Bundle on Faculty Issues

Published on *Inside Higher Ed* (https://www.insidehighered.com)

10 strategies to support students and help them learn during the coronavirus crisis (opinion)

Submitted by Mays Imad on March 17, 2020 - 3:00am

On the day when
the weight deadens
on your shoulders
and you stumble,
may the clay dance
to balance you.

-- John O'Donohue

A few years ago, a student of mine lost his father to an unexpected illness that took a wrong turn. Two days later my student came to class. Surprised, I let my student know that if he needed to take time off to be with his family, I would later work with him to help him catch up on materials he would miss. I was giving him permission to be absent from class. He didn't want to. In fact, he said that being in class helped him forget about his problems.

His reason resonated with me. As a student, and even now as a teacher, being in class has always offered me a sanctuary where I could tune down everything else and immerse myself in a community of knowledge seekers, if only for a few hours each week.

Today, growing numbers of colleges and universities all across the country -- including Dartmouth College, Rice University and Stanford University, among many others -- are temporarily canceling their face-to-face classes to deal with the impact of the COVID-19 situation. The conversations on our campuses, as well as on professional Listservs, have turned to the topic of academic continuity plans as the nation continues to deal with the impact of COVID-19. As I look through the materials put together by various teaching and learning centers and instructional technology groups, I have noticed that the resources have focused almost exclusively on the hows of technology: tools to record lectures, create discussions and proctor exams. Yet while the technological know-how to virtually connect with our students is necessary, it is not sufficient to continue the teaching and learning endeavor.

Beyond the electronic connection, we need to connect emotionally -- especially in times of anxiety and uncertainty. As a neuroscientist, I know that emotions are key to learning. In *Descartes' Error* [1], Antonio Damasio asserts, "We are not thinking machines. We are feeling machines that think." Recent [2] literature [3] affirms [4] the importance of the affective domains in teaching and learning.

So I began to wonder about the impact such transitions will have on students and colleagues emotionally, psychologically and even physically. The current situation hits close to home for me. During the 1991 Operation Desert Storm, I was a student in middle school in Baghdad. When the bombing started, schools shut down abruptly. We didn't have internet or the ability to attend school virtually. One morning, one of my teachers showed up at my house, hand-delivered homework and reminded me to keep studying. To this day, I remember how her dedication and acts of resilience and hope helped me feel a tiny sense of normalcy during that turbulent time in my life. At night, I would sit by the candlelight to study and dream of going back to school and all the conversations I would have with my friends.

I do not question any higher education institution's decision to move their classes online or close their campuses. Rather, I am thinking about how we can teach in times of uncertainty and how we can ensure that our students continue to learn most effectively.

More specifically, I am thinking about students who don't have a safe environment at home -- for whom residence halls and classrooms have served as a sanctuary, students who have found a community within college, or students who rely on

college for their sustenance and security. In other words, *most* students. So how can we, teachers, be that "dancing clays" to balance our students' mental and emotional loads, so that they may stumble just a little bit less?

Reflecting on that experience and my questions, I came up with a short list of what I would've liked my teachers to do had I been a student who was sent home due to COVID-19.

1. Email your students to remind them that you are still there for them.
2. Tell them how you are shifting your schedule to deal with the new situation and that change is part of life. Humanize yourself and make it casual and lighthearted. For example, you might talk about how, in between reading their discussion posts, you decided to start your spring cleaning, which you've been putting off forever.
3. Reflect on the notion of rigor and continue to challenge *and* support your students. As instructors, we often must balance rigor and support, and this situation might be one where students will need more support than rigor. Establishing continuity doesn't mean you increase the amount of work required of them. I say this because I worry that some of us might be fixated on the rigor of the materials presented. Let's face it -- the rigor may suffer, and that's OK considering the situation.
4. Repeat some of the lessons you taught in class. Especially for those students who are missing the classroom environment, this will probably help activate their memory of being part of a community and remind them that they are still part of one. For example, in your email you can say something like, "Remember when we talked about this and ..."
5. Use hopeful and optimistic language, such as, "When you come back this fall ..." This will help students look forward to coming back to the campus.
6. Offer students an opportunity to exchange phone numbers and, for those who are interested, help them create a WhatsApp chat group. It can sometimes be difficult for a student to ask for a classmate's phone number.
7. Don't ignore the elephant in the room. If possible, talk about COVID-19 and fear. This is an opportunity for you to remind your students to consider the sources of their news and to beware of the large amount of misinformation.
8. Remember that students have left behind more than just their classes and academics. On both residential and commuter campuses, there are important spaces where students meet and talk about their nonacademic lives -- sports, upcoming concerts, recently discovered shows and so on. Consider creating a community discussion board for them to share what is happening in their lives, especially given the stress, fear and strains in these uncertain times.
9. Let your students know that you are there for them and that if they need help to reach out to you. Let them know that you are (I hope) in touch with counselors or mental health experts that can help them should they need to speak to someone.
10. Most important, ask each of your students how you can help them. The Persian poet Rumi says, "Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there." Likewise, in times of uncertainty and unknowing, we can create a space where our students' voice and insights can illuminate the path we are carving out for them -- and us.

Clearly, this is not an exhaustive list, and I invite you all to add to it in the comments section below or at #hopematters4learning. Think about yourself as a vulnerable student who is trying to learn and complete a degree on an already thinly spread set of obligations. What might help you?

Author Bio:

Mays Imad is the coordinator of the Teaching & Learning Center at Pima Community College. She also teaches pathophysiology and biomedical ethics.

Source URL: https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/03/17/10-strategies-support-students-and-help-them-learn-during-coronavirus-crisis

Links

[1] https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/297609/descartes-error-by-antonio-damasio/

[2] https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?title=Affective+e-learning%3A+using%22+Emotional%22+data+to+improve+learning+in+pervasive+learning+environment%2E&journal=Educ%2E++Technol%2E+Soc%2E&a 189

[3] https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?title=Emotional+design+in+multimedia+learning%2E&journal=J%2E+Educ%2E+Psychol%2E&author=Um+E.&author=Plass+J.++L.&author=H 498

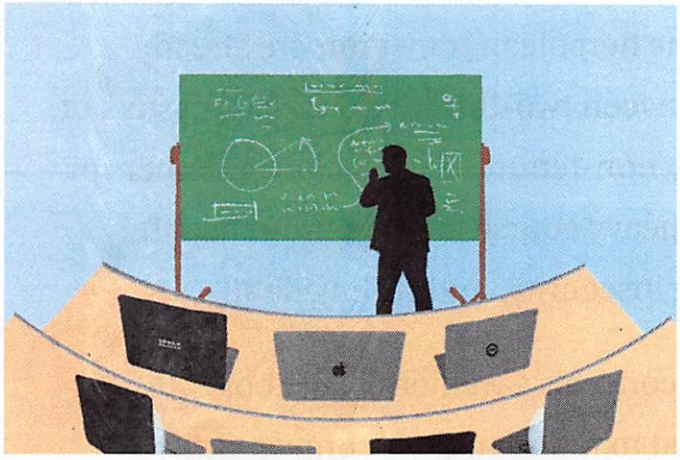
[4] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed?Db=pubmed&Cmd=ShowDetailView&TermToSearch=24959160

THE CHRONICLE
of Higher Education

Back to Special Report

Academe's Coronavirus Shock Doctrine

Faculty members are already stretched thin, and now they are being asked to do more. They should hesitate before doing so.



David Senior for The Chronicle

By Anna Kornbluh | March 12, 2020

PREMIUM

Never let a crisis go to waste. In her bestselling book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Naomi Klein observes that disasters, emergencies, and breakdowns often prove inspirational to entrepreneurs, and just as often provide ideological cover for the repurposing of public funds and the reconfiguration of labor conditions. Covid-19 looks like it will furnish exactly this sort of pretext. Faculty members — a variegated group that has not excelled at thinking of ourselves as a collective — should beware.

As the home of expertise across the research and medical sciences, public policy, and human expression, universities are taking a leadership role in responding to this pandemic, especially given the absence of a functioning federal government. Being on the front lines means that universities are acting rapidly to take the kinds of dramatic steps necessary to flatten the contagion curve and limit harm. But unlike some elementary schools or businesses, U.S. universities are not simply closing; they are ordering faculty to ensure "continuity of instruction" by moving classes online.

Online education has several benefits and has seen experimentation and progress, often thanks to big budgets. Yet the mandate for this sudden conversion of large swaths of higher education to an online format threatens to trigger a breakneck paradigm shift with unforeseen ramifications. Shock doctrines make emergencies the new normal — they turn temporary exertions into permanent expectations. American higher education has already endured several slow-moving disasters over the past 40 years: the radical defunding of public institutions, the casualization of academic labor, the militarization of campus security, and the erosion of faculty governance. As a result, the very instructors now tasked with the herculean transition are already working in extreme conditions: Somewhere between two-thirds and three-quarters of college and university teaching is performed by non-tenure-track faculty members or by graduate students, many of whom conduct heavy course loads without health insurance and with suppressed wages, housing insecurity, and stifling debt.

The directive for immediate transition conceals a tremendous labor intensification. Faculty are being asked to redesign their courses and reinvent their pedagogy on an emergency basis. Are there appropriately urgent ways to limit virus exposure while also allotting time for these laborious undertakings? Could all courses be suspended for a week to give faculty time to survey students about their internet access, computer ownership, and data limits — and to give institutions time to redress inequities in student access? What about time for faculty to reconcile the lack of alternatives to face-to-face learning for laboratories, ensembles, seminars, and studios? Time for disability services offices to train faculty members in online accommodations? Time for institutions to devise support systems for faculty teaching from "home" when home might be scrambled by young children whose own schools are closed? Time to develop collaboration workarounds with crucial staff, who should also be afforded "social distancing"?

While we need institutional support for these transitions, we also need to be involved in decision making. We are the experts in the classroom, so we should have a seat at the table whenever redefinitions of "classroom" and "instruction" are taking place. We must have autonomy over the new paths for our courses. We are the ones who meet students face to face, so we know not to underestimate the uncertainties

confronting those whose families may be sick or vulnerable, whose employment prospects may be uncertain, whose campus lives are disintegrating. The edict that students continue the labor of education amid calamity is its own strain-normalizing spike. Students want to learn, and faculty members want to teach, desperately so in devastating times, but crisis learning must not exacerbate the existing crises in higher education.

What comes after the shock? If instruction is going to be utterly transformed, then other protocols and systems must be too, and faculty members ought to insist upon assurances and protections now. Intellectual property rules by which universities claim ownership over materials uploaded to course-management software must be completely suspended; we cannot willingly contribute to the rebranding of education as "content delivery." Universities must explicitly ensure that third-party platforms will not monetize our words for Big Data and our faces for surveillance industries. Faculty performance reviews (crucial to renewal for contingent faculty, to merit pay, to tenure proceedings) should be reformatted to account for the derailed "outputs" when conferences and guest lectures have been canceled, publications slowed, and alternate teaching strenuously improvised. Student evaluations should not be proctored or employed as usual. Face-to-face learning is irreplaceable — even in a virtualizing culture, even when classroom infrastructures are overcrowded and outmoded, even when administration has become the dominant sector in education. Absent firm administrative commitments to resume ordinary instruction after the virus subsides, and in the presence of administrative memos specifying "indefinite" and "permanent" dimensions of the transition, faculty as a group should pause before making the extraordinary efforts now demanded.

Societal straits present openings for reinvention. The history of capitalist crisis shows how often these reinventions have come at the expense of average workers. But faculty are a creative lot who should be able to anticipate and deflect the risks of coronavirus shock doctrine. We must seize this moment to organize for student-debt relief, student and faculty health care, and the public goods of research and expertise. Tasked with conjuring continuity in a pandemic, we find ourselves at a precipice that clarifies how much we have overworked to weather the structural adjustment of

higher ed, and how much we have in common with each other — with the hourly employees who make the university and its surrounding businesses go, with our students, with the school teachers who've been struggling and striking nationwide. A cataclysm is here. What can we collectively rebuild?

Anna Kornbluh is associate professor of English at the University of Illinois at Chicago. *She gratefully acknowledges communal conversations about faculty concerns in various social media venues.*

This article is part of:
Coronavirus Hits Campus

Published on *Inside Higher Ed* (https://www.insidehighered.com)

If It Doesn't Make Sense... Refuse

Submitted by John Warner on March 16, 2020 - 9:10pm
Blog: Just Visiting [1]

Because I have not done it, I do not have specific advice how to convert an in-person class to online learning on the fly. Guest blogger Alexandra Milsom covered that [2] with great insight yesterday.

However, I do have many years of experience navigating institutional policy and bureaucracy, factors that are going to be causing problems for many instructors trying to make the best of a troubled situation.

Based on my experience as a contingent instructor, often subject to the whims of policy decided above me, while not having the power to challenge or change those policies, here's my advice if you are faced with an impossible, or even merely counterproductive edict: refuse to do it.

Depending on your situation, you can either refuse silently or make a public fuss and try to change the policy for others, but either way, if what you are being asked to do is inconsistent with what you know to be in the interests of student learning and overall well-being, just don't do it.

For example, I have seen word that some institutions are requiring instructors to try to meet their courses synchronously over video. This is absurd on multiple levels.

1. It is predicated on a notion that's outdated even in face-to-face settings, that seat time is equivalent to learning.
2. It presumes that faculty and students have access to reliable technology to pull off such a feat.
3. It presumes that students and faculty are in a situation where they can meet in a synchronous manner while dealing with the uncertainty of living through a global pandemic.

4. It fails to recognize that the experts in online teaching tell us that *asynchronous* activities are, in most cases, best practices.

Don't do it. If it is both dumb and harmful, refuse.

I have not done things I was supposed to do or have done things I was not supposed to do many times in my career.[1] [3] I ditched my class attendance policy attached to semester grades even though department regulations required it.

How did I get away with it? I didn't tell anyone. I didn't even try to hide it. I would put my polices defying institutional edict in my syllabus that was then turned in to the higher-ups.

No one said "boo." My guess is this is either because no one was bothering to truly monitor the syllabi, or that the person who was in charge of this also thought the policy was dumb.

Much of what I'm seeing -- for example, instructors being required to craft and deliver their plan for moving instruction online -- appears to be bureaucratic rigmarole for the sake of bureaucratic rigmarole. Somewhere there is probably a policy that "requires" such a plan, but that policy was crafted without considering a sudden midsemester shift triggered by a global pandemic. I'm sorry -- under these conditions, that policy is dumb. If the institution is enforcing it, they're being dumb.

Refusing to do it, on the other hand, is sensible.

I don't intend to come off as arrogant or imply that I know better in every single situation, but when it comes to the learning and well-being of the students in the class, taught by me, I do know better. I know better both because of my experience and because I am closest to the situation in the moment. The instructor is best positioned to know what students are capable of during this crisis and therefore what sorts of learning activities are advisable.

You know better than the policy. No one was considering these circumstances when the policy was made. Ignore the policy. If you are not getting the flexibility necessary to do your work, seize it for yourself.

Perhaps you believe, as I do, and as Jesse Stommel does [4], that grades for this semester should be some version of pass/fail or credit/no credit, but your administration is insisting on adhering to the traditional grading scale.

Jesse Stommel
@Jessifer

Every college or university shifting classes online should make all grades pass/no record (or something similar).

Students will drop out, lose necessary scholarships, experience intense anxiety as a result of how they're graded. Support students by not putting them through that.
twitter.com/EthanZ/status/…

> **Ethan Zuckerman** @EthanZ
> Replying to @hakeemjefferson @texasinafrica
> MIT has made all spring courses pass/no record, which takes a lot of the stress off.

1,491 9:05 AM - Mar 15, 2020

614 people are talking about this

Do it anyway. Give every student an A. I swear nothing important is harmed if you do this. You have not abandoned principles or rigor. In fact, if you announce your pass/fail policy up front, you will likely receive more and better work from your students as you've relieved the burden of anxiety and uncertainty.

At the very least, convert your course to a grading contact. Determine some threshold of work that students will be able to do under present circumstances and have them do it. Don't worry about deadlines and don't give any incompletes.[2] [7] Take the work that comes in and assess it according to the contract and assign a grade accordingly.

Writing at *Slate*, Dan Kois lists [8] all of the previously sacrosanct public policies that are suddenly being lifted as the crisis unfolds. You can now take a 12-ounce bottle of hand sanitizer on a plane. San Antonio has stopped throwing

people in jail for minor offenses. Evictions are being halted in multiple cities. Caps on broadband access are being eliminated. Companies that never previously offered paid sick leave are offering paid sick leave.

The emergent nature of the situation has revealed what is worth valuing and what is worth abandoning. It shows that constraints we are asked to live under are entirely artificial. If these things are worth abandoning in a crisis, what makes them worth adhering to under normal circumstances?

Some are possibly horrified at the notion of simply refusing to follow the rules and regulations. I believe they're putting their faith in the wrong things, and not just during this crisis.

Order in the absence of humanity and compassion is not worth our embrace.

In my view, we should have been refusing lots of things along the way to this crisis, but certainly now is the time to stand up for ourselves and our students.

[1] [9]All without the protection of tenure.

[2] [10]Never giving incompletes is another example of where I refused to adhere to a policy that was harmful to students and me. I always figured out a way to give students a grade at the end of the semester, often in consultation with the student.

Links

[1] https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-visiting
[2] https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-visiting/guest-post-your-suddenly-online-class-could-actually-be-relief
[3] applewebdata://6E3EEE6D-E1F8-4A04-9396-C5E481AF71AE#_ftn1
[4] https://www.humanrestorationproject.org/things-fall-apart/virtual-learning-covid-19
[5] https://t.co/LnZsS1DkKy
[6] https://twitter.com/Jessifer/status/1239175861414375424?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw
[7] applewebdata://6E3EEE6D-E1F8-4A04-9396-C5E481AF71AE#_ftn2
[8] https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2020/03/coronavirus-tsa-liquid-purell-paid-leave-rules.html
[9] applewebdata://6E3EEE6D-E1F8-4A04-9396-C5E481AF71AE#_ftnref1
[10] applewebdata://6E3EEE6D-E1F8-4A04-9396-C5E481AF71AE#_ftnref2