Teaching & Learning Insights from Spring 2020

Successes, Failures, and Future Challenges

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Presentation Overview

- Lessons from the Sudden Transition
  - Anticipating Student Needs

- Spring Insights
  - Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Learning
  - Boise State STEM Faculty Survey
  - Faculty Evaluating Students
  - Students Evaluating Faculty
  - Adoption vs. Non-Adoption of Virtual Classes

- Challenges and Future Plans
  - National Faculty Survey
  - Strategies for Maximizing Engagement
  - Plans for the Fall
  - Distance Learning and Social Science Education
COVID-19 and the Sudden Transition

- The transition was met with last minute preparations
  - Ensuring that students took home books needed for study at home
  - Tying up loose ends (test results, reports, etc.)
  - Staff training, safeguarding arrangements, mutual communication and support mechanisms

- Importance of prioritizing reassurance to students and parents during crises
  - Targeted communication to address emotional and psychological challenges
  - Special efforts toward students with unsupportive home environments
  - More important than trying to learn new pedagogy/technology on the fly
Anticipating Student Needs when adopting Remote Learning

- **Lesson from Spring: Different students have different needs**
  - Transitioning students
    - Will not be able to complete their curricula/assessments normally
    - Abrupt separation from social groups
  - Mid-program students
    - Worries about how course/assessment schemes will be restored after crisis
    - Long term disadvantages compared to those who studied “normally”
      - Further levels of study
      - Entering labour market
Spring Insights: Asynchronous Learning

● Simple approach to remote learning
  ○ Participants do not have to communicate simultaneously
  ○ Gives instructors flexibility in preparing learning materials
  ○ Enables students to juggle demands of home and study
  ○ Short video lessons are easier to prepare and more effective (5-10 min)

● Asynchronous learning
  ○ On-demand access allows students to engage on their own schedule
  ○ Teachers can check progress periodically; students can book online appointments

● Boise State STEM Faculty Survey
  ○ 50% of teachers said mix of synchronous and asynchronous learning is a better approach
  ○ Students reported mixed feelings with both synchronous and asynchronous methods
Teachers Evaluating Students

- **Assessment**
  - Cancellation/suspension of many EOY exams leaving many students “left in the lurch”
  - Distance learning assessments as initial part of course construction
    - Clarifies learning objectives
    - Helps teachers determine which content to focus on/adopt

- **Boise State STEM Faculty Survey**
  - Almost \( \frac{2}{3} \) of >50 respondents changed how they evaluated students
  - Sudden change negatively impacted student learning
    - Less engagement in virtual learning
  - Many professors offered flexibility due to uncertainty
  - Only time for doing, not thinking
  - >\( \frac{2}{3} \) surveyed said more time would have made big difference
Students Evaluating Instructors

- **Study of undergraduate evaluation surveys from 2018-20 at a small private college**
  - Overall ratings of course and instructor increased by small but significant amount
  - Response rate decreased
  - Conclusion: Student evaluation means are unaffected by large scale changes to instruction or life experiences outside of teacher control

- **Concerns about student evaluations were that faculty would be evaluated unfairly for sudden responsibilities**
  - Student evaluations appear to be stable
  - Faculty do not need to be protected from pandemic-influenced student evaluations
Students Evaluating Teachers (cont.)

- Pandemic-related alterations to student evaluations varied by university
  - Ohio State added instructions for students and faculty to consider evaluation subjects “holistically”
  - Michigan added items about transition to online learning
  - FSU gave instructors the option to remove Spring 2020 evaluations from future consideration by evaluation committees
  - UHawaii faculty could opt out of evaluations
  - Marquette cancelled evaluations all together
Virtual Classes: Adoption vs. Non-Adoption

- Survey of higher ed faculty in India
  - Did adopt
    - Actual benefits < expected benefits
      - Network issues
      - Lack of training
      - Lack of awareness
    - Drawbacks
      - Lower attendance
      - Lack of personal touch
      - Lack of interaction (connectivity issues)
  - Did not adopt
    - Lack of awareness
    - Lack of interest
    - Doubts regarding usefulness of virtual classes
Spring Insights: National Faculty Survey

- Shift in perception of online learning during COVID-19
  - 45% grew more favorable toward online learning
  - 38% perception did not change
  - 17% grew less favorable toward online learning

- Presence of resources/infrastructure/support made transition smoother
  - Presence of centralized online learning unit
  - Instructional design staff
  - Peer to peer collaboration forum
Biggest Faculty Challenge in the Spring: Engagement

- National Faculty Survey results (cont.)
- Techniques to engage students online
  - 61% faculty said keeping students engaged was biggest challenge
  - 74% said increasing engagement is fall priority
- Support for transitioning instructional content and practice
  - Only 20% of faculty used 7 or more instructional practices (e.g. small group assignments, student self-evals, live lectures, real world examples, personal messages, live sessions)
    - Small group assignments, student self-evaluations, real world examples, personal messages to students associated with higher instructor satisfaction with student learning
  - ⅓ of faculty (⅔ of first time online instructors) struggled to transition practice
Strategies for Maximizing Engagement: Motivation

- **Create a strong presence**
  - Be a role model to assuage discomfort or uncertainty about communicating in a virtual learning environment

- **Help learners believe they can succeed**
  - Boost motivation to create opportunities for quick wins early on and reward behaviors you want to encourage - reduce drop outs!

- **Establish ways for students to monitor progress**
  - Establish objectives, tie materials/assessments/materials to objectives, encourage tools for progress monitoring

- **Build a sense of community**
  - Collaborative activities and soliciting feedback to reduce feelings of isolation
Strategies for Maximizing Engagement: Effective Learning Experiences

- Base course activities on a trajectory that supports learning
  - Build on prior learning, practical applications of new knowledge beyond simple replication
- Apply learning principles that are likely to lead to better outcomes
  - Knowledge and skills defined, constructive activities, timely actionable feedback, avoid overload, leverage tech to personalize
- Relate the class to learners’ lives
  - Everyday lives/career goals
- Plan effective interactions
  - Instructor-learner, learner-learner, and learner-content
- Support self-directed learning
Plans for the Fall: National Faculty Survey

- **Fall priorities**
  - Building a course that can be transitioned F2F/online
  - Redesigning course around online delivery

- **Equity is a major concern**
  - 51% of faculty changed learning outcomes, 71% moved to Pass/Fail
  - Foundation may not be truly mastered
Remote Learning and Social Science

- On a meta level, the impact of COVID-19 on social science education is an intriguing case study for social science and citizenship education itself.
- Key questions on social science education and citizenship education
  - What is the impact of physical distance/virtual participation on topics/forms of learning in a domain that focuses on political and social debate, discussion and understanding?
  - How have remote teaching environments balanced collectivity and solidarity vs individualization and self-referentiality?
  - Who owns the virtual classroom and who set the rules?
  - What are the consequences for social and civic relationships among the students?
  - Will learner opportunities for intervention/interruption/resistance/disobedience increase or decrease?
References


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Gaertner, David. “#COVIDCAMPUS.” https://novelalliances.com/2020/03/16/covidcampus/.
