Michelle Newhart:

I always like to say that professors do not have to go it alone. They are content experts, and we are here to help support them on these things that are surrounding instruction. And instruction has gotten more complicated with technology. It can be hard to be an expert in all of these things. And so, we're here to be a support and we know all of our faculty are working really hard right now. And so we're working hard to support them.

Christina Barsi:

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

Sun Ezzell:

And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina Barsi:

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground so to speak, by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend. The resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

Sun Ezzell:

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC from the classroom to completion.

Speaker 1:

And I know I'm going to achieve my goals, and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

Speaker 2:

She is a sociology major, and she is transferring to [inaudible 00:01:06]. Psychology major, English major.

Sun Ezzell:

From transforming part-time into full time.

Speaker 3:

I really liked the time that you spent with Julie, about how to write a CV and a cover letter-

Christina Barsi:

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

Speaker 4:

I think of the natural environment around us as a library.

Christina Barsi:

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC. But most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni, and producer of this podcast.

Sun Ezzell:

And I'm Sun Ezzell, learning assistance faculty and professional learning academy coordinator.

Christina Barsi:

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

Sun Ezzell:

We're back. Like everyone on campus, we at the Magic Mountie Podcast have had to transition to working remotely. For us, this included new equipment and new processes for remote podcast interviews. Since we're all working from home, you might hear the sounds of daily life in the background of some of our interviews. We have been so inspired by the incredible work of the Mt. SAC community to transition online in a very short period of time. Folks all over campus are pulling together and doing amazing work every day, especially now. And we're excited to bring you some of those resources on stories through the podcast. Now more than ever, we hope the Magic Mountie Podcast will be a way to connect and celebrate the Mt. SAC community.

Sun Ezzell:

For our first episode back, I spoke with Michelle Newhart and Hugo Aguilera from the Faculty Center for Learning Technology. Part of the Library and Learning Resources Division, the FCLT is a resource for teaching with technology and home to distance learning at Mt. SAC. The FCLT offers workshops and teaching and technology, including teaching online. As you can imagine, the FCLT has been working around the clock to support the college's transition to online instruction. Here's Michelle Newhart and Hugo Aguilera. Good morning, and welcome back to the Magic Mountie Podcast. I'm so pleased this morning to be joined by Michelle Newhart and Hugo Aguilera from the Faculty Center for Learning Technology. Welcome.

Michelle Newhart:

Thank you.

Hugo Aguilera:

Thank you. Happy to be here.

Sun Ezzell:

Can you both introduce yourselves and tell us a little bit about what you do at FCLT?

Michelle Newhart:

Sure. My name is Michelle Newhart. I'm one of two instructional designers in the Faculty Center for Learning Technology. And we like to say that the Faculty Center for Learning Technology is a dedicated resource for teaching faculty about educational technology. So we support the use of Canvas for faculty in designing their courses and any associated technology. And we also can talk about best practices with various tools. We do many workshops and direct help to faculty consultation, and we can also help them identify resources that are available for free or through the institution to do various things. Sometimes faculty are not aware of the tools that are available through our institution or through the State that are free. And so we'd like to make sure they know about those so nobody pays out of pocket for tools that can they get through our college.

Hugo Aguilera:

And my name is Hugo Aguilera. I'm a computer technician for the Faculty Center for Learning Technology and the Library and Learning Resources Division. Basically, I do a lot of the technical work and support of our instructional designers, as well as our faculty and things like helping develop training for Canvas and other technology tools, answering questions, supporting these tools and working with IT on tool integration. So a lot of the tools that have been installed into Canvas I've had, my fingerprints are all over that, but yeah, I do a lot of the behind the scenes technical work, really supporting our instructional designers mostly.

Sun Ezzell:

On behalf of the whole campus, thank you so much for all the work you've done to help us transition during this time. Can you talk a little bit about what it's been like for you at the FCLT?

Michelle Newhart:

Well, we've been a little busy. So, when the college announced that we were going to have the transitional weeks, we were tasked with arranging for training during that time period to help our faculty move to Canvas for those who weren't already on Canvas. So we did a number of trainings on basics for remote teaching in Canvas and on specific tools that are key to success online, like how to build assignments, how to use conferencing and how to use the grade book and grading related tools. And then we had over a thousand unique attendees across those 12 workshops we threw in that transition period. And I was looking at the reports from the admin perspective in Canvas and activity in Canvas basically doubled overnight on March 30th. We currently have about 1,300 people in the teacher role inside Canvas, and about 2,900 active courses in Canvas that have about 28,000 students in Canvas.

Michelle Newhart:

So our role has been to support those teachers in getting their courses started and accomplishing what they needed to do in there, along with IT, and the help desk, we help answer questions that people have, but we also help train and just make sure people know about the tools that are available and about the basic design principles to apply in there. So we created some templates to help people get started on courses that they could pull into their course shells to get them going with some steps that they could take to get started. And over 700 people downloaded that into their courses during that period of time. So hopefully that helps some people get started on setting up their Canvas course shells.

Hugo Aguilera:

I just want to add that, I mean, yeah, obviously it was a tough time at first, but I really got to say thank you to all of our faculty who stepped up, who were very familiar with Canvas and were able to offer their time and knowledge to help get a lot of the other faculty within their groups trained and ready to go to get this whole thing off the ground. Because it was all very sudden, as we all know. I can't tell you how many requests I got to create spaces within Canvas, where they can collaborate with one another and share content. And that really helped ease a lot of the load that was on us, that they were able to help each other. And I think that was very, very powerful and we wouldn't have been able to do it without them. And they still continue to offer their time through weekly office hours. And they're also answering a lot of questions from faculty and on how to use Canvas and how to get their stuff moved online. And it's been it's been great to have them along to help us through this.

Michelle Newhart:

No, it's true. We are a little bit in the hot seat where people can see that we're working really hard, but the truth is our work relies on coordination and collaboration with so many people who are also have been very busy making sure that the campus transitioned successfully, including a bunch of people who volunteered to be faculty mentors, departments that did some self-training with their power users from their department, to people who are more new to Canvas and then our coordination with our IT partners and the help desk with Pod and the DL coordinators, with presentation services who manage our captioning service locally and even with the testing center who took over processing exams using Respondus, which is a tool that we got during this period of time for institution wide use that helps exams on paper or in word document format move into Canvas without having to manually enter those questions.

Michelle Newhart:

Just so many people that we rely on to get our job done, who have been so helpful. And even the faculty themselves who have communicated with us. We worked out the numbers to report out what our activity was from our team. And it came out to an average of basically about a hundred emails a day on average that our team was managing among a three person team. But I have to say our professors have been so kind and so patient and understanding, and we just really appreciate their attitude and their willingness to learn. And to understand that we were doing a large volume of work and everybody was just really pleasant to interact with. And it just felt like such a great testimony to Mt. SAC.

Sun Ezzell:

That's great to hear. It's pretty amazing to see everyone rising to the challenge and working together to make everything happen for students. You mentioned tools. I was wondering what are some of the tools that you're finding folks are really excited to find out about right now.

Michelle Newhart:

Well, we've been implementing tools. That's been a big piece of what Hugo has been up to in this period of time. So maybe I should let him talk a little bit about that.

Hugo Aguilera:

Yeah. We have a couple of new tools that are available now and that we're very excited about. One of them is called Screencast-O-Matic, which has a tool we already know that a lot of our faculty have experience using it before, purchasing their own accounts. But now it is provided to all Mt. SAC faculty through an institutional license that Mt. SAC has purchased. And it's basically a tool that allows you to very easily record at your desktop. And you can even add a camera overlay of yourself speaking. It's a great way to record, like you talking over your PowerPoints. You can record instructions on how to create guides using this tool where you can record what you're doing, to speak over it. You can then edit the video, make little focuses on the mouse.

Hugo Aguilera:

You can blur out the background. It's basically a screen recording tool. And one very nice thing about it that we like, the reason why we went with this tool is because it's easy to use, it integrates with Canvas, and it also provides auto captions for all the videos that you record. Auto captions as we all know are not perfect, but you can then easily go in there and modify the captions before you publish your video. So it's a pretty good tool. It's a full solution for recording a video and posting it online and then getting it into your Canvas courses very quickly. So that's available now.

Michelle Newhart:

So Screencast-O-Matic not only records your screen, but it also will do webcam alone videos. So you can either do your screen or anything that's on your screen like PowerPoints, or if you want to demonstrate how to do something in Canvas for instance, you could record the steps that you did to do that. Or you could record yourself on your webcam talking. So anything you could capture with your webcam. It also has a phone app. So you could use your phone's camera to be more mobile in what you capture on your webcam, and you can do an inset of your webcam into your screen so they can see you and the screen, and it saves your entire gallery of the things that you record in Canvas. So it's very easy to add them to any course. So that makes it more available to make videos for your class for various things where you might want to have more rich content to share with your students.

Hugo Aguilera:

Thank you, Michelle. Yeah. And the other tool that Michelle mentioned earlier was Respondus, which is a tool that we did acquire an institutional license for also that anybody at Mt. SAC can use, but it's mainly geared towards faculty members and towards faculty members who want to convert word document based exams into exams that can be used in Canvas, which saves you a ton of time. So that tool is available also. We also have some staff on campus that are using it to take care of some of these conversion services for faculty right now, as Michelle mentioned, also in the testing center and also at our local ASAC department, Academic Support and Achievement Center, they're helping us with that as well. And then the other tool I wanted to talk about was a tool called Ally, which we're getting ready to roll out, probably sometime this weekend.

Hugo Aguilera:

Ally is a tool that provides alternative formats for all files that have been uploaded into Canvas. So, it's a big deal because accessibility is always something that we have to be mindful of. And accessibility, it's a tough thing to deal with for several reasons. But everybody at the campus in general have documents that they create and they might not always be the most accessible. And when they're used for instruction, they have to be. So what Ally does is any documents that get uploaded into Canvas, it scans them automatically, and it provides an alternative accessible format of the document that the student then has access to. So this is a big tool. The implementation was a long one, but we're going to get ready to roll this out this week. Out of the alternative formats, it also provides an audio version of the format where students can actually listen to the document. Michelle, did you want to jump in and speak a little bit about Ally also.

Michelle Newhart:

Really excited about Ally. That's something that got pushed down from the chancellor's office and the OEI Program. So we're excited to have that available to make courses more accessible with less effort. Part of faculty accessibility can be such a big and complex area, and every course has layers to it where there's just covering your content. But then there's also the design of your course and then there's accessibility. These are all important pieces of your course that affect your students' experience. And we know that that can get overwhelming for individual faculty to figure out how to solve all of these issues. And so our team is available to provide help. I always like to say that professors do not have to go it alone. They are content experts, and we are here to help support them on these things that are surrounding instruction and instruction has gotten more complicated with technology.

Michelle Newhart:

It can be hard to be an expert in all of these things. And so we're here to be a support and we know all of our faculty are working really hard right now. And so, we're working hard to support them. We like solutions like Ally because they take it out of each individual having to figure out how to do something and make it a more of a workflow that reduces the amount of things each individual person has to figure out or do in order to meet, be in compliance with laws like accessibility laws. So, we're very excited for that to roll out and take some of that burden off of our professors.

Hugo Aguilera:

One last quick thing I will briefly talk about. Michelle mentioned design. Design in Canvas is also something that can be overwhelming for a lot of people. Having to think about not just creating your course content that's good for the web, but also making it look nice and accessible of course. So we are working on something, it's under wraps for now. We won't name drop anything, but we are working on something very exciting that's going to help greatly with faculty design efforts in Canvas moving forward. And we should have that implemented in the very near future here, but be on the lookout, it's going to be really exciting. We're really excited to roll this one out. No names though.

Sun Ezzell:

Alright. Mysterious.

Michelle Newhart:

We know of faculty have also been concerned about using Zoom and Zoom has a number of things that concern professors and staff alike in terms of security, how to manage the setup, in some ways live conferencing is the most on the spot use of technology. So if you're not used to using technology, or anytime you use something live, as you know, it's the most high pressure to be able to get it to work right, so Zoom is actually an institutional account. Right now, it is managed through the CCC TechConnect Center at the State level. We don't have any local control over our account. Those exist through the CCC TechConnect office and their website is just conferzoom.org, where they have guides and support, and they have improved several things about the functionality and security now that there's so many people using Zoom for various things, including instruction.

Michelle Newhart:

And the other major thing about Zoom is captioning. So we started getting some questions about captioning in Zoom. For temporary remote teaching or temporary remote instruction, TRI, that applied for the term that we were in for Spring, because those courses had already started at the point when we moved into remote teaching. But as we move into Summer and possibly Fall being online, those do not fall under a temporary remote instruction because those courses did not begin before we moved to remote instruction. And so what that means is, more rules are going to kick in where those courses need to meet local policies in order to be in compliance basically. So academic Senate just met, I'm sure Carol will talk about this and Catherine, when you talk to the distance learning coordinators, but they figured out some local policies for that. But what that means from our perspective at FCLT is that the courses in Summer have a higher bar when it comes to being in compliance with the rules that apply to the distance learning environment. One of those pieces is captioning.

Michelle Newhart:

So captioning is a requirement. It's part of the rules at the Federal level. It's written into our State law, and it's also written into our local APs. It was suspended to only be for accommodations during the temporary remote instruction period, based on distance education discussions that took place Statewide about how to handle it. But in Summer, that kicks in as a requirement for everything that involves using video, whether that's recorded videos or live rich content through conferencing tools. So we're working really hard right now to ensure there's a clear way to get live captioning if you're using a conferencing tool and we already have a captioning workflow in place to make sure that any videos that you create or any videos that you use that do not have captions on them, or do not have good captions on them can be corrected before they're used for instruction.

Michelle Newhart:

And thanks to our presentation services department who manages that captioning workflow locally, those have been handled. We've managed to keep pace with the requests for that. And most of the time for simple jobs, you can get those in under a week, but it's always good to put them in as early as possible to make sure you don't have to rush the situation. And if there's any complications that can be dealt with, and we're right at the verge of figuring out what the solution is going to be for conferencing in Summer and Fall so that we have those things in place as well.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you so much. I was wondering probably one of the challenges now is that faculty are in so many places, a lot of continuum of having never taught online to being quite expert in being able to help their colleagues. Do you have any advice or recommendations for folks who might be starting out or feeling a little bit overwhelmed?

Michelle Newhart:

Sure. First, our website is a good place to go and look, that's mtsac.edu/fclt. And we tell people that you can just take the word faculty and remove the vowels and you get our acronym FCLT if that helps remember. We are also linked onto the pod page for remote teaching. So, we have a whole section on remote teaching, a section on Canvas and a section on tools and services for faculty that can lead you to lots of resources that are available and how to get started in Canvas or how to learn specific things about specific tools or about Canvas. So that can be a great place to start. We also maintain a course in Canvas called the Faculty Center, that gives more specific details and how to about tools and functions inside Canvas. So those are great places to start.

Michelle Newhart:

We also want faculty to know that we have a course in Canvas called the Faculty Accessibility Center that breaks down accessibility information for each type of content that requires some type of accessibility action to be taken so that you can better understand how that works and that is connected to our faculty center. So if you start in the faculty center, you'll get to all of our other resources that we have if you're looking for it in there. We also started a project called the Mountie Student Hub, and we want faculty. And to know that that's there as well. It's on the global navigation bar in Canvas. All students are enrolled in the Student Hub and it contains information for students about how to use Canvas and about how to use other tools that are integrated in Canvas, as well as linking them to other resources available for students using technology on our campus.

Michelle Newhart:

So faculty don't have to also teach students how to use tools while they're learning how to use tools. Canvas has a lot of resources available, and we've tried to curate some for use among students so they can get services through there. We were lucky enough this year to have a grant funded project of peer mentors in Canvas that are called the Canvassadors and Canvassadors are designed to be a support for students. They're more than helped us. I mean, they're not replacing the help desk. They are really our counterpart for students to help students who are struggling with using technology or have questions related to how to use Canvas.

Michelle Newhart:

They can help, and they have a number of ways that you can contact them or students can contact them. Then I'll be happy to provide you so you can post on your page. They are just, canvassadors@mtsac.edu. That's the word canvass. And then A-D-O-R-S@mtsac.edu. They're also on social media and they run a couple of course shells inside Canvas to support students. We were very lucky to get that in place before we went into remote instruction so that we actually had a component that supports students directly.

Sun Ezzell:

So I was wondering if you would be willing to share what are the biggest hurdles you two have faced during this transition?

Hugo Aguilera:

I can start with the ones that I've experienced. So coming from the, I guess the perspective of somebody who works a lot with rolling out tools and integrating tools, having to leave the campus has created challenges for us. The thing is, a lot of these tools or some of these tools have required. For example, Respondus requires that you have local admin access to install it to your computer. So, because a lot of these computers are no longer on campus, it's a lot difficult for our local IT to just go and install these tools for instructors on these computers that are issued by our Mt. SAC help desk.

Hugo Aguilera:

So, it's made everything take a little bit longer because... And extra work for a lot of other people, because they need to set up VPN access, they need to connect with the person, they need to do the install remotely. That just the fact that we're off campus and away from the Mt. SAC domain is what makes that so much difficult for us. That's just one thing I wanted to point out from a technical perspective. I'll let Michelle talk about other non technical stuff that may have affected us as well.

Michelle Newhart:

I think when this first started, one of the things I kept saying was when you get into a situation like this, you find all the leaks in the boat. And I think that's true. It's like any system or any area that wasn't prepared or wasn't already set up to manage a situation like this becomes a pain point for everyone. In normal times, it's like an 80/20 rule in terms of how we get used by our professors and used on campus where probably 20% of our faculty use 80% of our services. And of course, that's not quite how it is right now. I want to be quick to say that it is never a hurdle to serve our faculty. We are happy to hear from everybody and talk to everybody who we can help.

Michelle Newhart:

And part of our mission is to be a human face on things. So, we've had a few people who reached us and said, "Finally, a real person." It was just, they needed to talk to a person to get their question answered. And we're really good for that. We can offer that help cut through sometimes processes that don't seem to make sense or asking questions that don't work and trying to just look something up online. That's our pleasure, to help with anything like that. I think part of the hurdle though with switching from 20% of people using 80% of our services to literally 90% of people trying to go online all at once, is that it meant there was a shift in having to implement tools and being concerned about whether tools were going to be able to manage that change in activity and traffic.

Michelle Newhart:

So worried that things were going to be overly slow or break. Ultimately there's growing pains that happen with that were things that weren't perfect prior to this, but it didn't matter because not many people used that particular thing, suddenly lots of people are using it and that's what I meant by it shows you where all the leaks in the boat are because you suddenly became very aware of things that weren't working as they were meant to work. And a lot of times that was an urgent problem when it happened and not always something that we had very much ability to resolve. Also, when you roll out new tools, it causes, in anything that changes, like if something gets introduced where people need to do it, certain types of training or new tools come out, it typically causes a wave of response or questions that end up coming into us.

Michelle Newhart:

And sometimes that could be a little challenging and in part, because it's hard to answer a bunch of questions individually, when what you really need to do is just answer everybody. But you can get underwater with trying to answer the individual questions, to be able to make an appropriate response that goes to campus at large. So part of it has been figuring out how to manage those kinds of circumstances in the best way so that people do get personal service and do get responded to, but also we are able to reserve enough time to put out a more consistent and a thorough message that everybody gets to see.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you. I was wondering, do you think there's anything coming out of the challenging experience, any new tools or processes or ways of working or connecting, things that are working great that you think we should continue even when we're not in this situation anymore.

Michelle Newhart:

Well, we've talked about this a couple of times and I mean, one of the things about Mt. SAC being such a large school is that it's hard to talk in generalities for all course types. There are lots of different scenarios, lots of programs that may not be, ever be appropriate for online. And even though we are in a position to manage technology, believe me, we also really value that personal service and understand how much connection between people matters for education and don't think technology is the answer to everything. But having said that, I think this is an amazing time of a lot of people getting to have some experience with what the tools can do and allowing those tools to become more ordinary.

Michelle Newhart:

Having more people with practice at those tools means that, I mean, it's like cell phones or the Internet or any of these things. When those tools become ordinary, that's actually when they can do extraordinary things. So, what I hope is that understanding what the tools do well and can make more efficient and can make work better for students and for professors can come clear by just having the experience of using them. And then, ideally it would mean that professors have a better, more professors, I should say, have a better handle on what to use, how to best use the time you have in person with people and how to best use the technology to optimize both for the best possible educational experience.

Hugo Aguilera:

Yeah. I think I've told Michelle and the rest of the FCLT team this several times, but I do feel like this shift has created something that's irreversible. I think a lot more people are using Canvas now and online tools now because they have to, and moving forward when they no longer need to, I think they will continue to use them because a lot of them probably would have found that it's a tool that really is there to make your life a little bit easier. And even though it doesn't mean you have to move your entire classroom online, you can use Canvas to just supplement your classroom in small ways.

Hugo Aguilera:

Like I know a lot of faculty who use Canvas just for the grade book, because it eliminates them having to remind their students what their grades are when their students ask. They could just point them to Canvas. Even something as basic as that, it's something they can get out of Canvas moving forward. So, there's a lot more that it can do besides that of course, but I'm just giving you an example of that and it's because people have had to use the tool. And I think that's a great thing. I think that's a fantastic thing because I don't anticipate Canvas usage numbers going down, moving forward after we no longer have to use it the way we have.

Michelle Newhart:

It also adds things like being able to use, check proctoring or checks for plagiarism, it allows for compliant grades. The thing I was going to say is, we surveyed our students about Canvas last year. And we had over a thousand students respond to our survey about their experiences in Canvas, and they had a few things that were consistent trends and what they had to say about their experiences at Mt. SAC using Canvas. And the first one was, I think we've already experienced accidentally, which is that they said, "Please have all professors use it." And the underlying reason for this is that students are not just using Canvas to go into their class and do their coursework.

Michelle Newhart:

They're using Canvas as an organizational tool for their educational experience overall. So if all classes are in there, that means all classes have all the assignments listed on the calendar, which populates their to do list and they can actually use it as a planner to make sure they've caught everything that they need to do. And the other thing that they had to say about it was Canvas is great, but only if the course is designed well. And so that's where we come in. We're happy to help people make sure their courses are designed well and navigate well so that students have a good experience in the LMS and find it to be easy to follow what they're trying to do, to find content, to complete assignments. And that we have plenty of ideas about how to make that more engaging and keep people connected.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you so much. I so appreciate your time you've given us. Just a huge heartfelt thank you and shout out to all the amazing work you've been doing to support the whole campus through this challenging time. So thank you so much.

Michelle Newhart:

It's our pleasure-

Hugo Aguilera:

Thank you so much for having us. Our pleasure.

Christina Barsi:

Thank you for listening to the Magic Mountain Podcast. Remember to subscribe on Apple podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you like to get your podcasts so you can listen in the car, in your office or however you like to listen. Once you subscribe, we'd love to hear what you think by leaving us a review, and don't forget to share your favorite episodes.