Q&A: Tips for Online Teaching and Learning

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Because of the coronavirus outbreak, the University of Denver has moved spring quarter classes online. That means DU professors are quickly shifting gears to adapt their lesson plans, lectures and assignments for the virtual classroom. With faculty and students adapting to online teaching and learning, the DU Newsroom reached out to the experts at University College, where the majority of classes offered are 100% online. Allison O'Grady, University College's senior instructional support specialist, has helped faculty facilitate online learning for the past decade. She shares her expertise with the DU community.

What's your best advice to faculty members teaching classes online for the first time this quarter?

- **Think about the student experience.** You want to be thoughtful in the way that you are presenting your course online, and you have control over whether or not the students are confused or engaged.

- **Get support.** The Office of Teaching and Learning offers wonderful support for faculty who need training or one-to-one help in preparing for the quarter. Don't suffer in silence. There are instructional designers, faculty developers and educational technology specialists who can make your life easier.
- **Be kind to yourself and your students**. It may be the first time that all of you are diving into the world of online learning. Be kind to yourself if things don't work out as you have planned. It takes time to master online delivery and for students to learn how to navigate the class. Maintain flexibility with students when possible.
- **Show your personality**. Students want to get to know you as an instructor. Use video, pictures and other forms of communication to show your personality. It can help make this whole transition easier for all.

What are three things faculty members can do to stay on track when managing a class from home?

Allison O'Grady

- **Plan ahead**. There are many distractions that can get in the way of delivering a quality experience to students, leading to feedback being rushed, lectures being cut short or communication being eliminated. However, with a solid plan of action and dedicating time to plan ahead, faculty members can ensure that they have the time and space to deliver an engaging, valuable experience.
- **Practice with the technology**. Rather than assuming your lecture will record the first time or your Zoom session will take off without a snag, it is always a good idea to be prepared and test the technology. There is nothing more stressful than trying to troubleshoot in the moment or having to rerecord a video when it doesn't work the first time. Create extra time to practice and engage with a colleague or friend to see if the technology works on the other end.
- **Engage regularly**. The more that faculty members can log in regularly, maintain grades and establish consistent communication with students, the easier the workload will be. When faculty only log in or check in on their course once or twice a week, the work can build up, and [you] can get behind in trying to catch up and comprehend how the course has been going.

How can faculty members stay connected with students in a remote environment?

Communication between faculty members and students is almost more important in the online environment than when meeting regularly in person. Without a physical presence, it can be difficult to gauge student understanding and engagement with the class material. It's

easier for students to get distracted, and life can get in the way when one is not in a physical classroom. With a few simple strategies, faculty members can establish a strong instructor presence and connection with students.

- **Communicate weekly** about the topic of the week, course concepts and assignment deadlines. Use videos or announcements in Canvas to make this easier.
- **Leverage Zoom to engage with your students.** [It allows you to]facilitate a live class discussion (you can even offer breakout rooms and polls), host guest speakers and answer any questions. Consider making any lectures available asynchronously, then use Zoom to interact with students and have further discussion or answer questions.
- **Offer office hours** by appointment to help answer questions about course assignments or feedback.

Tell us about University College's Learning Experience Design Team.

The Learning Experience Design Team (or LX Team) provides the crux of teaching and learning support to University College faculty and staff. The team is comprised of instructional support specialists and instructional designers. Working with approximately 340 adjunct faculty and a curricula that changes often to keep up with market demands, the team is instrumental in providing quality support to subject-matter experts who are designing courses, onboarding new faculty, preparing courses each quarter, training faculty on new technologies, coaching faculty on teaching best practices and maintaining a faculty professional development program. We are busy to say the least, and it's incredible to see the impact that this team of seven has on the student experience.

What tips can you offer students who might be taking their first online class this quarter?

Taking an online course for the first time can be intimidating. Many students are fearful that they will have a hard time staying engaged, will have limited interaction with faculty, or won't have the self-discipline to stay on top of assignments. These are all very real fears/concerns. Here are three recommendations for success in an online learning environment:

- **Plan ahead to stay organized.** When taking an online class, you are in control of your own engagement. All students are encouraged to look ahead in the course to see when the major assignments are due and plan dedicated time to complete coursework. Try to find a time that works for you to complete assignments and make sure that you have a place to focus.
- **Communicate with your instructor.** It's a great idea to connect with your instructor regularly. If you have questions about grades or feedback, if you can't find content in your course or need to check in on a particular subject area, just ask your instructor. Students are often instrumental in helping instructors stay on top of the course delivery, and many faculty offer virtual office hours/appointments by phone or Zoom.

- **Utilize your resources.** There are so many wonderful resources at DU that are fully available online and underutilized by students. The University offers world-class resources such as the Writing Center, the Research Center, Career Services, academic advisors, Disability Services, the IT Helpdesk and more. These services are in place to help you succeed, and all of them offer support to online students. Use them! Canvas also has 24/7 support for students and a wealth of <u>student resources</u> on their website.
- **Embrace the advantages of online learning.** You may not have chosen to take an online course this term,but this is your opportunity to explore the advantages of online learning. Pros can include: the flexibility of completing work and engaging on one's own time, the opportunity to hear more perspectives from peers in the online environment, and the increased quality of instructional content through the use of multimedia.