waketech.edu](http://www.waketech.edu) (<http://www.waketech.edu/>), and on social media [@waketechcc](https://twitter.com/waketechcc) (<https://twitter.com/waketechcc>).