

Increasing Faculty Satisfaction and Student Access to Online Education via Dedicated Technical Support Specialists

5th Annual Social Work Distance Education Conference

Best Pedagogical Approaches to Advance Social Justice



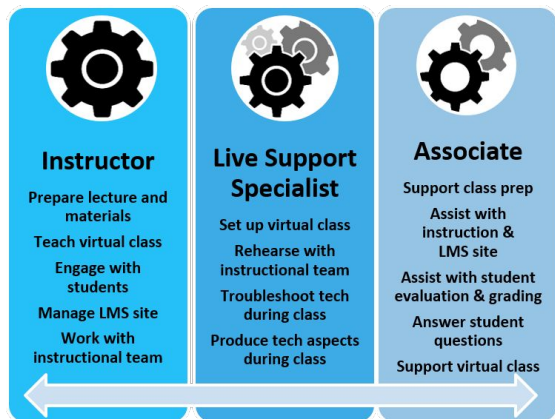
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 **COLUMBIA**
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

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Dedicated Technical Support Social Worker on Every Instructional Team and Only Top-3 School of Social Work with a Fully Online MSW Program

Abstract: High-quality technical support for synchronous social work classes is imperative to support technological preparedness and overcome technological challenges for instructors and students. Columbia University School of Social Work's Online Campus uses a primarily synchronous model for our online MSW program, with each course supported by a dedicated technical support specialist, called a Live Support Specialist (LSS). This role provides a vital contribution to the quality of our online courses, and substantially increases faculty satisfaction and student access.



The Challenge

As many seasoned or novice online social work instructors have discovered, technology is not always predictable and technological disruptions or challenges are inevitable (Pardasani, Goldkind, Heyman, & Cross-Denny, 2012; Hitchcock, Sage, & Smyth, 2019).

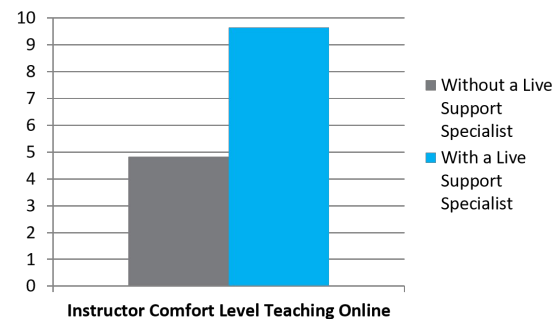
LSS Contributions

- Enable instructor to focus on teaching by handling all technical setup and issues
- Provide students & instructional team with empathetic support from an alumni perspective, using social work skills

LSS Logistics

- Work 5 hours/week/course, plus 10 hours prior to the start of the semester to prep with the instructional team
- Position is a variable hours officer position, with a maximum of 20 hours/week
- Paid an hourly rate with submission of timesheet
- Provided potential opportunities for additional projects, such as working on quality assurance of online courses

Instructor Feedback About Live Support Specialists
Source: Survey of Fall 2018 online instructors (38 responses)
Scale of 1-10



Quotes from Instructors

"I get to focus on student engagement and content delivery without the added responsibility of managing/problem solving the tech during a live session." - Dawn Shedrick

"Having a team of people with the Associate and the Live Support Specialist allows instructors to focus on teaching rich content. I think it would be difficult to teach somewhere else because of the support I receive at Columbia; this truly is the gold standard of how online teaching should work." - Adrienne Williams

"I feel strongly that the Live Support Specialist (LSS) is an integral member of the instructional leadership team. The LSS offers skills and support that help me to teach my courses efficiently. The LSS allows me to focus on session agendas while trusting that the behind-the-scenes details are attended to and students' technology needs are well taken care of." - Bonnie Glass

Quotes from Online Alumni

"Live Support Specialists really made the online classroom possible...even better than an in-person classroom - due to the specialized attention to enhancing my experience with technology and helping me stay positive and calm if a tech issue did arise. It was comforting to know someone is always there and ready to help, which is not always possible in a regular classroom setting." - Elexia Lowe

"Knowing that we had a live support specialist in class gave me a sense of security. The LSS allowed me to focus on the course content and return swiftly in case of a technical hiccup." - Ana Quiñones

"In a rapidly moving environment, LSSs support both the student and professor by simplifying, troubleshooting, reassuring, and just lending an empathetic ear to the participants in a virtual classroom." - Valerie Samuel

Quotes from Live Support Specialists

"LSSs bring a lot to the classroom...including support with audio/video, connectivity, flash-player and file compatibility...also the unique lens of being a social worker, too." - Joshua Levine

"LSSs play an integral role in the success of our courses as they ensure that technology is a tool rather than a barrier in online education." - Agata Dera

"Live Support Specialists are like the "executive producers" of the classroom. They set up the class materials in advance, listen for cues from the instructional team to keep the session running smoothly, and troubleshoot tech issues in real time. They play a key role in supporting the instructional team and students to help provide solutions to the challenges that come with technology in the online classroom." - Marianna da Costa