

## Moving My University Class Online - *Where Do I Start?*

In our new reality, this is a very challenging time in higher education with information changing hourly. Suddenly, many colleges and universities have been thrust into teaching online whether they are prepared or not. Here are few tips to survive this semester and mitigate this abrupt transition to virtual learning.



1. **Assume this is the first time your students are learning in this way.** While most students may be used to their courses being supported by learning platforms such as Blackboard, Moodle, Desire to Learn (D2L), Angel or others, they are not accustomed to completing the *entire* course online. Upload video tutorials discussing how to use the necessary software and define familiar terms associated with virtual learning and meetings like Zoom or WebEx meeting. Let's not assume they know these things.

Little things make a big difference, so *teach online etiquette*. A student may not know how to mute their background noises while you are giving a lecture. Classmates may not want to hear a barking dog or younger sibling cry.

2. **Build in ways for students to interact with each other.** In the era of physical isolation and sheltering in place, students still value social interaction. In fact, *they may need it more now than ever!* Remember, we tell students to network and build relationships. As creators of learning activities, we must develop opportunities for students to interact virtually.

This is an opportunity for us to be creative. In lieu of requiring students to write a paper, consider encouraging them to submit a three-minute video on a research topic. The video can be recorded on smartphones or tablets. They can post their video and comment on three of their classmates' videos. Support and encourage virtual hangouts with smaller groups by making it an assignment!

3. **Use synchronous spaces.** Synchronous means everyone is online at the same time. *Students want to talk to you and others.* Virtual meeting tools such as Skype, Zoom, Google Hangout and Slack are great for live communications. Create space for guided conversations around a topic from your course. Open-ended discussion questions work best in this format. You can always introduce a new topic or encourage one of your students to facilitate on a specific piece of content such as a video or article. Student facilitation always heightens engagement.
4. **Give space for learners to reflect on their own reality.** *They really want to process the uncertainty of their lives.* Not only do they don't know about the grade they will receive in your course, they also



do not know about the future of their education, finances and other things that once were very secure. Connecting course content to the impact of COVID-19 is also a plausible way for them to contemplate this new reality.

5. **Acknowledge that this really is a disruption.** Students and faculty alike are experiencing a dramatic shift in the normal way of teaching and learning. *Be patient.* It may take the rest of the semester before students become comfortable with virtual learning. If a student does not log into your course, email him or her to encourage them to go virtual with you. Doing this may seem like you are emailing a student to attend class. Well you are! In disruptive situations, humans will either accept the challenge or exit. Reaching out to students who have not logged into the course will at least demonstrate that you care and realize that their norm has been altered.