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Student and Faculty Preferences Regarding Instructional Modalities at an HBCU Business School as a Result of Covid-19 – A Change Management Approach and Mindset

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the higher education community, especially the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). At a micro-level, the HBCU business schools have felt the effects as well, particularly in critical areas such as instructional modalities and the overall classroom experience. Since COVID-19 has changed the educational game, what do key stakeholder groups now prefer regarding instructional modalities in the HBCU business school? This study will answer this question and more while incorporating a change management approach and mindset for leadership and decision-making.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the higher education community, especially the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). A study conducted by the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) of more than 5,138 undergraduate students enrolled at 17 private HBCUs across the country found that many are dealing with hardships such as sick family members, trouble paying bills, and general stress from COVID (St. Amour; United Negro College Fund; Valbrin, 2020). At a micro-level, HBCU business schools have felt the effects as well. Faculty within one HBCU business school surveyed 148 of its students and found that COVID-19 had adversely affected students' mental health (65%), financial health (61%), physical health (33%) and academic performance (59%) in Fall 2021 (Powell & Rey, 2022). Business leadership wanted to explore these shifts further by examining how COVID-19 has affected a related area: preferences regarding instructional modalities. The classroom instructional experience plays a

significant role in retention, academic performance, and can be influenced by changes in the external environment. Authors such as Gasman (2021), St. Amour (2021), Sande et.al (2021) and others point out the potential for a dramatic shifting of the instructional modalities that are used in the education process.

Historically, higher education has been criticized for the lack of innovation in its delivery process in adapting to the opportunities associated with switching to a virtual instructional platform. Technological innovations in the classroom have not been a priority for educational leadership (Duderstadt, Atkins, & van Houweling, 2002). Conversely, business schools have long recognized the need for online education when compared to other academic disciplines. With the need to respond to the globalization of business education, increasingly demanding customers (degree students and executive education participants), and the need to provide global learning solutions with faster delivery time – business schools understood quite early that the traditional educational model of direct interaction between students and teachers within the confines of a single physical classroom needed to evolve from a technological context (Hawawini, 2005).

The COVID-19 pandemic has hastened adoption of technology and caused a rapid emergency pivot to the use of digital technology for instruction. Given the influences such as COVID-19 and the lack of prioritization regarding technology, what are HBCU business schools to do when it comes to the strategic delivery of instructional modalities in a fluid environment? Do HBCU business schools even know what students now want when it comes to instructional delivery? Do they even know their end-users' experience with key technologies?

This study seeks to address this through the examination of student and faculty preferences regarding instructional modalities across multiple semesters at one HBCU business school. The primary research questions that will guide this study are as follows:

- What are the critical factors for increasing end-user proficiency and comfort of the instructional modalities that were utilized as a result of COVID-19?
- Would students and faculty prefer to continue using virtual technology on a permanent basis?

Given the leadership implications of this study, the researchers discuss the findings and recommendations from a change management approach and mindset.

Literature Review

Much has been written concerning the impact of COVID-19 on educational outcomes. Researchers have found that HBCU students have been most adversely impacted during the pandemic in terms of access to technology and retention (St. Amour, 2021). Their needs at the height of COVID were quite varied and spanned across a number of categories. Due to the interruption and stress from the Spring 2020 semester, the majority of respondents in the UNCF HBCU study, particularly first year HBCU students, wanted to return to their university campuses for some level of face-to-face instruction in the subsequent semester (United Negro College Fund, 2020). At the conclusion of the Spring 2020 semester, Powell and Rey (2021) surveyed 111 HBCU business students to examine their satisfaction with remote instruction at the height of COVID. High levels of dissatisfaction were present and significant group differences were noted among the first- and

second-generation groups. Lower mean scores indicating dissatisfaction were prevalent among first generation business students. Sande and et.al (2021) found that students desired increased orientation and training on e-courses and Canvas, followed by more communication and weekly updates by faculty, video descriptions accompanying assignments, supply of additional technology, alternative assessment methods, and more emotional support.

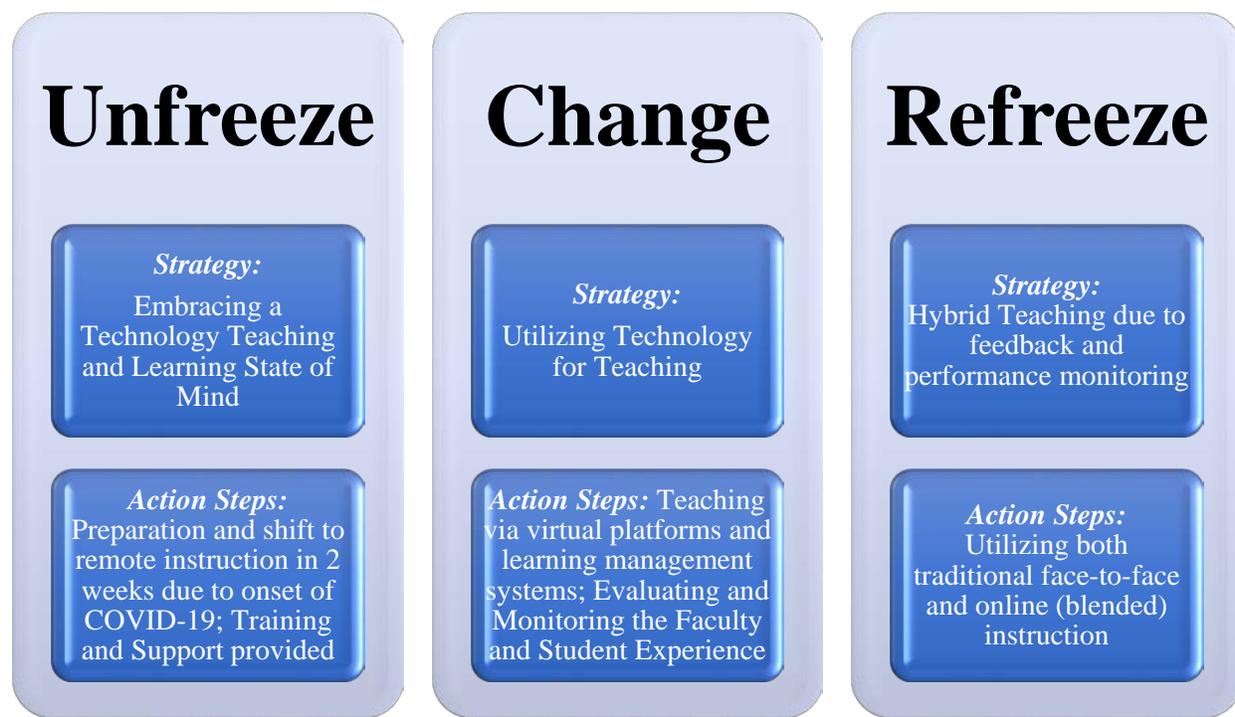
There can be no doubt that faculty and students in general have been negatively impacted by the disruption that COVID-19 has had on the learning environment. The majority of HBCU students in the UNCF study preferred in-person classes on campus (United Negro College Fund, 2020). Information from a survey by OneClass of 14,000 students in Fall 2020 reported by St. Amour (2021) indicates that 85% of the respondents' grades were negatively impacted by the pandemic. The two main factors affecting grades were academic changes caused by remote instructional technology and mental health issues in their personal adjustment to the pandemic (Amour, 2021).

Sande et.al (2021) points out the work by Lewin (1947) regarding Change Management, which in the business school is always a topic of major interest in terms of leadership (Collins 2001) and how to get organizations to realize the need for change. This is followed by the way in which to structure the transition to deliver the desired result. The model for change management according to Lewin (1947) is composed of three stages, referred to as (1) Unfreeze, (2) Change and (3) Refreeze. In the first stage, leadership is preparing the organization to embrace change; recognizing that the status quo will no longer provide a viable solution to the organization's mission. In the second stage, individuals are concerned about how they will be affected by the Change and how they can adopt for a successful outcome. Time and communication are needed to create a feeling of connection. Finally, in the third stage or the Refreezing, the new form can include a cultural shift and leadership to support the change taking place.

The Change Management Model Applied in a COVID Environment

In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic for one HBCU business school, the Change took the form of a crisis with the Unfreezing stage and the Change stage taking place in an emergency format, thus mandating that higher education and education as a whole shift to remote instruction in a matter of one to two weeks, if not sooner. The university provided training for faculty and students on learning and teaching in the online environment with video conferencing and teleconferencing systems such as Zoom, Teams, and other platforms that can be integrated into learning management systems such as Moodle, Blackboard, and Canvas. To maintain impactful and superior instruction, Quality Matters (QM) and other trainings were provided to faculty. Students were supplied with support services where possible. Technology in the form of hardware and software proved to be a problem and funding was allocated to address these issues. Thus, the business school went through Stages One and Two in record speed. For Fall 2022, it is anticipated to be the restart of education in the traditional or face-to-face format. It will be over two years in higher education since the transition to remote instruction was made. What did the business school learn from this experience and what will they carry forward in the context of the Lewin model with respect to the third stage of change or the Refreeze? Will they move to a model that incorporates the best of the traditional face-to-face model and online or virtual model in the form of a hybrid model? The following schematic illuminates a change model that the business school experienced at the height of COVID-19.

Figure 1
Change Management Model Underpinned by COVID-19



Methodology

To address the primary research questions for this study, one Historically Black business school surveyed 47 graduating seniors in Fall 2020 and 37 in Fall 2021 for a total population size of 84 graduating seniors. Information was collected on 70 variables from the graduating seniors for Fall 2020 and Fall 2021 using the online survey platform, SurveyMonkey. Information was collected on students regarding their experiences in the College of Business from the context of quality of instruction, advising, placement, facilities, student and faculty interaction among others. Additional variables were added to the survey in 2020 to assess student attitudes with various learning modalities as a result of COVID-19. The main question of concern in the study is to assess the impact of COVID-19 regarding students' preferences toward instructional modalities. The researchers are specifically concerned with better understanding the preferences of students based on face-to-face, synchronous online, asynchronous online and hybrid teaching modalities. In addition, the paper was presented at the Southwestern Teaching Conference held at Texas Southern University in the Spring 2022 and one of the suggestions was to conduct a survey of the faculty to see if their preferences were also changing toward more hybrid instruction as a result of the investment made in virtual instructional technology. Thus, in Spring 2022 faculty were surveyed. Twenty responses out of a population of 26 full-time faculty were surveyed, resulting in a completion rate of 77%. The faculty were asked a series of questions relating to their experience with traditional and online instructional methods as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and their involuntary transition to remote instruction.

Analysis and Findings

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics consisting of means, standard deviations and other key statistics were calculated on the variables and analyzed. Some of the important findings are as follows:

What could have been done to better support you in making this transition?

In Fall 2020, the Need for Technology Support was 63% in Figure 2 vs Fall 2021 Technology Support at 53% (Figure 3). A change of about 10% points away from hard technology to more help sessions for online instruction in 2021.

Figure 2
Student Survey Fall 2020

Q61 What could have been done to better support you in making this transition?

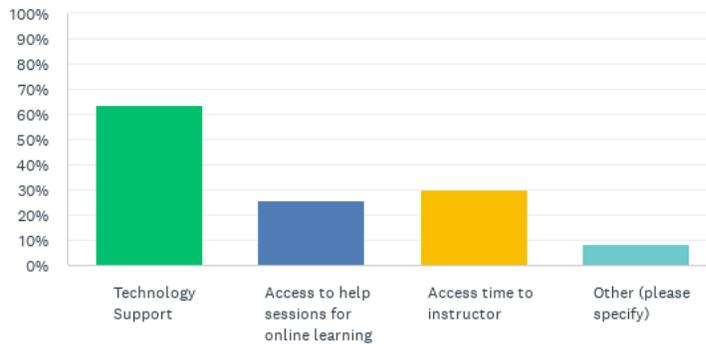
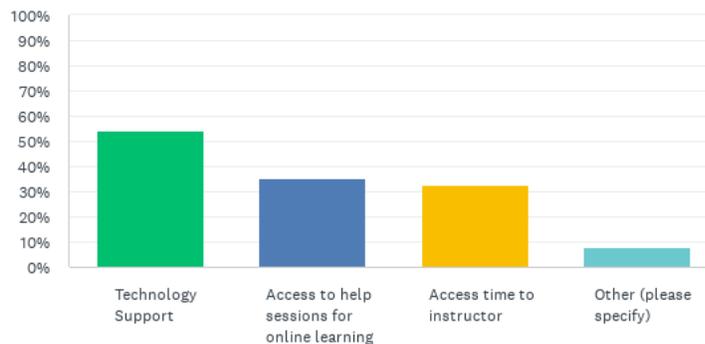


Figure 3
Student Survey Fall 2021

Q63 What could have been done to better support you in making this transition?

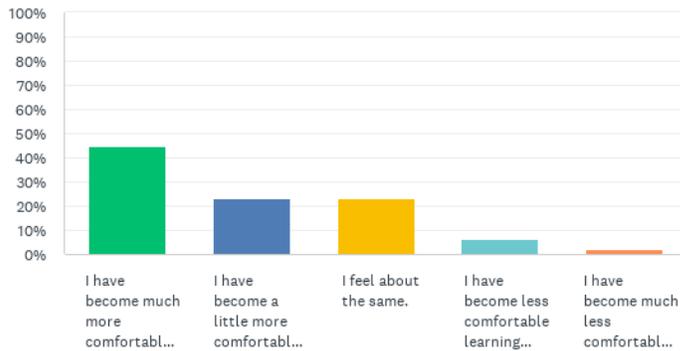


How has your experience of learning in a remote environment changed?

The responses to this question are displayed in Figures 4 and 5 below. For Fall 2020, 45% of the respondents had become more comfortable with remote learning compared to Fall 2021 when 61% had become much more comfortable with remote learning technology, a change of over 15% becoming much more comfortable with remote instruction in 2021. This indicates a dramatic shift in a one-year period. In fact, when the researchers add the percentage of students that have become much more comfortable with remote learning and those that are a little more comfortable in 2021, they realize that over 80 percent are somewhat comfortable with remote learning.

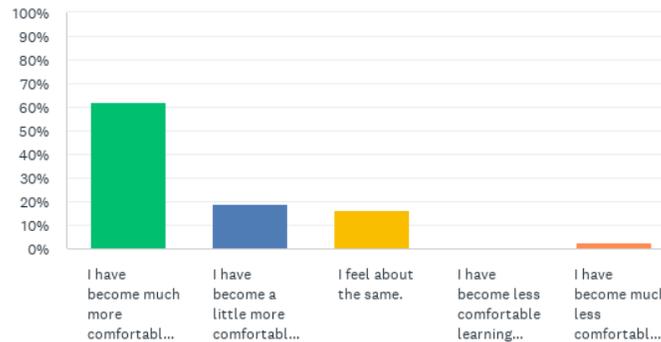
**Figure 4
Student Survey Fall 2020**

Q67 Take a minute to think back to the first week of remote learning. Comparing how you feel now to how you felt then, how has your experience of learning in a remote environment changed?



**Figure 5
Student Survey Fall 2021**

Q69 Take a minute to think back to the first week of remote learning. Comparing how you feel now to how you felt then, how has your experience of learning in a remote environment changed?



These two questions are representative of the outlook on the part of the graduating seniors in that the critical need was for technology support in the form of hardware, software and training support. The same was true for faculty as well (See Tables 1 and 2). As the researchers expect, given more time, students and faculty are making the adjustment or unfreezing in adopting to the changed instructional technology. As access to technology and training is improved, the researchers would expect a change to an even higher level of comfort to be realized.

Student and Faculty Instructional Preferences Impacted by COVID-19

Student Preferences

As displayed in Figures 6 and 7, students in Fall 2020 indicated face-to-face instruction as their most preferred teaching modality at 38.30% while synchronous online was the second most preferred method, followed by hybrid, and the least preferred being asynchronous online instruction. Fall 2021 in comparison to Fall 2020 shows a substantial decline for face-to-face instruction to 27.03%. This represents a change of over 10 percentage points away from face-to-face in this one-year period. In Fall 2021, the most preferred method for instruction by students is hybrid at approximately 65% followed by Face to Face, synchronous online, and least preferred is asynchronous online instruction. The researchers noted that hybrid instruction increased by 43.58 percentage points from Fall 2020 to Fall 2021 compared to other modes of instruction. Thus, these data points indicate that students prefer access to the instructor in the traditional and the combination of traditional and virtual format known as hybrid, but predominately in the hybrid format. When examining the two most popular modes of instruction for students in Fall 2021, face-to-face and hybrid are preferred by approximately 91% of the students while in Fall 2020 the combined total for these two modes was approximately 60%. Thus, a 30-percentage point increase in these two modes are present; however, the face-to-face preference on the part of students was declining while hybrid was increasing over this period.

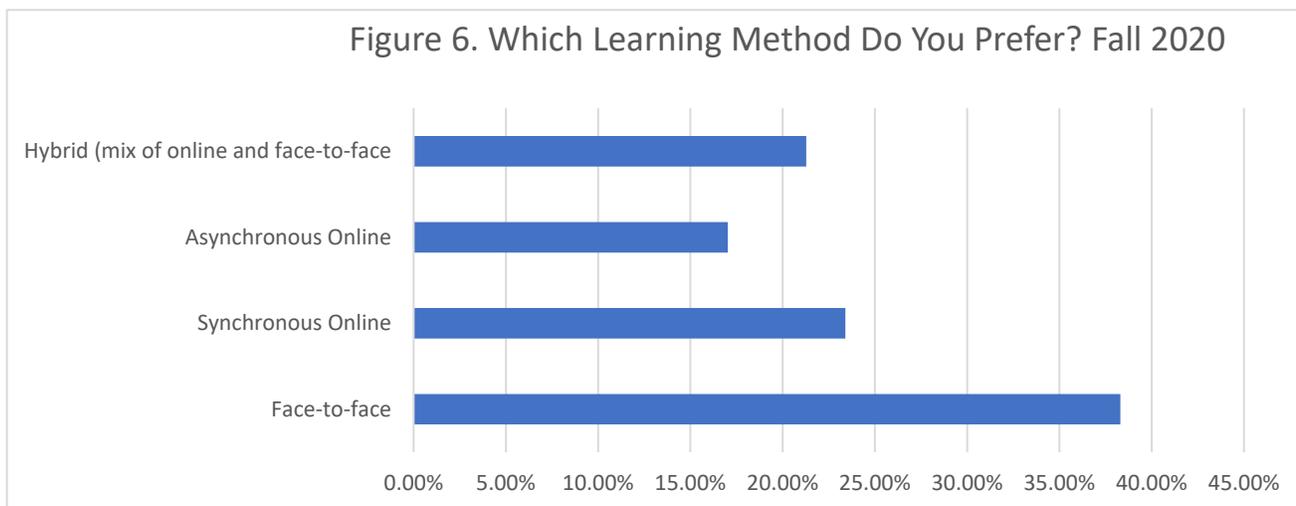
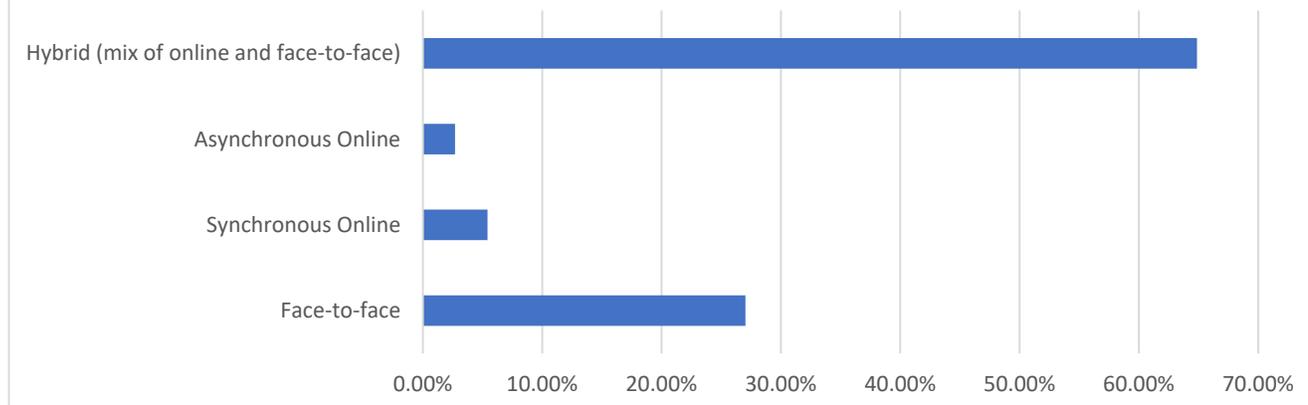


Figure 7. Which Learning Method Do You Prefer? Fall 2021



Pairwise t-test of Population Means

From the pair-wise t-test of population means in Table 1, it was observed that there were significant differences between the two graduating classes in the area of parents' education, views on helpfulness of staff, faculty help provided to students, and experience working with remote learning. Question 68 asked the students to provide their preference with respect to instructional modality, where the value one is equal to face-to-face, the value 2 is equal to Synchronous Online, the value 3 is assigned to Asynchronous Online and the value 4 is given to Hybrid Instruction. The population mean for the Fall 2020 graduating class is 2.21 versus 3.05 for the Fall 2021 class. The t-statistic with a value of 3.04 is significant at the one percent level, this result validates that preferences on the part of the Fall 2020 students and the Fall 2021 are indeed statistically different at the one percent level. The next most significant variable is Parents' Education a proxy for family income that shows a significant difference at the one percent level with a t-value of 2.81. This result indicates the Fall 2021 seniors have a higher percentage of parents with high school education or less compared to the Fall 2020 seniors. Thus, the implication is that the 2021 graduating seniors on average coming from lower income parents or households may prefer more remote instruction methods that can be important to generate job opportunities with more flexible work and study schedules. Other variables, that were significant are having a helpful staff and a faculty that works to help students, both are important (values greater than 4 out of max of 5); however, they are less important for the Fall 2021 group compared to the Fall 2020 group. This would suggest that a helpful staff and faculty in a time of crisis such as the initial move to remote instruction is crucial. The final variable significant in the analysis is experience with remote learning where the value one represents become much less comfortable with remote learning and five represents having become much more comfortable with remote learning. Thus, it seems somewhat expected that the more experience and engagement one has with remote learning the more comfortable they will become with this method of instruction. One would say that it is what is expected when one talks about the gains to be expected as one engages in learning by doing.

Table 1
Results of t-Test Analysis

Variable	df	Mean 2020 vs 2021 Population	t-value	Probability	
Gender (Q7)	82	0.42 vs 0.62	-1.79	0.0759	Male=1
Parents Education (Q10)	82	0.41 vs 0.71	2.81	0.0061	HS or Less = 1
Post-Graduation Goal (Q22)	82	1.87 vs 1.59	1.64	0.1029	Traditional = 1 Intrapreneur = 2 Eship = 3
Would Attend SU MBA (29)	82	0.80 vs 0.62	1.92	0.0575	Attend = 1
Helpful Staff (Q34)	82	4.65 vs 4.40	2.07	0.0411	Very Satisfied = 5
Quality of Academic Advising (40)	82	4.59 vs 4.27	1.72	0.0888	Very Satisfied = 5
Faculty Work with Me (Q48)	82	4.55 vs 4.21	2.25	0.0268	Very Satisfied = 5
Sense of Community(Q54)	82	4.42 vs 4.16	1.90	0.0606	Very Satisfied = 5
Resident Student Remain on Campus (Q59)	82	2.04 vs 1.72	1.62	0.1088	Remain on Campus = 0
Experience with Remote Learning (Q67)	82	3.78 vs 4.37	-2.25	0.0267	Become Much More Comfortable = 5
Which Learning Method do you Prefer (68)Q	82	2.21 vs 3.05	-3.04	0.0031	Hybrid = 4
Bold Significant at Five Percent Level or Less					

Faculty Instructional Preferences

The Spring 2022 survey of the faculty indicates that 55% of the faculty have become much more comfortable teaching remotely and an additional 15% are somewhat more comfortable with remote instruction (Table 2). Thus, 70% of the faculty indicate comfortability with remote instruction, while 30% are the same or less comfortable with remote instruction. Faculty were asked to indicate the one thing they would change about their experience with remote instruction if they had the opportunity (Table 3), they responded with their top five as follows: (1) the need for technical support (30%), (2) students with technology (25% - Laptops, software and hotspots), (3) security in the examination process (20%), (4) better training for students (10 %) and (5) better understanding of RPNOW (Remote Proctor) testing security (5%). When asked to indicate their preference for most preferred teaching method (Table 4), 55% indicated face-to-face followed by

25% for hybrid and 10% each for synchronous and asynchronous teaching modalities. Thus, while the faculty has become more comfortable with remote teaching, they still prefer face-to-face or traditional instructional methods. While much progress has been achieved in faculty development and upgrades to the technology infrastructure, the faculty in the College of Business prefer the traditional instructional methods. If the administration wants to move further down the virtual instructional pathway, it is critical to take away the objections in the form of the technology infrastructure and training (as indicated in Table 5) needed to make virtual instructional preferences as good as or superior to traditional instructional preferences. The informational technology revolution is here to stay and artificial intelligence is moving forward at an accelerating pace. There needs to be technology that can create the best of both worlds and make the transitional experience seamless and efficient.

The faculty rated the institution on its handling of the emergency transition to remote instruction as displayed in Table 6. While no faculty rated the response to the emergency as poor, only 25% indicated it as excellent. As Jim Collins (2001) has indicated, one should not let good be the enemy of great. There is much room for improvement, especially if COVID-19 continues to mutate into more serious variants.

Table 2
Comfort Level of Remote Teaching

Take a Minute to Think Back to the First Week of Remote Teaching. Comparing how you feel now to how you felt then, how has your experience of teaching in a remote environment changed?		
	Number	Percent
I have Become much more comfortable	11	55
I have Become little more comfortable	3	15
I feel about the same	3	15
I have Become little less comfortable	2	10
I have Become much less comfortable	1	5

Table 3
Changes to Remote Teaching Experience

If you could change one thing about your experience with remote teaching, what would it be?		
	Number	Percent
Better Technology	6	30
Students with laptops, software and hotspots	5	25
Security during testing (test monitoring)	5	20
Better Training for students on technology	2	10
Technical difficulty with RPNOW	1	5
Other	2	10

Table 4
Teaching Method Preferences

Which Teaching Method do you prefer?		
	Number	Percent
Face to Face	11	55
Synchronous Online	2	10

Asynchronous Online	2	10
Hybrid	5	25

Table 5
Improvements to Remote Instruction Transition

What Could have been done better in making the Transition to Remote Instruction?		
	Number	Percent
Technology Support	11	55
Access to Help Sessions	6	30
Access Time to Training Instructor	1	5
Other	2	10

Table 6
Support of Institution

Overall, how would you rate your institution's support in the transition to remote teaching during the spring and summer 2020 semesters?		
	Number	Percent
Excellent	5	25
Good	8	40
Fair	7	35
Poor	0	0

Conclusions

In the analysis, the researchers used t-tests to account for differences in the two populations to determine the statistical significance of variables hypothesized to account for changes in preferences. The transition of students to the virtual environment with hybrid instruction being the most preferred is dramatic and will cause the University administrations to adjust their academic offerings (Refreeze). Change is here to stay and stakeholders must adapt more rapidly than initially expected.

The educational landscaping is shifting rapidly with the COVID-19 pandemic moving education and the business world ahead in the use of digital communication technology at a pace that stakeholders have never experienced. Some would say that the move has never occurred at this rate and that change will never lag or move this slow again. Business executives are having second thoughts about the impact of COVID-19 and the digital revolution in the case of the remote workforce. In many cases, employees are being ordered back to the office as productivity has suffered in the workplace. Executives are worried that workers are being distracted by competing activities away from the office and not gaining the needed teamwork and leadership skills associated with working in close proximity on major projects.

The same can be true for higher education, especially for HBCUs that are known for having a nurturing culture that is more hands on. However, if HBCUs are to remain competitive there is much work to be done to be ready for the next emergency. As HBCU students are making the transition, faculty must acquire the skills needed to operate in both the virtual and traditional instructional environments, thus making change management models such as Lewin's germane to the business model that HBCUs may need to adopt moving forward.

Therefore, stakeholders in the educational arena need to advance their investment in the technologies for remote instruction, especially hybrid, based on the findings in this study. If the HBCUs are going to continue to be relevant in the 21st Century, as they were in the 19th and 20th Centuries, they must make the investments required as the new digitally enhanced competitive economy is leaving the less technologically enabled institutions behind.

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