Developing Asynchronous Workshop Models for Professional Development

Imari Cheyne Tetu
Michigan State University
tetuimar@msu.edu

Shannon Kelly
Western Washington University
kellys24@wwu.edu

Jun Fu
Michigan State University
fujun2@msu.edu

Caitlin K. Kirby
Michigan State University
kirbycai@msu.edu

Scott Schopieray
Michigan State University
schopie1@msu.edu

Stephen Thomas
Michigan State University
stThomas@msu.edu

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Imari Cheyne Tetu  
Michigan State University  
tetuimar@msu.edu

Shannon Kelly  
Western Washington University  
kellys24@wwu.edu

Jun Fu  
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fujun2@msu.edu

Caitlin K. Kirby  
Michigan State University  
kirbycai@msu.edu

Scott Schopieray  
Michigan State University  
schopie1@msu.edu

Stephen Thomas  
Michigan State University  
sthomas@msu.edu

ABSTRACT
Asynchronous workshops have potential as a flexible and accessible tool for instructor professional development. Translating synchronous workshops into asynchronous versions represents an opportunity to expand access to training materials, but translating across modalities is a challenge. As facilitators of the Colleges Online Learning Academy summer fellowship program, we outline our process for developing asynchronous workshops focused on pedagogy and digital learning for graduate student instructors. We evaluated participant engagement and accessibility based on survey responses (n=10) and workshop artifacts. Our four asynchronous workshops consisted of multimodal modules with video clips from the synchronous sessions and engagement opportunities on Jamboard. We found low Jamboard engagement from asynchronous participants, but high engagement in multimodal modules. Potential barriers to access included mental health, Wi-Fi access, English language comprehension, and a lack of discussion, but many participants (4 of 9) reported no access barriers. We provide recommendations for developing engaging, accessible, and content-rich asynchronous workshops from synchronous workshop materials.

CCS Concepts
Social and professional topics

Keywords
Asynchronous workshops, Multimodality, Professional development, Remote learning

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DEVELOPING ASYNCHRONOUS WORKSHOP MODELS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Workshops are key components of professional development in many spaces, including for university instructors. University instruction is carried out by multiple groups, including tenure-system faculty, teaching-focused faculty, and graduate students. As a collaborative learning experience team, we focused on developing a series of asynchronous workshops for graduate students to aid in their preparation for teaching in online and digital spaces.

Amidst increasing reports of faculty burnout and dissatisfaction (Chessman, 2023), we have noticed a decrease in attendance at our synchronous workshop offerings. Participant attendance at any single workshop does not necessarily indicate the interest or need for that topic in supporting university instructors. With the shift toward increased online learning following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, more flexibility in professional development offerings is becoming essential. One way of offering such flexibility—and addressing challenges in workshop attendance—is through developing and sharing asynchronous learning materials with an emphasis on accessibility, engagement, and comparability to synchronous versions.

Accessibility in learning requires multiple means of engagement, of representation, and of action and expression (https://udlguidelines.cast.org). These considerations represent why to learn, what to learn, and how to learn, respectively, and serve as a heuristic for developing robust, equitable learning experiences. Following CAST’s UDL guidelines requires flexibility and creativity in learning development.

One challenge with online asynchronous workshops is the increased difficulty of facilitating collaborative, interaction-oriented learning across time and space. While the most common and simplest way to create asynchronous learning materials from a synchronous workshop experience is to disseminate a recording of the synchronous session, the effectiveness of this
approach is limited. Prior scholars have documented best practices, successful outcomes, and challenges in developing asynchronous workshops, including how to create contextualized, accessible, and participatory asynchronous offerings (Cummings, 2016; Muljana et al., 2020; Towle, 2022). Successful asynchronous workshops require both effective use of technology and deliberate experience-planning—neither of which is easily achieved through sharing a workshop recording. Beth Towle (2022) has written about the need to develop online workshops that were suited to the contexts in which they would be used. Towle’s workshops were developed similarly to in-person workshops but with increased emphasis on accessible delivery. In examining instructional designers’ participation in online asynchronous learning, Muljana et al. (2020) offered multiple levels of participation to accommodate the varying abilities and constraints of participants, which further speaks to the need for accessibility and interaction.

Advantages of online asynchronous learning models include ability to revisit recorded content and share resources with ease (Towle, 2022). In successful asynchronous learning models, Muljana et al.’s (2020) crew of instructional designers reported greater engagement when they experienced knowledge-sharing efficacy, bonding among peers, open communication, and high perceived value of learning from others. However, there are also many challenges associated with asynchronous learning, including measuring student engagement and understanding, ensuring fair labor and compensation for student workers and faculty, and providing additional technological support for participants (Towle, 2022). Additional barriers to effective learning come from participants’ personal factors and perceptions of the workshop design. In Muljana et al.’s study (2020), instructional designers were less likely to participate in asynchronous professional development events when they faced a lack of time; issues with trust, bonding, and open communication through workshop engagement and activities; and lesser enjoyment of some activities.

To foster active participation in asynchronous online learning, instructional designers should focus on emphasizing trust and open communication (Yoon et al., 2020), be aware of potential time constraints (Muljana et al., 2020), provide multimodal material in short chunks (Harris & Greer, 2017), and be aware that not all participants may be able or willing to engage with the content and materials at the same level (Muljana et al., 2020).

In this experience report, members of the Enhanced Digital Learning Initiative (EDLI) team outline the systems and methods we used in developing asynchronous workshops from our synchronous workshop content for the College Online Learning Academy (COLA) summer workshop series. EDLI is an interdisciplinary team associated with the colleges of arts and letters, natural science, and business focused on research, evaluation, and implementation of digital pedagogies and educational technologies. Within and beyond our own institution, many asynchronous workshops are converted from synchronous versions by simply providing a recording of the synchronous event to participants. Recording synchronous workshops is a seemingly easy way to allow asynchronous learning, but doing so often comes at the cost of meaningful engagement and interaction. However, developing born-asynchronous workshops is often time-consuming, and it is more difficult to utilize the synchronous workshop planning and implementation when designing an asynchronous workshop from scratch. For this reason, we developed and tested a model to create asynchronous workshops from the synchronous offerings to be more efficient for workshop designers while effectively responding to participant needs and best practices.

**PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The Colleges Online Learning Academy summer fellowship (COLA) is a mentored teaching fellowship where students work in peer cohorts to complete projects related to online and digital teaching and learning. COLA began in summer 2020 as a response to the shift to emergency remote instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first month of the fellowship, students are introduced to a series of workshops focused on online and digital pedagogical frameworks and tools, such as incorporating backward design into planning course modalities, accessibility and equity in online classrooms, and developing digital teaching portfolios. In 2020 and 2021, all workshops were offered synchronously, with recordings of the workshops later available to attendees who were unable to attend the synchronous sessions. In 2022, we expanded on the workshop offerings by developing fully asynchronous versions of each of the COLA workshops. Our goal in developing a new model of asynchronous workshops was to ensure we were offering accessible materials, providing content highly similar to the synchronous workshop versions, and encouraging maximum participant engagement. Our focus on flexibility for participants and engagement with one another is important as a component of our program’s desire to promote graduate students’ wellbeing throughout the fellowship (Clem & Buysere, 2023). There were two primary components to this work:

- develop models for asynchronous workshops;
- evaluate the effectiveness of these models in terms of student engagement and access.

**COLA’S ASYNCHRONOUS MODEL**

We worked with the following three workshop models during the 2022 COLA fellowship:

1. **Designed synchronous**: speaker delivering content to participants synchronously. Designed synchronous workshops are common in both academic and professional spaces. In a designed synchronous workshop, all information and material is intended to be delivered directly from the presenters to the participants in real-time. Designed synchronous workshops tend to be one-time events that are fully self-contained. Designed synchronous workshops may occur in a series, with the topic of each successive workshop building and expanding on the one before it, but the content is delivered fully during the workshop time.

2. **Soiree style**: participants and facilitators have an initial meeting, followed by individual asynchronous work, then individuals report out to groups (either online or in-person). The soiree style was a model developed and named by those in educator professional development at Michigan State University during the shift to emergency remote instruction at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Soiree-style workshops were intended to facilitate instructors’ professional development quickly and at scale. Soiree-style workshops involve a blend of synchronous and asynchronous learning. The initial meeting runs similar to a designed synchronous workshop, but rather than concluding after the presentation ends, the workshop continues as individual participants complete a learning activity on their own time before
coming together in small groups to report on their learning development. A soiree-style workshop may take place over a matter of hours or days, depending on the amount of time needed to complete the individual asynchronous work.

3. Fully asynchronous: Participants work individually at their own pace on workshop materials. Rather than being a simple recording of a synchronous workshop, a fully asynchronous workshop is deliberately designed for asynchronous delivery. Components of fully asynchronous workshops may vary but can include audio, video, reading, and interactive activities. Fully asynchronous workshops place emphasis on engagement and interaction that isn’t possible with a simple recording of a synchronous workshop.

In this article, we highlight the unique features and processes we used when developing asynchronous workshops from both synchronous (i.e., “synchronous-to-asynchronous”) and soiree style (i.e., “soiree-to-asynchronous”).

Workshop Format and Content
COLA’s summer workshops had three components: slides and linked materials, interactive activities, and recordings. Each of the asynchronous workshops we developed included elements of reading, watching and listening, and interacting. We invited participants to read from PowerPoint slides, watch focused video clips from the synchronous sessions, and respond to discussion prompts using Jamboard.

To develop these workshops, we began by recording the synchronous online sessions, most of which were approximately 90 minutes long. After the workshop, we reviewed the videos and clipped the most important segments with content that could not be drawn from reading the slides or linked materials. We used a combination of the Zoom auto transcript and our institution’s auto-captioning service and corrected any captions or transcripts in our clipped videos. We then embedded the video content into a copy of the workshop slides. Each asynchronous workshop contained three or four video clips ranging from one to ten minutes in length, with most clips falling in the three-to-four-minute length. The amount of time required to convert each workshop from synchronous to asynchronous varied based on frequency and public versus private sharing. It also provided frameworks for starting and enacting reflective practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section Title</th>
<th>Instructional Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Some slides have written instructions, prompts, and ideas that you can read through at your own pace. Follow the instructions on the slide and move to the next slide whenever you’re ready.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos</td>
<td>Some slides have video clips from the synchronous version of this workshop. When you get to a video slide, click play to see the video. Move to the next slide when the video is finished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamboards</td>
<td>You can engage with others in the workshop by commenting on a Jamboard. For each prompt, go to the appropriate Jamboard page and add a sticky note or two with your response to the prompt. Be sure to spend some time reading through others’ responses as well!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Content of instructional slide titled “How to Engage with this Workshop.”

We developed a total of four asynchronous COLA workshops. The topics included multimodality, student engagement, student motivation, and reflective practice. The multimodality workshop was delivered in the soiree style originally, with a synchronous kick-off session that delivered content, asynchronous assignments for participants to explore further, and a second synchronous session to debrief and provide further content. The workshop focused on how instructors can adopt a multimodal lens with their future educational experiences. Due to the length and complexity of this workshop, both the synchronous and asynchronous versions were offered in two parts. The first asynchronous segment provided an overview of multimodality and explained its context in teaching during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were invited to complete a reimagining exercise at the conclusion of the first part of the workshop, which was presented via a worksheet in Google Drive and was suggested to take one hour to complete. The second part of the workshop provided more information about how to teach with multiple modalities as well as possible impacts on students.

The remaining three workshops demonstrated our synchronous-to-asynchronous model. The student engagement workshop directed COLA fellows to consider how active learning online could facilitate student engagement. This workshop helped COLA fellows develop a conceptual understanding of student engagement, explore active learning as a feasible approach to facilitate student engagement, and develop ideas for a problem-based learning approach in online or hybrid contexts. The student motivation workshop introduced COLA fellows to self-determination theory and offered a way to understand student motivation through competence, autonomy, and relatedness. This workshop helped COLA fellows form frameworks for helping students understand their own motivations and develop structures for following through on coursework and activities. The reflective practice workshop encouraged COLA fellows to cultivate a habit of reflective practice in their own work. The workshop included prompts to consider current reflection practices in terms of frequency and public versus private sharing. It also provided frameworks for starting and enacting reflective practice.
**Survey Responses**

Of the 25 summer 2022 COLA fellows, 21 completed an end-of-fellowship engagement survey that asked about their experiences in the fellowship overall and their participation in the asynchronous workshops. We asked which asynchronous workshops they participated in, how they engaged with the workshop, how they interacted with others around the workshop content, and any barriers they experienced to engaging. Of 21 respondents, eight participated in at least one workshop asynchronously. Four students participated in one workshop asynchronously, and four students participated in two workshops asynchronously. Participants’ responses give us insight into the effectiveness and future improvements of our asynchronous workshop models.

**Participant engagement**

According to post-program survey responses, interaction with asynchronous workshops concentrated primarily on following the materials presented directly within the workshop. Of seven valid responses, six reported reading the text on the slides and/or watching the video recordings. Less than half of respondents reported taking notes or reflecting on the materials. There was only one response each for following links to further resources, engaging passively with the Jamboard, or engaging actively with the Jamboard. These responses demonstrate a pattern of significant engagement with primary workshop materials but low engagement with supplemental materials.

The first prompt was an open text box asking participants to “describe how you interacted with the asynchronous workshops you completed.” Methods of engagement described by the respondents are listed in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement Method</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading the text on the slides</td>
<td>6 of 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching the recorded videos</td>
<td>6 of 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking notes while interacting with the materials</td>
<td>3 of 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on the learning materials</td>
<td>2 of 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following links to additional resources</td>
<td>1 of 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive engagement with the Jamboard (reading what others wrote)</td>
<td>1 of 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active engagement with the Jamboard (contributing to the knowledge space)</td>
<td>1 of 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Participants’ methods of engagement.

**Use of Jamboard**

All four asynchronous workshops included embedded comments from the synchronous workshops to begin the conversation. Asynchronous participants were invited to read what others had shared and to record their own thoughts. Our measurement of participation and engagement sought to determine how many COLA fellows participated in each asynchronous workshop as well as how many of those participants engaged with the Jamboards as a means of interacting with other asynchronous participants. Of the asynchronous workshops offered, Reflective Practice had the second most participants as well as the highest level of engagement. The highest level of participation was for the Student Motivation workshop, but there was no engagement. Table 3 represents the number of asynchronous participants per workshop and the number of participants who contributed to the Jamboard discussion for each workshop.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asynchronous Workshop Title</th>
<th>Asynchronous Workshop Participants</th>
<th>Participants who contributed to the Jamboard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Practice</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Motivation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multimodality</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Asynchronous participants per workshop and engagement per Jamboard.

**Interaction with other participants**

Responses to survey questions about interaction with other COLA fellows during asynchronous workshops showed that participants valued multiple factors of engagement. Although the asynchronous workshops suggested interaction via Jamboard, only two of eight fellows reported using the Jamboards as a means of interacting with one another. Instead, four respondents used Microsoft Teams, the primary communication medium for the COLA program, to interact with one another. Two respondents used alternate means of communication, and two reported not interacting at all with the other fellows. One fellow reported that they looked at the Jamboard but did not contribute to it. Table 4 represents the distribution of respondents’ interactions with other fellows while participating in the asynchronous workshops.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction Method</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interacting with other COLA fellows through Microsoft Teams</td>
<td>4 of 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting with other COLA fellows through Jamboard</td>
<td>2 of 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting with other COLA fellows through other discussion mediums</td>
<td>2 of 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking at the Jamboard but not contributing</td>
<td>1 of 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No interaction with other COLA fellows during asynchronous workshops</td>
<td>2 of 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: In what ways did you interact with other COLA fellows during asynchronous workshops?

Another measure of interaction considered the value COLA fellows placed on engaging with their peers’ ideas as a contributing factor to their own understanding, represented in Table 5. Four of ten fellows believed that engagement with other fellows’ ideas was important.
for gaining new perspectives, with an additional two fellows stating that such engagement was important for understanding the material. Another two respondents said that engagement was important but did not specify how or in what ways. Finally, two respondents claimed that engagement with others’ ideas was not important at all in the asynchronous workshops.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction Importance</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Important for understanding the material</td>
<td>2 of 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important for gaining new perspectives</td>
<td>4 of 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important in non-specific ways</td>
<td>2 of 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not important</td>
<td>2 of 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: How important was engaging with other fellows’ ideas to your sense of learning from your workshops?

Accessibility and barriers
The final question asked COLA fellows to report any barriers to learning they may have encountered while participating in the asynchronous workshops.

Of participants who engaged in asynchronous workshops, one reported lack of access to reliable Wi-Fi, and one reported English as a Second Language concerns. Of participants who did not complete any asynchronous workshops, two reported barriers with mental health and one reported a barrier with lack of discussion. Four participants did not encounter any barriers to completing the asynchronous workshops.

DISCUSSION
In developing and implementing the COLA asynchronous workshops, we were concerned with developing accessible materials, providing content with high similarity to that of the synchronous workshops, and magnifying participant engagement. Given that each of these workshops was offered synchronously before the asynchronous versions were created, the number of asynchronous participants may reflect the number of COLA fellows who were not able to participate in the synchronous versions. We did not find any significant accessibility barriers throughout our research, and ensured that our videos were captioned and reading materials followed best practices for accessibility. Because COLA fellows participated in either the synchronous or the asynchronous versions of each workshop, we cannot assess how well the fellows believe the asynchronous versions replicate the content of the synchronous versions. However, using video and audio clips and slides directly from the synchronous workshops did help keep content consistent across modalities.

Perhaps the most interesting data is related to participant engagement. The higher engagement in the interactive components of the Reflective Practice workshop may be due to the personal nature of the topic. Participants in the Reflective Practice workshop were asked to consider their own practices, goals, and thoughts. The remaining workshops were more content-oriented and asked participants to brainstorm ideas based on the concepts. Additionally, not all COLA fellows had previous teaching experience, so they may have found it easier to respond to questions about their own reflective practice than prompts related to working with students.

Students’ lower level of engagement with additional resources and other fellows in the asynchronous versions indicates that students engaging in the asynchronous and synchronous workshops are not likely having equivalent experiences. Prior studies showed that learners are less likely to participate in asynchronous online discussions when there are no clear deadlines for posting (Pena-Shaff & Altman, 2015) or the expectations for their engagement in such activities are not clear (Kim, 2013).

In the synchronous workshops, students were directly engaged with one another through video chat and breakout rooms, and they had a high percentage of participation in Jamboards and other collaborative activities. This pattern indicates that participants may be more willing to spend time with prompts and activities directly embedded in the main workshop than they are to pursue external, additional materials on their own time.

We achieved accessibility and similarity of content, but we need to revise our synchronous-to-asynchronous model to increase participant engagement. We have considered multiple avenues for promoting engagement in these asynchronous models. For engagement in brief reflective activities (for example, those that participants might report out in Zoom chat), asynchronous participants could write down their own thoughts, share them on a Jamboard or other collaborative online space, or be asked to write them in a reflection that they share with facilitators. For activities that require greater engagement, such as developing their own materials or critiquing example materials, we currently use Jamboards or worksheets shared in Google Docs that the participants copy and complete. To encourage engagement in these types of activities, we have discussed creating Qualtrics or Google Forms submissions to accompany the asynchronous workshop slides, scheduling small working group sessions for asynchronous workshop participants, or suggesting that asynchronous workshop participants complete the workshop with a colleague and share responses with them. In future iterations, we will also implement facilitation strategies such as incorporating deadlines for asynchronous collaborative activities, following up with completion reminders, and clearly communicating the learning objectives and expectations at the beginning and end of each workshop.

TAKEAWAYS/IMPLICATIONS
The process of creating asynchronous workshops from our synchronous material became streamlined as we gained experience. Some prior planning of materials for the synchronous workshop also facilitated a smooth transition to asynchronous materials. For example, auto transcription was a valuable tool in ensuring accessibility of our workshops, and creating slides for the synchronous workshops with more text than we normally would to ensure points conveyed in asynchronous versions. Following our experiences described above, the basic process that we recommend in improving asynchronous materials over a simple recording is:

1. Clip videos. Ideally, short video or audio clips with captions or transcripts of presenters delivering content that cannot be understood by reading the slides, links, or other workshop materials. At a minimum, dead space, introductory chatter, or audio and video of participants who did not consent to be involved in future workshop materials should be removed.
2. **Streamline materials.** Remove any redundant materials from the presented video clips. Include as many materials as possible within the slide deck or presentation of asynchronous materials to reduce participants’ need to move back and forth between materials.

3. **Develop asynchronous engagement opportunities.** Consider the sharing setting of linked materials, ways to connect participants with one another, how to share prior participants’ input as examples, and setting deadlines to create buy-in for engagement in the asynchronous components.

It’s worth noting that our experience was based on using online synchronous workshops in creating asynchronous materials, but the process would be similar for in-person synchronous workshops. Ensuring that the audio and video recording of in-person workshops is high quality would be important and potentially more challenging than in online workshop recordings for translation of the activities.

Through examining participants’ self-reported engagement, we also found that our model should be adjusted to promote greater engagement with supplemental materials, as very few COLA fellows chose to interact with the supplemental materials during this initial asynchronous study. We also need to focus additional attention on providing means for conversational interactions in familiar spaces rather than one-time posts in a tertiary platform. Finally, we need to consider variables in engagement levels, Wi-Fi requirements, and pausability/pacing for English learners.

Further study is needed regarding participants’ reasons for choosing asynchronous versus synchronous workshops as well as participants’ preferred means of interaction.

**REFERENCES**


**ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Imari Cheyne Tetu is a research assistant with the Enhanced Digital Learning Initiative (EDLI) and a PhD student in Rhetoric and Writing at Michigan State University. Her work encompasses UX research, digital accessibility, and technical communication; and her teaching experience includes a mix of online, in-person, and hyflex sections of accessibility for the humanities, experience architecture, and writing as inquiry. She also serves as a graduate researcher with WIDE (Writing, Information, and Digital Experience) and as a freelance technical writer and instructional designer.

Shannon Kelly is the Assistant Director of the Teaching and Learning Division at Western Washington University. She holds a PhD in Rhetoric and Writing from Michigan State University, where she also contributed to this piece. Her work focuses on coalitional teams, relational institutional change, and trauma-informed practices.

Jun Fu is the data analyst for the Neighborhood Student Success Center (NSSC) at Michigan State University. With rich experiences in higher-education research, teaching, and program evaluation, she leads or conducts holistic assessment and data analytics activities for the Center and other Pathway Programs with a lens of DEI. An educational psychologist by training, she adopts an integrated lens to analyze the motivational, social, and cultural factors that shape learning and instruction. Her research has been published in journals such as *Teaching of Psychology, Environmental Conservation and Higher Education Today.*

Caitlin Kirby is the Associate Director of Research in EDLI, based in the College of Arts and Letters and College of Natural Science at Michigan State University. Her research uses qualitative and quantitative methods to explore student and instructor outcomes of professional development and classroom interventions across disciplines. Dr. Kirby earned her Ph.D. in Science Education and Environmental Science from Michigan State University in 2020. Dr. Kirby has teaching and curriculum design experience in K-12, undergraduate, and informal spaces across mathematics, sciences, and social science.

Scott Schopieray is Assistant Dean for Academic and Research Technology at the Michigan State University College of Arts and Letters. He also serves as Associate Director of MESH Research, a center focusing on futures of digital scholarly publishing, and as Co-Director of the Enhanced Digital Learning Initiative (EDLI).
His current research looks at sustainable models for educator professional development, digital presence and public scholarship, and curricular development and revision.

Stephen Thomas serves as Assistant Dean for STEM Education, Associate Director for Integrative Studies, and Digital Curriculum Coordinator at MSU’s College of Natural Science. His work pivoted from studying fungal pathogens to enhancing science communication and STEM education through technology. Notable projects include using comics to ease science anxiety, creating a general science MOOC, and devising interactive museum exhibits. His recent endeavors focus on the ‘Drawing to Learn Biology’ curriculum that fosters scientific observation and reasoning via nature journaling. Additionally, he fosters professional communities around STEM teaching, research, and the intersection of art, science, and culture.