Going Online in A Hurry: Teaching Considerations

Teaching during times of potential disruption requires creative and flexible thinking about how instructors can support students in achieving essential core course learning objectives. While the process will no doubt feel unfamiliar and at times possibly frustrating, try as much as possible to be patient both with yourself and your students. Below you will find concise guidance for moving your courses online, fast, while maintaining instructional continuity as much as possible by staying focused on course learning goals and making sure the students are comfortable.

Try to **focus on those aspects of your course that are central to students' learning online**; this is not the time to innovate or revise your course for online delivery. Build on your strengths, what has been effective in supporting your students, and how you have been supporting in-person with online learning, such as course materials and assignments offered in Blackboard (Bb). **Limit your introduction of new technology tools** to one tool that best aligns with your learning goals and activities. For example, incorporate Zoom to conduct live sessions and continue the discussion format, especially if participation constitutes a portion of the course grade. Limiting the integration of new tools will help minimize stress, anxiety and confusion in this transition phase as student anxiety may be quite high already.

1. Go over your course assignments for the coming weeks.

Are the assignments accessible online, so that students can find the instructions and materials that they need? Is it clear how students will be turning in their work? Have deadlines changed, and are all those deadlines prominently posted in the LMS?

2. How will you give feedback on the students' progress?

Consider how students will be able to practice the key skills and competencies you want them to get out of the course — things they would normally do in class. How will you give them opportunities for practice and feedback, for both small-stakes and high-stakes assignments? Those opportunities will be different from what they were before you moved the class online. Communicate clearly how students can access and complete these learning opportunities.

Consider ways in which students can practice and get feedback online, such as (a) if students would have been developing their skills in analyzing and synthesizing assigned readings via in-class discussion, perhaps they could do that online using the online discussion in Bb, or (b) if you'd typically have students practice by attempting to answer questions in an interactive in-person lecture, present a version of those questions in online discussion forum or quizzes in Bb, and offer feedback on their responses.

3. How will you provide an online experience that is comparable to the in-class experience?

How do you typically use your in-class time? Try to describe what you do in class at a higher, more goal-oriented level, such as presenting content, checking for understanding, conducting textual analysis, solving problems in pairs, working on collaborative project — instead of just saying "lecture," "quiz," "discussion". Keeping those actionable goals in mind, will help you think about how to achieve them online and what core aspects of the in-class experience you ought to focus on simulating.

This reflection might help you decide whether to go with a synchronous means of engagement (e.g., a real-time Zoom meeting), an asynchronous one (e.g., narrated power point slides via MediaSite), or some combination of the two. You may not be able to offer all in-class experiences online; please select experiences that are critical to students' learning (e.g., check for understanding via quiz toll in Bb) and that you are comfortable implementing.

4. Review the course materials.

Likely, your readings and other materials exist in digital form, and you may have posted them already in Bb. Please check that any readings, videos, problem sets, quizzes, and the like are accessible, along with key documents such as the syllabus and calendar.

5. Focus on communication.

In the face of all this uncertainty, you need to explain — as clearly as you can and in a variety of places — what students can expect about the course in the next few weeks. Be sure to outline what it is that students are responsible for doing, how they can find the things they need to meet those responsibilities, and what they should do first. Make sure the lines of communication are two-way, as well and highlight how students can contact you. For example, "Blackboard (Bb) will be the central means of communication and completing course work. Please check the course in Bb once a day. Should you not be able to access Bb, please contact me via email at <your email address> or phone so that we can stay connected and you are able to complete your work in a timely fashion.

There are many components to consider for teaching online, but for now due to the tight timeline, the focus is on students, and on using what we know to help them move forward under some very difficult circumstances.

6. Integrate a live (synchronous) component into your online course.

You may select to conduct live class sessions for multiple purposes, such as check-in to see how students are doing, how they are working with this disruption, to affirm your support and express appreciation for their patience and commitment to continuing their learning and participation in the course. You may conduct virtual office hours, consult one-on-one

with students, engage students in discussion grounded in segments of text and/or questions, conduct student-guided problem-solving process, use annotation tool in Zoom to complete tables and solve problems with student input.

Live meetings provide a space for personalization, student participation and connection with peers and faculty, affirmation, feedback, and continued sense of community. They deepen students' learning by giving them the opportunity to think through ideas, explore different perspectives, support claims with evidence, and reflect critically on the course content, and others' views. In line with these goals, we need to **carefully structure learning activities**, clearly communicate expectations for student participation and its rational, and provide criteria for student participation, resulting in a grade for asynchronous participation. Dr. Perun, faculty in Public Administration at Villanova, provides practice-based details in his recent article.

Students may be joining the live session from a **time zone other than EST**. We advise you ask your students to inform you; for example, "Let me know via email at <your email address> if you will be continuing the class from a time zone other than EST. This information will help us determine the best time(s) to connect in live sessions."

Similarly, to in-person discussions, students may be reluctant to participate in online discussions and may remain silent. You may find it helpful to state the goal of the discussion, prepare discussion questions, ask students to explain, elaborate, exemplify, or highlight what they have learned from the discussion. Structure your questions from low-stakes (general input, thoughts are welcome) to high-stakes (hot seat – how does this evidence support your argument?) questions as illustrated in "Promoting meaningful discussions" by S. Perun, 2016.

Adapted from:

Miller, D. M. (2020, March 09). Going online in a hurry: What to do and where to start. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved March 10: https://www.chronicle.com/article/Going-Online-in-a-Hurry-What/248207

Perun, S. (2020, February 24). Adding a live online class to your course. *Faculty Focus*. Accessed March 11: https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/adding-a-live-online-class-to-your-course/

Perun, S. (2016). Promoting meaningful engagement. *Online Classroom*, 16(1).

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