

Tackling Online Education

Tackling Online Education:

*Implications of Responses
to COVID-19 in Higher
Education Globally*

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PREFACE

Because of COVID-19, many campuses are closed all over the world. The impact of having to shift to online teaching has challenged the paradigms and culture of higher education. As higher education continues in the midst of the pandemic, the implications for future operations and the core missions of teaching and learning, research, and service, are beginning to take shape. These early decisions are likely to shape the future direction of higher education in different national contexts.

This edited volume includes chapters by leading experts from eight countries. Such a book is needed to understand both what has worked, or not worked, so far, and how national conditions, institutions, and initial policy responses are shaping the future of higher education internationally. Drawing on the expertise of authors in higher education in the different contexts, the book provides rich detail on instructive differences and commonalities in response. The international perspective and the framing of responses in terms of context and institutional cultures provide a new perspective and unique contribution to the literature for researchers and higher education administrators and policy makers alike.

This book is timely as it explores current issues in teaching in higher education in the midst of COVID-19 from an international perspective. Some of the unique and important topics that will be discussed are: how higher education (HE) systems in eight countries are dealing with COVID-19, how HE is moving from in-person to online classes, how HE

continues teaching without the resources of the physical campus, what mistakes HE has made during this period of virtual learning which need to be avoided in future, and what successful experiences can be applied to the future of online, or hybrid, education.

The international perspective of this book is new. Contributing experts from eight countries discuss how their countries are handling online teaching during the pandemic. Topics include student engagement, outbound students, education faculty, internationalization of the curriculum, TV-based lessons, and so on. The combination of timeliness and international perspective makes the book unique.

This book should be of interest to a wide readership. The primary audience will be those interested in higher education around the world, e.g., faculty and staff of higher education institutions, college students, the families of college students, companies with business concerning higher education, citizens who are concerned with COVID-19, and/or higher education.

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The Editors

INTRODUCTION

This timely edited volume focuses on higher education's responses to COVID-19, and explores the implications of online teaching for the future of higher education on a global scale. This book's uniqueness lies in its international perspective, drawing on diverse expertise from leading experts from eight countries. The book is divided into three sections. Section 1 focuses on problems and solutions for virtual learning, such as minimizing Zoom fatigue, utilizing trauma-informed pedagogy to eliminate compassion fatigue, promoting deep learning, and focusing on student engagement.

Chapter 1 discusses how to improve professors' and students' experiences with synchronous class meetings by minimizing Zoom fatigue. Zoom fatigue is mental exhaustion associated with having to concentrate on small video windows to read student body language during web-based synchronous class meetings. Professors chose to adopt digital tools that they thought would replicate their current teaching practices, such as Zoom, because the dominant form of instruction in higher education is the lecture. However, spending many hours each week in synchronous online lectures resulted in complaints of Zoom fatigue. This chapter examines how web-based synchronous class meetings are conducted in the Digital Education Leadership graduate program at Seattle Pacific University, to maximize collaborative learning opportunities and minimize Zoom fatigue. Strategies for research-based synchronous online learning are shared, including how to prepare for a synchronous class

meeting, how to facilitate a synchronous class meeting, and what should be done following a synchronous class meeting. When synchronous online learning tools are used effectively, instructors and students reported having positive experiences with this technology.

The instructors have to deal with not only Zoom fatigue, but also compassion fatigue and maintaining cultural humility while assisting faculty in supporting graduate students during times of distress. Traumatic experiences can sometimes be debilitating, and heighten already existing mental health and anxiety concerns. In order to better support graduate students in need, faculty must utilize a trauma-informed pedagogy to consider and attend to the many struggles students may be facing. Given the appropriate scope of practice, Chapter 2 offers some best practices for faculty to offer empathy, support, and referrals, and to balance structure with flexibility, choice-based assignments, and avenues for critical self-reflection and expression while teaching graduate students in an online platform.

Amidst the transition to online learning, there has been much discussion about the logistics of making online education work, like which platforms to use, whether to offer classes synchronously or asynchronously, and how to grade students' virtual work. While these issues are important, deeper questions about the nature of teaching and learning should be at the center of the discussion, regardless of the modality universities use in the wake of COVID-19. Even in a pandemic, the university's central goal of students learning 'deeply' has not changed. In Chapter 3, the author describes 'deep' learning's fundamental components, and then discusses three dimensions of deep learning that should guide our online learning decisions: 1) balancing structure with trust; 2) giving students choice; and

3) re-examining how we assess students on their learning. Keeping these points at the center of the conversation will ensure that, in the midst of many disruptions to in-person learning, we do not lose sight of the university's main goal.

Years of research have noted that there are three key contributing factors to student engagement. These include behavioural, cognitive, and socio-emotional engagement. Understanding how these factors impact student learning is the key to designing engaging online learning experiences. Many academics thought they could simply replicate their traditional approach in an online environment, but quickly realized that it was not sufficient in keeping students engaged. Chapter 4 provides insights into how professors can move beyond lecturing and engage their students in a more meaningful way.

Section 2 provides further techniques and support for online teaching and learning. This section discusses how to use technology and pedagogy to support online teaching, avoid challenges that are unique to online higher education, and center the students as we shift to virtual learning. Chapter 5 is based on an interview with Geneva Henry, GW Dean of Libraries and Academic Innovation (LAI). It focuses on GW's strategies and practices for the transition, the training and support of faculty and students, advantages and disadvantages of online teaching, and the future of online teaching. This chapter aims to provide an overview of GWLAI's experiences in providing services related to online teaching in higher education. Dean Henry's insight is highly relevant for the COVID-19 crisis but the takeaways from studying this experience will benefit online education for years to come.

Other sources of support for universities during the transition to online teaching included third-party companies known as online program managers (OPMs), but those sources of support could be a double-edged sword. Drawing on a large-scale analysis of the business relationships behind the scenes of many online degree programs offered in the United States, Chapter 6 outlines common pitfalls that university administrators can, and should, avoid when considering temporarily or permanently shifting programs to an online format. Many public universities in the US contract OPMs in order to develop and run online programs. As such, OPMs hold a great deal of control over the academic function of the university and receive a large portion of student tuition funds in exchange. The OPM industry has global reach, so implications for quality, cost, outcomes, and academic freedom, are discussed from a comparative perspective. The chapter considers how university leaders can smartly navigate the field and serve students in the coming years, and concludes with recommendations for protecting students and the public interest, during and after the pandemic-related crises.

Furthermore, higher education has continued to evolve over the years with more learners pursuing their degrees in an online model. Disruptions such as COVID-19 have created a magnitude of challenges for academic institutions. The default has been to ensure access to higher education through online courses and degree programs. The success of online education will be significantly dependent on colleges and universities developing and implementing student-centric strategies and providing individual student needs. Chapter 7 predicts that online higher education will become a norm, but that many schools will fail to adopt student-centric online programming fast enough to save themselves from shutdown.

Section 3 delves into international adaptations to online teaching and learning outside the US and Canada. In the following chapters, higher education experts from China, Japan, Sweden, India, Azerbaijan, and Nigeria, introduce their countries' responses to COVID-19 and how they will shape the future of higher education.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, online teaching has allowed professors to take advantage of modern technology and spread awareness of the uneven development of education and IT support across different countries and universities. Chapter 8 analyzes the online teaching experiences in Chinese universities during the pandemic and examines how online teaching will improve post-pandemic models of pedagogy. Online teaching needs to be accommodated in teaching theory, design, and methods, and also needs to be supported by curriculum resources, practical resources, and platform technologies. The lessons learned by the Chinese government, private sector, and universities, during the pandemic can be exported to improve online education worldwide.

As the pandemic hit Japan, universities across the country shifted classes to online platforms. It was the first time they had experienced online classes on such a massive scale. Chapter 9 reviews the experience with a focus on efforts at three levels: governmental, university, and departmental. With its strong authority over higher education, the central government in Japan has played an important role in facilitating online education at universities. Efforts at the university and departmental levels vary from one university or department to another. As an example, this chapter examines efforts that have been made at Osaka University, with which the author has been affiliated. The author argues that Osaka University completed the semester extending from April to August of

2020 successfully, because it has a learning management system and functional support institutions.

Since the 1970s, the number of students studying in another country to obtain post-secondary education has grown significantly. Today, some higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world depend on revenue from international students' tuition fees. However, due to travel restrictions imposed by COVID-19, students must find other ways to have an international experience. Outbound students' experiences include integrating on campus with international staff and/or students, and/or interacting via information and communication technology (ICT) with peers around the world, without travelling. While Swedish outbound students prefer to study in English-speaking countries, the findings show a growth in the numbers of Swedes studying in some Asian countries such as South Korea, Hong Kong China, Mainland China, Thailand, Japan, and Singapore. Chapter 10 poses the question: Will the increase in youth travel continue, or take new directions after COVID-19 because of the expansion of the social space through interaction with international peers via ICT? COVID-19 will certainly influence students' opportunities to participate in international student mobility and their willingness to travel abroad for a post-secondary education. The current pandemic may lead to other ways of 'travelling the world' without traveling, to have an international experience.

Higher education institutions are looking for ways to strengthen their existing curricula in order to meet the expectations of the students. One such case is of the Master's in European Studies offered in India, whose structure and curricula are developed to cater to the students' aspirations. Whilst providing an overview of this program, Chapter 11 highlights how

the curricula are designed to impart soft skills and to bring internationalization to a domestic audience. The Indian Master's in European Studies acts as a study abroad alternative, and offers an interesting approach to international higher education. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the need to embrace internationalization, abroad and at home, as India shapes the present international higher education landscape.

While traditional learning is the type of education where students and teachers are working under the same roof, distance education occurs when learners and teachers are physically distant from each other. Azerbaijan has integrated different comprehensive and modern ICT into its education system. In this regard, the main goal is to boost the quality of education in the country, and make it conform to world standards. Chapter 12 covers the key points of how TV-based lessons could be used as an effective tool for the dissemination of high-quality distance learning, as well as what opportunities and responses have been provided by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan for ensuring the continuity of the education process during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because there was no national educational infrastructure built to accommodate online education in Nigeria, teaching and learning could not continue, especially in public institutions. Some schools sought ways to engage their students in Nigeria as the pandemic lingered and the reopening of schools was not in sight. Some schools in the 'cities', mostly the primary and secondary schools, used local television stations that allowed students to tune in at certain times to be part of a televised educational session. The challenge with this approach was that the rural areas could not be a part of those televised sessions. They either did not

own television sets, or did not have electricity to power them. A few private HEIs eased into online learning and continued to engage their students remotely. The COVID-19 pandemic only widened the equity gap of an already declining educational system. One thing educators have learned from the COVID-19 pandemic is that online teaching and learning is no longer a luxury; it is a necessity for every country. Chapter 13 assumes that the percentage of HEIs in Nigeria without access to online education is critically high. The chapter makes recommendations on how that gap can be bridged.

As of press, online teaching has now been a reality for professors and students for over a year, and thus has attracted a lot of attention. Virtual learning will be a crucial topic for a long time past the end of the pandemic, because it has opened a new window for improving education. Across the world, many countries will come to terms with this new paradigm of teaching and learning.

SECTION 1:
PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS IN ONLINE
TEACHING AND LEARNING

CHAPTER 1

MINIMIZING ZOOM FATIGUE AND OTHER STRATEGIES FOR A SUCCESSFUL SYNCHRONOUS CLASS EXPERIENCE

DAVID A. WICKS

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic forced universities around the world to cancel most in-person instruction and pivot to fully-online teaching and learning. Faculty had limited time to think through the instructional design of learning activities or participate in online learning professional development (Johnson et al. 2020). Before the pandemic, approximately 46% of professors in the United States had taught an online course (Jaschik & Lederman 2019). While this number may seem impressive, many of these professors had no formal training in online learning pedagogy. Overall, university faculty lack digital literacy skills such as media literacy and information literacy (Gilchrist et al. 2019, Radovanović et al. 2015). During the pandemic, university professors were forced to move to emergency remote teaching, a form of online instruction where instructional design and professional development are rushed, or not offered at all (Bozkurt & Sharma 2020, Ferdig et al. 2020). Many professors lacked an understanding of what digital education tools were available to them and how these tools could best be used. This rare combination of circumstances required faculty

to pivot to online teaching with minimal understanding of how to do it. Faculty who lacked knowledge about research-based best practices employed synchronous online teaching methods that resulted in discomfort and frustration, called ‘Zoom fatigue’ (Fosslien & Duffy 2020, Wiederhold 2020). Zoom fatigue is mental exhaustion which faculty and students may experience when they spend many hours in synchronous online meetings, and during those meetings have to make choices, multitask, or be distracted by other participants’ body movements.

In this chapter, COVID-19’s impact on university instruction will be identified. Faculty use of synchronous digital technology for emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic will be explained. Possible causes and solutions for Zoom fatigue in synchronous class meetings will be shared. The chapter will conclude with an overview of the process that Seattle Pacific University’s Digital Education Leadership program uses for planning, facilitating, and summarizing, synchronous class meetings. This overview will include an introduction to the QUEST model for inquiry-based learning which is used in all courses within the program.

COVID-19’s impact on university instruction

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, professional development for online learning was often voluntary. Workshops and course design consultations were typically planned for willing faculty (Foltos 2013). University initiatives that mandated the use of digital teaching and learning tools typically failed, as faculty claimed academic freedom for course delivery and format (Young 1997). Online learning was, and still is, considered by some to be an inferior course delivery format that is only necessary for

students who are pace and place challenged (Tucker 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic changed how many thought about online learning, as suddenly all faculty and students were place challenged. All teaching and learning had to be done remotely. Faculty had little time to move their courses to a digital format that would allow them to continue to teach students who were no longer permitted to come to campus. Institutions with robust online and blended learning programs, such as the University of Central Florida (UCF), were able to make the transition with minimal interruptions because a significant percentage of their faculty already had online teaching experience (Thompson & Moskal 2020). UCF also had educational technologists and instructional designers with expertise to lead large groups of faculty through a course redesign process. At the same time, many universities were unprepared to pivot to remote learning.

In some cases, unprepared institutions lacked software, such as a learning management system (e.g., Canvas) to digitally manage course content, provide assignments, and assess learning. Some institutions lacked teaching and learning centers, educational technologists, and instructional designers, which forced them to rely on information technologists to help make the transition to online instruction. Many information technologists excel at optimizing digital systems for speed and reliability but lack an understanding of digital pedagogy which is critical for a successful transition to online teaching and learning.

The rush to emergency remote teaching forced professors to adopt digital tools quickly. In many cases, professors chose tools that allowed them to teach as they were taught, which was primarily in a lecture format (Oleson

& Hora, 2014). The digital tools that best lent themselves to traditional lecturing were web conferencing systems such as Zoom. With minimal technical directions, many professors began replacing their in-person classes with Zoom meetings, with little or no regard for how online teaching should be different. Online course time was filled with professors lecturing and students listening and taking notes. Initially, the professors did not understand the challenges for themselves and their students as they tried to teach in the same way using a new delivery format.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many professors chose to lecture in Zoom, with the same lectures and delivery style they used in their traditional classrooms. Faculty figured out how to set up a webcam, share their slides, and email zoom links to their students. These professors began speaking at the beginning of a Zoom class and stopped when class was over, just as if they were still in a lecture hall. However, the outcome was different. Some professors were annoyed by students who did not appear to be paying attention during a lecture because they were not looking at their web camera. Professors wondered what to do with students who did not have their webcams turned on, students who skipped web meetings, students who failed to mute their microphones, students who used Zoom's chat feature to share non-course-related posts during class time. Some professors were overwhelmed by Zoom's Gallery view, which (as of the time of writing) can show up to 49 students' webcams on the screen at one time. Intently watching a screenful of individual webcam videos can lead to Zoom fatigue, which will be discussed next.

Causes and solutions for Zoom fatigue

Faculty and students reported experiencing Zoom fatigue when their participation in a synchronous web class meeting left them feeling more exhausted than the same activity would in person (Fosslien & Duffy 2020, Wiederhold 2020). There are many possible reasons for this exhaustion. First, vocalizations, gestures, and communication movements are difficult to track and read when viewing a screen full of headshot videos. Second, participants may not turn screen notifications off, and may be distracted or tempted to multitask, during class time. Third, during a synchronous class meeting, attention is shown by looking at the web camera, which can become tiring if done for too long. In person, students and professors look away or look down, and no one thinks much about it. However, in a web meeting, if participants look elsewhere, it appears as if they are distracted. Fourth, rather than look at the web camera, some participants stare at their own video during a meeting. They become hyperaware and distracted, thinking about how others interpret them. Each of these issues limits participants' ability to concentrate and take needed breaks during a learning activity, and may result in participants feeling tired. Faculty and students need to be taught how to counter these issues. These ideas will be explored next.

Zoom reported that 10 million people had participated in a Zoom meeting by the end of 2019. Four months and a pandemic later, that number grew to 300 million, with many university professors and students joining as first-time users (Morris 2020). Faculty and students reported participating in three or more Zoom meetings a day, as Zoom became the default emergency remote learning application. With the heavy use and limited professional

development in synchronous online learning, reports of Zoom fatigue should not have surprised anyone. Faculty needed ideas on how they could alter their online instruction and workflow. Here are seven recommendations to minimize the possibility of Zoom fatigue (Fosslien & Duffy 2020, Wiederhold 2020).

1. Avoid multitasking by turning off computer notifications and putting away cell phones and tablets during class meetings. Focusing on a single task is less tiring than switching between multiple tasks.
2. Schedule breaks during class meetings. The breaks do not have to be long, but give students time to stretch during hour-long meetings and time for a bio break during longer meetings.
3. Minimize onscreen stimuli. When possible, encourage students to participate in a Zoom meeting with a neutral background. Discourage students riding in a vehicle or walking during a web meeting from sharing their videos. Discuss how backgrounds with motion may be distracting for other participants.
4. Spend some time looking at the web camera rather than at other participants' videos. Professors report that primarily watching the Zoom gallery view with all of the student videos can be tiring. Periodically looking at the webcam can help participants appear more engaged and reduce some of the fatigue caused by trying to process what is happening in multiple video windows.
5. Make live participation optional. Consider giving students the choice of interacting with web meeting recordings rather than requiring them to attend all synchronous class meetings. This choice will provide students who may be more sensitive to fatigue-inducing

synchronous activities an opportunity to opt out.

6. Use voice or email when video is not necessary. During the pandemic, it seemed like the default form of multi-person communication became a web meeting. More web meetings may increase the opportunity for Zoom fatigue. Consider having a voice meeting while going for a walk, or use email when a synchronous meeting is not necessary.
7. Look for opportunities to use other technologies, such as virtual reality or telepresence robots. Occasionally having class in a 3D environment where each participant is represented by an avatar may provide a break from zoom meetings. The virtual meeting space can look like a classroom, or a field location where the class may have gone if meeting in person were an option. Telepresence robots allow students and faculty to move around in a physical space using a tablet that is strapped to a robot on wheels (Fitter et al. 2020). Students can use arrow keys on their keyboard to move the robot around the classroom. Telepresence learning works best when the professor and some students are physically present in the classroom which may not be possible during a pandemic (Cain et al. 2016, Lei et al. 2019). Students may have greater agency when using telepresence robots rather than Zoom. They can reposition themselves to see or hear better. They can move their robot when asked to pair up with a partner, or get into a small group. They can move closer to the instructor to indicate a need for help.

Employing several, or all, these tips may reduce the amount of fatigue that faculty, and students experience in synchronous class meetings. Professors

can review these issues and recommendations with students and agree on norms that may result in a better online meeting experience for all participants. The final section of this chapter will describe the process that Seattle Pacific University's Digital Education Leadership program uses for planning, facilitating, and summarizing, synchronous class meetings. This overview includes an introduction to the QUEST model for inquiry-based learning, which is used in all courses within the program.

Planning, facilitating, and summarizing, synchronous class meetings

From its inception in 2014, SPU's Digital Education Leadership program has held weekly synchronous class meetings. Throughout the program's short history, students and faculty have expressed high levels of satisfaction with these synchronous class meetings. Synchronous class sessions are carefully planned, facilitated, and summarized. This section will cover what happens during the planning, facilitation, and summary phases of a synchronous meeting.

Each Digital Education Leadership course runs for ten weeks, and contains four modules. Individual modules last two weeks. There are a total of ten synchronous meetings in each course. Each module introduces a program standard and asks students to work through an inquiry-based process, called QUEST that involves asking a question about a course topic, understanding the topic, educating others about the topic, creating a solution, and teaching the topic to someone not in the course. The QUEST model allows students to research and answer their own questions related to the course content, and demonstrate mastery by explaining how they would apply the content

(Wicks 2017). Synchronous class meetings happen during the third, or Educate, step of QUEST (see Figure 3). QUEST will be described in detail later in the chapter. How meetings are planned will be explained next.

During the planning phase for a synchronous class meeting, faculty begin by reviewing the desired results, determining how the results will be assessed, and then designing instructions and learning experiences for the meeting (Wiggins & McTighe 2005). This information is used to determine how much direct instruction is necessary for students to demonstrate mastery of the content. See Figure 1 for an example of a student's evidence of mastery, which in this case, is a blog post that shares a solution to an inquiry. If a significant amount of direct instruction is needed for students to demonstrate mastery, then podcasts are created to give students greater agency about when and how they interact with this content. A goal for all synchronous class meetings is to minimize the amount of teacher talk and maximize student voices (Wicks and Tremonte 2020). By using podcasts, the content is flipped so students engage with it prior to the synchronous meeting. This reduces the amount of lecture time or teacher talk in class and allows more time for the student voices via learner-centered activities.

Fig. 1-1. Screenshot of *Digital Education Leadership* student Kaelynn Mumley's solution using the *QUEST inquiry model* (Mumley 2020)

Developing a Shared Vision and Culture That Embraces Technology

By admin

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Having both a clear vision and a healthy school culture are essential foundations before adopting new and innovative practices. According to ASCD, school culture is the way “teachers and other staff members work together and the set of beliefs, values, and assumptions they share.” These beliefs and values have a huge impact on instructional decisions and student learning. So if a school is adopting a new technology initiative, school leaders should take the time to create a shared vision and culture for using technology. If teachers believe in the positive influence technology can have on student learning, then there will be forward momentum by staff working towards a common goal. Likewise, a school should have a strong and prevalent mission and vision statement. Aguilar (2015) argues that a school mission and vision help educators to feel that they are on the same page and that it offers direction when decisions need to be made. A shared mission statement and vision “motivates, unifies, and guides all stakeholders in their day-to-day operations” and comes “alive in the hearts and hands of those doing the work” (Aguilar, 2015).

Creating a Shared Vision and Culture

How do coaches inspire educators and create a shared vision and culture for using technology? How can principals, teacher leaders, and coaches ensure staff buy-in? Below are some helpful tips to consider when working with your school's staff.

Laugh. Try and include humor in your staff meetings – look up comic strips

Another way professors can reduce the amount of teacher talk during a synchronous meeting is to produce and share an agenda that students can use to prepare for a synchronous class meeting. See Figure 2 to review a

sample agenda. In the agenda, students may be asked to participate in a poll, respond to open-ended questions, discuss an article, demonstrate examples of their work, or lead a breakout group through an activity. Note the questions the professor asks students in the Figure 2 agenda. All questions require students to discuss their own projects, rather than general questions about the meeting topic.

Once an agenda is set, it is shared through the learning management system. The agenda should be filled with activities that produce opportunities for student voices. Students should understand that their voices are needed in the synchronous class meeting. Otherwise, why would students need to attend a live meeting, if most, or all, of the time is spent on teacher talk? Podcasts may be better technologies for lectures, since students have the ability to play, pause, and replay, content at their own pace. Also, a real-time meeting with one voice doing most of the talking can be exhausting for both students and professors. Next will be an explanation of how a professor facilitates synchronous meetings in phase 2.

The facilitation phase begins with professors being mindful of possible security issues during a synchronous class meeting. Zoom bombing and ways to prevent it will be addressed in the next paragraph. Faculty also need to understand ways to establish behavior norms in synchronous environments. Students should be made aware of what is expected of them in terms of class participation. Time should be made for teacher-to-student interactions as well as student-to-student interactions. Decisions need to be made regarding whether meetings will be recorded, how recordings will be accessed, and requirements for those who miss meetings. Details of how to facilitate a synchronous class meeting, including addressing security issues,