

Final Project Report

Overall Status: **Complete**

Project Name: Supporting sessional teachers

Nov, 2022 / Author: Abigail Grover Snook

The project is Finished the week of Nov 21-25, 2022, due to the following:	Development of website external to UGLA for physical therapy sessional teacher access Development of materials for website addressing many needs of physical therapy sessional teachers Cooperation with Clinical Education Coordinator to use website as primary information for clinical sessional teachers for the department Active use of website since 2021
Issues:	Limitations of Wordpress site Combination of Icelandic and English on website Tracking of usage has only begun recently (fall 2022) so difficult to assess impact
Areas/questions for discussion:	How can we accurately assess impact of website? How can website be improved for better effectiveness? Does the use of English make this site less friendly or useful?

Contact Information

Project Manager Abigail Grover Snook,

Adjunkt

Office: Stapi v Hringbraut Mobile: 8314200

Email: abigail@hi.is

Project Abstract

This project, accepted for funding in May 2020, was designed to increase the support of sessional teachers who work for the department of physical therapy. Increasing support of sessional teachers was a goal of the University of Iceland's 2016-2021 Strategy. Recent studies investigating the teaching and support needs of sessional teachers have identified interventions that could be implemented to increase the support of sessional teachers. This project developed one of the major interventions suggested – a website outside of UGLA that would allow sessional teachers access to both logistic and pedagogical information that was important to their teaching. Although we have only begun to measure the impact of this website, it is becoming one of the main ways to convey information to sessional teachers, especially those teachers who teach clinically. The website continues to be being made more Icelandic-friendly, as well as advertised, developed, improved, and updated.

Introduction

The University of Iceland has, as one of its 2016-2021 goals, to increase the support of sessional teachers as a way to support better teaching. Sessional teachers do have an impact on teaching, but most health science sessional teachers have no training in pedagogy. My doctoral project, which included the publication of three articles on sessional teachers in international health science education journals, concluded with specific suggestions at the university, department and faculty development level to support health science sessional teachers. These included, among others, the development of context-specific pedagogical courses (that are digitally available), context-specific information and orientations to the department and university, and other support resources. The suggestions also mentioned enhancing the sessional faculty experience of connectedness and appreciation with their department through active communication and activities, while enhancing awareness among sessional teachers of faculty development offerings from the Teaching Center (Kennslumidstod) that they could specifically benefit from.

The development of a website for sessional teachers working for the University of Iceland could address many of these suggestions by providing links to specific pedagogical courses and information that would be useful to the sessional teacher. This website would need to be outside the UGLA system at HI to make it accessible to teachers without an HI email address. This was especially important in the department of physical therapy as there are about 8 tenured teachers and over 200 sessional teachers. Making this website specific to the needs of these teachers may help to increase their feelings of connectedness and enhance communication between these teachers and the department. The goal of this project was to develop this website with these goals in mind.

Methods

To establish a website, options were explored by contacting help.hi.is. The website needed to be external to the UGLA system so that it could be accessed by teachers without a HI email address. To determine what should be included on the website, prior research was considered. I also emailed current, active sessional teachers and asked their opinions on what should be included on such a site. To develop materials for the website, teaching materials from the internet and Kennslumidstod were considered for use as well as materials developed by the myself. Research articles were also included.

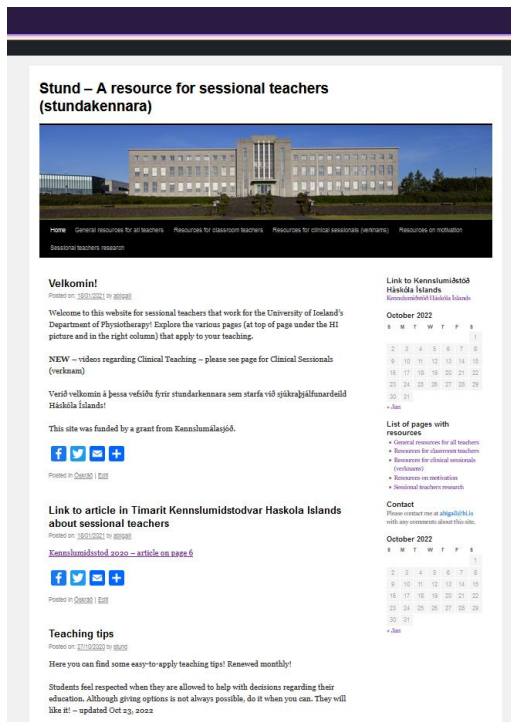
For ease of reading and organization, pages on the website were developed so that the teacher could go to the section that pertained to them. Efforts were made to make the website user friendly. Ongoing efforts are being made to advertise site among faculty of the Department of Physical Therapy and among sessional teachers.

Results

Help.hi.is provided a few different options for a website external to UGLA system but recommended the use of a WordPress site for the type of information being distributed. A specific website was obtained, and time was spent learning how to format and use the WordPress site provided by the university. The website was named “Stund” and is located at <https://vefir.hi.is/stund/>. This site is located external to UGLA and should be available to all teachers.

Prior research had indicated that there were distinct needs of classroom sessionals versus clinical sessionals in the department of physical therapy. Therefore, the website was divided into the following pages: (1) General resources for all teachers; (2) Resources for classroom teachers; (3) Resources for clinical sessionals (verknam); (4) Resources on motivation; (5) Sessional teachers research; and a Home page.

Topics on the website are a common of prior research and suggestions from practicing sessional teachers. Prior research had indicated that classroom sessions were interested in many of the same topics that tenured teachers were. Therefore, many links were used from the Kennslumidstod website as they were relevant and in Icelandic. Many of the topics that were identified as important to clinical teachers were available through the department’s clinical coordinator as developed videos of important information, especially developed due to COVID restrictions. Many of the topics important to both types of teachers (e.g., how to motivate and engage students, self-regulation) were covered by recorded videos by Dr. Brett Jones, an educational psychologist and motivation specialist at Virginia Tech in the USA. Practical information about the curriculum and building were collected from the department. Many links point to the information available from Kennslumidstod at <https://setberg.hi.is/is>. The hope is that, once the teachers see the resources at Kennslumidstod, they will be more likely to return there for information and help with teaching. The website was available as of July 2021 but had limited exposure until the spring of 2022. The website has continued to be developed even after its opening with a special effort to keep it accurate and up to date. The department plans to continue to advertise the website to its teachers. Here is an example website taken on October 23, 2022.



As of November 2022, tracking on the website was started. In addition, another faculty member (native Icelandic) has agreed to work with me on continuing to update the website and also make it more Icelandic-friendly. The hope is that this site will continue to develop into an important resource for our sessional teachers.

Discussion

Did you accomplish the purpose of the project?

Yes, the purpose of this project was to establish the website as a resource for sessional teachers with the idea of supporting both their pedagogical and logistical needs as sessional teachers. I feel that this website can serve as a form of communication with sessional teachers outside of UGLA and can increase their feelings that they can grow as teachers and also feel more connected with the physical therapy department. As the content of the website is directly associated with the research on the needs of these teachers, I feel that this website had the potential to improve the support of these teachers. With the support of the department and, specifically, the faculty member within the department, I hope that the website will continue to have a positive impact for years to come. I am excited to see how it develops in the future.

Did anything interesting come to light that was not related to the original project?

There were definitely some challenges in working with the WordPress site provided by the university. There were limited plug-ins that made it challenging to make the site more attractive. There were also limitations on the size of the files that could be embedded so there was a need to provide links rather than actual documents.

What conclusions can be drawn from the results?

Results related to the website's impact are ongoing as tracking of the site has recently been implemented. As the "word gets out" and improvements to the site continue, this website should be a valuable resource for the department.