Course name: **Enhancing Community Engagement in OEL Asynchronous Classrooms**

Course Overview
Course Description: This course is designed for faculty members of the Online Education Leadership (OEL) program, with the goal of empowering these educators to create more engaged and interactive communities within their asynchronous online classrooms. As part of the Master's in Education Leadership offered by the Harvard Graduate School of Education, this course will build upon the invaluable skills educators have already developed, providing them with the tools to propel themselves to new leadership opportunities and to have an even more significant impact in the field of education.
Course Overview: The course is structured into two modules: 1) Module 1: Foundations of OEL Online Community Building. This module exemplifies the challenges students face through data from the PreK-12 Pathway, underscores the goals of the OEL program, and emphasizes the significance of cultivating a supportive cohort community in online learning to promote a thriving asynchronous OEL community. 2) Module 2: Empowering OEL Faculty: Addressing Student Challenges with Constructivism and Social Cognitive Strategies. This module will tailored for OEL faculty members and address OEL students' challenges based on their past feedback and experiences. These two modules will delve into the principles of asynchronous learning, provide practical strategies for community building, explore various tools and technologies, analyze real-life case studies, and focus on the role of educators as leaders in online education. With a focus on inclusivity and individual educational experiences, the course positions educators to build a vibrant learning community that caters to diverse learning needs.
Course Objectives: By the end of this course, participants will be able to: ● Understand the challenges and opportunities of building a community in an OEL asynchronous classroom. ● Learn various strategies and techniques for fostering engagement and interaction. ● Explore the use of technology and digital tools to facilitate communication and collaboration. ● Draw insights and best practices from real-life case studies of successful online learning communities. ● Design and implement a plan for building an engaged community in their own OEL asynchronous classrooms.

Module 1 Foundations of OEL Online Community Building

Module 1
Module Overview This module focuses on the community's pivotal role in the success of students enrolled in the OEL program at HGSE. The module uses data from PreK-12 Pathway as an example, recognizing the challenges students face, underscores the goals of the OEL program, and emphasizes the significance of cultivating a supportive cohort community in online learning to promote a thriving asynchronous OEL community.
Learning Objectives ● Understand the importance of community in OEL asynchronous online education. ● Identify the unique challenges facing in OEL asynchronous classrooms.
Learning Contents Understanding the role of community in OEL asynchronous setting Understanding the role of community in asynchronous Online Education Leadership (OEL) courses is crucial for participants in the online Master's in Education Leadership program at Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE). In this program, the concept of community plays a significant role in fostering collaboration, support, and a sense of belonging among a diverse cohort of professionals.

Online Education Leadership (OEL) courses can be categorized into two main norms:

1. Building a Supportive Cohort Community:
- **Real-World Perspectives:** OEL provides a diverse cohort, bringing together professionals like me with rich, real-world leadership experience. We recognize the value of tapping into these varied perspectives to enrich our collective learning experience.

- **Collaborative Learning:** OEL emphasizes a collaborative learning environment where leaders come together to address real-world challenges. Students are encouraged to share their experiences and insights to create a supportive community.

2. Asynchronous Interactions In OEL:
- **Flexible Asynchronous Work:** OEL allows students the flexibility to engage in asynchronous work and assignments, enabling learners to set their own schedule. The freedom to work independently and participate in self-scheduled small-group activities, aligning with their work style and preferences.

- **Clear Deadlines and Milestones:** OEL structures asynchronous work with clear deadlines and milestones. Students can manage their time effectively and plan to meet these milestones, recognizing that the workload may vary based on the term, courses, and their work style.

Current Challenges Facing by OEL

Drawing from students' self-reported needs and expectation data of PreK-12 Pathway in OEL, the following highlights challenges students encountered with online learning and potential factors that might interfere with students' success in this program.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED WITH ONLINE LEARNING?

UNFAMILIARITY OF GRAD SCHOOL (31 mentions)
FOCUS/ENGAGEMENT (19 mentions)
ENVIRONMENT (11 mentions)
NEW TECH/PLATFORMS (10 mentions)
FIRST TIME LEARNING ONLINE (8 mentions)
SYNCHRONOUS SCHEDULING (4 mentions)
HEALTH (2 mentions)
ACCESSIBILITY (1 mention)

WHAT IS ONE THING THAT MIGHT INTERFERE WITH YOUR SUCCESS IN THIS PROGRAM?

WORK OBLIGATIONS (46 mentions)
FAMILY OBLIGATIONS (20 mentions)
UNFAMILIARITY OF GRAD SCHOOL (15 mentions)
HEALTH (9 mentions)
SCHEDULING (8 mentions)
ENVIRONMENT (5 mentions)
FINANCES (3 mentions)

The challenges students have encountered with online learning in the OEL program, based on the PreK-12 Pathway data, provide valuable insights for OEL faculty members. The most frequently mentioned challenges include the unfamiliarity of graduate school, with 31 mentions indicating that many students may be navigating a new academic environment. Additionally, focus and engagement (19 mentions), environment (11 mentions), and new technology/platforms (10 mentions) suggest that students face issues related to adapting to

the online learning format, maintaining concentration, and navigating unfamiliar digital tools.

Work obligations stand out with the highest number of mentions for potential interferences with students' success in the program (46). This indicates that balancing work commitments may be a significant challenge for students, emphasizing the need for faculty members to consider and address these external responsibilities in course design. In addition, family obligations (20 mentions) and unfamiliarity with graduate school (15 mentions) are prominent factors that might interfere with success.

Overall, the data suggests that students need help to balance their education with other major life responsibilities. Many are navigating graduate-level coursework for the first time. Environmental factors and struggles with focus compound these issues.

Based on the data, as a faculty designing a course to build an asynchronous community, the key takeaways are:

- Students need more orientation to grad school expectations
- Managing distractions and engagement is difficult with work/family demands
- Fostering peer support can mitigate feelings of unfamiliarity/isolation

Module 2 Empowering OEL Faculty: Addressing Student Challenges with Constructivism and Social Cognitive Strategies

Module 2
Module Overview
In this module, tailored for OEL faculty members, we will address OEL students' challenges based on their past feedback and experiences. The first session focuses on the unfamiliarity of graduate school, offering strategies rooted in Constructivism—encouraging active participation and collaborative learning. The second session tackles managing distractions and engagement, aligning with social cognitive theory and emphasizing observational learning and self-regulation amidst work and family demands. OEL faculty will gain practical insights better to support students within the unique context of OEL, fostering a more successful learning experience.
Learning Objectives
- Understanding Graduate School Expectations: - Explore strategies to provide clear orientation and support for students navigating graduate-level coursework.   - Connect to Constructivism by emphasizing active participation and collaborative learning to build students' understanding.

- Managing Distractions and Engagement:
  - Identify techniques for helping students balance work and family demands while staying engaged in the online learning environment.
  - Connect to Social Cognitive Theory by emphasizing observational learning and self-regulation to manage distractions effectively.

Session 1 Understanding Graduate School Expectations

Learning Contents

Ice Breaker Activities: Exploring Academic Journeys

Icebreakers play a crucial role in fostering connections among students, particularly in the online learning environment where spontaneous interactions are limited. The objective of this icebreaker activity is to not only introduce students to their peers but also to prompt thoughtful reflections on their academic journeys and aspirations, aligning closely with the expectations of graduate school.

Ice Breaker Activity Format Suggestions: Padlet Profile Board

Padlet Profile Board Connection with Constructivism Learning Theory

The Padlet Profile Board icebreaker activity in graduate school effectively embodies constructivist principles by promoting active, reflective, and collaborative learning. This activity aligns with the constructivist view that learning is a dynamic, constructive process, as students create and share personal and academic profiles, facilitating self-reflection and knowledge construction based on their experiences (Oyarzun & Conklin, 2021).

It fosters collaborative learning, a cornerstone of Constructivism, by enabling students to interact, share, and comment on diverse perspectives and learn from each other, thus enhancing their understanding of the academic community. Additionally, it supports the development of self-regulated learning and metacognition, crucial for graduate-level research and study, by encouraging students to articulate their educational journeys and goals. This not only builds a sense of community among peers from varied backgrounds but also bridges theoretical knowledge with practical application, embodying the Constructivist emphasis on learning through social interaction and real-world connections (Oyarzun&Conklin, 2021).

Teaching Guide Example
- Padlet Profile Board Setup:
  - Direct students to a Padlet Board.
  - Share the tutorial link for creating a Padlet Profile Board, providing step-by-step guidance.

- Self-Introduction and Reflection:
  - Ask each student to create a post introducing themselves on the Padlet Board. Include the following reflective prompts:
    - Where are you from, and what do you appreciate about that place?
    - What is your major or area of interest in graduate studies?
    - What are your expectations for graduate school?

- ■ Share a favorite hobby or how you like to spend a free day.
- ■ *(Optionally) Inquire about a specific issue in the field you're interested in or how you plan to apply your knowledge in daily life.*

- ● Image Representation:
  - ○ Encourage each student to choose a photo of themselves or an image that somehow symbolizes them.
  - ○ Ask them to embed this image in their self-introduction post, providing a visual element complementing their written introduction.

- ● Peer Interaction:
  - ○ Instruct students to explore their classmates' introductions and images.
  - ○ Set up Pre-course homework and encourage them to respond to one or more peers, fostering connections based on shared interests or aspirations.
  - ○ Students could tie the insights gained from the Padlet Profile Board to their own expectations and challenges of graduate school.

Padlet Profile Board Assignment Overview on Canvas:

Ice Breaker Activity: Padlet Profile Board

⊘ Publish ✎ Edit ⋮

Open the Padlet Profile Board ⇨ **and Create your own Padlet Post by answering the following questions**

Self-Introduction and Reflection:

Create a post introducing yourself on this Padlet Board. Include the following reflective prompts: 1) Where are you from, and what do you appreciate about that place? 2) What is your major or area of interest in graduate studies? 3) What are your expectations for graduate school? 4) Share a favorite hobby or how you like to spend a free day. 5) *(Optionally) Inquire about a specific issue in the field you're interested in or how you plan to apply your knowledge in daily life.

Image Representation: You are encouraged to choose a photo of yourself or an image that somehow symbolizes yourself. Please embed the image in your self-introduction post, providing a visual element complementing your written introduction.

Peer Interaction: 1) After posting your profile, explore your classmates' introductions and images. 2) Students could tie the insights gained from the Padlet Profile Board to their expectations and challenges of graduate school. 3) Respond to one or more peers, fostering connections based on shared interests or aspirations.

If you need to learn how to make a post on Padlet, here is the tutorial link: Padlet Using Tutorial. ⇨

Points	1	
Submitting	Nothing	

Due	For	Available from	Until
-	Everyone	-	-

+ Rubric

Padlet Overview:

:Padlet

Hanzhang(Katherine) Zhao • 1m

OEL Profile Board

Self-Introduction and Reflection: Create a post introducing yourself on this Padlet Board. Include the following reflective prompts: 1) Where are you from, and what do you appreciate about that place? 2) What is your major or area of interest in graduate studies? 3) What are your expectations for graduate school? 4) Share a favorite hobby or how you like to spend a free day. 5) *(Optionally) Inquire about a specific issue in the field you're interested in or how you plan to apply your knowledge in daily life.

Image Representation: You are encouraged to choose a photo of yourself or an image that somehow symbolizes yourself. Please embed the image in your self-introduction post, providing a visual element complementing your written introduction.

Peer Interaction: 1) After post your profile, explore your classmates' introductions and images. 2) Students could tie the insights gained from the Padlet Profile Board to their own expectations and challenges of graduate school. 3) Respond to one or more peers, fostering connections based on shared interests or aspirations.

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OEL Profile Post Example

Hello everyone! I'm Alex, originally from Portland, Oregon. I appreciate Portland for its vibrant arts scene and the amazing natural beauty surrounding the city – it's a place where urban and natural environments coexist harmoniously.

Major/Area of Interest: I am

Session 2: Managing Distractions and Engagement

Learning Contents

Ongoing Peer Support for Work-Life Balance in Online Learning

Online peer support plays a crucial role in enhancing graduate students' work-life balance during their online learning journey. By facilitating meaningful connections and shared experiences with fellow learners, this form of support creates a sense of community and belonging, which is often lacking in virtual educational environments. Through regular peer interactions, students can exchange practical strategies and emotional support for managing the unique challenges they face, such as juggling academic responsibilities with work and family commitments. This reciprocal exchange not only provides a platform for discussing and overcoming common obstacles but also fosters a sense of accountability and motivation. As a result, graduate students are better equipped to navigate the complexities of their personal and professional lives while maintaining active engagement in their online studies, leading to a more harmonious and effective work-life balance.

Ongoing Peer Support Connection with Cognitivism Learning Theory

Ongoing Peer Support for Work-Life Balance in Online Learning aligns with Cognitivism, a learning theory that emphasizes the role of internal mental processes and the active role of the learner in constructing knowledge. In this context, graduate students engage actively with information shared by peers, integrating it into their existing knowledge structures. Cognitivism highlights the importance of social interaction in learning, evident in how students

learn from each other's experiences to better manage work, life, and academic responsibilities. This interaction aids in reorganizing their cognitive frameworks enhancing their problem-solving skills. Additionally, the reciprocal nature of peer support fosters reflection, an essential aspect of cognitivism, leading to deeper understanding and more effective management of work-life balance in their online educational journey (Oyarzun & Conklin, 2021).

Ongoing Peer Support Format Suggestions: Working in Pairs

The Ongoing Peer Support activity, designed for graduate students working in pairs, integrates a Random Pair-Up Mechanism using an automated tool for equitable pairing and thoughtful time zone consideration. Each week, paired students mutually schedule meetings, which are recommended to be 30-45 minutes long, with flexible formats like video calls, phone calls, or in-person meetings. These sessions focus on sharing personal experiences and strategies to balance work, family, and education. The program also includes a mini-workshop on feedback techniques, encouraging constructive and respectful interactions. Students engage in reflective writing, submitting weekly pieces on Canvas, guided by specific prompts to introspect on their peer interactions and personal growth. The activity is monitored through regular check-ins, ensuring effective student engagement and addressing any pairing or scheduling issues, thereby fostering a supportive community and enhancing work-life balance in the online learning environment.

Teaching Guide Sample:
- Random Pair-Up Mechanism
  - Automated Tool: Utilize a tool (either integrated within Canvas or an external one) that can randomly pair students.
  - Equitable Pairing: Ensure that each student is paired with someone with a different background to promote diverse interactions.
  - Notification System: Set up a system where both students in a pair receive a notification with their partner's contact details, so students could reach out to their partner and initiate the first meeting
  - Time Zone Consideration: Place students in the same time zone in the same pair as much as possible to facilitate their subsequent meetings at a suitable time.

- Weekly Meetings
  - Scheduling: Students should contact their peers and mutually decide on a weekly meeting time.
  - Duration: Recommend a specific duration for each meeting (e.g., 30-45 minutes).
  - Format: Offer flexibility in the format of meetings (video calls, phone calls, or meet in-person).
  - Discussion Topics: Encourage students to share personal experiences and strategies that focus on balancing work, family, and education.
  - Create an assignment on Canvas for weekly peer support check-in survey
    - Survey Questions can be include:
      - Who is your peer for this week?
      - When did you guys do your weekly meeting? How long was it?
      - Use scale 1-5 to rate the effectiveness of the peer meeting
        - To evaluate the effectiveness of peer meetings in the