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# TOPkit: An Online Faculty Development Resource

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## TOPkit: An Online Faculty Development Resource

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Faculty preparation is a critical success factor for any program that involves online teaching and learning (Kane, Shaw, & Pang, 2016; Merillat & Scheibmeir, 2016; Parker, Maor, & Herrington, 2013). Although experts in their respective fields, faculty may not have studied online pedagogy or instructional design before stepping into the onsite or online classroom. While few educators would argue against offering faculty development, institutions grapple with limited funding and campus resources (e.g., limited space, scheduling constraints) for faculty training. To pool resources for this purpose, the State University System of Florida Board of Governors committed to sponsoring a program to develop an online toolkit and annual workshop to support faculty development efforts statewide. The result was The Teaching Online Preparation Toolkit (TOPkit), an open educational resource (website and two free, customizable online faculty development courses) that faculty developers anywhere can use. This article describes the online toolkit and specifically highlights the toolkit's pair of sample courses that may be downloaded and customized.

On February 1, 2017, the TOPkit website went live at TOPkit.org. Florida-funded and Florida-focused in support of the State University System of Florida Board of Governors 2025 Strategic Plan for Online Education, TOPkit is a comprehensive resource that provides instructional designers, faculty developers, and educational technologists with the essential tools required to support faculty in the development of very high-quality online courses. While TOPkit was launched for the purpose of supporting faculty development professionals in Florida public colleges and universities, the Community of Practice (COP), *TOPkit Digest*, and TOPkit's online resources (including two downloadable sample faculty development courses) are available to all educational institutions in the US and around the world. The TOPkit COP is a global online forum for ongoing collaboration and sharing of faculty development resources and effective practices. The TOPkit COP also advances the scholarship of teaching and learning in the online environment. Discussion topics include Ask ADDIE, Share an Effective Practice, and Topical Discussions. *TOPkit Digest* is a monthly e-newsletter that highlights activity in the online TOPkit COP and links discussion posts to the Toolkit. TOPkit's strategies and tools for effective online faculty development include Faculty Development Models, Techniques and Strategies, Checklists and Rubrics, and Sources of Data for evaluating the impact of educational technologies on students, faculty, and institutions.

A team of instructional designers at the University of Central Florida produced TOPkit's two sample courses; these courses feature Creative Commons licensing as part of the Toolkit. These sample courses are available to instructional designers and faculty developers who prepare faculty to teach online. These courses are downloadable as an IMS common cartridge that can be imported into a variety of learning management systems (LMSs) and customized to meet the needs of individual institutions. While each sample course is a complete, customizable course, one version (Sample Course) features a 10-week, facilitated course structure while the other version (Sample Course Lite) features a 5-week, self-paced or facilitated structure. The Sample Course requires approximately 80 hours to complete while the Sample Course Lite requires approximately 40 hours.

Although the two sample courses vary in length, both courses contain the same high-quality content that UCF uses to train its faculty. The adoption of these sample courses may be leveraged to drive distance learning to excellence by decreasing development time and resources.

Topics in the Sample Courses include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Accessibility & Universal Design for Learning;
- Open Educational Resources;
- Interaction, Collaboration & Group Work Strategies;
- Online Assessments & Assessment Tools;
- Managing Academic Integrity & Honesty in the Online Environment;
- LMS Training;
- Campus Resources;
- Web Vet Strategies;
- Online Teaching Persona;
- FERPA & Copyright;
- Library Services;
- Bloom's Taxonomy & Course Objectives;
- Group, Collaboration, and Conferencing Tools;
- Online Classroom Dynamics;
- Content Delivery and Logistics, and
- Emerging Technology.

As previously stated, the two Sample Courses—the full version and the light version—support customizability. Developed in the Instructure Canvas learning management system (LMS), the courses are exported using IMS common cartridge standards so that they may be imported into other systems in addition to Canvas. As previously noted, the two versions of the course vary not just in length but also in facilitation; the first step in implementing one of the Sample Courses is to determine whether your institution would benefit from, and can offer, a facilitated course. Implementation of a facilitated course requires the identification of a facilitator (or team of facilitators) and the selection of either the full course (10 weeks) or light course (5 weeks). The time commitment required of the facilitator (or team of facilitators) for the full course is greater than that of the light course, which is an important consideration. Successful implementation of either Sample Course also involves consideration of faculty schedules and how often to offer the course. For example, institutions can offer different versions of the course based on their academic calendars, potentially offering the full version during the fall and/or spring terms and the light version in the summer. Both courses also highlight specific text that is customizable and the light version contains a note for the facilitator that appears at the top of each content page. Each facilitator note features a summary and a list of suggestions for that specific content. For example, in week 2 of the light course, the facilitator note indicates that the quiz may be revised to meet the specific needs of the institution.

The Teaching Online Preparation Toolkit offers a variety of tools (Faculty Development Decision Guide, Checklists and Rubrics) and resources (Sample Courses, COP, *TOPkit Digest*, Ask ADDIE) to faculty developers, instructional designers, and other professionals invested in student success. While they may have experience in online teaching, not enough college and university faculty have had the opportunity to participate in a faculty development course that promotes high-quality online teaching. Licensed under Creative Commons, the Toolkit makes

easier the offering of faculty development for online teaching by harnessing the economies of scale to reduce the economic and staffing barriers to campus-specific efforts.